CALVIN'S COMMENTARIES

COMMENTARY ON PSALMS

VOLUME 2

Psalms 36–92



JOHN CALVIN

SOLI DEO GLORIA

CALVIN'S COMMENTARIES

Commentary on Psalms

Volume 2

Psalms 36-92

John Calvin

Translated from the original Latin and collated with the author's French version by the Rev. James Anderson

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Commentary on Psalms, Volume 2: Psalms 36-92

John Calvin

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Psalm 36

Psalm 36

Almost all interpreters agree in supposing, that in this psalm David in general expresses his wonder and amazement at the goodness of God, because, in the exercise of his favor and mercy, he bears with the wicked, who, notwithstanding, basely contemn him. The opinion which I have formed is somewhat different. I think that the holy prophet, being grievously troubled and harassed by wicked and ungodly men, first complains of their depravity, and then seeks refuge in the infinite goodness of God, which extends not only to all men in general, but in a particular and special manner to his own children; and this he does in order to console, and, so to speak, take his breath, in the assurance that he shall at length be delivered since God is favorable to him. This is evident from the conclusion of the psalm, in which he arms and fortifies himself against all the assaults of the ungodly, by reflecting that he is safe under the protection of God.

To the chief musician. A Psalm of David, the servant of Jehovah.

Why the appellation, *the servant of God,* is ascribed to David only in this place and in the eighteenth psalm, rather than elsewhere, cannot positively be ascertained, unless that having been victorious in a conflict, of all others the most difficult, he proved himself to be a valiant warrior and an invincible champion in the sight of God. We know how rare and singular a virtue it is, when ungodliness is prevailing without restraint, and when the shade of its obscurity darkens our spiritual vision, to look up, notwithstanding, by the eye of faith, to the providence of God, which, by disposing our minds to patience, may keep us constantly in the fear of God.

Psalm 36:1-4

> **1.** Ungodliness saith to the wicked in the midst of my heart, There is no fear of God before his eyes. **2.** For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful. [1] **3.** The words of his mouth are iniquity [2] and deceit; he hath left off to understand that he may do good. **4.** He meditates [or devises] iniquity upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way that is not good; and abhorreth not evil.

1. *Ungodliness saith to the wicked in the midst of my heart* Commentators are not agreed as to the interpretation of the first verse. Literally it is, *The saying* [or *speech*] *of transgression,* or rather, *Transgression saith to the wicked* As, however, the letter ל*, lamed,* is in Hebrew sometimes used for מן*, min,* some translate it thus, *Ungodliness or transgression speaketh of the wicked in my heart;* as if the prophet had said, I clearly perceive from the wickedness which the ungodly commit, that they are not influenced by the fear of God. But as there is no need to depart from the proper signification of the words, I rather agree with others in supposing that the language of the prophet is to this effect: The malice of the wicked, though seemingly hidden and unknown, speaks aloud in my heart, and I am a sure witness of what it says or suggests.

And, first, it is to be observed, that the prophet speaks not of outward faults, but penetrates even to the very source; as if he had said, Although the wicked cloak their malice with wily dissimulation, yet I know it so well that I seem to hear it speaking. It is indeed true, that as the ungodly and profane rush headlong into every kind of wickedness, as if they were never to be called to render up an account of it, the judgment which David here expresses may be formed even from their life; but his language is much more emphatic when he says, that the servants of God openly perceive the depravity of such persons hidden within the heart. Now David does not speak of the wicked generally, but of the abandoned despisers of God. There are many who indulge in their vices, who, notwithstanding, are not intoxicated by the wretched infatuation which David here censures. But when a man becomes hardened in committing sin, ungodliness at length reduces him to such a state of insensibility, that, despising the judgment of God, he indulges without fear in the practice of every sin to which his depraved appetite impels him. A reckless assurance, therefore, in the commission of sin, and especially where it is associated with a contempt and scorn of every holy admonition, is, as it were, an enchantment of Satan, which indicates that the condition of such a person is indeed hopeless. And although true religion has the effect of keeping the hearts of the godly in

1

"C'est, tant que chacun commence a avoir en haine l'iniquite d'iceluy." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, so that every one begins to hate his iniquity."

2

"Mensonge." — *Fr.* "Falsehood."

the fear of God, and drives wicked thoughts far from their minds, yet this does not prevent them from perceiving and understanding in their hearts how the ungodly are agitated with horrible fury when they neither regard God nor are afraid of his judgments.

There is no fear of God before his eyes David shows in these few words the end of all evil suggestions; and it is this, that the sense both of good and evil being destroyed or suppressed, men shrink from nothing, as if there were not seated in heaven a God, the Judge of all. The meaning therefore is, Ungodliness speaks in my heart to the wicked man, urging him to the extremity of madness, so that, laying aside all fear of God, he abandons himself to the practice of sin; that is to say, I know as well what the ungodly imagine in their hearts, as if God had set me as a witness or judge to unveil their hypocrisy, under the mask of which they think their detestable malice is hidden and deeply buried. When the wicked, therefore, are not restrained by the fear of God from committing sin, this proceeds from that secret discourse with themselves, to which we have referred, and by which their understanding is so depraved and blinded, that, like brute beasts, they run to every excess in rioting. Since the eyes are, as it were, the guides and conductors of man in this life, and by their influence move the other senses hither and thither, it is therefore said that men have the fear of God before their eyes when it regulates their lives, and by presenting itself to them on every side to which they may turn, serves like a bridle to restrain their appetites and passions. David, by using here a contrary form of expression, means that the ungodly run to every excess in licentiousness, without having any regard to God, because the depravity of their own hearts has completely blinded them.

2 *For he flattereth himself in his own eyes* Here the Psalmist shows by their fruits or the marks of their character, that there is no fear of God among the wicked, seeing they take such pleasure in committing deeds of wickedness, that, although hateful in the sight of all other men, they still cherish the natural obstinacy of their hearts, and wilfully harden themselves in their evil course. First, he says that they nourish their vices by flatteries, [3] that they may not be dissatisfied with themselves in sinning. But when he adds, *until their iniquity be found to be hateful,* by these words he is to be

3

The verb חלף, *chalak*, which is rendered *flattereth*, signifies *to smooth*, and means here, that the wicked man described endeavors by plausible arguments to put a soft, smooth, and fair gloss on his wickedness, as if there were nothing repulsive and hateful about it, nothing amiss or blame-worthy in it; and in this way he deceives himself. This is the sense expressed in the literal translation of Montanus, which seems very forcible: "Quoniam lenivit ad se in oculis ipsius, ad inveniendum iniquitatem suam ad odiendam." — "For he has smoothed over [or set a polish] to himself in his own eyes, with respect to the finding out of his iniquity, [that is, so as not to find it out,] to hate it." Horsley reads,

"For he giveth things a fair appearance to himself,
In his own eyes, so that he discovers not his own
iniquityto hate it."

understood as referring to their determined obstinacy; for the meaning is, that while they falsely flatter themselves, they proceed to such an extent in their evil course, that their iniquity becomes hateful to all men. Some translate the words thus: *So that he himself finds his own iniquity to be hateful;* and understand them as meaning, that the wicked persist in rushing headlong into sin without restraint, until, satiated or glutted with the indulgence of their depraved desires, they begin to loathe it: for even the most depraved are sometimes dissatisfied with themselves on account of their sinful conduct. The first interpretation is, however, the more natural, namely, that the wicked, though they are hateful to all men on account of their iniquity, which, when once discovered and made manifest, excites a general feeling of displeasure, are not affected by any displeasure against themselves, but, on the contrary, rather applaud themselves, whilst the people despise them, and abhor the wickedness of their lives. The prophet, therefore, condemns them for their infatuation in this, that while all others are offended at their disgraceful conduct, they themselves are not at all affected by it. As far as in them lies, they abolish all distinction between good and evil, and lull their conscience into a state of insensibility, lest it should pain them, and urge them to repentance. Certainly the infatuation here described ought to be the subject of our serious consideration, the infatuation which is manifested in this, that men who are given up to a reprobate mind, while they render themselves hateful in the sight of all other men, are notwithstanding destitute of all sense of their own sins.

3. *The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit.* The two clauses of this verse may be understood as referring to the same thing, namely, that the wicked indulging in deceit and vanity, will not receive or admit the light of understanding. This, I apprehend, is the meaning of David. He reproves the wicked not merely for circumventing others by their wiles and stratagems, but especially because they are altogether destitute of uprightness and sincerity. We have already said that the Psalmist is here speaking not of sinful and wicked men, in whose hearts there still remains

"He sets such a false gloss," says this critic, "in his own eyes, upon his worst actions, that he never finds out the blackness of his iniquity, which, were it perceived by him, would be hateful even to himself." The wicked in all ages have thus contrived to put a fair appearance upon the most unprincipled maxims and pernicious practices. It will be seen that Montanus' and Horsley's translation of the last clause of the verse gives a different meaning from that given by Calvin. The original text is somewhat obscure and ambiguous from its brevity; but it seems to support the sense given by these critics. The Hebrew is, עונולשנא למצא, *limtso avono lisno*, *to find*, or *to*, *for*, or *concerning the finding of*, [the first word being an infinitive with the prefix ל, *lamed*,] *his iniquity to hate* [*it.*] "The prefix ל," says Walford, "cannot, I imagine, be translated with any propriety by *until*." His rendering is,

"For he flattereth himself in his own sight,
That his iniquity will not be found to be hateful:"

That is, will not be viewed by others as the hateful thing which it really is. The original words will easily bear this sense as well as that given by Montanus and Horsley.

some fear of God, but of the profane despisers of his name, who have given themselves up entirely to the practice of sin. He therefore says that they have always in their mouth some frivolous excuses and vain pretexts, by which they encourage themselves in rejecting and scoffing at all sound doctrine. He then adds, that they purposely suppress in themselves all knowledge or understanding of the distinction between good and evil, because they have no desire to become better than they are. We know that God has given understanding to men to direct them to do what is good. Now David says that the wicked shun it, and strive to deprive themselves of it, that they may not be constrained to repent of their wickedness, and to amend their lives. We are taught from this passage, that if at any time we turn aside from the path of rectitude, the only remedy in such a case is to open the eyes of our understanding, that we may rightly distinguish between good and evil, and that thus we may be led back from our wandering. When, instead of doing this, a man refuses instruction, it is an indication that he is in a state of depravity altogether desperate.

4. *He meditates iniquity upon his bed* Here the sacred writer shows that the wickedness of the ungodly man is of a secret and very determined character. It sometimes happens that many, who otherwise are not disposed to wickedness, err and fall into sin, because occasion presents itself all on a sudden; but David tells us, that the wicked, even when they are withdrawn from the sight of men, and in retirement, form schemes of mischief; and thus, although there is not presented before them any temptation, or the evil example of others to excite them to it, they, of their own accord, devise mischief, and urge themselves to it without being impelled by any thing else. Since he describes the reprobate by this distinguishing mark of character, that *they devise mischief upon their beds,* true believers should learn from this to exercise themselves when alone in meditations of a different nature, and to make their own life the subject of examination, so that they may exclude all evil thoughts from their minds. The Psalmist next refers to their stubbornness, declaring *that they set themselves in a crooked and perverse way;* that is to say, they purposely and wilfully harden themselves in doing evil. Finally, he adds the reason of their doing this: *They abhor not evil* Wilfully shutting their eyes, they rush forward in their headlong course till they spontaneously yield themselves the slaves of wickedness. Let us now shortly state the contrast between the ungodly and the people of God, contained in the preceding verses. The former deceive themselves by flattery; the latter exercise over themselves a strict control, and examine themselves with a rigid scrutiny: the former, throwing loose the reins, rush headlong into evil; the latter are restrained by the fear of God: the former cloak or disguise their offenses by sophistry, and turn light into darkness; the latter willingly acknowledge their guilt, and by a candid confession are brought to repentance: the former reject all sound judgment; the latter always desire to vindicate themselves by coming to the open light of day: the former upon

their bed invent various ways of doing evil; the latter are sedulously on their guard that they may not devise or stir up within themselves any sinful desire: the former indulge a deep and fixed contempt of God; the latter willingly cherish a constant displeasure at their sins.

Psalm 36:5-9

5. O Jehovah! thy mercy is unto the heavens, and thy truth even unto the clouds. **6.** Thy righteousness is as the mountains of God; [4] thy judgments are a great deep: [5] O Jehovah! thou preservest man and beast. **7**. O God! how excellent [6] is thy loving-kindness! therefore, the children of men shall trust in the shadow of thy wings. **8.** They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them to drink of the river of thy pleasures. **9.** For with thee [7] is the fountain of life; and in thy light [8] shall we see light.

5. *O Jehovah! thy mercy is unto the heavens.* Commentators think that David, after having described the great corruption and depravity which every where prevail in the world, takes occasion from thence to extol in rapturous praises the wonderful forbearance of God, in not ceasing to manifest his favor and good-will towards men, even though they are sunk in iniquity and crime. But, as I have already observed, I am of a somewhat different opinion. After having spoken of the very great depravity of men, the prophet, afraid lest he should become infected by it, or be carried away by the example of the wicked, as by a flood, quits the subject, and recovers himself by reflecting on a different theme. It usually happens, that in condemning the wicked, the contagion of their malice insinuates itself into our minds when we are not conscious of it; and there is scarcely one in a hundred who, after having complained of the malice of others, keeps

4

In the French version it is, "Comme hautes montagnes;" — "as the high mountains;" and in the margin Calvin states that the Hebrew is, "Montagnes de Dieu;" — "Mountains of God." The Hebrews were accustomed to describe things eminent, as Calvin observes in his exposition of the verse, by adding to them the name of God; as, "river of God;" Psalm 65:9; "mount of God," Psalm 68:15; "cedars of God," Psalm 80:10; "the trees of the Lord," Psalm 104:16. "The mountains of God," therefore, here mean *the highest mountain.*

5

Lowth reads, "A vast abyss."

6

Heb. — how precious.

7

"En toy." — *Fr.* "In thee."

8

"Par ta clarte." — *Fr.* "By thy light."

himself in true godliness, pure and unpolluted. The meaning therefore is, Although we may see among men a sad and frightful confusion, which, like a great gulf, would swallow up the minds of the godly, David, nevertheless, maintains that the world is full of the goodness and righteousness of God, and that he governs heaven and earth on the strictest principles of equity. And certainly, whenever the corruption of the world affects our minds, and fills us with amazement, we must take care not to limit our views to the wickedness of men who overturn and confound all things; but in the midst of this strange confusion, it becomes us to elevate our thoughts in admiration and wonder, to the contemplation of the secret providence of God. David here enumerates four cardinal attributes of Deity, which, according to the figure of speech called *synecdoche,* include all the others, and by which he intimates, in short, that although carnal reason may suggest to us that the world moves at random, and is directed by chance, yet we ought to consider that the infinite power of God is always associated with perfect righteousness. In saying that the goodness of God is *unto the heavens,* David's meaning is, that in its greatness it is as high as the heavens. In the same sense he adds, *Thy truth is even unto the clouds* The term *truth* in this place may be taken either for the faithfulness which God manifests in accomplishing his promises, or for the just and well regulated character of his government, in which his rectitude is seen to be pure and free from all deception. But there are many other similar passages of Scripture which constrain me to refer it to the promises of God, in the keeping and fulfilling of which he is ever faithful.

6. *Thy righteousness is as the mountains of God* In this verse there is a commendation of God's righteousness, which the sacred writer compares to the high mountains, (this being the manner of the expression — "the mountains of God," for we know that the Hebrews were accustomed to distinguish by the appellation *divine,* or *of God,* whatever is excellent,) because his glory shines forth more clearly there. In the last place, it is said, that his *judgments are like a great and bottomless abyss.* By these words he teaches us, that to whatever side we turn our eyes, and whether we look upward or downward, all things are disposed and ordered by the just judgment of God. This passage is usually quoted in a sense quite different, namely, that the judgments of God far exceed our limited capacity, and are too mysterious for our being able to comprehend them; and, indeed, in this sense the similitude of an abyss is not inappropriate. It is, however, obvious from the context, that the language of the Psalmist is to be understood in a much more extensive sense, and as meaning, that however great the depth of wickedness which there is among men, and though it seems like a flood which breaks forth and overflows the whole earth, yet still greater is the depth of God's providence, by which he righteously disposes and governs all things. Whenever, therefore, our faith may be shaken by the confusion and disorder of human affairs, and when we are unable to explain the reasons

of this disorder and confusion, let us remember that the judgments of God in the government of the world are with the highest propriety compared to a great depth which fills heaven and earth, that the consideration of its infinite greatness may ravish our minds with admiration, swallow up all our cares, and dispel all our sorrows. When it is added in the end of the verse, *O Jehovah! thou preservest man and beast,* the meaning is to this effect, that since God vouchsafes to extend his providential care even to the irrational creation, much more does he provide for the wants of men. And, indeed, whenever any doubt may arise in our minds regarding the providence of God, we should fortify and encourage ourselves by setting before us this consideration, that God, who provides food for the beasts of the field, and maintains them in their present state, can never cease to take care of the human race. The explanation which some have given of the term *beasts,* interpreting it allegorically of beastly men, I regard as too forced, and reject it.

7 *O God! how precious is thy loving-kindness!* Some explain these words in this sense: That the mercy of God is precious, and that the children of men who put their trust in it are precious; but this is a sense too far removed from the words of the text. Others understand them as meaning, that the mercy of God is very great to the gods, that is to say, to the angels and the sons of men; but this is too refined. I am also surprised that the Jewish Rabbins have wearied and bewildered themselves, without any occasion, in seeking to find out new and subtile interpretations, since the meaning of the prophet is of itself perfectly evident; namely, that it is because the mercy of God is great and clearly manifested, that the children of men put their trust under the shadow of it. As David has hitherto been speaking in commendation of the goodness of God, which extends to every creature, the opinion of other commentators, who consider that David is here discoursing of the peculiar favor which God manifests towards his children, is in my judgment very correct. The language seems to refer in general to all the sons of men, but what follows is applicable properly to the faithful alone. In order to manifest more clearly the greatness of divine grace, he thus speaks in general terms, telling us, that God condescends to gather together under his wings the mortal offspring of Adam, as it is said in Psalm 8:4,

"What is man, that thou art mindful of him?
and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

The substance of the passage is this: The ungodly may run to every excess in wickedness, but this temptation does not prevent the people of God from trusting in his goodness, and casting themselves upon his fatherly care; while the ungodly, whose minds are degraded, and whose hearts are polluted, never taste the sweetness of his goodness so as to be led by it to the faith, and thus to enjoy repose under the shadow of his wings. The metaphorical expression of *wings,* as applied to God, is common enough in

Scripture. [9] By it God teaches us that we are preserved in safety under his protecting care, even as the hen cherishes her chickens under her wings; and thus he invites us kindly and affectionately to return to him.

8. *They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of that house.* I have no doubt that by *the fatness of God's house* the prophet means the abundance of good things which is not designed for all men indiscriminately, but is laid up in store for the children of God who commit themselves wholly to his protection. Some restrict the expression to spiritual graces; but to me it seems more likely, that under it are comprehended all the blessings that are necessary to the happiness and comfort of the present life, as well as those which pertain to eternal and heavenly blessedness. It ought, however, to be observed, that in the style of speaking which the prophet here employs, the use of earthly blessings is connected with the gracious experience of faith, in the exercise of which we can alone enjoy them rightfully and lawfully to our own welfare. When the ungodly glut themselves with the abundance of God's benefits, their bodies indeed grow fat like the flesh of cattle or swine, but their souls are always empty and famished. It is the faithful alone, as I have said, who are satisfied with the goodness of God towards them, because it is to them a pledge of his fatherly love. The expression *meat* and *drink* denotes a complete and perfect fullness, and the term *river,* [10] denotes an overflowing abundance.

9. *For with thee is the fountain of life* The Psalmist here confirms the doctrine of the preceding verse, the knowledge of which is so profitable that no words can adequately express it. As the ungodly profane even the best of God's gifts by their wicked abuse of them, unless we observe the distinction which I have stated, it were better for us to perish a hundred times of hunger, than to be fed abundantly by the goodness of God. The ungodly do not acknowledge that it is in God they live, move, and have their being, but rather imagine that they are sustained by their own power; and, accordingly, David, on the contrary, here affirms from the experience of the godly, and as it were in their name, that the fountain of life is in God. By this he means, that there is not a drop of life to be found without him, or which flows not from his grace. The metaphor of *light,* in the last clause of the verse, is tacitly most emphatic, denoting that men are altogether destitute

9

"Frequens in Psalmis figura ab alio Cherubinorum Arcae," etc. *i.e.* "A common figure in the Psalms, taken more immediately, in my opinion, from the wings of the Cherubim overshadowing the mercy-seat which covered the ark; but more remotely from birds, which defend their young from the solar rays by overshadowing them with their wings. See Psalm 17:8; 57:1; 61:4; 91:4, etc., and Deuteronomy 32:11." — *Bishop Hare.*

10

The words in the original are, עתיך נחל, *nachal adanecha*, *the river of thy Eden*, in which there is probably an allusion to the garden of ערן Eden, and to the river which flowed through and watered it.

of light, except in so far as the Lord shines upon them. If this is true of the light; of this life, how shall we be able to behold the light of the heavenly world, unless the Spirit of God enlighten us? for we must maintain that the measure of understanding with which men are by nature endued is such, that

"the light shineth in darkness,
but the darkness comprehendeth it not," (John 1:5;)

and that men are enlightened only by a supernatural gift. But it is the godly alone who perceive that they derive their light from God, and that, without it, they would continue, as it were, buried and smothered in darkness.

Psalm 36:10-12

10. Prolong [11] thy mercy to them that know thee, and thy righteousness to the upright in heart. **11.** Let not the foot of pride come upon me, and let not the hand of the wicked remove me. **12.** There the workers of iniquity are fallen: they are thrust down, and shall not be able to rise.

10. *Prolong thy mercy to them that know thee.* David now sets himself to pray. And, first, he asks in general, that God would continue his mercy to all the godly, and then he pleads particularly in his own behalf, imploring the help of God against his enemies. Those who affirm that God is here said to prolong or extend his mercy because it is exalted above the heavens, indulge in a style of speaking too puerile. When David spake of it in such terms in a preceding verse, his intention was not, as I have already said, to represent the mercy of God as shut up in heaven, but simply to declare that it was diffused throughout the world; and here what he desires is just this, that God would continue to manifest, even to the end, his mercy towards his people. With the mercy of God he connects his righteousness, combining them as cause and effect. We have already said in another place, that the righteousness of God is manifested in his undertaking the defense of his own people, vindicating their innocence, avenging their wrongs, restraining their enemies, and in proving himself faithful in the preservation of their welfare and happiness against all who assail them. Now, since all this is done for them freely by God, David, with good reason, makes mention particularly of his goodness, and places it first in order, that we may learn to depend entirely upon his favor. We ought also to observe the epithets by which he describes true believers; first, he says, that *they know God;* and, secondly, that *they are upright in heart.* We learn from this that true godliness springs from the knowledge of God, and again, that the light of

11 Heb. Draw out at length.

faith must necessarily dispose us to uprightness of heart. At the same time, we ought always to bear in mind, that we only know God aright when we render to him the honor to which he is entitled; that is, when we place entire confidence in him.

11. *Let not the foot of pride come upon me* As I have observed a little before, the Psalmist here applies to his own circumstances the prayer which he had offered. But by including in his prayer in the preceding verse all the children of God, he designed to show that he asked nothing for himself apart from others, but only desired that as one of the godly and upright, who have their eyes directed to God, he might enjoy his favor. He has employed the expressions, *the foot of pride,* [12] and *the hand of the wicked,* in the same sense. As the wicked rush boldly to the destruction of good men, lifting up their feet to tread upon them, and having their hands ready to do them wrong, David entreats God to restrain their hands and their feet; and thus he confesses that he is in danger of being exposed to their insolence, abuse, and violence, unless God come speedily to his aid.

12. *There the workers of iniquity are fallen.* Here he derives confidence from his prayer, not doubting that he has already obtained his request. And thus we see how the certainty of faith directs the saints to prayer. Besides, still farther to confirm his confidence and hope in God, he shows, as it were, by pointing to it with the finger, the certain destruction of the wicked, even though it lay as yet concealed in the future. In this respect, the adverb *there* [13] is not superfluous; for while the ungodly boast of their good fortune, and the world applaud them, David beholds by the eye of faith, as if from a watch-tower, their destruction, and speaks of it with as much confidence as if he had already seen it realised. That we also may attain a similar assurance, let us remember, that those who would hasten prematurely the time of God's vengeance upon the wicked, according to the ardor of their desires, do indeed err, and that we ought to leave it to the providence of God to fix the period when, in his wisdom, he shall rise up to judgment. When it is said, *They are thrust down,* the meaning is, that they are agitated with doubt, and totter as in a slippery place, so that in the midst of their

12

That is, the foot of the proud man, as the Chaldee translates it, the thing being put for the person in whom it is; a mode of expression of frequent occurrence in Scripture. Thus *deceit*, in Proverbs 12:27, is put for *a deceitful man*; *poverty*, in 2 Kings 24:14, *for poor people*, etc. There appears to be here an allusion to the ancient practice of tyrants in treading upon their enemies, or in spurning those who offended them from their presence with their feet.

13

Heb. שם *sham*, *there*, that is, (pointing with the finger to a particular place,) see there! lo! the workers of iniquity are fallen. "It represents strongly before the eye," says Mudge, "the downfall of the wicked. Upon the very spot where they practice their treachery, they receive their downfall." A similar mode of expression occurs in Psalm 14:5

prosperity they have no security. Finally, it is added, that they shall fall into utter destruction, so that it can never be expected that they shall rise again.

Psalm 37

PSALM 37

This psalm, the title of which shows it to have been composed by David, contains most profitable instruction. Since the faithful, so long as they pursue their earthly pilgrimage through life, see things strangely confused in the world, unless they assuaged their grief with the hope of a better issue, their courage would soon fail them. The more boldly any man despises God, and runs to every excess in wickedness, so much the more happily he seems to live. And since prosperity appears to be a token of God's favor towards the ungodly, what conclusion, it may be said, can be drawn from this, but either that the world is governed by chance, and that fortune bears the sovereignty, or else that God makes no difference between the good and the bad? The Spirit of God accordingly confirms and strengthens us in this psalm against the assaults of such a temptation. However great the prosperity which the wicked enjoy for a time, he declares their felicity to be transient and evanescent, and that, therefore, they are miserable, while the happiness of which they boast is cursed; whereas the pious and devoted servants of God never cease to be happy, even in the midst of their greatest calamities, because God takes care of them, and at length comes to their aid in due season. This, indeed, is paradoxical, and wholly repugnant to human reason. For as good men often suffer extreme poverty, and languish long under many troubles, and are loaded with reproaches and wrongs, while the wicked and profligate triumph, and are regaled with pleasures, might we not suppose that God cares not for the things that are done on earth? It is on this account that, as I have already said, the doctrine of this psalm is so much the more profitable; because, withdrawing our thoughts from

the present aspect of things, it enjoins us to confide in the providence of God, until he stretch forth his hand to help those who are his servants, and demand of the ungodly a strict account of their lives, as of thieves and robbers who have foully abused his bounty and paternal goodness.

A Psalm of David.

Psalm 37:1-6

> **1**. Fret not thyself because of the wicked, and be not envious at the workers of iniquity: **2**. For they shall soon be cut down like grass; and they shall wither as the green and tender herb. **3**. Put thy trust in Jehovah, and do good; dwell in the land, and be fed in truth, [or faithfully. [14]] **4**. And delight thyself in Jehovah, and he will give thee the desires of thy heart. **5**. Roll [or devolve] thy ways on Jehovah, and trust in him, and he will bring it to pass. **6**. And he will bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgments [15] as the noon day.

1. *Fret not thyself because of the wicked.* David lays down this as a general principle, that the prosperity of the wicked, in which they greatly rejoice, should on no account vex or disquiet the children of God, because it will soon fade away. On the other hand, although the people of God are afflicted for a time, yet the issue of their afflictions shall be such, that they have every reason to be contented with their lot. Now all this depends upon the providence of God; for unless we are persuaded that the world is governed by him in righteousness and truth, our minds will soon stagger, and at length entirely fail us. David then condemns two sinful affections of the mind, which are indeed closely allied, and the one of which is generated by the other. He first enjoins the faithful not to fret on account of the wicked; and, secondly, that they should not indulge an envious spirit towards them. For, in the first place, when they see the wicked enjoying prosperity, from which it might naturally be supposed that God regards not the affairs of men, there is a danger lest they should shake off the fear of God, and apostatise from the faith. Then another temptation follows, namely, that the influence of the example of the wicked excites in them a desire to involve themselves in the same wickedness with them. This is the natural sense. The Hebrew words, תתחר-אל, *al-tithechar,* which we have rendered, *Fret not thyself,* are by some translated, *Do not mingle thyself with.* [16] But this

14

"C'est, jouy des biens d'icelle en repos ferme et asseure." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, enjoy the good things of it in quietness and security."

15

"C'est, ton bon droict." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, thy just cause, or thy rectitude.

16

That is, do not enter into fellowship with.

interpretation is too forced, and may be disproved by the context; for in the eighth verse, where mention is expressly made of *wrath* and *anger,* it would surely be absurd to interpret in another sense the same verb which immediately follows these two words, and which is there used in the same sense and for the same end as in this first verse. In the second place, the order which David observes is very natural; for when the prosperity of the wicked has irritated our minds, we very soon begin to envy them their happiness and ease. First, then, he exhorts us to be on our guard, lest a happiness which is only transitory, or rather imaginary, should vex or disquiet us; and, secondly, lest envy should lead us to commit sin. The reason by which he enforces this exhortation is added in the following verse: for if the wicked flourish to-day like the grass of the field, to-morrow they shall be cut down and wither. We need not wonder that this similitude is often to be met with in the sacred writings, since it is so very appropriate; for we see how soon the strength of the grass decays, and that when cast down by a blast of wind, or parched with the heat of the sun, even without being cut by the hand of man, it withers away. [17] In like manner, David tells us that the judgment of God, like a scythe in the hand of man, shall cut down the wicked, so that they shall suddenly perish.

3. *Put thy trust in Jehovah, and do good.* The inspired writer now goes on, in the second place, to say, that every thing in the end shall be well with the righteous, because they are under the protection of God. But as there is nothing better or more desirable than to enjoy the fostering and protecting care of God, he exhorts them to put their trust in him, and at the same time to follow after goodness and truth. It is not without good reason that he begins with the doctrine of faith, or trust in God; for there is nothing more difficult for men than to preserve their minds in a state of peace and tranquillity, undisturbed by any disquieting fears, whilst they are in this world, which is subject to so many changes. On the other hand, while they see the wicked becoming rich by unjust means, extending their influence, and acquiring power by unrestrained indulgence in sin, it is no less difficult for them steadily to persevere in a life of piety and virtue. Nor is it sufficient merely to disregard those things that are commonly sought after with the greatest eagerness. Some of the philosophers of antiquity were so noble-minded, that they despised riches unjustly acquired, and abstained from fraud and robbery; nay, they held up to ridicule the vain pomp and splendor of the wicked, which the common people look upon with such high admiration. But as they were destitute of faith, they defrauded God of his honor, and so it happened that they never knew what it was to be truly

17

The fitness of this figure to express the transient and short-lived character of the prosperity of the wicked, will appear in a still more striking light when we take into consideration the great heat of the climate of Palestine.

happy. Now, as David places faith first in order, to show that God is the author of all good, and that by his blessing alone prosperity is to be looked for; so it ought to be observed that he connects this with a holy life: for the man who places his whole confidence in God, and gives himself up to be governed by him, will live uprightly and innocently, and will devote himself to doing good.

Dwell in the land This language is much more expressive than if he had promised that the righteous should dwell securely in the land. [18] It is just as if he had led them to the place, and put them in possession of it. Moreover, by these words he declares that they shall long enjoy it. They are, it is true, only strangers or sojourners in this world, yet the hand of the Lord is stretched forth to protect them, so that they live in security and peace. This David again confirms by the following clause, *Thou shalt be fed in truth* Assured of the protection of God, he exhorts them to place entire and unsuspecting confidence in him. It is surprising to find how interpreters have wrested, and as it were mangled this clause, by the different meanings they have put upon it. Some take the verb *to feed* in an active signification; and others understand the expression *to feed on faith* as denoting to cherish within the heart the promises of God. Others are of opinion that David exhorts us to feed our brethren with faith by ministering to them the pure word of God, which is the spiritual food of the soul. Others render the term for *faith* in the sense of *sincerity,* so that the expression *to feed on faith* would signify to behave in an upright and honest manner among men. But the scope and connection of the passage necessarily require, and it is quite in accordance with the nature of the Hebrew language, that the verb רעה, *reeh,* should be taken in a passive signification, *Be fed* This, too, is the opinion of the greater part of commentators, who, notwithstanding, afterwards differ in explaining its meaning. Some of them adopt the interpretation, that we are fed with faith, when the promises of God suffice us, and we are satisfied with them. Others give this explanation, *Feed thyself with the fruit of faith,* because God will indeed show that we have not believed his word in vain. Others explain it in this way, *Let truth be thy food,* and let nothing give thee greater pleasure than to converse sincerely and frankly with thy neighbors. There is still another interpretation which, although in some respects different, is similar to the preceding, namely, Live not upon spoil, but be content with lawful sustenance; that is to say, with that which is lawfully acquired. [19] It is certainly a shameful and disgraceful thing that

18

Some read, "Thou shalt dwell in the land." The Hebrew verb is in the imperative mood; but the imperative in Hebrew is sometimes used for the future of the indicative. — *Glass.* tom. 1, can. 40, p. 285.

19

"C'est dire, qui te vient loyaument." — *Fr.*

so many learned men should have erred in a matter so plain and obvious. [20] Had not every one been led by his own ambition to seek for something new, the true and natural meaning of the prophet would have occurred at once, which is this, Dwell in the land, that thou mayest enjoy it in sure and lasting repose. The Hebrew word אמונה, *emunah,* not only signifies *truth* or *faith,* but also *secure continuance for a long period.* And who does not see that since the possession of the land was given to the righteous, this latter clause was added by way of exposition?

4. *And delight thyself in Jehovah* This delight is set in opposition to the vain and deceitful allurements of the world, which so intoxicate the ungodly, that despising the blessing of God, they dream of no other happiness than what presents itself for the time before their eyes. This contrast between the vain and fickle joys with which the world is deluded, and the true repose enjoyed by the godly, ought to be carefully observed; for whether all things smile upon us, or whether the Lord exercise us with adversities, we ought always to hold fast this principle, that as the Lord is the portion of our inheritance, our lot has fallen in pleasant places, [21] as we have seen in Psalm 16:5, 6. We must therefore constantly recall to our minds this truth, that it can never be well with us except in so far as God is gracious to us, so that the joy we derive from his paternal favor towards us may surpass all the pleasures of the world. To this injunction a promise is added, that, if we are satisfied in the enjoyment of God alone, he will liberally bestow upon us all that we shall desire: *He will give thee the desires of thy heart.* This does not imply that the godly immediately obtain whatever their fancy may suggest to them; nor would it be for their profit that God should grant them all their vain desires. The meaning simply is, that if we stay our minds wholly upon God, instead of allowing our imaginations like others to roam after idle and frivolous fancies, all other things will be bestowed upon us in due season.

5. *Roll* [22] *thy ways upon Jehovah.* Here David illustrates and confirms the doctrine contained in the preceding verse. In order that God may accomplish our desires, it behoves us to cast all our cares upon him in the

20

Modern critics have varied as much in their interpretations of this clause of the verse as those who preceded Calvin, of whom he complains. For example, Ainsworth reads, "Thou shalt be fed by faith;" Archbishop Secker," Thou shalt be fed in plenty;" Parkhurst, "Thou shalt be fed in security;" Dathe, "Tunc terram inhabitabis et secure vivas," assigning the reason for this translation to be, that "*pascere securitatem*, sive si malis, *in securitate*, nihil aliud est quam *secure vivere*;" and Gesenius reads, "Follow after truth," or, "seek to be faithful," deriving the verb from a root which signifies *to take delight in*, or *to follow after*.

21

"D'autant que Dieu est la part de nostre heritage, que nostre lot est escheu en lieux plaisan,." — *Fr.*

22

exercise of hope and patience. Accordingly, we are taught from this passage how to preserve our minds in tranquillity amidst anxieties, dangers, and floods of trouble. There can be no doubt, that by the term *ways* we are here to understand all *affairs* or *businesses.* The man, therefore, who, leaving the issue of all his affairs to the will of God, and who, patiently waiting to receive from his hand whatever he may be pleased to send, whether prosperity or adversity, casts all his cares, and every other burden which he bears, into his bosom; or, in other words, commits to him all his affairs, — such a person *rolls his ways upon Jehovah* Hence, David again inculcates the duty of hope and confidence in God: *And trust in him* By this he intimates, that we render to him the honor to which he is entitled only when we intrust to him the government and direction of our lives; and thus he provides a remedy for a disease with which almost all men are infected. Whence is it that the children of God are envious of the wicked, and are often in trouble and perplexity, and yield to excess of sorrow, and sometimes even murmur and repine, but because, by involving themselves immoderately in endless cares, and cherishing too eagerly a desire to provide for themselves irrespective of God, they plunge, as it were, into an abyss, or at least accumulate to themselves such a vast load of cares, that they are forced at last to sink under them? Desirous to provide a remedy for this evil, David warns us, that in presuming to take upon us the government of our own life, and to provide for all our affairs as if we were able to bear so great a burden, we are greatly deceived, and that, therefore, our only remedy is to fix our eyes upon the providence of God, and to draw from it consolation in all our sorrows. Those who obey this counsel shall escape that horrible labyrinth in which all men labor in vain; for when God shall once have taken the management of our affairs into his own hand, there is no reason to fear that prosperity shall ever fail us. Whence is it that he forsakes us and disappoints our expectations, if it is not because we provoke him, by pretending to greater wisdom and understanding than we possess? If, therefore, we would only permit him, he will perform his part, and will not disappoint our expectations, which he sometimes does as a just punishment for our unbelief.

6. *And he will bring forth thy righteousness as the light* This David says, in order to anticipate the misgivings which often trouble us when we seem to lose our labor in faithfully serving God, and in dealing uprightly with our neighbors; nay, when our integrity is either exposed to the calumnies of the wicked, or is the occasion of injury to us from men; for then it is thought to be of no account in the sight of God. David, therefore, declares, that God

Calvin here gives the exact sense of the Hebrew verb גלל, *galal.* It literally signifies *to roll*, or *to devolve*; and in this passage it evidently means, Roll or devolve all thy concerns upon God; "cast thy burden upon him," as it is in Psalm 55:22; "the metaphor being taken," says Cresswell, "from a burden put by one who is unequal to it upon a stronger man." But Dr Adam Clarke thinks that the idea may be taken from the camel who lies down till his load be rolled upon him.

will not suffer our righteousness to be always hid in darkness, but that he will maintain it and bring it forth to the light; namely, when he will bestow upon us such a reward as we desire. He alludes to the darkness of the night, which is soon dispelled by the dawning of the day; as if he had said, We may be often grievously oppressed, and God may not seem to approve our innocence, yet this vicissitude should no more disturb our minds than the darkness of the night which covers the earth; for then the expectation of the light of day sustains our hope.

Psalm 37:7-11

> **7**. Be silent to Jehovah, and wait for him; fret not because of the man who prospereth in his way, against the man who commits wickedness. [23] **8**. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself so as to do evil, **9**. For the wicked shall be cut off; but those that wait upon Jehovah shall inherit the earth. **10**. Yet a little while; and the wicked shall not be; and thou shalt look upon his place, and shalt not find him. **11**. But the meek shall inherit the earth, [24] and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

7. *Be silent to Jehovah.* The Psalmist continues the illustration of the same doctrine, namely, that we should patiently and meekly bear those things that usually disquiet our minds; for amid innumerable sources of disquietude and conflict there is need of no small patience. By the similitude of *silence,* which often occurs in the sacred writings, he declares most aptly the nature of faith; for as our affections rise in rebellion against the will of God, so faith, restoring us to a state of humble and peaceful submission, appeases all the tumults of our hearts. By this expression, [25] therefore, David commands us not to yield to the tumultuous passions of the soul, as the unbelieving do, nor fretfully to set ourselves in opposition to the authority of God, but rather to submit peacefully to him, that he may execute his work in silence. Moreover, as the Hebrew word חול, *chul,* which we have rendered *to wait,* sometimes signifies to *mourn,* and sometimes to

23

"Ou, qui vient a bont de ses entreprises." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, who accomplishes his devices."

24

"C'est, y auront leurs plaisirs avec grande prosperite." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, shall have their enjoyment in it with great prosperity."

25

The Hebrew verb rendered *silent* is דום, *dom*, from which the English word *dumb* appears to be derived. The silence here enjoined is opposed to murmuring or complaining. The word is rendered by the Septuagint, ὑποταγνθι, *be subject*; which is not an exact translation of the original term: but it well expresses the meaning; for this silence implies the entire subjection of ourselves to the will of God.

wait, the word התחולל, *hithcholel,* in this place is understood by some as meaning *to mourn moderately,* or *to bear sorrow patiently.* It might also be rendered more simply *to mourn before God,* in order that he might be a witness of all our sorrows; for when the unbelieving give way to doubt and suspense, they rather murmur against him than utter their complaints before him. As, however, the other interpretation is more generally received, namely, that David is exhorting us to hope and patience, I adhere to it. The prophet Isaiah also connects hope with silence in the same sense, (Isaiah 30:15.)

David next repeats what he had said in the first verse, *Fret not because of the man who prospereth in his way,* or who brings his ways to a happy issue; nor *against the man who behaveth himself wickedly,* or *who accomplishes his devices* Of these two interpretations of this last clause, the latter is more in accordance with the scope of the psalm. I confess, indeed, that the word מזמות *mezimmoth,* is commonly taken in a bad sense for fraud and stratagem. But as זמם *zamam,* sometimes signifies in general *to meditate*, the nature of the Hebrew language will bear this meaning, that *to execute his devices* is of the same import as to effect what he has purposed. Now we see that these two things are connected, namely *to dispose his ways according to his desires,* or *to prosper in his way,* and *to accomplish his devices* It is a very great temptation to us and difficult to bear, when we see fortune smiling upon the ungodly, as if God approved of their wickedness; nay, it excites our wrath and indignation. David, therefore, not contented with a short admonition, insists at some length upon this point.

The accumulation of terms which occurs in the next verse, in which he lays a restraint as with a bridle upon anger, allays wrath and assuages passion, it is not superfluous; but, as in necessary, he rather prescribes numerous remedies for a disease which it is difficult to cure. By this means, he reminds us how easily we are provoked, and how ready we are to take offence, unless we lay a powerful restraint upon our tumultuous passions, and keep them under control. And although the faithful are not able to subdue the lusts of the flesh without much trouble and labour, whilst the prosperity of the wicked excites their impatience, yet this repetition teaches us that we ought unceasingly to wrestle against them; for if we steadily persevere, we know that our endeavors shall not be in vain in the end. I differ from other commentators in the exposition of the last clause. They translate it, *at least to do evil;* as if David meant that we should appease our anger lest it should lead us to do mischief. But as the particle אך, *ach,* which they translate *at least,* is often used affirmatively in Hebrew, I have no doubt that David here teaches, that it cannot be otherwise than that the offense which we take at the prosperity of the wicked should lead us to sin, unless we speedily check it; as it is said in another Psalm,

"God will break the cords of the ungodly, lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity," (Psalm 125:3.)

9. *For the wicked shall be cut off.* It is not without cause that he repeatedly inculcates the same thing, namely, that the happiness and prosperity which the ungodly enjoy is only a mask or phantom; for the first sight of it so dazzles our senses, that we are unable to form a proper estimate of what will be its issue, in the light of which alone we ought to judge of the value of all that has preceded. But the contrast between the two clauses of the verse ought to be observed. First, in saying that *the wicked shall be cut off,* he intimates that they shall flourish fresh and green till the time of their destruction shall arrive; and, secondly, in allotting the earth to the godly, saying, *They shall inherit the earth,* he means that they shall live in such a manner as that the blessing of God shall follow them, even to the grave. Now, as I have already said, the present condition of men is to be estimated by the state in which it will terminate. From the epithet by which he distinguishes the children of God, we learn that they are exercised by a severe conflict for the trial of their faith; for he speaks of them, not as *righteous* or *godly,* but as those that *wait upon the Lord.* What purpose would this waiting serve, unless they groaned under the burden of the cross? Moreover, the possession of the earth which he promises to the children of God is not always realised to them; because it is the will of the Lord that they should live as strangers and pilgrims in it; neither does he permit them to have any fixed abode in it, but rather tries them with frequent troubles, that they may desire with greater alacrity the everlasting dwelling-place of heaven. The flesh is always seeking to build its nest for ever here; and were we not tossed hither and thither, and not suffered to rest, we would by and by forget heaven and the everlasting inheritance. Yet, in the midst of this disquietude, the possession of the earth, of which David here speaks, is not taken away from the children of God; for they know most certainly that they are the rightful heirs of the world. Hence it is that they eat their bread with a quiet conscience, and although they suffer want, yet God provides for their necessities in due season. Finally, although the ungodly labor to effect their destruction, and reckon them unworthy to live upon the earth, yet God stretches forth his hand and protects them; nay, he so upholds them by his power, that they live more securely in a state of exile, than the wicked do in their nests to which they are attached. And thus the blessing, of which David speaks, is in part secret and hidden, because our reason is so dull, that we cannot comprehend what it is to possess the earth; and yet the faithful truly feel and understand that this promise is not made to them in vain, since, having fixed the anchor of their faith in God, they pass their life every day in peace, while God makes it manifest in their experience, that the shadow of his hand is sufficient to protect them.

10 *Yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be.* This is a confirmation of the preceding verse. It might well have been objected, that the actual state of things in the world is very different from what David here represents it, since the ungodly riot in their pleasures, and the people of God pine away in

sickness and poverty. David, therefore, wishing to guard us against a rash and hasty judgment, exhorts us to be quiet for a little while, till the Lord cut off the wicked entirely, and show the efficacy of his grace towards his own people. What he requires then on the part of the true believers is, that in the exercise of their wisdom they should suspend their judgment for a time, and not stop at every trifle, but exercise their thoughts in meditation upon divine providence, until God show out of heaven that the full time is come. Instead, however, of describing them as *those who wait upon the Lord,* he now speaks of them as *the meek;* and this he does not without good reason: for unless a man believe that God preserves his own people in a wonderful manner, as if they were like sheep among wolves, he will be always endeavoring to repel force by force. [26] It is hope alone, therefore, which of itself produces meekness; for, by restraining the impetuosity of the flesh, and allaying its vehemence, it trains to equanimity and patience those who submit themselves to God. From this passage it would seem, that Christ has taken that which is written in Matthew 5:5. The word *peace* is generally employed in the Hebrew to denote the prosperous and happy issue of things; yet another sense will agree better with this place, namely, that while the ungodly shall be agitated with inward trouble, and God shall encompass them on every side with terror, the faithful shall rejoice in the abundance of peace. It is not meant that they are exempted from trouble, but they are sustained by the tranquillity of their minds; so that accounting all the trials which they endure to be only temporary, they now rejoice in hope of the promised rest.

Psalm 37:12-15

> **12**. The wicked plotteth against the righteous, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. **13**. But the Lord [27] shall laugh at him; for he seeth that his day is coming. **14**. The wicked draw their sword, and bend their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay those that are of upright ways. **15**. But their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bow shall be broken.

12. *The wicked plotteth against the righteous.* David here anticipates an objection which might have been taken to the preceding verse. Where, it might be said, can tranquillity and joy be found when the wicked are mad with rage, and plot every kind of mischief against the children of God? And how shall they cherish good hope for the future who see themselves

26

"De se venger, et de rendre mal pour mal." — *Fr.* "To take revenge, and to render evil for evil."

27

Dominus. Heb. אתי, *Adonai*

surrounded with innumerable sources of death? David therefore replies, That although the life of the godly should be assailed by many dangers, yet they are secure in the aid and protection of God; and that however much the wicked should plot against them, they shall be continually preserved. Thus, the design of David is to obviate our fears, lest the malice of the ungodly should terrify us above measure, as if they had the power of doing with us according to their pleasure. [28] He indeed confesses that they are not only full of fraud, and expert in deceiving, but also that they burn with anger, and a raging desire of doing mischief, when he says, *that they plot mischief deceitfully against the righteous, and gnash upon them with their teeth* But after making this statement, he immediately adds, that their endeavors shall be vain. Yet he seems to provide very coldly for our consolation under sorrow, for he represents God as merely *laughing* But if God values highly our salvation, why does he not set himself to resist the fury of our enemies, and vigorously oppose them? We know that this, as has been said in Psalm 2:4, is a proper trial of our patience, when God does not come forth at once, armed for the discomfiture of the ungodly, but connives for a time and withholds his hand. But as the eye of sense in such circumstances reckons that he delays his coming too long, and from that delay concludes that he indulges in ease, and feels no interest in the affairs of men, it is no small consolation to be able by the eye of faith to behold him laughing; for then we are assured that he is not seated idly in heaven, nor closes his eyes, resigning to chance the government of the world, but purposely delays and keeps silence because he despises their vanity and folly.

And lest the flesh should still murmur and complain, demanding why God should only laugh at the wicked, and not rather take vengeance upon them, the reason is added, that he sees the day of their destruction at hand: *For he seeth that his day* [29] *is coming.* Whence is it that the injuries we sustain from the wickedness of man so trouble us, if it be not that, when not obtaining a speedy redress, we begin to despair of ever seeing a better state of things? But he who sees the executioner standing behind the aggressor with drawn sword no longer desires revenge, but rather exults in the prospect of speedy retribution. David, therefore, teaches us that it is not meet that God, who sees the destruction of the wicked to be at hand, should rage and fret after the manner of men. There is then a tacit distinction here made between God and men, who, amidst the troubles and confusions of the world,

28

"Comme s'ils avoyent puissance de faire de nous a leur plaisir." — *Fr.*

29

"Day is often used," says Ainsworth, "for the time of punishment; as, 'the posterity shall be astonied at his day,' Job 18:20; 'Woe unto them, for their day is come!' Jeremiah 50:27. So 'the day of Midian,' Isaiah 9:4; 'the day of Jezreel,' Hosea 1:11; 'the day of Jerusalem,' Psalm 137: 7."

do not see the day of the wicked coming, and who, oppressed by cares and fears, cannot laugh, but because vengeance is delayed, rather become so impatient that they murmur and fret. It is not, however, enough for us to know that God acts in a manner altogether different from us, unless we learn to weep patiently whilst he laughs, so that our tears may be a sacrifice of obedience. In the meantime, let us pray that he would enlighten us by his light, for by this means alone will we, by beholding with the eye of faith his laughter, become partakers thereof, even in the midst of sorrow. Some, indeed, explain these two verses in another sense; as if David meant to say, that the faithful live so happily that the wicked envy them. But the reader will now perceive that this is far from the design of the prophet.

14. *The wicked draw their sword, and bend their bow.* David now goes on to say, that the ungodly, being armed with sword and bow, threaten with death the children of God; and this he does in order to meet the temptation which would otherwise overwhelm them. The promises of God do not have place in a time of quietness and peace, but in the midst of severe and terrible conflicts. And, therefore, David now teaches us that the righteous are not deprived of that peace of which he had spoken a little before, although the wicked should threaten them with instant death. The sentence ought to be explained in this way: Although the wicked draw their swords and bend their bows to destroy the righteous, yet all their efforts shall return upon their own heads, and shall tend to their own destruction. But it is necessary to notice the particular terms in which the miserable condition of the righteous is here described, until God at length vouchsafe to help them. First, *they are called poor and needy;* and, secondly, they are compared to sheep devoted to destruction, [30] because they have no power to withstand the violence of their enemies, but rather lie oppressed under their feet. Whence it follows, that a uniform state of enjoyment here is not promised to them in this psalm, but there is only set before them the hope of a blessed issue to their miseries and afflictions, in order to console them under them. But as it often happens that the wicked are hated and treated with severity for their iniquity, the Psalmist adds, that those who thus suffered were *those who were of upright ways;* meaning by this, that they were afflicted without cause. Formerly he described them as *the upright in heart*, by which he commended the inward purity of the heart; but now he commends uprightness in the conduct, and in fulfilling every duty towards our neighbor; and thus he shows not only that they are unjustly persecuted, because they have done no evil to their enemies, and have given them no cause of offense, but also, that though provoked by injuries, they nevertheless do not turn aside from the path of duty.

30 "De brebis destinees au sacrifice." — *Fr.*

In the 15th verse, David is not speaking of the laughter of God, but is denouncing vengeance against the ungodly, just as we have already seen in the second psalm, at the fourth verse, that although God, by conniving at the wicked, has often suffered them for a time to run to every excess in mirth and rioting, yet he at length speaks to them in his anger to overthrow them. The amount of what is stated is, that the ungodly should prevail so little, that the sword which they had drawn should return into their own bowels, and that their bow should be broken in pieces.

Psalm 37:16-19

> **16**. Better is the little of the righteous than the abundance of many wicked. [31] **17**. For the arms of the wicked shall be broken; but Jehovah upholdeth the righteous. **18**. Jehovah knoweth the days of the upright, and their inheritance shall be everlasting. **19**. They shall not be ashamed in the season of adversity; and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.

16. *Better is the little of the righteous, etc* This verse, without any sufficient reason, has been variously rendered. The word המון, *hamon,* [32] which is rendered *abundance,* indeed, sometimes signifies a great multitude of men, and sometimes abundance of things; sometimes, too, an adjective of the plural number is joined to a substantive of the singular number. But those who wrest David's words to this sense, that a few righteous persons are better than a great multitude of the ungodly, [33] plainly destroy their import, and pervert the meaning of the whole sentence. Nor can I receive the explanation which others have given, that the little which the just man possesses is better than the great abundance of the wicked; for I see no necessity for connecting, contrary to the rules of grammar, the word המון, *hamon,* which denotes *abundance,* with the word רבים, *rabbim.* which signifies *many* or *great,* and not with the word רשעים, *reshaim,* which means *wicked* I have therefore no doubt; that David here contrasts the limited possessions of one righteous man with the riches and wealth of many wicked men. The Hebrew word רבים, *rabbim,* however, which I have rendered *many,*

31

"Ou, aux grans qui sont meschans." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, to the great who are wicked."

32

Ainsworth renders this word, "plenteous mammon," which, he remarks, "signifieth multitude, plenty, or store of riches, or any other thing." The Septuagint renders it *riches.* The English word *mammon* is derived from this Hebrew word.

33

This is the view taken by Fry, who renders the words,
"Better are the few of the Just one,
Than the great multitude of the wicked."
By the Just One, he understands Christ.

may also be properly taken to denote persons of great authority and power. Certainly, it is not difficult to understand that David means to say, that although the wicked excel in this world, and are enriched with its possessions in great abundance and trust in their riches, yet the little which the just man possesses is far better than all their treasures. From this we learn, that David is here speaking, not so much of external grandeur and wealth, as of the secret blessing of God which truly enriches the righteous; for although they live from hand to mouth, yet are they fed from heaven as it were with manna; while the ungodly are always hungry, or else waste away in the very midst of their abundance.

To this also belongs the reason which is added in the next verse, namely, that there is nothing stable in the world except it be sustained by the power of God; but we are plainly told that *the righteous* only are *upheld by him,* and that *the power of the ungodly shall be broken* Here again we see, that in order to form a right and proper estimate of true felicity, we must look forward to the future, or contemplate by the eye of faith the secret grace of God, and his hidden judgments. Unless we are persuaded by faith that God cherishes us in his bosom as a father does his children, our poverty will always be a source of trouble to us; and, on the other hand, unless we bear in mind what is here said concerning the wicked, that *their arms shall be broken,* we will make too great account of their present condition. But if this doctrine be deeply fixed in the hearts of the faithful, as soon as they shall have learned to rely upon the divine blessing, the delight and joy which they will experience from their little store shall be equal to the magnanimity with which they shall look down, as it were from an eminence, upon the vast treasures in which the ungodly glory. At the same time, we are here admonished, that whilst the ungodly rely upon their own strength, and proudly boast of it, we ought to wait patiently till God arise and break their arms in pieces. As for us, the best consolation which we could have in our infirmity is, that God himself upholds and strengthens us.

18 *Jehovah knoweth the days of the upright* [34] It is not without good reason that David so frequently inculcates this doctrine, that the righteous are blessed because God provides for their necessities. We see how prone the minds of men are to distrust, and how much they are vexed by an excess of cares and anxieties from which they are unable to extricate themselves, while, on the other hand, they fall into another error in being more anxious regarding the future than there is any reason for; and yet, however active and industrious in the formation of their plans, they are often disappointed in their expectations, and not unfrequently fail altogether of success. Nothing, therefore, is more profitable for us than to have our eyes continually set upon

34

"'Depositeth the days of the upright," — lays them up in safety for them: for such is the original idea of ירע." — *Fry*

the providence of God, which alone can best provide for us every thing we need. On this account, David now says, that *God knoweth the days of the righteous;* that is to say, he is not ignorant of the dangers to which they are exposed, and the help which they need. This doctrine we ought to improve as a source of consolation under every vicissitude which may seem to threaten us with destruction. We may be harassed in various ways, and distracted by many dangers, which every moment threaten us with death, but this consideration ought to prove to us a sufficient ground of comfort, that not only are our days numbered by God, but that he also knows all the vicissitudes of our lot on earth. Since God then so carefully watches over us for the maintenance of our welfare, we ought to enjoy, in this our pilgrimage on earth, as much peace and satisfaction as if we were put in full possession of our paternal inheritance and home. Because we are regarded by God, David from this concludes, that our inheritance is everlasting. Moreover, in declaring that those who are upright are thus carefully protected by God, he exhorts us to the sincere pursuit of truth and uprightness; and if we desire to be placed in safety under the protection of God, let us cultivate meekness, and reject with detestation this hellish proverb, "We must howl among wolves."

19 *They shall not be ashamed in the season of adversity* This verse also shows us, that the faithful have no right to expect such exemption as the flesh would desire from affliction and trial, but they are assured of deliverance in the end; which, though it be indeed obtained, yet it is of such a nature as can be realised only by faith. We must regard these two things as inseparably connected, namely, that as the faithful are mingled among the wicked in this world, so hunger and adversity are common to both. The only difference betwixt them is, that God stretches forth his hand towards his own people in the time of their need, while he abandons the ungodly, and takes no care of them. If it should be objected, that the wicked often fare sumptuously in the time of famine, and gratify all their desires, whilst the faithful are oppressed with poverty and want, I answer, that the fullness of which mention is here made consists chiefly in this, that the faithful, though they live sparingly, and often labor hard to acquire the means of subsistence, are nevertheless fed by God as truly as if they had a greater abundance of this world's goods than the ungodly, who greedily devour the good things of this life in all their variety and abundance, and yet are never satisfied. Besides, as I have elsewhere said, these temporal blessings are not always seen flowing in one uniform course. The hand of God is indeed always open, but we are straitened and limited in our desires, so that our own unbelief is no small hinderance to his liberality. Moreover, as our corrupt nature would soon break forth into excess, God deals with us more sparingly; and lest he might corrupt us by too great indulgence, he trains us to frugality by bestowing with a sparing hand what he was ready otherwise to lavish upon us in full abundance. And, indeed, whoever shall consider how much addicted we are

to sensuality and pleasure, will not be surprised that God should exercise his own people with poverty and want. But although God may not bestow upon us what is necessary for our gratification, yet, unless our own ingratitude prevent us, we shall experience, even in famine and want, that be nourishes us graciously and liberally.

Psalm 37:20-22

> **20**. For the wicked shalt perish, and the enemies of Jehovah shall be consumed as the preciousness [35] of lambs; they shalt be consumed into smoke. [36] **21.** The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again; but the righteous is merciful, and giveth. **22**. For those who are blessed by him shall inherit the earth; and those who are cursed of him shall be cut off.

20 *For the wicked shall perish.* The causal particle כי, ki, which is here translated *for,* might also be rendered as if used adversatively by *but* or *although,* unless, perhaps, some would prefer to expound the sentence as of much higher import. But the preferable interpretation is, that there is here a contrast between the subjects spoken of, namely, that the righteous are satisfied in the time of famine, whereas the ungodly shall perish in the midst of their affluence; for, while they trust in their abundance, God brings them to nought by the use of means that are secret and hidden. In calling them the *enemies of Jehovah,* he teaches us, that they are justly overwhelmed by his vengeance, which they bring upon themselves by their own wickedness. When he says, that they *shall be consumed as the excellency of lambs,* this is understood by some to refer to the fat of them. But as יכר, *yakar,* signifies *excellency,* as I have said elsewhere, I have no doubt that this expression denotes the very best of lambs, and such as are of extraordinary fatness: and this is very suitable to the contrast here stated. We learn from this what another prophet likewise teaches, that the ungodly are fattened for the day of slaughter; so that the more sumptuously they shall have lived, the more suddenly shall their destruction come upon them. *To be consumed into smoke* is of the same import as *to vanish away quickly;* as if it had been said, There is no stability or substance in them. Those who understand the term יקר, *yakar,* to mean *fat,* explain this latter clause in this sense: that the wicked are consumed into smoke as fat melts or wastes away. [37] But the reader will see that the first interpretation is better.

35

"Ou, l'excellence, c'est, les agneaux plus beaux et plus gras." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, the excellency, that is, the finest and fattest lambs."

36

"C'est, s'esvanouiront en brief." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, shall speedily vanish away."

37

21 *The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again* Those are mistaken who suppose that the wicked are here blamed for their treachery in carrying off the goods of others by fraud and deception; and that, on the other hand, the children of God are commended for their kindness in being always ready to relieve the wants of their poorer brethren. The prophet rather extols, on the one hand, the blessing of God towards the godly; and declares, on the other, that the ungodly never have enough. The meaning therefore is, that God deals bountifully with his own people, that they may be able to aid others; but that the ungodly are always in want, so that their poverty leads them to have recourse to fraud and rapine. And were we not blinded by insensibility and indifference, we could not fail to perceive the many proofs of this which are daily presented to our view. However great the abundance of the ungodly, yet their covetousness is so insatiable, that, like robbers, they plunder right and left, and yet are never able to pay; [38] while God bestows upon his own people a sufficiency not only for the supply of their own ordinary wants, but also to enable them to aid others. I do not indeed deny, that the wicked are reproved for wasteful extravagance, by which they defraud their creditors of what is their due, and also that the righteous are praised for applying to a proper use the bounty of God; but the design of the prophet is to show the high value of the divine blessing. This is confirmed by the following verse, in which he illustrates the difference resulting from the blessing and the curse of God. It then it is asked, whence the children of God are able to relieve the wants of the needy, and to exercise liberality towards them? and why it is that the ungodly are continually contracting debts from which they are never able to extricate themselves? David answers, that the former are blessed of the Lord, and that the latter are brought to utter ruin by his curse. Some expound the word מברכיו, *meborakayv,* actively, as if it were, *Those who bless the righteous shall possess,* etc.; [39] but this is constrained and absurd. The meaning is simply this, that whatever we need for the preservation and maintenance of life, and for the exercise of humanity towards others, comes to us neither from the heavens nor from

It is generally supposed that there is here an allusion to the sacrificial services of the former dispensation. Lambs were then offered in large numbers as burnt-offerings; and if the allusion is to these sacrifices, as is highly probable, the doctrine taught is, that as the fat of them melted away, and was wholly and rapidly consumed by the fire of the altar of burnt-offering, so the wicked shall melt away and be quickly consumed in the fire of Jehovah's wrath. The Chaldee paraphrases the last clause thus: — "They shall be consumed in the smoke of Gehenna," or of hell.

38

"Comme escumeurs de mer sans jamais avoir de quoy satisfaire." — *Fr.* "Like pirates, without ever having any thing to pay."

39

"Comme s'il y avoit, Ceux qui beniront les justes, possederont," etc. — *Fr.*

the earth, but only from the favor and blessing of God; and that if he once withdraw his grace, the abundance of the whole world would not satisfy us.

Psalm 37:23-26

> **23.** The footsteps of a man are directed by Jehovah, and he will delight [or, take pleasure] in his way. **24.** Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for Jehovah upholdeth him with his hand. **25.** I have been young, I am also become old; and yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. **26.** He is daily merciful, and lendeth, and his seed is for blessing.

23 *The footsteps of a man are directed by Jehovah* Some join together these two things, first, that the footsteps of the godly are ordered by the grace of God, since men do not in their own strength follow what is just and right, but only in so far as the Spirit of God directs them; and hence the second follows, namely, that God favors and approves what is his own. But David simply continues his commendation of the divine blessing towards the faithful, of whom this is especially worthy of being remembered, that whatever they undertake always has a favorable and happy result. At the same time, the reason why God crowns with prosperity and success all our efforts throughout the course of our life is to be observed, namely, because we attempt nothing which is not pleasing to him. For I consider the copula *and,* in the second clause of the verse, to be used instead of the causal particle *because,* and resolve the whole verse in this way: Because the way of the godly is acceptable to God, he directs their footsteps to a happy issue; so that the meaning is, As God sees that the faithful act conscientiously, and do not turn aside from the way which he has appointed, he blesses their efforts. And, certainly, since the prophet speaks generally — and yet it is certain that the faithful only are here spoken of — the second clause must necessarily be considered as spoken by way of exposition. Accordingly, the term *way* denotes their manner and course of living; as if he had said, that the godly have no other object in view but to frame their lives agreeably to the will of God, and to obey what he commands. The term *footsteps* I consider as referring to external success.

24 *Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down* This verse has generally been interpreted proverbially, and as meaning, that though the righteous may fall into sin, his fall is not deadly; but this is not at all in accordance with the design of the prophet, who is discoursing of the happiness of the godly. The simple meaning is, that when God visits his servants with severe afflictions, he at the same time mitigates them that they may not faint under them; [40] as Paul declares,

40 "Neither the text," says Dr Adam Clarke, "nor any of the versions, intimate that a falling into sin is meant; but a falling into *trouble*, *difficulty*," etc.

"We are persecuted, but not forsaken;
cast down, but not destroyed."— (2 Corinthians 4:9)

Some say that the righteous are not utterly cast down, because they lose not their courage, but rather bear with invincible fortitude whatever burden is laid upon them. I readily admit that the reason why they are not overwhelmed is, that they are not so tender and delicate as to sink under the burden. I, however, understand the words in a more extensive sense, and explain them thus: That the miseries of the godly are so tempered with God's fatherly mercy, that they fail not under their burden, and even when they fall, sink not into destruction. From these words we learn that the godly, although they serve God sincerely, and study to lead a blameless life, are not suffered to continue unmoved, and always in the same condition, but are often afflicted and cast down by various trials; and that the only difference between them and the unbelieving is, that their falls are not deadly. We know that if God smite the reprobate, though it be but very slightly, it becomes the cause of their final destruction. Solomon speaks still more expressly when he says,

"For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again,"
(Proverbs 24:16,)

and by these words he teaches us, that the godly are not only subjected to frequent afflictions in this life, but that they are visited with daily trials, and yet are never forsaken of the Lord. We must also shortly observe, that even the slightest fall would be enough to destroy us utterly, did not God uphold us by his hand.

25 *I have been young, I am also become old.* The meaning of these words is not in the least doubtful, namely, that David, even when he was become an old man, had not seen any of the righteous, or any of their children, begging their bread. But here there arises a question of some difficulty with respect to the fact stated; for it is certain that many righteous men have been reduced to beggary. And what David here declares as the result of his own experience pertains to all ages. Besides, he refers in this verse to the writings of Moses, for in Deuteronomy 15:4, begging is reckoned among the curses of God; and the law, in that place, expressly exempts from it those who fear and serve God. How then does the consistency of this appear, that none of the righteous ever begged his bread, since Christ placed Lazarus among the most abject of them? (Luke 16:20.) I answer, that we must bear in mind what I have before said upon this subject, that with respect to the temporal blessings which God confers upon his people, no certain or uniform rule can be established. There are various reasons why God does not manifest his favor equally to all the godly in this world. He chastises some, while he spares others: he heals the secret maladies of some, and passes by others, because they have no need of a like remedy: he exercises the patience of some, according as he has given them the spirit of fortitude; and, finally, he sets forth others by way of example. But in general, he humbles all of them

by the tokens of his anger, that by secret warnings they may be brought to repentance. Besides, he leads them, by a variety of afflictions, to fix their thoughts in meditation upon the heavenly life; and yet it is not a vain or imaginary thing, that, as is set forth in the Law, God vouchsafes earthly blessings to his servants as proofs of his favor toward them. I confess, I say, that it is not in vain, or for nought, that an abundance of earthly blessings, sufficient for the supply of all their wants, is promised to the godly. This, however, is always to be understood with this limitation, that God will bestow these blessings only in so far as he shall consider it expedient: and, accordingly, it may happen that the blessing of God may be manifested in the life of men in general, and yet some of the godly be pinched with poverty, because it is for their good. But if it happen that any of the faithful are brought to beggary, they should lift up their minds on high, to that blessed state in which God will largely recompense them for all that is now wanting in the blessings of this transitory life. We must also bear this in mind, that if God sometimes involve the faithful in the same punishments by which he takes vengeance upon the ungodly — seeing them, for example, affected with the same diseases, — in doing so there is no inconsistency; for although they do not come the length of contemning God, nor are devoted to wickedness, nor even act according to their own inclination, nor yield themselves wholly to the influence of sin like the wicked, yet are they not free of all blame; and, therefore, it need not surprise us though they are sometimes subjected to temporal punishments. We are, however, certain of this, that God makes such provision for his own people, that, being contented with their lot, they are never in want; because, by living sparingly, they always have enough, as Paul says, Philippians 6:12,

"I am instructed both to abound and to suffer need."

26 *He is daily merciful* The Psalmist here repeats what he had already said, that the grace of God is a fountain of all blessings which can never be exhausted; and, therefore, while it is displayed towards the faithful, they not only have enough for the supply of their own wants, but are able also liberally to assist others. What he adds concerning *their seed* is variously expounded. That he is speaking of the children of the godly, there can be no doubt; and this is evident from the preceding verse. But when he says that they *shall be for blessing,* [41] some understand it as if he had said, They shall be the ministers of God's liberality: so that, according to them, the sense would be, that they shall follow the good example of their fathers in helping the poor, and in exercising liberality towards all men. But I fear that this exposition is too refined. Nor do I admit the interpretation which has been given by others, that the meaning is, that the grace of God shall be so signally manifested towards the children of the godly, that their

41 This is also the reading of the Septuagint, Τὸ σπέζμα αὐτου εἰς εὐλογίαν ἔσται

names shall be employed in a form of prayer, when prosperity and success are prayed for. This mode of expression, I allow, is to be so understood in various places; but here, in my opinion, David designs nothing more than to extol the continuation of God's favor from the fathers to their children: as if he had said, God's blessing does not terminate with the death of the righteous man, but it extends even to his children. [42] And there is indeed no inheritance more certain to which our children may succeed us, than when God, receiving them in like manner into his fatherly favor, makes them partakers of his blessing.

Psalm 37:27-29

27. Depart from evil, and do good, and dwell for ever. **28**. For Jehovah loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his meek ones: they shall be preserved for ever: and the seed of the wicked shall be cut off. **29**. The righteous shall inherit the earth, and shall dwell for ever upon it.

27 *Depart from evil, and do good.* In this verse David argues, that, in order to realize the blessedness of which he has spoken, we must abstain from all evil, perform the duties of humanity, and exert ourselves in doing good to our neighbors. This doctrine is at variance with the dictates of corrupt human nature; but it is, notwithstanding, certain that many of the troubles and distresses in which the whole human race are involved, proceed from no other cause than this, that every man respectively, in his own sphere, being given to injustice, fraud, extortion, and evil-dealing, contemptuously rejects the blessing of God. Thus, it is in consequence of the barriers which men throw in their own way, that they do not attain happiness in this world, and that every man in his own place does not possess the peace and quietness which belong to him. It is then with the highest propriety that David passes from the doctrine of the preceding context to this exhortation: for if the meek possess the earth, then every one, as he regards his own happiness and peace, ought also to endeavor to walk uprightly, and to apply himself to works of beneficence. It should also be observed, that he connects these two things, first, that the faithful should strictly do good; and, secondly, that they should restrain themselves from doing evil: and this he does not without good reason: for as we have seen in the thirty-fourth psalm, it often happens that the same person who not only acts kindly towards certain persons, but even with a bountiful hand deals out largely of his own, is yet all the while plundering others, and amassing by extortion the resources by

42

Ainsworth reads, "And his seed are in the blessing," and understands the words as meaning, that the children of the just man "are in the blessing, or are appointed to the blessing, as the heirs thereof," Genesis 28:3; 1 Peter 3:9; and that they have still abundance, notwithstanding the liberality of their parents; for "the blessing of the Lord maketh rich," Proverbs 10:22.

means of which he displays his liberality. Whoever, therefore, is desirous to have his good offices approved by God, let him endeavor to relieve his brethren who have need of his help, but let him not injure one in order to help another, or afflict and grieve one in order to make another glad. Now David, under these two expressions, has briefly comprised the duties of the second table of the law: first, that the godly should keep their hands free from all mischief, and give no occasion of complaint to any man; and, secondly, that they should not live to themselves, and to the promotion merely of their own private interests, but should endeavor to promote the common good of all according to their opportunities, and as far as they are able. But we have already said, that the blessing which is promised to the righteous, that "they shall inherit the earth," is not always realised in an equal degree as to all the people of God; and the reason we assigned for this is, that God cannot find among men an example of such great uprightness, but that even the most perfect procure to themselves much misery by their own fault: and therefore it need not surprise us though God withdraw, at least in some measure, his blessing even from his own. We know too to what excess the lusts of the flesh run riot, unless the Lord lay a restraint upon them. Besides, there is no one who is ready cheerfully to engage in meditation upon the divine life, who is not urged and encouraged to it by various motives. Hence it is that the possession of the earth, which David here assigns to the children of God, does not (as the lawyers would define the term) always consist in having the feet planted within it, and in being securely established in it; for there are many sources of disquietude and affliction here to trouble them. And yet it does not follow that it is a mere fiction or imaginary thing which he promises. For although daily experience shows us that the children of God do not as yet inherit the earth, yet, according to the measure of our faith, we feel how efficacious the blessing of God is, which, like a spring that cannot be drained, flows continually. They are indeed more than blind who do not perceive that the righteous have at present this reward, that God defends and upholds them by his power.

28 *For Jehovah loveth judgement.* This, it ought to be observed, is a confirmation of the doctrine contained in the preceding sentence; and it is here made to rest upon a higher principle, namely, that God takes pleasure in righteousness and truth. The argument indeed appears to be incomplete; but as David takes for granted — what ought to be deeply fixed in the hearts of all the faithful — that the world is directed by the providence of God, his conclusion is admirable. In the first place, then, it must be admitted that the condition of the human race is not under the direction of chance, but of the providence of God, and that the world is conducted and governed by his counsel: so that he regulates according to his pleasure the issue of all things, and controls them by his power; and, secondly, to this it must be added what David here states, that righteousness and truth are pleasing to God. Hence it follows, that all who lead an upright and blameless life

among men shall be happy, because, enjoying the favor of God, every thing at length must in regard to them have a happy and successful result. But let us bear in mind, that the promise which is spoken of in this verse is to be understood in this sense, that while God has undertaken the preservation of the godly, it is not to cherish them continually in retirement and ease, but after he has for a time exercised them under the cross, at length to come to their help: for the language here employed, *Jehovah forsaketh not his meek ones,* is tacitly very emphatic. Those, therefore, who separate the exercise of patience from the favor which God bestows upon the godly in this life, misinterpret this psalm. On the contrary, lest any one should hastily and rashly pronounce judgment, the prophet entreats the faithful to suspend their judgment, until God manifest his displeasure after the death of the wicked, in inflicting punishment upon their posterity: *The seed of the wicked shall be cut off* This is of the same import as if he had again asserted, that although the judgements of God are not immediately executed upon the wicked and ungodly, yet they are not on that account anything the better of it, since the punishment justly due to them will extend to their children. If then the curse of God is not forthwith inflicted upon them, it need not surprise us if he delay for a time to manifest the favor which he bears towards the faithful.

29 *The righteous shall inherit the earth* The repetition of the same doctrine here is not superfluous, since it is so very difficult to impress it deeply upon our minds. For while all men seek after happiness, scarcely one in a hundred looks for it from God, but rather all, on the contrary, in making provision for themselves, provoke the vengeance of God, as it were deliberately, and strive to excel each other in doing so, so that some of them stain themselves with fraud and perjury, some indulge in robbery and extortion, some practice all sorts of cruelty, and others commit violence and outrage even with the sword and poison. Moreover, I have just now, and on several other occasions, stated the sense in which this everlasting habitation upon the earth, which is here promised to the righteous, is to be understood, namely, that although they are surrounded by the troubles and changes which occur in this world, yet God preserves them under his wings; and although there is nothing lasting or stable under heaven, yet he keeps them in safety as if they were sheltered in a secure haven. And, finally, they enjoy in addition to this that inward peace of mind which is better than a hundred lives, and which is therefore justly regarded as a privilege surpassing in value and importance all others.

Psalm 37:30-33

30. The mouth of the righteous will speak wisdom, and his tongue will utter judgment. **31**. The law of his God is in his heart: his steps shall not slide. **32**. The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh

to slay him. **33**. Jehovah will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged.

30 *The mouth of the righteous will speak wisdom* As it is customary with hypocrites confidently to draw to their own advantage whatever the Spirit of God declares concerning the just and upright, David here gives a definition of the righteousness which God requires on the part of his children, and divides it into three principal parts — that their speech should be in sincerity and truth; that the law of God should reign in their heart; and that they should order their conversation aright. Some give a different exposition of the first part from what we have given: they say that the righteous serve as teachers and guides, by instructing others to live well, and leading them in the way; and, therefore, *to speak wisdom,* and *to utter judgment,* is, in their view, of the same import as to instruct others in holy doctrine, and to train them to the fear of God. I do not altogether disapprove of this exposition, but I fear it is too restricted. Wisdom and uprightness are here opposed as much to the profane and filthy language by which the wicked endeavor to blot out the name of God, as to cunning and fraud, and every species of stratagem and deceit; and also to the threats and terrors by which they endeavor to frighten the simple. [43] The meaning therefore is, first, that the righteous speak honourably and reverently of the righteousness of God, that they may cherish in themselves and others, to a large extent, the knowledge and the fear of God; [44] secondly, that both in their own affairs and those of others, they approve, without disguise or deceit, of what is just and reasonable, and are not given to justify what is wrong under the color and varnish of sophistry; and, finally, that they never depart from the truth.

To this there is added integrity of heart: *The law of the Lord is in his heart.* This, though it should precede in point of order, is not improperly put in the second place here. For the Scriptures are not particular in observing an exact arrangement in the enumeration of virtues and vices. Besides, the source whence this integrity of heart proceeds is, that the Law of God has its seat in the heart; and it is it alone which prescribes the best rule of life, restrains all the depraved affections and lusts, and imbues the minds of men with the love of righteousness. No man will constantly and steadily devote himself to a life of uprightness, exert himself in behalf of others in preference to his own personal interests, renounce covetousness, subdue pride, and maintain a constant warfare with his own nature, unless he is endued with the fear of God. There next follows the third division, which relates to the external conduct: *His steps shall not slide* Some, indeed, think

43

"Par lesquelles ils taschent d'espouvanter les simples." — *Fr.*

44

"En toutes les parties de la cognoissance et crainte de Dieu." — *Fr.*

that this is a promise; but I have no doubt, that in this clause David still continues the definition of righteousness. The meaning therefore is, that although the children of God are tempted in a variety of ways to commit sin, and many things occur urging them to it, — and although men, for the most part, too, endeavor, as far as in them lies, by their maliciousness to turn them aside from the fear of God, — yet, because the Law of God rules and reigns in their hearts, they *do not slide,* but stand to their purpose with firm and determined resolution, or at least adhere to the right course.

32. and **33.** *The wicked watcheth the righteous, etc.* David here illustrates more plainly the nature of the possession of the earth, of which he had spoken, namely, that God preserves his own people, though they are beset with enemies round about. And hence we are again taught, that the faithful are not promised in the preceding context a quiet state of life, and one free from all trouble and distress. If so, these two statements would be contradictory: first, that the faithful possessing an inheritance, enjoy repose and pleasure; and, secondly, that yet they are daily delivered as sheep out of the mouth of wolves. These two verses, however, contain this special ground of consolation, that the faithful, though surrounded by such a variety of dangers, shall notwithstanding escape, and be preserved in safety by the help of God. Accordingly, David here teaches them, that when they shall see their enemies lying in wait for them, and seeking by every means in their power to annoy them, they, on the contrary, ought to consider how deeply interested God is in the welfare of his own people, and how carefully he watches over them to preserve them in safety. David indeed confesses that the stratagems to which the wicked have recourse in seeking not only to deprive good men of their property, but even to take away their lives, are terrible in themselves, because they cruelly plot their destruction; but still he teaches us at the same time, that we ought to continue to preserve firm and undaunted courage, because God has promised that he will be our guardian and defender: *Jehovah will not leave him in his hand* This circumstance, however, ought to be considered, that God does not always grant us deliverance at the first, but often delays it till we seem to be even at the point of death. In the last clause of the verse, we are also admonished, that however carefully good men may guard against giving offense to any, and endeavor to secure the good-will of all, and shun debate and strife, yet they shall not be exempted from false accusations: *Jehovah will not condemn them when they are judged* David does not say that they shall receive the applause of the world, and that their virtues shall be celebrated in such praises as they deserve; but he exhorts them, when they shall be haled to judgment, and as it were overwhelmed with slander, so that they already resemble those who are condemned, to rest contented with the protection of God, who will at length manifest their innocence, and maintain it against the unrighteous judgments of men. If any one object, that, on the contrary, many of the children of God, after having been condemned, have suffered a

cruel and bitter death, I answer, that their avenger nevertheless is in heaven. Christ was put to death in the most cruel form, and in circumstances of the deepest ignominy, but notwithstanding, as the prophet Isaiah says, Isaiah 53:8, "he was taken from that distress and condemnation;" and in the same manner God is still acting daily towards those who are his members. If it may still be objected, that David is here discoursing not of the life to come, but of the state of the godly in the present life, I must again repeat in answer to this, the explanation which I have given before, namely, that earthly blessings are at God's disposal, and are regulated entirely according to his will; and hence it is that he never bestows them in an equal measure upon all, but according to his wisdom, and as he sees meet, sometimes withdrawing them either in whole or in part, and at other times displaying them to the view of all. Accordingly, it may happen, that the holy martyrs, after they have been condemned, may also be put to death, as if God had forsaken them; but this is only because it is better for themselves, and because they desire nothing more than to glorify God by their death. Yet he who permits the ungodly to exercise their cruelty, ceases not to be the assertor of the righteousness of his servants: for he openly shows before his angels, and before his whole Church, that he approves it, and declares that he will make inquisition for it; nay, more, raising them from the darkness in which they have been hid, he makes their ashes yield a sweet and pleasant odour. Finally, after the Lord has suffered them to be overwhelmed by reproach and violence, he will pronounce the judgment by which he will vindicate their righteous cause from wicked calumnies and false accusations.

Psalm 37:34-36

34. Wait upon Jehovah, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee, that thou mayest inherit the earth: when the wicked are cut off thou shalt see it. **35**. I have seen the wicked terrible, [45] and spreading

45

Striking terror in all around.

himself like a green bay tree: [46] **36**. And he passed away, [47] and, lo! he was not: and I sought for his place, and he was not found.

34 *Wait upon Jehovah, and keep his way* David again returns to the style of exhortation, in order that the faithful, trusting to God's promises and sustained by them, may not suffer themselves to be drawn hither and thither by any temptations through devious and sinful ways, but may persevere steadfastly in the service of God. In the first place, he exhorts them to hope and patience, as if he wished them, amidst the tumults and troubles of life, to trust in God, and hold their peace till he again show them his countenance, which for a time he had hid from them. Hence arises, in the second place, another exhortation, that they should not turn aside from the way of the Lord; for wherever hope and patience prevail, they will so restrain the minds of men that they will not break out into any thing unlawful and wicked. It will doubtless be found, that the reason why every man endeavors to promote his own advantage by wicked practices is, that no one depends upon God, or else that he thinks, if fortune do not quickly smile upon him, that it is vain for him to persevere in the practice of equity and uprightness. Moreover, we may learn from this place, that if many, even of the good and the upright, are subjected to poverty, and lead a life of protracted affliction and trial, they suffer their punishment justly, because, so far from being firmly persuaded that it belongs to God as his proper office not only to lift up his servants from the dunghill, but also to bring them forth even from their graves, scarcely one in a hundred of them patiently waits upon God, and continues perseveringly in the right course. Nor is it without good reason that David makes use of the word *exalt,* that we may know

46

The proper signification of the word אזרח, *azrach*, has been controverted among interpreters, and it has been variously rendered. Most of the Rabbins, and many modern commentators, as Mudge, Waterland, Gesenius, and others, are of opinion, that the preferable reading is, "like an indigenous or native tree;" that is, a tree which flourishes in its native soil, where it grows most vigorously, and acquires its largest and most luxuriant growth. The Septuagint translates it, ὡς τὰς χέδρους του Λιβάνου, "as the cedars of Lebanon;" being self-growing, spreading, and lofty trees. Some suppose that the translators of this version must have had a different reading in their Hebrew Bibles from what is in our present copies; and others that, as is common with them, they paraphrase the original words, the more clearly to express their meaning. The translation of the Septuagint is followed by the Vulgate, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions, by Houbigant, Boothroyd, Geddes, and other good authorities. Ainsworth reads, "as a green self-growing laurel." Bythner says he is at a loss for the reason of translating the word *laurel.* "For the reading of *bay tree*," says the illustrated Commentary upon the Bible, "we are not aware of any authority, except the very feeble one which is offered by some of the older of the modern versions in this country and on the Continent."

47

The Suptuagint, Vulgate, Syriac, and Arabic versions, Jerome, Houbigant, Horsley, and Walford, read the verb in the first person, "But I passed by." The Chaldee adheres to the Hebrew, "And he passed, *or* failed, from the age, *or* world, and, lo! he was not."

that God often stretches forth his hand to the faithful when they appear to be overwhelmed by the weight of their calamities. He then adds, that the *wicked* shall perish before the eyes of the godly. If their end were not very different from that of the righteous, the state in which the reprobate now rejoice for a time would easily allure even the best of men to evil. And, indeed, God would make us daily to behold such sights if we had eyes to behold his judgments. And yet, although the whole world were blinded, God does not cease to render a just reward to the wickedness of men; but by punishing them in a more private manner, he withdraws from us that fruit of which our own dulness deprives us.

35. and **36** *I have seen the wicked terrible, etc.* David here confirms from his own experience what I have just said, namely, that although the wicked are intoxicated with their prosperity, and held in admiration by all on account of it, yet their happiness is transitory and evanescent, and, therefore, nothing else than a mere illusion. In the 35th verse he tells us, that it is no strange or unwonted thing for the ungodly, puffed up with their prosperity, to spread themselves far and wide, and to give occasion of terror to the innocent. Then he adds, that their greatness, which had been regarded with so much wonder, disappears in a moment. As to the meaning of the words, עריץ, *arits,* which we have rendered *terrible,* might also be translated *strong,* because the word from which it is derived signifies sometimes *to terrify,* and sometimes *to strengthen.* The word מתערה, *mithareh,* is taken by some for *green,* but it rather means *discovering* or *spreading himself out,* as high and broad trees spread out their branches. David, I have no doubt, here rebukes the insolence of those who vaunt themselves immoderately. *To pass away,* in the 36th verse, is used for *to vanish away;* and thus he admonishes us to sit still for a time, in order that it may appear, after it has passed away, that all that the world admires in the prosperity of the wicked has been only a mist.

Psalm 37:37-40

37. Observe the perfect man, and consider the just for the end of that man is peace. **38**. But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off. **39**. The salvation of the righteous is from Jehovah: he is their strength in the time of trouble. **40**. Jehovah shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked: he shall preserve them, because they trust in him.

37 *Observe the perfect man* David exhorts the faithful diligently to consider every instance they may meet with of the grace of God, as well as of his judgment; but he teaches, at the same time, that it is in vain for any to sit in judgment upon the first aspect of things. When men do not wait patiently and quietly the time which God has appointed in his good pleasure, it often happens that faith is extinguished, and trust in the promises of God,

at the same time, perishes with it. This is the reason why David exhorts us to observe and consider, for when our minds are preoccupied by the temptation which is once presented to our view, hasty judgment is then the cause of our being deceived. But if a man extend his view, as if it were from a watch-tower, to a great distance, he will find that it has been said with truth, that *the end* of the reprobate and *the end* of the righteous respectively are at length very different. This clause, with respect to the end of these two classes of men, seems to be added by way of caution, that we may learn to suspend our judgment, if God should not immediately accomplish what he has spoken. If we should become impatient in our desires, let us moderate our minds by the reflection, that the end is not yet come, and that it behoves us to give God time to restore to order the confused state of things. Some explain the word אחרית, *acharith,* which we have rendered the end of the wicked, of their posterity. This, however, is incorrect. David refers only to the difference which subsists between them and the righteous in the end; for God, after he has severely tried his servants, and exercised their patience, in the end converts their adversity into a blessing, while he turns the mirth of the ungodly into mourning.

39 *The salvation of the righteous is from Jehovah* The sum of the whole is, that whatever may happen, the righteous shall be saved, because they are in the hand of God, and can never be forgotten by him. This ought to be particularly noticed, that those who are greatly afflicted may be sustained by the assurance that the salvation which they expect from God is infallibly certain, because God is eternal, and governs the world by his power; as Christ said,

"My Father, who gave them me, is greater than all,"
(John 10:29.)

David still inculcates this principle, that as righteousness is approved of God, it can never happen that he should forsake his faithful servants, and deprive them of his help. He, therefore, exhorts true believers to depend upon God, not only when things prosper according to their desires, but even when they are sorely afflicted. By these words he teaches that it is enough, if God only impart strength to his servants, so that, when severely afflicted and oppressed with anguish, they may not faint under it, or that, when groaning under the weight of severe afflictions, they may not sink under the burden. To the same purpose also is the expression which David uses twice in the last verse, that *God will deliver* By this he admonishes the children of God to learn patiently to endure afflictions, and that, if God should prolong them, they should often recall this to their remembrance, that after he has tried their patience, he will in the end deliver them.

Psalm 38

PSALM 38

David, suffering under some severe and dangerous malady, as may be conjectured, acknowledges that he is chastened by the Lord, and entreats him to turn away his anger from him. In order the more effectually to induce God to have mercy upon him, he bewails before him the severity of his afflictions in a variety of particulars. These we shall consider separately, and in order.

A Psalm of David to bring to remembrance. [48]

The title of this psalm refers to its subject. Some suppose that it is the beginning of a common song, because in other psalms the beginning of the song, to the tune of which they were set, is commonly prefixed: but such an interpretation is unnatural, and without foundation. Instead of this, I rather think that the title indicates that David composed this psalm as a memorial for himself, as well as others, lest he should too soon forget the chastisement by which God had afflicted him. He knew how easily and speedily the chastisements with which God visits us, and which ought to serve as a means of instruction to us all our life, pass away from the

[48] This title occurs only here and in the 70th psalm. This psalm is the third of what are called the Penitential Psalms. The two before this are the 6th and the 32d; and the four which follow it are the 51st, the 102d, the 130th, and the 143d. It is a curious fact, that when Galileo was sentenced to be confined in the dungeons of the Inquisition for an indefinite period, for having maintained the Copernican system, he was enjoined to repeat as a penance these seven Penitential Psalms every week for three years; by which it was doubtless intended to extort a sort of confession from him of his guilt, and an acknowledgement of the justice of his sentence.

mind. He was also mindful of his own high calling; for, as he was appointed master and teacher over the whole Church, it was necessary that whatever he had himself learned in particular by divine teaching should be made known, and appropriated to the use of all, that all might profit thereby. Thus we are admonished that it is a very profitable exercise often to recall to remembrance the chastisements with which God has afflicted us for our sins.

Psalm 38:1-5

1. O Jehovah! rebuke me not in thy wrath, and chasten me not in thy anger. **2.** For thy arrows go down in me [49] and thy hand has come down upon me. **3.** There is no soundness in my flesh because of thy anger; nor any peace in my bones because of my sin. **4.** For my iniquities have passed over my head, and as a weighty burden they have become too heavy for me. **5.** My wounds have become putrid, they are corrupt, because of my foolishness.

1 *O Jehovah! rebuke me not in thy wrath* As I have already expounded this verse in the beginning of the sixth psalm, where it occurs, and that I may not prove tedious to the reader, I shall notice it more briefly here. David does not expressly ask that his afflictions should be removed, but only that God would moderate the severity of his chastisements. Hence we may infer, that David did not give loose reins to the desires of the flesh, but offered up his earnest prayer in a duly chastened spirit of devotion. All men would naturally desire that permission should be granted them to sin with impunity. But David lays a restraint upon his desires, and does not wish the favor and indulgence of God to be extended beyond measure, but is content with a mitigation of his affliction; as if he had said, Lord, I am not unwilling to be chastised by thee, but I entreat thee, meanwhile, not to afflict me beyond what I am able to bear, but to temper the fierceness of thy indignation according to the measure of my infirmity, lest the severity of the affliction should entirely overwhelm me. This prayer, as I have said, was framed according to the rule of godliness; for it contains nothing but what God promises to all his children. It should also be noticed, that David does not secretly indulge a fretful and repining spirit, but spreads his complaint before God; and this he does, not in the way of sinful complaining, but of humble prayer and unfeigned confession, accompanied with the hope of obtaining forgiveness. He has used *anger* and *wrath* as denoting extreme rigour, and has contrasted them with fatherly chastisement.

49

That is, they enter deep into the flesh. The Septuagint reads, "Ενεπάγησάν μοι" the Vulgate, "Infixae sunt mihi;" — "Are fastened in me;" which is a natural consequence of entering deep, and rather expresses the meaning, than conveys the precise idea of the original word. The Syriac and Arabic versions give the same rendering with the Vulgate.

2. *For thy arrows go down in me.* He shows that he was constrained by dire necessity to ask an alleviation of his misery; for he was crushed under the weight of the burden which he sustained. This rule is always to be observed in our prayers — to keep God's promises present to our view. But God has promised that he will chastise his servants, not according to their deserts, but as they are able to bear. This is the reason why the saints so often speak of their own weakness, when they are severely oppressed with affliction. David very properly describes the malady under which he labored, by the terms, *the arrows* and *the hand,* or the chastisement *of God.* Had he not been persuaded that it was God who thus afflicted him, he could never have been brought to seek from him deliverance from his affliction. We know that the great majority of men are blinded under the judgments of God, and imagine that they are entirely the events of chance; and scarcely one in a hundred discerns in them the hand of God. But, in his sickness, as in all his other adversities, David views the hand of God lifted up to punish him for his sins. And certainly, the man who estimates his affliction only by the feeling of pain which it produces, and views it in no other light, differs nothing from the beasts of the field. As every chastisement of God should remind us of his judgment, the true wisdom of the saints, as the prophet declares,

"to look to the hand of him who smiteth."— (Isaiah 9:13)

The pronoun *thy* is therefore emphatic. David's words are, as if he had said, I have not to do with a mortal man, who can shoot his arrows with a force only in proportion to his own strength, but I have to do with God, who can discharge the arrows that come from his hand with a force altogether overwhelming.

3. *There is no soundness in my flesh because of thy anger* Others translate, *There is no beauty;* but this does not seem to be so suitable. In the clause which follows, David ascribes to God the praise of righteousness, without which, the acknowledgement which he formerly made would be of little avail; nay, instead of this, such an acknowledgement sometimes rather exasperates the minds of men, so that they provoke the wrath of God still more, by charging him with cruelty, and pouring forth horrible blasphemies against him. Nothing, therefore, can be more preposterous, than to imagine that there is in God a power so supreme and absolute, (as it is termed,) as to deprive him of his righteousness. David, as soon as he recognised his affliction as coming from God, turns to his own sin as the cause of the Divine displeasure; for he had already been fully satisfied in his own mind, that he is not like a tyrant who exercises cruelty needlessly and at random, but a righteous judge, who never manifests his displeasure by inflicting judgments but when he is grievously offended. If, then, we would render to God the praise which is due to him, let us learn by the example of David to connect our sins with his wrath.

4. *For my iniquities have passed over my head.* Here he complains that he is overwhelmed by his sins as by a heavy burden, so that he utterly faints under their weight; and yet he again confirms the doctrine which we have already stated, that he deservedly suffered the wrath of God, which had been inflicted on him in a manner so severe and dreadful. The word עון, *avon,* which we have translated *iniquities,* no doubt often *signifies punishment,* but this is only in a secondary and metaphorical sense. I am also willing to admit, that David assigns to the effect what is proper to the cause, when he describes by the appellation *iniquities,* the punishment which he had procured by his own sin; and yet his object at the same time is plainly and distinctly to confess, that all the afflictions which he suffered were to be imputed to his sins. He quarrels not with God for the extreme severity of his punishment, as Cain did, who said,

"My punishment is greater than I can bear," (Genesis 4:13.)

It is true, indeed, that Moses uses the same word עון, *avon,* in that passage, so that there is some similarity between the language of David and Cain. But David's meaning is very different. When such temptations as these were insinuating themselves into his mind, Could God afflict thee more severely than he does? certainly, since he is doing nothing to relieve thee, it is a sure sign that he wishes thee destroyed and brought to nought; he not only despises thy sighs and groanings, but the more he seeth thee cast down and forsaken, he pursueth thee the more fiercely and with the greater rigour; — to preclude the entrance of such evil thoughts and surmisings, he defended himself as with a shield by this consideration, that he was afflicted by the just judgment of God. He has here attributed to his own sins as the cause the weight of the wrath of God which he felt; and, as we shall find in the following verse, he again acknowledges, that what he is now suffering was procured by his own foolishness. Although, then, in bewailing his own miseries, he may seem in some measure to quarrel with God, yet he still cherishes the humble conviction, (for God afflicteth not beyond measure,) that there is no rest for him but in imploring the Divine compassion and forgiveness; whereas the ungodly, although convicted by their own consciences of guilt, murmur against God, like the wild beasts, which, in their rage, gnaw the chains with which they are bound.

5 *My wounds* [50] *have become putrid* In this verse, he pleads the long continuance of his disease as an argument for obtaining some alleviation. When the Lord declares, concerning his Church,

50

"The proper meaning of חכר is not a wound, but a bruise or wale made by a severe blow. My wales through my severe chastisement are become putrid and running sores." — *Fry*

"that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned,
for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins,"
(Isaiah 40:2)

his meaning is, that when he has sufficiently chastised his people, he is quickly pacified towards them; nay, more, that if he continue to manifest his displeasure for too long a time, he becomes through his mercy, as it were, weary of it, so that he hastens to give deliverance, as he says in another place,

"For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off. Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction."— (Isaiah 48:9, 10)

The object, therefore, which David has in view, in complaining of the long continuance of his misery is, that when he had endured the punishment which he had merited, he might at length obtain deliverance. It was certainly no slight trial to this servant of God to be thus kept in continual languishing, and, as it were, to putrify and be dissolved into corruption in his miseries. In this his constancy is the more to be admired, for it neither broke down from the long period of delay, nor failed under the immense load of suffering. By using the term *foolishness* instead of *sin,* he does not seek in this way to extenuate his faults, as hypocrites do when they are unable to escape the charge of guilt; for in order to excuse themselves in part, they allege the false pretense of ignorance, pleading, and wishing it to be believed, that they erred through imprudence and inadvertence. But, according to a common mode of expression in the Hebrew language, by the use of the term *foolishness,* he acknowledges that he had been out of his right mind, when he obeyed the lusts of the flesh in opposition to God. The Spirit, by employing this term in so many places to designate crimes the most atrocious, does not certainly mean to extenuate the criminality of men, as if they were guilty merely of some slight offenses, but rather charges them with maniacal fury, because, blinded by unhallowed desires, they wilfully fly in the face of their Maker. Accordingly, sin is always conjoined with folly or, madness. It is in this sense that David speaks of his own foolishness; as if he had said, that he was void of reason and transported with madness, like the infatuated rage of wild beasts, when he neglected God and followed his own lusts.

Psalm 38:6-10

6. I am bent, I am, bowed down beyond measure: I go mourning [literally black] all the day long, **7**. For my reins are filled with burning, [or, inflammation [51]] and there is no soundness in my flesh. **8**. I am

51

Berlin reads, "aestu torrente;" Horsley, "with a parching heat;" and this is the view taken by Hare, Dathe, Gesenius, and the Chaldee.

very feeble and sore broken: I have roared because of the roaring of my heart. **9**. O Lord! [52] thou knowest all my desire, and my groaning is not hid from thee. **10**. My heart hath turned round, my strength hath failed me: and as for the light of my eyes, it also is gone from me.

6 *I am bent* This description clearly shows that this holy man was oppressed with extreme grief, so much so, that it is marvellous how, under such a vast accumulation of miseries, his faith was sufficiently strong to bear up his mind. When he says *bowed down,* he seems tacitly to contrast his humility and dejection with the pride and stubbornness of many, who refuse to be humbled by the many chastisements with which God afflicts them, but rather harden themselves, daring to resist and oppose him. They must, no doubt, of necessity, feel the pain of their afflictions, but they fall into such a state of insensibility, that they are not affected by it. David then, from this circumstance, draws an argument to induce his heavenly Judge to have compassion on him, showing that he was not one of those who obstinately rebel against him, and refuse to bow in humble submission, even while the hand of God is upon them; but that he is abased and humbled, even as the Apostle Peter exhorts all the godly to

"humble themselves under the mighty hand of God."
(1 Peter 5:6)

Let us therefore learn, that there is no other way by which we can obtain consolation under our afflictions, than by laying aside all stubbornness and pride, and humbly submitting to the chastisement of God. The word כודר, *koder,* which I have translated *black,* is rendered by others *clad in black,* [53] and explained as referring to the outward apparel, the black color of which has always been a token of grief. But the opinion of those who understand it of the blackness of the skin is more correct; for we know that grief renders men's countenances lean, wan, and black. David, therefore, by this token of grief, describes the greatness of his affliction, because the natural color of his face had faded, and he was like a corpse, already withered and shrunk.

In the next verse, the word כסלים, *kesalaim,* which I have rendered *reins,* is by some translated *the flanks.* But the more generally received opinion is, that it denotes the part under the reins, which extends towards the haunch, or the space between the thighs and flanks, where it is supposed there had been a sore. Commentators also differ in their opinion respecting

52

Dominus. In the Hebrew Bible it is אדני, *Adonai*; but several MSS. read יהאה, *Yehovah*

53

"קדר is literally 'dressed in mourning;' hence it may, by an easy figure, denote the melancholy looks of a mourner." — *Horsley.* This is the sense put upon the expression by the Septuagint, "Ολην τὴν ήμερον σχυθρωπάζ ων ἐπορευόμης;" — "I went with a mourning countenance all the day."

the word נקלה, *nikleh,* which I have rendered *burning* In my translation I have followed those who adhere to the original meaning of the word; for the verb קלה, *kalah,* signifies *to burn,* or *to consume with fire.* Others, indeed, explain it not improperly in the sense *of filthiness and corruption.* I am, however, not inclined to limit it to a sore. In my opinion, the sense simply is, that his reins, or flanks, or thighs, were filled with an inflammatory disease, or at least were covered over with putrid sores; for these parts of the body are most subject to inflammation, and most liable to contract putrid humours. Some expound it allegorically, as meaning, that David seemed loathsome in his own eyes, when he thought of his reproach; but this appears too forced. When he adds that he was *weakened* and *sore broken,* he still farther confirms what he had said in the preceding verses: for by these various terms he wished to express the intolerable vehemence of his grief. Now, as a man, who is distinguished by courage, does not cry out and complain, and as we know that David did not shrink in bearing his afflictions, we may gather from this, that his sufferings were severe and painful in the extreme, inasmuch as he not only wept bitterly, but was also forced to cry out and complain. The noun נהמת, *nahamath,* which I have rendered *roaring,* may be derived from another verb than that which David has here used; but the meaning is obvious, namely, that the incontrollable emotions of his heart forced him to cry out.

9 *O Lord! thou knowest all my desire.* He adds this, not so much in respect of God, as to strengthen himself in the hope of obtaining some alleviation of his trouble, and thus to animate himself to persevering prayer. It may be explained in a twofold sense, either as denoting his confident assurance that his prayers and groanings were heard by the Lord, or a simple declaration that he had poured out before God all his cares and troubles; but the meaning is substantially the same: for as long as men entertain any doubt whether their groanings have come up before God, they are kept in constant disquietude and dread, which so fetters and holds captive their minds, that they cannot elevate their souls to God. On the contrary, a firm persuasion that our groanings do not vanish away in their ascent to God, but that he graciously hears them, and familiarly listens to them, produces promptitude and alacrity in engaging in prayer. It might, therefore, prove no small ground of encouragement to David, that he approached God, not with a doubting and trembling heart, but strengthened and encouraged by the assurance of which we have spoken, and of which he himself speaks in another place, that his tears were laid up in God's bottle, (Psalm 56:8.) In order that we may obtain access to God, we must believe that he is "a rewarder of them that diligently seek him," as the apostle states in his Epistle to the Hebrews, (Hebrews 11:6.) But I rather approve of the other interpretation, That David here declares that he had disburdened all his sorrows into the bosom of God. The reason why the greater part of men derive no profit from complaining grievously in their sorrow is, that they

direct not their prayers and sighs to God. David, then, in order to encourage himself in the assured conviction that God will be his deliverer, says, that he had always been a witness of his sorrows, and was well acquainted with them, because he had neither indulged in a fretful spirit, nor poured out into the air his complaints and howlings as the unbelieving are wont to do, but had spread out before God himself all the desires of his heart.

10 *My heart hath turned round* The verb which David here uses signifies *to travel* or *wander hither and thither;* but here it is taken for the agitation or disquietude which distress of heart engenders when we know not what to do. According as men are disquieted in mind, so do they turn themselves on all sides, and so their heart may be said to turn round, or to run to and fro. But since faith, when it has once brought us into obedience to God, holds our minds fixed on his word, it might here be asked by way of objection, How it is that the heart of David was so affected by disquietude and trouble? To this I answer, That although he continued to walk in the ways of God, while he was sustained by the promises of God, yet he was not altogether exempted from human infirmity. And, indeed, it will always happen, that as soon as we fall into some danger, our flesh will suggest to us various shifts and devices, and lead us into many errors in search of counsel; so that even the most confident would fail and go astray, unless he laid upon himself the same restraint by which David was preserved and kept in subjection, namely, by keeping all his thoughts shut up within the limits of God's word. Nay, even in the prayers which we offer up when our minds are at ease, we experience too well how easily our minds are carried away, and wander after vain and frivolous thoughts, and how difficult it is to keep them uninterruptedly attentive and fixed with the same degree of intensity upon the object of our desire. If this happen when we are not exercised by any severe trial, what will be the case when we are agitated by violent storms and tempests which threaten a thousand deaths, and when there is no way to escape them? It is, therefore, no great wonder if they carried away the heart of David, so that it was subject to various emotions amidst such tempestuous agitations. He adds, that *his strength had failed him,* as if he had compared himself to a dead man. What he adds concerning *the light of his eyes* some understand as if he had said, that he was so much oppressed with despair on all sides, that no counsel or foresight was left to him. The more simple meaning, however, is, that the light of life was taken away from him, because in it the energy of the soul principally shows itself.

Psalm 38:11-14

> **11**. My friends and my companions stand away from my sore; and my kinsfolk stand afar off. **12**. They also that sought for my life have laid snares for me; and they that sought after my hurt have talked of treachery, and imagine deceit daily. **13**. But I, as a deaf man, hear

not; and am as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth. **14**. And I was as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs.

11 *My friends and my companions stand away from my sore* Here David enumerates other circumstances to show the aggravated character of his misery, that he might excite the compassion of God. One of these is, that he finds no help or solace among men. In saying that his friends *stand away from him,* he means, that they cease from performing any of the offices of humanity towards him. This might happen either from pride or fear. If they withdrew from this poor afflicted man because they despised him, they were cruel and proud; and if they refused him their assistance for fear of being brought into odium, it was most unpardonable cowardice. But in the meantime, it augmented not a little the calamity of David, that even his friends and kinsfolk dared not to show any token of compassion towards him. It is, indeed, a very sore trial, when a man, who has had a great number of friends, comes to be abandoned by them all.

12 *They also that sought for my life have laid snares for me, etc.*. Here another circumstance is added, that the enemies of David laid snares for him, and talked about his destruction, and framed deceits among themselves. [54] The purport of what is stated is, that while his friends cowardly sit still and will do nothing to aid him, his enemies vigorously bestir themselves, and seek by every means to destroy him. He says that *they seek his life,* for as they were his deadly enemies and blood-thirsty men, they were not content with doing him some common injury, but furiously sought his destruction. He, however, here complains not so much that they assailed him by force of arms and with violence, as he accuses them of guileful conspiracy, which he designates in the first place metaphorically by the term *snares,* and afterwards adds in plain terms, that they *talk about his destruction,* and secretly consult among themselves how they might do him hurt. Now, as it is certain that David borrows not an artificial rhetoric from the bar, (as profane orators [55] do when they plead their cause,) in order to win the favor of God, but rather draws his arguments from the Word of God, the sentences which he here brings together for the confirmation of his faith we ought to appropriate to our own use. If we are altogether destitute of human aid and assistance, if our friends fail us in the time of need, and if others seek our ruin, and breathe out nothing but destruction against us, let us remember that it is not in vain for us to lay these things in prayer before God, whose province it is to succor those who are in misery, to take under

54

"Et machine des finesses pour le surprendre." — *Fr.* "And devised stratagems for ensnaring him."

55

"Comme celles des orateurs profanes." — *Fr.*

his protection those who are perfidiously forsaken and betrayed, to restrain the wicked, and not only to withstand their violence, but also to anticipate their deceitful counsels and to frustrate their designs.

13 *But I, as a deaf man, hear not, etc.* The inspired writer here compares himself to a dumb and deaf man, for two reasons. In the first place, he intimates that he was so overwhelmed with the false and wicked judgments of his enemies, that he was not even permitted to open his mouth in his own defense. In the second place, he alleges before God his own patience, as a plea to induce God the more readily to have pity upon him; for such meekness and gentleness, not only with good reason, secures favor to the afflicted and the innocent, but it is also a sign of true piety. Those who depend upon the world, and have respect only to men, if they cannot avenge the injuries that are done them, plainly show by their loud complaints the burning rage and fury of their hearts. In order, therefore, that a man may quietly and patiently endure the insolence, violence, calumny, and deceit of his enemies, it is necessary that he trust in God. The man who is fully persuaded in his own heart that God is his defender, will cherish his hope in silence, and, calling upon him for help, will lay a restraint upon his own passions. Accordingly, Paul, in Romans 12:19, very properly says, that we "give place unto wrath" when, oppressed before the world, we nevertheless still repose on God. On the other hand, whoever gives loose reins to his passions, takes away as much as he can from God, to whom alone it belongs, the right of taking vengeance, and deprives himself of his assistance. It is indeed certain, that if David had obtained a hearing, he would have been ready to defend his own innocence; but perceiving that it availed him nothing, nay, that he was shut out and debarred from all defense of his cause, he humbly submitted, waiting patiently for the heavenly Judge. He therefore says that he held his peace, as if he had already been convicted and struck dumb. And it is indeed very difficult, when we are conscious of our own innocence, patiently and silently to bear an unjust condemnation, as if all argument had failed us, and we had no excuse or reply left us.

Psalm 38:15-20

15. For on thee, O Jehovah! do I wait: thou wilt answer me, O Lord! [56] my God. **16**. For I said, lest they rejoice over me when my foot slippeth, they magnify themselves against me. **17**. Surely I am

56

Dominus. Heb. אתי, *Adonai*. But instead of אתי, *Adonai*, one hundred and two of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS. read יהוה, *Yehovah*, which may be presumed to be the true reading. As the Jews, from the sacredness which they attach to the name *Jehovah*, never pronounce it, and when it occurs in reading the Scriptures, pronounce אתי, *Adonai*, it may readily be supposed that Jewish scribes, in writing out copies of the Scriptures, from their constantly reading *Adonai* for *Jehovah*, would be very apt to fall into the mistake of writing the former word for the latter.

ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me. **18**. Surely I declare my iniquity; and I am dismayed because of my sin. **19**. And yet my enemies living are become strong; and they that oppose me wrongfully are become mighty. **20**. And they that reader me evil for good are opposed to me; because I follow that which is good.

15 *For on thee, O Jehovah! do I wait.* David here shows the source of his patience. It consisted in this, that, trusting in the grace of God, he overcame all the temptations of the world. And certainly, the mind of man will never be framed to gentleness and meekness, nor will he be able to subdue his passions, until he has learned never to give up hope. The Psalmist, at the same time, adds, that he cherished his hope by constant meditation, lest he should yield to despair. And this is the only means of our perseverance, when, on the ground of his own promises, with which we are furnished, we appeal to him, yea, rather when setting before our view his fidelity and his constancy in fulfilling what he has promised, we are sureties to ourselves for him. Accordingly, Paul, in Romans 5:4, very properly joins patience to hope and consolation. The repetition of terms in this verse shows, that this holy man was subjected to a severe and arduous conflict. *Thou,* he says, *O Lord! my God, wilt answer me.* His language implies, that if God should delay to come to his help, there was reason to fear that he would faint from weariness, or fall into despair, unless, setting this double defense before him, he persevered valiantly in the conflict.

16 *For I said, lest they rejoice over me.* Here he also confirms his faith and his earnestness in prayer from this consideration, that if he should be forsaken of God, his enemies would triumph. This indignity, on their part, is of no small weight in inducing God to help us; for the wicked, in thus magnifying themselves against us, and indulging in derision, not only make war with our flesh, but also directly assail our faith and endeavor to destroy whatever there is of religion and the fear of God in our hearts. What is the object of all their mockery, but to persuade us that what God has promised is vain and worthless? The Psalmist immediately adds, that it is not without cause that he is struck with the fear that his enemies would rejoice over him, since he had already had experience of their proud boastings. We are taught from this passage, that in proportion as our enemies increase in insolence and cruelty towards us, or, seeing us already overwhelmed by a heavy load of adversities, in their proud disdain trample us under their feet, we ought to cherish the greater hope that God will come to our help.

17 *Surely I am ready to halt* This verse has led expositors to suppose that David was afflicted with some sore, from which he was afraid of having brought upon him the infirmity of halting all his days; but I have already shown, in Psalm 35:15, that this supposition is very improbable. We have certainly no greater reason for supposing that David was lame than that Jeremiah was so, when he said,

"All my familiars watched for my halting." —
(Jeremiah 20:10,)

I therefore think that David here employs a metaphorical mode of expression, and that his meaning is, that if God did not soon come to his aid, there was no hope of his ever being restored to his former condition; and that he was so greatly afflicted, that he would walk as if he had been maimed or lame all the days of his life. [57] It next follows by way of exposition, that *his sorrow was continually before him.* The sense is, that he was so grievously afflicted, that he could not forget it for a single moment, so as to obtain some relaxation. In both the clauses of the verse, David confesses that his disease is incurable, unless he obtain some remedy from God, and that he cannot endure it, unless he be raised up and sustained by the hand of God himself. This is the reason why he directs all his thoughts and his requests to God alone; for as soon as he shall turn aside from him, he sees nothing but immediate ruin.

18 and **19** *Surely I declare my iniquity.* By comparison, he amplifies what he had just said concerning the pride and the reproachful conduct of his enemies; for he says, that whilst he is lying in a filthy and wretched condition, like a wicked man, and one abandoned by God, they fly about in mirth and gladness, nay, they carry their heads high, because they are rich and powerful. But first, it is proper to notice in what sense it is that *he declares his sin.* Those, in my judgment, are mistaken, who understand this passage simply in the sense of a confession of his guilt before God, that he might obtain forgiveness. According to their interpretation, the Psalmist is supposed to repeat here what we have seen he said

"I acknowledged my sin unto thee,
and mine iniquity have I not hid."— (Psalm 32:5)

But in this place he is not speaking so much of his repentance, as he is bewailing his sad and miserable condition; and, therefore, *sin* and *iniquity* are to be understood of the afflictions and chastisements which are the tokens of God's wrath; as if he had said, that the hand of God was against him, and lying so heavily upon him, that from the very sight of the misery to which he was reduced, the world in general might regard him as a condemned and reprobate man. In order to render the meaning more obvious, the 18th and 19th verses must be read together, thus: *I declare my iniquity, and my enemies are living; I am dismayed because of my sin, but they are become strong.* I do not, however, deny that he regards the miseries to which he was subjected as proceeding from his sins. In this respect, the godly differ from the wicked, that, being admonished of their transgression

57

"Et que son affliction est telle, qu'il ne sera jour de sa vie qu'il ne s'en sente." — *Fr.* "And that his affliction was such, that there would not be a day of his life but he would feel it."

by adversity, they humbly sist themselves before the judgment-seat of God. Accordingly, judging of the cause from the effects, he takes into account these two things: First, That thus overwhelmed and afflicted, he is lying under a heavy load of miseries; and, secondly, That all these evils are justly inflicted as chastisements for sin.

This *living,* [58] which he attributes to his enemies, implies as much as to enjoy continued and abundant prosperity in all things; and therefore he adds, that they *are become strong and increase in power* I interpret the word רבב, *rabbab,* in this place, *increase in power,* because he would speak improperly were he to be understood as saying, *that they were multiplied.* He does not here complain that they increased in number, but rather exalts their greatness, because the more they acquired of riches, they acquired so much the greater audacity in oppressing the good and the simple. He tells us that he is *assailed by them wrongfully,* and without cause, that he may induce God to be the more favorable and propitious to him. And surely, if we would have the favor of God for our defense, we must always take care not to injure any man, and to do nothing to provoke the hatred of any against us.

This is more fully confirmed in the following verse, in which he declares that they requited him evil for the good which he had done them. More than this, however, is implied in the language of David. It implies that he not only abstained from all hurtful dealing towards his enemies, but that he had done them all the good which was in his power; and on this account the rage of the wicked is the less excusable, which not only moves them to do harm to others without cause, but which likewise cannot be appeased by any marks of kindness exercised towards them. It is indeed true, that there is nothing which wounds those of an ingenuous disposition of mind more than when wicked and ungodly men recompense them in a manner so dishonorable and unjust; but when they reflect upon this consolatory consideration, that God is no less offended with such ingratitude than those to whom the injury is done, they have no reason to be troubled beyond measure. To mitigate their sorrow, let this doctrine be the subject of their frequent meditation, That whenever the wicked, to whom we have endeavored to do good, shall requite us evil for good, God will certainly be their judge. In the last place, it is added, as the highest degree of their desperate wickedness, that they

58

Ainsworth reads, "*are alive*, or *living*;" "that is," says he, "lively, lusty, cheerful, hale, and sound, or rich, as the word seemeth to mean in Ecclesiastes 6:8." Dr Lowth, instead of חיים, *chayim*, *living*, proposes to read here חאנם, *chinam*, *without cause — without cause have strengthened themselves.* "I think," says he, "חינם, here for חיים, is a remarkable instance of a reading merely conjectural, unsupported by any authority but that of the context, of the truth of which, no possible doubt can be made. Hare and Houbigant, and I suppose every other competent reader, has hit upon it. You see the two hemistichs are parallel and synonymous, word answering to word." — *Dr Lowth in Mr Merrick's Note on this place.* — Street and Dr Adam Clarke agree in this alteration.

hated David because he studied to practice uprightness: *They are opposed to me, because I follow that which is good* It must be admitted, that those are froward and wicked in the extreme, nay, even of a devilish disposition, who hold uprightness in such abhorrence that they deliberately make war upon those who follow after it. It is, indeed, a very sore temptation, that the people of God, the more sincerely they endeavor to serve him, should procure to themselves so much the more trouble and sorrow; but this consideration ought to prove a sufficient ground of consolation to them, that they are not only supported by the testimony of a good conscience, but that they also know that God is ever ready, and that, too, for this very reason, to manifest his mercy towards them. On the ground of this assurance, they dare to appear in the presence of God, and entreat him, as it is his cause as well as theirs, that he would maintain and defend it. There can be no doubt that David, by his own example, has prescribed this as a common rule to all the faithful, rather to incur the hatred and ill-will of the world, than in the least degree to swerve from the path of duty, and without any hesitation to regard those as their enemies whom they know to be opposed to that which is just and righteous.

Psalm 38:21-22

21. Forsake me not, O Jehovah! my God, and be not far from me.
22. Make haste to come to my aid, O Lord! [59] my salvation. [60]

In these concluding verses, David briefly states the chief point which he desired, and the sum of his whole prayer; namely, that whereas he was forsaken of men, and grievously afflicted in every way, God would receive him and raise him up again. He uses three forms of expression; first, that *God would not forsake him,* or cease to take care of him; secondly, that *he would not be far from him;* and, thirdly, that *he would make haste to help him.* David was, indeed, persuaded that God is always near to his servants, and that he delays not a single moment longer than is necessary. But, as we have seen in another place, it is not at all wonderful that the saints, when they unburden themselves of their cares and sorrows into the bosom of God, should make their requests in language according to the feeling of the flesh. They are not ashamed to confess their infirmity, nor is it proper to conceal the doubts which arise in their minds. Although, however, waiting was wearisome to David according to the flesh, yet in one word he plainly shows that he did not pray in uncertainty when he calls God *his salvation,* or the author of his salvation. Some render it *to my salvation,* but this is

59
Dominus. Heb. אדני, Adonai.

60
"Ou, de mon salut." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, of my salvation."

forced. David rather sets up this as a wall of defense against all the devices by which, as we have seen, his faith was assailed, That whatever might happen, he was, nevertheless, well assured of his salvation in God.

Psalm 39

PSALM 39

In the beginning of the psalm, David intimates that his heart had been seized with extreme bitterness of grief, which forced him to give utterance to complaints with too much vehemence and ardor. He confesses that whilst he was disposed to be silent, and to exercise patience, he was nevertheless compelled, by the vehemence of his sorrow, to break out into an excess which he by no means intended. Then he relates the complaints which he had made mingled with prayers, which indicate great trouble of mind; so that from this it appears that he had wrestled with no ordinary effort in resisting temptation, lest he should fall into despair.

To the chief musician, Jeduthun. A Psalm of David.

It is well known that Jeduthun was one of the chief singers of whom sacred history makes mention. (1 Chronicles 9:16; 16:38, 41, 42) It is, therefore, probable that this psalm was delivered to the chief singer, who was of his household. Some, indeed, understand it as denoting the particular kind of tune, and suppose that it was the beginning of some other song; but this I consider too forced an interpretation. Nor can I agree with others who suppose that David here complains of some disease; for unless some urgent reason require it, it is improper to limit general statements to particular cases. On the contrary, from the extreme character of the sufferings which he here describes, it may be presumed that a variety of afflictions is here included, or, at least, that some one is referred to which was more severe than all the others, and one which had continued for a long time. Besides, it ought to be considered that in this psalm David is not proclaiming his own merit, as if in his affliction he had presented his prayers to God in

the language, and according to the spirit dictated by true piety: he rather confesses the sin of his infirmity in bursting forth into immoderate sorrow, and in being led by the vehemence of this affection to indulge in sinful complaints.

Psalm 39:1-3

> **1**. I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked standeth before me. **2**. I was dumb in silence; I held my peace from good; and my sorrow was stirred. **3**. My heart became hot within me; in my musing a fire burned: I spake with my tongue.

1. *I said, I will take heed to my ways.* David explains and illustrates the greatness of his grief by this circumstance, that, contrary to his inclination and resolution, he broke forth into the severest complaints. The meaning substantially is, that although he had subdued his heart to patience, and resolved to keep silence, yet the violence of his grief was such that it forced him to break his resolution, and extorted from him, if we might so speak, expressions which indicate that he had given way to an undue degree of sorrow. The expression, *I said,* it is well known, does not always mean what is expressed in words, but is often used to denote the purpose of the heart, and, therefore, the words *in heart* are sometimes added. David, therefore, means not that he boasted of his fortitude and constancy, and made a display of them before men, but that before God he was, by continued meditation, well fortified and prepared to endure patiently the temptations by which he was now assailed. We ought to mark particularly the carefulness by which he was distinguished. It was not without cause that he was so much intent on exercising watchfulness over himself. He did so because he was conscious of his own weakness, and also well knew the manifold devices of Satan. He, therefore, looked on the right hand and on the left, and kept watch on all sides, lest temptation stealing upon him unawares from any quarter might reach even to his heart. Access to it, then, had been impossible, since it was shut up on every side, if the extreme severity of his grief had not overpowered him, and broken his resolution. When he says, *I will keep my mouth with a muzzle,* [61] *that I sin not with my tongue,* it is not to be understood as if he could with difficulty restrain and conceal his grief, (for it is mere pretense for a man to show by the countenance and speech the appearance of meekness when the heart still swells with pride;) but as there is nothing more slippery

61

The Hebrew word מחסום, *machsom*, rendered *bridle* in our English version, properly signifies a *muzzle*, and is so rendered in Deuteronomy 25:4. "Our translations," observes Mant, "say 'as with a bridle.' But we do not see how a bridle would preclude the person from speaking; nor is it a correct phrase, which the word muzzle is." It is probable that the bridles of the ancients were made in the form of muzzles.

or loose than the tongue, David declares that he had endeavored so carefully to bridle his affections, that not so much as one word should escape from his lips which might betray the least impatience. And that man must indeed be endued with singular fortitude who unfeignedly and deliberately restrains his tongue, which is so liable to fall into error. As to what follows, *while the wicked standeth before me,* it is generally understood, as if David had concealed his grief, lest he should give occasion of blasphemy to the wicked, who, as soon as they see the children of God fail under the weight of their afflictions, insolently break forth into derision against them, which amounts to a contempt of God himself. But it appears to me that by the term *standeth,* David meant to express something more, — that even while he saw the wicked bearing rule, exercising authority, and exalted to honor, he resolved not to speak a single word, but to bear patiently the poverty and indignity which otherwise grieve and torment not a little even good men. Accordingly, he says not merely that when he was in the presence of the wicked he restrained himself, lest he should be subjected to their scorn, but that even while the worst of men prospered, [62] and, proud of their high rank, despised others, he was fully determined in his own mind not to be troubled at it. By this he very plainly shows that he was so beset with wicked men, ever ready for mischief, that he could not freely heave a sigh which was not made the subject of ridicule and scorn. Since, then, it was so hard a task for David to restrain his tongue, lest he should sin by giving way to complaints, let us learn from his example, whenever troubles molest us, to strive earnestly to moderate our affections, that no impious expression of dissatisfaction against God may slip from us.

2. *I was dumb in silence.* He now declares that this resolution of which he has spoken had not been a mere passing and momentary thought, but that he had shown by his conduct that it was indeed a resolution deeply fixed in his heart. He says, then, that he held his peace for a time, just as if he had been deaf, which was a singular manifestation of his patience. When he thus determined to be silent, it was not such a resolution as persons of a changeable disposition, who scarcely ever know their own mind, and who can with difficulty be brought to carry their desires into effect, often make: he had long and steadfastly inured himself to the exercise of patience; and this he had done, not only by keeping silence but by making himself utterly dumb, as if he had been deprived of the power of speech. The expression *from good* is expounded by some in the sense that he not only refrained from uttering sinful and unadvised words, but also that he abstained from speaking on any subject whatever. Others think that he held his peace from good, either because, being overwhelmed with miseries and afflictions, he found no relief to whatever side he turned, or else, because, by reason of

62 Dr Geddes renders the last clause of the verse, "While the wicked prosper before me."

the greatness of his sorrow, he was unable to sing the praises of God. But in my opinion the natural sense is, that although he was able adequately to defend himself, and it could not be shown that he wanted just and proper grounds of complaint, yet he refrained from speaking of his own mere will. [63] He might have encountered the ungodly with a good defense of his own innocence, but he rather preferred to forego the prosecution of his righteous cause than indulge in any intemperate sorrow. He adds in the last clause of the verse, that although he thus restrained himself for a time, yet at length the violence of his grief broke through all the barriers which he had set to his tongue. If David, who was so valiant a champion, failed in the midst of his course, how much greater reason have we to be afraid lest we fall in like manner? He says that *his sorrow was stirred,* because, as we shall soon see, the ardor of his affections was inflamed so as to become tumultuous. Some render the phrase in this sense, that *his sorrow was corrupted,* as if his meaning were, that it became worse; just as we know that a wound becomes worse when it happens to putrify or fester: but this sense is forced.

3. *My heart became hot within me* He now illustrates the greatness of his grief by the introduction of a simile, telling us that his sorrow, being internally suppressed, became so much the more inflamed, until the ardent passion of his soul continued to increase in strength. From this we may learn the very profitable lesson, that the more strenuously any one sets himself to obey God, and employs all his endeavors to attain the exercise of patience, the more vigorously is he assailed by temptation: for Satan, whilst he is not so troublesome to the indifferent and careless, and seldom looks near them, displays all his forces in hostile array against that individual. If, therefore, at any time we feel ardent emotions struggling and raising a commotion in our breasts, we should call to remembrance this conflict of David, that our courage may not fail us, or at least that our infirmity may not drive us headlong to despair. The dry and hot exhalations which the sun causes to arise in summer, if nothing occurred in the atmosphere to obstruct their progress, would ascend into the air without commotion; but when intervening clouds prevent their free ascent, a conflict arises, from which the thunders are produced. It is similar with respect to the godly who desire to lift up their hearts to God. If they would resign themselves to the vain imaginations which arise in their minds, they might enjoy a sort of unrestrained liberty to indulge in every fancy; but because they endeavor to resist their influence, and seek to devote themselves to God, obstructions which arise from the opposition of the flesh begin to trouble

63

French and Skinner read, "I held my peace from good and bad." In the Hebrew it is simply "from good;" but they observe, "This expression occurs frequently in Scripture, and it would seem, that owing to the constant use of it, one part only of the sentence has been here expressed. Thus, 'Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob *either good or bad*,' (Genesis 31:24.) Again, 'Absalom spake *neither good nor bad*,' (2 Samuel 13:22.")

them. Whenever, therefore, the flesh shall put forth its efforts, and shall kindle up a fire in our hearts, let us know that we are exercised with the same kind of temptation which occasioned so much pain and trouble to David. In the end of the verse he acknowledges that the severity of the affliction with which he was visited had at length overcome him, and that he allowed foolish and unadvised words to pass from his lips. In his own person he sets before us a mirror of human infirmity, that, being warned by the danger to which we are exposed, we may learn betimes to seek protection under the shadow of God's wings. When he says that *he spake with his tongue,* it is not a superfluous mode of expression, but a true and fuller confession of his sin, in that he had not only given way to sinful murmuring, but had even uttered loud complaints.

Psalm 39:4-6

4. O Jehovah! cause me to know my end, and the number of my days, that I may understand how long I may live. [64] **5**. Behold, thou hast made my days as a hand-breadth, and mine age as if it were nothing before thee: truly every man, while he standeth, is wholly vanity. Selah. **6**. Surely man walketh in a shadow; surely he disquieteth himself in vain: they heap together [riches, [65]] and know not who shall gather them.

4. *O Jehovah! cause me to know my end.* It appears from this, that David was transported by an improper and sinful excess of passion, seeing he finds fault with God. This will appear still more clearly from the following verses. It is true, indeed, that in what follows he introduces pious and becoming prayers, but here he complains, that, being a mortal man, whose life is frail and transitory, he is not treated more mildly by God. Of this, and similar complaints, the discourses of Job are almost full. It is, therefore, not without anger and resentment that David speaks in this manner: "O God, since thou art acting with so much severity towards me, at least make me to know how long thou hast appointed me to live. But is it so, that my life is but a moment, why then dost thou act with so great rigour? and why dost thou accumulate upon my head such a load of miseries, as if I had yet many ages to live? What does it profit me to have been born, if I must pass the period of my existence, which is so brief, in misery, and oppressed with a continued succession of calamities?"

64

Or, as Horsley reads, "how brief I am."

65

The word *riches* is a supplement; there being no word for it in Calvin's version, nor in the Hebrew text; but the meaning evidently is, "they heap up, accumulate, or amass riches." Horsley reads, "His accumulated riches — he knoweth not who shall gather them."

Accordingly, this verse should be read in connection with the following one. *Behold, thou hast made my days as a hand-breadth.* A hand-breadth is the measure of four fingers, and is here taken for a very small measure; as if it had been said, the life of man flies swiftly away, and the end of it, as it were, touches the beginning. Hence the Psalmist concludes that all men are only *vanity* before God. As to the meaning of the words, he does not ask that the brevity of human life should be shown to him, as if he knew it not. There is in this language a kind of irony, as if he had said, Let us count the number of the years which still remain to me on earth, and will they be a sufficient recompense for the miseries which I endure? Some render the word חדל, *chedel, mundane;* and others *temporal,* that is to say, that which endures only for a time. But the latter rendering is not appropriate in this place: for David does not as yet expressly declare the shortness of his life, but continues to speak on that subject ambiguously. If the word *mundane* is adopted, the sense will be, Show me whether thou wilt prolong my life to the end of the world. But in my judgment, the translation which I have followed is much more appropriate; and, besides, there may have been a transposition of the letters ד, *daleth,* and ל, *lamed,* making the word *chedel* for *cheled.* It may, however, very properly be taken for an age or period of life. [66] When he says that *his age is, as it were, nothing before God,* in order to excite God so much the more to pity and compassion, he appeals to him as a witness of his frailty, intimating, that it is not a thing unknown to him how transitory and passing the life of man is. The expression, *wholly* or *altogether vanity,* [67] implies that among the whole human race there is nothing but vanity. He declares this of men, even whilst *they are standing;* [68] that is to say, when, being in the prime and vigor of life, they wish to be held in estimation, and seem to themselves to be men possessed of considerable influence and power. It was the pangs of sorrow which forced

66

"*Mine age*, *i.e.*, the whole extent of my life." — *Cresswell.*

67

The word הבל, *hebel*, rendered *vanity*, according to some, means *the mirage*, that deceptive appearance of a collection of waters in the distance, which the traveler, through the Arabian deserts, imagines he sees before him, and from which he fondly hopes to quench his thirst; but which, upon his coming up to it, he finds to be only burning sands, to which the reflection of the light of the sun had given the appearance of a lake of water. According to others, vanity means *a vapor*, as the breath of one's mouth, which speedily vanishes; to which the apostle refers in James 4:14. "I take the word in its proper sense," [vapor,] says Bishop Mant, "as more poetical and energetic than the derivative one of 'vanity.'" See Simonis and Parkhurst on הבל. Abel gave to his second son the name of *Hebel*, *vanity*, and here David declares that אדם-כל *col-adam*, all adam, every man is *hebel*, vanity.

68

This word here rendered *standeth* "is well paraphrased by Dathe, 'Dum firmissime constitutus videatur.'" — *Rogers*' *Psalms in Heb.*, *volume*2, p. 200.

David to give utterance to these complaints; but it is to be observed, that it is chiefly when men are sore oppressed by adversity that they are made to feel their nothingness in the sight of God. Prosperity so intoxicates them, that, forgetful of their condition, and sunk in insensibility, they dream of an immortal state on earth. It is very profitable for us to know our own frailty, but we must beware lest, on account of it, we fall into such a state of sorrow as may lead us to murmur and repine. David speaks truly and wisely in declaring, that man, even when he seems to have risen to the highest state of greatness, is only like the bubble which rises upon the water, blown up by the wind; but he is in fault when he takes occasion from this to complain of God. Let us, therefore, so feel the misery of our present condition, as that, however cast down and afflicted, we may, as humble suppliants, lift up our eyes to God, and implore his mercy. This we find David does a little after, having corrected himself; for he does not continue to indulge in rash and inconsiderate lamentations, but lifting up his soul in the exercise of faith, he attains heavenly consolation.

6. *Surely man walketh in a shadow.* [69] He still prosecutes the same subject. By the word *shadow,* he means, that there is nothing substantial in man, but that he is only, as we say, a vain show, and has I know not how much of display and ostentation. [70] Some translate the word *darkness,* and understand the Psalmist's language in this sense, That the life of man vanishes away before it can be known. But in these words David simply declares of every man individually what Paul extends to the whole world, when he says,

"The fashion of this world passeth away." — 1 Corinthians 7:31

Thus he denies that there is any thing abiding in men, because the appearance of strength which displays itself in them for a time soon passes away. What he adds, that men *disquiet themselves in vain,* shows the very height of their vanity; as if he had said, It seems as if men were born for the very purpose of rendering themselves more and more contemptible: for although they are only as a shadow, yet as if they were fools, or rather

69

In the Hebrew it is literally, "Man walketh in an image;" a phantasm, that which seems to be something real and substantial, but which does not deserve that character, which is an appearance only. Life is a mere show; "the baseless fabric of a vision;" it has the semblance of solidity, but there is no reality in it. The word occurs again in Psalm 73:20, "Thou shalt despise their image;" their vain show, or phantastic prosperity. Walford reads, "walketh *as* a shadow;" observing, that "the prefix ב is often used for כ as a particle of similitude." he farther observes, that Dathe's translation, "he pursues a shadow," gives a good sense, but does not convey the exact notion of the figure that is conveyed by the Hebrew.

70

"Et je ne scay quelle parade et ostentation." — *Fr.*

insane, they involve themselves needlessly in harassing cares, and vexing themselves to no purpose. He expresses still more plainly how they manifest their folly, when he declares that while they anxiously and carefully heap up riches, they never think that they must soon, and it may be suddenly, leave their present abode. And why is it that they thus fret away their mind and body, but only because they imagine that they can never have enough? for by their insatiable desire of gain, they eagerly grasp at all the riches of the world, as if they had to live a hundred times the life of man. Moreover, David does not in this passage hold up to scorn the covetousness of man in the same sense in which Solomon does, Ecclesiastes 5:10; for he not only speaks of their heirs, but declares generally, that men disquiet and vex themselves with care, although they know not who shall reap the fruit of their labor in amassing riches. [71] They may indeed wish to make provision for themselves; but what madness and folly is it for them to torment themselves with incessant and unprofitable cares which have no certain object or limit? David here condemns those ardent and unbridled desires, under the influence of which worldly men are carried away, and talk in a strange manner, confounding heaven and earth; for they admit not that they are mortal, much less do they consider that their life is bounded by the narrow limits of a hand-breadth. David spoke under the influence of a distempered and troubled state of mind; but there is included in his language this very profitable lesson, that there is no remedy better fitted for enabling us to rise above all unnecessary cares, than the recollection that the brief period of our life is only, as it were, a hand-breadth.

Psalm 39:7-9

7. And now, O Lord! [72] what do I wait for? my hope is towards thee. **8**. Deliver me from all my sin; do not make me the reproach of the foolish. [73] **9**. I was dumb; I will not open my mouth, because thou hast done it.

71

It is important to mark the difference between the Hebrew word צכר, *tsabar*, here rendered *to heap together*, and the Word אסף, *asaph*, rendered *to gather* "The former," says Hammond, "here appears to contain all the toil of the harvest, in reaping, binding, setting up, and heaping things together, bringing them from the several places where they grow, into a *cumulus* The latter denotes the stowing or housing, laying it up, removing or carrying it out of the field, where it is heaped or set up, ready for carriage. For so אסף signifies sometimes *to lay up*, sometimes *to take away* This, then, is the description of the vanity of our human estate, that when a man hath run through all the labors of acquisition, and hath nothing visible to interpose betwixt him and his enjoyments, yet even then he is uncertain, not only whether himself shall possess it at last, but whether his heir shall do it; nay, he knows not whether his enemy may not; he cannot tell 'who shall gather them into the barn,' or enjoy them when they are there."

72

In the original it is אדני; but in some MSS. it is יהוה, which is probably the true reading.

73

7. *And now, O Lord! what do I wait for?* David, having acknowledged that his heart had been too much under the influence of ardent and impetuous emotion, from which he had experienced great disquietude, now returns to a calm and settled state of mind; and from this what I have before stated is rendered still more obvious, namely, that this psalm consists partly of appropriate prayers and partly of inconsiderate complaints. I have said that David here begins to pray aright. It is true, that even worldly men sometimes feel in the very same way in which David here acknowledges that he felt; but the knowledge of their own vanity does not lead them so far as to seek substantial support in God. On the contrary, they rather wilfully render themselves insensible, that they may indulge undisturbed in their own vanity. We may learn from this passage, that no man looks to God for the purpose of depending upon him, and resting his hope in him, until he is made to feel his own frailty, yea, and even brought to nought. There is tacitly great force in the adverb *now,* as if David had said, The flattery and vain imaginations by which the minds of men are held fast in the sleep of security no longer deceive me, but I am now fully sensible of my condition. But we must go beyond this elementary stage; for it is not enough, that, being aroused by a sense of our infirmity, we should seek with fear and trembling to know our duty, unless at the same time God manifest himself to us, on whom alone all our expectation should depend. Accordingly, as it serves no end for worldly men to be convinced of their utter vanity, because, although convinced of this, they never improve by it, let us learn to press forward and make still further progress, in order that, being as it were dead, we may be quickened by God, whose peculiar office it is to create all things out of nothing; for man then ceases to be vanity, and begins to be truly something, when, aided by the power of God, he aspires to heavenly things.

8. *Deliver me from all my sins.* In this verse the Psalmist still continues his godly and holy prayer. He is now no longer carried away by the violence of his grief to murmur against God, but, humbly acknowledging himself guilty before God, he has recourse to his mercy. In asking to be delivered from his transgressions, he ascribes the praise of righteousness to God, while he charges upon himself the blame of all the misery which he endures; and he blames himself, not only on account of one sin, but acknowledges that he is justly chargeable with manifold transgressions. By this rule we must be guided, if we would wish to obtain an alleviation of our miseries; for, until the very source of them has been dried up, they will never cease to follow one another in rapid succession. David unquestionably wished an alleviation of his miseries, but, as he expected that, as soon as he should be reconciled to God, the chastisement of his sins would also cease, he only here asks that his sins may be forgiven him. We are thus taught by the example of David,

"Ou, vauneant et desbauche, ou, meschant." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, the idle and debauched, or, wicked."

not merely to seek deliverance from the miseries which afflict and trouble us, but to trace them to their cause and source, entreating God that he would not lay our sins to our charge, but blot out our guilt. What follows concerning the *reproach* or *scorn of the foolish* may be understood in an active as well as a passive signification, denoting, either that God would not abandon him to the mockery of the wicked, or that he would not involve him in the same disgrace to which the ungodly are given over. As, however, either of these senses will agree very well with the design of the Psalmist, I leave it to the reader to adopt the one which he prefers. Besides, the word נבל*, nabal,* signifies not only a foolish person, but also a contemptible man, one who is utterly worthless and base. It is at least certain, that by this word the reprobate, whom the Scriptures condemn for their folly, are intended; because, being deprived of their reason and understanding, they break forth into every excess in contemning and reproaching God.

9. *I was dumb* Here David blames himself, because he had not preserved that silence which, as we have already seen, the violence of his grief forced him to break. When he says then that he was *dumb,* he does not mean this as a commendation of the uniform and persevering restraint which he had exercised over himself. It is rather a correction of his error, as if reproving his own impatience, he had spoken within himself in this way: What doest thou? thou hadst enjoined upon thyself silence, and now thou murmurest proudly against God; what wilt thou gain by this presumption? We have here a very profitable and instructive lesson; for nothing is better fitted to restrain the violent paroxysms of grief, than the recollection that we have to do, not with a mortal man, but with God, who will always maintain his own righteousness in opposition to all that men may say against it in their murmuring complaints, and even in their outrageous accusations. What is the reason why the great majority of men run to such excess in their impatience, but because they forget that, in doing so, they dare to plead a controversy with God? Thus, while some impute all their miseries to fortune, and others to men, and others account for them from a variety of causes which their own fancy suggests, while scarcely one in a hundred recognises in them the hand of God, they allow themselves to indulge in bitter complaint, without ever thinking that in so doing they offend God. David, on the contrary, in order to subdue every unholy desire and sinful excess, returns to God, and resolves to keep silence, because the affliction which he is now suffering proceeded from God. As David, who was thus afflicted with the severest trials, resolved nevertheless to keep silence, let us learn from this, that it is one of the chief exercises of our faith to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and to submit to his judgments without murmuring or complaint. It is to be observed, that men humbly and calmly submit themselves to God only when they are persuaded, not only that he does by his almighty power whatever he pleases, but that he is also a righteous Judge; for although the wicked feel that the hand of God

is upon them, yet as they charge him with cruelty and tyranny, they cease not to pour forth horrible blasphemies against him. In the meantime, David regards the secret judgments of God with such reverence and wonder, that, satisfied with his will alone, he considers it sinful to open his mouth to utter a single word against him.

Psalm 39:10-11

> **10**. Take away thy stroke from me: I have failed [or fainted] by the blow of thy hand. **11**. Thou chastisest man with rebukes for his iniquity; and as a moth, thou makest his excellency to consume away: surely every man is vanity. Selah.

10 *Take away thy stroke from me.* David here confirms the prayer which he had already presented, namely, that having obtained pardon from God, he might, at the same time, be gently dealt with by him. This prayer, however, does not disturb the silence of which he had just made mention; for our desires and prayers, if they are framed according to the rule of God's word, are not inconsiderate and noisy so as to provoke the divine displeasure against us, but proceed from the calm stillness which faith and patience produce in our hearts. It is indeed true, that when any one prays earnestly to God, he cannot fail to mix up with it his own feelings, pour forth his complaints, and manifest an extreme ardor. But we see that David, who formerly bewailed his miseries in loud lamentations, now sets himself calmly to consider and weigh what he merited, and prays for pardon. His meaning is, that God would mitigate the punishment which he had inflicted upon him. The reason immediately follows; for *I have fainted by the blow of thy hand.* In thus speaking, David does not allege this as an excuse to extenuate his fault, but desires that he may be borne with in his infirmity. As he says with respect to himself individually, that he is consumed, because he feels that the hand of God is against him, so he immediately states in the 11th verse the same truth in general terms, telling us, that if God should begin to deal with us according to the strict demands of the law, the consequence would be, that all would perish, and be utterly overwhelmed under his wrath. He plainly shows, first, that he is speaking not of any one man, or even of men generally, for he makes use of a Hebrew word, which denotes a man renowned for his valor, courage, or excellence; [74] and then, secondly, he says, that if God should set himself to chastise such persons, every thing which they esteem precious in themselves would consume away or be dissolved. The sum is, that among men there is no one endued with such power and glory whom the wrath of God, if it burn fiercely against him,

74 "Car il use d'un mot par lequel les Hebrieux signifient un homme vertueux, courageux, ou excellent." — *Fr.* The Hebrew word is איש, *ish* See volume 1, p. 40, note.

will not forthwith bring to nothing. But it will be necessary to examine the words more minutely. David does not simply describe the dreadful character of God's wrath; but at the same time he declares and sets forth his righteousness in all the punishments which he inflicts upon men. The judgments of God sometimes strike fear and dread into the hearts even of heathen men, but their blindness fills them with such rage, that they still continue to fight against God. By the term *rebukes,* David means severe punishments, such as are the tokens of strict justice and signs of divine wrath. We know that God often exercises the rod of his chastisement upon true believers, but he does it in such a manner as that in punishing them he at the same time gives them a taste of his mercy and his love, and not only tempers the chastisements with which he visits them, but also mingles them with comfort, which serves to render them much more tolerable. David, then, is not speaking in this place of fatherly chastisement, but of the punishment which God inflicts upon the reprobate, when, like an inexorable judge in the exercise of his office, he executes against them the judgment which they have merited. He tells us that when God makes this rigour to be felt, there is no man who does not forthwith consume or pine away. At first view the comparison of God to a moth may seem absurd; for what relation is there, it may be said, between a small moth-worm and the infinite majesty of God? I answer, That David has with much propriety made use of this simile, that we may know that although God does not openly thunder from heaven against the reprobate, yet his secret curse ceases not to consume them away, just as the moth, though unperceived, wastes by its secret gnawing a piece of cloth or wood. [75] At the same time, he alludes to *the excellency* [76] of man, which he says is destroyed as it were by corruption, when God is offended, even as the moth destroys the most precious cloths by wasting them. The Scriptures often very appropriately employ various similitudes in this Way, and are wont to apply them sometimes in one view and sometimes

75

The meaning according to our English version seems to be, that the beauty of man is consumed as the moth is consumed. "But," says Walford, "this gives no correct or suitable sense. The design is to state, not that the moth is consumed, but that it is a consumer or spoiler of garments." He reads,

"With rebukes thou chastisest man for iniquity,
Then thou destroyest his goodliness as a moth
destroyeth a garment."

This is precisely Calvin's interpretation. The moth is called in Hebrew עש, *ash*, from its *corroding* and *destroying* the texture of cloth, etc. See Parkhurst's Lexicon on the word עש. The metaphor here employed is of frequent occurrence in Scripture. For example, in Hosea 5:12, God says, "I will be to Ephraim as a moth," that is, I will consume them; and in Isaiah 50:9, it is said, "The moth shall eat them as a garment."

76

The original word, which Calvin renders "excellency," is translated by Hammond "precious things;" by which he understands wealth, greatness, health, beauty, strength, and, in short, whatever is most precious to us.

in another. When Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:13) compares God to a lion, he does so in reference to the feelings of his own mind, because he was so prostrated and overwhelmed with fear and terror. But in this place David teaches us, that although the world may not perceive the dreadful vengeance of God, yet it consumes the reprobate by secretly gnawing them. This sentence, *that every man is vanity,* is again very properly repeated; for until we are overcome by the power of God, and as it were humbled in the dust, we never search into our own hearts, that the knowledge of our own vanity may divest us of all presumption. Whence is it that men are so foolishly satisfied with themselves, yea, and even applaud themselves, unless it be that, so long as God bears with them, they are wilfully blind to their own infirmities? The only remedy, then, by which men are cured of pride is when, alarmed with a sense of God's wrath, they begin not only to be dissatisfied with themselves, but also to humble themselves even to the dust.

Psalm 39:12-13

> **12**. Hear my prayer, O Jehovah! and hearken to my cry; and hold not thy peace [77] at my tears: for I am a stranger before thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were. **13**. Let me alone, that I may recover strength, before I depart, and be no more.

12 *Hear my prayer, O Jehovah!* David gradually increases his vehemence in prayer. He speaks first of *prayer;* in the second place, of *crying;* and in the third place, of *tears* This gradation is not a mere figure of rhetoric, which serves only to adorn the style, or to express the same thing in different language. This shows that David bewailed his condition sincerely, and from the bottom of his heart; and in this he has given us, by his own example, a rule for prayer. When he calls himself a *stranger* and a *sojourner,* he again shows how miserable his condition was; and he adds expressly, *before God,* not only because men are absent from God so long as they dwell in this world, but in the same sense in which he formerly said, *My days are before thee as nothing;* that is to say, God, without standing in need of any one to inform him, knows well enough that men have only a short journey to perform in this world, the end of which is soon reached, or that they remain only a short time in it, as those who are lodged in a house for pay. [78] The purport of the Psalmist's discourse is, that God sees from heaven how miserable our condition would be, if he did not sustain us by his mercy.

13 *Let me alone, that I may recover strength.* Literally, it is, *cease from me,* and therefore some explain it, Let there be a wall raised betwixt us, that

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"Ne dissimule point." — *Fr.* "Dissemble not."

78

"Comme des gens qui sont logez en une maison par emprunt." — *Fr.*

thy hand may not reach me. Others read, as a supplement, the word *eyes;* but as to the sense, it matters little which of the expositions be adopted, for the meaning is the same, That David entreats God to grant him a little relaxation from his trouble, that he might recover strength, or, at least, enjoy a short respite, before he depart from this world. This concluding verse of the psalm relates to the disquietude and sinful emotions which he had experienced according to the flesh; for he seems in the way of complaining of God, to ask that at least time might be granted him to die, as men are wont to speak who are grievously harassed by their affliction. I admit, that he speaks in a becoming manner, in acknowledging that there is no hope of his being restored to health, until God cease to manifest his displeasure; but he errs in this, that he asks a respite, just that he may have time to die. We might, indeed, regard the prayer as allowable, by understanding it in this sense: *Lord,* as it will not be possible for me to endure thy stroke any longer, but I must, indeed, miserably perish, if thou continuest to afflict me severely, at least grant me relief for a little season, that in calmness and peace I may commit my soul into thy hands. But we may easily infer, from the language which he employs, that his mind was so affected with the bitterness of his grief that he could not present a prayer pure and well seasoned with the sweetness of faith; for he says, *before I depart, and be no more:* a form of speech which indicates the feeling almost of despair. Not that David could regard death as the entire annihilation of man, or that, renouncing all hope of his salvation, he resigned himself to destruction; but he employs this language, because he had previously been so much depressed by reason of grief, that he could not lift up his heart with so much cheerfulness as it behoved him. This is a mode of expression which is to be found more than once in the complaints of Job. It is obvious, therefore, that, although David endeavored carefully to restrain the desires of the flesh, yet these occasioned him so much disquietude and trouble, that they forced him to exceed the proper limits in his grief.

Psalm 40

PSALM 40

David, being delivered from some great danger, and it may be, not from one only, but from many, extols very highly the grace of God, and by means of this, his soul is filled with admiration of the providence of God, which extends itself to the whole human race. Then he protests that he will give himself wholly to the service of God, and defines briefly in what manner God is to be served and honored. Afterwards, he again returns to the exercise of thanksgiving, and celebrates the praises of the Eternal by rehearsing many of his glorious and powerful deeds. Lastly, when he has complained of his enemies, he concludes the psalm with a new prayer.

To the chief musician. A Psalm of David.

Psalm 40:1-3

> **1**. In waiting I waited [79] for Jehovah, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. **2**. And he drew me out of the roaring pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my steps. **3**. And he hath put into my mouth a new song, even praise to our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in Jehovah.

1. *In waiting I waited* The beginning of this psalm is an expression of thanksgiving, in which David relates that he had been delivered, not only

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"C'est, paciemment." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, patiently." Calvin in the text gives the literal rendering of the Hebrew. *In waiting I waited* is a Hebraism which signifies vehement desire, and yet entire resignation of mind. "The doubling of the word," says Ainsworth, "denotes earnestness, constancy, patience."

from danger, but also from present death. Some are of opinion, but without good reason, that it ought to be understood of sickness. It is rather to be supposed that David here comprehends a multitude of dangers from which he had escaped. He had certainly been more than once exposed to the greatest danger, even of death, so that, with good reason, he might be said to have been swallowed up in the gulf of death, and sunk in the *miry clay* It, nevertheless, appears that his faith had still continued firm, for he ceased not to trust in God, although the long continuance of the calamity had well nigh exhausted his patience. He tells us, not merely that he had waited, but by the repetition of the same expression, he shows that he had been a long time in anxious suspense. In proportion then as his trial was prolonged, the evidence and proof of his faith in enduring the delay with calmness and equanimity of mind was so much the more apparent. The meaning in short is, that although God delayed his help, yet the heart of David did not faint, or grow weary from delay; but that after he had given, as it were, sufficient proof of his patience, he was at length heard. In his example there is set before us this very useful doctrine, that although God may not forthwith appear for our help, but rather of design keep us in suspense and perplexity, yet we must not lose courage, inasmuch as faith is not thoroughly tried, except by long endurance. The result, too, of which he speaks in terms of praise, ought to inspire us with increased fortitude. God may succor us more slowly than we desire, but, when he seems to take no notice of our condition, or, if we might so speak, when he seems to be inactive or to sleep, this is totally different from deceit: for if we are enabled by the invincible strength and power of faith to endure, the fitting season of our deliverance will at length arrive.

2. *And he drew me out of the roaring pit.* Some translate, *from the pit of desolation,* [80] because the verb שאה, *shaah,* from which the noun שאום, *shaon,* is derived, signifies *to destroy* or *to waste,* as well as *to resound* or *echo.* But it is more appropriate to consider that there is here an allusion to the deep gulfs, where the waters gush with a tumultuous force. [81] By this similitude he shows that he was placed in as imminent peril of death as if he had been cast into a deep pit, roaring with the impetuous rage of waters. To the same purpose also is the similitude of *the miry clay,* by

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The Septuagint reads, "Εχ λάχχου ταλαιπωρίας." — "Out of a pit of misery;" and Ainsworth, "the pit of sounding calamity," or "dungeon of tumultuous desolation, which," says he, "echoed and resounded with dreadful noises." "The sufferings of the Psalmist," observes Bishop Mant, "are here described under the image of a dark subterraneous cavern from which there was no emerging; and where roaring cataracts of water broke in upon him, overwhelming him on every side, till, as it is expressed in the 18th psalm, 'God sent from above and took him, and drew him out of many waters.'"

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"Un marveilleux bruit." — *Fr.* "A marvellous noise."

which he intimates that he had been so nearly overwhelmed by the weight of his calamities, that it was no easy matter to extricate him from them. Next, there follows a sudden and incredible change, by which he makes manifest to all the greatness of the grace which had been bestowed upon him. He declares that *his feet were set upon a rock,* whereas formerly he had been overwhelmed with water; and that his *steps were established* or *upheld,* whereas before they were not only unsteady and slippery, but were also stuck fast in the mire.

3. *And he hath put into my mouth a new song* In the first clause of the verse he concludes the description of what God had done for him. By God's putting *a new song into his mouth* he denotes the consummation of his deliverance. In whatever way God is pleased to succor us, he asks nothing else from us in return but that we should be thankful for and remember it. As often, therefore, as he bestows benefits upon us, so often does he open our mouths to praise his name. Since God, by acting liberally towards us, encourages us to sing his praises, David with good reason reckons, that having been so wonderfully delivered, the matter of a new song had been furnished to him. He uses the word *new* in the sense of exquisite and not ordinary, even as the manner of his deliverance was singular and worthy of everlasting remembrance. It is true, that there is no benefit of God so small that it ought not to call forth our highest praises; but the more mightily he stretches forth his hand to help us, the more does it become us to stir up ourselves to fervent zeal in this holy exercise, so that our songs may correspond to the greatness of the favor which has been conferred upon us.

Many shall see it Here the Psalmist extends still farther the fruit of the aid which he had experienced, telling us, that it will prove the means of instruction common to all. And certainly it is the will of God that the benefits which he bestows upon any individual of the faithful should be proofs of the goodness which he constantly exercises towards all of them, so that the one, instructed by the example of the other, should not doubt that the same grace will be manifested towards himself. The terms *fear,* and *hope,* or *trust,* do not seem at first view to harmonise; but David has not improperly joined them together; for no man will ever entertain the hope of the favor of God but he whose mind is first imbued with the fear of God. I understand *fear* in general to mean the feeling of piety which is produced in us by the knowledge of the power, equity, and mercy of God. The judgment which God executed against the enemies of David served, it is true, to inspire all men with fear; but, in my opinion, David rather means, that by the deliverance which he had obtained, many would be induced to yield themselves to the service of God, and to submit with all reverence to his authority, because they would know him to be the Judge of the world. Now, whoever submits cordially to the will of God will of necessity join hope with fear; especially when there is presented to his view the evidence of the grace by which God commonly allures all men to himself; for I have already

said that God is presented to our view as merciful and kind to others, that we may assure ourselves that he will be the same towards us. As to the word *see,* of which David makes use, we are to understand it as referring not only to the eyes, but chiefly to the perception of the mind. All without distinction saw what had happened, but to many of them it never occurred to recognize the deliverance of David as the work of God. Since, then, so many are blind regarding the works of God, let us learn, that those only are considered to see clearly to whom the Spirit of understanding has been given, that they may not occupy their minds in dwelling upon the mere events which take place, but may discern in them by faith the secret hand of God.

Psalm 40:4-5

4. Blessed is the man who hath set Jehovah for his confidence, and hath not regarded the proud, and those who turn aside to lying. [82]
5. Many are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, O Jehovah! my God: and it is impossible to reckon up in order to thee, [83] thy counsels towards us. I will declare and speak of them; they are more than can be told.

4. *Blessed is the man who hath set Jehovah for his confidence* David here relates what ground for good hope his deliverance would give to all the faithful; inasmuch as, setting aside all the allurements of the world, they would thereby be encouraged to commit themselves with confidence to the protection of God; persuaded not only that they are happy who trust in him alone, but that all other expectations at variance with this are deceitful and cursed. This assurance is not natural to us, but is derived partly from the word of God, and partly from his works; although, as I have said before, the contemplation alone of the works of God would not kindle this light within us, unless God, illuminating us by his word, should show us his benevolence. After having promised to be gracious to us, in manifesting also his goodness by indubitable proofs, he confirms with his own hand what he had previously uttered with his lips. David, therefore, from the fact of his having been restored to life from the abyss of death, justly declares that the faithful are taught from this proof — what men are naturally so reluctant to believe — that they are happy who trust in God alone.

As the instability of our nature commonly tends to draw us downward, and as all of us, from our proneness to yield to delusions, are tempted by many wicked examples, David immediately adds, that he is blessed *who*

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"A vanite." — *Fr.* "To vanity."

83
"Devant toy." — *Fr.* "Before thee, or in thy presence."

regardeth not the proud Some, indeed, render רהבים, *rehabim, the rich,* or *the great of this world,* but improperly, in my opinion; because *pride,* and *turning aside to lies,* are two things which David here joins together. *To regard the great of the earth,* therefore, does not signify, as they suppose, to rely upon their power and riches, as if a man's welfare depended thereupon, but it rather means to be carried away by their examples, to imitate their conduct. When we are everywhere constantly seeing men puffed up with pride, who despise God, and place their highest felicity in ambition, in fraud, in extortion, in guile, a perverse desire of imitating them steals upon us by degrees; and, especially when every thing turns out according to their wishes, a vain and delusive expectation solicits us to try the same course. David, therefore, wisely, and not without good reason, warns us, that in order to have our mind constantly fixed in simple reliance upon God alone, we must guard against those evil examples which ever seek to allure us on all sides to apostatise from him. Moreover, when he says that the proud *turn aside to lying,* or *vanity,* [84] in this way he describes briefly the foolish confidence of the flesh. What else is the pride of those who put their own fancies in the place of God but a vain illusion? Certainly the man who, puffed up by the breath of fond conceit, arrogates any thing in the least degree to himself, flatters himself to his own destruction. In short, pride and vanity are opposed to the holy confidence which relies upon God alone; for there is nothing more difficult to the flesh than to trust in God alone, and the world is always full of proud and haughty men, who, soothing themselves with vain allurements, would soon corrupt the minds of the godly, if this arrest were not laid upon them, to restrain, as with a bridle, their erroneous and extravagant opinions.

5. *Many are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, O Jehovah!* Interpreters are not entirely agreed as to these words; but it is generally admitted that David here contemplates with admiration the providence of God in the government of mankind. And first of all, he exclaims that the *wonders of God's works are great or many;* [85] meaning by this, that God in his inscrutable wisdom so governs human affairs, that his works, which come to be little thought of by men, from their constant familiarity with them, far surpass the comprehension of the human understanding. Thus we find, that from one particular species he ascends to the whole class; as if he had said, God has proved not only by this particular act the paternal care which he exercises towards men, but that, in general, his wonderful providence shines forth in the several parts of creation. Then he adds, that

84 "Ou vanite" — *Fr.*

85 "Sont grandes ou infinies." — *Fr.* "Are great or innumerable."

the counsels of God concerning us are so high and so hidden, that it is impossible to reckon them up in order distinctly and agreeably to their nature. Some think that the word אלינו, *elenu, towards us,* is employed by way of comparison, in this sense, The counsels of God are far beyond the reach of our understanding, (but David rather commends the care which God vouchsafes to take of us;) and as, in this way, the connection of the words is broken, they are constrained to render the word ערוד, *aroch,* which I have rendered *to count in order,* differently, namely, that none is equal to God, or can be compared with him. [86] But that I may not enter upon any lengthened refutation, the intelligent reader will agree with me in considering that the true meaning is this: That God, by his incomprehensible wisdom, governs the world in such a manner that we cannot reckon up his works in their proper order, seeing our minds, through their very dulness, fail us before we can reach to so great a height. It follows, *to thee,* for although we should in so far reflect how wonderfully the Lord can make provision for our wants, yet this consideration is limited by the imperfection of our understanding: and hence it falls far short of the infinite glory of God. Those who give this explanation, that *the counsels of God* are not referred to him, because the greatest part of men imagine that every thing is subject to chance and fortune, as if David meant in passing to censure the ingratitude of those who defraud God of his praise, are no doubt mistaken as to the meaning. In stating, as David does, immediately after, that however much he might set himself to rehearse the works of God, he yet would fail ere he could declare the half of them; — in stating this he shows with sufficient plainness that the godly and devout meditation, in which the children of God are often engaged, gives them only, as it were, a slight taste of them and nothing more. We have now arrived then at the Psalmist's meaning. Having spoken before of the deliverance which God had vouchsafed to him, he takes occasion from it to set forth the general providence of God in nourishing and sustaining men. It is also his design in this to exhort the faithful to a consideration of God's providence, that they may not hesitate to cast all their cares upon it. Whilst some are in constant pain by reason of their own anxiety and discontent, or quake at the slightest breeze that blows, and others labor hard to fortify and preserve their life by means of earthly succours, — all this proceeds from ignorance of the doctrine, that God governs the affairs of this world according to his own good pleasure. And as the great majority of men, measuring the providence of God by

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"This verb," says Ainsworth, "is sometimes used for matching or comparing." In this sense the word occurs in Psalm 89:7; and this is the sense in which the Septuagint understands it here: "Καὶ τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς σου οὐχ ἔστι τις ὁμοιωθήσεται σοι;" — "and in thy thoughts there is none who shall be likened to thee." Street reads, "There is none to be compared to thee;" and observes, that "above sixty copies of Dr Kennicott's collection have ערוך, the passive participle here, instead of ערך."

their own understanding, wickedly obscure or degrade it, David, placing it on its proper footing, wisely removes this impediment. The meaning of the sentence, therefore, amounts to this, that in the works of God men should reverently admire what they cannot comprehend by their reason; and whenever the flesh moves them to contradiction or murmuring, they should raise themselves above the world. If God cease to work, he seems to be asleep, because, binding up his hands to the use of outward means, we do not consider that he works by means which are secret. We may therefore learn from this place, that although the reason of his works may be hidden or unknown to us, he is nevertheless wonderful in his counsels.

This verse is closely connected with the preceding. No man places, as he ought, entire trust in God, but he who, shutting his eyes upon external circumstances, suffers himself to be governed by him according to his good pleasure. Moreover, having spoken hitherto in the third person, David now suddenly addresses his discourse, not, however, unadvisedly, to God, that he might lead us the more effectually to this sobriety and discretion. When, however, he affirms that the works of God cannot be distinctly known by us, it is not for the purpose of deterring us from seeking the knowledge of them, or from the examination of them, but only to lay a restraint upon our rashness, which would otherwise go beyond the proper boundaries in this respect. To this end, the words *to thee,* or *before thee,* are expressly employed, by which we are admonished that however diligently a man may set himself to meditate upon the works of *God,* he can only attain to the extremities or borders of them. Although then so great a height be far above our reach, we must, notwithstanding, endeavor, as much as in us lies, to approach it more and more by continual advances; as we see also the hand of God stretched forth to disclose to us, so far as it is expedient, those wonders, which we are unable of ourselves to discover. There is nothing so preposterous as to affect, of one's own accord, a gross ignorance of the providence of God, because as yet we cannot comprehend it perfectly, but only discern it in part; even as at this day we find some who employ all their endeavors to bury it in oblivion, for no other pretense than that it surpasses our understanding, as if it were unreasonable to allow to God anything more than what appears right and proper, according to our carnal reason. David acts very differently regarding it. Feeling all his senses absorbed by an inconceivable majesty and brightness, which he could not bear to look upon, [87] he confesses frankly that these are wonderful things of which he could not comprehend the reason; but still he does not abstain wholly and everywhere from making mention of them, but, according to the measure of his capacity, sets himself devoutly to meditate upon them. From this

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"Sentant tous ses sens engloutis d'une majeste et resplendeur infinie, que sa veue pouvoit porter." — *Fr.*

we learn how foolish and vain a thing it is to say, by way of caution, that none should speak of the counsels or purposes of God, because they are high and incomprehensible. David, on the contrary, though he was ready to sink under the weight, ceased not to contemplate them, and abstained not from speaking of them, because he felt unequal to the task of rehearsing them, but was content, after having declared his faith on this subject, to finish his discourse in admiration.

Psalm 40:6-8

6. In sacrifice and oblation thou hast not taken pleasure: thou hast bored my ears: thou hast not required burnt offering nor sin-offering.
7. Then I said, Lo! I come: in the roll of the book it is written of me,
8. That I may do thy pleasure, O my God! I have delighted to do it, and thy law is in the midst of my bowels. (Hebrews 10:5.)

6 *In sacrifice and oblation thou hast not taken pleasure.* Here David offers not only the sacrifice of praise, or, as the prophet Hosea calls it, (Hosea 14:2,) "the calves of the lips," but, in token of his gratitude, offers and consecrates himself entirely to God; as if he had said, I am now wholly devoted to God, because, having been delivered by his wonderful power, I am doubly indebted to him for my life. At the same time, treating of the true worship of God, he shows that it consists not in outward ceremonies, but rather that it is spiritual. Accordingly, the meaning is, that he came into the presence of God not only in the outward pomp or ceremony and figures of the law, but that he brought with him the true devotion of the heart. We know, indeed, that all men have some sense of religion impressed upon their hearts, so that no one dares to withdraw openly and wholly from his service, and yet the greater part of men turn aside into winding and crooked paths; and hence it happens, that in serving God in a perfunctory manner, their worship is scarcely anything else than a mockery of him. We see then the reason why David, on the present occasion, shows in what the true worship of God consists; it is, that he may distinguish between himself and hypocrites, who draw near to God with their lips only, or at least seek to pacify him with cold and unmeaning ceremonies.

We now come to the exposition of the words. I have no doubt that David, under the four different kinds of sacrifices which he here enumerates, comprehends all the sacrifices of the law. His meaning, to express it in a few words, is, that God requires not mere ceremonies of those who serve him, but that he is satisfied only with sincerity of heart, with faith and holiness of life: and that he takes no pleasure merely in the visible sanctuary, the altar, the burning of incense, the killing of beasts, the lights, the costly apparel, and outward washings. From this he concludes, that he ought to be guided by another principle, and to observe another rule in the service of God, than a mere attention to these — that he should yield himself wholly to God.

Thou hast bored my ears. Some think that in using this form of expression, David has a reference to the ordinance under the Law of which we read in Exodus 21:6. If any bond-servant, when the time of his being discharged from servitude had arrived, made no account of his freedom, he was brought to the public place of judgment, and having there declared that he wished to continue in servitude, his master pierced his ear with an awl, as a mark of perpetual bondage. But this mode of interpretation appears to be too forced and refined. [88] Others more simply consider that it is of the same meaning as to render fit, or qualify for service, for David mentions not one ear only, but both. Men, we know, are naturally deaf, because they are so dull, that their ears are stopped until God pierce them. By this expression, therefore, is denoted the docility to which we are brought and moulded by the grace of the Holy Spirit. I, however, apply this manner of expression more closely to the scope of the passage before us, and explain it in this sense, That David was not slow and dull of hearing, as men usually are, so that he could discern nothing but what was earthly in the sacrifices, but that his ears had been cleansed, so that he was a better interpreter of the Law, and able to refer all the outward ceremonies to the spiritual service of God. He encloses the sentence, *Thou hast bored my ears,* as it were, in parenthesis, whilst he is treating professedly of sacrifices, so that the sentence might be explained in this way: Lord, thou hast opened my ears, that I may distinctly understand whatever thou hast commanded concerning the sacrifices, namely, that of themselves they afford thee no pleasure: for thou, who art a Spirit, takest no delight in these earthly elements, and hast no need of flesh or blood; and, therefore, thou requirest something of a higher

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The objections to this interpretation are,

1. That the verb כרה *carah*, here used, does not mean *to bore*, but that the radical idea of the word is, *to dig*, *to hollow out*; as to dig a well, Genesis 26:25; a pit, Psalm 7:15; to carve or cut out a sepulcher from a rock, 2 Chronicles 16:14; and hence we find it transferred from the grottoes of the sepulcher to the quarry of human nature, Isaiah 51:1, 2. Williams, viewing the verb as properly signifying *digged*, *carved*, or *cut out*, in the sense *of forming*, explains the words as if the Psalmist had said, "Mine ears hast thou made, or *prepared*, for the most exact and complete obedience." Stuart, (Commentary on Hebrews 10:5,) and Davidson, (Sacred Hermeneutics, p. 461,) viewing the word as meaning *digged*, *hollowed out*, simply in the sense of *opening*, read, "Mine ears hast thou opened;" which they explain as meaning, Thou hast made me obedient, or, I am entirely devoted to thy service; observing, that *to open* or *uncover the ear* was a customary expression among the Hebrews, to signify a revealing something to any one, including the idea of listening to the communication, followed by prompt obedience, Isaiah 50:5; 1 Samuel. 20:2. There is another verb of the same radical letters, which means to *purchase* or *provide*; and this is the sense in which the LXX. understood כרה, *carah*, as is evident from their rendering it by κατηρτίσω

2. That the verb used in Exodus is not כרה, as here, but רצע, *ratsang*

3. That only one ear was pierced, as appears from the passages in the Pentateuch in which the rite is described. But here the plural number is used, denoting both ears. From these considerations, it is concluded that there is here no allusion to the custom of boring the ear of a servant under the Law.

and more excellent nature. If, however, it is objected that sacrifices were offered by the express commandment of God, I have just said that David here distinguishes between the spiritual service of God, and that which consisted in outward types and shadows. And in making this comparison, it is no great wonder to find him saying that the sacrifices are of no value, since they were only helps designed to lead men to true piety, and tended to a far higher end than that which was at first apparent. Seeing, then, God made use of these elements, only to lead his people to the exercises of faith and repentance, we conclude that he had no delight in being worshipped by sacrifices. We must always bear in mind, that whatever is not pleasing to God for its own sake, but only in so far as it leads to some other end, if it be put in the place of his true worship and service is rejected and cast away by him.

7. *Then said I, Lo! I come.* By the adverb *then* he intimates, that he had not been a good scholar, and capable of profiting by instruction, until God had opened his ears; but as soon as he had been instructed by the secret inspirations of the Spirit, he tells us, that then his heart was ready to yield a willing and cheerful obedience. Here true obedience is very properly distinguished from a constrained and slavish subjection. Whatever service, therefore, men may offer to God, it is vain and offensive in his sight, unless at the same time they offer themselves; and, moreover, this offering of one's self is of no value unless it be done willingly. These words, *Lo! I come,* ought to be observed, and likewise the words, *I have delighted to do thy will;* for the Hebrew word חפצתי, *chaphatsti,* means, I was well pleased, or, I willingly condescended. Here David indicates his readiness to yield obedience, as well as the cordial affection of his heart and persevering resolution. His language implies, that he cordially preferred the service of God to every other desire and care, and had not only yielded a willing subjection, but also embraced the rule of a pious and holy life, with a fixed and steady purpose of adhering to it. This he confirms still further in the third clause of the verse, in which he says, that *the Law of God* was deeply fixed *in the midst of his bowels* [89] It follows from this, first, that however beautiful and splendid the works of men may appear, yet unless they spring from the living root of the heart, they are nothing better than a mere pretense; and, secondly, that it is to no purpose that the feet, and hands, and eyes, are framed for keeping the Law, unless obedience begin at the heart. Moreover, it appears from other places of Scripture, that it is the peculiar office of the Holy Spirit to engrave the Law of God on our hearts. God, it is true, does not perform his work in us as if we were stones or stocks, drawing us to himself without the feeling or inward moving of our hearts towards him. But as there is in us naturally

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This is the literal rendering of the Hebrew, and means, As dear to me as life itself; (John 6:38; Job 38:36.)

a will, which, however, is depraved by the corruption of our nature, so that it always inclines us to sin, God changes it for the better, and thus leads us cordially to seek after righteousness, to which our hearts were previously altogether averse. Hence arises that true freedom which we obtain when God frames our hearts, which before were in thraldom to sin, unto obedience to himself.

In the roll of the book As the Septuagint has made use of the word *head* instead of *roll,* [90] some have been inclined to philosophise upon this clause with so much refinement of speculation, that they have exposed themselves to ridicule by their foolish and silly inventions. But the etymology of the word במגלת, *bemegilath,* is the same as the Latin word *volumen,* [91] which we call *a roll* It is necessary to ascertain in what sense David claims peculiarly to himself what is common or alike to all men. Since the Law prescribes to all men the rule of a holy and upright life, it does not appear, it may be said, that what is here stated pertains to any one man or any set of men. I answer, that although the literal doctrine of the Law belongs to all men in common, yet as of itself it is dead, and only beats the air, God teaches his own people after another manner; and that, as the inward and effectual teaching of the Spirit is a treasure which belongs peculiarly to them, it is written of them only in the secret book of God, that they should fulfill his will. The voice of God, indeed, resounds throughout the whole world, so that all who do not obey it are rendered inexcusable; but it penetrates into the hearts of the godly alone, for whose salvation it is ordained. As a general, therefore, enrols the names of his soldiers, that he may know their exact number, and as a schoolmaster writes the names of his scholars in a

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Anciently, books did not consist, like ours, of a number of distinct leaves bound together, but were composed of sheets of parchment joined to each other, and rolled up for preservation upon wooden rollers, as our charts of geography are; and in this form are all the sacred MSS. of the Jewish synagogues to this day. The *roll of the book*, therefore, simply means *the book* itself. With respect to the reading of the Septuagint, "Εν κεθαλίσδι βιβλίου;" — "In the head of the book;" and which Paul, in Hebrews 10:7, quotes instead of the Hebrew: this is an expression which the LXX. employ simply to mean *the book*, as in Ezra 6:2; Ezekiel 2:9; and 3:1-3; and not the *beginning* or *head of the book* At the extremity of the cylinder on which the Hebrew כפר, βιβλιου, book or manuscript, was rolled, were *heads* or *knobs* for the sake of convenience to those who used the MS. The *knob* or *head*, κεθαλις, is here taken as a *part* put for the *whole* Κεθαλις βιβλίου means therefore βιβλιου, or ספר, with a κεθαλις, *i e.*, a manuscript roll. — *Stuart* on Hebrews 10:7. Hence it is evident, that we are not to understand this phrase, *the head of the book*, as referring to that prophecy in Genesis 3:15. As to what book is here referred to, there is some diversity of opinion among interpreters. Some understand it to be the book of the divine decrees, some the Pentateuch, and others all that was written concerning Christ "in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets, and in the Psalms."

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Volumen is from *volvo*, *I roll.*

scroll, so has God written the names of his children in the book of life, that he may retain them under the yoke of his own discipline.

There still remains another difficulty connected with this passage. The Apostle, in Hebrews 10:5, seems to wrest this place, when he restricts what is spoken of all the elect to Christ alone, and expressly contends that the sacrifices of the Law, which David says are not agreeable to God in comparison of the obedience of the heart, are abrogated; and when quoting rather the words of the Septuagint, [92] than those of the prophet, he infers from them more than David intended to teach. As to his restricting this passage to the person of Christ, the solution is easy. David did not speak in his own name only, but has shown in general what belongs to all the children of God. But when bringing into view the whole body of the Church, it was necessary that he should refer us to the head itself. It is no objection that David soon after imputes to his own sins the miseries which he endures; for it is by no means an uncommon thing to find our errors, by a mode of expression not strictly correct, transferred to Christ. As to the abrogation of the sacrifices that were under the Law, I answer thus: That their abrogation may be fairly inferred from the language of the prophets; for this is not like many other places in which God condemns and rejects the sacrifices which were offered by hypocrites, and which were deservedly offensive to him on account of their uncleanness: for in these God condemns the outward ceremony, on account of the abuse and corruption of it, which rendered it nothing but a vain mockery; whereas here, when the Prophet speaks of himself as one who worshipped God sincerely, and yet denies that God had pleasure in these sacrifices, it may easily be inferred, that the

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The Septuagint here reads, "Σῶμα δὲ κατηρτίσω μοι" — "But a body hast thou prepared [or fitted] for me." This reading is widely different from that of our Hebrew Bibles; and, to account for it, critics and commentators have had recourse to various conjectures: nor is the subject without considerable difficulty. Some think that the Septuagint has been corrupted, and others the Hebrew. Grotius is of opinion, and he is followed by Houbigant, that the original reading of the Septuagint was ἄκουσμα, *auditum*, which afterwards, in the process of transcription, had been changed into σῶμα; while Drs Owen and Hammond think that the original reading was ὠτία, *ears* It is conjectured by Kennicott that the Hebrew text has been changed from גות אז, *az gevah*, *then a body*, into אזנום, *aznayim*, *ears*; a conjecture which meets with the approbation of Dr Lowth, Dr Adam Clarke, and Dr Pye Smith. But it goes far to support the accuracy of the Hebrew text as it now stands, that the Syriac, Chaldee, and Vulgate versions agree with it, and that in all the MSS. collated by Kennicott and De Rossi there is not a single variation. With respect to the Apostle's quoting from the Septuagint instead of the Hebrew, it is sufficient to say, that he did so because the Septuagint was then in common use. And it is worthy of observation, that his argument does not depend on the word, σῶμα δὲ κατηρτίσω μοι: his design is to show the insufficiency of the legal sacrifices, and to establish the efficacy of Christ s *obedience* unto death; and his argument would be equally complete had these words been omitted: for it is not made to depend on the *manner* of the obedience. — See Archbishop Secker's able Dissertation on the subject in the Appendix to Merrick's Notes on the Psalms; and Stuart on Hebrews 10:5, and Excursus 20.

rudiments which God had enjoined upon his ancient people for a time had some other end in view, and were only like infantile instructions designed to prepare them for some higher state. But if their truth and substance are contained in Christ, it is certain that they have been abolished by his coming. They were indeed still in use in the time of David: and yet he admonishes us that the true service of God, even when performed without sacrifices, was perfect and complete in all its parts, and every where; and that the ceremonies are things which might be regarded as non-essential, and, as we speak, adventitious. This is worthy of being noticed, that we may know that God, even after he has removed the figures which he had commanded for a time, does not cease always to resemble himself; for in these outward services he had respect solely to men. As to this, that the Apostle, following the Septuagint, has made subservient to his own use the word *body,* which is not used here by David, in such an allusion there is no inconsistency; for he does not undertake expressly to unfold and explain in every point the Psalmist's meaning: but as he had said, that by the one sacrifice of Christ all the others had been abolished, he adds at the same time that a body had been prepared for Christ, that by the offering up of it he might fulfill the will of God.

Psalm 40:9-11

> **9**. I have proclaimed thy righteousness in the great assembly: behold, I will not refrain my lips: O Jehovah! thou knowest it. **10**. I have not hidden thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy truth and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy goodness nor thy truth in the great assembly. **11**. O thou Jehovah! withhold not thy tender mercies from me: let thy goodness and thy truth always preserve me.

9. *I have proclaimed thy righteousness in the great assembly.* Here David again brings forward his own thankfulness, and for no other reason but to induce God to continue his goodness towards him. God, whenever he manifests his liberality towards us, encourages us to render thanks to him; and he continues to act in a similar manner towards us when he sees that we are thankful and mindful of what he has done for us. In the first place, David makes use simply of the word *righteousness;* but it must be understood of the righteousness of God, which he expressly mentions soon after. Nor does he say, that it was only in the secret affection of the heart, or in private, that he offered praise to God, but that he had openly proclaimed it in the solemn assembly, even as the faithful in those days were wont to testify their devotion by presenting peace-offerings to God when they had been delivered from any great danger. *The great assembly* of which he speaks is not to be understood of the concourse of people that assemble at courts of law, or at the public market-places, but it denotes the true and lawfully constituted Church of God, which we know assembled in the place of his

sanctuary. Accordingly, he declares that he had not concealed in his heart the righteousness of God, which it becomes us publicly to make known for the edification of one another. Those who keep it hid in their hearts are surely seeking as much as in them lies that the memory of God may be buried in oblivion. He calls upon God as a witness of this, not only to distinguish between himself and hypocrites, who often proclaim loudly, and with all their might, the praises of God, and yet do so without the least spark of affection; but also to make it the more abundantly obvious that he had sincerely and heartily uttered the praises of God, and was careful not to defraud him of any part of them. This affirmation teaches us that the subject which is here treated of is one of no small importance; for although God stands in no need of our praises, yet it is his will that this exercise for many reasons should prevail amongst us.

10 *I have not hidden thy righteousness within my heart.* Here it is necessary to observe the accumulation of terms which are employed to denote the same thing. To the righteousness of God the Psalmist adds his truth, his salvation, and his mercy. And what is the design of this, but to magnify and set forth the goodness of God by many terms or expressions of praise? We must, however, notice in what respects these terms differ; for in this way we may be able to ascertain in what respects they apply to the deliverance of which David here discourses. If these four things should be taken in their proper order, *mercy* will hold the first place, as it is that by which alone God is induced to vouchsafe, to regard us. *His righteousness* is the protection by which he constantly defends his own people, and the goodness by which, as we have already said elsewhere, he preserves them. And, lest any should doubt that it will flow in a constant and uninterrupted course, David adds in the third place *truth;* by which we are taught that God continues always the same, and is never wearied of helping us, nor at any time withdraws his hand. There is, at the same time, implied in this an exhibition of the promises; for no man will ever rightly take hold of the righteousness of God but he who embraces it as it is offered and held forth in the Word. *Salvation* is the effect of righteousness, for God continues to manifest his free favor to his people, daily affording them aid and assistance, until he has completely saved them.

11 *O thou Jehovah! withhold not thy tender mercies from me* We now see more clearly, what I have just adverted to, that David speaks of his own thankfulness, that he might secure a continuance of God's favor towards him; and that he opened his mouth in the praises of God, that he might continue to acquire new favors, against which our perverse and ungrateful silence very often closes the gate. We ought, therefore, carefully to observe the relation which the clause, in which David affirms that he closed not his lips, bears to what follows, namely, that God on his part would not contract or stop up the course of his tender mercies; for by this we are taught that God would always be ready to relieve us by his goodness, or rather that

it would flow down upon us as from a never-failing fountain, if our own ingratitude did not prevent or cut off its course. *The tender mercies* of God, which he expresses by the word רחמיד, *rachamecha,* and of which he here speaks, differ little from his goodness. It was not, however, without cause that David chose to make this distinction. It could only be, first, because he was unable otherwise to satisfy himself in extolling the grace of God; and, secondly, because it was requisite to show that the source from which the mercy and goodness of God proceed, when he is moved in compassion for our miseries to aid and succor us. Then he places his confidence of salvation in the goodness and faithfulness of God, for we must of necessity begin (as I have said a little before) at the free favor of God, that his bounty may extend even to us. But as we are unable to discern that God is gracious to us until he grant us some assurance of his love, his constancy is, with much propriety, placed in connection with his truth in keeping his promises.

Psalm 40:12-15

> **12**. For innumerable evils have compassed me on all sides; my iniquities have laid hold upon me, so that I cannot look up: [93] they are more in number than the hairs of my head; and my heart has failed me. **13**. Be thou pleased, O Jehovah! to deliver me: O Jehovah! make haste to help me. **14**. Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my life to destroy it; let them be turned backward, and put to shame, that seek after my hurt. **15**. Let them be destroyed for a reward of their shame who have said to me, [94] Aha, aha!

12. *For innumerable evils have compassed me on all sides* This phrase, in the original, denotes more than can be expressed in an English translation; for he says, עלי *alay, upon me,* meaning by this, that he was not only beset on all sides, but that also an accumulation of evils pressed upon his head. He, however, does not now complain of being punished unjustly, or above his desert, but rather confesses plainly that it is the just recompense of his sins which is rendered to him. For although the word עון, *avon,* which we have rendered *iniquity,* signifies also *the punishment of iniquity,* (as we have elsewhere seen more than once;) yet we must take into consideration the derivation of the word. [95] Accordingly, since David calls the afflictions which he endures the fruit or effect of his transgressions, there is implied in this a humble confession, from which we may ascertain with what reverence

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"Mes iniquitez m'ont attrappe, *voire en si grand nombre* que ne *les* ay peu veoir." — *Fr.* "My iniquities have laid hold upon me, *even in such vast numbers* that I cannot see *them*."

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"Ou, dit de moy." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, who have said concerning me."

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and meekness he submitted to the judgments of God, seeing that, when overwhelmed with an accumulation of miseries, he sets forth his sins in all their magnitude and aggravation, lest he should suspect God of undue severity. When we see David treated so severely, let us also learn, when we are oppressed with extreme afflictions, and are groaning under them, humbly to implore the grace and mercy of our Judge. Nor is it his design to show that he had been stupid or hardened, when he says that *his heart failed or forsook him.* His language means, that he was not only broken-hearted, but that he lay as if he had been dead. We must, however, understand this *fainting* or *failing of the heart* as referring to the sense of the flesh; for his perseverance in prayer is a certain proof that his faith was never altogether extinguished. But since he was, in so far as man was concerned, destitute of counsel, and was altogether without strength, it is not without cause that he says that his heart failed him.

13. *Be thou pleased, O Jehovah! to deliver me.* The verb which David here makes use of, signifies to desire a thing from pure kindness and good-will. [96] He desires, therefore, to be delivered by the free mercy of God. As to his desire, that God would *make haste,* we have elsewhere spoken of it. Even when God delays to help us, it is our duty to contend against a feeling of weariness; but such is his goodness, that he permits us to use this form of prayer, That he would make haste according to our desires. Then, according to his usual practice, citing his enemies to the judgment-seat of God, he feels confident, that, on account of their cruelty, and unjust and wicked hatred, he shall obtain what he asks. We must maintain it as a fixed principle, that the more unjustly our enemies afflict us, and the more cruelly they wrong us, God is so much the more disposed to give us help. And it is no slight consolation that the mercy of God strives against their wickedness, so that the more fiercely our enemies pursue us to effect our hurt, the more ready is he to bring us help. We have already frequently spoken of the feelings with which David uttered these imprecations, and it is necessary here again to refresh our memories on the subject, lest any man, when giving loose reins to his passions, should allege the example of David in palliation or excuse. This wicked and counterfeit imitation on the part of those who follow the powerful impulse of the flesh, instead of being guided by the zeal of the Spirit, is always to be held up to condemnation.

When the Psalmist prays (verse 15) that his enemies *may be destroyed for a reward of their shame,* the meaning is this: As their sole desire has

The word עוז, *avon*, is derived from עוה, *avah*, *he was crooked*, *oblique*; and hence the noun signifies iniquity, depravity, perverseness; but it is also put for the punishment due to iniquity. See volume 1, p. 507, note.

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"רצה, *retse*, *be pleased* From רצה, *ratsah*, *he wished well*, *was pleased*, *accepted*, excluding any merit as a ground for that acceptance." — *Bythner's Lyra*

been to overwhelm me with shame, in order that, while thus dismayed and confounded, they might make me the object of their derision; so let a similar confusion fall upon their own heads. In the second clause of the verse he describes the nature of this confusion by relating the terms of their wicked triumphing, by which they poured contempt upon him while he was so oppressed with misery and affliction. We are here taught that, when our enemies shall have persecuted us to the uttermost, a recompense is also prepared for them; and that God will turn back, and cause to fall upon their own heads, all the evil which they had devised against us; and this doctrine ought to act as a restraint upon us, that we may behave ourselves compassionately and kindly towards our neighbors.

Psalm 40:16-17

16. Let all those that seek thee be glad and rejoice in thee: and let those that love thy salvation say continually, Jehovah be magnified!
17. But I am poor and needy: Jehovah hath regarded me; thou art my help and my deliverer: O thou my God! make no delay.

16. *Let all those that seek thee be glad and rejoice in thee.* David here uses another argument — one which he often adduces elsewhere — in order to obtain deliverance; not that it is necessary to allege reasons to persuade God, but because it is profitable to confirm our faith by such supports. As, then, it is the will of God that he should be known in his gracious character, not only of one or two, but generality of all men, whenever he vouchsafes deliverance to any of his children, it is a common benefit which all the faithful ought to apply to themselves when they see in the person of one man in what manner God, who is never inconsistent with himself, will act towards all his people. David, therefore, shows that he asks nothing for himself individually but what pertains to the whole Church. He prays that God would gladden the hearts of all the saints, or afford them all common cause of rejoicing: so that, assured of his readiness to help them, they may have recourse to him with greater alacrity. Hence we conclude, that, in the case of every individual, God gives a proof of his goodness towards us. What is added, *those that love thy salvation,* is also worthy of being observed by us. We may infer from this, that our faith is only proved to be genuine when we neither expect nor desire preservation otherwise than from God alone. Those who devise various ways and means of preservation for themselves in this world, despise and reject the salvation which God has taught us to expect from him alone. What had been said before, *those who seek thee,* is to the same purpose. If any individual would depend wholly upon God, and desire to be saved by his grace, he must renounce every vain hope, and employ all his thoughts towards the reception of his strength. Here, again, we must observe that two things are contrasted with each other. Formerly David had said that the wicked *sought* his life; now he ascribes to the faithful

quite a contrary feeling, namely, that they seek God. In like manner he had related the reproaches and derision of the ungodly, while they said, *Aha, aha!* and now he introduces the godly speaking very differently, saying, The Lord be magnified!

17. *But I am poor and needy.* In this concluding clause he mingles prayer with thanksgiving, although it may be that he records a request which he had made when he was placed in extreme danger. The first clause of the verse might be rendered thus: Although I was miserable and poor, God did think upon me. As according to the extent in which any one is afflicted, so is he despised by the world, we imagine that he is disregarded by God, we must, therefore, steadfastly maintain that our miseries in no respect produce on the part of God a feeling of weariness towards us, so that it should become troublesome to him to aid us. In this way, however, let us rather read the clause: When I was miserable and poor, the Lord looked upon my necessity: So that by this circumstance he enhances the grace of God. If God anticipate us with his goodness, and do not wait till adversity presses upon us, then his favor towards us is not so apparent. This comparison, therefore, illustrates very clearly the glory of God in the deliverance of David, inasmuch as he vouchsafed to stretch forth his hand to a man who was despised and rejected of all men, nay, who was destitute of all help and hope. Now, if it was necessary that David should have been reduced to this extremity, it is no wonder if persons in a more private station are often humbled after this manner, that they may feel and acknowledge in good earnest that they have been delivered out of despair by the hand of God. The simple and natural meaning of the prayer is this, Lord, thou art my help and my deliverer, therefore delay not to come to my aid. As it is a foolish thing to approach God with a doubtful and wavering mind, the Psalmist takes courage, as he was wont to do from his own experience, and persuades himself that the help of God, by which he had been hitherto preserved, would not fail him.

Psalm 41

PSALM 41

David, while he was severely afflicted by the hand of God, perceived that he was unjustly blamed by men who regarded him as one who had already been condemned and devoted to eternal destruction. Under this trial he fortifies himself by the consolation of hope. At the same time, he complains partly of the cruelty, and partly of the treachery, of his enemies. And although he recognises the affliction with which he is visited as a just punishment of his sins, yet he charges his enemies with cruelty and malice, inasmuch as they troubled and afflicted one who had always endeavored to do them good. Finally, he records an expression of his gratitude and joy, because he had been preserved by the grace of God.

To the chief musician. A Psalm of David.

Psalm 41:1-3

1. Blessed is he that judgeth wisely of the poor: [97] Jehovah will deliver him [98] in the day of evil. **2**. Jehovah will keep him, and preserve him in life: he shall be blessed upon the earth; [99] and thou wilt not abandon him to the will of his enemies. **3**. Jehovah will

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"C'est, de l'afflige." — *Fr.* *marg.* "That is, the afflicted."

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"Ascavoir, l'afflige." — *Fr.* *marg* "Namely, the afflicted."

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"Il prosperera en la terre." — *Fr.* "He shall prosper on the earth."

support [100] him upon the bed of sorrow: thou hast turned all his bed in his sickness.

1. *Blessed is he that judgeth wisely of the poor.* Interpreters are generally of opinion that the exercise of kindness and compassion manifested in taking care of the miserable, and helping them, is here commended. Those, however, who maintain that the Psalmist here commends the considerate candour of those who judge wisely and charitably of men in adversity, form a better judgment of his meaning. Indeed, the participle משכיל, *maskil,* cannot be explained in any other way. At the same time, it ought to be observed on what account it is that David declares those to be blessed who form a wise and prudent judgment concerning the afflictions by which God chastises his servants. We have said that he had to contend in his own heart against the perverse judgments of foolish and wicked men, because, when affliction was pressing heavily upon him, many considered that he had fallen into a desperate condition, and was altogether beyond the hope of recovery. Doubtless, it happened to him as it did to the holy patriarch Job, whom his friends reckoned to be one of the most wicked of men, when they saw God treating him with great severity. And certainly it is an error which is by far too common among men, to look upon those who are oppressed with afflictions as condemned and reprobate. As, on the one hand, the most of men, judging of the favor of God from an uncertain and transitory state of prosperity, applaud the rich, and those upon whom, as they say, fortune smiles; so, on the other hand, they act contemptuously towards the wretched and miserable, and foolishly imagine that God hates them, because he does not exercise so much forbearance towards them as he does towards the reprobate. The error of which we speak, namely, that of judging wrongfully and wickedly, is one which has prevailed in all ages of the world. The Scriptures in many places plainly and distinctly declare, that God, for various reasons, tries the faithful by adversities, at one time to train them to patience, at another to subdue the sinful affections of the flesh, at another to cleanse, and, as it were, purify them from the remaining desires of the flesh, which still dwell within them; sometimes to humble them, sometimes to make them an example to others, and at other times to stir them up to the contemplation of the divine life. For the most part, indeed, we often speak rashly and indiscriminately concerning others, and, so to speak, plunge even into the lowest abyss those who labor under affliction. To restrain such a rash and unbridled spirit, David says that they are blessed who do not suffer themselves, by speaking at random, to judge harshly of their neighbors; but, discerning aright the afflictions by which they are visited, mitigate, by the wisdom of the Spirit, the severe and unjust judgments to which we are

100 "Confortera." — *Fr. Text.* "Soulagera." — *Fr. marg.* "Will comfort."

naturally so prone. I have just adduced as an example the case of Job, whom his friends, when they saw him involved in extreme misery, hesitated not to account an outcast, and one whose case was altogether hopeless. [101] If any one endued with candour, and possessed of a humane disposition, should meet with such a case, he would regard it in the exercise of the same discretion which David here commends. As to ourselves, being admonished by this testimony of the Holy Spirit, let us learn to guard against a too precipitate judgment. We must therefore judge prudently of our brethren who are in affliction; that is to say, we must hope well of their salvation, lest, if we condemn them unmercifully before the time, this unjust severity in the end fall upon our own heads. It ought, however, especially to be observed, what indeed I have already noticed, that the object which David had in view, when he saw himself, as it were, overwhelmed by the malicious and cruel judgments which were expressed concerning him, was to fortify himself by this as a ground of consolation, lest he should sink under the temptation. If, therefore, at any time Satan should endeavor to destroy the foundation of our faith, by the rash and presumptuous judgments of men, let us also learn to have recourse to this device of wisdom, lest unawares we fall into despair. This is the proper use of the doctrine contained in this passage.

The Lord will deliver him in the day of evil. Some connect these words, *in the day of evil,* with the preceding clause; and the reading thus suggested might indeed be admitted; but the distinction which I have followed is better adapted to the sense, and is also supported by the Hebrew accent. Thus at least the doctrine deducible from these words is susceptible of a fuller meaning, namely, that the Lord will deliver the poor in the day of his adversity. Some think that David here prays for a blessing in behalf of the upright and compassionate; as if he had said, May the Lord himself recompense them again for their kindness, if at any time it happen that they are grievously afflicted! Others suppose that David here records the language of such men from which we may come to the knowledge of their wisdom and uprightness. In my opinion, however, both are equally in error in reading this clause in the form of a desire or prayer. Whether, indeed, David speaks in his own name, or in the name of others, he briefly recommends and enjoins the kindness which we ought to exercise towards the afflicted; for although God may for a time manifest his displeasure against them, yet he will, nevertheless, be gracious to them, so that the issue will at length be happier and more joyful than the judgment we might be led to form from the present aspect of things. We now see that the sense in which I have explained this verse is much more copious and fuller of meaning, namely, that we ought to hope for salvation and deliverance from the hand

101 "Pour un homme reprouve et forclos d'esperance de salut." — *Fr.*

of the Lord, even in the day of adversity; for otherwise, no man who had once fallen into a state of sorrow and sadness would ever be able to rise again. And this I say, because the design of the Holy Spirit in this passage is not only to exhort the faithful to be ready in showing kindness towards their brethren when they see them in affliction, but also to point out the remedy which has been provided for the mitigation of our sorrow, whenever our faith is shaken by adversity.

2. *Jehovah will keep him, and preserve him in life.* Here David follows out the same sentiment expressed in the preceding verse, when he says that the Lord will keep the afflicted, whose destruction cruel and unjust men represent as inevitable. It is likewise necessary always to bear in mind the contrast which is stated between the day of evil and the blessing of deliverance. In this verse the expressions denoting *restoration to life,* and *blessedness on the earth,* are of similar import. By these expressions, David means to show that although he had been to all appearance a dead man, yet the hope of life both for himself and for all the faithful had not been extinguished. There might, it is true, appear some inconsistency in his promising himself a happy life in this world, seeing our condition here would be miserable indeed if we had not the expectation of a better state in the world to come. But the answer to this is, that as many had despaired of his recovery, he expressly declares that he will yet be restored to his former state, and will continue alive, nay, that in him there will be seen manifest tokens of the favor of God. He does not in the least exclude by these expressions the hope of a better life after death. What follows concerning the *bed of sorrow* has led some to form a conjecture which, in my opinion, is not at all probable. What David says of affliction in general, without determining what kind of affliction, they regard as applicable exclusively to sickness. But it is no uncommon thing for those who are sorrowful and grieved in their minds to throw themselves upon their bed, and to seek repose; for the hearts of men are sometimes more distressed by grief than by sickness. It is, certainly, highly probable that David was at that time afflicted with some very heavy calamity, which might be a token that God was not a little displeased with him. In the second clause of the verse there is some obscurity. Some understand the expression, *turning the bed,* in the same sense as if God, in order to give some alleviation to his servant in the time of trouble, had made his bed and arranged it, as we are wont to do to those who are sick, that they may lay themselves more softly. [102] Others hold, and, in my opinion, more correctly, that when David was restored to

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Viewed in this sense, the passage is very beautiful and highly consolatory. How refreshing is it in sickness to have the bed turned and made anew! and this is the way in which God refreshes and relieves the merciful man in his sickness. He acts towards him the part of a kind nurse, turning and shaking his whole couch, and thus making it easy and comfortable for him.

health, his bed, which had formerly served him as a sick couch, was *turned,* that is to say, changed. [103] Thus the sense would be, that although he now languish in sorrow, whilst the Lord is chastening him and training him by means of affliction, yet in a little while he will experience relief by the hand of the same God, and thus recover his strength.

Psalm 41:4-6

4. I have said, O Jehovah! Have mercy upon me: heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee. **5**. My enemies have spoken evil of me, When shall he die, and his name perish? **6**. And if he come to see me, he speaketh lies: his heart heapeth up iniquity to himself; when he shall have gone forth he will tell it.

4. *I have said, O Jehovah! have mercy upon me.* By this verse he shows that in his adversity he did not seek to soothe his mind by flattery, as the greater part of men do, who endeavor to assuage their sorrows by some vain consolation. And, certainly, the man who is guided by the Spirit of God will, when warned of God by the afflictions with which he is visited, frankly acknowledge his sins, and quietly submit to the admonitions of his brethren, nay, he will even anticipate them by a voluntary confession. David here lays down a mark by which he distinguishes himself from the reprobate and wicked, when he tells us that he earnestly entreated that his sin might not be laid to his charge, and that he had sought refuge in the mercy of God. He indeed requests that some alleviation might be granted to him under the affliction which he endured: but he rises to a higher source of relief, when he asks that through the forgiveness of his sins he might obtain reconciliation to God. Those, as we have said elsewhere, invert the natural order of things, who seek a remedy only for the outward miseries under which they labor, but all the while neglect the cause of them; acting as a sick man would do who sought only to quench his thirst, but never thought of the fever under which he labors, and which is the chief cause of his trouble. Before David, therefore, speaks at all of the healing of his soul, that is to say, of his life [104] he first says, *Have mercy upon me:* and with this we must connect the reason which immediately follows — *for I have sinned against thee.* In saying so, he confesses that God is justly displeased with him, and that he can only be restored again to his favor by his sins being blotted out. I take the particle כי, *ki,* in its proper and natural signification, and not adversatively, as some would understand it. He asks then that God would have mercy upon him because he had sinned. From that proceeds *the healing of the soul,* which

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"C'est a dire, change."

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"C'est a dire, de sa vie." — *Fr.*

he interposes between his prayer and confession, as being the effect of the compassion and mercy of God; for David expects that as soon as he had obtained forgiveness, he would also obtain relief from his affliction.

5. *My enemies have spoken evil of me. To speak* is here used in the sense of *to imprecate.* In thus describing the unbecoming conduct of his enemies, he seeks, as has been elsewhere said, to induce God to have mercy upon him: because the more that God sees his own people cruelly treated, he is so much the more disposed mercifully to succor them. Thus David, by his own example, stirs up and encourages us to greater confidence in God; because the more that our enemies break forth in their cruelty towards us, so much the more does it procure for us favor in the sight of God. The terms in which his enemies uttered this imprecation show how cruel their hatred had been towards him, since it could only be appeased by his destruction, and that, too, accompanied with shame and ignominy; for they wished that with his life the very remembrance of his name should also be blotted out.

6. *And if he come to see me, he speaketh lies.* What is contained in this verse relates to his false and treacherous friends. Those who were his professed enemies made no secret of their enmity against him, but openly persecuted him; and that he has already shown in the preceding verse. In addition to this, he now complains that many came to him with professions of attachment to him, as if they had been his friends, who, nevertheless, afterwards poured forth their malicious ill-will in secret against him. Enemies of this sort, who thus cover and conceal their malice, and insinuate themselves under the mask of a fair appearance, only for the purpose of secretly doing us mischief, are indeed much more to be feared than those who openly declare their wicked intentions. Accordingly, having complained of his open enemies, he proceeds to speak of his pretended friends, of whom he declares that they come to see him with no other design than *to speak lies,* and yet that they are meanwhile devising some deceitful and malicious purpose against him, nay, that they are even secretly *heaping up iniquity,* and, so to speak, laying it up in store in their hearts; and then he adds, that when *they have gone forth* from his presence, they manifest their hypocrisy and deceitfulness.

> Psalm 41:7-9
>
> **7**. All they that hate me whisper together against me: they plot mischief against me. **8**. An evil deed of Belial cleaveth fast to him: and he that lieth down shall never be able to rise again. **9**. Even the man of my peace, in whom I trusted, who eats of my bread, has lifted up the heel against me.

7. *All they that hate me whisper together against me.* Here he seems generally to include both classes of his enemies; those who sought to oppress him in an open manner, and in the character of avowed enemies; and

those who, under the pretense of friendship, attempted to do the same thing by deceit and stratagem. Accordingly, he says that all of them took counsel together about his destruction, just as we know that wicked men hold much secret consultation respecting their intended deeds of treachery, and whisper to one another concerning them. Hence he adds the words *to meditate,* or *plot,* which he employs to denote their base conspiracies and sinful consultations.

8. *An evil deed of Belial cleaved fast to him.* From this verse it appears that they had thus conspired together for his destruction, on the ground that they regarded him as a wicked man, and a person worthy of a thousand deaths. The insolence and arrogance which they manifested towards him proceeded from the false and wicked judgment which they had formed concerning him, and of which he made mention in the beginning of the psalm. They say, therefore, that *an evil deed of Belial holds* him shut up, and, as it were, bound fast. This the verb יצוק, *yatsuk,* properly signifies; but in translating the verse I have followed the rendering which is most commonly received, reading *cleaveth fast to him, etc.* This expression is by others rendered *spreadeth upon him,* but this interpretation seems to me to be too constrained. As to the word *Belial,* we have already spoken of it in the eighteenth psalm. But as grammarians maintain that it is compounded of בלי, *beli,* and יעל, *yaäl,* which signify *not to rise,* the expression, *thing of Belial,* (for so it is literally in the Hebrew,) I understand in this place as meaning an extraordinary and hateful crime, which, as we commonly say, can never be expiated, and from which there is no possibility of escape; unless, perhaps, some would rather refer it to the affliction itself under which he labored, as if his enemies had said that he was seized by some incurable malady. [105] But whatever may be as to this, his enemies regarded it as absolutely certain that God was altogether hostile to him, and would never be reconciled towards him, since he was chastising him with so much severity. When they add in the following clause, *he shall never be able to rise again,*

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[106] this clearly shows that they utterly cut off from him all hope of recovery. And certainly it was a sore temptation to David, who had in himself the testimony of a good conscience, to think that he was regarded by men as one who was pursued by the vengeance of God, nay, that they even cast him headlong into hell. But it pleased God thus to try his servant, that, trusting to the testimony of his own conscience, he should pay no regard to what men might say, or be troubled by the reproaches they might cast upon him. It was also his design to teach us, by his example, that we must seek the reward of our righteousness elsewhere than in this world, since we see with what unequal balances the world often sets itself to estimate the difference between virtue and vice.

9. *Even the man of my peace.* As the very height of all his miseries, David here declares that he had found the same treachery in some one, or, indeed, in many of his greatest friends. For the change of number is very frequent in the Hebrew language, so that he may speak of several individuals as if they were only one person. Thus the meaning would be: Not only the common people, or strangers of whom I had no knowledge or acquaintance, but my greatest friends, nay, even those with whom I was most intimate, and those of my own household, whom I admitted to eat and drink with me at

There seems some difficulty as to what is meant by the words לעיעל, *debar beliyaäl* They are literally *a word of Belial* But *word* in Hebrew is often used for *a thing* or *matter*, Exodus 18:16; Deuteronomy 17:4; 1 Kings 14:13. And *Belial* is used by the Hebrews to designate any detestable wickedness. Thus the original words bring out the meaning which Calvin fixes upon them; and in the same sense they are understood by several critics. Dr Geddes reads "a lawless deed;" and he explains the expression as referring to "David's sin in the case of Uriah; which his enemies now assign as the cause of his present calamity; as if they had said, 'This sin hath at length overtaken him,' etc." Horsley reads, "Some cursed thing presseth heavily upon him;" and by "some cursed thing" he understands "the crime which they supposed to be the cause of the divine judgment upon him." Fry reads, "Some hellish crime cleaveth unto him." Cresswell adopts the interpretation of M. Flaminius: "They say, Some load of iniquity presses upon him, (or clings to him,) so that from the place where he lieth he will rise no more." But there is another sense which the words will bear. The Septuagint reads, "λόγος παράνομος;" the Vulgate, "a wicked word;" the Chaldee, "a perverse word;" the Syriac, "a word of iniquity;" and the Arabic, "words contrary to law;" and so the expression may mean a grievous slander or calumny. This is the sense in which it is understood by Hammond. "And this," says he, "is said *to cleave* to him on whom it is fastened; it being the nature of calumnies, when strongly affixed on any, to cleave fast, and leave some evil mark behind them: "*Calumniare fortiter*, *aliquid hoerebit*." In our vulgar version it is "an evil disease." And דבר, *debar*, no doubt sometimes signifies a *plague* or *pestilence* According to this rendering, the sense will be, he is smitten with an evil disease on account of his crimes, from which he will never recover.

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So Hammond reads with our English version, *Now that he lieth he shall rise again no more*, and thinks that this is a proverbial phrase which was in use among the Hebrews, and which was applied to any sort of ruin, as well as to that which is effected by bodily disease. "The calumniator," he observes, "may destroy and ruin as well as the pestilence; and from him was David's danger most frequently, and not from a pestilential disease."

my table, vaunt themselves reproachfully against me. Among the Hebrews, the expression, *men of peace,* denotes their kinsfolk and connections; but it was a much closer alliance, and one which ought to have secured a stricter observance of the laws of friendship, *to eat the bread* of David in company with himself: for it is as if he had employed the appellation, My companion. [107] If, however, any would rather understand it of some particular traitor than of several persons, I have no objection to it. *To lift up the heel* is, in my opinion, to be understood metaphorically, and signifies *to rise up disdainfully* against a man who is afflicted and cast down.

[108] Others explain the expression by *to lay wait secretly;* but the former interpretation is more appropriate, That the wicked, seeing that David was placed in embarrassed circumstances, or already prostrated in the dust, took occasion from this to assail him indirectly indeed, but, nevertheless, always with insolence; a thing which usually happens among people of a wicked and servile disposition. Christ, in quoting this passage, (John 13:18,) applies it to the person of Judas. And certainly we ought to understand that, although David speaks of himself in this psalm, yet he speaks not as a common and private person, but as one who represented the person of Christ, inasmuch as he was, as it were, the example after which the whole Church should be conformed — a point well entitled to our attention, in order that each of us may prepare himself for the same condition. It was necessary that what was begun in David should be fully accomplished in Christ; and, therefore, it must of necessity come to pass, that the same thing should be fulfilled in each of his members, namely, that they should not only suffer from external violence and force, but also from internal foes, ever ready to betray them, even as Paul declares that the Church shall be assailed, not only by *"fightings* without," but also by *"fears* within," (2 Corinthians 7:5.)

Psalm 41:10-13

10. Do thou, O Jehovah! have mercy upon me: raise me up, and I will recompense them. **11**. By this I know that I have been acceptable to thee, because my enemy doth not triumph over me. **12**. And as for me, thou wilt uphold me in my integrity, [109] and establish me before thy face for ever. **13**. Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Israel, for ever and ever. Amen and Amen.

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"Mon compagnon ordinaire, et qui estoit a pot et a feu avec moy, ainsi qu'on dit en commun proverbe." — *Fr.* "My usual companion, and one who, according to the common proverb, had bed and board with me."

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"*Hath lifted against me his heel*; *i.e.* hath spurned me, hath kicked at me, as a vicious beast of burden does, hath insulted me in my misery. Comp. Psalm 36:11." — *Cresswell.*

109

Or soundness.

10 *Do thou, O Jehovah I have mercy upon me.* From a consideration of the wrongful cruelty of his enemies, he again takes encouragement to pray. And there is included in what he says a tacit contrast between God and men; as if he had said, Since there is to be found no aid or help in the world, but as, on the contrary, a strange degree of cruelty, or secret malice, every where prevails, be thou, at least, O Lord! pleased to succor me by thy mercy. This is the course which ought to be pursued by all the afflicted, whom the world unjustly persecutes; that is to say, they ought not only to occupy themselves in bewailing the wrongs which are done them, but they ought also to commend their cause to God: and the more Satan endeavors to overthrow their faith, and to distract their thoughts, the more should they fix their minds attentively on God alone. In using such language, the Psalmist again ascribes his restoration to the mercy of God as its cause. What he says in the concluding clause of the verse of taking vengeance seems harsh and unaccountable. If he confessed truly and from the heart, in the preceding part of the psalm, that God was just in thus afflicting him, why does he not extend forgiveness to others, as he desires that forgiveness should be granted to himself? Surely it were a shameful abuse of the grace of God, if, after having been restored and pardoned by him, we should refuse to follow his example in showing mercy. Besides, it would have been a feeling far removed from that of humility or kindness, for David, even while he was yet in the midst of death, to have desired revenge. But here two things are to be taken into account: First, David was not as one of the common people, but a king appointed by God, and invested with authority; and, secondly, It is not from an impulse of the flesh, but in virtue of the nature of his office, that he is led to denounce against his enemies the punishment which they had merited. If, then, each individual indiscriminately, in taking vengeance upon his enemies, should allege the example of David in his own defense, it is necessary, first, to take into account the difference which subsists between us and David, by reason of the circumstances and position in which he was placed by God; [110] and, secondly, it is necessary to ascertain whether the same zeal which was in him reigns also in us, or rather, whether we are directed and governed by the same divine Spirit. David, being king, was entitled, in virtue of his royal authority, to execute the vengeance of God against the wicked; but as to us our hands are tied. In the second place, As he represented the person of Christ, so he cherished in his heart pure and holy affections: and hence it is, that, in speaking as he does in this verse, he indulged not his own angry spirit, but fulfilled faithfully the duties of the station to which he had been called of God. In short, in acting thus, he executed the righteous judgment of God, just in the same way as it is lawful for us to pray that the Lord himself would take vengeance upon the

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"Pour raison de la condition et estat qu'il avoit de Dieu." — *Fr.*

ungodly; for, as we are not armed with the power of the sword, it is our duty to have recourse to the heavenly Judge. At the same time, in beseeching him to show himself our guardian and defender, by taking vengeance on our enemies, we must do so in a calm and composed state of mind, and exercise a watchful care lest we should give too loose reins to our desires, by casting off the rule prescribed by the Spirit. As to David, the duties of his station required that he should employ means for subduing the rebellious, and that he should be truly the minister of God in inflicting punishment upon all the wicked.

11 *By this I know that I have been acceptable to thee* David now proceeds to the exercise of thanksgiving; unless, indeed, by altering the tense of the verb, we would rather with some read this verse in connection with the preceding, in this way: In this I shall know that thou favorest me, if thou suffer not my enemies to triumph over me; but it suits much better to understand it as an expression of joy on account of some deliverance which God had vouchsafed to him. After having offered up his prayers, he now ascribes his deliverance to God, and speaks of it as a manifest and singular benefit he had received from him. It might, however, be asked, whether it is a sufficiently sure method of our coming to the knowledge of God's love towards us, that he does not suffer our enemies to triumph over us? for it will often happen, that a man is delivered from danger, whom, nevertheless, God does not regard with pleasure; and, besides, the good-will of God towards us is known chiefly from his word, and not simply by experience. The answer to this is easy: David was not destitute of faith, but for the confirmation of it he took advantage of the helps which God had afterwards added to his word. In speaking thus, he seems to refer not only to the favor and good-will which God bears to all the faithful in common, but to the special favor which God had conferred upon him in choosing him to be king; as if he had said, Now, Lord, I am more and more confirmed in the belief that thou hast vouchsafed to adopt me to be the first-born among the kings of the earth. Thus he extends to the whole state of the realm the help of God, by means of which he had been delivered from some particular calamity.

12 *And as for me, thou wilt uphold me in my integrity* Some expound the clause thus: That, as David followed after uprightness, God had stretched out the hand to him. But this interpretation does not agree very well with a preceding sentence, in which he acknowledged that he had been justly punished by God. The calamity which had befallen him exposed him to the insult and derision of his enemies; but it is not likely that they were the authors of it: and hence, it would have been out of place to have adduced his integrity for this purpose, because the Lord is said to have respect to our integrity, when he defends us against our enemies, and delivers us from the outrage of men. We must therefore seek another meaning. The Hebrew word which we have rendered *integrity* might be referred to the body as well as the mind, thus: I shall continue *sound,* because thou wilt preserve and

establish me. He seems, however, to extend the favor of God still farther; as if he had said, that he had been assisted not only once by his hand, but that, during the whole course of the period he had enjoyed prosperity, he had always been upheld in safety by the power of God. If any would rather understand by this term the piety and sincere disposition for which David was distinguished, — and this meaning would be very suitable, — it will not follow from this that David boasts of his past life, but only that he declares that, when brought to the test, or in the midst of the conflict, even although Satan and wicked men endeavored to shake his faith, he had not turned aside from the fear of God. By these words, then, he bears testimony to his patience, because, when sorely vexed and tormented, he had not forsaken the path of uprightness. If this meaning should be adopted, it must be observed, that this benefit, namely, that David continued invincible, and boldly sustained these assaults of temptation, is immediately after ascribed to God, and that for the future, David looked for preservation by no other means than by the sustaining power of God. If the language should be understood as referring to his external condition, this will be found to suit equally well the scope of the passage, and the meaning will be this, That God will never cease to manifest his favor, until he has preserved his servants in safety, even to the end. As to the form of expression, *that God establishes them before his face,* this is said of those whom he defends and preserves in such a manner, that he shows by evident tokens the paternal care which he exercises over them; as, on the other hand, when he seems to have forgotten his own people, he is said to hide his face from them.

13 *Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Israel, for ever and ever* [111] Here the Psalmist confirms and repeats the expression of thanksgiving contained in a preceding verse. By calling God expressly *the God of Israel,* he testifies that he cherished in his heart a deep and thorough impression of the covenant which God had made with the Fathers; because it was the source from which

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The Hebrew Psalter is divided into five books. This is the end of the first book. The second ends with the 72d psalm, the third with the 89th, the fourth with the 106th, and the fifth with the 150th. It is worthy of remark, that each of these five books solemnly concludes with a distinct ascription of praise to God; only no distinct doxology appears at the end of the fifth book, probably because the last psalm throughout is a psalm of praise. The Jewish writers affirm that this form of benediction was added by the person who collected and distributed The Psalms into their present state. How ancient this division is, cannot now be clearly ascertained. Jerome, in his Epistle to Marcella, and Epiphanius, speak of The Psalms as having been divided by the Hebrews into five books; but when this division was made, they do not inform us. The forms of ascription of praise, added at the end of each of the five books, are in the Septuagint version, from which we may conclude that this distribution had been made before that version was executed. It was probably made by Ezra, after the return of the Jews from Babylon to their own country, and the establishment of the worship of God in the new temple; and it was perhaps made in imitation of a similar distribution of the books of Moses. In making this division of the Hebrew Psalter, regard appears to have been paid to the subject-matter of the psalms.

his deliverance proceeded. The term *amen* is repeated twice, to express the greater vehemence, and that all the godly might be the more effectually stirred up to praise God.

Psalm 42

PSALM 42

In the first place, David shows that when he was forced to flee by reason of the cruelty of Saul, and was living in a state of exile, what most of all grieved him was, that he was deprived of the opportunity of access to the sanctuary; for he preferred the service of God to every earthly advantage. In the second place, he shows that being tempted with despair, he had in this respect a very difficult contest to sustain. In order to strengthen his hope, he also introduces prayer and meditation on the grace of God. Last of all, he again makes mention of the inward conflict which he had with the sorrow which he experienced.

To the chief musician. A lesson of instruction to the sons of Korah.

The name of David is not expressly mentioned in the inscription of this psalm. Many conjecture that the sons of Korah were the authors of it. This, I think, is not at all probable. As it is composed in the person of David, who, it is well known, was endued above all others with the spirit of prophecy, who will believe that it was written and composed for him by another person? He was the teacher generally of the whole Church, and a distinguished instrument of the Spirit. He had already delivered to the company of the Levites, of whom the sons of Korah formed a part, other psalms to be sung by them. What need, then, had he to borrow their help, or to have recourse to their assistance in a matter which he was much better able of himself to execute than they were? To me, therefore, it seems more probable, that the sons of Korah are here mentioned because this psalm was committed as a precious treasure to be preserved by them, as we know that out of the number of the singers, some were chosen and appointed to

be keepers of the psalms. That there is no mention made of David's name does not of itself involve any difficulty, since we see the same omission in other psalms, of which there is, notwithstanding, the strongest grounds for concluding that he was the author. As to the word משכיל, *maskil,* I have already made some remarks upon it in the thirty-second psalm. This word, it is true, is sometimes found in the inscription of other psalms besides those in which David declares that he had been subjected to the chastening rod of God. It is, however, to be observed, that it is properly applied to chastisements, since the design of them is to instruct the children of God, when they do not sufficiently profit from doctrine. As to the particular time of the composition of this psalm, expositors are not altogether agreed. Some suppose that David here complains of his calamity, when he was expelled from the throne by his son Absalom. But I am rather disposed to entertain a different opinion, founded, if I mistake not, upon good reasons. The rebellion of Absalom was very soon suppressed, so that it did not long prevent David from approaching the sanctuary. And yet, the lamentation which he here makes refers expressly to a long state of exile, under which he had languished, and, as it were, pined away with grief. It is not the sorrow merely of a few days which he describes in the third verse; nay, the scope of the entire composition will clearly show that he had languished for a long time in the wretched condition of which he speaks. It has been alleged as an argument against referring this psalm to the reign of Saul, that the ark of the covenant was neglected during his reign, so that it is not very likely that David at that time conducted the stated choral services in the sanctuary; but this argument is not very conclusive: for although Saul only worshipped God as a mere matter of form, yet he was unwilling to be regarded in any other light than as a devout man. And as to David, he has shown in other parts of his writings with what diligence he frequented the holy assemblies, and more especially on festival days. Certainly, these words which we shall meet with in Psalm 55:14, "We walked unto the house of God in company," relate to the time of Saul.

Psalm 42:1-3

1. As the hart crieth [112] for the fountains of water, so my soul crieth after thee, O Jehovah! **2**. My soul hath thirsted for God, even for the living God: when shall I come to appear before the face of God? **3**. My tears have been my bread day and night, while they say daily to me, Where is thy God?

1. *As the hart crieth for the fountains of water, etc* The meaning of these two verses simply is, that David preferred to all the enjoyments, riches, pleasures, and honors of this world, the opportunity of access to the sanctuary, that in this way he might cherish and strengthen his faith

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and piety by the exercises prescribed in the Law. When he says that he *cried for the living God,* we are not to understand it merely in the sense of a burning love and desire towards God: but we ought to remember in what manner it is that, God allures us to himself, and by what means he raises our minds upwards. He does not enjoin us to ascend forthwith into heaven, but, consulting our weakness, he descends to us. David, then, considering that the way of access was shut against him, cried to God, because he was excluded from the outward service of the sanctuary, which is the sacred bond of intercourse with God. I do not mean to say that the observance of external ceremonies can of itself bring us into favor with God, but they are religious exercises which we cannot bear to want by reason of our infirmity. David, therefore, being excluded from the sanctuary, is no less grieved than if he had been separated from God himself. He did not, it is true, cease in the meantime to direct his prayers towards heaven, and even to the sanctuary itself; but conscious of his own infirmity, he was specially grieved that the way by which the faithful obtained access to God was shut against him. This is an example which may well suffice to put to shame the arrogance of those who without concern can bear to be deprived of those means, [113] or rather, who proudly despise them, as if it were in their power to ascend to heaven in a moment's flight; nay, as if they surpassed David in zeal and alacrity of mind. We must not, however, imagine that the prophet suffered himself to rest in earthly elements, [114] but only that he made use of them as a ladder, by which he might ascend to God, finding that he had not wings with which to fly thither. The similitude which he takes from *a hart* is designed to express the extreme ardor of his desire. The sense in which some explain this is, that the waters are eagerly sought by the harts, that they may recover from fatigue; but this, perhaps, is too limited. I admit that if the hunter pursue the stag, and the dogs also follow hard after it, when it comes to a river it gathers new strength by plunging into it. But we know

Horsley also reads, "crieth." In the Hebrew it is "brayeth." In Hebrew there are distinct words to mark the peculiar cries of the hart, the bear, the lion, the zebra, the wolf, the horse, the dog, the cow, and the sheep. The distressing cry of the hart seems to be here expressed. Being naturally of a hot and sanguine constitution, it suffers much from thirst in the Oriental regions. When in want of water, and unable to find it, it makes a mournful noise, and eagerly seeks the cooling river; and especially when pursued over the dry and parched wilderness by the hunter, it seeks the stream of water with intense desire, and braying plunges into it with eagerness, as soon as it has reached its wished-for banks, at once to quench its thirst and escape its deadly pursuers. It is the female hart which is here meant, as "brayeth" is feminine, and as the reading of the LXX. also shows, which is, ἡ ἔλσφος

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"Qui ne soucient pas beaucoup d'estre privez de ces moyens." — *Fr.*

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"C'est assavoir, es ceremonies externes commandees en la Loy." — *Fr. marg.* "That is to say, in the external ceremonies commanded by the Law."

also that at certain seasons of the year, harts, with an almost incredible desire, and more intensely than could proceed from mere thirst, seek after water; and although I would not contend for it, yet I think this is referred to by the prophet here.

The second verse illustrates more clearly what I have already said, that David does not simply speak of the presence of God, but of the presence of God in connection with certain symbols; for he sets before himself the tabernacle, the altar, the sacrifices, and other ceremonies by which God had testified that he would be near his people; and that it behoved the faithful, in seeking to approach God, to begin by those things. Not that they should continue attached to them, but that they should, by the help of these signs and outward means, seek to behold the glory of God, which of itself is hidden from the sight. Accordingly, when we see the marks of the divine presence engraven on the word, or on external symbols, we can say with David that there *is the face of God,* provided we come with pure hearts to seek him in a spiritual manner. But when we imagine God to be present otherwise than he has revealed himself in his word, and the sacred institutions of his worship, or when we form any gross or earthly conception of his heavenly majesty, we are only inventing for ourselves visionary representations, which disfigure the glory of God, and turn his truth into a lie.

3. *My tears have been my bread* Here the Psalmist mentions another sharp piercing shaft with which the wicked and malevolent grievously wounded his heart. There can be no doubt that Satan made use of such means as these to fan the flame that consumed him with grief. "What," we may suppose that adversary to say, "wouldst thou have? Seest thou not that God hath cast thee off? For certainly he desires to be worshipped in the tabernacle, to which you have now no opportunity of access, and from which you are as it were banished." These were violent assaults, and enough to have overturned the faith of this holy man, unless, supported by the power of the Spirit in a more than ordinary degree, he had made a strong and vigorous resistance. It is evident that his feelings had been really and strongly affected. We may be often agitated, and yet not to such an extent as to abstain from eating and drinking; but when a man voluntarily abstains from food, and indulges so much in weeping, that he daily neglects his ordinary meals, and is continually overwhelmed in sorrow, it is obvious that he is troubled in no light degree; but that he is wounded severely, and even to the heart. [115] Now, David says, that he did not experience greater relief in any thing whatever than from weeping; and, therefore, he gave himself up to it, just in the same manner as men take pleasure and enjoyment in eating; and this he says had been the case every day, and not only for a short time. Let us, therefore, whenever the ungodly triumph over us in our miseries, and spitefully taunt

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"Mais qu'il est naure a bon escient et jusques au bout." — *Fr.*

us that God is against us, never forget that it is Satan who moves them to speak in this manner, in order to overthrow our faith; and that, therefore, it is not time for us to take our ease, or to yield to indifference, when a war so dangerous is waged against us. There is still another reason which ought to inspire us with such feelings, and it is this, that the name of God is held up to scorn by the ungodly; for they cannot scoff at our faith without greatly reproaching him. If, then, we are not altogether insensible, we must in such circumstances be affected with the deepest sorrow.

Psalm 42:4-6

> **4**. When I remember these things, [116] I pour out my soul within me, because I had gone in company with them, [literally in number,] leading them even to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, even the multitude dancing for joy. [117] **5**. O my soul! why art thou cast down? and why art thou disquieted within me? Wait thou upon God: for I shall yet praise him for the helps [or salvations] of his countenance. **6**. O my God! my soul is cast down within me, when I remember thee from the land of Jordan and of Hermonim, [or, and from the Hermons,] from the hill Mizar.

4. *When I remember these things* This verse is somewhat obscure, on account of the variation of the tenses in the Hebrew. And yet I have no doubt that the true and natural sense is, that David, when he called to remembrance his former condition, experienced so much the greater sadness by comparing it with his present condition. The remembrance, I say, of the past had no small influence in aggravating his misery, from the thought that he, who had formerly acted the part of a leader and standard-bearer in conducting others to the holy assemblies, should now be debarred from access to the temple. We know that those who have been accustomed to suffering from their childhood become insensible to it, and the very continuance of misery produces in us a certain degree of callousness, so

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"Things" is a supplement. Boothroyd prefers reading "these times."

117

In this verse, there is evidently a reference to the festive religious solemnities of the Jews, in which singing and dancing were used. These also formed an eminent part of the religious rites of the ancient Greeks and other heathen nations. Among the Greeks at the present day, it is the practice for a lady of distinction to lead the dance, and to be followed by a troop of young females, who imitate her steps, and if she sings, make up the chorus. This serves to throw light on the description given of Miriam, when she "took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dances," (Exodus 15:20.) She led the dance; they followed and imitated her steps. When David "danced before the Lord" at the bringing up of the ark, "with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet," it is probable that he was accompanied by others whom he led in the dance, (2 Samuel 6:15, 16.) To this practice there is evidently an allusion in this passage; and the allusion greatly enhances its beauty.

that we cease to think of it, or to regard it as anything unusual. It is different with those who have not been so accustomed to it. And, therefore, it is no wonder if David, who had been not one of the common people, but who had lately occupied a chief place among the princes, and had been leader of the foremost ranks among the faithful, should be more grievously disquieted, when he saw himself utterly cast off, and not admitted to a place even among the lowest. Accordingly, I connect the demonstrative pronoun *these* with the declaration which follows, namely, that he remembered how he had been accustomed to mingle in the company of the godly, and to lead them to the house of God. *To pour out the soul* is taken metaphorically by some for to give utterance to his grief*;* others are of opinion, that it signifies to rejoice greatly*,* or, as we commonly speak, to be melted or dissolved in joy It appears to me that David rather means to say, that his affections were, as it were, melted within him, whether it were from joy or sorrow. As the soul of man sustains him, so long as it keeps its energies collected, so also it sinks within him, and, as it were, vanishes away, when any of the affections, by excessive indulgence, gains the ascendancy. [118] Accordingly, he is said to pour out his soul, who is so excited, that his affections lose their vigor, and begin to flow out. David's language implies, that his soul melted and fainted within him by the greatness of his sorrow, when he thought of the condition from which he had fallen. If any would rather understand it of *joy,* the language will admit of such an illustration as this: Formerly I took such a delight in walking foremost in the ranks of the people, and leading them in procession to the sanctuary, that my heart melted within me for joy, and I was quite transported with it: if, therefore, I should again be restored to the same happy condition, all my feelings would be ravished with the same delight. I have, however, already stated what appeared to me to be the best exposition. We must not suppose that David had been overwhelmed with the sorrow of the world; but, as in his present misery he discerned the wrath of God, he sorrowed after a godly sort, because, by his own fault, he had provoked the displeasure of God against him. And, even without touching this reason of his sorrow, we see the source from which it proceeded. Even when afflicted by so many personal privations, he is nevertheless grieved only for the sanctuary, thereby showing that it would have been less distressing to him to have been deprived of life, than to continue in a state of exile from the presence of God. And, indeed, the way in which we ought to regulate all our affections is this, That, on the one hand, our joy may have respect to the paternal love and favor of God towards us, and that, on the other, the only cause of our grief may arise from feeling that he is angry with us.

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"Car ainsi que l'ame de l'homme le soustient tandis qu'elle conserve sa vigueur et la tient comme amasse, aussi elle se fond, et par maniere de dire, s'esvanouit quand quelque affection desmesuree vient a y dominer." — *Fr.*

This is the "godly sorrow" of which Paul speaks, 2 Corinthians 7:10. By the term *number,* which in the Hebrew is called סך, *sach,* David, I have no doubt, intended *ranks,* or *companies in procession;* for when they went to the tabernacle on the holy days, they went not in confusion or in crowds, but walked in regular order, (Luke 2:44.)

5 *O my soul! why art thou cast down?* From this it appears that David contended strongly against his sorrow, lest he should yield to temptation: but what we ought chiefly to observe is, that he had experienced a strong and bitter contest before he obtained the victory over it; or we might rather say, that he was not delivered from it after one alarming assault, but was often called upon to enter into new scenes of conflict. It need not excite our wonder that he was so much disquieted and cast down, since he could not discern any sign of the divine favor towards him. But David here represents himself as if he formed two opposing parties. In so far as in the exercise of faith he relied upon the promises of God, being armed with the Spirit of invincible fortitude, he set himself, in opposition to the affections of his flesh, to restrain and subdue them; and, at the same time, he rebuked his own cowardice and imbecility of heart. Moreover, although he carried on war against the devil and the world, yet he does not enter into open and direct conflict with them, but rather regards himself as the enemy against whom he desires chiefly to contend. And doubtless the best way to overcome Satan is, not to go out of ourselves, but to maintain an internal conflict against he desires of our own hearts. It ought, however, to be observed, that David confesses that his soul was cast down within him: for when our infirmities rise up in vast array, and, like the waves of the sea, are ready to overwhelm us, our faith seems to us to fail, and, in consequence we are so overcome by mere fear, that we lack courage, and are afraid to enter into the conflict. Whenever, therefore, such a state of indifference and faint-heartedness shall seize upon us, let us remember, that to govern and subdue the desires of their hearts, and especially to contend against the feelings of distrust which are natural to all, is a conflict to which the godly are not unfrequently called. But here there are two evils specified, which, however apparently different, yet assail our hearts at the same time; the one is *discouragement,* and the other *disquietude* When we are quite downcast, we are not free of a feeling of disquietude, which leads us to murmur and complain. The remedy to both of them is here added, *hope in God,* which alone inspires our minds, in the first place, with confidence in the midst of the greatest troubles; and, secondly, by the exercise of patience, preserves them in peace. In what follows, David very well expresses the power and nature of hope by these words, *I shall yet praise him;* for it has the effect of elevating our thoughts to the contemplation of the grace of God, when it is hidden from our view. By the term *yet,* he confesses that for the present, and in so far as the praises of God are concerned, his mouth is stopped, seeing he is oppressed and shut up on all sides. This, however, does not prevent him from extending his

hope to some future distant period; and, in order to escape from his present sorrow, and, as it were, get beyond its reach, he promises himself what as yet there was no appearance of obtaining. Nor is this an imaginary expectation produced by a fanciful mind; but, relying upon the promises of God, he not only encourages himself to cherish good hope, but also promises himself certain deliverance. We can only be competent witnesses to our brethren of the grace of God when, in the first place, we have borne testimony to it to our own hearts. What follows, *The helps of his countenance,* may be differently expounded. Commentators, for the most art, supply the word *for:* so that, according to this view, David here expresses the matter or cause of thanksgiving — that *yet he would give praise or thanks to God for the help of his countenance* This interpretation I readily admit. At the same time, the sense will not be inappropriate if we read the terms separately, thus: *helps or salvations are from the countenance of God;* for as soon as he is pleased to look upon his people he sets them in safety. *The countenance of God* is taken for the manifestation of his favor. His countenance then appears serene and gracious to us; as, on the contrary, adversity, like the intervening clouds, darkens or obscures its benign aspect.

6. *O my God! my soul is cast down within me.* If we suppose that this verse requires no supplement, then it will consist of two distinct and separate sentences. Literally it may be read thus: *O my God! my soul is cast down within me, therefore will I remember thee, etc.* But the greater number of expositors render the word עַל-כֵּן, *al-ken,* by *forasmuch as,* or *because,* so that it is employed to express the reason of what is contained in the preceding clause. And certainly it would be very appropriate in this sense, That as often as David, from the land of Jordan, in which he now lay hid as an exile, set himself to think of the sanctuary, his sorrow was so much the more increased. If, however, any would rather, as I have already observed, distinguish this verse into two parts, it must be understood as meaning that David thought of God in his exile, not to nourish his grief, but to assuage it. He did not act the part of those who find no relief in their afflictions but in forgetting God; for although wounded by his hand, he, nevertheless, failed not to acknowledge him to be his physician. Accordingly, the import of the whole verse will be this, I am now living in a state of exile, banished from the temple, and seem to be an alien from the household of God; but this will not prevent me from regarding him, and having recourse to him. I am now deprived of the accustomed sacrifices, of which I stand much in need, but he has not taken from me his word. As, however, the first interpretation is the one more generally received, and this also seems to be added by way of exposition, it is better not to depart from it. David then complains that his soul was oppressed with sorrow, because he saw himself cast out of the Church of God. At the same time, there is in these words a tacit contrast; [119] as if he had said, It is not the desire to be restored to my

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wife, or my house, or any of my possessions, which grieves me so much as the distressing consideration, that I now find myself prevented from taking part in the service of God. We ought to learn from this, that although we are deprived of the helps which God has appointed for the edification of our faith and piety, it is, nevertheless, our duty to be diligent in stirring up our minds, that we may never suffer ourselves to be forgetful of God. But, above all, this is to be observed, that as in the preceding verse we have seen David contending courageously against his own affections, so now we here see by what means he steadfastly maintained his ground. He did this by having recourse to the help of God, and taking refuge in it as in a holy sanctuary. And, assuredly, if meditation upon the promises of God do not lead us to prayer, it will not have sufficient power to sustain and confirm us. Unless God impart strength to us, how shall we be able to subdue the many evil thoughts which constantly arise in our minds? The soul of man serves the purpose, as it were, of a workshop to Satan in which to forge a thousand methods of despair. And, therefore, it is not without reason that David, after a severe conflict with himself, has recourse to prayer, and calls upon God as the witness of his sorrow. *By the land of Jordan* is to be understood that part of the country which, in respect of Judea, was beyond the river of that name. This appears still more clearly from the word Hermonim or Hermons. Hermon was a mountainous district, which extended to a considerable distance; and because it had several tops, was called in the plural number Hermonim. [120]

Perhaps David also has purposely made use of the plural number on account of the fear by which he was forced frequently to change his place of abode, and wander hither and thither. As to the word *Mizar,* some suppose that it was not the proper name of a mountain, and therefore translate it *little,* supposing that there is here an indirect comparison of the Hermons with the mountain of Sion, as if David meant to say that Sion, which was comparatively a small hill, was greater in his estimation than the lofty Hermons; but it appears to me that this would be a constrained interpretation.

Psalm 42:7-8

"C'est a dire, consideration d'autres choses a l'opposite." — *Fr. marg.* "That is to say, the consideration of other things quite opposite."

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Just as we say the Alps and the Appenines. The Hermons formed part of the ridge of the high hills called Antilibanus. The sources of the Jordan are in the vicinity. Davidson reads, "*From the land of Jordan*, *even of the Hermons*; the two espressions signifying the same district." — *Sacred Hermeneutics*, p. 667.

7. Depth calleth unto depth [121] at the noise of thy waterspouts: [122] all thy waves and thy floods have passed over me. **8**. Jehovah will command his loving-kindness by day: and by night his song shall be with me; and prayer to the God of my life.

7. *Depth calleth unto depth* These words express the grievousness, as well as the number and long continuance, of the miseries which he suffered; as if he had said, I am oppressed not only with one kind of misery, but various kinds of distress return one after another, so that there seems to be neither end nor measure to them. In the first place, by the term *depth,* he shows that the temptations by which he was assailed were such, that they might well be compared to gulfs in the sea; then he complains of their long continuance, which he describes by the very appropriate figure, that his temptations cry out from a distance, and call to one another. In the second part of the verse, he continues the same metaphor, when he says, that *all the waves and floods of God have passed over his head* By this he means that he had been overwhelmed, and as it were swallowed up by the accumulation of afflictions. It ought, however, to be observed, that he designates the cruelty of Saul, and his other enemies*, floods of God,* that in all our adversities we may always remember to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God which afflicts us. But it is of importance to go beyond this, and to consider, that if it should please God to rain with violence upon us, as soon as he shall have opened his sluices or *waterspouts,* there will be no termination to our miseries till he is appeased; for he has in his power means marvellous and unknown for executing his vengeance against us. Thus, when once his anger is kindled against us, there will be not only one depth to swallow us up, but depth will call unto depth. And as the insensibility of men is such,

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"Un abysme crie a l'autre abysme." — *Fr.* "One depth crieth to another depth."

122

"A waterspout is a large tube or cylinder formed of clouds, by means of the electric fluid, the base being uppermost, and the point let down perpendicularly from the clouds. It has a particular kind of *circular motion* at the point; and being hollow within attracts vast quantities of water; which it frequently pours down in torrents on the earth or the sea. So great is the quantity of water, and so sudden and precipitate the fall, that if it happen to break on a vessel, it shatters it to pieces, and sinks it in an instant. Those waterspouts which Dr Shaw saw in the Mediterranean, he informs us, "seemed to be so many cylinders of water falling down from the clouds;" and he states, that they "are more frequent near the capes of Latikea, Greego, and Carmel, than in any other part of the Mediterranean." — (*Travels*, p. 333.) "These are all places," as Harmer observes, "on the coast of Syria, and the last of them every body knows in Judea, it being a place rendered famous by the prayers of the prophet Elijah. The Jews then could not be ignorant of what happened on their coasts; and David must have known of these dangers of the sea, if he had not actually seen some of them." — (*Observations*, volume 3, p. 222.) In the description of a violent and dangerous storm at sea, by which he here portrays his great distress, he would, therefore, naturally draw his imagery from these awful phenomena, which were of frequent occurrence on the Jewish coasts.

that they do not stand in awe of the threatenings of God, to the degree in which they ought, whenever mention is made of his vengeance, let us recall this verse to our recollection.

8. *Jehovah will command his loving-kindness by day* The verb here used is of the future tense; but I do not deny that, according to the Hebrew idiom, it might be rendered in the past tense, as some do who think that David here enumerates the benefits which he had formerly received from God, in order by contrast to add greater force to the complaint which he makes of his present sad and miserable condition; as if he had said, How comes it to pass that God, who formerly manifested so much kindness towards me, having as it were changed his mind, now deals towards me with great severity? But as there is no sufficient reason for changing the tense of the verb, and as the other interpretation seems more in accordance with the scope of the text, let us adhere to it. I do not, indeed, positively deny, that for the strengthening of his faith, David calls to memory the benefits which he had already experienced from God; but I think that he here promises himself deliverance in future, though it be as yet hidden from him. I have, therefore, no desire to raise any discussion regarding the verb, whether it should be taken in the future or in the past tense, provided only it be fully admitted that the argument of David is to this effect: Why should I not expect that God will be merciful to me, so that in the day-time his loving-kindness may be manifested towards me, and by night upon my bed a song of joy be with me? He, no doubt, places this ground of comfort in opposition to the sorrow which he might well apprehend from the dreadful tokens of the divine displeasure, which he has enumerated in the preceding verse. The *prayer* of which he speaks in the end of the verse is not to be understood as the prayer of an afflicted or sorrowful man; but it comprehends an expression of the delight which is experienced when God, by manifesting his favor to us, gives us free access into his presence. And, therefore, he also calls him *the God of his life,* because from the knowledge of this arises cheerfulness of heart.

Psalm 42:9-11

> **9**. I will say to God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? **10**. It is as a wound [123] in my bones when my enemies reproach me, saying to me daily, Where is thy God? **11**. O my soul! why art thou cast down? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall yet praise him, the helps [or salvations] of my countenance, and my God.

9. *I will say to God my rock* If we read the preceding verse in the past tense, the meaning of this verse will be, Since God has, in this way, heretofore

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"Ou, tuerie." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, slaughter."

shown himself so kind towards me, I will pray to him now with so much the greater confidence: for the experience which I have had of his goodness will inspire me with courage. But if the preceding verse is rendered in the future tense, David, in this verse, combines the prayer which it contains with the reflections which faith led him to make. And, surely, whoever, from a persuasion of the paternal love of God, anticipates for himself the same favor which David has just described, will also be induced from his example to pray for it with greater confidence. The meaning, then, will be this: Since I expect that God will be favorable to me, inasmuch as by day he manifests his favor towards me, and continues to do this, so that even by night I have occasion to praise him, I will bewail the more frankly my miseries before him, saying, *O Lord! my rock, why hast thou forgotten me?* In making such a complaint, the faithful are not to be understood as meaning that God has utterly rejected them: for if they did not believe that they were under his care and protection, it were in vain for them to call upon him. But they speak in this manner according to the sense of the flesh. This forgetfulness, then, relates both to outward appearance, and to the disquietude by which the faithful are troubled according to the flesh, although, in the meantime, they rest assured by faith that God regards them, and will not be deaf to their request.

10 *It is as a slaughter in my bones.* This verse is somewhat involved in point of expression; but as to the meaning of it there is no obscurity. David here affirms that the grief which he experienced from the reproaches of his enemies, wounded him in no degree less than if they had pierced through his bones. The word ברצה*, beretsach,* signifies *killing;* and, therefore, I have retained this idea in the translation of it. And yet I do not condemn the opinion of those who render it *a slaughtering sword.* [124] There is here a difference as to the reading, arising from the great similarity which there is between the two letters ב*, beth,* and כ*, caph,* the mark of similitude. As the letter ב *beth,* is often superfluous, I would rather be disposed, in a doubtful matter like this, to omit it altogether. But as I have said, the sense is perfectly plain, except that interpreters do not seem to take this sufficiently into their consideration, that by the terms *my bones,* the bitterness of grief is referred to; for we feel much more acutely any injury which is done to the bones, than if a sword should pierce the bowels, or the other parts of the

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The original word רצח *retsach*, is constantly used in prose for a *homicide*, or *murderer*, being derived from the verb רצח *ratsach*, which signifies *to slay, to murder*; and although it is not used in any other passage for *a sword*, "it may," as Horsley observes, "very naturally, in poetry, be applied to the instrument of slaughter, the sword." In support of this view, he refers to a passage in one of the tragedies of Sophocles, in which Ajax calls his sword, upon which he is about to fall, Ο σφαγεὺς which gives the literal rendering of the Hebrew רצח, *retsach*, *murderer* Horsley's rendering is, "While the sword is in my bones."

body which are soft and yielding. Nor should the children of God regard this similitude as hyperbolical; and if one should wonder why David took so sorely to heart the derision of his enemies, he only manifests in this his own insensibility. For of all the bitter evils which befall us, there is nothing which can inflict upon us a severer wound than to see the wicked tear in pieces the majesty of God, and endeavor to destroy and overturn our faith. The doctrine taught by Paul, (Galatians 4:24,) concerning the persecution of Ishmael, is well known. Many consider his childish jesting as of little moment, but as it tended to this effect, that the covenant of God should be esteemed as a thing of no value, it is on that account, according to the judgment of the Holy Spirit, to be accounted a most cruel persecution. David, therefore, with much propriety, compares to a slaughtering sword, which penetrates even within the bones and marrow, the derision of his enemies, by which he saw his own faith and the word of God trampled under foot. And would to God that all who boast themselves of being his children would learn to bear their private wrongs more patiently, and to manifest the same vehement zeal for which David is here distinguished, when their faith is assailed to the dishonor of God, and when the word also which gives them life is included in the same reproach!

11 *O my soul! why art thou cast down?* This repetition shows us that David had not so completely overcome his temptations in one encounter, or by one extraordinary effort, as to render it unnecessary for him to enter anew into the same conflict. By this example, therefore, we are admonished, that although Satan, by his assaults, often subjects us to a renewal of the same trouble, we ought not to lose our courage, or allow ourselves to be cast down. The latter part of this verse differs from the fifth verse in one word, while in every other respect they agree. In the fifth verse, it is the *helps of* His *countenance,* but here we have the relative pronoun of the first person, thus, *The helps of* My *countenance* Perhaps in this place, the letter *w*, *vau,* which in the Hebrew language denotes the third person, is wanting. Still, as all the other versions agree in the reading which I have adopted, [125] David might, without any absurdity, call God by this designation, *The helps* or *salvations of* My *countenance,* inasmuch as he looked with confidence for a deliverance, manifest and certain, as if God should appear in a visible manner as his defender, and the protector of his welfare. There can, however, be no doubt, that in this place the term *helps or salvations* is to be viewed as an epithet applied to God; for immediately after it follows, *and my God*

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All the ancient versions, with the exception of the Chaldee, read both in this and the fifth verse, "my countenance." Hammond thinks that as these words are the burden of this and the following psalm, and as the meaning of the other words of the sentence in which they occur is the same in the different verses, it is not improbable that the old reading in both places may have been "my countenance."

Psalm 43

PSALM 43

This psalm is very similar to the preceding. [126] David, who probably was the author of it, being chased and driven out of his country by the unjust violence and tyranny of his enemies, calls upon God for vengeance, and encourages himself to hope for restoration.

Psalm 43:1-5

1. Judge me, O God! and plead my cause: deliver me from the cruel [or unmerciful] nation, free me from the deceitful and wicked man. **2**. For thou art the God of my strength; why art thou estranged from me? why go I sad because of the oppression of the enemy? **3**. Send forth thy light and thy truth, let them direct me, let them conduct me to thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. **4**. And I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy, [literally the joy of my rejoicing:] and I will praise thee upon the harp, O God! my God. **5**. O my soul! why art thou cast down? and why art thou disquieted within me? for I will yet praise him who is the help of my countenance, and my God.

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This and the preceding psalm have been considered by the greater number of critics as having originally formed only one psalm, and they make but one in forty-six MSS. The similarity of the style, sentiment, and metrical structure, and the occurrence of the intercalary verse at verses 5th and 10th of Psalm 42, and verse 5th of Psalm 43, confirm this opinion. "The fact, indeed," says Williams, "is self evident, and easily accounted for. The Jewish choristers having, on some occasion, found the anthem too long, have divided it for their own conveniency, (no uncommon thing among choristers,) and, being once divided, it was ignorantly supposed it ought to be so divided."

1 *Judge me, O God!* David, in the first place, complains of the extreme cruelty of his enemies; but in the verses which immediately follow, he shows that there was nothing which he felt to be more grievous, than to be deprived of the opportunity of access to the sanctuary. We have an evidence of his enjoying the testimony of a good conscience in this, that he commends the defense of his cause to God. The term *judge,* which he first makes use of, is nothing else than *to undertake the defense of one's cause;* and he expresses his meaning more clearly by adding, *plead my cause* The substance and object of his prayer, indeed, were, that he might be delivered from the wicked and malicious men by whom he was undeservedly persecuted. But as it is to the miserable and guiltless, who are wrongfully afflicted, that God promises his help, David, in the first place, submits himself to be examined by him, that, having discovered and thoroughly proved the rectitude of his cause, he may at length grant him aid. And as it is a most cheering source of consolation for us to find that God disdains not to take cognisance of our cause, so also, it is vain for us to expect that he will avenge the injuries and wrongs which are done to us, unless our own integrity be so manifest as to induce him to be favorable to us against our adversaries. By *the unmerciful nation* is to be understood the whole company of David's enemies, who were cruel, and destitute of all the feelings of humanity. What follows, concerning *the deceitful and wicked man,* might indeed be applied to Saul; but it seems rather to be a form of speech in which, by enallage, the singular number is used for the plural.

2 *For thou art the God of my strength* This verse differs very little from the ninth verse of the preceding psalm, and the difference consists more in words than in matter. Setting as a shield against temptation the fact, that he had experienced the power of God to be present with him, he complains that his life is spent in mourning, because he sees himself as it were abandoned to the will of his enemies. He considered it absolutely certain that his enemies had no power to do him harm except in so far as the Lord permitted them; and therefore he asks, as if it were something altogether unaccountable, how it happened that his enemies prevailed against him whilst he was under the assured protection and guardianship of God. From this he gathers courage to pray, that God would be pleased again to manifest his favor, which he seemed to have hid from him for a time. The term *light* is to be understood as denoting *favor;* for as adversities not only obscure the face of God, but also overcast the heavens, as it were, with clouds and fogs, so also, when we enjoy the divine blessing which makes rich, it is like the cheerful light of a serene day shining around us; or rather the light of life, dispelling all that thick obscurity which overwhelmed us in sorrow. By this word the Psalmist intimates two things; first, that all our miseries arise from no other source than this, that God withdraws from us the tokens of his paternal love; and, secondly, that as soon as he is pleased to manifest towards us his serene and gracious countenance, deliverance and salvation also arise to us. He

adds *truth,* because he expected this light only from the promises of God. The unbelieving desire the favor of God, but they do not raise their eyes to his light; for the natural disposition of man always tends towards the earth, unless his mind and all his feelings are raised up on high by the word of God. In order, then, to encourage himself in the hope of obtaining the grace of God, David rests with confidence in this, that God, who is true, and cannot deceive any, has promised to assist his servants. We must therefore explain the sentence thus: Send forth thy light, that it may be a token and testimony of thy truth, or that it may really and effectually prove that thou art faithful and free from all deceit in thy promises. The knowledge of the divine favor, it is true, must be sought for in the Word of God; nor has faith any other foundation on which it can rest with security except his word; but when God stretches out his hand to help us, the experience of this is no small confirmation both of the word and of faith. David declares what was the chief object of his desire, and what end he had in view in seeking deliverance from his calamities, when he says, *Let them direct me, and lead me to thy holy hill.* As the chief cause of his sorrow consisted in his being banished from the congregation of the godly, so he places the height of all his enjoyments in this, that he might be at liberty to take part in the exercises of religion, and to worship God in the sanctuary. Tacitly, indeed, David makes a vow of thanksgiving to God; but there can be no doubt, that by these words he intimates, that the end which he had in view in seeking deliverance from his afflictions was, that as formerly he might be at liberty to return to the sanctuary, from which he was driven by the tyranny of his enemies. And it deserves to be particularly noticed, that although he had been deprived of his wife, spoiled of his goods, his house, and all his other earthly comforts, yet he always felt such an ardent desire to come to the temple, that he forgot almost every thing else. But it is enough for me at present briefly to notice this, as in the preceding psalm I have treated at greater length of this holy desire of David, which ought to be imitated by all the faithful. [127] Still, however, it might be asked, How it is that mention is here made of *Mount Sion,* which was not appointed to the service of God till after the death of Saul? The only solution of this difficulty which I can give is, that David, composing this psalm at an after period of his life, employs, in accordance with the revelation which had subsequently been given to him, language which otherwise he would have used more generally in speaking only of the tabernacle, and without at all specifying the place. [128] In this I see no inconsistency.

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"Laquelle tous fideles doyvent ensuyvre." — *Fr.*

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"Sans specifier le lieu." — *Fr.*

4. *And I will go to the altar of God.* Here he promises to God a solemn sacrifice, in commemoration of the deliverance which he should obtain from him; for he speaks not only of the daily or ordinary service, but in making mention of the altar on which it was customary to offer the peace-offerings, he expresses the token of gratitude and thanksgiving of which I have spoken. For this reason, also, he calls God *the God of his joy,* because, being delivered from sorrow, and restored to a state of joy, he resolves to acknowledge openly so great a benefit. And he calls him the *joy of his rejoicing,* that he may the more illustriously set forth the grace of his deliverance. The second word in the genitive is added by way of an epithet, and by it he signifies that his heart had been filled with joy of no common kind, when God restored him, contrary to the expectation of all. As to the fifth verse, I have already treated of it sufficiently in the preceding psalm, and therefore deem it superfluous to speak of it here.

Psalm 44

PSALM 44

This psalm is divided into three principal parts. In the beginning of it the faithful record the infinite mercy of God towards his people, and the many tokens by which he had testified his fatherly love towards them. Then they complain that they do not now find that God is favorable towards them, as he had formerly been towards their fathers. In the third place, they refer to the covenant which God had made with Abraham, and declare that they have kept it with all faithfulness, notwithstanding the sore afflictions to which they had been subjected. At the same time, they complain that they are cruelly persecuted for no other cause but for having continued steadfastly in the pure worship of God. In the end, a prayer is added, that God would not forget the wrongful oppression of his servants, which especially tends to bring dishonor and reproach upon religion.

To the chief musician of the sons of Korah, giving instruction.

It is uncertain who was the author of this psalm; but it is clearly manifest that it was composed rather by any other person than by David. The complaints and lamentations which it contains may be appropriately referred to that miserable and calamitous period in which the outrageous tyranny of Antiochus destroyed and wasted every thing. [129] Some, indeed, may be disposed to apply it more generally; for after the return of the Jews from the captivity of Babylon, they were scarcely ever free from severe afflictions. Such a view, doubtless, would not be applicable to the time of David, under whose reign the Church enjoyed prosperity, It may be, too, that during the time of their captivity in Babylon, some one of the prophets composed

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this complaint in name of all the people. It is, however, at the same time to be observed, that the state of the Church, such as it was to be after the appearance of Christ, is here described. Paul, in Romans 8:36, as we shall afterwards see in its proper place, did not understand this psalm as a description of the state of the Church in one age only, but he warns us, that Christians are appointed to the same afflictions, and should not expect that their condition on earth, even to the end of the world, will be different from what God has made known to us, as it were by way of example, in the case of the Jews after their return from captivity. Christ, it is true, afterwards appeared as the Redeemer of the Church. He did not however appear, that the flesh should luxuriate in ease upon the earth, but rather that we should wage war under the banner of the cross, until we are received into the rest of the heavenly kingdom. As to the meaning of the word משכיל, *maskil,* it has been already elsewhere explained. It is sometimes found in the inscription of psalms whose subject is cheerful; but it is more commonly used when the subject treated of is distressing; for it is a singular means of leading us to profit by the instruction of the Lord, when, by subduing the obduracy of our hearts, he brings us under his yoke.

Psalm 44:1-3

1. O God! we have heard with our ears, our fathers have declared to us, the work which thou hast done in their days, even in the days of old. **2**. Thou hast expelled the heathen [or nations [130]] with thy hand, and planted them [131] thou hast wasted the peoples [132] and multiplied them, [or made them [133] to spread.] **3**. For they got not possession of the land by their own sword, and their own arm did not save them, but thy right hand, and thy arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favor for them.

Dr Geddes supposes with Calvin that this psalm was composed during the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes; and that Matthias may have been its author. See 1 Maccabees ch. 1 and 2. Walford refers it to the same period. There is, certainly, no part of the history of the Jews with which we are acquainted, to which the statement made in the 17th verse is so applicable as to the time when they were so cruelly persecuted for their religion by Antiochus Epiphanes, King of Syria, and when, notwithstanding, the great mass of the people displayed an invincible determination to keep themselves from the pollutions of idolatry, and to adhere to the worship of the true God.

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That is, the Canaanites.

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"Ascavoir, nos peres." — *Fr. marg.* "Namely, our fathers." Israel is here compared to a vine planted in the promised land. See Exodus 15:17; Isaiah 5:1-7. See also Psalm 80:8, where this elegant figure is carried out with remarkable force and beauty of language.

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The Canaanites.

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1. *O God! we have heard with our ears.* The people of God here recount the goodness which he had formerly manifested towards their fathers, that, by showing the great dissimilarity of their own condition, they may induce God to alleviate their miseries. They begin by declaring that they speak not of things unknown or doubtful, but that they related events, the truth of which was authenticated by unexceptionable witnesses. The expression, *We have heard with our ears,* is not to be considered as a redundant form of speech, but one of great weight. It is designed to point out that the grace of God towards their fathers was so renowned, that no doubt could be entertained respecting it. They add, that their knowledge of these things was handed down from age to age by those who witnessed them. It is not meant that their fathers, who had been brought up out of Egypt, had, a thousand and five hundred years after, declared to their posterity the benefits God had conferred upon them. The import of the language is, that not only the first deliverance, but that also the various other works which God had wrought from time to time in behalf of his people, had come down, as it were, from hand to hand, in an uninterrupted series, even to the latest age. As, therefore, those who, after the lapse of many ages, became witnesses and heralds of the grace which God had exercised towards this people, spake upon the report of the first generation, the faithful are warranted in saying, as they here do, that their fathers have declared to them that which they certainly knew, because the knowledge of it had not been lost by reason of its antiquity, but was continually preserved by the remembrance of it from the fathers to the children. The sum of the whole is, that God had manifested his goodness towards the children of Abraham, not only for ten or twenty years, but that ever since he had received them into his favor, he had never ceased to bestow upon them continued tokens of his grace.

2. *Thou hast expelled the heathen with thy hand.* This is an illustration of the preceding verse: for the inspired writer had not yet expressly referred to that work of God, the fame of which had been preserved by their fathers. He therefore now adds, that God *with his own hand expelled the heathen,* in order *to plant* in their room the children of Abraham: and that *he wasted and destroyed them, that he might increase and multiply* the seed of Abraham. He compares the ancient inhabitants of the land of Canaan to trees; for, from long continued possession of the country, they had, as it were, taken

"Ascavoir, nos peres." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, our fathers." The reading in our English version is, "and cast them out," namely, the heathen. But Calvin's rendering seems to be more suitable to the genius of the Hebrew poetry, and it also agrees with the meaning of the original. "The whole metaphor," says Dr Geddes, "is taken from the vine, or some other luxuriant tree. In our common version, 'and cast them out,' the parallelism is lost, and the beauty of the sentence disappears." The Hebrew verb here used is generally applied to the germination of plants, or to the shooting and spreading forth of branches. God caused his chosen people to spread abroad, to cast or shoot forth like the branches of a vine.

root in it. The sudden change, therefore, which had happened to them, was as if a man plucked up trees by the roots to plant others in their stead. But as it would not have been enough for God's ancient people to have been planted at first in the country, another metaphor is here added, by which the faithful testify that the blessing of God had caused this chosen people to increase and multiply, even as a tree, extending it roots and its branches far and wide, gains still greater strength in the place where it has been planted. Besides, it is necessary to observe for what purpose it is that the faithful here magnify this manifestation of the grace of God. It often happens that our own hearts suggest to us grounds of despair, when we begin to conclude that God has rejected us, because he does not continue to bestow upon us the same benefits which in his goodness he vouchsafed to our fathers. But it were altogether inconsistent, that the faithful here disposing their hearts for prayer, should allow such an obstacle to prevent them from exercising the confidence which is proper in prayer. I freely admit, that the more we think of the benefits which God has bestowed upon others, the greater is the grief which we experience when he does not relieve us in our adversities. But faith directs us to another conclusion, namely, that we should assuredly believe that we shall also in due time experience some relief, since God continues unchangeably the same. There can be no reason to doubt, that the faithful now call to remembrance the things which God had formerly done for the welfare of his Church, with the view of inspiring their minds with stronger hope, as we have seen them acting in a similar manner in the beginning of the twenty-second psalm. They do not simply state the comparison, which would tend to draw a line of separation between those who have in former times been preserved by the power of God, and those who now labored and groaned under afflictions; but they rather set forth the covenant of God as the bond of holy alliance between them and their fathers, that they might conclude from this, that whatever amount of goodness the Church had at any time experienced in God pertained also to them. At first, indeed, they use the language of complaint, asking why it is that the course of God's fatherly favor towards his people is, as it were, interrupted; but straightway they correct their mistake, and take courage from a new consideration — the consideration that God, who had adopted them as well as their fathers, is faithful and immutable. It is, however, no great wonder if the faithful, even in prayer, have in their hearts divers and conflicting affections. But the Holy Spirit, who dwells in them, by assuaging the violence of their sorrow, pacifies all their complaints and leads them patiently and cordially to obey. Moreover, when they here say that their fathers have declared to them the deliverances which God had accomplished in behalf of his Church, what the fathers did in this respect corresponds with the precept of the law, by which the fathers were commanded to teach their children. And all the faithful ought to reflect that the same charge is enjoined upon them by God even to this day. He communicates to them the doctrine of salvation, and commits

it to their charge for this purpose — that they may transmit it to their posterity, and, as much as in them lies, endeavor to extend its authority, that his worship may be preserved from age to age.

3 *For they got not possession of the land by their own sword.* Here the sacred writer confirms by contrast what he has just said; for if they obtained not possession of the land by their own power and skill, it follows that they were planted in it by the hand of another. The multitude of men who went out of Egypt was very great; but not being trained to the art of war, and accustomed only to servile works, they would soon have been defeated by their enemies, who far excelled them in numbers and strength. In short, there were not wanting evident signs by which the people were made to know as well their own weakness as the power of God; so that it was their bounden duty to confess that the land was not conquered by their own sword, and also, that it was the hand of God which had preserved them. The Psalmist, not content with mentioning *thy right hand,* adds, *thy arm,* to amplify the matter, and give greater weight to his discourse, that we may know that they were preserved in a wonderful manner, and not by any ordinary means. *The light of thy countenance* is here taken, as in other places, for the manifestation of the divine favor. As, on the one hand, when God is afflicting us severely, he seems to frown upon us, and to overshadow his face with thick clouds; so, on the other, when the Israelites, sustained by his power, overthrew their enemies without any great difficulty, and pursued them in every direction far and near, it is said, that then they beheld the face of God serene and placid, just as if he had manifested himself in a visible manner near them. Here it is necessary to observe the mode of reasoning which the prophet employs, when he argues that it is by the free gift of God that the people obtained the land in heritage, seeing they had not acquired it by their own power. We then truly begin to yield to God what belongs to him, when we consider how worthless our own strength is. And certainly, the reason why men, as it were through disdain, conceal and forget the benefits which God has conferred on them, must be owing to a delusive imagination, which leads them to arrogate somewhat to themselves as properly their own. The best means, therefore, of cherishing in us habitually a spirit of gratitude towards God, is to expel from our minds this foolish opinion of our own ability. There is still in the concluding part of the verse another expression, which contains a more illustrious testimony to the grace of God, when the Psalmist resolves the whole into the good pleasure of God: *Thou hadst a favor for them.* The prophet does not suppose any worthiness in the person of Abraham, nor imagine any desert in his posterity, on account of which God dealt so bountifully with them, but ascribes the whole to the good pleasure of God. His words seem to be taken from the solemn declaration of Moses,

"The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; (for ye were the fewest of all people;) but because the Lord loved you," (Deuteronomy 7:7, 8.)

Special mention is here made of the land of Canaan; but the prophet has stated the general principle why it was that God vouchsafed to reckon that people for his flock and peculiar heritage. And certainly, the source and origin of the Church is the free love of God; and whatever benefits he bestows upon his Church, they all proceed from the same source. The reason, therefore, why we are gathered into the Church, and are nourished and defended by the hand of God, is only to be sought in God. Nor does the Psalmist here treat of the general benevolence of God, which extends to the whole human race; but he discourses of the difference which exists between the elect and the rest of the world; and the cause of this difference is here referred to the mere good pleasure of God.

Psalm 44:4-8

4. Thou, even thou, art my King, [134] O God! command [or ordain] deliverances for Jacob. **5**. Through thee we have pushed [or smitten] with the horn our adversaries: in thy name we have trampled under foot those that rose u, against us. **6**. For I will not trust in my bow, and my sword will not save me. **7**. Surely thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put to shame those that hated us. **8**. In God we will boast all the day, and confess thy name for ever. Selah.

4. *Thou, even thou, art my King, O God!* In this verse the faithful express still more plainly what I have already alluded to a little before, namely, that the goodness of God was not only apparent in the deliverance of his people, but also flowed upon them in continued succession from age to age; and therefore it is said, *Thou, even thou, art my King* In my judgment, the demonstrative pronoun הוּא, *hu,* imports as much as if the prophet had put together a long series of the benefits of God after the first deliverance; so that it might appear, that God, who had once been the deliverer of his people, did not show himself otherwise towards their posterity: unless, perhaps, it might be considered as emphatic, and employed for the purpose of asserting the thing stated the more strongly, namely, that the faithful praise God alone as the guardian of their welfare to the exclusion of all others, and the renunciation of aid from any other quarter. Hence they also present the prayer, that God would ordain and send forth new *deliverances* to his people; for, as he has in his power innumerable means of preservation

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Geddes reads, "Our King" "The Hebrew," says he, "has *my King*; but as the Psalmist speaks in the name of his nation, the plural number is preferable in English, as in numerous other instances." "The speaker throughout the psalm," says Walford, "is the Church, which accounts for the use of both the singular and plural numbers in different parts."

and deliverance, he is said to appoint and send forth deliverances as his messengers wherever it seems good to him.

5. *Through thee we have pushed, or smitten, with the horn our adversaries.* [135] The prophet here declares in what respect God had manifested himself to be the King of this people. He did so by investing them with such strength and power, that all their enemies stood in fear of them. The similitude, taken from bulls, which he here uses, tends to show, that they had been endued with more than human strength, by which they were enabled to assail, overturn, and trample under foot, every thing which opposed them. *In God,* and *in the name of God,* are of the same import, only the latter expression denotes, that the people had been victorious, because they fought under the authority and direction of God. It ought to be observed, that what they had spoken before concerning their fathers, they now apply to themselves, because they still formed a part of the same body of the Church.

And they do this expressly to inspire themselves with confidence and courage, for had they separated themselves from their fathers, this distinction would, in a certain sense, have interrupted the course of God's grace, so that it would have ceased to flow down upon them. But now, since they confess that whatever God had conferred upon their fathers he had bestowed upon them, they may boldly desire him to continue his work. At the same time, it ought to be observed again in this place, that, as I have stated a little before, the reason why they ascribe their victories wholly to God is, that they were unable to arrive at such a consummation by *their own sword or their own bow.* When we are led to consider how great is our own weakness, and how worthless we are without God, this contrast much more clearly illustrates the grace of God. They again declare, (verse 7,) that they were saved by the power of God, and that he also had chased away and put to shame their enemies.

8. *In God we will boast* [136] *all the day* This is the conclusion of the first part of the psalm. To express the meaning in a few words, they acknowledge, that in all ages the goodness of God had been so great towards the children of Abraham, that it furnished them with continual matter of thanksgiving. As if the thing were still present to their view, they acknowledge that, without ceasing, they ought to give praise to God, because they had flourished and triumphed, not merely for one age, or a short period of time, but because

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The allusion is to the pushing, striking, or butting of oxen and other animals with their horns, and means *to vanquish* or *subdue*, (Deuteronomy 33:17; 1 Kings 22:11; Daniel 8:4.) "Literally," says Dr Adam Clarke, "We will toss them in the air with our horn; a metaphor taken from an ox or bull tossing the dogs into the air which attack him."

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Hammond reads, "We have praised God." He considers the preposition ב, *beth*, prefixed to the name of God, as a pleonasm.

they had continued to do so successively from age to age, [137] for whatever prosperity had befallen them, they ascribe it to the grace of God. And, certainly, it is then that men experience from the prosperity which befalls them, a holy and a well-regulated joy, when it bursts forth in the praises of God. [138] Let us then, in the first place, bear in mind that this verse relates to the time of joy and prosperity in which God manifested his favor towards his people; secondly, that the faithful here manifest that they are not ungrateful, inasmuch as, having laid aside all vain boasting, they confess that all the victories by which they had become great and renowned proceeded from God, and that it was by his power alone that they had hitherto continued to exist, and had been preserved in safety; and, thirdly, that it was not only once or twice that matter of joy had been afforded them, but that this existed for a long time, inasmuch as God had manifested towards them, during a long and uninterrupted period, divers proofs and tokens of his paternal favor, so that the continuance, and, so to speak, the long experience they had had of it, ought to have been the means of confirming their hope.

Psalm 44:9-14

9. Nevertheless thou hast abhorred us, [139] and put us to shame: and thou goest not forth with our armies. **10**. Thou hast made us to turn back from the enemy: and they that hate us have made of us a spoil for themselves. **11**. Thou hast given us as sheep for food: and thou hast scattered us among the heathen. **12**. Thou hast sold thy people, and not become rich, [140] and thou hast not increased the price of them. **13**. Thou hast made us a reproach to our neighbors, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us. **14**. Thou hast made us a byword among the heathen, and a nodding of the head among the people.

9. *Nevertheless thou hast abhorred us* Here follows a complaint, in which they bewail their present miseries and extreme calamity. There is here described such a change as showed not only that God had ceased to exercise towards them his accustomed favor, but also, that he was openly adverse and hostile to his people. First, they complain that they have been rejected

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"Mais que la chose a continue, d'aage en aage." — *Fr.*

138

"Quand d'icelle ils entrent a rendre louanges a Dieu." — *Fr.* "When from it they are led to give praise to God."

139

"Ou, mis en oubli." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, hast forgotten us."

140

"C'est, sans aucun profit pour toy." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, without any profit to thee."

as through hatred, for such is the proper import of the word זנחת, *zanachta,* which, along with others, I have translated *abhorred* If, however, any would rather translate it *to forget,* or *to be cast off*, I have no great objection to it. They next add, that they had been *put to shame,* namely, because it must necessarily follow that every thing should go ill with them when deprived of the protection of God. This they declare immediately after, when they say, that God *no longer goes forth with their armies* — goes forth as their leader or standard-bearer when they go forth to war.

10. *Thou hast made us to turn back from the enemy.* Here the people of God still further complain, that he had made them to flee before their enemies, and had given them up as a prey to be devoured by them. As the saints firmly believe that men are strong and valiant only in so far as God upholds them by his secret power, they also conclude, that when men flee, and are seized with trembling, it is God who strikes them with terror, so that the poor wretched creatures are deprived of reason, and both their skill and courage fail them. The expression here used is taken from the Law, Deuteronomy 32:30, where Moses says,

"How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the Lord had shut them up?"

The faithful, fully persuaded of this truth, do not ascribe to fortune the change which had passed over them, that those who were wont vigorously and fearlessly to assail their enemies, were now terrified by their very appearance; but they feel assured that it was by the appointment of heaven that they were thus discomfited, and made to flee before their enemies. And as they formerly confessed that the strength which they had hitherto possessed was the gift of God, so, on the other hand, they also acknowledge that the fear by which they are now actuated was inflicted upon them as a punishment by God. And when God thus deprived them of courage, they say that they are exposed to the will of their enemies; for in this sense I interpret the word למו, *lamo,* which I have rendered, *for themselves,* namely, that their enemies destroyed them at their pleasure and without any resistance, as their prey.

To the same purpose is that other comparison, (verse 11) in which they say that *they were given as sheep for food* [141] By this the prophet intimates, that being already vanquished previous to the battle, they fell down, as it were, upon the earth before their enemies, ready to be devoured by them, [142] and not fit for any thing else than to gratify their insatiable cruelty. It

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"This very strongly and strikingly intimates the extent of the persecution and slaughter to which they were exposed; there being no creature in the world of which such vast numbers are constantly slaughtered as of sheep, for the subsistence of man. The constancy of such slaughter is also mentioned in verse 22, as illustrating the continual oppression to which the Hebrews were subject." — *Illustrated Commentary upon the Bible.*

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ought to be observed, that when the faithful represent God as the author of their calamities, it is not in the way of murmuring against him, but that they may with greater confidence seek relief, as it were, from the same hand which smote and wounded them. It is certainly impossible that those who impute their miseries to fortune can sincerely have recourse to God, or look for help and salvation from him. If, therefore, we would expect a remedy from God for our miseries, we must believe that they befall us not by fortune or mere chance, but that they are inflicted upon us properly by his hand. Having stated that they were thus abandoned to the will of their enemies, they add, at the same time, that they were *scattered among the heathen:* a dispersion which was a hundred times more grievous to them than death. The whole glory and felicity of that people consisted in this, that, being united under one God and one King, they formed one body; and that such being the case, it was a sign that the curse of God lay heavy upon them to be mingled among the heathen, and scattered hither and thither like broken members.

12 *Thou hast sold thy people, and not become rich.* In saying that they were sold without any gain, it is meant that they were exposed to sale as slaves that are contemptible, and of no value. In the second clause, too, *And hast not increased the price of them,* there seems to be an allusion to the custom of exposing things to auction, and selling them to the highest bidder. We know that those slaves who were sold were not delivered to the buyers till the price of them had been increased by bidding. Thus the faithful mean, that they were cast out as being altogether worthless, so that their condition had been worse than that of any bond-slave. [143] And as they rather appeal to God than turn to their enemies, of whose pride and cruelty they had just cause to complain, let us learn from this, that there is nothing better, or more advantageous for us in our adversity, than to give ourselves to meditation upon the providence and judgment of God. When men trouble us, it is no doubt the devil who drives them to it, and it is with him we have to do; but we must, notwithstanding, raise our thoughts to God himself, that we may know that we are proved and tried by him, either to chastise us, or to exercise our patience, or to subdue the sinful desires of our flesh, or to humble us and train us to the practice of self-denial. And when we hear that the Fathers who lived under the Law were treated so ignominiously, there is no reason why we should lose courage by any outrage or ill treatment, if God should at any time see meet to subject us to it. It is not here said simply that God sold some people, but that he

"Prests a estre par eux devorez." — *Fr.*

143

As if they had said, Thou hast sold us to our enemies at whatever price they would give; like a person who sells things that are useless at any price, not so much for the sake of gain, as to get quit of what he considers of no value and burdensome.

sold his own people, as if his own inheritance were of no estimation in his sight. Even at this day, we may in our prayers still make the same complaint, provided we, at the same time, make use of this example, for the purpose of supporting and establishing our faith, so that, however much afflicted we may be, our hearts may not fail us. In Isaiah 52:3, God, using the same form of speech, says that he sold his people without price; but there it is to be understood in a different sense, namely, to show that he will have no difficulty in redeeming them, because he is under no obligation to those that bought them, and had received nothing from them in return.

13 *Thou hast made us a reproach to our neighbors* Here the Psalmist speaks of their neighbors, who were all actuated either by some secret ill-will, or avowed enmity to the people of God. And certainly it often happens, that neighborhood, which ought to be the means of preserving mutual friendship, engenders all discord and strife. But there was a special reason in respect of the Jews; for they had taken possession of the country in spite of all men, and their religion being hateful to others, so to speak, served as a trumpet to stir up war, and inflamed their neighbors with rage against them. Many, too, cherished towards them a feeling of jealousy, such as the Idumeans, who were inflated on the ground of their circumcision, and imagined that they also worshipped the God of Abraham as well as the Jews. But what proved the greatest calamity to them was, that they were exposed to the reproach and derision of those who hated them on the ground of their worship of the true God. The faithful illustrate still farther the greatness of their calamity by another circumstance, telling us, in the last clause of the verse, that they were met by reproaches on all sides; for they were beset round about by their enemies, so that they would never have enjoyed one moment of peace unless God had miraculously preserved them. Nay, they add still farther, (verse 14,) that they were a *proverb, a byword,* or *jest,* even among the nations that were far off. The word משל, *mashal,* which is translated *proverb,* might be taken in the sense of a *heavy imprecation* or *curse,* as well as of *a byword or jest;* but the sense will be substantially the same, namely, that there were no people under heaven held in greater detestation, insomuch that their very name was bandied about every where in proverbial allusions, as a term of reproach. To the same purpose also is *the wagging,* or *shaking of the head,* which occurs in Psalm 22, of which we have already spoken. There can be no doubt that the faithful recognised this as inflicted upon them by the vengeance of God, of which mention was made in the Law. In order to arouse themselves to the consideration of the judgments of God, they carefully compared with the threatenings of God all the punishments which he inflicted upon them. But the Law had declared beforehand, in express terms, this derision of the Gentiles, which they now relate as a thing that had come to pass, (Deuteronomy 28:3.) Moreover, when it is said, *among the heathen,* and *among the people,* the repetition is very emphatic and expressive; for it was a thing quite unseemly and

intolerable, that the heathen nations should presume to torment with their scoffings the chosen people of God, and revile them by their blasphemies at their pleasure. That the godly complained not of these things without cause is abundantly obvious from a passage in Cicero, in his oration in defense of Flaccus, in which that heathen orator, with his accustomed pride, scoffs no less against God than against the Jews, asserting that it was perfectly clear that they were a nation hated of the gods, inasmuch as they had often, and, as it were, from age to age, been wasted with so many misfortunes, and in the end subjected to a most miserable bondage, and kept, as it were, under the feet of the Romans. [144]

Psalm 44:15-21

> **15**. My reproach is daily [145] before me, and the shame of my face hath quite covered me, **16**. Because of the voice of him who reproached me; because of the face of the enemy and the avenger. **17**. All this has come upon us, and we have not forgotten thee, nor dealt falsely in thy covenant: **18**. Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps declined from thy path. **19**. Although thou hast wasted us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death: **20**. If we have forgotten the name of our God, and have stretched out our hands to a strange god: **21**. Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart.

15 *My reproach is daily before me.* The Hebrew words כלהיום, *col-hayom,* mean all the day, and denote long continuance: but they may be understood in two ways, either for the whole or entire day, from morning to evening, or for continued succession of days. According to either of these interpretations, the meaning is, that there is no end to their misfortunes. As to the change of the number from the plural to the singular, it is not at all inconsistent that what is spoken in the name of the Church should be uttered, as it were, in the person of one man. The reason is added why they were so overwhelmed with shame, that they dared not to lift up their eyes and their *face,* namely, because they had no respite, but were incessantly subjected to the insolence and reproach of their enemies. Had they been allowed to hide themselves in some corner, they might have endured, as well as they were able, their calamities in secret; but when their enemies openly derided them with the greatest insolence, it served to redouble the wound inflicted upon them. They, therefore, complain that their calamities had accumulated to such an extent, that they were forced unceasingly to hear blasphemies and bitter

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"Et comme tenue sous les pieds des Romains." — *Fr.*

145

"Ou, tout le jour." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, all the day."

reproaches. They describe their enemies by the epithet *avengers,* a term which, among the Hebrews, denotes barbarity and cruelty, accompanied with pride, as we have remarked on the 8th Psalm

17 *All this has come upon us, etc.* As they have already attributed to God all the afflictions which they endured, if they should now say that they were undeservedly afflicted, it would be the same thing as to accuse God of injustice; and thus what is here spoken would no longer be a holy prayer, but rather an impious blasphemy. It is, however, to be observed, that the faithful, although in their adversities they do not perceive any obvious reason for being so dealt with, yet they rest assured of this, and regard it as a fixed principle, that God has some good reasons for treating them so severely. At the same time, it is proper to observe, that the godly do not speak in this place of the time past, but rather allege their patient endurance, which was no small token of their piety, since, in the most humble manner, they thus bowed their neck to the yoke of God. We see how the great majority of men murmur and obstinately fret against God, like refractory horses which rage furiously against their masters, and strike them with their feet. And, therefore, we know that the man who, in affliction, imposes a holy restraint upon himself, that he may not by any impatience be carried away from the path of duty, has made no inconsiderable attainments in the fear of God. It is an easy matter even for hypocrites to bless God in the time of their prosperity; but as soon as he begins to deal hardly with them, they break forth into a rage against him. Accordingly, the faithful declare that, although so many afflictions as they endured tended to turn them aside from the right path, they did not forget God, but always served him, even when he did not show himself favorable and merciful towards them. They do not, therefore, proclaim their virtues in a former and distant period of their history, but only allege, that even in the midst of afflictions they steadfastly kept *the covenant of God* It is well known, that long before the persecution of Antiochus, there were many abuses and corruptions which provoked the vengeance of God against them, so that, in respect of that period, they had no ground to boast of such integrity as is here described. True it is that, as we shall very soon see, God spared them, thus showing that they had been afflicted more for his name's sake than for their own sins; but the forbearance which God exercised towards them in this respect was not sufficient to warrant them to plead exemption from guilt. We must, therefore, consider that in this place they do nothing more than allege their own patience, in that, amidst such grievous and hard temptations, they had not turned aside from the service of God. In the first place, they affirm, *We have not forgotten thee:* for, indeed, afflictions are, as it were, like so many clouds which conceal heaven from our view, so that God might then readily slip from our remembrance, as if we were far removed from him. They add, secondly, *We have not dealt falsely in thy covenant:* for, as I have said, the wickedness of men discovers itself more especially when they are tried more

severely than they had anticipated. Thirdly, they declare *that their heart had not turned back* And, lastly, *that their footsteps declined not from the paths of God.* As God is daily inviting us, so our hearts must be always ready to proceed in the paths into which he calls us. Hence follows the direction of our ways; for by our outward works, and by our whole life, we testify that our heart is unfeignedly devoted to God. Instead of the translation, *Nor have our steps declined,* which I have given, some suggest another reading, which is not without some degree of plausibility, namely, *Thou hast made our steps to decline;* for, in the first place, the term תט, *tet,* may be so rendered; and, secondly, according to the arrangement of the words, there is no negative in this clause. As to the meaning, however, I am not at all of their opinion; for they connect this passage with that in Isaiah 63:17,

"O Lord, why hast thou made us to err from thy ways?"

The complaint which is here made amounts rather to this, That the faithful are like poor wretched creatures wandering in desert places, seeing God had withdrawn his hand from them. The expression, *The paths of God,* does not always refer to doctrine, but sometimes to prosperous and desirable events.

19 *Although thou hast broken us in the place of dragons.* In the Hebrew it is, *For thou hast broken us, etc.;* but the causal particle, כי, *ki,* according to the idiom of the Hebrew language, is often taken in the sense of *although* or *when.* [146] And certainly it must be so rendered in this place, for these three verses are connected, and the sentence is incomplete till the end of the words, *For he knoweth the secrets of the heart.* The faithful repeat more largely what we have already seen, namely, that although plunged into the greatest depth of miseries, yet they continued steadfast in their resolution, and in the right way. If we consider the distressing circumstances in which they were placed, it will not appear to us a hyperbolical mode of speech, when they say that they were *broken* even within the depths of the sea; for by *the place of dragons* I understand not the deserts and solitary places, but the deepest gulfs of the sea. Accordingly, the word תנים, *tannim,* which others translate

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"Il y a en Hebrieu, Car tu nous as, etc. Mais souvent selon la maniere de la langue Hebraique, Car, se prend pour Combien que, ou Quand." — *Fr.*

dragons, [147] I would rather render *whales,* [148] as it is also understood in many other places. This interpretation is obviously confirmed by the following clause, in which they complain that *they had been covered with the shadow of death,* which implies that they were swallowed up of death itself. Let us, however, remember, that in these words the Holy Ghost dictates to us a form of prayer; and that, therefore, we are enjoined to cultivate a spirit of invincible fortitude and courage, which may serve to sustain us under the weight of all the calamities we may be called to endure, so that we may be able to testify of a truth, that even when reduced to the extremity of despair, we have never ceased to trust in God; that no temptations, however unexpected, could expel his fear from our hearts; and, in fine, that we were never so overwhelmed by the burden of our afflictions, however great, as not to have our eyes always directed to him. But it is proper for us to notice still more particularly the style of speaking here employed by the faithful. In order to show that they still continued steadfastly in the pure service of God, they affirm that they have not lifted up their hearts or their hands to any but to the God of Israel alone. It would not have been enough for them to have cherished some confused notion of the Deity: it was necessary that they should receive in its purity the true religion. Even those who murmur against God may be constrained to acknowledge some Divinity; but they frame for themselves a god after their own pleasure. And this is an artifice of the devil, who, because he cannot at once eradicate from our hearts all sense of religion, endeavors to overthrow our faith, by suggesting to our minds these devices — that we must seek another God; or that the God whom we have hitherto served must be appeased after another manner; or else that the assurance of his favor must be sought elsewhere than in the Law and the Gospel. Since, then, it is a much more difficult matter for men, amidst the tossings and waves of adversity, to continue steadfast and

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"Lequel les autres traduisent dragons." This is the sense in which the expression is understood by several eminent critics. Aquila explains it thus: "In a desert place where great serpents are found;" and Bishop Hare thus: "In desert places among wild beasts and serpents. *The place of dragons*, observes Bishop Mant, appears to mean the wilderness; in illustration of which, it may be noticed from Dr Shaw, that 'vipers, especially in the wilderness of Sin, which might be called the inheritance of dragons, (see Malachi 1:3,) were very dangerous and troublesome; not only our camels, but the Arabs who attended them, running every moment the risk of being bitten.'" Viewed in this light, we must understand the language either as meaning that the Israelites had been driven from their dwellings and places of abode, and compelled to dwell in some gloomy wilderness infested by serpents; or that the fierce and cruel persecutors into whose hands God had delivered them are compared to serpents, and that the circumstances in which the chosen tribes were now placed resembled those of a people who had fallen into a wilderness, where they heard nothing but the hissing of serpents, and the howlings of beasts of prey.

148

Williams reads, "*In the place of sea-monsters*, perhaps crocodiles;" and thinks the allusion is to a shipwreck.

tranquil in the true faith, we must carefully observe the protestation which the Holy Fathers here make, that even when reduced to the lowest extremity of distress by calamities of every kind, they nevertheless did not cease to trust in the true God.

This they express still more clearly in the following clause, in which they say, *We have not stretched out our hands* [149] *to a strange god.* By these words they intimate, that, contented with God alone, they did not suffer their hopes to be divided on different objects, nor gazed around them in search of other means of assistance. Hence we learn, that those whose hearts are thus divided and distracted by various expectations are forgetful of the true God, to whom we fail to yield the honor which is due to him, if we do not repose with confidence in him alone. And certainly, in the true and rightful service of God, faith and supplication which proceeds from it hold the first place: for we are guilty of depriving him of the chief part of his glory, when we seek apart from him in the least degree our own welfare. Let us then bear in mind, that it is a true test of our piety, when, being plunged into the lowest depths of disasters, we lift up our eyes, our hopes, and our prayers, to God alone. And it only serves to demonstrate more convincingly and clearly the impiety of Popery, when, after having confessed their faith in the one true God with the mouth, its rotaries the next moment degrade his glory by ascribing it to created objects. They indeed excuse themselves by alleging, that in having recourse to Saint Christopher and other saints of their own making, they do not claim for them the rank of Deity, but only employ them as intercessors with God to obtain his favor. It is, however, well known to every one, that the form of the prayers which they address to the saints, [150] is in no respects different from those prayers which they present to God. Besides, although we should yield this point to them, it will still be a frivolous excuse to pretend that they are seeking advocates or intercessors for themselves. This is as much as to say, that Christ is not sufficient for them, or rather, that his office is wholly lost sight of among them. Moreover, we should carefully observe the scope of this passage. The faithful declare, that they did not stretch forth their hands to other gods, because it is an error too common among men to forsake God, and to seek for other means of relief when they find that their afflictions continue to oppress them. So long as we are gently and affectionately treated of God we resort to him, but as soon as any adversity befalls us we begin to doubt. And if we are pressed still further, or if there be no end to our afflictions, the very continuance of them tempts us to despair; and despair generates various

149

That is, in the attitude of worship.

150

"Que le formulaire des prieres qui ils font aux saincts." — *Fr.*

kinds of false confidence. Hence arises a multitude of new gods framed after the fancy of men. Of *the lifting up of the hands* we have spoken elsewhere.

21 *Shall not God search this out?* We have here a solemn and emphatic protestation, in which the people of God dare to appeal to him as the judge of their integrity and uprightness. From this it appears, that they did not plead their cause openly before men, but communed with themselves as if they had been before the judgment-seat of God; and moreover, as a token of still greater confidence, they add, that nothing is hidden from God. Why is it that hypocrites often call God to witness, if it is not because they imagine that, by concealing their wickedness under some specious disguise, they have escaped the judgment of God? and thus they would represent the character of God to be different from what it is, as if by their deceptions they could dazzle his eyes. Whenever, therefore, we come before God, let us at the same time remember, that there is nothing to be gained by any vain pretense in his presence, inasmuch as he knows the heart.

Psalm 44:22-26

22. Surely for thy sake we are killed all the day; we are accounted as sheep for slaughter. **23**. Arise, O Lord! why sleepest thou? awake, do not forget us or ever. [151] **24**. Why hidest thou thy face? wilt thou forget our misery and our affliction [152] **25**. For our soul is humbled to the dust: our belly cleaveth to the earth. **26**. Arise for our help, and redeem us, for thy goodness' sake.

22 *Surely for thy sake we are killed all the day.* Here the faithful urge another reason why God should show mercy to them, namely, that they are subjected to sufferings not on account of crimes committed by themselves, but simply because the ungodly, from hatred to the name of God, are opposed to them. "This," it may be said, "seems at first sight a foolish complaint, for the answer which Socrates gave to his wife was apparently more to the purpose, when, upon her lamenting that he was about to die wrongfully, [153] he reproved her saying, That it was better for him to die innocently than from any fault of his own. And even the consolation which Christ sets forth

'Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake,'
Matthew 5:10,

151

Fry reads the last clause, "Awake, do not fail for ever;" and observes, "The term is sometimes applied to the failing of a stream through drought."

152

"Et oublies nostre affliction et nostre oppression?" — *Fr.* "And forgettest our affliction and our oppression?"

153

"Quand elle se lamentant de ce qu'on le faisoit-mourir a tort." — *Fr.*

seems to differ widely from the language here expressed by the people of God. It seems also opposed to what Peter says,

'Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed;
but let him glorify God on this behalf.' —1 Peter 4:16,

"To this I answer, That although it is the greatest alleviation of our sorrow that the cause for which we suffer is common to us with Christ himself, yet it is neither in vain nor out of place that the faithful here plead with God that they suffer wrongfully for his sake, in order that he may the more vigorously set himself for their defense. It is right that he should have respect to the maintenance of his glory, which the wicked endeavor to overthrow, when they insolently persecute those who serve him. And from this it appears the more clearly that this psalm was composed when the people languished in captivity, or else when Antiochus laid waste the Church, because religion was at that time the cause of suffering. The Babylonians were enraged by the constancy of the people, when they perceived that the whole body of the Jews, vanquished and routed as they were, ceased not on that account to condemn the superstitions of the country; and the rage of Antiochus was wholly bent upon extinguishing entirely the name of God. Moreover, what made the thing appear more strange and difficult to bear was, that God, so far from repressing the insolence and the wrongs inflicted by the wicked, left them, on the contrary, to continue in their cruelty, and gave them, as it were, loose reins. Accordingly, the godly declare that *they are killed all the day long,* and that they are counted of no more value than *sheep for slaughter* It is, however, proper always to bear in mind, what I have already remarked, that they were not so free from all blame as that God, in afflicting them, might not justly chastise them for their sins. But whilst in his incomparable goodness he fully pardons all our sins, he yet allows us to be exposed to unmerited persecutions, that we may with greater alacrity glory in bearing the cross with Christ, and thereby become partakers with him in his blessed resurrection. We have already said, that there was no other reason why the rage of the enemy was so inflamed against them, but that the people would not revolt from the law, and renounce the worship of the true God. It now remains for us to apply this doctrine to our own circumstances; and, first, let us consider that it becomes us, after the example of the fathers, patiently to submit to the afflictions by which it is necessary to seal the confession of our faith; and, secondly, that even in the deepest afflictions we must continue to call upon the name of God and abide in his fear. Paul, however, in his Epistle to the Romans, chapter 8:36, proceeds still farther; for he quotes this not only by way of example, but also affirms that the condition of the Church in all ages is here portrayed. Thus, then, we ought to regard it as a settled point, that a state of continual warfare in bearing the cross is enjoined upon us by divine appointment. Sometimes, it is true, a truce or respite may be granted us; for God, has compassion upon our infirmity: but although the sword of persecution is not always unsheathed against us, yet,

as we are the members of Christ, it behoves us always to be ready to bear the cross with him. Lest, therefore, the severity of the cross should dismay us, let us always have present to our view this condition of the Church, that as we are adopted in Christ, we are appointed to the slaughter. If we neglect to do this, the same thing will befall us which happens to many apostates; for as it is in their judgment too severe and wretched a state, even while they live, to be continually dying, to be exposed to the mockery of others, and not to have one moment free from fear, — to rid themselves of that necessity they shamefully forsake and deny Christ. In order, therefore, that weariness, or dread of the cross, may not root up from our hearts true godliness, let us continually reflect upon this, that it behoves us to drink the cup which God puts into our hands, and that no one can be a Christian who does not dedicate himself to God.

23 *Arise, O Lord! why sleepest thou?* Here the saints desire that God, having pity upon them, would at length send them help and deliverance. Although God allows the saints to plead with him in this babbling manner, when in their prayers they desire him to rise up or awake; yet it is necessary that they should be fully persuaded that he keeps watch for their safety and defense. We must guard against the notion of Epicurus, who framed to himself a god who, having his abode in heaven, [154] delighted only in idleness and pleasure. But as the insensibility of our nature is so great, that we do not at once comprehend the care which God has of us, the godly here request that he would be pleased to give some evidence that he was neither forgetful of them nor slow to help them. We must, indeed, firmly believe that God ceases not to regard us, although he appears not to do so; yet as such an assurance is of faith, and not of the flesh, that is to say, is not natural to us, [155] the faithful familiarly give utterance before God to this contrary sentiment, which they conceive from the state of things as it is presented to their view; and in doing so, they discharge from their breasts those morbid affections which belong to the corruption of our nature, in consequence of which faith then shines forth in its pure and native character. If it is objected, that prayer, than which nothing is more holy, is defiled, when some froward imagination of the flesh is mingled with it, I confess that this is true; but in using this freedom, which the Lord vouchsafes to us, let us consider that, in his goodness and mercy, by which he sustains us, he wipes away this fault, that our prayers may not be defiled by it.

25 *For our soul is humbled to the dust* The people of God again deplore the greatness of their calamities, and in order that God may be the more

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"Lequel estant au ciel." — *Fr.*

155

"C'est dire, en nostre sens naturel." — *Fr.*

disposed to help them, they declare to him that they are afflicted in no ordinary manner. By the metaphors which they here employ, they mean not only that they are cast down, but also that they are crushed and laid upon the earth, so that they are not able to rise again. Some take the word *soul* for the body, so that there would be in this verse a repetition of the same sentiment; but I would rather take it for the part in which the life of man consists; as if they had said, We are cast down to the earth, and lie prostrate upon our belly, without any hope of getting up again. After this complaint they subjoin a prayer, (verse 26,) that God would *arise for their help* By the word *redeem* they mean not ordinary kind of help, for there was no other means of securing their preservation but by redeeming them. And yet there can be no doubt, that they were diligently employed in meditating upon the great redemption from which all the deliverances which God is daily effecting in our behalf, when he defends us from dangers by various means, flow as streams from their source. In a previous part of the psalm, they had boasted of the steadfastness of their faith; but to show us that, in using this language, they boasted not in their own merits, they do not claim here some recompense for what they had done and suffered for God. They are contented to ascribe their salvation to the unmerited goodness of God as the alone cause of it.

Psalm 45

PSALM 45

In this psalm, the grace and beauty of Solomon, his virtues in ruling the kingdom, and also his power and riches, are illustrated and described in terms of high commendation. More especially, as he had taken to wife a stranger out of Egypt, the blessing of God is promised to him in this relationship, provided the newly espoused bride, bidding adieu to her own nation, and renouncing all attachment to it, devote herself wholly to her husband. At the same time, there can be no doubt, that under this figure the majesty, wealth, and extent of Christ's kingdom are described and illustrated by appropriate terms, to teach the faithful that there is no felicity greater or more desirable than to live under the reign of this king, and to be subject to his government.

To the chief musician upon the lilies; of the sons of Korah;
for instruction; a song of loves.

It is well known that this psalm was composed concerning Solomon; but it is uncertain who was its author. It is, in my opinion, probable, that some one of the prophets or godly teachers (whether after Solo-men's death, or while he was yet alive, it is of no importance to inquire) took this as the subject of his discourse, with the design of showing, that whatever excellence had been seen in Solomon had a higher application. This psalm is called *a song of loves,* not, as some suppose, because it illustrates the fatherly love of God, as to the benefits which he had conferred in such a distinguished manner upon Solomon, but because it contains an expression of rejoicing on account of his happy and prosperous marriage. Thus the words, *of loves,* are put for a descriptive epithet, and denote, that it is a love-song.

Indeed, Solomon was called ידידיה, *Yedidyah,* which means *beloved of the Lord,* 2 Samuel 12:25. But the context, in my opinion, requires that this term ירידות, *yedidoth,* that is to say, *loves,* be understood as referring to the mutual love which husband and wife ought to cherish towards each other. But as the word *loves* is sometimes taken in a bad sense, and as even conjugal affection itself, however well regulated, has always some irregularity of the flesh mingled with it; this song is, at the same time, called משכיל, *maskil,* to teach us, that the subject here treated of is not some obscene or unchaste amours, but that, under what is here said of Solomon as a type, the holy and divine union of Christ and his Church is described and set forth. As to the remaining part of the inscription, interpreters explain it in various ways. שושן, *shushan,* properly signifies *a lily;* and the sixtieth psalm has in its inscription the same term in the singular number. Here, and in the eightieth psalm, the plural number is employed. It is therefore probable, that it was either the beginning of a common song, or else some instrument of music. But as this is a matter of no great consequence, I give no opinion, but leave it undecided; for, without any danger to the truth, every one may freely adopt on this point whatever view he chooses.

Psalm 45:1-5

1. My heart is boiling over with a good matter: I shall speak of the works which I have made concerning the king: my tongue is as the pen of a swift writer. **2**. Thou art fairer than the sons of men: grace is poured into thy lips; because God hath blessed thee for ever. **3**. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O mighty one! with glory and majesty. [156] **4**. And in thy majesty do thou prosper: ride forth upon the word of truth, and meekness, and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. **5**. Thine arrows are sharp (so that the people fall under thee) in the heart of the enemies of the King.

1 *My heart is boiling over* [157] *with a good matter* This preface shows sufficiently that the subject of the psalm is no common one; for whoever the

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"(Qui est,) gloire et magnificence." — *Fr.* "(Which is,) glory and majesty."

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"רחש, *rachash*, *boileth*, or *bubbleth up*, denotes the language of the heart, full and ready for utterance." — *Bythner's Lyra* The Psalmist's heart was so full and warmed with the subject of the psalm, that it could not contain; and the opening of the poem evinces that it was so, for he abruptly breaks forth into an annunciation of its subject as if impatient of restraint. Ainsworth thinks there is here an allusion to the boiling of the *minchah*, or meat-offering under the law in the frying-pan, (Leviticus 7:9.) It was there boiled in oil, being made of fine flour unleavened, mingled with oil, (Leviticus 11:5;) and afterwards was presented to the Lord by the priest, verse 8, etc. "Here," says he, "the matter of this psalm is the *minchah* or oblation, which with the oil, the grace of the spirit, was boiled and prepared in the prophet's breast, and now presented."

author of it may have been, he here intimates, at the very outset, that he will treat of great and glorious things. The Holy Spirit is not accustomed to inspire the servants of God to utter great swelling words, and to pour forth empty sounds into the air; and, therefore, we may naturally conclude, that the subject here treated of is not merely a transitory and earthly kingdom, but sortie-thing more excellent. Were not this the case, what end would it serve to announce, as the prophet does in such a magnificent style, that his heart *was boiling over,* from his ardent desire to be employed in rehearsing the praises of the king? Some prefer to translate the word *to utter;* but the other signification of the word appears to me to be more appropriate; and it is confirmed by this, that from this verb is derived the noun מרהשת, *marchesheth,* a word which is found once or twice in Moses, and signifies a frying-pan, in which sweatmeats are baked. It is then of the same import as if the inspired writer had said, My heart is ready to breathe forth something excellent and worthy of being remembered. He afterwards expresses the harmony between the tongue and the heart, when he compares his tongue to *the pen of a swift* and ready *writer*

2. *Thou art fairer than the sons of men.* The Psalmist commences his subject with the commendation of the beauty of the king, and then he proceeds also to praise his eloquence. Personal excellence is ascribed to the king, not that the beauty of the countenance, which of itself is not reckoned among the number of the virtues, ought to be very highly valued; but because a noble disposition of mind often shines forth in the very countenance of a man. This may have been the case with Solomon, so that from his very countenance it might have appeared that he was endued with superior gifts. Nor is the grace of oratory undeservedly commended in a king, to whom it belongs, by virtue of his office, not only to rule the people by authority, but also to allure them to obedience by argument and eloquence, just as the ancients feigned that Hercules had in his mouth golden chains, by which he captivated the ears of the common people, and drew them after him. How manifestly does this rebuke the mean-spiritedness of kings in our day, by whom it is regarded as derogatory to their dignity to converse with their subjects, and to employ remonstrance in order to secure their submission; nay, who display a spirit of barbarous tyranny in seeking rather to compel than to persuade them, and in choosing rather to abuse them as slaves, than to govern them by laws and with justice as a tractable and obedient people. But as this excellence was displayed in Solomon, so also did it shine forth more fully afterwards in Christ, to whom his truth serves the part of a scepter, as we shall have occasion by and by to notice mere at large. The term כן-על, *al-ken,* which we have translated *because,* is sometimes rendered *wherefore;* but it is not necessary that we should interpret it in this place in the latter sense, as if Solomon had been blessed on account of his beauty and excellence, for both of these are blessings of God. It is rather to be understood as the reason why Solomon

was distinguished for these endowments, namely, because God had blessed him. As to the interpretation which others give, *God shall bless thee for thy excellency,* it is both cold and forced.

3. *Gird thy sword upon thy thigh.* Here Solomon is praised as well for his warlike valor, which strikes terror into]his enemies, as for his virtues which give him authority among his subjects, and secure him their reverence. On the one hand, no king will be able to preserve and defend his subjects, unless he is formidable to his enemies; and, on the other hand, it will be to little purpose to make war boldly upon foreign realms, if the internal state of his own kingdom is not established and regulated in uprightness and justice. Accordingly, the inspired writer says, that the sword with which he will be girded will be, in the first place, a token of warlike prowess to repel and rout his enemies; and, secondly, of authority *also,* that he might not be held in contempt among his own subjects. He adds, at the same time, that the glory which he will obtain will not be a merely transient thing, like the pomp and vain-glory of kings, which soon decay, but will be of lasting duration, and will greatly increase.

He then comes to speak of the virtues which flourish most in a time of peace, and which, by an appropriate similitude, he shows to be the true means of adding strength and prosperity to a kingdom. At first sight, indeed, it seems to be a strange and inelegant mode of expression, to speak of *riding upon truth, meekness, and righteousness,* (verse 4;) but, as I have said, he very suitably compares these virtues to chariots, in which the king is conspicuously borne aloft with great majesty. These virtues he opposes not only to the vain pomp and parade in which earthly kings proudly boast; but also to the vices and corruptions by which they endeavor most commonly to acquire authority and renown. Solomon himself

"Mercy and truth preserve the king;
and his throne is upholden by mercy."— Proverbs 20:28

But, on the contrary, when worldly kings desire to enlarge their dominions, and to increase their power, ambition, pride, fierceness, cruelty, exactions, rapine, and violence, are the horses and chariots which they employ to accomplish their ends; and, therefore, it is not to be wondered at if God should very often cast them down, when thus elated with pride and vain-glory, from their tottering and decayed thrones. For kings, then, to cultivate faithfulness and justice, and to temper their government with mercy and kindness, is the true and solid foundation of kingdoms. The latter clause of the verse intimates, that every thing which Solomon undertakes shall prosper, provided he combine with warlike courage the qualities of justice and mercy. Kings who are carried headlong with a blind and violent impulse, may for a time spread terror and consternation around them; but they soon fall by the force of their own efforts. Due moderation, therefore, and uniform self-restraint, are the best means for making the hands of the valiant to be feared and dreaded.

5. *Thy arrows are sharp, etc.* Here the Psalmist again refers to warlike power, when he says that the *arrows* of the king shall be sharp, so that they shall pierce the *hearts of his enemies;* by which he intimates that he has weapons in his hand with which to strike, even at a distance, all his enemies, whoever they may be, who resist his authority. In the same sense also he says that *the people shall fall under him;* as if it had been said, Whoever shall engage in the attempt to shake the stability of his kingdom shall miserably perish, for the king has in his hand a sufficiency of power to break the stubbornness of all such persons.

Psalm 45:6-7

6. Thy throne, O God: is for ever and ever the sceptre of thy kingdom is the sceptre of equity. **7**. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: because God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

6. *Thy throne, O God! is for ever and ever.* In this verse the Psalmist commends other princely virtues in Solomon, namely, the eternal duration of his throne, and then the justice and rectitude of his mode of government. The Jews, indeed, explain this passage as if the discourse were addressed to God, but such an interpretation is frivolous and impertinent. Others of them read the word אלהים, *Elohim,* in the genitive case, and translate it *of God,* thus: *The throne of thy God* But for this there is no foundation, and it only betrays their presumption in not hesitating to wrest the Scriptures so shamefully, that they may not be constrained to acknowledge the divinity of the Messiah. [158] The simple and natural sense is, that Solomon reigns not tyrannically, as the most of kings do, but by just and equal laws, and that, therefore, his throne shall be established for ever. Although he is called *God,* because God has imprinted some mark of his glory in the person of kings, yet this title cannot well be applied to a mortal man; for we nowhere read in Scripture that man or angel has been distinguished by this title without some qualification. It is true, indeed, that angels as well as judges are called collectively אלהים, *Elohim, gods;* but not individually, and no one man is called by this name without some word added by way of restriction, as when Moses was appointed to be a god to Pharaoh, (Exodus 7:1.) From this we may naturally infer, that this psalm relates, as we shall soon see, to a higher than any earthly kingdom.

In the next verse there is set before us a fuller statement of the righteousness for which this monarch is distinguished; for we are told that he is no less strict in, the punishment of iniquity than in maintaining justice. We know how many and great evils are engendered by impunity and license in doing

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evil, when kings are negligent and slack in punishing crimes. Hence the old proverb, That it is better to live under a prince who gives no allowance, than under one who imposes no restraint. To the same purpose also is the well-known sentiment of Solomon,

"He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord." — (Proverbs 17:15)

Just and rightful government, therefore, consists of these two parts: first, That they who rule should carefully restrain wickedness; and, secondly, That they should vigorously maintain righteousness; even as Plato has well and wisely said, that civil government consists of two parts — rewards and punishments. When the Psalmist adds, that the king was *anointed above his fellows,* this is not to be understood as the effect or fruit of his righteousness, but rather as the cause of it: for the love of uprightness and equity by which Solomon was actuated arose from the fact, that he was divinely appointed to the kingdom. In ordaining him to the honor of authority and empire, Jehovah, at the same time, furnished him with the necessary endowments. The particle כם-על *al-ken,* therefore, as in the former instance, is to be understood here in the sense of *because;* as if it had been said, It is no wonder that Solomon is so illustrious for his love of justice, since, from the number of all his brethren, he was chosen to be consecrated king by holy anointing. Even before he was born, he was solemnly named by a divine oracle, as successor to the kingdom, and when he was elevated to the throne, he was also adorned with princely virtues. From this it follows, that anointing in respect of order preceded righteousness, and that, therefore, righteousness cannot be accounted the cause of the anointing. The royal dignity is called *the oil of gladness,* because of the effect of it; for the felicity and welfare of the Church depended upon the kingdom promised to the house of David. [159]

Hitherto, I have explained the text in the literal sense. But it is necessary that I should now proceed to illustrate somewhat more largely the comparison of Solomon with Christ, which I have only cursorily noticed. It would be quite sufficient for the pious and humble simply to state what is obvious, from the usual tenor of Scripture, that the posterity of David typically represented Christ to the ancient people of God; but as the Jews and other ungodly men refuse to submit cordially to the force of truth, it is of importance to show briefly from the context itself, the principal reasons from which it appears that some of the things here spoken are not applicable fully and perfectly to Solomon. As I intimated at the outset, the design of the prophet who composed this psalm was to confirm the hearts of the faithful, and to guard them against the terror and alarm with which

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"Promis a la maison de David." — *Fr.*

the melancholy change that happened soon after might fill their minds. An everlasting duration, it might be said, had been promised to this kingdom, and it fell into decay after the death of one man. To this objection, therefore, the prophet replies, that although Rehoboam, who was the first successor of that glorious and powerful king, had his sovereignty reduced within narrow limits, so that a great part of the people were cut off and placed beyond the bounds of his dominion, yet that was no reason why the faith of the Church should fail; for in the kingdom of Solomon God had exhibited a type or figure of that everlasting kingdom which was still to be looked for and expected. In the first place, the name of king is ascribed to Solomon, simply by way of eminence, to teach us, that what is here said is not spoken of any common or ordinary king, but of that illustrious sovereign, whose throne God had promised should endure as long as the sun and moon continued to shine in the heavens, (Psalm 72:5.) David certainly was king, and so were those who succeeded Solomon. It is necessary then to observe, that there is in this term some special significance, as if the Holy Spirit had selected this one man from all others, to distinguish him by the highest mark of sovereignty. Besides, how inconsistent would it be to commend very highly warlike valor in Solomon, who was a man of a meek and quiet disposition, and who having ascended the throne when the kingdom enjoyed tranquillity and peace, devoted himself only to the cultivation of those things that are suitable to a time of peace, and never distinguished himself by any action in battle? But, above all, no clearer testimony could be adduced of the application of this psalm to Christ, than what is here said of the eternal duration of the kingdom. There can be no doubt, that allusion is here made to the holy oracle of which I have already made mention, That as long as the sun and moon shall endure in the heavens the throne of David shall endure. Even the Jews themselves are constrained to refer this to the Messiah. Accordingly, although the prophet commenced his discourse concerning the son of David, there can be no doubt, that, guided by the Holy Spirit to a higher strain, he comprehended the kingdom of the true and everlasting Messiah. Besides, there is the name אלהים, *Elohim,* which it is proper to notice. It is no doubt also applied both to angels and men, but it cannot be applied to a mere man without qualification. And, therefore, the divine majesty of Christ, beyond all question, is expressly denoted here. [160]

I now proceed to notice the several parts, which however I shall only refer to briefly in passing. We have said that while this song is called a *love song,* or *wedding song,* stilldivine instruction is made to hold the most prominent place in it, lest our imaginations should lead us to regard it as referring to some lascivious and carnal amours. We know also, that in the same sense Christ is called “the perfection of beauty;” not that there was any striking display of it in his countenance, as some men grossly imagine, but because

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he was distinguished by the possession of singular gifts and graces, in which he far excelled all others. Nor is it an unusual style of speaking, that what is spiritual in Christ should be described under the form of earthly figures. The kingdom of Christ, it is said, shall be opulent; and in addition to this it is said, that it shall attain to a state of great glory, such as we see where there is great prosperity and vast power. In this description there is included also abundance of pleasures. Now, there is nothing of all this that applies literally to the kingdom of Christ, which is separated from the pomps of this world. But as it was the design of the prophets to adapt their instruction to the capacity of God's ancient people, so in describing the kingdom of Christ, and the worship of God which ought to be observed in it, they employ figures taken from the ceremonies of the Law. If we bear in mind this mode of statement, in accordance with which such descriptions are made, there will no longer be any obscurity in this passage. It is also deserving of our notice, that, after the Psalmist has commended this heavenly king for his eloquence, he also describes him as armed with *his sword.* As, on the one hand, he governs by the influence of persuasion, those who willingly submit to his authority, and manifest docility of disposition; so, on the other hand, as there have been in all ages, and will continue to be, many who are rebellious and disobedient, it is necessary that the unbelieving should be made to feel in their own destruction that Christ has not come unarmed. While, therefore, he, is alluring us with meekness and kindness to himself, let us promptly and submissively yield to his authority, lest he should fall upon us, armed as he is with his sword and with deadly arrows. It is said, indeed, with much propriety, that *grace is poured into his lips;* for the Gospel, in its very nature, breathes the odour of life: but if we are stubborn and rebellious,

It is somewhat strange, after making the above observations, that Calvin should consider this beautiful psalm as referring primarily to Solomon, and to his marriage with the daughter of Pharaoh. That this is an epithalamium or nuptial song, is readily admitted; but that it refers to the nuptials of Solomon with Pharaoh's daughter, there seems no just ground for concluding. If Solomon could not be described as "fairer than the children of men," as "a mighty warrior," as "a victorious conqueror," as "a prince, whose throne is for ever and ever;" — if the name "God" could not be applied to him; — if it could not be said that his "children," in the room of their father, were made princes in all the earth," (verse 16;) that "his name" "would be remembered in all generations," and that "the people would praise him for ever and ever," (verse 17;) — if these things could not be spoken of him without much incongruity, it may well be doubted whether the primary application of this psalm is to him. Besides, although Solomon was a type of Christ, he was not so in all things, and there is nothing in this poem, nor in any other part of Scripture, which can lead us to regard the marriage of this prince with the daughter of Pharaoh as an image or type of the mystical marriage of Jesus Christ to the Church. We therefore agree with Rosenmüller, that "the notion of Rudinger and Grotius," and other critics, "that this song is an epithalamium — a song in celebration of the marriage of Solomon, and his chief wife, the daughter of Pharaoh, (1 Kings 3:5,) is altogether to be abandoned;" and that it applies exclusively to the Messiah, and to the mystical union between him and his Church; set forth in an allegory borrowed from the manners of an Eastern court, and under the image of conjugal love, he being represented as the bridegroom, and the Church as his bride. — See Appendix.

this grace will become a ground of terror, and Christ himself will convert the very doctrine of his salvation into a sword and arrows against us. From this also there arises no small consolation to us, that the multitude and insolence of the adversaries of Christ may not discourage us. We know well with what arrogance the Papists reject Jesus Christ, whom, nevertheless, they boast to be their King; we know also with what profane contempt the greater part of the world deride him, and how frowardly the Turks and Jews reproach him. In the midst of such disorder, let us remember this prophecy, That Christ has no want of a sword and arrows to overthrow and destroy his enemies. Here I will again briefly repeat what I have noticed above, namely, that however much the Jews endeavor by their cavillings to pervert the sense of this verse, *Thy throne, O God! is for ever and ever,* yet it is sufficient of itself to establish the eternal divinity of Christ: for when the name אלהים, *Elohim* is ascribed either to angels or men, some other mark is at the same time usually added, to distinguish between them and the only true God; but here it is applied to Christ, simply and without any qualification. It is of importance, however, to notice, that Christ is here spoken of as he is

"God manifested in the flesh," — (1 Timothy 3:16.)

He is also called God, as he is the Word, begotten of the Father before all worlds; but he is here set forth in the character of Mediator, and on this account also mention is made of him a little after, as being subject to God. And, indeed, if you limit to his divine nature what is here said of the everlasting duration of his kingdom, we shall be deprived of the inestimable benefit which redounds to us from this doctrine, when we learn that, as he is the head of the Church, the author and protector of our welfare, he reigns not merely for a time, but possesses an endless sovereignty; for from this we derive our greatest confidence both in life and in death. From the following verse also it clearly appears, that Christ is here exhibited to us in the character of Mediator; for he is said *to have been anointed of God,* yea, even *above his fellows,* (Isaiah 42:1; Hebrews 2:17.) This, however, cannot apply to the eternal Word of God, but to Christ in the flesh, and in this character he is both the servant of God and our brother.

Psalm 45:8-12

8. All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whence they have made thee glad **9.** The daughters of kings were among thy honorable women: [161] thy consort stood on thy right hand [162] in gold of Ophir. [163] **10.** Hearken, O daughter!

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"Ou, dames d'honneur." — *Fr. marg.* "Maids of honor."

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The right hand was the place of dignity and honor.

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> And consider, and incline thy ear; and forget thy own people and thy father's house. **11**. And the King shall greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord, and thou shalt worship him. [164] **12.** And the daughter of Tyre with a gift: the rich among the people shall entreat thy face.

8. *All thy garments smell of myrrh* As to the signification of the words I am not disposed to contend much, for I find that even the Jews are not agreed among themselves as to the meaning of the third word, except that from the similarity of pronunciation it may be conjectured to denote cassia. It is sufficient that we understand the prophet as meaning that the garments of the king are perfumed with precious and sweet-smelling odours. He describes Solomon coming forth from his ivory palace amidst shoutings of universal applause and joy. I explain not the word מני, *minni, Out of me,* because no tolerable meaning can be drawn from this. I translate it *whence,* [165] and refer it to the *ivory palaces* Superfluity and excess in pleasures cannot be justified, not only in the common people, but not even in kings; yet, on the other hand, it is necessary to guard against too much austerity, that we may not condemn the moderate display of grandeur which is suitable to their dignity, even as, a little after, the prophet describes the queen sumptuously and royally apparelled. [166] We must, however, at the same

"אופור, *Ophir*; in gold *of Ophir*, *in a golden garment.* Ophir, a country in India abounding in precious gold, 1 Kings 9:28, whose gold was obryzum, or ophrizum, *i e* most excellent." — *Bythner's Lyra*

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"C'est, luy porteras reverence." — *Fr. marg.* That is, thou shalt do him reverence."

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Calvin here seems to take the word מני, *Minni*, which has somewhat perplexed commentators, to be the particle מן, *min*, *out of*, with י, *yod*, paragogic, as it is in Psalm 44:19, and many other places; and to suppose that the relative אשר, *asher*, *which*, a pronoun frequently omitted, is to be understood, — "*out of which* palaces *they have made thee glad.*" This is the view taken by many interpreters. Others understand the word מני, *minni*, to be a noun; (and from Jeremiah 51:27, it appears that מני, *minni*, was the proper name of a territory, which Bochart shows was a district of Armenia;) and they translate the words thus, "From the ivory palaces of Armenia they make thee glad," make thee glad with presents. Others suppose that מני, *minni*, is here the name of a region, *Minnaea* in Arabia Felix, which abounded in myrrh and frankincense; and according to this view, the clause may be rendered, "The Minnaeitas from their ivory palaces make thee glad;" that is, coming to thee from their ivory palaces they gladden thee with presents. Rosenmüller thinks with Schmidt, De Wette, and Gesenius, that a more elegant sense will be brought out if we understand מני, *minni*, as a plural noun in a form somewhat unusual, but of which there are several other examples in the Old Testament, such as שכשי, 2 Samuel 23:8; כרי, 2 Kings 9:4, 19; עמי, 2 Samuel 22:44; Psalm 144:2. "The word," says he, "according to these examples, stands for מנים, and signifies, as in the Syriac, Psalm 150:4, *chords*, *stringed* instruments of music. The sense of the clause will thus be, 'From the palaces of ivory, musical instruments — players on musical instruments — make thee glad.'" — *Rosenmüller on the Messianic Psalms*, pp. 213-215. — *Biblical Cabinet*, volume 32.

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time, consider that all that is here commended in Solomon was not approved of by God. Not to speak of other things, it is well known that from the very first the sin of polygamy was a thing displeasing to God, and yet concubines are here spoken of as included among the blessings of God, for there is no reason to doubt that by *the honorable women,* or *maids of honor,* [167] the prophet means Solomon's wives, of whom mention is made in another place. The daughter of the king of Egypt, whom Solomon had married, was his principal wife, and the first in rank [168] but it appears that the others, whom sacred history describes as occupying an inferior rank, were provided for in a liberal and honorable manner. These the prophet calls the *daughters of kings,* because some of them were descended of the royal blood. In what sense, then, it might be asked, does the prophet account it among the praises of Solomon that he had many wives, — a thing which God condemns in all private *persons,* but expressly in kings? (Deuteronomy 17:17.) Doubtless it may easily be inferred that in commending, according to a common practice, the wealth and glory of the king, as the prophet here does, he did not mean to approve of the abuse of them. It was not his design to set forth the example of a man in opposition to the law of God. It is true, indeed, that the power, dignity, and glory, which Solomon enjoyed, were granted to him as singular blessings from God; but as generally happens, he defiled them greatly by not exercising self-control, and in abusing the great abundance with which he was blessed, by the excessive indulgence of the flesh. In short, it is here recorded what great liberality God manifested towards Solomon in giving him every thing in abundance. As to the fact that he took to him so many wives, and did not exercise a due moderation in his pomp, this is not to be included in the liberality of God, but is a thing as it were accidental.

10. *Hearken, O daughter! and consider* I have no doubt, that what is here said is spoken of the Egyptian woman, whom the prophet has described as standing at the right hand of the king. It was not, indeed, lawful for Solomon to marry a strange woman; but this of itself is to be accounted among the gifts of God, that a king so powerful as the king of Egypt was, [169] sought his alliance. At the same time, as by the appointment of the Law, it was required that the Jews, previous to entering into the marriage

"Comme un peu apres le prophere descrit la Royne ornee somptueusement et magnifiquement." — *Fr.*

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"Ou, dames d'honneur." — *Fr.*

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"Car combien que la fille du Roy d'Egypte que Salomon avoit espousee, fust sa principale femme, et teinst le premier lieu." — *Fr.*

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"Comme estoit la Roy d'Egypte." — *Fr.*

relation, should endeavor to instruct their wives in the pure worship of God, and emancipate them from superstition; in the present instance, in which the wife spoken of was descended from a heathen nation, and who, by her present marriage, was included in the body of the Church, the prophet, in order to withdraw her from her evil training, exhorts her to forget her own country and her father's house, and to assume a new character and other manners. If she did not do this, there was reason to fear, not only that she would continue to observe in private the superstitions and false modes of worshipping God to which she had been habituated, but that also, by her public example, she would draw away many into a similar evil course; and, indeed, this actually came to pass soon after. Such is the reason of the exhortation which the prophet here gives her, in which, in order to render his discourse of more weight, he addresses her by the appellation of *daughter,* a term which it would have been unsuitable for any private man to have used. The more clearly to show how much it behoved the new bride to become altogether a new woman, he employs several terms thereby to secure her attention, *Hearken, consider, and incline thy ear* It is certainly a case in which much vehemence and urgent persuasion are needed, when it is intended to lead us to a complete renunciation of those things in which we take delight, either by nature or by custom. He then shows that there is no reason why the daughter of Pharaoh should feel any regret in forsaking *her father,* her kinsfolk, and the land of Egypt, because she would receive a glorious recompense, which ought to allay the grief she might experience in being separated from them. To reconcile her to the thought of leaving her own country, he encourages her by the consideration that she is married to so illustrious a king.

Let us now return to Christ. And, in the first place, let us remember that what is spiritual is here described to us figuratively; even as the prophets, on account of the dulness of men, were under the necessity of borrowing similitudes from earthly things. When we bear in mind this style of speaking, which is quite common in the Scriptures, we will not think it strange that the sacred writer here makes mention of *ivory palaces, gold, precious stones,* and *spices;* for by these he means to intimate that the kingdom of Christ will be replenished with a rich abundance, and furnished with all good things. The glory and excellence of the spiritual gifts, with which God enriches his Church, are indeed held in no estimation among men; but in the sight of God they are of more value than all the riches of the world. At the same time, it is not necessary that we should apply curiously to Christ every particular here enumerated; [170] as for instance, what is here said of the many wives which Solomon had. If it should be imagined from this that there may be several churches, the unity of Christ's body will be rent in pieces. I admit, that as every individual believer is called "the temple of God," (1 Corinthians 3:17, and 6:19,) so also might each be named "the

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spouse of Christ;" but properly speaking, there is only one spouse of Christ, which consists of the whole body of the faithful. She is said *to sit by the side of the king,* not that she exercises any dominion peculiar to herself, but because Christ rules in her; and it is in this sense that she is called "the mother of us all," (Galatians 4:26.)

This passage contains a remarkable prophecy in reference to the future calling of the Gentiles, by which the Son of God formed an alliance with strangers and those who were his enemies. There was between God and the uncircumcised nations a deadly quarrel, a wall of separation which divided them from the seed of Abraham, the chosen people, (Ephesians 2:14;) for the covenant which God had made with Abraham shut out the Gentiles from the kingdom of heaven till the coming of Christ. Christ, therefore, of his free grace, desires to enter into a holy alliance of marriage with the whole world, in the same way as if a Jew in ancient times had taken to himself a wife from a foreign and heathen land. But in order to conduct into Christ's presence his bride chaste and undefiled, the prophet exhorts the Church gathered from the Gentiles to forget her former manner of living, and to devote herself wholly to her husband. As this change, by which the children of Adam begin to be the children of God, and are transformed into new men, is a thing so difficult, the prophet enforces the necessity of it the more earnestly. In enforcing his exhortation in this way by different terms, *hearken, consider, incline thy ear,* he intimates, that the faithful do not deny themselves, and lay aside their former habits, without intense and painful effort; for such an exhortation would be superfluous, were men naturally and voluntarily disposed to it. And, indeed, experience shows how dull and slow we are to follow God. By the word *consider,* or *understand,* our stupidity is tacitly rebuked, and not without good reason; for whence arise that self-love which is so blind, that false opinion which we have of our own wisdom and strength, the deception arising from the fascinations of the world, and, in fine, the arrogance and pride which are natural to us, but because we do not consider how precious a treasure God is presenting to us in his only begotten Son? Did not this ingratitude prevent us, we would without regret, after the example of Paul, (Philippians 3:8,) reckon as nothing, or as "dung," those things which we admire most, that Christ might replenish us with his riches. By the word *daughter,* the prophet gently and sweetly soothes the new Church; and he also sets before her the promise

This is certainly a most important rule in interpreting the allegorical compositions of Scripture. It is not to be imagined that there are distinct analogies between every part of an allegorical representation, and the spiritual subjects which it is designed to illustrate. The interpreter who allows his ingenuity to press too closely all the points of the allegory to the spiritual subjects couched under it, seeking points of comparison in the complementary parts, which are introduced merely for the purpose of giving more animation and beauty to the discourse, is in danger by his fanciful analogies of degrading the composition, and falling into absurdities.

of a bountiful reward, [171] to induce her, for the sake of Christ, willingly to despise and forsake whatever she made account of heretofore. It is certainly no small consolation to know that the Son of God will delight in us, when we shall have put off our earthly nature. In the meantime, let us learn, that to deny ourselves is the beginning of that sacred union which ought to exist between us and Christ. By her *father's house* and *her people* is doubtless meant all the corruptions which we carry with us from our mother's womb, or derive from evil custom; nay, under this mode of expression there is comprehended whatever men have belonging to themselves; for there is no part of our nature sound or free from corruption.

It is necessary, also, to notice the reason which is added, namely, that if the Church refuses to devote herself wholly to Christ, she casts off his due and lawful authority. By the word *worship* we must understand not only the outward ceremony, but also, according to the figure synecdoche, a holy desire to yield reverence and obedience. Would to God that this admonition, as it ought, had been thoroughly weighed! for the Church of Christ had then been more obedient to his authority, and we should not in these days have had so great a contest to maintain in reference to her authority against the Papists, who imagine that the Church is not sufficiently exalted and honored, unless with unbridled license she may insolently triumph over her own husband. They, no doubt, in words ascribe supreme authority to Christ, saying, that every knee should bow before him; but when they maintain that the Church has an unlimited power of making laws, what else is this but to give her loose reins, and to exempt her from the authority of Christ, that she may break forth into any excess according to her desire? I stay not to notice how wickedly they arrogate to themselves the title and designation of the Church. But it is intolerable sacrilege to rob Christ and then adorn the Church with his spoils. It is no small dignity which the Church enjoys, in being seated at the right hand of the King, and it is no small honor to be called "the Mother" of all the godly, for to her it belongs to nourish and keep them under her discipline. But at the same time it is easy to gather from innumerable passages of Scripture, that Christ does not so elevate his own Church that he may diminish or impair in the least his own authority.

12 *And the daughter of Tyre with a gift.* This also is a part of the recompense which the prophet promises to the queen in order to mitigate or rather to extinguish entirely, the longing desire she might still feel after her former condition. He says: that the Tyrians will come humbly to pay her reverence, bringing presents with them. Tyre, we know, was formerly a city of great renown, and, therefore, he accounts it a very high honor that men will come from a city so distinguished and opulent to greet her and to testify their submission to her. It is not necessary for us to examine every word

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"En luy proposant bonne recompense." — *Fr.*

minutely, in order to apply to the Church every thing here said concerning the wife of Solomon; but in our own day we realize some happy fruits of this prophecy when God has so ordered it, that some of the great men of this world, although they themselves refuse to submit to the authority of Christ, act with kindness towards the Church, maintaining and defending her.

Psalm 45:13-17

> **13**. The daughter of the King is all glorious within: her clothing is of garments embroidered with gold. **14**. She shall be brought to the King in raiment of needle-work: the virgins after her, her companions, shall be brought to thee. **15**. They shall be brought with joy and gladness; they shall enter into the palace of the King. **16**. Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children: thou shalt make them princes in all the earth. **17**. I will make thy name to be remembered throughout all generations: therefore the people shall praise thee for ever and ever.

13 *The daughter of the King is all glorious within* [172] This verse may be understood in a twofold sense; either as meaning that the queen, not only when she appears in public before all the people, but also when sitting in private in her own chamber, is always sumptuously apparelled; or, that the splendor and gorgeous appearance of her attire is not merely a thing of display, designed to dazzle the eyes of the simple, but consists of expensive and really substantial material. The prophet accordingly enhances the happy and lofty condition of the queen by the circumstance, that she has not only sumptuous apparel in which she may appear on particular occasions, but also for her ordinary and daily attire. Others expound it in this sense, That all her glory consists in the king inviting her familiarity into his presence; and this opinion they rest on the ground that immediately after there is a description given of her as passing into the chamber of the king accompanied with a great and glorious train of followers. This display of pomp exceeds the bounds of due moderation; but, in the meantime, we are taught by it, that while the Church is thus richly apparelled, it is not designed to attract the notice of men, but only for the pleasure of the King.

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Dathe and Berlin refer *within* to the interior of the queen's palace, which seems to agree best with the context. The original word rendered *within* denotes *the interior of a house* in Leviticus 10:18, and 1 Kings 6:18. Fry explains the words thus: "*Most splendid is the royal daughter within* the awning of her covered vehicle;" and refers to the picture of a bridal procession in Mr Lane's Egypt. Dr Geddes reads: —

"All glorious is the queen in her apartment,
Her robe is bespangled with gold;
To the king she shall be brought in brocade,
Attended by her virgin companions."

"This," says he, namely, verse 13th, "and the two next verses, contain a fine description of Oriental manners. The queen, before she be led to the king's apartment, is gorgeously dressed in her own; and thence proceeds with her female train to the royal palace."

If in our day the Church is not so richly adorned with that spiritual beauty in which the glory of Christ shines forth, the fault ought to be imputed to the ingratitude of men, who either through their own indifference despise the goodness of God, or else, after having been enriched by him, again fall into a state of poverty and want.

16 *Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children* This also serves to show the glory and transcendent excellence of this kingdom, namely, that the children will not be inferior in dignity to their fathers, and that the nobility of the race will not be diminished after the death of Solomon; for the children which shall be born to him will equal those who had preceded them in the most excellent virtues. Then it is added, that they shall be *princes in all the earth,* because the empire shall enjoy such an extent of dominion on every side, that it might easily be divided into many kingdoms. It is easy to gather, that this prophecy is spoken expressly concerning Christ; for so far were the sons of Solomon from having a kingdom of such an extent, as to divide it into provinces among them, that his first successor retained only a small portion of his kingdom. There were none of his true and lawful successors who attained the same power which he had enjoyed, but being princes only over one tribe and a half of the people, they were, on this account, shut up within narrow limits, and, as we say, had their wings clipped. [173] But at the coming of Christ, who appeared at the close of the ancient Church, and the beginning of the new dispensation, it is an undoubted truth, that children were begotten by him, who were inferior in no respect to their fathers, either in number or in excellence, and whom he set as rulers over the whole world. In the estimation of the world, the ignominy of the cross obscures the glory of the Church; but when we consider how wonderfully it has increased, and how much it has been distinguished by spiritual gifts, we must confess that it is not without cause that her glory is in this passage celebrated in such sublime language. It ought, however, to be observed, that the sovereignty, of which mention is here made, consists not in the persons of men, but refers to the head. According to a frequent mode of expression in the Word of God, the dominion and power which belong properly to the head, and are applicable peculiarly to Christ alone, are in many places ascribed to his members. We know that those who occupy eminent stations in the Church, and who rule in the name of Christ, do not exercise a lordly dominion, but rather act as servants. As, however, Christ has committed to them his Gospel, which is the scepter of his kingdom, and intrusted it as it were to their keeping, they exercise, in some sort, his power. And, indeed, Christ, by his ministers, has subdued to his dominion the whole world, and has erected as many principalities under his authority as there have been churches gathered to him in divers nations by their preaching.

173 "Et (comme on dit) ont eu les ailes rongnees." — *Fr.*

17 *I will make thy name to be remembered, etc.* This also is equally inapplicable to Solomon, who, by his shameful and impious rebellion, stained the memory of his name with disgrace. In polluting by superstitious abominations the land which was consecrated to God, did he not bring upon himself indelible ignominy and shame? For this deed alone his name deserves to be buried in everlasting oblivion. Nor was his son Rehoboam in any degree more deserving of praise; for through his own foolish presumption he lost the better part of his kingdom. To find, therefore, the true accomplishment of what is here said, we must come to Christ, the memory of whose name continues to prosper and prevail. It is no doubt despised by the world, nay, wicked men, in the pride of their hearts, even reproach his sacred name, and outrageously trample it under their feet; but still it survives in its undiminished majesty. It is also true, that his enemies rise up on all sides in vast numbers to overthrow his kingdom; but notwithstanding, men are already beginning to bow the knee before him, which they will continue to do, until the period arrive when he shall tread down all the powers that are opposed to him. The furious efforts of Satan and the whole world have not been able to extinguish the name of Christ, which, being transmitted from one generation to another, still retains its glory in every age, even as at this day we see it celebrated in every language. And although the greater part of the world tear it in pieces by their impious blasphemies, yet it is enough that God stirs up his servants every where to proclaim with fidelity and with unfeigned zeal the praises of Christ. In the meantime, it is our duty diligently to use our endeavors, that the memory of Christ, which ought to prosper and prevail throughout all ages, to the eternal salvation of men, may never at any time lose any of its renown.

Psalm 46

PSALM 46

This psalm seems to be an expression of thanksgiving rather for some particular deliverance, than for the constant aid by which God has always protected and preserved his Church. It may be inferred from it that the city of Jerusalem. when stricken with great terror, and placed in extreme danger, was preserved, contrary to all expectation, by the unlooked for and miraculous power of God. The prophet, therefore, whoever composed the psalm, commending a deliverance so singularly vouchsafed by God, exhorts the faithful to commit themselves confidently to his protection, and not to doubt that, relying fearlessly upon him as their guardian and the protector of their welfare, they shall be continually preserved in safety from all the assaults of their enemies, because it is his peculiar office to quell all commotions.

To the chief musician of the sons of Korah, a song upon Alamoth.

Interpreters are not agreed as to the meaning of the word עלמות, *alamoth;* but without noticing all the different opinions, I shall mention only two of them, namely, that it was either an instrument of music, or else the commencement of some common and well known song. The latter conjecture appears to me the most probable. As to the time when this psalm was written it is also uncertain, unless, perhaps, we might suppose that it was written when the siege of the city was suddenly raised by the terrible and sore destruction which God brought upon the army of Sennacherib, [174] (2 Kings 19:35.) This opinion I readily admit, because it accords most with the

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whole scope of the psalm. It is abundantly manifest that some favor of God, worthy of being held in remembrance, such as that was, is here commended.

Psalm 46:1-2

> **1**. God is our refuge and strength: he is found an exceeding [or superlative] help in tribulations. **2**. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved, and the mountains fall into the midst of the sea.

1. *God is our refuge and strength* Here the Psalmist begins with a general expression or sentiment, before he comes to speak of the more particular deliverance. He begins by premising that God is sufficiently able to protect his own people, and that he gives them sufficient ground to expect it; for this the word מחסה, *machaseh,* properly signifies. In the second clause of the verse the verb *he is found,* which we translate in the present, is in the past tense, *he has been found;* and, indeed, there would be no impropriety in limiting the language to some particular deliverance which had already been experienced, just as others also have rendered it in the past tense. But as the prophet adds the term *tribulations* in the plural number, I prefer explaining it of a continued act, That God comes seasonably to our aid, and is never wanting in the time of need, as often as any afflictions press upon his people. If the prophet were speaking of the experience of God's favor, it would answer much better to render the verb in the past tense. It is, however, obvious that his design is to extol the power of God and his goodness towards his people, and to show how ready God is to afford them assistance, that they may not in the time of their adversities gaze around them on every side, but rest satisfied with his protection alone. He therefore says expressly that God acts in such a manner towards them, to let the Church know that he exercises a special care in preserving and defending her. There can be no doubt that by this expression he means to draw a distinction between the chosen people of God and other heathen nations, and in this way to commend the privilege of adoption which God of his goodness had vouchsafed to the posterity of Abraham. Accordingly, when I said before that it was a general expression, my intention was not to extend it to all manner of persons, but only to all times; for the object of the prophet is to teach us after what manner God is wont to act towards those who are his people. He next concludes, by way of inference, that the

Others refer it, as Rosenmüller, to the victory of Jehoshaphat, which was celebrated with great rejoicing, 2 Chronicles 20:26-30. It is, however, difficult or impossible to ascertain with certainty the occasion on which it was composed. It seems rather the language of faith under threatened difficulties, than of triumph over vanquished foes. Thus, in the midst of threatened danger, it may be employed by Christians to support their faith, hope, and peace. This was Luther's favorite psalm. He composed a famous version of it on his journey to the Diet at Worms, where he went boldly to defend the Reformation at the risk of his life; and he was wont to say when threatened with any fresh trouble, "Come, let us sing the 46th Psalm."

faithful nave no reason to be afraid, since God is always ready to deliver them, nay, is also armed with invincible power. He shows in this that the true and proper proof of our hope consists in this, that, when things are so confused, that the heavens seem as it were to fall with great violence, the earth to remove out of its place, and the mountains to be torn up from their very foundations, we nevertheless continue to preserve and maintain calmness and tranquillity of heart. It is an easy matter to manifest the appearance of great confidence, so long as we are not placed in imminent danger: but if, in the midst of a general crash of the whole world, our minds continue undisturbed and free of trouble, this is an evident proof that we attribute to the power of God the honor which belongs to him. When, however, the sacred poet says, *We will not fear,* he is not to be understood as meaning that the minds of the godly are exempt from all solicitude or fear, as if they were destitute of feeling, for there is a great difference between insensibility and the confidence of faith. He only shows that whatever may happen they are never overwhelmed with terror, but rather gather strength and courage sufficient to allay all fear. *Though the earth be moved, and the mountains fall into the midst of the sea,* are hyperbolical modes of expression, but they nevertheless denote a revolution, and turning upside down of the whole world. Some have explained the expression, *the midst of the sea,* as referring to the earth. I do not, however, approve of it. But in order more fully to understand the doctrine of the psalm, let us proceed to consider what follows.

Psalm 46:3-5

3. Though the waters thereof roar and rage [175] tempestuously: though the mountains be shaken with the swelling thereof. Selah. **4**. The streams of her river shall make glad the city of God, the sanctuary of the tabernacles of the Most High. **5**. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God will help her at the dawn of the morning.

3 *Though the waters thereof roar,* etc This verse ought to be read in connection with the verse which follows, because it is necessary to complete the sense, as if it had been said: Though the waters of the sea roar and swell, and by their fierce impetuosity shake the very mountains — even in the midst of these dreadful tumults, the holy city of God will continue to enjoy comfort and peace, satisfied with her small streams. The relative pronoun *her,* according to the common usage of the Hebrew language, is superfluous in this place. The prophet intended simply to say, that the small streams of a river would afford to the holy city abundant cause of

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"Ou, s'enfleront." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, swell."

rejoicing, though the whole world should be moved and destroyed. I have already mentioned shortly before how profitable is the doctrine taught us in this place, that our faith is really and truly tested only when we are brought into very severe conflicts, and when even hell itself seems opened to swallow us up. In like manner, we have portrayed to us the victory of faith over the whole world, when, in the midst of the utmost confusion, it unfolds itself, and begins to raise its head in such a manner as that although the whole creation seem to be banded together, and to have conspired for the destruction of the faithful, it nevertheless triumphs over all fear. Not that the children of God, when placed in peril, indulge in jesting or make a sport of death, but the help which God has promised them more than overbalances, in their estimation, all the evils which inspire them with fear. The sentiment of Horace is very beautiful, when, speaking of the righteous man and the man who feels conscious of no guilt, he says, (Car., Lib. iii., Od. 3,)

"Dux inquieti turbidus Adriae,
Nec fulminantis magna Jovis manus,
Si fractus illabitur orbis,
Impavidum ferient ruinae."

"Let the wild winds that rule the seas,
Tempestuous, all their horrors raise;
Let Jove's dread arm with thunders rend the spheres;
Beneath the crush of worlds undaunted he appears." [176]

But as no such person as he imagines could ever be found, he only trifles in speaking as he does. Their fortitude, therefore, has its foundation in the assurance of the divine protection alone, so that they who rely upon God, and put their trust in him, may truly boast, not only that they shall be undismayed, but also that they shall be preserved in security and safety amidst the ruins of a falling world.

The prophet says expressly, that *the city of God shall be glad,* although it had no raging sea, but only a gently flowing stream, to set for its defense against those waves of which he has made mention. By this mode of expression he alludes to the stream which flowed from Shiloah, and passed through the city of Jerusalem. Further, the prophet, I have no doubt, here indirectly rebukes the vain confidence of those who, fortified by earthly assistance, imagine that they are well protected, and beyond the reach of all danger. Those who anxiously seek to strengthen themselves on all sides with the invincible helps of the world, seem, indeed, to imagine that they are able to prevent their enemies from approaching them, just as if they were environed on all sides with the sea; but it often happens that the very defenses which they had reared turn to their own destruction, even as when

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Francis' Translation of Horace.

a tempest lays waste and destroys an island by overflowing it. But they who commit themselves to the protection of God, although in the estimation of the world they are exposed to every kind of injury, and are not sufficiently able to repel the assaults made upon them, nevertheless repose in security. On this account, Isaiah (Isaiah 8:6) reproves the Jews because they despised the gently flowing waters of Shiloah, and longed for deep and rapid rivers.

In that passage, there is an elegant antithesis between the little brook Shiloah on the one hand, and the Nile and Euphrates on the other; as if he had said, They defraud God of his honor by the unworthy reflection, that when he made choice of the city of Jerusalem, he had not made the necessary provision in respect of strength and fortifications for its defense and preservation. And certainly, if this psalm was written after the slaughter and flight of the army of Sennacherib, it is probable that the inspired writer purposely made use of the same metaphor, to teach the faithful in all ages, that the grace of God alone would be to them a sufficient protection, independent of the assistance of the world. In like manner, the Holy Spirit still exhorts and encourages us to cherish the same confidence, that, despising all the resources of those who proudly magnify themselves against us, we may preserve our tranquillity in the midst of disquietude and trouble, and not be grieved or ashamed on account of our defenseless condition, so long as the hand of God is stretched out to save us. Thus, although the help of God comes to our aid in a secret and gentle manner, like the still flowing streams, yet it imparts to us more tranquillity of mind than if the whole power of the world were gathered together for our help. In speaking of Jerusalem as *the sanctuary of the tabernacles of the Most High,* the prophet makes a beautiful allusion to the circumstances or condition of that time: for although God exercised authority over all the tribes of the people, yet he made choice of that city as the seat of royalty, from which he might govern the whole nation of Israel. The tabernacles of the Most High were scattered throughout all Judea, but still it was necessary that they should be gathered together and united in one sanctuary, that they might be under the dominion of God.

5. *God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved. The Psalmist now* shows that the great security of the Church consists in this, that God dwells in the midst of her; for the verb which we translate, *shall be moved,* is of the feminine gender, nor can it be referred to God, as if it were designed to teach that God is immovable. The sentence must be explained in this way, The holy city shall not be moved or shaken, because God dwells there, and is always ready to help her. The expression, *the dawn of the morning* [177] denotes *daily,* as soon as the sun rises upon the earth. The sum of the whole is, If we desire to be protected by the hand of God, we must be concerned above all things that he may dwell amongst us; for all hope of safety depends upon his presence alone. And he dwells amongst us for no other purpose

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than to preserve us uninjured. Moreover, although God does not always hasten immediately to our aid, according to the importunity of our desires, yet he will always come to us seasonably, so as to make apparent the truth of what is elsewhere said,

"Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep," (Psalm 121:4.)

Psalm 46:6-11

> **6**. The peoples raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice [178] the earth melted. **7**. Jehovah of armies is with us: the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah. **8**. Come ye, consider the works of Jehovah, what desolations [179] he hath made in the earth. **9**. He maketh battles to cease even to the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, he cutteth in pieces the spear; he burneth the chariots with fire. [180] **10**. Be still [181] and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth [182] **11**. Jehovah of armies is with us: the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah.

6 *The peoples raged* Since the Church of God is never without enemies, and these very powerful, and such as consequently fight against her with

"*At the looking forth of the morning*; that is, as the Greek explaineth it, 'very early;' when the morning peereth or showeth the face." — *Ainsworth.* "*As soon as the morning appears* [or *shows*] *its face*; *i.e.*, God will come very early to her succor, before any enemy is awakened to annoy her." — *Mudge.* "*Before the dawn of the morning*; *i.e.*, with the utmost readiness and alacrity. The expression is borrowed from the conduct of a person who, in his anxiety to accomplish a favorite object, engages in it earlier than men ordinarily would. Jeremiah 7:13; and 7:25." — *French and Skinner.*

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"C'est, fait resonner." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, made to resound."

179

"Ou, quels deserts." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, what deserts."

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There is probably here an allusion to the ancient custom of collecting the arms and armor of the vanquished into a heap, and setting it on fire. The image is employed to express complete victory, and a perfect establishment of peace. This custom prevailed among the Jews, and the first instance of it which we meet with is in Joshua 11:6. It is also referred to in the description of the judgments of God upon Gog, Ezekiel 39:8-10. This was also a Roman custom. Virgil alludes to it in Aeneid, lib. 8, 50, 560. A medal struck by Vespasian the Roman emperor to commemorate the termination of his wars both in Italy and through all parts of the world, represents the Goddess of Peace holding an olive-branch with one hand, and in the other a lighted torch, with which she sets fire to a heap of armor.

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"Ou, arrestez, demeurez coy." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, stop, be quiet."

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"Par toute la terre." — *Fr.* "Through all the earth."

cruel and unbridled fury, the prophet now confirms from experience the doctrine which he had advanced concerning the impregnable character of the divine protection. He then deduces from it this general ground of consolation, That it belongs continually to God to restrain and quell all commotions, and that his arm is strong enough to break all the efforts of the enemy. This passage, I admit, might be understood in a more general sense, as meaning that the city of God is liable to be assailed by many storms and tempests; but that by the favor of God she is, nevertheless, always preserved in safety. It is, however, more probable, as I have already said at the beginning, that the Psalmist is here speaking of some notable deliverance, in which God had given a striking proof of the power and favor which he exercises in the constant preservation of the Church. Accordingly, he relates what had taken place, namely, that the enemies of the Church came with a dreadful host to waste and destroy it; but that immediately, by *the voice of God,* they, as it were, *melted* and vanished away. From this we derive an invaluable ground of consolation, when it is said, That although the whole world rise up against us, and confound all things by their increased madness, they can be brought to nought in a moment, as soon as God shows himself favorable towards us. The *voice of God,* no doubt, signifies his will or command; but the prophet, by this expression, seems to have an eye to the promises of God, by which he has declared, that he will be the guardian and defender of the Church. At the same time, let us observe the contrast which is here stated between the voice of God and the turbulent commotions of the kingdoms of this world.

7. *Jehovah of armies is with us.* In this verse we are taught how we shall be able to apply to our own use the things which the Scriptures everywhere record concerning the infinite power of God. We shall be able to do this when we believe ourselves to be of the number of those whom God has embraced with his fatherly love, and whom he will cherish. The Psalmist again alludes, in terms of commendation, to the adoption by which Israel was separated from the common condition of all the other nations of the earth. And, indeed, apart from this, the description of the power of God would only inspire us with dread. Confident boasting, then, arises from this, that God has chosen us for his peculiar people, to show forth his power in preserving and defending us. On this account, the prophet, after having celebrated the power of God by calling him *the God of armies,* immediately adds another epithet, *the God of Jacob,* by which he confirms the covenant made of old time with Abraham, that his posterity, to whom the inheritance of the promised grace belongs, should not doubt that God was favorable to them also. That our faith may rest truly and firmly in God, we must take into consideration at the same time these two parts of his character — his immeasurable power, by which he is able to subdue the whole world under him; and his fatherly love which he has manifested in his word. When these two things are joined together, there is nothing which can hinder our faith

from defying all the enemies which may rise up against us, nor must we doubt that God will succor us, since he has promised to do it; and as to power, he is sufficiently able also to fulfill his promise, for he is the God of armies. From this we learn, that those persons err egregiously in the interpretation of Scripture, who leave in entire suspense the application of all that is said concerning the power of God, and do not rest assured that he will be a Father to them, inasmuch as they are of his flock, and partakers of the adoption.

8 *Come ye, consider the works of Jehovah* The Psalmist seems still to continue in this verse the history of a deliverance by which God had given abundant evidence that he is the most efficient and faithful protector of his Church, that the godly might derive from it both courage and strength to enable them to overcome whatever temptations might afterwards arise. The manifestations which God has given of his favor towards us in preserving us, ought to be kept continually before our eyes as a means of establishing in our hearts a persuasion of the stability of his promises. By this exhortation we have tacitly rebuked the indifference and stupidity of those who do not make so great account of the power of God as they ought to do; or rather, the whole world is charged with ingratitude, because there is scarcely one in a hundred who acknowledges that he has abundant help and security in God, so that they are all blinded to the works of God, or rather wilfully shut their eyes at that which would, nevertheless, prove the best means of strengthening their faith. We see how many ascribe to fortune that which ought to be traced to the providence of God. Others imagine that they obtain, by their own industry, whatever God has bestowed upon them, or ascribe to second causes what proceeds from him alone; while others are utterly lost to all sense. The Psalmist, therefore, justly calls upon all men, and exhorts them to consider the works of God; as if he had said, The reason why men repose not the hope of their welfare in God is, that they are indifferent to the consideration of his works, or so ungrateful, that they make not half the account of them which they ought to do. As he addresses himself in general to all men, we learn, that even the godly themselves are drowsy and unconcerned in this respect until they are awakened. He extols very highly the power of God in preserving his chosen people, which is commonly despised or not estimated as it ought to be, when it is exercised after an ordinary manner. He therefore sets before them the desolations of countries, and marvellous devastations, and other miraculous things, which more powerfully move the minds of men. If any one would prefer to understand what follows — *He maketh battles to cease* — of some special help vouchsafed by God, yet still it must be considered as intended to lead the faithful to expect as much help from him in future as they had already experienced. The prophet, it appears, from one particular instance, designs to show in general how mightily God is wont to defend his Church. At the same time, it happened more than once, that God quelled throughout the land of Judea all the dangerous tumults by

which it was distracted, and drove away wars far from it, by depriving the enemies of their courage, breaking their bows, and burning their chariots; and it is very probable that the prophet, froth a particular instance, here takes occasion to remind the Jews how often God had disappointed the greatest efforts of their enemies. One thing, however, is quite certain, that God is here set forth as adorned with these titles, that we should look for peace from him, even when the whole world is in uproar, and agitated in a dreadful manner.

10 *Be still, and know that I am God* The Psalmist seems now to turn his discourse to the enemies of the people of God, who indulge their lust of mischief and revenge upon them: for in doing injury to the saints they do not consider that they are making war against God. Imagining that they have only to do with men, they presumptuously assail them, and therefore the prophet here represses their insolence; and that his address may have the more weight, he introduces God himself as speaking to them. In the first place, he bids them *be still, that they may know that he is God;* for we see that when men are carried away without consideration, they go beyond all bounds and measure. Accordingly, the prophet justly requires the enemies of the Church to be still and hold their peace, so that when their anger is appeased they may perceive that they are fighting against God. We have in the fourth Psalm, at the fourth verse, a sentiment somewhat similar, "Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." In short, the Psalmist exhorts the world to subdue and restrain their turbulent affections, and to yield to the God of Israel the glory which he deserves; and he warns them, that if they proceed to act like madmen, his power is not enclosed within the narrow limits of Judea, and that it will be no difficult matter for him to stretch forth his arm afar to the Gentiles and heathen nations, that he may glorify himself in every land. In conclusion, he repeats what he had already said, that God has more than enough, both of weapons and of strength, to preserve and defend his Church which he has adopted.

Psalm 47

PSALM 47

Some think that this psalm was composed at the time when the temple was dedicated, and the ark of the covenant placed in the sanctuary. But as this is a conjecture which has little to support it, it is better, if I am not mistaken, instead of detaining ourselves with this, to consider the subject-matter of the psalm, and the use to which it ought especially to be applied. It was no doubt appointed for the stated holy assemblies, as may be easily gathered from the whole tenor of the poem; and perhaps it was composed by David, and delivered by him to the Levites, to be sung by them before the temple was built, and when the ark as yet abode in the tabernacle. But whoever was its author, he exhorts not only the Israelites, but also all nations, to worship the only true God. It chiefly magnifies the favor which, according to the state of things at that time, God had graciously vouchsafed to the offspring of Abraham; and salvation to the whole world was to proceed from this source. It however contains, at the same time, a prophecy of the future kingdom of Christ. It teaches that the glory which then shone under the figure of the material sanctuary will diffuse its splendor far and wide; when God himself will cause the beams of his grace to shine into distant lands, that kings and nations may be united into fellowship with the children of Abraham.

To the chief musician of the sons of Korah: A Psalm.

Psalm 47:1-4

1. Clap your hands, all ye peoples: shout unto God with the voice of triumph. **2**. For Jehovah is high, terrible, and a great King over all

the earth. **3**. He hath put in order [183] the people under us, and the nations under our feet. **4**. He hath chosen our inheritance for us, the glory of Jacob, whom he loved. Selah.

1. *Clap your hands, all ye peoples* As the Psalmist requires the nations, in token of their joy and of their thanksgiving; to God, to clap their hands, or rather exhorts them to a more than ordinary joy, the vehemence of which breaks forth and manifests itself by external expressions, it is certain that he is here speaking of the deliverance which God had wrought for them. Had God erected among the Gentiles some formidable kingdom, this would rather have deprived all of their courage, and overwhelmed them with despair, than given them matter to sing and leap for joy. Besides, the inspired writer does not here treat of some common or ordinary blessings of God; but of such blessings as will fill the whole world with incredible joy, and stir up the minds of all men to celebrate the praises of God. What he adds a little after, that all nations were brought into subjection to Israel, must, therefore, necessarily be understood not of slavish subjection, but of a subjection which is more excellent, and more to be desired, than all the kingdoms of the world. It would be unnatural for those who are subdued and brought to submit by force and fear to leap for joy. Many nations were tributary to David, and to his son Solomon; but while they were so, they ceased not, at the same time, to murmur, and bore impatiently the yoke which was imposed upon them, so far were they from giving thanks to God with joyful and cheerful hearts.

Since, then, no servitude is happy and desirable but that by which God subdues and brings under the standard and authority of Christ his Son those who before were rebels, it follows that this language is applicable only to the kingdom of Christ, who is called *a high and terrible King,* (verse 2;) not that he makes the wretched beings over whom he reigns to tremble by the tyranny and violence of his sway, but because his majesty, which before had been held in contempt, will suffice to quell the rebellion of the whole world. It is to be observed, that the design of the Holy Spirit is here to teach, that as the Jews had been long contumeliously treated, oppressed with wrongs, and afflicted from time to time with divers calamities, the goodness and liberality of God towards them was now so much the more illustrious, when the kingdom of David had subdued the neighboring nations on every sidle, and had attained to such a height of glory. We may, however, easily gather from the connection of the words the truth of what I have suggested, that when God is called *a terrible and great King over all the earth,* this prophecy applies to the kingdom of Christ. There is, therefore, no doubt, that the grace of God was celebrated by these titles, to strengthen the hearts of the godly during the period that intervened till the advent of Christ, in which not only the triumphant state of the people of Israel had fallen into decay,

183 "Ou, range." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, subdued."

but in which also the people, being oppressed with the bitterest contumely, could have no taste of the favor of God, and no consolation from it, but by relying on the promises of God alone. We know that there was a long interruption of the splendor of the kingdom of God's ancient people, which continued from the death of Solomon to the coming of Christ. This interval formed, as it were, a gulf or chasm, which would have swallowed up the minds of the godly, had they not been supported and upheld by the Word of God. As, therefore, God exhibited in the person of David a type of the kingdom of Christ, which is here extolled, although there followed shortly after a sad and almost shameful diminution of the glory of David's kingdom, then the most grievous calamities, and, finally, the captivity and a most miserable dispersion, which differed little from a total destruction, the Holy Spirit has exhorted the faithful to continue clapping their hands for joy, until the advent of the promised Redeemer.

3. *He hath set in order the people under us* Some translate the verb *he hath subjected;* and this agrees with the translation which I have given. Others translate it *he hath led,* which is somewhat more remote from the meaning. But to understand the verb ידבר, *yadebber,* as meaning *to destroy,* as is done by others, is altogether at variance with the mind of the prophet; for it is doubtless an advantageous, joyful, and desirable subjection which is here meant. In the Hebrew, the verb is in the future tense, *he will set in order;* and if any are disposed to prefer retaining it in this tense, I have no great objection to it. As, however, it is certain that under the figure of the kingdom of David there is here celebrated the grace of God to come, I have readily adopted that rendering which has been preferred by other interpreters. Besides, although in this verse the prophet especially exhorts his own countrymen to gratitude to God, because, through his favor, they ruled over all people; yet it is certain that he means, that those also who were subdued are associated with the Jews in this joy. The body does not differ more from the shadow than the reigned expressions of joy with which the heathen nations honored David in old time, differ from those with which the faithful through the whole world [184] receive Christ,; for the latter flow from the willing obedience of the heart. And assuredly, if after the ark was brought to the temple, there had not appeared hidden under this figure something far higher, which formed the substance of it:, it would have been as it were a childish joy to assign to God his dwelling there, and to shut him up within such narrow limits. But when the majesty of God which had dwelt in the tabernacle was manifested to the whole world, and when all nations were brought in subjection to his authority, this prerogative of the offspring of Abraham was then illustriously manifested. The prophet, then, when he declares that the Gentiles Will be subdued, so that they will not

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"Par tout le monde." — *Fr.*

refuse to obey the chosen people, is describing that kingdom of which he had previously spoken. We are not to suppose that he here treats of that secret providence by which God governs the whole world, but of the special power which he exercises by means of his word; and, therefore, in order that he may be properly called a King, his own people must necessarily acknowledge him as such. It may, however, be asked, "Since Christ has brought the Church under his own authority and celestial power, in what sense can it be said that the nations are subject to the Jews, seeing we know that the order of the Church cannot be settled aright, and as it ought to be, unless Christ the only head stand forth prominently above all, and all the faithful, from the greatest to the least, keep themselves in the humble rank of members? Nay, more, when Christ erected his dominion through the whole world, the adoption, which had before been the peculiar privilege of one people, began to be the common privilege of all nations; and by this means liberty was granted to all together, that being united to one another by the ties of true brotherhood, they should aspire to the celestial inheritance." The answer to this is easy: When the yoke of the law, [185] was imposed upon the Gentiles, the Jews then obtained the sovereignty over them; even as by the word the pastors of the Church exercise the jurisdiction of the Holy Spirit. For this very reason the Church is called a Queen, and the Mother of all the godly, (Galatians 4:26,) because divine truth, which is like a scepter to subdue us all, has been committed to her keeping. Although then the Jews, when the kingdom of Christ emerged into light, were in a state of wretched and ignominious servitude to heathen nations, and had been, as it were, their slaves; yet the sovereignty is truly and justly attributed to them, because God "sent the rod of his strength out of Zion," (Psalm 110:2;) and as they were intrusted with the keeping of the la their office was to restrain and subdue the Gentiles by its authority. The only way by which the rest of the world has been brought into subjection to God is, that men, being renewed by the Spirit of God, have willingly yielded themselves docile and tractable to the Jews, and suffered themselves to be under their dominion; as it is said in another passage,

"In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you;for we have heard that God is with you," (Zechariah 8:23.)

4. *He hath chosen our inheritance for us.* The inspired poet here celebrates more distinctly the special grace which God, in his goodness, had bestowed upon the chosen and holy seed of Abraham. As he passed by all the rest of the word, and adopted to himself a people who were few

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"C'est a dire, la reformation selon la vraye religion de Dieu." — *Fr. marg.* "That is to say, the reformation according to the true religion of God."

in number and contemptible; so it was proper that such a signal pledge of his fatherly love should be distinguished from his common beneficence, which is extended to all mankind without distinction. The word *chosen* is therefore peculiarly emphatic, implying that God had not dealt with the children of Abraham as he had been accustomed indiscriminately to deal with other nations; but that he had bestowed upon them, as it were by *hereditary* right, a peculiar dignity by which they excelled all others. The same thing is expressed immediately after by the word *glory* Thus then the prophet enjoins the duty of thanksgiving to God, for having exalted, in the person of Jacob, his chosen people to the highest degree of honor, so that they might boast that their condition was distinguished from that of all other nations. He shows, at the same time, that this was entirely owing to the free and unmerited favor of God. The relative pronoun *whom* is put instead of the causal particle *for* or *because,* as if the Psalmist had attributed the cause of this prerogative by which they were distinguished to God himself. Whenever the favor of God towards the Jews is commended, in consequence of his having loved their fathers, this principle should always be kept in mind, that hereby all merits in man are annihilated. If all the excellence or glory of the holy patriarch depended purely and simply upon the good pleasure of God, who can dare to arrogate any thing to himself as peculiarly his own? If God then has given us any thing above others, and as it were by special privilege, let us learn to ascribe the whole to the fatherly love which he bears towards seeing he has chosen us to be his flock. We also gather from this passage that the grace which God displays towards his chosen is not extended to all men in common, but is a privilege by which he distinguishes a few from the great mass of mankind.

Psalm 47:5-9

> **5**. God is gone up with triumph, Jehovah with the sound of a trumpet. **6**. Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises to our King, sing praises. **7**. For God is King of all the earth: sing praises every one who understandeth. **8**. He hath obtained the kingdom over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness. **9**. The princes of the peoples [or nations] are assembled together to the people of the God of Abraham: for the shields of the earth are God's: he is greatly exalted.

5. *God is gone up with triumph* There is here an allusion to the ancient ceremony which was observed under the Law. As the sound of trumpets was wont to be used in solemnising the holy assemblies, the prophet says that God *goes up,* when the trumpets encourage and stir up the people to magnify and extol his power. When this ceremony was performed in old time, it was just as if a king, making his entrance among his subjects, presented himself to them in magnificent attire and great splendor, by which he gained their admiration and reverence. At the same time, the sacred writer, under that

shadowy ceremony, doubtless intended to lead us to consider another kind of going up more triumphant — that of Christ when he "ascended up far above all heavens," (Ephesians 4:10) and obtained the empire of the whole world, and armed with his celestial power, subdued all pride and loftiness. You must remember what I have adverted to before, that the name *Jehovah* is here applied to the ark; for although the essence or majesty of God was not shut up in it, nor his power and operation fixed to it, yet it was not a vain and idle symbol of his presence. God had promised that he would dwell in the midst of the people so long as the Jews worshipped him according to the rule which he had prescribed in the Law; and he actually showed that he was truly present with them, and that it was not in vain that he was called upon among them. What is here stated, however, applies more properly to the manifestation of the glory which at length shone forth in the person of Christ. In short, the import of the Psalmist's language is, When the trumpets sounded among the Jews, according to the appointment of the Law, that was not a mere empty sound which vanished away in the air; for God, who intended the ark of the covenant to be a pledge and token of his presence, truly presided in that assembly. From this the prophet draws an argument for enforcing on the faithful the duty of *singing praises to God* He argues, that by engaging in this exercise they will not be acting blindly or at random, as the superstitious, who, having no certainty in their false systems of religion, lament and howl in vain before their idols. He shows that the faithful have just ground for celebrating with their mouths and with a cheerful heart the praises of God; [186] since they certainly know that he is as present with them, as if he had visibly established his royal throne among them.

7. *For God is King of all the earth* The Psalmist, having called God in the close of the preceding verse *King* of the chosen people, now calls him *King of all the earth;* and thus, while he claims to the Jews the right and honor of primogeniture, he at the same time joins to them the Gentiles as associates and partakers with them of the same blessing. By these words he intimates that the kingdom of God would be much more magnificent and glorious at the coming of the Messiah, than it was under the shadowy dispensation of the Law, inasmuch as it would be extended to the utmost boundaries of the earth. To show the greater earnestness in his exhortation, he repeats the words, *Sing praises to God,* five times. The word מַשְׂכִּיל, *maskil,* [187] is put

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"De faire retentir en leurs bouches et d'un coeur alaigre les louanges de Dieu." — *Fr.*

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Calvin renders this word in the Latin version by "intelligens;" and in the French by "entendu;" and in the margin of the French version there is the note, "C'est, O vous chacun entundu!" — "That is, O every one of you who understandeth!" Dr Adam Clarke reads, "Sing an instructive song;" and observes, "Let *sense* and *sound* go together. Let your *hearts* and *heads* go with your *voices*."

in the singular number instead of the plural; for he invites to this exercise all who are skillful in singing. He, no doubt, speaks of knowledge in the art of music; but he requires, at the same time, the worshippers of God to sing the praises of God intelligently, that there may not be the mere sound of tongues, as we know to be the case among the Papists. Knowledge of what is sung is required in order to engage in a proper manner in the singing of psalms, that the name of God may not be profaned, as it would certainly be, were there nothing more but the voice which melts away or is dissolved in the air. [188]

8. *He hath obtained the kingdom over the heathen* Literally it is, *He hath reigned;* but as the verb מלך, *malach,* is in the past tense, which in Hebrew denotes a continued act, we have translated it, *He hath obtained the kingdom* The prophet repeatedly informs us that God reigns over the Gentiles; and from this it is easy to gather that he here treats of a new and a previously unheard of manner of reigning. There is an implied contrast between the time of the Law, when God confined his empire, or kingdom, within the boundaries of Judea, and the coming of Christ, when he extended it far and wide, so as to occupy the whole world from one end to the other. The majesty of God sent forth some sparks of its brightness among the heathen nations, when David made them tributary; but the prophet could not, on that account, have properly said that God reigned among them, since they both contemned his worship and the true religion, and also wished to see the Church completely extinguished. To find the fulfillment of this prophecy, we must, therefore, necessarily come to Christ. What is added in the second clause of the verse, *God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness,* may be taken in a twofold sense. By this form of expression is often to be understood *the tabernacle,* or *the temple;* but it also sometimes signifies *heaven.* If any are inclined to explain it of *the temple,* the meaning will be, That while God reigned over the whole world, and comprehended all nations under his dominion, he had established his chief seat at Jerusalem; and it was from thence that the doctrine of the gospel, by which he has brought under his dominion all people, flowed. We may, however, very properly take this expression as spoken of heaven*;* and thus the sense will be, That God, in stretching forth his hand to subdue men, and bring them to submit to his authority, evidently shows that, from his heavenly throne, he reigns over men. Unless he show men his power and working by signs manifest and near at hand, he is not acknowledged as Governor of the world.

9 *The princes of the peoples are gathered together.* The Psalmist enriches and amplifies by various expressions the preceding sentence. He again

188 "Comme de faict il seroit s'il n'y avoit seulement que la voix qui s'escoule en l'air." — *Fr.*

declares that the way in which God obtained dominion over the Gentiles was, that those who before were aliens united in the adoption of the same faith with the Jews; and thus different nations, from a state of miserable dispersion, were gathered together into one body. When the doctrine of the Gospel was manifested and shone forth, it did not remove the Jews from the covenant which God had long before made with them. On the contrary, it has rather joined us to them. As then the calling of the Gentiles was nothing else than the means by which they were grafted and incorporated into the family of Abraham, the prophet justly states, that strangers or aliens from every direction *were gathered together* to the chosen people, that by such an increase the kingdom of God might be extended through all quarters of the globe. On this account Paul says, (Ephesians 3:6,) that the Gentiles were made one body with the Jews, that they might be partakers of the everlasting inheritance. By the abolition of the ceremonies of the Mosaic economy, "the middle wall of partitions" which made a separation between the Jews and the Gentiles, is now removed, (Ephesians 2:14;) but it nevertheless remains true, that we are not accounted among the children of God unless we have been grafted into the stock of Abraham. The prophet does not merely speak of the common people: he also tells us that princes themselves will regard it as the height of their felicity to be gathered together with the Jews; as we shall see in another psalm, (Psalm 87:5,)

"And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her."

Farther, it is said that this gathering together will be *to the people of the God of Abraham,* to teach us that it is not here meant to attribute to the Jews any superiority which they naturally possess above others, but that all their excellence depends upon this, that the pure worship of God flourishes among them, and that they hold heavenly doctrine in high estimation. This, therefore, is not spoken of the bastard or cast-off Jews, whom their own unbelief has cut off from the Church. But as, according to the statement of the Apostle Paul, (Romans 11:16,) the root being holy, the branches are also holy, it follows that the falling away of the greater part does not prevent this honor from continuing to belong to the rest. Accordingly, the "consumption" which, as is stated in the prophecy of Isaiah, overflowed the whole earth, is called the people of the God of Abraham, (chapter 10:22, 23.) This passage contains two very important and instructive truths. In the first place, we learn from it, that all who would be reckoned among the children of God ought to seek to have a place in the Church, and to join themselves to it, that they may maintain fraternal unity with all the godly; and, secondly, that when the unity of the Church is spoken of, it is to be considered as consisting in nothing else but an unfeigned agreement to yield obedience to the word of God, that there may be one sheepfold and one Shepherd. Moreover, those who are exalted in the world in respect of honors and riches, are here admonished to divest themselves of all pride,

and willingly and submissively to bear the yoke in common with others, that they may show themselves the obedient children of the Church.

What follows immediately after, *The shields of the earth are God's,* is understood by many as spoken of princes. [189] I admit that this metaphor is of frequent occurrence in Scripture, nor does this sense seem to be unsuitable to the scope of the passage. It is as if the prophet had said, It is in the power of God to ingraft into his Church the great ones of the world whenever he pleases; for he reigns over them also. Yet the sense will be more simple if we explain the words thus: That, as it is God alone who defends and preserves the world, the high and supreme majesty, which is sufficient for so exalted and difficult a work as the preservation of the *world,* is justly looked upon with admiration. The sacred writer expressly uses the word *shields* in the plural number, for, considering the various and almost innumerable dangers which unceasingly threaten every part of the world, the providence of God must necessarily interpose in many ways, and make use, as it were, of many bucklers.

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Magistrates and governors are called *shields* in Hosea 4:18; Psalm 89:19. In this sense the word is here understood by the Septuagint.

Psalm 48

PSALM 48

In this psalm there is celebrated some notable deliverance of the city of Jerusalem at a time when many kings had conspired to destroy it. The prophet, (whoever was the author of the psalm,) after having given thanks to God for this deliverance, takes occasion from thence to extol in magnificent terms the happy state of that city, seeing it had God for its continual guardian and protector. It would not have been enough for the people of God to have felt and acknowledged that they were once preserved and defended by the power of God, had they not at the same time been assured of being also preserved and protected by the same God in the time to come, because he had adopted them for his peculiar people. The prophet, therefore, chiefly insists upon this point, that it was not in vain that the sanctuary of God was erected upon mount Zion, but that his name was there called upon in order that his power might be conspicuously manifested for the salvation of his people. It is easy to gather from the subject-matter of the psalm that it was composed after the death of David. I indeed admit that among David's enemies there were some foreign kings, and that it was not for want of will on their part that the city of Jerusalem was not utterly destroyed; but we do not read that they ever proceeded the length of besieging it, and reducing it to such extremity as to render it necessary that their efforts should be repressed by a wonderful manifestation of the power of God. It is more probable that the psalm is to be referred to the time of king Ahaz, when the city was besieged and the inhabitants brought to the point of utter despair, and when, nevertheless, the siege was suddenly raised, (2 Kings 16:5;) or else to the time of Jehoshaphat and Asa, (2 Chronicles 14:9; and 20:2) for we

know that under their reigns Jerusalem was preserved from utter destruction only by miraculous aid from heaven. This we are to regard as certain, that the Psalmist here exhibited to true believers an example of the favor of God towards them, from which they had reason to acknowledge that their condition was happy, seeing God had chosen for himself a dwelling-place upon mount Zion, that from thence he might preside over them for their good and safety.

A song of praise of the sons of Korah.

Psalm 48:1-3

1. Great is Jehovah, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. **2**. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. **3**. God in her palaces is known for a defence, [or fortress.]

1. *Great is Jehovah, and greatly to be praised.* The prophet, before proceeding to make mention of that special example of the favor of God towards them, to which I have adverted, teaches in general that the city of Jerusalem was happy and prosperous, because God had been graciously pleased to take upon him the charge of defending and preserving it. In this way he separates and distinguishes the Church of God from all the rest of the world; and when God selects from amongst the whole human race a small number whom he embraces with his fatherly love, this is an invaluable blessing which he bestows upon them. His wonderful goodness and righteousness shine forth in the government of the whole world, so that there is no part of it void of his praise, but we are everywhere furnished with abundant matter for praising him. Here, however, the inspired poet celebrates the glory of God which is manifested in the protection of the Church. He states, that *Jehovah is great, and greatly to be praised* in the holy city. But is he not so also in the whole world? Undoubtedly he is. As I have said, there is not a corner so hidden, into which his wisdom, righteousness, and goodness, do not penetrate; but it being his will that they should be manifested chiefly and in a particular manner in his Church, the prophet very properly sets before our eyes this mirror, in which God gives a more clear and vivid representation of his character. By calling Jerusalem *the holy mountain,* he teaches us in one word, by what right and means it came to be in a peculiar manner the city of God. It was so because the ark of the covenant had been placed there by divine appointment. The import of the expression is this: If Jerusalem is, as it were, a beautiful and magnificent theater on which God would have the greatness of his majesty to be beheld, it is not owing to any merits of its own, but because the ark of the covenant was established there by the commandment of God as a token or symbol of his peculiar favor.

2. *Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion* For the confirmation of the statement made in the preceding sentence, the prophet celebrates the excellencies for which mount Zion was at that time renowned; and in them was to be seen the glory of God, of which I have just now spoken. The beauty of its situation, which he mentions in the first place, was indeed natural; but by it he gives us to understand, that from the very commencement the agreeable appearance of the city had engraven upon it marks of the favor of God, so that the sight of it alone showed that God had in a special manner adorned and enriched that place, with the view of its being, at some future period, consecrated to sacred purposes. I do not, however, think that the situation is called beautiful and pleasant, merely because it was unequalled in the country of Judea; for there were other cities, as is well known, which were in no respect inferior to Jerusalem, either as to fertility or pleasantness of situation, and other advantages. In my opinion, along with the situation of the city, the Psalmist comprehends the glory which it derived from another source — from the circumstance that the temple of God was built there. When, therefore, we hear the beauty of the city here celebrated, let us call to our remembrance that spiritual beauty which was added to the natural beauty of the place, after the prophecy was given forth that the ark would there abide for ever. With respect to the word נוֹף, *noph,* which I have translated *situation,* commentators are not agreed. Some understand it as meaning *height* or *elevation,* as if it had been said that Jerusalem was situated on high and elevated ground. Others render it *climate* [190] because the Jews metaphorically call climates *branches,* [191] on account of the extent to which they are spread out. In a matter like this, which is of no great consequence, I am not disposed to be so very critical. Only I have selected that translation which seemed to me the most probable, namely, that the country in its appearance was pre-eminently pleasant and delightful. When the Psalmist speaks of mount Zion being *on the sides of the north,* it is doubtful whether he lays it down as a commendation of mount Zion, that it lay or looked towards the north; or whether we should explain the sentence thus: Although mount Zion looks towards the north, that does not in any degree diminish its beauty. The former interpretation, however,

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Beautiful in climate, that is, mount Zion is situated in a fair and lovely climate. This is the view taken by Montanus and Ainsworth. Bate and Parkhurst read, "*Beautiful in extension*, *i.e.*, in the prospect which it extends to the eye."

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Some ancient copies of the Septuagint have for the original words, נוֹף יפה, *yepheh noph*, which Calvin renders *beautiful for situation*, εὐρύνων, which Augustine and Ambrose translate by *dilatans*, *spreading* "This," says Hammond, "may not improbably have respect to a notion of נוף, usual in the *Misneh* for the *boughs* or *top branches of a tree*; which some of the Jews also would have take place here, as comparing *Zion* to *a beautiful well-spreading* tree."

seems to me to give the more natural meaning. We find the prophet Isaiah, with the view also of touching upon the excellence of this mountain, applying to it the very expression which is here employed. In the 14th chapter of his Prophecies, at the 13th verse, he represents Sennacherib as speaking thus: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north."

The Psalmist, in the next place, calls mount Zion *the joy of the whole earth* And he thus describes it, not only because, as the Jews foolishly talk, that country was healthy on account of the mildness of the climate; or because it produced sweet and excellent fruits, which might gratify ard yield delight to foreign nations — for this also is a cold and unsatisfactory speculation; — but because from thence salvation was to issue forth to the whole world, even as all nations have borrowed from thence the light of life, and the testimony of heavenly grace. If the joy which men experience and cherish is without God, the issue of their joy at length will be destruction, and their laughter will be turned into gnashing of teeth. But Christ appeared with his Gospel out of Zion, to fill the world with true joy and everlasting felicity. In the time of the prophet, the knowledge of the Gospel, it is true, had not yet reached foreign nations; but he makes use of this manner of expression with the highest propriety, to teach the Jews that true blessedness was to be sought for only from the gracious covenant of God, which was deposited in that holy place. At the same time also, he has foretold that which was at length fulfilled in the last time by the coming of Christ. From this we may learn, that to cause the hearts of the godly to rejoice, the favor of God alone abundantly suffices; as, on the contrary, when it is withdrawn, all men must inevitably be thrown into a state of wretchedness and sorrow. What is added immediately after, concerning *the city of the great King,* is intended to show, that mount Zion was not only holy itself, but that this high prerogative had been conferred upon it to render sacred the whole city, where God had chosen his seat, that he might rule over all people.

3. *God in her palaces is known for a defense* Here the sacred poet again brings forward, for the purpose of setting forth the dignity of the city of Jerusalem, the protection which God afforded it; as we have seen in Psalm 46:5,

"God is in the midst of her: she shall not be moved:
God shall help her, and that right early."

He expressly makes mention of *palaces* for the sake of contrast — to teach the Jews, that although the holy city was fortified by strong towers, and had within it magnificent houses, and such as resembled fortresses, yet its continued safety was owing to the power and aid of God alone. By these words, the people of God are taught, that although they dwell in strongholds and palaces, they must, nevertheless, be carefully on their guard, that this magnificence or loftiness may not shroud or conceal from their view the power of God; and that they be not like worldly men, who, resting satisfied

with riches and earthly means of help, set no value whatever upon having God for their guardian and protector. Worldly wealth, from our natural perverseness, tends to dazzle our eyes, and to make us forget God, and, therefore, we ought to meditate with special attention upon this doctrine, That whatever we possess, which seems worthy of being prized, must not be permitted to obscure the knowledge of the power and grace of God; but that, on the contrary, the glory of God ought always clearly to shine forth in all the gifts with which he may be pleased to bless and adorn us; so that we may account ourselves rich and happy in him, and no where else.

Psalm 48:4-7

4. For, behold! the kings assembled, they passed away together. **5**. They saw, so they marvelled; they were frightened, they fled precipitately. **6**. Fear [192] seized upon them there, and pain as of a woman in travail. **7**. By the east wind thou breakest in pieces the ships of Tarshish.

4 *For, behold! the kings assembled* Here that special deliverance of which I have spoken is touched upon. The prophet relates how, when the kings were assembled together to destroy Jerusalem, their efforts passed away without producing any effect, even as clouds in the atmosphere vanish away; yea, he tells us, that by a simple look at the city, they were defeated and undone, and that not after an ordinary manner, but like a woman who, when the hour of child-birth has come upon her, finds herself suddenly afflicted with pain and sorrow. We cannot affirm with certainty what particular part of Jewish history the prophet here speaks of; but the statements made suit very well both the time of Ahaz, and that of Hezekiah or Asa. It was indeed a wonderful work of God, when two very powerful kings — the king of Syria and the king of Israel, accompanied with an immense army — had smitten the city with such terror, that the king and his people were brought to the brink of despair, to see this formidable host suddenly routed and disappointed of the certain expectation which they entertained of making themselves masters of the city. Hence the prophet Isaiah 7:4 ironically calls them "smoking firebrands," because they were, so to speak, burning torches to kindle and consume by fire the whole country of Judea. Nor was the destruction of the countless host of Sennacherib in one night by an angel, without the intervention of man's agency, a less stupendous miracle, (2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36.) In like manner, when the king of Ethiopia gathered together an army of ten hundred thousand men, and came to besiege Jerusalem, the overthrow of so great a host was a memorable instance of the power of God, (2 Chronicles 14:9.) But

192 "Tremblement." — *Fr.* "Trembling."

whatever was the occasion on which this psalm was composed, the sacred writer informs us that the Jews found from manifest experience that God was the guardian and protector of the holy city, when he opposed himself to the invincible power of their enemies. He first declares that *the kings assembled* By these words he intimates that they had confederated and conspired together to destroy the Church. The expression, *passed away together,* may be explained in two ways; either as meaning that the armies when they had gathered themselves together were reduced to nothing, or that they undertook together, and with one consent, the expedition, as it were marshalled in battle array.

This second sense seems to me the most suitable to the scope of the passage; for it follows immediately after in the fifth verse, that they stood stricken with astonishment whenever they saw the city; and yet there will be no impropriety in understanding this verse as added by way of amplification. But as it affects very little the substance of the passage which of these two interpretations is adopted, I leave the reader to choose that which he considers the most appropriate. When the Psalmist says that upon beholding the city *they marvelled — were frightened — fled precipitately — and were seized with sorrow, like the pangs of a woman in travail* — he heaps together as many and varied expressions as possible, in order to set forth the greatness of the miracle which God had wrought in the overthrow of such a vast and formidable host. The language should be resolved thus: As soon as they saw the city they marvelled. It is related of Caesar in ancient times, that when speaking of the ease with which he subdued Egypt, he made use of the laconic saying, "I came, I saw, I conquered;" but the prophet here states, on the contrary, that the ungodly were struck with amazement at the mere sight of the city, as if God had dazzled their eyes with the splendor of his glory. The particle כֵּן, *ken, so,* is put as it were to show the thing by pointing to it with the finger. In the verse which immediately follows, the adverb שָׁם, *sham, there,* is used in the same sense. The comparison of *a woman in travail* is intended to express the sudden change which came upon the enemies of Israel. It afforded a more bright and illustrious manifestation of the grace of God, that they were seized with a fear which they had not anticipated, lost their courage all at once, and from the height of secure and presumptuous pride, instantly fell into such a state of terror, and were so confounded, that they precipitately betook themselves to flight. [193] From this passage we are taught that it is no uncommon thing, if in our day the Church is assailed by powerful adversaries, and has to sustain dreadful assaults; for it has been God's usual way from the beginning thus to humble his own people, in order to give more irrefragable and striking proofs of his

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"Et d'une fierte pleine d'asseurance et outrecuidance sont incontinent tombez en espouvantement et ont tellement este estourdis, qu'ils s'en sont fuis grand erre." — *Fr.*

wonderful power. At the same time, let us remember that a nod alone on the part of God is sufficient to deliver us; and that, although our enemies may be ready to fall upon us on every side to overwhelm us, it is in his power, whenever he pleases, to strike them with amazement of spirit, and thus to make their hearts fail in a moment in the very midst of their efforts against us. Let this reflection serve as a bridle to keep our minds from being drawn away, to look in all directions for human aid.

7. *By the east wind* [194] *thou breakest in pieces the ships of Tarshish* Commentators are divided in their view of this passage. [195] But let us rest contented with the natural sense, which is simply this, that the enemies of the Church were overthrown and plunged into destruction, just as God by suddenly raising storms sinks the ships of Cilicia to the bottom of the sea. The Psalmist celebrates the power which God is accustomed to display in great and violent storms; and his language implies that it is not to be wondered at if God, who breaks by the violence of the winds the strongest *ships,* had also overthrown his enemies, who were inflated with the presumptuous confidence which they reposed in their own strength. By the *sea of Tarshish* the Hebrews mean the Mediterranean Sea, because of the country of Cilicia, which in ancient times was called *Tarshish,* as Josephus informs us, although in process of time this name came to be restricted to one city of the country. But as the chief part of the naval traffic of the Jews was with Cilicia, there is here attributed to that country by synecdoche what was common to other countries which were at a greater distance and less known.

Psalm 48:8-10

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The east wind in Judea and in the Mediterranean is very tempestuous and destructive. It is also very dry and parching, as well as sudden and terrible in its action. Genesis 41:6; Exodus 14:21; Ezekiel 19:12; and 27:26; Job 27:21; Isaiah 27:8; Jeremiah 18:17; Jonah 4:8. Hence the LXX. translate the original words, "Εν πνευματι βιαίω," "With a violent wind;" and the Chaldee reads, "A strong east wind as a fire from before the Lord." "Such a wind," says Bishop Mant, "is well known to the modern mariner by the name of *Levanter*, and is of the same kind as that spoken of in the twenty-seventh chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, under the name of Euroclydon."

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It is supposed by some that there is in it an implied similitude; the particle of similitude used in the preceding verse being understood. Thus French and Skinner translate the 6th and 7th verses — "Then did trembling seize upon them — Pangs as of a woman in travail — As when with a stormy wind, Thou breakest in pieces the ships of Tarshish." According to this translation, "the ships of Tarshish" do not refer to an invading army, nor "the breaking in pieces of them" to an actual storm which had this effect; but the sacred writer employs another figure, the more vividly to describe the terror which seized upon these confederate powers. He had in the preceding verse compared it with the pangs of a woman in travail; and here he compares it to the trembling which seized upon mariners when the fury of the east wind, which shattered in pieces the largest and strongest vessels, as the ships of Tarshish probably then were, was let loose upon them.

> **8**. As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of Jehovah of hosts, [or armies,] in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever. Selah. **9**. O God! we have waited for thy mercy in the midst of thy temple. **10**. As is thy name, O God! so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness.

8. *As we have heard, so have we seen.* There are two senses in which this passage may be understood, either of which is suitable. The first is, that the sacred writer, speaking in the name of true believers, declares that the same power which God in the days of old had displayed in delivering their fathers, he now exercised towards their posterity. They had heard from the mouth of their fathers, and had learned from sacred history, how God in his great mercy and fatherly goodness had succoured his Church; but now they affirm that they can bear testimony to this not only from their having heard it spoken about, but also from having seen it, [196] inasmuch as they had actually experienced the same mercy exercised by God towards themselves. The amount of what is stated then is, that the faithful not only had a record of the goodness and power of God in histories, but that they also felt by actual experience, yea, even saw with their eyes, what they knew before by hearsay, and the report of their fathers; and that therefore God continues unchangeably the same, confirming as he does, age after age, the examples of his grace exhibited in ancient times, by renewed and ever-recurring experiences. The other sense is somewhat more refined; and yet it is very suitable, namely, That God actually performed what he had promised to his people; as if the faithful had said, that what they had before only heard of was now exhibited before their eyes. As long as we have only the bare promises of God, his grace and salvation are as yet hidden in hope; but when these promises are actually performed, his grace and salvation are clearly manifested. If this interpretation is admitted, it contains the rich doctrine, that God does not disappoint the hope which he produces in our minds by means of his word, and that it is not His way to be more liberal in promising than faithful in performing what he has promised. When it is said, *in the city,* the letter ב, *beth,* is taken for מ, *mem,* or ל, *lamed;* that is to say, for *of*, or *as to,* or *with respect to the city.* The prophet does not mean to say that in Jerusalem the faithful were informed that God would succor his servants, although this was no doubt true, but that God from the beginning had been the gracious and faithful guardian of his own city, and would continue always to be so. Mention is expressly made of *the city of God,* because he has not promised to extend the same protecting care to all indiscriminately, but only to his chosen and peculiar people. The name *Jehovah of armies* is employed to express the power of God; but immediately

196 "Mais maintenant ils disent qu'ils en sont testmoins non pas par avoir ouy dere seulement, mais par avoir veu." — *Fr.*

after the faithful add, that he is *their God,* for the purpose of pointing to their adoption, that thus they may be emboldened to trust in him, and thus to betake themselves freely and familiarly to him. In the second Council of Nice, the good fathers who sat there wrested this passage to prove that it is not enough to teach divine truth in churches, unless there are at the same time pictures and images for confirming it. This was a piece of silliness very shameful, and unworthy of being mentioned, were it not that it is profitable for us to understand that those who purposed to infect the Church of God with such a corruption, were horribly stricken with a spirit of giddiness and stupidity.

The concluding clause of the verse distinguishes Jerusalem from all the other cities of the world, which are subject to vicissitudes, and flourish only for a time. As Jerusalem was founded by God, it continued steadfast and unmoved amidst the varied commotions and revolutions which took place in the world; and it is not to be wondered at, if he continued through successive ages to maintain the city of which he made choice, and in which it was his will that his name should be called upon for ever. It may, however, be objected, that this city was once destroyed, and the people carried into captivity. But this does not militate against the statement here made; for, before that event happened, the restoration of the city was foretold by Jeremiah 27:22; and, therefore, when it took place, God truly, and in a special manner, showed how steadfast his work was. And now, since Christ by his coming has renewed the world, whatever was spoken of that city in old time belongs to the spiritual Jerusalem, which is dispersed through all the countries of the world. Whenever, therefore, our minds are agitated and perplexed, we should call to remembrance the truth, that, whatever dangers and apprehensions may threaten us, the safety of the Church which God has established, although it may be sorely shaken, can never, however powerfully assaulted, be so weakened as to fall and be involved in ruin. The verb, which is in the future tense, *will establish,* may be resolved into the past tense, *has established;* but this will make no difference as to the sense.

9 *O God! we have waited for thy mercy* This verse teaches us that the faithful were preserved by the power of God; for, when all things were in a state of the greatest confusion, they continued tranquil and patient until God at length, having pity upon them, brought them help. The Hebrew word, דמם, *damam,* which we have rendered *to wait,* properly signifies *to be silent,* and is here used to denote tranquillity of mind. From this we conclude, that the people of God were so harassed with dangers, that, had they listened to the judgment of carnal sense and reason, they would have been overwhelmed with terror; even as we know that men are in a state of continual uneasiness, and are driven hither and thither by contrary waves, until faith tranquillise their minds, and settle them in true patience. The amount of what the Psalmist says is, that the faithful, although severely afflicted, were not driven from their purpose, and prevented from relying

upon the aid of God; but that, on the contrary, by their patience and hope, they opened the gate of his grace. It served to magnify and illustrate the greatness of the grace of God, that their expectations of assistance from him were not disappointed. From this we may also deduce the profitable warning, that if the aid of God is withdrawn from us, it is because we distrust his promises, and, by our impatience, prevent his grace, which is laid up for those who wait in patience, from flowing upon us. But what is meant by the expression, *In the midst of the temple?* Is it that the people of God maintained their faith only in that place, and that each of them ceased to hope as soon as he returned to his own dwelling? No; on the contrary, it is certain that they carried home with them the hope which they had entertained in the temple, that they might continue steadfastly to abide by it. But God having promised that this place, in which he would be called upon, would be the seat and dwelling-place of his power and grace, his people here affirm, that, relying upon this heavenly promise, they were persuaded beyond all doubt that God would show himself merciful and gracious towards them, since they had a real and sure pledge of his presence. We must not conceive, merely because our own fancy suggests it, that God will be our deliverer. We are to believe that he will be so only in so far as he freely and willingly offers himself to us in this character. Now, if this symbol or pledge of the presence of God, which was only a shadow, ought to have had such influence upon the minds of true believers under the former dispensation, as to make them hope for life in the midst of death, surely when Christ has now descended amongst us, to unite us much more closely to his Father, we have sufficient ground for continuing in a state of undisturbed tranquillity, although the world should be embroiled in confusion and turned upside down. Only it must be our endeavor that the service of God may flourish pure and entire amongst us, and that thus the glory of his temple may shine forth in the midst of us.

10. *As is thy name, O God! so is thy praise* Some connect this verse with the preceding sentence, as if it had been said, Lord, it is not in vain that thou hast enjoined upon us the duty of celebrating thy name; for thou furnishest at the same time matter of praise. Thus the sense will be, that the name of God is magnified and extolled with effect, or that along with his promises his power is at the same time manifested. Others give this exposition, which is somewhat more refined, That the works of God correspond with his name; for in Hebrew he is called, אל, *El,* [197] from his power, and he shows in very deed that this name is not applied to him in vain, but that the praise which is ascribed to him by it is right and what is due to him. The former exposition, as it is less forced, so it comes nearer to the words and mind of the sacred writer, namely, that God bore testimony by his works that it was not in

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"C'est a dire, Fort." — *Fr. marg.* "That is to say, Strong."

vain that he was acknowledged and worshipped by the Jews as the true and only God. Yet when I come to consider the words which follow immediately after, *Unto the ends of the earth,* I think that the prophet meant something else, — that he intended to show, that wherever the fame of the name of God may be spread, men will know that he is worthy of the highest praise. The words contain a tacit contrast. At that time, the names of idols, it is well known, were very common, and had sway through the whole world; and yet, whatever fame these counterfeit gods had acquired, we know that praise in no respect belonged to them, since no sign of divinity whatever could be discovered about them. But here the prophet, on the contrary, declares, Lord, in whatever part of the world thy name is heard, it will always be accompanied with solid and rightful praise, or it will ever carry along with it matter of praise, since the whole world will understand how thou hast dealt with thy chosen people. What is added immediately after is to the same purpose, *Thy right hand is full of righteousness,* teaching us, that God, in succouring his own people, clearly manifests his righteousness, as if he stretched forth his arm to us that we might touch his righteousness with the finger; and that he shows not only one specimen or two of his righteousness, but in every thing and every where exhibits to us a complete proof of it. We ought to bear in mind what we have stated elsewhere, that *the righteousness of God* is to be understood of his faithfulness which he observes in maintaining and defending his own people. From this there accrues to us the inestimable comfort, that the work in which God especially desires to be acknowledged as righteous consists in providing what belongs to our welfare and to our maintenance in safety. [198] We now see that the meaning of the inspired poet is, That the names of false gods prevailed, and were renowned among men, although they had done nothing to furnish matter of true praise; but that it was altogether different with respect to the God of Israel: for wherever the report of him was carried, all would understand that he was the deliverer of his people, and that he did not disappoint their hope and desires, nor forsake them in danger.

Psalm 48:11-14

11. Mount Zion shall rejoice, the daughters [199] of Judah shall be glad, because of thy judgments. **12**. Encompass Zion, and go round about her, number her towers. **13**. Set your hearts [200] to her walls, exalt

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"Que l'oeuvre en laquelle Dieu vent singulierement estre recognu juste, c'est in procurant les choses qui appartienent a nostre salut, et a nous maintenir en sauvete." — *Fr.*

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"C'este, villes," — *Fr. marg.* "That is, cities."

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"C'est, prenez bien garde." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, take good heed."

her towers, [201] that ye may make report to the generation to come. **14**. For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.

11 *Mount Zion shall rejoice* The Psalmist now concludes his exhortation to rejoicing, telling us that Jerusalem and the other cities of Judea shall have cause to commend the righteousness of God, [202] because they had found from undoubted experience that he was the protector of their welfare. He here makes use of the word *judgment,* because God, who undertook the cause of his Church, openly showed that he was the enemy of her oppressors, and that he would repress their presumption and audacity.

12 and **13** *Encompass Zion, etc.* Here the prophet again commends the situation and beauty of Jerusalem, intimating that the city was strongly fortified and impregnable; and he does this, because in these external things the blessing of God in some respect shone forth. We must always bear in mind what he stated in a preceding verse, that "God in her palaces is known for a fortress." In making mention here of her *towers* and *walls,* we are not to suppose that he would have the minds of the faithful to rest in these things. He rather sets them before us as a mirror in which the character of God may be seen. He therefore says, *Encompass Zion* that is, look upon it carefully and attentively on every side*; — number her towers, and apply your mind to consider her walls;* that is, estimate her palaces as they deserve, and thus it will be manifest beyond all doubt that this is a city chosen of God, seeing it far surpasses all other cities. In insisting upon these points, his whole drift is to make manifest the character with which the Lord had invested Jerusalem in making it a sacred place, in which he himself might take up his abode, and in erecting it as a dwelling-place for his people. It seems, moreover, that the prophet, in stating that the object of his exhortation was, that the beauty and magnificence of the holy city *might be reported* to the succeeding generation, tacitly gives us to understand, that the time would at length come when that city would be no longer seen. What need would there be for making this report if it could be seen and were always before the eyes of the world? Although, then, he has said a little before that Jerusalem is established for ever, yet he now teaches us, by way of correction, what kind of perpetuity it will be — that it will endure only till the time of the renovation of the Church. We belong to that generation to come, to whom it is said these things will be reported; for we are sharers in all the benefits which God, in the days of old, bestowed upon his ancient people. The outward splendor for which Jerusalem was admired does not, indeed, stand

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"Palais." — *Fr.* "Palaces."

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"Auront matiere de liesse." — *Fr.* "Shall have matter of gladness."

forth conspicuous amongst us at the present day; but since the coming of Christ into our world, the Church has been no less richly and magnificently adorned with spiritual gifts than Jerusalem, under the shadows of the Law, was in old time surrounded and fortified with strong walls and towers. I have translated the word פסגו, *pasgu, exalt,* referring it to the value which ought to be put upon the towers of the city because of their excellence. To explain it, as is done by some, *fortify* or *strengthen,* seems to be less suitable. If any are inclined rather to follow the interpretation of those who render it *look upon* or *behold,* I have no great objection to it.

14. *For this God is our God for ever and ever* From these words it appears still more clearly, that when the prophet spake of the palaces of Jerusalem, it was not that the godly should keep their eyes fixed upon them, but that by the aid of these outward things they should elevate their minds to the contemplation of the glory of God. God would have them to behold, as it were, the marks of his grace engraven wherever they turned themselves, or rather, to recognize him as present in these marks. From this we conclude, that whatever dignity or excellence shines forth in the Church, we are not to consider it otherwise than as the means of presenting God to our view, that we may magnify and praise him in his gifts. The demonstrative pronoun זה, *zeh, this,* is not superfluous; it is put to distinguish the only true God, of whose existence and character the faithful were fully persuaded, from all the false gods which men have set themselves to invent. The unbelieving may boldly speak of the name of God, and prate about religion; but however much they may do this, when they are more closely questioned, it will be found that they have nothing certain or settled on the subject. Yea, the vain imaginations and inventions of those who are not grounded in the true faith must necessarily come to nothing. It is, then, the property of faith to set before us not a confused but a distinct knowledge of God, and such as may not leave us wavering, as superstition leaves its votaries, which, we know, is always introducing some new counterfeit deities and in countless numbers. We ought, therefore, so much the more to mark the emphatic demonstrative pronoun *this,* which is here used. We meet with an almost similar passage in the prophecies of Isaiah,

"Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation:"— Isaiah 25:9

as if the faithful had protested and declared, We have not an uncertain God, or a God of whom we have only a confused and an indistinct apprehension, but one of whom we have a true and solid knowledge. When the faithful here declare that God will continue unchangeably steadfast to his purpose in maintaining his Church, their object is to encourage and strengthen themselves to persevere in a continued course of faith. What follows immediately after, *He will be our guide even unto death,* seems to be added by way of exposition. In making this statement, the people

of God assure themselves that he will be their guide and keeper for ever. They are not to be understood as meaning that they will be safe under the government and conduct of God in this life only, and that he will abandon them in the midst of death; but they express generally, and according to the common people's way of speaking, [203] what I have stated, that God will take care of all who rely upon him even to the end. What we translate, *Even unto death,* consists of two words in the Hebrew text, מות אל, *al muth;* but some read in one word, אלמות, *almuth,* and take it for *age or eternity* [204] The sense, however, will be the same whether we read the one way or the other. Others translate it *childhood,* [205] in this sense, As God has from the beginning carefully preserved and maintained his Church, even as a father brings up his children from their infancy, so he will continue to act in the same manner. The first sense, however, in my opinion, is the more appropriate. Others translate it *in secret* or *hidden,* [206] which seems equally remote from the meaning of the prophet; unless, perhaps, we should understand him as intending expressly to say, that God's way of exercising his government is hidden, that we may not measure or judge of it by carnal reason, but by faith.

203

"Et selon la facon de parler du commun peuple." — *Fr.*

204

This is the view taken by the Septuagint, which renders it by, "Εις τους αἰωνας," "To all eternity." "A very large number of copies," says Street, "both of De Rossi's and Dr Kennicott's collation, have עלמות in one word. Symmachus renders this expression by το διηνεκες, *perpetuum.*"

205

As if the word were derived from, עלם *elem, a young man* Thus the Chaldee reads, "In the days of our youth." See מות, in Buxton's Lexicon.

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This is the sense in which Houbigant understands אלמות, *almuth*; for he reads it as one word; and he is of opinion that it belongs to the title of the following psalm, to which, he says, אלמות, *hidden*, agrees very well, as an enigma is set forth in that psalm. Others, who read מות אל, *al muth*, in two words, *upon death*, consider them also as belonging to the inscription of the following psalm, observing that there can be no propriety in saying — *ever and ever — unto death* Merrick, however, remarks, "The words *for ever and ever*, and *unto death*, seem to me very consistent, as they relate to different propositions: This God will be our God to all eternity, and (by that power which he has already thus exerted in our protection) will conduct us through life with safety."

Psalm 49

PSALM 49

The wicked and the votaries of worldly pleasure often enjoy prosperity, while such as fear the Lord are exposed to affliction, and disposed to faint under the pressure of it. To moderate that pride which the one class is apt to feel in the midst of their success, and administer a check to the despondency of the other, the Psalmist shows what little reason we have to envy the supposed happiness of the ungodly, which, even when at its height, is vain and evanescent; and he teaches us that good men, however great their trials may be, are objects of the divine regard, and will be eventually delivered from their enemies.

To the Chief musician, a psalm of the sons of Korah. [207]

Psalm 49:1-4

1. Hear this, all ye people; give ear, all ye inhabitants of the world:
2. Both ye sons of Adam, [208] and ye sons of men, [209] rich and poor,

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Ten psalms bear the inscription, "*Of* or *for* the sons of Korah." As the prefixed preposition ל may be translated either *of* or *for*, it has been doubted whether this and other psalms, with a similar inscription, were written by or for the sons of Korah. Some, as Calmet, think it most probable that they were composed by them, from certain peculiarities of style in which they agree with each other, and differ from the psalms which bear the name of David. Others ascribe these psalms to David, and suppose that they were committed by him to the chief musician, to be sung by the posterity of Korah.

208

"C'est, ceux de bas estat." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, those of low estate."

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together. **3.** My mouth shall speak of wisdom; and the meditation of my heart shall be of understanding. **4.** I will incline my ear to a parable: [210] I will open my enigma [211] upon the harp.

1. *Hear this, all ye people.* Whoever may have been the penman of this psalm, it discusses one of the most important principles in divine philosophy, and there is a propriety in the elevated terms designed to awaken and secure attention, with which the Psalmist announces his purpose to discourse of things of a deep and momentous nature. To a superficial view, indeed, the subject might seem trite and common-place, treating, as he does, of the shortness of human life, and the vanity of those objects in which worldly men confide. But the real scope of the psalm is, to comfort the people of God under the sufferings to which they are exposed, by teaching them to expect a happy change in their condition, when God, in his own time, shall interpose to rectify the disorders of the present system. There is a higher lesson still inculcated by the Psalmist — that, as God's providence of the world is not presently apparent, we must exercise patience, and rise superior to the suggestions of carnal sense in anticipating the favorable issue. That it is our duty to maintain a resolute struggle with our afflictions, however severe these may be, and that it were foolish to place happiness in the enjoyment of such fleeting possessions as the riches, honors, or pleasures of this world, may be precepts which even the heathen philosophers have enforced, but they have uniformly failed in setting before us the true source of consolation. However admirably they discourse of a happy life, they confine themselves entirely to commendations upon virtue, and do not bring prominently forward to our view that God, who governs the world, and to whom alone we can repair with confidence in the most desperate circumstances. But slender comfort can be derived upon this subject from the teaching of philosophy. If, therefore, the Holy Ghost in this psalm introduces to our notice truths which are sufficiently familiar to experience, it is that he may raise our minds from them to the higher truth of the divine government of the world, assuring us of the fact, that God sits supreme, even when the wicked are triumphing most in their success, or when the righteous are trampled under the foot of contumely, and that a day is coming when he will dash the cup of pleasure out of the hands of his enemies, and rejoice the hearts of his friends, by delivering them out of their severest distresses. This is the only consideration which can impart solid comfort under our afflictions.

"C'est, les nobles." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, the noble."

210

"A *mon* proverbe." — *Fr.* "To *my* proverb." "Ou, sentence grave." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, grave sentence."

211

"Ou, dire obscur." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, obscure saying."

Formidable and terrible in themselves, they would overwhelm our souls, did not the Lord lift upon us the light of his countenance. Were we not assured that he watches over our safety, we could find no remedy from our evils, and no quarter to which we might resort under them.

The remarks which have been made may explain the manner in which the inspired writer introduces the psalm, soliciting our attention, as about to discourse on a theme unusually high and important. Two things are implied in this verse, that the subject upon which he proposes to enter is of universal application, and that we require to be admonished and aroused ere we are brought to a due measure of consideration. The words which I have translated, *inhabitants of the world,* are translated by others, *inhabitants of time;* but this is a harsh mode of expression, however much it may agree with the scope of the psalm. He calls upon all men indiscriminately, because all were equally concerned in the truths which he intended to announce. By *sons of Adam,* we may understand the meaner or lower class of mankind; and by *sons of men,* [212] the high, the noble, or such as sustain any pre-eminence in life. Thus, in the outset, he states it to be his purpose to instruct high and low without exception; his subject being one in which the whole human family was interested, and in which every individual belonging to it required to be instructed.

3. *My mouth shall speak of wisdom* The prophet was warranted in applying these commendatory terms to the doctrine which he was about to communicate. It is, no doubt, by plain appeals to observation that we find him reproving human folly; but the general principle upon which his instruction proceeds is one by no means obvious to the common sense of mankind, not to say that his design in using such terms is less to assert the dignity of his subject than simply to awaken attention. This he does all the more effectually by speaking as one who would apply his own mind to

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The original words for the first of these expressions are, אדם בני *bene adam*; and those for the second, איש בני *bene ish* אדם, *adam*, from אדמה, *adamah*, *earth*, means an earthly, frail, mortal, mean man. The term איש, *ish*, on the other hand, is often used to describe a man who is great and eminent, distinguished for his extraction, strength, valor, and dignity. Thus, in 1 Samuel 25:15, we read, "Art thou not איש, *ish*, a man?" which is explained by what follows, "And who is like thee in Israel?" denoting there the military valor and reputation of Abner. When the two expressions, אדם בני, *bene adam*, and בני איש, *bene ish*, are used together as in this place, in Psalm 62:9, Isaiah 2:9, and 5:15, the Jewish Rabbins and modern Christian interpreters have understood a difference of rank to be stated; the former expression, denoting persons of obscure birth, of low rank, the common people: and the latter, meaning men of illustrious descent, the great or nobler sorts of men. See Archbishop Secker's Dissertation on the words אדם איש אנוש, in Appendix to Merrick's Annotations on the Psalms, No. 5. The Septuagint translates the former phrase by "Οἱ γηγενεῖς," the earth-born." The Chaldee expresses the former by *the sons of old Adam*, and the latter by *the sons of Jacob*; thus intending to comprehend Jews and Gentiles, all men in the world. "But," says Hammond, "it is more likely that the phrases denote only the several conditions of men, men of the *lower* and *higher* rank, for so the *consequeents* interpret it, *rich* and *poor*."

instruction rather than assume the office of exhortation. He puts himself forward as an humble scholar, one who, in acting the part of teacher, has an eye at the same time to his own improvement. It were desirable that all the ministers of God should be actuated by a similar spirit, disposing them to regard God as at once their own teacher and that of the common people, and to embrace in the first place themselves that divine word which they preach to others. [213] The Psalmist had another object in view. He would secure the greater weight and deference to his doctrine by announcing that he had no intention to vend fancies of his own, but to advance what he had learned in the school of God. This is the true method of instruction to be followed in the Church. The man who holds the office of teacher must apply himself to the reception of truth before he attempt to communicate it, and in this manner become the means of conveying to the hands of others that which God has committed to his own. Wisdom is not the growth of human genius. It must be sought from above, and it is impossible that any should speak with the propriety and knowledge necessary for the edification of the Church, who has not, in the first place, been taught at the feet of the Lord. To condescend upon the words, some read in the third verse, *And the meditation of my heart shall speak of understanding* But as it were a harsh and improper expression to say that *the meditation of the heart speaks,* I have adopted the simpler reading.

4. *I will incline my ear* [214] *to a parable* The Hebrew word משל, *mashal,* [215] which I have translated *parable,* properly denotes a *similitude;* but it is often applied to any deep or weighty sayings, because these are generally embellished with figures and metaphors. The noun which follows, חידת,

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"Aussi certes il est bien requis que tous les Prophetes de Dieu ayent un tel vouloir et affection, ascavoir qu'ils souffrent volontiers que Dieu soit leur maistre aussi bien que de tout le peuple, et qu'ils recoyvent tous les premiers sa parolle, laquelle ils portent de leur bouche aux autres." — *Fr.*

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Bythner and Fry are of opinion, that "the inclining of the ear" is a metaphor taken from the position of the minstrel, who, in accommodating his words to the tune, brings his ear close to the harp, that he may catch the sounds. Thus the Psalmist expresses the sense he himself had of the importance of his subject, and his purpose of giving to it the most serious attention.

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chidoth [216] and which I have rendered *an enigma,* or *riddle,* is to be understood in nearly the same sense. In Ezekiel 17:2, we have both the nouns with their corresponding verbs joined together, חוד חידה ומשל משל, *chud chedah umshol mashal,* the literal translation being, "Enigmatize an enigma, and parabolize a parable." I am aware that the reference in this place is to an allegorical discourse, but I have already adverted to the reason why, in Hebrew, the name of enigmas or similitudes is given to any remarkable or important sayings. The Psalmist, when he adds that he will *open* his dark saying, shows that nothing was farther from his intention than to wrap the subject of his discourse in perplexing and intricate obscurity. The truths of revelation are so high as to exceed our comprehension; but, at the same time, the Holy Spirit has accommodated them so far to our capacity, as to render all Scripture profitable for instruction. None can plead ignorance: for the deepest and most difficult doctrines are made plain to the most simple and unlettered of mankind. I see little force in the idea suggested by several interpreters, of the Psalmist having employed his *harp,* that he might render a subject in itself harsh and disagreeable more engaging by the charms of music. He would merely follow the usual practice of accompanying the psalm with the harp.

This word is of great latitude in its signification. It signifies primarily any similitude by which another thing is expressed. Thence it comes to denote a figurative discourse, either in the form of fiction and fable, such as riddles or significant apologues, as that of Jotham, Judges 9:7, or in which application is made of some true example or similitude, as when the sluggard is bidden "go to the ant," and the impenitent sinner to consider the "swallow and crane," which return at their certain seasons, and so are fitted to give a lesson to sinners to repent. And, finally, it belongs to all moral doctrine, either darkly or sententiously delivered; wise men, in ancient times, having been in the habit of delivering their lessons in short concise sentences, sometimes in schemes and figures, and sometimes without them, as we see in the Proverbs of Solomon, many of which are plain moral sayings without any figure or comparison. Of this sort is that which is here introduced to our attention; it is a moral theme not much veiled with figures, nor so concise as proverbs usually are, but which contains the most instructive lessons on the vanity of the prosperity of all wicked men. See Hammond *in loco.*

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This word is derived from an Arabic root which signifies *to bend a thing aside*, *to tie knots*, *etc.*; and thus it means *an intricate species of composition*, *a riddle* It is used for *a riddle* in the story of Samson, Judges 14:14, 15; and for *difficult questions*, as those put by the Queen of Sheba to Solomon, 1 Kings 10:1. See Lowth's Lectures on Sacred Poetry, volume1, p. 78. Accordingly, it is here rendered by the Septuagint, "τὸ πρόβλημά μου," "my problem or difficult question," which is not only asked in the fifth verse, but also answered in the subsequent verses. The word, however, is also applied to poetical compositions of a highly adorned and finished style, in which nothing enigmatical appears, but which contain weighty and important matter set forth in the parabolic style to secure the reader's or the hearer's attention, Psalm 78:2. See Gesenius' Lexicon. In the subject-matter of this psalm there does not appear to be any thing peculiarly intricate. It treats of the vanity of riches, and the folly of those who trust in them; their insufficiency to save from the power of death; and the final triumph of all the suffering people of God over their rich and haughty persecutors. This is indeed a dark theme to the worldly-minded man; but it contains nothing occult or mysterious to those who are taught of God.

Psalm 49:5-9

> **5**. Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil? the iniquity of my heel shall compass me about. **6**. They trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches. **7**. The brother shall not be able to redeem, [literally, shall not redeem by redeeming;] none shall give to God the price of his redemption. **8**. And the redemption of their soul shall be precious, and their continuance for ever. **9**. That he should still live for ever, and not see the grave.

5. *Wherefore should I fear in the days of evil?* The Psalmist now enters upon the point on which he proposed to discourse, That the people of God must not yield to despondency even in the most distressing circumstances, when their enemies may seem to have enclosed them on every side, but must rest assured that God, although he connives for a time, is awake to their condition, and only watches the best opportunity of executing his judgments. This manner of introducing the subject by interrogation is much more emphatic than if he had simply asserted his resolution to preserve his mind undisturbed in the midst of adversity. In the second clause of the verse he particularises the heaviest and most bitter of all afflictions, those which are experienced by the righteous when their enemies triumph in the unrestrained indulgence of their wickedness. *When,* the adverb of time, must therefore be understood — *When the iniquity of my heel shall compass me about* There is a different meaning which some interpreters have attached to the words, namely, If I should fear in the days of evil, and be guilty of the excessive anxieties of the unbeliever, — in that case, when the hour of my death came, my iniquity would compass me about. *The heel* they take to be the end of life. But this interpretation is to be dismissed at once as most unnatural. Nor do I see what reason others have for referring this word to *the thoughts,* for I believe that in no other part of Scripture can such a metaphor or similitude be found. Others, with more plausibility, have rendered the original word *liers in wait,* [217] because the Hebrew verb עקב, *akab,* signifies *to deceive;* and they consider the Psalmist as intimating, that he would not fear though crafty and treacherous men laid snares for him. In my opinion, there is no figure intended; and he means to say, that he would have no fear when his enemies surrounded him, and in pursuing him, trode, as it were, upon his heel. The French have a similar expression,

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Lowth reads, "The wickedness of those who *lie in wait for me*, or endeavor to *supplant me*;" and Horsley, "When the iniquity of *those who plot against me* environs me." The original word is עקבי, *akabey*, which Dr Adam Clarke thinks is to be considered as the contracted plural of עקבים, *akabim*, *supplanters*, from עקב, *akab*, *to supplant*, *to defraud* It is literally, "My Jacobs;" that is, those who would act towards me as Jacob acted towards Esau. See Genesis 27:36, and Jeremiah 9:4-17, 9. The Syriac and Arabic versions read it, "My enemies."

"Poursuyvre jusques aux talons." [218] I agree with them, that he speaks of enemies, but it is of their wicked persecution as they press upon him in the height of their power, and with design to destroy him, keep themselves near him, and tread, so to speak, upon his very heel.

6. *They trust in their wealth.* We are now furnished with the reason why the suffering children of God should dismiss their apprehensions, and keep themselves from despondency, even when reduced to extremity by the violence and treachery of their enemies. Any boasted power which they possess is fleeting and evanescent. The Psalmist would convince us that the fear of man is unwarrantable; that it argues ignorance of what man is even at his best; and that it were as reasonable to startle at a shadow or a spectre. *They boast themselves,* he adds, *in the multitude of their riches,* and this is an error into which we are disposed to fall, forgetting that the condition of man in this world is fluctuating and transitory. It is not merely from the intrinsic insufficiency of wealth, honors, or pleasures, to confer true happiness, that the Psalmist proves the misery of worldly men, but from their manifest and total incapacity of forming a correct judgment of such possessions. Happiness is connected with the state of mind of that man who enjoys it, and none would call those happy who are sunk in stupidity and security, and are destitute of understanding. The Psalmist satisfactorily proves the infatuation of the wicked from the confidence which they place in their power and wealth, and their disposition to boast of them. It is a convincing sign of folly when one cannot discern what is before his eyes. Not a day passes without forcing the plain fact upon their notice, that none can redeem the life of another; so that their conduct is nothing less than insanity. Some read, *A man shall not be able to redeem his brother;* which amounts to the same meaning, and the text admits of this translation. The Hebrew word אח, *ach,* which I have rendered *brother,* is by others translated *one;* but I do not approve, although I would not absolutely reject, this reading. The Psalmist adds, that *none can give a price to God for the ransom of another,* where he adverts to the truth that men's lives are absolutely at the disposal of God, and that they never can be extended by any human arrangement one moment beyond the period which God has fixed.

He enforces the same lesson in the verse which follows, where he states that *the redemption of their soul is precious,* an expression not to be understood as implying merely that it is an event of rare occurrence, but that it never can take place, as 1 Samuel 3:1, where the word of the Lord is said to have been precious under the priesthood of Eli, when it is evidently meant that it had ceased altogether. The Psalmist would assert that no man can hope to purchase an immortality either for himself or others in this world. I have rendered the close of verse 8, *And their continuance for ever;* but

218 *i.e.* "To pursue even to the heels."

others, who construe the Hebrew word חדל, *chadal,* as a verb, meaning *to cease,* read, *And ceaseth for ever,* as if the Psalmist meant that no price was sufficiently great to answer the purpose, and that it must therefore cease for ever, as what could never obtain the end desired. I consider that which I have given to be the real meaning of the word, having had occasion already to observe upon Psalm 39:5, that it signifies the fixed term of human life. The words in verse 9, *That he should still live for ever,* more fully express the truth, that it is not merely impossible to redeem the life of men when they are dead, but impossible while they are yet living, to extend the term of their existence. A definite limit has been assigned to every man's life. This he cannot pass over, and the Psalmist would impress the fact upon us as one which stamps folly upon the conduct of the wicked, who will cherish their unfounded confidence even at the moment when they are upon the brink of the grave. In all this, it may strike the reader that he has not announced any thing which merits being called a *dark saying,* and has rather been treating a popular subject in a very plain style of language; but if he consider that David here condemns, as by a voice issuing from the awful judgment-seat of God, the stupidity of such as forget that they are men, he will not be disposed to reckon the expression inapplicable. Again, we have seen that he *has opened* his dark saying, it being the divine will that instruction should be delivered in a form adapted to the meanest capacity.

Psalm 49:10-12

> **10**. For he shall see that wise men die, the fool and the brutish person shall perish together, and shall leave their wealth to strangers. **11**. Their inward thought is their houses for ever, [219] and their dwelling-places to all generations; they have called out their names upon the earth. **12**. And man shall not abide in honour; he has become like the beasts: they perish.

10 *For he shall see that wise men die.* I consider the ninth and tenth verses to be connected, and that it is the intention of the Psalmist to censure the folly of those who dream of spending an eternity in this world, and set themselves seriously to establish a permanent settlement in it, though they cannot but see their fellow-creatures cut down daily before their eyes by the stroke of death. It is a common proverb, that experience teaches fools, and they may be looked upon as something worse who will not lay to heart their mortality, when surrounded by so many convincing illustrations of it. This seems obviously to be the connection. These infatuated enemies of God, as if he had said, cannot fail to perceive that death is the universal lot of

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"C'est, ils ne pensent a autre chose si non comment ils pourront faire durer leurs maisons." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, they think of nothing else but how they shall be able to make their houses continue for ever."

mankind, that the wise are equally liable to it with the foolish; and yet they persist in the imagination that they will remain here always, and will live as if they were never to quit with this world! They see what happens to others, that all, without exception or discrimination, are involved in the common mortality; and they must observe how often it happens that wealth passes *into the hands of strangers* The word אחרים, *acherim,* I translate *strangers,* rather than *others;* for although it may be extended to successors of any kind, yet I think that the Psalmist here supposes the case of wealth passing into the hands of those who are not our natural and lawful heirs, and cannot be considered in any sense as representing us. Many not only die, but die childless, and their name becomes extinct, which is an additional ingredient of bitterness in the cup of the worldling. And yet all these affecting lessons of experience are entirely lost upon them, and they still in their secret thoughts fondly cherish the idea of living here for ever. The Hebrew word קרב, *kereb,* means *the middle* of anything; but it is taken metaphorically to signify *the heart,* or inward parts of the man. Here it denotes that their *secret thoughts* are occupied with an imaginary eternity which they hope to enjoy upon earth. Another and more ingenious interpretation has been suggested by some, that as the word occasionally means a *tomb,* the Psalmist may here be satirising those who think to perpetuate their memory after death by rearing expensive mausoleums. [220] This view of the words is strained and unnatural; and what immediately follows proves that the other is the most correct, when it is added, that worldly men *call out their names upon the earth;* that is, make every exertion in their power to win reputation amongst their fellow-creatures. Their desire should be to have their names written in the book of life, and to be blessed before God and his holy angels; but their ambition is of another kind — to be renowned and extolled upon earth. By the expression, *calling out,* it is insinuated that the fame of ungodly men is but an empty sound. Some interpreters prefer reading, *They have called their lands by their own names,* [221] that they might leave some monument of themselves to posterity. But what the Psalmist seems chiefly to insist upon is, that they are wholly bent upon earthly renown.

12 *And man shall not abide in honor* Having exposed the vain and delusory nature of the fancies entertained by the ungodly, he next shows

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The reading of the Septuagint is, "Καὶ οἱ τάφοι αὐτῶν οἰκίαι αὐτῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα." "And their sepulchres are their houses for ever." The Vulgate, Syriac, and Chaldee, also read "sepulchres." Kennicott supposes that the authors of these versions must have read קברם, *kaberam*, *their graves*, instead of קרבם, *kirbam*, *their inward part* The text as it stands admits of a good sense. Some eminent critics, however, are disposed to think that the reading of the ancient versions is the true one.

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Some also read the verse thus, "Their grave is their house for ever, their dwelling-place through all generations, though their names are celebrated over countries."

that however fondly they may cherish them, they must experience the same fate with the beasts of the field. It is true that there is a great difference, so far as the soul is concerned, between man and the brute creation; but the Psalmist speaks of things as they appear in this world, and in this respect he was warranted to say of the ungodly that they die as the beasts. His subject does not lead him to speak of the world to come. He is reasoning with the children of this world, who have no respect to another, and no idea of a farther happiness than that which they enjoy here. He accordingly ridicules their folly in conceiving of themselves as privileged with exemption from the ordinary lot of humanity, and warns them that death will soon be near to humble their presumptuous thoughts, and put them on a level with the meanest of the lower creatures. This I prefer to the more ingenious interpretation which some would put upon the words, that they reduced themselves to the level of beasts by not recognising the true dignity of their nature, which consists in the possession of a never-dying soul. The Psalmist's great aim is to show the vanity of the boasting of the wicked, from the nearness of death, which must join them in one common fate with the beasts of the field. The last word in the verse gives the reason why the ungodly may be compared to the beasts — *they perish* It matters little whether or not we consider the relative אשר, *asher,* as understood, and read, *that perish*

Psalm 49:13-15

> **13**. This their way is foolishness in them, [222] and their posterity will acquiesce in their sayings, [literally, in their mouth.] Selah. **14**. Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning, and their strength [223] shall wax old; the grave shall receive them [224] from their dwelling. **15**. But God shall redeem my soul from the hand [225] of the grave; for he hath taken me up. Selah

13 *This their way is foolishness* As this verse has been variously rendered, I shall briefly, before giving my own sense of it, state the views which

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"C'est, est cognue n'estre que folie en eux." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, is known to be only folly in them."

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"Ou, figure." *Fr. marg.* "Or, form."

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The words, *shall receive them*, are a supplement, there being nothing for them in the Latin version nor in the Hebrew text. They stand for *le prendra* in the French version.

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"C'est, puissance et domination de la mort." — *Fr. marg*, "That is, the power and dominion of death."

have been taken by others. As the Hebrew word כסל, *kesel,* which I have translated *foolishness,* occasionally means *the kidneys,* some refine upon the term, and consider it to be here taken for *fat;* as if this imagination of theirs were, so to speak, fat which stupified and rendered their senses obtuse. But this reading is too forced to bear examination. Others read, *This their way is their folly;* [226] that is, the reason why they pursue such a line of conduct is, that they are destitute of sound judgment; for, were they not utterly devoid of it, and did they possess one spark of intelligence, would they not reflect upon the end for which they were created, and direct their minds to higher objects? I rather conceive the Psalmist simply to mean, that the event proves them to be wholly destitute of wisdom, in placing their happiness upon earthly objects, and brands them, notwithstanding all the pretensions they make to foresight and shrewdness, with ridicule and contempt. And this he states, to show in a more aggravated light the madness of their posterity, who will not be instructed by the fate of their predecessors. The last clause of the verse has also been variously rendered, and I may state the views which have been taken of it by others. The Hebrew verb רצה, *ratsah,* which I have translated *to acquiesce,* they render, *to walk,* and the noun פי, *phi,* translated *mouth* or *sayings,* they take to mean *a measure,* thus understanding the Psalmist to say, that the children walked by the same rule with their fathers; and they change the letter ב, *beth,* into כ, *caph,* the mark of similitude which is sufficiently common in the Hebrew language. This view of the passage comes near to the proper meaning of it. Some conceive that there is an allusion to the beasts of the field; but this is improbable. It seems best to understand with others that the word mouth denotes *principles* or *sayings;* and the verb רצה, *ratsah,* may be taken in its more ordinary and most generally received sense, which implies consent or complacency. I have therefore translated it *to acquiesce.* The boasted confidence of the ungodly proving vain in the issue, and exposing them justly to ridicule, it argues a monstrous infatuation in their posterity, with this example before their eyes, to set their affections upon the same trifles, and to feel and express themselves exactly in the same manner as those who went before them. If men reflect at all upon the judgments which God executes in the world, we might expect that they would particularly consider his dealings with their immediate predecessors, and when, wholly insensible to the lessons which should be learned from their fate, they precipitate themselves into the same courses, this convincingly demonstrates their brutish folly.

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"למו כסל is literally, *folly to them*; *i e.*, though this their way (the worldling's trust in his wealth), seem to them a piece of special wisdom, yet in the event it proves otherwise; it becomes perfect folly to them when they come to discern their frustrations." — *Hammond*

14 *Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed them* [227] The figure is striking. They go down into the grave as sheep are gathered into the fold by the shepherd. The entire world might not seem vast enough for men of a haughty spirit. They are so swollen with their vain imaginations, that they would engross universal nature to themselves. But the Psalmist, finding the wicked spread as it were far and wide, in the boundless pride of their hearts, collects them together into the grave, and hands them over to death as their shepherd. He intimates, that whatever superiority they might affect over their fellow-creatures, they would feel, when too late, that their boasting was vain, and be forced to yield themselves up to the irresistible and humiliating stroke of death. In the second part of the verse, the Psalmist points out the very different fate which awaits the children of God, and thus anticipates an obvious objection. It might be said, "Thou tellest us that those who place their confidence in this world must die. But this is no new doctrine. And why convert into matter of reproach what must be considered as a law of nature, attaching to all mankind? Who gave thee a privilege to insult the children of mortality? Art thou not one of them thyself?" This objection he meets effectually, by granting that on the supposition of death being the destruction of the whole man, he would have advanced no new or important doctrine, but arguing that infidel worldlings reject a better life to come, and thus lay themselves justly open to this species of reprehension. For surely it is the height of folly in any man for a mere momentary happiness

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This is also the reading of the Septuagint, "Θάνατος ποιμανεῖ αὐτούς," "Death shall feed them as a shepherd," and of Jerome, "Mors pascet eos;" and this is the view taken by Dr Kennicott, Dr Hammond, and Bishop Horsley. Hammond's explanation of this clause is as follows. He observes, that the Hebrew word רעה, *raah*, means to give the sheep pasture, or to look to them when they are feeding, Genesis 29:7, and 30:32; and that this feeding of sheep is very different from feeding on them. He farther observes, that the word is frequently used for *ruling* or *governing* "In this place," says he, "the metaphor of sheep must needs rule the signification of it. As sheep are put into a pasture, there to continue together in a common place, so men are put into שאול, ἅδης, the state of the dead, mentioned in the former words, and to that regularly follows — Death ידעם, [shall feed them,] — is as the shepherd that conducts or leads them into this pasture, those Elysian fields: — an excellent piece of divine poesy, to signify, how men like sheep, like beasts, go by flocks and herds out of this life, or more plainly, that men die as ordinarily and regularly as sheep are led to their pasture." Some, however, read, "Death feedeth upon them." "רעה signifies not only *to feed*, but *to feed upon* and lay waste; and thus we render it in Micah 5:6, 'They shall waste Assyria with the sword.' See also Psalm 80:14." — Appendix to the Notes in Merrick's version, No. 4, p. 304. This verb also signifies *to feed upon* in Isaiah 44:20, and Hosea 12:2. Fry's translation is,

"They are set apart like sheep for Hades;
Death feedeth upon them, and they go down to them;"

and he thinks that the idea here is, that Death and Hades are the two monsters for whose consumption the flock is destined. This is a personification which we frequently meet with in the Latin poets. Cerberus is often represented by them as feasting on the bodies of men in the grave; Thus, notwithstanding the strong desires which worldly men have for immortality in this world, they shall become the victims of the grave, and the prey of death.

— a very dream — to abdicate the crown of heaven, and renounce his hopes for eternity. Here it must be apparent, as I already took occasion to observe, that the doctrine of this psalm is very different from that taught by the philosophers. I grant that they may have ridiculed worldly ambition with elegance and eloquence, exposed the other vices, and insisted upon the topics of our frailty and mortality; but they uniformly omitted to state the most important truth of all, that God governs the world by his providence, and that we may expect a happy issue out of our calamities, by coming to that everlasting inheritance which awaits us in heaven. It may be asked, what that dominion is which the upright shall eventually obtain? I would reply, that as the wicked must all be prostrated before the Lord Jesus Christ, and made his footstool, His members will share in the victory of their Head. It is indeed said, that he "will deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father," but he will not do this that he may put an end to his Church, but "that God may be all in all," (1 Corinthians 15:24.) It is stated that this will be *in the morning* [228] — a beautiful and striking metaphor. Surrounded as we are by darkness, our life is here compared to the night, or to a sleep, an image which is specially applicable to the ungodly, who lie as it were in a deep slumber, but not inapplicable to the people of God, such being the dark mist which rests upon all things in this world, that even their minds (except in so far as they are illuminated from above) are partially enveloped in it. Here "we see only as through a glass darkly," and the coining of the Lord will resemble the morning, when both the elect and reprobate will awake. The former will then cast aside their lethargy and sloth, and being freed from the darkness which rested upon them, will behold Christ the Sun of Righteousness face to face, and the full effulgence of life which resides in him. The others, who lie at present in a state of total darkness, will be aroused from their stupidity, and begin to discover a new life, of which they had previously no apprehension. We need to be reminded of this event, not only because corruption presses us downwards and obscures our faith, but because there are men who profanely argue against another life, from the continued course of things in the world, scoffing, as Peter foretold, (2 Peter 3:4,) at the promise of a resurrection, and pointing, in derision, to the unvarying regularity of nature throughout the lapse of ages. We may arm ourselves against their arguments by what the Psalmist here declares, that, sunk as the world is in darkness, there will dawn ere long a new morning, which will introduce us to a better and an eternal existence. It follows, that *their strength,* or *their form,* [229] (for the Hebrew word צורה, *tsurah,* is susceptible of either meanings) *shall wax old* If we read *strength,*

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In the morning, that is, says Dathe, *in the time of judgment.* He thinks there is here an allusion to the usual time of holding courts of justice, which was in the morning. See Psalm 73:14, and 101:8; and Jeremiah 21:12.

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the words intimate, that though at present they are in possession of wealth and power, they shall speedily decline and fall; but I see no objection to the other meaning, which has more commonly been adopted. Paul tells us, (1 Corinthians 7:31,) that "*the fashion* of this world passes away," a term expressive of the evanescent nature of our earthly condition; and the Psalmist may be considered as comparing their vain and unsubstantial glory to a shadow. The words at the close of the verse are obscure. Some read, *The grave is their dwelling;* and then they make ם, *mem,* the formative letter of a noun. But the other interpretation agrees better both with the words and scope of the psalm, that *the grave awaits them from his dwelling*, which is put for *their dwelling;* such a change of number being common in the Hebrew language. They reside at present in splendid mansions, where they rest in apparent security, but we are reminded that they must soon come out of them, and be received into the tomb. There may be a covert allusion to their goings abroad to places of public resort with gaiety and pomp. These, the Psalmist intimates, must give place to the sad procession by which they must be carried down to the grave.

15 *But God will redeem my soul* The Hebrew particle, אך, *ach,* may be also translated, *surely,* or *certainly.* The psalmist had made a general assertion of the great truth, that the righteous shall have dominion in the morning, and now he applies it to himself for the confirmation of his own faith. This verse may, therefore, be regarded as a kind of appendix to the former; in it he makes a personal application of what had been said of all the righteous. By the word, *the hand,* is to be understood *the dominion* and *power,* and not *the stroke,* of the grave, as some have rendered it. The prophet does not deny his liability to death; but he looks to God as He who would defend and redeem him from it. We have here a convincing proof of that faith in which the saints under the Law lived and died. It is evident that their views were directed to another and a higher life, to which the present was only preparatory. Had the prophet merely intended to intimate that he expected deliverance from some ordinary emergency, this would have been no more than what is frequently done by the children of the world, whom God often delivers from great dangers. But here it is evident that he hoped for a life beyond the grave, that he extended his glance beyond this sublunary sphere, and anticipated the morning which will introduce eternity. From this we may conclude, that the promises of the Law were spiritual, and that our fathers who embraced them were willing to confess themselves pilgrims upon

The LXX. read, Ἡ βοήθεια αὐτῶν, *their help*, conceiving the word צותם, *tsuram*, to be derived from צור, *tsur*, *a rock*, and metaphorically, *confidence*, *aid* Ainsworth reads, "their form," *their figure*, *shape*, or *image*, *with all their beauty and proportion*; or "their rock," that is, *their strength* "The Hebrew *tsur*," says he, "is usually *a rock*; here it seemeth to be all one with *tsurah*, *a form* or *figure*; and this is confirmed by the writing, for though by the vowels and reading it is *tsur*, yet, by the letters, it is, *tsir*, which is an *image*, Isaiah 45:16."

earth, and sought an inheritance in heaven. It evinced gross stupidity in the Sadducees, educated as they were under the Law, to conceive of the soul as mortal. The man must be blind indeed who can find no mention of a future life in this passage. To what other interpretation can we wrest the preceding verse, when it speaks of a morning altogether new and peculiar? We are sufficiently accustomed to see the return of morning, but it points us to a day of an extraordinary kind, when God himself shall rise upon us as the sun, and surprise us with the discovery of his glory. When the Psalmist adds, *Assuredly God will redeem my soul* [230] *from the power of the grave,* does he not contemplate a special privilege, such as could not be shared by all other men? If deliverance from death, then, be a privilege peculiar to the children of God, it is evident that they are expectants of a better life. We must not overlook, (what I have already noticed,) that the sure method of profiting by the divine promises is, to apply to ourselves what God has offered generally to all without exception. This is done by the prophet, for how could he have arrived at an assured promise of the redemption of his soul, except by the general fact known to him of the future glory awaiting the children of God, and by concluding himself to be amongst their number? The last clause of the verse runs in the Hebrew literally, *for he will take me up* Some, however, resolve the causal particle כי, *ki,* which we render *for,* into the adverb of time *when,* and the verb לקח, *lakach,* which we translate *to receive* or *to take up,* they translate *to cut off,* or *take away from this world,* giving to the passage this sense, When God shall have called my soul out of this world to himself, he will rescue it from the power of the grave. I am afraid that this is rather too strained an interpretation. Those seem to take a juster view of the words who consider that the future tense has been substituted for the perfect, and who retain the proper signification of the causal particle, reading, *for he has taken me up* The prophet did not consider that the ground of his hope for a better resurrection was to be found in himself, but in the gratuitous adoption of God who had taken him into his favor. There is no need, however, why we should suppose a change of tense, and not understand the Psalmist as meaning that God would redeem his soul from death, by undertaking the guardianship of it when he came to die. The despairing fears which so many entertain when descending to the grave spring from the fact of their not commending their spirit to the preserving care of God. They do not consider it in the light of a precious deposit which will be safe in his protecting hands. Let our faith be established in the great truth, that our soul, though it appears to evanish upon its separation from

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Soul is not here to be understood of the intellectual immaterial spirit. The Hebrew word נפשי, *naphshi*, *my soul*, is often put in the Old Testament Scriptures for the personal pronoun; and thus it means *my person*, *myself*, *me*. — See Appendix., Note on Psalm 16:10.

the body, is in reality only gathered to the bosom of God, there to be kept until the day of the resurrection.

Psalm 49:16-20

> **16**. Be not thou afraid when one shall be made rich, when the glory of his house shall be increased; **17**. For when he dieth he shall not carry all away: his glory shall not descend after him: **18**. For he will bless his soul in his lifetime, and they shall praise thee when thou doest well to thyself. [231] **19**. He shall come but to the age of his fathers, and will not see the light even for ever. **20**. Man is in honour, and will not understand: he is like the beasts: they shall perish.

16 *Be not thou afraid* The Psalmist repeats, in the form of an exhortation, the same sentiment which he had formerly expressed, that the children of God have no reason to dread the wealth and power of their enemies, or to envy their evanescent prosperity; and as the best preservative against despondency, he would have them to direct their eyes habitually to the end of life. The effect of such a contemplation will be at once to check any impatience we might be apt to feel under our short-lived miseries, and to raise our minds in holy contempt above the boasted but delusory grandeur of the wicked. That this may not impose upon our minds, the prophet recalls us to the consideration of the subject of death — that event which is immediately at hand, and which no sooner arrives than it strips them of their false glory, and consigns them to the tomb. So much is implied in the words, *He shall not carry away all these things when he dieth* [232] Be their lives ever so illustrious in the eyes of their fellow-creatures, this glory is necessarily bounded by the present world. The same truth is further asserted in the succeeding clause of the verse, *His glory shall not descend after him* Infatuated men may strain every nerve, as if in defiance of the very laws of nature, to perpetuate their glory after death, but they never can escape the corruption and nakedness of the tomb; for, in the language of the poet Juvenal, -

"Mots sola fatetur Quantula sint hominum corpuscula," —

"It is death which forces us to confess how worthless the bodies of men are."

18 *For he will bless his soul in his lifetime* Various meanings have been attached to this verse. Some read, *He ought to have blessed his soul during*

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French and Skinner read, "Yea, though men praise thee when thou indulgest thyself;" and they explain *men* to mean "parasites and flatterers," and "indulgest thyself" as meaning, "indulgest thyself in unrestrained luxury."

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"Heb. 'take of all;' that is, ought of all that he hath. 'For we brought nothing into the world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out.'" — *Ainsworth.*

his life Others apply the first clause of the verse to the wicked, while they refer the second to believers, who are in the habit of praising God for all his benefits. Others understand the whole verse as descriptive of believers, but without sufficient ground. There can be little doubt that the reference is to the children of the world. In the first part of the verse it is said that *they bless their own soul* [233] so long as they live on earth, by which is meant, that they indulge and pamper themselves with earthly pleasures, giving way to the excesses of brutish intemperance, like the rich man, of whom Christ spoke in the parable, who said,

"Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry," — (Luke 12:19)

or that they seek their happiness entirely from this world, without cherishing a desire for the life that is to come. Some translate the Hebrew verb, *he will do good,* and read thus, *He will do good to his own soul in his lifetime.* But I conceive the phrase to be synonymous in its import with that which is employed by Moses,

"And it come to pass, that he bless himself in his heart;" (Deuteronomy 29:19,)

that is, flatter himself as if he might despise God with impunity. The inspired penman here represents the stupidity of such as please themselves with a fallacious dream of happiness. In the latter part of the verse the person is changed, and the votary of pleasure is apostrophised; [234] the prophet insinuating, by the words he uses, that the preposterous pride with which the wicked are inflamed is in part the consequence of the delusive applause of the world, which pronounces them to be happy, and echoes their praises even when they gratify their most unlicensed passions.

19 *He shall come to the age of his fathers* He proceeds to show how false are the flatteries by which the wicked deceive themselves, and are deceived by others. Be they ever so intoxicated with the praises of the world, or with their own vain imaginations, yet they cannot live beyond the age of their fathers; and, granting their life to be extended to the longest term, it can never stretch into eternity. Others understand the expression as synonymous with *their being gathered to the tomb along with their fathers* who have gone before them; as in Scripture death is usually called "The way of all the earth." The Psalmist, a little above, had spoken of their being gathered together

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That is, themselves. — See note, p. 252.

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"There is here a change," says Walford, "from the oblique to the direct form of speech, by which the writer turns himself to the rich man, who prospers in the world, and says to him, Though you now count yourself happy, and meet with applause from persons of a character resembling your own, yet you shall go to the abode of your fathers, who will never behold the light." He reads the 19th verse, "Thou shalt go to the abode of thy fathers, who will never behold the light."

in the grave as sheep in a fold. According to this view, the meaning of the passage is, that having never aspired after heaven, but having been sunk in the low grovelling pursuits of this world, they would come at last to the same fate with their fathers. When it is added, *They shall not see the light even for ever,* we are to understand their consignment to everlasting darkness. [235] In my opinion, both clauses of the verse combine to express the same truth, That however they may flatter and deceive themselves, they cannot prolong their life beyond the common term of mortality. As either interpretation, however, agrees with the general scope of the psalm, the reader may choose for himself. Should the latter be adopted, the words in the close of the verse are to be considered as asserting that the ungodly can only enjoy the light of life for a short period, as they have no hope of another existence beyond the grave. We are taught by the Psalmist, in the words which have been under our consideration, to beware of flattering ourselves in the possessions of this world, and to be principally anxious for the attainment of that happiness which is reserved for us in heaven. We are also warned not to allow ourselves to be carried away by the erring influence of worldly applause. Even heathen authors have taught us the same lesson. Thus the poet Persius says, —

"Non si quid turbida Roma
Elevet, accedas, examenve improbum in illa
Castiges trutina: nec te quaesiveris extra," —

"If Rome, a city full of commotions, exalt or despise any thing, beware of being satisfied with its weight or balance; that is to say, of stopping at its judgment; and do not look to what others say of you, but enter into thyself, and examine what thou art." [236] But the disposition to be deceived by flattery is one so strongly marked in our nature, as to require that we should attend to the weightier admonition of one who was inspired.

20 *Man is in honor, and will not understand* [237] Here the prophet, that he may not be understood as having represented the present life, which in

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Horsley reads, "To all eternity they shall not see light;" "that light," says he, "which emphatically deserves the name — that light, of which created light is but a faint image; the light of God's glory. He shall have no share in the beatific vision."

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This is the translation which is given of these lines in the French version.

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This verse is precisely the same as the 12th, with the exception of one word. Instead of ילין-בל, *bal-yalin*, *will not lodge*, in the 12th verse, we have here יבין ולא, *velo yabin*, *and will not understand* But the Septuagint and Syriac versions read in the 12th verse as here, "understands not." Houbigant thinks that this is the true reading of the 12th verse. "The very repetition," says he, "proves that it is to be so read. Besides, as the Psalmist immediately subjoins, *They are like brute creatures*, it is sufficiently evident that the reason why men are said to be like the beasts is, because they do not *understand*, and not because *they do not continue in honor*, since *honor* does not belong to the brute creation."

itself is a singular blessing of God, as wholly contemptible, corrects himself as it were, or qualifies his former statements by a single word, importing that those whom he reprehends have reduced themselves to the level of the beasts that perish, by senselessly devouring the blessings which God has bestowed, and thus divesting themselves of that honor which God had put upon them. It is against the abuse of this world that the prophet has been directing his censures. They are aimed at those who riot in the bounties of God without any recognition of God himself, and who devote themselves in an infatuated manner to the passing glory of this world, instead of rising from it to the contemplation of the things which are above.

Psalm 50

PSALM 50

There have always been hypocrites in the Church, men who have placed religion in a mere observance of outward ceremonies, and among the Jews there were many who turned their attention entirely to the figures of the Law, without regarding the truth which was represented under them. They conceived that nothing more was demanded of them but their sacrifices and other rites. The following psalm is occupied with the reprehension of this gross error, and the prophet exposes in severe terms the dishonor which is cast upon the name of God by confounding ceremony with religion, showing that the worship of God is spiritual, and consists of two parts, prayer and thanksgiving.

A Song of Asaph. [238]

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The preposition ל, *lamed*, prefixed to the name of Asaph, which Calvin renders *of*, may also be rendered *for*, as we have before observed, and it is, therefore, somewhat doubtful whether he was the author of the psalms in whose inscriptions his name appears, or whether they were merely delivered to him by David to be sung m the temple worship. We, however, know from 2 Chronicles 29:30, that a seer of the name of Asaph, the son of Berechia, and who, along with his sons, were appointed singers in the sacred services of the temple, (1 Chronicles 6:31, 39; 15:19; 25:1, 2; Nehemiah 12:46,) was the inspired writer of several psalms. It is therefore probable that he was the author of the psalms which bear his name. These are twelve, the 50th, and from the 73d to the 83d, both inclusive. It has been thought by some that these psalms differ very remarkably, both in style and subject, from those of David, the composition being more stiff and obscure than the polished, flowing, and graceful odes of the sweet singer of Israel, and the subject-matter being of a melancholy character, and full of reprehension.

The prophet holds up the ingratitude of such persons to our reprobation, as proving themselves unworthy of the honor which has been placed upon them, and debasing themselves by a degenerate use of this world. From this let us learn, that if we are miserable here, it must be by our own fault; for could we discern and properly improve the many mercies which God has bestowed upon us, we would not want, even on earth, a foretaste of eternal blessedness. Of this, however we fall short through our corruption. The wicked, even while on earth, have a pre-eminency over the beasts of the field in reason and intelligence, which form a part of the image of God; but in reference to the end which awaits them the prophet puts both upon a level, and declares, that being divested of all their vain-glory, they will eventually perish like the beasts. Their souls will indeed survive, but it is not the less true that death will consign them to everlasting disgrace.

Psalm 50:1-5

> **1**. The God of gods, even Jehovah, hath spoken, and called the earth [239] from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof. **2**. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined. **3**. Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence; a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. **4**. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth to judge his people. **5**. Gather my meek ones (will he say [240]) together unto me, those who strike a covenant with me over sacrifices.

1. *The God of gods, even Jehovah,* [241] *hath spoken* The inscription of this psalm bears the name of Asaph; but whether he was the author of it, or merely received it as chief singer from the hand of David, cannot be known. This, however, is a matter of little consequence. The opinion has been very

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That is, the inhabitants of the earth.

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("Dira-il.") — *Fr.*

241

The original words here rendered "The God of gods, even Jehovah," are אלהים אל יהוה, *El Elohim Yehovah* Each of these words is a name of the Divine Being. The first has reference to the power of the Deity; so that it might be translated, "The Mighty One." If we read אלהים אל, *El Elohim*, together, and translate "The God of gods," this is a Hebrewism for "Most mighty God;" the word אלהים, *Elohim*, being placed after the name of any thing to express its excellency, greatness, or might. See p. 7, note 1, of this volume. Comp. Deuteronomy 10:17; Joshua 22:22; and Daniel 11:36. Horsley reads, "The omnipotent God Jehovah hath spoken." The reading of the Chaldee is, "The mighty One, the God Jehovah." The prophet has here joined together these three names of God, to give to the Israelites a more impressive idea of the greatness of Him who, now seated on his throne, and surrounded with awful majesty, was about to plead his controversy with them.

generally entertained, that the psalm points to the period of the Church's renovation, and that the design of the prophet is to apprise the Jews of the coming abrogation of their figurative worship under the Law. That the Jews were subjected to the rudiments of the world, which continued till the Church's majority, and the arrival of what the apostle calls "the fullness of times," (Galatians 4:4,) admits of no doubt; the only question is, whether the prophet must here be considered as addressing the men of his own age, and simply condemning the abuse and corruption of the legal worship, or as predicting the future kingdom of Christ? From the scope of the psalm, it is sufficiently apparent that the prophet does in fact interpret the Law to his contemporaries, with a view of showing them that the ceremonies, while they existed, were of no importance whatever by themselves, or otherwise than connected with a higher meaning. Is it objected, that God never called the whole world except upon the promulgation of the Gospel, and that the doctrine of the Law was addressed only to one peculiar people? the answer is obvious, that the prophet in this place describes the whole world as convened not for the purpose of receiving one common system of faith, but of hearing God plead his cause with the Jews in its presence. The appeal is of a parallel nature with others which we find in Scripture:

"Give ear, O ye heavens! and I will speak; and hear, O earth! the words of my mouths" (Deuteronomy 32:1;)

or as in another place,

"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death," (Deuteronomy 30:19;)

and again Isaiah,

"Hear, O heaven! and give ear, O earth! for the Lord hath spoken," (Isaiah 1:2.) [242]

This vehement mode of address was required in speaking to hypocrites, that they might be roused from their complacent security, and their serious

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"The Targum, Kimchi, and R. Obediah Gaon, interpret this psalm of the day of judgment, and Jarchi takes it to be a prophecy of the redemption by their future Messiah." — *Dr Gill.* Dr Adam Clarke explains it in the first of these senses; observing, that "to any minor consideration or fact it seems impossible with any propriety to restrain it." It appears, however, as Calvin holds, to be rather the aim and intention of the poem to teach the utter uselessness of all outward ceremonies in the absence of inward piety; and it is constructed on the plan of a dramatic performance, the sole actor being Jehovah seated on his throne in Zion, and the audience being the whole world, who are summoned to be witnesses of the judgment which he is to execute upon his people. This is the view taken by Bishop Lowth in his Lectures on Sacred Poetry, volume 2, p. 235. Walford gives the same interpretation. "To interpret this passage," says he, "of the promulgation of the Gospel, as is done by Bishop Horne and other expositors of this book, is for the sake of a favorite theory to confound things that are distinct, and to throw obscurity over the whole, by which its specific design is darkened, and the poem deprived of its consistency and unity. The great purpose of the psalm is to deliver the judgment of God respecting the Jewish people; and heaven and earth are summoned, as in Isaiah 1:2, to behold the righteousness of Jehovah, and bear their testimony to it."

attention engaged to the message of God. The Jews had special need to be awakened upon the point to which reference is here made. Men are naturally disposed to outward show in religion, and, measuring God by themselves, imagine that an attention to ceremonies constitutes the sum of their duty. There was a strong disposition among the Jews to rest in an observance of the figures of the Law, and it is well known with what severity the prophets all along reprehended this superstition, by which the worst and most abandoned characters were led to arrogate a claim to piety, and hide their abominations under the specious garb of godliness. The prophet, therefore, required to do more than simply expose the defective nature of that worship which withdraws the attention of men from faith and holiness of heart to outward ceremonies; it was necessary that, in order to check false confidence and banish insensibility, he should adopt the style of severe reproof. God is here represented as citing all the nations of the earth to his tribunal, not with the view of prescribing the rule of piety to an assembled world, or collecting a church for his service, but with the design of alarming the hypocrite, and terrifying him out of his self-complacency. It would serve as a spur to conviction, thus to be made aware that the whole world was summoned as a witness to their dissimulation, and that they would be stripped of that pretended piety of which they were disposed to boast. It is with a similar object that he addresses Jehovah as *the God of gods,* to possess their minds with a salutary terror, and dissuade them from their vain attempts to elude his knowledge. That this is his design will be made still more apparent from the remaining context, where we are presented with a formidable description of the majesty of God, intended to convince the hypocrite of the vanity of those childish trifles with which he would evade the scrutiny of so great and so strict a judge.

To obviate an objection which might be raised against his doctrine in this psalm, that it was subversive of the worship prescribed by Moses, the prophet intimates that this judgment which he announced would be in harmony with the Law. When God speaks *out of Zion* he necessarily sanctions the authority of the Law; and the Prophets, when at any time they make use of this form of speech, declare themselves to be interpreters of the Law. That holy mountain was not chosen of man's caprice, and therefore stands identified with the Law. The prophet thus cuts off any pretext which the Jews might allege to evade his doctrine, by announcing that such as concealed their wickedness, under the specious covert of ceremonies, would not be condemned of God by any new code of religion, but by that which was ministered originally by Moses. He gives Zion the honorable name of *the perfection of beauty,* because God had chosen it for his sanctuary, the place where his name should be invoked, and where his glory should be manifested in the doctrine of the Law.

3. *Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence* [243] He repeats that God would come, in order to confirm his doctrine, and more effectually arouse them. He would come, and should not always keep silence, lest they should be encouraged to presume upon his forbearance. Two reasons may be assigned why the prophet calls God *our God* He may be considered as setting himself, and the comparatively small number of the true fearers of the Lord, in opposition to the hypocrites whom he abhors, claiming God to be his God, and not theirs, as they were disposed to boast; or rather, he speaks as one of the people, and declares that the God who was coming to avenge the corruptions of his worship was the same God whom all the children of Abraham professed to serve. He who shall come, as if he had said, is our God, the same in whom we glory, who established his covenant with Abraham, and gave us his Law by the hand of Moses. He adds, that God would come with *fire* and *tempest,* in order to awaken a salutary fear in the secure hearts of the Jews, that they might learn to tremble at the judgments of God, which they had hitherto regarded with indifference and despised, and in allusion to the awful manifestation which God made of himself from Sinai, (Exodus 19:16; see also Hebrews 12:18.) The air upon that occasion resounded with thunders and the noise of trumpets, the heavens were illuminated with lightnings, and the mountain was in flames, it being the design of God to procure a reverential submission to the Law which he announced. And it is here intimated, that God would make a similarly terrific display of his power, in coming to avenge the gross abuses of his holy religion.

4. *He shall call to the heavens from above* It is plain from this verse for what purpose God, as he had already announced, would call upon the earth. This was to witness the settlement of his controversy with his own people the Jews, against whom judgment was to be pronounced, not in the ordinary manner as by his prophets, but with great solemnity before the whole world. The prophet warns the hypocritical that they must prepare to be driven from their hiding-place, that their cause would be decided in the presence of men and angels, and that they would he dragged without excuse before that dreadful assembly. It may be asked, why the prophet represents the true fearers of the Lord as cited to his bar, when it is evident that the remonstrance which follows in the psalm is addressed to the hypocritical and degenerate portion of the Jews? To this I answer, that God here speaks of the whole Church, for though a great part of the race of Abraham had declined from the piety of their ancestors, yet he has a respect to the Jewish Church, as being his own institution. He speaks of them as *his meek ones,* to remind them of what they ought to be in consistency with their calling, and not as if they were all without exception patterns of godliness. The form of

243 This negative form of expression is employed to give greater emphasis.

the address conveys a rebuke to those amongst them whose real character was far from corresponding with their profession. Others have suggested a more refined interpretation, as if the meaning were, Separate the small number of my sincere worshippers from the promiscuous multitude by whom my name is profaned, lest they too should afterwards be seduced to a vain religion of outward form. I do not deny that this agrees with the scope of the prophet. But I see no reason why a church, however universally corrupted, provided it contain a few godly members, should not be denominated, in honor of this remnant, the holy people of God. Interpreters have differed upon the last clause of the verse: *Those who strike a covenant with me over sacrifices,* Some think *over* is put for *besides,* or *beyond,* and that God commends his true servants for this, that they acknowledged something more to be required in his covenant than an observance of outward ceremonies, and were not chargeable with resting in the carnal figures of the Law. [244] Others think that the spiritual and true worship of God is here directly opposed to sacrifices; as if it had been said, Those who, instead of sacrifices, keep my covenant in the right and appointed manner, by yielding to me the sincere homage of their heart. But in my opinion, the prophet is here to be viewed as pointing out with commendation the true and genuine use of the legal worship; for it was of the utmost consequence that it should be known what was the real end for which God appointed sacrifices under the Law. The prophet here declares that sacrifices were of no value whatever except as seals of God's covenant, an interpretative handwriting of submission to it, or in general as means employed for ratifying it. There is an allusion to the custom then universally prevalent of interposing sacrifices, that covenants might be made more solemn, and be more religiously observed. [245] In like manner, the design with which sacrifices were instituted by God was to bind his people more closely to himself, and to ratify and confirm his covenant. The passage is well worthy of our particular notice, as defining those who

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In Luther's German translation of the Bible this verse is rendered,

"Gather me mine holy ones,
That regard the covenant more than offering."

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The manner in which covenants were anciently ratified by sacrifices was this: The victim was cut into two parts, and each half was placed upon an altar. The contracting parties then passed between the pieces, which was a kind of imprecation upon the party who should violate the covenant, being as much as to say, May he or they be cut asunder like that dissected victim. In this manner, the covenant which God made with Abraham and his family was ratified, Genesis 15:9, 17, 18. This awful ceremony was also observed by God's ancient people at the renovation of the covenant, as appears from Jeremiah 34:18. See also a covenant between God and his people with sacrifices in Exodus 24:4-8. This explains the phrase here used, which is literally, "Those who *have cut* a covenant with me by sacrifice," the verb being from כרת, *carath*, *he cut* The same mode of ratifying covenants prevailed among some of the heathen nations, as appears from the allusions made to it by Homer and Virgil, Iliad, lib. 19, 50, 260; Æneid, lib. 12, 50, 292.

are to be considered the true members of the Church. They are such, on the one hand, as are characterised by the spirit of meekness, practising righteousness in their intercourse with the world; and such, on the other, as close in the exercise of a genuine faith with the covenant of adoption which God has proposed to them. This forms the true worship of God, as he has himself delivered it to us from heaven; and those who decline from it, whatever pretensions they may make to be considered a church of God, are excommunicated from it by the Holy Spirit. As to sacrifices or other ceremonies, they are of no value, except in so far as they seal to us the pure truth of God. All such rites, consequently, as have no foundation in the word of God, are unauthorised, and that worship which has not a distinct reference to the word is but a corruption of things sacred.

Psalm 50:6-13

> **6**. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness, for God is judge himself. Selah. **7**. Hear, O my people! and I will speak; O Israel! and I will announce to thee: I am God, even thy God. **8**. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices, and thy burnt offerings are continually before me. **9**. I will take no calf out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds. **10**. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. **11**. I know all the fowls of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are at my command. **12**. If I am hungry, I will not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. **13**. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, [246] and drink the blood of goats?

6. *And the heavens shall declare his righteousness.* The Jews were vain enough to imagine that their idle and fantastic service was the perfection of righteousness; but they are here warned by the prophet, that God, who had seemed to connive at their folly, was about to reveal his own righteousness from heaven, and expose their miserable devices. "Think you," as if he had said, "that God can take delight in the mockery of your deluded services? Though you send up the smoke of them to heaven, God will make known his righteousness in due time from above, and vindicate it from the dishonors done to it by your wicked inventions. The heavens themselves will attest your perfidy in despising true holiness, and corrupting the pure worship of God. He will no longer suffer your gratuitous aspersions of his character, as if he took no notice of the enmity which lurks under your pretended friendship." There is thus a cogency in the prophet's manner of treating his

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In explanation of this, Martin observes, "Le feu descendu du ciel," etc.; *i.e.*, "The fire which descended from heaven upon the sacrifices was considered mystically as the mouth of God which devoured the flesh of the victims; and it was on that account that God had expressly forbidden to consume them by fire brought elsewhere, because this *strange fire*, not being that which descended from heaven, could not be regarded mystically as the mouth of God."

subject. Men are disposed to admit that God is judge, but, at the same time, to fabricate excuses for evading his judgment, and it was therefore necessary that the sentence which God was about to pronounce should be vindicated from the vain cavils which might be brought against it.

7. *Hear, O my people! and I will speak.* Hitherto the prophet has spoken as the herald of God, throwing out several expressions designed to alarm the minds of those whom he addressed. But from this to the end of the psalm God himself is introduced as the speaker; and to show the importance of the subject, he uses additional terms to awaken attention, calling them his own people, that he might challenge the higher authority to his words, and intimating, that the following address is not of a mere ordinary description, but an expostulation with them for the infraction of his covenant. Some read, *I will testify against thee.* But the reference, as we may gather from the common usage of Scripture, seems rather to be to a discussion of mutual claims. God would remind them of his covenant, and solemnly *exact* from them, as his chosen people, what was due according to the terms of it. He announces himself to be the God of Israel, that he may recall them to allegiance and subjection, and the repetition of his name is emphatical: as if he had said, When you would have me to submit to your inventions, how far is this audacity from that honor and reverence which belong to me? I am God, and therefore my majesty ought to repress presumption, and make all flesh keep silence when I speak; and among you, to whom I have made myself known as your God, I have still stronger claims to homage.

8 *I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices, etc.* God now proceeds to state the charge which he adduced against them. He declares, that he attached no value whatsoever to sacrifices in themselves considered. Not that he asserts this rite of the Jews to have been vain and useless, for in that case it never would have been instituted by God; but there is this difference betwixt religious exercises and others, that they can only meet the approbation of God when performed in their true spirit and meaning. On any other supposition they are deservedly rejected. Similar language we will find employed again and again by the prophets, as I have remarked in other places, and particularly in connection with the fortieth psalm. Mere outward ceremonies being therefore possessed of no value, God repudiates the idea that he had ever insisted upon them as the main thing in religion, or designed that they should be viewed in any other light than as helps to spiritual worship. Thus in Jeremiah 7:22, he denies that he had issued any commandment regarding sacrifices; and the prophet Micah says,

"Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy?" — (Micah 6:7)

"I desire mercy," he says in another place, (Hosea 6:6,) "and not sacrifice." The same doctrine is every where declared by the prophets. I might refer especially to the prophecies of Isaiah, chapter 1:12; 58:1, 2; 66:3. The

sacrifices of the ungodly are not only represented as worthless and rejected by the Lord, but as peculiarly calculated to provoke his anger. Where a right use has been made of the institution, and they have been observed merely as ceremonies for the confirmation and increase of faith, then they are described as being essentially connected with true religion; but when offered without faith, or, what is still worse, under the impression of their meriting the favor of God for such as continue in their sins, they are reprobated as a mere profanation of divine worship. It is evident, then, what God means when he says, *I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices;* he looked to something beyond these. The last clause of the verse may be understood as asserting that their burnt-offerings were before the eyes of the Lord to the producing even of satiety and disgust, as we find him saying, (Isaiah 1:13,) that they were "an abomination unto him." There are some, however, who consider the negative in the beginning of the verse as applying to both clauses, and that God here declares that he did not design to reckon with them for any want of regularity in the observance of their sacrifices. It has been well suggested by some, that the relative may be understood, *Thy burnt-offerings which are continually before me;* as if he had said, According to the Law these are imperative; but I will bring no accusation against you at this time for omitting your sacrifices. [247]

9 *I will take no calf out thy house* Two reasons are given in this and the succeeding verses to prove that he cannot set any value upon sacrifices. The first is, that supposing him to depend upon these, he needs not to be indebted for them to man, having all the fullness of the earth at his command; and the second, that he requires neither food nor drink as we do for the support of our infirm natures. Upon the first of these he insists in the ninth and three following verses, where he adverts to his own boundless possessions, that he may show his absolute independence of human offerings. He then points at the wide distinction betwixt himself and man, the latter being dependent for a frail subsistence upon meat and drink, while he is the self-existent One, and communicates life to all beside. There may be nothing new in the truths here laid down by the Psalmist; but, considering the strong propensity we have by nature to form our estimate of God from ourselves, and to degenerate into a carnal worship, they convey a lesson by no means unnecessary, and which contains profound wisdom, that man can never benefit God by any of his services, as we have seen in Psalm 16:2, "My goodness extendeth not unto thee." In the second place, God says that he

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"I do not well see how it (verse 8th) can be translated otherwise than Leusden has done it." — *Dr Lowth.* Leusden translates it thus: — "Non super sacrificia tua arguam te, et holocausta tua coram me *sunt* semper." — *Merrick's Annotations.* Dr Adam Clarke explains the verse as follows: — "I do not mean to find fault with you for not offering sacrifices; you have offered them; they *have been continually before me*; but you have not offered them in the proper way."

does not require any thing for his own us but that, as he is sufficient in his own perfection, he has consulted the good of man in all that he has enjoined. We have a passage in Isaiah to a similar effect,

"The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me, and where is the place of my rest? For all these things hath mine hand made." — (Isaiah 66:1, 2,)

In these words

God asserts his absolute independence; for while the world had a beginning, he himself was from eternity. From this it follows, that as he subsisted when there was nothing without him which could contribute to his fullness, he must have in himself a glorious all-sufficiency.

> Psalm 50:14-15
>
> **14**. Sacrifice unto God praise, [248] and pay thy vows [249] unto the Most High. **15**. And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.

These verses cast light upon the preceding context. Had it been stated in unqualified terms that sacrifices were of no value, we might have been perplexed to know why in that case they were instituted by God; but the difficulty disappears when we perceive that they are spoken of only in comparison with the true worship of God. From this we infer, that when properly observed, they were far from incurring divine condemnation. There is in all men by nature a strong and ineffaceable conviction that they ought to worship God. Indisposed to worship him in a pure and spiritual manner, it becomes necessary that they should invent some specious appearance as a substitute; and however clearly they may be persuaded of the vanity of such conduct, they persist in it to the last, because they shrink from a total renunciation of the service of God. Men have always, accordingly, been found addicted to ceremonies until they have been brought to the knowledge of that which constitutes true and acceptable religion. *Praise* and *prayer* are here to be considered as representing the whole of the worship of God, according to the figure synecdoche. The Psalmist specifies only one part of divine worship, when he enjoins us to acknowledge God as the Author of

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Dr Adam Clarke reads, "Sacrifice unto God the thank-offering;" and observes, that "תודה, *todah*, *the thank-offering*, was the same as the *sin-offering*, viz., 'a bullock or a ram without blemish;' only there was in addition, 'unleavened cakes mingled with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and cakes of fine flour mingled with oil and fried,'" (Leviticus 7:12.)

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The same author translates נדריך, *nedareyca*, "*thy vow-offerings The nedar*, or *vow-offering*, was a male without blemish taken from among the beeves, the sheep, or the goats. Comp. Leviticus 22:19, with verse 22."

all our mercies, and to ascribe to him the praise which is justly due unto his name: and adds, that we should betake ourselves to his goodness, cast all our cares into his bosom, and seek by prayer that deliverance which he alone can give, and thanks for which must afterwards be rendered to him. Faith, self-denial, a holy life, and patient endurance of the cross, are all sacrifices which please God. But as *prayer* is the offspring of faith, and uniformly accompanied with patience and mortification of sin, while *praise,* where it is genuine, indicates holiness of heart, we need not wonder that these two points of worship should here be employed to represent the whole. Praise and prayer are set in opposition to ceremonies and mere external observances of religion, to teach us, that the worship of God is spiritual. Praise is first mentioned, and this might seem an inversion of natural order. But in reality it may be ranked first without any violation of propriety. An ascription to God of the honor due unto his name lies at the foundation of all prayer, and application to him as the fountain of goodness is the most elementary exercise of faith. Testimonies of his goodness await us ere yet we are born into the world, and we may therefore be said to owe the debt of gratitude before we are called to the necessity of supplication. Could we suppose men to come into the world in the full exercise of reason and judgment, their first act of spiritual sacrifice should be that of thanksgiving. There is no necessity, however, for exercising our ingenuity in defense of the order here adopted by the Psalmist, it being quite sufficient to hold that he here, in a general and popular manner, describes the spiritual worship of God as consisting in praise, prayer, and thanksgiving. In the injunction here given, to *pay our vows,* there is an allusion to what was in use under the ancient dispensation,

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord." Psalm 116:12, 13

What the words inculcate upon the Lord's people is, in short, gratitude, which they were then in the habit of testifying by solemn sacrifices. But we shall now direct our attention more particularly to the important point of the doctrine which is set before us in this passage. And the first thing deserving our notice is, that the Jews, as well as ourselves, were enjoined to yield a spiritual worship to God. Our Lord, when he taught that this was the only acceptable species of worship, rested his proof upon the one argument, that "God is a spirit," (John 4:24.) He was no less a spirit, however, under the period of the legal ceremonies than after they were abolished; and must, therefore, have demanded then the same mode of worship which he now enjoins. It is true that he subjected the Jews to the ceremonial yoke, but in this he had a respect to the age of the Church; as afterwards, in the abrogation of it, he had an eye to our advantage. In every essential respect the worship was the same. The distinction was one entirely of outward form, God accommodating himself to their weaker and unripe apprehensions by

the rudiments of ceremony, while he has extended a simple form of worship to us who have attained a maturer age since the coming of Christ. In himself there is no alteration. The idea entertained by the Manicheans, that the change of dispensation necessarily inferred a change in God himself, was as absurd as it would be to arrive at a similar conclusion from the periodical alterations of the seasons. These outward rites are, therefore, in themselves of no importance, and acquire it only in so far as they are useful in confirming our faith, so that we may call upon the name of the Lord with a pure heart. The Psalmist, therefore, justly denounces the hypocrites who gloried in their ostentatious services, and declares that they observed them in vain. It may occur to some, that as sacrifices sustained a necessary place under the Law, they could not be warrantably neglected by the Jewish worshipper; but by attending to the scope of the Psalmist, we may easily discover that he does not propose to abrogate them so far as they were helps to piety, but to correct that erroneous view of them, which was fraught with the deepest injury to religion.

In the fifteenth verse we have first an injunction to prayer, then a promise of its being answered, and afterwards a call to thanksgiving. We are enjoined to pray *in the day of trouble,* but not with the understanding that we are to pray only then, for prayer is a duty incumbent upon us every day, and every moment of our lives. Be our situation ever so comfortable and exempt from disquietude, we must never cease to engage in the exercise of supplication, remembering that, if God should withdraw his favor for a moment, we would be undone. In affliction, however our faith is more severely tried, and there is a propriety in specifying it as the season of prayer; the prophet pointing us to God as the only resort and means of safety in the day of our urgent necessity. A promise is subjoined to animate us in the duty, disposed as we are to be overwhelmed by a sense of the majesty of God, or of our own unworthiness. Gratitude is next enjoined, in consideration of God's answer to our prayers. Invocation of the name of God being represented in this passage as constituting a principal part of divine worship, all who make pretensions to piety will feel how necessary it is to preserve the pure and uncorrupted form of it. We are forcibly taught the detestable nature of the error upon this point entertained by the Papists, who transfer to angels and to men an honor which belongs exclusively to God. They may pretend to view these in no other light than as patrons, who pray for them to God. But it is evident that these patrons are impiously substituted by them in the room of Christ, whose mediation they reject. It is apparent, besides, from the form of their prayers, that they recognize no distinction between God and the very least of their saints. They ask the same things from Saint Claudius which they ask from the Almighty, and offer the prayer of our Lord to the image of Catherine. I am aware that the Papists justify their invocation of the dead, by denying that their prayers to them amount to divine worship. They talk so much about the kind of worship which they

call *latria,* that is, the worship which they give to God alone, as to make it appear, that in the invocation of angels and saints they give none of it to them. [250] But it is impossible to read the words of the Psalmist, now under our consideration, without perceiving that all true religion is gone unless God alone is called upon. Were the Papists asked whether it were lawful to offer sacrifices to the dead, they would immediately reply in the negative. They grant to this day that sacrifice could not lawfully be offered to Peter or to Paul, for the common sense of mankind would dictate the profanity of such an act. And when we here see God preferring the invocation of his name to all sacrifices, is it not plain to demonstration, that those who call upon the dead are chargeable with the grossest impiety? From this it follows, that the Papists, let them abound as they may in their genuflections before God, rob him of the chief part of his glory when they direct their supplications to the saints. [251] The express mention which is made in these verses of affliction is fitted to comfort the weak and the fearful believer. When God has withdrawn the outward marks of his favor, a doubt is apt to steal into our minds whether he really cares for our salvation. So far is this from being well founded, that adversity is sent to us by God, just to stir us up to seek him and to call upon his name. Nor should we overlook the fact, that our prayers are only acceptable when we offer them in compliance with the commandment of God, and are animated to them by a consideration of the promise which he has extended. The argument which the Papists have drawn from the passage, in support of their multiplied vows, is idle and unwarrantable. The Psalmist, as we have already hinted, when he enjoins the payment of their vows, refers only to solemn thanksgiving, whereas they

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The Papists have different words by which they express different degrees of worship. The term λατρεια, or *latria*, they say, denotes the divine worship which exclusively belongs to God, and which they yield to him alone; while δουλεια, or *dulia*, signifies that inferior sort of worship which is due to angels and departed saints, and which alone they yield to them. They have also a third degree, which they call ὑπερδουλεια, or *hyperdulia*, that superior kind of inferior worship which they yield to the Virgin Mary. These distinctions are had recourse to, merely to evade the charge of idolatry. But if the Papists yield to angels and glorified saints the honor due only to God, it is of little consequence by what name it is called. Besides, the words λατρεαι and δουλεαι are used indifferently by classic Greek authors, by the Greek fathers, by the Septuagint, and in the New Testament, to express divine worship. In the New Testament, δουλεια frequently denotes divine worship. Thus we read, in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, "Ye turned to God from idols, δουλευειν τω Θεω ζῶντι, *to serve* the living God;" and in Galatians 4:8, it is said of the Galatians in their heathen state, that "ἐδουλευσαν, *they did service* unto them which, by nature, are no gods." — See *Calvin's Institutes*, Book I. chap.12, sections 2 and 3; *Turretine's Works*, *volume* 4, *De Necessaria Secessione Nostra ab Ecclesia Romana*, pp. 50-53; and *M'Gavin's Protestant*, *volume*1, No. 42, p. 334.

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The subject of the invocation of departed saints is discussed at length in Calvin's Institutes, Book III. chap. 20, sections 21-27.

trust in their vows as meriting salvation. They contract vows, beside, which have no divine warrant, but, on the contrary, are explicitly condemned by the word of God.

Psalm 50:16-20

> **16**. But unto the wicked God hath said, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant into thy lips? **17**. Also thou hatest correction, and castest my words behind thee. **18**. If thou seest a thief, thou wilt run with him, and thou hast been partaker with adulterers. **19**. Thou puttest forth thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. **20**. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's sons.

16 *But unto the wicked, etc.* He now proceeds to direct his censures more openly against those whose whole religion lies in an observance of ceremonies, with which they attempt to blind the eyes of God. An exposure is made of the vanity of seeking to shelter impurity of heart and life under a veil of outward services, a lesson which ought to have been received by all with true consent, but which was peculiarly ungrateful to Jewish ears. It has been universally confessed, that the worship of God is pure and acceptable only when it proceeds from a sincere heart. The acknowledgement has been extorted from the poets of the heathen, and it is known that the profligate were wont to be excluded from their temples and from participation in their sacrifices. And yet such is the influence of hypocrisy in choking and obliterating even a sentiment so universally felt as this, that men of the most abandoned character will obtrude themselves into the presence of God, in the confidence of deceiving him with their vain inventions. This may explain the frequency of the warnings which we find in the prophets upon this subject, declaring to the ungodly again and again, that they only aggravate their guilt by assuming the semblance of piety. Loudly as the Spirit of God has asserted, that a form of godliness, unaccompanied by the grace of faith and repentance, is but a sacrilegious abuse of the name of God; it is yet impossible to drive the Papists out of the devilish delusion, that their idlest services are sanctified by what they call their *final intention.* They grant that none but such as are in a state of grace can possess the *meritum de condigno;* [252] but they maintain that the mere outward acts of devotion,

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"The Schoolmen in that Church, 'the Church of Rome,' spoke of *meritum de congruo*, and *meritum de condigno*. By *meritum de congruo*, 'to which Calvin refers in the concluding part of the sentence,' they meant the value of good works and good dispositions previous to justification, which it was fit or congruous for God to reward by infusing his grace. By *meritum de condigno* they meant the value of good works performed after justification, in consequence of the grace then infused." — *Dr Hill's Lectures in Divinity*, *volume* 2, p. 348; see also *Turretine's Theology*, *volume* 2, p. 778.

without any accompanying sentiments of the heart, may prepare a person at least for the reception of grace. And thus, if a monk rise from the bed of his adultery to chant a few psalms without one spark of godliness in his breast, or if a whore-monger, a thief, or any foresworn villain, seeks to make reparation for his crimes by mass or pilgrimage, they would be loath to consider this lost labor. By God, on the other hand, such a disjunction of the form from the inward sentiment of devotion is branded as sacrilege. In the passage before us, the Psalmist sets aside and refutes a very common objection which might be urged. Must not, it might be said, those sacrifices be in some respect acceptable to God which are offered up in his honor? He shows that, on the contrary, they entail guilt upon the parties who present them, inasmuch as they lie to God, and profane his holy name. He checks their presumption with the words, *What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?* that is, to pretend that you are one of my people, and that you have a part in my covenant. Now, if God in this manner rejects the whole of that profession of godliness, which is unaccompanied by purity of heart, how shall we expect him to treat the observance of mere ceremonies, which hold quite an inferior place to the declaration of the statutes of God?

17. *Also thou hatest correction* Here hypocrites are challenged with treacherous duplicity in denying, by their life and their works, that godliness which they have professed with the lip. Their contempt of God he proves from their want of reverential deference to his Word; subjection to the Word of God, and cordial submission to his precepts and instructions, being the surest test of religious principle. One way in which hypocrisy usually displays itself is, by the ingenious excuses it invents for evading the duty of obedience. The Psalmist points to this as the mainspring of their ungodliness, that they had cast the Word of God behind their back, while he insinuates that the principle from which all true worship flows is the obedience of faith. He adverts also to the cause of their perversity, which lies in the unwillingness of their corrupt heart to suffer the yoke of God. They have no hesitation in granting that whatever proceeds from the mouth of God is both true and right; this honor they are willing to concede to his Word; but in so far as it proposes to regulate their conduct, and restrain their sinful affections, they dislike and detest it. Our corruption, indisposing us to receive correction, exasperates us against the Word of God; nor is it possible that we can ever listen to it with true docility and meekness of mind, till we have been brought to give ourselves up to be ruled and disciplined by its precepts. The Psalmist next proceeds to specify some of those works of ungodliness, informing us that hypocrites, who were addicted to theft and adultery, mixed up and polluted the holy name of God with their wickedness. By adverting only to some species of vices, he would intimate, in general, that those who have despised correction, and hardened themselves against instruction, are prepared to launch into every excess which corrupt desire or evil example may suggests. He makes mention, first,

of thefts; then of adulteries; and, thirdly, of calumnies or false reproaches. Most interpreters render תרף, *tirets, to run,* although others derive it from רצה, *ratsah,* rendering it *to consent.* Either translation agrees sufficiently with the scope of the Psalmist, and the preference may be left to the reader's own choice. The charge here brought against hypocrites, that they *put forth their mouth to evil,* may include not merely slander, but all the different kinds of speaking which injure their neighbors, for it immediately follows, *my tongue frameth deceit* It is well known in what a variety of ways the lying and deceitful tongue may inflict injury and pain. When it is added, Thou *sittest, etc.,* the allusion may be to one who sits for the passing of a formal judgment; as if it had been said, Thou defamest thy brethren under pretext of issuing a just sentence. [253] Or there may be a reference to petty calumny; such as men maliciously indulge in, and in which they pass their time as they sit at ease in their houses. [254] It seems more probable, however, that he refers to the higher crime of accusing the innocent and righteous in open court, and bringing false charges against them. *Brethren,* and *the children of their mother,* [255] are mentioned, the more emphatically to express the cruelty of their calumnies, when they are represented as violating the ties of nature, and not even sparing the nearest relations.

Psalm 50:21-23

21. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I would be like thyself; [256] I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. **22**. Now consider this, ye that forget God: lest I seize upon you, and there be none to deliver. **23**. Whoso offereth

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תשב. Gejerus and others suppose that this word alludes to the mode of sitting in judgment. See Psalm 119:23." — *Dimock's Notes on the Book of Psalms*

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When you are sitting still, and have nothing else to do, you are ever injuring your neighbor with your slanderous speech. Your table-talk is abuse of your nearest friends." — *Horsley.* The meaning, according to others, is, Thou sittest in the most public places of resort, which were usually the gates of the city, and spendest thy time in calumniating thy brother. See Psalm 69:12; and 119:23.

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"*Thine own mother's son.* To understand the force of this expression, it is necessary to bear in mind that polygamy was allowed amongst the Israelites. Those who were born to the same father were all brethren, but a yet more intimate relationship subsisted between those who had the same mother as well as the same father." — *French and Skinner.* Compare Genesis 20:12. It was a high aggravation of the wickedness and malignity of the persons here spoken or; that they indulged in abusing with their tongues those to whom they were most nearly related, their brother, yea, the son of their mother.

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Horsley translates these two clauses as follows: —

"These things thou hast done, and I was still;
Thou hast thought that I AM is such an one as thyself.

praise will glorify me: and to him that ordereth his way aright will I show the salvation of God.

21 *These things hast thou done* Hypocrites, until they feel the hand of God against them, are ever ready to surrender themselves to a state of security, and nothing is more difficult than to awaken their apprehensions. By this alarming language the Psalmist aims at convincing them of the certainty of destruction should they longer presume upon the forbearance of God, and thus provoke his anger the more, by imagining that he can favor the practice of sin. The greatest dishonor which any can cast upon his name is that of impeaching his justice. This hypocrites may not venture to do in an open manner, but in their secret and corrupt imagination they figure God to be different from what he is, that they may take occasion from his conceived forbearance to indulge a false peace of mind, and escape the disquietude which they could not fail to feel were they seriously persuaded that God was the avenger of sin. We have a sufficient proof in the supine security which hypocrites display, that they must have formed such false conceptions of God. They not only exclude from their thoughts his judicial character, but think of him as the patron and approver of their sins. The Psalmist reprehends them for abusing the goodness and clemency of God, in the way of cherishing a vain hope that they may transgress with impunity. He warns them, that ere long they will be dragged into the light, and that those sins which they would have hidden from the eyes of God would be set in all their enormity before their view. He will set the whole list of their sins in distinct order, for so I understand the expression, *to set in order,* before their view, and force them upon their observation.

22 *Now consider this, ye that forget God* Here we have more of that severe expostulation which is absolutely necessary in dealing with hardened hypocrites, who otherwise will only deride all instruction. While, however, the Psalmist threatens and intends to alarm them, he would, at the same time, hold out to them the hope of pardon, upon their hastening to avail themselves of it. But to prevent them from giving way to delay, he warns them of the severity, as well as the suddenness, of the divine judgments. He also charges them with base ingratitude, in having forgotten God. And here what a remarkable proof have we of the grace of God in extending the hope

He thinks that the words אהיה חיות, *heyoth ehyeh*, which Calvin renders, "I would be," have been misunderstood by all interpreters, and maintains that they should be rendered, "I AM is." "All interpreters," says he, "seem to have forgotten that אהיה, *ehyeh*, is the name which God takes to himself in the third chapter of Exodus; and he observes, that it is with particular propriety, that God, in expostulating with his people for their breach of covenant, calls himself by the name by which he was pleased to describe himself to that same people, when he first called them by his servant Moses." The LXX. render היות, *heyoth*, as a noun substantive, and אהיה, *ehyeh*, as the first person future of the substantive verb. "'Ψπελαθες ἀνομιαν, ὁτι ἐσομαι σοι ὁμοιος:" "Thou thoughtest wickedly that I should be like thee."

of mercy to those corrupt men, who had so impiously profaned his worship, who had so audaciously and sacrilegiously mocked at his forbearance, and who had abandoned themselves to such scandalous crimes! In calling them to repentance, without all doubt he extends to them the hope of God being reconciled to them, that they may venture to appear in the presence of his majesty. And can we conceive of greater clemency than this, thus to invite to himself, and into the bosom of the Church, such perfidious apostates and violators of his covenant, who had departed from the doctrine of godliness in which they had been brought up? Great as it is, we would do well to reflect that it is no greater than what we have ourselves experienced. We, too, had apostatized from the Lord, and in his singular mercy has he brought us again into his fold. It should not escape our notice, that the Psalmist urges them to hasten their return, as the door of mercy will not always stand open for their admission — a needful lesson to us all! lest we allow the day of our merciful visitation to pass by, and be left, like Esau, to indulge in unavailing lamentations, (Genesis 27:34.) So much is implied when it is said, *God shall seize upon you, and there shall be none to deliver* [257]

23 *Whoso offereth praise will glorify me* This is the third time that the Psalmist has inculcated the truth, that the most acceptable sacrifice in God's sight is praise, by which we express to him the gratitude of our hearts for his blessings. The repetition is not a needless one, and that on two accounts. In the first place, there is nothing with which we are more frequently chargeable than forgetfulness of the benefits of the Lord. Scarcely one out of a thousand attracts our notice; and if it does, it is only slightly, and, as it were, in passing. And, secondly, we do not assign that importance to the duty of praise which it deserves. We are apt to neglect it as something trivial, and altogether commonplace; whereas it constitutes the chief exercise of godliness, in which God would have us to be engaged during the whole of our life. In the words before us, the sacrifice of praise is asserted to form the true and proper worship of God. The words, *will glorify me,* imply that God is then truly and properly worshipped, and the glory which he requires yielded to him, when his goodness is celebrated with a sincere and grateful heart; but that all the other sacrifices to which hypocrites attach such importance are worthless in his estimation, and no part whatsoever of

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The language here is metaphorical. The Almighty, provoked by the wickedness of these hypocrites, compares himself to a lion, who, with irresistible fury, seizes on his prey, and tears it in pieces, none being able to rescue it from his jaws. We meet with a similar form of expression in Hosea 5:14: "For I will be as a lion unto Ephraim, and as a young lion to the house of Judah: I, even I, will tear and go away; I will take away, and none shall rescue him." We must not, however, suppose that the rage and fury of this relentless destroyer can have place in the bosom of the Deity. Such phraseology is adopted in accommodation to the feebleness of our conceptions, and our contracted modes of thinking, to impress the hearts and consciences of sinners with a conviction of the tremendous character of the judgments of God, and the fearful condition of those who fall under his penal wrath.

his worship. Under the word *praise,* however, is comprehended, as I have already noticed, both faith and prayer. There must be an experience of the goodness of the Lord before our mouths can be opened to praise him for it, and this goodness can only be experienced by faith. Hence it follows, that the whole of spiritual worship is comprehended under what is either presupposed in the exercise of praise, or flows from it. Accordingly, in the words which immediately follow, the Psalmist calls upon those who desired that their services should be approved of God, *to order their way aright* By the expression here used of *ordering one's way,* some understand repentance or confession of sin to be meant; others, the taking out of the way such things as may prove grounds of offense, or obstacles in the way of others. It seems more probable that the Psalmist enjoins them to walk in the right way as opposed to that in which hypocrites are found, and intimates that God is only to be approached by those who seek him with a sincere heart and in an upright manner. By *the salvation of God,* I do not, with some, understand a great or signal salvation. God speaks of himself in the third person, the more clearly to satisfy them of the fact, that he would eventually prove to all his genuine worshippers how truly he sustained the character of their Savior.

Psalm 51

PSALM 51

We learn the cause which led to the composition of this psalm from the title appended to it, and which will immediately come under our consideration. For a long period after his melancholy fall, David would seem to have sunk into a spiritual lethargy; but when roused from it by the expostulation of Nathan, he was filled with self-loathing and humiliation in the sight of God, and was anxious both to testify his repentance to all around him, and leave some lasting proof of it to posterity. In the commencement of the psalm, having his eyes directed to the heinousness of his guilt, he encourages himself to hope for pardon by considering the infinite mercy of God. This he extols in high terms, and with a variety of expressions, as one who felt that he deserved multiplied condemnation. In the after part of the psalm, he prays for restoration to the favor of God, being conscious that he deserved to have been cast off for ever, and deprived of all the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He promises, should forgiveness be bestowed upon him, to retain a deep and grateful sense of it. Towards the conclusion, he declares it to be for the good of the Church that God should grant his request; and, indeed, when the peculiar manner in which God had deposited his covenant of grace with David is considered, it could not but be felt that the common hope of the salvation of all must have been shaken on the supposition of his final rejection.

To the chief musician. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

When Nathan the prophet came to him Express mention is made of the prophet having come before the psalm was written, proving, as it does,

the deep lethargy into which David must have fallen. It was a wonderful circumstance that so great a man, and one so eminently gifted with the Spirit, should have continued in this dangerous state for upwards of a year. Nothing but satanic influence can account for that stupor of conscience which could lead him to despise or slight the divine judgment, which he had incurred. It serves additionally to mark the supineness into which he had fallen, that he seems to have had no compunction for his sin till the prophet came to him. We have here a striking illustration, at the same time, of the mercy of God in sending the prophet to reclaim him when he had wandered. In this view, there is an antithesis in the repetition of the word *came.* It was when David came in to Bathsheba that Nathan came to him. By that sinful step he had placed himself at a distance from God; and the Divine goodness was signally displayed in contemplating his restoration. We do not imagine that David, during this interval, was so wholly deprived of the sense of religion as no longer to acknowledge the supremacy of the Divine Being. In all probability he continued to pray daily, engaged in the acts of Divine worship, and aimed at conforming his life to the law of God. There is no reason to think that grace was wholly extinct in his heart; but only that he was possessed by a spirit of infatuation upon one particular point, and labored under a fatal insensibility as to his present exposure to Divine wrath. Grace, whatever sparks it might emit in other directions, was smothered, so to speak, in this. Well may we tremble to contemplate the fact, that so holy a prophet, and so excellent a king, should have sunk into such a condition! That the sense of religion was not altogether extinguished in his mind, is proved by the manner in which he was affected immediately upon receiving the prophet's reproof. Had such been the case, he could not have cried out as he did, "I have sinned against the Lord," (2 Samuel 12:13;) nor would he have so readily submitted himself, in the spirit of meekness, to admonition and correction. In this respect, he has set an example to all such as may have sinned against God, teaching them the duty of humbly complying with the calls to repentance, which may be addressed to them by his servants, instead of remaining under sin till they be surprised by the final vengeance of Heaven.

Psalm 51:1-2

1. Have mercy upon me, O God: according to thy lovingkindness; according to the multitude of thy compassions, blot out my transgressions. **2**. Multiply to wash me from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

1. *Have mercy upon me.* David begins, as I have already remarked, by praying for pardon; and his sin having been of an aggravated description, he prays with unwonted earnestness. He does not satisfy himself with one petition. Having mentioned the *loving-kindness* of the Lord, he adds

the multitude of his compassions, to intimate that mercy of an ordinary kind would not suffice for so great a sinner. Had he prayed God to be favorable, simply according to his clemency or goodness, even that would have amounted to a confession that his case was a bad one; but when he speaks of his sin as remissible, only through the countless multitude of the compassions of God, he represents it as peculiarly atrocious. There is an implied antithesis between the greatness of the mercies sought for, and the greatness of the transgression which required them. Still more emphatical is the expression which follows, *multiply to wash me* Some take הרבה, [258] *herebeh,* for a noun, but this is too great a departure from the idiom of the language. The sense, on that supposition, would indeed remain the same, That God would wash him abundantly, and with multiplied washing; but I prefer that form of expression which agrees best with the Hebrew idiom. This, at least, is certain from the expression which he employs, that he felt the stain of his sin to be deep, and to require multiplied washings. Not as if God could experience any difficulty in cleansing the worst sinner, but the more aggravated a man's sin is, the more earnest naturally are his desires to be delivered from the terrors of conscience.

The figure itself, as all are aware, is one of frequent occurrence in Scripture. Sin resembles filth or uncleanness, as it pollutes us, and makes us loathsome in the sight of God, and the remission of it is therefore aptly compared to *washing* This is a truth which should both commend the grace of God to us, and fill us with detestation of sin. Insensible, indeed, must that heart be which is not affected by it!

> Psalm 51:3-6
>
> **3**. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is continually before me. **4**. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done evil in thy sight; that thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. **5**. Behold, I was born in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. **6**. Behold, thou hast desired truth in the inward parts, and hast shown me wisdom in secret.

3. *For I know my sins* [259] He now discovers his reason for imploring pardon with so much vehemency, and this was the painful disquietude which his sins caused him, and which could only be relieved by his obtaining reconciliation with God. This proves that his prayer did not proceed from

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There are here two verbs, הרבה, *herebeh*, and כבסני, *kabbeseni*, the first signifying *to multiply*, and the second *to wash* Many expositors think that the verb הרבה, *herebeh*, is used in the sense of an adverb, and they read, *Multum lava me* "When two verbs of the same tense are joined together, whether a copula goes between them or not, the first is often expressed in Latin by an adverb." — Glass. Lib. 1, Tract. 3, De Verbo Can. 29, tom. 1, p. 272. See Genesis 25:1; Psalm 6:10; 45:5; 78:41; and 102:3

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dissimulation, as many will be found commending the grace of God in high terms, although, in reality, they care little about it, having never felt the bitterness of being exposed to his displeasure. David, on the contrary, declares that he is subjected by his sin to constant anguish of mind, and that it is this which imparts such an earnestness to his supplications. From his example we may learn who they are that can alone be said to seek reconciliation with God in a proper manner. They are such as have had their consciences wounded with a sense of sin, and who can find no rest until they have obtained assurance of his mercy. We will never seriously apply to God for pardon, until we have obtained such a view of our sins as inspires us with fear. The more easily satisfied we are under our sins, the more do we provoke God to punish them with severity, and if we really desire absolution from his hand, we must do more than confess our guilt in words; we must institute a rigid and formidable scrutiny into the character of our transgressions. David does not simply say that he will confess his sins to man, but declares that he has a deep inward feeling of them, such a feeling of them as filled him with the keenest anguish. His was a very different spirit from that of the hypocrite, who displays a complete indifference upon this subject, or when it intrudes upon him, endeavors to bury the recollection of it. He speaks of his *sins* in the plural number. His transgression, although it sprung from one root, was complicated, including, besides adultery, treachery and cruelty; nor was it one man only whom he had betrayed, but the whole army which had been summoned to the field in defense of the Church of God. He accordingly recognises many particular sins as wrapt up in it.

4. *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned* [260] It is the opinion of some that he here adverts to the circumstance of his sin, although it was committed against man, being concealed from every eye but that of God. None was aware of the double wrong which he had inflicted upon Uriah, nor of the wanton manner in which he had exposed his army to danger; and his crime being thus unknown to men, might be said to have been committed exclusively against God. According to others, David here intimates, that however deeply he was conscious of having injured men, he was chiefly distressed for having violated the law of God. But I conceive his meaning to be, that though all the world should pardon him, he felt that God was the Judge with whom he had to do, that conscience hailed him to his bar, and that the voice of man could administer no relief to him, however much he might be disposed to forgive, or to excuse, or to flatter. His eyes and his whole soul were directed to God, regardless of what man might think

As if he had said, "I confess and acknowledge that I have sinned, nor do I say as Cain did, 'I know not,' (Genesis 4:9.) What I formerly shamefully and foolishly excused and extenuated, I now acknowledge before thee and thy prophet, and the whole Church, in this penitential psalm." The verb is in the future, *I will know* or *acknowledge*, to intimate that he would continue to retain an humble sense of his guilt.

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or say concerning him. To one who is thus overwhelmed with a sense of the dreadfulness of being obnoxious to the sentence of God, there needs no other accuser. God is to him instead of a thousand. There is every reason to believe that David, in order to prevent his mind from being soothed into a false peace by the flatteries of his court, realised the judgment of God upon his offense, and felt that this was in itself an intolerable burden, even supposing that he should escape all trouble from the hands of his fellow-creatures. This will be the exercise of every true penitent. It matters little to obtain our acquittal at the bar of human judgment, or to escape punishment through the connivance of others, provided we suffer from an accusing conscience and an offended God. And there is, perhaps, no better remedy against deception in the matter of our sins than to turn our thoughts inward upon ourselves, to concentrate them upon God, and lose every self-complacent imagination in a sharp sense of his displeasure. By a violent process of interpretation, some would have us read the second clause of this verse, *That thou mayest be justified when thou speakest,* in connection with the first verse of the psalm, and consider that it cannot be referred to the sentence immediately preceding. [261] But not to say that this breaks in

From the confession which David makes in this verse, "Against thee, thee *only*, have I sinned," Horsley is of opinion that the title of the psalm is not authentic, and that it could not have been composed on the occasion to which the title refers. "It ill suits the case of David," says he, "who laid a successful plot against Uriah after he had defiled his bed." But there seems to be no force in this objection. The prefix ל, *lamed*, translated *against*, sometimes means *before*, *in the presence of*, and is so rendered in Genesis 23:11, and 45:1. The Hebrew words לברך לך, *lecha*, *lebaddecha*, may, therefore be rendered, "before thee, before thee only." If this reading is adopted, then, David alludes to the clandestine manner in which he committed the sin, intimating that it was a secret sin witnessed by God only, and known in the first instance only to him, God says of it, "For thou didst it secretly," (2 Samuel 12:12.) There is, however, no need to alter the translation to meet the objection of Horsley. By these words, "Against thee, thee only," David does not mean to say that he had not wronged Uriah, whose wife he had dishonored, whom he had caused to be made drunk, and afterwards to be slain; for he acknowledges in the 14th verse that "blood-guiltiness" lay heavy upon him, and he prays for deliverance from it. They are an emphatic declaration of the heinousness of his guilt — that he had sinned chiefly against God — more against him than against man. "My offense," as if he had said, "against Uriah, and against society at large, great as it has been, is nothing compared to that which I have committed against thee."

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This is the opinion of R. Abraham and other Jewish commentators. They say that these words are not to be joined to the immediately preceding part of this verse, but either to the prayer in the first verse, or to what is stated in the third verse, "I acknowledge my transgressions;" and they put the beginning of the fourth verse, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done evil in thy sight," within a parenthesis. But there is no just ground for such an interpretation. Green reads the last clause of the verse, "So that thou art just in passing sentence *upon me*, and clear in condemning *me*." And it is not uncommon for למען, *le-maan*, to be used in the sense of *so that*, as in Psalm 30:12; Isaiah 28:13; and Jeremiah 50:34. According to this reading, the words are a part of David's confession; — he not only confesses his sin in the first part of the verse, but also here acknowledges the divine righteousness should God condemn him. This is the sense in which Calvin understands the passage.

upon the order of the verses, what sense could any attach to the prayer as it would then run, *have mercy upon me, that thou mayest be clear when thou judgest?* etc. Any doubt upon the meaning of the words, however, is completely removed by the connection in which they are cited in Paul's Epistle to the Romans,

"For what if some did not believe? Shall God be unjust? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mayest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged." — Romans 3:3, 4

Here the words before us are quoted in proof of the doctrine that God's righteousness is apparent even in the sins of men, and his truth in their falsehood. To have a clear apprehension of their meaning, it is necessary that we reflect upon the covenant which God had made with David. The salvation of the whole world having been in a certain sense deposited with him by this covenant, the enemies of religion might take occasion to exclaim upon his fall, "Here is the pillar of the Church gone, and what is now to become of the miserable remnant whose hopes rested upon his holiness? Once nothing could be more conspicuous than the glory by which he was distinguished, but mark the depth of disgrace to which he has been reduced! Who, after so gross a fall, would look for salvation from his seed?" Aware that such attempts might be made to impugn the righteousness of God, David takes this opportunity of justifying it, and charging himself with the whole guilt of the transaction. He declares that God was justified *when he spoke* — not when he spoke the promises of the covenant, although some have so understood the words, but justified should he have spoken the sentence of condemnation against him for his sin, as he might have done but for his gratuitous mercy. Two forms of expression are here employed which have the same meaning, *that thou mayest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.* As Paul, in the quotation already referred to, has altered the latter clause, and may even seem to have given a new turn to the sentiment contained in the verse, I shall briefly show how the words were applicable to the purpose for which they were cited by him. He adduces them to prove that God's faithfulness remained unaffected by the fact that the Jews had broken his covenant, and fallen from the grace which he had promised. Now, at first sight it may not appear how they contain the proof alleged. But their appositeness will at once be seen if we reflect upon the circumstance to which I have already adverted. Upon the fall of one who was so great a pillar in the Church, so illustrious both as a prophet and a king, as David, we cannot but believe that many were shaken and staggered in the faith of the promises. Many must have been disposed to conclude, considering the close connection into which God had adopted David, that he was implicated in some measure in his fall. David, however, repels an

insinuation so injurious to the divine honor, and declares, that although God should cast him headlong into everlasting destruction, his mouth would be shut, or opened only to acknowledge his unimpeachable justice. The sole departure which the apostle has made from the passage in his quotation consists in his using the verb *to judge* in a passive sense, and reading, *that thou mightest overcome,* instead of, *that thou mightest be clear.* In this he follows the Septuagint, [262] and it is well known that the apostles do not study verbal exactness in their quotations from the Old Testament. It is enough for us to be satisfied, that the passage answers the purpose for which it was adduced by the apostle. The general doctrine which we are taught from the passage is, that whatever sins men may commit are chargeable entirely upon themselves, and never can implicate the righteousness of God. Men are ever ready to arraign his administration, when it does not correspond with the judgment of sense and human reason. But should God at any time raise persons from the depth of obscurity to the highest distinction, or, on the other hand, allow persons who occupied a most conspicuous station to be suddenly precipitated from it, we should learn from the example which is here set before us to judge of the divine procedure with sobriety, modesty, and reverence and to rest satisfied that it is holy, and that the works of God, as well as his words, are characterised by unerring rectitude. The conjunction in the verse, *that-that thou mayest be justified,* denotes not so much cause as consequence. It was not the fall of David, properly speaking, which caused the glory of God's righteousness to appear. And yet, although men when they sin seem to obscure his righteousness, it emerges from the

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There does not appear to be any substantial difference between the reading of the Septuagint, which the apostle follows, and that of the Hebrew text. Calvin says that Paul uses the verb *to judge* in a passive sense, whereas it is here used actively. But this is a mistake. Street, after giving the words of the Septuagint, which are, Νικησης ἐν τω κρινεσθαι σε, says, "The verb κρινεσθαι is in the middle, not in the passive voice, and the phrase ἐν τω κρινεσθαι σε, signifies *cum tu judicas*," [*i e when thou judgest.*] "I take notice of this the rather, because the passage being cited by Paul, Romans 3:4, (and the Septuagint version of it having been inserted instead of the Hebrew, which the apostle quoted,) our translators seem to have mistaken the sense of it; for they render it, 'That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome *when thou art judged.*' But who shall judge the Almighty?" In the other instance which Calvin mentions, the difference between the apostle's reading and that of the Hebrew text is more in appearance than in reality. "The word זכה," says Hammond, "is ordinarily rendered *mundus fuit*, *clean*, or *clear*, or *pure* But this, as the context evinces, must be understood in a forensic sense, as *pure* is all one with *free from guilt*; and so there is a second notion of the word for *overcoming*, meaning that sort of victory which belongs to him that carries the cause in judicature." After stating that this is the rendering of the Septuagint, he observes, "That is very reconcilable with the notion of *mundus fuit*; for he that doth overcome in the suit is fitly said to be *cleared* or quitted by the law." Thus Hammond, with Chrysostom, supposes the meaning to be, that should God proceed against David, should he indite and arraign him at the bar of justice for his sins, demanding vengeance to be inflicted upon him, God would be justified and cleared, and would overcome in the suit.

foul attempt only more bright than ever, it being the peculiar work of God to bring light out of darkness.

5 *Behold, I was born in iniquity,* etc He now proceeds further than the mere acknowledgement of one or of many sins, confessing that he brought nothing but sin with him into the world, and that his nature was entirely depraved. He is thus led by the consideration of one offense of peculiar atrocity to the conclusion that he was born in iniquity, and was absolutely destitute of all spiritual good. Indeed, every sin should convince us of the general truth of the corruption of our nature. The Hebrew word יחמתני, *yechemathni,* signifies literally, *hath warmed herself of me,* from יחם, *yacham,* or חמם, *chamam, to warm;* but interpreters have very properly rendered it *hath conceived me.* The expression intimates that we are cherished in sin from the first moment that we are in the womb. David, then, is here brought, by reflecting on one particular transgression, to east a retrospective glance upon his whole past life, and to discover nothing but sin in it. And let us not imagine that he speaks of the corruption of his nature, merely as hypocrites will occasionally do, to excuse their faults, saying, "I have sinned it may be, but what could I do? We are men, and prone by nature to everything which is evil." David has recourse to no such stratagems for evading the sentence of God, and refers to original sin with the view of aggravating his guilt, acknowledging that he had not contracted this or that sin for the first time lately, but had been born into the world with the seed of every iniquity.

The passage affords a striking testimony in proof of original sin entailed by Adam upon the whole human family. It not only teaches the doctrine, but may assist us in forming a correct idea of it. The Pelagians, to avoid what they considered the absurdity of holding that all were ruined through one man's transgression, maintained of old, that sin descended from Adam only through force of imitation. But the Bible, both in this and other places, clearly asserts that we are born in sin, and that it exists within us as a disease fixed in our nature. David does not charge it upon his parents, nor trace his crime to them, but sists himself before the Divine tribunal, confesses that he was formed in sin, and that he was a transgressor ere he saw the light of this world. It was therefore a gross error in Pelagius to deny that sin was hereditary, descending in the human family by contagion. The Papists, in our own day, grant that the nature of man has become depraved, but they extenuate original sin as much as possible, and represent it as consisting merely in an inclination to that which is evil. They restrict its seat besides to the inferior part of the soul and the gross appetites; and while nothing is more evident from experience than that corruption adheres to men through life, they deny that it remains in them subsequently to baptism. We have no adequate idea of the dominion of sin, unless we conceive of it as extending to every part of the soul, and acknowledge that both the mind and heart of man have become utterly corrupt. The language of David sounds very differently from that of the Papists, *I was formed in iniquity, and in sin did*

my mother conceive me He says nothing of his grosser appetites, but asserts that sin cleaved by nature to every part of him without exception.

Here the question has been started, How sin is transmitted from the parents to the children? And this question has led to another regarding the transmission of the soul, many denying that corruption can be derived from the parent to the child, except on the supposition of one soul being begotten of the substance of another. Without entering upon such mysterious discussions, it is enough that we hold, that Adam, upon his fall, was despoiled of his original righteousness, his reason darkened, his will perverted, and that, being reduced to this state of corruption, he brought children into the world resembling himself in character. Should any object that generation is confined to bodies, and that souls can never derive anything in common from one another, I would reply, that Adam, when he was endued at his creation with the gifts of the Spirit, did not sustain a private character, but represented all mankind, who may be considered as having been endued with these gifts in his person; and from this view it necessarily follows that when he fell, we all forfeited along with him our original integrity. [263]

6. *Behold, thou hast desired truth, etc.* This verse confirms the remark which we already made, that David was far from seeking to invent an apology for his sin, when he traced it back to the period of his conception, and rather intended by this to acknowledge that from his very infancy he was an heir of eternal death. He thus represents his whole life to have been obnoxious to condemnation. So far is he from imitating those who arraign God as the author of sin, and impiously suggest that he might have given man a better nature, that in the verse now before us he opposes God's judgment to our corruption, insinuating, that every time we appear before him, we are certain of being condemned, inasmuch as we are born in sin, while he delights in holiness and uprightness. He goes further, and asserts, that in order to meet the approval of God, it is not enough that our lives be conformed to the letter of his law, unless our heart be clean and purified from all guile. He tells us that God desires truth in *the inward parts,* [264] intimating to us, that secret as well as outward and gross sins excite his displeasure. In the second clause of the verse, he aggravates his offense by confessing that he could not plead the excuse of ignorance. He had been sufficiently instructed by God in his duty. Some interpret בסתום, *besathum,* as if he here declared that God had discovered secret mysteries to him, or things hidden from the human understanding. He seems rather to mean that wisdom had been discovered to his mind in a secret and intimate manner.

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Our Author's views on the doctrine of original sin are more fully stated in his Institutes, Book II. chap. 1.

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[265] The one member of the verse responds to the other. He acknowledges that it was not a mere superficial acquaintance with divine truth which he had enjoyed, but that it had been closely brought home to his heart. This rendered his offense the more inexcusable. Though privileged so highly with the saving knowledge of the truth, he had plunged into the commission of brutish sin, and by various acts of iniquity had almost ruined his soul.

We have thus set before us the exercise of the Psalmist at this time. First, we have seen that he is brought to a confession of the greatness of his offense: this leads him to a sense of the complete depravity of his nature: to deepen his convictions, he then directs his thoughts to the strict judgment of God, who looks not to the outward appearance but the heart; and, lastly, he adverts to the peculiarity of his case, as one who had enjoyed no ordinary measure of the gifts of the Spirit, and deserved on that account the severer punishment. The exercise is such as we should all strive to imitate. Are we conscious of having committed any one sin, let it be the means of recalling others to our recollection, until we are brought to prostrate ourselves before God in deep self-abasement. And if it has been our privilege to enjoy the special teaching of the Spirit of God, we ought to feel that our guilt is additionally heavy, having sinned in this case against light, and having trampled under foot the precious gifts with which we were intrusted.

Psalm 51:7-9

7. Thou shalt purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; thou shalt wash me, and I shall be whiter than the snow. **8**. Make me to hear joy and gladness; and the bones which thou hast broken shall rejoice. **9**. Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

The word טחות, *tuchoth*, which is rendered *inward parts*, and which is derived from the verb טוח, *tuach*, *to spread over*, means *the reins*, which are so called, because they are *overspread* with fat. "Once more it is used in Scripture, Job 38:36, where, as here, our English Bible renders it *inward parts*, somewhat too generally. The Chaldee expresses it more particularly by *reins*, and these, in the Scripture style, are frequently taken for the seat of the affections, the purity whereof is most contrary to the natural corruption or inbred pollution spoken of in the preceding verse. The word אמת, *emeth*, *truth*, ordinarily signifies sincerity, uprightness, and integrity; and so *truth in the reins* is equivalent to a hearty sincere obedience, not only of the actions, but of the very thoughts and affections to God; and so, in things of this nature, wherein this psalm is principally concerned, denotes the purity of the heart, the not admitting any unclean desire or thought, the very first degree of indulgence to any lust. And this God is said *to will*, or *desire*, or *delight in*, and so to command and require of us." — *Hammond*

[265] The word is explained in the first of these senses in the Septuagint: "Τὰ ἄδηλα καὶ τα κρύφια τῶς σοφίας εδήλοσίς μοι;" — "Thou hast manifested to me the secret and hidden things of thy wisdom." Viewed in this light as well as in the other, the language expresses the aggravated nature of David's sin. He had sinned, although God had revealed to him high and secret mysteries.

7. *Thou shalt purge me with hyssop* He still follows out the same strain of supplication; and the repetition of his requests for pardon proves how earnestly he desired it. He speaks of *hyssop* [266] , in allusion to the ceremonies of the law; and though he was far from putting his trust in the mere outward symbol of purification, he knew that, like every other legal rite, it was instituted for an important end. The sacrifices were seals of the grace of God. In them, therefore, he was anxious to find assurance of his reconciliation; and it is highly proper that, when our faith is disposed at any time to waver, we should confirm it by improving such means of divine support. All which David here prays for is, that God would effectually accomplish, in his experience, what he had signified to his Church and people by these outward rites; and in this he has set us a good example for our imitation. It is no doubt to the blood of Christ alone that we must look for the atonement of our sins; but we are creatures of sense, who must see with our eyes, and handle with our hands; and it is only by improving the outward symbols of propitiation that we can arrive at a full and assured persuasion of it. What we have said of the *hyssop* applies also to the *washings* [267] referred to in this verse, and which were commonly practiced under the Law. They figuratively represented our being purged from all iniquity, in order to our reception into the divine favor. I need not say that it is the peculiar work of the Holy Spirit to sprinkle our consciences inwardly with the blood of Christ, and, by removing the sense of guilt, to secure our access into the presence of God.

In the two verses which follow, the Psalmist prays that God would be pacified towards him. Those put too confined a meaning upon the words who have suggested that, in praying *to hear the voice of joy and gladness,* he requests some prophet to be sent, who might assure him of pardon. He prays, in general, for testimonies of the divine favor. When he speaks of his *bones* as having been *broken,* he alludes to the extreme grief and overwhelming distress to which he had been reduced. The joy of the Lord would reanimate

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Hyssop was much used by the Hebrews in their sacred purifications and sprinklings. The allusion here probably is to the ceremony of sprinkling such as had been infected with leprosy. Two birds were to be taken, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop; one of the birds was to be killed, and the priest having dipped the living bird, the cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop, in the blood of the bird that was killed, sprinkled the leper, (Leviticus 14.) This ceremony, it is to be observed, was not to be performed until the person was cured; and it was intended as a declaration to the people, that, God having healed him of a disease which no human means could remove, he might with safety be restored to society, and to the privileges of which he had been deprived. David, polluted with the crimes of adultery and murder, regarded himself as a man affected with the dreadful disease of leprosy, and he prays that God would sprinkle him with hyssop, as the leper was sprinkled, using this figurative language to express his ardent desires to obtain forgiveness and cleansing by the application of the blood of Christ, and that God would show to the people that he had pardoned his sin, restored him to favor, and purified his soul.

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his soul; and this joy he describes as to be obtained by *hearing;* for it is the word of God alone which can first and effectually cheer the heart of any sinner. There is no true or solid peace to be enjoyed in the world except in the way of reposing upon the promises of God. Those who do not resort to them may succeed for a time in hushing or evading the terrors of conscience, but they must ever be strangers to true inward comfort. And, granting that they may attain to the peace of insensibility, this is not a state which could satisfy any man who has seriously felt the fear of the Lord. The joy which he desires is that which flows from hearing the word of God, in which he promises to pardon our guilt, and readmit us into his favor. It is this alone which supports the believer amidst all the fears, dangers, and distresses of his earthly pilgrimage; for the joy of the Spirit is inseparable from faith. When God is said, in the 9th verse, to *hide his face* from our sins, this signifies his pardoning them, as is explained in the clause immediately annexed — *Blot out all my sins.* This represents our justification as consisting in a voluntary act of God, by which he condescends to forget all our iniquities; and it represents our cleansing to consist in the reception of a gratuitous pardon. We repeat the remark which has been already made, that David, in thus reiterating his one request for the mercy of God, evinces the depth of that anxiety which he felt for a favor which his conduct had rendered difficult of attainment. The man who prays for pardon in a mere formal manner, is proved to be a stranger to the dreadful desert of sin. "Happy is the man," said Solomon, "that feareth alway," (Proverbs 28:14.)

But here it may be asked why David needed to pray so earnestly for the joy of remission, when he had already received assurance from the lips of Nathan that his sin was pardoned? (2 Samuel 12:13.) Why did he not embrace this absolution? and was he not chargeable with dishonoring God by disbelieving the word of his prophet? We cannot expect that God will send us angels in order to announce the pardon which we require. Was

David felt that he was stained, as it were, by the blood of Uriah, and therefore he prays, "Wash me." The word כבסנ, *cabbeseni*, *wash me*, is from כבס, *cabas*, *to tread*, *to trample with the feet*; and hence it signifies *to wash*, *to cleanse*, for example, garments, by treading them in a trough, etc. It differs from רחץ, *rachats*, *to lave or wash the body*, as the Greek word πλύνειν, *to cleanse soiled garments*, differs from λούειν, *to wash the body* See Gesenius Lexicon. These two words, כבס, *cabas*, and רחץ, *rachats*, which thus express different kinds of washing, observes Bishop Mant, "are always used in the Hebrew language with the strictest propriety: the one to signify that kind of washing which *pervades the substance* of the thing washed, and cleanses it thoroughly; and the other to express that kind of washing which only *cleanses the surface* of a substance, which the water cannot penetrate. The former is applied to the washing of clothes; the latter is used for washing some part of the body. By a beautiful and strong metaphor, David uses the former word in this and the second verse: '*Wash* me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.' '*Wash* me, and I shall be whiter than snow.' So in Jeremiah 4:14, the same word is applied to the heart. There is a similar distinction in the Greek language, which the LXX. constantly observe in their rendering of the Hebrew words above alluded to."

it not said by Christ, that whatever his disciples remitted on earth would be remitted in heaven? (John 20:23.) And does not the apostle declare that ministers of the gospel are ambassadors to reconcile men to God? (2 Corinthians 5:20.) From this it might appear to have argued unbelief in David, that, notwithstanding the announcement of Nathan, he should evince a remaining perplexity or uncertainty regarding his forgiveness. There is a twofold explanation which may be given of the difficulty. We may hold that Nathan did not immediately make him aware of the fact that God was willing to be reconciled to him. In Scripture, it is well known, things are not always stated according to the strict order of time in which they occurred. It is quite conceivable that, having thrown him into this situation of distress, God might keep him in it for a considerable interval, for his deeper humiliation; and that David expresses in these verses the dreadful anguish which he endured when challenged with his crime, and not yet informed of the divine determination to pardon it. Let us take the other supposition, however, and it by no means follows that a person may not be assured of the favor of God, and yet show great earnestness and importunity in praying for pardon. David might be much relieved by the announcement of the prophet, and yet be visited occasionally with fresh convictions, influencing him to have recourse to the throne of grace. However rich and liberal the offers of mercy may be which God extends to us, it is highly proper on our part that we should reflect upon the grievous dishonor which we have done to his name, and be filled with due sorrow on account of it. Then our faith is weak, and we cannot at once apprehend the full extent of the divine mercy; so that there is no reason to be surprised that David should have once and again renewed his prayers for pardon, the more to confirm his belief in it. The truth is, that we cannot properly pray for the pardon of sin until we have come to a persuasion that God will be reconciled to us. Who can venture to open his mouth in God's presence unless he be assured of his fatherly favor? And pardon being the first thing we should pray for, it is plain that there is no inconsistency in having a persuasion of the grace of God, and yet proceeding to supplicate his forgiveness. In proof of this, I might refer to the Lord's Prayer, in which we are taught to begin by addressing God as our Father, and yet afterwards to pray for the remission of our sins. God's pardon is full and complete; but our faith cannot take in his overflowing goodness, and it is necessary that it should distil to us drop by drop. It is owing to this infirmity of our faith, that we are often found repeating and repeating again the same petition, not with the view surely of gradually softening the heart of God to compassion, but because we advance by slow and difficult steps to the requisite fullness of assurance. The mention which is here made of *purging with hyssop,* and of *washing* or *sprinkling,* teaches us, in all our prayers for the pardon of sin, to have our thoughts directed to the great sacrifice by which Christ has reconciled us to God. "Without shedding of blood," says Paul, "is no remissions" (Hebrews 9:22;) and this, which was

intimated by God to the ancient Church under figures, has been fully made known by the coming of Christ. The sinner, if he would find mercy, must look to the sacrifice of Christ, which expiated the sins of the world, glancing, at the same time, for the confirmation of his faith, to Baptism and the Lord's Supper; for it were vain to imagine that God, the Judge of the world, would receive us again into his favor in any other way than through a satisfaction made to his justice.

Psalm 51:10-12

> **10**. Create in me a clean heart, O God! and renew a right spirit [268] in my inward parts. **11**. Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not the Spirit of thy holiness from me. **12**. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a free spirit.

10 *Create in me a clean heart, O God!* In the previous part of the psalm David has been praying for pardon. He now requests that the grace of the Spirit, which he had forfeited, or deserved to have forfeited, might be restored to him. The two requests are quite distinct, though sometimes confounded together, even by men of learning. He passes from the subject of the gratuitous remission of sin to that of sanctification. And to this he was naturally led with earnest anxiety, by the consciousness of his having merited the loss of all the gifts of the Spirit, and of his having actually, in a great measure, lost them. By employing the term *create,* he expresses his persuasion that nothing less than a miracle could effect his reformation, and emphatically declares that repentance is the gift of God. The Sophists grant the necessity of the aids of the Spirit, and allow that assisting grace must both go before and come after; but by assigning a middle place to the free will of man, they rob God of a great part of his glory. David, by the word which he here uses, describes the work of God in renewing the heart in a manner suitable to its extraordinary nature, representing it as the formation of a new creature.

As he had already been endued with the Spirit, he prays in the latter part of the verse that *God would renew a right spirit within him* But by the term *create,* which he had previously employed, he acknowledges that we are indebted entirely to the grace of God, both for our first regeneration, and, in the event of our falling, for subsequent restoration. He does not merely assert that his heart and spirit were weak, requiring divine assistance, but that they must remain destitute of all purity and rectitude till these be communicated from above. By this it appears that our nature is entirely corrupt: for were it possessed of any rectitude or purity, David would not,

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French and Skinner read, "*a steadfast spirit*; *i.e.*, a mind steady in following the path of duty."

as in this verse, have called the one *a gift of the Spirit,* and the other *a creation.*

In the verse which follows, he presents the same petition, in language which implies the connection of pardon with the enjoyment of the leading of the Holy Spirit. If God reconcile us gratuitously to himself, it follows that he will guide us by the Spirit of adoption. It is only such as he loves, and has numbered among his own children, that he blesses with a share of his Spirit; and David shows that he was sensible of this when he prays for the continuance of the grace of adoption as indispensable to the continued possession of the Spirit. The words of this verse imply that the Spirit had not altogether been taken away from him, however much his gifts had been temporarily obscured. Indeed, it is evident that he could not be altogether divested of his former excellencies, for he seems to have discharged his duties as a king with credit, to have conscientiously observed the ordinances of religion, and to have regulated his conduct by the divine law. Upon one point he had fallen into a deadly lethargy, but he was not given over to a reprobate mind;" and it is scarcely conceivable that the rebuke of Nathan the prophet should have operated so easily and so suddenly in arousing him, had there been no latent spark of godliness still remaining in his soul. He prays, it is true, that his spirit may be *renewed,* but this must be understood with a limitation. The truth on which we are now insisting is an important one, as many learned men have been inconsiderately drawn into the opinion that the elect, by falling into mortal sin, may lose the Spirit altogether, and be alienated from God. The contrary is clearly declared by Peter, who tells us that the word by which we are born again is an incorruptible seed, (1 Peter 1:23;) and John is equally explicit in informing us that the elect are preserved from falling away altogether, (1 John 3:9.) However much they may appear for a time to have been cast off by God, it is afterwards seen that grace must have been alive in their breast, even during that interval when it seemed to be extinct. Nor is there any force in the objection that David speaks as if he feared that he might be deprived of the Spirit. It is natural that the saints, when they have fallen into sin, and have thus done what they could to expel the grace of God, should feel an anxiety upon this point; but it is their duty to hold fast the truth that grace is the incorruptible seed of God, which never can perish in any heart where it has been deposited. This is the spirit displayed by David. Reflecting upon his offense, he is agitated with fears, and yet rests in the persuasion that, being a child of God, he would not be deprived of what indeed he had justly forfeited.

12 *Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation* He cannot dismiss his grief of mind until he have obtained peace with God. This he declares once and again, for David had no sympathy with those who can indulge themselves in ease when they are lying under the divine displeasure. In the latter clause of the verse, he prays as in the verses preceding, that the Holy Spirit might not be taken away from him. There is a slight ambiguity in the words. Some

take תסמכני, *thismecheni,* to be the third person of the verb, because רוח, *ruach,* is feminine, and translate, *let the Spirit uphold me.* The difference is immaterial, and does not affect the meaning of the passage. There is more difficulty in fixing the sense of the epithet נדיבה, *nedibah,* which I have translated *free* As the verb נדב, *nadab,* signifies *to deal liberally,* princes are in the Hebrew called, by way of eminence, נדיבים, *nedibim,* which has led several learned men to think that David speaks here of a *princely* or *royal* spirit; and the translators of the Septuagint rendered it accordingly ἡγεμονικον. The prayer, in this sense, would no doubt be a suitable one for David, who was a king, and required a heroical courage for the execution of his office. But it seems better to adopt the more extensive meaning, and to suppose that David, under a painful consciousness of the bondage to which he had been reduced by a sense of guilt, prays for a free and cheerful spirit. [269] This invaluable attainment, he was sensible, could only be recovered through divine grace.

Psalm 51:13-15

> **13**. I will teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee. **14**. Deliver me from bloods, O God! thou God of my salvation, and my tongue shall sing aloud with joy of thy righteousness. **15**. O Lord! open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.

13 *I will teach transgressors thy ways* Here he speaks of the gratitude which he would feel should God answer his prayer, and engages to show it by exerting himself in effecting the conversion of others by his example. Those who have been mercifully recovered from their falls will feel inflamed

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Some commentators refer the clause, upon which Calvin is here commenting, to the Holy Spirit, and others to the qualities of mind with which David desired to be endued. The translators of our English Bible understand the expression in the first sense, reading, "thy free Spirit." The word *thy* is a supplement, but it does not appear to be liable to any material objection. Fry, who adopts the same view, reads, "bountiful or spontaneously flowing Spirit;" and observes, that the word נדיבה, *nedibah*, "is more still than spontaneously flowing: it signifies to flow both spontaneously and plentifully: 'prae uberitate succi sponte fluens.' This epithet of the indwelling Spirit will be best explained from our Lord's own words, John 4:14, and 7:38." Others refer the expression to the mind of the Psalmist. Mudge reads, "And let a plentiful effusion of spirit support me." Dimock, "Let a free spirit sustain me;" "that is," says he, "let me not be enslaved, as I have been, by my sinful passions." Green, "And support with a cheerful spirit." French and Skinner, "And may a willing spirit uphold me;" by which they understand, "a spirit devoted to the service of God." Walford, following the Septuagint, reads, "And with a princely spirit sustain me." "David," says this critic, "was so overwhelmed by the consciousness of his extreme iniquity, so broken in spirit, courage, and fortitude, as to feel altogether incompetent to the discharge of his office, as the King of Israel. He therefore addresses this petition to God, in the hope that he would grant to him a renewal of that powerful energy by which he had at first been fitted for an employment so every way unsuitable to his lowly descent, and his employment as a shepherd."

by the common law of charity to extend a helping hand to their brethren; and in general, such as are partakers of the grace of God are constrained by religious principle, and regard for the divine glory, to desire that others should be brought into the participation of it. The sanguine manner in which he expresses his expectation of converting others is not unworthy of our notice. We are too apt to conclude that our attempts at reclaiming the ungodly are vain and ineffectual, and forget that God is able to crown them with success.

14 *Deliver me from bloods* His recurring so often to petitions for pardon, proves how far David was from flattering himself with unfounded hopes, and what a severe struggle he sustained with inward terrors. According to some, he prays in this verse to be delivered from the guilt of the blood of Uriah, and, in general, of the whole army. [270] But the term *bloods* in Hebrew may denote any capital crime, and, in my opinion, he is here to be considered as alluding to the sentence of death, to which he felt himself to be obnoxious, and from which he requests deliverance. By *the righteousness of God,* which he engages to celebrate, we are to understand his goodness; for this attribute, as usually ascribed to God in the Scriptures, does not so much denote the strictness with which he exacts vengeance, as his faithfulness in fulfilling the promises and extending help to all who seek him in the hour of need. There is much emphasis and vehemency in the mode of his address, *O God! the God of my salvation,* intimating at once how tremblingly he was alive to the danger of his situation, and how strongly his faith terminated upon God as the ground of his hope. Similar is the strain of the verse which follows. He prays that *his lips may be opened;* in other words, that God would afford him matter of praise. The meaning usually attached to the expression is, that God would so direct his tongue by the Spirit as to fit him for singing his praises. But though it is true that God must supply us with words, and that if he do not, we cannot fail to be silent in his praise, David seems rather to intimate that his mouth must be shut until God called him to the exercise of

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This opinion, although disapproved of by our Author, is very generally held by commentators. When *blood* is used in the plural number as here, it usually denotes murder or manslaughter, and the guilt following thereupon: as in Genesis 4:11, "The voice of thy brother's bloods crieth unto me from the ground;" 1 Chronicles 22:8, "Thou hast shed bloods abundantly;" and Psalm 9:13, "When he maketh inquisition for bloods." See also Psalm 106:38. "A man of bloods" is a bloody man, a man who is guilty of bloodshed, Psalm 5:6; 26:9; 59:2; and 55:23. David's conduct towards Uriah, forming as it did a dark and an atrocious deed of treachery and cruelty which has few parallels in the history of mankind, must, on his recovery to a sense of its real character, have inflicted on his soul an agony which cannot be told. He escaped being tried before an earthly tribunal; but his conscience told him that he stood at the bar of Heaven, laden with the guilt of murder; and he was convinced that the mercy of God alone could pardon him and purify his conscience. No wonder then that he cries out with such emphasis and earnestness, *O God*! *thou God of my salvation*! *deliver me*! The Chaldee reads, "Deliver me from the judgment of murder."

thanksgiving by extending pardon. In another place we find him declaring that a new song had been put in his mouth, (Psalm 40:3,)and it seems to be in this sense that he here desires his lips to be opened. He again signifies the gratitude which he would feel, and which he would express, intimating, that he sought the mercy of God with no other view than that he might become the herald of it to others. *My mouth,* he says emphatically, *shall show forth thy praise.*

Psalm 51:16-19

> **16**. For thou wilt not accept a sacrifice; though I should give [271] a burnt offering, it would not please thee. **17**. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God! thou wilt not despise. **18**. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion; build thou the walls of Jerusalem. **19**. Thou shalt then accept the sacrifices of righteousness, even the burnt-offering and whole oblation; then shall calves come upon thine altar.

16. *For thou wilt not accept a sacrifice* By this language he expresses his confidence of obtaining pardon, although he brought nothing to God in the shape of compensation, but relied entirely upon the riches of Divine mercy. He confesses that he comes to God both poor and needy; but is persuaded that this will not prevent the success of his suit, because God attaches no importance to sacrifices. In this he indirectly reproves the Jews for an error which prevailed amongst them in all ages. In proclaiming that the sacrifices made expiation for sin, the Law had designed to withdraw them from all trust in their own works to the one satisfaction of Christ; but they presumed to bring their sacrifices to the altar as a price by which they hoped to procure their own redemption. In opposition to this proud and preposterous notion, David declares that God had no delight in sacrifices, [272] and that he had nothing to present which could purchase his favor. God had enjoined the observance of sacrifice, and David was far from neglecting it. He is not to be understood as asserting that the rite might warrantably be omitted, or that God would absolutely reject the sacrifices of his own institution, which, along with the other ceremonies of the Law, proved important helps, as we have already observed, both to David and the whole Church of God. He speaks of them as observed by the proud and the ignorant, under an

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The original word ואחנה, *ve-etenah*, which Calvin renders, *Though I should give*, is considered by some as a noun. "The common interpretation, *Else would I give it thee*," says Rogers, "is harsh. Gesenius attributes to the word אחנה, with a slight difference in the punctuation, the sense of a *gift*, *reward* It is used only in Hosea 2:14. If this sense might be given to the word in this passage, the verse might be translated,

'For thou desirest no sacrifice or gift,
[In] a burnt-offering thou hast no delight.'"

Book of Psalms in Hebrew, *volume* 2, p. 208.

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impression of meriting the divine favor. Diligent as he was, therefore, in the practice of sacrifice, resting his whole dependence upon the satisfaction of Christ, who atoned for the sins of the world, he could yet honestly declare that he brought nothing to God in the shape of compensation, and that he trusted entirely to a gratuitous reconciliation. The Jews, when they presented their sacrifices, could not be said to bring anything of their own to the Lord, but must rather be viewed as borrowing from Christ the necessary purchase-money of redemption. They were passive, not active, in this divine service.

17 *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.* He had shown that sacrifices have no such efficacy in procuring the Divine favor as the Jews imagined; and now he declares that he needed to bring nothing whatever to God but a contrite and humbled heart. Nothing more is necessary, on the part of the sinner, than to prostrate himself in supplication for Divine mercy. The plural number is used in the verse to express more forcibly the truth, that the sacrifice of repentance is enough in itself without any other. Had he said no more than that this kind of sacrifice was peculiarly acceptable to God, the Jews might easily have evaded his argument by alleging that this might be true, and yet other sacrifices be equally agreeable in his sight; just as the Papists in our own day mix up the grace of God with their own works, rather than submit to receive a gratuitous pardon for their sins. In order to exclude every idea of a pretended satisfaction, David represents contrition of heart as comprehending in itself the whole sum of acceptable sacrifices. And in using the term *sacrifices of God,* he conveys a tacit reproof to the proud hypocrite, who sets a high value upon such sacrifices as are of his own unauthorised fancy, when he imagines that by means of them he can propitiate God. But here a difficulty may be started. "If the contrite heart," it may be said, "hold a higher place in the estimation of God than all sacrifices, does it not follow that we acquire pardon by our penitence, and that thus it ceases to be gratuitous?" In reply to this, I might observe, that David is not speaking at this time of the meritorious condition by which pardon is procured, but, on the contrary, asserting our absolute destitution of merit by enjoining humiliation and contrition of spirit, in opposition to everything like an attempt to render a compensation to God. The man of broken spirit is one who has been emptied of all vain-glorious confidence, and

There may be another reason why David here affirms that God would not accept of a sacrifice, nor be pleased with a burnt-offering. No particular sacrifices were appointed by the Law of Moses to expiate the guilt of murder and adultery. The person who had perpetrated these crimes was, according to the Divine law, to be punished with death. David therefore may be understood as declaring, that it was utterly vain for him to think of resorting to sacrifices and burnt-offerings with a view to the expiation of his guilt; that his criminality was of such a character, that the ceremonial law made no provision for his deliverance from the doom which his deeds of horror deserved; and that the only sacrifices which would avail were those mentioned in the succeeding verse, "The sacrifices of a broken heart."

brought to acknowledge that he is nothing. The contrite heart abjures the idea of merit, and has no dealings with God upon the principle of exchange. Is it objected, that faith is a more excellent sacrifice that that which is here commended by the Psalmist, and of greater efficacy in procuring the Divine favor, as it presents to the view of God that Savior who is the true and only propitiation? I would observe, that faith cannot be separated from the humility of which David speaks. This is such a humility as is altogether unknown to the wicked. They may tremble in the presence of God, and the obstinacy and rebellion of their hearts may be partially restrained, but they still retain some remainders of inward pride. Where the spirit has been broken, on the other hand, and the heart has become contrite, through a felt sense of the anger of the Lord, a man is brought to genuine fear and self-loathing, with a deep conviction that of himself he can do or deserve nothing, and must be indebted unconditionally for salvation to Divine mercy. That this should be represented by David as constituting all which God desires in the shape of sacrifice, need not excite our surprise. He does not exclude faith, he does not condescend upon any nice division of true penitence into its several parts, but asserts in general, that the only way of obtaining the favor of God is by prostrating ourselves with a wounded heart at the feet of his Divine mercy, and supplicating his grace with ingenuous confessions of our own helplessness.

18 *Do good to Zion in thy good pleasure: build thou the walls of Jerusalem* [273] From prayer in his own behalf he now proceeds to offer up supplications for the collective Church of God, a duty which he may have felt to be the more incumbent upon him from the circumstance of his having done what

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We have already considered Horsley's first objection, founded on the fourth verse, to the authenticity of the title of this psalm. His second and only other objection rests on the 18th verse. He thinks that the prayer, "Build thou the walls of Jerusalem," is more applicable to the time of the Babylonish captivity than to the time of David; and to the former period he refers the psalm. Calmet and Mudge are of the same opinion. Some learned Jewish interpreters, while they assign the psalm to the occasion mentioned in the title, conjecture that the 18th and 19th verses were added by some Jewish bard in the time of the Babylonish captivity. This opinion is also held by Venema, Green, Street, French and Skinner. There does not, however, seem to be any sufficient ground for referring the poem, either in whole or in part, to that period. Neither the walls of Jerusalem, nor the buildings of Zion, as the royal palace, and the magnificent structure of the temple, which we know David had already contemplated for the worship of God, (2 Samuel 7:1, etc.) were completed during his reign. This was only effected under the reign of his son Solomon, (1 Kings 3:1.) The prayer, then, in the 18th verse, might have a particular reference to the completion of these buildings, and especially to the rearing of the temple, in which sacrifices of unprecedented magnitude were to be offered. David's fears might easily suggest to him that his crimes might prevent the building of the temple which God had promised should be erected, (2 Samuel 7:13.) "The king forgets not," observes Bishop Horne, "to ask mercy for his people, as well as for himself; that so neither his own nor their sins might prevent either the building and flourishing of the earthly Jerusalem, or, what was of infinitely greater importance, the promised blessing of Messiah, who was to descend from him, and to rear the walls of the New Jerusalem."

he could by his fall to ruin it, Raised to the throne, and originally anointed to be king for the very purpose of fostering the Church of God, he had by his disgraceful conduct nearly accomplished its destruction. Although chargeable with this guilt, he now prays that God would restore it in the exercise of his free mercy. He makes no mention of the righteousness of others, but rests his plea entirely upon the good pleasure of God, intimating that the Church, when at any period it has been brought low, must be indebted for its restoration solely to Divine grace. Jerusalem was already built, but David prays that God would build it still farther for he knew that it fell far short of being complete, so long as it wanted the temple, where he had promised to establish the Ark of his Covenant, and also the royal palace. We learn from the passage, that it is God's own work to build the Church. "His foundation," says the Psalmist elsewhere, "is in the holy mountains," (Psalm 87:1.) We are not to imagine that David refers simply to the Church as a material structure, but must consider him as having his eye fixed upon the spiritual temple, which cannot be raised by human skill or industry. It is true, indeed, that men will not make progress even in the building of material walls, unless their labor be blessed from above; but the Church is in a peculiar sense the erection of God, who has founded it upon the earth in the exercise of his mighty power, and who will exalt it higher than the heavens. In this prayer David does not contemplate the welfare of the Church for a short period merely, but prays that God would preserve and advance it till the coming of Christ. And here, may it not justly excite our surprise, to find one who, in the preceding part of the psalm, had employed the language of distress and almost of despair, now inspired with the confidence necessary for commending the whole Church to the care of God? How comes it about, may we not ask, that one who so narrowly escaped destruction himself, should now appear as a guide to conduct others to salvation? In this we have a striking proof, that, provided we obtain reconciliation with God, we may not only expect to be inspired with confidence in praying for our own salvation, but may hope to be admitted as intercessors in behalf of others, and even to be advanced to the higher honor still, of commending into the hands of God the glory of the Redeemer's kingdom.

19 *Then shalt thou accept sacrifices of righteousness* In these words there is an apparent, but only an apparent, inconsistency with others which he had used in the preceding context. He had declared sacrifices to be of no value when considered in themselves, but now he acknowledges them to be acceptable to God when viewed as expressions or symbols of faith, penitence, and thanksgiving. He calls them distinctly *sacrifices of righteousness,* right, warrantable, and such as are offered in strict accordance with the commandment of God. The expression is the same employed in Psalm 4:5, where David uses it with a tacit condemnation of those who gloried in the mere outward form of ceremonies. We find him again exciting himself and others by his example to the exercise of gratitude, and to the expression of it

openly in the solemn assembly. Besides sacrifices in general, two particular kinds of sacrifice are specified. Although some consider כליל, *calil,* and עולה, *olah,* to be both of one signification, others maintain with more correctness, that the first is to be understood as meaning the priest's sacrifice, because in it the offering was consumed or burnt with fire. [274] In the enumeration which he makes, David designs to teach us that none of all the legal rites can find acceptance with God, unless they be used with a reference to the proper end of their institution. The whole of this verse has been figuratively applied by some to the kingdom of Christ, but the interpretation is unnatural and too refined. Thanksgivings are indeed called by Hosea "the calves of the lips," (Hosea 14:2;) but it seems evident that in the passage before us there are conjoined along with the frame or disposition of the heart those solemn ceremonies which constituted part of the ancient worship.

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Ainsworth reads, "the burnt-offering and the whole oblation;" and observes, that "*The whole oblation*, *the calil*, was a kind of oblation that was wholly and every whit given up in fire unto God, and differed from the *ghnola*, or burnt-offering, which was only of beasts or birds, Leviticus 1; whereas the *calil* was also of flour, called the meat-offering, but burned altogether, which the common meat-offerings were not, Leviticus 6:20, 22, 23. It was also of beasts, 1 Samuel 7:9."

Psalm 52

PSALM 52

This psalm was composed by David at the time when the death of Abimelech and the other priests had spread universal terror among the people, indisposing them for lending any countenance to his cause, and when Doeg was triumphing in the successful issue of his information. Supported, even in these circumstances, by the elevating influence of faith, he inveighs against the cruel treachery of that unprincipled informer, and encourages himself by the reflection, that God, who is judge in heaven, will vindicate the interests of such as fear him, and punish the pride of the ungodly.

To the chief singer. A Psalm of David for instruction; when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, and said unto him, that David had come into the house of Abimelech.

I have already had occasion to observe that the term משכיל, *maskil,* is strictly affixed to those psalms in which David makes mention of having been chastised by God, or at least admonished, by some species of affliction, sent, like the rod of the schoolmaster, to administer correction. Of this we have examples in Psalms 32 and 42. As inscribed above the 45th psalm, its meaning is somewhat different. There, it seems designed to intimate to the reader that the song, although breathing of love, was not intended to please a mere wanton taste, but describes the spiritual marriage of Christ with his Church. In this and the following psalms, the term admits of being understood as signifying *instruction,* more particularly such as proceeds from *correction;* and David, by employing it, would evidently insinuate that he was at this time subjected to peculiar trials, sent to instruct him in the duty of placing an absolute trust in God. The portion of history to which the

psalm refers is well known. When David had fled to Abimelech in Nob, he obtained provisions and the sword of Goliath from the hands of that priest, having concealed from him the real danger in which he stood, and pretended that he was executing a secret and important business of the king. Doeg, chief of the king's herdsmen, having conveyed intelligence of this to Saul, in expectation of a reward, was the means of drawing down the rage of the tyrant, not only upon that innocent individual, but the whole priesthood. [275] The bloody example which was thus made must have deterred the people from extending to David even the commonest offices of humanity, and every avenue of relief seemed shut upon the miserable exile. As Doeg triumphed in the success of his crime, and others might be tempted, by the reward which he had received, to meditate the ruin of David, we find him in this psalm animating his soul with divine consolations, and challenging his enemies with the audacity of their conduct.

Psalm 52:1-4

> **1**. Why boastest thou of thy wickedness, thou mighty man? The goodness of God endureth daily. **2**. Thy tongue reckons up mischiefs, like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. **3**. Thou lovest evil more than good, to speak lying rather than righteousness. Selah. **4**. Thou lovest all words of deceit, O thou guileful tongue!

1. *Why boastest thou of thy wickedness?* The success which crowned the treachery of Doeg must have tended considerably to stagger David's faith; and he seems to have adopted the strain of holy defiance with which the psalm commences, in order to arm himself more effectually against this temptation. He begins by charging Doeg with an aggravation of his guilt, in boasting of the power which he had acquired by an act of consummate villany. This power may have been sufficiently considerable to attract the notice which is here taken of it; for although he is only said to have been

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The history of this transaction is recorded in 1 Samuel 21:1-7, and 22:9-19. It affords a strong evidence of the hatred which Saul bore to David, and of his savage cruelty to order the execution of eighty-five priests for no crime; and what a monster of iniquity must Doeg have been, who executed this command when not another individual in all Saul's company would do it, and who, in addition to this, "smote the city of the priests with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep?" "If we are confounded," says Walford, "by the savage ferocity of a prince who could order the execution of eighty-five persons of most venerable station, for a crime which existed alone in his disturbed imagination, we shall feel disposed to execrate the ruthless villain who could imbrue his hands in the blood of so many innocent victims; and we shall be ready to draw the conclusion, that both Saul and Doeg were prompted to this deed of atrocious cruelty, not merely by their hatred of David, but by a malevolence, almost without parallel, against the ministers of religion, and which rendered conspicuous their contempt and hatred for God himself. It can excite little surprise to find David saying, as he does, in the next psalm, 'The fool saith in his heart, There is no God.'"

"master of the king's herdsmen," the designation does not imply that he was personally occupied in herding cattle, but may have been an honorary title; as in modern courts we speak of "The Master of the Horse." he is reminded that there was no reason why he should applaud himself in his greatness, so long as he abused it to purposes of wickedness; nor why he should be vain of any new honor which the king might have conferred upon him in consideration of his late crime, as integrity is the only sure pathway to power and preferment. Any triumph which may be obtained by violence, treachery, or other unjustifiable means, is short-lived. In the second part of the verse, he points at the true cause of the blindness and stupidity that lead men to glory in their wickedness, which is, that they despise the poor and the humble; imagine that God will not condescend to interest himself in their behalf; and therefore embrace the occasion of oppressing them with impunity. They make no account of that providence which God exerts over his own children. David, in the exercise of a holy confidence, challenges such proud boasters with dishonoring the goodness of God; and as the Divine goodness does not always pursue the same even course — occasionally appears to suffer an interruption, and sometimes seems as if it were cut off altogether, David repels any temptation which this might suggest, by asserting that, whatever appearances may say to the contrary, it is daily exercised. This is evidently the meaning which he intends to convey, that any partial obstructions which may take place in the display of it can never prevent its constant renewal. He was confident that he would experience, in the future, what he had found in the past; for God cannot become weary in helping his people, or alleviating their miseries; and although he may suffer them again and again to fall into affliction, he is always equally ready to extend them the deliverance which they need.

2. *Thy tongue reckons up mischiefs* David is not to be considered as here venting a flood of reproaches against his adversary, as many who have been unjustly injured are in the habit of doing, merely to gratify a feeling of revenge. He brings these charges against him in the sight of God, with a view to encourage himself in the hopefulness of his own cause: for it is plain that the farther our enemies proceed in the practice of iniquity, they proportionally provoke the anger of the Lord, and are nearer to that destruction which must issue in our deliverance. His object, therefore, is not to blacken the character of Doeg in the estimation of the world, but rather to set before his own eyes the divine punishment which the flagrant offenses he specifies were certain to draw down upon his head. Amongst these he singles out, as more especially worthy of reprobation, the hidden treachery with which he had been chargeable in accomplishing the destruction of the priesthood. Adverting to his secret and malicious information, he likens *his tongue to a sharp razor,* as elsewhere, Psalm 120:4, the tongues of the wicked are compared to "sharp arrows." It is added, *working deceitfully,* which words are considered by some as referring to the razor which cuts

subtilely, and not with an open wound like a sword; but perhaps they may be construed with more propriety as applying to the tongue, [276] although there can be no doubt of the reason of the comparison.

The term בלע, *balang,* in verse fourth, which has been translated *destruction,* I prefer understanding in the sense of *hiding* or *concealment.* He seems to allude to the drawing back of the tongue when we swallow; and under this figure, to describe the deceitfulness of Doeg's words, by which he devoured the unsuspecting and the innocent. [277] The great design of David, as I have already remarked in the preceding verses, is to encourage himself in the hope of deliverance by dwelling upon the extreme character of that wickedness which his enemy had displayed.

Psalm 52:5-7

> **5**. God shall likewise destroy thee for ever: he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling-place, and root thee out of the land of the living. Selah **6**. The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him. **7**. Lo! this is the man that made not God his strength; and trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness.

5 *God shall likewise destroy thee for ever.* From these words it is made still more evident that his object in dwelling upon the aggravated guilt of Doeg, was to prove the certainty of his approaching doom, and this rather for his own conviction and comfort, than with a view to alarming the conscience of the offender. Accordingly, he declares his persuasion that God would not allow his treachery to pass unpunished, though he might for a time connive at the perpetration of it. The ungodly are disposed, so long as their prosperity continues, to indulge in undisturbed security; and the saint of God, when he sees the power of which they are possessed, and witnesses their proud contempt of the divine judgments, is too apt to be overwhelmed with unbelieving apprehensions. But in order to establish his mind in the truth which he announces, it is observable that the Psalmist heaps one expression upon another, — God shall *destroy thee, take thee away, pluck thee out, root thee out,* — as if by this multiplicity of words he would convince

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According to the first sense, the meaning is, that as a razor cuts so easily, that the wound is at first hardly perceptible, in the same manner, the deceitful tongue works its purposes of mischief before the objects which it means to ruin are conscious of their danger. It is like a sharp razor, that cuts the throat before a man is aware of it. "If, however, we take the words, *thou workest deceitfully*, as being descriptive not of the razor but of the tongue, the sense will be, that such a tongue is capable of inflicting deep and dreadful wounds like a sharp razor." — *Walford.*

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"בלע, *balang*, is *to swallow*, *to devour*, with the idea of eagerness, greediness." — *Gesenius*

himself more effectually, that God was able to overthrow this adversary with all his boasted might and authority. [278] In adding that God would root him out of his *dwelling-place* or *tent,* [279] and *out of the land of the living,* he insinuates that the wicked will be destroyed by God, however securely they may seem to repose ir the nest of some comfortable mansion, and in the vain hope of living upon earth for ever. Possibly he may allude, in mentioning a *tent,* to the profession of Doeg, as shepherds have their dwelling in tents.

6 *The righteous also shall see, and fear* [280] He here adduces, as another reason why the ruin of Doeg might be expected, that an important end would be obtained by it, in so far as it would promote religion in the hearts of the Lord's people, and afford them a refreshing display of the Divine justice. Should it take place, it would be witnessed by the ungodly as well as by the righteous; but there are two reasons why the Psalmist represents it as being seen especially by the latter. The wicked are incapable of profiting by the judgments of God, being blind to the plainest manifestations which he has made of himself in his works, and it was only the righteous therefore who could see it. Besides, the great end which God has in view, when he prostrates the pride of the ungodly, is the comfort of his own people, that he may show to them the care with which he watches over their safety. It is they, therefore, whom David represents as witnessing this spectacle of Divine justice. And when he says that they would *fear,* it is not meant that they would tremble, or experience any slavish apprehension, but that

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"Wonderful," says Bishop Horne, "is the force of the verbs in the original, which convey to us the four ideas of 'laying prostrate,' 'dissolving as by fire,' 'sweeping away as with a besom,' and 'totally extirpating root and branch,' as a tree eradicated from the spot on which it grew." The second verb, יחתך, *yachtecha*, Bythner explains, "*will snatch thee away*, as one snatches fire from a hearth. From חתה, *chatheh*, he *snatched off live coals or fire from one place to another*."

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There is another interpretation of this expression which may here be stated. It has been thought that the allusion is to God's tabernacle. "מאהל, *meohel*," says Hammond, "is literally 'from the tabernacle,' not 'from *thy* dwelling-place:' and so the LXX. render it, 'Απὸ σκηνώματος,' 'from the tabernacle;' and though the Latin, and Syriac, and Arabic, have added *tuo*, *thy*, yet neither will the Hebrew bear, nor do the Chaldee acknowledge it, who read by way of paraphrase, 'He shall cause thee to depart from inhabiting in the place of the Schechina, or tabernacle, the place of God's presence.'" Hammond supposes that the expression is to be understood "of the censure of excommunication, which in the last and highest degree was *Schammatha*, delivering up the offender to the hand of heaven to be cut off, himself and his posterity." "Doeg," says Archbishop Secker, "had no office in the tabernacle; but it seems, by his history, that he frequented it, which he might do to seem a good man. And there seems an opposition between his being plucked out of God's dwelling-place, and David's continuing in the house of God, verse eighth."

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French and Skinner read, "The righteous shall see it, and feel reverence; — *feel reverence, i.e.*, in the punishment of this wicked man, find additional reason to reverence God, and to observe his righteous laws."

their reverential regard for God would be increased by this proof of his care of their interests. When left exposed to the injurious treatment of their enemies, they are apt to be distressed with doubts as to the concern which he takes in the government of the world. But such illustrations to the contrary have the effect of quickening their discouraged zeal, and promoting that fear which is by no means inconsistent with the joy spoken of in the close of the verse. They are led to reverence him the more when they see that he is the avenger of cruelty and injustice: on the other hand, when they perceive that he appears in defense of their cause, and joins common battle with them against their adversaries, they are naturally filled with the most triumphant joy. The beautiful play upon the words *see* and *fear,* in the Hebrew, cannot be transferred to our language; the form of the expression intimates that they would see, and see effectually.

7. *Lo! this is the man that made not God his strength* Some think that these words are given as what should afterwards be proverbially applied to Doeg; but they would not appear to have been intended in that restricted signification. They merely express the improvement which the people of God would make of the judgment. It would teach them, on the one hand, to be patient under the insolence of the ungodly, which is so speedily humbled; and, on the other, to beware of indulging a similarly infatuated spirit themselves. They would laugh at their destruction, yet not in the way of insulting over them, but rejoicing more and more in the confidence of the help of God, and denying themselves more cheerfully to the vain pleasures of this world. This is the lesson to be learned from such dispensations of providence: they should recall our wandering affections to God. The verse is introduced with an exclamation, *Lo! this is the man,* etc.; for David would have us to look upon this one instance as representing to our eyes, in a vivid manner, the end of all who despise the Lord; and it may be remarked, that it is no small point of practical wisdom thus to generalise individual providences. The two clauses, *made not God his strength,* and, *trusted in the abundance of his riches,* stand mutually connected; for none can be said sincerely to repose upon God but he who has been emptied of all confidence in his own resources. So long as men imagine that they have something of their own in which they can boast, they will never resort to God: just in proportion as we arrogate to ourselves do we derogate from him; and it is not only wealth, but any other earthly possession, which, by engrossing our confidence, may prevent us from inquiring after the Lord. The noun הוה, *havah,* which most interpreters have rendered *wickedness,* [281] and some *slaughter* or *destruction,* seems, in this place, rather to mean

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If this is the true rendering, there may be a reference to the expectations which Doeg had entertained of increasing his power and influence by maliciously injuring David, as he would thereby obtain, in a high degree, the favor of Saul.

substance. [282] Such repetitions of the same sentiment in different words are common with the Psalmist; and, according to this translation, the verse will flow connectedly, reading, that the man who trusts in his riches, and strengthens himself in his substance, defrauds God of his just glory.

Psalm 52:8-9

> **8**. But I am like a green olive-tree in the house of God: I have hoped in the goodness of God for ever and ever. **9**. I will praise thee for ever, because thou hast done it. I will wait on thy name, for it is good before thy meek ones.

8 *But I am like a green olive-tree* [283] We have seen that David was enabled, by the exercise of faith, to look down upon the worldly grandeur of Doeg with a holy contempt; and now we find him rising superior to all that was presently afflictive in his own condition. Though, to appearance, he more resembled the withered trunk of a tree which rots upon the ground, he compares himself, in the confidence of coming prosperity, to a green olive. I need not say that the destruction of Doeg could only communicate

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This is the marginal reading in our English Bible. As he was Saul's chief herdsman, it is probable that his riches consisted chiefly in cattle.

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Our English Bible also reads, "like a green olive-tree;" but it would be more correct to translate, "I am like a flourishing, or vigorous olive-tree." The original word, רענן, *raanan*, has no reference to the color of the tree, but to its fresh, vigouous and flourish condition. Hence this word is used, in Psalm 92:11, to express "*fresh* oil;" and in Daniel 4:4, to denote the prosperous condition of Nebuchadnezzar, "I was at rest in mine house, and *flourishing* in my palace." The fact is, that the color of the olive-tree, so far from being of a bright and lively green, is dark, disagreeable, and yellowish. Travellers, when they have seen this tree, have experienced a feeling of disappointment in not finding it to possess the vivid verdure which they had been led to expect from the description given of it in the Scriptures. An excellent English traveler, Mr Sharpe, writing from Italy, thus expresses himself on this subject: "The fields, and indeed the whole face of Tuscany, are in a manner covered with olive-trees; but the olive-tree does not answer the character I had conceived of it. The royal Psalmist, and some of the sacred writers, speak with rapture of the 'green olive-tree,' so that I expected a beautiful green; and I confess to you I was wretchedly disappointed to find its hue resembling that of our hedges when they are covered with dust." But this disappointment which Mr Sharpe felt arose not from overcharged or exaggerated colouring on the part of the sacred writers, but from his not understanding the meaning of their language. The beauty of the olive-tree is represented in other parts of Scripture as consisting, not in the greenness of its foliage, but in the spread of its branches, (Hosea 14:6.) — *Harmer's Observations*, *volume* 3, pp. 255-257. The propriety and beauty of the comparison which David here makes appears from the fact that the olive is an evergreen, and is also, considering its size, long-lived. While, in the 5th verse, he had predicted the speedy and total destruction of Doeg, comparing him to a tree plucked up by the roots, he, in contrast with this, represents himself as like a young, vigorous olive-tree, which had long to live and flourish; confidently expecting to obtain that outward peace and prosperity which God had promised him, and, along with this, the enjoyment of all spiritual blessings.

comfort to his mind, in the way of convincing him that God was the avenging judge of human cruelty, and leading him to infer that, as he had punished his wrongs, so he would advance him to renewed measures of prosperity. From his language, it appears that he could conceive of no higher felicity in his condition than being admitted amongst the number of the worshippers of God, and engaging in the exercises of devotion. This was characteristic of his spirit. We have already had occasion to see that he felt his banishment from the sanctuary of God more keenly than separation from his consort, the loss of worldly substance, or the dangers and hardships of the wilderness. The idea of an allusion being here made, by way of contrast, to Doeg, who came to the tabernacle of the Lord merely as a spy, and under hypocritical pretexts, is strained and far-fetched. It is more natural to suppose that David distinguishes himself from all his enemies, without exception, intimating that, though he was presently removed from the tabernacle, he would soon be restored to it; and that they who boasted of possessing, or rather monopolising, the house of God, would be rooted out of it with disgrace. And here let us engrave the useful lesson upon our hearts, that we should consider it the great end of our existence to be found numbered amongst the worshippers of God; and that we should avail ourselves of the inestimable privilege of the stated assemblies of the Church, which are necessary helps to our infirmity, and means of mutual excitement and encouragement. By these, and our common Sacraments, the Lord, who is one God, and who designed that we should be one in him, is training us up together in the hope of eternal life, and in the united celebration of his holy name. Let us learn with David to prefer a place in the house of God to all the lying vanities of this world. He adds the reason why he should be like the green olive-tree — because *he hoped in the goodness of God;* for the causal particle appears to be understood. And in this he adverts to the contrast between him and his enemies. They might flourish for a time, spread their branches far and wide, and shoot themselves up to a gigantic stature, but would speedily wither away, because they had no root in the goodness of God; whereas he was certain to derive from this source ever renewed supplies of sap and vigor. As the term of his earthly trials might be protracted, and there was a danger that he might sink under their long continuance, unless his confidence should extend itself far into futurity, he declares expressly that he would not presume to prescribe times to God, and that his hopes were stretched into eternity. It followed that he surrendered himself entirely to God in all that regarded this life or his death. The passage puts us in possession of the grand distinction between the genuine children of God and those who are hypocrites. They are to be found together in the Church, as the wheat is mingled with the chaff on the same threshing-floor; but the one class abides for ever in the steadfastness of a well-founded hope, while the other is driven away in the vanity of its false confidences.

9. *I will praise thee, etc.* He concludes the psalm with thanksgiving, and shows that he is sincere in this, by the special acknowledgement which he makes of the fact that this had been the work of God. Such is the corruption of the human heart, that out of a hundred who profess gratitude to God with their lips, scarcely one man seriously reflects upon the benefits which he has received as coming from his hand. David declares, therefore, that it was entirely owing to the divine protection that he had escaped from the treachery of Doeg, and from all his subsequent dangers, and promises to retain a grateful sense of it throughout the whole of his life. There is no religious duty in which it does not become us to manifest a spirit of perseverance; but we need to be especially enjoined to it in the duty of thanksgiving, disposed as we are so speedily to forget our mercies, and occasionally to imagine that the gratitude of a few days is a sufficient tribute for benefits which deserve to be kept in everlasting remembrance. He speaks of joining the exercise of hope with that of gratitude; *for to wait on the name of God* is synonymous with patiently expecting his mercy even when there is least appearance of its being granted, and trusting in his word, whatever delays there may be in the fulfillment of it. He encourages himself in the belief that his hope will not be vain, by reflecting that the name of God *is good before his saints* Some read, *because it is good before thy saints;* that is, to hope in the divine name, (Psalm 118:8.) But the other reading appears to me to be the most simple and natural, expressing the truth, that God will not frustrate the expectations of his people, because his goodness towards them is always conspicuous. The name of God may be detested by the wicked, and the very sound of it be sufficient to strike terror into their hearts; but David asserts it to be a sweet name in the experience of all his people. They are here called his meek ones, because, as I have remarked in commenting upon Psalm 16:3, they reflect in their character the kindness and beneficence of their Father in heaven.

Psalm 53

PSALM 53

This psalm being almost identical with the fourteenth, it has not been considered necessary to subjoin any distinct commentary. [284]

To the chief musician upon Mahalath. [285]
A Psalm of David for instruction.

Psalm 53:1-6

1. The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God: they have become corrupt, they have done abominable works: there is none that doeth good. **2**. God looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to

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Some slight differences will be found, on comparison, between this and the 14th psalm; the chief of which is in the 5th verse. For Calvin's explanation of this verse, see volume 1, p. 199. It is not easy to say whether these variations are owing to transcribers, or whether they were made by some prophetic bard, who, during some afflictive period of Jewish history, adapted the 14th psalm, by a few alterations, to circumstances different from those for which it was originally composed. Theodoret is of this last opinion, and refers it to the alarm created by Sennacherib's invasion under the reign of Hezekiah; others think it was written during the captivity — a conjecture which is founded on the last verse, "O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!"

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What מהלת, *mahalath*, signifies, in the title of this and the 88th psalm, must be uncertain, the word not being found elsewhere. It is most probably the name of an instrument on which the psalm was to be sung; and it may fitly be deduced from חלל, *perforavit*, or *incidit*, either from the hollowness of the instrument, or farther, from the holes cut in it; in which respect חליל is ordinarily used for *fistula*, or *tibia*, *a pipe*." — *Hammond*

see if there were any that did understand, that did seek God. **3**. Every one of them has gone back; they have together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one. **4**. Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge? eating my people as they eat bread: [286] they have not called upon God. **5**. There were they in great fear where no fear was; for God hath scattered the bones of him that encampeth against thee: thou hast put them to shame, because God hath despised them. **6**. Who shall give the salvation of Israel out of Zion? When God bringeth back the captivity of his people, [287] Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall triumph.

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"C'est, n'en font non plus de conscience, que de manger un morceau de pain." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, they have no more scruple in doing this than in eating a morsel of bread."

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"C'est, son peuple captif." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, his captive people."

Psalm 54

PSALM 54

David has recorded in this psalm the prayers which he offered up to God when he heard of his having been betrayed by the Ziphites, and was reduced to a situation of extreme danger. It cannot fail to impress us with a high idea of his indomitable faith, thus to find him calling upon the name of God in the immediate prospect of death.

To the chief musician on Neginoth. A Psalm of David for instruction: when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, Doth not David hide himself with us?

We know from the sacred history that David frequently concealed himself in that part of the wilderness which adjoined to the Ziphites. It appears (1 Samuel 23:19; 26:1) that he was betrayed by them on two different occasions; and he takes notice of the particular circumstances in which the psalm was written, to teach us that we should never despair of divine help even in the worst situation. Surrounded as he was by hostile troops, and hemmed in on every side by apparently inevitable destruction, we cannot but admire the rare and heroical intrepidity which he displayed in committing himself, by prayer, to the Almighty. It might have appeared just as credible that God could bring the dead out of the grave, as that he could preserve him in such circumstances; for it seemed impossible that he should escape from the cave where he was concealed with his life.

Psalm 54:1-3

1. Save me, O God! by thy name, and judge me by thy strength. **2**. Hear my prayer, O God! give ear to the words of my mouth. **3**. For

strangers are risen up against me, and the terrible ones have sought after my soul they have not set God before them. Selah.

1. *Save me, O God!* As David was at this time placed beyond the reach of human assistance, he must be understood as praying to be saved by the *name* and *the power of God,* In an emphatical sense, or by these in contradistinction to the usual means of deliverance. Though all help must ultimately come from God, there are ordinary methods by which he generally extends it. When these fail, and every earthly stay is removed, he must then take the work into his own hands. It was in such a situation that David here fled to the saints' last asylum, and sought to be saved by a miracle of divine power. By appealing, in the second part of the verse, to God as his judge, he asserts his uprightness. And it must strike us all, that in asking the divine protection it is indispensably prerequisite we should be convinced of the goodness of our cause, as it would argue the greatest profanity in any to expect that God should patronise iniquity. David was encouraged to pray for deliverance by the goodness of his cause and his consciousness of integrity; nor did he entertain a single doubt, that on representing this to God he would act the part of his defender, and punish the cruelty and treachery of his enemies.

2. *Hear my prayer, O God!* The language is expressive of his earnestness. He was led to this fervor of supplication by the extremity of his present circumstances, which is alluded to in the following verse, where he complains of being surrounded by men fierce, barbarous, and unrestrained by a sense of religion. There was no necessity for his informing God of a fact which was already known to him; but he disburdens his own heart by venting the cause of his fear and disquietude. By calling his enemies *strangers,* [288] he seems to refer to their barbarity, whether he applied the name to the Ziphites only, or, in general, to the whole army of Saul. Others consider him, in this term, to advert to their degeneracy as children of Abraham; and it is true that the Jews are repeatedly stigmatised by the prophets under this form of expression, when they had cast themselves out of the Church of God by their profligacy or impiety. But in this passage it seems to be used in a different sense. As even enemies are accustomed, in some measure, to respect the ties of kindred and relationship, David would point out to us the monstrous inhumanity of the men who now surrounded him, by the fact that they assaulted him as *strangers,* as persons who had never known him,

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For זרים, *zairim*, *strangers*, upwards of twenty MSS. have זדים, *zoidim*, *the proud*; and this is the sense given by the Chaldee Paraphrast. As the Ziphites were Jews, and of the same tribe with David, (Joshua 15:24,) and therefore not, strictly speaking, "strangers," some think that *the proud* is the true reading. But the Ziphites, as our Author justly observes, may be called "strangers," because they acted towards David the part of strangers and enemies, in seeking to deliver him into the hands of his unjust and cruel persecutor, Saul.

or as if he had been born in some distant part of the world. He calls them, also, *terrible ones,* [289] *not mighty,* or *powerful ones,* as some have rendered the word; for that falls short of the meaning intended by David, which was, that they were divested of all humanity, and ready to rush upon him like wild beasts. Hence the fear with which he resorted to the protection of God. He adds, that *they sought after his soul,* to denote that nothing would content their insatiable cruelty but his life. And the better to express the unbridled nature of their fury, he tells us that they had no respect to God. The only thing which could be supposed, in the circumstances, to act as a restraint upon their minds, was the consideration of there being a judge in heaven to whom they were amenable for their conduct; and being insensible to this, what moderation could be expected of them?

Psalm 54:4-7

> **4**. Behold! God is my helper; the Lord is with them that uphold my soul. **5**. He shall reward evil unto mine enemies: cut them off in thy truth. **6**. I will freely sacrifice unto thee: I will praise thy name, O God! for it is good. **7**. For he hath delivered me out of all trouble; and mine eye hath seen upon my adversaries. [290]

4. *Behold! God is my helper* Such language as this may show us that David did not direct his prayers at random into the air, but offered them in the exercise of a lively faith. There is much force in the demonstrative adverb. He points, as it were, with the finger, to that God who stood at his side to defend him; and was not this an amazing illustration of the power with which faith can surmount all obstacles, and glance, in a moment, from the depths of despair to the very throne of God? He was a fugitive amongst the dens of the earth, and even there in hazard of his life — how, then, could

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Ainsworth reads, "Daunting tyrants." "*Terrible dismayers*, as Saul and his retinue, whose terror daunted many. See Psalm 10:18."

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The translators of our English Bible have supposed an ellipsis here; and hence they supply "only desire." Calvin, in his translation of the verse, makes no supplement, but understands it in a similar sense, "My eye hath seen punishment upon my adversaries;" just as it is said in Psalm 91:8, "With thine eyes shalt thou behold and see *the reward* of the wicked." But if we read the words literally, without any supplement, and as they are rendered by the LXX. and the Syriac, "My eyes beheld, or looked upon mine enemies," they will be susceptible of a very good and natural meaning. David's enemies were not at this time destroyed; but Saul, when he had reached the farther side of the mountain where David lay concealed, and was about to seize his victim, having heard that the Philistines invaded the land, hastened in confusion to repel the invaders. The meaning of David's language, therefore, may be, that he was so near Saul and his army as to behold them marching away, which may be easily conceived, when it is considered that "Saul went on this side of the mountain Maon, and David and his men on that side of the mountains" (1 Samuel. 23:26.)

he speak of God as being near to him? He was pressed down to the very mouth of the grave; and how could he recognize the gracious presence of God? He was trembling in the momentary expectation of being destroyed; and how is it possible that he can triumph in the certain hope that Divine help will presently be extended to him? In numbering God amongst his defenders, we must not suppose that he assigns him a mere common rank amongst the men who supported his cause, which would have been highly derogatory to his glory. He means that God took part with those, such as Jonathan and others, who were interested in his welfare. These might be few in number, possessed of little power, and cast down with fears; but he believed that, under the guidance and protection of the Almighty, they would prove superior to his enemies: or, perhaps, we may view him as referring, in the words, to his complete destitution of all human defenders, and asserting that the help of God would abundantly compensate for all. [291]

5. *He shall reward evil unto mine enemies* As the verb ישיב, *yashib,* may be rendered *he shall cause to return,* [292] it seems to point not only at the punishment, but the kind of punishment, which would be awarded to his enemies, in the recoiling of their wicked machinations upon their own heads. Some give an optative signification to the verb, understanding the words to express a wish or prayer; but I see no reason why it should not be taken strictly in the future tense, and imagine that David intimates his certain expectation that this favor, which he had already prayed for, would be granted. It is by no means uncommon to find the prayers of the Psalmist intersected with sentences of this kind, inserted for the purpose of stimulating his faith, as here, where he announces the general truth, that God is the righteous judge who will recompense the wicked. With the view of confirming his hopes, he adverts particularly to *the truth* of God; for nothing can support us in the hour of temptation, when the Divine deliverance may

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The phrase, בסמכי אדני, *Adonai besomkey*, which Calvin renders, "The Lord is with them that uphold," is translated by Hammond, "The Lord among the sustainers;" and he remarks, that this form of expression, which is not unusual among the Hebrews, signifies no more than "God is my upholder; not one of many upholders, but my only upholder." Thus, when Jephtha (Judges 11:35) tells his daughter, "Thou art among the troublers of me," or "one of them that trouble me," the meaning simply is, that she very much grieved and troubled him. So Psalm 55:18, "There were many with me;" *i e.*, "God was with me," which is as good as the greatest multitude. This is the sense in which the learned Castellio understands the passage, rendering it, "Dominus est qui mihi vitam sustentat;" "The Lord is he who sustains my life;" and he defends it by the above and like arguments. With this the Septuagint agrees: "Κυριος ἀντιλήπτωρ τῶς ψνχῶς μου," "The Lord is the defender of my soul;" and also the Syriac, Arabic, and Aethiopic.

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French and Skinner read, "May their mischief return upon those who watch me;" and observe, "that *their mischief* in Hebrew is *the evil*, and that the meaning is, the very evil which they devised against me. Compare Psalm 7:16."

be long delayed, but a firm persuasion that God is true, and that he cannot deceive us by his divine promises. His confidence of obtaining his request was grounded upon the circumstance that God could no more deny his word than deny himself.

6. *I will freely sacrifice unto thee.* According to his usual custom, he engages, provided deliverance should be granted, to feel a grateful sense of it; and there can be no doubt that he here promises also to return thanks to God, in a formal manner, when he should enjoy an opportunity of doing so. Though God principally looks to the inward sentiment of the heart, that would not excuse the neglect of such rites as the Law had prescribed. He would testify his sense of the favor which he received, in the manner common to all the people of God, by sacrifices, and be thus the means of exciting others to their duty by his example. And he would *sacrifice freely:* by which he does not allude to the circumstance, that sacrifices of thanksgiving were at the option of worshippers, but to the alacrity and cheerfulness with which he would pay his vow when he had escaped his present dangers. The generality of men promise largely to God so long as they are under the present pressure of affliction, but are no sooner relieved than they relapse into that carelessness which is natural to them, and forget the goodness of the Lord. But David engages to sacrifice freely, and in another manner than the hypocrite, whose religion is the offspring of servility and constraint. We are taught by the passage that, in coming into the presence of God, we cannot look for acceptance unless we bring to his service a willing mind. The last clause of this verse, and the verse which follows, evidently refer to the time when the Psalmist had obtained the deliverance which he sought. The whole psalm, it is true, must have been written after his deliverance; but up to this point, it is to be considered as recording the form of prayer which he used when yet exposed to the danger. We are now to suppose him relieved from his anxieties, and subjoining a fresh expression of his gratitude: nor is it improbable that, he refers to mercies which he had experienced at other periods of his history, and which were recalled to his memory by the one more immediately brought under our notice in the preceding verses; so that he is to be understood as declaring, in a more general sense, that *the name of God was good, and that he had been delivered out of all trouble* I have already adverted, in a former psalm, (Psalm 52:6,) to the sense in which the righteous are said *to see* the destruction of their enemies. It is such a sight of the event as is accompanied with joy and comfort; and should any inquire, whether it is allowable for the children of God to feel pleasure in witnessing the execution of Divine judgments upon the wicked, the answer is obvious, that all must depend upon the motive by which they are influenced. If their satisfaction proceed in any measure from the gratification of a depraved feeling, it must be condemned; but there is certainly a pure and unblameable delight which we may feel in looking upon such illustrations of the divine justice.

Psalm 55

PSALM 55

Many interpreters have thought that this psalm refers to the conspiracy of Absalom, by which David was driven from the throne, and forced to take refuge under circumstances of great distress in the wilderness. But it seems rather to have been written at a period when he was reduced to extreme danger by the persecutions of Saul. It is a prayer, expressive of the deepest distress, and full of fervor, urging every consideration which could be supposed to solicit the compassion of God. After having disburdened his sorrows and given utterance to his requests, the Psalmist contemplates the prospect of deliverance, and offers thanksgivings to God as if he had already obtained it.

To the chief musician on Neginoth.
A Psalm of David for instruction.

Psalm 55:1-3

1. Give ear to my prayer, O God! and hide not thyself from my supplication. **2**. Attend unto me, and answer me. I will wail [293] in

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The verb אריד, *arid*, which Calvin renders, "I will wail," is rendered by Boothroyd, "I am distressed, confused, distracted." Mudge is of opinion that אריד, *arid*, is derived from ירד, *yarad*, *to tincture*, *to drop*, etc.; and hence he reads, "While I weep in my complaint."

my address, [294] and make a noise. [295] **3**. By reason of the voice of the enemy, under the affliction of the wicked: for they cast iniquity upon me, and in wrath they fight against me.

1. *Give ear to my prayer, O God!* From the language with which the psalm opens, we may conclude that David at this time was laboring under heavy distress. It could be no ordinary amount of it which produced such an overwhelming effect upon a saint of his distinguished courage. The translation which has been given of אריד, *arid, I will prevail,* does violence to the context, for, so far from boasting of the fortitude which would govern his address, he is anxious to convey an impression of his wretchedness, by intimating that he was constrained to cry out aloud. What is added in the third verse, *By reason of the voice of the enemy,* may be viewed as connected either with the first verse or that immediately preceding, or with both. By the *voice* some understand such a noise as is occasioned by a multitude of men; as if he had said, that the enemy was mustering many troops against him: but he rather alludes to the threatenings which we may suppose that Saul was in the habit of venting upon this innocent prophet. The interpretation, too, which has been given of the *casting of iniquity* upon him, as if it meant that his enemies loaded him with false accusations, is strained, and scarcely consistent with the context. The words are designed to correspond with the succeeding clause, where it is said that *his enemies fought against him in wrath;* and, therefore, *to cast iniquity upon him* means, in my opinion, no more than to discharge their unjust violence upon him for his destruction, or iniquitously to plot his ruin. If any distinction be intended between the two clauses, perhaps the *fighting against him in wrath* may refer to their open violence, and *the casting of iniquity upon him* [296] to their deceitful treachery. In this case, און, *aven,* which I have rendered *iniquity,* will signify hidden malice. The *affliction of the wicked* is here to be understood in the active sense of persecution. And in applying the term *wicked* to his enemies, he does not so much level an accusation against

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"Meditation or discoursing, talk, prayer, complaint. The Hebrew *siach* signifieth any large discourse or exercise of the mind or mouth, by busy musing, talking, praying, communing with one's self or others." — *Ainsworth.*

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"*Heb* am in a violent tumultuous agitation, as the waves of the sea." — *Bishop Horne* The original word הום, *hum*, according to Gesenius, signifies "*to put in motion*, *throw into commotion*, *consternation*, *to agitate*; and *Hiph to make commotion*, to make a noise, spoken of an unquiet mind, internal commotion, Psalm 55:3."

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"Literally *slide iniquity upon me*; *i.e.*, by oblique and artful insinuations they asperse my character. The sentiment of the whole line I take to be this, that the enemies of the Psalmist, by sly insinuations, brought him under the suspicion of the worst enemies, and then wreaked their malice upon him under the color of a just resentment." — *Horsley.*

them as implicitly assert his own innocence. Our greatest comfort under persecution is conscious rectitude, the reflection that we have not deserved it; for there springs from this the hope that we will experience the help of the Lord, who is the shield and defense of the distressed.

Psalm 55:4-8

4. My heart trembles within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me. **5**. Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me. **6**. And I said, Who will give me wings like a dove? I will fly away, and be at rest. **7**. Lo! I will prolong the flight, [297] I will repose in the wilderness. Selah. **8**. I will hasten a deliverance for me, [298] from the wind raised by the whirlwind.

4. *My heart trembles within me* [299] Here we have additional evidence of the extremity of David's sufferings. He that uses these words was no soft or effeminate person, but one who had given indubitable proofs of constancy. Nor is it merely of the atrocious injuries inflicted upon him by his enemies that he complains. He exclaims that he is overwhelmed with terrors, and thus acknowledges that his heart was not insensible to his afflictions. We may learn from the passage, therefore, not only that the sufferings which David endured at this time were heavy, but that the fortitude of the greatest servants of God fails them in the hour of severe trial. We are all good soldiers so long as things go well with us, but when brought to close combat, our weakness is soon apparent. Satan avails himself of the advantage, suggests that God has withdrawn the supports of his Spirit, and instigates us to despair. Of this we have an example in David, who is here represented as struggling with inward fears, as well as a complication of outward calamities, and sustaining a sore conflict of spirit in his application to the throne of God. The expression, *terrors of death,* shows that he was on the very eve of sinking unless Divine grace interposed.

6 *And I said, Who will give me wings like a dove?* [300] These words mean more than merely that he could find no mode of escape. They are meant to express the deplorableness of his situation, which made exile a blessing to be coveted, and this not the common exile of mankind, but such as that of the dove when it flies far off to some deserted hiding-place. They

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"C'est, m'enfuiray bien loin." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, I will flee afar off."

298

"C'est, hasteroye de m'eschapper." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, I will hasten to escape."

299

"*My heart is in travail within me.*" חול, "*de tremore* maxime parturientium." — *Fry* Ainsworth reads, "My heart is pained within me, or trembleth with pain." "The word," says he, "usually meaneth such pains as a woman feeleth in her travail."

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imply that he could only escape by a miracle. They intimate that even the privilege of retreat by common banishment was denied him, so that it fared worse with him than with the poor bird of heaven, which can at least fly from its pursuer. Some think that the dove is singled out on account of its swiftness. The Jews held the ridiculous idea that the Hebrew reads *wing* in the singular number, because doves use but one wing in flying; whereas nothing is more common in Scripture than such a change of number. It seems most probable that David meant by this comparison, that he longed to escape from his cruel enemies, as the timid and defenseless dove flies from the hawk. Great, indeed, must have been the straits to which he was reduced, when he could so far forget the promise made to him of the kingdom as, in the agitation of his spirits, to contemplate a disgraceful flight, and speak of being content to hide himself far from his native country, and the haunts of human society, in some solitude of the wilderness. Nay, he adds, as if by way of concession to the fury of his adversaries, that he was willing (would they grant it) *to wander far off,* that he was not proposing terms of truce to them which he never meant to fulfill, merely to gain time, as those will do who entertain some secret and distant hope of deliverance. We may surely say that these are the words of a man driven to the borders of desperation. Such was the extremity in which he stood, that though prepared to abandon all, he could not obtain life even upon that condition. In such circumstances, in the anguish of this anxiety, we must not wonder that his heart was overwhelmed with the sorrows of death. The Hebrew word סוּעָה, *soah,* which I have rendered *raised,* is by some translated *tempestuous;* and there can be no doubt that the Psalmist means a stormy wind raised by

This very beautiful image, derived from the flight of the dove, is continued in the two following verses. The defenselessness of the dove, the danger to which it is exposed from birds of prey, the surprising rapidity with which, when pursued by the hawk, it flees to deserts and rocks to hide itself, putting forth its utmost speed, and outstripping its deadly pursuer; all these characteristics of this bird were in the view of the Psalmist on the present occasion. We find an allusion to them in Jeremiah 48:28: "O ye that dwell in Moab, leave the cities, and dwell in the rock, and be like the dove that maketh her nest in the sides of the hole's mouth." The poets of Greece and Rome make frequent allusions to the rapid flight of the dove: —

"So, when the falcon wings her way above,
To the cleft cavern speeds the gentle dove,
Not fated yet to die." — Pope's Homer.

Sophocles, in a passage somewhat similar to this of the Psalmist, says, "O that with the rapid whirlwind flight of a dove I could cleave the etherial clouds!" — (*Œdip Colon* 1136.) "Kimshi gives it as the reason why the Psalmist prefers the dove to other birds, that while they become weary with flying, and alight upon a rock or a tree to recruit their strength, and are taken; the dove, when she is fatigued, alternately rests one wing, and flies with the other, and, by this means, escapes from the swiftest pursuers." — (*Paxton's Illustrations of Scripture*, *volume* 2, p. 292.) It is worthy of observation, and it serves to heighten the effect of the Psalmist's comparison, that יוֹנָה, *yonah*, the Hebrew name of the dove, is derived from יָנָה, *yanah*, *he hath oppressed by force or fraud*, and seems to have been applied to it from the circumstance of its being particularly defenseless, and exposed to rapine and violence. — *Buxtorf's Lexicon*

a whirlwind. When he says that this wind *is raised by the whirlwind,* [301] by this circumlocution he means a violent wind, such as compels the traveler to fly and seek shelter in the nearest dwelling or covert.

Psalm 55:9-11

> **9**. Destroy, O Lord! and divide their tongue: for I have seen persecution and strife in the city. **10**. Day and night they go about it upon the walls thereof labouring also, and sorrow, are in the midst of it. **11**. Wickedness [302] is in the midst thereof; deceit and guile depart not from her streets.

9. *Destroy,* [303] *O Lord; and divide their tongue* Having now composed, as it were, his mind, he resumes the exercise of prayer. Had he indulged longer in the strain of complaint, he might have given his sanction to the folly of those who do themselves more harm than good by the excessive use of this barren species of comfort. There will occasionally escape from the lips of a saint, when he prays, some complaining exclamations which cannot be altogether justified, but he soon recalls himself to the exercise of believing supplication. In the expression, *divide their tongue,* there seems an allusion to the judgment which fell upon the builders of Babel, (Genesis 31:7.) He means in general to pray that God would break their criminal confederacies, and distract their impious counsels, but evidently with an indirect reference to that memorable proof which God gave of his power to thwart the designs of the wicked by confounding their communication. It

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Whirlwinds are not uncommon in Palestine, and the surrounding countries, and to them we often find allusions in the Sacred Writings. The description of that kind of whirlwind called the Sammiel, which sometimes happens between Egypt and Nubia, will serve to show the propriety with which David made this allusion in his present circumstances of distress and danger. "This wind, which the Arabs call poisonous, stifles on the spot those that are unfortunate enough to breathe in it: so that to guard against its pernicious effects, they are obliged to throw themselves speedily on the ground, with their face close to these burning sands, with which they are surrounded, and to cover their heads with some cloth or carpet, lest, in respiration, they should suck in that deadly quality which everywhere attends it. People ought even to think themselves very happy when this wind, which is always besides very violent, does not raise up large quantities of sand with a whirling motion, which, darkening the air, render the guides incapable of discerning their way. Sometimes whole caravans have been buried by this means under the sand, with which this wind is frequently charged." — Maillet, quoted in *Harmer's Observations*, volume1, p. 95.

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"Malice." — *Fr.*

303

Hare, Green, and others, conjecture that the first verb in the verse, "destroy," had been originally "divide" — "divide, O Lord! divide their tongues." In Scripture we sometimes meet with an elegant repetition of this kind, as in Psalm 59:13, "Consume them in wrath, consume them, that they may not be."

is thus that to this day he weakens the enemies of the Church, and splits them into factions, through the force of mutual animosities, rivalries, and disagreements in opinion. For his own encouragement in prayer, the Psalmist proceeds to insist upon the wickedness and malignity of his adversaries, this being a truth never to be lost sight of, that just in proportion as men grow rampant in sin, may it be anticipated that the divine judgments are about to descend upon them. From the unbridled license prevailing amongst them, he comforts himself with the reflection that the deliverance of God cannot be far distant; for he visits the proud, but gives more grace to the humble. Before proceeding to pray for divine judgments against them, he would intimate that he had full knowledge of their evil and injurious character. Interpreters have spent an unnecessary degree of labor in determining whether the *city* here spoken of was that of Jerusalem or of Keilah, for David by this term would appear merely to denote the open and public prevalence of crime in the country. The *city* stands opposed to places more hidden and obscure, and he insinuates that strife was practiced with unblushing publicity. Granting that the city meant was the metropolis of the kingdom, this is no reason why we should not suppose that the Psalmist had in his view the general state of the country; but the term is, in my opinion, evidently employed in an indefinite sense, to intimate that such wickedness as is generally committed in secret was at that time openly and publicly perpetrated. It is with the same view of marking the aggravated character of the wickedness then reigning in the nation, that he describes their crimes as going about the walls, keeping sentry or watch, so to speak, upon them. Walls are supposed to protect a city from rapine and incursion, but he complains that this order of things was inverted — that the city, instead of being surrounded with fortifications, was beset with strife and oppression, or that these had possession of the walls, and went about them. [304] I have already commented elsewhere upon the words אוֹן, *aven,* and עָמָל, *amal.* In announcing that *wickedness was in the midst* of the city, and *deceit and guile* in her streets, he points to the true source of the prevailing crimes; even as it was to be expected that those who were inwardly corrupt, and given to such mischievous devices, would indulge in violence, and in persecuting the poor and defenseless. In general, he is to be considered as adverting in this passage to the deplorable confusions which marked the government of Saul, when justice and order

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"Violence and Strife" are here personified, as sentinels or patrol, who keep watch over the city; going their rounds upon the walls to guard "labor, sorrow, wickedness, deceit, and guile," which reign in the midst of it, and to exclude happiness, righteousness, and truth. "It is, in fact," says Bishop Mant, "a very fine specimen of that power of personification, or enduing general and abstract ideas with personal qualities; and thus introducing them acting and speaking upon the stage, for which the Hebrew poets are distinguished, equalling therein the most polished writers of other nations in elegance and beauty, and surpassing the most elevated in grandeur and sublimity."

were in a manner banished from the realm. And whether his description were intended to apply to one city or to many, matters had surely reached a portentous crisis in a nation professing the true religion, when any of their cities had thus become a den of robbers. It may be observed, too, that David, in denouncing a curse, as he does in the psalm before us, upon cities of this description, was obviously borne out by what must have been the judgment of the Holy Spirit against them.

Psalm 55:12-15

> **12.** Of a truth, it was not an enemy that cast reproach upon me, for then I could have borne it: [305] it was not an adversary that did magnify himself against me, for then I would have hid [306] myself from him. **13**. But it was thou, a man of mine own order, my leader, and mine acquaintance. **14**. We sweetly exchanged our most secret thoughts; [307] we walked into the house of God in company. **15**. Let death seize upon them, let them descend alive into the grave for wickedness is in their dwelling, and in the midst of them.

12 *Of a truth, it was not an enemy that cast reproach upon me* He informs us of one circumstance which added bitterness to the injuries under which he suffered, that they came from the hands not only of his professed enemies, but of such as pretended to be his friends. Those mistake the meaning of נשא, *nasa,* who interpret it as if David had said, that he *could patiently have borne* the reproach of an open enemy. What he says is, that had an open enemy reproached him, he could then have *met it,* as one meets and parries off a blow which is aimed at him. Against a known foe we are on our watch, but the unsuspected stroke of a friend takes us by surprise. By adopting this view of the word, we shall find that the repetition in the verse is more perfect; reading in the one member, *I would have met it;* and in the other, *I would have hidden myself* When he speaks of the enemy *magnifying himself against him,* he does not simply mean that he used insulting language, but in general, that he summoned all his violence to overthrow him. The sum of David's complaint in this passage is, that he was assailed by treachery of that secret description which rendered self-defense impossible. With regard to the individual whom he had particularly in view, when he preferred this

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"C'est, receu et soustenu le coup." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, received and sustained the blow."

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"C'est, donne garde." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, been on my guard."

307

"The phrase, סור נמתיק, will literally be read, 'We made our secret sweet.' And so it may be an elegance to signify the pleasure of his friendship, or of communicating secrets to him." — *Hammond*

accusation, I do not imagine that it was Ahitophel, for the psalm itself would not appear to have been written upon the persecution of Absalom. Whether it may have been some notorious traitor in the city of Keilah, it is impossible to determine. Not the least probable conjecture is, that it may have been some great man at court, whose intimacy with David was generally known. Possibly he may have had more than one in his eye, courtiers who had sacrificed former friendship to a desire of rising in the royal favor, and lent their influence to destroy him. These, with some more eminent person at their head, may be the parties aimed at. At any rate, we are taught by the experience of David, as here represented to us, that we must expect in this world to meet with the secret treachery of friends, as well as with undisguised persecution. Satan has assaulted the Church with sword and open war, but he has also raised up domestic enemies to injure it with the more secret weapons of stratagem and fraud. This is a species of foe which, as Bernard expresses it, we can neither fly from nor put to flight. Whoever might be the individual referred to, David calls him a man of *his own order,* for so the term ערך, *erach,* should, in my opinion, be translated, and not as some, *his equal in estimation,* or as by others, a man *esteemed by him to be his second self.* [308] He complains of the violation of the common bond of fraternity, as none needs to be told that there are various bonds, whether of relationship, profession, or office, which ought to be respected and held sacred. He makes mention also of his having been his *leader* and commander, of their having enjoyed sweet interchange of secret counsel together, and of their having frequented the religious assemblies in company, — all of which he adverts to as circumstances which lent an additional aggravation to his treachery. The term רגש [309] , *regesh,* does not seem to signify here *the stir attending the convention of an assembly,* but rather *company,* intimating, that he was his close companion when they went to the house of God. Thus he would inform us, that he was betrayed by one who had been his intimate associate, and to whom he had looked up as a leader, in matters not only secular but religious. We are taught by the Spirit to reverence all the natural ties which bind us together in society. Besides the common and universal one of humanity, there are others of a more sacred kind, by which we should feel ourselves attached to men in proportion as they are more nearly connected with us than others by neighborhood, relationship, or professional calling, the more as we know that such connections are not the result of chance,

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This is the sense put upon the Hebrew word ערך, *erach*, by the LXX., who read, "Σὺ δὲ ἄνθρωπε ἰσόψυχε," "But thou, a man whom I love and esteem as I do my own soul;" the word ἰσόψυχος signifying ἴσος ἐμῷψυχῇ, *equal to my soul*

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"Properly, a noisy crowd; hence, genr. *crowd*, *multitude*." — *Gesenius* It is from רגש, *ragash*, *to rage*, *to make a noise*, *tumult*; of nations, Psalms 2:1.

but of providential design and arrangement. Need I say that the bond of religious fellowship is the most sacred of all?

15 *Let death seize upon them.* He now denounces the whole faction, not the nation generally, but those who had taken a prominent part in the persecution of him. In imprecating this curse he was not influenced by any bad feeling towards them, and must be understood as speaking not in his own cause but in that of God, and under the immediate guidance of his Spirit. This was no wish uttered in a moment of resentment or of reckless and ill-considered zeal, and which would justify us in launching maledictions against our enemies upon every trivial provocation. The spirit of revenge differs widely from the holy and regulated fervor with which David prays for the judgment of God against wicked men, who had already been doomed to everlasting destruction. The translation, *Let death condemn them,* is forced, and so also is another which has been suggested, *Let him appoint death a creditor over them.* [310] That which we have given is the most obvious and simple. In praying that his enemies may *descend alive into the grave,* it has been well observed, that he seems to allude to the punishment of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; though I conceive that in imprecating sudden and unexpected ruin upon them, he adverts to the proud persuasion which they cherished in their prosperity, that they would escape the stroke of death. "Lord," as if he had said, "in the infatuation of their pride they consider themselves to be exempted from the ordinary lot of mortality, but let the earth swallow them up alive — let nothing prevent their being dragged down with all their pomp to the destruction which they deserve." The cause which he assigns for his prayer in the latter part of the verse, is another proof that he was not influenced by any personal resentment against his enemies, but simply denounced the just judgments of God upon such as persecuted the Church. *Wickedness,* he adds, *is in their dwelling* By this he meant that it could not but dwell where they dwelt and this he expresses still more fully when he adds, *in the midst of them;* intimating, that they inwardly cherished their wickedness, so that it was their inseparable companion, and dwelt with them under the same roof.

Psalm 55:16-19

16. I will call upon God, and Jehovah shall save me. **17**. Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice. **18**. He hath redeemed my soul into peace from the

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This is the sense in which Horsley understands the passage. He observes, that "the image here is not sufficiently expressed by the English word *seize*, though it is not impossible that our translators might intend to allude to the seizure of a debtor. But this is rather a kindred image than the same. The precise image in the original is the exaction of payment, not the seizure of the person." His rendering is, "Let death exalt his claim upon them."

battle which was against me: for they were in great numbers with me. **19**. God shall hear, and afflict them, [311] even He who sitteth from ancient time. [312] Selah. Because they have no changes, and fear not God.

16 *I will call upon God.* In translating this verse I have retained the future tense of the verb, as the Psalmist does not refer to something already done, but rather excites himself to the duty of prayer, and to the exercise of hope and confidence. Though there was no apparent method of escape, and he stood on the brink of immediate destruction, he declares his resolution to continue in prayer, and expresses his assurance that it would be successful. In the verse which follows he engages more particularly to show perseverance in prayer. He does not content himself with saying that he will pray, for many do this in a perfunctory manner, and soon become wearied with the exercise; but he resolves to display both assiduity and vehemency. From the particular mention he makes of *evening, morning,* and *noon,* we are left to infer that these must have been the stated hours of prayer amongst the godly at that period. Sacrifices were offered daily in the temple morning and evening, and by this they were taught to engage privately in prayer within their own houses. At noon also it was the practice to offer additional sacrifices. As we are naturally indisposed for the duty of prayer, there is a danger that we may become remiss, and gradually omit it altogether, unless we restrict ourselves to a certain rule. In appointing particular fixed hours to be observed for his worship, there can be no doubt that God had respect to the infirmity of our nature, and the same principle should be applied to the secret as to the public services of devotion, as appears from the passage now before us, and from the example of Daniel, (Daniel 9:3.) Sacrifices are no longer to be observed in the Church, but as there remains the same indisposition on our part to the duty, and an equal need of incitements to overcome it, we should still prescribe certain hours to ourselves to be observed in prayer. He adds, that he would *cry aloud,* to denote vehemency of supplication, under the grief and anxiety of mind to which he was subjected. He intimates, that no extremity of present trouble would prevent him from directing his complaint to God, and cherishing a confident hope of deliverance.

18 *He hath redeemed my soul into peace* Those who read the two preceding verses in the perfect instead of the future tense, are apparently led to this by considering that David here proves his former prayers to have been answered, from the fact of deliverance having been granted. But there

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"C'est, leur respondra." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, will answer them."

312

Ainsworth reads, "from antiquity;" Boothroyd, "from eternity."

is no difficulty involved in adopting the other reading. We may suppose that either he was so confident of being delivered that he speaks as if he actually were so already, or that he inserts what was the substance of his meditations at different times; it being sufficiently common, when mention is made of prayers, to subjoin a statement of the event which followed from them. Having spoken, then, of his prayers, he adverts to the result of them, with the view of expressing his thankfulness for the mercy which he had received. He says that he had been *redeemed into peace* — a strong expression, signifying the danger to which he had been exposed, and the almost miraculous manner in which he had been delivered from it. What is added, *they were in great numbers with me,* admits of a double meaning. Some understand him as referring to enemies; *with me* being, according to them, equivalent to *against me. He* represents himself as having been beset, by a host of adversaries, and commends the goodness manifested by God in accomplishing his deliverance. Others think that he refers to the angels, whose hosts are encamped round about those that fear the Lord, (Psalm 34:7.) The letter ב, *beth,* which I have rendered *in,* they consider to be here, as in many other places, merely expletive; [313] so that we may read the words, *great numbers were with me.* The last of these interpretations conveys a comfortable truth, as God, although he cannot stand in need of auxiliaries, has seen fit, in accommodation to our infirmity, to employ a multitude of them in the accomplishment of our salvation. But David would appear rather to speak of enemies, and to refer to the number of them, with the view of magnifying the deliverance which he had received. [314]

19 *God shall hear, and afflict them* As the verb ענה, *anah,* which I have rendered *afflict,* signifies, occasionally, *to testify,* some understand David to say that God would rise up as a witness against them. The syntax of the language will scarcely, however, admit of this, as, in Hebrew, the letter ב, *beth,* is generally subjoined in such a case. There seems no doubt that the word signifies here *to addict* or *punish,* although this is rather its

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Rogers is of this opinion; and observes, that "in the Appendix to the first volume of Glassius, many instances are adduced of the redundancy of the prefix כ; as Exodus 32:22; Psalm 68:5; Ezra 3:3."

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Walford renders the sentence, "Though multitudes be in opposition to me." "The sense," says he, "which is here given, is evidently required, and is fairly deducible from the Hebrew text." Bishop Horsley's rendering is, "For they who stood on my side told for many;" — "they who stood on my side," denoting the Divine assistance described under the image of numerous auxiliaries. See 2 Kings 6:16; 1 John 4:4. Bishop Mant is satisfied that this is the Psalmist's meaning, and he accordingly turns the verse thus: —

"And he shall hear me, he shall shield,
And he with peace shall crown;
My guardian in the battle-field,
An host himself alone."

signification implicitly and by a species of irony; for, most commonly, ענה, *anah,* means *to answer.* Having said that God would hear him, he adds that he would answer him, in the way of avenging his cause, in the punishment of his enemies. The epithet, or descriptive title, which he applies to God, is one calculated to comfort the pious mind in times of trouble and confusion. Much of that impatience into which we are hurried arises from not elevating our thoughts to the eternity of God. Can anything be more unreasonable than that poor mortals, who pass away like a shadow, should measure God by their feeble apprehensions, which is to cast him down from his eternal throne, and subject him to the fluctuations of a changing world? As חלף, *chalaph,* may signify *to cut off* as well as *to change,* some have supposed that David here complains of the destruction of the wicked having been too long deferred; but this is not a probable interpretation. The term has been more properly rendered *changes* But even those who have adopted this rendering have varied in the sense of the passage. [315] Some understand it to mean that no change to the better was to be expected in their character; that they were so bent upon evil as to be inflexible to repentance; so entirely under the influence of a cruel disposition, as never once to incline to humanity or mercy. Others, with more reason, consider that he refers, in the language of complaint, to the uninterrupted flow of their prosperity, which was such that they seemed exempt from the common vicissitudes of life. He represents them as being corrupted by this indulgence, and casting off from their minds every principle of fear, as if they were privileged with immunity from mortal ills. The copulative particle will thus carry the force of a consequence — *they have no changes, and therefore they fear not God* [316] It is an undeniable truth, that the longer the wicked are left in the enjoyment of their pleasures, they are only hardened the more in their evil courses; and that where pride has the ascendancy in the heart, the effect of the Divine indulgence is to make us forget that we are men. In the connection between the two parts of the verse there is an implied censure of the infatuation of those who are led by their exemption from adversity to conclude that. they are a species of

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The reason of this difference arises from the ambiguity of the meaning of the original word, which signifies *change* simply, without reference to the kind of change. Of the two senses which our Author proceeds to state, the first is that adopted by the Chaldee, which reads, "Wicked men, who change not their very evil course, and fear not the sight of God, shall perish." Dathe, while he admits the ambiguity of the word, follows the Chaldee. Gesenius gives the same interpretation. "But," says Walford, "this reduces the passage nearly to an identical proposition; so that the probable meaning is, vicissitudes of fortune. These men had enjoyed great prosperity, and been subjected to few trials; they were therefore enamoured of this world and its pleasures, and gave themselves little regard about the will and authority of God. See Psalm 73:5, 6."

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"That is," says Williams, "they suppose they also shall live for ever; or, at least, that things will go on the same for ever. See 2 Peter 3:4.

demigods; for, how insignificant is the course of human life when compared with the eternity of God? We have need to be upon our guard when under prosperity, lest we fall into the secure spirit which the Psalmist here alludes to, and even carry our exultation to the extent of a defiance of the Almighty.

Psalm 55:20-23

20. He hath sent his hands against those that were at peace with him: [317] he hath broken his covenant. **21**. The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, and his heart war: his words were softer than oil, yet were they darts. **22**. Cast thy giving [318] upon Jehovah, and he shall feed thee: he shall not suffer the righteous always to stagger. [319] **23**. Thou, O God! shalt cast them into the pit of corruption: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days: but I will hope in thee.

20. *He hath sent his hands against those that were at peace with him* He afterwards speaks in verse 23d in the plural number, but here it is probable that he begins by addressing the leader and head of the wicked conspiracy. He accuses him of waging war in the midst of peace, and being thus guilty of a breach of faith. He had neither suffered provocation, nor had he announced in an open manner his intention to give battle, but had commenced the attack unexpectedly and with treachery. The same charge is insisted upon still further, when it is added, that butter and oil were in his lips, while war was in his heart, and his words themselves were darts. To appearance they were soft and agreeable, but they covered a hidden virulence and cruelty which wounded like a sword or like darts, [320] according to the common proverb, that deceivers carry on their lips poison besmeared with honey. It is well known how many fair promises and flatteries Saul addressed to David with a view to entrap him, and we may conjecture that the same arts were

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"Misit manus in paces suas." — *Lat.* On the margin of the French version, "paces suas" is thus explained: "C'est, ses alliez et gens qui vivoyent paisiblement avec luy."

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"Ou, ta charge." *Fr. marg.* "Or, thy burden."

319

"Ou, tombe." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, fall." Fry reads, "He will not permit for ever the displacing, moving, tossing, or slipping of the righteous."

320

In the figurative language of the East, severe, unfeeling, and injurious words are often compared to swords, daggers, arrows, etc. Thus it is said in Psalm 59:7, "Swords are in their lips; for who, *say they*, doth hear?" and in Proverbs 12:18, "There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword." In our own language, a similar figure of speech is quite common, as when we speak of *keen*, *cutting*, and *piercing* words, and of the wounds which they inflict. "I will speak daggers to her." — *Hamlet.*

practiced by his courtiers. It is one special trial of the Lord's people, that they are exposed to such attempts on the part of crafty men to seduce them into destruction. Here the Holy Spirit puts a mark of reprobation upon all subtilty of this kind, and particularly upon treacherous flatteries, exhorting us to cultivate simplicity of intention.

22 *Cast thy giving upon Jehovah.* The Hebrew verb יהב, *yahab,* signifies *to give,* so that יהבע, *yehobcha,* according to the ordinary rules of grammar, should be rendered *thy giving,* or *thy gift.* [321] Most interpreters read *thy burden,* but they assign no reason for this rendering. The verb יהב, *yahab,* never denotes *to burden,* and there is no precedent which might justify us in supposing that the noun deduced from it can mean *a burden.* They have evidently felt themselves compelled to invent that meaning from the harshness and apparent absurdity of the stricter translation, *Cast thy gift upon Jehovah.* And I grant that the sentiment they would express is a pious one, that we ought to disburden ourselves before God of all the cares and troubles which oppress us. There is no other method of relieving our anxious souls, but by reposing ourselves upon the providence of the Lord. At the same time, I find no example of such a translation of the word, and adhere therefore to the other, which conveys sufficiently important instruction, provided we understand the expression *gift* or *giving* in a passive sense, as meaning all the benefits which we desire God to give us. The exhortation is to the effect that we should resign into the hands of God the care of those things which may concern our advantage. It is not enough that we make application to God for the supply of our wants. Our desires and petitions must be offered up with a due reliance upon his providence, for how many are there who pray in a clamorous spirit, and who, by the inordinate anxiety and restlessness which they evince, seem resolved to dictate terms to the Almighty. In opposition to this, David recommends it as a due part of modesty in our supplications, that we should transfer to God the care of those things which we ask, and there can be no question that the only means of checking an excessive impatience is an absolute submission to the Divine will, as to the blessings which should be bestowed. Some would explain the

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"What thou desirest to have given thee," according to the Chaldee, which renders the word *thy hope*; *i e.*, that which thou hopest to receive. On the margin of our English Bibles it is, *thy gift*, which Williams explains by "allotment." "*Cast thy allotment upon the Lord*," says he, "on which we may remark, that whatever allotment we receive from God, whether of prosperity or adversity, it is our duty to refer it back to him: 'He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord, and he will repay him;' or if our lot be adverse, 'he will sustain' under every burden, and 'never suffer the righteous to be moved' from his foundation." In like manner Rogers understands the word. "*Cast upon Jehovah what he allots you*; *i e.*, commit to Jehovah your destiny. Supply אשר before יהבך" — *Book of Psalms in Hebrew*, volume 2, p. 210. The Septuagint reads, μέριμνάν, *thy care*; in which it is followed by the apostle Peter, (1 Peter 5:5.) The reading of the Vulgate, Syriac, Æthiopic, and Arabic versions is the same.

passage: Acknowledge the past goodness of the Lord to have been such, that you ought to hope in his kindness for the future. But this does not give the genuine meaning of the words. As to whether David must be considered as here exhorting himself or others, it is a question of little moment, though he seems evidently, in laying down a rule for his own conduct, to prescribe one at the same time to all the children of God. The words which he subjoins, *And he shall feed thee,* clearly confirm that view of the passage which I have given above. Subject as we are in this life to manifold wants, we too often yield ourselves up to disquietude and anxiety. But David assures us that God will sustain to us the part of a shepherd, assuming the entire care of our necessities, and supplying us with all that is really for our advantage. He adds, that *he will not suffer the righteous to fall, or always to stagger* If מוט, *mot,* be understood as meaning *a fall,* then the sense will run: God shall establish the righteous that he shall never fall. But the other rendering seems preferable. We see that the righteous for a time are left to stagger, and almost to sink under the storms by which they are beset. From this distressing state David here declares, that they shall be eventually freed, and blessed with a peaceful termination of all their harassing dangers and cares.

23 *Thou, O God! shalt cast them into the pit of corruption.* He returns to speak of his enemies, designing to show the very different end which awaits them, from that which may be expected by the righteous. The only reflection which comforts the latter, when cast down at the feet of their oppressors, is, that they can confidently look for a peaceful issue to the dangers which encompass them; while, on the other hand, they can discern by faith the certain destruction which impends the wicked. The Hebrew word שחת, *shachath,* signifies *the grave,* and as there seems an impropriety in saying that they are cast into the *pit of the grave,* some read in preference *the pit of corruption,* [322] the word being derived from שחת, *shachath, to corrupt,* or *destroy.* It is a matter of little consequence which signification be adopted; one thing is obvious, that David means to assert that they would be overtaken not only by a temporary, but everlasting destruction. And here he points at a distinction between them and the righteous. These may sink into many a deep pit of worldly calamity, but they arise again. The ruin which awaits their enemies is here declared to be deadly, as God will cast them into the grave, that they may rot there. In calling them *bloody men,* [323] he adverts to a reason which confirmed the assertion he had made. The vengeance of God is certain to overtake the cruel and the deceitful; and this being the character of his adversaries, he infers that their

322 The Chaldee explains it, "the deep Gehenna."

323 Heb. "men of blood and deceit."

punishment would be inevitable. “But does it consist,” may some ask, “with what passes under our observation, that *bloody men live not half their days?* If the character apply to any, it must with peculiar force to tyrants, who consign their fellow-creatures to slaughter, for the mere gratification of their licentious passions. To such very evidently, and not to common murderers, does the Psalmist refer in this place; and yet will not tyrants, who have butchered their hundreds of thousands, reach frequently an advanced period of life?” They may; but notwithstanding instances of this description, where God has postponed the execution of judgment, the assertion of the Psalmist is borne out by many considerations. With regard to temporal judgments, it is enough that we see them executed upon the wicked, in the generality of cases, for a strict or perfect distribution in this matter is not to be expected, as I have shown at large upon the thirty-seventh psalm. Then the life of the wicked, however long it may be protracted, is agitated by so many fears and disquietudes, that it scarcely merits the name, and may be said to be death rather than life. Nay, that life is worse than death which is spent under the curse of God, and under the accusations of a conscience which torments its victim more than the most barbarous executioner. Indeed, if we take a right estimate of what the course of this life is, none can be said to have reached its goal, but such as have lived and died in the Lord, for to them, and them alone, death as well as life is gain. When assailed, therefore, by the violence or fraud of the wicked, it may comfort us to know that their career shall be short, — that they shall be driven away, as by a whirlwind, and their schemes, which seemed to meditate the destruction of the whole world, dissipated in a moment. The short clause which is subjoined, and which closes the psalm, suggests that this judgment of the wicked must be waked for in the exercise of faith and patience, for the Psalmist rests in hope for his deliverance. From this it appears that the wicked are not cut off so suddenly from the earth, as not to afford us hope for the exhibition of patience under the severity of long-continued injuries.

Psalm 56

PSALM 56

In this psalm David mixes complaint with prayer, and assuages the distress of his mind by meditation upon the mercy of God. He pray, that he may experience the divine help under the persecutions to which he was subjected by Saul, and his other enemies; and expresses his confidence of success. It is possible, however, that the psalm may have been written after the dangers to which he alludes were past, and in thanksgiving for a deliverance which he had already received.

To the chief musician upon the silent dove in distant places, [324] Michtam of David, when the Philistines took him in Gath.

The portion of history referred to in the title is recorded in 1 Samuel 21. Being driven from every hiding-place in which he had hitherto found safety, he fled to King Achish. He speaks here of having been apprehended; and that he was so, may be gathered from the inspired narrative, where Achish is represented as saying, "Lo, ye see the man is mad; wherefore, then, have ye brought him to me?" It is probable that they suspected him of some sinister design in the visit. He escaped upon that occasion by feigning madness; but this psalm proves that he must have been engaged in fervent supplication, and that faith was secretly in exercise even when he betrayed this weakness. He would not appear to have been under that inordinate agitation of mind, which instigates men to adopt methods of relief which are positively sinful;

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The late learned Editor of Calmet, from comparing this title with verse 6 of the psalm preceding, had a suspicion that it is here misplaced, and belonged originally to that psalm." — *Williams' Cottage Bible.*

but in the desperate emergency to which he was reduced, he was compelled through fear to employ an artful device, which might save his life, although it would lower his dignity in the eyes of the world. If he lost the praise of magnanimity, it is at least apparent from this psalm, what a strenuous contest there was between faith and fear in his heart. The words, *upon the silent dove,* are supposed by some to have formed the commencement of a song well known at the time. Others have thought that David is here compared to a dove; and this conjecture is borne out by the propriety of the metaphor in his present circumstances, [325] especially as it is added, *in distant places,* for he had been driven to an enemy's country by the fury of his persecutors. The meaning which some have attached to the word, translating it *a palace,* is farfetched. I have already given my views of the term *Michtam.* [326] I would not pretend to say anything dogmatically on a point upon which even Hebrew interpreters are not agreed in opinion; but the probability is, that it was a particular kind of tune, or a musical instrument.

Psalm 56:1-4

1. Be merciful unto me, O God! for man swallows me up [327] he fighting against me, daily oppresseth me. **2**. Mine enemies daily swallow me up: surely they be many [328] that fight against me, O Most High! [329] **3**. In the day that I was afraid, I did put my trust in thee. **4**. In God I will praise his word; in God I have put my trust: I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.

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Harmer is of opinion, that the *dove dumb in distant places* is simply the name of the psalm. In support of this view, he quotes the titles of several Eastern books; a Persian metaphysical and mystic poem, called the *Rose Bush*; a collection of Floral Essays, the *Garden of Anemonies*; and a poem in which the Arabian prophet is celebrated for having given sight to a blind person, which is entitled the *Bright Star.* "The ancient Jewish taste." he remarks, "may reasonably be supposed to have been of the same kind. Every one that reflects on the circumstances of David at the time to which the 56th psalm refers, and considers the Oriental taste, will not wonder to see that psalm entitled the *Dove dumb in distant places.*" — *Observations*, *volume*3, p. 147-149.

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See volume1, p. 215.

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"Ou, me mangeant." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, eating me."

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"Ou, des puissans et robustes." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, they be mighty and strong."

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1 *Be merciful unto me, O God! for man swallows me up* [330] It would be difficult to determine whether he speaks here of foreign or domestic enemies. When brought to King Achish he was as a sheep between two bands of wolves, an object of deadly hatred to the Philistines on the one hand, and exposed to equal persecutions from his own fellow-countrymen. He uses the indefinite term *man* in this verse, though in the next he speaks of having many enemies, the more forcibly to express the truth that the whole world was combined against him, that he experienced no humanity amongst men, and stood in the last necessity of divine help. The term *daily* would suggest that he refers more immediately to Saul and his faction. But in general, he deplores the wretchedness of his fate in being beset with adversaries so numerous and so barbarous. Some translate שאף, *shaaph, to regard,* but it is more properly rendered *to swallow up,* a strong expression, denoting the insatiable rage with which they assailed him. I have adhered to the common translation of לחם, *lacham,* though it also signifies *to eat up,* which might consist better with the metaphor already used in the preceding part of the verse. It is found, however, in the sense *to fight against,* and I was unwilling to depart from the received rendering. I shall only observe in passing, that those who read in the second member of the verse, *many fighting with me,* as if he alluded to the assistance of angels, mistake the meaning of the passage; for it is evident that he uses the language of complaint throughout the verse.

3. *In the day that I was afraid, etc.* In the Hebrew, the words run in the future tense, but they must be resolved into the praeterite. He acknowledges his weakness, in so far as he was sensible of fear, but denies having yielded to it. Dangers might distress him, but could not induce him to surrender his hope. He makes no pretensions to that lofty heroism which contemns danger, and yet while he allows that he felt fear, he declares his fixed resolution to persist in a confident expectation of the divine favor. The true proof of faith consists in this, that when we feel the solicitations of natural fear, we can resist them, and prevent them from obtaining an undue ascendancy. Fear

The original word מרום, *marom*, here rendered "O Most High!" is literally *loftily* Dathe, Berlin, and Gesenius, render it *superbly*, *proudly* Cresswell, following Le Clerc, reads, *from the highest places*, and considers the meaning to be, that the foes of David made an incursion upon him, descending from the mountains, and forcing him again to supplicate Achish. Compare 1 Samuel 27:1, 2, 3. Horsley and Dr Adam Clarke read, "from on high;" by which the latter critic understands from "the place of *authority*, the court and cabinet of Saul." He observes, on the word מרום, *marom*, "I do not think that this word expresses any attribute of God, or, indeed, is at all addressed to him." "In Micah 6:6, however," says Dr Morrison, "מרום seems to express the perfections of the divine character." Calvin's translation agrees with that of the Chaldee, of Aquila, and of our English Bible.

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The verb here translated *swallows me up*, is rendered by French and Skinner, *panteth after me*. It is literally *draweth in the air*. It thus implies the intense desire of David's enemies to get him into their hands, and to destroy him.

and hope may seem opposite and incompatible affections, yet it is proved by observation, that the latter never comes into full sway unless there exists some measure of the former. In a tranquil state of the mind, there is no scope for the exercise of hope. At such times it lies dormant, and its power is only displayed to advantage when we see it elevating the soul under dejection, calming its agitations, or soothing its distractions. This was the manner in which it manifested itself in David, who feared, and yet trusted, was sensible of the greatness of his danger, and yet quieted his mind with the confident hope of the divine deliverance.

4. *In God I will praise his word* Here he grows more courageous in the exercise of hope, as generally happens with the people of God. They find it difficult at first to reach this exercise. It is only after a severe struggle that they rise to it, but the effort being once made, they emerge from their fears into the fullness of confidence, and are prepared to grapple with the most formidable enemies. *To praise,* is here synonymous with glorying or boasting. He was now in possession of a triumphant confidence, and rejoiced in the certainty of hope. The ground of his joy is said to be *the divine word;* and this implies, that however much he might seem to be forsaken and abandoned by God, he satisfied himself by reflecting on the truthfulness of his promises. He would glory in God notwithstanding, and although there should be no outward appearance of help, or it should even be sensibly withdrawn, he would rest contented with the simple security of his word. The declaration is one that deserves our notice. How prone are we to fret and to murmur when it has not pleased God immediately to grant us our requests! Our discontent may not be openly expressed, but it is inwardly felt, when we are left in this manner to depend upon his naked promises. It was no small attainment in David, that he could thus proceed to praise the Lord, in the midst of dangers, and with no other ground of support but the word of God. The sentiment contained in the latter clause of the verse might seem at first glance to merit little consideration. What more obvious than that God is able to protect us from the hand of men, that his power to defend is immensely greater than their power to injure? This may be true, but we all know too well how much of that perverse unbelief there is in our hearts, which leads us to rate the ability of God below that of the creature. It was no small proof, therefore, of the faith of David, that he could despise the threatenings of his enemies. And it would be well if all the saints of God were impressed with such a sense of his superiority to their adversaries as would lead them to show a similar contempt of danger. When assailed by these, it should never escape their recollection, that the contest is in reality between their enemies and God, and that it were blasphemous in this case to doubt the issue. The great object which these have in view is to shake our faith in the promised help of the Lord; and we are chargeable with limiting his power, unless we realize him standing at our right hand, able with one movement of his finger, or one breath of his mouth, to dissipate their hosts,

and confound their infatuated machinations. Shall we place him on a level with mortal man, and measure his probable success by the numbers which are set against him? "But how," may it be asked, "are we to account for this sudden change in the exercise of David? A moment before, he was expressing his dread of destruction, and now he bids defiance to the collected strength of his enemies." I reply, that there is nothing in his words which insinuate that he was absolutely raised above the influence of fear, and every sense of the dangers by which he was encompassed. They imply no more than that he triumphed over his apprehensions, through that confident hope of salvation with which he was armed. Men he terms in this verse *flesh,* to impress the more upon his mind the madness of their folly in attempting a contest so infinitely above their strength.

Psalm 56:5-8

> **5**. Every day my words vex me; all their thoughts are against me for evil. **6**. They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they watch my heels, because they seek my soul. [331] **7**. After their mischief they think to escape: in thine anger cast down the peoples, O God! **8**. Thou hast taken account of my wandering; put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy register?

5 *Every day my words vex me* The first part of this verse has been variously rendered. Some understand *my words* to be the nominative in the sentence, and with these I agree in opinion. Others suppose a reference to the enemies of David, and translate, *they calumniate my words,* or, *they cause me grief on account of my words.* Again, יעצבו, *yeatsebu,* has been taken in the neuter sense, and translated, *my words are troublesome.* But עצב [332], *atsab,* commonly signifies to *afflict with grief,* and in *Pihel* is always taken transitively; nor does there seem any reason in this place to depart from the

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"Ou, ne demandent qu'a m'oster la vie." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, they want only to take away my life."

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Horsley observes, that the primary meaning of the verb עצב, *atsab*, is "perhaps *to do a thing with great labor*, *to take pains about it*; if, indeed, its primary meaning be not *to distort* Hence it may signify to affect the mind with any unpleasing passion or sensation, grief, vexation, anger; for every perturbation is a sort of distortion of the mind. רברי עלי יעצבו — 'torquent contra me verba mea,' — 'torquent, *i e.*, labouriose fingunt in mentem alienam et sensum alienum.' — Pagninus after Aben Ezra and R.D." — *Horsley* Hammond, after stating that עזב, *atsab*, signifies primarily *to grieve*, or *be in pain*, and that by metonomy it is used for the laborious framing or forming of any thing, says, "Here, being applied to another's words or speeches, it seems to denote the depraving them, laboring and using great art and diligence to put them into such a form as may be most for the disadvantage of the speaker, turning and winding them to his hurt, in putting some odious gloss upon them, and so, according to sense, may most fully be rendered *depraving.*"

general rule of the language. And the passage flows more naturally when rendered, *my words affect me with grief,* or *vex me,* than by supposing that he refers to his enemies. According to this translation, the verse contains a double complaint, that, on the one hand, he was himself unsuccessful in everything which he attempted, his plans having still issued in vexatious failure; while, on the other hand, his enemies were devising every means for his destruction. It may appear at first sight rather inconsistent to suppose that he should immediately before have disclaimed being under the influence of fear, and now acknowledge that he was not only distressed, but in some measure the author of his own discomfort. I have already observed, however, that he is not to be considered as having been absolutely divested of anxiety and fear, although enabled to look down with contempt upon his enemies from the eminence of faith. Here he speaks of the circumstances which tried him, which his faith certainly overcame, but at the same time could not altogether remove out of the way. He confesses his own lack of wisdom and foresight, shown in the abortive issue of every plan which he devised. It aggravated the evil, that his enemies were employing their united counsels to plot his ruin. He adds, that *they gathered themselves together;* and this made his case the more calamitous, matched as he was, a single individual, against this numerous host. In mentioning that they *hide themselves,* he adverts to the subtile devices which they framed for surprising him into destruction. The verb יצפינו, *yitsponu,* by grammatical rule ought to have the letter ו, *vau,* in the middle; from which the general opinion is, that the י *yod,* is as it were the mark of *Hiphil*, denoting that the enemies of David came to the determination of employing an ambush, with the view of surrounding him. He tells us that they pressed upon him in every direction, and as it were trod upon his heels, so that he had no respite. And he points at their implacable hatred as the cause of their eager pursuit of him; for nothing, he informs us, would satisfy them but his death.

7. *After their mischief they think to escape.* The beginning of this verse is read by some interrogatively, *Shall they escape in their iniquity?* [333] But there is no necessity for having recourse to this distant meaning. It is much better to understand the words in the sense which they naturally suggest when first read, That the wicked think to escape in their iniquity, but that God will cast them down. He alludes to the fact that the ungodly, when allowed to proceed without interruption in their evil courses, indulge the idea that they have a license to perpetrate the worst wickedness with impunity. In these our own times, we see many such profane characters, who display an unmeasured audacity under the assurance that God's hand

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French and Skinner read, "Shall they escape after their wickedness?" and observe, that the Hebrew is, "Is there escape for them?" the meaning being, that they assuredly will not escape, because of their wickedness.

can never reach them. They not only look to go unpunished, but found their hopes of success upon their evil deeds, and encourage themselves to farther wickedness, by cherishing the opinion that they will contrive a way of escape from every adversity. David has no sooner stated this vain confident persuasion of the wicked, than he refutes it by an appeal to the judgment of God, declaring his conviction that, however proudly they might exalt themselves, the hour of vengeance would come when God would *cast down the peoples* He makes use of the plural number, to fortify his mind against fear, when he reflected upon the array of his enemies. Let us remember, when our enemies are many, that it is one of the prerogatives of God to cast down the people, and not one nation of foes merely, but the world.

8. *Thou hast taken account of my wanderings* The words run in the form of an abrupt prayer. Having begun by requesting God to consider his tears, suddenly, as if he had obtained what he asked, he declares that they were written in God's book. It is possible, indeed, to understand the interrogation as a prayer; but he would seem rather to insinuate by this form of expression, that he stood in no need of multiplying words, and that God had already anticipated his desire. It is necessary, however, to consider the words of the verse more particularly. He speaks of his *wandering* as having been noted by God, and this that he may call attention to one remarkable feature of his history, his having been forced to roam a solitary exile for so long a period. The reference is not to any one wandering; the singular number is used for the plural, or rather, he is to be understood as declaring emphatically that his whole life was only one continued wandering. This he urges as an argument to commiseration, spent as his years had been in the anxieties and dangers of such a perplexing pilgrimage. Accordingly, he prays that God might *put his tears into his bottle* [334] It was usual to preserve the wine and oil in bottles: so that the words amount to a request that God would not suffer his tears to fall to the ground, but keep them with care as a precious deposit. The prayers of David, as appears from the passage before us, proceeded upon faith in the providence of God, who watches our every step, and by whom (to use an expression of Christ)

"the very hairs of our head are numbered,"

(Matthew 10:30.)

Unless persuaded in our mind that God takes special notice of each affliction which we endure, it is impossible we can ever attain such confidence as to pray that God would put our tears into his bottle, with a view to regarding them, and being induced by them to interpose in our behalf. He immediately adds, that he had obtained what he asked: for, as already observed, I prefer understanding the latter clause affirmatively. He animates his hope by the consideration that all his tears were written in the book of God, and would therefore be certainly remembered. And we may surely believe, that if God bestows such honor upon the tears of his saints, he

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must number every drop of their blood which is shed. Tyrants may burn their flesh and their bones, but the blood remains to cry aloud for vengeance; and intervening ages can never erase what has been written in the register of God's remembrance.

Psalm 56:9-11

9. When I cry, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know, for God is with me. **10.** In God will I praise his word; in Jehovah will I praise his word. **11.** In God have! hoped: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.

9. *When I cry, then shall mine enemies turn back.* Here he boasts of victory with even more confidence than formerly, specifying, as it were, the very moment of time when his enemies were to be turned back. He had no sensible evidence of their approaching destruction but from the firm reliance which he exercised upon the promise, he was able to anticipate the coming period, and resolved to wait for it with patience. Though God might make no haste to interpose, and might not scatter his enemies at the very instant when he prayed, he was confident that his prayers would not be disappointed: and his ground for believing this was just a conviction of the truth, that God never frustrates the prayers of his own children. With this conviction thoroughly fixed in his mind, he could moderate his anxieties,

Some think that there is here an allusion to an ancient custom of putting the tears of mourners into lachrymal urns or bottles. In the Roman tombs there are found small vials, or bottles of glass or pottery, usually called *ampulloe*, or *urnoe lachrymales*, which, it has been supposed, contained tears shed by the surviving relatives and friends, and were deposited in the sepulchres of the deceased as memorials of affection and sorrow. If in this passage there is a reference to this custom, it must have existed at an early period among the Hebrews. It may however be doubted, whether there is any such allusion. "It is only a modern conjecture that these bottles 'found in the Roman tombs' have been deposited there for such a purpose, and there is no trace of such a custom in ancient writings or sculptures. Some think they were intended to contain the perfumes used in sprinkling the funeral pile. On some of them there is the representation of one or two eyes, and this seems to favor the former view." — *Illustrated Commentary on the Bible* Let it also be observed, that the word נאד, *nod*, here translated *bottle*, means a sort of bottle which had no resemblance to these Roman urns. It was made of a goat's or kid's skin, and was used by the Hebrews for keeping their wine, their milk, and their oil. Compare 1 Samuel 16:20; Joshua 9:13; Judges 4:19; Matthew 9:17. "Besides," as Bishop Mant remarks, "the treasuring up of the Psalmist's tears shed by him during his own sufferings, seems a very different thing from the offering up of the tears of surviving relations or friends, as memorials on the tomb of a deceased person." The expression, "Put thou my tears into thy bottle," may be viewed as simply meaning, Let not my tears fall unnoticed; let my distress and the tears which it has wrung from me be ever before thee, excite thy compassion, and plead with thee to grant me relief. As the choicest things, such as wine and milk, were put into bottles, the Psalmist may also be understood as praying that his tears might not only be noted by God, but prized by him. The מאד, *nod*, was of large capacity, and used for churning as well as for wine. It may therefore contain a reference to the large quantity of tears which David's affliction forced from him. — *Harmer's Observations*, *volume* 2, pp. 121, 122.

and calmly await the issue. It is instructive to notice, that David, when he would secure the obtainment of his request, does not pray in a hesitating or uncertain spirit, but with a confident assurance of his being heard. Having once reached this faith, he sets at defiance the devil and all the host of the ungodly.

10 *In God will I praise his word* In the original the pronoun is not expressed, but we are left to infer, from the parallel verse which went before, that it is understood. The repetition adds an emphasis to the sentiment, intimating, that though God delayed the sensible manifestation of his favor, and might seem to deal hardly in abandoning him to the word — giving him nothing more, he was resolved to glory in it with undiminished confidence. When in a spirit such as this we honor the word of God, though deprived of any present experience of his goodness or his power, we "set to our seal that God is true," (John 3:33.) The repetition amounts to an expression of his determination that, notwithstanding all circumstances which might appear to contravene the promise, he would trust in it, and persist in praising it both now, henceforth, and for ever. How desirable is it that the Lord's people generally would accustom themselves to think in the same manner, and find, in the word of God, matter of never-failing praise amidst their worst trials! They may meet with many mercies calling for the exercise of thanksgiving, but can scarcely have proceeded one step in life before they will feel the necessity of reliance upon the naked promise. A similar reason may be given for his repetition of the sentiment in the 11th verse — *In God have I hoped,* etc. We shall find men universally agreed in the opinion that God is an all-sufficient protector; but observation proves how ready we are to distrust him under the slightest temptation. When exposed to the opposition of assailants formidable for strength, or policy, or any worldly advantages, let us learn with David to set God in opposition to them, and we shall speedily be able to view the mightiest of them without dismay.

Psalm 56:12-13

> **12**. Thy vows are upon me, O God! I will pay thy praises. **13**. For thou hast delivered my soul from death: hast thou not delivered my feet from falling headlong? that I may walk before God in the light of the living.

12. *Thy vows are upon me, O God!* I hinted, from the outset, that it is probable this psalm was written by David after he had escaped the dangers which he describes; and this may account for the thanksgiving here appended to it. At the same time, we have evidence that he was ever ready to engage in this exercise even when presently suffering under his afflictions. He declares that *the vows of God were upon him;* by which he means, that he was bound to pay them, as, among the Romans, a person who had obtained what he sought, under engagement of a vow, was said to be *voti damnatus*

— *condemned of his vow* If we have promised thanks, and our prayers have been heard, an obligation is contracted. He calls them the vows of *God* — *thy vows;* for the money in my hand may be said to be my creditor's, being, as I am, in his debt. He views his deliverance as having come from God; and the condition having been performed, he acknowledges himself to be burdened with the vows which he had contracted. We learn from the second part of the verse what was the nature of the vows to which he adverts, and, by attending to this, may preserve ourselves from the mistake of imagining that he sanctions any such vows as those which are practiced among Papists. He says that he would render *praises,* or *sacrifices of praise;* for the word is applied to sacrifices, which were the outward symbols of thanksgiving. David knew well that God attached no value to sacrifices considered in themselves, or irrespectively of the design and spirit of the person offering them; but we may believe that he would not neglect the sacred ceremonies of the Law which was imposed upon the Church at that time; and that he speaks of some solemn expression of gratitude, such as was customary among the Jews upon the reception of a signal Divine favor.

13. *For thou hast delivered my soul from death* This confirms the truth of the remark which I have already made, that he considered his life as received from the hands of God, his destruction having been inevitable but for the miraculous preservation which he had experienced. To remove all doubt upon that subject, he speaks of having been preserved, not simply from the treachery, the malice, or the violence of his enemies, but from death itself. And the other form of expression which he employs conveys the same meaning, when he adds, that God had kept him back with his hand when he was on the eve of rushing headlong into destruction. Some translate מדחי, *middechi, from falling;* but the word denotes here a violent impulse. Contemplating the greatness of his danger, he considers his escape as nothing less than miraculous. It is our duty, when rescued from any peril, to retain in our recollection the circumstances of it, and all which rendered it peculiarly formidable. During the time that we are exposed to it, we are apt to err through an excessive apprehension; but when it is over, we too readily forget both our fears and the Divine goodness manifested in our deliverance. *To walk in the light of the living* means nothing else than to enjoy the vital light of the sun. The words, *before God,* which are interjected in the verse, point to the difference between the righteous, who make God the great aim of their life, and the wicked, who wander from the right path and turn their back upon God.

Psalm 57

PSALM 57

This psalm consists of two parts. In the first, David gives expression to the anxiety which he felt, imploring Divine assistance against Saul and his other enemies. In the second, he proceeds upon the confident expectation of deliverance, and stirs up his soul to the exercise of praise.

To the chief musician, Al-tascheth, [335] Michtam of David,
when he fled from the face of Saul in the cave.

We are left entirely to conjecture as to the meaning of the word *Michtam;* and equal uncertainty prevails among interpreters regarding the reason of the inscription given to the psalm, *Al-tascheth, i.e., destroy not.* Some are of opinion that this formed the commencement of a song well known at the time; others take it to be an expression uttered by David in the desperate exigency to which he was reduced, *O God! destroy me not* Others conceive that the word is inscribed upon the psalm in praise of the high principle shown by David when he prevented Abishai from slaying Saul, and are confirmed in their opinion by the fact, that this is the very expression which the inspired historian represents him as having used, (1 Samuel 26:9.) But as the prayers which follow must have been offered up before he gave any such injunction to Abishai, this explanation is not satisfactory; and we are left to adopt one or other of the two former suppositions, either that the psalm was composed to the air of some song generally known at the time, or that the word expresses a brief prayer, which David notes down as having

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The words, תשחת-אל, *al-tascheth*, are found in the titles of three other psalms, the 58th, 59th, and 75th.

been uttered in memorable circumstances, and in circumstances of great danger.

Psalm 57:1-3

> **1**. Be merciful unto me, O God! be merciful unto me, for my soul trusteth in thee; and in the shadow of thy wings will I hope, [336] until wickedness [337] pass over. **2**. I will cry unto God most High, to God that performeth all things for me. **3**. He shall send from heaven, and save me from the reproach of him that would swallow me up. [338] God shall send forth his mercy and his truth.

1. *Be merciful unto me, O God!* The repetition of the prayer proves that the grief, the anxiety, and the apprehension, with which David was filled at this time, must have been of no common description. It is noticeable, that his plea for mercy is, his having hoped in God. His *soul* trusted in him; and this is a form of expression the force of which is not to be overlooked: for it implies that the trust which he exercised proceeded from his very innermost affections, — that it was of no volatile character, but deeply and strongly rooted. He declares the same truth in figurative terms, when he adds his persuasion that God would cover him with the shadow of his wings. The Hebrew word חסה, *chasah,* which I have translated *to hope,* signifies occasionally *to lodge,* or *obtain shelter,* and in this sense it may be understood with great propriety in the passage before us, where allusion is made to the shadow of wings. David had committed himself, in short, entirely to the guardianship of God; and now experienced that blessed consciousness of dwelling in a place of safety, which he expresses in the beginning of the ninetieth psalm. The divine protection is compared to the shadow of wings, because God, as I have elsewhere observed, the more familiarly to invite us to himself, is represented as stretching out his wings like the hen, or other birds, for the shelter of their young. The greater our ingratitude and perversity, in being so slow to comply with such an

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"Ou, hebergeray." — *Fr. marg* "Or, will lodge."

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The original word, הוות, *ha-uoth*, for *wickedness*, the Septuagint here renders *sin* — "Until sin pass away." Symmachus explains it in Psalm 55:12, by επηρεια, *insulting injury* "Simon, from Schultens, has, I think, given the true meaning. הוה, *barathrum* — est *desiderium*, idque *pravum* v. c. cupiditas devorandi — *cupiditas* dicitur profundum quod, *barathrum*, quod expleri non potest." — *Fry* French and Skinner read, "until their mischief pass away;" "the mischief," they observe, "now directed against me by my enemies."

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"Ou, a la confusion de celuy qui m'a guette." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, to the confusion of him who hath laid wait for me." See note on Psalm 56:1, where the same original word is used.

endearing and gentle invitation! He does not merely say, in general, that he would hope in God, and rest under the shadow of his wings, but, particularly, that he would do so at the time when wickedness should pass over him, like a storm or whirlwind. The Hebrew word הוה, *hovah,* which I have rendered *wickedness,* some translate *power.* Be that as it may, it is evident he declares that God would prove his refuge, and the wings of God his shelter, under every tempest of affliction which blew over him. There are seasons when we are privileged to enjoy the calm sunshine of prosperity; but there is not a day of our lives in which we may not suddenly be overtaken by storms of affliction, and it is necessary we should be persuaded that God will cover us with his wings. To hope he adds prayer. Those, indeed, who have placed their trust in God, will always direct their prayers to him; and David gives here a practical proof of his hope, by showing that he applied to God in his emergencies. In addressing God, he applies to him an honorable title, commending him as the God who performed whatsoever he had promised, or (as we may understand the expression) who carries forward to perfection the work which he has begun. [339] The Hebrew word גמר, *gomer,* here employed, would seem to be used in the same sense as in Psalm 138:8, the scope of both passages being the same. It materially confirms and sustains our hope to reflect that God will never forsake the workmanship of his own hands, — that he will perfect the salvation of his people, and continue his divine guidance until he have brought them to the termination of their course. Some read, *to God, who rewards me;* but this fails to bring out the force of the expression. It would be more to the purpose, in my judgment, to read, *God, who fails me;* in which case the sentence would, of course, require to be understood adversatively: That though God failed him, and stretched not out his hand for his deliverance, he would still persist in crying to him. The other meaning, which some have suggested, *I will cry to God, who performs, or exerts to the utmost, his severity against me,* is evidently forced, and the context would lead us to understand the word as referring to the goodness of God, the constancy of which in perfecting his work when once begun, should ever be present to our remembrance,

3 *He shall send from heaven, and save me.* David, as I have repeatedly had occasion to observe, interlaces his prayers with holy meditations for the comfort of his own soul, in which he contemplates his hopes as already realised in the event. In the words before us, he glories in the divine help with as much assurance as if he had already seen the hand of God interposed in his behalf. When it is said, *he shall send from heaven,* some consider the expression as elliptical, meaning that he would send *his angels;* but it seems rather to be an indefinite form of speech, signifying that

339 Horsley reads the last clause of the verse, "Upon God, who will bring things to a conclusion for me."

the deliverance which David expected was one not of a common, but a signal and miraculous description. The expression denotes the greatness of the interposition which he looked for, and *heaven* is opposed to earthly or natural means of deliverance. What follows admits of being rendered in two different ways. We may supply the Hebrew preposition מ, *mem,* and read, *He shall save me from the reproach;* or it might be better to understand the words appositively, *He shall save me, to the reproach of him who swallows me up.* [340] The latter expression might be rendered, *from him who waits for me.* His enemies gaped upon him in their eagerness to accomplish his destruction, and insidiously watched their opportunity; but God would deliver him, to their disgrace. He is said to strike his enemies with shame and reproach, when he disappoints their expectations. The deliverance which David anticipated was signal and miraculous; and he adds, that he looked for it entirely from the mercy and truth of God, which he represents here as the hands, so to speak, by which his assistance is extended to his people.

Psalm 57:4-6

4. My soul is among lions; [341] and I lie even among them that are set on fire, [342] even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. **5**. Exalt thyself, O God: above the heavens: let thy glory be above all the earth. **6**. They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves.

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In this all the ancient versions agree: They make חרף, *chereph*, a verb, and not a noun, regarding it as applicable to God, and conveying the idea that He would deliver David, having put to shame, or to reproach, his enemies. Thus, in the Septuagint, it is "ἔδωκεν εἰς ὄνειδος" and in the Vulgate, "dedit in opprobrium," "he gave to reproach;" and in like manner in the Chaldee, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions.

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"Mudge translates literally, 'I lie with my soul amidst lionesses.'" — *Arch. Secker.* This agrees with the opinion of Bochart, who thinks that the animals here intended are lionesses, properly when giving suck to their young, a time when they are peculiarly fierce and dangerous. "Nor need we wonder," he observes, "that the lioness is reckoned among the fiercest lions; for the lioness equals, or even exceeds, the lion in strength and fierceness;" and this he proves from the testimonies of ancient writers.

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Fry reads, "I lay down among children of men, who are flaming fire, or breathing flames." Ainsworth reads, "I lie among inflamers;" "meaning," says he, "fiery, fierce, and raging persons, that flamed with wrath and envy, and inflamed others. Of such David did complain to Saul, 1 Samuel. 24:40 [*sic*]." French and Skinner read, "*men of fiery spirit*; and observe, that the Hebrew is *flaming sons of men*, *i.e.*, violent men urging on my destruction." Mant observes, that it may either be "*persons set on fire*, that is, with rage and malice; or, perhaps, *setters on fire*, kindlers of mischief, incendiaries."

4. *My soul is among lions.* He again insists upon the cruelty of his enemies as a plea to prevail with God for his speedier interposition. He compares them to lions, speaks of them as inflamed with fury or implacable hatred, and likens their teeth to spears and arrows. In what he says of their tongue, he alludes to the virulent calumnies which are vended by the wicked, and which inflict a deeper wound than any sword upon the innocent party who suffers from them. David, as is well known, encountered no heavier trial than the false and calumnious charges which were levelled against him by his enemies. When we hear of the cruel persecution of different kinds which this saint was called upon to endure, we should account it no hardship to be involved in the same conflict, but be satisfied so long as we may bring our complaints to the Lord, who can bridle the false tongue, and put an arrest upon the hand of violence.

To him we find David appealing in the words that follow, *Exalt thyself, O God! above the heavens: let thy glory be above all the earth.* To perceive the appropriateness of this prayer, it is necessary that we reflect upon the height of audacity and pride to which the wicked proceed, when unrestrained by the providence of God, and upon the formidable nature of that conspiracy which was directed against David by Saul, and the nation in general, all which demanded a signal manifestation of divine power on his behalf. Nor is it a small comfort to consider that God, in appearing for the help of his people, at the same time advances his own glory. Against it, as well as against them, is the opposition of the wicked directed, and he will never suffer his glory to be obscured, or his holy name to be polluted with their blasphemies. The Psalmist reverts to the language of complaint. He had spoken of the cruel persecution to which he was subjected, and now bewails the treachery and deceit which were practiced against him. His soul he describes as being *bowed down,* in allusion to the crouching of the body when one is under the influence of fear, or to birds when terrified by the fowler and his nets, which dare not move a feather, but lie flat upon the ground. Some read, *He has bowed down my soul* But the other is the most obvious rendering, and the verb כפף, *caphaph,* is one which is frequently taken with the neuter signification. Although the Hebrew word נפש, *nephesh,* rendered *soul,* is feminine, this is not the only place where we find it with a masculine adjunct.

Psalm 57:7-11

7. My heart is prepared, O God! my heart is prepared: I will sing, and give praise. **8**. Awake up, my tongue: awake, psaltery and harp: I myself shall be awaked [343] at dawn of day. **9**. I will praise thee, O Lord! among the peoples: I will sing unto thee among the nations.

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"Ou, me resueilleray." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, I will awake."

> **10**. For thy mercy is great unto the heavens, and thy truth unto the clouds. **11**. Be thou exalted, O God! above the heavens: let thy glory be above all the earth.

7. *My heart is prepared, O God!* [344] Some read *fixed,* or *confirmed,* and the Hebrew word נכון, *nacon,* bears that signification as well as the other. If we adopt it, we must understand David as saying that he had well and duly meditated upon the praises which he was about to offer; that he did not rush into a hurried and perfunctory discharge of this service, as too many are apt to do, but addressed himself to it with steadfast purpose of heart. I prefer, however, the other translation, which bears that he was ready to enter upon the service with all cheerfulness and cordiality. And although, wherever this spirit is really felt, it will lead to steadfastness of religious exercise, it is not without importance that the reader should be apprised of the force of the word which is here employed in the Hebrew. The ready heart is here opposed by David to the mere lip-service of the hypocrite, on the one hand, and to dead or sluggish service, on the other. He addressed himself to this voluntary sacrifice with a sincere fervor of spirit, casting aside sloth, and whatever might prove a hinderance in the duty.

8. *Awake up, my tongue* David here expresses, in poetical terms, the ardor with which his soul was inspired. He calls upon tongue, psaltery, and harp, to prepare for the celebration of the name of God. The word כבוד, *cabod,* which I have translated *tongue,* some have rendered *glory;* but although this is its more common signification, it bears the other in the sixteenth psalm, and in numerous places of Scripture. The context proves this to be its signification here, David intimating that he would celebrate the praises of God both with the voice and with instrumental music. He assigns the first place to the heart, the second to declaration with the mouth, the third to such accompaniments as stimulate to greater ardor in the service. It matters little whether we render the verb אעירה, *airah, I will be awaked,* or transitively, *I will awake myself by dawn of day.* [345] But one who is

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This psalm consists of two parts. The preceding verses, which contain the first part, express deep distress and extreme danger, and are of a plaintive and imploring strain. But here, where the second part commences, there is an elegant transition suddenly made to the language of exultation and triumph, which continues to the close of the psalm.

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Hammond reads, "I will awaken the morning." Dr Geddes, Archbishop Secker, Street, and Fry, give a similar version. "The verb אעירה," says Street, "is in the Hiphil conjugation; and therefore transitive; and the word השחר is the objective case after it." As to translating שחר, *early,* Archbishop Secker says, "שחר is not elsewhere used adverbially, nor, I believe, with an ellipsis of כ;" and he observes, that "'I will awaken the morning' is more grammatical and poetical." A similar thought frequently occurs in poetry. Thus Ovid says, "Non vigil ales ibi cristati cantibus oris evocat auroram." "The cock by crowing calls not up the morning there." And in Milton's Allegro we meet with the following couplet: —

really awaked to the exercise of praising God, we are here taught will be unremitting in every part of the duty.

9. *I will praise thee, O Lord! among the peoples.* As the *nations* and *peoples* are here said to be auditors of the praise which he offered, we must infer that David, in the sufferings spoken of throughout the psalm, represented Christ. This it is important to observe, as it proves that our own state and character are set before us in this psalm as in a glass. That the words have reference to Christ's kingdom, we have the authority of Paul for concluding, (Romans 15:9,) and, indeed, might sufficiently infer in the exercise of an enlightened judgment upon the passage. To proclaim the praises of God to such as are deaf, would be an absurdity much greater than singing them to the rocks and stones; it is therefore evident that the Gentiles are supposed to be brought to the knowledge of God when this declaration of his name is addressed to them. He touches briefly upon what he designed as the sum of his song of praise, when he adds, that the whole world is full of the goodness and truth of God. I have already had occasion to observe, that the order in which these divine perfections are generally mentioned is worthy of attention. It is of his mere goodness that God is induced to promise so readily and so liberally. On the other hand, his faithfulness is commended to our notice, to convince us that he is as constant in fulfilling his promises as he is ready and willing to make them. The Psalmist concludes with a prayer that God would arise, and not suffer his glory to be obscured, or the audacity of the wicked to become intolerable by conniving longer at their impiety. The words, however, may be understood in another sense, as a prayer that God would hasten the calling of the Gentiles, of which he had already spoken in the language of prediction, and illustrate his power by executing not only an occasional judgment in Judea for the deliverance of distressed innocence, but his mighty judgments over the whole world for the subjection of the nations.

"Oft listening how the hound and horn
Cheerly rouse the slumbering morn."

Psalm 58

PSALM 58

The following psalm consists of two parts. In the commencement, David vindicates his personal integrity from the calumnies cast upon him by his enemies. Having expressed his sense of the grievous injuries which they had inflicted, their cruelty and their treachery, he concludes by an appeal to the judgment of God, and by praying that they might be visited with deserved destruction.

To the chief musician, Destroy not, Michtam of David.

Psalm 58:1-5

1. Do ye indeed speak righteousness? O congregation! do ye judge uprightly? O ye sons of men! **2**. Yea, rather in heart ye plot wickedness; your hands weigh out violence upon the earth. **3**. They are estranged, being wicked from the womb: they went astray as soon as they were born, speaking lies. **4**. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear: **5**. Which will not hearken to the voice of the enchanter, charm he never so wisely.

1. *Do ye indeed speak righteousness?* In putting this question to his enemies, by way of challenge, David displays the boldness of conscious rectitude. It argues that the justice of our cause is demonstratively evident when we venture to appeal to the opposite party himself; for were there any ground to question its justice, it would show an absurd degree of confidence to challenge the testimony of an adversary. David comes forward with the openness of one who was supported by a sense of his integrity, and

repels, by a declaration forced from their own lips, the base charges with which they blackened his character in the estimation of such as were simple enough to believe them. "Ye yourselves," as if he had said, "can attest my innocence, and yet persecute me with groundless calumnies. Are you not ashamed of such gross and gratuitous oppression?" It is necessary, however, to determine who they were whom David here accuses. He calls them a *congregation,* and again, *sons of men* The Hebrew word אלם, *elem,* which I have rendered *congregation,* some consider to be an epithet applied to *righteousness,* and translate *dumb;* [346] but this does not express the meaning of the Psalmist. Interpreters differ as to what we should understand by the term *congregation.* Some think that he adverts, by way of accusation, to the meetings which his enemies held, as is usual with those who entertain wicked designs, for the purpose of concerting their plans. I rather incline to the opinion of those who conceive that he here gives (although only in courtesy) the usual title of honor to the counsellors of Saul, who met professedly to consult for the good of the nation, but in reality with no other intention than to accomplish his destruction. Others read, *in the congregation* — a translation which gives the same meaning to the passage we have already assigned to it, but is not supported by the natural construction of the words. The congregation which David addresses is that assembly which Saul convened, ostensibly for lawful objects, but really for the oppression of the innocent. The term, *sons of men,* which he immediately afterwards applies to them — taking back, as it were, the title of courtesy formerly given — would seem to be used in contempt of their character, being, as they were, rather a band of public robbers than a convention of judges. Some, however, may be of opinion, that in employing this expression, David had in his eye the universality of the opposition which confronted him — almost the whole people inclining to this wicked factions and that he here issues a magnanimous defiance to the multitude of his enemies. Meanwhile, the lesson taught us by the passage is apparent. Although the whole world be set against the people of God they need not fear, so long as they are supported by a sense of their integrity, to challenge kings and their counsellors, and the

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"אלם.There is some difficulty in ascertaining the sense of this word. Gesenius derives it from אלם, *to be silent*: *Is justice indeed silent?* but this breaks the parallelism, which requires תדברון צדק, 'will ye speak righteousness?' in the first line, to correspond with תשפטו מישרים, 'will ye judge uprightness?' In the second. Dathe agrees with Bishop Lowth, etc., who propose to point the word אלם, or *plene*, אלים, *judices*, '*O ye judges*, or rulers!' See Exodus 22:27; Psalm 82:1. But this reading, though it makes a very good sense, receives no support from the MSS., or ancient versions. Diodati and De Rossi agree with our translators in taking the word in the sense of *assembly*, *congregation* So Schindler אלם, *collegatio hominum*, congregation, multitudo coetus, ab אלם, *ligavit*, colligavit. This is probably the true sense. LXX. Vulg. Aeth. and Ar., seem to have read אלם, or אלם." — (*Rogers*' *Book of Psalms*, *volume* 2, p. 212.) Walford prefers Dathe's version.

promiscuous mob of the people. Should the whole world refuse to hear us, we must learn, by the example of David, to rest satisfied with the testimony of a good conscience, and with appealing to the tribunal of God. Augustine, who had none but the Greek version in his hands, is led by this verse into a subtle disquisition upon the point, that the judgment of men is usually correct when called to decide upon general principles, but fails egregiously in the application of these principles to particular cases, [347] through the blinding and warping influences of their evil passions. All this may be plausible, and, in its own place, useful, but proceeds upon a complete misapprehension of the meaning of the passage.

2. *Yea, rather, in heart ye plot wickedness.* In the former verse he complained of the gross shamelessness manifested in their conduct. Now he charges them both with entertaining wickedness in their thoughts, and practising it with their hands. I have accordingly translated the Hebrew article אף, *aph, yea, rather* — it being evident that David proceeds, after first repelling the calumnies of his enemies, to the further step of challenging them with the sins which they had themselves committed. The second clause of the verse may be rendered in two different ways, *ye weigh violence with your hands,* or, *your hands weigh violence;* and as the meaning is the same, it is immaterial which the reader may adopt. Some think that he uses the figurative expression, *to weigh,* in allusion to the pretense of equity under which he was persecuted, as if he were a disturber of the peace, and chargeable with treason and contumacy towards the king. In all probability, his enemies glossed over their oppression with plausible pretences, such as hypocrites are never slow to discover. But the Hebrew word פלס, *phalas,* admits of a wider signification, *to frame* or *set in order;* and nothing more may be meant than that they put into shape the sins which they had first conceived in their thoughts. It is added, *upon the earth,* to denote the unbridled license of their wickedness, which was done openly, and not in places where concealment might have been practiced.

3. *They are estranged, being wicked from the womb.* He adduces, in aggravation of their character, the circumstance, that they were not sinners of recent date, but persons born to commit sin. We see some men, otherwise not so depraved in disposition, who are drawn into evil courses through levity of mind, or bad example, or the solicitation of appetite, or other occasions of a similar kind; but David accuses his enemies of being leavened with wickedness from the womb, alleging that their treachery and cruelty were born with them. We all come into the world stained with sin, possessed, as Adam's posterity, of a nature essentially depraved, and incapable, in

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"Argute hic disputant, hominibus rectum esse judicium in generalibus principiis: sed ubi ad hypothesin ventum est, hallucinari," etc. The French translation runs — "Dispute yci subtilement que les hommes ont un jugement droit et entier es principes generaux, mais quand ce vient a la particularite, que leur raison defaut," etc.

ourselves, of aiming at anything which is good; but there is a secret restraint upon most men which prevents them from proceeding all lengths in iniquity. The stain of original sin cleaves to the whole humanity without exception; but experience proves that some are characterised by modesty and decency of outward deportment; that others are wicked, yet, at the same time, within bounds of moderation; while a third class are so depraved in disposition as to be intolerable members of society. Now, it is this excessive wickedness — too marked to escape detestation even amidst the general corruption of mankind — which David ascribes to his enemies. He stigmatises them as monsters of iniquity.

4. *Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder* [348] He prosecutes his description; and, though he might have insisted on the fierceness which characterised their opposition, he charges them more particularly, here as elsewhere, with the malicious virulence of their disposition. Some read, *their fury;* [349] but this does not suit the figure, by which they are here compared to serpents. No objection can be drawn to the translation we have adopted from the etymology of the word, which is derived from *heat.* It is well known, that while some poisons kill by cold, others consume the vital parts by a burning heat. David then asserts of his enemies, in this passage, that they were as full of deadly malice as serpents are full of poison. The more emphatically to express their consummate subtlety, he compares them to deaf serpents, which shut their ears against the voice of the charmer — not the common kind of serpents, but such as are famed for their cunning, and are upon their guard against every artifice of that description. But is there such a thing, it may be asked, as enchantment? If there were not, it might seem absurd and childish to draw a comparison from it, unless we suppose David to speak in mere accommodation to mistaken, though generally received opinion. [350] He would certainly seem, however, to insinuate that serpents can be fascinated by enchantment; and I can see no harm in granting it. The Marsi in Italy were believed by the ancients to excel in the art. Had there been no enchantments practiced, where was the necessity of their being forbidden and condemned under the Law? (Deuteronomy 18:11.) I do not mean

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The פתן, *phethen*, rendered *adder*, is generally supposed by interpreters to be the kind of serpent called by the ancients the aspic, and to which there are frequent allusions in Scripture. Deuteronomy 32:33; Job 20:14, 16; Isaiah 11:8. It is the בתם, *boeten*, of the Arabians, which M. Forskal (*Descript Anim* p. 15) describes as spotted with black and white, about one foot in length, nearly half an inch thick, oviparous, and its bite almost instant death; and which is called "the aspic" by the literati of Cyprus, though the common people give it the name of κουφη, *deaf*

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This is the reading of the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and of Jerome. Sept. "Θυμὸς." Vulg. and Jeremiah "Furor."

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to say that there is an actual method or art by which fascination can be effected. It was doubtless done by a mere sleight of Satan, [351] whom God has suffered to practice his delusions upon unbelieving and ignorant men, although he prevents him from deceiving those who have been enlightened by his word and Spirit. But we may avoid all occasion for such curious inquiry, by adopting the view already referred to, that David here borrows his comparison from a popular and prevailing error, and is to be merely supposed as saying, that no kind of serpent was imbued with greater craft than his enemies, not even the species (if such there were) which guards itself against enchantment.

Psalm 58:6-9

6. Break their teeth, O God! in their mouth: break the jaws of the lions. **7.** Let them flow away like waters, let them depart: let them bend their bow, and let their arrows be as broken. [352] **8.** Let him vanish like a snail, which melts away; like the untimely birth of a

That the serpent tribe may be charmed is a well-attested fact, and one of the most curious and interesting in natural history. It is often mentioned by the Greek and Roman classics, by Hebrew and Arabic writers; to the last of whom the different species of serpents were well known. It is also supported by the testimony of many modern travelers. Some serpents are delighted with the sounds of vocal and instrumental music, and by it may be disarmed of their fury and rendered innoxious, (Ecclesiastes 10:11.) In the East it is not uncommon to make use of pipes, flutes, whistles, or small drums, to draw them from their hiding-places and to subdue their ferocity; and when they are tame ones, the charmer makes them dance and keep time with the notes of music, twists them round his body, and handles them without any harm, although the fangs are not broken or extracted. But in some cases the charmer's art fails; and, notwithstanding his incantations, the serpent will fasten on the arm, or some other part of the body, and inflict, with its poisoned fangs, a deadly wound, (Jeremiah 8:17.) In this case it "will not listen to the voice of the charmer." It is not necessary to suppose that the "deaf adder" means a species of serpent naturally deaf, and which it is impossible for the charmer ever to fascinate. Nothing more may be meant but that his incantations sometimes fail of success; that some adders are so stubborn that the sound of music makes no impression upon them; and they are like creatures who are destitute of hearing, or whose ears are stopped. The manner in which the "deaf adder stoppeth its ear" is described by Lochart to be this: — "The reptile lays one ear close to the ground, and with its tail covers the other, that it cannot hear the sound of the music; or it repels the incantation by hissing violently." So impenetrable are the wicked here represented to be to persuasion: they will not be wrought upon to forsake their wicked courses, and gained to the ways of God, by his most persuasive entreaties.

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The power which charmers had over serpents was probably ascribed by them to the agency of invisible beings, although it might be the natural effect of the music which they used.

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woman, which does not see the sun. **9.** Before your pots [353] can feel the fire of the thorns, a whirlwind shall carry him away, like flesh yet raw.

6. *Break their teeth, O God! in their mouth* [354] From this part of the psalm he assumes the language of imprecation, and solicits the vengeance of God, whose peculiar prerogative it is to repel oppression and vindicate injured innocence. It is necessary, however, that we attend to the manner in which this is done. He does not claim the judgment or patronage of God to his cause, until he had, in the first place, asserted his integrity, and stated his complaint against the malicious conduct of his enemies; for God can never be expected to undertake a cause which is unworthy of defense. In the verse before us, he prays that God would crush the wicked, and restrain the violence of their rage. By their *teeth,* he would intimate that they resembled wild beasts in their desire to rend and destroy the victims of their oppression; and this is brought out more clearly in the latter part of the verse, where he likens them to *lions* The comparison denotes the fury with which they were bent upon his destruction.

In the next verse, and in the several succeeding verses, he prosecutes the same purpose, employing a variety of apt similitudes. He prays that God would make them *flow away like waters,* that is, swiftly. The expression indicates the greatness of his faith. His enemies were before his eyes in

There is nothing in the original for, "Let their arrows be;" it is a supplement made by Calvin in the French version. There is some difficulty in the last member of the verse. Many interpreters refer it to God, who bends his bow against the ungodly. This agrees with the Septuagint, Vulgate, Chaldee, Syriac, and Arabic versions. But Symmachus and others refer it to ungodly men, who study, indeed, to hurt the godly, but without effect. "This seems," says Dathe, "to be the most natural connection: in the 6th verse the sacred writer addresses God himself in the second person; and there is here described the unsuccessful issue of the endeavors of the wicked against the righteous." "I am persuaded," says Rogers, "that some word, the name of something with which the wicked, perishing under the Divine vengeance, were compared, is lost in the Hebrew." — *Book of Psalms in Hebrew*, *volume*2, p. 213.

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"Ou, vos espines." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, your thorns."

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"Break their teeth in their mouth" is most probably a continuation of the metaphorical illustration taken from serpents and adders immediately before, whose poison is contained in a bag at the bottom of one of their teeth, and who are disarmed by being deprived of this tooth which conveys the poison. This the charmer sometimes does after he has brought them out of their retreats by music. When the serpent makes its appearance, he seizes it by the throat, draws it forth, shows its poisoned fangs, and beats them out. To this beating out there seems to be here an allusion. "This mention of teeth," says Hammond, "fairly introduces that which follows concerning the lion, whose doing mischief with that part is more violent and formidable, and so signifies the open, riotous invader, the violent and lawless person; as the serpent's teeth, the more secret, indiscernible wounds of the whisperer or backbiter, which yet are as dangerous and destructive as the former, by the smallest puncture killing him on whom they fasten."

all the array of their numbers and resources; he saw that their power was deeply rooted and firmly established; the whole nation was against him, and seemed to rise up before him like a hopeless and formidable barrier of rocky mountains. To pray that this solid and prodigious opposition should melt down and disappear, evidenced no small degree of courage, and the event could only appear credible to one who had learnt to exalt the power of God above all intervening obstacles. In the comparison which immediately follows, he prays that the attempts of his adversaries might be frustrated, the meaning of the words being, that their arrows might fall powerless, as if broken, when they bent their bow. Actuated as they were by implacable cruelty, he requests that God would confound their enterprises, and in this we are again called to admire his unshaken courage, which could contemplate the formidable preparations of his enemies as completely at the disposal of God, and their whole power as lying at his feet. Let his example in this particular point be considered. Let us not cease to pray, even after the arrows of our enemies have been fitted to the string, and destruction might seem inevitable.

8. *Let him vanish like a snail, which melts away* The two comparisons in this verse are introduced with the same design as the first, expressing his desire that his enemies might pass away quietly, and prove as things in their own nature the most evanescent. He likens them to *snails,* [355] and it might appear ridiculous in David to use such contemptible figures when speaking of men who were formidable for their strength and influence, did we not reflect that he considered God as able in a moment, without the slightest effort, to crush and annihilate the mightiest opposition. Their power might be such as encouraged them, in their vain-confidence, to extend their schemes into a far distant futurity, but he looked upon it with the eye of faith, and saw it doomed in the judgment of God to be of short continuance. He perhaps alluded to the suddenness with which the wicked rise into power, and designed to dash the pride which they are apt to feel from such an easy advance to prosperity, by reminding them that their destruction would be equally rapid and sudden. There is the same force in the figure employed in the end of the verse where they are compared to *an abortion.* If we consider the length of time to which they contemplate in their vain-confidence that their life shall extend, [356] they may be said to pass out of this world before

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The original word for *snail* occurs only in this instance in the whole Bible. The LXX. render it ὡσεὶ κηρὸς, *as wax*, and the Syriac and Vulgate follow them. But the Chaldee reads "as a reptile," interpreting the word as meaning some creeping thing, which affords an eminent example of melting, and this seems to apply to the snail, which, in its progress from its shell, leaves a slime in its track till it altogether melts away and dies. Comp. Job 3:16

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they have well begun to live, and to be dragged back, as it were, from the very goal of existence.

9. *Before your pots can feel the fire of your thorns.* Some obscurity attaches to this verse, arising partly from the perplexed construction, and partly from the words being susceptible of a double meaning. [357] Thus the Hebrew word סירות, *siroth,* signifies either *a pot* or *a thorn.* If we adopt the first signification, we must read, *before your pots feel the fire which has been kindled by thorns;* if the second, *before your thorns grow to a bush,* that is, reach their full height and thickness. What, following the former sense, we have translated *flesh yet raw,* must be rendered, provided we adopt the other, *tender, or not yet grown.* But the scope of the Psalmist in the passage is sufficiently obvious. He refers to the swiftness of that judgment which God would execute upon his enemies, and prays that he would carry

"Si reputamus quantum temporis inani fiducia devorent," etc. Literally, "If we consider how much time they devour in their vain-confidence," etc. The French version adheres to this translation of the mere words. "Si nous regardons combien ils devorent de temps par leur vaine confiance." We have hazarded the more free translation given in the text, because this seems one of those instances where the brevity of the Latin idiom demands explanation, in order that the idea may be intelligible in any other language.

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This verse has been deemed one of the most difficult passages in the Psalter, and has greatly perplexed commentators. Bishop Horsley reads —

"Before your pots feel the bramble,
In whirlwind and hurricane he shall sweep them away."

He supposes that the language is proverbial, and that the Psalmist describes the sudden eruption of the divine wrath; sudden and violent as the ascension of the dry bramble underneath the housewife's pot. Walford reads —

"Before your cooking vessels feel the fuel;
Both the green and the dry a whirlwind shall scatter."

The passage is supposed by this author and others to contain an allusion to the manners of the Arabs, who, when they want to cook their food, collect bushes and brambles, both green and withered, with which they kindle a fire in the open air. But before their culinary vessels are sensibly afflicted with the heat, a whirlwind not unfrequently arises and scatters the fuel. And this strikingly expresses the sudden and premature destruction of the wicked. Fry gives a somewhat different explanation. He reads —

"Sooner than your vessels can feel the *blazing* thorn,
The hot blast shall consume them, as well the green as the dry."

And he observes, that "שער, or סער, no doubt expresses the action of the hot wind of the desert." This wind is eminently destructive, and has not unfrequently been known to entomb and destroy whole caravans. Sidi Hamet, describing his journey across the great desert to Tombuctoo with a caravan consisting of above one thousand men and four thousand camels, relates that, "after travelling upwards of a month they were attacked by the Shume, the burning blast of the desert, carrying with it clouds of sand. They were obliged to lie for two days with their faces on the ground, only lifting them occasionally to shake off the sand and obtain breath. Three hundred never rose again, and two hundred camels also perished." — (*Murray's Discoveries in Africa*, *volume* 1, pp. 515, 516.) Estius gives this sense: "Before your thorns shall arrive to their full growth into a bush, the rage of a tempest shall snatch them away, as it were, in the flower of their age and growing to maturity." The words חי-כמו, *kemo-chai*, which Calvin renders *flesh yet raw*, are used in this sense in Leviticus 13:16, and 1 Samuel 11:15

them away as by a whirlwind, either before they arrived at the full growth of their strength, like the thorn sprung to the vigorous plant, or before they came to maturity and readiness, like flesh which has been boiled in the pot. The latter meaning would seem to be the one of which the passage is most easily susceptible, that God, in the whirlwind of his anger, would carry away the wicked like flesh not yet boiled, which may be said scarcely to have felt the heat of the fire.

Psalm 58:10-11

> **10**. The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth [358] the vengeance; he shall wash his hands in the blood of the wicked. [359] **11**. And a man shall say, Verily there is a reward [literally fruit [360]] for the righteous; verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.

10 *The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance* It might appear at first sight that the feeling here attributed to the righteous is far from being consistent with the mercy which ought to characterise them; but we must remember, as I have often observed elsewhere, that the affection which David means to impute to them is one of a pure and well-regulated kind; and in this case there is nothing absurd in supposing that believers, under the influence and guidance of the Holy Ghost, should rejoice in witnessing the execution of divine judgments. That cruel satisfaction which too many feel when they see their enemies destroyed, is the result of the unholy passions of hatred, anger, or impatience, inducing an inordinate desire of revenge. So far as corruption is suffered to operate in this manner, there can be no right or acceptable exercise. On the other hand, when one is led by a holy zeal to sympathise with the justness of that vengeance which God may have inflicted, his joy will be as pure in beholding the retribution of the wicked, as his desire for their conversion and salvation was strong and unfeigned. God is not prevented by his mercy from manifesting, upon fit occasions, the severity of the judge, when means have been tried in vain to bring the sinner to repentance, nor can such an exercise of severity be considered as impugning his clemency; and, in a similar way, the righteous would anxiously desire the conversion of their enemies, and evince much patience under injury, with a view to reclaim them to the way of salvation: but when wilful obstinacy has at last brought round the hour of retribution,

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"Ou, pource qu'il aura veu." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, because he seeth."

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"The similitude is taken from fierce battles, in which the effusion of blood is so great as to moisten the feet of the victors in the conflict." — *Walford.* See Appendix.

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Reward is the fruit of obedience, Isaiah 53:10.

it is only natural that they should rejoice to see it inflicted, as proving the interest which God feels in their personal safety. It grieves them when God at any time seems to connive at the persecutions of their enemies; and how then can they fail to feel satisfaction when he awards deserved punishment to the transgressor?

11. *So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward.* We have additional evidence from what is here said of the cause or source of it, that the joy attributed to the saints has no admixture of bad feeling. It is noticeable from the way in which this verse runs, that David would now seem to ascribe to all, without exception, the sentiment which before he imputed exclusively to the righteous. But the acknowledgement immediately subjoined is one which could only come from the saints who have an eye to observe the divine dispensations; and I am, therefore, of opinion that they are specially alluded to in the expression, *And a man shall say,* etc At the same time, this mode of speech may imply that many, whose minds had been staggered, would be established in the faith. The righteous only are intended, but the indefinite form of speaking is adopted to denote their numbers. It is well known how many there are whose faith is apt to be shaken by apparent inequalities and perplexities in the divine administration, but who rally courage, and undergo a complete change of views, when the arm of God is bared in the manifestation of his judgments. At such a time the acknowledgement expressed in this verse is widely and extensively adopted, as Isaiah declares,

"When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness," (Isaiah 26:9.)

The Hebrew particle אך, *ach,* which we have translated *verily,* occasionally denotes simple affirmation, but is generally intensitive, and here implies the contrast between that unbelief which we are tempted to feel when God has suspended the exercise of his judgments, and the confidence with which we are inspired when he executes them. Thus the particles which are repeated in the verse imply that men would put away that hesitancy which is apt to steal upon their minds when God forbears the infliction of the punishment of sin, and, as it were, correct themselves for the error into which they had been seduced. Nothing tends more to promote godliness than an intimate and assured persuasion that the righteous shall never lose their reward. Hence the language of Isaiah, "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him; for they shall eat the fruit of their doings," (Isaiah 3:10.) When righteousness is not rewarded, we are disposed to cherish unbelieving fears, and to imagine that God has retired from the government of the world, and is indifferent to its concerns. I shall have an opportunity of treating this point more at large upon the seventy-third psalm.

There is subjoined the reason why the righteous cannot fail to reap the reward of their piety, because *God is the judge of the world;* it being impossible, on the supposition of the world being ruled by the providence of God, that he should not, sooner or later, distinguish between the good and

the evil. He is said more particularly to judge *in the earth,* because men have sometimes profanely alleged that the government of God is confined to heaven, and the affairs of this world abandoned to blind chance.

Psalm 59

PSALM 59

The title, which immediately follows, informs us upon what occasion this psalm was written, which bears a considerable resemblance to the preceding. He begins by insisting upon the injustice of that cruel hostility which his enemies showed to him, and which he had done nothing to deserve. His complaint is followed up by prayer to God for help; and afterwards, as his hopes revive in the exercise of devout meditation, he proceeds to prophesy their calamitous destruction. At the close, he engages to preserve a grateful remembrance of his deliverance, and to praise the goodness of God.

To the chief musician, Al-taschith, [destroy not,] Michtam of David, when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him.

The incident in David's history, here referred to, is one with which we are all familiar, (1 Samuel 19:11.) Besieged in his own house by a troop of soldiers, and having no opportunity of egress from the city, every avenue to which was taken possession of by Saul's guards, it seemed impossible that he could escape with his life. He was indebted instrumentally for his deliverance to the ingenuity of his wife, but it was from the divine goodness that he looked for safety. Michal may have contrived the artifice which deceived the soldiers sent by her father, but he never could have been saved except through the wonderful preservation of God. We are told in the words of the title that his house was watched, and this amounts, in the circumstances, to its being said that he was shut up to certain destruction; for the emissaries of Saul were sent with orders not only for his apprehension, but his death.

Psalm 59:1-5

> **1**. Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God! lift me up from the reach of them that rise up against me. **2**. Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men. **3**. For, lo! they lie in wait for my soul: the mighty are gathered against me; not for my transgression, nor for my sin, O Jehovah: **4**. They run and prepare themselves without my fault: awake to hasten for my help, and behold. **5**. And thou, O Jehovah, God of Hosts! the God of Israel, awake to visit all the nations: be not merciful to any wicked transgressors. Selah.

1 *Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God!* He insists upon the strength and violence of his enemies, with the view of exciting his mind to greater fervor in the duty of prayer. These he describes as *rising up* against him, in which expression he alludes not simply to the audacity or fierceness of their assaults, but to the eminent superiority of power which they possessed; and yet he asks that he may be lifted up on high, as it were, above the reach of this over-swelling inundation. His language teaches us that we should believe in the ability of God to deliver us even upon occasions of emergency, when our enemies have an overwhelming advantage. In the verse which follows, while he expresses the extremity to which he was reduced, he adverts at the same time to the injustice and cruelty of his persecutors. Immediately afterwards, he connects the two grounds of his complaint together: on the one hand, his complete helplessness under the danger, and, on the other, the undeserved nature of the assaults from which he suffered. I have already repeatedly observed, that our confidence in our applications to a throne of grace will be proportional to the degree in which we are conscious of integrity; for we cannot fail to feel greater liberty in pleading a cause which, in such a case, is the cause of God himself. He is the vindicator of justice, the patron of the righteous cause everywhere, and those who oppress the innocent must necessarily rank themselves amongst his enemies. David accordingly founds his first plea upon his complete destitution of all earthly means of help, exposed as he was to plots on every side, and attacked by a formidable conspiracy. His second he rests upon a declaration of innocency. It may be true that afflictions are sent by God to his people as a chastisement for their sins, but, so far as Saul was concerned, David could justly exonerate himself from all blame, and takes this occasion of appealing to God on behalf of his integrity, which lay under suspicion from the base calumnies of men. They might pretend it, but he declares that they could charge him with no crime nor fault. Yet, groundless as their hostility was, he tells us that they *ran,* were unremitting in their activity, with no other view than to accomplish the ruin of their victim.

4. *Awake to hasten for my help, and behold.* In using this language, he glances at the eagerness with which his enemies, as he had already said, were pressing upon him, and states his desire that God would show the same haste in extending help as they did in seeking his destruction. With

the view of conciliating the divine favor, he once more calls upon God to be the witness and judge of his cause, adding, *and behold* The expression is one which savours at once of faith and of the infirmity of the flesh. In speaking of God, as if his eyes had been hitherto shut to the wrongs which he had suffered, and needed now for the first time to be opened for the discovery of them, he expresses himself according to the weakness of our human apprehension. On the other hand, in calling upon God *to behold* his cause, he shows his faith by virtually acknowledging that nothing was hid from his providential cognisance. Though David may use language of this description, suited to the infirmity of sense, we must not suppose him to have doubted before this time that his afflictions, his innocence, and his wrongs, were known to God. Now, however, he lays the whole before God for examination and decision.

He prosecutes the same prayer with still greater vehemency in the verse which succeeds. He addresses God under new titles, calling him *Jehovah, God of Hosts, and the God of Israel,* the first of which appellations denotes the immensity of his power, and the second the special care which he exerts over the Church, and over all his people. The manner in which the pronoun is introduced, *and Thou, etc.,* is emphatical, denoting that it was as impossible for God to lay aside the office of a judge as to deny himself, or divest himself of his being. He calls upon him *to visit all the nations:* for although the cause which he now submitted was of no such universal concernment, the wider exercise of judgment would necessarily include the lesser; and on the supposition of heathens and foreigners being subjected to the judgment of God, it followed that a still more certain and heavy doom would be awarded to enemies within the pale of the Church, who persecuted the saints under the guise of brethren, and overthrew those laws which were of divine appointment. The opposition which David encountered might not embrace *all nations;* but if these were judicially visited by God, it was absurd to imagine that those within the Church would be the only enemies who should escape with impunity. In using these words, it is probable also that he may have been struggling with a temptation with which he was severely assailed, connected with the number of his enemies, for these did not consist merely of three or four abandoned individuals. They formed a great multitude; and he rises above them all by reflecting that God claims it as his prerogative, not only to reduce a few refractory persons to submission, but to punish the wickedness of the whole world. If the judgments of God extended to the uttermost parts of the earth, there was no reason why he should be afraid of his enemies, who, however numerous, formed but a small section of the human race. We shall shortly see, however, that the expression admits of being applied without impropriety to the Israelites, divided, as they were, into so many tribes or peoples. In the words which follow, when he deprecates the extension of God's mercy to wicked transgressors, we must understand him as referring to the reprobate, whose sin was of a desperate

character. We must also remember, what has been already observed, that in such prayers he was not influenced by mere private feelings, and these of a rancorous, distempered, and inordinate description. Not only did he know well that those of whom he speaks with such severity were already doomed to destruction, but he is here pleading the common cause of the Church, and this under the influence of the pure and well-regulated zeal of the Spirit. He therefore affords no precedent to such as resent private injuries by vending curses on those who have inflicted them.

Psalm 59:6-9

> **6**. They will return at evening; they will make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city [361] **7**. Behold, they will prate [362] with their mouth; swords are in their lips for who (say they) will hear? **8**. But thou, O Jehovah! shalt laugh at them; thou shalt have all the nations in derision. **9**. I will put in trust his strength with thee; [363] for God is my fortress.

6. *They will return at evening.* He compares his enemies to famished and furious dogs which hunger impels to course with endless circuits in every direction, and under this figure accuses their insatiable fierceness, shown in the ceaseless activity to which they were instigated by the desire of mischief. He says that *they return in the evening,* to intimate, not that they rested at other times, but were indefatigable in pursuing their evil courses. If they came no speed through the day, yet the night would find them at their work. The barking of dogs aptly expressed as a figure the formidable nature of their assaults.

In the verse which follows, he describes their fierceness. The expression, *prating,* or belching out with their mouth, denotes that they proclaimed their infamous counsels openly, and without affecting concealment. The Hebrew word נבע, *nabang,* means, metaphorically, *to speak,* but properly, it signifies *to gush out,* [364] and here denotes more than simply speaking. He would inform us, that not content with plotting the destruction of the innocent

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"Ou, ils iront et viendront." — *Fr. marg.* "*Or, they go and come.*" "He here describes the ceaseless pursuit of him in which his enemies were engaged all the day they were seeking him in vain in more distant places; in the evening they came again into the city, and continued their search, while their execrations and curses resembled the angry howling of a dog." — *Walford.*

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"Ou, bouilloneront." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, will belch out."

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"Ou, sa force est a toy, je me tiendray coy: ou, ma force est a toy," etc. — *Fr. marg.* "Or, his strength is with thee, I will keep myself quiet: or, my strength is with thee," etc.

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secretly amongst themselves, they published their intentions abroad, and boasted of them. Accordingly, when he adds, that *swords were in their lips,* he means that they breathed out slaughter, and that every word they spoke was a sword to slay the oppressed. He assigns as the cause of their rushing to such excess of *wickedness,* that they had no reason to apprehend disgrace. It may be sufficiently probable, that David adverts here, as in many other places, to the gross stupidity of the wicked, who, in order to banish fear from their minds, conceive of God as if he were asleep in heaven; but I am of opinion that he rather traces the security with which they prosecuted their counsels, and openly proclaimed them, to the fact, that they had long ere now been in possession of the uncontrolled power of inflicting injury. They had succeeded so completely in deceiving the people, and rendering David odious by their calumnies, that none had the courage to utter a word in his defense. Nay, the more atrociously that any man might choose to persecute this victim of distress, from no other motive than to secure the good graces of the king, the more did he rise in estimation as a true friend to the commonwealth.

8. *But thou, O Jehovah! shalt laugh at them.* In the face of all this opposition, David only rises to greater confidence. When he says that God would *laugh* at his enemies, he employs a figure which is well fitted to enhance the power of God, suggesting that, when the wicked have perfected their schemes to the uttermost, God can, without any effort, and, as it were, in sport, dissipate them all. No sooner does God connive at their proceedings, than their pride and insolence take occasion to manifest themselves: for they forget that even when he seems to have suspended operation, he needs but nod, and his judgments shall be executed. David, accordingly, in contempt of his adversaries, tells them that God was under no necessity to make extensive preparations, but, at the moment when he saw fit to make retribution, would, by a mere play of his power, annihilate them all. He in this manner conveys a severe rebuke to that blind infatuation which led them to boast so intemperately of their own powers, and to imagine that God was slumbering in the heavens. In the close of the verse, mention is made of *all nations,* to intimate that though they might equal the whole world in numbers, they would prove a mere mockery with all their influence and resources. Or the words may be read — Even As *thou hast*

Ainsworth reads, "*to utter* or *well out*, as from a fountain; *belch* or *babble*, as Proverbs 15:2, 28, 'As a fountain casteth out her waters, so she casteth out her malice.'" "Le mot Hebrieu signifie *se repandre en paroles*, etc.;" *i.e.*, "The Hebrew word signifies *to break out in words*, and it here denotes the oft repeated and passionate expressions which proceed from the mouth of persons actuated by hatred and rage, as in Psalm 94:4. To it the word *bark* answers very well, which is borrowed from dogs, and expresses the noise made by these animals; and this word is here the more apposite, that David in the preceding verse compares his enemies to dogs which incessantly run about and do nothing but bark." — *Martin.*

all the nations in derision. One thing is obvious, that David ridicules the vain boasting of his enemies, who thought no undertaking too great to be accomplished by their numbers.

9 *I will intrust his strength to thee* The obscurity of this passage has led to a variety of opinions amongst commentators. The most forced interpretation which has been proposed is that which supposes a change of person in the relative *his,* as if David, in speaking of himself, employed the third person instead of the first, *I will intrust my strength to thee* The Septuagint, and those who adopt this interpretation, have probably been led to it by the insufficient reason, that in the last verse of the psalm it is said, *I will ascribe with praises* my *strength to thee,* or, my *strength is with thee, I will sing, etc.* But on coming to that part of the psalm, we will have occasion to see that David there, with propriety, asserts of himself what he here in another sense asserts of Saul. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the relative is to be here understood of Saul. Some consider that the first words of the sentence should be read apart from the others — *strength is his* — meaning that Saul had the evident superiority in strength, so as at the present to be triumphant. Others join the two parts of the sentence, and give this explanation: Although thou art for the present moment his strength, in so far as thou dost sustain and preserve him on the throne, yet I will continue to hope, until thou hast raised me to the kingdom, according to thy promise. But those seem to come nearest the meaning of the Psalmist who construe the words as one continuous sentence — *I will put in trust his strength with thee;* meaning that, however intemperately Saul might boast of his strength, he would rest satisfied in the assurance that there was a secret divine providence restraining his actions. We must learn to view all men as subordinated in this manner, and to conceive of their strength and their enterprises as depending upon the sovereign will of God. In my opinion, the following version is the best — *His strength is with thee,* [365] *I will wait.* The words are parallel with those in the end of the psalm, where there can be no doubt that the nominative case is employed, *My strength is with thee; I will sing.* So far as the sense of the passage is concerned, however, it does not signify which of the latter interpretations be followed. It is evident that David is here enabled, from the eminence of faith, to despise the violent opposition of his enemy, convinced that he could do nothing without the divine permission. But by taking the two parts of the sentence separately, in the way I have suggested, — *His strength is with thee, I will wait,* — the meaning is more distinctly brought out. First, David, in vindication of that

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In the Latin edition, from which we now translate, it reads, "Fortitude *mea* ad re." This is evidently a mistake of the printer for "*fortitudo ejus*," and has misled the former English translators. This is the more wonderful, as they thus make the Author adopt the very transposition of person which he had immediately before rejected. Of course, the French version reads, "*Sa* forte est a toy: je garderay."

power by which God governs the whole world, declares that his enemy was under a secret divine restraint, and so entirely dependent for any strength which he possessed upon God, that he could not move a finger without his consent. He then adds, that he would wait the event, whatsoever it might be, with composure and tranquillity. For the word which we have translated, *I will intrust,* may here be taken as signifying *I will keep myself,* or quietly wait the pleasure of the Lord. In this sense we find the word used in the conjugation *Niphal,* Isaiah 7:4. Here it is put in the conjugation *Kal,* but that is no reason why we may not render it, "I will silently wait the issue which God may send." It has been well suggested, that David may allude to the guards which had been sent to besiege his house, and be considered as opposing to this a watch of a very different description, which he himself maintained, as he looked out for the divine issue with quietness and composure. [366]

Psalm 59:10-12

> **10**. The God of my mercy will prevent me: God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies. **11**. Slay them not, lest my people forget: scatter them by thy power; and bring them down, O Lord! our shield. **12**. The sin of their mouth, the words of their lips; let them be taken in their pride: and let them speak of cursing and lying.

10. *The God of my mercy will prevent me* In the Hebrew, there is the affix of the third person, but we have the point which denotes the first. [367] The Septuagint has adopted the third person, and Augustine too ingeniously, though with a good design, has repeatedly quoted the passage against the Pelagians, in proof that the grace of God is antecedent to all human merit. In the same manner, he has again and again cited the preceding verse, to refute the arrogancy of those who boast of the power of free-will. *"I will put in trust my strength with thee,"* he says; "that is, men must subject themselves with all modesty and humility to God, as having no strength but that with which he supplies them." Now, it may be said with great

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Hammond translates, "His strength I will ward, or avoid, or beware, or take heed of at thee." And the amount of his explanation is: Saul having sent a party to guard, that is, to besiege the house in which David was, in order to kill him, as is mentioned in the title of the psalm, David resolves to guard, or look to, or beware of the strength of his persecutor, by fleeing to God as his refuge.

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"We have חסדו, *his mercy*, with the points חסדי, *my mercy*, the *keri* being for the one, and the *kethib* for the other. And, accordingly, of the interpreters, some read the one, some the other, both certainly meaning the same thing: the Chaldee, 'the God of my grace, *or* goodness, or mercy;' but the LXX. 'Ο Θεός μοῦ τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ,' 'My God his mercy,' and so the Latin." — *Hammond* Green translates, "My God shall prevent me with his loving-kindness."

plausibility, that the man *puts his strength in trust with God,* who declares that he has no strength but what comes from him, and who depends entirely upon his help. The sentiment inculcated is also, without all doubt, a pious and instructive one; but we must be ever on our guard against wresting Scripture from its natural meaning. The Hebrew word קדמ, *kidem,* means no more than *to come forward seasonably;* and David simply intimates that the divine assistance would be promptly and opportunely extended. [368] The scope of the words is, that God will interpose at the very moment when it is required, however much he may retard or defer his assistance. Were it not that we are hurried on by the excessive eagerness of our own wishes, we would sufficiently recognize the promptness with which God hastens to our help, but our own precipitance makes us imagine that he is dilatory. To confirm his faith, he calls him *the God of his mercy,* having often proved him to be merciful; and the experience of the past afforded him good hopes of what he might expect in the future. The idea of some, that David uses the word in an active sense, and praises his own mercy, is poor and unnatural. Its passive use is quite common.

11 *Slay them not, lest my people forget* David very properly suggests this to his own mind, as a consideration which should produce patience. We are apt to think, when God has not annihilated our enemies at once, that they have escaped out of his hands altogether; and we look upon it as properly no punishment, that they should be gradually and slowly destroyed. Such being the extravagant desire which almost all, without exception, have, to see their enemies at once exterminated, David checks himself, and dwells upon the judgment of God to be seen in the lesser calamities which overtake the wicked. It is true, that were not our eyes blinded, we would behold a more evident display of divine retribution in cases where the destruction of the ungodly is sudden; but these are so apt to fade away from our remembrance, that he had good reason to express his desire that the spectacle might be one constantly renewed, and thus our knowledge of the judgments of God be more deeply graven upon our hearts. He arms and fortifies himself against impatience under delays in the execution of divine judgment, by the consideration that God has an express design in them, as, were the wicked exterminated in a moment, the remembrance of the event might speedily be effaced. There is an indirect censure conveyed to the people of Israel for failing to improve the more striking judgments of God. But the sin is one too prevalent in the world even at this day. Those judgments which are so evident that none can miss to observe them without shutting his eyes, we sinfully allow to pass into oblivion; so that we need to be brought daily into that theater where we are compelled to perceive the divine hand. This we must never forget when we see God subjecting his enemies to a

368 Horsley reads, "God shall give me ready help."

gradual process of destruction, instead of launching his thunders instantly upon their head. He prays that God would *make them to wander,* as men under poverty and misery, who seek in every direction, but in vain, for a remedy to their misfortunes. The idea is still more forcibly described in the word which follows, *make them descend,* or, *cast them down.* He wished that they might be dragged from that position of honor which they had hitherto occupied, and thrown to the ground, so as to present, in their wretchedness and degradation, a constant illustration of the wrath of God. The word בחילך, *becheylcha,* which we have translated, *in thy power,* some render, *with thy army,* understanding the people of God. But it is more probable that David calls to his assistance *the power* of God for the destruction of his enemies, and this because they deemed themselves invincible through those worldly resources in which they trusted. As a further argument for obtaining his request, he intimates in the close of the verse that he was now pleading the cause of the whole Church, for he uses the plural number, *O God our shield* Having been chosen king by divine appointment, the safety of the Church stood connected with his person. The assault made upon him by his enemies was not an assault upon himself merely as a private individual, but upon the whole people, whose common welfare God had consulted in making choice of him. And this suggested another reason why he should patiently submit to see the judgments of God measured out in the manner which might best engage their minds in assiduous meditation.

12 *The sin of their mouth, the words of their lips* Some interpreters read, *for,* or, *on account of the sin of their mouth,* [369] supplying the causal particle, that the words may be the better connected with the preceding verse. And there can be no doubt that the reason is stated here why they deserved to be subjected to constant wanderings and disquietude. The words as they stand, however, although abrupt and elliptical, well express the meaning which David would convey; as if he had said, that no lengthened proof was necessary to convict them of sin, which plainly showed itself in the mischievous tendency of their discourse. Wickedness, he tells us, proceeded from their mouth., They vomited out their pride and cruelty. That this is the sense in which we are to understand the words, is confirmed by what immediately follows — *Let them be taken in their pride.* He here points to the source of that insolence which led them with such proud and contumelious language, and in such a shameless manner, to oppress the innocent. He then specifies the sin of their lips, adding, that *they spoke words of cursing and falsehood* By this he means that their mouth was continually filled with horrid imprecations, and that they were wholly addicted to deceit and to

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This is the reading adopted by Jerome, and also by Horsley, who remarks, that in Jerome's copies the words, "sin" and "discourse," had certainly the preposition כ prefixed.

calumniating. [370] Those have mistaken the meaning of David who give a passive signification to the word which I have translated *to speak,* and understand him as saying that the wicked would be accounted examples of divine vengeance, the plain and notorious marks of which were written upon them.

Psalm 59:13-17

> **13**. Consume, consume them in wrath, that they may not be, and let them know unto the ends of the earth that God ruleth in Jacob. Selah. **14**. And at evening they will return; they will make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city. **15**. They will wander up and down to eat;
>
> [371] if they be not satisfied, [372] they will even lodge all night long. **16**. But I will sing of thy power, I will praise thy mercy in the morning; [373] for thou hast been my fortress and refuge in the day of my trouble. **17**. My strength is with thee, I will sing psalms; for God is my defence, the God of my mercy.

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The Syriac translation of the first part of the verse is, "The discourse of their mouth is the sin of their lips." That is, whatever their lips speak is sin; so many words, so many sins.

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"The literal translation, *to eat*, *i.e.*, to devour, may be best." — *Archbishop Secker.* From the great attention which is paid to external purity in the East, and in consequence of dogs being reckoned unclean, as they were by the Jews under the law, the inhabitants do not admit them into their houses, and even carefully avoid touching them in their streets, by which they would consider themselves defiled. But though not there domesticated as with us, dogs are to be found in great numbers, and crowd the streets. They are not attached to any particular person or family, nor accounted the property of any one; and though it is not uncommon for some of the inhabitants, from motives of superstition, to give money weekly or monthly to butchers and bakers to feed them at stated times, and though some even leave legacies at their death for the same purpose, yet they must necessarily subsist in a great measure on what they can seize or steal; and, being very numerous, they are perpetually wandering about in large troops seeking for something to devour. — (*Harmer's Observations*, *volume* 1, p. 344.) To these circumstances the Psalmist clearly alludes in the 14th and 15th verses, when he compares the behavior of his enemies to that of dogs. He repeats what he had said in the 5th verse; but here he intends to convey a different idea. "Let them do what they may;" as if he had said, "I am safe under the protection of God."

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"C'est, combien qu'ils ne soyent." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, though they be not satisfied."

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"*In the morning.* It should seem this hath a relation to Saul's servants watching for him in the morning to kill him, (1 Samuel 19:11;) meaning, At that time when those people imagine to have me in their hands I shall be in safety, and have cause to praise and bless thee for my deliverance." — *Annotations on the Bible by English Divines.*

13 *Consume, consume them in wrath, that they may not be* David may seem to contradict himself in praying for the utter destruction of his enemies, when immediately before he had expressed his desire that they might not be exterminated at once. [374] What else could he mean when he asks that God would consume them in wrath, but that he would cut them off suddenly, and not by a gradual and slower process of punishment? But he evidently refers in what he says here to a different point of time, and this removes any apparent inconsistency, for he prays that when they had been set up for a sufficient period as an example, they might eventually be devoted to destruction. It was customary with the victorious Roman generals, first to lead the captives which had been kept for the day of triumph through the city, and afterwards, upon reaching the capital, to give them over to the lictors for execution. Now David prays that when God had, in a similar manner, reserved his enemies for an interval sufficient to illustrate his triumph, he would upon this consign them to summary punishment. The two things are not at all inconsistent; first, that the divine judgments should be lengthened out through a considerable period, to secure their being remembered better, and that then, upon sufficient evidence being given to the world of the certainty with which the wicked are subjected in the displeasure of God to the slower process of destruction, he should in due time bring them forth to final execution, the better to awake, by such a demonstration of his power, the minds of those who may be more secure than others, or less affected by witnessing moderate inflictions of punishment. He adds, accordingly, *that they may know, even to the ends of the earth, that God ruleth in Jacob* Some would insert the copulative particle, reading, *that they may know that God rules in Jacob, and in all the nations of the world,* an interpretation which I do not approve, and which does violence to the sense. The allusion is to the condign nature of the judgment, which would be such that the report of it would reach the remotest regions, and strike salutary terror into the minds even of their benighted and godless inhabitants. He was more especially anxious that God should be recognised as ruling *in the Church,* it being preposterous that the place where his throne was erected should present such an aspect of confusion as converted his temple into a den of thieves.

14 *And at evening they shall return* It is of no consequence whether we read the words in the future tense or in the subjunctive, understanding it to be a continuance of the preceding prayer. But it seems more probable that David, after having brought his requests to a close, anticipates the happy issue which he desired. And he makes an apt allusion to what he had

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Williams observes, that the Hebrew rendered *consume* "literally means *to finish*, bring to an end; namely, the *banditti.* The Psalmist, verse 11, prays, 'Slay them not;' *i.e.*, take not away their lives as individuals, but put an end to the conspiracy."

already said of their insatiable hunger. The words which he had formerly used he repeats, but with a different application, ironically declaring that they would be ravenous in another sense, and that matters would issue otherwise than they had looked for. Above he had complained that they made a noise like dogs, adverting to the eagerness and fierceness with which they were bent upon mischief; now he derides their malicious efforts, and says, that after wearying themselves with their endless pursuit all day, they would go disappointed of their purpose. He uses no longer the language of complaint, but congratulates himself upon the abortive issue of their activity. The Hebrew word which I have translated, *if not,* in the close of the fifteenth verse, is by some considered to be the form of an oath. But this is an over-refined interpretation. Others would have the negation repeated, reading, *if they shall not have been satisfied, neither shall they lodge for the night* But this also is far-fetched. The simple and true meaning suggests itself at once, that, although they might not be satisfied, they would be forced to lay themselves down, and the misery of their hunger would be aggravated, by the circumstance that they had passed the whole day in fruitless application, and must lie down for the night empty, wearied, and unsatisfied. [375]

16 *But I will sing of thy power* By this he does not mean merely that he would have occasion to sing at some future period, but prepares himself presently for the exercise of thanksgiving; and he proceeds to acknowledge that his deliverance would be at once an illustrious effect of Divine power, and conferred of mere grace. It may be true, that David escaped at this time from the hands of his enemies without stir, and with secrecy, through the dexterity of his wife; still, by means of this artifice, God disappointed the preparations and forces of Saul, and may, therefore, with propriety be said to have exerted his power. We may suppose, however, that David takes occasion, from this particular instance, to look further back, and embrace, in his view, the various Divine interpositions which he had experienced.

17 *My strength is with thee, I will sing psalms* He expresses still more explicitly the truth, that he owed his safety entirely to God. Formerly he had said that the strength of his enemy was with God, and now he asserts the same thing of his own. The expression, however, which admits of two meanings, he elegantly applies to himself in a different sense. [376] God has the strength of the wicked in his hands, to curb and to restrain it, and to

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Street translates, "If they be not satisfied, they spend the night in howling;" and observes, that there seems to be a word lost after the original verb לון, *lun*, which he renders, *they spend the night*; and he supplies h; by the words, *in howling* The meaning of the verb לום, *lun*, is ambiguous. It signifies both *to continue all night*, and *to growl*, or *murmur* Either sense will be appropriate in this passage. The Chaldee and Syriac understand it in the former sense; and the Septuagint in the latter.

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show that any power of which they boast is vain and fallacious. His own people, on the other hand, he supports and secures, against the possibility of falling, by supplies of strength from himself. In the preceding part of the psalm, David had congratulated himself upon his safety, by reflecting that Saul was so completely under the secret restraint of God's providence as to be unable to move a finger without his permission. Now, weak as he was in himself, he maintains that he had strength sufficient in the Lord; and accordingly adds, that he had good reason to engage in praise, as James the inspired apostle exhorts those who are merry to sing psalms, (James 5:13.) As to the reading which some have adopted, *I will ascribe my strength with praises unto thee,* the reader cannot fail to see that it is forced. It is clear that the two clauses must be taken separately, as I have already observed.

"Sed eleganter ambiguam locutionem diverso sensu ponit." — *Lat.* In the French version, "Mais c'est une bonne rencontre et qui a grace, quand il met deux fois un propos ambigu, mais en divers sens."

Psalm 60

PSALM 60

David, who was now settled upon the throne, and had gained several signal victories, tending to confirm him in the kingdom, in this Psalm exalts the goodness of God, that he might at once express his gratitude, and by conciliating the favor of such as still stood out against his interests, unite the community, which had been rent into factions. Having first adverted to the clear indications of the Divine favor, which proved that God had chosen him to be king, he more particularly calls the attention of the faithful to the oracle itself, in order to convince them that they could only comply with the mind of God, by yielding their consent and approbation to the anointing which he had received from Samuel. Prayers also are offered up throughout the psalm, urging God to perfect what he had begun.

To the chief musician upon Shushan-eduth, Michtam [377] of David, to teach; when he strove with the Syrians of Mesopotamia, and with the Syrians of Zoba, and when Joab returned, and smote of the Edomites in the valley of Salt twelve thousand.

Of the first part of this title I have spoken in another place, and shall not insist upon it further than to repeat, that *Shushan-eduth, the lily of witness,* [378] *or of beauty,* seem to have been the first words of some song which was

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Michtam is prefixed to six psalms, of which this is the last. The others are, the 16th, 56th, 57th, 58th, and 59th.

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What that means it is not easy to ascertain: from the lily being a six-leafed flower, it has been supposed that the word may also mean a six-stringed instrument.

commonly known at the time. It is added, *to teach;* and this, as some have thought, because the psalm was given to the Levites, that they might learn it. But others have very properly rejected this idea, as we cannot suppose that a title, which is equally applicable to all the psalms, would have been here used as a term of distinction. More probably it points at a particular instruction or doctrine, which would be taught by the following psalm. We may suppose that David, who had gained so many decisive victories, but had not the satisfaction, as yet, of seeing the kingdom finally settled under him, employs the word to denote that he had a special lesson to enforce, which was, the duty of all who had hitherto opposed him to put an end to factions, and, after such convincing evidences, acknowledge that he was their divinely-appointed king. Let experience, at least, as if he had said, prove that the sovereignty which I hold meets with the approbation of God, crowned, as it is, in the eyes of all, with so many tokens of his favor. The psalm is described as being a kind of triumphal song for victories obtained over the Syrians and other allied nations. As the Jews reckon Mesopotamia, and other countries, to be included in Syria, which they call Aram, they are forced subsequently to distinguish it into different parts, as here we find *Syria Naharim* put for Mesopotamia, which some of the Latins have named Interamnis, (or, *between two rivers,)* following the Greek etymology; for Mesopotamia in Greek means between two rivers, that is, between the Tigris and Euphrates. [379] Next, we have *Syria Soba* mentioned, which some have considered upon good grounds to be Sophene, because adjacent to the bank of the Euphrates; and David is said (2 Samuel 8:3) to have smitten Rehob, king of Soba, as he went to recover his border at the river. In the same passage, we read of a third Syria, that of Damascus, nearer to Judea, and almost touching upon it. Syria is, in other places of Scripture, represented as still more extensive, and has epithets attached to it according to the different territories which are meant to be pointed out. As David had war with the more adjacent part of Syria, and routed the army which had come out from it to the assistance of the Ammonites, it may be asked why he speaks only of the inhabitants of Mesopotamia and Soba. I think it probable that he specifies the more distant nations, as being the most formidable, and as affording a more illustrious proof of the Divine favor which accompanied his arms. For this reason, he passes over the more neighboring nations, and mentions those which were situated at a distance, the terror of which was known only by report, and whose overthrow was something unheard of, and almost incredible. In the inspired history, two-and-twenty thousand are said

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We have here adopted the French version, which is fuller than the Latin, "laquelle aucuns des Latins a l'imitation des Grecs (car Mesopotamie en Grec signifie entre les fleuves, pource qu'elle est entre Tigris et Euphrates) ont nommee Interamnis."

to have been slain, [380] (1 Chronicles 18:12,) in the title of this psalm only twelve thousand; but the apparent inconsistency is easily explained. It is Abishai whom the history represents as defeating the forces, which are here said to have been overthrown by Joab. We are to consider that the army was divided between the two brothers. Abishai being inferior in rank and authority, we need not wonder that the praise of the victory is ascribed to him who was the chief commander, although both had a share in gaining it; as in 1 Samuel 18:7, David is described as having the whole honor of the victory, because he was the individual under whose auspices it had been accomplished. It is probable that about half the number mentioned in the history fell during the main engagement, and that the rest having fled from the field, were put to the sword by Joab in their retreat. [381]

Psalm 60:1-3

1. O God! thou hast cast us off; thou hast scattered us; thou hast been displeased: O turn thyself to us again! **2**. Thou hast made the earth [or the land] to tremble; thou hast caused it to open wide: heal the breaches thereof; for it shaketh. **3**. Thou hast showed thy people hard things: thou hast made us drunk with the wine of astonishment. [382]

1. *O God! thou hast cast us off.* With the view of exciting both himself and others to a more serious consideration of the goodness of God, which they presently experienced, he begins the psalm with prayer; and a

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It should be eighteen thousand.

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There is another way in which this difference as to number may be reconciled besides that in which Calvin attempts to do it. "If the Hebrew numbers here," says Street, "have been ever expressed by letters used as numerals, the variation might be accounted for; יב being twelve, and יח being eighteen, and many instances being to be found of the corruption of ח into ב. — See *Dr Kennicott's Dissertation* on 1 Chronicles 11, page 96, where it is plainly shown that many errors in numbers have arisen from the numbers having been expressed by letters, and one letter having been mistaken for another."

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The three first verses, which complain of calamities and distresses, seem not to correspond to the title of the psalm, from which we would naturally expect the expressions of joy and praise for the victory obtained. Hare conjectures that these three verses have accidentally changed place with Psalm 85:2, 3, 4. Archbishop Secker observes, that this conjecture "is bold, but otherwise very ingenious and plausible; and this change would make each psalm more consistent, and reconcile this psalm to its title very well; for the historical books mention no distress in the war to which the title refers." Dr Adam Clarke considers this conjecture well founded; but others think the apparent discrepancy may be removed by supposing that the psalm was written after some of the battles of which mention is made in the title, and that the Author does not restrict himself to those events, but takes in a wider range, so as to embrace the afflictive condition both of Israel and Judah during the latter part of Saul's life, and the former years of David's reign.

comparison is instituted, designed to show that the government of Saul had been under the divine reprobation. He complains of the sad confusions into which the nation had been thrown, and prays that God would return to it in mercy, and re-establish its affairs. Some have thought that David here adverts to his own distressed condition: this is not probable. I grant that, before coming to the throne, he underwent severe afflictions; but in this place he evidently speaks of the whole people as well as himself. The calamities which he describes are such as extended to the whole kingdom; and I have not the least doubt, therefore, that he is to be considered as drawing a comparison which might illustrate the favor of God, as it had been shown so remarkably, from the first, to his own government. With this view, he deplores the long-continued and heavy disasters which had fallen upon the people of God under Saul's administration. It is particularly noticeable, that though he had found his own countrymen his worst and bitterest foes, now that he sat upon the throne, he forgets all the injuries which they had done him, and, mindful only of the situation which he occupied, associates himself with the rest of them in his addresses to God. The *scattered* condition of the nation is what he insists upon as the main calamity. In consequence of the dispersion of Saul's forces, the country lay completely exposed to the incursions of enemies; not a man was safe in his own house, and no relief remained but in flight or banishment. He next describes the confusions which reigned by a metaphor, representing the country as *opened,* or *cleft asunder;* not that there had been a literal earthquake, but that the kingdom, in its rent and shattered condition, presented that calamitous aspect which generally follows upon an earthquake. The affairs of Saul ceased to prosper from the time that he forsook God; and when he perished at last, he left the nation in a state little short of ruin. The greatest apprehension must have been felt throughout it; it was become the scorn of its enemies, and was ready to submit to any yoke, however degrading, which promised tolerable conditions. Such is the manner in which David intimates that the divine favor had been alienated by Saul, pointing, when he says that God was *displeased,* at the radical source of all the evils which prevailed; and he prays that the same physician who had broken would heal.

3. *Thou hast showed thy people hard things* He says, first, that the nation had been dealt with severely, and then adds a figure which may additionally represent the grievousness of its calamities, speaking of it as drunk with the wine of stupor or astonishment. Even the Hebraist interpreters are not agreed among themselves as to the meaning of תרעלה, *tarelah,* which I have rendered *astonishment.* Several of them translate it *poison.* But it is evident that the Psalmist alludes to some kind of poisoned drink, which deprives a person of his senses, insinuating that the Jews were stupified by their calamities. [383] He would place, in short, before their eyes the curse of God, which had pressed upon the government of Saul, and induce them

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to abandon their obstinate attempts to maintain the interests of a throne which lay under the divine reprobation.

Psalm 60:4-8

> **4**. Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed before the truth. Selah. **5**. That thy beloved may be delivered, [384] save with thy right hand, and hear me. **6**. God hath spoken in his holiness; I will rejoice: I will divide Shechem, and mete out the valley of Succoth. **7**. Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine; Ephraim also is mine strength of my head; Judah is my lawgiver. [385] **8**. Moab is my washpot; over Edom will I cast my shoe: Palestina, triumph over me.

4 *Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee.* Some interpreters would change the past tense, and read the words as if they formed a continuation of the prayers which precede — *O that thou wouldst give a banner to them that fear thee!* [386] But it is better to suppose that David diverges to the language of congratulation, and, by pointing to the change which had taken place, calls attention to the evident appearances of the divine favor. He returns thanks to God, in the name of all the people, for having raised a standard which might at once cheer their hearts, and unite their divided numbers. [387] It is a poor and meagre interpretation which some have attached to the words, *before the truth,* that God showed favor to the Jews because he had found them true-hearted, and sound in his cause.

It was customary among the Hebrews to make their wine stronger and more inebriating by the addition of hotter and more powerful ingredients; such as honey, spices, *defrutum*, (*i e.*, wine inspissated by boiling it down to two-thirds or one-half of the quantity,) mandrakes, opiates, and other drugs. Such were the stupifying ingredients which the celebrated Helen is represented, in Homer's Odyssey, as mixing in the bowl, together with the wine, for her guests oppressed with grief, to raise their spirits; and such is probably the wine to which there is here an allusion. The people were stupified by the heavy judgments of God, like a person stupified with wine which had been rendered more intoxicating by the deleterious drugs with which it had been mingled. This highly poetical language is not unfrequently employed to express the divine judgments: as in Isaiah 51:17, 20-22, and Jeremiah 25:15, 16. The original word תרעלה, *tarelah*, means properly *trembling*, from the verb רעל, *raal*, from which the English word *reel* is perhaps derived. We might therefore read, "the wine of trembling."

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"Ou, que tes bien aimez soyont delivrez." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, let thy beloved be delivered."

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"Ou, gouverneur." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, governor."

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Boothroyd gives a translation similar to this, and thinks that this is required by the connection. But see note 3, p. 397.

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Those in the higher ranks had, as is well known, proved eminently disloyal; the common people had, along with their king, broken their divine allegiance: from the highest to the lowest in the kingdom all had conspired to overthrow the gracious purpose of God. It is evident, then, that David refers to the truth of God as having emerged in a signal manner, now that the Church began to be restored. This was an event which had not been expected. Indeed, who did not imagine, in the desperate circumstances, that God's promises had altogether failed? But when David mounted the throne, his truth, which had been so long obscured, again shone forth. The advantage which ensued extended to the whole nation; but David intimates that God had a special respect to his own people, whose deliverance, however few they might be in number, he particularly contemplated.

He next proceeds to address God again in prayer; although, I may observe in passing, the words which follow, *that thy beloved may be delivered,* are read by some in connection with the preceding verse. I am myself inclined to

Hamer has given a very ingenious explanation of this passage, derived from the manners of the East. "It seems," says he, "that the modern Eastern people have looked upon the giving them a *banner* as a more sure pledge of protection 'than that given by words.' So Albertus Aquensis tell us, that when Jerusalem was taken in 1099, about three hundred Saracens got upon the roof of a very lofty building, and earnestly begged for quarter, but could not be induced, by any promises of safety, to come down, until they had received the banner of Tancred [one of the chiefs of the Crusade army] as a pledge of life. It did not, indeed, avail them, as that historian observes; for their behavior occasioned such indignation that they were destroyed to a man. The event showed the faithlessness of these zealots, whom no solemnities could bind; but the Saracens surrendering themselves upon the delivery of a standard to them, proves in what a strong light they looked upon the giving them a banner; since it induced them to trust it when they would not trust any promises. Perhaps the delivery of a banner was anciently esteemed, in like manner, an obligation to protect, and the Psalmist might consider it in this light, when, upon a victory gained over the Syrians and Edomites, after the public affairs of Israel had been in a bad state, he says, 'Thou hast showed thy people hard things, etc.; thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee.' Though thou didst for a time give up thine Israel into the hands of their enemies, thou hast now given them an assurance of thy having received them under thy protection." — *Observations*, *volume* 3, pp. 496, 497. Harmer supposes that our translation, which speaks of *a banner displayed*, is inaccurate; observing, that it is most probable that the Israelites anciently used only a spear, properly ornamented to distinguish it from a common one — a supposition which he founds on the fact, that a very long spear, covered all over with silver, and having a ball of gold on the top, was the standard of the Egyptian princes at the time of the Crusade wars, and was carried before their armies. He proposes to read, "Thou hast given an ensign or standard [נס, *nes*] to them that fear thee, that it may be lifted up." But Parkhurst considers the radical meaning of the Hebrew word נס, *nes*, to be *a banner* or *ensign*, from its *waving* or *streaming* in the wind; in other words, *a streamer* See his Lexicon on נס. Mant's explanation of the phrase is similar to that of Calvin. "In this place," says he, "it may mean no more than that God had united his people under one head, and so enabled them to meet their enemies by repairing to the standard of their sovereign." "The banner, or standard of an army," says Walford, "is the object of constant attention to soldiers: so long as it is safe, and elevated, so long courage, hope, and energy, are maintained. The poet uses this symbol to express his hope that God Himself would be the source of their valor and success, in order that *the truth*, the promise made to David, might be accomplished."

adopt that construction; for David would seem to magnify the illustration which had been given of the divine favor, by adverting to the change which had taken place, [388] God having inspirited his people so far as to display a banner; where, formerly, they were reduced to a state of extremity, from which it seemed impossible to escape without a miracle. In the previous verse he calls them *fearers* of the Lord, and now his *beloved;* implying that, when God rewards such as fear and worship him, it is always with a respect to his own free love. And prayer is subjoined: for however great may be the favors which God has bestowed upon us, modesty and humility will teach us always to pray that he would perfect what his goodness has begun.

6. *God hath spoken in his holiness; I will rejoice.* Hitherto he has adverted to the proofs which had come under their own observation, and from which they might easily see that God had manifested his favor in a manner new, and for many years unprecedented. He had raised the nation from a state of deep distress to prosperity, and had changed the aspect of affairs so far, that one victory was following another in rapid succession. But now he calls their attention to a point of still greater importance, the divine promise — the fact that God had previously declared all this with his own mouth. However numerous and striking may be the practical demonstrations we receive of the favor of God, we can never recognize them, except in connection with his previously revealed promise. What follows, although spoken by David as of himself individually, may be considered as the language adopted by the people generally, of whom he was the political head. Accordingly, he enjoins them, provided they were not satisfied with the sensible proofs of divine favor, to reflect upon the oracle by which he had been made king in terms the most distinct and remarkable. [389] He says that God had spoken *in his holiness,* not *by his Holy Spirit,* as some, with an over-refinement of interpretation, have rendered it, nor *by his holy place, the sanctuary;* [390] for we read of no response having been given from it to the prophet Samuel. It is best to retain the term *holiness,* as he adverts to the fact of the truth of the oracle having been confirmed, and the constancy and efficacy of the promise having been placed beyond all doubt by numerous

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The Latin is here concise — "Nam in ipsa varietate David magnitudinem gratiae commendat." Accordingly, the French version amplifies the passage — "Car David en proposant la diversite et la changement d'un temps a l'autre magnifie," etc.

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"Cum praeclaris elogiis." — *Lat.* Amplified in the French version as follows: — "l'ornant de titres excellens, et lui faisant des promesses authentiques."

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This is the reading of Mudge, Street, Archbishop Secker, and Morrison. "Should not the word be read, *in his sanctuary*? whence the divine oracles were issued forth. David, having received a favorable answer, perhaps by Urim and Thummim, delivers himself in a strain of the fullest confidence of victory over his enemies." — *Dimock.*

proof, of a practical kind. As no room had been left for question upon the point, he employs this epithet to put honor upon the words which had been spoken by Samuel. He immediately adds, that this word of God was the chief ground upon which he placed his trust. It might be true that he had gained many victories, and that these had tended to encourage his heart; but he intimates, that no testimony which he had received of this kind gave him so much satisfaction as the word. This accords with the general experience of the Lord's people. Cheered, as they unquestionably are, by every expression of the divine goodness, still faith must ever be considered as holding the highest place — as being that which dissipates their worst sorrows, and quickens them even when dead to a happiness which is not of this world. Nor does David mean that he merely rejoiced himself. He includes, in general, all who feared the Lord in that Kingdom. And now he proceeds to give the sum of the oracle, which it is observable that he does in such a way as to show, in the very narration of it, how firmly he believed in its truth: for he speaks of it as something which admitted of no doubt whatsoever, and boasts that he would do what God had promised. *I will divide Shechem, he says, and mete out the valley of Succoth* [391] The parts which he names are those that were more late of coming into his possession, and which would appear to have been yet in the hands of Saul's son, when this psalm was written. A severe struggle being necessary for their acquisition, he asserts that, though late of being subdued, they would certainly be brought under his subjection in due time, as God had condescended to engage this by his word. So with *Gilead and Manasseh* [392] As *Ephraim* was the most populous of all the tribes, he appropriately terms it the *strength of his head,* that is, of his dominions. [393] To procure the greater credit to the oracle, by showing that it derived a sanction from antiquity, he adds, that *Judah* would be *his lawgiver,* or *chief;* which was equivalent to saying, that the posterity of Abraham could never prosper

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Shechem lay in Samaria, and, therefore, by it the whole of Samaria may be intended. The valley of Succoth, or booths, received its name from Jacob's making booths, and feeding his cattle there. (See Genesis 33:17, 18.) It lay beyond the Jordan, and it may be employed to designate the whole of that district of country. Though Samaria, and the country beyond the Jordan, were now in the hands of the enemy, yet David anticipates the time when he would gain complete and absolute possession of them, which he expresses by *dividing*, and *meting them out.* The allusion is to the dividing and measuring out of land; and it was a part of the power of a king to distribute his kingdom into cities and provinces, and to place judges and magistrates over them.

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Gilead and Manasseh were beyond the Jordan. The tribe of Gad, which was in Gilead, was distinguished for its warlike valor.

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This tribe was also distinguished for its valor. (Deuteronomy 33:17; Psalm 78:9; see also Genesis 48:19.)

unless, in agreeableness to the prediction of the patriarch Jacob, they were brought under the government of Judah, or of one who was sprung from that tribe. He evidently alludes to what is narrated by Moses, (Genesis 49:10,) "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come." The same word is there used, מחוקק, *Mechokek,* or legislator. It followed, that no government could stand which was not resident in the tribe of Judah, this being the decree and the good pleasure of God. The words are more appropriate in the mouth of the people than of David; and, as already remarked, he does not speak in his own name, but in that of the Church at large.

8 *Moab is my wash-pot* In proceeding to speak of foreigners, he observes a wide distinction between them and his own countrymen. The posterity of Abraham he would govern as brethren, and not as slaves; but it was allowable for him to exercise greater severities upon the profane and the uncircumcised, in order to their being brought under forcible subjection. In this he affords no precedent to conquerors who would inflict lawless oppression upon nations taken in war; for they want the divine warrant and commission which David had, invested as he was not only with the authority of a king, but with the character of an avenger of the Church, especially of its more implacable enemies, such as had thrown off every feeling of humanity, and persisted in harassing a people descended from the same stock with themselves. He remarks, in contempt of the Moabites, that they would be a vessel in which he should wash his feet, the washing of the feet being, as is well known, a customary practice in Eastern nations. [394] With the same view he speaks of casting his shoe over Edom. This is expressive of reproach, and intimates, that as it had once insulted over the chosen people of God, so now it should be reduced to servitude. [395] What follows concerning Palestina is ambiguous. By some the words are taken ironically, as if David would deride the vain boastings of the Philistines,

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This office of washing the feet was in the East commonly performed by slaves, and the meanest of the family, as appears from what Abigail said to David when he took her to wife, "Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord," 1 Samuel. 25:41; and from the fact of our Savior washing his disciples' feet, to give them an example of humility, John 13:5. The word νιπτὴρ, used in this last passage, signifies in general *a washing pot*, and is put for the word ποδονιπτρον, the term which the Greeks, in strict propriety of speech, applied to a vessel for washing the feet. As this office was servile, so the vessels employed for this purpose were a mean part of household stuff. Gataker and Le Clerc illustrate this text from an anecdote related by Herodotus, concerning Amasis, king of Egypt, who expressed the meanness of his own origin by comparing himself to a pot for washing the feet in, (Herod., Lib. 2, c. 172.) When, therefore, it is said, 'Moab is my washing-pot,' the complete and servile subjection of Moab to David is strongly marked. This is expressed not by comparing Moab to a slave who performs the lowest offices, as presenting to his master the basin for washing his feet, but by comparing him to the mean utensil itself. See 2 Samuel 8:2; 1 Chronicles 18:1, 2, 12, 13

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who were constantly assaulting him with all the petulance which they could command. [396] And the Hebrew verb רוע, *ruang,* though it means in general *to shout with triumph,* signifies also to make a tumult, as soldiers when they rush to battle. Others, without supposing any ironical allusion, take the words as they stand, and interpret them as meaning servile plaudits; that much and obstinately as they hated his dominion, they would be forced to hail and applaud him as conqueror. Thus in Psalm 18:44, it is said, "The sons of the strangers shall feign submission to me." [397]

Psalm 60:9-12

9. Who will bring me into the fortified city? who will lead me into Edom? **10**. Wilt not thou, O God! who hadst cast us off, and thou,

Edom or Idumea was inhabited by the Edomites, or posterity of Edom, that is, Esau, (the elder brother of Jacob,) who, on account of his profanity in selling his birthright for a mess of red pottage — called in Hebrew *Edom* — had this name imposed upon him to the perpetual disgrace of himself and his posterity, (Genesis 25:30; 36:8, 9; Hebrews 12:16.) The expression, "Over Edom will I cast my shoe," has been differently explained by interpreters. Some, as Gataker and Martin, read, "To Edom will I cast my shoe;" and suppose that the reference is to the custom which then prevailed, of the master employing his meanest servant to untie, take off, and cleanse his shoes, (Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16;) and that David intimates, that the Edomites would become his menial slaves, who would perform to him the lowest offices. "And the prophet," observes Martin, "uses the word *throw*, which marks an action done in a passionate and angry manner, in allusion to the circumstance that masters, when employing their servants with whom they are displeased to take off their shoes, hold out their feet to them with violence, as if they would thrust their feet against them." The LXX. and Vulgate read, "will extend my shoe." And Bishop Horne is of opinion, that the meaning is, "extending his shoe," that is to say, putting his feet upon them; and this, it is well known, was the manner in which Eastern conquerors were wont to treat their captives. But there is another ancient custom to which others suppose the passage refers. The ancients were wont to throw their shoes and sandals, when soiled with dirt, into some obscure corner before they sat down to meat, and many might possibly have some mean place in their houses into which they commonly threw them; and, therefore, the throwing of the shoe *over* or *on* Edom might mean, as Bucer expounds it, "Edom will be as the place into which I cast my shoe." But whatever may be the precise allusion, the meaning conveyed undoubtedly is, that David would make a complete conquest of Edom, that he would reduce it to the lowest subjection. And such was actually the case, as we learn from 2 Samuel 8:14. "Abu Walid would have נעל here to signify *a fetter*, — 'I will cast my fetter or chain on him:' and so Kimchi, in his roots; though in his comment here he interpret it in the notion of a shoe." — *Hammond*

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"The apostrophe to Philistia is the language of irony and of defiance. — 'Philistia, triumph thou over me!' as if he had said, 'Thou hast been used to insult and triumph over me; but circumstances are now reversed, and it is my turn to shout and triumph over thee.' See Psalm 108:9." *Williams*' *Cottage Bible*.

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"*Philistia*, *be thou glad of me*, rather, *Philistia*, *welcome we* (as thy conqueror) *with shouts*; a hard task for the vanquished to perform." — *Cresswell* Bishop Horne reads, "Over Philistia give a shout of triumph." Horsley reads, "Over Philistia is my shout of triumph." "I take," says he, "התריעעי for a noun substantive, with the pronoun of the first person suffixed."

> O God! who didst not go out with our armies? **11**. Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man. [398] **12**. Through God we shall do valiantly: for he it is that shall tread down our enemies.

9 *Who will bring me into the fortified city?* Anticipating an objection which might be alleged, he proceeds to state that he looked to God for the accomplishment of what remained to be done in the capture of the fortified places of his enemies, and the consolidation of his victories. It might be said, that as a considerable number continued to resist his claims, the confident terms which he had used were premature. God, however, had pledged his word that every nation which set itself in opposition to him would be brought under his power, and in the face of remaining difficulties and dangers he advances with certainty of success. By the *fortified city,* [399] some understand Rabbah, the capital of the Moabites. Others, with more probability, consider that the singular is used for the plural number, and that David alludes in general to the different cities under protection of which his enemies were determined to stand out. He declares, that the same God who had crowned his arms with victory in the open field would lead him on to the siege of these cities. With a view to prove his legitimate call to the government, he amplifies a second time the marks of the divine favor which it had received, by contrasting it with that which preceded. "The God," he says, "who had formerly cast us off, and abandoned us to unsuccessful warfare, will now lay open before me the gates of hostile cities, and enable me to break through all their fortifications."

11 *Give us help from trouble: for vain is the help of man.* Again he reverts to the exercise of prayer, or rather is led to it naturally by the very confidence of hope, which we have seen that he entertained. He expresses his conviction, that should God extend his help, it would be sufficient of itself, although no assistance should be received from any other quarter. Literally it reads, *Give us help from trouble, and vain is the help of man* "O God," as if he had said, "when pleased to put forth thy might, thou needest none to help thee; and when, therefore, once assured of an interest in thy

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"C'est, la salut que l'homme peut apporter." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, the help which man can bring."

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Literally, "the strong city," or "the city of strength." The Chaldee makes it Tyre, the capital of Phoenicia. Mudge and others think Petra, the capital of Idumea, is meant. Viewed as referring to that remarkable city, which was hewn out of the rock, and deemed impregnable, (Obadiah, 3d verse,) and with which Burckhardt, Laborde, Stephens, and other modern travelers, have made us so minutely acquainted; the language of the Psalmist is very appropriate, illustrating the strength of his faith, and magnifying the greatness of the divine aid. *Who will bring me into the fortified city*? it is impossible for me, by my own strength, or by mere human aid, to occupy this stronghold, unless God interpose in my behalf, assist, and prosper my attempts.

favor, there is no reason why we should desire the aid of man. All other resources of a worldly nature vanish before the brightness of thy power." The copulative in the verse, however, has been generally resolved into the causal particle, and I have not scrupled to follow the common practice. It were well if the sentiment expressed were effectually engraven upon our hearts. Why is it almost universally the case with men that they are either staggered in their resolution, or buoy themselves up with confidences, vain, because not derived from God, but just because they have no apprehension of that salvation which he can extend, which is of itself sufficient, and without which, any earthly succor is entirely ineffectual? In contrasting the help of God with that of man, he employs language not strictly correct, for, in reality, there is no such thing as a power in man to deliver at all. But, in our ignorance, we conceive as if there were various kinds of help in the world, and he uses the word in accommodation to our false ideas. God, in accomplishing our preservation, may use the agency of man, but he reserves it to himself, as his peculiar prerogative, to deliver, and will not suffer them to rob him of his glory. The deliverance which comes to us in this manner through human agency must properly be ascribed to God. All that David meant to assert is, that such confidences as are not derived from God are worthless and vain. And to confirm this position, he declares in the last verse of the psalm, that as, on the one hand, we can do nothing without him, so, on the other, we can do all things by his help. Two things are implied in the expression, *through God we shall do valiantly;* [400] first, that if God withdraw his favor, any supposed strength which is in man will soon fail; and, on the other hand, that those whose sufficiency is derived from God only are armed with courage to overcome every difficulty. To show that it is no mere half credit which he gives God, he adds, in words which ascribe the whole work to him, that *it is he who shall tread down our enemies* Thus, even in our controversy with creatures like ourselves, we are not at liberty to share the honor of success with God; and must it not be accounted greater sacrilege still when men set free will in opposition to divine grace, and speak of their concurring equally with God in the matter of procuring eternal salvation? Those who arrogate the least fraction of strength to themselves apart from God, only ruin themselves through their own pride.

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Street supposes that this psalm was composed before the battle of Helam, which is recorded in 1 Chronicles 19:16, where David beat the Syrians of Mesopotamia and the Syrians of Zobah; and, farther, that this psalm might have been sung by the armies of Israel when they were marching out to that battle, triumphantly commemorating their former victories, and avowing their hopes of gaining another by the help of the Almighty. On this verse he observes: "it was a constant practice among the bravest nations of the Greeks, for the troops to advance to battle chanting some kind of song." And, after quoting some lines which were sung by the Spartan soldiery, he adds, "The Grecian poet avails himself of the love of glory, and the ties of domestic affection, to animate his troops; but the Hebrew makes use of the more powerful stimulus of religious enthusiasm."

Psalm 61

PSALM 61

This psalm begins with prayer, or, at any rate, with the brief record of a prayer, which David had preferred to God in a season of deep distress. It is chiefly occupied, however, with the praises of God, expressing his thankfulness for a miraculous deliverance which he had experienced from some imminent danger, and for his establishment upon the throne.

To the chief musician upon Neginoth, A Psalm of David.

Psalm 61:1-4

> **1**. Hear my cry, O God! attend unto my prayer. **2**. Prom the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is vexed: thou shalt lead me to the rock which is too high for me. [401] **3**. For thou hast been my hope, a tower of strength from the face of the enemy. **4**. I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever; I will be safe under the covert of thy wings. Selah.

1. *Hear my cry, O God!* It is not exactly ascertained at what time this psalm was composed; but there seems to be some probability in the conjecture, that David had been for a considerable period in possession of the throne before he fell into the circumstances of distress which are here mentioned. I agree with those who refer it to the time of the conspiracy of Absalom; [402] for, had he not been an exile, he could not speak, as in

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He represents himself as like a man climbing to get up into a place of safety, but who wants strength to get to it.

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the second verse, of crying from the ends of the earth. By using the term *cry,* he would intimate the vehemency of his desire; and it is a word which expresses inward fervency of spirit, without reference to the fact whether he may have prayed aloud, or in a low and subdued tone. The repetition which is employed denotes his diligence and perseverance in prayer, and teaches us that we should not faint and become discouraged in this exercise, because God may not have immediately and openly testified his acceptance of our petitions. There can be no question that, by *the ends of the earth,* he refers to the place of his banishment, as being cut off from access to the temple and the royal city. By some, indeed, the words have been understood figuratively, as meaning, that he prayed from the lowest deeps of distress; but I can see no foundation for this. In a subsequent part of the psalm, he calls himself King, a title never assumed by him before the death of Saul, and from this circumstance we may at once infer, that the time referred to was that when he fled in trepidation from the fury of his son Absalom, and hid himself in the wilderness of Mahanaim, and places of a similarly solitary description. Mount Zion was the place where the ark of the covenant had been deposited, and it was the seat of royalty; and David, when banished from this, which was the principal and most eligible locality, speaks as if he had been driven to the uttermost parts of the earth. Living, though he did, under the shadows of a legal dispensation, he did not cease to pray, because removed to a distance from the temple; and how inexcusable must our conduct be, privileged as we are of God, and called to draw near by the way which has been opened through the blood of Christ, if we break not through every hinderance which Satan presents to our communications with heaven? Let those who may have been deprived of the hearing of the word, and the dispensation of the sacraments, so as, in a manner, to be banished out of the Church, learn from the example of David to persevere in crying to God, even under these solitary circumstances. He adverts, in what follows, to his grief and anguish. He adds the fact of his being shut up from every method of escape, that the grace of God might be made more apparent in his deliverance. The Hebrew word עטף, *ataph,* which I have translated *vexed,* means occasionally *to cover,* or *involve,* which has led some to render the clause, *while my heart is turned about;* that is, tossed hither and thither, or agitated. This is a harsh translation. Others read with more propriety, *while my heart is involved in cares and troubles, or overwhelmed.* [403] I have adopted a simpler rendering, although I would not be understood as denying the metaphor, to which they suppose that

It is generally agreed that this psalm refers to the history recorded in 2 Samuel 17:22, 24.

403 This last translation is omitted in the French version, perhaps through inadvertency.

there is an allusion. The clause, there can be no question, is inserted to intimate that he was not prevented by trouble from having recourse to God. Notice was taken already of the outward trial to which he was subjected, in distance from the sanctuary, and of his rising above this, so as to direct his cry to God; and in the words before us, we have his confession that he was far from being stoically insensible, being conscious of a severe inward struggle with grief and perplexity of mind. It is the duty, then, of believers, when oppressed with heaviness and spiritual distress, to make only the more strenuous efforts for breaking through these obstacles in their approaches to God. His prayer is, that God would bring him to that safety from which he seems to be excluded. By a *rock* or *citadel,* he means, in general, secure protection, from which he complains of being shut out, as it was impossible to reach it unless he were raised by the hand of God. In looking round him, it seemed as if every place of shelter and safety were lifted up above his head and rendered inaccessible. He was cut off from all help, and yet, hopeless as deliverance appeared, he had no doubt of his safety, should God only extend his hand for interposition. This is the plain meaning of the passage, when divested of figure, that God was able to rescue him from danger, though all other help should be withdrawn, and the whole world should stand between him and deliverance; a truth which we would do well to consider seriously. In looking for deliverance from God, we must beware of yielding to the suggestions of sense; we should remember that he does not always work by apparent means, but delivers us when he chooses by methods inscrutable to reason. If we attempt to prescribe any one particular line of procedure, we do no less than wilfully limit his almighty power.

3. *For thou hast been my hope* Here we may suppose, either that he calls to his remembrance such benefits as he had formerly received, or that he congratulates himself upon deliverance which he had presently experienced. There is much probability in either supposition. Nothing animates our hopes more than the recollection of the past goodness of God, and, in the midst of his prayers, we frequently find David indulging in reflections of this kind. On the other hand, the remainder of the psalm is occupied with returning praise to God for his present goodness; and there is no reason why we should not suppose, that these words before us form the commencement of the thanksgiving. In that case, the Hebrew particle, which we have rendered *for* or *because,* may be understood rather in an affirmative sense, *surely* or *certainly.*

In the verse which follows, he expresses the confidence which he had that he would dwell from this time forth in the sanctuary of the Lord. I cannot altogether agree with those who think that David was still in his state of exile from his native country when this was written, and is merely to be understood as promising to himself the certainty of his return. He would seem rather to be rejoicing in restoration already obtained, than assuaging his grief by anticipation of it in the future; and this will be still more

apparent, when we come to consider the immediate context. It is noticeable, that now when he was returned from his banishment, and established within his own palace, his heart was set more upon the worship of God than all the wealth, splendor, and pleasures of royalty. We have his testimony in other parts of his writings, that in the worst calamities which he endured, he experienced nothing which could be compared to the bitterness of being shut out from the ordinances of religion; and now he accounts it a higher pleasure to lie as a suppliant before the altar, than to sit upon the throne of a king. By the words which immediately follow, he shows that he did not, like too many uninformed persons, attach a superstitious importance to the mere externals of religion, adding, that he found his safety *under the shadow of God's wings.* Ignorant persons might conceive of God as necessarily confined to the outward tabernacle, but David only improved this symbol of the Divine presence as a means of elevating the spiritual exercises of his faith. I would not deny that there may be an allusion to the cherubim when he speaks of the shadow of God's wings. Only we must remember, that David did not rest in carnal ordinances, the elements of the world, [404] but rose by them and above them to the spiritual worship of God.

Psalm 61:5-8

5. For thou, O God! hast heard my vows: thou hast given inheritance to those [405] fearing thy name. **6**. Thou shalt add days upon days to the king, and his years as generation upon generation. **7.** He shalt abide before the face of God for ever: prepare mercy and truth; let them keep him. **8.** So will I sing unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows.

5. *For thou, O God! hast heard my vows.* He here shows the grounds upon which he had spoken of his abiding under the wings of God. The sudden joy which he experienced arose from the circumstance of God's having heard his prayers, and made light to spring out of darkness. By his *vows* we must understand his prayers, according to a common figure of speech by which the part is taken for the whole, having made vows when he prayed. In general, he would acknowledge himself indebted for his restoration entirely to an interposition of Divine power, and not to any dexterity which he had shown in gaining time for the collection of his forces, [406] nor to any assistance which he had derived, either from the favor of the priests or the exertions of

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"Non fuisse retentum in mundi elementis." — *Lat.* "David ne s'est point arret, aux elemens du monde, (comme Sainct Paul appelle les ceremonies prises charnellement et quant a l'exterieur,") etc. — *Fr.*

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"Ou, l'heritage de ceux." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, the inheritance of those."

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his soldiers. Had the letter ל, *lamed,* been prefixed to the Hebrew word יראי, *yirey,* which is rendered *fearing,* there would have been no reason left to doubt that the words which follow were of the nature of a general assertion, to the effect, that God has given the inheritance to those who fear him. As it is, they may be construed to mean, that God had given David the inheritance of those who fear him. Still I prefer attaching the more general sense to the words, and understand them as intimating that God never disappoints his servants, but crowns with everlasting happiness the struggles and the distresses which may have exercised their faith. They convey an implied censure of that unwarrantable confidence which is indulged in by the wicked, when favored, through the divine forbearance, with any interval of prosperity. The success which flatters them is merely imaginary, and speedily vanishes. But *inheritance* — the word here employed by David — suggests that the people of God enjoy a species of prosperity more solid and enduring; their momentary and short-lived troubles having only the effect of promoting their eternal welfare. He praises God that those who fear his name are not left to the poor privilege of rejoicing for a few days, but secured in a permanent heritage of happiness. The truth is one which cannot be questioned. The wicked, having no possession by faith of the divine benefits which they may happen to share, live on from day to day, as it were, upon plunder. It is only such as fear the Lord who have the true and legitimate enjoyment of their blessings.

6. *Thou shalt add days upon days to the king etc.* [407] David cannot be considered as using these words of gratulation with an exclusive reference to himself. It is true that he lived to an extreme old age, and died full of days, leaving the kingdom in a settled condition, and in the hands of his son, who succeeded him; but he did not exceed the period of one man's life, and the greater part of it was spent in continued dangers and anxieties. There can be no doubt, therefore, that the series of years, and even ages, of which he speaks, extends prospectively to the coming of Christ, it being the very condition of the kingdom, as I have often remarked, that God maintained them as one people under one head, or, when scattered, united them again. The same succession still subsists in reference to ourselves. Christ must be viewed as living in his members to the end of the world. To this Isaiah alludes, when he says, "Who shall declare his generation or age?" — words in which he predicts that the Church would survive through all ages, notwithstanding the incessant danger of destruction to which it is

"Quamvis prudenter colligendis viribus tempus sumpsisset," etc. — *Lat.* "Combien qu'il eust use de prudence a donner ordre a son affaire, et prendre temps pour amasser forces," etc. — *Fr.*

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In the Chaldee it is: "Thou shalt add days to the days of the King Messiah; his years shall be as the generation of this world, and of the world to come."

exposed through the attacks of its enemies, and the many storms assailing it. So here David foretells the uninterrupted succession of the kingdom down to the time of Christ.

7. *He shall abide before the face of God for ever.* This is only a simpler way of expressing what he had said before, *I will abide in thy tabernacle for ever.* He refers to the security and peace which he would enjoy under the protection of God, who would effectually preserve his life. By *the face of God,* must be meant the fatherly care and providence which he extends to his people. So numerous are the dangers which surround us, that we could not stand a single moment, if his eye did not watch over our preservation. But the true security for a happy life lies in being persuaded that we are under divine government. There follows a prayer that God would *appoint mercy and truth* for preserving the king. And this admits of two meanings. As clemency and truth are the best safeguards of a kingdom, it would not be altogether unreasonable to suppose that David prays here to be endued with these dispositions, as a means of establishing his throne. But the other meaning is perhaps preferable, that God would gird himself with clemency and truth in order to the preservation of the king. The Hebrew term מנה, *manah,* signifies not only *to prepare,* but *to set over,* or *appoint;* and he speaks as if the true defense of the kingdom was only to be found in the mercy and faithfulness of God. He uses the expression *prepare,* or *command,* to intimate how easily God can provide the means necessary for preserving his people. In the concluding words, he expresses his resolution to persevere in the constant celebration of the praises of God, with a view to fulfilling the vows which he had contracted — and this again may lead us to remark the agreement which ought ever to subsist between the two parts of invocation: for David, while he applied to God for help, under the pressure of calamity, showed himself uniformly grateful when he had experienced deliverance.

Psalm 62

PSALM 62

The greater part of this psalm is occupied with meditations, in which David encourages himself and others to hope in God, and fortifies his mind against the assaults of temptation. And as we are ever prone to be drawn away from God by the influence which worldly objects exert over our senses, perishing and evanescent as these are, occasion is taken to show the folly of this, and bring us to a single and entire dependence upon God.

To the chief musician upon Jeduthun, A Psalm of David.

The fact being ascertained that there was one of the chief singers who bore the name of Jeduthun, some have thought that this psalm was committed into his hands to be sung, (1 Chronicles 9:16; 16:38, 41; and 25:1) In the title to Psalm 39, it is sufficiently probable that the allusion is to some musician of that family. But this would not seem to be the case here; for the psalm is not said to be given *to,* but *upon* Jeduthun. This has led to the opinion that it formed the beginning of some song commonly known at that time. Still the Hebrew particle על, *al,* which we have rendered *upon,* means frequently *for, to,* or *before;* and it will consist with the words to suppose, that this psalm was put into the hands of the posterity of Jeduthun. [408]

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Jeduthun was first chosen to be one of the chief musicians in conducting the praises of the Jewish sanctuary when the ark was brought from Obed-edom to mount Zion. His sons were also appointed to preside over different departments of the vocal and instrumental worship in the tabernacle. He had six sons who were thus employed. Jeduthun and his family appear to have been eminent for their piety, and to have been endued with the spirit of prophecy.

Psalm 62:1-2

> **1**. Nevertheless, my soul is silent towards God: from him is my salvation. **2**. Nevertheless, he himself is my rock and my salvation, my high tower: I shall not be greatly moved.

1. *Nevertheless, my soul is silent towards God.* Should the translation I have followed be adopted, the psalm is to be considered as beginning abruptly, in the usual style of compositions of an impassioned kind. [409] Of this we have an instance in Psalm 73, where the prophet, who had been agitated with doubts, as we shall see more particularly afterwards, suddenly brings his mind to a fixed decision, and, in the way of cutting off all further subject of debate, exclaims, "Yet God is good to Israel." And so it is, I conceive, in the psalm before us. We know that the Lord's people cannot always reach such a measure of composure as to be wholly exempt from distraction. They would wish to receive the word of the Lord with submission, and to be dumb under his correcting hand; but inordinate affections will take possession of their minds, and break in upon that peace which they might otherwise attain to in the exercise of faith and resignation. Hence the impatience we find in many; an impatience which they give vent to in the presence of God, and which is an occasion to themselves of much trouble and disquietude. The Hebrew particle אך, *ach,* is often used in an exclusive sense, and has been rendered by some, *only;* it is also employed in an affirmative sense, and has been rendered *truly,* or *certainly.* But in order to arrive at its full meaning, we must suppose that David felt an inward struggle and opposition, which he found it necessary to check. Satan had raised a tumult in his affections, and wrought a degree of impatience in his mind, which he now curbs; and he expresses his resolution *to be silent.* [410] The word implies a meek and submissive endurance of the cross. It expresses the opposite of that heat of spirit which would put us

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"Sicuti patheticae sententiae ut plurimum defectivae sunt." — *Lat.* "Comme nous scavons que les propos dits de quelque affection vehemente, le plus souvent sont imparfaits." — *Fr.*

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The import of the Hebrew word is "patient silence." The Septuagint reads, "Ουχι τῶ Θεῶ ὑποταγήσεται ἡ ψυχή μου? "Shall not my soul be subject to God?" And doubtless the Psalmist intended to say that his soul was quiet, submissive, and subject; the rebellious affections being tamed and subdued. With respect to the translation of our English Bible, "Truly my soul waiteth upon God," Dr Adam Clarke remarks, "I do not think that the original will warrant this translation." He reads, "Surely to God only is my soul dumb;" which he thus explains: "I am subject to God Almighty. He has a right to lay on me what He pleases; and what He lays on me is much less than I deserve; therefore am *I dumb* before God. The Vulgate, and, almost all the versions, have understood it in this sense: 'Nonne Deo subjecta erit anima mea? Shall not my soul be subject to God?'" With this agree the version and interpretation of Calvin.

into a posture of resistance to God. The silence intended is, in short, that composed submission of the believer, in the exercise of which he acquiesces in the promises of God, gives place to his word, bows to his sovereignty, and suppresses every inward murmur of dissatisfaction. The Hebrew word דומיה, *dumiyah,* which I have rendered *is silent,* some consider to be the noun; and it is of little consequence which translation we adopt.

The particle אך, *ach,* in the second verse, I would render in the same way as in the first. The believer triumphs in one encounter with temptation only to enter upon another; and here David, who appeared to have emerged from his distress, shows that he had still to struggle with remaining difficulties. We meet with the same particle no fewer than six times throughout the psalm. This, too, may explain the many titles which he applies to God, each of which is to be considered as a foil by which he would ward off the attacks of the tempter. The expression in the close of the verse, *I shall not be greatly moved,* implies his persuasion that he might be overtaken with afflictions, (for he was well aware that he could claim no exemption from the common lot of humanity,) but his conviction, at the same time, that these would not overwhelm him, through the good help of God. We shall find him saying afterwards, in so many words, *I shall not fall;* perhaps because he felt, as he advanced in prayer, that he had greater boldness in despising affliction. Or the expressions may be taken as synonymous in the two places. The truth itself is unquestionable. The believer may be overthrown for a time; but as he is no sooner cast down than he is raised up again by God, he cannot properly be said to fall. He is supported by the Spirit of God, and is not therefore really prostrated and overcome.

Psalm 62:3-6

> **3**. How long will ye continue mischief against a man? [411] ye shall be slain all of you: as a bowing wall shall ye be, and a fence which has been struck. **4**. Yet they consult to cast him down from his elevations: they delight in lies: they bless with their mouth, and curse inwardly. Selah. **5**. Nevertheless, my soul, be thou silent before God: for my expectation is from him. **6**. Nevertheless, he is my rock and my salvation: my high tower; I shall not fall.

3. *How long will ye continue mischief?* The Hebrew word תהותתו, *tehotethu,* [412] which I have translated *continue,* or *lengthen out, mischief,* is rendered by some, *to meditate,* or *imagine mischief,* while others suppose an allusion to the putting forth of the tongue in sign of mockery. It has been rendered also, *to rush upon,* or *assault.* The sense of the passage seems to

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"Ou, courrez-vous sus l'homme?" — *Fr. marg.* "Or, will ye make assaults upon a man?"

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be, How long will ye meditate evil against a man, and persist in mischievous devices for accomplishing his ruin? He has in view the obstinate malice of his enemies, moving every stone for his destruction, and forming new plans daily for effecting it. The instruction to be learned from his experience is, that we should exercise patience, even when our enemies show unwearied cruelty in their attempts to destroy us, and are instigated by the devil to incessant artifices for our persecution. We may just advert to the meaning of the figure which is subjoined. Some think that the wicked are compared to a *bowing wall,* because it threatens every moment to fall to the ground, and they, upon every sin which they commit, tend more and more downwards, till they are precipitated into destruction. But it would seem as if the allusion were somewhat different. A wall, when ill built, bulges out in the center, presenting the appearance of nearly twice its actual breadth; but, as it is hollow within, it soon falls to ruins. The wicked, in like manner, are dilated with pride, and assume, in their consultations, a most formidable appearance; but David predicts that they would be brought to unexpected and utter destruction, like a wall badly constructed, and hollow in the interior, which falls with a sudden crash, and is broken by its own weight into a thousand pieces. [413] The word גדר, *gader,* which I have rendered, *a fence,* means, properly, an enclosure built of slight and insufficient materials; [414] and an epithet is added still more to express the violence and impetuosity of their fall. The Psalmist, then, would teach us that, high as our enemies may appear to stand, and proud and swelling as their denunciations may be, they shall be suddenly and signally overthrown, *like a smitten wall.*

4. *Yet they consult to cast him down from his elevation* I still would interpret the particle אך, *ach,* in an adversative sense. David, on the

Hammond observes, that this verb "is but once used in the Scriptures, and so will not be easily interpreted but either by the notion which we find put upon it by the ancient interpreters, or else by the Arabic use of it." The Chaldee renders it, *raise tumults*; the Syriac, *stir up*, *instigate*, *incite*, or *provoke*; the Septuagint and Vulgate, *assail*, or *rush upon*; and the Arabic, *use violence or injustice* Gesenius gives the sense of the Septuagint. Kimchi and Aben Ezra read, *pravitatis cogitabitis* "Abu Walid compares תהותתו with the Arabic תהתהתו, with *t*, not with *th*, which signifies *to multiply words*; and so he would have it, according to the use of it in that tongue, to signify speaking much against, backbiting, defaming, spreading evil reports of, lashing out with your tongues against, for hurt. What he thus observes of תהותתו, with *t*, not *th*, may have place also with the word, as we have it; for the root with ת, *th* also in Arabic signifies *mentiri*, *to lie*, and *confusion*, *injustice*, *violence*; which as well agree to his sense as that of the root with *t*." When David says, *against a man*, and uses also the third person in the fourth verse, it is of himself that he speaks. "*Against a man*; *i e.*, against me, a man like yourselves, whom common hmnanity obliges you to pity; a single man, who is no fit match for you." — *Poole's Annotations*

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Isaiah has also made use of this image to express sudden and utter destruction, (chapter 30:13.)

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one hand, encouraged himself by determining to rest steadfastly upon the promise of divine favor; but, upon the other, he had before him the machinations of his enemies, characterised by cruelty, audacity, pride, and deceit. By all their attempts, as if he had said, they do nothing but precipitate their own fall; still such are the frenzy and the fury by which they are actuated, that they persist in their intrigues against me. He insinuates that their attacks were directed, not so much against himself as against God — agreeably to the picture which is given us of impiety by the poets in their fable of the Giants. [415] Nothing will satisfy the enemies of God but setting themselves above the heavens. David is to be understood as primarily speaking here of himself in the third person, but of himself as elevated expressly by the divine hand. Accordingly, though we might consider that God is the party directly intended, the scope of the words rather intimates that they aimed at the overthrow of one whom God had exalted, and desired to establish in honor. In thus attempting to thwart his purpose, they were really fighting against God. The clause which follows, *they delight in lies,* has reference to the same thing. Refusing to acknowledge his divine vocation, they persevered in following such corrupt designs, as could only recoil upon them to their own confusion, as the Psalmist exclaims,

"O ye sons of men! how long is my glory made matter of your reproach? how long will ye love vanity, and seek after leasing? Selah." — (Psalm 4:2)

Or the expression may denote the hidden and deceitful measures which they adopted in their persecution of this saint of God; for it is immediately added, that *they blessed with their mouth, but cursed inwardly* Whatever may be the meaning, it is evident that David, contemplating all the treachery, intrigues, and wickedness of his enemies, supports himself by the single consideration, that his help was in God, and that every opposing instrumentality was therefore vain.

In the East it is common for the inhabitants to enclose their vineyards and gardens with hedges, consisting of various kinds of shrubs, and particularly such as are armed with spines. They have also mounds of earth-walls about their gardens. Rawwolff describes the gardens about Jerusalem as surrounded by mud-walls, not above four feet high, easily climbed over, and washed down by rain in a very little time. Stone-walls are also frequently used. Thus Egmont or Heyman, describing the country about Saphet, a celebrated city of Galilee, tells us, "The country round it is finely improved, the declivity being covered with vines, supported by low walls. — *Harmer's Observations*, volume 2, pp. 216-219. Doubdan describes some of these in the Holy Land as built of loose stones, without any cement to join them. The original word probably means some such "fence" as this. Indeed, it always appears to denote a wall of stones: sometimes in express contradistinction to the hedge, or thorny fence. — See *Parkhurst's Lexicon*, on גדר

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"Les Poetes profanes ont dit que les Geans delibererent de prendre les plus hautes montagnes et les mettans l'une sur l'autre, monter jusques au ciel, pour arracher Jupiter de son siege." — *Fr. marg.* "It was said by the profane poets that the Giants formed a design of taking the highest mountains which they could find piling them one above another, scaling the heavens, and taking Jupiter by storm."

5. *Nevertheless, my soul, be thou silent before God.* Here there may appear to be a slight inconsistency, inasmuch as he encourages himself to do what he had already declared himself to have done. His soul was silent before God; and where the necessity of this new silence, as if still under agitation of spirit? Here it is to be remembered, that our minds can never be expected to reach such perfect composure as shall preclude every inward feeling of disquietude, but are, at the best, as the sea before a light breeze, fluctuating sensibly, though not swollen into billows. It is not without a struggle that the saint can compose his mind; and we can very well understand how David should enjoin more perfect submission upon a spirit which was already submissive, urging upon himself farther advancement in this grace of silence, till he had mortified every carnal inclination, and thoroughly subjected himself to the will of God. How often, besides, will Satan renew the disquietudes which seemed to be effectually expelled? Creatures of such instability, and liable to be borne away by a thousand different influences, we need to be confirmed again and again. I repeat, that there is no reason to be surprised though David here calls upon himself a second time to preserve that silence before God, which he might already appear to have attained; for, amidst the disturbing motions of the flesh, perfect composure is what we never reach. The danger is, that when new winds of troubles spring up, we lose that inward tranquillity which we enjoyed, and hence the necessity of improving the example of David, by establishing ourselves in it more and more. He adds the ground of his silence. He had no immediate response from God, but he confidently hoped in him. *My expectation,* he says, *is from God.* Never, as if he had said, will he frustrate the patient waiting of his saints; doubtless my silence shall meet with its reward; I shall restrain myself, and not make that false haste which will only retard my deliverance.

Psalm 62:7-10

> **7.** In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my hope, is in God. **8.** Hope in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is our hope. Selah. **9.** Nevertheless, the sons of Adam are vanity, and the children of men [416] a lie [417] when they ascend in the scales, they are found together lighter than vanity.

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בני ארם, *beney Adam*, *the sons of Adam* בני אים, *beney ish*, *the sons of substance*, or children of substantial men, as Dr Adam Clarke renders the phrase. "Adam," says he, "was the name of the first man when formed out of the *earth*: *Ish* was his name when united to his wife, and they became one flesh. *Before*, he was the incomplete man; *after*, he was the *complete* man." The phrases are rendered in our English version, *men of low degree*, and *men of high degree* — See note, p. 236, of this volume; and volume1, note 1, p. 100.

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[418] **10.** Trust not in oppression and robbery, and be not vain: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.

7. *In God is my salvation* One expression is here heaped upon another and this apparently because he wished to rein that infirmity of disposition which makes us so prone to slide into wrong exercise. We may throw out a passing and occasional acknowledgement, that our only help is to be found in God, and yet shortly display our distrust in him by busying ourselves in all directions to supplement what we consider defective in his aid. The various terms which he employs to express the sufficiency of God as a deliverer, may thus be considered as so many arguments to constancy, or so many checks which he would apply to the waywardness of the carnal heart, ever disposed to depend for support upon others rather than God. Such is the manner in which he animates his own spirit; and next, we find him addressing himself to others, calling upon them to enter upon the same conflict, and reap the same victory and triumph. By the *people,* there seems little doubt that he means the Jews. The Gentiles being yet unvisited by the true religion and divine revelation, it was only in Judea that God could be the object of trust and religious invocation; and it would appear, that by distinguishing the chosen people of the Lord from the surrounding heathen, he insinuates how disgraceful it would be in them not to devote themselves entirely to God, being, as they were, the children of Abraham, favored with the discovery of his grace, and specially taken under his divine protection. The expression, *at all times,* means both in prosperity and adversity, intimating the blameworthiness of those who waver and succumb under every variation in their outward circumstances. God tries his children with afflictions, but here they are taught by David to abide them with constancy and courage. The hypocrites, who are loud in their praises of God so long as prosperity shines upon their head, while their heart fails them upon the first approach of trial, dishonor his name by placing a most injurious limitation to his power. We are bound to put honor upon his name by remembering, in our

"Because they promise much, and rouse men's expectations upon consideration of their great power and dignity, but are not able to perform, and generally deceive those who trust in them. In which respect lying is ascribed to *a fountain*, Jeremiah 15:18; to *wine*, Hosea 9:2; to *the olive*, Habakkuk 3:17; when they do not give what they promise." — *Poole's Annotations.*

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הכל"*hebel* The radical meaning of the term is, *a breath* The same word occurs in the first clause, intimating, that men of low degree are as unsubstantial as a breath; and here men of low degree, and men of high degree, when both are united, are described as lighter than a breath. See p. 78 of this volume, note 1. "Taking the infinitive with ל, *lamed*, to stand for the future, as it often does, the latter part may be literally translated, 'They will ascend together in the balance more than vanity.'" — *Arch Secker* This strongly expresses how unavailing it is to trust in man. If men of low degree and men of high degree are put both together in one scale, and vanity in the other, the scale of vanity will preponderate.

greatest extremities, that to Him belong the issues of death. And as we are all too apt at such times to shut up our affliction in our own breast — a circumstance which can only aggravate the trouble and imbitter the mind against God, David could not have suggested a better expedient than that of disburdening our cares to him, and thus, as it were, *pouring out our hearts before him.* It is always found, that when the heart is pressed under a load of distress, there is no freedom in prayer. [419] Under trying circumstances, we must comfort ourselves by reflecting that God will extend relief, provided we just freely roll them over upon his consideration. What the Psalmist advises is all the more necessary, considering the mischievous tendency which we have naturally to keep our troubles pent up in our breasts till they drive us to despair. Usually, indeed, men show much anxiety and ingenuity in seeking to escape from the troubles which may happen to press upon them; but so long as they shun coming into the presence of God, they only involve themselves in a labyrinth of difficulties. Not to insist farther upon the words, David is here to be considered as exposing that diseased but deeply-rooted principle in our nature, which leads us to hide our griefs, and ruminate upon them, instead of relieving ourselves at once by pouring out our prayers and complaints before God. The consequence is, that we are distracted more and more with our distresses, and merge into a state of hopeless despondency. In the close of the verse, he says, in reference to the people generally, what he had said of himself individually, that their safety was to be found only under the divine protection.

9. *Nevertheless, the sons of Adam are vanity.* If we take the particle אַךְ, *ach,* affirmatively, as meaning *surely* or *certainly,* then this verse contains a confirmation of the truth expressed in the preceding verse; and David argues by contrast, [420] that as men are lighter than vanity, we are shut up to the necessity of placing all our expectation upon God. It would agree well, however, with the contrast to suppose, that, under an impression of the little effect which the truth he had announced was calculated to have upon the people, (ever disposed to build upon fallacious hopes,) he exclaims, with a degree of holy fervor, *Nevertheless, etc.* According to this view, he is here administering a reproof to the blind infidelity so prevalent amongst men, and which leads them to deceive themselves with lying vanities rather than trust in the infallible promises of Jehovah. Having had occasion to discover such a large amount of vanity in the chosen seed of Abraham, he does not scruple to speak of the whole human family in general as being

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"Cependant que nostre coeur est enserre et comme estouppd de douleur, jamais il n'en sort de prieres naifves et franchement faites." — *Fr.*

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"A repugnantibus ostendet David." — *Lat.* Explained in the French version thus — "Montrera par un argument prins des choses repugnantes."

abandoned to lying delusions. The adverb יחד, *yachad, together,* intimates that all, without exception, are ready to find an occasion of turning aside. Such is the sweeping condemnation passed, not upon a few individuals, but upon human nature, declaring men to be lighter than vanity; and may we not ask what in this case becomes of boasted reason, wisdom, and free-will? It is of no avail to object, that believers are delivered from the deceit which is here condemned. If they owe their exemption from lying and vanity to the regeneration of the Spirit, this is to grant that they were subject to these in their natural state. The first man was created by God upright, but drew us by his fall into such a depth of corruption, that any light which was originally bestowed has been totally obscured. Is it alleged that there still remain in man such gifts of God as are not to be despised, and as distinguish him from all the other creatures, this is easily answered, by remembering, that however great these may be, he is tainted by sin, and therefore nothing to be accounted of. It is only when allied with the knowledge of God that any of the endowments conferred upon us from above can be said to have a real excellency; — apart from this, they are vitiated by that contagion of sin which has not left a vestige in man of his original integrity. With too much justice, then, might David say that all men are vanity and nothingness.

10 *Trust not in oppression and robbery* We are here taught that there can be no real trusting in God until we put away all those vain confidences which prove so many means of turning us away from him. The Psalmist bids us remove whatsoever would have this tendency, and purge ourselves of every vicious desire that would usurp the place of God in our hearts. One or two kinds of sin only are mentioned, but these are to be understood as representing a part for the whole, all those vain and rival confidences of which we must be divested before we can cleave to God with true purpose and sincerity of heart. By *oppression and robbery* may be understood the act itself of abstracting by violence, and the thing which has been abstracted. It is obviously the design of the passage to warn us against the presumption and hardihood of sin, which is so apt to blind the hearts of men, and deceive them into the belief that their evil courses are sanctioned by the impunity which is extended to them. Interpreters have differed in their construction of the words of this verse. Some join to each of the nouns its own verb, reading, *Trust not in oppression, and be not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.* [421] Others connect the words *oppression and robbery* with the first verb, and make the second to stand apart by itself in an indefinite sense. It is of very little consequence which of the constructions we adopt, since both express the main sentiment; and it is evident that the Psalmist, in condemning the infatuated confidence of those who boast in robbery, appropriately terms it a mere illusion of the

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The words are thus connected in our English version.

mind, with which they deceive or amuse themselves. Having denounced, in the first place, those desires which are plainly evil and positively wicked, he proceeds immediately afterwards to guard against an inordinate attachment even to such riches as may have been honestly acquired. To *set the heart* upon riches, means more than simply to covet the possession of them. It implies being carried away by them into a false confidence, or, to use an expression of Paul, "Being high-minded." The admonition here given is one which daily observation teaches us to be necessary. It is uniformly seen that prosperity and abundance engender a haughty spirit, leading men at once to be presumptuous in their carriage before God, and reckless in inflicting injury upon their fellow-creatures. But, indeed, the worst effect to be feared from a blind and ungoverned spirit of this kind is, that, in the intoxication of outward greatness, we be left to forget how frail we are, and proudly and contumeliously to exalt ourselves against God.

Psalm 62:11-12

> **11**. God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God. **12**. Also unto thee, O Lord: belongeth mercy; thou wilt certainly render to every man according to his work.

11 *God hath spoken once.* The Psalmist considered that the only effectual method of abstracting the minds of men from the vain delusions in which they are disposed to trust, was bringing them to acquiesce implicitly and firmly in the judgment of God. Usually they are swayed in different directions, or inclined at least to waver, just as they observe things changing in the world; [422] but he brings under their notice a surer principle for the regulation of their conduct, when he recommends a deferential regard to God's Word. God himself "dwells in the light which is inaccessible," (1 Timothy 6:16;) and as none can come to him except by faith, the Psalmist calls our attention to his word, in which he testifies the truth of his divine and righteous government of the world. It is of great consequence that we be established in the belief of God's Word, and we are here directed to the unerring certainty which belongs to it. The passage admits of two interpretations; but the scope of it is plainly this, that God acts consistently with himself, and can never swerve from what he has said. Many understand David to say that God had spoken once and a second time; and that by this explicit and repeated assertion of his power and mercy, he had confirmed the truth beyond all possibility of contradiction. There is a passage much to the same effect in the thirty-third chapter of the book of Job, and fourteenth verse, where the same words are used, only the copulative is interposed. If

422 "Ad varias mundi inclinationes." — *Lat.* "Selon les divers changements qu'on voit au monde." — *Fr.*

any should prefer it, however, I have no objections to the other meaning — *God has spoken once; twice have I heard this.* It agrees with the context, and suggests a practical lesson of great importance; for when God has once issued his word he never retracts: on the other hand, it is our duty to ponder on what he has said, long and deliberately; and the meaning of David will then be, that he considered the Word of God in the light of a decree, steadfast and irreversible, but that, as regarded his exercise in reference to it, he meditated upon it again and again, lest the lapse of time might obliterate it from his memory. But the simpler and preferable reading would seem to be, that God had spoken once and again. There is no force in the ingenious conjecture, that allusion may be made to God's having spoken once in the Law, and a second time in the Prophets. Nothing more is meant than that the truth referred to had been amply confirmed, it being usual to reckon anything certain and fixed which has been repeatedly announced. Here, however, it must be remembered, that every word which may have issued forth from God is to be received with implicit authority, and no countenance given to the abominable practice of refusing to receive a doctrine, unless it can be supported by two or three texts of Scripture. This has been defended by an unprincipled heretic among ourselves, who has attempted to subvert the doctrine of a free election, and of a secret providence. It was not the intention of David to say that God was tied down to the necessity of repeating what he might choose to announce, but simply to assert the certainty of a truth which had been declared in clear and unambiguous terms. In the context which follows, he exemplifies himself that deferential reverence and regard for the word of God which all should, but which so few actually do, extend to it.

We might just put together, in a connected form, the particular doctrines which he has singled out for special notice. It is essentially necessary, if we would fortify our minds against temptation, to have suitably exalted views of the power and mercy of God, since nothing will more effectually preserve us in a straight and undeviating course, than a firm persuasion that all events are in the hand of God, and that he is as merciful as he is mighty. Accordingly, David follows up what he had said on the subject of the deference to be yielded to the word, by declaring that he had been instructed by it in the power and goodness of God. Some understand him to say, that God is possessed of power to deliver his people, and of clemency imbuing him to exercise it. But he would rather appear to mean, that God is strong to put a restraint upon the wicked, and crush their proud and nefarious designs, but ever mindful of his goodness in protecting and defending his own children. The man who disciplines himself to the contemplation of these two attributes, which ought never to be dissociated in our minds from the idea of God, is certain to stand erect and immovable under the fiercest assaults of temptation; while, on the other hand, by losing sight of the all-sufficiency of God, (which we are too apt to do,) we lay ourselves open to be overwhelmed

in the first encounter. The world's opinion of God is, that he sits in heaven an idle and unconcerned spectator of events which are passing. Need we wonder, that men tremble under every casualty, when they thus believe themselves to be the sport of blind chance? There can be no security felt unless we satisfy ourselves of the truth of a divine superintendence, and can commit our lives and all that we have to the hands of God. The first thing which we must look to is his power, that we may have a thorough conviction of his being a sure refuge to such as cast themselves upon his care. With this there must be conjoined confidence in his mercy, to prevent those anxious thoughts which might otherwise rise in our minds. These may suggest the doubt — What though God govern the world? does it follow that he will concern himself about such unworthy objects as ourselves?

There is an obvious reason, then, for the Psalmist coupling these two things together, his power and his clemency. They are the two wings wherewith we fly upwards to heaven; the two pillars on which we rest, and may defy the surges of temptation. Does danger, in short, spring up from any quarter, then just let us call to remembrance that divine power which can bid away all harms, and as this sentiment prevails in our minds, our troubles cannot fail to fall prostrate before it. Why should we fear — how can we be afraid, when the God who covers us with the shadow of his wings, is the same who rules the universe with his nod, holds in secret chains the devil and all the wicked, and effectually overrules their designs and intrigues?

The Psalmist adds, *Thou wilt certainly render to every man according to his work.* And here he brings what he said to bear still more closely upon the point which he would establish, declaring that the God who governs the world by his providence will judge it in righteousness. The expectation of this, duly cherished, will have a happy effect in composing our minds, allaying impatience, and checking any disposition to resent and retaliate under our injuries. In resting himself and others before the great bar of God, he would both encourage his heart in the hope of that deliverance which was coming, and teach himself to despise the insolent persecution of his enemies, when he considered that every man's work was to come into judgment before Him, who can no more cease to be Judge than deny himself. We can therefore rest assured, however severe our wrongs may be, though wicked men should account us the filth and the off-scourings of all things, that God is witness to what we suffer, will interpose in due time, and will not disappoint our patient expectation. From this, and passages of a similar kind, the Papists have argued, in defense of their doctrine, that justification and salvation depend upon good works; but I have already exposed the fallacy of their reasoning. No sooner is mention made of works, than they catch at the expression, as amounting to a statement that God rewards men upon the ground of merit. It is with a very different design than to encourage any such opinion, that the Spirit promises a reward to our works — it is to animate us in the ways of obedience, and not to

inflame that impious self-confidence which cuts up salvation by the very roots. According to the judgment which God forms of the works of the believer, their worth and valuation depend, first, upon the free pardon extended to him as a sinner, and by which he becomes reconciled to God; and, next, upon the divine condescension and indulgence which accepts his services, [423] notwithstanding all their imperfections. We know that there is none of our works which, in the sight of God, can be accounted perfect or pure, and without taint of sin. Any recompense they meet with must therefore be traced entirely to his goodness. Since the Scriptures promise a reward to the saints, with the sole intention of stimulating their minds, and encouraging them in the divine warfare, and not with the remotest design of derogating from the mercy of God, it is absurd in the Papists to allege that they, in any sense, merit what is bestowed upon them. As regards the wicked, none will dispute that the punishment awarded to them, as violators of the law, is strictly deserved.

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"D'une pure douceur et support debonnaire dont il use, il fait qu'icelles soyent acceptees de lui," etc. — *Fr.*

Psalm 63

PSALM 63

The following psalm cannot so properly be said to consist of prayers as of a variety of pious meditations, which comforted the mind of David under dangers, anxieties, and troubles of a severe description. It contains the vows too which he made to God in the distress occasioned by the alarming circumstances in which he was placed.

A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah. [424]

Psalm 63:1-4

1. O God! thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul has thirsted for thee, my flesh has longed for thee in [425] a desert and

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David was often compelled to flee into the remote deserts which lay in the tribe of Judah, to escape the fury of Saul. In tracing his steps, when eagerly sought after by this relentless persecutor, we find him in the forest of Hareth, and in the wildernesses of Ziph, Maon, and Engedi, all in the tribe of Judah. See 1 Samuel 22:5; 23:14, 24, 25; 24:1; and Joshua 15:55, 62. The only objection which can be made to referring the occasion of the composition of this psalm to David's persecution by Saul is, that in the 11th verse, David is called king; whereas Saul still swayed the scepter over Israel. But, as Calvin observes on that verse, David may have called himself by this title to express his confident persuasion that God would raise him to the throne in fulfillment of his promise; and his followers might call him king even during Saul's lifetime, though he was not acknowledged to be sovereign by any tribe till after Saul fell at Gilboa. It is, however, supposed by some that the psalm was written during the rebellion of his son Absalom, when he was under the necessity of quitting Jerusalem, and escaping into the wilderness, 2 Samuel 15:23; 16:2; and 17:29.

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thirsty [426] land, where no water is. **2**. Thus have I beheld thee in the sanctuary, to see thy power and thy glory. **3**. Because thy mercy is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. **4**. Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name.

1. *O God! thou art my God.* The wilderness of Judah, spoken of in the title, can be no other than that of Ziph, where David wandered so long in a state of concealment. We may rely upon the truth of the record he gives us of his exercise when under his trials; and it is apparent that he never allowed himself to be so far overcome by them, as to cease lifting up his prayers to heaven, and even resting, with a firm and constant faith, upon the divine promises. Apt as we are, when assaulted by the very slightest trials, to lose the comfort of any knowledge of God we may previously have possessed, it is necessary that we should notice this, and learn, by his example, to struggle to maintain our confidence under the worst troubles that can befall us. He does more than simply pray; he sets the Lord before him as his God, that he may throw all his cares unhesitatingly upon him, deserted as he was of man, and a poor outcast in the waste and howling wilderness. His faith, shown in this persuasion of the favor and help of God, had the effect of exciting him to constant and vehement prayer for the grace which he expected. In saying that *his soul thirsted, and his flesh longed,* he alludes to the destitution and poverty which he lay under in the wilderness, and intimates, that though deprived of the ordinary means of subsistence, he looked to God as his meat and his drink, directing all his desires to him. When he represents his soul as thirsting, and his flesh as hungering, we are not to seek for any nice or subtile design in the distinction. He means simply that he desired God, both with soul and body. For although the body, strictly speaking, is not of itself influenced by desire, we know that the feelings of the soul intimately and extensively affect it.

2. *Thus in the sanctuary, etc.* It is apparent, as already hinted, that God was ever in his thoughts, though wandering in the wilderness under such circumstances of destitution. The particle *thus* is emphatic. Even when so situated, in a wild and hideous solitude, where the very horrors of the place were enough to have distracted his meditations, he exercised himself in beholding the power and glory of God, just as if he had been in the sanctuary. Formerly, when it was in his power to wait upon the tabernacle, he was far from neglecting that part of the instituted worship of God. He was

The Syriac, and several MSS., read כארץ, *ke-erets*, *as a land*, instead of בארץ, *be-erets*, *in a land*, like the parallel text of Psalm 143:6. The two letters, כ, *caph*, and ב, *beth*, may be easily mistaken for each other, differing less than the Roman letters c and g

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The Hebrew word עיף, *ayeph*, here rendered *thirsty*, is literally *weary*; "that is," says Horsley, "a land that creates weariness by the roughness of the ways, the steepness of the hills, and the want of all accommodations." He reads, "dry and inhospitable."

well aware that he needed such helps to devotion. But now, when shut out, in the providence of God, from any such privilege, he shows, by the delight which he took in spiritual views of God, that his was not a mind engrossed with the symbols, or mere outward ceremonial of religion. He gives evidence how much he had profited by the devotional exercises enjoined under that dispensation. It is noticeable of ignorant and superstitious persons, that they seem full of zeal and fervor so long as they come in contact with the ceremonies of religion, while their seriousness evaporates immediately upon these being withdrawn. David, on the contrary, when these were removed, continued to retain them in his recollection, and rise, through their assistance, to fervent aspirations after God. We may learn by this, when deprived at any time of the outward means of grace, to direct the eye of our faith to God in the worst circumstances, and not to forget him whenever the symbols of holy things are taken out of our sight. The great truth, for example, of our spiritual regeneration, though but once represented to us in baptism, should remain fixed in our minds through our whole life, [427] (Titus 3:5; Ephesians 5:26.) The mystical union subsisting between Christ and his members should be matter of reflection, not only when we sit at the Lord's table, but at all other times. Or suppose that the Lord's Supper, and other means of advancing our spiritual welfare, were taken from us by an exercise of tyrannical power, it does not follow that our minds should ever cease to be occupied with the contemplation of God. The expression, *So have I beheld thee to see,* etc., indicates the earnestness with which he was intent upon the object, directing his whole meditation to this, that he might see the power and glory of God, of which there was a reflection in the sanctuary.

3 *Because thy mercy is better than life, etc.* I have no objections to read the verse in this connected form, though I think that the first clause would be better separated, and taken in with the verse preceding. David would appear to be giving the reason of his earnestness in desiring God. By *life* is to be understood, in general, everything which men use for their own maintenance and defense. When we think ourselves well provided otherwise, we feel no disposition to have recourse to the mercy of God. That *being* (to speak so) which we have of our own, prevents us from seeing that we live through the mere grace of God. [428] As we are too much disposed to trust

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"Suivant cela, nous devons toute notre vie porter engrave en notre entendement le lavement spirituel, lequel Christ nous a une fois represente au baptesme." — *Fr.*

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"Denique nostrum esse, ut ita loquar, perstringit nobis oculos, ne cernamus sola Dei gratia nos subsistere." — *Lat.* "Brief, notre Etre, si ainsi faut parler, nous eblouit les yeux, tellement que nous ne voyons pas que c'est par la seule grace de Dieu que nous subsistons." — *Fr.*

in aids of a carnal kind, and to forget God, the Psalmist here affirms that we should have more reliance upon the divine mercy in the midst of death, than upon what we are disposed to call, or what may appear to be, life. Another interpretation has been given of the words of this verse, but a very meagre and feeble one, — That the mercy of God is better than life itself; or, in other words, that the divine favor is preferable to every other possession. But the opposition is evidently between that state of secure prosperity, in which men are so apt to rest with complacency, and the mercy of God, which is the stay of such as are ready to sink and perish, and which is the one effectual remedy for supplying (if one might use that expression) all defects.

The word which I have rendered *life,* being in the plural number in the Hebrew, has led Augustine to assign a meaning to the sentence which is philosophical and ingenious, but without foundation, as the plural of the word is quite commonly used in the singular signification. He considered that the term *lives* was here used in reference to the truth, That different men affect different modes of life, some seeking riches, and others pleasure; some desiring the luxuries, and some the honors of this world, while others are given to their sensual appetites. He conceived that there was an opposition stated in the verse between these various kinds of life and eternal life, here by a common figure of speech called *mercy,* because it is of grace, and not of merit. But it is much more natural to understand the Psalmist as meaning, that it was of no consequence how large a share men possess of prosperity, and of the means which are generally thought to make life secure, the divine mercy being a better foundation of trust than any life fashioned out to ourselves, and than all other supports taken together. [429] On this account the Lord's people, however severely they may suffer from poverty, or the violence of human wrongs, or the languor of desire, or hunger and thirst, or the many troubles and anxieties of life, may be happy notwithstanding; for it is well with them, in the best sense of the term, when God is their friend. Unbelievers, on the other hand, must be miserable, even when all the world smiles upon them; for God is their enemy, and a curse necessarily attaches to their lot.

In the words which follow, David expresses his consequent resolution to praise God. When we experience his goodness, we are led to open our lips in thanksgiving. His intention is intimated still more clearly in the succeeding verse, where he says that *he will bless God in his life* There is some difficulty, however, in ascertaining the exact sense of the words. When it is said, So *will I bless thee,* etc., the *so* may refer to the good reason which he had, as

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"Thy loving-kindness, חסדך, *chasdeca*, thy effusive mercy is better, מחיים, *me-chayim* than Lives: it is better, or good beyond, *countless* ages of human existence." — *Dr Adam Clarke*

just stated, to praise God, from having felt how much better it is to live by life communicated from God, than to live of and from ourselves. [430] Or the sense may be, *so,* that is, *even in this calamitous and afflicted condition:* for he had already intimated that, amidst the solitude of the wilderness, where he wandered, he would still direct his eye to God. The word *life,* again, may refer to his life as having been preserved by divine interposition; or the sense of the passage may be, that he would bless God *through the course of his life.* The former meaning conveys the fullest matter of instruction, and agrees with the context; he would bless God, because, by his goodness, he had been kept alive and in safety. The sentiment is similar to that which we find elsewhere,

"I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord;" — (Psalm 118:17)

and again; —

"The dead shall not praise the Lord, neither any that go down into silence, but we who live will bless the Lord,"
(Psalm 115:17, 18.)

In the *lifting up of hands,* [431] in the second clause of the verse, allusion is made to praying and vowing; and he intimates, that besides giving thanks to God, he would acquire additional confidence in supplication, and be diligent in the exercise of it. Any experience we may have of the divine goodness, while it stirs us up to gratitude, should, at the same time, strengthen our hopes of the future, and lead us confidently to expect that God will perfect the grace which he has begun. Some understand by the *lifting up of his hands,* that he refers to praising the Lord. Others, that he speaks of encouraging himself from the divine assistance, and boldly encountering his enemies. But I prefer the interpretation which has been already given.

Psalm 63:5-8

5. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips. **6**. I shall surely [432] remember

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"Melius esse nobis vivificari ab ipso quam apud nos vivere."

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"The practice of lifting up the hands in prayer towards heaven, the supposed residence of the object to which prayer is addressed, was anciently used, both by believers, as appears from various passages in the Old Testament, and by the heathen, agreeably to numerous instances in the classical writers. Parkhurst, considering the 'hand' to be the chief organ or instrument of man's power and operations, and properly supposing the word to be thence used very extensively by the Hebrews for power, agency, dominion, assistance, and the like, regards the lifting up of men's hands in prayer as an emblematical acknowledging of the *power*, and imploring of the *assistance* of their respective gods. Is it not, however, rather the natural and unstudied gesture of earnest supplication?" — *Mant.*

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thee upon my couch: I will meditate upon thee in the night watches, [433] **7**. Because thou hast been my help: and I will rejoice in the shadow of thy wings. **8**. My soul has cleaved hard after thee: thy right hand will uphold me.

5. *My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow, etc.* In accordance with what was said in the foregoing verse, David expresses his assured persuasion of obtaining a rich and abundant measure of every blessing that could call for thanksgiving and praise. At the period of composing this psalm, he may have been already in the enjoyment of ease and plenty; but there is reason to believe that he cherished the persuasion referred to, even when wandering in the wilderness in a state of poverty and destitution. If we would evidence a strong faith, we must anticipate the divine favor before it has been actually manifested, and when there is no present appearance of its forthcoming. From the instance here set before us, we must learn to be on our guard against despondency, in circumstances when we may see the wicked wallowing and rioting in the abundance of the things of this world, while we ourselves are left to pine under the want of them. David, in the present pressure to which he was exposed, might have given way to despair, but he knew that God was able to fill the hungry soul, and that he could want for nothing so long as he possessed an interest in his favor. It is God's will to try our patience in this life, by afflictions of various kinds. Let us bear the wrongs which may be done us with meekness, till the time come when all our desires shall be abundantly satisfied. It may be proper to observe, that David, when he speaks in figurative language of *being filled with marrow and fatness,* does not contemplate that intemperate and excessive indulgence to which ungodly men surrender themselves, and by which they brutify their minds. He looks forward to that moderate measure of enjoyment which would only quicken him to more alacrity in the praises of God.

6 *I shall surely remember thee, etc.* It may be read also, when, or, as often as *I remember thee, I will pray in the night watches.* But as the Hebrew particle here used is occasionally taken for an adverb of affirmation, as well as of time, I have adhered to the commonly received translation, In this case, his *remembering* God is to be understood as the same thing with his meditating upon him; and the one clause contains just a repetition of the sentiment expressed in the other. If the particle be taken in the different sense formerly mentioned, the words intimate, that as often as the name of God recurred to his mind, he would dwell upon it with pleasure, and speak of his goodness. He particularly mentions *the night watches,* as, when

"Ou, quand," etc. — *Fr. marg.* "Or, when I shall remember thee."

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Among the Hebrews the night was divided into portions of three or four hours each, which were denominated vigils or watches.

retired from the sight of our fellow-creatures, we not only revert to what may have given us anxiety, but feel our thoughts drawn out more freely to different subjects. We have next the reason assigned for the engagement or declaration he has just made, which is, that he owed to God his preservation. The experience of the divine goodness should dispose us to prayer as well as praise. "I will come into thy house," says the Psalmist in another place, "in the multitude of thy mercy," (Psalm 5:7.) The second part of the seventh verse is expressive of the lively hope with which he was animated. He was resolved to rejoice and triumph under the shadow of God's wings, as feeling the same peace and satisfaction in reliance upon his protection as he could have done had no danger existed.

8 *My soul has cleaved hard after thee* The Hebrew verb means also *to apprehend,* or *follow,* especially when in construction with the preposition which is here joined to it, and therefore we might very properly render the words, — *My soul shall press or follow after thee.* [434] But even should the other translation be retained, the sense is, that David's heart was devoted to God with steadfast perseverance. The phrase, *after thee,* is emphatical, and denotes that he would follow with unwearied constancy, long as the way might be, and full of hardships, and beset with obstacles, and however sovereignly God might himself seem to withdraw his presence. The latter clause of the verse may be taken as referring simply to the deliverance which he had previously mentioned as having been received. He had good reason to persevere, without fainting, in following after God, when he considered that he had been preserved in safety, up to this time, by the divine hand. But I would understand the words as having a more extensive application, and consider that David here speaks of the grace of perseverance, which would be bestowed upon him by the Spirit. To say that he would cleave to God, with an unwavering purpose, at all hazards, might have sounded like the language of vain boasting, had he not qualified the assertion by adding, that he would do this in so far as he was sustained by the hand of God.

Psalm 63:9-11

9. And they, whilst they seek my soul to destroy it, shall go into the lowest parts of the earth. **10**. They shall cast him out [435] to the edge

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Dr Adam Clarke renders, "My soul cleaves, or is glued after thee." "This phrase," says he, "not only shows the *diligence* of the pursuit, and the *nearness* of the attainment, but also the *fast hold* he had got of the mercy of his God."

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of the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes. **11**. But the king [436] , shall rejoice in God; and every one who swears by him shall glory: for the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.

9. *And they, whilst they seek, etc.* Here we find David rising to a more assured confidence, and triumphing as if he had already obtained the victory. And there is every reason to believe, that though he had escaped his difficulties, and was in circumstances of peace and prosperity when he wrote this psalm, yet he only expresses what he actually felt at the critical period when his life was in such imminent danger. He declares his conviction that the enemies who eagerly sought his life would be cut off; that God would cast them headlong into destruction; and that their very bodies should be left without burial. To be *the portion of foxes,* [437] is the same thing with being left to be torn and devoured by the *beasts of the field.* It is often denounced as one judgment which should befall the wicked, that they would perish by the sword, and become the prey of wolves and of dogs, without privilege of sepulture. This is a fate which the best of men have met with in the world, — for good as well as bad are exposed to the stroke of temporal evil; — but there is this distinction, that God watches over the scattered dust of his own children, gathers it again, and will suffer nothing of them to perish, whereas, when the wicked are slain, and their bones spread on the field, this is only preparatory to their everlasting destruction.

11. *But the king will rejoice in God.* The deliverance which David received had not been extended to him as a private person, but the welfare of the whole Church was concerned in it, as that of the body in the safety of the head, and there is therefore a propriety in his representing all the people of God as rejoicing with him. Nor can we fail to admire his holy magnanimity in not scrupling to call himself king, overwhelming as the dangers were by which he was surrounded, because he laid claim to that

"יגירהו," here rendered, *they shall cast him out*, "from נגר, signifies in *Hiphil*, *they shall cause to be poured out*, or *shall pour out* The word is ordinarily applied to water, 2 Samuel 14:14; Lamentations 3:49. But here, by the immediate mention of the sword, it is restrained to the effusion of blood; and being in the third person plural, in the active sense, it is, after the Hebrew idiom, to be interpreted in the passive sense, 'They shall pour out by the hand of the sword;' *i e.* 'They shall be poured out by the sword,' the *hand* of *the sword* being no more than the edge of the sword." — *Hammond* Dr Adam Clarke gives the same version: "*They shall be poured out by the hand of the sword* Heb. That is, their life's blood shall be shed either in war, or by the hand of justice." But נגר, *nagar*, also signifies metaphorically *to give over into one's hands*, *to give up*, as in the phrase, חרב ירי על הגיר, "to deliver any one up to the sword." See Ezekiel 35:5; Jeremiah 18:21. And the Septuagint, Syriac, Vulgate, Aethiopic, and Arabic versions, Gesenius and Hare here read, "They shall be delivered to the sword." Horsley translates, "They would shed it;" and observes, that *it* signifies "*my life*; for נפש, which is of the doubtful gender, is the antecedent of the masculine suffix הו."

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"I, who am king by God's anointing, 1 Samuel 15:12, 13." — *Ainsworth.*

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honor by faith, though yet denied him in actual possession. In saying that *he would rejoice in God,* he refers to the gratitude which he would feel; at the same time, in extolling the divine goodness shown to him, he views it as it affected the common body of the faithful. [438] As was already remarked, the safety of God's chosen people, at that time, was inseparably connected with the reign of David and its prosperity — a figure by which it was the divine intention to teach us, that our happiness and glory depend entirely upon Christ. By those who *swear in the name of the Lord,* he means in general all his genuine servants. The act of solemnly calling upon God to witness and judge what we say, is one part of divine worship: hence an oath, by the figure of speech called synecdoche, is made to signify the profession of religion in general. We are not to imagine from this that God reckons all those to be his servants who make mention of his name. Many take it into their lips only to profane it by the grossest perjury; others outrage or slight it by entering into trifling and unnecessary oaths; and hypocrites are

Under the Hebrew word שועל, *shual*, here rendered *fox*, was comprehended, in common language, *the jackal*, or *Vulpes aureus*, *golden wolf*, so called in Latin because its color is a bright yellow; and in this sense שועל, *shual*, has been generally interpreted here, because the jackal is found in Palestine, and feeds on carrion. Both of these circumstances are, however, also applicable to the fox, and, moreover, Bochart has made it probable that the specific name of the jackal (the θῶς of the Greeks) in Hebrew was אי, *aye*, *the howler*, being so called from the howling cry which he makes particularly at night. The term occurs in Isaiah 13:22; 34:14; and Jeremiah 50:39; where איים, *ayim*, is rendered, in our version, "the wild beasts of the islands," an appellation very vague and indeterminate. At the same time, it is highly probable that *shual* generally refers to the jackal. Several of the modern oriental names of this animal, as the Turkish *chical*, and the Persian *sciagal*, *sciachal*, or *schachal* — whence the English jackal — from their resemblance to the Hebrew word *shual*, favor this supposition; and Dr Shaw, and other travelers, inform us, that while jackals are very numerous in Palestine, the common fox is rarely to be met with. We shall, therefore, be more correct, under these circumstances, in admitting that the jackal of the East is the Hebrew *shual* These animals never go alone, but always associate in packs of from fifty to two hundred. They are known to prey on dead bodies; and so greedy are they of human carcases, that they dig them out of their graves, and devour them, however putrescent They have been seen waiting near the grave at the time of a funeral eagerly watching their opportunity of digging up the body almost as soon as it was buried. "I have known several instances," says a traveler quoted by Merrick, "of their attacking and devouring drunken men, whom they have found lying on the road, and have heard that they will do the same to men that are sick and helpless. I have seen many graves that have been opened by the jackals, and parts of the bodies pulled out by them." They visit the field of battle to prey upon the dying and the dead, and they follow caravans for the same purpose. It is usual with the barbarous nations of the East to leave the bodies of their enemies, killed in battle, in the field, to be devoured by jackals and other animals. When the Psalmist, therefore, says that his enemies would become *a portion for foxes*, the meaning is, that they would be denied the rites of sepulture, which was deemed a great calamity, — that they should be left unburied, for jackals and other wild beasts to prey upon and devour.

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"Sed extollit Dei gratiam, quia ad piorum omnium conservationem pertineat." — *Lat.* "Mais il exalte et magnifie la grace de Dieu envers in d'autant qu'elle s'etendoit a la conservation de tous les fideles." — *Fr.*

chargeable with wickedly abusing it. But those whom David refers to are such as swear by the Lord, considerately and with reverence, and whose hearts respond to what they declare. This appears more clearly from the contrast which follows in the verse, where he opposes those who swear by the name of God to those *who speak lies,* understanding by that term, not only treacherous and deceitful men, but men who profane the name of God by falsehoods of a sacrilegious kind.

Psalm 64

PSALM 64

This psalm expresses the language of complaint and prayer. David, in order that he may incline God to compassionate his case, dwells upon the injustice and cruelty, the intrigues and deceitfulness of his enemies. At the close, his eyes are directed to God, in the anticipation of a joyful deliverance from their hands.

To the chief musician. A Psalm of David.

Psalm 64:1-6

1. Hear my voice, O God: in my prayer: preserve my life from fear of the enemy. **2**. Hide me from the counsel of the wicked; from the assembly of the workers of iniquity. **3**. For they have whetted their tongue like a sword; they have directed [or aimed [439]] for their arrow a bitter word, [or report.] **4**. To shoot in secret at the perfect; suddenly will they shoot, and not fear. **5**. They assure themselves in an evil work, they commune of laying snares privily; they say, Who shall see them? **6**. They have searched out iniquities, they have accomplished

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The original word דרך, *darach*, signifies *to go*, *to send out*, *direct*, and is used in different senses, according to the objects to which it is applied. "But most especially it is used of a bow or arrows. If of קשת, *a bow*, then it is *to bend it*; if of חצים, *arrows*, then it is not so properly *to shoot* as *to prepare*, or *direct* them. So Psalm 58:7, 'He directeth or prepareth his arrows;' so here, 'they direct, or aim, or make ready their arrows.' Parallel to which is that of Jeremiah 9:3, where being applied to the tongue, as to a bow that shoots out lying words, as arrows, it must be rendered *bend*; but here applied to words as arrows, *direct*, and not *bend*." — *Hammond*

a diligent search, [lit. a search searched out,] both the inward part of each of them, and the heart, is deep.

1. *Hear my voice, O God!* He begins by saying that he prayed earnestly, and with vehemence, stating, at the same time, what rendered this necessary. The voice is heard in prayer, proportionally to the earnestness and ardor which we feel. He condescends upon the circumstances of distress in which he was presently placed, and takes notice of the dangers to which his life was exposed from enemies, with other points fitted to excite the favorable consideration of God. His praying that God would protect his life, proves that it must have been in danger at this time. In the second verse, he intimates that his enemies were numerous; and that, without divine assistance, he would be unable to sustain their attacks. Some difficulty attaches to the words, from their being susceptible of two meanings. The Hebrew term סוד, *sod,* which signifies *a secret,* is understood by some to refer here to the secret plots of the wicked, and by others, to denote their meeting together for consultation. In translating it, I have employed a word which admits of either interpretation. The term רגשת, *rigshath,* used in the second part of the verse, may also be rendered in two ways, as meaning either an *assembly* of men, or *noise* and *uproar.* It comes from רגש, *ragash,* a root signifying *to make a tumult.* This would suggest that the word סוד, *sod,* in the former clause, might refer to the clandestine plots of the wicked, and רגשת, *rigshath,* in the latter, to their open violence; and that David prayed to be protected, on the one hand, from the malicious purposes of his enemies, and, on the other, from the forcible measures by which they proceeded to put them into execution. But the meaning first given, and which I have adopted, seems the most simple and natural, That he solicits the compassion of God, by complaining of the number that were banded against him. Still his language implies that he looked upon the protection of heaven as amply sufficient against the greatest combination of adversaries. I may add, that there is an implied plea for strengthening his cause in prayer, in what he says of the malice and wickedness of those who were opposed to him; for the more cruel and unjust the conduct of our enemies may be, we have proportionally the better ground to believe that God will interpose in our behalf.

3 *For they have whetted their tongue like a sword* His enemies, in their rage, aimed at nothing less than his life, and yet what he complains of, more than all beside, is the poison with which their words were imbued. It is probable that he refers to the calumnious reports which he knew to be falsely spread to his discredit, and with a view of damaging his reputation with the people. *Their tongues* he likens to *swords; their bitter and venomous words* to *arrows.* [440] And when he adds, that, *they shoot against the upright and innocent,* he is to be considered as contrasting his integrity with

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their unprincipled conduct. It inspired him with confidence in his religious addresses, to know that he could exonerate his own conscience from guilt, and that he was the object of undeserved attack by worthless and abandoned men. In mentioning that *they shoot secretly* and *suddenly,* he refers to the craft which characterised them. They were not only eagerly bent upon mischief, and intent in watching their opportunities, but so expert and quick in their movements, as to smite their victim before he could suspect danger. When we hear that David, who was a man in every respect so much more holy and upright in his conduct than ourselves, suffered from groundless aspersions upon his character, we have no reason to be surprised that we should be exposed to a similar trial. This comfort, at least, we always have, that we can betake ourselves to God, and obtain his defense of the upright cause. He takes particular notice of another circumstance, that they shot their empoisoned arrows from their lips *without fear,* or shame. This self-secure spirit argued a degree of abandoned presumption, in so far as they could persist in obstinately pursuing the conduct in which they had been repeatedly detected, and renew their desperate attempts, to the disregard of all fear of God or worldly shame.

5 *They assure themselves in an evil work.* He proceeds to complain of the perverse determination with which they pursued their wickedness, and of their combinations amongst themselves; remarking, at the same time, upon the confidence with which they stirred one another up to the most daring acts of iniquity. In this there can be little doubt that they were encouraged by the present state of weakness to which David was reduced in his circumstances, taking occasion, when they found him in poverty and exile, and without means of resistance, to persecute him with the greater freedom. Having adverted to them as being beyond hope of amendment, and incapable of any impressions of humanity, he speaks of

They have directed for their arrow a bitter word There may be, in these words, an allusion to the practice of fixing letters on arrows, and shooting or directing them where it was designed they should fall and be taken up. Thus the Jews say, Shebna and Joab sent letters to Sennacherib, acquainting him that all Israel were willing to make peace with him; but Hezekiah would not suffer them. Timoxenus and Artabazus sent letters to one another in this way at the siege of Potidaea. See Gill, *in loco* The *word* which they are said to direct as their arrow is called מר, *mar*, *bitter*, and this probably contains an allusion to poisoned arrows. The Chaldee paraphrast has "bending the bow and anointing the arrows," plainly intimating a conviction that such an allusion is implied. Poisoned arrows appear, from Job 6:4, to have been of very ancient use in Arabia. They were also used by many other nations in different parts of the world. Homer says of Ulysses, that he went to Ephyre, a city of Thessaly, in order to procure deadly poison for smearing his deadly-pointed arrows, Odyssey, Lib. 1, 50, 335-345. Virgil describes one of his heroes as eminently skillful in anointing the dart, and arming its steel with poison, Aen. Lib. 9, 50, 771. And Horace mentions the *venenatoe sagittoe*, *the poisoned arrows* of the ancient Moors in Africa, Lib. 1, Ode 22, 50, 3. Wherever this practice has prevailed, the poison employed has been of the most deadly kind, the slightest wound being followed by certain and almost instant death. This makes the language here strikingly expressive. David compares the calumnies his enemies launched against him to poisoned arrows.

their meeting together to plot his destruction; and, in connection with this, of the unbounded confidence which they were led to display, from a belief that their designs were not seen. It is well known that one circumstance which strengthens the false security of the wicked, and encourages them to triumph in their crafty policy towards the simple and upright in heart, is their thinking that they can cover their crimes by such pretexts as they have always at hand. *They say, Who shall see them?* The word למו, *lamo, them,* may refer either to the workers of iniquity themselves, or to the snares spoken of in the preceding clause. The first seems the preferable meaning. They run recklessly, and without restraint, in the ways of sin, blinded by their pride, and influenced neither by the fear of God nor a sense of shame.

In the verse which follows, he animadverts severely upon the deceit which they practiced. He speaks of their having exhausted all the arts of mischief, so as to have left nothing in this department to be discovered. The *search* referred to has relation to the secret methods of doing evil. He adds, that their malice was deep. By the *inward part* and *the heart,* which was *deep,* he means the hidden devices to which the wicked have recourse for concealment. Some, instead of translating the words, *the inward part of each, etc.,* give a more indefinite sense to איש, *ish,* and read, *the inward part, and deep heart,* of every one, *is found in them;* that is, his enemies contrived to comprise in themselves all that men have ever displayed in the shape of craft and subtilty. Either rendering may be adopted; for it is evidently David's meaning that his enemies practiced secret stratagem as well as open violence, to compass his ruin, and showed themselves to be possessed of the deepest penetration in discovering dark and unimagined methods of doing mischief.

Psalm 64:7-10

> **7**. And God shall shoot an arrow at them; suddenly shall they be wounded. **8**. And they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves: and all that see them shall flee away. [441] **9**. And all men shall see, and shall declare the work of God, and shall understand [442] what he hath done. **10**. The righteous shall be glad in Jehovah, and shall hope in him; and all the upright in heart shall glory.

7 *And God shall shoot an arrow at them* The Psalmist now congratulates himself in the confident persuasion that his prayers have not been without effect, but already answered. Though there was no appearance of God's approaching judgment, he declares that it would suddenly be executed; and in this he affords a remarkable proof of his faith. He saw the wicked

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"Ou, trembleront." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, shall tremble."

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"Ou, feront entendre." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, shall cause to understand."

hardening themselves in their prosperity, and presuming upon impunity from the divine connivance and forbearance; but instead of yielding to discouragement, he was borne up by the belief that God, according to his usual mode of procedure with the wicked, would visit them at an unexpected moment, when they were flattering themselves with having escaped, and indulging in extravagant confidence. It is a consideration which should comfort us, when subjected to long-continued trial, that God, in delaying to punish the ungodly, does so with the express design of afterwards inflicting judgments of a more condign description upon them, and when they shall say, "Peace and safety," overwhelming them with sudden destruction, (Jeremiah 8:11 [443])

8 *And they shall make their own tongue to fall upon themselves* Pursuing the same subject, he remarks, that the poison concocted in their secret counsels, and which they revealed with their tongues, would prove to have a deadly effect upon themselves. The sentiment is the same with that expressed elsewhere by another figure, when they are said to be caught in their own snares, and to fall into the pit which they have digged themselves, (Psalm 57:6.) It is just that Heaven should make the mischiefs which they had devised against innocent and upright men to recoil upon their own heads. The judgment is one which we see repeatedly and daily exemplified before our eyes, and yet we find much difficulty in believing that it can take place. We should feel ourselves bound the more to impress the truth upon our hearts, that God is ever watching, as it were, his opportunity of converting the stratagems of the wicked into means just as completely effective of their destruction, as if they had intentionally employed them for that end. In the close of the verse, to point out the striking severity of their punishment, it is said that *all who saw them should flee away* The judgments of God are lifted above out of the sight of an ignorant world, and ere it can be roused to fear and dismay, these must be such as to bear signal marks indeed of a divine hand.

9 *And all men shall see, and shall declare the work of God.* He insists more fully upon the good effects which would result from the judgment executed in leading such as had formerly overlooked a Divine Providence altogether, to catch a spirit of inquiry from the singularity of the spectacle; and acquaint themselves with, and speak one to another of a subject hitherto entirely new to them. He intimates, that the knowledge of what God had so signally wrought would extend far and wide — for he says, *all men,* etc. The Hebrew verb שכל*, shachal,* employed, admits either of the neuter signification, *they shall understand,* or of the active, *they shall cause others to understand.* But as it is usual with David to repeat the same thing twice, perhaps the latter or transitive sense is preferable. Another desirable consequence which

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In the French version the reference is changed to 1 Thessalonians 5:3.

would flow from the deliverance granted is mentioned in the last verse, that it would afford matter of joy, hope, and holy triumph to the saints, who would be confirmed in expecting the same help from God which he had extended to his servant David. Those formerly called the *righteous* are now styled *the upright in heart,* to teach us, that the only righteousness which proves acceptable is that which proceeds from inward sincerity. This truth I have insisted upon at large elsewhere.

Psalm 65

PSALM 65

This psalm is composed both of petition and thanksgiving. It contains a prediction of the Gentiles being called to the common faith, but is principally occupied with praising God for the fatherly care which he exercises over his Church, and the benefits which flow from it. The Psalmist prays particularly that God would continue his former kindness to the Jewish people. Two instances of the Divine goodness are specified, — the powerful defense extended to their land, and the enriching of it with so many blessings.

To the chief musician, a Psalm of David. [444]

Psalm 65:1-3

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The title of this psalm does not inform us on what particular occasion it was written. Mudge is of opinion that it was "composed by a person just come to Jerusalem from some very distant parts, where, upon his prayers and vows, he had been signally delivered from the fury of the sea, and uproar of the natives; which leads him into a general acknowledgement of the Divine Providence which extended itself to the end of the earth." It is thought by others to be a thanksgiving to God for having graciously sent to the land of Judea a copious rain, after it had been previously suffering from the effects of a long-continued drought; and that it probably relates to the three years of famine that followed some time after the rebellion of Absalom, (2 Samuel 21) which, being alleviated by some plenteous showers of rain, called forth this hymn of thanksgiving. Dr Morrison supposes that David wrote it for the feast of tabernacles, as it seems to contain an expression of public thanksgiving for the fruits of the earth, which had been safely gathered in. All these, however, are only conjectures. Nor is it material for us to know the occasion of its composition, embracing, as it does, such general topics as may form a suitable theme for contemplation at all times and in all circumstances.

> **1**. Praise waiteth [445] for thee, O Lord! in Zion; and unto thee shall the vow be performed. **2**. O thou that hearest prayer! unto thee shall all flesh come. **3**. Words of iniquity have prevailed against me: our transgressions thou shalt purge them away. [446]

1 *Praise waiteth for thee, O God! in Zion* Literally it runs, *Praise is silent to thee,* but the verb דמיה, *dumiyah,* has been metaphorically rendered first, *to be at rest,* then *to wait.* The meaning of the expression is, that God's goodness to his people is such as to afford constantly new matter of praise. It is diffused over the whole world, but specially shown to the Church. Besides, others who do not belong to the Church of God, however abundantly benefits may be showered upon them, see not whence they come, and riot in the blessings which they have received without any acknowledgement of them. But the main thing meant to be conveyed by the Psalmist is, that thanksgiving is due to the Lord for his goodness shown to his Church and people. The second clause of the verse is to the same effect, where he says, *unto thee shall the vow be performed;* for while he engages on the part of the people to render due acknowledgement, his language implies that there would be ever remaining and new grounds of praise.

With the verse which we have been now considering, that which follows stands closely connected, asserting that God hears the prayers of his people. This forms a reason why the vow should be paid to him, since God never disappoints his worshippers, but crowns their prayers with a favorable answer. Thus, what is stated last, is first in the natural order of consideration. The title here given to God carries with it a truth of great importance, That the answer of our prayers is secured by the fact, that in rejecting them he would in a certain sense deny his own nature. The

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In our English version it is also *waiteth*, and in the margin *is silent.* "Waiteth as a servant, whose duty it is to do what thou commandest." — *Boothroyd.* "The allusion in this verse is beautiful, when we remember that Eastern servants wait in silence, watching their lords, waiting for the signs of their will." — *Edwards.*

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The Hebrew word here rendered, "Thou shalt purge them away," is תכפרם, *techapperem*; properly, "thou wilt make atonement for them." It is from the verb כפר, *kaphar*, which signifies *to cover*, *to draw over*; and which in the conjugation *pihel*, acquired the signification *to forgive*, (as it were *to cover* an offense,) and *to do any act* which shall be the *cause* or *occasion* of forgiveness; and thence, by a further process in the flow of ideas, *to compensate*, *to expiate*, *to propitiate*, and to accept an expiation." See Dr Pye Smith on *The Sacrifice of Christ*, pp. 339, 340. The covering of the ark was called כפרת, *kapporeth*, Exodus 25:17; in Greek ἱλαστήριον, that is, *the propitiatory* or *mercy-seat*; for upon it the blood of expiation, typical of the blood of Christ, was sprinkled on the great day of atonement; and from it God revealed his grace and will to his ancient people. The name ἱλαστήριον, is in Romans 3:25, given by Paul to Christ, who was the true propitiation for our sins, 1 John 2:2. The words of the Psalmist then, without doubt, have a reference to the expiatory sacrifices under the law, and consequently to Him who, "in the end of the ages, hath appeared *to put away sin* by the sacrifice of himself."

Psalmist does not say, that God has heard prayer in this or that instance, but gives him the name of the hearer of prayer, as what constitutes an abiding part of his glory, so that he might as soon deny himself as shut his ear to our petitions. Could we only impress this upon our minds, that it is something peculiar to *God,* and inseparable from him, to hear prayer, it would inspire us with unfailing confidence. The power of helping us he can never want, so that nothing can stand in the way of a successful issue of our supplications. What follows in the verse is also well worthy of our attention, that *all flesh shall come* unto God. None could venture into his presence without a persuasion of his being open to entreaty; but when he anticipates our fears, and comes forward declaring that prayer is never offered to him in vain, the door is thrown wide for the admission of all. The hypocrite and the ungodly, who pray under the constraint of present necessity, are not heard; for they cannot be said to come to God, when they have no faith founded upon his word, but a mere vague expectation of a chance issue. Before we can approach God acceptably in prayer, it is necessary that his promises should be made known to us, without which we can have no access to him, as is evident from the words of the apostle Paul, (Ephesians 3:12,) where he tells us, that all who would come to God must first be endued with such a faith in Christ as may animate them wig confidence. From this we may infer, that no right rule of prayer is observed in the Papacy, when they pray to God in a state of suspense and doubt. Invaluable is the privilege which we enjoy by the Gospel, of free access unto God. When the Psalmist uses the expression, *all flesh,* he intimates by these few words that the privilege which was now peculiar to the Jews, would be extended to all nations. It is a prediction of Christ's future kingdom.

3 *Words of iniquity have prevailed against me* [447] He does not complain of the people being assailed with calumny, but is to be understood as confessing that their sins were the cause of any interruption which had taken place in the communication of the divine favor to the Jews. The passage is parallel with that,

"The ear of the Lord is not heavy that it cannot hear, but our iniquities have separated betwixt us and him." — Isaiah 59:1

David imputes it to his own sins and those of the people, that God, who was wont to be liberal in his help, and so gracious and kind in inviting their dependence upon him, had withdrawn for a time his divine countenance. First, he acknowledges his own personal guilt; afterwards, like Daniel 9:5, he joins the whole nation with himself. And this truth is introduced by the Psalmist with no design to damp confidence in prayer, but rather to

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In our English Bible it is, "Iniquities prevail against me;" and on the margin, "Words or matters of iniquity," etc. Calvin gives the same meaning which is naturally suggested by our English version, although from his translating the Hebrew text by *words of iniquity*, we would at first view be apt, to suppose that he would explain them as referring to the evil reports, the calumnies and slanders, which David's enemies propagated against him to ruin his reputation. Dr Adam Clarke understands the words in this sense, and gives a translation equivalent to Calvin's "Iniquitous words have prevailed against me," or, "The words of iniquity are strong against me." — He thinks the reading of our English Bible "Is no just rendering of the original;" observing, that "this verse has been abused to favor Antinomian licentiousness;" and that "the true and correct translation of the former clause will prevent this." But we cannot see how the verse, as it stands in our English Bible, can with justice be viewed as tending to give encouragement to sin, it being no more than the confession of a repentant sinner, accompanied with hope in the mercy of God, founded on the glad tidings announced in the Gospel, that God is willing to pardon the most guilty who believe in his Son, and repent of their sins. The old Scottish, version of this verse —

"Iniquities, I must confess,
Prevail against me do:
And as for our transgressions.
Them purge away wilt thou,"

which this learned author terms "most execrable" and "abominable doggerel" — and at hearing which he supposes David would feel chagrin, if such a feeling could affect the inhabitants of heaven — is, it must be admitted, ill expressed, feeble, and easily susceptible of an Antinomian sense. But not so, we think, the revised version, now in very general use in Scotland, which, by the alteration of a single word in the beginning of the third line, has made the verse at the same time more correct and more nervous: —

"But *as for our transgressions,*
Them purge away shalt thou:"

thus implying at once a deep sense of the evil of sin, and a confident reliance on the forgiving mercy of God — two subjects on which it is of the highest importance for us to entertain just views in drawing near to God in prayer.

Dr Morrison gives the following rendering: —

"Our *iniquities prevail against us;*
But *thou art he who blotteth out our transgressions."*

Horsley's version is: —

"The account of iniquities is too great for me:
Thou shalt expiate our crimes."

remove an obstacle standing in the way of it, as none could draw near to God unless convinced that he would hear the unworthy. It is probable that the Lord's people were at theft time suffering under some token of the divine displeasure, since David seems here to struggle with some temptation of this kind. He evidently felt that there was a sure remedy at hand, for no sooner has he referred to the subject of guilt, than he recognises the prerogative of God to pardon and expiate it. The verse before us must be viewed in connection with the preceding, and as meaning, that though their iniquities merited their being cast out of God's sight, yet they would continue to pray, encouraged by his readiness to be reconciled to them. We learn from the passage that God will not be entreated of us, unless we humbly supplicate the pardon of our sins. On the other hand, we are to believe firmly in reconciliation with God being procured through gratuitous remission. Should he at any time withdraw his favor, and frown upon us, we must learn by David's example to rise to the hope of the expiation of our sins. The reason of his using the singular number, in the confession which he makes of sin, may be, that as king he represented the whole people, or that he intended, like Daniel, to exhort them each to an individual and particular examination and confession of his own guilt. We know how apt hypocrites are to hide their personal sin, under a formal acknowledgement of their share in the general transgression. But David, from no affectation of humility, but from deep inward conviction, begins with himself, and afterwards includes others in the same charge.

Psalm 65:4-8

4. Blessed is the man whom thou hast chosen, and hast brought near thee; we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of the sanctuary of thy palace. **5**. Terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer to us, O God of our salvation! the hope of all the ends of the earth, and the far of places of the sea. [448] **6**. By his strength setting fast the mountains, being girded with power. [449] **7**. Stilling the noise

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ים, *yam*, *the sea*, is frequently employed to denote the *islands* which are encompassed by the sea, and being here set in opposition to "the ends or extreme parts of the earth," that is, the continent, it signifies the most remote islands of the world. Accordingly, the Chaldee paraphrase is, "And of the islands of the sea which are remote from the continent." The concluding part of this verse is evidently prophetical of that period when all mankind, when people of every tribe and color and clime, shall be blessed with the knowledge of the gospel, and worship the only true God.

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From the length and looseness of the garments of the inhabitants of the East, in ancient times, it was necessary to bind them close with a girdle, when they intended to exert their strength. Hence the expression, "girded with strength." Dr Lowth thinks the allusion is to the vesture of the Aaronical priesthood. — *Lectures on Sacred Poetry*, *volume* 1, pp. 173-175.

of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the nations. **8**. They also that dwell in the ends of the earth shall fear at thy signs; thou shalt make the outgoings of the evening and morning to rejoice.

4. *Blessed is the man whom thou hast chosen* Having already acknowledged that the people had separated themselves from God by their sins, and forfeited all right to be heard, he now takes refuge in the free grace of God, which secures the remission of sin amongst other blessings. He thus casts an additional light upon what he had said on the point of guilt being purged away, by pointing to the cause of God, as being favorable to poor sinners, which can only be found in his fatherly love leading him to welcome them into his presence, however undeserving. That pardon which we daily receive flows from our adoption, and on it also are all our prayers founded. How could the sinner venture into the sight of God, to obtain reconciliation with him, were he not persuaded of his being a Father? In the words before us, David does not speak of the grace of God as reaching to the Gentiles, (which he had done in a preceding part of the psalm,) but in terms which apply only to the times in which he wrote. The Church of God was confined to the Jews, and they only were admitted into the sanctuary; whereas now, when the distinction has been abolished, and other nations called to the same privilege, we are all at liberty to approach him with familiarity. Christ is our peace, (Ephesians 2:14,) who has united in one those who were far off, and those who were nigh.

What has been now said may show at once the scope of the Psalmist. The Church and chosen people of God being in possession of the promise of the remission of sin, he calls those blessed whom God has included within that number, and introduced into the enjoyment of such a distinguished privilege. His language intimates, that the election did not at that time terminate upon all; for he insists upon it as the special prerogative of the Jews, that they had been chosen by God in preference to the other nations. Were it supposed that man could do anything to anticipate the grace of God, the election would cease to be with God himself, although the right and power of it are expressly ascribed to him. [450] But the Jews had no excellency above others, except in the one point of having enjoyed the distinguishing favor of God. The middle wall of partition is now broken down, that the Gentiles might be called in. It is evident, however, that all are not alike called; and observation proves the ignorance of those who will assert that the grace of God is extended to all in common, without any choice exerted on his part. Can any reason be imagined why God should not call all alike, except it be that his sovereign election distinguishes some from others? Faith and prayer may be means for procuring us an interest in the grace of God; but

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"Nam si anteverterent homines Dei gratiam, non resideret penes ipsum electio, eujus potestas et jus ei tribuitur." — *Lat.*

the source whence it flows is not within but without us. [451] There is a blessedness in exercising trust upon God, and embracing his promises — a blessedness experienced when, through faith in Christ the Mediator, we apprehend him as our Father, and direct our prayers to him in that character; — but ere this faith and prayer can have any existence, it must be supposed that we who are estranged from God by nature have been brought near by an exercise of his favor. We are near him, not as having anticipated his grace, and come to him of ourselves, but because, in his condescension, he has stretched out his hand as far as hell itself to reach us. To speak more properly, he first elects us, and then testifies his love by calling us. It is noticeable, also, that though God separated the seed of Abraham to be a peculiar people, entitled as the circumcision to a place in his temple, there can be no question that David recognised a distinction even amongst those who were Jews, all not having been the subjects of God's effectual calling, nor yet properly entitled to a place in his temple. The Psalmist alludes, indeed, to the outward sanctuary, when he speaks of the Jews as chosen to approach God; but we must remember (what was brought under our attention, Psalm 15:1 and Psalm 24:3) that all were not real members of the Church who trod the court of the temple, but that the great qualifications necessary were the pure heart and the clean hands. Accordingly, we must understand by those brought near to God, such as present themselves before him in the exercise of genuine faith, and not such as merely occupy a place in his temple as to outward appearance. But, again, the being chosen, and the being called to approach God, are two things mentioned here together, to correct any such vain idea as that the sheep of God's flock are allowed to wander at will for any length of time, and not brought into the fold. [452] This is one way by which our gratuitous adoption is evidenced, that we come to the sanctuary under the leading of the Holy Spirit.

The Psalmist insists upon the fruit springing out of the blessed privilege of which he had spoken, when he adds, that believers *would be satisfied* with the fullness of his temple. Hypocrites may go there, but they return empty and unsatisfied as to any spiritual blessing enjoyed. It is noticeable, that the person is changed in this part of the verse, and that David associates himself with other believers, preferring to speak upon this subject from

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"Fides quidem et invocatio media sunt, quae nobis concilient Dei gratiam, sed fons extra nos quaerendus est." — *Lat.* "Sont los moyens pour nous faire trouver grace envers Dieu." etc. — *Fr.*

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"Jam hic vocatio adjungitur electioni, ne quis somniet oves perpetuo vagari, neque unquam colligi in ovile. Nam hoc effectu se ostendit," etc. — *Lat.* "Or la vocation exterieure est yci adjointe a l'election, afin que nul n'imagine que les brebis soyent tousjours errantes sans estre recueillies en la bergerie: car l'adoption gratuite de Dieu se declare," etc. — *Fr.*

personal experience. We are not to understand that believers are fully replenished with the goodness of God at any one moment; it is conveyed to them gradually; but while the influences of the Spirit are thus imparted in successive measures, each of them is enriched with a present sufficiency, till all be in due time advanced to perfection. I might remark here, that while it is true, as stated, (Psalm 103:5,) that "God satisfieth our mouth with good things," at the same time it is necessary to remember what is said elsewhere, "Open thy mouth, and I will fill it." Our contracted desires is the reason why we do not receive a more copious supply of blessings from God; he sees that we are straitened in ourselves, and accommodates the communications of his goodness to the measure of our expectations. By specifying particularly the *goodness of the sanctuary,* the Psalmist passes an implied commendation upon the outward helps which God has appointed for leading us into the enjoyment of heavenly blessings. In these former times God could have directly stretched out his hand from heaven to supply the wants of his worshippers, but saw fit to satisfy their souls by means of the doctrine of the law, sacrifices, and other rites and external aids to piety. Similar are the means which he employs in the Church still; and though we are not to rest in these, neither must we neglect them.

5 *Terrible things* [453] *in righteousness wilt thou answer to us* He proceeds to illustrate, although in a somewhat different form, the same point of the blessedness of those who are admitted into the temple of God, and nourished in his house. He declares that God would answer his people by miracles or fearful signs, displaying his power; as if he had said, in deliverances as wonderful as those which he wrought for their fathers when they went out of Egypt. It is in no common or ordinary manner that God has preserved his Church, but with terrible majesty. It is well that this should be known, and the people of God taught to sustain their hopes in the most apparently desperate exigencies. The Psalmist speaks of the deliverances of God as specially enjoyed by the Jewish nation, but adds, that he was *the hope of the ends of the earth,* even to the world's remotest extremities. Hence it follows, that the grace of God was to be extended to the Gentiles.

6. *By his strength setting fast the mountains* For the sake of illustration, he instances the power of God seen in the general fabric of the world. In these times it sounded as a new and strange truth to say that the Gentiles

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The original word for *terrible things* "signifies sometimes *terrible* sometimes w*onderful things*, anything that exceeds in greatness or quality. In the latter sense we have it, Deuteronomy 10:21, when speaking of God, it is said, 'He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things,' — *great*, *exceeding*, *wonderful things*; and those acts of mercy, and not of justice or punishment; and so here it appears to signify, being joined with *answering us*, or *granting us*, *in answer to our prayers*, (so ענת signifies *to answer a request*, *to hear a prayer*,) and with *in righteousness*, which frequently imports *mercy* The LXX. accordingly read it θαυμαστὸς, *wonderful*." — *Hammond*

should be called to the same hope with the Jews. To prove that it was not so incredible as they were apt to conceive, the Psalmist very properly adverts to the Divine power apparent in all parts of the world. He instances the mountains rather than the plains, because the immense masses of earth, and the lofty rocks which they present, convey a more impressive idea of the Godhead. Interpreters are not agreed as to the exact meaning of the verse which follows. Some think that the mark of similitude must be supplied before the first word of the sentence, and that it is meant to be said that God stills the tumults of men when raging in their insolent attempts, as he stills the agitations of the sea. Others understand the first part of the verse to be a metaphorical declaration of what is plainly stated in the close. I would take the words simply as they stand, and consider that in the first member of the verse, David adverts to the illustration of the divine power which we have in the sea, and in the second to that which we have in his operations amongst men. His strength is shown in calming the waves and tempestuous swellings of the ocean. It is put forth also in quelling tumults which may have been raised by the people.

8 *They also that dwell, etc.* By the *signs* referred to, we must evidently understand those signal and memorable works of the Lord which bear the impress of his glorious hand. It is true, that the minutest and meanest objects, whether in the heavens or upon the earth, reflect to some extent the glory of God; but the name mentioned emphatically applies to miracles, as affording a better display of the divine majesty. So striking would be the proofs of God's favor to his Church, that, as the Psalmist here intimates to us, they would constrain the homage and wonder of the most distant and barbarous nations. In the latter part of the verse, if we take the interpretation suggested by some, nothing more is meant, than that when the sun rises in the morning, men are refreshed by its light; and again, that when the moon and stars appear at night, they are relieved from the gloom into which they must otherwise have been sunk. Were this interpretation adopted, a preposition must be understood; as if it had been said, Thou makest men to rejoice *on account of,* or *by* the rising of the sun, of the moon, and of the stars. But the words, as they stand, convey a sense which is sufficiently appropriate without having recourse to any addition. It was said, that in consequence of the wonders done by the Lord, fear would spread itself over the uttermost parts of the earth; and the same thing is now asserted of the joy which they would shed abroad: from the rising to the setting sun, men would rejoice in the Lord, as well as fear him.

Psalm 65:9-13

9. Thou hast visited the earth, and watered it; thou hast greatly enriched it; the river of God is full of waters: thou wilt prepare their corn, for so thou hast provided for it. **10**. Thou dost saturate its furrows, thou makest the rain to fall into them; thou moistenest

it with showers; thou blessest the buddings forth of it. **11**. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and thy paths will drop fatness. **12**. They drop upon the dwellings [454] of the wilderness, and the hills shall be girt about with gladness; [455] **13**. The pastures are clothed with flocks, the valleys are covered with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.

9. *Thou hast visited the earth, and watered it* This and the verbs which follow denote action continually going forward, and may therefore be rendered in the present tense. The exact meaning of the second verb in the sentence has been disputed. Some derive it from the verb שוק, *shuk,* signifying *to desire;* and giving this meaning, that God visits the earth after it has been made dry and thirsty by long drought. [456] Others derive it from the verb שקה, *shakah,* signifying *to give drink.* This seems the most natural interpretation — *Thou visitest the earth by watering it.* It suits the connection better, for it follows, *thou plentifully enrichest it,* an expression obviously added by way of amplification. Whether the Psalmist speaks of Judea only, or of the world at large, is a point as to which different opinions may be held. I am disposed myself to think, that although what he says applies to the earth generally, he refers more particularly to Judea, as the former part of the psalm has been occupied with recounting the kindness of God to his own Church and people more especially. This view is confirmed by what is added, *the stream* or *river of God is full of water* Some take the *river of God* to mean a great or mighty river, [457] but such a rendering is harsh and overstrained, and on that supposition, *rivers,* in the plural number, would have been the form of expression used. I consider that he singles out the small rivulet of Siloah, [458] and sets it in opposition to the natural rivers which enrich other countries, intending an allusion to the word

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"Ou, pasturages," — *Fr. marg.* "Or, pastures."

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"Curiously wrought or embroidered girdles are still, as they were of old, an essential part of Eastern finery both to men and women. It is in allusion probably to such sumptuous girdles worn particularly on joyful occasions, that the Psalmist here represents the hills as 'girded with joy.'" — *Mant.*

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This is the sense preferred by Aben Ezra and Kimchi. *Thou hast visited in mercy*; *i.e.*, blessed the earth *or* land, *after thou hast made it dry or thirsty*; *thou hast* or *dost enrich it greatly*; *i.e.*, thou, the same God, who hast punished and made thirsty dost again return in mercy, enriching the land and restoring plenty to it. Thus it was after the three years' famine recorded in 2 Samuel 21:1. But the Septuagint, Arabic, Chaldee, and Syriac versions, interpret the word in the sense of *watering.*

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Some think reference is made to the overflowing of the Jordan after a long drought.

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of Moses, (Deuteronomy 11:10,) that the land which the Lord their God should give unto his people would not be as the land of Egypt, fertilized by the overflowings of the Nile, but a land drinking water of the rain of heaven. Or we may suppose that he calls the rain itself metaphorically *the river of God* [459] The words must, at any rate, be restricted to Judea, as by *the pastures* or *dwellings of the wilderness,* we are also to understand the more dry and uncultivated districts, called in Scripture "the hill country." But while it is the kindness of God to his own people which is here more particularly celebrated as being better known, we are bound, in whatever part of the world we live, to acknowledge the riches of the Divine goodness seen in the earth's fertility and increase. It is not of itself that it brings forth such an inexhaustible variety of fruits, but only in so far as it has been fitted by God for producing the food of man. Accordingly, there is a propriety and force in the form of expression used by the Psalmist when he adds, that *corn is provided for man, because the earth has been so prepared by God;* [460] which means, that the reason of that abundance with which the earth teems, is its having been expressly formed by God in his fatherly care of the great household of mankind, to supply the wants of his children.

10. *Thou dost saturate its furrows* Some take the verbs as being in the optative mood, and construe the words as a prayer. But there can be little doubt that David still continues the strain of thanksgiving, and praises God for moistening and saturating the earth with rains that it may be fitted for

This river ran through Jerusalem, the city of God. Bishop Hare, following Simeon de Muis, is of opinion that this river is meant.

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"*The stream of God*, *i e.*, copious rain, according to the Oriental idiom." — *Dr Geddes.* See p. 7, note 1, of this volume. And without supposing this Hebraism, the treasures of water which descend from the clouds may, with great poetical beauty, be termed *the river of God* He collects them there by the wonderful process of evaporation, and he pours them down. They are entirely in his hand, and absolutely beyond the control of man. "The keys of the clouds," say the Jews, "are peculiarly kept in God's hand, as the keys of life and resurrection." He can employ them as the instruments of his mercy, by pouring down from them upon the earth copious and refreshing showers, to promote vegetation and produce fruitful seasons; and he can also make them when he pleases the instruments of judgment, either by bottling them up, or by pouring from them floods of rain, as in the deluge, and when the harvest is made a heap in the day of grief and desperate sorrow, Isaiah 17:11. Horsley, instead of פלג, *peleg*, in the singular, proposes to read פלגות, *pelagoth*, in the plural, and translates, "God is he who filleth the rivulets with water." "The word פלג," says he, "as remarked by "Archbishop Secker, is very rarely used as a noun in the singular number. Mr Bates, indeed, takes it to be a noun in Psalm 55:9; but his interpretation of that text is very doubtful. In the plural it never signifies large rivers, but small brooks and rivulets. We have the authority of the Syriac for reading it in the plural."

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In the Septuagint the last clause reads, "Οτι οὕτῶς ἡ ἑτοιμασία," "For thus is the preparation;" that is, the earth was thus prepared. In the Syriac it is, "When thou didst found or establish it;" and in the Chaldee, "Seeing thou hast so founded it."

producing fruit. By this he would signify to us, that the whole order of things in nature shows the fatherly love of God, in condescending to care for our daily sustenance. He multiplies his expressions when speaking of a part of the divine goodness, which many have wickedly and impiously disparaged. It would seem as if the more perspicacity men have in observing second causes in nature, they will rest in them the more determinedly, instead of ascending by them to God. Philosophy ought to lead us upwards to him, the more that it penetrates into the mystery of his works; but this is prevented by the corruption and ingratitude of our hearts; and as those who pride themselves in their acuteness, avert their eye from God to find the origin of rain in the air and the elements, it was the more necessary to awaken us out of such a spirit.

11 *Thou crownest the year with thy goodness* [461] Some read — *Thou crownest the year* of *thy goodness;* as if the Psalmist meant that the fertile year had a peculiar glory attached to it, and were crowned, so to speak, by God. Thus, if there was a more abundant crop or vintage than usual, this would be the crown of the year. And it must be granted that God does not bless every year alike. Still there is none but what is crowned with some measure of excellency; and for that reason it would seem best to retain the simpler rendering of the words, and view them as meaning that the Divine goodness is apparent in the annual returns of the season. The Psalmist further explains what he intended, when he adds, that *the paths of God dropped fatness,* — using this as a metaphorical term for *the clouds,* upon which God rideth, as upon chariots, as we read in Psalm 104:3 [462] The earth derives its fruitfulness from the sap or moisture; this comes from the rain, and the rain from the clouds. With a singular gracefulness of expression, these are therefore represented as dropping fatness, and this because they are the paths or vehicles of God; as if he had said, that, wherever the Deity walked there flowed down from his feet fruits in endless variety and abundance. He amplifies this goodness of God, by adding, that his fatness drops even upon the wilder and more uncultivated districts. The *wilderness*

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This, say some, was probably the year which followed the three years of famine, after Absalom's rebellion.

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Some have imagined that instead of *paths* we should render *cloud*; but the former reading is more poetical. The original word מעגלך, *paths*, is derived from עגל, *round*, *circular*, *smooth*, because *paths* are made by *cart-wheels turning round* upon them. Accordingly, Horsley renders it, "thy chariot-wheels," and French and Skinner, "the tracts of thy chariot-wheels." God is here represented as driving round the earth, and from the *clouds* the *paths* of his chariot everywhere scattering blessings upon mankind. This is an instance of the bold and sublime imagery for which the Hebrew poetry is so remarkably distinguished. God is elsewhere described as riding on the clouds during a storm of rain or thunder, Psalm 18:9, 10, 11. Some read, "thy orbits," and understand all the circling seasons of the year, as ruled by the courses of the heavenly bodies.

is not to be taken here for the absolute waste where nothing grows, but for such places as are not so well cultivated, where there are few inhabitants, and where, notwithstanding, the Divine goodness is even more illustrated than elsewhere in dropping down fatness upon the tops of the mountains. [463] Notice is next taken of *the valleys* and level grounds, to show that there is no part of the earth overlooked by God, and that the riches of his liberality extend over all the world. The variety of its manifestation is commended when it is added, that *the valleys* and lower grounds *are clothed with flocks,* [464] as well as with corn. He represents inanimate things as rejoicing, which may be said of them in a certain sense, as when we speak of the fields smiling, when they refresh our eye with their beauty. It may seem strange, that he should first tell us, that they *shout for joy,* and then add the feebler expression, that *they sing;* interposing, too, the intensative particle, אף, *aph, they shout for joy,* yea, *they also sing* The verb, however, admits of being taken in the future tense, *they shall sing,* and this denotes a continuation of joy, that they would rejoice, not only one year, but through the endless succession of the seasons. I may add, what is well known, that in Hebrew the order of expression is frequently inverted in this way.

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"By desert or wilderness," observes Dr Shaw, "the reader is not always to understand a country altogether barren and unfruitful, but such only as is rarely or never sown or cultivated; which, though it yields no crops of corn or fruit, yet affords herbage, more or less, for the grazing of cattle, with fountains or rills of water, though more sparingly interspersed than in other places."

464

The phrase, "the pastures are clothed with flocks," cannot be regarded as the vulgar language of poetry. It appears peculiarly beautiful and appropriate, when we consider the numerous flocks which whitened the plains of Syria and Canaan. In the Eastern countries, sheep are much more prolific than with us, and they derive their name from their great fruitfulness; bringing forth, as they are said to do, "thousands and ten thousands in their streets," Psalm 144:13. They, therefore, formed no mean part of the wealth of the East.

Psalm 66

PSALM 66

There may have been one deliverance in particular, which the Psalmist celebrates here in the name of the Church, but he includes the many and various mercies which God had all along conferred upon his chosen people. While he takes notice of the divine interposition in their behalf, in a crisis of great mercy and distress, he suggests it as matter of comfort under trial, that their subjection to the tyranny of their enemies had been designed to prove them as silver in the furnace. At the close, he would appear to speak of himself individually, and adduces it as a proof of his integrity, that God had heard him, for God does not grant acceptance to the wicked.

To the chief musician, the Song of a Psalm. [465]

Psalm 66:1-4

1. Shout unto God, all the earth. **2**. Sing the honor of his name: make glorious his praise. [466] **3**. Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works! in the greatness of thy power shall thine enemies lie [or

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"This psalm is anonymous; nor can we, with certainty, determine to what time it relates. Venema refers it to the reign of Hezekiah, and supposes it to celebrate the deliverance which was effected by the destruction of Sennacherib's army. Rudinger is of opinion, that it celebrates the opening of the sacred temple, after the return from Babylon. It must be owned, that we have nothing but conjecture to offer on this subject; yet it appears to me that the latter of these opinions is the most probable." — *Walford.*

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"Ou, mettez gloire a sa louan." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, put glory to his praise."

feign submission] unto thee. **4**. All the earth shall worship thee, and they shall sing unto thee; they shall sing thy name. Selah.

1. *Shout unto God, all the earth* The psalm begins with this general declaration, which is afterwards reduced to particulars. [467] He addresses himself to the whole world, and from this it would seem evident, that he predicts the extent to which the kingdom of God should reach at the coming of Christ. In the second verse the call is repeated with increasing vehemency, to stir up to the praises of God, such as might otherwise be remiss in the service. *To sing the honor of his name,* is an expression sufficiently obvious; meaning, that we should extol his sacred name in a manner suitable to its dignity, so that it may obtain its due and deserved adoration. But the clause which follows is rather ambiguous. Some think that it conveys a repetition of the same idea contained in other words, and read, *set forth the glory of his praise.* [468] I prefer taking the Hebrew word signifying *praise* to be in the accusative case; rendering the words literally, *make a glory his praise.* And by this I understand him to mean, not as some do, that we should glory exclusively in his praises, [469] but simply, that we highly exalt his praises, that they may be glorious. The Psalmist is not satisfied with our declaring them moderately, and insists that we should celebrate his goodness in some measure proportionably to its excellence.

3. *Say unto God, How terrible art thou in thy works!* Here he proceeds to state the grounds why he would have us to praise God. Many content themselves with coldly descanting to others of his praises, but with the view of awakening and more deeply impressing our hearts, he directs us to address ourselves immediately to God. It is when we hold converse with him apart, and with no human eye to witness us, that we feel the vanity of hypocrisy, and will be likely to utter only what we have well and seriously meditated in our hearts. Nothing tends more to beget a reverential awe of God upon our spirits than sisting ourselves in his presence. What the Psalmist adds is fitted and designed to produce the same feeling, *that through the greatness of God's power, his enemies feign submission to him* Are they who would perversely and obstinately revolt from his service, forced to humble themselves before him, whether they will it or not, how much more, then,

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"Generalis est praefatio, quam mox sequentur hypotheses." — *Lat.* "C'est une preface generale, dont les applications speciales suivent incontinent apres." — *Fr.*

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Hammond's objection to this is, that if כבוד, *glory*, were in the construct state, governing the noun which follows, and giving this reading, *the glory of his*, *praise*, the vowel should be changed from *kamets*, to *segol*

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This is Aben Ezra's view. He would read, "Make *your* glory his praise;" that is, let it be your glory to praise him.

ought his own children to serve him, who are invited into his presence, by the accents of tenderness, instead of being reduced to subjection by terror? There is an implied contrast drawn between the voluntary homage which they yield, as attracted by the sweet influences of grace, and that slavish obedience which is wrung reluctantly from the unbeliever. The Hebrew word here used for *to lie,* signifies to yield such a submission as is constrained, and not free or cordial, as Psalm 18:45. Neither the words nor the scope favor the other senses which have been suggested, as, that his enemies would acknowledge themselves to have been deceived in their hopes, or that they would deny having ever intended hostilities against him. There are many ways in which hypocrites may *lie,* but nothing more is meant by the Psalmist here, than that the power of God is such as to force them into a reluctant subjection.

4. *All the earth shall worship thee.* The Psalmist had good reason for insisting upon this one point again and again. Though all tongues were tuned to the praise of God, they never could adequately extol it; and yet such are the negligence and the perversity of men, that they will scarcely lift one feeble note in celebration of a theme which should command their united strength and might. We have another prediction here, of a time being to come when God would be worshipped, not only by the Jews, a small section of the human family, but by all the nations which would be eventually brought under his government. And we are not to consider that he refers to such a worship as would be constrained, and only not withheld, because resistance might be dangerous, but to the sincere homage of the heart — *they shall sing unto thee! they shall sing unto thy name* Praise is the best of all sacrifices, (as we are told, Psalm 50:14, 23) and the true evidence of godliness. [470]

Psalm 66:5-9

5. Come and see the works of God; he is terrible in his dealing towards the children of men. **6**. He turned the sea into dry land; they went through the flood on foot; there did we rejoice in him. **7.** He ruleth by his power over the world; his eyes behold the nations; rebels [471] shall not exalt themselves. **8**. Bless our God; [472] O ye people! and resound the voice of his praise. **9**. Who hath brought our souls unto life, and hath not suffered our feet to fall.

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"Est enim hoc praecipuum laudis sacrificium, ut habetur, Psalmo 50:14, 23, ac verum etiam testimonium pietatis. — *Lat.* "Car c'est le principal sacrifice, que le sacrifice de louange, etc., et aussi le vray tesmoignage de piete." — *Fr.*

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Defectores — Lat Apostats — Fr The original word is הסוררים, *hassorerim*, from סור, *sur*, *to turn aside*

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5. *Come and see the works of God* An indirect censure is here passed upon that almost universal thoughtlessness which leads men to neglect the praises of God. Why is it that they so blindly overlook the operations of his hand, but just because they never direct their attention seriously to them? We need to be aroused upon this subject. The words before us may receive some explanation by referring to a parallel passage, Psalm 46:8. But the great scope of them is this, that the Psalmist would withdraw men from the vain or positively sinful and pernicious pursuits in which they are engaged, and direct their thoughts to the works of God. To this he exhorts them, chiding their backwardness and negligence. The expression, *Come and see,* intimates that what they blindly overlooked was open to observation; for were it otherwise with the works of God, this language would be inappropriate. He next points out what those works of God are to which he would have our attention directed; in general he would have us look to the method in which God governs the human family. This experimental or practical kind of knowledge, if I might so call it, is that which makes the deepest impression. [473] We find, accordingly, that Paul, (Acts 17:27) after speaking of the power of God in general, brings his subject to bear upon this one particular point, and calls upon us to descend into ourselves if we would discover the proofs of a present God. The last clause of the fifth verse I would not interpret with some as meaning that God was *terrible above the children of men* — superior to them in majesty — but rather that *he is terrible towards them,* evincing an extraordinary providence in their defense and preservation, as we have seen noticed, Psalm 40:5. Men need look no further, therefore, than themselves, in order to discover the best grounds for reverencing and fearing God. The Psalmist passes next from the more general point of his providence towards mankind at large, to his special care over his own Church, adverting to what he had done for the redemption of his chosen people. What he states here must be considered as only one illustration of many which he might have touched upon, and as intended to remind God's people of the infinite variety of benefits with which their first and great deliverance had been followed up and confirmed. This appears obvious from what he adds, *there we rejoiced in him* It is impossible that the joy of that deliverance could have extended to him or any of the descendants of the ancient Israelites, unless it had partaken the nature of a pledge and illustration of the love of God to the Church generally. Upon that event he

"On this Theodoret remarks, that when men bless God they offer him words only; but when God blesses man, it is not in word only, but in deed; an abundance of good things always accompanying the benediction." — *Cresswell*

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"Haec enim experimentalis (ut ita loquar) notitia magis afficit." — *Lat.* "Car ceste cognoissance d'experience et de prattique esmeut d'avantage." — *Fr.*

showed himself to be the everlasting Savior of his people; so that it proved a common source of joy to all the righteous.

7. *He ruleth by his power over the world* The Hebrew word עולם, *olam,* which I have translated *the world,* signifies occasionally *an age,* or *eternity;* [474] but the first sense seems to agree best with the context, and the meaning of the words is, that God is endued with the power necessary for wielding the government of the world. What follows agrees with this, *that his eyes behold the nations* Under the law, Judea was the proper seat of his kingdom; but his providence always extended to the world at large; and the special favor shown to the posterity of Abraham, in consideration of the covenant, did not prevent him from extending an eye of providential consideration to the surrounding nations. As an evidence of his care reaching to the different countries round, he takes notice of the judgments which God executed upon the wicked and the ungodly. He proves that there was no part of the human family which God overlooked, by referring to the fact of the punishment of evil-doers. There may be much in the Divine administration of the world calculated to perplex our conclusions; but there are always some tokens to be seen of his judgments, and these sufficiently clear to strike the eye of an acute and attentive observer.

8 *Bless our God, O ye people!* Although calling upon all, without exception, to praise God, he refers particularly to some Divine interposition in behalf of the Church. He would seem to hint that the Gentiles were destined, at a future period, to share the favor now exclusively enjoyed by God's chosen people. In the meantime, he reminds them of the signal and memorable nature of the deliverance granted, by calling upon them to spread abroad the fame of it. Though he speaks of the Jewish people as having been *brought unto life,* (an expression intended to denote deliverance of a more than ordinary kind,) this means that they had been preserved from approaching danger rather than recovered from a calamity which had actually overtaken them, It is said that *their feet had not been suffered to fall,* which implies, that, through seasonable help which they had received, they had not fallen, but stood firm. The Psalmist, however, does not take occasion, from the evil having been anticipated and averted, to undervalue it. As they had been preserved safe by an interposition of Divine goodness, he speaks of this as tantamount to having been brought or restored to life.

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Our English version renders the word in this last sense. Hammond, with Calvin, prefers reading, "over the world." "That עולם," says he, "ἄιὼν, as the English *age*, signifies not only *time* and *duration*, but also the *men* that live in any *time*, there is no question. And then עולם מושל, must here most properly be rendered *ruling the world*, or *over the world*; and so the Chaldee certainly understood, who read, 'who exerciseth dominion over the world;' and so I suppose the LXX. their 'δεσπόξουτι τοῦ ἀιῶνος,' 'having dominion over the world,' doth import." The Vulgate, in this instance not following the Septuagint, has "in aeternum," "for ever."

Psalm 66:10-12

> **10**. For thou, O God! hast proved us, thou hast tried us as silver is tried. **11**. Thou broughtest us into the net, thou laidest restraint upon our loins. **12**. Thou hast made man to ride over our heads, [475] we have come into fire and water, and thou hast brought us into a fruitful place. [476]

10 *For thou, O God! hast proved us* We may read, *Though thou, O God! etc.,* and then the passage comes in as a qualification of what went before, and is brought forward by the Psalmist to enhance the goodness of God, who had delivered them from such severe calamities. But there is another object which I consider him to have in view, and this is the alleviation of the grief of God's people, by setting before them the comfort suggested by the words which follow. When visited with affliction, it is of great importance that we should consider it as coming from God, and as expressly intended for our good. It is in reference to this that the Psalmist speaks of their having been *proved and tried.* At the same time, while he adverts to God's trying his children with the view of purging away their sin, as dross is expelled from the silver by fire, he would intimate, also, that trial had been made of their patience. The figure implies that their probation had been severe; for silver is cast repeatedly into the furnace. They express themselves thankful to God, that, while proved with affliction, they had not been destroyed by it; but that their affliction was both varied and very severe, appears not only from the metaphor, but from the whole context, where they speak of having been cast into the net, being reduced to straits, men riding over their heads, and of being brought through shipwreck and conflagration. [477] The expression,

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To ride over; signifies to insult or tyrannise over. But here the image may be taken from the trampling of war-horses in the day of battle. The cavalry, in the field of battle, pay no regard to the fallen, the dying, and the dead, but tread promiscuously upon all that come in their way, "Thou hast permitted us," says Dr Adam Clarke, "to fall under the dominion of our enemies, who have treated us as broken infantry are when the cavalry dashes among their disordered ranks, treading all under their horses' feet."

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"In planitiem." — *Lat.* "En lieu plantureux." — *Fr.*

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"Per naufragium et incendium transiisse." The French version reads, "Par l'eau et par le feu;" but it is important to retain the original more closely, as giving what Calvin considered to be the sense of the words in the text. Fire and water, the one of which elements consumes, while the other suffocates, is a proverbial expression, signifying, as our author afterwards states, extreme danger and complicated calamities. "When thou passest through the *waters*, I will be with thee; when thou walkest through the *fire*, thou shalt not be burnt," Isaiah 43:2. See also Psalm 32:6; Ezekiel 16:6, 7; Numbers 31:23. Those things are said to come into or to pass through the fire, which abide the same, without being consumed; and which, like metals, lose only thereby their dross.

laying a restraint [or *chain*] *upon their loins,* is introduced as being stronger than the one which goes before. It was not a net of thread which had been thrown over them, but rather they had been bound down with hard and insolvable fetters. The expression which follows refers to men who had shamefully tyrannised over them, and ridden them down as cattle. By *fire* and *water* are evidently meant complicated afflictions; and it is intimated that God had exercised his people with every form of calamity. They are the two elements which contribute more than any other to sustain human life, but are equally powerful for the destruction of it. It is noticeable, that the Psalmist speaks of all the cruelties which they had most unjustly suffered from the hands of their enemies, as an infliction of Divine punishment; and would guard the Lord's people against imagining that God was ignorant of what they had endured, or distracted by other things from giving attention to it. In their condition, as here described, we have that of the Church generally represented to us; and this, that when subjected to vicissitudes, and cast out of the fire into the water, by a succession of trials, there may at last be felt to be nothing new or strange in the event to strike us with alarm. The Hebrew word רויה, *revayah,* which I have rendered *fruitful place,* means literally *a well-watered land.* Here it is taken metaphorically for a condition of prosperity, the people of God being represented as brought into a pleasant and fertile place, where there is abundance of pasturage. The truth conveyed is, that God, although he visit his children with temporary chastisements of a severe description, will ultimately crown them with joy and prosperity. It is a mistake to suppose that the allusion is entirely to their being settled in the land of Canaan,

[478] for the psalm has not merely reference to the troubles which they underwent in the wilderness, but to the whole series of distresses to which they were subjected at the different periods of their history.

Psalm 66:13-16

> **13**. I will come into thy house with burnt-offerings; I will pay thee my vows, **14**. Which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble. **15**. I will offer unto thee burnt-sacrifices of fatlings, with the incense of rams; [479] I will bring bullocks, with goats.

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Cresswell takes this view. His note on the place is, "'*Into* a wealthy place,' literally *into* an irriguous region, (comp. Judges 1:15,) *i.e.*, into a fertile country, a land of abundance, the promised land: comp. Exodus 3:8."

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Here Calvin, as well as our English Bible, joins *incense* with *rams*, appearing to mean by *incense*, offering by fire, the smoke produced by the sacrifice. But the burning of incense was a distinct offering from that of animal sacrifices; and therefore many critics read the verse so as to make *incense* a distinct offering. Thus Horsley, altering the punctuation, translates,

Selah. **16**. Come, hear, I will tell to all them that fear God, what he hath done for my soul.

13 *I will come into thy house with burnt offerings* Hitherto the Psalmist has spoken in the name of the people at large. Now he emphatically gives expression to his own private feelings, and calls upon them, by his example, to engage individually in the exercises of religion, it being impossible that there should be any hearty common consent unless each entered seriously upon the service of thanksgiving for himself and apart. We are taught that when God at any time succours us in our adversity, we do an injustice to his name if we forget to celebrate our deliverances with solemn acknowledgements. More is spoken of in this passage than thanksgiving. He speaks of vows having been contracted by him in his affliction, and these evidenced the constancy of his faith. The exhortation of the Apostle James is worthy of our special notice —

"Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry?
let him sing psalms." (James 5:13)

How many are there who lavish their hypocritical praises upon God in the career of their good fortune, while they are no sooner reduced to straits than the fervor of their love is damped, or gives place to the violence of fretfulness and impatience. The best evidence of true piety is when we sigh to God under the pressure of our afflictions, and show, by our prayers, a holy perseverance in faith and patience; while afterwards we come forward with the expression of our gratitude. The words, *which my lips have uttered,* are not an unmeaning addition, but imply that he had never allowed himself to be so far overcome by grief as not to throw his desires into the express form of petition, declaring that he cast himself for safety into the hands of God. On the subject of vows, I may just shortly repeat the remarks which have been given at greater length elsewhere. First, the holy fathers never vowed anything to God but what they knew to be sanctioned by his approval. Secondly, their sole end in vowing was to evidence their gratitude. The Papists, therefore, can find no warrant, from their example, for the rash and impious vows which they practice. They obtrude upon God whatever chances to come first into their lips; the end which they propose to themselves is the farthest removed from the right one; and with devilish presumption they engage themselves to things which are not allowed them.

15 *I will offer unto thee burnt-sacrifices of fatlings.* We must suppose the speaker to be either David or one of the more considerable men of the nation, for none in humbler circumstances could have offered rich sacrifices of this

"Offerings of fatlings I will offer unto thee, with incense;
"I will sacrifice rams, bullocks, and full-grown goats."

This, we think, gives an improved view of the passage. It may be here observed, that the Hebrews were not allowed to sacrifice other animals than these three kinds, rams, bullocks, and goats.

kind. It is probable that David was the author of the psalm, and here he signifies his intention to show a kingly liberality in his offerings. The reason why God ordered victims to be offered as an expression of thanksgiving was, as is well known, to teach the people that their praises were polluted by sin, and needed to be sanctified from without. However we might propose to ourselves to praise the name of God, we could only profane it with our impure lips, had not Christ once offered himself up a sacrifice, to sanctify both us and our services. (Hebrews 10:7) It is through him, as we learn from the apostle, that our praises are accepted. The Psalmist, by way of commendation of his burnt-offering, speaks of its incense or sweet savor; for although in themselves vile and loathsome, yet the rams and other victims, so far as they were figures of Christ, sent up a sweet savor unto God. [480] Now that the shadows of the Law have been abolished, attentionis called to the true spiritual service. What this consists in, is more clearly brought under our notice in the verse which follows, where the Psalmist tells us, that he would spread abroad the fame of the benefits which he had received from God. Such was the end designed, even in the outward ceremonies under the Law, apart from which they could only be considered as an empty show. It was this — the fact, that they set forth the praises of the divine goodness — which formed the very season of the sacrifices, preserving them from insipidity. In calling, as he does, upon all *the fearers of the Lord,* the Psalmist teaches us, that if we duly feel the goodness of God, we will be inflamed with a desire to publish it abroad, that others may have their faith and hope confirmed, by what they hear of it, as well as join with us in a united song of praise. He addresses himself to none but such as feared the Lord, for they only could appreciate what he had to say, and it would have been lost labor to communicate it to the hypocritical and ungodly.

Psalm 66:17-20

17. I cried unto him with my mouth, and have extolled him under [or with] my tongue. [481] **18**. If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. **19**. But truly God hath heard me; he hath

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"Le Prophere loue yci le perfum de son holocauste, combien qu'il n'en peust monter au ciel qu' une odeur puante et infecte: mais il faut noter que les beliers et autres bestes qu'on sacrifioit flairoyent bon devant Dieu, entant que c'estoyent figures de Iesus Christ." — *Fr.*

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In the original, the prefix ב, *beth*, for *with* is omitted, but it is evidently understood. The reading is simply פי, *my mouth*, for בפי, *bephi*, *with my mouth* It is not uncommon in Hebrew for some word or phrase to be omitted, which must be supplied by the reader, in order to complete the regular or full construction. Thus in Psalm 114: 8, to the words מים-אגם, *agam-main*, *a pool of waters*, the letter ל, *lamed*, is to be supplied, לאגם, *laagam*, *into* a pool of, etc.

attended to the voice of my prayer. **20**. Blessed be God! who hath not turned away my prayer, and his mercy from me.

17. *I cried unto him with my mouth* He proves that he owed his safety to Divine interposition, from the circumstance of his having prayed, and in consequence, having sensibly experienced his kindness. Answers to prayer serve in no small degree to illustrate the goodness of God; and confirm our faith in it. In saying that he cried to God with his *mouth* and *tongue,* these are terms denoting, as we have seen in a previous part of the psalm, the vehemency and earnestness with which he prayed. Had he not prayed from the heart, he would have been rejected, but he makes mention of the *tongue* also, in token of the ardor of his supplications. Some absurdly imagine, that because the expression *under the tongue* is used, the meaning is *with the heart* Words are said to come from under the tongue, because they are formed by the flexion of the tongue, as in that passage,

"The poison of asps is under their lips," (Psalm 140:3)

The term *extol* intimates, that we cannot honor God more in our worship, than by looking upwards to him for deliverance. The Papists rob him of a chief part of his glory, when they direct their prayers to the dead or to images, and make such little account of calling upon the name of the Lord.

The Psalmist next lays down the rule, which must be attended to, if we would pray properly and acceptably; guarding against that presumptuous exercise which overlooks the necessity of faith and penitence. We see with what audacity hypocrites and ungodly men associate themselves with the Lord's people, in compliance with the general calls of the word to engage in prayer. To check this solemn mockery, the Psalmist mentions integrity of heart as indispensable. I am aware that the words may be considered as an assertion of his own personal uprightness of conduct, as we find him frequently vindicating this, by an appeal to the visible and practical proofs which God had shown of his favor to him; but his main object is evidently to enforce by the example of his own exercise the common propriety of drawing near to God with a pure heart. We have a parallel scripture in John 9:31, "We know that God heareth not sinners." In one sense, he hears none but sinners; for we must all conform to the great rule of applying to him for the remission of our sins. But while believers make an unreserved confession of guilt before God, by this very thing they cease to be sinners, for God pardons them in answer to their supplications. We are not to forget the words of Paul,

"Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity," — (2 Timothy 2:19)

Besides, to *regard iniquity in the heart* does not mean to be conscious of sin — for all the Lord's people must see their sins and be grieved for them, and this is rather praiseworthy than condemnable; — but to be bent upon the practice of iniquity. He particularly refers to the *heart,* intimating that

not only were his hands clean, in the sense of his being innocent before men, but that he could appeal to God in proof of his inward integrity. When the heart does not correspond to the outward conduct, and harbours any secret evil intent, the fair exterior appearance may deceive men; but it is an abomination in the sight of God, The Psalmist affirms with emphasis, that his prayers had been answered, and we ought to draw the inference that we shall never be disappointed, if we seek God in sincerity.

20 *Blessed be God! who hath not turned away my prayer* He concludes the psalm, as he began it, with thanksgiving, and gives the reason of his not having met with a repulse; or, to take the figurative expression which he employs, of God's not having *turned away his prayer.* This was, that he had not withdrawn his mercy. For it is entirely of his free grace that he is propitious, and that our prayers are not wholly ineffectual.

Psalm 67

PSALM 67

The following psalm contains a prayer for a blessing upon the Church, that besides being preserved in a state of safety in Judea, it might be enlarged to a new and unprecedented extent. It touches shortly upon the kingdom of God, which was to be erected in the world upon the coming of Christ. [482]

To the chief musician on Neginoth. A psalm or song.

Psalm 67:1-7

1. God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us. Selah. [483] **2**. That they may know thy way upon the earth,

[482]

With this agrees the opinion of the ancient Jews, who apply this psalm *to future times*, to the world to come, the times of the Messiah. The particular time and occasion of its composition can only be conjectured. Bishop Patrick thinks that it was probably composed by David, when, having brought the ark to Jerusalem and offered sacrifices, as promised in the psalm foregoing, verse 15, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord of Hosts, (2 Samuel 6:17, 18.) Horsley views it as "a hymn for the feast of tabernacles, prophetic of a general conversion of the world to the worship of God." Calmet is of opinion that the composition of this, as well as of the two preceding psalms, was posterior to the return of the Jews from Babylon; and that the particular occasion was the restoration of fertility to the soil after the protracted drought and scarcity recorded by the prophet Haggai, (Haggai 1:10,11; 2:17-19.) But though the particular time and occasion on which it was written cannot with certainty be determined, it is evidently a prayer of the ancient Church for the appearance of the Messiah, and the universal diffusion of his gospel.

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This verse contains a manifest allusion to the blessings which the priests were taught to pronounce upon the people of Israel, (Numbers 6:24-26.)

> thy salvation among all nations. **3**. Let the people praise thee, O God! let all the people praise thee. **4**. Let the nations be glad, and shout for joy; for he shall judge the people righteously, and thou shalt govern the nations upon earth. Selah. **5**. Let the people praise thee, O God: let all the people praise thee. **6**. The earth has given its increase; and God, even our own God!, will bless us. **7**. God shall bless us, [484] and all ends of the earth shall fear him.

1 *God be merciful unto us, and bless us* The psalm contains a prediction of Christ's kingdom, under which the whole world was to be adopted into a privileged relationship with God; but the Psalmist begins by praying for the Divine blessing, particularly upon the Jews. They were the first-born, (Exodus 4:22,) and the blessing was to terminate upon them first, and then go out to all the surrounding nations. I have used the imperative mood throughout the psalm, as other translators have done, although the future tense, which is that employed in the Hebrew, would suit sufficiently well, and the passage might be understood as encouraging the minds of the Lord's people to trust in the continuance and increase of the Divine favor. The words, however, are generally construed in the form of a prayer, and I merely threw out this as a suggestion. Speaking, as the Psalmist does, of those who belonged to the Church of God, and not of those who were without, it is noticeable that yet he traces all the blessings they received to God's free favor; and from this we may learn, that so long as we are here, we owe our happiness, our success, and prosperity, entirely to the same cause. This being the case, how shall any think to anticipate his goodness by merits of their own? *The light of God's countenance* may refer either to the sense of his love shed abroad in our hearts, or to the actual manifestation of it without, as, on the other hand, his face may be said to be clouded, when he strikes terrors into our conscience on account of our sins, or withdraws the outward marks of his favor.

2 *That they may know thy way upon the earth.* Here we have a clear prophecy of that extension of the grace of God by which the Gentiles were united into one body with the posterity of Abraham. The Psalmist prays for some conspicuous proof of favor to be shown his chosen people, which might attract the Gentiles to seek participation in the same blessed hope. [485] By the *way of God* is meant his covenant, which is the source or spring of salvation, and by which he discovered himself in the character of a Father to

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God, even our own God, will bless us, God shall bless us. There is here again clearly an allusion to the formula of blessing in Numbers 6:24-26, where the name of God is, as here, repeated three times in succession.

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"A fin que par la clarte d'icelle les Gentils soyent amenez a la participation de la mesme esperance." — *Fr.*

his ancient people, and afterwards more clearly under the Gospel, when the Spirit of adoption was shed abroad in greater abundance. [486] Accordingly, we find Christ himself saying,

"This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God," (John 17:3)

3 *Let the people praise thee, O God!* Having spoken of all nations participating in the saving knowledge of God, he next tells us that they would proclaim his goodness, and exhorts them to the exercise of gratitude. The repetition used clearly shows of itself that he alludes to an event of a new and unprecedented kind. Had the allusion been to some such manifestation of his favor as he ordinarily made to the Jews, we would not have looked for the same vehemency of expression. First he says, *Let the people praise thee;* then he adds, *Let all the people praise thee* Afterwards he repeats the exclamation once more. But he appropriately makes mention, between, of *rejoicing,* and the occasion there was for it, since it is impossible that we can praise God aright, unless our minds be tranquil and cheerful — unless, as persons reconciled to God, we are animated with the hope of salvation, and "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," reign in our hearts, (Philippians 4:7.) The cause assigned for joy plainly in itself points to the event of the calling of the Gentiles. The reference is not to that government of God which is general in its nature, but to that special and spiritual jurisdiction which he exercises over the Church, in which he cannot properly be said to govern any but such as he has gathered under his sway by the doctrine of his law. The word *righteousness* is inserted in commendation of his government. Language almost identical is used by Isaiah and Micah when they speak of the times in which the word of salvation would be diffused throughout all the earth, (Isaiah 11:4; Micah 4:3.)

6 *The earth has given its increase* Mention having been made of the principal act of the Divine favor, notice is next taken of the temporal blessings which he confers upon his children, that they may have everything necessary to complete their happiness. And here it is to be remembered, that every benefit which God bestowed upon his ancient people was, as it were, a light held out before the eyes of the world, to attract the attention of the nations to him. From this the Psalmist argues, that should God liberally supply the wants of his people, the consequence would be, to increase the fear of his name, since all ends of the earth would, by what they saw of his

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"The petition here offered is, that the Gospel, God's 'way,' might be universally spread; — a prayer that is not yet accomplished, but is in progress towards completion. The mention of nations and peoples, all of them, intimates, that the time which is the object of supplication is the time when God will no longer be the God of the Jews, but of the Gentiles also." — *Walford.*

fatherly regard to his own, submit themselves with greater cheerfulness to his government.

Psalm 68

PSALM 68

In this psalm it was David's design to celebrate the victories which, through the blessing of God, he had gained over his enemies; [487] but, in the opening verses, he commends the power and goodness of God generally,

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As to the time and occasion of the composition of this psalm, the majority of interpreters refer it to the translation of the ark from the house of Obed-Edom to Mount Zion, and with this every part of it would, no doubt, harmonize. But other critics, as Drs Geddes, Boothroyd, and Morrison, think (and Calvin's opinion seems to be the same) that it was penned after some great victory; probably after David's signal victory over the Ammonites and Syrians, when the ark was brought back in triumph to Jerusalem, (1 Chronicles 19:10-19.) That the ark accompanied the army in those ways we learn from the words of Uriah to David, in 2 Samuel 11:11, compared with 2 Samuel 12:31. As every thing under that dispensation was typical or prophetical, it is very natural to regard the triumphant manner in which the ark ascended the holy mountain, as an emblem of the far more triumphant and glorious ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ (of whom the ark, and the tabernacle, and the temple itself, were all figures) to the highest heavens, after he had overcome his own and his people's enemies; and in this application the 18th verse of this psalm is quoted by the Apostle Paul, (Ephesians 4:8, 9.)

This inspired composition, though highly sublime and beautiful, is universally acknowledged by critics to be of very difficult interpretation. Dr Adam Clarke pronounces it "the most difficult psalm in the whole Psalter;" and, after quoting the words of Simon de Muis, — who observes, that "it may not be improperly termed the torture of critics, and the reproach of commentators," — he says, "There are customs here referred to, which I do not fully understand: there are words whose meaning I cannot, to my own satisfaction, ascertain; and allusions which are to me inexplicable. Yet of the composition itself I have the highest opinion: — it is sublime beyond all comparison; — it is constructed with an art truly admirable; — it possesses all the dignity of the sacred language; — none but David could have composed it; and, at this lapse of time, it would require no small influence of the Spirit that was upon him to give its true interpretations."

as seen in the government of the world at large. From this he passes to the consideration of what God had done in redeeming his chosen people, and of the continued proofs of fatherly care which he had manifested to the posterity of Abraham. He then proceeds to the subject which he had more particularly in view, prosecuting it at length, and in terms of the most exalted description; praising the signal display of Divine power which he, and the whole nation with him, had experienced. Now that he had been made king, he infers that the Church was brought to a settled condition, and that God, who seemed to have departed, would now at length erect his throne, as it were, in the midst of it, and reign. In this it would evidently appear, that he designed, typically, to represent the glory of God afterwards to be manifested in Christ.

To the chief musician. A psalm or song of David.

Psalm 68:1-6

1. God shall arise: his enemies shall be scattered; and they who hate him shall flee before him. **2**. As smoke is driven away, thou shalt drive them away; as wax melteth before the fire, the wicked shall perish from the presence of God. **3**. But the righteous shall be glad; they shall rejoice before God, and leap for exultation. **4**. Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: exalt him that rideth upon the clouds in Jah [488] his name, [or, in his name Jah,] and rejoice before him. **5**. A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in the habitation of his holiness. **6**. God who setteth the solitary in families, who bringeth, out those who are bound with chains; [489] but the rebellious shall dwell in a dry land.

1. *God shall arise: his enemies shall be scattered* In this verse the Psalmist intimates, as it were by way of preface, the subject which he proposed to treat in the psalm, and which related to the truth that God, however long he may seem to connive at the audacity and cruelty of the enemies of his Church, will eventually arise to avenge it, and will prove himself able to protect it by the mere forth-putting of his hand. I agree with other interpreters in thinking that the sentiment is borrowed from Moses, (Numbers 10:35) [490]

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"C'est, Qui est Jah, ou l'Eternel?" — *Fr. marg.* "That is, Who is Jah, or Jehovah?" Jah seems simply a contraction of the word Jehovah, the name which expresses, as far as can be expressed by words, the essence, self-existence, and eternity of the Supreme Being.

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The original word בכושרות, *bakosharoth*, which Calvin renders, *with chains*, is rendered by Dathe, *ad abundantiam*; and by Berlin, *ad opimitates*; and is explained by Simeon, in his Lexicon, as "loca omnibus affluentia proprie abundantiae." According to Gesenius, כושרה denotes "*happiness*, *abundance*, *prosperity*." The LXX. render it ἐν ἀνδρείᾳ, *in strength*, *i e.*, bound firmly. Fry reads, "Bringing forth prisoners into scenes of plenty."

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There can be little doubt that in dictating the form of prayer there referred to, he had an eye to the instruction and comfort of all succeeding ages, and would teach the Lord's people confidently to rely for safety upon the ark of the covenant, which was the visible symbol of the Divine presence. We may notice this difference, however, that Moses addressed the words to God as a prayer, while David rather expresses his satisfaction and delight in what he saw daily fulfilling before his own eyes. Some indeed read, *Let God arise;* but they appear to misapprehend the scope of the Psalmist. He means to say that observation attested the truth which Moses had declared of God's needing only to rise up that all his enemies might be scattered before his irresistible power. Yet I see no objections to the other reading, provided the idea now mentioned be retained, and the words be considered as intimating that God needs no array of preparation in overthrowing his enemies, and can dissipate them with a breath. We are left to infer, that when his enemies at any time obtain an ascendancy, it is owing to an exercise of Divine forbearance, and that rage as they may, it is only with his permission; the time being not yet come for his rising. There is much comfort to be derived from the circumstance, that those who persecute the Church are here spoken of as *God's enemies.* When he undertakes our defense, he looks upon the injuries done to us as dishonors cast upon his Divine Majesty. The Psalmist adds a striking figure to illustrate how easily God can overthrow the machinations of our enemies, comparing them to *smoke which vanishes when blown upon by the wind,* or *wax which melts before the fire* [491] We consider it utterly incredible that such a formidable array of opposition should be made to disappear in a moment. But the Spirit takes this method of chiding the fearfulness of our carnal minds, and teaching us that there is no such strength in our enemies as we suppose, — that we allow the smoke of them to blind our eyes, and the solid mass of resistance which they present to deceive us into a forgetfulness of the truth, that the mountains themselves flow down at the presence of the Lord. [492]

That passage contains the words which Moses used when the ark began a procession. Whenever the tabernacle was moved, and the Levites marched onward, bearing upon their shoulders the ark of the covenant, and the whole host of Israel proceeded on their march, "Moses said, Rise up, Lord," etc. Martin observes, that "the God whom these opening words of the psalm have in view is manifestly the same of whom it is said in verse 18, that he ascended up on high, and led captivity captive. Now he of whom that is said, being, according to the interpretation of the Apostle Paul, (Ephesians 4:8,) Jesus Christ, the Son of God, it clearly follows that it was the Son of God, the true God, Jehovah the eternal God, whom the Prophet had in his eye in the first verse and in the rest of the psalm." See Appendix.

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As wax melteth before the fire, "a proverbial expression, denoting speedy dissolution, consumption, and *death.*" — *Bythner.*

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3 *But the righteous shall be glad* It is here intimated by David, that when God shows himself formidable to the wicked, this is with the design of securing the deliverance of his Church. He would seem indirectly to contrast the joy of which he now speaks with the depression and grief felt by well affected men under the reign of Saul — suggesting, that God succeeds a season of temporary trouble with returns of comfort, to prevent his people from being overwhelmed by despondency. He leaves us also to infer, that one reason of that joy which they experience is derived from knowing that God is propitious to them, and interests himself in their safety. The Hebrew words, מפני, *mipne,* and לפני, *liphne,* admit of the same meaning; but I think that the Psalmist intended to note a distinction. The wicked flee from the presence of God, as what inspires them with terror; the righteous again rejoice in it, because nothing delights them more than to think that God is near them. When commenting upon the passage, Psalm 18:26, we saw why the Divine presence terrifies some and comforts others; for "with the pure he will show himself pure, and with the froward he will show himself froward." One expression is heaped by the Psalmist upon another, to show how great the joy of the Lord's people is, and how entirely it possesses and occupies their affections.

4 *Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: exalt him* [493] *that rideth, etc.* He now proceeds to call upon the Lord's people to praise God. And he begins by pointing out the grounds in general, as I have already hinted, which they have for this exercise, because he comprehends the whole world under his power and government, adding, that he condescends to take the poorest and the most wretched of our family under his protection. His infinite power is commended, when it is said that he *rides upon the clouds,* or the heavens, [494] for this proves that he sits superior over all things. The Holy Spirit may signify by the expression, that we should exclude from our minds every thing gross and earthly in the conceptions we form of him; but

"Sed quasi fumo hebetari nostros oculos; falli etiam nos in ipsa duritie, quia non reputamus solo Dei conspectu liquefieri montes ipsos." — *Lat.* "Mais qu'il y a comme une fumee qu'il nous esblouist les yeux; semblablement que nons nous abusons quant a leur durete et obstination; pource que nous ne venons point a considerer qu'au seul regard de Dieu les montagnes mesmes fondent et s'ecoulent." *Fr.*

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The reading of the Septuagint is, Ὁδοποιήσατε, "Make way." The Hebrew word סלו, *sollu*, has this sense, as well as that of *exalt* In two passages in Isaiah, the forms of expression are very like the present passage, (Isaiah 57:14,) "Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way;" and (Isaiah 62:10,) "Cast up, cast up the highway." Jerome has, "Praeparate viam," "Prepare yea way." Walford adopts the same translation, — "Prepare a way for him who rideth through the deserts," — which he explains in the following note: "The imagery is borrowed from the custom of Eastern princes, who sent pioneers before their armies, to reduce the hills, and carry raised roads through the valleys, to facilitate their progress. God is described as riding through the deserts, from his having accompanied Israel through the wilderness, to conduct them to Canaan."

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he would, doubtless, impress us chiefly with an idea of his great power, to produce in us a due reverence, and make us feel how far short all our praises must come of his glory. We would attempt in vain to comprehend heaven and earth; but his glory is greater than both. As to the expression which follows, *in Jah, his name,* there has been some difference of opinion. The Hebrew preposition ב, *beth,* may here, as sometimes it is, be a mere expletive, and we may read, *Jah is his name* [495] Others read, *in Jah is his name;* [496] and I have no objection to this, though I prefer the translation which I have adopted. It is of less consequence how we construe the words, as the meaning of the Psalmist is obvious. The whole world was at that time filled with the vain idols of superstition, and he would assert the claim of God, and set them aside when he brought forward the God of Israel. But it is not enough that the Lord's people should bow before him with suppliant spirits. Even the wicked, while they fear and tremble before him, are forced to yield him reverence. David would have them draw near to him with cheerfulness and alacrity; and, accordingly, proceeds to insist upon his transcendent goodness shown in condescending to the *orphans* and *widows.* The incomprehensible glory of God does not induce him to remove himself to a distance from us, or prevent him from stooping to us in our lowest depths of wretchedness. There can be no doubt that orphans and widows are named to indicate in general all such as the world are disposed to overlook as unworthy of their regard. Generally we distribute our attentions where we expect some return. We give the preference to rank and splendor, and despise or neglect the poor. When it is said, *God is in the habitation of his holiness,* this may refer either to heaven or to the temple, for either sense will suit the connection. God does not dwell in heaven to indulge his own ease, but heaven is, as it were, his throne, from which he judges the world. On the other hand, the fact of his having chosen to take up his residence with men, and inviting them

The word בערבות, *baaraboth*, here rendered *the clouds*, *or the heavens*, is by the LXX. translated *the west*, as if it were derived from ערב, *ereb*, *evening*; and by the Vulgate, "Super occasum," "Upon the going down of the sun." Others translate it "deserts." Thus, Jerome reads, "ascendenti per deserta," "for him that rideth through the deserts." In this he is followed by Dr Boothroyd, Bishops Lowth and Horsley, Drs Kennicott and Chandler, Fry, and others; but critics of no less note read *heavens*, as Paginus, Buxtorf, and Hammond. "The feminine ערבה," says this last critic, "is frequently taken for *a plain*, and so for *the desert*; but ערבות, in the plural, is acknowledged by the Hebrews to signify *the heavens*." The idea is altogether fanciful which has been put forth by some, that this word, which frequently signifies *a plain* or *desert*, is applied to the highest heavens, "either as being plain and void of stars, and so a kind of superior desert, without anything in it, or (as the learned Grotius piously conjectures from 1 Timothy 6:16) because, as a desert, it is ἀπρόσοιτον, not approached or approachable by any."

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This is the rendering in all the ancient versions, as the Septuagint, Chaldee, Syriac, Vulgate, etc. Many instances might be produced in which ב it is redundant; as, for example, Exodus 32:22, Proverbs 3:26

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familiarly to himself there, is one well fitted to encourage the poor, who are cheered to think that he is not far off from them. In the next verse, other instances of the Divine goodness are mentioned — that he gives the bereaved and solitary a numerous offspring, and releases the bonds of the captive. In the last clause of the verse, he denounces the judgment of God against those who impiously despise him, and this that he might show the Lord's people the folly of envying their lot as well as strike terror into their minds. The sense of the words is, That we ought to comfort ourselves under the worst afflictions, by reflecting that we are in God's hand, who can mitigate all our griefs and remove all our burdens. The wicked, on the other hand, may congratulate themselves for a time upon their prosperity, but eventually it will fare ill with them. By *dwelling in a dry land,* is meant being banished, as it were, to a wilderness, and deprived of the benefits of that fatherly kindness which they had so criminally abused.

Psalm 68:7-10

7. O God! when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; Selah: **8**. The earth was moved, the heavens also dropped at the presence of this God: Sinai at the presence of God, the God of Israel. [497] **9**. Thou, O God! shalt make

This is the translation given by Horsley, who applies the passage to Christ; and his criticism upon it is excellent. "Upon mature consideration," says he, "I am inclined to take the text as it stands, and render it literally with Jerome, 'In Jah is his name;' *i e.*, his name, who is riding through the wilderness, is in Jehovah, in the Self-existent One. He who led the armies of Israel through the wilderness, when they first came up from Egypt, was Christ. He who brought the captives home from Babylon was Christ. He who shall finally bring the revolted Jews home to his Church, and, in a literal sense, bring the nation home to its ancient seat, is Christ. Christ, therefore, is intended here, under the image of one riding through the wilderness, ('ascendenti per deserta,' *Jerome*,) not upon the heavens, at the head of the returning captives. '*His name is in Jah*:' Christ's name is in Jehovah. שם, 'the Name,' is used, in the Hebrew language, for the thing imperfectly apprehended, to which, however, a name belongs. Thus, for God all languages have a name; and all men have an idea of the Being intended by that name, as the First Cause, the Maker, and Governor of the universe. Yet the human intellect, — we may say, more generally, the created intellect, — comprehends not the nature of this Great Being, nor can it enumerate his attributes. 'The name of God' is the incomprehensible Being who is all that the name imports, more than is expressed; more, at least, than any name can express to the finite understanding. Thus, when we are commanded to fear the name of God, the injunction is, that we carry in our minds a constant fear of the Being to whom that name belongs. The name, therefore, of Christ is Christ himself, considered as known by a name, but yet imperfectly understood, or rather incomprehensible in his nature. The sentence, 'His name is in Jehovah,' is an emphatical assertion of his divinity, introduced here to justify and enforce the worship enjoined. 'Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: cast up a way for him that is riding through the wilderness.' Who is he that is riding through the wilderness, that we should pay him this respect? 'He,' says the Psalmist, 'who cannot be described.' 'His name is in Jah.' His name and his nature are involved in the name and nature of the Godhead. Name him: you name the All-glorious One. Name the All-glorious One: you name him. Name him as distinct from the All-Good and Glorious: you name him not aright."

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a liberal [498] rain to fall upon thine inheritance, and thou refreshest it when it is weary. **10**. Thy congregation [499] shall dwell therein; thou, O God! wilt prepare in thy goodness for the poor.

7 *O God! when thou wentest forth before thy people, etc.* The Psalmist now proceeds to show that the Divine goodness is principally displayed in the Church, which God has selected as the great theater where his fatherly care may be manifested. What follows is evidently added with the view of leading the posterity of Abraham, as the Lord's chosen people, to apply the observations which had been just made to themselves. The deliverance from Egypt having been the chief and lasting pledge of the Divine favor, which practically ratified their adoption under the patriarch, he briefly adverts to that event. He would intimate that in that remarkable exodus, proof had been given to all succeeding ages of the love which God entertained for his Church. Why were so many miracles wrought? why were heaven and earth put into commotion? why were the mountains made to tremble? but that all might recognize the power of God as allied with the deliverance of his people. He represents God as having been their leader in conducting them forth. And this not merely in reference to their passage of the Red Sea, but their journeys so long as they wandered in the wilderness. When he speaks of the *earth being moved,* he would not seem to allude entirely to what occurred upon the promulgation of the law, but to the fact that, throughout all their progress, the course of nature was repeatedly altered, as if the very elements had trembled at the presence of the Lord. It was upon Mount Sinai, however, that God issued the chief displays of his awful power; it was there that thunders were heard in heaven, and the air was filled with lightnings; and, accordingly, it is mentioned here by name as having presented the most glorious spectacle of the Divine majesty which was ever beheld. Some read, This *Sinai,* etc., connecting the pronoun זה, *zeh,* with the mountain here named; but it is much more emphatical to join it with the preceding clause, and to read, *the heavens dropped at the presence of This God;* David meaning to commend the excellency of the God of Israel.

This verse and the preceding scem to be copied from the Song of Deborah, Judges 5:4, 5.

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"C'est, par ta volonte et liberalite." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, by thy free will and liberality."

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Thy congregations, or *company.* This is the reading adopted also by Dathe, Berlin, and De Rossi; and it "is a much better exposition than those of the two latest English translators, Bishop Horsley and Mr Fry: —

'Thy flocks dwelt in the mansion which thou preparedst.' — Horsley.
'Thy food settled upon it.' — Fry."

Rogers' *Book of Psalms in Hebrew, etc.*, volume 2, Page 220.

The expression is one frequently used by the prophets to denote that the God worshipped by the posterity of Abraham was the true God, and the religion delivered in his law no delusion, as in Isaiah 25:9, "This, this is our God, and he will save us." To establish the Lord's people in their faith, David leads them, as it were, into the very presence of God; indicates that they were left to no such vague uncertainties as the heathen; and indirectly censures the folly of the world in forsaking the knowledge of the true God, and fashioning imaginary deities of its own, of wood and stone, of gold and silver.

9. *Thou, O God! shalt make a liberal rain to fall* [500] *upon thine inheritance* Mention is made here of the continued course of favor which had been extended to the people from the time when they first entered the promised land. It is called *the inheritance of God,* as having been assigned over to his own children. Others understand by the inheritance spoken of in the verse, *the Church,* but this is not correct, for it is afterwards stated as being the place where the Church dwelt. The title is appropriately given to the land of Canaan, which God made over to them by right of inheritance. David takes notice of the fact, that, from the first settlement of the seed of Abraham in it, God had never ceased to make the kindest fatherly provision for them, sending his rain in due season to prepare their food. The words translated a *liberal rain,* read literally in the Hebrew *a rain of freenesses,* and I agree with interpreters in thinking that he alludes to the blessing as having come in the exercise of free favor, [501] and to God, as having of his own unprompted goodness provided for all the wants of his people. Some read *a desirable rain;* others, *a rain flowing without violence,* or *gentle;* but neither of these renderings seems eligible. Others read *a copious* or *plentiful rain;* but I have already stated what appears to me to be the preferable sense. It was a proof, then, of his Divine liberality, that God watered the land seasonably with showers. There is clearly a reference to the site of Judea, which owed its fertility to dews and the rains of heaven. In allusion to the same circumstance, he speaks of *its being refreshed when weary.* The reason is assigned — because it had been given to his chosen people to dwell in. On no other account was it blessed, than as being the habitation of God's Church and people. The more to impress upon the minds of the Jews their obligations to Divine goodness, he represents them as *pensioners* depending upon God for their daily food. He fed them upon the finest of the wheat, giving them wine, and honey, and oil in abundance — still he proportioned the communication of his kindness so as to keep them always dependent in

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Heb. *Shall shake out*, *i.e.*, from the clouds, *a liberal rain.*

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Ainsworth reads, "a rain of liberalities." Horsley, "a shower of unmerited kindnesses;" "literally," says he, "*a plentiful rain*, rain being used here metaphorically."

expectation upon himself. Some, instead of reading, *Thou wilt prepare with thy goodness, etc.,* render it, *Thou wilt prepare with rich food;* but, without absolutely objecting to this translation, I rather think that he adverts to the circumstance of God's being led to provide for his people entirely by his own good pleasure.

Psalm 68:11-14

> **11**. The [502] Lord shall give the word to the women who announce the great army. [503] **12**. Kings of armies shall flee — shall flee; and she that tarries at home shall divide the spoil. **13**. Though you should lie among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and which behind is of the paleness of gold. [504] **14**. When the Almighty scattered kings in it, thou shalt make it white [505] in Salmon.

11. *The Lord shall give the word, etc.* David now adverts to the victories by which God had signally displayed his power in behalf of his people. He had himself been the instrument of restoring peace to the country, by putting down its foes, and he had extended the boundaries of the kingdom; but he

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Dr Geddes here observes, that "the poet passes rapidly from former times to his own days, and the occasion of composing his psalm, namely, the discomfiture and flight of the combined kings of Syria, Ammon, Moab, and Edom: for with all these David had been engaged in this war."

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The original word for "the women who announce" is המבשרות, *hamebasseroth* It is from בשר, *bisser*, "to announce joyous tidings;" and, being a participle of the feminine gender, is very properly referred to women, who were wont to celebrate victories, or any kind of good news, with songs and music. But we find it on one occasion used to express melancholy news, (1 Samuel 4:17.) The women here are represented as announcing the victory by singing congratulatory songs. All the difficulty is, whether המבשרות, *hamebasseroth*, be in the dative or the genitive case. If in the genitive case, then צבא, *tsaba*, which Calvin renders *army*, must, as Hammond observes, be rendered *company* — great was the company of the women who thus sang; and צבא, *an host*, is often taken for the congregation or assembly employed in the service of God. But it, may also be taken in the dative, as the same critic remarks, and as Calvin here renders it. Castellio gives a similar translation. "And thus the LXX. may be understood: Ο Θεός Κύριος δώσει ῥῆμα τοῖς εὐαγγελισαμένοις (I suppose it should be ταῖς εὐαγγελισαμείαις) δυνάμει πολλῷ; 'the Lord shall give the word or matter to the women that evangelise to or for the great army;' *i e.*, which supply the office of *proecones* thereto, in proclaiming their victories; though it is certain the Latin that renders it 'virtute multa,' 'by much virtue,' did not thus understand it." — *Hammond*

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"Et posteriora ejus in pallore auri." — *Lat.* In the French it is, "Et *laquelle* par derriere est *comme* fin or bien jaune;" — "and *which* behind is *as* fine yellow gold."

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"Ou, elle fust blanche." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, it was white."

ascribes the praise of all that had been done in stratagems and counsels of war to God. In representing God as issuing orders for the song of triumph, he intimates, figuratively, that it is he who determines the successful issue of battles. Notice is taken of the *women who announce the army,* for it was the custom anciently for women to sing the song of triumph, as Miriam, the sister of Moses, with her companions, sounded the praises of God upon the timbrel, and the women celebrated David's victory upon the harp, when he slew Goliath, and routed the Philistines, (Exodus 15:20; Judges 11:34; 1 Samuel 18:6.) In making this reference to a song of praise, the Psalmist, as I have already said, intended to impress the truth upon the people, that the victories gained were entirely owing to God; though, at the same time, he tacitly reminds them of its being their duty to proclaim his benefits with due gratitude.

From the verse which succeeds, we are taught that the mightiest preparations which the enemies of the Church may make for its destruction shall be overthrown. We may consider the words as spoken in the person of the Psalmist himself, or as forming the song of the women mentioned above. It was a circumstance illustrative of the Divine favor, that the most formidable kings, before whom the Jews could never have stood in their own strength, had been put to flight. That princes, who could easily have overrun the world with their forces, should have not only departed without obtaining their purpose, but been forced to fly to a distance, could be accounted for on no other supposition than God's having stood forward signally as their defender. In the Hebrew the verb is repeated, *they shall flee, they shall flee,* signifying that the attacks of the enemy had been repelled by Divine assistance once and again. The greatness of the spoil taken is intimated by the circumstance stated, that a share of it would come even to the women who remained at home. While the soldiers would return from battle clothed with the spoils, such would be the quantity of booty taken, that the females, who took no part in war, would partake of it.

13. *Though ye should lie among the pots* [506] Having spoken of God as fighting the battles of his people, he adds, by way of qualification, that they may lie for a time under darkness, though eventually God will appear for their deliverance; There can be little doubt that he hints at the state of wretchedness and distress to which the nation had been reduced under the government of Saul, for the interposition was the more remarkable, considering the misery from which it had emerged. The words, however, convey a further instruction than this. They teach us the general truth, that believers are, by the hidden and mysterious power of God, preserved unhurt in the midst of their afflictions, or suddenly recovered so as to exhibit no marks of them. The language admits of being interpreted to mean either that they shine even when lying under filth and darkness, or that, when freed from their troubles, they shake off any defilement which they may

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have contracted. Let either sense be adopted, and it remains true that the believer is never consumed or overwhelmed by his afflictions, but comes out safe. An elegant figure is drawn from the dove, which, though it lie amongst the pots, retains the beauty which naturally belongs to it, and contracts no defilement on its wings. From this we learn that the Church does not always

The interpretation of this verse is attended with great difficulty. Speaking of it and the following verse, Dr Lowth says, "I am not at all satisfied with any explication I have ever met with of these verses, either as to sense or construction, and I must give them up as unintelligible to me. Houbigant helps out the construction in his violent method: '*Aut invenit viam, aut facit.*'" It is pretty generally admitted, that in the first part of this verse a "state of wretchedness and distress," as Calvin remarks, is indicated; but it is difficult to ascertain the meaning of the word שפתים, *shephataim*, which he renders *pots*, and, consequently, to ascertain to what the allusion particularly is. None of the old translators have so rendered it; and numerous significations have been given to it. The Chaldee renders it, "bounds in the divisions of the way;" the Syriac and Arabic, "paths" or "ways;" the Septuagint, κλήρων, "allotments," "inheritances," or "portions," apparently deriving the word from שפת, *divisit, ordinavit*, and perhaps attaching to it a similar idea as in the preceding translations, men's portions of land or possessions having been divided and distinguished by *paths* Jerome, adhering to the Septuagint, makes it "inter medios terminos." Thus, the word will not be without significance, expressing a forlorn and wretched condition, lying down betwixt the bounds; that is, in the highways. But many modern critics think that it signifies something in relation to pots, and that it may very probably be the same as that which the Arabs call אתאפי, *Athaphi, stones* set in a chimney for a pot to rest on, the pots being without legs. "Of these," says Hammond, "the Arabians had three, and the third being commonly (to them in the desert) some fast piece of a rock, or the like, behind the pot, — as in a chimney the back of the chimney itself, and that not looked on as distinct from the chimney, — the other two at the sides, which were loose, might fitly be here expressed in the dual number שפתים; and then the *lying between these* will betoken a very low, squalid condition, as in the ashes, or amidst the soot and filth of the chimney." "These two renderings," he adds, "may seem somewhat distant; and yet, considering that the *termini* or bounds in divisions of ways were but heaps of stones, or broken bricks, or rubbish, the word שפתים, which signifies these, may well signify these supporters of the pots also, in respect of the matter of these being such stones or broken bricks."

Parkhurst takes a view somewhat similar to this last interpretation. He reads, "among the fire ranges," or "rows of stones." "Those," says he, "on which the caldrons or pots were placed for boiling; somewhat like, I suppose, but of a more structure, than those which Niebuhr says are used by the wandering Arabs. 'Their fire-place is soon constructed: they only set their pots upon *several separate stones*, or over a hole digged in the earth.' Lying among these denotes the most abject slavery; for this seems to have been the place of rest allotted to the vilest slaves. So, old Laertes, grieving for the loss of his son, is described by Homer (in the Eleventh Book of the Odyssey) as, in the winter, sleeping where the slaves did, in the ashes near the fire: —

'—Oqi dmwev eni oikw
En koni agci purov.'"

See *his Lexicon* on שפת ii.

The Chaldee has "broken bricks," or "rubbish," that are thrown away; the word, according to this sense, being derived from שפה, *shephah, to bruise, to trample on* A similar noun, אשפת, *ashpoth*, derived from the verb שפה, is used in Psalm 113:7, for *a dunghill*, or the vilest place, whither all kinds of rubbish are cast out, and where the poor are said to lie. When Job was brought by Satan to the lowest depths of affliction, he sat down among the ashes, and scraped himself with a potsherd, which indicated the state of extreme sadness and debasement to which he was reduced. If this is the sense here, "lying among the broken bricks or rubbish" expresses, in like manner as the preceding translations, the most mean, dejected, and wretched condition.

present a fair or peaceable aspect, but rather emerges occasionally from the darkness that envelops it, and recovers its beauty as perfectly as if it had never been subjected to calamity.

14. *When the Almighty scattered kings in it* We might read *extended,* or *divided kings, etc.,* and then the allusion would be to his leading them in triumph. But the other reading is preferable, and corresponds better with what was said above of their being put to flight. There is more difficulty in the second part of the verse, some reading, *it was white in Salmon;* that is, the Church of God presented a fair and beautiful appearance. Or the verb may be viewed as in the second person — *Thou, O God! Didst make it fair and white as mount Salmon* [507] *with snows* The reader may adopt either construction, for the meaning is the same. It is evident that David

Harmer's attempt to explain this passage is at least very ingenious: — As shepherds in the East betake themselves, during the night, for shelter to the caves which they find in their rocky hills, where they can kindle fires to warm themselves, as well as dress their provisions, and as doves, as well as other birds, frequently haunt such places, he conjectures that the afflicted state of Israel in Egypt is here compared to the condition of a dove making its abode in the hollow of a rock which had been smutted by the fires which the shepherds had made in it. He supposes the word here translated *pots* to mean the little heaps of stones on which the shepherds set their pots, there being a hollow under them to contain the fire. — *Harmer's Observations*, volume 1, pp. 176, 177.

Gesenius thinks the word is equivalent to המשפתים, *hammishpethaim*, which occurs in Judges 5:16, and which our English version makes "sheepfolds," the only difference between the two words being, that the word here wants the formative letter מ, *mem* Thus, it may refer to the condition of the Israelites when living among their flocks in the wilderness. We have not yet exhausted the different significations affixed by commentators to this word; but, without referring to more, we shall only add, that, according to some, the allusion is to the condition of the Israelites in Egypt, who were doomed to the drudgery of brick-making and pottery, and had probably to sleep among the brick-kilns or earthenware manufactories in which they were employed.

With respect to the second clause of the verse, in which an image taken from the dove is introduced, a difficulty which has been stated is, how her feathers can be said to resemble yellow gold. From the circumstance, that the splendor of gold is here intermingled, Harmer concludes that this is not a description of the animal merely as adorned by the hand of nature, but that the allusion is to white doves that were consecrated to the Syrian deities, and adorned with trinkets of gold, the meaning being, "Israel is to me as a *consecrated* dove; and though your circumstances have made you rather appear like a poor dove, blackened by taking up its abode in a smoky hole of the rocks, yet shall you become beautiful and glorious as a Syrian silver-coloured pigeon, on which some ornament of gold is put." — *Harmer's Observations*, volume 1, p. 180. But there are certainly doves which answer to the description here given, some of them having the feathers on the sides of the neck of a shining copper color, which in a bright sun must resemble gold. See *Encyc. Brit. Art. Columbia.* Besides, the reference is not necessarily to the color of gold, but to its brilliancy. How highly poetical an emblem, to depict the glorious change effected in the condition of the Hebrews by the deliverance which God had granted them over the proud and formidable enemies who had kept them in the degrading condition represented in the first clause of the verse!

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Salmon is the name of a mountain in Samaria, in the tribe of Ephraim, (Judges 9:48,) white with perpetual snow.

insists still upon the figure of the whiteness of silver, which he had previously introduced. The country had, as it were, been blackened or sullied by the hostile confusions into which it was thrown, and he says that it had now recovered its fair appearance, and resembled Salmon, which is well known to have been ordinarily covered with snows. [508] Others think that Salmon is not the name of a place, but an appellative, meaning *a dark shade.* [509] I would retain the commonly received reading. At the same time, I think that there may have been an allusion to the etymology. It comes from the word צלם, *tselem,* signifying *a shade,* and mount Salmon had been so called on account of its blackness. [510] This makes the comparison more striking; for it intimates, that as the snows whitened this black mountain, so the country had resumed its former beauty, and put on an aspect of joy, when God dispelled the darkness which had lain upon it during the oppression of enemies. [511]

Psalm 68:15-17

15. The hill of God, the hill of Bashan, a high hill, [512] the hill of Bashan. **16**. Why leap ye, ye high hills? the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, Jehovah will dwell in it for ever. **17**. The chariots

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Carrieres, in his paraphrase, has, "You became white as snow on mount Salmon." "We certainly think," says the author of the Illustrated Commentary upon the Bible, "that Carrieres has seized the right idea. The intention evidently is, to describe by a figure the honor and prosperity the Hebrews acquired by the defeat of their enemies, and to express this by whiteness, and superlatively by the whiteness of snow. Nothing can be more usual in Persia, for instance, than for a person to say, under an influx of prosperity or honor, or on receiving happy intelligence, 'My face is made white;' or gratefully, in return for a favor or compliment, 'You have made my face white;' so also, 'His face is whitened,' expresses the sense which is entertained of the happiness or favor which has before been received. Such a figurative use of the idea of whiteness does, we imagine, furnish the best explanation of the present and some other texts of Scripture."

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Instead of "in Salmon," the Targum has, "in the shade of death;" and Boothroyd has,

"The Almighty having scattered these kings,
hath by this turned death-shade to splendor."

Walford gives a similar version, and explains the meaning to be, "Though you have been in bondage and the darkness of a dejected condition, you are now illuminated with the splendor of victory and prosperity."

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That is, it was so called from the dark shade produced by its trees.

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"Que comme les neiges font blanchir ceste montagne, laquelle de soy est obscure et noire, ainsi quand il a pleu a Dieu d'oster l'obscurite qu'apportoit l'affliction des ennemis, lors on a veu la terre reluire d'un lustre naif, et par maniere de dire, porter une face joyeuse." — *Fr.*

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of God are twenty thousand thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.

15. *The hill of God, the hill of Bashan* Here he adverts to the spring and source of all the kindness which God had shown, this being the circumstance that he had chosen mount Zion as the place of his palace and temple, whence all blessings should go out to the nation. A Divine declaration to that effect had been made to David, and this pre-eminence and dignity conferred upon mount Zion is very properly adduced as a proof of his being king, lawfully and by Divine appointment; for there was an inseparable connection between God's dwelling upon that mountain, and David's sitting upon the throne to govern the people. The words of the verse admit of two senses. We may suppose that the mountain of God is compared to mount Bashan as being like it, or we may understand that it is opposed to it. The first is the sense adopted almost by all interpreters, that while Bashan was famed for its fertility, Zion excelled it. It is of little importance which we prefer; but perhaps the distinction would be brought out as well were we to construe the words *the hill of God* by themselves, and consider that Bashan with its boasted height is afterwards ordered to yield precedence, as if David would say, that there was but one mountain which God had consecrated to himself by an irrevocable decree, and that though Bashan was renowned for height and fertility, it must rank with other mountains, which might in vain exalt themselves to an equality with Zion, honored as the chosen residence of God. If we read the verse differently, and consider it as applying to mount Zion throughout, then the Psalmist extols it as high and illustrious, and this because there emanated from it the Divine favor, which distinguished the Jews from every other nation.

16. *Why leap ye,* [513] *ye high hills?* In this verse there is no obscurity or ambiguity. David having said that there was only one mountain in all the world which God had chosen, calls upon the highest hills to yield it the pre-eminency. As he repeats in the plural number what had been said immediately before of Bashan, this leads me to think that he intended first to oppose that mountain, and then all other high mountains generally, to Zion.

"La montagne des hauteurs," "the hill of highnesses or eminences." — *Fr.* That is, (says Calvin, on the margin,) "treshaute," "very high." The literal rendering of the original words is, "a hill of gibbosities," "a hill with humps," *i e.*, projections, eminences. This seems peculiarly applicable to Bashan, which had many tops; and this may explain the origin of the name of that mountain. It has its name from שן, *a tooth*; and בשן הר, *the mountain with teeth*, might be given to it, from the appearance of the face of it studded over with small hills. See Street, *in loco* What is here rendered "a high hill," is, in the Septuagint, rendered ὄρος τετυρωμένον, and in the Vulgate, "mons coagulatus," "cheesey, full of cheeses;" or, as Hammond renders it, "a hill that yielded much butter and cheese," Bashan being a rich and fertile mountain beyond Jordan. Horsley has, "a hill of lofty brows;" and Fry, "a hill of swelling heights."

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[514] Mountains are here to be understood figuratively, and the great truth conveyed is, that the kingdom of Christ, which God had begun to shadow forth in the person of David, far excels all that is reckoned glorious by the world. The reproof which the Psalmist administers, in order to humble the proud boasting of the world, is justified by that contempt which we know that carnal and ungodly persons entertain of Christ's kingdom, devoted as they are to their own pleasures or wealth, and unable to appreciate spiritual blessings. The lesson will be felt to be the more useful and necessary, if we consider that this vain pride of man rises to an additional height, when the slightest occasion is afforded for its exercise. When we see those indulging it who have no grounds to do so, we need not wonder at the arrogance of such as are possessed of wealth and influence. But the Lord's people may afford to leave them to their self-complacency, resting satisfied with the privilege of knowing that God has chosen to take up his habitation in the midst of them. They have no reason to repine at their lot so long as they have union with God, the only and the sufficient source of their happiness.

17. *The chariots of God are twenty thousand thousands of angels.* [515] For the most part, we are apt to undervalue the Divine presence, and therefore David presents us with a description fitted to exalt our thoughts of it. Owing to our unbelieving hearts, the least danger which occurs in the world weighs more with us than the power of God. We tremble under the slightest trials; for we forget or cherish low views of his omnipotence. To preserve us from

The word here rendered *leap ye* "occurs only here," observes Hammond, "and is by guess rendered *to leap*, or *lift up*, or *exalt* one's self; but may best be interpreted, not *leap* as an expression of joy, but *lift up*, or *exalt* yourselves, as an effect of pride;" and he understands the meaning to be, Why do ye lift up or exalt yourselves, ye high hills, God not having chosen any of the highest hills to build his temple on, but the hill of Zion, of a very moderate size, lower than the hill of Hermon, and at the foot of it, (Psalm 133:3.) Some Jewish commentators, founding their opinion on the cognate Arabic word רצר, would render it, *to look after* This gives the same sense. What look ye for? what expect ye, ye high hills, to be done to you? Ye are not those which God has chosen to beautify with his glorious presence, but mount Zion is the object of his choice. Aquila and Jerome read, "Why contend ye?" Dr Chandler renders it, "Why look askance?" *i e.*, "with jealous leer malign," as Milton expresses it. "Why are ye jealous?" Horsley, following Jerome, has, "For what would ye contend?"

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"The Psalmist," says Horsley, "having settled the Israelites between their hills, proceeds to the circumstance of God's choice of a hill for the site of his temple. He poetically imagines the different hills as all ambitious of the honor, anxiously waiting God's decision, and ready to enter into a jealous contention; *watching each other with an anxious eye.* The lofty hill of Bashan first puts in his claim, pleading his stately height —

The hill for God is the hill of Bashan;
A hill of lofty brows is the hill of Bashan.

The Psalmist cuts short the contention —

For what would ye contend, ye hills of lofty brows?
This is the hill desired of God for himself to dwell in;
Yea, Jehovah will dwell in it for ever."

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this error, David directs us to the countless myriads of angels which are at his command, — a circumstance, the consideration of which may well enable us to defy the evils which beset us. *Twenty thousand* are spoken of; but it is a number designed to intimate to us that the armies of the living God, which he commissions for our help, are innumerable; and surely this should comfort us under the deadliest afflictions of this life. In adding that *the Lord is among them,* the Psalmist is still to be considered as designing to give us an exalted view of what is included in God's presence; for the words suggest that he can no more divest himself of his existence than not have this power whereby angels are subordinated to his will. Another idea suggested is, that one God is better than a universe of angels. The great distance to which we are apt to conceive God as removed from us is one circumstance which tries our faith, and in order to obviate this, the Psalmist reminds us of *Sinai,* where there was a display of his majesty. The inference was conclusive that he still abode *in the sanctuary.* For why did God appear upon that occasion in such a glorious manner? Evidently to show that his covenant formed a sacred bond of union between him and the posterity of Abraham. Hence the words of Moses —

"Say not in thine heart, Who shall go up into heaven? or who shall descend into the deep? or who shall go over the sea? For the word is nigh unto thee," etc. (Deuteronomy 30:12.)

The words שנאן אלפי, *alphey shinan*, which Calvin renders "thousands of angels," are literally "thousands of repetition;" the noun שנאן, *shanan*, being derived from שנה, *shanah*, *he repeated* or *reiterated* Accordingly, the reading which many prefer is, "The chariots of God are twenty thousand thousands multiplied or reiterated." Hammond, who adopts this translation, observes, that "though angels are not mentioned, they are to be understood, as Jude 14, μυριάδες ἁγίαι, *holy myriads*." Horsley reads, "Twenty thousand thousand of thousands is the cavalry of God." "The cavalry of God," says he, "is every thing in nature which he employs as the instruments or vehicles of his power. The image, which some would introduce here of God riding in a car drawn by angels, I cannot admire; nor do I think that it is really to be found in any passage of Scripture rightly understood." But God, though not here represented as riding on a car drawn by angels, is undoubtedly, in the most magnificent style of Eastern poetry, represented as riding on his exalted car, attended by legions of angels, mounted also on cars. Comp. Deuteronomy 32:3, and 2 Kings 6:16. French and Skinner give a different view of the passage, which brings out a very good sense —

"God hath been to them [the Israelites] twice ten thousand chariots,
Even thousand of thousands."

Chariots were much used in war by the nations of antiquity; and the chosen people were forbidden to use chariots and horses in war; but God was to them as effectual a safe-guard as innumerable war-chariots would have been. He was "the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof," 2 Kings 2:12. Comp. Psalm 20:7. And in *his* protection and aid they were to trust. "When thou goest out to battle against thine enemies, and seest horses, and chariots, and a people more than thou, be not afraid of them: for the Lord thy God is with thee, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." "For the Lord your God is he that goeth with you, to fight for you against your enemies to save you," (Deuteronomy 20:1 and 4.)

Sinai accordingly is mentioned by David, to teach us that if we would fortify our minds with a firm faith in the Divine presence, we must derive it from the Law and the Prophets.

Psalm 68:18-24

> **18.** Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: [516] thou hast received gifts among men; [517] even the rebellious, that the Lord Jehovah [518] might dwell amongst his people. **19** Blessed be the Lord daily: this Lord will load us with deliverances. Selah. **20.** He that is our God is the God of salvations; and to the Lord Jehovah [519] belong the issues from death. **21.** Surely God shall wound the head of his enemies, the crown of the hair of him who walketh on in his wickedness. **22.** The Lord said, I will bring back from Bashan; I will bring again from the depths of the sea: **23.** That thy foot may be stained with blood, the tongue of thy dogs even in that of thine enemies. **24.** They have seen thy goings, O God! even the goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary.

18. *Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive* There can be little doubt that these words are intended to magnify the proofs of Divine favor granted upon the elevation of David to the throne, by contrasting the state of matters with that under Saul. The *ascending on high* implies the being previously low, and intimates, that under the melancholy confusions which had prevailed in the kingdom, there was no longer the same conspicuous display of the Divine glory as formerly. The government of Saul, which, from the first, had originated in a way that was condemnable, was doomed to fall under the displeasure of God, while his favor, on the other hand, was to be restored under David; and the

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"That is, a number of prisoners *captive*. See Judges 5:12; Esther 2:6; Isaiah 20:4." — *Archbishop Secker*. See the like phrase in 2 Chronicles 28:5, 11; Numbers 21:1; Deuteronomy 21:10. "The allusion may be to public triumphs, when captives were led in chains, even kings and great men, that had captivated others." — *Dr Gill*.

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Hebrews באדם *baadam*, *in man*, "*in human nature*," says Dr Adam Clarke, "and God, manifest in human flesh, dwells among mortals." "The gifts which Jesus Christ distributes *to man* he has received *in man*, in and by virtue of his *incarnation*, and it is in consequence of his being made man that it may be said, 'the Lord God dwells among them;' for Jesus was called *Immanuel*, 'God with us,' in consequence of his incarnation."

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The Hebrew here is not יהוה, *Jehovah*, but יה, *Jah*

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"It is worthy of remark, that whilst אלהים occurs twenty-six times, אדני seven times, and אל five times in this psalm, יהוה only occurs twice." — *Rogers*' *Book of Psalms in Hebrew*, etc. volume 2, p. 221.

undeniable appearances of this left no room for doubt that one who began his reign under such auspices was the object of the Divine choice. David, although he had acquitted himself with courage in the battles which were fought, ascribes all the glory of them to God, saying, that it was he who had taken captive the enemy, and forced them to pay tribute, and reduced the more fierce and rebellious to subjection. By the term סוררים *sorerim, rebellious,* contumacious, or revolters, he would evidently seem to mean a distinct class of persons from the other enemies, whom he mentions as having been taken captive; and it intimates, that while those who did not venture to resist, and who surrendered, had been brought under the yoke, the more proud and unyielding had been forced into submission. The end designed by this is stated in the words which follow, *that God might dwell in the midst of his people;* and that he might demonstrate himself to be an all-sufficient protector to those who put their trust in him.

As the passage which we have now been considering is applied by Paul in a more spiritual sense to Christ, (Ephesians 4:8,) it may be necessary to show how this agrees with the meaning and scope of the Psalmist. It may be laid down as an incontrovertible truth, that David, in reigning over God's ancient people, shadowed forth the beginning of Christ's eternal kingdom. This must appear evident to every one who remembers the promise made to him of a never-failing succession, and which received its verification in the person of Christ. As God illustrated his power in David, by exalting him with the view of delivering his people, so has he magnified his name in his only begotten Son. But let us consider more particularly how the parallel holds. Christ, before he was exalted, emptied himself of his glory, having not merely assumed the form of a servant, but humbled himself to the death of the cross. To show how exactly the figure was fulfilled, Paul notices, that what David had foretold was accomplished in the person of Christ, by his being cast down to the lowest parts of the earth in the reproach and ignominy to which he was subjected, before he ascended to the right hand of his Father, (Psalm 22:7.) That in thinking upon the ascension, we might not confine our views to the body of Christ, our attention is called to the result and fruit of it, in his subjecting heaven and earth to his government. Those who were formerly his inveterate enemies he compelled to submission and made tributary — this being the effect of the word of the Gospel, to lead men to renounce their pride and their obstinacy, to bring down every high thought which exalteth itself, and reduce the senses and the affections of men to obedience unto Christ. As to the devils and reprobate men who are instigated to rebellion and revolt by obstinate malice, he holds them bound by a secret control, and prevents them from executing intended destruction. So far the parallel is complete. Nor when Paul speaks of Christ having *given gifts to men,* is there any real inconsistency with what is here stated, although he has altered the words, having followed the Greek

version in accommodation to the unlearned reader. [520] It was not himself that God enriched with the spoils of the enemy, but his people; and neither did Christ seek or need to seek his own advancement, but made his enemies tributary, that he might adorn his Church with the spoil. From the close union subsisting between the head and members, to say that God manifest in the flesh received gifts from the captives, is one and the same thing with saying that he distributed them to his Church. What is said in the close of the verse is no less applicable to Christ — that he obtained his victories that as God he might dwell among us. Although he departed, it was not that he might remove to a distance from us, but, as Paul says, "that he might fill all things," (Ephesians 4:10.) By his ascension to heaven, the glory of his divinity has been only more illustriously displayed, and though no longer present with us in the flesh, our souls receive spiritual nourishment from his body and blood, and we find, notwithstanding distance of place, that his flesh is meat indeed, and his blood drink indeed.

19. *Blessed be the Lord, etc.* David would have us to understand, that in recounting the more particular deliverances which God had wrought, he did not mean to draw our minds away from the fact, that the Church is constantly and at all times indebted for its safety to the Divine care and protection. He adds, *Blessed be God daily* And he intimates, that deliverances might be expected from him with great abundance of every blessing. Some read, *he will load,* others, *he will carry;* [521] but it is of little importance which reading we adopt. He points at the fact, that God extends continued proofs of his kindness to his people, and is unwearied in renewing the instances of it. I read this *Lord* in the second part of the verse, for the letter ה, *he*, prefixed in the Hebrew, has often the force of a demonstrative pronoun; and he would point out, as it were with the finger, that God in whom their confidence ought to be placed. So in the next verse, which may be read, this *our God is the God of salvation* What

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Paul's words are not exactly those of the Septuagint, the present reading of which is, ἔλαβες δοματα ἐν ἀνθρώπω, "Thou hast received gifts for man;" while Paul's words are, ἔδωκε δόματα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις But Bloomfield thinks that ἐν ἀςθρώπω in the Septuagint is a corruption for ἐπ᾽ ἀνθρώποις; and that Paul read in that version ἔλαθες δοματα ἐπ᾽ ανθρώποις, which is the true sense of the Hebrew words, being no other than this, "Thou hast received gifts on account of men;" *i e.*, to give to men. Paul, therefore, might say ἔδωκε instead of ἔλαθες ἐπι, to make the sense plainer; as also does the Chaldee Paraphrast, and the Syriac and Arabic translators. Paul's words are evidently not intended to be a regular quotation, as appears from his changing the second person into the third.

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"The word עמס, *amas*, which we translate *to load*, signifies *to lift*, *bear up*, *support*, or, *to bear a burden for another* Hence it would not be going far from the ideal meaning to translate, 'Blessed be the Lord, day by day, who bears our burthens for us.'" — *Dr Adam Clarke* Boothroyd, on the contrary, asserts, that "as an active verb it signifies 'to load, to lay a burthen on another,' but in no instance to bear or support one, 1 Kings 12:2."

is here said coincides with the scope of what immediately precedes, and is meant to convey the truth that God protects his Church and people constantly. In saying *this God,* he administers a check to the tendency in men to have their minds diverted from the one living and true God. The salvation of God is set before the view of all men without exception, but is very properly represented here as something peculiar to the elect, that they may recognize themselves as continually indebted to his preserving care, unlike the wicked, who pervert that which might have proved life into destruction, through their unthankfulness. The Hebrew word in the 20th verse is *salvations,* in the plural number, to convince us that when death may threaten us in ever so many various forms, God can easily devise the necessary means of preservation, and that we should trust to experience the same mercy again which has been extended to us once. The latter clause of the verse bears the same meaning, where it is said, that to the Lord *belong the issues of death* Some read, the *issues unto death,* [522] supposing that the reference is to the ease with which God can avenge and destroy his enemies; but this appears a constrained interpretation. The more natural meaning obviously is, that God has very singular ways, unknown to us, of delivering his people from destruction. [523] He points at a peculiarity in the manner of the Divine deliverances, that God does not generally avert death from his people altogether, but allows them to fall in some measure under its power, and afterwards unexpectedly rescues them from it. This is a truth particularly worthy of our notice, as teaching us to beware of judging by sense in the matter of Divine deliverances. However deep we may have sunk

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The Septuagint has, Τοῦ Κυρίου διέξοδοι τοῦ θανάτου, "To the Lord belong the passages of death," expressing the ways by which death *goes out* upon men to destroy them. The Vulgate has, "exitus mortus," "the goings out of death;" and the Chaldee Paraphrast, "From before the Lord, death, and the going out of the soul to suffocation, do contend or fight against the wicked." Hammond follows the LXX. He observed, that the original words "must literally be rendered *goings forth to death*, and must signify the several plagues and judgments inflicted by God on impenitent enemies, the ways of punishing and destroying the Egyptians and Canaanites, drowning in the sea, killing by the sword, infesting by hornets, etc.; and these are properly to be attributed and imputed to God, as the deliverances of the Israelites, his people, in the former part of the verse; and to this sense the consequents incline, verse 21, 'Even God shall wound.' Horsley reads the verse,

"He that is our God is a God of salvation,
And for death are the goings forth of the Lord Jehovah;
"*i.e.*," says he, "When Jehovah takes the field, deadly is the battle to his enemies."

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Agreeably to this, Hewlett observes, that the "*issues of death* mean the many providential escapes and deliverances from death;" and Boothroyd reads,

"For to Jehovah we owe our escapes from death."

The Syriac version has, —

"The Lord God is the Lord of death and of escaping."

in trouble, it becomes us to trust the power of God, who claims it as his peculiar work to open up a way where man can see none.

21. *Surely God shall wound, etc.* The enemies of the Church are fierce and formidable, and it is impossible that she can be preserved from their continued assaults, without a vigorous protection being extended. To persuade us that she enjoys such a defense, David represents God as armed with dreadful power for the overthrow of the ungodly. The verse stands connected as to scope with the preceding, and we might render the Hebrew particle אך, *ach,* by *wherefore,* or *on which account;* but it seems better to consider it as expressing simple affirmation. We are to notice the circumstance, that God counts all those his enemies who unjustly persecute the righteous, and thus assures us of his being always ready to interpose for our defense. The concern he feels in our preservation is forcibly conveyed by the expressions which follow, that *he will wound the head of his enemies, and the crown of their hair;* [524] intimating, that he will inflict a deadly and incurable wound upon such as harass his Church. This is still more strikingly brought out in what is added immediately afterwards, when God is described as wading through destruction.

22. *The Lord said, I will bring back from Bashan.* That the Israelites might not be led to take an irreligious and self-glorious view of their victories; that they might look to God as the author of them; and rest assured of his protection in time to come, David sends them back to the first periods of their history, and reminds them how their fathers had been originally brought by the victorious hand of God out of the lowest depths of trouble. He would have them argue that if God rescued his people at first from giants, and from the depths of the Red Sea, it was not to be imagined that he would desert them in similar dangers, but certain that he would defend them upon every emergency which might occur. The prophets are in the constant habit, as is well known, of illustrating the mercy of God by reference to the history of Israel's redemption, that the Lord's people, by looking back to their great original deliverance, might find an argument for expecting interpositions of a future kind. To make the deeper impression, God is introduced speaking himself. In what he says he may be considered as asserting his Divine prerogative of raising the dead to life again, for his people's passage through the Red Sea, and victory over warlike giants, was a species of resurrection. [525] Some read, *I will cause the enemy to fly from*

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Bishops Hare and Horsley suppose that there is here an allusion to the usage of the people in those Arabian regions, who nourished their hair on the crown of their head, that by their unshorn heads and shaggy hair they might appear more fierce. "The expressions, 'the head,' and 'the hairy crown,'" observes Bishop Horne, "denote the principal part, the strength, the pride, and the glory of the adversary which was to be crushed;" and Roberts, in his Oriental Illustrations, observes, that "this language, '*wounding the crown of the hair*,' still used in the East, is equivalent to saying, 'I will kill you.'"

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Bashan; [526] but this cannot be received, and does not agree with the context, as it follows, *I will bring back from the depths of the sea* In representing God as bedewed or stained with blood, David does not ascribe to him anything like cruelty, but designs to show the Lord's people how dear and precious they are in his sight, considering the zeal which he manifests in their defense. We know that David himself was far from being a man of cruel disposition, and that he rejoiced in the destruction of the wicked from the purest and most upright motives, as affording a display of the Divine judgments. That is here ascribed to God which may be asserted equally of his Church or people, for the vengeance with which the wicked are visited is inflicted by their hands. Some read the close of the verse, *the tongue of thy dogs in thine enemies, even in him, i.e.,* the king and chief of them all. This is not the meaning of the Psalmist, which simply is, that the tongues of the dogs would be red with licking blood, such would be the number of dead bodies scattered round.

24. *They have seen thy goings, O God!* This verse may refer to processions of a warlike kind, or to such as are made in times of peace by those who give thanks for victory. It is customary for the people of God, on occasions of the latter description, to go forth and present peace-offerings in the temple. This has led some to understand by *the goings of God,* [527] the crowds of his people when they proceed to the temple. But I am disposed to think that God himself is here represented as a king leading

Or, "I will bring again from Bashan," may be thus explained. I will perform for my people the like wonders which I did in the days of old; I will render them victorious over their proud enemies, as I before enabled them to triumph in the conflict with Og king of Bashan, (Deuteronomy 3:3, 4;) and I will deliver them from the greatest dangers, as I saved them from the Red Sea, by opening up a passage for them through the midst of it.

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Walford considers the persons here intended, not God's people, but their enemies. "It is evident," says he, "from the next verse, that the persons who are here meant are the enemies of God and his people; because the purpose for which they were to be brought was, that his people might completely triumph over them in their utter slaughter and destruction. These, he says, I will bring back from Bashan, and from the abysses of the sea; thus referring to the victories that had been gained over the kings of the Canaanites, and the triumph of Israel at the Red Sea. The design of this declaration is, to express the determination of God to bring forth all his enemies to destruction: be they on the heights of Bashan, or in the profoundest depths of the ocean, they shall not escape; his hand will lay hold upon them, and his power utterly destroy them. In Amos 9:2, and in Obadiah 4, there are two sublime illustrations of the sentiment that is here delivered." "Bashan was east of Judea," says Boothroyd, "and the sea in the west, so that the meaning is, that God would bring his enemies from every quarter to be slain by his people."

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"This doubtless refers to the order of the procession then on its march, and to that of religious processions in general. In the religious and festal processions of the Hindoos there is the same order and classes of performers. The singers, men and women, precede, singing songs appropriate to the occasion; and then the players on instruments follow after." — *Illustrated Commentary upon the Bible.*

and marshalling forth his armies. Accordingly, it is added, *in the sanctuary,* under which expression there is an apt allusion to the visible symbol of the Divine presence. The great reason why God undertakes the guardianship of his people, and goes before them to repel the attacks of the enemy, is his having promised that he will hear their prayers in the sanctuary. He is therefore described as if he were seen coming out of his holy habitation, that he might conduct his people to victory. David calls him *his King,* to divert the attention of the people from himself, and lead them to view a name which belonged to a frail mortal man such as he was, in its higher application to the supreme Head of all. He speaks, it is true, in the name of the people, but not to the exclusion of himself.

Psalm 68:25-27

25. The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; in the midst were the damsels playing with timbrels. [528] **26**. Bless ye God in the congregations, even the Lord, O ye who are of the fountain of Israel! **27**. There is little Benjamin their ruler, the princes of Judah in their assembly, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali.

25. *The singers went before* It is evident that he does not now speak of an army in battle array, but of a solemn assembly held for offering up thanksgivings to God for victory. God had openly shown that he was their leader in war, and to him the song of triumph is with propriety addressed. Mention is made of distinct choirs employed in his service, and particularly of such as played upon the timbrel; for, absurd as the practice may appear to us, it was then customary for the women to play upon that instrument. By the fountain [529] from which they are called upon to bless God, some understand *the heart,* as it is known that those praises which proceed from the lips merely, and are hypocritical, meet with the Divine reprobation. But I conceive the true meaning to be, that all are summoned to praise the

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"The musical instrument here rendered 'timbrels' was a sort of small drum, carried in the hand, (Exodus 15:20,) and played on by beating with the hand or fingers, as is probable from Nahum 2:7. It was used both on civil and religious occasions; and is often mentioned, as here, to have been beaten by women, but was sometimes played on by men. It was very like, if not the same kind of instrument as the modern Syrian *diff*, which is described by Dr Russell as 'a hoop, (sometimes with bits of brass fixed in it to make a jingling,) over which a piece of parchment is distended. It is beat with the fingers; and is the true tympanum of the ancients, as appears from its figure in several relievos representing the orgies of Bacchus, and the rites of Cybele. It is worth observing, that, according to Juvenal, the Romans had this instrument from Syria.' Niebuhr also has given us a similar description, and a print of an instrument which, (according to his German spelling,) he says, they call *doff*: He informs us that they 'hold it by the bottom, in the air, with one hand, while they play on it with the other.' The Oriental *diff* appears to be very like what is known to the French and English by the name of *tambourine*." — *Mant.*

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Lord who could deduce their origin from the patriarch Jacob. Many might not sustain the character which answered to their high vocation; but, as the whole race had been chosen of God, the Psalmist very properly invites them to engage in this devotional exercise. At the same time, I see nothing objectionable in the opinion, if any persist in preferring it, that the term is here used to distinguish the true saints of God from those who vainly boasted of being the posterity of Abraham, while they had degenerated from his spirit. Those only who walk in the footsteps of his faith are reckoned to be his children. It has caused some surprise that, in a general description of the sacred assemblies of the people, precedence should have been given to the tribe of *Benjamin* According to certain interpreters, this is owing to the position which it occupied, as being next to David; and honor is put upon the tribes of *Zebulun* and *Naphtali,* [530] which, though they lay at a great distance, were in a particular manner friendly and attached to him. Others think that the whole nation is represented under the tribes specified, which were at once the nearest and most distant. [531] These conjectures [532]

"A metaphor denoting the posterity of Israel, springing, as it were, from a common source or fountain." — *Mant* Bishop Hare's conjectural emendation gives a good sense; but it seems unnecessary. Instead of ממקור, *mimmekor*, he proposes to read מקור, *mekor*; and then the passage would run thus: —

"The fount whence blessings spring to Israel's race."

Horsley reads, "The Lord of the stock of Israel;" and explains it of the Messiah, who was of the stock of Israel according to the flesh. Fry conceives that the reading more strictly may be, "*from the quarry of Israel*; dug, as it were, from this pit, hewn from this rock. See Isaiah 51:1."

"They blessed Elohim in the congregations,
The Lord from the stock of Israel, (or from the quarry of Israel.)"

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Zebulun and Naphtali were in Galilee, divided from the country of the half-tribe of Manasseh; the former by the Jordan, the latter by the Lake of Gennesareth.

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Why these tribes in particular? May it be, Judah (having, instead of Reuben, succeeded to the blessing which conveyed the privilege of having the Chief Ruler and Messiah of his line) and Benjamin (צעיר) the youngest? or Judah and Benjamin, as two of the tribes most southern and nearest to Jerusalem; and Zebulun and Naphtali, as two of the most northern and most remote? as another way of expressing 'from Dan to Beersheba,' to include them all." — *Dr Lowth*

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Of other conjectures the following are a specimen: "As for Zebulun and Naphtali, why their names are here added rather than any of the other tribes, the reason may, perhaps, best be taken from what we find prophesied of those two (Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 and Judges 5.) by Jacob and Moses and Deborah, that learning and knowledge should be most eminent in those two tribes. Of Naphtali it is said, (Genesis 49:21,) 'Naphtali is a hind let loose; he giveth goodly words;' and of Zebulun, (Judges 5:14,) 'They shall handle the pen of the writer.'" — *Hammond.* "It then specifies the tribes of Judah, Zebulun, and Naphtali, not as if they were the only tribes present, but as occupying, perhaps, the foremost ranks of the procession, and followed by all the other tribes." — *Walford.*

are probable enough, but the point is one which may be left in uncertainty, as there may have been some other reason, which it is impossible for us to discover. It has been suggested that Benjamin is called *little* on account of the smallness of its numbers, the tribe having been nearly exterminated for the crime of the men of Gibeah, (Judges 19:20;) but David would not probably have adverted to any reproach of this kind in calling them to take so prominent a part in the praises of God. [533] The inspired writers, in speaking of the tribes, often allude to the patriarchs from whom they respectively took their origin; nor is it surprising that the posterity of Benjamin, who was the youngest of Jacob's children, [534] should receive the designation here given to them; and the truth is, that even antecedently to the heavy stroke which befell them, they were not numerous. Interpreters, by general consent, have considered that Benjamin is called *ruler,* as Saul, who was first made king in Israel, belonged to this tribe; but I cannot bring myself to think it probable that David would have made such an unseasonable allusion to Saul's memory, whose government is everywhere represented in Scripture as pregnant with disaster, and which was to be buried in that of his successor, whose reign is so prominently brought forward in this psalm. The more likely conjecture is, that this title of dignity is applied in order to put honor upon a tribe, which some might despise for its smallness, and to intimate that the Benjamites, though few in numbers, and not possessed of great influence, formed one head in Israel as well as the rest. [535] Others may be disposed to think that there must have been some illustrious individual in this and the two tribes mentioned along with it, or that the whole tribe had signalised itself in a recent battle. Though honorable mention is made of these tribes, yet the chief place in the numbers assembled together at this time is assigned to the princes of Judah. Some think that the copulative is understood, and read, *the princes of Judah and their congregation* The Hebrew word which we translate *congregation* is by others translated *stoning.* [536] But it seems preferable to construe the words as implying that this tribe

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"Car David appelant yci ceux qui devoyent faire le plus grand devoir et estre les premiers a annoncer les louanges de Dieu, n'eust pas fait mention de ceste acte qui estoit ignominieux, et tendoit grandement a leur deshonneur." — *Fr.*

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The Septuagint has, "There is Benjamin the younger." He was the son of Jacob's old age; and to this there is an allusion in the name, which is compounded of בן, *ben*, *a son*, and ימין, *yamin*, *of days*, (according to the Chaldee plural termination, ין, *yin*,) intimating that he was the son of his father's old age, (Genesis 44:20,) and not, as is commonly said, *the son of my right hand — Bythner*

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"Caput tamen unum efficere." — *Lat.* "Font toutesfois un chef comme les autres lignees." — *Fr.*

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presided over the assembly which marched under its auspices in war. The power of summoning the people together is thus asserted as belonging to Judah, and it is represented as honored with the government and primacy of the kingdom.

Psalm 68:28-30

> **28**. Thy God hath commanded thy strength; strengthen, O God! that which thou hast wrought in us. **29**. From thy temple upon Jerusalem kings shall bring presents unto thee. **30**. Destroy the company of spearmen, (literally, of the reed,) the multitude of bulls with the calves of the people, treading with their feet upon pieces of silver: scatter thou the people that delight in war.

28. *Thy God hath commanded thy strength* Men are always disposed to arrogate to themselves the glory of what they may have done instead of tracing their success to God, and David reminds the people once more that they had not triumphed by their own strength, but by power communicated from above. If they had acquitted themselves with energy on the field, he would have them consider that it was God who inspired them with this valor, and would guard them against the pride which overlooks and disparages the Divine goodness. As a consideration which might farther tend to promote humility in their minds, he adverts to the dependence in which they stood of the future continuance of the same favor and protection; this being the great cause of presumptuous confidence, that we do not feel our own helplessness, and are not led under a sense of it to resort humbly to God for the supply of our wants. Another lesson which the passage teaches us is, that more is required than that God should visit us at first with his preventing grace; that we stand constantly in need of his assistance throughout our whole lives. If this be true in the literal warfare, where our conflict is with flesh and blood, it must be still more so in matters of the soul. It is impossible that we could stand one moment in the contest with such enemies as Satan,

The word רגמתם, *rigmatham*, here translated *congregation* or *assembly*, signifies, according to Parkhurst, *a heap of stones for defence*, *a bulwark of stones*; and he considers it to be here applied metaphorically to the princes of Judah, who, so to speak, were *the bulwark* of Israel. Horsley adopts the same reading: "The princes of Judah their bulwark." Hammond, after stating that the word signifies *a stone*, observes, that it "is here used in a metaphorical sense for a *ruler* or *governor*, as a *foundation-stone* which supports the whole building may fitly be applied to a commonwealth, and then signify the prince thereof." In this sense the LXX., no doubt, understood רגמתם, *rigmatham*, who render it ἡγεμόνες αὐτων, "their governors." "It may mean," says Pike, in his Hebrew Lexicon, "their supreme authority, signified by *stoning*, a capital punishment among the Israelites, in the same manner as it was represented among the Romans by the Fasces and Securis, the instruments of punishment carried before the Consuls." Jerome, however, has taken it for another word nearly similar to it in its letters, signifying purple, — "in purpura sua;" — but this comes to the same thing as the Septuagint translation. Dathe has "agmen," "a troop;" and according to Gesenius, it signifies "a multitude, crowd, band."

sin, and the world, did we not receive from God the grace which secures our perseverance.

What is said of the temple in the following verse is intended to carry out the same strain of sentiment which has been already expressed. It gives the reason why God had exerted his power in behalf of the Israelites rather than others; which was, that it might be displayed as coming forth from the sanctuary and the ark of the covenant. Hence the emphasis with which David calls him in a previous part of the psalm — the God of Israel. It was not in vain that God had erected his sanctuary, or promised his presence in connection with it; and his power is here represented as issuing from the temple, to denote that the only security for his favor was to be found in his gracious covenant and promises. Some read, *From thy temple* in *Jerusalem* — a frigid interpretation, and one which does not express the meaning of the Psalmist. His prayer is to the effect that the Divine power might be commanded from the sanctuary upon his chosen people, here denoted by a common figure of speech by Jerusalem. It may be asked how he speaks of the temple, when it had not been yet built. The word *temple* or palace may have been used to express the tabernacle. This, at least, I think more probable than that he should speak of the temple by anticipation, as some suppose; and there can be no doubt that the ark had already been placed in Zion. Having already traced all the honor of the recent victories to God, he next proceeds to vindicate his claim to reap the fruits of them, by asserting that the kings who had been subdued would acknowledge God to have been their conqueror, as well as yield themselves tributary to David and his successors, — a circumstance which should lay the people of God under an additional obligation to present him with their free-will offerings of praise.

30. *Destroy the company of spearmen* Some read *rebuke,* but I approve of the distinction which has been noticed by those who are most skilled in the Hebrew language, that while the verb גער, *gear,* has this meaning when the letter ב *beth,* is interposed, it signifies without it *to destroy.* The word, חית, *chayath,* which I have rendered *company,* has been translated *beast,* [537] but no such sense can apply to it here. David evidently prays in this passage that God would deliver his chosen people by destroying their cruel

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and bloody enemies. In calling these *the company of the reed* or *cane,* [538] he does not mean to say that they are weak, but alludes to the kind of armor which they wore, and which were lances or spears. The reed grows in some countries to a tree, or at least has all the consistency of wood, and the people are in the habit of making darts from it. In the East missile weapons are commonly used in war. He compares them for their fierceness to *bulls,* so I have rendered the word אבירים, *abbirim;* for though it may be translated *strong* or *stout* persons — *the congregation of the strong* — it occasionally bears the other meaning; and as David adds, *calves of the people,* [539] it would seem evident that he uses a figure to represent the rage and fury of the enemy, and perhaps their strength, which the Israelites were wholly unequal to combat except with Divine assistance. It is not so easy

Instead of *the company of spearmen*, the greater number of modern critics consider *the wild beast of the reeds* as the most correct translation; and this is understood by many to represent the Egyptian people and government under the emblem of the hippopotamus or river-horse, the behemoth of Scripture. This animal — which is a quadruped of enormous size, of prodigious strength, fierce and cruel in its disposition, and whose skin is so impenetrable that no arrows can pierce it — shelters and reposes itself among the tall reeds which skirt in abundance the banks of the Nile, (Job 40:21.) It is a very appropriate emblem of the Egyptian power, in the height of its greatness so formidable, and the inveterate enemy of Israel. And that the Psalmist here refers to it has been thought the more probable, from his mentioning, in the clause immediately following, the bulls and calves of the people, these animals having been honored and worshipped as deities by that degenerate and superstitious nation. Or, the *wild beast of the reeds* may, as is supposed by others, denote the same power under the representation of the crocodile, to which the characteristics of the hippopotamus, now specified, are equally applicable. By this ferocious and truculent animal Pharaoh king of Egypt is represented in Ezekiel 29:3, 5, and 32:2; and in Psalm 74:14. This, it would appear, was anciently employed as an emblem of Egypt. On a medal which the Emperor Augustine caused to be struck after he had completely reduced this powerful kingdom, Egypt is represented by the figure of a crocodile bound with a chain to a palm-tree, with the inscription, *Nemo antea relegavit.* Dathe, however, rejects the opinion, that the crocodile, and under it the King of Egypt, is pointed at; and observes, that David cultivated peace with the King of Egypt, and that, in verse 31st, the Egyptians are commemorated as worshippers of the true God. He supposes that *the wild beast of the reeds* may be an epithet applied to the lion, who is accustomed to haunt places where reeds grow, and that under this image the King of Syria may be referred to, with whom David carried on lengthened and bloody wars, as is abundantly evident from sacred history. Dr Lowth also supposes that *the lion* is meant, (see his *Lectures on Sacred Poetry*, volume 1, p. 135;) and the same view is adopted by Schnurrer, Rosenmuller, and others.

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The original term is קנה, *kane*; hence the English word *cane*

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While by *the multitude of bulls* some understand powerful leaders, by *the calves of the people* they understand the mass of the people, undistinguished for rank or power, and particularly the young men. But others, as Bishop Horne, suppose, that by *the calves of the people* is meant the idol-calves of the Egyptians, their Apis, Osiris, etc., whom they made the objects of their religious worship. Horsley reads, "The assembly of those who place their strength in the calves;" that is, as he explains it, "The people of Egypt, who worshipped calves, and trusted in them as their gods."

to discover the meaning of the next clause in the verse, *treading upon pieces of silver* The Hebrew verb רפס, *raphas,* signifies *to tread,* or literally, (for it, is here in the *hithpael* conjugations) *causing themselves to tread;* and some consider that the allusion is to the arrogance and vain-glorious boasting of the enemy. Others attach exactly the opposite sense to the words, holding that they denote submission, and that the enemy would bring pieces of silver in token of subjection. [540] But how could we suppose that David would pray for the destruction of enemies who were already subdued, and paying tribute in the character of suppliants? To this it has been said in reply, that enemies may retain their animosity in all its force within their own breasts, ready to vent itself in rebellion upon the first opportunity, although when deprived of arms they cannot display it openly, and that this is especially true of the enemies of the Church, whose antipathies are virulent, ever breaking forth afresh so soon as an occasion offers. But I see no necessity for doing violence to the words of the Psalmist, and would take them in their plain acceptation, as meaning that the enemy in their pride trampled upon pieces of silver. The reference may be to attachments of silver upon their sandals, as the Eastern nations were always proverbial for their luxury. [541] What immediately follows by no means favors the sense we have formerly adverted to, *scatter the people who delight in war,* where he hints that they sought groundless occasions for quarrel and tumult, and gratuitously attacked such as were disposed for peace. When we find David, after all the victories he had gained, still commending himself and his people to the protection of God, it should teach us to abandon the hope of ever seeing the Church placed in a state of perfect tranquillity in this world, exposed, as it is, to a succession of enemies raised up by the malice of Satan, and designed by God for the trial and exercise of our patience. In comparing their enemies to the beasts here mentioned, and taking notice that they delighted in war, it was

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In Bagster's interlinear version, the rendering is, "*shall be each* submitting itself with pieces of silver." Wheatland and Silvester translate,

"Till each submiss, from hostile acts shall cease,
And with the tribute-silver sue for peace."

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Various other explanations have been given of the words, מתרפס כסף-ברצי, *mithrappes beratsey-kaseph*, rendered by Calvin, *treading with their feet upon pieces of silver*, and by which critics have been much perplexed. "Berlin translates the words 'calcantem frusta argenti,' which he explains by 'pavimentum argento tessellatum.' De Rossi explains the words thus, 'Who advance with laminae of silver under their horses' hoofs.' Immanuel Ben Solomon, whose *Scholia* on select passages of the Psalms were published by De Rossi, gives the following explanation. 'Dicit [vates scil.] quod Deus disperdit nationes, quae volunt malum inferre Israeli, et coetum taurorum, seu reges illustriores, ut reges Assyriae et Babylonis, quorum quisque conculcat frusta argentea; *i e.*, incedunt cum lamina aurea sub pedibus suis ob multitudinem divitiarum suarum.'" — *Rogers*' *Book of Psalms*, volume 2, p. 223. Dr Geddes' version is:

"The assemblage of the potent lords of nations,
Who tread on tiles of silver;"

no doubt his intention to influence the minds of the people of God to the contrary dispositions of clemency and mercy, as being that frame of spirit in the exercise of which they might expect to receive the Divine assistance. The more violently their enemies raged, and the more lawless their attempts might prove, they had only the more reason to expect the interposition of God, who humbles the proud and the mighty ones of this world. Such being the character of God, let us learn from this prayer of David to resort to him with confidence when the objects at any time of unmerited persecution, and to believe that he is able to deliver us at once from all our enemies.

Psalm 68:31-35

> **31**. Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out [or, shall hasten to stretch out] her hands unto God. **32**. Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth: sing praises to the Lord. Selah. **33**. To him that rideth upon the heaven of heavens, which were of old, [literally the heavens of ancientness;] lo! he shall send forth in his voice a mighty voice. **34**. Give strength unto God over Israel; his excellency and his strength are in the clouds. 35. O God! thou art terrible out of thy holy places: the God of Israel himself shall give strength and power unto his people. Blessed be God!

31. *Princes shall come out of Egypt.* He resumes the strain of thanksgiving, and confirms what he had previously asserted, that kings would come and pay tribute unto God. The examples which he brings forward are those

and he supposes that the poet alludes to the floors in the palaces of the Oriental kings, which were paved with silver. Dr Jubb renders the phrase, "who excite themselves with fragments of silver;" and considers the allusion to be to the dancing of the Egyptians before their idol-calves, with the tinkling instruments called Sistra. That they were accustomed to dance before these idols is evident from Exodus 32:6, where we are taught that the people of Israel, in imitation of the Egyptian idolatry, rose up to shout and dance before the golden calf; for such is the meaning of the words, "they rose up to play," as appears from verses 17, 18, and 19. And that they used the *sistrum* in religious feasts, Herodotus informs us in the second book of his History. The words, *pieces of silver*, according to Jubb, signify the little loose pieces of metal with which the *sistrum* was hung round, which produced the jingling noise when the instrument was played upon. This description fits the Egyptians; and that it really belongs to them may be inferred, with some degree of probability, from the following verse, where it is said, "Princes shall come out of Egypt," as if the subjugation of this nation, imprecated in the preceding verse, were here supposed complete. Tucker has here a very good remark. "David," says he, "invokes the Messiah to bring down the power of Egypt; but in his abhorrence of their idolatry, deigns not to designate them except in the most contemptuous terms. He says not, Rebuke the assembly of those who worship bulls and calves, and dance round altars to the sound of instruments of silver, but he classes the people on a par with the idols which they worshipped, — 'the assembly of bulls and calves, who dance to bits (or pieces) of silver.'"

"The *sistrum* was of an oval figure, or a dilated semicircle, in the shape of a shoulder-belt, with brass wires across, which played in holes wherein they were stopped by their flat heads. The performer played on it by shaking the *sistrum* in cadence, and thereby the brass wires made a shrill and loud noise." — *Mant.*

of the Egyptians and Ethiopians. This sufficiently proves that the prediction must be extended to Christ, by whom the Egyptians and Ethiopians were brought under the sway of God. The word תריץ, *tarits,* translated, *shall soon stretch out,* might have been rendered, *shall cause to run.* [542] But it seemed necessary to soften the harshness of the figure. It is doubtful whether the allusion be to the promptness with which they should yield subjection, or whether he means that they would stretch out their hands to entreat pardon, this being an attitude common to suppliants. According to either interpretation, it is their submission which is intended, and it is enough to know that David asserts that Ethiopia and Egypt would come under the power of God, and not they only, but the most distant parts of the world.

In the next verse he goes farther than before, and calls upon *the kingdoms of the earth to praise God,* language which implies that those who had once been distinguished by their hostility to him would be ranked amongst his willing worshippers. There must be the knowledge of God, as I have remarked elsewhere, before men can celebrate the praises of his name; and we have a proof of the calling of the Gentiles, in the fact that Moses and the prophets invite them to offer sacrifices of praise. That it might not seem a strange and incredible thing to speak of the extension of the worship of God from one land, within which it had been hitherto confined, to the whole world, David insists upon God's rightful dominion over all parts of the earth. *He rideth upon the heaven of heavens;* that is, as we have observed at the beginning of the psalm, he has supreme power over all creatures, and governs the universe at his will. This truth is one which, even in its general application, is well fitted to beget a reverential consideration of the majesty of God; but we must not overlook the more particular reason for which it is here introduced. Mention having been made of the Gentiles, who lay as yet without the pale of the Church, he proves them to be embraced in the government of God by virtue of his sovereignty as Creator, and intimates that there was nothing wonderful in the fact, that he who sits upon the heavens should comprehend the whole inhabitants of the earth under his sway. By the *heavens of ancient times,* it is meant to intimate that the whole human family were under his power from the very beginning. We have a signal proof of the glorious power of God in the fact, that, notwithstanding the immensity of the fabric of the heavens, the rapidity of their motion, and the conflicting revolutions which take place in them, the most perfect subordination and harmony are preserved; and that this fair and beautiful order has been uninterruptedly maintained for ages. It is apparent then how

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"The Hebrew is very emphatic: — 'Cush will cause her hands to run out to God.' She will with great *alacrity* and delight surrender her *power* and *influence* unto God." — *Dr Adam Clarke.*

the ancientness of the heavens may commend to us the singular excellency of the handiwork of God. Having touched upon the work of creation, he particularises *thunder,* for this is what he intends by *a mighty voice*, as in Psalm 29:4. There are two constructions which we may put upon the words used, either that by his voice of command he calls forth the thunders which shake heaven and earth with the loudness of their sound, or that he sends forth his mighty voice in the thunder. I have already shown, at some length, in commenting upon the other passage just quoted, that there is a propriety in God's being represented as *thundering;* for the phenomenon is one which, more than any other, impresses an awe upon the spirits of men. And the words are introduced with the exclamation *lo!* or *behold!* the better to arrest our wandering thoughts, or rather to reprehend our security.

34. *Give strength unto God over Israel* The expression is in allusion to the sentence which went before, and in which God was said to send forth a strong or mighty voice. Not that, properly speaking, we can give anything to Him, but, disposed as we are to withhold that honor which is his due, David subjoins to what he had said of his thundering with a mighty voice, an injunction that we should, on our part, be ready to sound forth his praises. To guard the Gentile nations against those false ideas upon religion in which they were accustomed to indulge, he brings them back to the doctrine of the Law, in which God had specially revealed himself, and intimates that, if they would not lose themselves in error, they must advance by necessary steps from the creation and government of the world, to that doctrine in which God had condescended to make a familiar revelation of himself to men. So much is included when God is spoken of here as *the God of Israel* But he does not satisfy himself with enjoining them to celebrate the power of God with praises of the voice. He exhorts them to the exercise of faith, for in reality we cannot better ascribe strength unto God, than by reposing in his protection as all-sufficient. Thus, after having said that *his strength is in the clouds;* [543] he adds, that *he is terrible out of his holy places,* by which is meant, that he exerts a power in his temple which is sufficient to confound his enemies. Some understand heaven and earth to be the *holy places* intended, but this does not agree with the context, for it is immediately added, that *the God of Israel* would give strength unto his people. It is evident, therefore, that the Psalmist speaks of God's protection of his Church. The plural number is used in speaking of the sanctuary, here as in other places, because the tabernacle was divided into three parts. He points, in short, to the ark of the covenant, as that which the believing people of God should recognize

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"This refers to the phenomena of thunder and lightning; for all nations have observed that the electric fluid is an irresistible agent — destroying life, tearing towers and castles to pieces, rending the strongest oaks, and cleaving the most solid rocks; and the most enlightened nations have justly considered it as an especial manifestation of the power and Sovereignty of God." — *Greenfield.*

as a symbol of confidence, remembering the promise, "I will dwell in the midst of you," and thus resting with security under the wings of the Divine protection, and confidently calling upon his name. Any right which Israel might have in distinction from others to trust in the guardianship of God, rested entirely upon that covenant of free grace by which they had been chosen to be God's peculiar heritage. Let it be remembered, however, that God continues to exert in behalf of his Church still these terrible displays of his power of which the Psalmist speaks.

Psalm 69

PSALM 69

There is a close resemblance between this psalm and the twenty-second. In the opening verses, David complains of the barbarous cruelty of his enemies, and of the grievous wrongs which they had inflicted upon him. [544] But his mind, he affirms, was not hereby reduced to such a state of distress as to prevent him from patiently relying on the protection of God, or to discourage him from continuing in the undeviating course of a holy and an upright life. He rather testifies that his piety, and the courage and activity which he had manifested in maintaining the interests of the divine glory, were the cause of the hostility borne to him by the generality of men. After having again complained of being not less shamefully than cruelly oppressed by his enemies, he invokes God to visit them with deserved punishment. In the close, exulting as if he had obtained his highest wishes, he engages to yield to God a solemn sacrifice of praise.

To the chief musician upon Shoshannim of David.

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The particular enemies of whom he speaks are uncertain; some referring the occasion of the composition of the psalm to his persecution by Saul, and others to the rebellion of Absalom. But to whatever part of David's eventful life the psalm primarily refers, it may be concluded, from the frequency with which it is quoted and applied to Christ in the New Testament, that it was prophetic of him, of whom David, rejected and persecuted, was an eminent type. It is quoted in the New Testament at least seven times; the 4th verse in John 15:25; the 9th verse in John 2:17, and Romans 15:3; the 21st verse in Matthew 27:34, 48, and John 19:28, 29; the 22d and 23d verses in Romans 11:9, 10; and the 25th verse in Acts 1:16, 20.

We have already spoken elsewhere of the word *Shoshannim.* Its proper meaning is uncertain and obscure; but the most probable conjecture is, that it was the commencement of some song. If, however, any would prefer considering it as the name of some musical instrument, I have no objections. But the opinion held by some that this psalm was composed at the season of spring, when the lilies begin to blossom, is altogether unfounded and frivolous. [545] Before proceeding farther, we would have you to observe that David wrote this inspired ode not so much in his own name, as in the name of the whole Church, of whose Head he was an eminent type, as will be more dearly brought out in the sequel. This is highly worthy of our notice, that from this consideration we may be led to contemplate with the greater attention the representation which is here given of the common condition of all the people of God. Besides, it is highly probable that David did not here comprehend only one kind of persecution, but all the evils which he had suffered during the course of many years.

Psalm 69:1-5

1. Save me, O God! for the waters have entered in unto my soul. **2**. I am sunk in deep mire, where there is no footing, [or standing place:] I am come into deep waters, and the flood [546] of the water overfloweth me. **3**. I am weary of crying; my throat has become hoarse therewith: my eyes have failed with [or in] waiting for my God. **4**. They who hate me without cause are more in number than the hairs of my head: my lying adversaries, who eagerly desire to destroy me, are increased; [547] that which I took not by spoil, then [548] I restored it. **5**. O God! thou knowest my foolishness; and my faults are not hidden from thee.

1. *Save me, O God! for the waters, etc.* Under the figure of *waters,* the Psalmist represents his condition as so extremely distressing that it brought him even to the brink of despair; and yet we know that, so far from being a soft and an effeminate person, he was one who encountered and overcame dreadful temptations with extraordinary courage. Whence we may infer the

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They rest this opinion upon the meaning which they attach to the word ששנים, *Shoshannim*, in the title of the psalm, which they translate *lilies*

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"Ou, la force et le fil." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, the force and course."

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"Ou, fortifiez." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, strengthened."

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The Hebrew word אז, for *then*, appears to be emphatic. "אז; *in ipso articulo*, (Schultens *in* Proverbs 7:22;) immediately, without any contention, or delay." Lowth, quoted in Merrick's Annotations.

bitterness of the distress with which he was at that time afflicted. Some understand the word *soul* as denoting *life;* [549] but this gives a very cold and unsatisfactory meaning. It rather signifies *the heart.* A man when he falls into an abyss of waters, may prevent for some time the water from entering his body, by stopping his mouth and his nostrils, but at length, from its being impossible for a human being to live without respiration, suffocation will compel him to let in the waters, and they will penetrate even to the heart. David by this metaphor would intimate, not only that the waters had covered and overwhelmed him, but also that he had been forced to draw them into his body.

2. *I am sunk in deep mire, where there is no standing place* Here he compares his afflictions to a deep sink of mire, where there is still greater danger; for if a man fixes his feet upon a solid bottom, he may raise himself up, there having been many instances in which persons, placing their feet on the bottom, have by a sudden spring emerged and escaped the peril of the waters; but when a man finds himself once sunk in some slough or muddy river, it is all over with him, he has no means of saving himself. [550] The Psalmist adduces additional circumstances in illustration of his afflicted condition. He declares that *he was inundated by the flowing of the waters;* an expression indicating the disorder and confusion which his distresses and persecutions produced.

3 *I am weary of crying* David, in seeking and calling upon God, when his affairs were in such a confused and desperate condition, exhibited an instance of rare and wonderful patience. He complains of having continued crying until he was exhausted and became hoarse, and all to no purpose. By the word *weary,* he does not mean that he gave up with prayer, as if he had cast from him all love to and delight in that exercise upon finding that it proved unavailing as a means of deliverance. He rather describes his untiring perseverance; and the same idea is expressed by his *hoarse throat* and *failing eyes.* [551] He certainly did not cry out before men from mere affectation, nor was this hoarseness contracted in the course of one day. We perceive, then, that although his bodily senses failed him, the vigor of his

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"*The waters are come in unto my soul*; *i.e.*, a flood of overwhelming calamities threaten my life: comp. verse 16." — *Cresswell.* Williams thinks the allusion is to a leaky vessel, or to an inundation.

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"Comme nous en voyons plusieurs qui donnans du pied au fond, de roideur trouvent facon d'eschapper le peril de l'eau: mais depuis qu'on se trouve une fois enfonce en quelque bourbier ou riviere limonneuse, c'est fait, il n'y a nul moyen de se sauver." — *Fr.*

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"'*My sight* faileth me,' etc. This is said metaphorically, the metaphor being taken from the pain occasioned to the eyes when they are long and intently fixed upon the same point." — *Cresswell*

faith was by no means extinguished. When we reflect that David has spoken, as it were, out of the mouth of Christ, and, as it were, out of the mouth of all true saints who are the members of Christ, we ought not to think that any strange thing happens to us, if at any time we are so overwhelmed with death, as to be unable to discern the slightest hope of life. Yea, rather let us learn betimes, while God spares us, to meditate on this truth, and derive the aid which it is fitted to impart under calamity, that even in the most profound depths of adversity faith may hold us up, and, what is more, may elevate us to God; there being, as Paul testifies, (Romans 8:39) no height nor depth which can separate us from the infinite love of Him who swallows up all depths, yea, even hell itself.

4. *They who hate me without cause are more in number than the hairs of my head* The Psalmist now expresses without figure what he had said under the metaphors of the mire and of the impetuous rushing of the waters. Persecuted as he was by so great a multitude of enemies, he had too good reason to be afraid of death in innumerable ways. Nor is his language hyperbolical, when he represents his enemies as *more in number than the hairs of his head,* since he was mortally hated and detested by the whole kingdom, it being the universal belief that he was a base and wicked traitor to his country. Farther, we know from the sacred history how numerous and powerful the armies were which Saul sent forth to pursue him. He expresses the mortal hatred which they bore to him, when he tells us that they were intently set upon his destruction, being eagerly desirous to have him cut off by a violent death; and yet he avows that he had done nothing to merit such unrelenting persecution. The Hebrew word חנם, *chinnam,* which we have rendered, *without cause,* and which some translate, *for nothing,* intimates that they were impelled by a strong desire to do him injury, although he had not done them even the slightest wrong, nor given them the smallest provocation by ill usage of any kind. For this reason he applies to his enemies the appellation שקר, *sheker,* that is, *liars,* because they had no just ground to make war upon him, although they pretended the contrary. Let us, therefore, after his example, if at any time we are subjected to persecution, study to have the support arising from the testimony of a good conscience, and to be able freely to protest before God, that the hatred which our enemies cherish against us is altogether causeless. This implies a self-control to which it is very difficult for a man to inure himself; but the more difficult it is, the more strenuous ought to be his efforts to attain it. It is mere effeminacy to regard it as an intolerable evil to be unrighteously afflicted; and the folly of this is very happily exposed by that noble answer of Socrates to his wife, who, having one day lamented, in prison, that he was condemned wrongfully, received from him this reply, "What then — would you rather that I should have suffered death for my offenses?" Farther, David adds, that he not only had to suffer the wrongs of violence, but had also to bear much reviling and contumely, as if he had been convicted of

many crimes; a trial which, to an ingenuous mind, is more bitter and hard to bear than a hundred deaths. Many are to be found resolutely prepared to encounter death, who are by no means prepared to exhibit equal fortitude in the endurance of shame. Farther, David was not only despoiled of his goods by the violence of robbers, but he had been also mangled in his person, as if he had been a thief and a robber: *That which I took not by spoil, then I restored it* [552] When his enemies thus plundered and maltreated him, they doubtless boasted that they were acting as the judges of a perverse and wicked man; and we know that they were held in honorable estimation as judges. Let us therefore learn from this example to prepare ourselves not only to bear patiently all losses and troubles, yea, even death itself; but also shame and reproach, if at any time we are loaded with unfounded accusations. Christ himself, the fountain of all righteousness and holiness, was not exempted from foul calumny, why then should we be dismayed when we meet with a similar trial? It may well fortify our minds against it when we consider, that to persevere steadfastly in the practice of righteousness, although such is the reward which we receive from the world, is the genuine test of our integrity.

5. *O God! thou knowest my foolishness* Augustine has labored to little purpose to show in what way these words are applicable to Christ; and at length he transfers to his members that which could not properly be said of the Head. [553] David here uses the language of irony; and by this mode of expressing himself he meant to intimate, that, overwhelmed with the unrighteous judgments of men, he betakes himself to God, and implores him to appear as the defender of his cause. This is much more emphatic than if he had affirmed plainly, and without figure, that his integrity was known to God. In this way he administers a sharp rebuke to his enemies, and as it were looks down with a noble contempt upon the calumnious speeches which they uttered against him; as Jeremiah does when he says,

"O Lord! thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived."
(Psalm 20:7)

Some ignorant people put a violent construction on these words of Jeremiah, as if they implied that he was actually deceived; whereas he is

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"There is an apparent impropriety in the language of this verse, though the sense is perfectly clear. It is a proverbial expression, to mark the injustice and extortion of the enemies that are referred to, who compelled the speaker, without any right, to yield up his goods to persons to whom he was not indebted." — *Walford.* Horsley observes, that this last clause is a proverbial expression, the meaning of which is, "I have been accountable for the crimes of others." Dr Adam Clarke also remarks, that this is a sort of proverbial expression like these: "Those who suffered the wrong pay the costs" — "Kings sin and the people are punished." This pre-eminently applies to Christ, who was perfectly holy, but who, by bearing the punishment due to the guilt of man, made satisfaction to Divine justice for sins which he never committed, and restored those blessings which he never took away.

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rather to be understood as deriding with bitter sarcasm his calumniators, who, in speaking evil of him, were chargeable with reproaching and blaspheming God himself. David in like manner, in the passage before us, as a means of preserving himself from succumbing under the perverse judgments of men, appeals to God as the judge of his cause; and possessing as he did the approving testimony of a good conscience, he regards in a great measure with indifference the unjust estimate which men might form of his character. It were indeed desirable that our integrity should also be acknowledged and approved of by men, and that not so much on our own account as for the edification of our brethren. But if, after we have done all in our power to make men form a favorable opinion respecting us, they misconstruct and pervert every good word which we utter, and every good action which we perform, we ought to maintain such greatness of mind as boldly to despise the world and all false accusers, resting contented with the judgment of God and with that alone; for those who are over anxious about maintaining their

According to Augustine, the Messiah, when he says "my foolishness" and "my iniquities," speaks of the sins of men which were imputed to him, and for which he suffered and died under the curse of the law, which treated him as if he had been a sinner, in consequence of the sins thus imputed to him. A similar interpretation is given by Bishops Horsley and Horne, as well as many others. "The Messiah," says the first of these critics, "here, as in many places, may speak of the follies and crimes of men, for which he had made himself answerable as his own." Admitting, as we are disposed to do, although Calvin takes an opposite view, that the passage is applicable to Christ, it may be doubted whether this is the correct interpretation. The sins of those for whom Christ died, by being imputed to him, no doubt became his in the eye of the law, in such a sense as to make him answerable for them. But the Scriptures, be it observed, while they speak of him as "wounded for *our* transgressions, and bruised for *our* iniquities," and as "bearing *our* sins in his own body on the tree," as if afraid to use any forms of expression which would even seem to derogate from his immaculate purity, never speak of the sins of those for whom he died as his *own* sins. What Horsley adds, as an additional explanation, is very unguarded. "Perhaps," says he, "He who, although he was without sin, was yet tempted in all points like up to us, might, in his humility, speak of *the incitement of the passions in his own mind as weakness and fault*, making confession of it before the Father." Nothing, doubtless, was farther from the mind of the prelate than to teach any thing inconsistent with the perfect holiness of the Son of God; and he expressly warns that "he was without sin;" but the language which he employs is scarcely consistent with this position, and it can convey no idea on the subject except an erroneous one. "The prince of this world cometh," said Jesus to his disciples, "and hath nothing in me" — *hath nothing in me*, that is, to use the words of Dr Doddridge, "no guilt of mine to give him power over me; nor any inward corruption, to take part with his temptations." The explanation of the text, which appears to be the most natural and consistent, is that which considers the Savior as solemnly appealing to the Father in vindication of his innocence. His enemies falsely charged him with crimes, and made these charges the ground of their cruel and malignant proceedings against him. The Divine Sufferer, therefore, with confidence appeals to God, saying, Thou, who art the omniscient and all-righteous Judge, knowest that I am innocent of the crimes laid to my charge, and I invoke thee to plead my cause. This interpretation, which is adopted by many eminent critics, as Dr Boothroyd, Dr Morrison, Walford, and others, is strongly supported by the context. The preceding verse contains strong assertions of his innocence; and it was very natural to accompany these with an appeal from the falsehood and calumny of men, to the all-seeing and righteous Judge of the universe.

good name cannot but often experience fainting of heart. Let us be always ready to satisfy men; but if they refuse to listen to what we have to say in self-vindication, let us proceed in our course through evil report as well as good report, following the example of Paul where he fearlessly appeals to the judgment of God,

"who will bring to light the hidden things of dark,"
(1 Corinthians 4:5)

Psalm 69:6-9

> **6**. O Jehovah, Lord of Hosts! let not them that wait for thee be ashamed in me: let not them who seek thee be put to shame in me, O God of Israel! **7**. For on thy account I have suffered reproach: shame hath covered my face. **8**. I have been a stranger to my brethren, and am become an alien to the children of my mother. [554] **9**. For the zeal of thy house hath eaten me up; and the reproach of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.

6 *O Jehovah, Lord of Hosts! let not them that wait for thee be ashamed in me.* David declares that he is set forth as an example from which all the people of God may derive matter either of hope or despair. Although he was held in detestation and execrated by the great body of the people, there yet remained a few who were ready to bear just and impartial testimony to his innocence; knowing as they did that he was unrighteously afflicted by his persecutors, that he constantly reposed on the grace and goodness of God, and that no temptations could discourage or prevent him from continuing steadfast in the practice of true godliness. But when they observed the distresses and calamities to which he was notwithstanding subjected, the only conclusion to which they were able to arrive was, that all the pains and labor which he had taken in devoutly serving God were entirely thrown away. As all the instances in which God extends his succor to his servants are so many seals, by which he confirms and gives us assurance of his goodness and grace towards us, the faithful must have been exceedingly discouraged had David been forsaken in the extremity of his distress. The danger of their being thus discouraged he now lays before God; not that God has ever need of being put in mind of any thing, but because he allows us to deal familiarly

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In the East, where polygamy prevails, those who are children of the same father, but by different mothers, scarcely look upon each other as brothers and sisters at all, but as strangers or enemies; while those who are children of the same mother regard each other with peculiarly strong affection. Hence said Gibeon to Zebah and Zalmunna, who had put to death his brethren, "They were my brethren, even the sons of my mother; as the Lord liveth, if ye had saved them alive, I would not slay you," (Judges 8:19.) It therefore greatly aggravated the affliction of David that he had "become an alien to the children of his mother," from whom he might have expected affection and sympathy, however much he might have been disregarded by his brethren, who were the children of his father's other wives. See volume 2, p. 277, note 3.

with him at the throne of grace. The word *wait* is properly to be understood of hope, and the expression *to seek God,* of prayer. The connecting of the two together teaches us the profitable lesson, that faith is not all inactive principle, since it is the means of stirring us up to seek God.

7 *For on thy account I have suffered reproach* He now expresses more distinctly what he had stated ironically in the fifth verse, where he asserts that his faults were not hidden from God. Nay, he proceeds farther, declaring not only that the evil treatment which he met with from his enemies was unjust and altogether unmerited, but also that his cause was really God's cause, since whatever he had undertaken and engaged in was expressly in obedience to the command of God. Saul no doubt had other reasons, or at least other pretences, for persecuting David; but as the hatred which he entertained against him most unquestionably proceeded from God's having called and anointed him to be king, David here justly protests that it was not for any wickedness which he had committed, but because he had obeyed God, that men in general disapproved of and rashly condemned him. It is a source of great consolation to true believers when they can protest that they have the warrant and call of God for whatever they undertake or engage in. If we are hated by the world for making a public confession of the faith, a thing which we are to expect, it being evident from observation that the wicked ordinarily are never more fierce than when they assault the truth of God and the true religion, we have ground to entertain double confidence. [555] We also learn from this passage how monstrous is the malice of men, who convert into a ground for reproach and reprehension the zeal for the Divine glory by which true believers are animated. [556] But it is well for us that God not only wipes away the reproaches with which the wicked load us, but also so ennobles them, that they surpass all the honors and triumphs of the world. The Psalmist farther aggravates his complaint by the additional circumstance, that he was cruelly cast off by his own relations and friends; from which we are taught, that when by our devotedness to the cause of religion we cannot avoid exciting the displeasure of our brethren against us, it is our duty simply to follow God, and not to confer with flesh and blood.

9 *For the zeal of thy house hath eaten me up* [557] David's enemies, no doubt, professed that nothing was farther from their mind than to touch the sacred name of God; but he reproves their hypocritical pretences, and affirms that he is fighting in God's quarrel. The manner in which he did this, he shows,

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That is, the confidence arising from the reflection that we are, in the *first* place, suffering unjustly; and, *secondly*, that we are suffering in the cause of God.

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"Qui convertissent en diffame et blasme le desir que les fideles ont de sa gloire." — *Fr.*

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was by the zeal for the Church of God with which his soul was inflamed. He not only assigns the cause of the evil treatment which he received — his zeal for the house of God — but also declares that whatever evil treatment he was undeservedly made the object of, yet, as it were, forgetting himself, he burned with a holy zeal to maintain the Church, and at the same time the glory of God, with which it is inseparably connected. To make this the more obvious, let it be observed, that although all boast in words of allowing to God the glory which belongs to him; yet when the law, the rule of virtuous and holy living, presents its claims to them, men only mock him, and not only so, but they furiously rush against him by the opposition which they make to his Word. They do this as if he willed to be honored and served merely with the breath of the lip, and had not rather erected a throne among men, from which to govern them by laws. David, therefore, here places the Church in the room of God; not that it was his intention to transfer to the Church what is proper to God, but to show the vanity of the pretensions which men make of being the people of God, when they shake themselves loose from the control of God's holy law, of which the Church is the faithful guardian. Besides, David had to deal with a class of men who, although a hypocritical and bastard race, professed to be the people of God; for all who adhered to Saul boasted of having a place in the Church, and stigmatised David as an apostate or a rotten member. With this unworthy treatment David was so far from being discouraged, that he willingly sustained all assaults for the defense of the true Church. He declares that he is unmoved by all the wrongs and revilings which he personally suffered at the hands of his enemies. Laying aside all concern about himself, he is disquieted and distressed only for the oppressed condition of the Church, or rather burns with anguish, and is consumed with the vehemence of his grief.

The second clause of the verse is to the same effect, denoting that he has nothing separate from God. Some explain it in a different sense, understanding it to mean that the wicked and proud, with the view of making an assault upon David, directed their fury and violence against God himself, and in this way indirectly pierced the heart of this holy man with their blasphemies, knowing as they did that nothing would be more grievous to him to bear than this. But this interpretation is too forced. Equally forced is that of those who consider David as intimating that he did not less prostrate himself in humble supplication at the mercy-seat

The verb means not only 'to eat up, to devour,' but 'to corrode or consume,' by separating the parts from each other, as fire, (see Parkhurst on אכל 2;) and the radical import of the Hebrew word for 'zeal,' seems to be 'to eat into, corrode, as fire.' The word (says Parkhurst) is, in the Hebrew Bible, generally applied to the fervent or ardent affections of the human frame, the effects of which are well known to be even like those of fire, corroding and consuming; and, accordingly, the poets, both ancient and modern, abound with descriptions of these ardent and consuming affections, taken from fire and its effects. (See on קנא.)" — *Mant*

whenever he heard the name of God torn by reproaches and blasphemy, than if he himself had been guilty of treason against the Divine Majesty. I therefore adhere to the opinion which I have already expressed, That David forgot what concerned himself, and that all the grief which he felt proceeded from the holy zeal with which he burned when he saw the sacred name of God insulted and outraged with horrible blasphemies. By this example we are taught, that whereas we are naturally so tender and delicate as to be unable to bear ignominy and reproach, we must endeavor to get quit of this unhappy state of mind, and ought rather to be grieved and agonised with the reproaches which are poured forth against God. On account of these, it becomes us to feel deep indignation, and even to give expression to this in strong language; but we ought to bear the wrongs and reproaches which we personally suffer without complaining. Until we have learned to set very little value upon our own reputation, we will never be inflamed with true zeal in contending for the preservation and advancement of the interests of the Divine glory. Besides, as David speaks in the name of the whole Church, whatever he says concerning himself behoved to be fulfilled in the supreme Head. It is, therefore, not surprising to find the Evangelists applying this passage to Christ, (John 2:17.) In like manner, Paul, in Romans 15:3, 5, 6, exhorting the faithful to imitate Christ, applies the second member to them all, and there also teaches us that the doctrine contained in it is very comprehensive, requiring them to devote themselves wholly to the advancement of the Divine glory, to endeavor in all their words and actions to preserve it unimpaired, and to be carefully on their guard that it may not be obscured by any fault of theirs. Since Christ, in whom there shines forth all the majesty of Deity, did not hesitate to expose himself to every species of reproach for the maintenance of his Father's glory, how base and shameful will it be for us to shrink from a similar lot.

Psalm 69:10-13

10. And I wept, my soul fasted; and that was laid to me as a reproach. **11**. I also made sackcloth my clothing: and I became a proverb to them. **12**. They who sit in the gate defame me: and I am the song of those who drink intoxicating liquor. **13**. But as for me, my prayer is to thee, O Jehovah! in a time of thy favor, [or good-will,] O God: answer me in the multitude of thy mercy, in the truth of thy salvation.

10. *And I wept, my soul fasted* David here proves, by the signs or effects, that his efforts to promote the Divine glory proceeded from a pure and well-regulated zeal, inasmuch as he was not impelled or inflamed by the impetuosity of the flesh, but rather humbly abased himself before God, choosing him to be the witness of his sorrow. By this he shows the more evidently the incorrigible perversity of his enemies. It frequently happens, that those who set themselves boldly for the vindication of the glory of

God, provoke and exasperate the wicked to a higher pitch by opposing them contentiously and without moderation. But David's zeal was so tempered that it ought to have softened even the hardness of steel. By this circumstance he, however, intended to show that he was oppressed with such violence by the frowardness of his enemies, that he dared not even open his mouth to speak a single word in defense of the cause of God, and no other means were left him of defending it but tears and mourning. He was deprived, as we know, of the liberty of giving utterance to the sentiments of his heart, or rather his words, as being those of a condemned person, would have been repelled with cruel reproaches. It was a proof of the greater constancy when in such circumstances he continued to burn with a zeal as unabated as ever, and persevered in the voluntary sorrow which he had engaged to exercise with the view of maintaining the honor and glory of God. He accordingly declares, *that he wept and that his soul fasted, and that he was clothed with sackcloth;* which were the tokens of mourning among the Jews. But his enemies turned all these things into mockery and jesting; [558] from which it is manifest that they were carried away with the fury of demons. It is of importance for us to be fortified with such an example, that in the present day we may not be discouraged when we meet with the same perversity by which the enemies of the Gospel prove themselves to be rather devils than men. We must, *however,* beware of pouring oil upon the fire which is already burning too fiercely, and should rather imitate David and Lot, who, although they had not liberty to rebuke the wicked, were yet deeply grieved in their hearts. And even when the wicked are constrained to hear us, mildness and humility will be a powerful means, or rather will be the best seasoning, for tempering holy zeal. Those who conceive of David as intimating that he resigned himself to suffer punishment in the room or stead of his enemies, attempt to confirm their opinion from his having clothed himself in sackcloth. But I take it more simply as meaning, that when he saw things in such a state of confusion, he voluntarily engaged in this sorrowful exercise to testify that nothing was more grievous to him than to witness the sacred name of God exposed to contumely.

12. *They who sit in the gate defame me* Had David been molested only by vulgar buffoons and the refuse of the people, it would have been more easily endured; for it is not surprising that mean persons, who have no regard to what is becoming and honorable, degrade themselves by indulging in defamation without shame. But when the very judges, forgetful of what is demanded by the dignity of their office, abandon themselves to the same audacious conduct, the iniquity and baseness of it is greatly aggravated. Accordingly, David expressly complains that he was made a by-word and a

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"*That was turned to my reproach*; *i.e.*, it was made a subject of reproach to me." — *Cresswell.*

proverb by those in the highest ranks of life. The opinion of some who, by the expression, *they who sit in the gate,* understand the whole people, [559] is both frigid and inconsistent with the words of the text; for although men of every rank and condition assembled at the gates, yet none but the judges and counsellors sat there. [560] This is confirmed by the second clause of the verse; for by *those who drink strong drink,* [561] is doubtless meant the rulers who were elevated by their wealth and dignity. It was, indeed, very cruel treatment, that this holy man was not only harassed by the lower classes of the people, but that the very persons who presided in the cause of justice, and the dignitaries of the Church, were in this ringleaders to others. As the same thing happens in our own day, it is not without cause that the Holy Spirit has set this example before our eyes. In the Papacy we find that the higher a man is exalted in honor, he is proportionally the more violent and outrageous in his opposition to the Gospel and its ministers, that he may exhibit himself a more valiant defender of the Catholic faith. Yea, this is a malady with which almost all kings and princes are smitten; which arises from their not regarding true dignity and excellence as consisting in virtue, and from their thinking that they are entitled to act without restraint as they please. And what is the estimation in which they hold the faithful servants of Christ? It is a fact which cannot be denied, that one of the principal things about which they are concerned is, to scoff at and defame them, not only at their tables, but also on their thrones, in order, if possible, to shame them into a renunciation of their faith. In general, also, they sneer at all the people of God, and enjoy themselves in descanting upon their simplicity, as if they were fools in wearying and wasting themselves in the service of God.

13. *But as for me, my prayer is to thee, O Jehovah!* It was a sign of uncommon virtue in David, that even this hard treatment could not shake his mind, and sink him into despondency. He informs us of the means by

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"*They that sit in the gate* — vain and idle persons who spent their time there, in which there used to be a confluence of people." — *Rosenmuller.* "*They that sit in the gate*; *i.e.*, the elders. The expression may, however, be put for the crowd assembled there to hear the decisions of the magistrates: compare 2 Kings 7:1-18." — *Cresswell.*

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Judges sat there in the exercise of their judicial functions; the gates of cities being anciently the places where courts of judicature were held for trying all causes, and deciding all affairs. See Job 29:7, compared with verses 12, 16, and 17; Deuteronomy 25:7; Ruth 4:1, 2; 1 Kings 22:10; Esther 2:19.

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"*Bibentes siceram.*" — *Lat.* Cresswell has the following note on this clause of the verse: "More literally, *I am the subject of the songs of them that drink sicera.* Sicera was, according to Chrysostom, an intoxicating liquor, made from the juice of the palm-tree; the fruit of that tree being bruised and fermented, was probably the beverage of the lower orders, like the *bouza* of Æthiopia."

which he fortified himself against that terrible stumbling-block. When the wicked directed against him their witty and scoffing remarks, as if engines of war, to overthrow his faith, the means to which he had recourse for repelling all their assaults was pouring out his heart in prayer to God. He was constrained to keep silence before men, and, being thus driven out from the world, he betook himself to God. In like manner, although the faithful in the present day may be unable to make any impression upon the wicked, yet they will ultimately triumph, provided they retire from the world, and go directly to God to present their prayers before him. The meaning, in short, is, that David, having tried every means in his power, and finding that his labor was to no purpose, left off dealing with men, and dealt with God only. What follows, *a time of thy favor, O God!* is explained otherwise by many interpreters, who read the two clauses of the verse in one sentence, thus: *But as for me, I prayed to God in a time of his favor;* corresponding to that passage in Isaiah 55:6, "Call ye upon him while he is near." Others resolve it thus: *I prayed that the time of favor might come, and that God would begin to be merciful to me.* But David is rather speaking of the consolation which he then received by reflecting with himself, that although it was now a time of trouble with him, and although his prayers seemed to be altogether unavailing, yet God's favor would have its turn also. Thus the Prophet Habakkuk says,

"I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me." (Habakkuk 2:1)

In like manner, Isaiah says,

"I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob;" (Isaiah 8:17)

and Jeremiah 14:22,) "We will wait upon thee." The only means by which, in our affliction, we can obtain the victory, is by our having hope shining in us in the midst of darkness, and by our having the sustaining influence which arises from waiting for the favor of God. After David has thus fortified himself for continued perseverance in the attitude of waiting, he immediately adds, *Answer me in the multitude of thy goodness;* and to *goodness* he joins *the truth of salvation,* [562] intimating that God's mercy is proved by indubitable effect when he succours his servants who are reduced to the very depths of despair. What prompted him to present this prayer was, the full persuasion which he had, that the darkness in which he was now involved would in due time be dispelled, and that a serene and unclouded season of God's favor would succeed; a persuasion which arose from his recalling all his thoughts to God, lest he should faint by reason of the harassing treatment which he met with from the wicked.

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Dr Wells explains, *the truth of thy salvation*, as meaning, "according to the promises thou hast made of saving me."

Psalm 69:14-18

> **14.** Deliver me from the mire, that I may not sink: let me be delivered from my adversaries, and from the deep waters. **15.** Let not the flood of waters overflow me; and let not the deep swallow me up; and let not the pit [563] close its mouth upon me. **16.** Answer me, O Jehovah! for thy mercy [564] is good: in the multitude of thy compassions [565] look upon me. **17**. And hide not thy face from thy servant; for I am in trouble: hasten! answer me! **18.** Draw near to my soul, redeem it; deliver me, on account of my enemies.

14. *Deliver me from the mire, that I may not sink.* The Psalmist repeats the same similitude which he had used before, but in a different manner. He had previously said that he was sunk in the mire, and now he prays that he may not sink in it. In short, he now prays that those things may not now befall him which he had formerly complained of as having befallen him. But it is very easy to reconcile this diversity of statement; for in the opening of the psalm he spake according to his actual feeling and experience; but now, looking to the issue, although living in the midst of death, he cherishes the hope of deliverance. This is expressed still more clearly in the last clause of the 15th verse, where he prays, *Let not the pit close its mouth upon me;* which is as if he had said, Let not the great multitude and weight of my afflictions overwhelm me, and let not sorrow swallow me up.

16. *Answer me, O Jehovah! for thy mercy is good.* The appeal which he here makes to the mercy and compassion of God is an evidence of the distressed condition into which he was brought. There can be no doubt that he sustained a dreadful conflict, when he had recourse to these as the only means of his safety. It is a very difficult matter to believe that God is merciful to us when he is angry with us, and that he is near us when he has withdrawn himself from us. David, aware of this, brings to his view a subject which he may oppose to this distrust, and by pleading for the exercise of the mercy and great compassions of God towards him, shows, that the only consideration which inspired him with hope was the benignant and merciful character of God. When he says, a little after, *Look upon me,* it is a prayer that God would make it manifest in very deed that he had heard him by

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"The Chaldee interpreter understands by *the pit*, Gehenna." — *Cresswell.*

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The original word חסד, *chesed*, here translated *mercy*, signifies, as Dr Adam Clarke observes, "*exuberance of kindness.*"

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רחמיך, *rachamecha*, for *compassions*, signifies, according to the same author, such affection as mothers bear to their young, and in God there is רב, *rob*, a multitude of these.

granting him succor. In the following verse he utters a similar prayer. And by repeating so often the same things, he declares both the bitterness of his grief and the ardor of his desires. When he beseeches God *not to hide his face,* it is not from any apprehension which he entertained of being rejected, but because those who are oppressed with calamities cannot avoid being agitated and distracted with mental disquietude. But as God, in a peculiar manner, invites his servants to him, David avows that he is one of their number. In thus speaking, as I have already shown, and will afterwards have occasion to state at greater length, he does not boast of services on account of which he could prefer any claim to a divine reward, but rather depends on the gratuitous election of God; although, at the same time, he is to be understood as adducing the service which he had faithfully yielded to God by whom he was called, as an evidence of his godliness.

18. *Draw near to my soul, redeem it.* David was doubtless fully persuaded by faith that God was near him; but as we are accustomed to measure the presence or absence of God by the effects, David here tacitly complains, judging according to the flesh, that he is far from him. By the expression, *Draw near,* he means, that in so far as could be gathered from his actual condition, God appeared to have no regard to his welfare. Again, by calling upon God *to draw near to his life,* which he seemed to have forsaken, he exhibits a striking proof of the strength of his faith. The more cruelly he is molested by the wicked and proud, the more does he trust that God will appear to deliver him. As has been elsewhere observed, it is always to be held as an undoubted truth, that since "God resisteth the proud" (James 4:6,) he must at length repress the insolence and pride of those who obstinately resist him, although he may seem to connive at them for a time.

Psalm 69:19-21

19. Thou knowest my reproach, and my confusion, and my ignominy: all my adversaries are before thee. **20.** Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am afflicted: and I looked for one to take pity upon me, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. **21.** And they put gall into my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

19 *Thou knowest my reproach, and my confusion.* This is a confirmation of the preceding sentence. Whence is it that the greater part of men become dispirited when they see the wicked outrageously rushing upon them, and their wickedness, like a water-flood, carrying all before it, but because they think that heaven is so obscured and overcast with clouds as to prevent God from beholding what is done upon the earth? It becomes us, therefore, in this matter, to call to our remembrance the doctrine of a Divine Providence, that contemplating it we may be assured beyond all doubt, that God will appear for our succor in due season; for he cannot, on the one hand, shut his

eyes to our miseries, and it is impossible for him, on the other, to allow the license which the wicked take in doing evil to pass with impunity, without denying himself. David, therefore, takes comfort from the consideration that God is the witness of his grief, fear, sorrows, and cares; nothing being hidden from the eye of Him who is the judge and governor of the world. Nor is it a vain repetition when he speaks so frequently of his *reproach and shame.* As he was subjected to such dreadful assaults of temptations as might have made the stoutest heart to tremble, it was indispensably necessary for his own defense to oppose to them a strong barrier for resistance. Nothing is more bitter to men of an ingenuous and noble spirit than reproach; but when this is repeated, or rather when shame and reproach are heaped upon us, how needful is it then for us to possess more than ordinary strength, that we may not thereby be overwhelmed? for when succor is delayed, our patience is very apt to give way, and despair very easily creeps in upon us. This shame and reproach may very properly be referred both to the outward appearance and to the actual feelings of the mind. It is well known that he was everywhere held in open derision; and the mockeries which he experienced could not but strike into him both shame and sorrow. For the same reason he subjoins that *his enemies are before God,* or known to him; as if he had said, Lord, thou knowest how, like a poor sheep, I am surrounded by thousands of wolves.

20. *Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am afflicted.* He expresses more distinctly not only that he was confounded, or ashamed at the sad aspect which he presented of having been deserted, but that he was well nigh overwhelmed with sorrow by lying so long under reproach and shame. Whence it is evident that he did not overcome this sorrow without a struggle; and that the reason why he so firmly withstood the waves of temptations was, not because they did not reach his heart, but because, being sorely smitten, he made resistance with a corresponding degree of intrepidity. He states, as an additional aggravation of his distress, that every office of humanity was withheld from him: that there was nobody who had compassion upon him, or to whom he could disburden his griefs. Some take the word נוד, *nud,* for *to tell* or *recount;* and undoubtedly when we pour out our complaints to our friends, it affords some alleviation to our distress. Thus he employs as an argument for obtaining mercy from God, the consideration that he was deprived of all aid and comfort from his fellow-men.

21. *And they put gall into my meat.* Here he again repeats that his enemies carry their cruelty towards him to the utmost extent in their power. He speaks metaphorically when he describes them as *mingling gall* or poison *with his meat,* [566] *and vinegar with his drink;* even as it is said in Jeremiah,

"Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood,
and give them water of gall to drink." (Jeremiah 9:15)

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But still the Apostle John justly declares that this Scripture was fulfilled when the soldiers gave Christ vinegar to drink upon the cross, (John 19:28-30;) for it was requisite that whatever cruelty the reprobate exercise towards the members of Christ, should by a visible sign be represented in Christ himself. We have stated on the same principle, in our remarks upon Psalm 22:18, that when the soldiers parted the garments of Christ among them, that verse was appropriately quoted, "They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots;" although David's object was to express by figurative language that he was robbed, and that all his goods were violently taken from him, and made a prey of by his enemies. The natural sense must, however, be retained; which is, that the holy prophet had no relief afforded him; and that he was in a condition similar to that of a man who, already too much afflicted, found, as an additional aggravation of his distress, that his meat was poisoned, and his drink rendered nauseous by the bitter ingredients with which it had been mingled.

Psalm 69:22-29

22. Let [567] their table before them be for a snare; and their prosperity [568] [or things for peace] for a net. **23.** Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see; and make their loins continually to tremble. **24.** Pour out thy wrath upon them; and let thy hot displeasure seize them. **25.** Let their habitation be desolate; let none dwell in their tent; **26.** For they have persecuted him whom thou hast smitten; and they have added to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded, [literally of thy wounded ones.] **27.** Add iniquity to their iniquity; and let them not

The word ראש, *rosh*, here denominated *gall*, is thought by Celsius, Michaelis, Boothroyd, and others, to be *hemlock* According to Dr Adam Clarke and Williams, it refers to *bitters* in general, and particularly those of a deleterious nature. Bochart, from a comparison of this passage with John 19:29, thinks that ראש, *rosh*, is the same herb as the Evangelist calls ὑσσωπος, "hyssop;" a species of which growing in Judea, he proves from Isaac Ben Orman, an Arabian writer, to be so bitter, as not to be eatable. Theophylact expressly tells us that the hyssop was added as being deleterious or poisonous; and 'Nonnus' paraphrase is, "one gave the deadly acid mixed with hyssop." See Parkhurst on ראש. The word occurs in Deuteronomy 29:18; 32:33; and is, in the latter place, rendered *poison* In Hosea 10:4, it is rendered *hemlock*; and in Amos 6:12, it is put in apposition with a word there translated *hemlock*, although the same word is also rendered *wormwood*

Vinegar, we conceive, here means sour wine, such as was given to slaves or prisoners in the East. Persons in better circumstances used lemons or pomegranates to give their drink a grateful acidity. It was therefore a great insult offered to a royal personage to give him in his thirst the refreshment of a slave or of a wretched prisoner; and David employs this figure to express the insults which were offered to him by his enemies. See *Harmer's Observations*, volume 2, pp. 158, 159.

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This and the following verses, which are here expressed in the form of imprecations, are translated by many in the future tense, as predictions: "Their table before them shall be for a snare," etc.

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enter into thy righteousness. **28.** Let them be blotted out from the book of the living; and let them not be written among the righteous. **29.** As for me, I am poor and sorrowful; thy salutation shall exalt me.

22. *Let their table before them be for a snare.* Here we have a series of dire imprecations, with respect to which we must bear in mind, what we have elsewhere observed, that David did not allow himself recklessly to pour out his wrath, even as the greater part of men, when they feel themselves wronged, intemperately give way to their own passion; but, being under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he was kept from going beyond the bounds of duty, [569] and simply called upon God to exercise just judgment against the reprobate. Farther, it was not on his own account that he pleaded in this manner; but it was a holy zeal for the divine glory which impelled him to summon the wicked to God's judgment-seat. It was also owing to this: that he was not carried away by violence of passion, like those who are actuated by a desire of taking revenge. Since, then, the Spirit of wisdom, uprightness, and moderation, put these imprecations into the mouth of David, his example cannot justly be pleaded in self-vindication by those who pour forth their wrath and spite upon every one that comes in their way, or who are carried away by a foolish impatience to take revenge; never allowing themselves to reflect for a moment what good purpose this can serve, nor making any efforts to keep their passion within due bounds. We need wisdom by which to distinguish between those who are wholly reprobate and those of whose amendment there is still some hope; we have also need of uprightness, that none may devote himself exclusively to his own private interests; and of moderation too, to dispose our minds to calm endurance. It being evident, then, that David was distinguished by these three qualities, whoever would follow him aright, must not allow himself

The LXX. have rendered the word here translated *prosperity* by a word which signifies *recompense*: "Let their table before them be for a snare, και εἰς ἀνταπόδοσιν, *and for a recompense*, and for a stumbling-block." Paul, in quoting this and the verse immediately following, as descriptive of the judgments which befell the Jews after their rejection of the Messiah, quotes with some slight difference the words of the LXX. He has, Εἰς ἀνταπόομα αὐτοῖς, "for a retribution upon them." The Psalmist's enemies had given him gall for his meat, and in his thirst vinegar to drink, and he denounces on them evils similar in kind: as if he had said, Would that their own table may be made bitter by misery and misfortune, and the food provided for the nourishment and strengthening of their bodies turned, in the righteous retribution of God, into the means of their injury and destruction. "Michaelis," says Walford, "shows how exactly these comminations were fulfilled in the history of the final siege of Jerusalem by the Romans. Many thousands of the Jews had assembled in the city to eat the Paschal lamb, when Titus unexpectedly made an assault upon them. In this siege the greater part of the inhabitants of Jerusalem miserably perished."

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"Mais estant conduit par le Sainct Esprit, il n'a point passe outre les limites." — *Fr.*

to break forth with reckless and blind impetuosity into the language of imprecation; he must, moreover, repress the turbulent passions of his mind, and, instead of confining his thoughts exclusively to his own private interests, should rather employ his desires and affections in seeking to advance the glory of God. In short, if we would be true imitators of David, we must first clothe ourselves with the character of Christ, that he may not administer to us at the present day the same rebuke which he gave to two of his disciples of old,

"Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of,"
(Luke 9:55.)

David had complained that his enemies mingled his meat with gall; and now he prays that their table may be turned into a snare for them, and that the things which are for peace may be turned into a net for them. These expressions are metaphorical, and they imply a desire that whatever things had been allotted to them in providence for the preservation of life, and for their welfare and convenience, might be turned by God into the occasion or instrument of their destruction. From this we gather that as things which naturally and of themselves are hurtful, become the means of furthering our welfare when we are in favor with God; so, when his anger is kindled against us, all those things which have a native tendency to produce our happiness are cursed, and become so many causes of our destruction. It is an instance of the Divine justice, which ought deeply to impress our minds with awe, when the Holy Spirit declares that all the means of preserving life are deadly to the reprobate, (Titus 1:15;) so that the very sun, which carries healing under his wings, (Malachi 4:2,) breathes only a deadly exhalation for them.

23. *Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see.* The Psalmist here refers chiefly to two powers of the body, those of *the eyes* and of *the loins;* and I have no hesitation in considering his language as a prayer that God would deprive his enemies of reason and understanding, and at the same time enfeeble their strength, that they might be altogether unfitted for exerting themselves in any way. We know how indispensable it is, in order to the doing of any thing aright, that counsel go before to give light, and that there should also be added the power of putting what is purposed into execution. The curse here expressed impends over the heads of all the enemies of the Church; and, therefore, we have no reason to be terrified at the malice or fury of the wicked. God, whenever he pleases, can strike them suddenly with blindness, that they may see nothing, and by breaking their loins, [570] lay them prostrate in shame and confusion.

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The loins are the seat of strength in every animal; and hence the prayer, "Make their loins continually to tremble," is just a prayer that their strength might be impaired, or entirely taken away.

24. *Pour out thy fury upon them.* It is not surprising that David utters a lengthened series of imprecations; for we know well that the frantic enemies of the Church, into whom it was his object to inspire terror, are not easily moved. He therefore lifts up his voice against them in tones of greater vehemence, that they might be led to desist from their wrongful and insolent conduct. He, however, had principally an eye to true believers, who, being oppressed with calamities, have no other stay to lean upon, but such as arises from the voice which they hear proceeding from the mouth of God, declaring the terrible vengeance which is prepared for their enemies, if, indeed, they are among the reprobate. As to those of whose repentance and amendment there was some hope, David would have had them to be corrected by chastisements; but as to those whose repentance and reformation were hopeless, he prays that destruction may fall upon their heads, that thus they might not escape the punishment which was appointed for them, and which they had deserved.

25 *Let their habitation be desolate.* Here he proceeds farther than in the preceding verse, praying that God would cause his wrath to descend to their posterity; and it is no new thing for the sins of the fathers to be cast into the bosom of the children. As David uttered these imprecations by the inspiration and influence of the Holy Spirit, so he took them out of the law itself, in which God threatens that he will

"visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him," (Exodus 20:5)

In this way he desires that the memorial of them may be cursed, and that thus God would not spare them even after their death.

26. *For they have persecuted him whom thou hast smitten.* He brings forward the crime with which they were chargeable, to make it manifest that they richly deserved such dreadful punishments. Some explain the verse in this way: "These enemies, O Lord! not content with the strokes which thou hast inflicted, have exercised their cruelty upon a wretched man, who had already been wounded by thy hand." And as it is the dictate of humanity to succor the afflicted, he who treads down the oppressed most assuredly betrays the brutal cruelty of his disposition. Others reject this exposition, whether upon sufficient ground I know not, observing that David, properly speaking, was not stricken or wounded by the hand of God, it being of the violent rage of his enemies that he complains through the whole of the psalm. Accordingly, they have recourse to a subtle interpretation, and view David as meaning that his enemies wickedly pretended that they had just cause against him, and boasted of being the ministers of God, whose office it was to execute punishment upon him as a wicked person. This is a pretext under which the wicked generally shield themselves, and by which they are led to think that they may lawfully do what they please against those who are in misery, without ever being called to account for it. Thus we find this purpose of the wicked expressed in another place,

"Come let us persecute him, for God hath forsaken him;
for there is none to deliver him," (Psalm 71:11.)

But I am rather of opinion that the Psalmist applies the term *smitten* to the man whom God intended to humble as one of his own children; so that in the very chastisement or correction, there was engraven a mark of God's paternal love. And he employs the expression, *the wounded of God,* almost in the same sense in which Isaiah 26:19 speaks of *the dead of God,* the prophet thereby denoting those who continue under the Divine guardianship, even in death itself. This cannot be extended to all men in general, but is exclusively applicable to true believers, whose obedience God puts to the test by means of afflictions. If from this the wicked take occasion to persecute the righteous with greater severity, it is not to be wondered at if they involve themselves in heavier damnation. Upon seeing such examples set before them, the manner in which they should have reasoned with themselves is this,

"If these things are done in a green tree,
what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke 23:31.)

But from their becoming more and more hardened, it is evident that the pride and insolence which they manifest against the children of God proceed from contempt and hatred of true religion. The Hebrew word יספרו, *yesapperu,* which is usually translated *they will recount,* I would interpret differently. It properly signifies *to number,* and may, therefore, be properly enough translated *to add to* or *increase,* [571] giving here the meaning, That the persons spoken of, by adding misery to misery, raised grief to its utmost height.

27. *Add iniquity to their iniquity.* As the Hebrew word עון, *avon,* signifies at times *guilt* as well as *iniquity,* some translate the verse thus, *Add thou,* that is, thou, O God! *punishment to their punishment* Others extend it yet further, regarding it as a prayer that wicked men might punish them for their wickedness. But it is abundantly evident, from the second clause, that what David prays for rather is, as is almost universally admitted, that God, taking his Spirit altogether from the wicked, would give them over to a reprobate mind, that they might never seek or have any desire to be brought to genuine repentance and amendment. Some interpret the phrase *to come into righteousness* as meaning *to be absolved or acquitted;* [572] but it

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This is the translation given by the LXX., who read, προσέθηκαν, "they added to;" and similar is that of the Syriac, Vulgate, Arabic, and Æthiopic versions, and of the learned Castellio, who reads, "Sauciorum tuorum numerum adaugentes," "increasing the number of thy wounded." "ספר," says Hammond, "signifies *to number*, and of that we know *addition* is one sort."

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This is the idea attached to it by Horsley, who translates the verse thus: "Give them punishment upon punishment, and admit them not to thy justification." Cresswell explains it thus: "Let them not be restored to thy favor, nor experience thy clemency."

seems to want the spirit of the language here used, by which David intends to express much more. Accordingly, the words ought to be expounded thus: Let their wickedness increase more and more, and let them turn away with abhorrence from all thought of amendment, to make it manifest that they are utterly alienated from God. [573] As this form of expression is familiar to the Sacred Writings, and every where to be met with, we ought not to think it harsh; and to wrest it, as some do, for the sake of avoiding what may have the appearance of absurdity, is ridiculous. The explanation they give of it is, That God adds sins to sins by permitting them; [574] and they defend such an exposition by asserting that this is an idiom of the Hebrew language, an assertion, the accuracy of which no Hebrew scholar will admit. Nor is it necessary to bring forward any such quibbles to excuse God; for, when he blinds the reprobate, it is sufficient for us to know that he has good and just causes for doing so; and it is in vain for men to murmur and to dispute with him, as if they sinned only by his impulse. Although the causes why they are blinded sometimes lie hidden in the secret purpose of Deity, there is not a man who is not reproved by his own conscience; and it is our duty to adore and admire the high mysteries of God, which surpass our understanding. It is justly said that "God's judgments are a great deep," (Psalm 36:6.) It would certainly be highly perverse to involve God in a part of the guilt of the wicked, whenever he executes his judgments upon them; as, for example, when he executes the judgment threatened in the passage before us. The amount is, that the wicked are plunged into a deep gulf of wickedness by the just vengeance of Heaven, that they may never return to a sound understanding, and that he who is filthy may become still more filthy, [575] (Revelation 22:11.) Let it further be observed, that I do not explain *the*

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"Qu'ils sont alienez et bannis de la presence de Dieu." — *Fr.* "That they are alienated and banished from the presence of God."

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This is the explanation given by Hammond. The Hebrew word נתן, *nathan*, here rendered *add*, he translates *give or permit*, which he supports in the following note. "That נתם, *to give*, signifies also *to permit*, appears by Esther 9:13, ינתן, 'let it be given to the Jews,' *i e.*, permitted them. So Exodus 12:23, 'And shall not suffer (the Hebrew hath יתן, *give*) the destroyer to come in; the Chaldee reads ישבק, 'permit,' and the LXX. ἀθήσει, to the same sense. So Psalm 16:10, 'Thou shalt not suffer (יתם, again, *give*) thy Holy One to see corruption.' And so תנה עון, *give wickedness*, is no more than permit: for so it is ordinary with God, as a punishment of some former great sin or sins, though not to infuse any malignity, yet by withdrawing his grace, and delivering them up to themselves, to permit more sins to follow, one on the heels of the other, and so to be so far from reforming and amending as daily to grow worse and worse, to be more obdurate, and so finally never to enter into God's righteousness; *i e.*, into that way of obedience required by him, and which will be accepted by him, or (as צדק, in the notion of *mercy*, may signify being applied to God) *into his mercy*, so as to be made partakers of it." A fuller statement and illustration of Calvin's views on this point is given in his Institutes, Book I. chapter 18.

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righteousness of God as denoting the righteousness which he bestows upon his chosen ones in regenerating them by his Holy Spirit, but the holiness manifested in the life which is so well-pleasing to him.

28. *Let them be blotted out from the book of the living.* [576] This is the last imprecation, and it is the most dreadful of the whole; but it nevertheless uniformly follows the persevered in impenitence and incorrigible obduracy of which the Psalmist has spoken above. After having taken away from them all hope of repentance, he denounces against them eternal destruction, which is the obvious meaning of the prayer, that they might be blotted out of the book of the living; for all those must inevitably perish who are not found written or enrolled in the book of life. This is indeed an improper manner of speaking; but it is one well adapted to our limited capacity, the book of life being nothing else than the eternal purpose of God, by which he has predestinated his own people to salvation. God, it is certain, is absolutely immutable; and, further, we know that those who are adopted to the hope of salvation were written before the foundation of the world, (Ephesians 1:4;) but as God's eternal purpose of election is incomprehensible, it is said, in accommodation to the imperfection of the human understanding, that those whom God openly, and by manifest signs, enrols among his people, *are written.* On the other hand, those whom God openly rejects and casts out of his Church are, for the same reason, said *to be blotted out.* As then David desires that the vengeance of God may be manifested, he very properly speaks of the reprobation of his enemies in language accommodated to our understanding; as if he had said, O God! reckon them not among the number or ranks of thy people, and let them not be gathered together with thy Church; but rather show by destroying them that thou hast rejected them; and although they occupy a place for a time among thy faithful ones, do thou at length cut them off, to make it manifest that they were aliens, though they were mingled with the members of thy family. Ezekiel uses language of similar import when he says,

"And mine hand shall be upon the prophets that see vanity, and that divine lies: they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel."
(Ezekiel 13:9)

In the French version, the two last verbs of the sentence are put in the future tense, by which the idea conveyed is somewhat modified: "En sorte qu'ils ne retourneront jamais, a bon sens, et celuy qui est ord, deviendra encore plus ord." — "So that they shall never return to a sound understanding, and he who is filthy will become still more filthy."

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"This phrase," observes Bishop Mant, "which is not unusual in Scripture, alludes to the custom of well ordered cities, which kept registers, containing all the names of the citizens. Out of these registers the names of apostates, fugitives, and criminals, were erased, as also those of the deceased: whence the expression 'blotting,' or 'erasing names from the book of life.'"

That, however, continues true which is spoken by the Apostle John, (1 John 2:19,) that none who have been once really the children of God will ever finally fall away or be wholly cut off. [577] But as hypocrites presumptuously boast that they are the chief members of the Church, the Holy Spirit well expresses their rejection, by the figure of their being blotted out of the book of life. Moreover, it is to be observed that, in the second clause, all the elect of God are called *the righteous;* for, as Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, 4, 7,

"This is the will of God, even our sanctification, that every one of us should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor: for God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." (1 Thessalonians 4:3, 4, 7)

And the climax which the same Apostle uses in the 8th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, at the 30th verse, is well known:

"Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom
he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified,
them he also glorified." (Romans 8:30)

29. *As for me, I am poor and sorrowful.* [578] From this verse we perceive more distinctly how David cast away from him the swelling and raging passion of those who, with ungovernable fury, pour forth imprecation and vengeance. He here, without doubt, offers himself to God with the sacrifice of a broken and humble heart, that by this meekness of spirit he may obtain favor with him. He therefore adds immediately after, *Thy salvation shall exalt me.* Those assuredly who are impelled to avenge themselves by their own ungovernable spirits are so far from being humbled, that they exalt themselves to a position to which they are not entitled. There is here a mutual relation stated between the sorrow with which he was oppressed, and the help of God by which he hoped to be lifted up. At the same time, he assures himself that the very thing which others considered as a ground for despair, would prove to him the cause of his salvation. This sentence might also be explained adversatively thus: Although I now mourn under the pressure of affliction, yet shall thy salvation, O Lord! exalt me. But for my part, I consider it certain that David brings forward his own affliction as a plea for obtaining mercy at the hand of God. Nor does he say simply that he will be raised up, but he expressly speaks of *being exalted;* and in this he alludes to fortresses which are set upon high places; for this is the proper signification of the Hebrew word שגב, *sagab,* here employed.

Psalm 69:30-33

577

"Et se retrancher du tout." — *Fr.*

578

Boothroyd reads, "humbled and afflicted!"

> **30.** I will celebrate the name of God in a song, and I will magnify him in praise. [579] **31.** And this will please Jehovah more than a young bullock that hath horns and hoofs. **32.** The afflicted have seen it, and those who seek God shall rejoice at it; and your heart shall live. **33.** For Jehovah hath hearkened to the afflicted; and hath not despised his prisoners.

30. *I will celebrate the name of God in a song.* The Psalmist now elevated with joy, and sustained by the confident hope of deliverance, sings the triumphant strains of victory. This psalm, there is every reason to believe, was composed after he had been delivered from all apprehension of dangers; but there can be no doubt that the very topics with which it concludes were the matter of his meditation, when trembling with anxiety in the midst of his troubles; for he laid hold upon the grace of God by assured faith, although that grace was then hidden from him, and only the matter of his hope. God is here said *to be magnified by our praises;* not because any addition can be made to his dignity and glory, which are infinite, but because by our praises his name is exalted among men.

31. *And this will please Jehovah more than a young bullock.* The more effectually to strengthen himself for this exercise, David affirms that the thanksgiving which he is about to tender, will be to God a sacrifice of a sweet and an acceptable savor. There cannot be a more powerful incitement to thanksgiving than the certain conviction that this religious service is highly pleasing to God; even as the only recompense which he requires for all the benefits which he lavishes upon us is, that we honor and praise his name. This sets in a stronger light the inexcusableness of those who are so sluggish as, by their silence or forgetfulness, to suppress the praises of God. David neither omitted nor despised the outward sacrifices which the law enjoined; but he very justly preferred the spiritual service, which was the end of all the Levitical ceremonies. This subject I have treated at greater length on Psalm 50:14. By the way, the humility of David is worthy of being noticed, who, although he rose so high as to be a heavenly pattern, yet disdained not to humble himself for the common benefit of the Church, as if he had belonged to the common class of the people, that by the figures of the law he might learn the truth which has since been more clearly manifested in the gospel; namely, that the praises of God, in so far as they proceed from our mouths, are impure, until they are sanctified by Christ.

579

Venema and others conjecture, that what follows, from this verse to the end of the psalm, was added during the captivity of the Jews in Babylon; while others, from the expressions occurring in these verses, refer the whole psalm to that period; and observe, that the Hebrew letter ל, *lamed*, prefixed to David's name in the title, does not always signify *of*; but sometimes, as in Genesis 1:11, means *according to*, and so may be intended to describe this psalm as being after the manner of David. But Paul, in Romans 11:9, ascribes it to David.

But how gross and stupid is the superstition of those who would again bring into use the outward pomp of ceremonies which were abolished by the one sacrifice of Christ's death, and think that God is truly pacified when they have wearied themselves with doing nothing! What does this amount to, but to obscure or cover, by the intervention of thick veils, this legitimate service of thanksgiving, which David had no hesitation in greatly preferring to the Mosaic ceremonies, although these were of divine appointment? By *a young bullock,* he means one of the most choice or select and the idea which he intends to convey is, that there was no sacrifice or victim, however valuable or precious, that he could offer, in which God would take so great delight as in thanksgiving.

32. *The afflicted have seen it.* He here shows that the blessed effects of his deliverance will extend to others as well as to himself, a point which he frequently insists on in the Psalms, as we have seen in Psalm 22:23, 26, and in many other places. And his object in doing this is, partly to commend the goodness and grace of God to true believers, and partly that by this as an argument he may prevail with God to succor him. Besides, he does not mean that God's people would rejoice at this spectacle merely on the ground of brotherly friendship, but because, in the deliverance of one man, a pledge would be given to others, affording them also assurance of salvation. For this very reason he terms them *the afflicted.* Whoever seek God, (says he,) although they may be subjected to afflictions, will nevertheless take courage from my example. The first and the second clauses of the verse must be read together; for a connected sense would not be preserved were we not to understand the meaning to be this, That the example of David would afford a ground of rejoicing to all the faithful servants of God when they should seek a remedy for their afflictions. He very properly conjoins the desire of seeking God with affliction; for all men do not so profit under the chastening hand of God as to seek salvation from him in the exercise of a sincere and ardent faith. In the concluding part of this verse there is a change of person: *And your heart shall live.* But this apostrophe is so far from rendering the sense obscure, that, on the contrary, it expresses it the more forcibly, as if a thing present were described. In addressing those who were so much under the pressure of affliction as to be laid prostrate like dead men, he exhibits to their view a kind of image of the resurrection; as if he had said, O ye who are dead! unto you new vigor shall be restored. It is not meant that faith perishes in the children of God, and remains entirely dead until it is quickened into life again by the example of the deliverance of others; but that the light which was quenched is rekindled, and thus, so to speak, recovers life anew. The Psalmist immediately after (verse 33) describes the means by which this will be brought about in the children of God, which is, that believing the deliverance of David to be a common token or pledge of the grace of God presented before them, they will confidently come to the conclusion, that God regards the needy, and does not despise

the prisoners. We thus see that he considers what was done to one man, as a clear indication on the part of God that he will be ready to succor all who are in adversity. [580]

Psalm 69:34-36

34. Let the heavens and the earth praise him; the seas, and whatever creepeth in them. **35.** For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah; and they shall dwell there, and possess it by inheritance. **36.** And the seed of his servants shall inherit it; and they who love his name shall dwell in it.

34. *Let the heavens and the earth praise him.* From this we may conclude with the greater certainty, that, as I have touched upon above, David in the whole of this psalm spake in the name of the whole Church; for he now transfers to the Church what he had spoken in particular concerning himself. In calling upon the elements, which are destitute of thought or understanding, to praise God, he speaks hyperbolically, and by this manner of expression, he would teach us that we are not animated with sufficient earnestness of heart in celebrating the praises of God, the infinitude of which overpasses the whole world, unless we rise above our own understandings. But what above all kindled this ardor in the heart of David was his concern for the preservation of the Church. Moreover, there is no doubt that by the Spirit of prophecy he comprehended the whole of that period during which God would have the kingdom and priesthood continued among the ancient people of Israel. Yet he begins at the restoration of a new state of things, which by his means was suddenly brought about upon the death of Saul, when a melancholy devastation threatened at once the utter destruction of the worship of God, and the desolation of the whole country. He says, in the first place, that *Zion shall be saved,* because God would defend the place where he had chosen to be called upon, and would not suffer the worship which he himself had appointed to be abolished. In the next place, from the ark of the covenant and the sanctuary, he represents the divine blessing as extending to the whole land; for religion was the foundation upon which the happiness of the people rested. He farther teaches, that this change to the better would not be of short continuance; but that the people would be always preserved safe through the constant and enduring protection of God: *And they shall dwell there, and possess it by inheritance.* He therefore intimates, that the promise which God had so often made in the law, That they should inherit that land forever, was truly confirmed by the commencement of his reign. He contrasts tranquil and settled abode with a mere temporary residence; as if he had said, Now that the sacred throne is

580 "Tous ceux qui seront oppressez a tort." — *Fr.* "All who shall be wrongfully oppressed."

erected, the time is come in which the children of Abraham will enjoy the rest which has been promised to them, without fear of being removed from it.

36. *And the seed of his servants shall inherit it.* In this verse he declares that the blessing now mentioned would extend through a continued succession of ages — that, the fathers would transmit to their children the possession which they had received, as from hand to hand, and the children to their children; and the enduring possession of all good things depends upon Christ, of whom David was a type. Yet the Psalmist at the same time briefly intimates, that such only as are the legitimate children of Abraham shall inherit the land: *They who love his name shall dwell in it.* It was needful to take away all grounds for self-gloriation from hypocrites, who, looking to and depending solely upon the circumstances connected with the origin of their race, foolishly boasted that the land belonged to them by right of inheritance, notwithstanding of their having apostatised from the faith of their ancestors. Although that land was given to the chosen people to be possessed until the advent of Christ, we should remember that it was a type of the heavenly inheritance, and that, therefore, what is here written concerning the protection of the Church, has received a more true and substantial fulfillment in our own day. There is no reason to fear that the building of the spiritual temple, in which the celestial power of God has been manifested, will ever fall into ruins.

Psalm 70

PSALM 70

This psalm is merely a part of the fortieth, and the inscription, *To call to remembrance,* is perhaps designed to indicate this; David having taken these five verses out of that other psalm, and accommodated them for being used on some particular occasion. I shall only here repeat the words of the text; and would refer the reader for the interpretation to the proper place.

To the chief musician of David, to call to remembrance.

Psalm 70:1-5

1. O God! make haste to deliver me: O Jehovah! hasten to my help. **2.** Let those who seek my life be ashamed and confounded; let those who desire my hurt be turned backward, and put to confusion **3.** Let those who say to me, Aha! aha! perish as a reward of their shame. **4.** Let all those who seek thee rejoice and exult in thee: let those who love thy salvation say, Let God be magnified for evermore! **5.** As for me, I am poor and needy: O God! hasten to me: thou art my help and my deliverer: O Jehovah! make no delay.

Psalm 71

PSALM 71 [581]

David, having spoken at the outset of his confidence in God, partly calls upon him for deliverance, and partly complains of the pride of his enemies. At length, to confirm his faith, he prepares himself for yielding a grateful ascription of praise for the benefits which God had conferred upon him.

Psalm 71:1-4

1. In thee, O Jehovah! do I put my trust; let me not be put to confusion for ever. **2.** Deliver me in thy righteousness, and rescue me: incline thy ear to me, and save me. **3.** Be thou to me for a rock of strength, [582] [or for a strong rock,] into which I may at all times enter: thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my tower and my fortress. **4.** O my God! deliver me from the hand of the wicked man; from the hand of the perverse and violent man.

581

"Although this psalm has no title, it is by general consent ascribed to David, and supposed to have been composed during Absalom's revolt, as he mentions his old age, and his danger of perishing. It is almost a copy of Psalm 31; and, as the passages in the present psalm, which refer to his advanced age, are wanted in the other, it seems as if the 31st psalm (written probably during the persecution of Saul) was taken and adapted, by a little alteration and addition, to his latter afflictions." — *Illustrated Commentary upon the Bible.*

582

In the Hebrew it is, "Be thou to me for a rock of habitation." But instead of מעון, *maon*, "habitation," many of Dr Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS. have מעוז, *maoz*, "munition," or "defense." "Be thou my rock of defence."

1. *In thee, O Jehovah! do I put my trust.* It has been thought that the occasion of the composition of this psalm was the conspiracy of Absalom; and the particular reference which David makes to his old age renders this conjecture not improbable. As when we approach God, it is faith alone which opens the way for us, David, in order to obtain what he sought, protests, according to his usual manner, that he does not pour forth at the throne of grace hypocritical prayers, but betakes himself to God with sincerity of heart, fully persuaded that his salvation is laid up in the Divine hand. The man whose mind is in a state of constant fluctuation, and whose hope is divided by being turned in different directions, in each of which he is looking for deliverance, or who, under the influence of fear, disputes with himself, or who obstinately refuses the Divine assistance, or who frets and gives way to restless impatience, is unworthy of being succoured by God. The particle לעולם, *leolam,* in the end of the first verse, which we have translated *for ever,* admits of a twofold sense, as I have shown on Psalm 31:1. It either tacitly implies a contrast between the present calamities of David and the happy issue which he anticipated; as if he had said, Lord, I lie in the dust at present as one confounded; but the time will come when thou wilt grant me deliverance. Or *not to be ashamed for ever,* means never to be ashamed. As these verses almost correspond with the beginning of the 31st psalm, I would refer to that place for those explanatory remarks which I here purposely omit, not wishing to tax the patience of my readers by unnecessary repetition.

In these words of the third verse, *Into which I may at all times enter,* which are not to be found in the other psalm, David briefly prays that he may have so ready and easy access to God for succor, as to find in him a secure refuge whenever threatened by any immediate danger. Lord! as if he had said, let me always find ready succor in thee, and do thou meet me with a smile of benignity and grace, when I betake myself to thee. The expression which follows, *Thou hast given commandment to save me,* is resolved by some interpreters into the optative mood; as if David requested that he might be committed to the guardianship of angels. But it is better to retain the past tense of the verb, and to understand him as encouraging himself, from his experience in times past, to hope for a happy issue to his present calamities. Nor is there any necessity for limiting to the angels the verb, *thou hast given commandment.* God, no doubt, employs them in defending his people; but as he is possessed of innumerable ways of saving them, the expression, I conceive, is used indefinitely, to teach us that he gives commandment concerning the salvation of his servants, according as he has purposed, whenever he gives some manifest token of his favor toward them in his providence; and what he has determined in his own mind, he executes sometimes by his nod alone, and sometimes by the instrumentality of men or other creatures. Meanwhile, David would intimate that such is the all-sufficient power of God intrinsically considered, that without having

recourse to any foreign aid, his commandment alone is abundantly adequate for effecting our salvation.

4. *O my God! deliver me from the hand of the wicked man.* Here he uses the singular number; but he is not to be understood as indicating one man only. [583] It is highly probable that he comprehends the whole host of the enemies who assaulted him. We have elsewhere had occasion to observe how greatly it contributes to inspire us with the confidence of obtaining our requests, when we are so assured of our own integrity, as to be able freely to complain before God that we are unjustly and wickedly assaulted by our enemies; for we ought not to doubt that God, who has promised to become the defender of those who are unjustly oppressed, will, in that case, undertake our cause.

Psalm 71:5-8

5. For thou art my expectation, [or hope,] O Lord Jehovah! My trust from my youth. **6.** Upon thee have I leaned [or have I been sustained] from the womb: [584] thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise is continually of thee. **7.** I have been as a prodigy to the great ones, [585] and yet [586] thou art my strong confidence. **8.** My mouth shall be filled with thy praise and with thy glory daily.

5. *For thou art my expectation, O Lord Jehovah!* The Psalmist here repeats what he had said a little before concerning his trust or confidence. But some, perhaps, may be inclined to refer this sentence rather to the matter or ground afforded him for hope and confidence than to the emotions of his heart; supposing him to mean, that by the benefits which God had conferred upon him, he was furnished with well-grounded hope. And

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At the same time, it may be observed, that if this psalm was written during the rebellion of Absalom, this cruel son or Achitophel may be the person whom David has here in his eye, and describes in the singular number. If he refers to his own son, how deep must have been his agony of soul to be under the necessity of appealing to God in his present distressing circumstances, against an unnatural and wicked child, around whom all the affections of his heart were intwined! What Calvin renders, in the last clause of the verse, "the violent man," is literally "leavened man." Leaven seems to be an image for deep and inveterate depravity of any kind. "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees," said our Lord. — (Matthew 16:6; see also 1 Corinthians 5:8.)

584

"Des le ventre *de ma mere*." — *Fr* "From the womb *of my mother*."

585

"Ou, a plusieurs." — *Fr marg* "Or, to many."

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"Et *toutesfois*." — *Fr*

certainly he does not here simply declare that he hoped in God, but with this he conjoins experience, and acknowledges that even from his youth he had received tokens of the Divine favor, from which he might learn, that confidence is to be reposed in God alone. By adverting to what God had done for him, [587] he expresses the real cause of faith, (if I may so speak;) and from this we may easily perceive the powerful influence which the remembrance of God's benefits had in nourishing his hope.

6. *Upon thee have I been sustained from the womb.* This verse corresponds with the preceding, except that David proceeds farther. He not only celebrates the goodness of God which he had experienced from his childhood, but also those proofs of it which he had received previous to his birth. An almost similar confession is contained in Psalm 22:9, 10, by which is magnified the wonderful power and inestimable goodness of God in the generation of men, the way and manner of which would be altogether incredible, were it not a fact with which we are quite familiar. If we are astonished at that part of the history of the flood, in which Moses declares (Genesis 8:13) that Noah and his household lived ten months amidst the offensive nuisance produced by so many living creatures, when he could not draw the breath of life, have we not equal reason to marvel that the infant, shut up within its mother's womb, can live in such a condition as would suffocate the strongest man in half an hour? But we thus see how little account we make of the miracles which God works, in consequence of our familiarity with them. The Spirit, therefore, justly rebukes this ingratitude, by commending to our consideration this memorable instance of the grace of God, which is exhibited in our birth and generation. When we are born into the world, although the mother do her office, and the midwife may be present with her, and many others may lend their help, yet did not God, putting, so to speak, his hand under us, receive us into his bosom, what would become of us? and what hope would there be of the continuance of our life? Yea, rather, were it not for this, our very birth would be an entrance into a thousand deaths. God, therefore, is with the highest propriety said *to take us out of our mother's bowels* To this corresponds the concluding part of the verse, *My praise is continually of thee;* by which the Psalmist means that he had been furnished with matter for praising God without intermission.

7. *I have been as a prodigy to the great ones.* He now makes a transition to the language of complaint, declaring that he was held in almost universal abhorrence by reason of the great calamities with which he was afflicted. There is an apparent, although only an apparent, discrepancy between these two statements; first, that he had always been crowned with the benefits of

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In the Latin version it is, "Ab affectu ipso;" which is probably a mistake for "Ab effecto ipso." In the French version it is, "Par l'effet mesme."

God; and, secondly, that he was accounted as a prodigy on account of his great afflictions; but we may draw from thence the very profitable doctrine, that he was not so overwhelmed by his calamities, heavy though they were, as to be insensible to the goodness of God which he had experienced. Although, therefore, he saw that he was an object of detestation, yet the remembrance of the blessings which God had conferred upon him, could not be extinguished by the deepest shades of darkness which surrounded him, but served as a lamp in his heart to direct his faith. By the term *prodigy* [588] is expressed no ordinary calamity. Had he not been afflicted in a strange and unusual manner, those to whom the miserable condition of mankind was not unknown would not have shrunk from him with such horror, and regarded him as so repulsive a spectacle. It was, therefore, a higher and more commendable proof of his constancy, that his spirit was neither broken nor enfeebled with sham but reposed in God with the stronger confidence, the more he was cast off by the world. The sentence is to be explained adversatively, implying that, *although* men abhorred him as a monster, yet, by leaning upon God, he continued in despite of all this unmoved. If it should be thought preferable to translate the word רבים, *rabbim,* which I have rendered *great ones,* by the word *many,* the sense will be, That David's afflictions were generally known, and had acquired great notoriety, as if he had been brought forth upon a stage and exposed to the view of the whole people. But in my opinion it will be more suitable to understand the word of *great men,* or *the nobles.* There is no heart so strong and impervious to outward influences as not to be deeply pierced when those who are considered to excel in wisdom and judgment, and who are invested with authority, treat a suffering and an afflicted man with such indignity, that they shrink with horror from him, as if he were a monster. In the next verse, as if he had obtained the desire of his heart, he expresses it to be his resolution to yield a grateful acknowledgement to God. To encourage himself to hope with the greater confidence for a happy issue to his present troubles, he promises loudly to celebrate the praises of God, and to do this not only on one occasion, but to persevere in the exercise without intermission.

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Green reads, "I am become a gazing-stock to the multitude." Horsley, "'I am become a prodigious sight to the many.' *A prodigious sight*, 'a sign which shall be spoken against,' Luke 2:34." "'I am become, as it were, a portentous sign unto many.' Many are willing to persuade themselves that my trials proceed directly from God's wrath, and are intended to warn them against pursuing a like course of conduct." — *French and Skinner* "*A monster*, *i e.*, the supposed object of God's signal displeasure. Comp. Isaiah 20:3; Ezekiel 12:6; 24:24, 27." — *Cresswell* But others suppose that כמופת, *hemopheth*, *as a prodigy*, implies that the great and many dangers to which he had been exposed, and the extraordinary deliverances from them which he had experienced, marked him out as an object of wonder, so that men looked upon him as if he were exempted from the common lot of mankind, as if he possessed a charmed life, and were invulnerable to all assaults; and the second member of the verse has been viewed as the reason why he was so regarded: "for thou art my strong refuge."

Psalm 71:9-13

> **9.** Cast me not off in the time of my old age: forsake me not in the declining of my strength. **10.** For my enemies have said of me, and those who watch for my life have taken counsel together, **11.** Saying, God hath forsaken him; follow after him, and ye shall take him: for there is none to deliver him. **12.** O God! be not far from me: my God: hasten to my aid. **13.** Let those who are enemies to my life be confounded [589] and fail: let those who seek my hurt be covered with reproach and shame.

9. *Cast me not off in the time of my old age.* David having just now declared that God had been the protector of his life at his birth, and afterwards his foster-father in his childhood, and the guardian of his welfare during the whole course of his past existence; being now worn out with age, casts himself anew into the fatherly bosom of God. In proportion as our strength fails us — and then necessity itself impels us to seek God — in the same proportion should our hope in the willingness and readiness of God to succor us become strong. David's prayer, in short, amounts to this: "Do thou, O Lord, who hast sustained me vigorous and strong in the flower of my youth, not forsake me now, when I am decayed and almost withered, but the more I stand in need of thy help, let the decrepitude and infirmities of age move thee to compassionate me the more." From this verse expositors, not without good reason, conclude that the conspiracy of Absalom is the subject treated of in this psalm. And certainly it was a horrible and tragical spectacle, which tended to lead, not only the common people, but also those who excelled in authority, to turn away their eyes from him, as they would from a detestable monster, when the son, having driven his father from the kingdom, pursued him even through the very deserts to put him to death.

10. *For my enemies have said of me, etc.* He pleads, as an argument with God to show him mercy, the additional circumstance, that the wicked took greater license in cruelly persecuting him, from the belief which they entertained that he was rejected and abandoned of God. The basest of men, as we all know, become more bold and audacious, when, in tormenting the innocent, they imagine that this is a matter in which they have not to deal with God at all. Not only are they encouraged by the hope of escaping unpunished; but they also boast that all comes to pass according to their wishes, when no obstacle presents itself to restrain their wicked desires. What happened to David at that time is almost the ordinary experience of the children of God; namely, that the wicked, when once they come to believe that it is by the will of God that his people are exposed to them for a prey,

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Others read, "Those who are enemies to my life shall be confounded," etc., understanding the words to be prophetic denunciations.

give themselves uncontrolled license in doing them mischief. Measuring the favor of God only by what is the present condition of men, they conceive that all whom he suffers to be afflicted are despised, forsaken, and cast off by him. Such being their persuasion, they encourage and stimulate one another to practice every thing harassing and injurious against them, as persons who have none to undertake and avenge their cause. But this wanton and insulting [590] procedure on their part ought to encourage our hearts, since the glory of God requires that the promises which he has so frequently made of succouring the poor and afflicted should be actually performed. The ungodly may flatter themselves with the hope of obtaining pardon from him; but this foolish imagination does not by any means lessen the criminality of their conduct. On the contrary, they do a double injury to God, by taking away from him that which especially belongs to him.

12. *O God! be not far from me.* It is scarcely possible to express how severe and hard a temptation it was to David, when he knew that the wicked entertained the persuasion that he was rejected of God. They did not without consideration circulate this report; but after having seemed wisely to weigh all circumstances, they gave their judgment on the point as of a thing which was placed beyond all dispute. It was therefore an evidence of heroic fortitude on the part of David, [591] thus to rise superior to their perverse judgments, and, in the face of them all, to assure himself that God would be gracious to him, and to betake himself familiarly to him. Nor is it to be doubted that, in calling God *his God,* he makes use of this as a means of defending himself from this hard and grievous assault.

While invoking the aid of God, he at the same time prays (verse 13) that his enemies may be filled with shame until they be consumed. These words, however, may not improperly be read in the future tense; for it is frequently the practice of David, after having ended his prayer, to rise up against his enemies, and, as it were, to triumph over them. But I have followed that which seems more agreeable to the scope of the passage. Having had occasion elsewhere to explain this imprecation, it is unnecessary for me to repeat, in this place, what I have previously said.

Psalm 71:14-16

14. But I will hope continually, and will add [592] to all thy praise. **15.** My mouth shall recount thy righteousness and thy salvation daily; for

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"Atqui proterva haec eorum insultatio." — *Lat.* "Mais cest enrage desdain et outrage." — *Fr.*

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"Parquoy c'a este une vertu a David plus qu'humaine." — *Fr.* "It was therefore fortitude more than human for David."

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I know not the number thereof. **16.** I will go in the strengths of the Lord Jehovah! I will make mention of thy righteousness only.

14. *But I will hope continually.* David again, as having obtained the victory, prepares himself for thanksgiving. There is, however, no doubt, that during the time when the wicked derided his simplicity, he struggled manfully amidst his distresses, as may be gathered from the word *hope.* Although, to outward appearance, there was no prospect of deliverance from his troubles, and although the wicked ceased not proudly to pour contempt upon his trust in God, he nevertheless determined to persevere in the exercise of hope; even as it is a genuine proof of faith, to look exclusively to the Divine promise, in order to be guided by its light alone amidst the thickest darkness of afflictions. The strength, then, of the hope of which David speaks, is to be estimated by the conflicts which he at that time sustained. In saying, *I will add to all thy praises,* he shows the confidence with which he anticipated a desirable escape from his troubles. It is as if he had said — Lord, I have been long accustomed to receive benefits from thee, and this fresh accession to them, I doubt not, will furnish me with new matter for celebrating thy grace.

15. *My mouth shall recount thy righteousness* Here he expresses more clearly what sacrifice of praise he resolved to present to God, promising to proclaim continually his righteousness and salvation. I have often before had occasion to observe, that *the righteousness of God* does not mean that property of his nature by which he renders to every man his own, but the faithfulness which he observes towards his own people, when he cherishes, defends, and delivers them. Hence the inestimable consolation which arises from learning that our salvation is so inseparably linked with the righteousness of God, as to have the same stability with this Divine attribute. *The salvation of God,* it is very evident, is taken in this place actively. The Psalmist connects this salvation with righteousness, as the effect with the cause; for his confident persuasion of obtaining salvation proceeded solely from reflecting that God is righteous, and that he cannot deny himself. As he had been saved so often, and in so many different ways, and so wonderfully, he engages to apply himself continually to the celebration of the grace of God. The particle כי, *ki,* which we have translated *for,* is by some rendered adversatively *although,* and explained in this way: Although the salvation of God is to me incomprehensible, and transcends my capacity, yet I will recount it. But the proper signification of the word is more suitable in this place, there being nothing which ought to be more effectual in kindling and exciting our hearts to sing the praises of God, than the innumerable benefits which he has bestowed upon us. Although our

Horsley reads, "'I shall be added,' or 'made an addition;' literally, 'be-made-to-be-added to the sum of thy praise.'" "The sense is," says he, "that the mercies to the Psalmist would furnish the servants of God with a new topic of praise and thanksgiving."

hearts may not be affected from having experienced only one or two of the Divine benefits; although they may remain cold and unmoved by a small number of them, yet our ingratitude is inexcusable, if we are not awakened from our torpor and indifference when an innumerable multitude of them are lavished upon us. Let us learn then not to taste of the goodness of God slightly, and, as it were, with loathing, but to apply all our faculties to it in all its amplitude, that it may ravish us with admiration. It is surprising that the authors of the Greek version ever thought of translating this clause, *I have not known learning,* [593] an error unworthy of being noticed, were it not that some fanatics in former times, to flatter themselves in their ignorance, boasted that, after the example of David, all learning and liberal sciences should be despised; even as, in the present day, the Anabaptists have no other pretext for boasting of being spiritual persons, but that they are grossly ignorant [594] of all science.

16. *I will go in the strength of the Lord Jehovah!* This may also very properly be translated, *I will go into the strengths;* and this interpretation is not less probable than the other. As fear and sorrow take possession of our minds in the time of danger, from our not reflecting with that deep and earnest attention which becomes us upon the power of God; so the only remedy for alleviating our sorrow in our afflictions is to enter into God's strengths, that they may surround and defend us on all sides. But the other reading, which is more generally received, I have thought proper to retain, because it also is very suitable, although interpreters differ as to its meaning. Some explain it, I will go forth to battle depending upon the power of God. But this is too restricted. *To go* is equivalent to abiding

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The present reading of the Septuagint is, Οὐκ ἔγνων πραγματείας, "I know not the affairs *of men*;" but Nobilius, in his Notes on the Septuagint, observes, that in some Greek copies it is, γραμματείας, "learning," of which reading Augustine makes mention; and as the Vulgate reads, "literaturam," "learning," this makes it more probable that the ancient reading of the LXX. was not πραγματείας, but γραμματειάς. Horsley has followed the LXX. He considers this clause as the commencement of a new sentence, and connects it with the 16th verse thus: —

"Although I am no proficient in learning;
I will enter upon [the subject of] the Lord Jehovah's great might;
I will commemorate thy righteousness."

In a foot-note he refers to John 7:15, "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" and to Matthew 13:54, 56; and in an additional note he says, "It is strange that Houbigant should treat an interpretation with contempt, which is supported by the versions of the LXX., Jerome, and the Vulgate; which the Hebrew words will naturally bear, and which gives great spirit to the sentiment." Street reads: —

"Though I am ignorant of books,
I will proceed with strength," etc.;

and observes, that "The word מספר signifies *number*, but ספר, signifies *an epistle*, *a book*."

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"Expertes." — *Lat.* "Gros asniers. — *Fr.*

in a steady, settled, and permanent state. True believers, it must indeed be granted, so far from putting forth their energies without difficulty, and flying with alacrity in their heavenly course, rather groan through weariness; but as they surmount with invincible courage all obstacles and difficulties, not drawing back, or declining from the right way, or at least not failing through despair, they are on this account said to go forward until they have arrived at the termination of their course. In short, David boasts that he will never be disappointed of the help of God till he reach the mark. And because nothing is more rare or difficult in the present state of weakness and infirmity than to continue persevering, he collects all his thoughts in order to rely with entire confidence exclusively on the righteousness of God. When he says that he will be mindful of *it* ONLY, the meaning is, that, forsaking all corrupt confidences with which almost the whole world is driven about, he will depend wholly upon the protection of God, not allowing himself to wander after his own imaginations, or to be drawn hither and thither by surrounding objects.

Augustine quotes this text more than a hundred times as an argument to overthrow the merit of works, and plausibly opposes the righteousness which God gratuitously bestows to the meritorious righteousness of men. It must, however, be confessed that he wrests the words of David, and puts a sense upon them foreign to their genuine meaning, which simply is, that he does not rely upon his own wisdom, nor upon his own skill, nor upon his own strength, nor upon any riches which he possessed, as a ground for entertaining the confident hope of salvation, but that the only ground upon which he rests this hope is, that as God is righteous, it is impossible for God to forsake him. *The righteousness of God,* as we have just now observed, does not here denote that free gift by which he reconciles men to himself, or by which he regenerates them to newness of life; but his faithfulness in keeping his promises, by which he means to show that he is righteous, upright, and true towards his servants. Now, the Psalmist declares that the righteousness of God alone will be continually before his eyes, and in his memory; for unless we keep our minds fixed upon this alone, Satan, who is possessed of wonderful means by which to allure, will succeed in leading us astray after vanity. As soon as hopes from different quarters begin to insinuate themselves into our minds, there is nothing of which we are more in danger than of falling away. And whoever, not content with the grace of God alone, seeks elsewhere for the least succor, will assuredly fall, and thereby serve as an example to teach others how vain it is to attempt to mingle the stays of the world with the help of God. If David, in regard to his mere external condition in life, could remain stable and secure only by renouncing all other confidences, and casting himself upon the righteousness of God; what stability, I pray you to consider, are we likely to have, when the reference is to the spiritual and everlasting life, if we fall away, let it be never so little, from our dependence upon the grace of God? It is, therefore,

undeniable that the doctrine invented by the Papists, which divides the work of perseverance in holiness between man's free will and God's grace, [595] precipitates wretched souls into destruction.

Psalm 71:17-19

> **17.** O God! thou hast taught me from my youth; and hitherto will I announce thy wondrous works. **18.** And still, O God! when I am old and grey-headed, forsake me not, until I declare thy strength to the generation, and thy power to all who are to come. **19.** And thy righteousness, O God! Is very high: for thou hast done great things: O God! who is like thee?

17. *O God! thou hast taught me from my youth.* The Psalmist again declares the great obligations under which he lay to God for his goodness, not only with the view of encouraging himself to gratitude, but also of exciting himself to continue cherishing hope for the time to come: which will appear from the following verse. Besides, since God teaches us both by words and deeds, it is certain that the second species of teaching is here referred to, the idea conveyed being, that David had learned by continual experience, even from his infancy, that nothing is better than to lean exclusively upon the true God. That he may never be deprived of this practical truth, he testifies that he had made great proficiency in it. When he promises to become a publisher of God's wondrous works, his object in coming under this engagement is, that by his ingratitude he may not interrupt the course of the Divine beneficence.

Upon the truth here stated, he rests the prayer which he presents in the 18th verse, that he may not be forgotten in his old age. His reasoning is this: Since thou, O God! hast from the commencement of my existence given me such abundant proofs of thy goodness, wilt thou not stretch forth thy hand to succor me, when now thou seest me decaying through the influence of old age? And, indeed, the conclusion is altogether inevitable, that as God vouchsafed to love us when we were infants, and embraced us with his favor when we were children, and has continued without intermission to do us good during the whole course of our life, he cannot but persevere in acting toward us in the same way even to the end. Accordingly, the particle גם, *gam,* which we have translated *still,* here signifies *therefore;* it being David's design, from the consideration that the goodness of God can never be exhausted, and that he is not mutable like men, to draw the inference that he will be the same towards his people in their old age, that he was towards them in their childhood. He next supports his prayer by another argument, which is, that if he should fail or faint in his old age, the grace of

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That is, which represents this work as performed, partly by God, and partly by a power which man has in himself underived from God.

God, by which he had been hitherto sustained, would at the same time soon be lost sight of. If God were immediately to withdraw his grace from us after we have but just tasted it slightly, it would speedily vanish from our memory. In like manner, were he to forsake us at the close of our life, after having conferred upon us many benefits during the previous part of it, his liberality by this means would be divested of much of its interest and attraction. David therefore beseeches God to assist him even to the end, that he may be able to commend to posterity the unintermitted course of the Divine goodness, and to bear testimony, even at his very death, that God never disappoints the faithful who betake themselves to him. By *the generation* and *those who are to come,* he means the children and the children's children to whom the memorial of the loving-kindness of God cannot be transmitted unless it be perfect in all respects, and has completed its course. He mentions *strength and power* as the effects of God's righteousness. He is, however, to be understood by the way as eulogising by these titles the manner of his deliverance, in which he congratulates himself; as if he had said, that God, in the way in which it was accomplished, afforded a manifestation of matchless and all-sufficient power.

19. *And thy righteousness, O God! is very high.* [596] Some connect this verse with the preceding, and repeating the verb *I will declare,* as common to both verses, translate, And *I will declare thy righteousness, O God!* But this being a matter of small importance, I will not dwell upon it. David prosecutes at greater length the subject of which he had previously spoken. In the first place, he *declares* that *the righteousness of God is very high;* secondly, that it wrought mightily; and, finally, he exclaims in admiration, *Who is like thee?* It is worthy of notice, that the righteousness of God, the effects of which are near to us and conspicuous, is yet placed on high, inasmuch as it cannot be comprehended by our finite understanding. Whilst we measure it according to our own limited standard, we are overwhelmed and swallowed up by the smallest temptation. In order, therefore, to give it free course to save us, it behoves us to take a large and a comprehensive view — to look above and beneath, far and wide, that we may form some due conceptions of its amplitude. The same remarks apply to the second clause, which makes mention of the works of God: *For thou hast done great things.* If we attribute to his known power the praise which is due to it, we will never want ground for entertaining good hope. Finally, our sense of the goodness of God should extend so far as to ravish us with admiration; for thus it will come to pass that our minds, which are often distracted by an unholy disquietude, will repose upon God alone. If any temptation thrusts

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"Usque in excelsum." — *Lat* "Est eslevee jusques en haut." — *Fr.* "מרום עד, *ad marom* — is up to the exalted place, — reaches *up to heaven* The mercy of God fills all *space* and *place* It crowns in the heavens what it governed upon earth." — *Dr Adam Clarke*

itself upon us, we immediately magnify a fly into an elephant; or rather, we rear very high mountains, which keep the hand of God from reaching us; and at the same time we basely limit the power of God. The exclamation of David, then, *Who is like thee?* tends to teach us the lesson, that we should force our way through every impediment by faith, and regard the power of God, which is well entitled to be so regarded, as superior to all obstacles. All men, indeed, confess with the mouth, that none is like God; but there is scarce one out of a hundred who is truly and fully persuaded that He alone is sufficient to save us.

Psalm 71:20-24

> **20.** Thou hast made me to see great and sore troubles, but turning, thou wilt quicken me, and turning [597] thou wilt lift me up from the deep places of the earth. [598] **21.** Thou wilt multiply my greatness; and turning, thou wilt comfort me. **22.** I will also, O my God: praise thee, for thy truth, with the psaltery; I will sing to thee with the harp, O Holy One of Israel! **23.** My lips shall rejoice when I sing to thee; and my soul, which thou hast redeemed. **24.** My tongue also shall daily declare thy righteousness: for they who seek my hurt are confounded and brought to shame.

20. *Thou hast made me to see great and sore troubles.* The verb *to see* among the Hebrews, as is well known, is applied to the other senses also. Accordingly, when David complains that calamities had been *shown* to him, he means that he had suffered them. And as he attributes to God the praise of the deliverances which he had obtained, so he, on the other hand, acknowledges that whatever adversities he had endured were inflicted on him according to the counsel and will of God. But we must first consider the object which David has in view, which is to render by comparison the grace of God the more illustrious, in the way of recounting how hardly he had been dealt with. Had he always enjoyed a uniform course of prosperity, he would no doubt have had good reason to rejoice; but in that case he would not have experienced what it is to be delivered from destruction by the stupendous power of God. We must be brought down even to the gates of death before God can be seen to be our deliverer. As we are born without thought and understanding, our minds, during the earlier part of our life, are not sufficiently impressed with a sense of the Author of our existence; but when God comes to our help, as we are lying in a state of despair, this resurrection is to us a bright mirror from which is seen reflected his

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"Et to retournant, estant appaise." — *Fr.* "And returning, being appeased."

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"*The depths of the earth*, expressive of the lowest state of misery and suffering." — *Hewlett.*

grace. In this way David amplifies the goodness of God, declaring, that though plunged in a bottomless abyss, he was nevertheless drawn out by the divine hand, and restored to the light. And he boasts not only of having been preserved perfectly safe by the grace of God, but of having also been advanced to higher honor — a change which was, as it were, the crowning of his restoration, and was as if he had been lifted out of hell, even up to heaven. What he repeats the third time, with respect to *God's turning,* goes to the commendation of Divine Providence; the idea which he intends to be conveyed being, that no adversity happened to him by chance, as was evident from the fact that his condition was reversed as soon as the favor of God shone upon him.

22. *I will also, O my God! praise thee.* He again breaks forth into thanksgiving; for he was aware that the design of God, in so liberally succouring his servants, is, that his goodness may be celebrated. In speaking of employing *the psaltery* and *the harp* in this exercise, he alludes to the generally prevailing custom of that time. To sing the praises of God upon the harp and psaltery unquestionably formed a part of the training of the law, and of the service of God under that dispensation of shadows and figures; but they are not now to be used in public thanksgiving. We are not, indeed, forbidden to use, in private, musical instruments, but they are banished out of the churches by the plain command of the Holy Spirit, when Paul, in 1 Corinthians 14:13, lays it down as an invariable rule, that we must praise God, and pray to him only in a known tongue. By the word *truth,* the Psalmist means that the hope which he reposed in God was rewarded, when God preserved him in the midst of dangers. The promises of God, and his truth in performing them, are inseparably joined together. Unless we depend upon the word of God, all the benefits which he confers upon us will be unsavoury or tasteless to us; nor will we ever be stirred up either to prayer or thanksgiving, if we are not previously illuminated by the Divine word. So much the more revolting, then, is the folly of that diabolical man, Servetus, who teaches that the rule of praying is perverted, if faith is fixed upon the promises; as if we could have any access into the presence of God, until he first invited us by his own voice to come to him.

23. *My lips shall rejoice* [599] *when I sing to thee.* In this verse David expresses more distinctly his resolution not to give thanks to God

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"The original word רנן expresses a brisk, vibratory motion, like that of the lips in singing a lively air, or of the feet in dancing. Hence, figuratively, it signifies *to rejoice* or *exult* In this passage, it may be understood literally of *the lips*, and figuratively of the soul. And the English language having no corresponding verb which may be taken literally in reference to one subject, and figuratively in reference to another, it might be better to express its sense in connection with each, by two different verbs, thus: —

"My lips shall move briskly, when I sing unto thee,
And my soul shall rejoice, which thou, etc."

— *Horsley.*

hypocritically, nor in a superficial manner, but to engage with unfeigned earnestness in this religious exercise. By the figures which he introduces, he briefly teaches us, that to praise God would be the source of his greatest pleasure; and thus he indirectly censures the profane mirth of those who, forgetting God, confine their congratulations to themselves in their prosperity. The scope of the last verse is to the same effect, implying that no joy would be sweet and desirable to him, but such as was connected with the praises of God, and that to celebrate his Redeemer's praises would afford him the greatest satisfaction and delight.

Psalm 72

PSALM 72

David in this psalm prays to God, in the name of the whole Church, for the continual prosperity of the kingdom which was promised him, and teaches us at the same time, that the true happiness of the godly consists in their being placed under the government of a king who was raised to the throne by the appointment of heaven.

¶ Of Solomon. [600]

From the inscription of this psalm we cannot determine who was its author. As it is expressly said at the close to be the last of David's prayers, it is more probable that it was composed by him than by Solomon, his successor. [601] It may, however, be conjectured that Solomon reduced the prayer of his father into poetical measure, to make it more generally known, and to bring it more extensively into use among the people, — a conjecture

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"Ou, pour Solomon." — *Fr marg* "Or, for Solomon." The prefix ל, *lamed*, may be rendered either *of* or *for*

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To this it may be added, as Dathe observes, that "Solomon could not, without the imputation of vanity, have predicted in such strains the glory of his reign, the admiration with which he would be regarded by other nations, and the happiness of his subjects, arising from his prudence and virtue." The same writer adds, "But while David, or the inspired author, whoever he was, predicted the prosperity of Solomon's reign, the promise given (2 Samuel 7) of that greatest and best of kings, who was afterwards to arise in the family of David, seems to have been brought before his mind. This is the reason that the description given is, in various respects, more suited to the reign of the Messiah than to the reign of Solomon."

which is not improbable. But as the letter ל, *lamed,* has many significations in Hebrew, it may be explained as denoting that this psalm was composed for or in behalf of Solomon. If this is admitted, it is to be observed, that under the person of one man there is comprehended the state of the kingdom through successive ages. After having carefully weighed the whole matter, I am disposed to acquiesce in the conjecture, that the prayers to which David gave utterance on his death-bed were reduced by his son into the form of a psalm, with the view of their being kept in everlasting remembrance. To indicate the great importance of this prayer, and to induce the faithful with the greater earnestness to unite their prayers with the memorable prayer of this holy king, it is expressly added, that this is the last which he poured forth. As Solomon did nothing more than throw into the style of poetry the matter to which his father gave expression, David is to be considered as the principal author of this inspired composition. Those who would interpret it simply as a prophecy of the kingdom of Christ, seem to put a construction upon the words which does violence to them; and then we must always beware of giving the Jews occasion of making an outcry, as if it were our purpose, sophistically, to apply to Christ those things which do not directly refer to him. But as David, who was anointed king by the commandment of God, knew that the terms upon which he and his posterity possessed the kingdom were, that the power and dominion should at length come to Christ; and as he farther knew that the temporal well-being of the people was, for the time, comprehended in this kingdom, as held by him and his posterity, and that from it, which was only a type or shadow, there should at length proceed something far superior — that is, spiritual and everlasting felicity; knowing, as he did, all this, he justly made the perpetual duration of this kingdom the object of his most intense solicitude, and prayed with the deepest earnestness in its behalf, — reiterating his prayer in his last moments, with the view of distinctly testifying, that of all his cares this was the greatest. What is here spoken of everlasting dominion cannot be limited to one man, or to a few, nor even to twenty ages; but there is pointed out the succession which had its end and its complete accomplishment in Christ.

Psalm 72:1-6

1. O God! give thy judgments to the king, and thy righteousness to the king's son. **2.** He shall judge thy people in righteousness, and thy poor ones in judgment. **3.** The mountains shall bring forth peace to the people, and the hills in righteousness. [602] **4.** He shall judge the poor of the people; he shall save the children of the afflicted; and shall break in pieces the calumniator. **5.** They shall fear thee with the sun;

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In the Septuagint, *in righteousness* is connected with the following verse — In righteousness he shall judge the poor of the people," Dr Adam Clarke considers this to be the true division.

and generation of generations shall fear thee [603] in the presence of the moon. **6.** He shall descend as rain upon the mown grass; as the showers [604] which water the earth.

1. *O God! give thy judgments to the king.* [605] While David, to whom the promise had been made, at his death affectionately recommended to God his son, who was to succeed him in his kingdom, he doubtless endited to the Church a common form of prayer, that the faithful, convinced of the impossibility of being prosperous and happy, except under one head, should show all respect, and yield all obedience to this legitimate order of things, and also that from this typical kingdom they might be conducted to Christ. In short, this is a prayer that God would furnish the king whom he had chosen with the spirit of uprightness and wisdom. By the terms *righteousness and judgment,* the Psalmist means a due and well-regulated administration of government, which he opposes to the tyrannical and unbridled license of heathen kings, who, despising God, rule according to the dictates of their own will; and thus the holy king of Israel, who was anointed to his office by divine appointment, is distinguished from other earthly kings. From the words we learn by the way, that no government in the world can be rightly managed but under the conduct of God, and by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. If kings possessed in themselves resources sufficiently ample, it would have been to no purpose for David to have sought by prayer from another, that with which they were of themselves already provided. But in requesting that the righteousness and judgment of God may be given to kings, he reminds them that none are fit for occupying that exalted station, except in so far as they are formed for it by the hand of God. Accordingly, in the Proverbs of Solomon, (Proverbs 8:15,) Wisdom proclaims that kings reign by her. Nor is this to be wondered at, when we consider that civil government is so excellent an institution, that God

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"*Te craindra*," "*shall fear thee*," is a supplement in the French version. There is no supplement in the Latin version.

604

"Comme les pluyes drues et longues." — *Fr.* "As the plenteous and prolonged showers."

605

"In other places, those events which God himself brings to pass in defending the righteous, and in punishing the wicked, are called *his judgments*, as in Psalm 36:7; but the statutes promulgated by God for the regulation of human conduct are also styled *his judgments*. In this sense, the judgments and laws of God may be considered as synonymous terms, Psalm 119. 20, 30, 39, 52, 75. The clause is justly explained by Jarchi: '*Knowledge of the judgments* — to wit, of the particular rules of right — *which thou hast commanded in the law*.' The explication given by Kimchi is suitable also: 'That he may not err in giving forth sentences, give him knowledge and understanding, that he may judge with judgment and justice.'" — *Rosenmüller on the Messianic Psalms*, *Biblical Cabinet*, volume 32, pp. 232, 233.

would have us to acknowledge him as its author, and claims to himself the whole praise of it. But it is proper for us to descend from the general to the particular; for since it is the peculiar work of God to set up and to maintain a rightful government in the world, it was much more necessary for him to communicate the special grace of his Spirit for the maintenance and preservation of that sacred kingdom which he had chosen in preference to all others. By *the king's son* David no doubt means his successors. At the same time, he has an eye to this promise:

"Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne,"
(Psalm 132:11.)

But no such stability as is indicated in that passage is to be found in the successors of David, till we come to Christ. We know that after the death of Solomon, the dignity of the kingdom decayed, and from that time its wealth became impaired, until, by the carrying of the people into captivity, and the ignominious death inflicted upon their king, the kingdom was involved in total ruin. And even after their return from Babylon, their restoration was not such as to inspire them with any great hope, until at length Christ sprung forth from the withered stock of Jesse. He therefore holds the first rank among the children of David.

2. *He shall judge thy people in righteousness.* Some read this in the form of a wish — *O that he may judge, etc.* Others retain the future tense; and thus it is a prophecy. But we will come nearer the correct interpretation by understanding something intermediate, as implied. All that is afterwards spoken, concerning the king, flows from the supposition, that the blessing prayed for in the first verse is conferred upon him — from the supposition that he is adorned with righteousness and judgment. The prayer, then, should be explained thus: Govern our king, O God! that he may judge. Or in this way, When thou shalt have bestowed upon the king thy righteousness, then he will judge uprightly. To govern a nation well, is an endowment far too excellent to grow out of the earth; but the spiritual government of Christ, by which all things are restored to perfect order, ought much more to be considered a gift of heaven. In the first clause of the verse, David speaks of the whole people in general. In the second clause, he expressly mentions *the poor,* who, on account of their poverty and weakness, have need of the help of others, and for whose sake kings are armed with the sword to grant them redress when unjustly oppressed. Hence, also, proceeds *peace,* of which mention is made in the third verse. The term *peace* being employed among the Hebrews to denote not only *rest* and *tranquillity,* but also *prosperity,* David teaches us that the people would enjoy prosperity and happiness, when the affairs of the nation were administered according to the principles of righteousness. *The bringing forth of peace* is a figurative expression taken from the fertility of the earth. [606] And when it is said that *the mountains*

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and hills shall bring forth peace, [607] the meaning is, that no corner would be found in the country in which it did not prevail, not even the most unpromising parts, indicated by the mountains, which are commonly barren, or at least do not produce so great an abundance of fruits as the valleys. Besides, both the word *peace* and the word *righteousness* are connected with each clause of the verse, and must be twice repeated, [608] the idea intended to be conveyed being, that peace by righteousness [609] should be diffused through every part of the world. Some read simply *righteousness,* instead of In *righteousness,* supposing the letter ב, *beth,* to be here redundant, which does not, however, appear to be the case. [610]

4. *He shall judge the poor of the people.* The poet continues his description of the end and fruit of a righteous government, and unfolds at greater length what he had briefly touched upon concerning the afflicted among the people. But it is a truth which ought to be borne in mind, that kings can keep themselves within the bounds of justice and equity only by the grace of God; for when they are not governed by the Spirit of righteousness proceeding from heaven, their government is converted into a system of tyranny and robbery. As God had promised to extend his care to the poor and afflicted among his people, David, as an argument to enforce the prayer which he presents in behalf of the king, shows that the granting of it will

As the earth brings forth fruits, so shall the mountains bring forth peace. The same figure is used in Psalm 85:12, where it is said, "Truth shall spring out of the earth."

607

Dathe and Boothroyd take another view. According to them, the allusion is to the custom which, in ancient times, prevailed in the East, of announcing good or bad news from the tops of mountains, or other eminences; by means of which, acts of justice were speedily communicated to the remotest part of the country. The same image is used in Isaiah 40:9.

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That is, we are to read thus: "The mountains shall bring forth peace to the people in righteousness; and the hills shall bring forth peace to the people in righteousness."

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"Peace by righteousness." Calvin considers the Psalmist as representing peace to be the native fruit or effect of righteousness. Such also is the interpretation of Rosenmüller: "'And *the hills* shall bring forth peace with *justice*, or *because of justice*.' *Justice* and *peace* are joined together, as cause and effect. When iniquity or injustice prevails, general misery is the consequence; and, on the contrary, the prevalence of justice is followed by general felicity. The sense of the clause is, — happiness shall reign throughout the land, for the people shall be governed with equity."

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Rosenmüller, in like manner, objects to this reading. "Some expositors," says he, "consider the prefix ב, *beth*, as redundant, or as denoting that the noun is in the accusative case; and that the clause may be rendered, *And the hills shall bring forth justice* Noldius, in his Concordance, adduces several passages as examples of a similar construction; but they appear, all of them, to be constructed on a different principle."

tend to the comfort of the poor. God is indeed no respecter of persons; but it is not without cause that God takes a more special care of the poor than of others, since they are most exposed to injuries and violence. Let laws and the administration of justice be taken away, and the consequence will be, that the more powerful a man is, he will be the more able to oppress his poor brethren. David, therefore, particularly mentions that the king will be the defender of those who can only be safe under the protection of the magistrate, and declares that he will be their avenger when they are made the victims of injustice and wrong. The phrase, *The children of the afflicted,* is put for *the afflicted,* an idiom quite common in Hebrew, and a similar form of expression is sometimes used by the Greeks, as when they say υἱους ἰατρων, *the sons of physicians,* for *physicians.* [611] But as the king cannot discharge the duty of succouring and defending the poor which David imposes upon him, unless he curb the wicked by authority and the power of the sword, it is very justly added in the end of the verse, that when righteousness reigns, *oppressors* or *extortioners will be broken in pieces.* It would be foolish to wait till they should give place of their own accord. They must be repressed by the sword, that their audacity and wickedness may be prevented from proceeding to greater lengths. It is therefore requisite for a king to be a man of wisdom, and resolutely prepared effectually to restrain the violent and injurious, that the rights of the meek and orderly may be preserved unimpaired. Thus none will be fit for governing a people but he who has learned to be rigorous when the case requires. Licentiousness must necessarily prevail under an effeminate and inactive sovereign, or even under one who is of a disposition too gentle and forbearing. There is much truth in the old saying, that it is worse to live under a prince through whose lenity everything is lawful, than under a tyrant where there is no liberty at all.

5. *They shall fear thee with the sun* If this is read as an apostrophe, or change of person, it may be properly and without violence understood of the king; implying, that the ornaments or distinctions which chiefly secure to a sovereign reverence from his subjects are his impartially securing to every man the possession of his own rights, and his manifesting a spirit of humanity ready at all times to succor the poor and miserable, as well as a spirit determined rigorously to subdue the audacity of the wicked. But it will be more appropriate, without changing the person, to explain it of God himself. [612] The preservation of mutual equity among men is an inestimable blessing; but the service of God is well worthy of being preferred even to this. David, therefore, very properly commends to us the blessed fruits of a holy and righteous government, by telling us that it will draw in its train

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Many examples of this Hebraism might be quoted. In Ecclesiastes 10:17, "a son of nobles" is put for "a noble person;" in Psalm 18:45, *children of the stranger*, for *strangers*; and, in many passages, *children*, or *sons of men*, for *men*, simply considered.

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true religion and the fear of God. And Paul, when enjoining us in 1 Timothy 2:2, to pray for kings, expressly mentions what we ought to have in view in our prayers, which is, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." As there is no small danger, were civil government overthrown, of religion being destroyed, and the worship of God annihilated, David beseeches God to have respect to his own name and glory in preserving the king. By this argument he at once reminds kings of their duty, and stirs up the people to prayer; for we cannot be better employed than in directing all our desires and prayers to the advancement of the service and honor of God. When we come to Christ, this is far more truly applicable to him, true religion being established in his kingdom and nowhere else. And certainly David, in describing the worship or service of God as continuing to the end of the world, intimates by the way that he ascends in thought to that everlasting kingdom which God had promised: *They shall fear thee with the sun; and generation of generations shall fear thee in the presence of the moon.* [613]

6. *He shall descend as the rain upon the mown grass.* This comparison may seem at first sight to be somewhat harsh; but it elegantly and appositely expresses the great advantage which is derived by all from the good and equitable constitution of a kingdom. Meadows, we know, are cut in the beginning of summer when the heat prevails; and did not the earth imbibe new moisture by the falling rain, even the very roots of the herbage would wither by reason of the barren and parched state of the soil. David, therefore, teaches us that as God defends the earth from the heat of the sun by watering

"The poet in this clause addresses God; not the king, of whom he speaks always in the third person. The sense is, This king shall establish and preserve among his subjects the true religion, — the uncorrupted worship of God. Michaelis, on this passage, justly remarks that this could not, without extreme flattery, be predicated of Solomon." — *Dathe.*

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"With the sun," and "in the presence of the moon," are Hebrew idioms, designating the eternity of the Messiah's kingdom. "'They shall venerate thee with the sun, and in presence of the moon;' that is, as long as the sun shines, and is succeeded by the moon, or while the sun and moon continue to give light, — in a word, for ever. Compare verse seventh, where the same idea is expressed, only in a slightly different manner, — *until there be no moon* Psalm 89:37 — 'His throne shall be as the sun before me, as the moon it shall be established for ever.' The word לפני, [translated *in presence of*,] in this passage, is to be understood in the same sense as in Genesis 11:28, *Mortuus est Haran*, פני-על,*coram facie* Terah; 'And Haran died before the face of Terah,' that is, while Terah still survived. Hence, in Psalm 102:28, where לפניך, *coram te*, 'before thee,' is used in reference to God, — the Alexandrine version gives εἰς αἰῶνας 'for ever.' Here the sense is given in the words immediately following, דורים דור, *generatio generationum*, 'a generation of generations' shall venerate thee; — in other words, throughout all generations, or during a continual series of years, men shall celebrate thy happy and glorious reign." — *Rosenmüller* Calvin also reads דורים דור, "generation of generations," in the nominative case. The translators of our English Bible supply the preposition ל, *lamed*, thus making it, "throughout all generations." But in either case the meaning is the same.

it, so he in like manner provides for the welfare of his Church, and defends it under the government of the king. But this prediction has received its highest fulfillment in Christ, who, by distilling upon the Church his secret grace, renders her fruitful.

Psalm 72:7-11

> **7.** In his days shall the righteous flourish; and there shall be abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth. [614] **8.** He shall have dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. **9.** The inhabitants of the desert shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust. **10.** The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring a present: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall bring a gift to him. **11.** And all kings shall prostrate themselves before him; all nations shall serve him.

7. *In his days shall the righteous flourish* It is unnecessary for me frequently to repeat what I have once stated, that all these sentences depend upon the first verse. David, therefore, prayed that the king might be adorned with righteousness and judgment, that the just might flourish and the people prosper. This prediction receives its highest fulfillment in Christ. It was, indeed, the duty of Solomon to maintain the righteous; but it is the proper office of Christ to make men righteous. He not only gives to every man his own, but also reforms their hearts through the agency of his Spirit. By this means he brings righteousness back, as it were, from exile, which otherwise would be altogether banished from the world. Upon the return of righteousness there succeeds the blessing of God, by which he causes all his children to rejoice in the way of making them to perceive that under their King, Christ, every provision is made for their enjoying all manner of prosperity and felicity. If any would rather take the word *peace* in its proper and more restricted signification, I have no objections to it. And, certainly, to the consummation of a happy life, nothing is more desirable than peace; for amidst the turmoils and contentions of war, men derive almost no good from having an abundance of all things, as it is then wasted and destroyed. Moreover, when David represents the life of the king as prolonged to the end of the world, this shows more clearly that he not only comprehends his successors who occupied an earthly throne, but that he ascends even to Christ, who, by rising from the dead, obtained for himself celestial life and glory, that he might govern his Church for ever.

8 *He shall have dominion from sea to sea.* As the Lord, when he promised his people the land of Canaan for an inheritance, assigned to it these four boundaries, (Genesis 15:18,) David intimates, that so long as the kingdom shall continue to exist, the possession of the promised land will be entire, to

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Literally, "till there be no moon;" till the end of the world — for ever.

teach the faithful that the blessing of God cannot be fully realised, except whilst this kingdom shall flourish. He therefore declares that he will exercise dominion from the Red Sea, or from that arm of the Egyptian sea to the sea of Syria, which is called the Sea of the Philistines, [615] and also from the river Euphrates to the great wilderness. If it is objected that such narrow bounds do not correspond with the kingdom of Christ, which was to be extended from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof, we reply, that David obviously accommodates his language to his own time, the amplitude of the kingdom of Christ not having been, as yet, fully unfolded. He has therefore begun his description in phraseology well known, and in familiar use under the law and the prophets; and even Christ himself commenced his reign within the limits here marked out before he penetrated to the uttermost boundaries of the earth; as it is said in Psalm 110:2,

"The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion."

But, soon after, the Psalmist proceeds to speak of the enlarged extent of the empire of this king, declaring that the kings beyond the sea shall also be tributaries to him; and also that the inhabitants of the desert shall receive his yoke. The word ציים, *tsiim,* [616] which we have translated *inhabitants of the desert,* is, I have no doubt, to be understood of those who, dwelling towards the south, were at a great distance from the land of Canaan. The Prophet immediately adds, that *the enemies of the king shall lick the dust* in token of their reverence. This, as is well known, was in ancient times a customary ceremony among the nations of the East; and Alexander the Great, after he had conquered the East, wished to compel his subjects to practice it, from which arose great dissatisfaction and contentions, the Macedonians disdainfully refusing to yield such a slavish and degrading mark of subjection. [617] The meaning then is, that the king chosen by God in Judea will obtain

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Or the Mediterranean.

616

ציים, *tsiim*, is from ציה, *tsiyah*, *a dry and parched country*, *a desert* Rosenmüller translates it, *the rude nations* "The word ציים," says he, "seems to signify rude, barbarous tribes; the inhabitants of desert places, — of vast and unknown regions. This sense appears to be most suitable, both here and in Psalm 74:14. Hence it is used Isaiah 13:21; 34:14; Jeremiah 50:39, for the animals, — the wild beasts that inhabit jungles and deserts." The LXX. translate it Αιθιοπες, "the Æthiopians;" and in like manner the Vulgate, Æthiopic, and Arabic versions. Boothroyd is of opinion that the wild Arabs may be intended.

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The kings of Persia never admitted any into their presence without exacting this act of adoration, and it was the Persian custom which Alexander wished to introduce among the Macedonians. — *Rollin's Ancient History*, volume 4, p. 288. This custom is still extant among the Turks. As soon as an ambassador sees the Sultan, he falls on his knees and kisses the ground.

so complete a victory over all his enemies, far and wide, that they shall come humbly to pay him homage.

10. *The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents.* The Psalmist still continues, as in the preceding verse, to speak of the extent of the kingdom. The Hebrews apply the appellation of *Tarshish* to the whole coast, which looks towards Cilicia. By *the isles,* therefore, is denoted the whole coast of the Mediterranean Sea, from Cilicia to Greece. As the Jews, contenting themselves with the commodities of their own country, did not undertake voyages to distant countries, like other nations; God having expressly required them to confine themselves within the limits of their own country, that they might not be corrupted by the manners of strangers; they were accustomed, in consequence of this, to apply the appellation of *isles* to those countries which were on the other side of the sea. I indeed admit that Cyprus, Crete, and other islands, are comprehended under this name; but I also maintain that it applies to all the territories which were situated beyond the Mediterranean Sea. By the words מנחה, *minchah, a present,* and אשכר, *eshcar, a gift,* must be understood any tribute or custom, and not voluntary offerings; for it is vanquished enemies, and the mark or token of their subjection, which are spoken of. These terms appear to be used intentionally in this place, in order to mitigate the odium attached to such a mark of subjugation; [618] as if the inspired writer indirectly reproved subjects, if they defrauded their kings of their revenues. By שבא, *Sheba,* some think Arabia is intended, and by שבא, *Seba,* Ethiopia. Some, however, by the first word understand all that part of the Gulf of Arabia which lies towards Africa; and by the second, which is written with the letter ס, *samech,* the country of Sabea, [619] the more pleasant and fruitful country. This opinion is probably the more correct of the two. It is unnecessary here to remark how foolishly this passage has been wrested in the Church of Rome. They chant this verse as referring to the philosophers or wise men who came to worship Christ; as if, indeed, it were in their power of philosophers to make kings all upon a sudden; and in addition to this, to change the quarters of the world, to make of the east the south or the west.

11. *And all kings shall prostrate themselves before him.* This verse contains a more distinct statement of the truth, That the whole world will be brought in subjection to the authority of Christ. The kingdom of Judah

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מנחה, *minchah*, properly signifies a *friendly offering*; and אשכר, *eshcar*, *a compensative present* made on account of benefits received, — a gift which a person presents as a token of gratitude. — See Appendix.

619

Supposed to be in Arabia Felix. "The Septuagint reads, 'The kings of the Arabs, and Sabaeans, shall bring gifts.' So that anciently, perhaps, Sheba was the general name of Arabia; and Seba, or Sabaea, was that particular province of it called Arabia Felix, lying to the South, between the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea." — *Hewlett.*

was unquestionably never more flourishing than under the reign of Solomon; but even then there were only a small number of kings who paid tribute to him, and what they paid was inconsiderable in amount; and, moreover, it was paid upon condition that they should be allowed to live in the enjoyment of liberty under their own laws. While David then began with his own son, and the posterity of his son, he rose by the Spirit of prophecy to the spiritual kingdom of Christ; a point worthy of our special notice, since it teaches us that we have not been called to the hope of everlasting salvation by chance, but because our heavenly Father had already destined to give us to his Son. From this we also learn, that in the Church and flock of Christ there is a place for kings; whom David does not here disarm of their sword nor despoil of their crown, in order to admit them into the Church, but rather declares that they will come with all the dignity of their station to prostrate themselves at the feet of Christ.

Psalm 72:12-15

> **12.** For he will deliver the poor when he crieth to him; and the afflicted person who hath none to succor him. **13.** He will have pity on the poor and indigent; and will save the souls [or lives] of the poor. **14.** He will redeem their souls from fraud and violence: and their blood will be precious in his sight. **15.** And he shall live; and there shall be given to him of the gold of Sheba; and prayer shall continually be made for him, and daily shall he be blessed.

12. *For he will deliver the poor when he crieth to him.* The Psalmist again affirms that the kingdom which he magnifies so greatly will not be tyrannical or cruel. The majority of kings, neglecting the well-being of the community, have their minds wholly engrossed with their own private interests. The consequence is, that they unmercifully oppress their miserable subjects; and it even happens that the more formidable any of them is, and the more absorbing his rapacity, he is accounted so much the more eminent and illustrious. But it is far different with the king here described. It has been held as a proverb by all mankind, "That there is nothing in which men approach nearer to God than by their beneficence;" and it would be very inconsistent did not this virtue shine forth in those kings whom God has more nearly linked to himself. Accordingly, David, to render the king beloved who was chosen of God, justly declares, not only that he will be the guardian of justice and equity, but also that he will be so humane and merciful, as to be ready to afford succor to the most despised; qualities too seldom to be found in sovereigns, who, dazzled with their own splendor, withdraw themselves to a distance from the poor and the afflicted, as if it were unworthy of, and far beneath, their royal dignity to make them the objects of their care. David avows that the blood of the common people, which is usually accounted vile and as a thing of nought, will be very precious in the estimation of this heavenly king. Constancy and magnanimity are

denoted by the words *he will redeem;* for it would be far short of the duty of a king merely to hate fraud and extortion, did he not resolutely come forward to punish these crimes and set himself to defend those who are oppressed. [620] Under the terms *fraud* and *violence* is comprehended all kind of wrong-doing; for a man in working mischief is either a lion or a fox. Some rage with open violence, and others proceed to wrong-doing insidiously and by secret arts. Moreover, we know that supreme sovereignty, both in heaven and earth, has been given to Christ, (Matthew 28:18,) that he may defend his people not only from all temporal dangers, but especially from all the harassing annoyances of Satan, until having delivered them at length from all trouble, he gather them into the everlasting rest of his heavenly kingdom.

15. *And he shall live.* To refer the word *live* to the poor, as some do, seems forced. What David affirms is, that this king shall be rewarded with long life, which is not the least of God's earthly blessings. The words which follow are to be read indefinitely, that is to say, without determining any particular person; [621] as if it had been said, The gold of Arabia shall be given him, and prayers shall everywhere be made for his prosperity. There is thus again a repetition of what had been previously said concerning his power; for if Arabia shall pay him tribute, how vast an amount of riches will be gathered from so many countries nearer home! Christ, it is true, does not reign to hoard up gold, but David meant to teach by this figure, that even the nations which were most remote would yield such homage to him, as to surrender to him themselves and all that they possessed. It is no uncommon thing for the glory of the spiritual kingdom of Christ to be portrayed under images of outward splendor. David, in conformity with this usual style of Scripture, has here foretold that the kingdom of Christ would be distinguished for its wealth; but this is to be understood as referring to its spiritual character. Whence it appears how wickedly and wantonly the Papists have perverted this passage, and made it subserve their purpose of raking to themselves the perishable riches of the world. Moreover, when he speaks of the common prayers of the people, by which they will commend

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"Si d'un grand coeur il ne se presentoit pour les punir et en faire la vengence, et s'opposoit pour defendre ceux qu'on oppresse." — *Fr.*

621

"C'est a dire, sans determiner quelque certaine personne." — *Fr.* In the Hebrew, the three last verbs of the verse are in the singular number, in the future of *kal* active, and there is no nominative with which they agree. Calvin translates them literally: "Et dabit ei de auro Seba: et orabit pro eo semper, quotidie benedicit eum;" "And shall give to him of the gold of Sheba, and shall pray for him continually, daily shall bless him." But, on the margin of the French version, he thus explains the construction: "C'est, on luy donnera, etc., on priera, etc., on benira." "That is, the gold of Sheba shall be given to him, prayer shall be made for him continually, and daily shall he be blessed."

the prosperity of the king to the care of God, he intimates that so well-pleased will they be with being his subjects, that they will account nothing so desirable as to yield entire submission to his authority. Many, no doubt, reject his yoke, and hypocrites fret and murmur secretly in their hearts, and would gladly extinguish all remembrance of Christ, were it in their power; but the affectionate interest here predicted is what all true believers are careful to cultivate, not only because to pray for earthly kings is a duty enjoined upon them in the Word of God, but also because they ought to feel a special desire and solicitude for the enlargement of the boundaries of this kingdom, in which both the majesty of God shines forth, and their own welfare and happiness are included. Accordingly, in Psalm 118:25, we will find a form of prayer dictated for the whole Church, That God would bless this king; not that Christ stands in need of our prayers, but because he justly requires from his servants this manifestation or proof of true piety; and by it they may also exercise themselves in praying for the coming of the kingdom of God.

Psalm 72:16-20

> **16.** A handful of corn shall be in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall be shaken as of Lebanon: [622] and they shall go forth from the city as it were a plant of the earth. **17.** His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued in the presence of the sun: and all nations shall bless themselves in him, and shall call him blessed. **18.** Blessed be Jehovah God! the God of Israel! who alone doeth wonderful things. **19.** And blessed be his glorious name [literally, the name of his glory] for ever; and let all the earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen. **20.** The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.

16. *A handful of corn shall be* [623] *in the earth upon the top of the mountains.* The opinion of those who take *a handful* [624] for a small portion appears to be well founded. They think that by the two circumstances here referred to, a rare and uncommon fertility is indicated. Only a very small quantity of wheat, not even more than a man can hold in the palm of his hand, has been sown, and that even upon the tops of the mountains, which generally are far from being fruitful; and yet so very abundant will be the increase, that the ears will wave and rustle in the winds as the trees on Lebanon. I do not, however, know whether so refined a comparison between seed-time and harvest is at all intended by David. His words may

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"Ou, le Leban." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, Lebanon."

623

In the French version, the word *semee*, *i.e.*, *sown*, is supplied.

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be considered more simply as denoting that so great will be the fertility, so abundant the produce of wheat which the mountain tops shall yield, that it may be reaped with full hand. By this figure is portrayed the large abundance of all good things which, through the blessing of God, would be enjoyed under the reign of Christ. To this is added the increase of children. Not only would the earth produce an abundance all kinds of fruits, but the cities and towns also would be fruitful in the production of men: *And they shall go out* [625] *from the city as the grass of the earth* I have preferred translating the word *Lebanon* in the genitive case instead of the nominative; for the metonomy of putting the name of the mountain, Lebanon, for the trees upon it, which is renounced by others, is somewhat harsh.

17. *His name shall endure for ever* The inspired writer again repeats what he had previously affirmed concerning the perpetual duration of this kingdom. And he doubtless intended carefully to distinguish it from earthly kingdoms, which either suddenly vanish away, or at length, oppressed with their own greatness, fall into ruin, affording by their destruction incontestible evidence that nothing in this world is stable and of long duration. When he says that *his name shall endure for ever,* it is not to be understood as merely implying that his fame should survive his death, as worldly men are ambitious that their name may not be buried with their body. He is rather speaking of the kingdom when he says that the name of this prince will continue illustrious and glorious for ever. Some explain the

The noun פסה, *phissah*, here translated *handful*, is found only in this passage. In explaining 1 Kings 18:44, the Chaldee interpreter, for the Hebrew words rendered "as a man's hand," has יד כפסת, *ke-phissath yad*, which strictly signify, "as if a part of the hand." On this authority several expositors, along with Calvin, have understood פסה, *phissah*, as signifying "a small quantity of corn," as much as may lie on a man's hand, or as he may hold within it. And some at the beginning of the verse supply the conditional particle אם, *im*, *if* But Rosenmüller thinks that "others with more propriety consider the noun פסה as having the same signification as פסיון, *diffusio*, *uberitas*, 'spreading abroad, plenty,' and as derived from the verb פסא, which, both in the Chaldee and in the Arabic, means *expandit*, *diffudit se*, 'he spread abroad, he enlarged himself.' The Syriac interpreter had, no doubt, this sense in view, when he rendered the words *multitudinem frumenti*, 'an abundance of corn.'"

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The word ציף, *tsits*, which Calvin renders *shall go out*, signifies *to spring from*, *to spring up* It is used, says Rosenmüller, with respect to plants or herbs when, sprouting from the seed, they make their appearance above ground in beauty and gracefulness, (Numbers 17:8 .) It is used to denote also the reproduction of mankind in prosperous circumstances, (Isaiah 27:6.) From the noun מעיר, [from the city,] we are at no loss to supply the proper nominative to the preceding verb; *q d.*, *ex civitatibus* singulis cives *efflorescent*, 'from the cities severally, the citizens shall spring forth.' The expression is somewhat similar to that in Psalm 68:27, where the descendants of Israel are said to be *from the fountain of Israel*." The extraordinary fertility and great increase of population here predicted took place in Palestine under the reign of Solomon, as is evident from 1 Kings 4:20, where it is said, that in the time of Solomon "Judah and Israel were many as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry." But this prophecy is destined to receive its fullest accomplishment under the reign of the Messiah.

words שמש-לפני, *liphney-shemesh,* which we have rendered, *in the presence of the sun*, as if he meant that the glory with which God would invest the kings of Judah would surpass the brightness of the sun; but this is at variance with the context, for he had said above, (verse 5th,) in the same sense, *with the sun,* and *in the presence of the moon.*

After having, therefore, made mention of the everlasting duration of the name of this king, he subjoins, by way of explanation, *his name shall be continued in the presence of the sun* Literally it is, *his name shall have children,* [626] (for the Hebrew verb is derived from the noun for *son*,) that is to say, it shall be perpetuated from father to son; [627] and as the sun rises daily to enlighten the world, so shall the strength of this king be continually renewed, and thus will continue from age to age for ever. In like manner, we shall afterwards see that the sun and the moon are called witnesses of the same eternity, (Psalm 89:38.) Whence it follows that this cannot be understood of the earthly kingdom, which flourished only for a short time in the house of David, and not only lost its vigor in the third successor, but was at length ignominiously extinguished. It properly applies to the kingdom of Christ; and although that kingdom often totters upon the earth when assailed with the furious hatred of the whole world, and battered by the most formidable engines of Satan, it is yet wonderfully upheld and sustained by God, that it may not altogether fail. The words which follow, *All nations shall bless themselves in him,* admit of a twofold meaning. The

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"Filiabitur nomen ejus." — *Henry* In the margin of our English Bibles it is, "He shall be as a son to continue his father's name." Bishop Patrick, therefore, paraphrases it, "His memory and fame shall never die, but be propagated from father to son, so long as the sun shall shine." Rosenmüller reads, "*Sobolescet nomen ejus*, 'his name shall increase,' that is, shall be continued as long as the sun endureth; the government shall continue to his posterity in perpetual succession." "The verb נון, *nun*," he adds, "which occurs only in this passage, is explained from the noun נין, *nin*, Genesis 21:23; Job 18:19; Isaiah 14:22. In these passages the word has obviously the meaning of offspring, and by the Chaldee interpreters, it is constantly rendered by the word בר, *bar*, *falius*, 'a son.' It may, therefore, be assumed with certainty, that the verb נון, *nun*, signifies *sobolem procreare*, 'to procreate descendants.' It may, however, be added, that the Alexandrine has here διαμενεῖ, a rendering in which both the Vulgate and Jerome concur: '*perseverabit nomen ejus*,' 'his name shall endure." Dathe takes this last mentioned view. He supposes, that instead of ינון, *yinnon*, we should read יכון, *yikon*, *stabilietur*, — *permanebit*; "shall be established, — shall continue." "The verb נון, *nun*," says he, "is not met with either in the Hebrew or in the cognate tongues, and is explained, — merely by conjecture, — *augescere* — *sobolescere*, — 'to increase or multiply,' because, as a noun in some of the dialects, it signifies a *fish* In the Septuagint the word is rendered διαμενεῖ; in the Vulgate and by Jerome, *perseverabit*; in the Chaldee, *praeparatum est*; in the Syriac, *existet nomen ejus* All these, without doubt, read יכון, *yikon*, 'prepared, — established, — fixed,' — the word which we find in the parallel passage, Psalm 89:38. The letters כ, *caph*, and נ, *nun*, it is evident, may very easily be interchanged from their similarity in form."

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"(Car c'est un verbe en la langue Hebraique qui vient du nom de Fils,) c'est a dire, sera perpetue de pere en fils." — *Fr.*

Hebrews often use this form of expression when the name of any man is used as an example or formula of prayer for blessings. For instance, a man blesses himself in David, who beseeches God to be as favorable and bountiful to him as he proved himself to be towards David. On the other hand, he is said to curse in Sodom and Gomorrah who employs the names of these cities by which to pronounce some curse. If, then, these two expressions, *they shall bless themselves in him, and they shall call him blessed,* are used in the same sense; the expression, *to bless themselves in the king,* will just mean to pray that the same prosperity may be conferred upon us which was conferred upon this highly favored king, whose happy condition will excite universal admiration. But if it is considered preferable to distinguish between these two expressions, (which is not less probable,) to *bless one's self in the king,* will denote to seek happiness from him; for the nations will be convinced that nothing is more desirable than to receive from him laws and ordinances.

18. *Blessed be Jehovah God! the God of Israel.* [628] David, after having prayed for prosperity to his successors, breaks forth in praising God, because he was assured by the divine oracle that his prayers would not be in vain. Had he not with the eyes of faith beheld those things which we have seen above, his rejoicing would have been less free and lively. When he says that *God alone doeth wonderful things,* this, no doubt, is spoken in reference to the subject of which he is presently treating, with the view not only of commending the excellence of the kingdom, but also to admonish himself and others of the need which there is that God should display his wonderful and stupendous power for its preservation. And certainly it was not owing to any of David's successors, a few excepted, that the royal throne did not fall a hundred times, yea, was not even completely ruined. To go no farther, was not Solomon's most disgraceful apostasy deserving of utter destruction? And as to the rest of his successors, with the exception of Josias, Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat, and a few others, did they not fall from evil to worse, as if each strove to outstrip his predecessor, and thus so provoked the wrath of God, as it were deliberately, that it is wonderful that he did not immediately launch the thunderbolts of his vengeance upon the whole race utterly to destroy them? Moreover, as David, being endued with the Spirit of prophecy, was not ignorant that Satan would always continue to be a cruel enemy of the Church's welfare, he doubtless knew that the grace of God, of which he presently speaks, would have great and arduous difficulties to overcome in order to continue for ever in his own nation. And the event afterwards unquestionably showed by how many miracles God accomplished his promises, whether we consider the return of his people from the captivity

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This psalm concludes the second book of the Psalms, and this and the following verse are a doxology similar to that with which the first book and the other three are concluded. See volume 2, p. 126, note.

of Babylon, or the astonishing deliverances which followed until Christ as a tender branch sprung out of a dead tree. David, therefore, with good reason prays that the glory of the divine name may fill the whole earth, since that kingdom was to be extended even to the uttermost boundaries of the globe, And that all the godly, with earnest and ardent affection of heart, may unite with him in the same prayers, there is added a confirmation in the words, *Amen, and Amen*

20. *The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.* We have before observed that this was not without cause added by Solomon, (if we may suppose him to have put the matter of this psalm into the form of poetical compositions) not only that he might avoid defrauding his father of the praise which was due to him, but also to stir up the Church the more earnestly to pour forth before God the same prayers which David had continued to offer even with his last breath. Let us then remember that it is our bounden duty to pray to God, both with unfeigned earnestness, and with unwearied perseverance, that he would be pleased to maintain and defend the Church under the government of his Son. The name of *Jesse,* the father of David, seems to be here introduced to bring to remembrance David's origin, that the grace of God may appear the more illustrious in having raised from the sheepfold a man of mean birth, as well as the youngest and the least esteemed among his brethren, and in having advanced him to so high a degree of honor, as to make him king over the chosen people.

Psalm 73

PSALM 73

David, or whoever may have been the author of this psalm, contending as it were against the judgment of carnal sense and reason, begins by extolling the righteousness and goodness of God. He next confesses that when he saw the wicked abounding in wealth, and living in the indulgence of every kind of pleasure, yea, even scornfully mocking God, and cruelly harassing the righteous, and that when he saw, on the other hand, how in proportion to the care with which any studied to practice uprightness, was the degree in which they were weighed down by troubles and calamities, and that in general all the children of God were pining away, and oppressed with cares and sorrows, while God, as if sitting in heaven idle and unconcerned, did not interfere to remedy such a disordered state of matters; it gave him so severe a shock, as almost to dispose him to cast off all concern about religion and all fear of God. In the third place, he reproves his own folly in proceeding rashly and hastily to pronounce judgment, merely from a view of the present state of things, and shows the necessity of exercising patience, that our faith may not fail under these troubles and disquietudes. At last he concludes that, provided we leave the providence of God to take its own course, in the way which he has determined in his secret purpose, [629] in the end, matters will assume a very different aspect, and it will be seen, that, on the one hand, the righteous are not defrauded of their reward, and that, on the other, the wicked do not escape the hand of the judge.

629

"Pourveu que nous laissions la providence de Dieu tenir sa procedure par les degrez, qu'il a determinez en son conseil secret." — *Fr.*

A Psalm of Asaph.

Psalm 73:1-3

1. Yet God is good to Israel, to those who are right of heart. **2.** As for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped. **3.** For I envied the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

As to the author of this psalm, I am not disposed to contend very strongly, although I think it probable that the name of Asaph was prefixed to it because the charge of singing it was committed to him, while the name of David, its author, was omitted, just as it is usual for us, when things are well known of themselves, not to be at the trouble of stating them. How much profit we may derive from meditation upon the doctrine contained in this psalm, it is easy to discover from the example of the prophet, who, although he had been exercised in no ordinary degree in true godliness, yet had great difficulty in keeping his footing, while reeling to and fro on the slippery ground on which he found himself placed. Nay, he acknowledges that, before he returned to such soundness of mind as enabled him to form a just judgment of the things which occasioned his trial, he had fallen into a state of almost brutish stupidity. As to ourselves, experience shows how slight impressions we have of the providence of God. We no doubt all agree in admitting that the world is governed by the hand of God; but were this truth deeply rooted in our hearts, our faith would be distinguished by far greater steadiness and perseverance in surmounting the temptations with which we are assailed in adversity. But when the smallest temptation which we meet with dislodges this doctrine from our minds, it is manifest that we have not yet been truly and in good earnest convinced of its truth.

Besides, Satan has numberless artifices by which he dazzles our eyes and bewilders the mind; and then the confusion of things which prevails in the world produces so thick a mist, as to render it difficult for us to see through it, and to come to the conclusion that God governs and extends his care to things here below. The ungodly for the most part triumph; and although they deliberately stir up God to anger and provoke his vengeance, yet from his sparing them, it seems as if they had done nothing amiss in deriding him, and that they will never be called to account for it. [630] On the other hand, the righteous, pinched with poverty, oppressed with many troubles, harassed by multiplied wrongs, and covered with shame and reproach, groan and sigh: and in proportion to the earnestness with which they exert themselves in endeavoring to do good to all men, is the liberty which the wicked have the effrontery to take in abusing their patience. When such is the state of

630 "Il semble qu'ils ont bon marche de se mocquer de luy, et qu'il n'en sera autre chose." — *Fr.*

matters, where shall we find the person who is not sometimes tempted and importuned by the unholy suggestion, that the affairs of the world roll on at random, and as we say, are governed by chance? [631] This unhallowed imagination has doubtless obtained complete possession of the minds of the unbelieving, who are not illuminated by the Spirit of God, and thereby led to elevate their thoughts to the contemplation of eternal life. Accordingly, we see the reason why Solomon declares, that since "all things come alike to all, and there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked," the hearts of the sons of men are full of impiety and contempt of God, (Ecclesiastes 9:2, 3;) — the reason is, because they do not consider that things apparently so disordered are under the direction and government of God.

Some of the heathen philosophers discoursed upon, and maintained the doctrine of a Divine Providence; but it was evident from experience that they had notwithstanding no real and thorough persuasion of its truth; for when things fell out contrary to their expectation, they openly disavowed what they had previously professed. [632] Of this we have a memorable example in Brutus. We can hardly conceive of a man surpassing him in courage, and all who intimately knew him bore testimony to his distinguished wisdom. Being of the sect of the Stoic philosophers, he spake many excellent things in commendation of the power and providence of God; and yet when at length vanquished by Antony, he cried out, that whatever he had believed concerning virtue had no foundation in truth, but was the mere invention of men, and that all the pains taken to live honestly and virtuously was only so much lost labor, since fortune rules over all the affairs of mankind. Thus this personage, who was distinguished for heroic courage, and an example of wonderful resolution, in renouncing virtue, and under the name of it cursing God, shamefully fell away. Hence it is manifest, how the sentiments of the ungodly fluctuate with the fluctuation of events. And how can it be expected that the heathen, who are not regenerated by the Spirit of God, should be able to resist such powerful and violent assaults, when even God's own people have need of the special assistance of his grace to prevent the same temptation from prevailing in their hearts, and when they are sometimes shaken by it and ready to fall; even as David here confesses, that his steps had well nigh slipped? But let us now proceed to the consideration of the words of the psalm.

631

"Que le monde tourne a l'aventure, et (comme on dit) est gouverne par fortune?" — *Fr.*

632

"Ce poinct de doctrine, lequel ils avoyent fait mine de tenir bien resoluement." — *Fr.* "This doctrine, which they had made a show of holding very resolutely."

1. *Yet God is good to Israel.* The adverb אך, [633] *ach,* does not here imply a simple affirmation *certainly,* as it often does in other places, but is taken adversatively for *yet, notwithstanding,* or some similar word. David opens the psalm abruptly; and from this we learn, what is worthy of particular notice, that before he broke forth into this language, his mind had been agitated with many doubts and conflicting suggestions. As a brave and valiant champion, he had been exercised in very painful struggles and temptations; but, after long and arduous exertion, he at length succeeded in shaking off all perverse imaginations, and came to the conclusion that *yet* God is gracious to his servants, and the faithful guardian of their welfare. Thus these words contain a tacit contrast between the unhallowed imaginations suggested to him by Satan, and the testimony in favor of true religion with which he now strengthens himself, denouncing, as it were, the judgment of the flesh, in giving place to misgiving thoughts with respect to the providence of God. We see then how emphatic is this exclamation of the Psalmist. He does not ascend into the chair to dispute after the manner of the philosophers, and to deliver his discourse in a style of studied oratory; but, as if he had escaped from hell, he proclaims, with a loud voice, and with impassioned feeling, that he had obtained the victory. To teach us by his own example the difficulty and arduousness of the conflict, he opens, so to speak, his heart and bowels, and would have us to understand something more than is expressed by the words which he employs. The amount of his language is, that although God, to the eye of sense and reason, may seem to neglect his servants, yet he always embraces them with his favor. He celebrates the providence of God, especially as it is extended towards genuine saints; to show them, not only that they are governed by God in common with other creatures, but that he watches over their welfare with special care, even as the master of a family carefully provides for and attends to his own household. God, it is true, governs the whole world; but he is graciously pleased to take a more close and peculiar inspection of his Church, which he has undertaken to maintain and defend.

This is the reason why the prophet speaks expressly of *Israel;* and why immediately after he limits this name to *those who are right of heart;* which is a kind of correction of the first sentence; for many proudly lay claim to the name of Israel, as if they constituted the chief members of the Church, while they are but Ishmaelites and Edomites. David, therefore, with the view of blotting out from the catalogue of the godly all the degenerate children of Abraham, [634] acknowledges none to belong to Israel but such as

633

This particle here expresses the state of mind of a person meditating a difficult question in which he is much interested, and is hardly come to a conclusion; — a state, in the Psalmist's case, between hope and despair, though strongly inclining to the former." — *Horsley.*

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purely and uprightly worship God; as if he had said, "*When* I declare that God is good to his Israel, I do not mean all those who, resting contented with a mere external profession, bear the name of Israelites, to which they have no just title; but I speak of the spiritual children of Abraham, who consecrate themselves to God with sincere affection of heart." Some explain the first clause, *God is good to Israel,* as referring to his chosen people; and the second clause, *to those who are right of heart,* as referring to strangers, to whom God would be gracious, provided they walked in true uprightness. But this is a frigid and forced interpretation. It is better to adhere to that which I have stated. David, in commending the goodness of God towards the chosen people and the Church, was under the necessity of cutting off from their number many hypocrites who had apostatised from the service of God, and were, therefore, unworthy of enjoying his fatherly favor. To his words corresponds the language of Christ to Nathanael, (John 1:47,) "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" As the fear of God among the Jews was at that time well nigh extinguished, and there remained among them almost nothing else but the "circumcision made with hands," that is to say, outward circumcision, Christ, to discriminate between the true children of Abraham and hypocrites, lays it down as a distinguishing characteristic of the former, that they are free from guile. And assuredly in the service of God, no qualification is more indispensable than uprightness of heart.

2. *As for me, etc.* Literally, it is, *And I:* which ought to be read with emphasis; for David means that those temptations, which cast an affront upon the honor of God, and overwhelm faith, not only assail the common class of men, or those who are endued only with some small measure of the fear of God, but that he himself, who ought to have profited above all others in the school of God, had experienced his own share of them. By thus setting himself forth as an example, he designed the more effectually to arouse and incite us to take great heed to ourselves. He did not, it is true, actually succumb under the temptation; but, in declaring *that his feet were almost gone,* and that *his steps had well nigh slipped,* he warns us that all are in danger of falling, unless they are upheld by the powerful hand of God.

3. *For I envied the foolish* [635] Here he declares the nature of the temptation with which he was assailed. It consisted in this, that when he saw the present prosperous state of the wicked, and from it judged them to be happy, he had envied their condition. We are certainly under a grievous and a dangerous temptation, when we not only, in our own minds, quarrel with

"Ceux qui estans descendus d'Abraham n'ensuyvoyent point sa sainctete." — *Fr.* "Those who being descended from Abraham did not follow his holiness."

635

The original word for *the foolish* signifies "men of no principle, wild, giddy, vain boasters." Boothroyd renders it "the madly profane," and Fry, "the vain-glorious."

God for not setting matters in due order, but also when we give ourselves loose reins, boldly to commit iniquity, because it seems to us that we may commit it, and yet escape with impunity. The sneering jest of Dionysius the younger, a tyrant of Sicily, when, after having robbed the temple of Syracuse, he had a prosperous voyage with the plunder, is well known. [636] "See you not," says he to those who were with him, "how the gods favor the sacrilegious?" In the same way, the prosperity of the wicked is taken as an encouragement to commit sin; for we are ready to imagine, that, since God grants them so much of the good things of this life, they are the objects of his approbation and favor. We see how their prosperous condition wounded David to the heart, leading him almost to think that there was nothing better for him than to join himself to their company, and to follow their course of life. [637] By applying to the ungodly the appellation of *foolish,* he does not simply mean that the sins which they commit are committed through ignorance or inadvertence, but he sets their folly in opposition to the fear of God, which is the principal constituent of true wisdom. [638] The ungodly are, no doubt, crafty; but, being destitute of the fundamental principle of all right judgment, which consists in this, that we must regulate and frame our lives according to the will of God, they are foolish; and this is the effect of their own blindness.

Psalm 73:4-9

> **4.** For there are no bands to their death, and their strength is vigorous. [639] **5.** They are not in the trouble that is common to man; neither are they scourged [or stricken] with other men. **6.** Therefore pride compasseth them as a chain; the raiment of violence hath covered them. **7.** Their eye goeth out for fatness; they have passed beyond [or exceeded] the thoughts of their heart. **8.** They become insolent, and wickedly talk of extortion: [640] they speak from on high. **9.** They

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"On scait assez par les histoires le brocard duquel usa anciennement un tyran de Sicile nomme Denis le jeune, quand apres avoir pille le temple de Syracuses, il se mit sur la mer, et veit qu'il avoit fort bon vent pour naviger." — *Fr.*

637

"Et suyvre a leur train." — *Fr.*

638

"Laquelle est le fondement et le comble de sagesse." — *Fr.* "Which is the foundation and the cope-stone of wisdom.

639

Literally, "Their strength is fat." Jerome renders as if, for אולם, his MSS. had אולמיהם, 'et firma sunt vestibula eorum;' 'their stately mansions are firm.' The stability of a dwelling is a significant image of general prosperity. — *Horsley*

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have set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. [641]

4 *For there are no bands to their death.* The Psalmist describes the comforts and advantages of the ungodly, which are as it were so many temptations to shake the faith of the people of God. He begins with the good health which they enjoy, telling us, that they are robust and vigorous, and have not to draw their breath with difficulty through continual sicknesses, as will often be the case with regard to true believers. [642] Some explain *bands to death,* as meaning *delays,* viewing the words as implying that the wicked die suddenly, and in a moment, not having to struggle with the pangs of dissolution. In the book of Job it is reckoned among the earthly felicities of the ungodly, That, after having enjoyed to the full their luxurious pleasures, they "in a moment go down to the grave," (Job 21:13.) And it is related of Julius Caesar, that, the day before he was put to death, he remarked, that to die suddenly and unexpectedly, seemed to him to be a happy death. Thus, then, according to the opinion of these expositors, David complains that the wicked go to death by a smooth and easy path, without much trouble and anxiety. But I am rather inclined to agree with those who read these two clauses jointly in this way: *Their strength is vigorous, and,* in respect to them, *there are no bands to death;* because they are not dragged to death like prisoners. [643] As diseases lay prostrate our strength, they are so many messengers of death, warning us of the frailty and short duration of our life. They are therefore with propriety compared to bands, with which God binds us to his yoke, lest our strength and rigour should incite us to licentiousness and rebellion.

5. *They are not in the trouble that is common to man.* Here it is declared that the wicked enjoy a delightful repose, and are as it were by special privilege exempted from the miseries to which mankind in general are subject. They also are no doubt involved in afflictions as well as the good, and God often executes his judgments upon them; but, for the express purpose of trying our faith, he always places some of them as it were upon

"Oppression. Dr Boothroyd joins this word to the latter clause, thus: Concerning oppression they talk loftily. This we think preferable." — *Williams.*

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"The powerful effects of the tongue are expressed by a like figure in a Greek proverb preserved by Suidas. Τλῶσσα ποῖ πορεύν; πόλιν ἀνορθώσουσα καὶ πόλιν καταστρέψουσα. 'Tongue, whither goest thou? To build up a city, and to destroy a city.' Garrulity is called 'the walk of the tongue' in a line quoted by Stobaeus (*Serm* 36) from Astydamas —

Tlw>sshv peri>pato>v ejstin ajdolesci>a."'

Merrick'Annotations.

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"Comme souvent il en prendra aux fideles." — *Fr.*

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an elevated stage, who appear to be privileged to live in a state of exemption from calamities, as is here described. Now, when we consider that the life of men is full of labor and miseries, and that this is the law and condition of living appointed for all, it is a sore temptation to behold the despisers of God indulging themselves in their luxurious pleasures and enjoying great ease, as if they were elevated above the rest of the world into a region of pleasure, where they had a nest for themselves apart. [644]

6. *Therefore pride compasseth them as a chain.* This complaint proceeds farther than the preceding; for we are here told that although God sees the ungodly shamefully and wickedly abusing his kindness and clemency, he notwithstanding bears with their ingratitude and rebellion. The Psalmist employs a similitude taken from the dress and attire of the body, to show that such persons glory in their evil deeds. The verb ענק, *anak,* which we have rendered, *encompasseth them as a chain,* comes from a noun which signifies *a chain.* The language, therefore, implies that the ungodly glory in their audacity and madness, as if they were richly adorned with a chain of gold: [645] and that violence serves them for raiment, thinking, as they

"They are not dragged to death," says Poole, "either by the hand or sentence of the magistrate, which yet they deserve, nor by any lingering or grievous torments of mind or body, which is the case with many good men; but they enjoy a sweet and quiet death, dropping into the grave like ripe fruit from the tree, without any violence used to them, (compare Job 5:26 and 31:13.) The word translated *bands* occurs in only one other place of Scripture, Isaiah 58:6, where in all the ancient versions it is rendered *bands* But *bands* will bear various significations. In the Hebrew style it often signifies *the pangs of child-birth*; and therefore the meaning here may be, *they have no pangs in their death*; *i e.*, they die an easy death, being suffered to live on to extreme old age, when the flame of life gradually and quietly becomes extinct. It was also used by the Hebrews to express *diseases* of any kind, and this is the sense, in which Calvin understands it. Thus Jesus says of the "woman who had a spirit of infirmity," a sore disease inflicted upon her by an evil spirit, "eighteen years," "Thou art loosed from thine infirmity," (and loosing, we know, applies to bands:) he again describes her as "this daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years;" and farther says, "Ought she not to be loosed from this bond?" that is, cured of this sickness? Luke 13:11, 12, 16. According to this view, the meaning will be, *they have no violent diseases in their death* Horsley reads, "There is no fatality in their death." After observing that the word חרצבות, translated *bands*, occurs but in one other place in the whole Bible, Isaiah 58:6; where the LXX. have rendered it συνδεσμον, and the Vulgate *colligationes*, he says, "From its sense there, and from its seeming affinity with the roots חרף and צבה, I should guess that in a secondary and figurative sense, the word may denote the strongest of all bands or knots, physical necessity, or fate; and in that sense it may be taken here. The complaint is, that the ordinary constitution of the world is supposed to contain no certain provision for the extermination of the impious; that there is no necessary and immediate connection between moral evil and physical, wickedness and death." The Septuagint reads, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνάνευσις ἐν τῷ Θανάτω αὐτῶν: "For there is no sign of reluctance in their death." The Vulgate, "Quia non est respectus morti eorum;" "For they do not think of dying," or, "For they take no notice of their death." The Chaldee, "They are not terrified or troubled on account of the day of their death."

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"En un lieu de plaisance, et comme pour avoir leur nid a part." — *Fr.*

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do, that it renders them very stately and honorable. Some translate the Hebrew word שית, *shith,* which we have rendered *raiment,* by *buttocks;* but this is a sense which the scope of the passage will by no means admit. David, I have no doubt, after having commenced at the neck or head — for the Hebrew verb ענק, *anak* which he uses, signifies also sometimes *to crown* [646] — now meant to comprehend, in one word, the whole attire of the person. The amount of what is stated is, that the wicked are so blinded with their prosperity, as to become more and more proud and insolent [647] The Psalmist has very properly put *pride* first in order, and then added *violence* to it as its companion; for what is the reason why the ungodly seize and plunder whatever they can get on all sides, and exercise so much cruelty, but because they account all other men as nothing in comparison of themselves; or rather persuade themselves that mankind are born only for them? The source, then, and, as it were, the mother of all violence, is pride.

7. *Their eye goeth out for fatness.* [648] He now adds, that it is not wonderful to see the ungodly breaking forth with such violence and cruelty, since, by reason of fatness and pampering, their eyes are ready to start out of their heads. Some explain the words *goeth out* as meaning, that their eyes being covered and hidden with fat, were, so to speak, lost, and could not be perceived in their sockets. But as fat causes the eyes to project from the head, I prefer retaining the proper meaning of the words. Let it, however, be observed, that David is not to be understood as speaking of the bodily countenance, but as expressing metaphorically the pride with which the ungodly are inflated on account of the abundance which they possess. They so glut and intoxicate themselves with their prosperity, that afterwards they

There is here a metaphorical allusion to the rich collars or chains worn about the necks of great personages for ornament. Compare Proverbs 1:9, and Cant. 4, 9. *Pride compassed* these prosperous wicked men *about as a chain*; they wore it for an ornament as gold chains or collars were worn about the neck; discovering it by their stately carriage. See Isaiah 3:16. Or there may be an allusion to the office which some of them bore; for chains of gold were among the ensigns of magistracy and civil power.

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Accordingly, the Chaldee, instead of "compasseth them as a chain." has "crowneth them as a crown or diadem does the head."

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"*Violence covereth them as a garment.* Wicked men that are prosperous and proud, are generally oppressive to others; and are very often open in their acts of violence, which are as openly done, and to be seen of all men, as the clothes they wear upon their backs; and frequently the clothes they wear are got by rapine and oppression, so that they may properly be called garments of violence. See Isaiah 59:6." — *Dr Gill.*

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"Their eyes are starting out for fatness." — *Horsley.* "*Their eyes swell with fatness* — *this* is a proverbial expression, used to designate the opulent, who are very commonly given to sensuality: comp. Job 15:27; Psalm 17:10." — *Cresswell.*

are ready to burst with pride. The last clause of the verse is also explained in two ways. Some think that by the verb עבר, *abar,* which we have translated *passed beyond,* is denoted *unbridled presumption;* [649] for the ungodly are not contented to keep themselves within ordinary bounds, but in their wild and extravagant projects mount above the clouds. We know, in fact, that they often deliberate with themselves how they may take possession of the whole world; yea, they would wish God to create new worlds for them. In short, being altogether insatiable, they pass beyond heaven and earth in their wild and unbounded desires. It would certainly not be inappropriate to explain the verb as meaning, that their foolish thoughts can be regulated by no law, nor kept within any bounds. But there is another exposition which is also very suitable, namely, that the prosperity and success which they meet with exceed all the flattering prospects which they had pictured in their imaginations. We certainly see some of them who obtain more than ever they had desired, as if, whilst they were asleep, Fortune laid nets and fished for them, [650] — the device under which king Demetrius was in old time wittily painted, who had taken so many cities, although otherwise he was neither skillful nor vigilant, nor of great foresight. If we are inclined to take this view of the words, this clause will be added by way of exposition, to teach us what is meant by that *fatness,* spoken of before — that it means that God heaps upon the wicked, and fills them with, an abundance of all good things, beyond what they had ever either desired or thought of.

8. *They become insolent, and wickedly talk of extortion.* Some take the verb ימיקו, *yamicu,* in an active transitive sense, and explain it as meaning, that the wicked soften, that is to say, render others pusillanimous, or frighten and intimidate them. [651] But as the idiom of the language admits also of its being understood in the neuter sense, I have adopted the interpretation which agreed best with the scope of the passage, namely, that the wicked, forgetting themselves to be men, and by their unbounded audacity trampling under foot all shame and honesty, dissemble not their wickedness, but, on the

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"*The fantasies of their minds run into excess*; *i.e.*, they suffer their imaginations to sway them." — *Cresswell.*

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"Et pesche pour eux." *Fr.*

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"Exposans que les meschans amolissent, c'est a dire, rendent lasches les autres, c'est a dire, les espouantent et intimident." — *Fr* ימיקו, *yamicu*, is rendered by Vatablus, Cocceius, Gejer, and Michaelis, "They cause to consume or melt away." "They melt or dissolve others," says Dr Gill, "they consume them, and waste their estates by their oppression and violence; they make their hearts to melt with their threatening and terrifying words; or they make them dissolute in their lives by keeping them company." Mudge reads, "They behave corruptly;" and Horsley, "They are in the last stage of degeneracy."

contrary, loudly boast of their extortion. And, indeed, we see that wicked men, after having for some time got every thing to prosper according to their desires, cast off all sham and are at no pains to conceal themselves when about to commit iniquity, but loudly proclaim their own turpitude. "What!" they will say, "is it not in my power to deprive you of all that you possess, and even to cut your throat?" Robbers, it is true, can do the same thing; but then they hide themselves for fear. These giants, or rather inhuman monsters, of whom David speaks, on the contrary not only imagine that they are exempted from subjection to any law, but, unmindful of their own weakness, foam furiously, as if there were no distinction between good and evil, between right and wrong. If, however, the other interpretation should be preferred, That the wicked intimidate the simple and peaceable by boasting of the great oppressions and outrages which they can perpetrate upon them, I do not object to it. When the poor and the afflicted find themselves at the mercy of these wicked men, they cannot but tremble, and, so to speak, melt and dissolve upon seeing them in possession of so much power. With respect to the expression, *They speak from on high,* [652] implies, that they pour forth their insolent and abusive speech upon the heads of all others. As proud men, who disdain to look directly at any body, are said, in the Latin tongue, *despicere,* and in the Greek, *Katablepein,* that is, *to look down;* [653] so David introduces them as speaking from on high, because it seems to them that they have nothing in common with other men, but think themselves a distinct class of beings, and, as it were, little gods. [654]

9. *They have set their mouth against the heavens.* Here it is declared that they utter their contumelious speeches as well against God as against men; for they imagine that nothing is too arduous for them to attempt, and flatter themselves that heaven and earth are subject to them. If any should endeavor to alarm them by setting before them the power of God, they audaciously break through this barrier; and, with respect to men,

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The original word, ממרום, *memmarom*, for *from on high*, is translated by our English version *loftily* But Musculus, Junius, Tremellius, Piscator, Mudge, Horsley, and others read with Calvin, *from on high They speak from on high*, "as if they were in heaven and above all creatures, and even God himself; and as if what they said were oracles, and to be received as such without any scruple and hesitation. Thus Pharaoh, Sennacherib, and Nebuchadnezzar spake, Exodus 5:2; Isaiah 36:20; Daniel 3:15." — *Dr Gill*

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"Car comme les Latins et aussi les Grecs, quand ils descrivent la contenance des gens enyvrez d'orgueil, ont des verbes qui signifient Regarder en bas, d'autant que telles gens ne daignent pas regarder droit les personnes." — *Fr.* "As the Romans, and also the Greeks, when they describe the countenance of persons intoxicated with pride, have words which mean *to look down*, because such persons deign not to look directly at other people."

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"Pource qu'il ne leur semble point avis qu'ils ayent rien de commun avec les autres hommes, mais pensent estre quelque chose a part, et comme des petis dieux." — *Fr.*

they have no idea of any difficulty arising from such a quarter. Thus, there is no obstacle to repress their proud and vaunting speeches, but *their tongue walketh through the whole earth.* This form of expression seems to be hyperbolical; but when we consider how great and unbounded their presumption is, we will admit that the Psalmist teaches nothing but what experience shows to be matter of fact.

Psalm 73:10-14

> **10.** On this account his people will return hither, and waters of a full cup will be wrung out to them. **11.** And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High? **12.** Behold! These are the ungodly, and yet they enjoy repose [or quietness] for ever: they heap up riches. **13.** Surely I have purified my heart in vain, and washed my hands daily. [655] **14.** And I have been scourged daily, and my chastisement has been every morning.

10. *On this account his people will return hither.* Commentators wrest this sentence into a variety of meanings. In the first place, as the relative *his* is used, without an antecedent indicating whose people are spoken of, some understand it simply of the ungodly, as if it had been said, That the ungodly always fall back upon this reflection: and they view the word *people* as denoting *a great troop* or *band;* for as soon as a wicked man raises his standard, he always succeeds in drawing a multitude of associates after him. They, therefore, think the meaning to be, that every prosperous ungodly man has people flocking about him, as it were, in troops; and that, when within his palace or magnificent mansion, they are content with getting water to drink; so much does this perverse imagination bewitch them. But there is another sense much more correct, and which is also approved by the majority of commentators; namely, that the people of God [656] return hither. Some take the word הלם, *halom,* which we have rendered *hither,* as denoting *afflicted;* [657] but this is a forced interpretation.

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"Et lave mes mains en nettete." — *Fr.* "And washed my hands in innocency." The Psalmist may allude to the rite of ablution which was in use among the Jews. See Deuteronomy 21:6, and Psalm 26:6. Or he may be understood as signifying by the metaphor of washing the hands in general, the pains which he took to be blameless in the whole of his outward conduct. "Opposite to the phrase, *to wash in innocence*," says Merrick, "is the *scelere imbuere* of Cicero, (*Philipp.* v.) 'Cum autem semel gladium scelere imbuisset,'" etc. See Job 9:30.

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The Septuagint, Vulgate, Syriac, Arabic, and Æthiopic versions read, "my people."

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The meaning is not, however, as yet, sufficiently evident, and therefore we must inquire into it more closely. [658] Some read the whole verse connectedly, thus: The people of God return hither, that they may drain full cups of the water of sorrow. But, in my opinion, this verse depends upon the preceding statements, and the sense is, That many who had been regarded as belonging to the people of God were carried away by this temptation, and were even shipwrecked and swallowed up by it. The prophet does not seem to speak here of the chosen people of God, but only to point to hypocrites and counterfeit Israelites who occupy a place in the Church. He declares that such persons are overwhelmed in destruction, because, being foolishly led away to envy the wicked, and to desire to follow them, [659] they bid adieu to God and to all religion. Still, however, this might, without any impropriety, be referred to the chosen seed, many of whom are so violently harassed by this temptation, that they turn aside into crooked by-paths: not that they devote themselves to wickedness, but because they do not firmly persevere in the right path. The sense then will be, that not only the herd of the profane, but even true believers, who have determined to serve *God,* are tempted with this unlawful and perverse envy and emulation.

"Abu Walid," says Hammond, "hath a peculiar way of rendering הלם, as if it were הלם, the infinitive, *with breaking of spirit.*" A similar interpretation is adopted by Horsley. "For הלם," says he, "many MSS. read הלום, which I take as the participle *Pual* of the verb הלם, 'Contusus miseria,' scilicet." He reads,

"Therefore his [God's] people sit woebegone."

To make out this translation, he adopts another of the various readings of MSS. "For ישיב," says he, "many MSS. have ישוב: I would transpose the *vau*, and read יושב. The third person future, *Hophal*, signifies *is made to sit*, *is settled*, attended with grief and consternation at the unpunished audacity of the profane."

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"Et pourtant il nous y faut aviser de plus pres." — *Fr.*

659

"Stulta aemulatione decepti." — *Lat.* "Se abusans par leur folie a porter envie aux meschans, et les vouloir ensuyvre." — *Fr*

[660] What follows, *Waters of a full cup are wrung out to them,* [661] seems to be the reason of the statement in the preceding clause, implying that they are tormented with vexation and sorrow, when no advantage appears to be derived from cultivating true religion. *To be saturated with waters* is put metaphorically for to drink the bitterest distresses, and to be filled with immeasurable sorrows.

11. *And they say, How doth God know?* Some commentators maintain that the Prophet here returns to the ungodly, and relates the scoffings and blasphemies with which they stimulate and stir up themselves to commit sin; but of this I cannot approve. David rather explains what he had stated in the preceding verse, as to the fact that the faithful fall into evil thoughts and wicked imaginations when the short-lived prosperity of the ungodly dazzles their eyes. He tells us that they begin then to call in question, Whether there is knowledge in God. Among worldly men, this madness is too common. Ovid thus speaks in one of his verses:

"Sollicitor nullos esse putare deos;"

"I am tempted to think that there are no gods."

It was, indeed, a heathen poet who spake in this manner; but as we know that the poets express the common thoughts of men, and the language which generally predominates in their minds, [662] it is certain that he spake, as it were, in the person of the great mass of mankind, when he frankly confessed, that as soon as any adversity happens, men forget all knowledge of God. They not only doubt whether there is a God, but they even enter

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While Calvin admits that the words, *his people*, may refer to true believers, he conceives that carnal and hypocritical Israelites are rather intended. One great objection to the opinion, that true believers are at all intended is, that stumbled though they often are at the unequal distributions of the present state, and chargeable though they may be with entertaining murmuring thoughts in reference to this matter, we can scarcely suppose that they would so far depart from every principle of truth and propriety, as to break forth into such language as is ascribed in verse 11th to the persons here spoken of, "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the Most High?" Neither David nor Jeremiah, though much perplexed in reconciling the prosperity of the wicked and the afflicted state of God's people, with the righteousness and goodness of Divine Providence, ever gave utterance to any such language. See Psalm 38 and Jeremiah 12. Walford thinks that "it is far more agreeable to the design of the entire passage, to interpret the words, *his people*, of the friends and connections of the wicked, who imitate their actions." In support of this it may be observed, that the description of the condition, conduct, and words, of these prosperous ungodly men, commences at the 4th verse, and seems to be continued to the 13th verse, where the Psalmist's reflections upon the subject begin, and are continued to the close of the psalm.

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This has also been understood as denoting the prosperity, the abundance of all outward good things bestowed upon the persons referred to.

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"Et les discours qui regnent communeement en leur cerveaux." — *Fr.*

into debate with, and chide him. What else is the meaning of that complaint which we meet with in the ancient Latin Poet-

"Nec Saturnius haec oculis pater adspicit aequis:"

"Nor does the great god, the son of Saturn, regard these things with impartial eyes," — but that the woman, of whom he there speaks, accuses her god Jupiter of unrighteousness, because she was not dealt with in the way which she desired? It is then too common, among the unbelieving part of mankind, to deny that God cares for and governs the world, and to maintain that all is the result of chance. [663] But David here informs us that even true believers stumble in this respect: not that they break forth into this blasphemy, but because they are unable, all at once, to keep their minds under restraint when God seems to cease from executing his office. The expostulation of Jeremiah is well known,

"Righteous art thou, O Lord! when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?" (Jeremiah 12:1)

It appears from that passage that even the godly are tempted to doubt of the Providence of God, but at the same time that doubts on this subject do not go very deep into their hearts; for Jeremiah at the outset protests the contrary; and by doing so, puts, as it were, a bridle upon himself. Yet they do not always so speedily anticipate the snares of Satan, as to avoid asking, under the influence of a doubting spirit, how it can happen, if God really regards the world, that he does not remedy the great confusion which prevails in it? Of those who impiously prate against God by denying his Providence, there are two sorts. Some openly pour out their blasphemies, asserting that God, delighting in ease and pleasure, cares about nothing, but leaves the government of all things to chance. Others, although they keep their thoughts on this subject to themselves, and are silent before men, yet cease not secretly to fret against God, and to accuse him of injustice or of indolence, in conniving at wickedness, neglecting the godly, and allowing all things to be involved in confusion, and to go to wreck. But the people of God, before these perverse and detestable thoughts enter deep into their hearts, disburden themselves into the bosom of God, [664] and their only desire is to acquiesce in his secret judgments, the reason of which is hidden from them. The meaning of this passage, therefore, is, that not only the wicked, when they see things in the world so full of disorder, conceive only of a blind government, which they attribute to fortune or chance; but that even true believers themselves are shaken, so as to doubt of the Providence

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"Que tout vient a l'aventure." — *Fr.*

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"En la presence de Dieu." — *Fr.* "In the presence of God."

of God; and that unless they were wonderfully preserved by his hand, they would be completely swallowed up in this abyss.

12. *Behold! these are the ungodly.* The Psalmist here shows, as it were by a vivid pictorial representation, the character of that envy which had well nigh overthrown him. *Behold!* says he, *these are wicked men!* and yet they happily enjoy their ease and pleasures undisturbed, and are exalted to power and influence; and that not merely for a few days, but their prosperity is of long duration, and has, as it were, an endless course. And is there anything which seems to our judgment less reasonable than that persons whose wickedness is accounted infamous and detestable, even in the eyes of men, should be treated with such liberality and indulgence by God? Some here take the Hebrew word עולם, *olam,* for *the world,* but improperly. It rather denotes in this passage *an age;* [665] and what David complains of is, that the prosperity of the wicked is stable and of long duration, and that to see it last so long wears out the patience of the righteous. Upon seeing the wicked so tenderly cherished by God, he descends to the consideration of his own case; and as his conscience bore him testimony that he had walked sincerely and uprightly, he reasons with himself as to what advantage he had derived from studiously devoting himself to the practice of righteousness, since he was afflicted and harassed in a very unusual degree. He tells us that he was *scourged daily,* and that as often as the sun rose, some affliction or other was prepared for him, so that there was no end to his calamities. In short the amount of his reasoning is this, "Truly I have labored in vain to obtain and preserve a pure heart and clean hands, seeing continued afflictions await me, and, so to speak, are on the watch to meet me at break of day. Such a condition surely shows that there is no reward for innocence before God, else he would certainly deal somewhat more compassionately towards those who serve him." As the true holiness for which the godly are distinguished consists of two parts, first, of purity of heart, and, secondly, of righteousness in the outward conduct, David attributes both to himself. Let us learn, from his example, to join them together: let us, in the first place, begin with purity of heart, and then let us give evidence of this before men by uprightness and integrity in our conduct.

Psalm 73:15-17

15. If I should say, I will speak thus, Behold! the generation of thy children: I have transgressed. [666] **16.** Although I applied my mind to know this, it was a trouble [or, a painful thing] in my sight; **17.**

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"Plustost il signifie yci un siecle," — *Fr.*

666

"Ou, J'ay transgresse contre la generation de tes enfans." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, I have transgressed against the generation of thy children"

Until I entered into the sanctuaries of God, and understood [667] their latter end.

15. *If I should say, I will speak thus.* David, perceiving the sinfulness of the thoughts with which he was tempted, puts a bridle upon himself, and reproves his inconstancy in allowing his mind to entertain doubts on such a subject. We can be at no loss in discovering his meaning; but there is some difficulty or obscurity in the words. The last Hebrew verb in the verse, בגד, *bagad,* signifies *to transgress,* and also *to deceive.* Some, therefore, translate, *I have deceived the generation of thy children,* as if David had said, Were I to speak thus, I should defraud thy children of their hope. Others read, *I have transgressed against the generation of thy children;* that is, Were I to speak thus, I would be guilty of inflicting an injury upon them. But as the words of the prophet stand in this order*, Behold! the generation of thy children: I have transgressed;* and as a very good meaning may be elicited from them, I would expound them simply in this way: Were I to approve of such wicked thoughts and doubts, I would transgress; for, behold! the righteous are still remaining on the earth, and thou reservest in every age some people for thyself. Thus it will be unnecessary to make any supplement to complete the sense, and the verb בגדתי, *bagadti, I have transgressed,* will read by itself, and not construed with any other part of the verse. We have elsewhere had occasion to observe, that the Hebrew noun דור, *dor*, which we have rendered *generation,* is properly to be referred to time. The idea which David intends to convey is now perfectly obvious. Whilst worldly men give loose reins to their unhallowed speculations, until at length they become hardened, and, divesting themselves of all fear of God, cast away along with it the hope of salvation, he restrains himself that he may not rush into the like destruction. *To speak* or *to declare* [668] here signifies *to utter what had been meditated upon.* His meaning, therefore, is, that had he pronounced judgment on this subject as of a thing certain, he would have been chargeable with a very heinous transgression. He found himself before involved in doubt, but now he acknowledges that he had grievously offended; and the reason of this he places between the words in which he expresses these two states of mind: which is, because God always sees to it, that there are some of his own people remaining in the world. He seems to repeat the

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"Aye considere." — *Fr.* "Considered."

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The word in the Hebrew text is ספר, *saphar* Horsley translates it "to argue" —

"If I resolve to argue thus,
I should be a traitor to the generation of thy children."

"The verb ספר," says he, "which literally signifies to count or reckon, may easily signify 'to reason within one's self, to syllogise,' as is indeed the case with the corresponding words of many languages; as λογιζεσθαι, *ratiocinari*, *putare*, *reckon*, *count*."

demonstrative particle, *Behold!* for the sake of contrast. He had a little before said, *Behold! these are the ungodly;* and here he says, *Behold! the generation of thy children.* It is assuredly nothing less than a divine miracle that the Church, which is so furiously assaulted by Satan and innumerable hosts of enemies, continues safe.

16. *Although I applied my mind to know this.* The first verb חשב, *chashab,* which he employs, properly signifies *to reckon* or *count,* and sometimes *to consider* or *weigh.* But the words which follow in the sentence require the sense which I have given, That he applied his mind to know the part of Divine Providence referred to. He has already condemned himself for having transgressed; but still he acknowledges, that until he entered into the sanctuaries of God, he was not altogether disentangled from the doubts with which his mind had been perplexed. In short, he intimates that he had reflected on this subject on all sides, and yet, by all his reasoning upon it, could not comprehend how God, amidst so great disorders and confusions, continued to govern the world. Moreover, in speaking thus of himself, he teaches us, that when men are merely under the guidance of their own understandings, the inevitable consequence is, that they sink under their trouble, not being able by their own deliberations and reasonings to arrive at any certain or fixed conclusions; for there is no doubt that he puts *the sanctuaries of God* in opposition to carnal reason. Hence it follows, that all the knowledge and wisdom which men have of their own is vain and unsubstantial; since all true wisdom among men — all that deserves to be so called — consists in this one point, [669] That they are docile, and implicitly submit to the teaching of the Word of God. The Psalmist does not speak of unbelievers who are wilfully blind, who involve themselves in errors, and are also very glad to find some color or pretext for taking offense, that they may withdraw to a distance from God. It is of himself that he speaks; and although he applied his mind to the investigation of divine subjects, not only earnestly, but with all humility; and although, at the same time, he contemplated, according to his small measure, the high judgments of God, not only with attention, but also with reverence, yet he confesses that he failed of success; for the word *trouble* [670] here implies unprofitable or lost labor. Whoever, therefore, in applying himself to the examination of God's judgments, expects to become acquainted with them by his natural understanding, will be disappointed, and will find that he is engaged in

669

"D'autant que toute la vraye sagesse qui doit estre ainsi nommee es hommes, consiste en un seul poinct." — *Fr.*

670

Green translates the Hebrew word for this, "hard;" Horsley, "perplexing;" and Boothroyd, "difficult."

a task at once painful and profitless; and, therefore, it is indispensably necessary to rise higher, and to seek illumination from heaven.

By *the sanctuaries of God* some, even among the Hebrews, understand the celestial mansions in which the spirits of the just and angels dwell; as if David had said, This was a painful thing in my sight, until I came to acknowledge in good earnest that men are not created to flourish for a short time in this world, and to luxuriate in pleasures while in it, but that their condition here is that of pilgrims, whose aspirations, during their earthly pilgrimage, should be towards heaven. I readily admit that no man can form a right judgment of the providence of God; but he who elevates his mind above the earth; but it is more simple and natural to understand the word *sanctuary* as denoting celestial doctrine. As the book of the law was laid up in the sanctuary, from which the oracles of heaven were to be obtained, that is to say, the declaration of the will of God, [671] and as this was the true way of acquiring profitable instruction, David very properly puts *entering into the sanctuaries,* [672] for *coming to the school of God,* as if his meaning were this, Until God become my schoolmaster, and until I learn by his word what otherwise my mind, when I come to consider the government of the world, cannot comprehend, I stop short all at once, and understand nothing about the subject. When, therefore, we are here told that men are unfit for contemplating the arrangements of Divine Providence until they obtain wisdom elsewhere than from themselves, how can we attain to wisdom but by submissively receiving what God teaches us both by his Word and by his Holy Spirit? David by the word *sanctuary* alludes to the external manner of teaching, which God had appointed among his ancient people; but along with the Word he comprehends the secret illumination of the Holy Spirit.

By the *end* of the wicked is not meant their exit from the world, or their departure from the present life, which is seen of all men — for what need was there to enter into the sanctuaries of God to understand that? — but the word *end* is to be regarded as referring to the judgments of God, by which he makes it manifest that, even when he is commonly thought to be asleep, he only delays to a convenient time the execution of the punishment which the wicked deserve. This must be explained at greater length. If we would learn from God what is the condition of the ungodly, he teaches us,

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"C'est a dire, la declaration de la volonte de Dieu." — *Fr.*

672

"It is remarkable," observes Horsley, "that the original word for 'sanctuary,' in this place, is plural, which is unexampled when the sanctuary is literally meant." He considers the expression, "Until I went into the sanctuary of God," as meaning, "Till I entered into the secret grounds of God's dealings with mankind." Cresswell explains it — "Until I entered into the grounds of God's dealings with men, as explained by the sacred writings, which are laid up in the place dedicated to his worship."

that after having flourished for some short time, they suddenly decay; and that although they may happen to enjoy a continued course of prosperity until death, yet all that is nothing, since their life itself is nothing. As, then, God declares that all the wicked shall miserably perish, if we behold him executing manifest vengeance upon them in this life, let us remember that it is the judgment of God. If, on the contrary, we do not perceive any punishment inflicted on them in this world, let us beware of thinking that they have escaped, or that they are the objects of the Divine favor and approbation; [673] but let us rather suspend our judgment, since the end or the last day has not yet arrived. In short, if we would profit aright, when we address ourselves to the consideration of the works of God, we must first beseech him to open our eyes, (for these are sheer fools who would of themselves be clear-sighted, and of a penetrating judgment;) and, secondly, we must also give all due respect to his word, by assigning to it that authority to which it is entitled.

Psalm 73:18-20

> **18.** Surely thou hast set them in slippery places; thou shalt cast them down into destruction. **19.** How have they been destroyed, as it were in a moment! they have perished, they have been consumed with terrors. **20.** As it were a dream after a man is awakened: O Lord! in awaking,
>
> [674] thou wilt make their image to be despised, [or contemptible.]

18. *Surely thou hast set them in slippery places.* David, having now gone through his conflicts, begins, if we may use the expression, to be a new man; and he speaks with a quiet and composed mind, being, as it were, elevated on a watchtower, from which he obtained a clear and distinct view of things which before were hidden from him. It was the prophet Habakkuk's resolution to take such a position, and, by his example, he prescribes this to us as a remedy in the midst of troubles — "I will stand upon my watch," says he, "and set me upon the tower," (Habakkuk 2:1.) David, therefore, shows how much advantage is to be derived from approaching God. I now see, says he, how thou proceedest in thy providence; for, although the ungodly continue to stand for a brief season, yet they are, as it were, perched on slippery places, [675] that they may fall ere long into destruction. Both the

673

"Gardons-nous de penser qu'ils soyent eschappez, ou que Dieu leur favorise." — *Fr.*

674

Martin thinks that there is here an allusion to the time at which judicial sentences were pronounced, which was in the morning, when men awoke from the sleep of night.

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"Comme junchez en lieux glissans." — *Fr.*

verbs of this verse are in the past tense; but the first, *to set them in slippery places,* is to be understood of the present time, as if it had been said, — God for a short period thus lifts them up on high, that when they fall their fall may be the heavier. This, it is true, seems to be the lot of the righteous as well as of the wicked; for everything in this world is slippery, uncertain, and changeable. But as true believers depend upon heaven, or rather, as the power of God is the foundation on which they rest, it is not said of them that they are set in slippery places, notwithstanding the frailty and uncertainty which characterises their condition in this world. What although they stumble or even fall, the Lord has his hand under them to sustain and strengthen them when they stumble, and to raise them up when they are fallen. The uncertainty of the condition of the ungodly, or, as it is here expressed, their slippery condition, proceeds from this, that they take pleasure in contemplating their own power and greatness, and admire themselves on that account, just like a person who would walk at leisure upon ice; [676] and thus by their infatuated presumption, they prepare themselves for falling down headlong. We are not to picture to our imaginations a wheel of fortune, which, as it revolves, embroils all things in confusion; but we must admit the truth to which the prophet here adverts, and which he tells us is made known to all the godly in the sanctuary, that there is a secret providence of God which manages all the affairs of the world. On this subject my readers, if they choose, may peruse the beautiful verses of Claudian in his first book against Ruffinus.

19. *How have they been destroyed, as it were in a moment!* The language of wonder in which the Psalmist breaks forth serves much to confirm the sentiment of the preceding verse. As the consideration of the prosperity of the ungodly induces a torpor upon our minds, yea, even renders them stupid; so their destruction, being sudden and unlooked for, tends the more effectually to awaken us, each being thus constrained to inquire how such an event came to pass, which all men thought could never happen. The prophet, therefore, speaks of it in the way of interrogation, as of a thing incredible. Yet he, at the same time, thus teaches us that God is daily working in such a manner as that, if we would but open our eyes, there would be presented to us just matter for exciting our astonishment. Nay, rather, if by faith we would look from a distance at the judgments of God daily approaching nearer and nearer, nothing would happen which we would regard as strange or difficult to be believed; for the surprise which we feel proceeds from the slowness and carelessness with which we proceed in acquiring the knowledge of Divine truth. [677] When it is said, *They are*

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"Qu'ils prenent plaisir a contempler leur puissance et grandeur, et sy mirent, comme qui voudroit se pourmener a loisir sur la glace." — *Fr.*

677

consumed with terrors, it may be understood in two ways. It either means that God thunders upon them in such an unusual manner, that the very strangeness of it strikes them with dismay; or that God, although he may not lay his hand upon his enemies, nevertheless throws them into consternation, and brings them to nothing, solely by the terror of his breath, at the very time when they are recklessly despising all dangers, as if they were perfectly safe, and had made a covenant with death. [678] Thus we have before seen David introducing them as encouraging themselves in their forwardness by this boasting language, "Who is lord over us?" (Psalm 12:4.) I am rather inclined to adopt the first sense; and the reason which leads me to do so is, that when God perceives that we are so slow in considering his judgments, he inflicts upon the ungodly judgments of a very severe kind, and pursues them with unusual tokens of his wrath, as if he would make the earth to tremble, in order thereby to correct our dullness of apprehension.

20. *As it were a dream after a man is awakened.* This similitude is often to be met with in the Sacred Writings. Thus, Isaiah, (Isaiah 29:7,) speaking of the enemies of the Church, says, "They shall be as a dream of a night vision." To quote other texts of a similar kind would be tedious and unnecessary labor. In the passage before us the metaphor is very appropriate. How is it to be accounted for, that the prosperity of the wicked is regarded with so much wonder, but because our minds have been lulled into a deep sleep? and, in short, the pictures which we draw in our imaginations of the happiness of the wicked, and of the desirableness of their condition, are just like the imaginary kingdoms which we construct in our dreams when we are asleep. Those who, being illuminated by the Word of God, are awake, may indeed be in some degree impressed with the splendor with which the wicked are invested; but they are not so dazzled by it as thereby to have their wonder very much excited; for they are prevented from feeling in this manner by a light of an opposite kind far surpassing it in brilliancy and attraction. The prophet, therefore, commands us to awake, that we may perceive that all which we gaze at in this world is nothing else than pure vanity; even as he himself, now returning to his right mind, acknowledges that he had before been only dreaming and raving. The reason is added, because God *will make their image to be despised,* or *render it contemptible.* By the word *image* some understand the soul of man, because it was formed

"De nostre tardivete et nonchalance a profiter en la doctrine." — *Fr.*

678

"*They are utterly consumed with terrors*; their destruction is not only sudden, but entire; it is like the breaking in pieces of a potter's vessel, a sherd of which cannot be gathered up and used; or like the casting of a millstone into the sea, which will never rise more: and this is done *with terrors*, — either by terrible judgments inflicted on them from without, or with terrors inwardly seizing upon their minds and consciences, as at the time of temporal calamities, or at death, and certainly at the judgment, when the awful sentence will be pronounced upon them. See Job 27:20." — *Dr. Gill.*

after the image of God. But in my opinion, this exposition is unsuitable; for the prophet simply derides the outward pomp or show [679] which dazzles the eyes of men, while yet it vanishes away in an instant. We have met with a similar form of expression in Psalm 39:6, "Surely every man passeth away in an image," the import of which is, Surely every man flows away like water that has no solidity, or rather like the image reflected in the mirror which has no substance. The word *image,* then, in this passage means what we commonly term *appearance,* or *outward show;* and thus the prophet indirectly rebukes the error into which we fall, when we regard as real and substantial those things which are merely phantoms created out of nothing by our imaginations. The word בעיר, *bair,* properly signifies *in the city.* [680] But as this would be a rigid form of expression, it has been judiciously thought by many that the word is curtailed of a letter, and that it is the same as בהעיר, *bahair;* an opinion which is also supported from the point *kamets* being placed under ב, *beth.* According to this view it is to be translated *in awakening,* that is, after these dreams which deceive us shall have passed away. And that takes place not only when God restores to some measure of order matters which before were involved in confusion, but also when dispelling the darkness he gladdens our minds with a friendly light. We never, it is true, see things so well adjusted in the world as we would desire; for God, with the view of keeping us always in the exercise of hope, delays the perfection of our state to the final day of judgment. But

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With this agree Bishop Horsley and Dr Adam Clarke. The former translates: —

"Like the dream of a man beginning to wake publicly,
O Lord! thou renderest their vain show contemptible."

The latter: —

"Like to a dream after one awaketh,
So wilt thou, O Jehovah! when thou risest up,
Destroy their shadowy grandeur."

The original word, צלם *tselem*, for *image*, means *likeness*, corporeal or incorporeal; and it agrees with צל, *tsel*, *a shade*, because an image is, as if the shade or shadow of the body. See Bythner on Psalm 39:6. "It seems to be taken here," says Hammond, "for that which hath a fantastical only in opposition to a real substantial being." "The Hebrew term," says Walford, "means an unsubstantial appearance, splendid while it continues, but which in an instant disappears." The prosperity which wicked men for a time enjoy, their greatness, riches, honor, and happiness, however dazzling and imposing, is thus nothing more than an *image* or *shadow* of prosperity, an empty phantom; and within a short period it ceases to be even so much as a shadow, it absolutely vanishes and comes to nothing, convincing the good but afflicted man, to whom it seemed to involve in doubt the rectitude of the Divine government, what is its real character, and that it should never occasion any perplexity to the student of Divine Providence.

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The LXX. read, ἐν τῃ πόλει σου, "in thy city," deriving the original word from עיר *ir*, *a city* Such, also, is the reading of the Vulgate, Arabic, and Æthiopic versions. But the word comes from עור, *ur*, *to awahe*, and is in the infinitive *hiph* ב, *beth*, excluding ה, *he*, characteristic of the conjugation.

whenever he stretches forth his hand against the wicked, he causes us to see as it were some rays of the break of day, that the darkness, thickening too much, may not lull us asleep, and affect us with dullness of understanding. [681] Some apply this expression, *in awaking,* to the last judgment, [682] as if David intended to say, In this world the wicked abound in riches and power, and this confusion, which is as it were a dark night, will continue until God shall raise the dead. I certainly admit that this is a profitable doctrine; but it is not taught us in this place, the scope of the passage not at all agreeing with such an interpretation. If any prefer reading *in the city — in the city thou wilt make their image to be despised,* — the meaning will be, that when God is pleased to bring into contempt the transitory beauty and vain show of the wicked, it will not be a secret or hidden vengeance, but will be quite manifest and known to all, as if it were done in the public market place of a city. But the word *awaking* suits better, as it is put in opposition to *dreaming.*

Psalm 73:21-24

> **21.** For my heart was in a ferment, and I was pierced in my reins. **22.** And I was foolish and ignorant: I was with thee as a brute beast. **23.** Nevertheless I was continually with thee; thou didst hold my right hand. **24.** Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel; and at length thou shalt take me to [or receive me into] glory.

21. *For my heart was in a ferment.* The Psalmist again returns to the confession which he had previously made, acknowledging that whilst he felt his heart pierced with perverse envy and emulation, he had complained against God, in a peevish or fretful manner. He compares his anger to *leaven.* Some translate, *My heart was steeped in vinegar.* But it is more suitable to explain the verb thus, *My heart was soured* or *swollen,* as dough is swollen by leaven. Thus Plautus, when speaking of a woman inflamed with anger, says that she is all in a ferment. [683] Some read the last clause of the verse, *My reins were pierced;* and they think that א, *aleph,* in the beginning of

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"As *a dream of one who awaketh.* The thought here is, as a pleasing dream vanishes instantly on awaking, so the pleasures of these men will vanish, and show their unsubstantial nature, when God shall effect his righteous judgement." — *Walford.* Then the prosperity of the wicked is seen to be fantastic, and to consist only of "such stuff as dreams are made of."

682

"The Chaldee in their paraphrase refer it to the day of judgment, when wicked men shall rise out of their graves, and God proceed in wrath against them, (דמותהון ברגז תבסר, 'in fury shalt thou scorn or despise them,') according to that expression of Daniel 12:2, 'Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to shame and everlasting contempt.'" — *Hammond*

683

the word, אשתונן, *eshtonan,* the verb for *pierced,* is put instead of ה, *he;* [684] but this makes little difference as to the sense. We know that the word כליות, *kelayoth,* by which the Hebrews denote *the reins,* comes from the verb כלא, *kalah,* which signifies *to desire, to covet earnestly,* this word being put for the reins, because it is said that the desires of man have their seat in that part of the body. David therefore declares that these perplexing and troublesome thoughts had been, as it were, thorns which pierced him. [685] We have already stated how he came to be affected with this pungent and burning vexation of spirit. We will find many worldly men who, although they deny that the world is governed by the Providence of God, yet do not greatly disquiet themselves, but only laugh at the freaks of Fortune. On the other hand, true believers, the more firmly they are persuaded that God is the judge of the world, are the more afflicted when his procedure does not correspond to their wishes.

22. *And I was foolish and ignorant.* David here rebuking himself sharply, as it became him to do, in the first place declares that he was foolish; secondly, he charges himself with ignorance; and, thirdly, he affirms that he resembled the brutes. Had he only acknowledged his ignorance, it might have been asked, Whence this vice or fault of ignorance proceeded? He therefore ascribes it to his own folly; and the more emphatically to express his folly, he compares himself to the lower animals. The amount is, that the perverse envy of which he has spoken arose from ignorance and error, and that the blame of having thus erred was to be imputed wholly to himself, inasmuch as he had lost a sound judgment and understanding, and that not after an ordinary manner, but even the length of being reduced to a state of brutish stupidity. What we have previously stated is undoubtedly true, that men never form a right judgment of the works of God; for when they apply their minds to consider them, all their faculties fail, being inadequate to the task; yet David justly lays the blame of failure upon himself, because, having lost the judgment of a man, he had fallen as it were into the rank of the brute creatures. Whenever we are dissatisfied with the manner of God's providence in governing the world, let us remember that this is to be traced to the perversity of our understanding. The Hebrew word עמך,

Plautus' words are, "Mea uxor tota in fermento jacet;" "My wife lies all in a ferment." In like manner he says, "Ecquid habet acetum in pectore?" "Has he any vinegar in his breast?"

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This is Kimchi's and Houbigant's opinion.

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"The Hebrew verb [for *pierced*] indicates the acute pain felt from a sharp weapon. (See Parkhurst, on שנן, iv.) Common experience shows that the workings of the mind, particularly the passions of joy, grief, and fear, have a very remarkable effect on the reins or kidneys." — *Mant*

immach, which we have translated *with thee,* is here to be taken by way of comparison for *before thee;* as if David had said, — Lord, although I have seemed in this world to be endued with superior judgment and reason, yet in respect of thy celestial wisdom, I have been as one of the lower animals. It is with the highest propriety that he has inserted this particle. To what is it owing, that men are so deceived by their own folly, as we find them to be, if it is not to this, that while they look at each other, they all inwardly flatter themselves? Among the blind, each thinks that he has one eye, in other words, that he excels the rest; or, at least, he pleases himself with the reflection, that his fellows are in no respect superior to himself in wisdom. But when persons come to God, and compare themselves with him, this prevailing error, in which all are fast asleep, can find no place.

23 *Nevertheless I was continually with thee.* [686] Here the Psalmist declares, in a different sense, that he was *with God.* He gives him thanks for having kept him from utterly falling, when he was in so great danger of being precipitated into destruction. The greatness of the favor to which he adverts is the more strikingly manifested from the confession which he made a little before, that he was bereft of judgment, and, as it were, a brute beast; for he richly deserved to be cast off by *God,* when he dared to murmur against him. Men are said to be with God in two ways; either, first, in respect of apprehension and thought, when they are persuaded that they live in his presence, are governed by his hand, and sustained by his power; or, secondly, when God, unperceived by them, puts upon them a bridle, by which, when they go astray, he secretly restrains them, and prevents them from totally apostatising from him. When a man therefore imagines that God exercises no care about him, he is not *with God,* as to his own feeling or apprehension; but still that man, if he is not forsaken, abides with God, inasmuch as God's secret or hidden grace continues with him. In short, God is always near his chosen ones; for although they sometimes turn their backs upon him, he nevertheless has always his fatherly eye turned towards them. When the Psalmist speaks of God as *holding him by the right hand,* he means that he was, by the wonderful power of God, drawn back from that deep gulf into which the reprobate cast themselves. He then ascribes it wholly to the grace of God that he was enabled to restrain himself from breaking forth into open blasphemies, and from hardening himself in error, and that he was also brought to condemn himself of foolishness; — this he ascribes wholly to the grace of God, who stretched out his hand to hold him up, and prevent him from a fall which would have involved him in destruction. From this we see how precious our salvation is in the sight of God; for when we wander far from him, he yet continues to look upon us with a watchful

686 "Notwithstanding these foolish thoughts, I am under the care of thy good providence." — *Patrick.*

eye, and to stretch forth his hand to bring us to himself. We must indeed beware of perverting this doctrine by making it a pretext for slothfulness; but experience nevertheless teaches us, that when we are sunk in drowsiness and insensibility, God exercises a care about us, and that even when we are fugitives and wanderers from him, he is still near us. The force of the metaphor contained in the language, which represents God as *holding us by the right hand,* is to be particularly noticed; for there is no temptation, let it be never so slight, which would not easily overthrow us, were we not upheld and sustained by the power of God. The reason then why we do not succumb, even in the severest conflicts, is nothing else than because we receive the aid of the Holy Spirit. He does not indeed always put forth his power in us in an evident and striking manner, (for he often perfects it in our weakness;) but it is enough that he succours us, although we may be ignorant and unconscious of it, that he upholds us when we stumble, and even lifts us up when we have fallen.

24. *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel.* As the verbs are put in the future tense, the natural meaning, in my opinion, is, that the Psalmist assured himself that the Lord, since by his leading he had now brought him back into the right way, would continue henceforth to guide him, until at length he received him into His glorious presence in heaven. We know that it is David's usual way, when he gives thanks to God, to look forward with confidence to the future. Accordingly, after having acknowledged his own infirmities, he celebrated the grace of God, the aid and comfort of which he had experienced; and now he cherishes the hope that the Divine assistance will continue hereafter to be extended to him. *Guidance by counsel* is put first. Although the foolish and inconsiderate are sometimes very successful in their affairs, (for God remedies our faults and errors, and turns to a prosperous and happy issue things which we had entered upon amiss;) yet the way in which God ordinarily and more abundantly blesses his own people is by giving them wisdom: and we should ask him especially to govern us by the Spirit of counsel and of judgment. Whoever dares, in a spirit of confident reliance on his own wisdom, to engage in any undertaking, will inevitably be involved in confusion and shame for his presumption, since he arrogates to himself what is peculiar to God alone. If David needed to have God for his guide, how much more need have we of being under the Divine guidance? *To counsel* there is added *glory,* which, I think, ought not to be limited to eternal life, as some are inclined to do. It comprehends the whole course of our happiness from the commencement, which is seen here upon earth, even to the consummation which we expect to realize in heaven. David then assures himself of eternal glory, through the free and unmerited favor of God, and yet he does not exclude the blessings which God bestows upon his people here below, with the view of affording them, even in this life, some foretaste of that felicity.

Psalm 73:25-28

> **25.** Who is there to me in heaven? [687] And I have desired none other with thee [688] upon the earth. **26.** My flesh and my heart have failed: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. **27.** For, lo: they who depart from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all those who go a whoring from thee. [689] **28.** As for me, it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord Jehovah, that I may recount all thy works. [690]

25. *Whom have I in heaven but thee?* The Psalmist shows more distinctly how much he had profited in the sanctuary of God; for being satisfied with him alone, he rejects every other object, except God, which presented itself to him. The form of expression which he employs, when he joins together an interrogation and an affirmation, is quite common in the Hebrew tongue, although harsh in other languages. As to the meaning, there is no ambiguity. David declares that he desires nothing, either in heaven or in earth, except God alone, and that without God, all other objects which usually draw the hearts of men towards them were unattractive to him. And, undoubtedly, God then obtains from us the glory to which he is entitled, when, instead of being carried first to one object, and then to another, we hold exclusively by him, being satisfied with him alone. If we give the smallest portion of our affections to the creatures, we in so far defraud God of the honor which belongs to him. And yet nothing has been more common in all ages than this sacrilege, and it prevails too much at the present day. How small is the number of those who keep their affections fixed on God alone! We see how superstition joins to him many others as rivals for our affections. While the Papists admit in word that all things depend upon God, they are, nevertheless, constantly seeking to obtain help from this and the other quarter independent of him. Others, puffed up with pride, have the effrontery to associate either themselves or other men with God. On this

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Calvin here gives the literal rendering of the original Hebrew. The question appears elliptical; and accordingly, in the French version he has introduced the supplement, "si non toy?" "but thee?" — "Who is there to me in heaven but thee?"

688

"C'est, outre toy." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, beyond or besides thee."

689

"Ascavoir, en te delaissant." — *Fr. marg.* "Namely, in forsaking thee."

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The Septuagint here adds, ἐυ ταῖς πύλαις της θυγατρὸς Σιών; "in the gates of the daughter of Zion." The Vulgate, Arabic, and Æthiopic versions have the same addition. This seems to make a better conclusion; but these words are not in our present copies of the Hebrew Bible, nor are they supported by any of the MSS. yet collated.

account we ought the more carefully to attend to this doctrine, That it is unlawful for us to desire any other object besides God. By the words *heaven and earth* the Psalmist denotes every conceivable object; but, at the same time, he seems purposely to point to these two in particular. In saying that he sought none in heaven but God only, he rejects and renounces all the false gods with which, through the common error and folly of mankind, heaven has been filled. When he affirms that he desires none on the earth besides God, he has, I suppose, a reference to the deceits and illusions with which almost the whole world is intoxicated; for those who are not beguiled by the former artifice of Satan, so as to be led to fabricate for themselves false gods, either deceive themselves by arrogance when confiding in their own skill, or strength, or prudence, they usurp the prerogatives which belong to God alone; or else trepan themselves with deceitful allurements when they rely upon the favor of men, or confide in their own riches and other helps which they possess. If, then, we would seek God aright, we must beware of going astray into various by-paths, and divested of all superstition and pride, must betake ourselves directly and exclusively to Him. This is the only way of seeking him. The expression, *I have desired none other with thee,* amounts to this: I know that thou by thyself, apart from every other object, art sufficient, yea, more than sufficient for me, and therefore I do not suffer myself to be carried away after a variety of desires, but rest in and am fully contented with thee. In short, that we may be satisfied with God alone, it is of importance for us to know the plenitude of the blessings which he offers for our acceptance.

26. *My flesh and my heart have failed.* Some understand the first part of the verse as meaning that David's heart and flesh failed him through the ardent desire with which he was actuated; and they think that by it he intends to testify the earnestness with which he applied his mind to God. We meet with a similar form of expression elsewhere; but the clause immediately succeeding, *God is the strength of my heart,* seems to require that it should be explained differently. I am rather disposed to think that there is here a contrast between the *failing* which David felt in himself and the *strength* with which he was divinely supplied; as if he had said, Separated from God I am nothing, and all that I attempt to do ends in nothing; but when I come to him, I find an abundant supply of strength. It is highly necessary for us to consider what we are without God; for no man will cast himself wholly upon God, but he who feels himself in a fainting condition, and who despairs of the sufficiency of his own powers. We will seek nothing from God but what we are conscious of wanting in ourselves. Indeed, all men confess this, and the greater part think that all which is necessary is that God should aid our infirmities, or afford us succor when we have not the means of adequately relieving ourselves. But the confession of David is far more ample than this when he lays, so to speak, his own nothingness before God. He, therefore, very properly adds, that *God is his portion.* The portion of an individual

is a figurative expression, employed in Scripture to denote the condition or lot with which every man is contented. Accordingly, the reason why God is represented as a portion is, because he alone is abundantly sufficient for us, and because in him the perfection of our happiness consists. Whence it follows, that we are chargeable with ingratitude, if we turn away our minds from him and fix them on any other object, as has been stated in Psalm 16:4, where David explains more clearly the import of the metaphor. Some foolishly assert that God is called our *portion,* because our soul is taken from him. I know not how such a silly conceit has found its way into their brains; for it is as far from David's meaning as heaven is from the earth, and it involves in it the wild notion of the Manicheans, with which Servetus was bewitched. But it generally happens that men who are not exercised in the Scriptures, nor imbued with sound theology, although well acquainted with the Hebrew language, yet err and fall into mistakes even in first principles. Under the word *heart* the Psalmist comprehends the whole soul. He does not, however, mean, when he speaks of *the heart failing,* that the essence or substance of the soul fails, but that all the powers which God in his goodness has bestowed upon it, and the use of which it retains only so long as he pleases, fall into decay.

27. *For, lo! they who depart from thee shall perish.* Here he proves, by an argument taken from things contrary, that nothing was better for him than simply to repose himself upon God alone; for no sooner does any one depart from God than he inevitably falls into the most dreadful destruction. All depart from him who divide and scatter their hope among a variety of objects. The phrase *to go a whoring* [691] is of similar import; for it is the worst kind of adultery to divide our heart that it may not continue fixed exclusively upon God. This will be more easily understood by defining the spiritual chastity of our minds, which consists in faith, in calling upon God, in integrity of heart, and in obedience to the Word. Whoever then submits not himself to the Word of God, that feeling him to be the sole author of all good things, he may depend upon him, surrender himself to be governed by him, betake himself to him at all times, and devote to him all his affections, such a person is like an adulterous woman who leaves her own husband, and prostitutes herself to strangers. David's language then is equivalent to his pronouncing all apostates who revolt from God to be adulterers.

28. *As for me, it is good for me to draw near to God.* Literally the reading is, *And I, etc.* David speaking expressly of himself, affirms that although he should see all mankind in a state of estrangement from God, and wandering after the ever-changing errors and superstitions of the world,

691 "*Go a whoring, etc.*; *i.e.*, forsake God for false gods, which is spiritual adultery." — *Sutcliffe.* When God is said *to have destroyed* such as do this, some think there is an allusion to that part of the Mosaic law which doomed idolaters to be punished with death, as guilty of high treason against Jehovah the King of Israel.

he would nevertheless study to continue always in a state of nearness to God. Let others perish, says he, if their headstrong passions cannot be restrained, and they themselves prevented from running after the deceits of the world; but *as for me,* I will continue steadfast in the resolution of maintaining a sacred communion with God. In the subsequent clause he informs us that we draw near to God in a right manner when our confidence continues firmly fixed in him. God will not hold us by his right hand unless we are fully persuaded of the impossibility of our continuing steadfast and safe in any other way than by his grace alone. This passage is worthy of notice, that we may not be carried away by evil examples, to join ourselves to the wicked, and to act as they do, although even the whole world should fall into unbelief; but that we may learn to gather in our affections from other objects, and to confine them exclusively to God. In the close, the Psalmist intimates that after he shall have devoted himself to God alone, he shall never want matter for praising him, since God never disappoints the hope which his people repose in him. From this it follows, that none curse God or murmur against him, but those who wilfully shut their eyes and involve themselves in darkness, lest knowing and observing his providence, they should be induced to give themselves up to his faithfulness and protection.

Psalm 74

PSALM 74

The people of God in this psalm bewail the desolate condition of the Church, which was such that the very name of Israel was almost annihilated. It appears from their humble supplications that they impute to their own sins all the calamities which they endured; but at the same time they lay before God his own covenant by which he adopted the race of Abraham as his peculiar people. Afterwards they call to remembrance how mightily and gloriously he had in the days of old displayed his power in delivering his Church. Encouraging themselves from this consideration, they beseech Him that he would at length come to their aid, and remedy a state of matters so deplorable and desperate.

An instruction of Asaph.

The inscription משכיל, *maskil,* agrees very well with the subject of the psalm; for although it is sometimes applied to subjects of a joyful description, as we have seen in the forty-fifth psalm, yet it generally indicates that the subject treated of is the divine judgments, by which men are compelled to descend into themselves, and to examine their own sins, that they may humble themselves before God. It is easy to gather from the contents of the psalm, that its composition cannot be ascribed to David; for in his time there was no ground for mourning over such a wasted and calamitous condition of the Church as is here depicted. Those who are of a different opinion allege, that David by the spirit of prophecy foretold what had not yet come to pass. But as it is probable that there are many of the psalms which were composed by different authors after the death of David, this psalm, I have no doubt, is one of their number. What calamity is here spoken of,

it is not easy precisely to determine. On this point there are two opinions. Some suppose that the reference is to that period of Jewish history when the city and the temple were destroyed, and when the people were carried away captives to Babylon under king Nebuchadnezzar; [692] and others, that it relates to the period when the temple was profaned, under Antiochus Epiphanes. There is some plausibility in both these opinions. From the fact that the faithful here complain of being now without signs and prophets, the latter opinion would seem the more probable; for it is well known that many prophets flourished when the people were carried into captivity. On the other hand, when it is said a little before that the sanctuaries were burnt to ashes, the carved works destroyed, and that nothing remained entire, these statements do not apply to the cruelty and tyranny of Antiochus. He indeed shamefully polluted the temple, by introducing into it heathen superstitions; but the building itself continued uninjured, and the timber and stones were not at that time consumed with fire. Some maintain that by *sanctuaries* we are to understand *the synagogues* in which the Jews were accustomed to hold their holy assemblies, not only at Jerusalem, but also in the other cities of Judea. It is also a supposable case, that the faithful beholding the awful desecration of the temple by Antiochus, were led from so melancholy a spectacle to carry their thoughts back to the time when it was burnt by the Chaldeans, and that they comprehend the two calamities in one description. Thus the conjecture will be more probable that these complaints belong to the time of Antiochus; [693] for the Church of God was then without prophets. If, however, any would rather refer it to the Babylonish captivity, it will be an easy matter to solve this difficulty; for although Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, were then alive, yet we know that they were silent for a time, as if they had finished the course of their vocation, until at length Daniel, a little before the day of their deliverance, again came forth for the purpose of inspiring the poor exiles with courage to return to their own country. To this

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This is the opinion of Calmet, Poole, Wells, Mant, Walford, and others. "A melancholy occasion," says Mant, "commemorated by an elegy of corresponding tenderness and plaintiveness. It would be difficult to name a finer specimen of elegiac poetry than this pathetic psalm of Asaph." If it was composed during the Babylonish captivity, and if Asaph, whose name is in the title, was the author of it, he must have been a different person from David's contemporary, previously noticed, (volume 2, page 257, note,) — probably a descendant of the same name and family. Dr Gill thinks that he was the Asaph of the time of David, and supposes that under the influence of the spirit of prophecy, he might speak of the sufferings of the Church in after ages, just as David and others testified before-hand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.

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Rosenmüller is of opinion that this is the period referred to. "For my part," says Dr Geddes, "I think it must have been composed during the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes; and the best commentary on it is the first chapter of the first book of Maccabees. The author may have been Mattathias."

the prophet Isaiah seems to have an eye, when he says in the fortieth chapter (Isaiah 40:1) of his prophecies at the beginning, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, will your God say." The verb, which is there in the future tense, shows that the prophets were enjoined to hold their peace for a time.

Psalm 74:1-8

> **1.** O God! why hast thou cast us off for ever? why doth thy anger smoke against the flock of thy pastures? **2.** Remember thy congregation, which thou hast possessed of old, the rod of thy inheritance which thou hast redeemed, this mount Zion on which thou hast dwelt. **3.** Lift up thy strokes to destroy for ever every enemy that worketh mischief to thy sanctuary. **4.** Thy adversaries have roared [694] in the midst of thy sanctuaries; they have set up their signs for signs. **5.** He who lifted up the axes upon the thick trees was renowned as doing an excellent work. **6.** And now they break in pieces the carved work thereof with axes and hammers together. **7.** They have set on fire thy sanctuaries; they have polluted the dwelling-place of thy name, levelling it with the ground. **8.** They have said in their heart, Let us destroy them all together: they have burned all the tabernacles of God in the land.

1. *O God! why hast thou east us off for ever?* If this complaint was written when the people were captives in Babylon, although Jeremiah had assigned the 70th year of their captivity as the period of their deliverance, it is not wonderful that waiting so long was to them a very bitter affliction, that they daily groaned under it, and that so protracted a period seemed to them like an eternity. As to those who were persecuted by the cruelty of Antiochus, they might, not without reason, complain of the wrath of God being perpetual, from their want of information as to any definite time when this persecution would terminate; and especially when they saw the cruelty of their enemies daily increasing without any hope of relief, and that their condition was constantly proceeding from bad to worse. Having been before this greatly reduced by the many disastrous wars, which their neighbors one after another had waged against them, they were now brought almost to the brink of utter destruction. It is to be observed, that the faithful, when persecuted by the heathen nations, lifted up their eyes to God, as if all the evils which they suffered had been inflicted by his hand alone. They were convinced, that had not God been angry with them, the heathen nations would not have been permitted to take such license in injuring them. Being persuaded, then, that they were not encountering merely the opposition of flesh and blood, but that they were afflicted by the just judgment of God, they direct their thoughts to the true cause of all their calamities, which

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"Ont rugi comme lions." — *Fr.* "Have roared like lions."

was, that God, under whose favor they had formerly lived prosperous and happy, had cast them off, and deigned no longer to account them as his flock. The verb זנה, *zanach,* signifies *to reject* and *detest,* and sometimes also *to withdraw one's self to a distance.* It is of no great moment in which of these senses it is here taken. We may consider the amount of what is stated as simply this, that whenever we are visited with adversities, these are not the arrows of fortune thrown against us at a venture, but the scourges or rods of God which, in his secret and mysterious providence, he prepares and makes use of for chastising our sins. *Casting off* and *anger* must here be referred to the apprehension or judgment of the flesh. Properly speaking, God is not angry with his elect, whose diseases he cures by afflictions as it were by medicines; but as the chastisements which we experience powerfully tend to produce in our minds apprehensions of his wrath, the Holy Spirit, by the word *anger,* admonishes the faithful to acknowledge their guilt in the presence of infinite purity. When, therefore, God executes his vengeance upon us, it is our duty seriously to reflect on what we have deserved, and to consider, that although He is not subject to the emotions of anger, yet it is not owing to us, who have grievously offended him by our sins, that his anger is not kindled against us. Moreover, his people, as a plea for obtaining mercy, flee to the remembrance of the covenant by which they were adopted to be his children. In calling themselves *the flock of God's pastures,* they magnify his free choice of them by which they were separated from the Gentiles. This they express more plainly in the following verse.

2. *Remember thy congregation, which thou hast possessed of old.* [695] Here they boast of having been the peculiar people of God, not on account of any merit of their own, but by the grace of adoption. They boast in like manner of their antiquity, — that they are not subjects who have come under the government of God only within a few months ago, but such as had fallen to him by right of inheritance. The longer the period during which he had continued his love towards the seed of Abraham, the more fully was their faith confirmed. They declare, therefore, that they had been God's people from the beginning, that is, ever since he had entered into an inviolable covenant with Abraham. There is also added the redemption by which the adoption was ratified; for God did not only signify by word, but also showed by deed at the time when this redemption was effected, that he was their King and Protector. These benefits which they had received from God they set before themselves as an encouragement to their trusting in him, and they recount them before him, the benefactor who bestowed them, as an argument with him not to forsake the work of his own hands.

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Archbishop Secker thinks that this verse may be read thus: "Remember thy congregation, which thou hast purchased, hast redeemed of old; the tribe of thine inheritance; this mount Zion," etc.

Inspired with confidence by the same benefits, they call themselves *the rod of his inheritance;* that is to say, the heritage which he had measured out for himself. The allusion is to the custom which then prevailed of measuring or marking out the boundaries of grounds with poles as with cords or lines. Some would rather translate the word שבט, *shebet,* which we have rendered *rod,* by *tribe;* but I prefer the other translation, taking the meaning to be, that God separated Israel from the other nations to be his own proper ground, by the secret pre-ordination which originated in his own good pleasure, as by a measuring rod. In the last place, the temple in which God had promised to dwell is mentioned; not that his essence was enclosed in that place, — an observation which has already been frequently made, — but because his people experienced that there he was near at hand, and present with them by his power and grace. We now clearly perceive whence the people derived confidence in prayer; it was from God's free election and promises, and from the sacred worship which had been set up among them.

3. *Lift up thy strokes.* Here the people of God, on the other hand, beseech him to inflict a deadly wound upon their enemies, corresponding to the cruelty with which they had raged against his sanctuary. They would intimate, that a moderate degree of punishment was not sufficient for such impious and sacrilegious fury; and that, therefore, those who had shown themselves such violent enemies of the temple and of the worshippers of God should be completely destroyed, their impiety being altogether desperate. As the Holy Spirit has dictated this form of prayer, we may infer from it, in the first place, the infinite love which God bears towards us, when he is pleased to punish so severely the wrongs inflicted upon us; and, in the second place, the high estimation in which he holds the worship yielded to his Divine majesty, when he pursues with such rigour those who have violated it. With respect to the words, some translate פעמים, *pheamim,* which we have rendered *strokes,* by *feet* or *steps,* [696] and understand the Church as praying that the Lord would lift up his feet, and run swiftly to strike her enemies. Others translate it *hammers,* [697] which suits very well. I have, however, no

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"That פעמים means *feet* or *steps* is evident from Psalms 17:5 57:6; and 58:10 *Lift up thy feet*, advance not slowly or by stealth, but with large and stately steps, full in the view of all; come to thy sanctuary, so long suffered to lie waste; examine what has been done there, and let thy grace and aid, hitherto so much withheld, be extended to us." — *Gejer To lift up the feet* is a Hebraism for "to put one's self in motion;" "to set out on a journey," as may be learned from Genesis 29:1, where of Jacob it is said, "He lifted up his feet, and went into the east country." Lifting up the feet is used for going, in the same way as opening the mouth is for speaking.

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"There is another notion of פעם, for a *mallet* or *hammer*, Isaiah 41:7 and Kimchi would have that to be the meaning here,פעם הורם, 'lift up thy mallet,' in opposition to the 'axes and hammers,' verse 6; and thus also Abu Walid, 'lift up thy dashing instruments.' And the LXX., who read, ἔπαρον τάς χεῖρας, 'lift up thy hands,' come near this." — *Hammond*

hesitation in following the opinion of those who consider the reference to be to the act of striking, and that the strokes themselves are denoted. The last clause of the verse is explained by some as meaning that the enemy had corrupted all things in the sanctuary. [698] But as this construction is not to be found elsewhere, I would not depart from the received and approved reading.

4. *Thy adversaries have roared in the midst of thy sanctuaries.* Here the people of God compare their enemies to lions, (Amos 3:8,) to point out the cruelty which they exercised even in the very sanctuaries of God. [699] In this passage we are to understand the temple of Jerusalem as spoken of rather than the Jewish synagogues; nor is it any objection to this interpretation that the temple is here called in the plural number *sanctuaries,* as is frequently the case in other places, it being so called because it was divided into three parts. If any, however, think it preferable to consider synagogues as intended, I would not dispute the point. Yea, without any impropriety, it may be extended to the whole land, which God had consecrated to himself. But the language is much more emphatic when we consider the temple as meant. It thus intimates, that the rage of the enemy was so unbounded and indiscriminate that they did not even spare the temple of God. When it is said, *They have set up their signs,* [700] this serves to show their insulting and contemptuous conduct, that in erecting their

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This is the sense put upon the words by some Jewish interpreters. Thus Abu Walid reads, "Lift up thy dashing instruments, because of the utter destructions which the enemy hath made, and because of all the evil that he hath done in *or* on the sanctuary." Aben Ezra has, "because of the perpetual desolations," that is, because of thy inheritance which is laid waste. Piscator takes the same view: "Betake thyself to Jerusalem, that thou mayest see these perpetual desolations which the Babylonians have wrought." In like manner, Gejer, who observes that this sense is preferable to that which considers the words as a prayer, that God would lift up his feet for the perpetual ruin of the enemy, because the Psalmist has been hitherto occupied with a mere description of misery, and has used nothing of the language of imprecation. But the Chaldee has, "Lift up thy goings *or* footsteps, to make desolate the nations for ever;" that is, Come and spread desolation among those enemies who have invaded and so cruelly reduced thy sanctuary to ruins.

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Instead of songs of praise and other acts of devotion, nothing was now heard in the Jewish places of worship but profane vociferation, and the tumultuous noise of a heathen army. This is with great beauty and effect compared to the roaring of a lion.

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Hammond reads, "They set up their ensigns for trophies." The original word both for *ensigns* and *trophies* is אות, *oth* But he observes that it requires here to be differently translated. אות, *oth*, signifies a *sign*, and thence *a military standard* or *ensign* The setting up of this in any place which has been taken by arms, is a token or sign of the victory achieved; and, accordingly, an ensign or standard thus set up becomes *a trophy* To convey, therefore, the distinctive meaning, he contends that it is necessary in this passage to give different renderings to the same word.

standards they proudly triumphed even over God himself. Some explain this of magical divinations, [701] even as Ezekiel testifies, (Ezekiel 21:21, 22,) that Nebuchadnezzar sought counsel from the flight and the voice of birds; but this sense is too restricted. The explanation which I have given may be viewed as very suitable. Whoever entered into the Holy Land knew that the worship of God which flourished there was of a special character, and different from that which was performed in any other part of the world: [702] the temple was a token of the presence of God, and by it he seemed, as if with banners displayed, to hold that people under his authority and dominion. With these symbols, which distinguished the chosen tribes from the heathen nations, the prophet here contrasts the sacrilegious standards which their enemies had brought into the temple. [703] By repeating the word *signs* twice, he means to aggravate the abominable nature of their act; for having thrown down the tokens and ensigns of the true service of God, they set up in their stead strange symbols.

5. *He who lifted up the axe upon the thick trees was renowned.* The prophet again aggravates still more the barbarous and brutal cruelty of the enemies of his countrymen, from the circumstance, that they savagely demolished an edifice which had been built at such vast expense, which was embellished with such beauty and magnificence, and finished with so great labor and art. There is some obscurity in the words; but the sense in which they are almost universally understood is, that when the temple was about to be built, those who cut and prepared the wood required for it were in great reputation and renown. Some take the verb מביא, *mebi,* in an active sense, and explain the words as meaning that the persons spoken of were illustrious and well known, as if they had offered sacrifices to God. *The thickness of the trees* is set in opposition to the polished beams, to show the more clearly with what exquisite art the rough and unwrought timber was brought into a form of the greatest beauty and magnificence. Or the prophet means, what I am inclined to think is the more correct interpretation, that in the thick forests, where there was vast abundance of wood, great care was taken in the selection of the trees, that none might be cut down but

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That is, they understand *signs* to mean such *signs* as diviners or soothsayers were wont to give, by which to foretell things to come. Jarchi, who adopts this interpretation, gives this sense: That the enemies of God's people having completed their conquest according to the auspices or signs of soothsayers, were fully convinced that these signs were real signs; in other words, that the art of divination was true.

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"Qu'il y avoit un service divine special et different de ce qui se faisoit ailleurs." — *Fr.*

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"*Their own symbols they have set for signs.* Profane representations, no doubt, agreeable to their own worship. See 1 Maccabees 1:47." — *Dr Geddes.*

such as were of the very best quality. May it not perhaps be understood in this sense, That in these thick forests the trees to which the axe was to be applied were well known and marked, as being already of great height, and exposed to the view of beholders? Whatever may be as to this, the prophet, there is no doubt, in this verse commends the excellence of the material which was selected with such care, and was so exquisite, that it attracted the gaze and excited the admiration of all who saw it; even as in the following verse, by the *carved* or *graven work* is meant the beauty of the building, which was finished with unequalled art, But now it is declared, that the Chaldeans, with utter recklessness, made havoc with their axes upon this splendid edifice, as if it had been their object to tread under foot the glory of God by destroying so magnificent a structure. [704]

7. *They have set fire to thy sanctuaries.* The Psalmist now complains that the temple was burned, and thus completely razed and destroyed, whereas it was only half demolished by the instruments of war. Many have supposed that the order of the words has been here inverted, [705] not being able to perceive how a suitable meaning could be elicited from them, and therefore would resolve them thus, *They have put fire into thy sanctuaries.* I have, however, no doubt that the sense which I have given, although the accent is against it, is the true and natural one, That the temple was levelled with the ground by being burned. This verse corroborates more fully the statement which I have made, that the temple is called *sanctuaries* in the plural number, because it consisted of three parts, — the innermost sanctuary, the middle sanctuary, and the outer court; for there immediately follows the expression, *The dwelling-place of thy name.* The name of God is here employed to teach us that his essence was not confined to or shut up in the temple, but that he dwelt in it by his power and operation, that the people might there call upon him with the greater confidence.

8. *They have said in their heart, Let us destroy them all together.* To express the more forcibly the atrocious cruelty of the enemies of the Church, the prophet introduces them speaking together, and exciting one another to

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In the English Common Prayer-Book the 5th and 6th verses are translated thus: — "He that hewed timber afore out of the thick trees was known to bring it to an excellent work. But now they break down all the carved work thereof with axes and hammers." Dr Nicholls' paraphrase of this is as follows: "It is well known from the sacred records of our nation to what admirable beauty the skillful hand of the artificers brought the rough cedar trees, which were cut down by the hatchets of Hiram's woodmen in the thick Tyrian forests. But now they tear down all the curious carvings, that cost so much time and exquisite labor, with axes and hammers, and other rude instruments of iron." "This is a clear and consistent sense of the passages" says Mant, "and affords a striking and well imagined contrast."

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The order of the words is this, שלחו באש מקדשך *shilchu baesh mikdashecha*, literally, "They have sent into fire thy sanctuary."

commit devastation without limit or measure. His language implies, that each of them, as if they had not possessed enough of courage to do mischief, stirred up and stimulated his fellow to waste and destroy the whole of God's people, without leaving so much as one of them. In the close of the verse he asserts that all the synagogues were burned. I readily take the Hebrew word מועדים, *moadim,* in the sense of *synagogues,* [706] because he says ALL *the sanctuaries,* and speaks expressly *of the whole land.* It is a frigid explanation which is given by some, that these enemies, upon finding that they could not hurt or do violence to the sanctuary of God in heaven, turned their rage against the material temple or synagogues. The prophet simply complains that they were so intent upon blotting out the name of God, that they left not a single corner on which there was not the mark of the hand of violence. The Hebrew word מועדים, *moadim,* is commonly taken for *the sanctuary;* but when we consider its etymology, it is not inappropriately applied to those places where the holy assemblies were wont to be held, not only for reading and expounding the prophets, but also for calling upon the name of God. The wicked, as if the prophet had said, have done all in their power to extinguish and annihilate the worship of God in Judea.

Psalm 74:9-12

9. We see not our signs: there is no longer a prophet, nor any with us that knoweth how long. **10.** How long, O God! shall the adversary

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It has been objected, that if this psalm was composed at the time of the captivity of the Jews by Nebuchadnezzar, and the desolation of the Holy Land by the Chaldeans, מועדי, *moadey*, cannot signify *synagogues*, because the Jews had no synagogues for public worship or public instruction till after the Babylonish captivity. Accordingly, Dr Prideaux thinks that the Proseuchae are meant. These were courts resembling those in which the people prayed at the tabernacle, and afterwards at the temple, built by those who lived at a distance from Jerusalem, and who were unable at all times to resort thither. They were erected as places in which the Jews might offer up their daily prayers. "They differed," says Prideaux, "from synagogues in several particulars. For, first, In synagogues the prayers were offered up in public forms in common for the whole congregation; but in the Proseuchae they prayed as in the temple, every one apart for himself. Secondly, The synagogues were covered houses; but the Proseuchae were open courts, built in the manner of forums, which were open enclosures. Thirdly, Synagogues were all built within the cities to which they did belong; but the Proseuchae without." — *Connection of the History*, etc., Part 1, Book 6, pages 139-141. Synagogues were afterwards used for the same purpose as the Proseuchae, and hence both come to be designated by the same name. The same author supposes that those places in the cities of the Levites, and the schools of the prophets, whither the people resorted for instruction, having been called, as well as the Proseuchae, אל-מועדי, *moadey-el*, are also here intended. "The word מועדי, *moadey*," says Dr Adam Clarke, "which we translate *synagogues*, may be taken in a more general sense, and mean *any places* where *religious assemblies* were held; and that such places and assemblies did exist long *before* the Babylonish captivity is pretty evident from different parts of Scripture." See 2 Kings 4:23; Ezekiel 33:31; Acts 15:21. All such places were consumed to ashes by the hostile invaders whose ravages are bewailed, it having been their purpose to extinguish for ever the Jewish religion, and, as the most likely means of effecting their object, to destroy every memorial of it.

reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever? **11.** How long wilt thou withdraw thy hand, and thy right hand? in the midst of thy bosom consume them. [707] **12.** But God is my King from the beginning, working deliverances in the midst of the earth.

9. *We see not our signs.* Here the pious Jews show that their calamities were aggravated from the circumstance that they had no consolation by which to alleviate them. It is a powerful means of encouraging the children of God, when he enables them to cherish the hope of his being reconciled to them, by promising, that even in the midst of his wrath he will remember his mercy. Some limit *the signs* here spoken of to the miracles by which God had in the days of old testified, at the very time when he was afflicting his people, that he would, notwithstanding, still continue to be gracious to them. But the faithful rather complain that he had removed from them the tokens of his favor, and had in a manner hidden his face from them. [708] We are overwhelmed with darkness, as if the prophet had said, because thou, O God! dost not make thy face to shine upon us as thou hast been accustomed to do. Thus it is common for us to speak of persons giving us signs either of their love or of their hatred. In short, God's people here complain not only that the time was cloudy and dark, but also that they were enveloped in darkness so thick, that there did not appear so much as a single ray of light. As to be assured by the prophets of future deliverance was one of the chief signs of God's favor, they lament that there is no longer a prophet to foresee the end of their calamities. From this we learn that the office of imparting consolation was committed to the prophets, that they might lift up the hearts which were cast down with sorrow, by inspiring them with the hope of Divine mercy. They were, it is true, heralds and witnesses of the wrath of God to drive the obstinate and rebellious to repentance by threatenings and terrors. But had they merely and without qualification denounced the vengeance of God, their doctrine, which was appointed and intended for the salvation of the people, would have only been the means of their destruction. Accordingly, the foretelling of the issue of calamities while yet hidden in the future, is ascribed to them as a part of their office; for temporary punishments are the fatherly chastisements of God, and the consideration that they are temporary alleviates sorrow; but his continual displeasure causes poor and wretched sinners to sink into utter despair. If, therefore, we also would find matter for patience and consolation, when we

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"We see not any token of thy Divine presence with us." — *Tremellius.*

708

The verb, which is, כלה, *kalleh*, in Pihel conjugation, is from כלה, *kalah*, *consumptus est* In Psalm 59:13, it is twice used, כלה בחמה כלה, *kalleh bechemah kalleh*, "consume *them* in wrath, consume *them*." *Consume*, therefore, appears to be a preferable translation to *pluck*, which is that of our English version.

are under the chastening hand of God, let us learn to fix our eyes on this moderation on the part of God, by which he encourages us to entertain good hope; and from it let us rest assured, that although he is angry, yet he ceases not to be a father. The correction which brings deliverance does not inflict unmitigated grief: the sadness which it produces is mingled with joy. This end all the prophets endeavored to keep in view in the doctrine which they delivered. They, no doubt, often make use of very hard and severe language in their dealings with the people, in order, by inspiring them with terror, to break and subdue their rebellion; but whenever they see men humbled, they immediately address them in words of consolation, which, however, would be no consolation at all, were they not encouraged to hope for future deliverance.

The question may here be asked, whether God, with the view of assuaging the sadness arising from the chastisement, which he inflicted, always determined the number of years and days during which they would last? To this I answer, that although the prophets have not always marked out and defined a fixed time, yet they frequently gave the people assurance that deliverance was near at hand; and, moreover, all of them spoke of the future restoration of the Church. If it is again objected, that the people in their affliction did wrong in not applying to themselves the general promises, which it is certain were the common property of all ages, I answer, that as it was God's usual way to send in every affliction a messenger to announce the tidings of deliverance, the people, when at the present time no prophet appeared to be expressly sent for that purpose, not without cause complain that they were deprived of the signs of the Divine favor which they had been accustomed to enjoy. Until the coming of Christ it was highly necessary that the memory of the promised deliverance should be renewed in every age, to show the people of God that to whatever afflictions they might be subjected, he still continued to care for them, and would afford them succor.

10. *How long, O God! shall the adversary reproach?* Here it is intimated that nothing inflicted upon them greater anguish than when they saw the name of God blasphemed by the ungodly. By this manner of praying, the object of the inspired writer was to kindle in our hearts a zeal for maintaining the Divine glory. We are naturally too delicate and tender for bearing calamities; but it is a decided proof of genuine godliness, when the contumely which is cast upon God grieves and disquiets our minds more than all our own personal sufferings. The poor Jews, there can be no doubt, were assailed with more kinds of reproach than one under a most cruel tyrant, and amongst a barbarous nation. But the prophet, speaking in the person of the whole Church, makes almost no account of the reproaches cast upon the people in comparison of the execrable blasphemies directed against God; according to the statement contained in Psalm 69:9, "The reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." The phrase *for ever* is again added; for when the ungodly continue long unpunished, this has

a hardening effect, and renders them more audacious, especially when the revilings which they pour forth against God seem to pass unnoticed by him. It is, therefore, added immediately after in the 11th verse,

11. *How long wilt thou withdraw thy hand?* It is easy to see what the prophet here intends, and yet interpreters are not agreed as to the words. Some by the word *hand,* in the first part of the verse, understand *the left hand,* to distinguish it from *the right hand,* mentioned in the last clause of the verse. But this is mere trifling; for when he uses the term *right hand,* he simply repeats the same thing according to his usual manner. Some translate the verb כלה, *kalah,* the last word of the verse, by *hinder* or *restrain,* as if the prophet had said, Do thou at length stretch forth thy hand, which has been kept too long in thy bosom. But this is a forced sense, to which they have recourse without any color of reason. Those who translate it *consume* understand *the midst of God's bosom,* as denoting allegorically his temple, [709] an interpretation of which I cannot approve. It will be better to continue the interrogation to the last word in this way: "How long wilt thou withdraw thy hand? Yea, wilt thou withdraw it from the midst of thy bosom? Consume, therefore, these ungodly men who so proudly despise thee." We may also not improperly view the words as a prayer that as God's enemies persuaded themselves that he was slothful and idle, because he did not bestir himself, nor openly lift up his hand; he would cause them to feel that he was perfectly able to destroy them with his nod alone, although he should not move so much as a finger.

12. *But God is my King from the beginning.* In this verse, as we have often seen to be the case in other places, the people of God intermingle meditations with their prayers, thereby to acquire renewed vigor to their faith, and to stir up themselves to greater earnestness in the duty of prayer. We know how difficult it is to rise above all doubts, and boldly to persevere in a free and unrestrained course of prayer. Here, then, the faithful call to remembrance the proofs of God's mercy and working, by which he certified, through a continued series of ages, that he was the King and Protector of the people whom he had chosen. By this example we are taught, that as it is not enough to pray with the lips unless we also pray in faith, we ought always to remember the benefits by which God has given a confirmation of his fatherly love towards us, and should regard them as so many testimonies of his electing love. It is quite clear that the title *King,* which is here applied to *God,* ought not to be restricted merely to his sovereignty. He is addressed by this appellation because he had taken upon him the government of the Jewish people, in order to preserve and maintain them in safety. We have

709

"The Jewish Arab reads, 'Turn not from them thy hand, even thy right hand, but consume them out of the midst of thy house,' giving a note, that the *house of God* is called חיק." — *Hammond*

already stated what is implied in the words, *from the beginning.* By *the midst of the earth* some think that Judea is intended, because it was situated as it were in the midst of the habitable globe. There is no doubt that it is to be understood of a place which stands prominently in view. We find the expression used in this sense in these words which God commanded Moses to speak to Pharaoh,

"And I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there; to the end thou mayest know that I am the Lord in the midst of the earth,"
(Exodus 8:22.)

The simple and natural meaning, therefore, is, that God had wrought in behalf of the chosen people many deliverances, which were as open and manifest as if they had been exhibited on a conspicuous theater.

Psalm 74:13-17

13. Thou hast divided the sea by thy [710] power: thou hast broken the heads of the dragons [711] upon the waters. **14.** Thou hast broken the head [712] of Leviathan [713] in pieces, and hast given him for food to thy people in the wilderness. **15.** Thou hast cleaved [or divided] the fountain and the torrent: thou hast dried up mighty rivers. **16.** The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast ordained [714] the

710

There is here a change of person, and a transition from the narrative form of speech to the apostrophe, which give animation to the composition, and enhances its poetical beauty.

711

The word תנינים, *thanninim*, for *dragons*, is used by the sacred writers somewhat indeterminately, and translators render it variously, as by whales, serpents, dragons, crocodiles, and other sea-monsters. (See Genesis 1:21; Exodus 7:12; Deuteronomy 32:33; and Psalm 148:7.) We cannot now ascertain what particular animal is in each case denoted, and it may very probably be merely a general term equivalent to our word "monster," for any strange and prodigious creature. תנינים, *thanninim*, is here explained by Williams as denoting "sea-monsters or large serpents." "What animal is meant by this name," says Mant, "is not well ascertained. But it seems to have been some aquatic or amphibious creature commonly known in the neighborhood of Egypt, but not the crocodile, as that is noticed under a different name in the following verse." By *the dragons* the Egyptian people may be intended.

712

In the Hebrew it is "the heads."

713

"C'est, le plus grand monstre marin qui soit." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, the greatest sea-monster which exists."

714

"Ou, establi." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, established."

light [715] and the sun. **17.** Thou hast set [or fixed] all the boundaries of the earth: thou hast made the summer and the winter.

13. *Thou hast divided the sea by thy power.* The prophet now collects together certain kinds of deliverances highly worthy of remembrance; all of them, however, belonging to the first deliverance by which God emancipated his people from the tyranny of Egypt. We will find him afterwards descending to the general commendation of the goodness of God which is diffused through the whole world. Thus from the special grace which God vouchsafes to his Church, he passes on to speak of the good-will which he displays towards all mankind. In the first place, he says, *Thou hast divided,* or *cleaved, the sea.* Some think that the following clause is subjoined as an effect of what is stated in the first clause, — God, by drying up the sea, having caused the whales and other great fishes to die. I am, however, of opinion, that it is to be taken metaphorically for Pharaoh and his army; this mode of expression being very common among the prophets, especially when they speak of the Egyptians, whose country was washed by a sea abounding with fish, and divided by the Nile. Pharaoh is, therefore, not improperly termed *Leviathan,* [716] on account of the advantages of the sea possessed by his country, and because, in reigning over that land with great splendor, he might be compared to a whale moving up and down at its ease in the midst

715

מאור, *maor*, here rendered *the light*, from אור, *or*, *to shine*, signifies in general any luminary or receptacle of light; the sun or the moon indiscriminately. See Genesis 1:16. But being here joined with and opposed to the sun, as the night is to the day in the preceding clause, it has been supposed to signify the moon, the luminary of the night, as the sun is that of the day. The Chaldee, the LXX., the Syriac, and Arabic, render it *the moon* The Vulgate has "auroram," "the morning."

716

of the waters of the mighty ocean. [717] As God put forth his power at that time for the deliverance of the people, to assure the Church that he would always be her protector and the guardian of her welfare, the encouragement afforded by this example ought not to be limited exclusively to one age. It is, therefore, with good reason applied to the descendants of that ancient race, that they might improve it as a means of confirming and establishing their faith. The prophet does not here recount all the miracles which God had wrought at the departure of the people from the land of Egypt; but in adverting to some of them, he comprehends by the figure synecdoche, all that Moses has narrated concerning them at greater length. When he says that leviathan was given *for food* to the Israelites, and that even in the wilderness, [718] there is a beautiful allusion to the destruction of Pharaoh and his host. It is as if he had said, that then a bountiful provision of victuals was laid up for the nourishment of the people; for when their enemies were destroyed, the quiet and security which the people in consequence enjoyed served, so to speak, as food to prolong their life. By *the wilderness,* is not meant the

Calvin supposes that the whale is the animal here referred to, and this was the opinion for a long time universally held. But from a comparison of the description given by Job of the Leviathan (Job 41) with what is known of the natural history of the crocodile, there can be little doubt that the crocodile is the Leviathan of Scripture. This is now very generally agreed upon. "Almost all the oldest commentators," says Dr Good, "I may say unconditionally *all* of them concurred in regarding the whale as the animal" intended by the Leviathan. "Beza and Diodati were among the first to interpret it 'the crocodile.' And Bochart has since supported this last rendering with a train of argument, which has nearly overwhelmed all opposition, and has brought almost every commentator over to his opinion." — *Dr Good's New Translation of Job* "With respect to the Leviathan," says Fry, "all are now pretty well agreed that it can apply only to the crocodile, and probably it was nothing but a defective knowledge of the language of the book of Job, or of the natural history of this stupendous animal, which led former commentators to imagine the description applicable to any other." — *Fry's New Translation and Exposition of the Book of Job* This Egyptian animal, the crocodile of the Nile, as we have formerly observed, (p. 38, note,) was anciently employed as a symbol of the Egyptian power, or of their king. Parkhurst remarks that in Scheuchzer's Physica Sacra may be seen a medal with Julius Caesar's head on one side, and on the reverse a crocodile with this inscription, — Ægypte Capta, Egypt Taken. This strengthens the conclusion that the crocodile is the animal intended by the name Leviathan. Both the etymology of the name Leviathan, and to what language it belongs, according to Simonis, are unknown. But according to Gesenius it signifies "properly the twisted animal." It is affirmed by the Arabic lexicographers quoted by Bochart, (*Phaleg* Lib. 1, cap. 15,) that Pharaoh in the Egyptian language signified a crocodile; and if so, there may be some such allusion to his name in this passage, and in Ezekiel 29:3, and 32:2, where the king of Egypt is represented by the same animal, as was made to the name of Draco, when Herodicus (in a sarcasm recorded by Aristotle, *Rhet* Lib. 2, cap. 23) said that his laws, — which were very severe, — were the laws οὐκ ἀνθρώπου ἀλλὰ δράκοντος, non hominis sed draconis. — *Merrick's Annotations* "*The heads* of Leviathan" may denote the princes of Egypt, or the leaders of the Egyptian armies.

717

"Regnoit en grand triomphe, comme la balene se pourmene a sou aise au milieu de ce grande amas d'eaux." — Fr.

718

countries lying on the sea coast, though they are dry and barren, but the deserts at a great distance from the sea. The same subject is prosecuted in the following verse, where it is declared, that *the fountain was cleaved* or *divided,* that is, it was so when God caused a stream of water to gush from the rock to supply the wants of the people. [719] Finally, it is added, that *mighty rivers* [720] *were dried up,* an event which happened when God caused the waters of the Jordan to turn back to make a way for his people to pass over. Some would have the Hebrew word אִיתָן, *ethan,* which signifies *mighty,* to be a proper name, as if the correct translation were *rivers of Ethan;* but this interpretation is altogether without foundation.

16. *The day is thine, the night also is thine.* The prophet now descends to the consideration of the divine benefits which are extended in common to all mankind. Having commenced with the special blessings by which God manifested himself to be the Father of his chosen people, he now aptly declares that God exercises his beneficence towards the whole human family. He teaches us, that it is not by chance that the days and nights succeed

Calvin reads, "thy people in the wilderness." But *thy* has nothing to represent it in the original, which literally is, "to a people, to those of the wilderness." Those who adopt this rendering are not agreed as to what is to be understood by the expression. Some think it means the birds and beasts of prey, who devoured the dead bodies of Pharaoh and the Egyptian army, when cast upon the coast of the Red Sea by the tides. See Exodus 14:30. If such is the meaning, these birds and beasts of prey are called "the people of wilderness," as being its principal inhabitants. That עַם, *am*, *people*, is sometimes to be thus interpreted in Scripture is evident from Proverbs 30:25, 26, where both the *ants* and the *conies* are styled *a people* But as the desert on the coast of which the Egyptians were thrown up was inhabited by tribes of people who lived on fishes — even on those of the largest kind, which they found cast upon the shore by the tides — and were from thence called Ἰχθυοφάγοι, or *fish-eaters*; some interpreters suppose that these are "the people of the wilderness" here mentioned; and that as Pharaoh and his host are represented under the figure of the Leviathan and other monsters of the deep, so these people, in allusion to their common way of living, are figuratively said to have preyed on their dead bodies, by which is understood their enriching themselves with their spoils.

719

"Quand Dieu feit que de la roche saillit un cours d'eau pour la necessite du peuple." — *Fr.*

720

It is *rivers* in the plural, from which it would appear that the Jordan was not the only river which was dried up, to give an easy passage to the Israelites. The Chaldee specifies the Arnon, the Jabbok, and the Jordan, as the rivers here referred to. With respect to the Jordan, see Joshua 3:16. As to the miraculous drying up either of the Arnon or the Jabbok, we have no distinct account in Scripture. But in Numbers 21, after it is mentioned, verse 13, that the Israelites "pitched on the other side of Arnon," it follows, verses 14, 15, "Wherefore, it is said in the book of the wars of the Lord, What he did in the Red Sea, and in the brooks of Arnon, and at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar, and lieth upon the border of Moab." From this it would appear that God wrought at "the brooks of Arnon, and at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar," miracles similar to that which was wrought at the Red Sea, when it was divided to open up a passage for the chosen tribes.

each other in regular succession, but that this order was established by the appointment of God. The secondary cause of these phenomena is added, being that arrangement by which God has invested the sun with the power and office of illuminating the earth; for after having spoken of *the light* he adds *the sun,* as the principal means of communicating it, and, so to speak, the chariot in which it is brought when it comes to show itself to men. [721] As then the incomparable goodness of God towards the human race clearly shines forth in this beautiful arrangement, the prophet justly derives from it an argument for strengthening and establishing his trust in God.

17. *Thou hast fixed* [722] *all the boundaries of the earth.* What is here stated concerning the boundaries or limits assigned to the earth, and concerning the regular and successive recurrence of summer and winter every year, is to the same effect as the preceding verse. It is doubtful whether the prophet means the uttermost ends of the world, or whether he speaks of the particular boundaries by which countries are separate from each other. Although the latter are often disturbed by the violence of men, whose insatiable cupidity and ambition cannot be restrained by any of the lines of demarcation which exist in the world, but are always endeavoring to break through them; [723] yet God manifests his singular goodness in assigning to each nation its own territory upon which to dwell. I am, however, rather of opinion, that the clause is to be understood of those bounds which cannot be confounded at the will of men, and consider the meaning to be, that God has allotted to men as much space of earth as he has seen to be sufficient for them to dwell upon. Farther, the well regulated successions of summer and winter clearly indicate with what care and benignity God has provided for the necessities of the human family. From this, the prophet justly concludes, that nothing is more improbable than that God should neglect to act the part of a father towards his own flock and household.

Psalm 74:18-23

18. Remember this: the adversary hath blasphemed Jehovah: and a worthless people hath done despite to thy name. **19.** Give not to the beast the soul of thy turtle dove: forget not the congregation of thy poor ones for ever. **20.** Have regard to thy covenant: for the

721

"Comme le principal instrument d'icelle, et par maniere de dire, le chariot auquel elle est apportee, quand elle se vient monstrer aux hommes." — *Fr.*

722

The original word implies "to settle, to place steadily in a certain situation or place." See *Parkhurst's Lexicon on* יצב

723

"Entant que leur cupidite et ambition insatiable ne pent estre retenue par quelque separation qu'il y ait, mais tasche tousjours d'enjamber par dessus." — *Fr.*

dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of violence. **21.** Let not him who is oppressed [or afflicted] return ashamed: let the poor and needy one praise thy name. **22.** Arise, O God! Plead thy cause: remember thy reproach, which is done to thee by the foolish man daily. **23.** Forget not the voice of thy adversaries: the tumult of those who rise up against thee ascendeth continually.

18. *Remember this.* The prophet having encouraged the hearts of the godly by magnifying the divine power and goodness, now returns to the prosecution of his prayer. He first complains that the enemies of his people revile God, and yet continue unpunished. When he says, *Remember this,* the manner of expression is emphatic; and the occasion demanded it, for it is not a crime of small magnitude to treat with contumely the sacred name of God. For the sake of contrast, he states that it was a *worthless* or *foolish people* who thus presumed insolently to pour forth their reproaches against God. The Hebrew word נבל, *nabal,* denotes not only *a foolish man,* but also *a wicked and infamous person.* The prophet, therefore, justly describes the despisers of God as people who are vile and worthless.

19. *Give not to the beast the soul of thy turtle dove.* The Hebrew word חית, *chayath,* which we translate *beast,* signifies sometimes *the soul* or *life,* and so some explain it in the second clause of this verse, where it again occurs. But it is here unquestionably to be taken either for *a wild beast* or for a *multitude.* Understood in either of these ways, this form of expression will contain a very apposite comparison between the life of a weak and timorous bird, and a powerful army of men, or a cruel beast. The Church is compared to *a turtle dove* [724] for, although the faithful consisted of a considerable number, yet so far were they from matching their enemies, that, on the contrary,

724

As none of the ancient versions have "turtle dove," and as the reading of the LXX. is, ἐξομολογουμένην σοι, *confessing thee*, it has been thought by some in a high degree probable that the word תורך, *torecha*, *thy turtle dove* in our present Hebrew copies, should be תודך, *todecha*, *confessing thee*; an error which transcribers might easily have committed, by writing ר, *resh*, instead of ד, *daleth* Houbigant, who approves of this opinion, boldly pronounces the other, which represents the people of God under the figure of *a turtle dove*, to be "putidum et aliunde conquisitum." But, says Archbishop Secker, "*Turtle dove*, which Houbigant calls *putidum*, should not be called so, considering that, יונתי, Cant. 2, 14, is the same thing." The passage, as it now stands, agrees with other texts of Scripture which represent the people of God under the image of a bird, Numbers 24:21; Jeremiah 22:23; 48:28. The turtle dove is a defenceless, solitary, timid, and mournful creature, equally destitute of skill and courage to defend itself from the rapacious birds of prey which thirst for its blood. And this gives a very apt and affecting representation of the state of the Church when this psalm was written. She was in a weak, helpless, and sorrowful condition, in danger of being speedily devoured by the inveterate and implacable enemies, who, like birds of prey, were besetting her on all sides, eagerly intent upon her destruction. "With the most plaintive earnestness she pleads her cause with the Almighty, through this and the following verses; continually growing more importunate in her petitions as the danger increases. While speaking, she seems in the last verse to hear the tumultuous clamours of the approaching enemy growing every minute louder as they advance; and we leave the 'turtle dove' without the Divine assistance, ready to sink under the talons of the rapacious eagle." — *Mant*

they were exposed to them as a prey. It is next added, *Forget not the soul or congregation of thy poor ones* The Hebrew word חית, *chayath,* is again employed, and there is an elegance when, on account of its ambiguity, it is used twice in the same verse, but in different senses. I have preferred translating it *congregation,* rather than *soul,* because the passage seems to be a prayer that it would please God to watch over and defend his own small flock from the mighty hosts of their enemies.

20. *Have regard to thy covenant.* That God may be the more inclined to show mercy, the prophet brings to his remembrance the Divine covenant; even as the refuge of the saints, when they have found themselves involved in extreme dangers, has always been to hope for deliverance, because God had promised, in the covenant which he made with them, to be a father to then, From this we learn, that the only firm support on which our prayers can rest is, that God has adopted us to be his people by his free choice. Whence, also, it appears how devilish was the phrensy of that filthy dog Servetus, who was not ashamed to affirm that it is foolish, and gross mockery, to lay before God his own promises when we are engaged in prayer. Farther, the godly Jews again show us how severely they were afflicted, when they declare that violence and oppression were everywhere prevalent; as if all places were the haunts of cut-throats and the dens of robbers. [725] It is said *the dark places of the earth;* for, whenever God seems to hide his face, the wicked imagine that whatever wickedness they may commit, they will find, wherever they may be, hiding-places by which to cover it all.

21. *Let not him who is oppressed return with shame.* The word *return,* as it has a reference to God, is equivalent to the expression, *to go away empty.* The faithful, then, beseech Him that they may not be put to shame by suffering a repulse at his hands. They call themselves *afflicted, poor,* and *needy,* as an argument to obtain the Divine favor and mercy. It is, however, to be observed, that they do not speak insincerely, nor give an exaggerated representation of their distresses, but intimate, that by so many calamities they were brought to such a low condition, that there no longer remained for them any quarter in the world from which they could expect any help. By this example, we are taught that when we are reduced to the greatest

"The Psalmist's expression, *thy turtle dove*, may perhaps be farther illustrated from the custom, ancient and modern, of keeping doves as favourite birds, (see Theocritus, 5. 96; and Virgil, *Eclog.* 3, 5, 68, 69,) and from the care taken to secure them from such animals as are dangerous to them." — *Merrick's Annotations.*

725

"The caves, dens, woods, etc., of the *land*, are full of robbers, cut-throats, and murderers, who are continually destroying thy people; so that the holy seed seems as if it would be entirely cut off, and the *covenant* promise thus rendered void." — *Dr Adam Clarke.* "*For the dark places of the earth*, *i.e.*, the caverns of Judea, *are full of the habitations of violence*, *i.e.*, of men who live by rapine. Some, however, *by the dark places of the earth*, understand the seat of the captivity of the Jews." — *Cresswell.*

extremity, there is a remedy always ready for our misery, in calling upon God.

22. *Arise, O God! plead thy cause.* The pious Jews again supplicate God to ascend into his judgment-seat. He is then said *to arise,* when, after having long exercised forbearance, he shows, in very deed, that he has not forgotten his office as judge. To induce him to undertake this cause the more readily, they call upon him to maintain his own right. Lord, as if they had said, since the matter in hand is what peculiarly concerns thyself; it is not time for thee to remain inactive. They declare, at the same time, how this was, in a special sense, the cause of God. It was so, because the foolish people daily cast reproaches upon him. We may here again translate the word נבל, *nabal, the worthless people,* instead of *the foolish people.* The wickedness charged against the persons spoken of is aggravated from the circumstance, that, not content with reproaching God on one occasion, they continued their derision and mockery without intermission. For this reason, the faithful conclude by invoking God that he would not forget such heaven-daring conduct in men who not only had the audacity to reproach his majesty, but who fiercely and outrageously poured forth their blasphemies against him. They seemed, it is true, to do this indirectly; but, as they despised God, it is asserted that they *rose up against him* with reckless and infatuated presumption, after the manner of the Giants of old, and that their haughtiness was carried to the greatest excess.

Psalm 75

PSALM 75

It affords matter of rejoicing and thanksgiving to the whole Church, to reflect that the world is governed exclusively according to the will of God, and that she herself is sustained by his grace and power alone. Encouraged by this consideration, she triumphs over the proud despisers of God, who, by their infatuated presumption, are driven headlong into all manner of excess.

To the chief musician. Destroy not. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

Psalm 75:1-7

1. We will praise thee, O God! we will praise thee: and [726] thy name is near: they will declare [or recount [727]] thy wondrous works. **2.** When I shall have taken the congregation, [728] I will judge righteously. [729] **3.** The earth is dissolved, and all its inhabitants: I will establish [730] the pillars of it. **4.** I said to the fools, Act not foolishly: and to

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"C'est, car." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, for."

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"*Par ainsi* on racontera." — *Fr.* "*Therefore* they will recount."

728

"Quand j'auray prins assignation." — *Fr.* "When I shall have received the appointment." "Ou, assemble la congregation." — *Fr. marg* "Or, assembled the congregation."

729

"C'est, je remettray les choses en leur estat." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, I will restore things to order."

730

the ungodly, Lift not up the horn. **5.** Lift not up your horn on high; and speak not with a stiff neck. **6.** For exaltations come neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the wilderness. [731] **7.** For God is judge: [732] he bringeth low, and he setteth up.

1. *We will praise thee, O God!* With respect to the inscription of this psalm, I have sufficiently spoken when explaining the 57th psalm. As to the author of it, this is a point, in the determination of which, I am not inclined to give myself much trouble. Whoever he was, whether David or some other prophet, he breaks forth at the very commencement into the language of joy and thanksgiving: *We will praise thee, O God! we will praise thee.* The repetition serves the more forcibly to express his strong affection and his ardent zeal in singing the praises of God. The verbs in the Hebrew are in the past tense; but the subject of the psalm requires that they should be translated into the future; which may be done in perfect consistency with the idiom of the Hebrew language. The inspired writer, however, may declare that God had been praised among his people for the benefits which he had bestowed in the times of old, the design being thereby to induce God to persevere in acting in the same manner, that thus continuing like himself, he might from time to time afford his people new matter for celebrating his praises. The change of the person in the concluding part of the verse has led some interpreters to supply the relative pronoun אשר, *asher, who,* as if the reading were, *O Lord! we will praise thee; and thy name is near to those who declare thy wondrous works* [733] But the prophet, I have no doubt, puts the verb *they will declare,* indefinitely, that is to say, without determining the person; [734] and he has used the copula *and* instead of the causal participle *for,* as is frequently done. His meaning, then, may be brought out very appropriately th We will praise thee, O God! for thy name is near; and, therefore, thy wondrous works shall be declared. He, no doubt, means that the same persons whom he said would celebrate the praise of God, would be

"Mais j'affermiray." — *Fr.* "But I will support or sustain."

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"C'est, du Midi." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, from the South."

732

"C'est, gouverne le monde." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, governs the world."

733

This is the reading adopted by Hammond; but instead of making it out by supplying the pronoun אשר, *asher*, as is done by some, he renders, ספרו, *sipperu*, as a participle plural in the sense of the dative case. "Thy name is near, ספרו, *sipperu*, *to them that declare* thy wondrous works." He supports this view from the Chaldee, and from the translation of the learned Castellio.

734

"C'est a dire, sans determiner personne." — *Fr.*

the publishers of his wonderful works. And, certainly, God, in displaying his power, opens the mouths of his servants to recount his works. In short, the design is to intimate that there is just ground for praising God, who shows himself to be at hand to afford succor to his people. The *name* of God, as is well known, is taken for *his power;* and *his presence,* or *nearness,* is judged of by the assistance which he grants to his people in the time of their need.

2. *When I shall have taken the congregation.* The Hebrew verb יעד, *yaäd,* signifies *to appoint a place* or *day,* and the noun מועד, *moed,* derived from it, which is here used, signifies both *holy assemblies,* or *a congregation of the faithful assembled together in the name of the Lord,* and *festival,* or *appointed solemn days.* As it is certain that God is here introduced as speaking, either of these senses will agree with the scope of the passage. It may be viewed as denoting either that having gathered his people to himself, he will restore to due order matters which were in a state of distraction and confusion, or else that he will make choice of a fit time for exercising his judgment. In abandoning his people for a season to the will of their enemies, he seems to forsake them and to exercise no care about them; so that they are like a flock of sheep which is scattered, and wanders hither and thither without a shepherd. It being his object, then, to convey in these words a promise that he would remedy such a confused state of things, he very properly commences with the gathering together of his Church. If any choose rather to understand the word מועד, *moed,* as referring to *time* [735] God is to be understood as admonishing his people, that it is their bounden duty to exercise patience until he actually show that the proper time is come for correcting vices, since he only has the years and days in his own power, and knows best the fit juncture and moment for performing this work. The interpretation to which I most incline is, That, to determine the end and measure of calamities, and the best season of rising up for the deliverance of his people, — matters, the determination of which men would willingly claim for themselves, — is reserved by God in his own hands, and is entirely subject to his own will. At the same time, I am very well satisfied with the former interpretation, which refers the passage to the gathering together of the Church. Nor ought it to seem absurd or harsh that God is here introduced as returning an answer to the prayers of his people. This graphic representation, by which they are made to speak in the first verse, while he is introduced as speaking in the second, is much more forcible than if the prophet had simply said, that God would at length, and at the determined time, show himself to be the protector of his Church, and gather her together again when she should be scattered and rent in pieces. The amount, in short,

735

The reading adopted by the most eminent critics is, "When I shall have gotten an appointed or fit time or season, I will judge uprightly." This is supported by all the ancient versions.

is, that although God may not succor his own people immediately, yet he never forgets them, but only delays until the fit time arrive, the redress which he has in readiness for them. *To judge righteously,* is just to restore to a better state matters which are embroiled and disordered. Thus Paul says,

"Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels." (2 Thessalonians 1:6, 7)

God, therefore, declares that it is his office to set in order and adjust those things which are in confusion, that, entertaining this expectation, we may be sustained and comforted by means of it in all our afflictions.

3. *The earth is dissolved, and all its inhabitants.* Many commentators are of opinion that these words are properly applicable to Christ, at whose coming it behoved the earth and its inhabitants to be shaken. He reigns, as we know, that he may destroy the old man, and he commences his spiritual kingdom with the destruction of the flesh; but he conducts his administration in such a manner as that afterwards there follows the restoration of the new man. Of the second part of the verse, *I will establish the pillars of it,* they make the same application, explaining it as if Christ had said, As soon as I come into the world, the earth with its inhabitants shall melt and be dissolved; but immediately after I will establish it upon firm and solid foundations; for my elect ones, renewed by my Spirit, shall no longer be like grass or withered flowers, but shall have conferred upon them new and unwonted stability. I do not, however, think that such a refined interpretation ever entered into the mind of the prophet, whose words I consider as simply meaning, that although the earth may be dissolved, God has the props or supports of it in his own hand. This verse is connected with the preceding; for it confirms the truth that God in due time will manifest himself to be an impartial and righteous judge; it being an easy matter for him, although the whole fabric of the world were fallen into ruins, to rebuild it from its decayed materials. At the same time, I have no doubt that there is a reference to the actual state of things in the natural world. The earth occupies the lowest place in the celestial sphere, and yet instead of having foundations on which it is supported, is it not rather suspended in the midst of the air? Besides, since so many waters penetrate and pass through its veins, would it not be dissolved were it not established by the secret power of God? While, however, the prophet alludes to the natural state of the earth, he, nevertheless, rises higher, teaching us, that were the world even in ruins, it is in the power of God to re-establish it.

4. *I said to the fools, Act not foolishly.* [736] After he has set the office of God full in his own view and in the view of the faithful, he now triumphs over all the ungodly, whom he impeaches of madness and blind rage, the effect of their despising God, which leads them to indulge to excess in pride and self-gloriation. This holy boasting to which he gives utterance depends upon the judgment, which in the name of God he denounced to be at hand; for when the people of God expect that he is coming to execute judgment, and are persuaded that he will not long delay his coming, they glory even in the midst of their oppressions. The madness of the wicked may boil over and swell with rage, and pour forth floods to overwhelm them; but it is enough for them to know that their life is protected by the power of God, who can with the most perfect ease humble all pride, and restrain the most daring and presumptuous attempts. The faithful here deride and despise whatever the wicked plot and conspire to execute, and bid them desist from their madness; and in calling upon them to do this, they intimate that they are making all this stir and commotion in vain, resembling madmen, who are drawn hither and thither by their own distempered imaginations. It is to be observed, that the Psalmist represents pride as the cause or mother of all rash and audacious enterprises. The reason why men rush with such recklessness upon unlawful projects most certainly is, that blinded by pride, they form an undue and exaggerated estimate of their own power. This being a malady which is not easily eradicated from the hearts of men, the admonition, *Lift not up your horn on* high [737] is repeated once and again. They are next enjoined *not to speak with a fat or a stiff neck;* by which is meant that they should not speak harshly and injuriously; [738] for it is usual with proud persons to erect the neck and raise the head when they pour

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"Or, Be not mad." The verb is תהולו, *tahollu*, from הלל, *halal*, *he was mad*, *boasting* — *Bythner*

737

Lift not up your horn on high, that is, bear not yourselves insolently, from a false notion of your power, (comp. Amos 6:13.) It has been supposed that the metaphor is taken from the manner in which horned animals carry themselves when they are in an excited state. A practice among the Abyssinians, described by Mr Bruce, has been also adduced as throwing light upon this verse. He observes, that the governors of the provinces in Abyssinia wear a broad fillet round their heads, which is tied behind the head. In the middle of this fillet is a horn, or a conical piece of silver, gilded with gold; and shaped like our candle-extinguishers. This is called *kirn* or *horn*; and is only used in reviews or processions after victory. The way in which they throw back the head when wearing this ornament (lest it should fall forward) gives a *stiffness* to the position of the head; and this seems to explain the language of the Psalmist, when he mentions *speaking with a stiff neck*. Instead of *with a stiff neck*, Parkhurst translates *with a retorted neck*; observing, that "this is a well-known gesture of pride, contempt, or disdain."

738

"*Praefracte*." — *Lat.* "Rigoureusement et outrageusement." — *Fr.*

forth their menaces. Others translate the words, *Speak not stiffly with your neck;* but the other translation is the more correct.

6. *For exaltations come neither from the east nor from the west.* [739] The prophet here furnishes an admirable remedy for correcting pride, when he teaches us that promotion or advancement proceeds not from the earth but from God alone. That which most frequently blinds the eyes of men is, their gazing about on the right hand and on the left, and their gathering together from all quarters riches and other resources, that, strengthened with these, they may be able to gratify their desires and lusts. The prophet, therefore, affirms, that in not rising above the world, they are laboring under a great mistake, since it is God alone who has the power to exalt and to abase. "This," it may be said, "seems to be at variance with common experience, it being the fact, that the majority of men who attain to the highest degrees of honor, owe their elevation either to their own policy and underhand dealing, or to popular favor and partiality, or to other means of an earthly kind. What is brought forward as the reason of this assertion, *God is judge,* seems also to be unsatisfactory." I answer, that although many attain to exalted stations either by unlawful arts, or by the aid of worldly instrumentality, yet that does not happen by chance; such persons being advanced to their elevated position by the secret purpose of God, that forthwith he may scatter them like refuse or chaff. The prophet does not simply attribute *judgment* to God. He also defines what kind of judgment it is, affirming it to consist in this, that, casting down one man and elevating another to dignity, he orders the affairs of the human race as seemeth good in his sight. I have stated that the consideration of this is the means by which haughty spirits are most effectually humbled; for the reason why worldly men have the daring to attempt whatever comes into their minds is, because they conceive of God as shut up in heaven, and think not that they are kept under restraint by his secret providence. In short, they would divest him of all sovereign power, that they might find a free and an unimpeded course for the gratification of their lusts. To teach us then, with all moderation and humility, to remain contented with our own condition, the Psalmist clearly defines in what the judgment of God, or the order which he observes in the government of the world, consists, telling us that it belongs to him alone to exalt or to abase those of mankind whom he pleases.

From this it follows that all those who, spreading the wings of their vanity, aspire after any kind of exaltation, without any regard to or dependence upon God, are chargeable with robbing him as much as in them lies of his prerogative and power. This is very apparent, not only from their frantic

739 "*For promotion*, etc. The meaning is, the fortunes of men are not governed by planetary influences, but by God's overruling Providence. The Eastern nations of the world always were, and are at this day, much addicted to judicial astrology." — *Warner.*

counsels, but also from the blasphemous boastings in which they indulge, saying, Who shall hinder me? What shall withstand me? as if, forsooth! it were not an easy matter for God, with his nod alone, suddenly to cast a thousand obstacles in their way, with which to render ineffectual all their efforts. As worldly men by their fool-hardihood and perverse devices are chargeable with endeavoring to despoil God of his royal dignity, so whenever we are dismayed at their threatenings, we are guilty of wickedly setting limits to the sovereignty and power of God. If, whenever we hear the wind blowing with any degree of violence, [740] we are as much frightened as if we were stricken with a thunderbolt from heaven, such extreme readiness to be thrown into a state of consternation manifestly shows that we do not as yet thoroughly understand the nature of that government which God exercises over the world. We would, no doubt, be ashamed to rob him of the title of judge; yea, there is almost no individual who would not shrink with horror at the thought of so great a blasphemy; and yet, when our natural understanding has extorted from us the confession that he is the judge and the supreme ruler of the world, we conceive of him as holding only a kind of inactive sovereignty, which I know not how to characterise, as if he did not govern mankind by his power and wisdom. But the man who believes it to be an established principle that God disposes of all men as seemeth good in his sight, and shapes to every man his condition in this world, will not stop at earthly means: he will look above and beyond these to God. The improvement which should be made of this doctrine is, that the godly should submit themselves wholly to God, and beware of being lifted up with vain confidence. When they see the impious waxing proud, let them not hesitate to despise their foolish and infatuated presumption. Again, although God has in his own hand sovereign power and authority, so that he can do whatever he pleases, yet he, is styled *judge,* to teach us that he governs the affairs of mankind with the most perfect equity. Whence it follows, that every man who abstains from inflicting injuries and committing deeds of mischief, may, when he is injured and treated unjustly, betake himself to the judgment-seat of God.

Psalm 75:8-10

8. For in the hand of Jehovah there is a cup, and the wine is turbid, [or full of dregs: [741]] it is full of mixture, and he shall pour forth of it: surely they shall wring out the dregs of it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drink of it. **9.** But I will publish for ever, and will

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"Si tost que nous oyons le vent de quelque esmotion." — *Fr.*

741

"Ou, rouge." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, red."

sing praise to the God of Jacob. **10.** And I will break all the horns of the wicked: but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted.

8. *For in the hand of Jehovah there is a cup.* [742] The Psalmist here applies more directly to the use of the godly that judgment of which he has just now spoken. He affirms, that the object for which God reigns is, that no iniquity may remain unpunished; but that when wicked men have broken through all restraint and abandoned themselves to wickedness, he may drag them to deserved punishment. From this we again learn what estimate we ought to form of the providence of God — that we ought to regard it as exercising its control by an ever-present energy over every part of our life. It is therefore asserted that God has in his hand a cup with which to make the wicked drunk. The word חמר, *chamar,* signifies *full of dregs,* and also *red.* As red wine among the Jews was the strongest and sharpest, we may suppose that it is here referred to; and the similitude is very appropriate, which represents God as having in his hand wine of a highly intoxicating character, with which to make the ungodly drunk even to death. It is implied, that the swiftness of divine vengeance is incredible, resembling the rapidity and power with which strong wine penetrates to the brain, and either produces madness or kindles a fever. It is on this account said, that the wine in God's cup is of a red color; as it is said in Proverbs 23:31,

"Look not upon the wine when it is red in the cup."

Nor is it any objection to this that it is described a little after as *full of mixture.* These two things do not ill agree with each other; first, that the wicked are suddenly made drunk with the vengeance of God; and, secondly, that they drink it out even to the dregs, until they perish. Some give a different explanation of the term *mixture,* considering, but without any just ground, the allusion to be to the custom which prevails in warm climates of diluting wine with water. This expression, *it is full of mixture,* was rather added to give additional force to the statement of the prophet; his object being to compare the vehemence and fury of God's wrath to spiced wine. [743] By these figures he intimates that it will be impossible for the ungodly to escape drinking the cup which God will put into their hands, and that they will be compelled to drain it to the last drop.

9. and **10.** *But I will publish for ever.* This conclusion of the psalm evinces the joy which God's people felt from having experienced that He

742

"Here there seems to be an allusion to the *cup of malediction*, as the Jews called that 'mixed cup of wine' and frankincense, which used to be given to condemned criminals before their execution, in order to take away their senses. So the Chaldee Targum paraphrases the passage; 'Because a *cup of malediction* is in the hand of the Lord, and strong wine full of a mixture of bitterness, to take away the understanding of the wicked.'" — *Parkhurst* quoted by Mant.

743

was their deliverer in adversity; for it seems to be their own experience which they engage to publish, and on account of which they resolve to sing praise to God. Whence also they gather, that by the divine aid they will overcome all the power of the reprobate; and that being themselves possessed of righteousness and equity, they will be sufficiently armed for their own preservation and defense. The expression, *the horns of the righteous shall be exalted,* [744] implies, that the children of God, by a blameless and holy life, acquire greater strength, and more effectually protect themselves than if it were their endeavor to advance their own interests by every species of wickedness.

Mixed wine, naturally suggests to us the idea of wine weaker than in its pure state. Accordingly, Green, instead of "full of mixture," translates "unmixed," by which he means wine unmixed with water. He perceived, what is evident at first sight, that wine of the strongest quality is intended, and having apparently no idea of any other mixture than that of water, which would weaken the wine, he took the liberty of rendering the words, מסך מלא, *male mesech*, by "unmixed." The Greeks and Latins, in like manner by "mixed wine," understood wine diluted and weakened with water. But the phrase among the Hebrews generally denotes wine made stronger, by the addition of higher and more powerful ingredients. In the East, wines are much mixed with drugs of a stimulating and intoxicating kind; so that commonly when drawn from the vessels in which they are preserved, they are strained for use. What remains is the thick sediment of the strong and stimulating ingredients with which they had been mixed. This the wicked are doomed to drink. "The introduction of this circumstance," says Mant, "forms a fine climax, and carries the idea of God's indignation to the highest point." Some interpreters have explained the passage as meaning that God would pour out the pure and clear wine for his friends, while he would compel his enemies to drink the dregs. But the reference is entirely to his enemies, who were wholly to exhaust this cup of his fury. This, with the prophets, is a very common image of divine wrath. See volume 2, page 399, note.

744

"By the *horns* of the wicked is signified *pride*; by the horns of the righteous, on the other hand, is meant their power. Basil has remarked, that the horn is more exalted and more solid than any other part of the body to which it belongs; and that, at the same time, it supplies ornament to the head, and is also a weapon of defense. Hence it is put metaphorically both for strength and power, and also for pride." — *Cresswell.* Here it is threatened that the power and honor of the wicked, which had been employed as the instruments of cruel wrong and oppression, would be destroyed, and their pride effectually humbled; while the righteous would be exalted to power and dignity.

Psalm 76

PSALM 76

There is here celebrated the grace and truth of God in having, according to his promise that he would be the protector of the city of Jerusalem, defended it by his wonderful power against enemies, who were renowned for their warlike valor, and well equipped with everything requisite for war. [745]

To the chief musician upon Neginoth. A Psalm of Asaph. A Song.

This psalm, it is probable, was composed after the death of David; and, accordingly, some think that what is here described is that deliverance of the Jews from the Ammonites which took place in the reign of king Jehoshaphat. But I am rather inclined to adopt a different opinion, and to refer the psalm to that deliverance which they obtained from the Assyrians, recorded in 2 Kings 19. The Assyrians, under the conduct of Sennacherib, not only invaded Judea, but also made a violent assault upon the city of Jerusalem, the capital of the kingdom. The result of this is well known. They were compelled to raise the siege by the miraculous interference of God, who in one night destroyed that army with dreadful slaughter by the hand of his angel, (2 Kings 19:35.) [746] Hence the prophet, not inappropriately, affirms that God broke the arrows, the swords, and the shields. The point, however, which is chiefly necessary to be known and attended to is, that the continual care of God in defending the Church, which he has chosen, is here celebrated to encourage the faithful without any doubt or hesitation to glory in his protection.

745

"Et bien equippez de toutes choses requises a la guerre." — *Fr.*

746

Psalm 76:1-6

> **1.** God is known in Judah; his name is great in Israel. **2.** And his tabernacle was in Salem, and his dwelling-place in Zion. **3.** There he broke the arrows of the bow, the shield, and the sword, and the battle. Selah. **4.** Thou art more glorious and terrible than the mountains of prey. **5.** The stout hearted were spoiled, they slept their sleep, [747] and all the men of might have not found their hands. **6.** At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob! the chariot and the horse were cast into a deep sleep.

1. *God is known in Judah.* In the outset, we are taught that it was not by human means that the enemies of Israel were compelled to retire without accomplishing any thing, but by the ever-to-be-remembered aid of Jehovah. Whence came *that knowledge of God and the greatness of his name* which are spoken of, but because He stretched forth his hand in an extraordinary manner, to make it openly manifest that both the chosen people and the city were under his defense and protection? It is therefore asserted, that the glory of God was conspicuously displayed when the enemies of Israel were discomfited by such a miraculous interposition.

2. *And his tabernacle was in Salem* Here the reason is assigned why God, putting the Assyrians to flight, vouchsafed to deliver the city of Jerusalem, and to take it under his protection. The reason is, because he had there chosen for himself a dwelling-place, in which his name was to be called upon. The amount, in short, is, first, that men had no ground to arrogate to themselves any share in the deliverance of the city here portrayed, God having strikingly showed that all the glory was his own, by displaying from heaven his power in the sight of all men; and, secondly, that he was induced to oppose his enemies from no other consideration but that of his free choice of the Jewish nation. God having, by this example, testified that his power is invincible for preserving his Church, it is a call and an encouragement to all the faithful to repose with confidence under his shadow. If his name is precious to himself, it is no ordinary pledge and security which he gives to our faith when he assures us that it is his will that the greatness of his

The inscription prefixed to the psalm in the Septuagint expressly mentions this as the occasion of its composition, Ωδὴ πρὸς τὸν Ασσύριον; "An ode against the Assyrian." If in this the version of the LXX. is correct, and if Asaph, to whom the psalm is ascribed, was the person of that name who lived in the time of David, one of his compositions must have been adopted as suitably descriptive of this remarkable deliverance. He may, however, have been a different person of the same name, and was probably one of his descendants, as has been before observed, (page 159,) who lived in the time of Hezekiah. Bishop Patrick and Calmet are of this last opinion. Those who adopt the former suppose that the original reference of the psalm was to the victory obtained by David over the Philistines in the valley of Rephaim.

747

"N'ont peu trouver leurs mains." — *Fr.* "Have not been able to find their hands."

power should be known in the preservation of his Church. Moreover, as the Church is a distinguished theater on which the Divine glory is displayed, we must always take the greatest care not to shroud or bury in forgetfulness, by our ingratitude, the benefits which have been bestowed upon it, and especially those which ought to be held in remembrance in all ages. Farther, although God is not now worshipped in the visible tabernacle, yet as by Christ he still dwells in the midst of us, yea even within us, we will doubtless experience, whenever we are exposed to danger, that under his protection we are in perfect safety. If the earthly sanctuary of Jerusalem afforded to God's ancient people succor while it stood, we may rest assured that he will have no less care of us who live in the present day, when we consider that he has vouchsafed to choose us as his temples in which he may dwell by his Holy Spirit. Here the prophet, in speaking of Jerusalem, uses merely the name of *Salem,* which was the simple and uncompounded name of the city, and had been applied to it very anciently, as appears from Genesis 14:18. Some think that the name in the course of time assumed its compound form, by having *Jebus* prefixed to *Salem;* for Jebus was the name by which it was afterwards known in the intervening period, as we learn from the Book of Judges, Judges 19:10, it being so called because it was inhabited by the Jebusites. But we will be more correct as to the etymology of the word, if we derive it from the verb יראה, *yereh,* which signifies *will see,* [748] because Abraham said,

"God will look out for himself a lamb for a burnt-offering," (Genesis 22:8.)

3. *There he broke the arrows of the bow.* We have here stated the particular way in which God was known in Judah. He was known by the wonderful proofs of his power, which he exhibited in preserving the city. Under these figures is described the destruction of the enemies of the chosen people. [749] They could not otherwise have been overthrown than by being despoiled of their armor and weapons of war. It is therefore said, that *the arrows, the swords, and the shields, were broken,* yea, all the implements of war; implying that these impious enemies of the Church were deprived of the power of doing harm. The fact indeed is, that they were wounded and slain, while their weapons remained uninjured; but this metonymy, by which what befell themselves is represented as happening to their implements of war, is not improper. Some translate the word רשפים, *reshaphim, points* of weapons! Properly, it should be rendered *fires;* [750] but it is more accurate

748

From ראה, *raäh*, *he saw*, or *beheld*

749

"This seems to allude to the miraculous destruction of the Assyrian army, as recorded in Isaiah 27:36." — *Warner.*

750

to take it for *arrows.* Even birds are sometimes metaphorically so called, on account of their swiftness; and flying is attributed to arrows in Psalm 91:6

It is farther added, (verse 4th,) that *God is more glorious and terrible than the mountains of prey* By *the mountains of prey,* is meant kingdoms distinguished for their violence and extortion. We know that from the beginning, he who exercised himself most in robbery and pillage, was the man who most enlarged his borders and became greatest. The Psalmist, therefore, here compares those great kings, who had acquired large dominions by violence and the shedding of human blood, to savage beasts, who live only upon prey, and their kingdoms to mountains covered with forests, which are inhabited by beasts inured to live by the destruction of other animals. The enemies of God's ancient people had been accustomed to make violent and furious assaults upon Jerusalem; but it is affirmed that God greatly surpassed them all in power that the faithful might not be overwhelmed with terror.

5. *The stout-hearted were spoiled,* The power of God in destroying his enemies is here exalted by another form of expression. The verb אשתוללו, *eshtolelu,* which we translate *were spoiled,* is derived from שלל, *shalal,* and the letter א, *aleph,* is put instead of the letter ה, *he.* [751] Some translate, *were made fools;* [752] but this is too forced. I, however, admit that it is of

"The Hebrew רשף, [here rendered *arrows,*] signifies fire, Job 5:7, where 'sparks that fly upward' are poetically expressed by רשף בני, 'the sons of the fire.' By metaphor it is applies to an 'arrow' or 'dart' shot out of a bow, and, by the swiftness of the motion, supposed to be inflamed. See Cant. 8, 6, where of love it is said, (not the *coals*, but) 'the arrows thereof are arrows of fire,' it shoots, and wounds, and burns a man's heart, inflames it vehemently by wounding it. The poetical expression will best be preserved by retaining some trace of the primary sense in the rendering of it — 'fires or lightnings of the bow,' *i e.*, those hostile weapons which are most furious and formidable, as fire shot out from a bow." — *Hammond* Parkhurst renders "glittering flashing arrows," or rather, "fiery, or fire-bearing arrows;" such as, it is certain, were used in after times in sieges and in battles; the βελη πεπυρωμενα of the Greeks, to which Paul alludes in Ephesians 6:16, and *the phalarica* of the Romans, which Servius (on Virgil, Æn. lib. 9, 5, 705) describes as a dart or javelin with a spherical leaden head, to which combustible matter was attached, which being set on fire, the weapon was darted against the enemy; and when thrown by a powerful hand, it killed those whom it hit, and set fire to buildings. Walford has, "fiery arrows." "The arrows," says he, "are described as fiery, to denote either the rapidity of their motion, or that they were tinged with some poisonous drugs to render them more deadly."

751

The verb is in the praet. hithpahel; and it has א, *aleph*, instead of ה, *he*, according to the Chaldaic language, which changes ה, the Hebrew characteristic of *hiphil* and hithpahel into א

752

As the verb signifies, *has plundered*, *spoiled*; and as it is here in the praet. *hithpahel*, which generally denotes reciprocal action, that is, acting on one's self, it has been here rendered by some, *despoiled themselves* of mind, *were mad*, *furious.* Hammond reads, "The stout-hearted have despoiled or disarmed themselves." The Chaldee paraphrase is, "They have cast away their weapons."

the same import, as if it had been said, that they were deprived of wisdom and courage; but we must adhere to the proper signification of the word. What is added in the second clause is to the same purpose, *All the men of might have not found their hands* [753] that is to say, they were as incapable of fighting as if their hands had been maimed or cut off. In short, their strength, of which they boasted, was utterly overthrown. The words, *they slept their sleep,* [754] refer to the same subject; implying that whereas before they were active and resolute, their hearts now failed them, and they were sunk asleep in sloth and listlessness. The meaning, therefore, is, that the enemies of the chosen people were deprived of that heroic courage of which they boasted, and which inspired them with such audacity; and that, in consequence, neither mind, nor heart, nor hands, none either of their mental or bodily faculties, could perform their office. We are thus taught that all the gifts and power which men seem to possess are in the hand of God, so that he can, at any instant of time, deprive them of the wisdom which he has given them, make their hearts effeminate, render their hands unfit for war, and annihilate their whole strength. It is not without reason that both the courage and power of these enemies are magnified; the design of this being, that the faithful might be led, from the contrast, to extol the power and working of God. The same subject is farther confirmed from the statement, that *the chariot and the horse were cast into a deep sleep at the rebuke of God* [755] This implies, that whatever activity characterised these enemies, it was rendered powerless, simply by the nod of God. Although, therefore, we may be deprived of all created means of help, let us rest contented with the favor of God alone, accounting it all-sufficient, since he has no need of great

753

"מצאו לא ידיהם, may be rendered *have not found their hands*, *i e.*, have not been able to use them for resistance, for the offending others, or even for their own defense." — *Hammond* The Chaldee paraphrase is, "They could not take their weapons in their hands," *i e.*, they could not use their hands to manage their weapons. In the Septuagint, the reading is, εὕρον οὐδὲν ταῖς χερσιν αὐτῶν; "they found nothing with their hands," *i e.*, they were able to do nothing with them: the vast army of Assyrians, the most warlike and victorious then in the world, achieved nothing, but "returned with shame to face to their own land," (2 Chronicles 32:21.)

754

"*They slept their sleep.*" "They slept, but never waked again." — *Hammond.* There may be here a direct allusion to the catastrophe which befell the Assyrian army during the night, when, as they were fast *asleep* in their tents, a hundred and eighty-five thousand of them were at once slain, Isaiah 37:36.

755

The *chariot and horse* may be put poetically for charioteers and horsemen. Chariots formed a most important part of the array in the battles of the ancients. See Judges 4:3. Instead of "both the chariot and the horse," Horsley reads, "both the rider and the horse." "It is not improbable," says he, "that the pestilence in Sennacherib's army might seize the horses as well as the men, although the death of the beasts is not mentioned by the sacred historian."

armies to repel the assaults of the whole world, but is able, by the mere breath of his mouth, to subdue and dissipate all assailants.

Psalm 76:7-12

> **7.** Thou, even thou, art terrible, and who shall stand before thy face when thou art angry? **8.** From heaven thou hast made thy judgment to be heard: the earth was afraid, [756] and was still, **9.** When God arose to judgment, [757] to save all the meek [758] of the earth. Selah. **10.** Surely the wrath of men shall praise thee, and the remainder of wrath thou wilt restrain. **11.** Vow and pay [759] to Jehovah your God: let all those who are round about him bring presents to him who is worthy to be feared, [760] [literally to the terrible one.] **12.** He will cut off the spirit of princes: he is terrible to the kings of the earth.

7. *Thou, even thou, art terrible.* The repetition of the pronoun *Thou,* is intended to exclude all others from what is here predicated of God, as if it had been said, Whatever power there is in the world, it at once vanishes away, and is reduced to nothing, when He comes forth and manifests himself; and, therefore, He alone is terrible. This is confirmed by the comparison added immediately after, which intimates that, although the wicked are so filled with pride as to be ready to burst with it, yet they are unable to abide the look and presence of God. But as he sometimes keeps silence, and seems merely to look on as an idle spectator, it is expressly asserted, that as soon as he begins to be angry, ruin will be near all the wicked. Although they may then for a time not only stand, but also rise above the clouds by their fury, we are here, notwithstanding, admonished that we ought to wait for the time of wrath. Let us also mark that this terror is denounced against the wicked in such a manner as that it sweetly draws all true believers to God.

8. *From heaven thou hast made thy judgment to be heard.* By the name of *heaven,* the Psalmist forcibly intimates that the judgment of God was too manifest to admit of the possibility of its being ascribed either to fortune

756

"*Dont* la terre a eu frayeur." — *Fr.* "*With which* the earth was afraid."

757

"*Pour faire* jugement." — *Fr.* "*To execute* judgment."

758

"Tous les humbles." — *Fr.* "All the humble."

759

"Rendez *vos voeus*." — *Fr.* "Pay *your vows*."

760

"Ou, a cause de la frayeur." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, on account of fear."

or to the policy of men. Sometimes God executes his judgments obscurely, so that they seem to proceed out of the earth. For example, when he raises up a godly and courageous prince, the holy and lawful administration which will flourish under the reign of such a prince will be the judgment of God, but it will not be vividly seen to proceed from heaven. As, therefore, the assistance spoken of was of an extraordinary kind, it is distinguished by special commendation. The same remarks apply to *the hearing of God's judgment,* of which the Psalmist speaks. It is more for the divine judgments to sound aloud like a peal of thunder, and to stun the ears of all men with their noise, than if they were merely seen with the eyes. There is here, I have no doubt, an allusion to those mighty thunder-claps by which men are stricken with fear. [761] When it is said, *the earth was still,* it is properly to be referred to the ungodly, who, being panic-struck, yield the victory to God, and dare no longer to rage as they had been accustomed to do. It is only fear which has the effect of bringing them to subjection; and, accordingly, fear is justly represented as the cause of this stillness. It is not meant that they restrain themselves willingly, but that God compels them whether they will or no. The amount is, that whenever God thunders from heaven, the tumults which the insolence of the ungodly stir up, when things are in a state of confusion, come to an end. We are, at the same time, warned of what men may expect to gain by their rebellion; for, whoever despise the paternal voice of God which is loudly uttered, must be destroyed by the bolts of his wrath.

9. *When God arose to judgment.* The great object which God had in view in executing this judgment is now declared; which was, that he might furnish a proof of his fatherly love towards all his people. He is, therefore, introduced as speaking, not with his mouth, but with his hand, that he may show to all how precious in his sight is the salvation of all who fear and love him. Under the word *arise,* there is a reference to the inactivity and indolency ascribed by wicked men to God, an opinion which had led them to take so much liberty to themselves. God is then said to ascend into his judgment-seat, when he plainly indicates that he exercises a special care over his Church. The design of the passage is to show that it is as impossible for God to forsake the afflicted and innocent, as it is impossible for him to deny himself. It is to be observed that he is termed Judge, because he affords succor to the poor who are unrighteously oppressed. The appellation

761

When an angel of the Lord descended to perform some mighty work with which he had been commissioned, thunders and earthquakes frequently accompanied the execution of his commission; and it is highly probable that both these phenomena accompanied such a stupendous display of power, as that which was afforded by the slaughter of one hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the army of Sennacherib. By *God's judgment being heard*, may accordingly be understood the thunder which was heard; and what follows, "The earth was afraid," may signify the earthquake which then took place.

of *the meek* or *humble of the earth* is applied to the faithful, who, subdued by afflictions, seek not high things, but, with humble groaning, patiently bear the burden of the cross. The best fruit of afflictions is, when thereby we are brought to purge our minds from all arrogance, and to bend them to meekness and modesty. When such is the effect, we may conclude with certainty that we are under the guardianship and protection of God, and that he is ready to extend his aid and favor towards us.

10. *Surely the wrath of men shall praise thee.* Some understand these words as denoting, that after these enemies shall have submitted to God, they will yield to him the praise of the victory; being constrained to acknowledge that they have been subdued by his mighty hand. Others elicit a more refined sense, That when God stirs up the wicked, and impels their fury, he in this way affords a most illustrious display of his own glory; even as he is said to have stirred up the heart of Pharaoh for this very purpose, (Exodus 14:4; Romans 9:17.) Understood in this sense, the text no doubt contains a profitable doctrine, but this being, I am afraid, too refined an explanation, I prefer considering the meaning simply to be, that although at first the rage of the enemies of God and his Church may throw all things into confusion, and, as it were, envelop them in darkness, yet all will at length redound to his praise; for the issue will make it manifest, that, whatever they may contrive and attempt, they cannot in any degree prevail against him. The concluding part of the verse, *The remainder of wrath thou wilt restrain,* may also be interpreted in two ways. As the word חגר, *chagar,* signifies *to gird,* some supply the pronoun *thee,* and give this sense, All the enemies of the Church are not yet overthrown; but thou, O God! wilt gird thyself to destroy those of them who remain. The other interpretation is, however, the more simple., which is, that although these enemies might not cease to breathe forth their cruelty, yet God would effectually restrain them, and prevent them from succeeding in the accomplishment of their enterprises. [762] Perhaps, also, it would not be unsuitable to explain the verb thus, *Thou wilt gather into a bundle,* as we say in French, "*Tu trousseras," i.e., Thou wilt truss* or *pack up.* Let us therefore learn, while the wicked would involve in obscurity and doubt the providence of God, to wait patiently until he glorify himself by bringing about a happier state of things, and trample under foot their infatuated presumption, to their shame and confusion. But if new troubles arise from time to time, let us remember that it is his proper office to restrain the remainder of the wrath of the wicked, that they may not proceed to greater lengths. Meanwhile, let us not be surprised if we observe fresh outrages every now and then springing forth; for, even to the end of the world, Satan will always have partisans or agents, whom he will urge forward to molest the children of God.

11. *Vow and pay to Jehovah your God.* The faithful are now exhorted to the exercise of gratitude. As under the law the custom prevailed

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among the Jews of vowing sacrifices for singular blessings which God had conferred upon them, by which they solemnly acknowledged that their safety depended solely upon him, and that to him they were entirely indebted for it, they are called anew to engage in this exercise of religion; and by the word *pay* it is intended to inculcate steadfastness, — to teach them that they should not make merely a sudden and inconsiderate acknowledgement, but that they should also testify at all times that the remembrance of their deliverance was deeply fixed in their hearts. Their most important business, no doubt, was seriously to reflect with themselves that God was the author of their salvation; but still it is to be observed, that the solemn profession of religion, by which every man stimulates not only himself but also others to the performance of their duty, is far from being superfluous. In the second clause, those addressed seem to be the neighboring nations; as if it had been said, that such a special manifestation of the goodness of God was worthy of being celebrated even by foreign and uncircumcised nations. [763] But it

Hammond's statement of these two interpretations is clear and full. It is as follows: — "What תחגור [which Calvin renders, *thou wilt restrain*] signifies here, is not agreed among the interpreters, the word signifying 1. *to gird*, and, 2. *to restrain* In the notion of *restraining*, it will have a very commodious sense, applied to Sennacherib, to whom this psalm belongs. For, as by the slaughter of the one hundred and eighty-five thousand in his army he was forced to depart, and dwell at Nineveh, 2 Kings 19:36; so, after his return thither, there are some remainders of his wrath on the Jews that dwelt there. We may see it, Tobit 1:18, 'If the king Sennacherib had slain any, when he was come and fled from Judea, I buried them privily, (for in his wrath he killed many,') etc. This was the gleanings of his wrath, and this was 'restrained' by God; for he soon falls by the hands of his sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer, 'as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god,' 2 Kings 19:37. And to this sense Kimchi interprets it, 'Thou shalt so repress the malice of our enemies, that the other nations shall not dare to fight against us;' so likewise Aben Ezra. And thus it must be, if 'the remainder of wrath' be 'man's wrath,' as the former part of the verse inclines it, 'Surely the wrath of man,' etc. But חגר, in the primary notion, signifies *girding* or *putting on*, *arraying oneself* *Girding*, we know, signifies *putting on*, and is applied to garments, ornaments, arms: חגור, 'Gird thy sword upon thy thigh,' Psalm 45:3, and frequently elsewhere; and so 'girding with gladness,' is putting on festival ornaments. And in like manner here, in a poetical phrase, 'Thou shalt gird on the remainder of wrath,' parallel to 'putting on the garments of vengeance for clothing,' Isaiah 59:17, will signify God's adorning and setting out himself by the exercise of his *vengeance*, vulgarly expressed by his *wrath*, and the word חמת, *wrath*, most fitly used with reference on חמת, the *wrath of man*, in the beginning of the verse. *Man's* wrath is the violence, and rage, and blasphemy of the oppressor, upon the *meek* or poor man foregoing. This begins, goes foremost, in provoking God; and then שארית, *the remnant*, or second part *of wrath*, is still behind for God; and with that he *girds* himself, *i e.*, sets himself out illustriously and dreadfully, as with an ornament, and as with an hostile preparation in the eyes of men. And so in this sense also it is agreeable to the context... In either sense, the parts of this verse are perfectly answerable the one to the other. To this latter rendering of תחגור, the Chaldee inclines us, paraphrasing it by, 'Thou hast girded on, *or* prepared, *or* made ready, the remainder of fury, (meaning by God's fury,) for the destroying of the nations.'"

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This is Kimchi's interpretation: He understands by "those round about God," the nations near the land of Israel, and so near God.

appears to me, that the sense most agreeable to the context is, that these words are addressed either to the Levites or to all the posterity of Abraham, both of whom are not improperly said *to be round about God,* both because the tabernacle was pitched in the midst of the camp so long as the Israelites traveled in the wilderness, and also because the resting-place assigned for the ark was mount Zion, whither the people were accustomed to resort from all the surrounding parts of the country. And the Levites had intrusted to them the charge of the temple, and were appointed to keep watch and ward round about it. The word למורא*, lammora,* is referred to God by the majority of interpreters, and they translate it *terrible.* The term *fear* is, however, sometimes taken in a passive sense for God himself. [764] If it is applied to the Gentiles and to irreligious men, [765] the sense will be, that they shall be tributaries to God; because, being stricken with fear, they shall no longer dare to offer him any resistance. But it is more probable that this word has a reference to God, whom the prophet justly declares to be worthy of being feared, after having given such a remarkable proof of his power.

12. *He will cut off* [766] *the spirit of princes.* As the Hebrew word בצר, *batsar,* occasionally signifies *to strengthen,* some think it should be so translated in this passage. But as in the two clauses of the verse the same sentiment is repeated, I have no doubt that by the first clause is meant that understanding and wisdom are taken away from princes; and that by the second, God is represented in general as terrible to them, because he will cast them down headlong from their loftiness. As the first thing necessary to conduct an enterprise to a prosperous issue is to possess sound foresight, in which the people of God are often deficient from the great perplexity in which they are involved in the midst of their distresses, while, on the other hand, the ungodly are too sharp-sighted in their crafty schemes; it is here declared that it is in the power of God to deprive of understanding, and to inflict blindness on those who seem to surpass others in acuteness and ingenuity. The majority of princes being enemies to the Church of God, it is expressly affirmed, that He is sufficiently terrible to subdue all the kings of the earth. When it is said, that *their spirit is cut off,* or taken away from them, it is to be limited to tyrants and robbers whom God

764

In this sense it is employed in Genesis 31:53, "And Jacob sware by the Fear of his father Isaac."

765

If it is thus applied, the reading will be, "Let all those who are round about him bring presents on account of fear."

766

The word employed by Calvin is "Vindemiabit," which expresses the precise idea of the original verb, יבצור, *yebtstor* It is from בצר, *he cut off, brake off*, referring properly to grapes and other fruits. The reading of the LXX. is, "takes away."

infatuates, because he sees that they apply all their ingenuity and counsels to do mischief.

Psalm 77

PSALM 77

Whoever was the penman of this psalm, the Holy Spirit seems, by his mouth, to have dictated a common form of prayer for the Church in her afflictions, that even under the most cruel persecutions the faithful might not fail to address their prayers to heaven. It is not the private grief of some particular individual which is here expressed, but the lamentations and groanings of the chosen people. The faithful celebrate the deliverance which had been once wrought for them, and which was a testimony of God's everlasting grace, to animate and strengthen themselves to engage in the exercise of prayer with the greater earnestness.

To the chief musician upon Jeduthun. A Psalm of Asaph.

> Psalm 77:1-6
>
> **1.** My voice came to God, and I cried: my voice came to God, and he heard me. **2.** I sought the: Lord in the day of my trouble: my hand was stretched out in the night, and remitted not my soul refused to be comforted. **3.** I will remember God, and will be troubled: I will meditate, and my spirit will be oppressed [or overwhelmed] with sorrow. Selah. **4.** Thou hast held the watches of my eyes: I am troubled, and will not speak. **5.** I have recounted the days of old, the years of ancient times. **6.** I will call to remembrance my song in the night: I will commune with my heart, and my spirit will search diligently.

1. *My voice came to God, and I cried.* This is not a mere complaint, as some interpreters explain it, denoting the surprise which the people of

God felt in finding that he who hitherto had been accustomed to grant their requests shut his ears to them, and was called upon in vain. It appears more probable that the prophet either speaks of the present feeling of his mind, or else calls to remembrance how he had experienced that God was inclined and ready to hear his prayers. There can be no doubt that he describes the greatness of the sorrow with which he was afflicted; and, in nay opinion, he denotes a continued act both by the past and the future tenses of the verbs. In the first place, he declares that he did not foolishly rend the air with his cries, like many who pour forth bitter cries without measure and at random under their sorrows; but that he addressed his speech to God when necessity constrained him to cry. The copula *and,* which is joined to the verb *cried,* should be resolved into the adverb of time *when,* in this way, *When I cried my voice came to God* At the same time, he also shows, that although he had been constrained often to reiterate his cries, he had not given over persevering in prayer. What is added immediately after is intended for the confirmation of his faith: *And he heard me.* The copula *and,* as in many other places, is here put instead of the causal adverb *for.* The meaning is, that he encouraged himself to cry to God, from the consideration that it was God's usual manner to show his favor and mercy towards him.

2. *I sought the Lord in the day of my trouble.* In this verse he expresses more distinctly the grievous and hard oppression to which the Church was at that time subjected. There is, however, some ambiguity in the words. The Hebrew word יד, *yad,* which I have translated *hand,* is sometimes taken metaphorically for *a wound;* and, therefore, many interpreters elicit this sense, *My wound ran in the night, and ceased not,* [767] that is to say, My wound was not so purified from ulcerous matter as that the running from it was made to stop. But; I rather take the word in its ordinary signification, which is *hand,* because the verb נגרה, *niggera,* which he uses, signifies not only to run as a sore does, but also to be stretched forth or extended. [768] Now, when he affirms that he sought the Lord in the day of his trouble, and that his hands were stretched out to him in the night season, this denotes

767

This is the rendering in our English Bible, which Dr Adam Clarke pronounces to be "a most unaccountable translation." The reading of the margin, however, "my hand," favours the sense given by our Author.

768

This is the translation adopted by many critics, and it appears to be the true signification of the passage. Thus Symmachus' version is, ἡ χειρ μου νυκτοςἐκτετατο διηνεκως, "my hand was stretched out by night continually;" and, in like manner, Jerome, "Manus mea nocte extenditur, et non quiescit." Parkhurst renders the verse thus: "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; my hand was stretched out by night and ceased not," or, "without interruption." With this agree the versions of Horsley, Mant, Fry, Adam Clarke, Walford, and others. The stretching out of the hand was an usual gesture in prayer. Instead of ידי, the Chaldee reads עיני, "*mine eye* trickled down," which Archbishop Secker and Green think likely to be the true reading.

that prayer was his continual exercise, — that his heart was so earnestly and unweariedly engaged in that exercise, that he could not desist from it. In the concluding sentence of the verse the adversative particle *although* is to be supplied; and thus the meaning will be, that although the prophet found no solace and no alleviation of the bitterness of his grief, he still continued to stretch forth his hands to God. In this manner it becomes us to wrestle against despair, in order that our sorrow, although it may seem to be incurable, may not shut our mouths, and keep us from pouring out our prayers before God.

3. *I will remember God, and will be troubled.* The Psalmist here employs a variety of expressions to set forth the vehemence of his grief, and, at the same time, the greatness of his affliction. He complains that what constituted the only remedy for allaying his sorrow became to him a source of disquietude. It may, indeed, seem strange that the minds of true believers should be troubled by remembering God. But the meaning of the inspired writer simply is, that although he thought upon God his distress of mind was not removed. It no doubt often happens that the remembrance of God in the time of adversity aggravates the anguish and trouble of the godly, as, for example, when they entertain the thought that he is angry with them. The prophet, however, does not mean that his heart was thrown into new distress and disquietude whenever God was brought to his recollection: he only laments that no consolation proceeded from God to afford him relief; and this is a trial which it is very hard to bear. It is not surprising to see the wicked racked with dreadful mental agony; for, since their great object and endeavor is to depart from God, they must suffer the punishment which they deserve, on account of their rebellion against him. But when the remembrance of God, from which we seek to draw consolation for mitigating our calamities, does not afford repose or tranquillity to our minds, we are ready to think that he is sporting with us. We are nevertheless taught from this passage, that however much we may experience of fretting, sorrow, and disquietude, we must persevere in calling upon God even in the midst of all these impediments.

4. *Thou hast held the watches of my eyes.* [769] This verse is to the same effect with the preceding. The Psalmist affirms that he spent whole nights in watching, because God granted him no relief. The night in ancient times was usually divided into many watches; and, accordingly, he describes his

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Some of the Jewish commentators interpret this clause thus: "Thou holdest the brows of my eyes." The eyebrows which protect the eyes were held, so that he could not shut them and obtain sleep. Sleep to a person in trouble has the effect of interrupting his sorrow for a time, and of weakening it by refreshing the body. It is, therefore, in such circumstances, a great blessing, and is earnestly desired. But to have this denied, and for the sufferer to have sleepless and wearisome nights appointed to him, is a great aggravation of his distress.

continued grief, which pre. vented him from sleeping, by the metaphorical term *watches.* When he stated a little before that he prayed to God with a loud voice, and when he now affirms that he will remain silent, there seems to be some appearance of discrepancy. This difficulty has already been solved in our exposition of Psalm 32:3, where we have shown that true believers, when overwhelmed with sorrow, do not continue in a state of unvarying uniformity, but sometimes give vent to sighs and complaints, while, at other times, they are silent as if their mouths were stopped. It is, therefore, not wonderful to find the prophet frankly confessing that he was so overwhelmed, and, as it were, choked, with calamities, as to be unable to open his mouth to utter even a single word.

5. *I have recounted the days of old.* There is no doubt that he endeavored to assuage his grief by the remembrance of his former joy; but he informs us that relief was not so easily nor so speedily obtained. By the *days of old,* and *the years of ancient times,* he seems not only to refer to the brief course of his own life, but to comprehend many ages. The people of God, in their afflictions, ought, undoubtedly, to set before their eyes, and to call to their remembrance, not only the Divine blessings which they have individually experienced, but also all the blessings which God in every age has bestowed upon his Church It may, however, be easily gathered from the text, that when the prophet reckoned up in his own mind the mercies which God had bestowed in time past, he began with his own experience.

6. *I will call to remembrance my song in the night.* By *his song* he denotes the exercise of thanksgiving in which he had engaged during the time of his prosperity. [770] There is no remedy better adapted for healing our sorrows, as I have just now observed, than this; but Satan often craftily suggests to our thoughts the benefits of God, that the very feeling of the want of them may inflict upon our minds a deeper wound. It is, therefore, highly probable, that the prophet was pierced with bitter pangs when he compared the joy experienced by him in time past with the calamities which he was presently suffering. He expressly mentions *the night;* because, when we are then alone by ourselves, and withdrawn from the society and presence of men, it engenders in the mind more cares and thoughts than are experienced during the day. What is added immediately after with respect to *communing with his own heart,* is to the same effect. Solitude has an influence in leading men to retire within their own minds, to examine themselves thoroughly, and to speak to themselves freely and in good earnest, when no created being is with them to impose a restraint by his presence.

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"The times were indeed greatly altered; formerly his sleep had been prevented by the joyfulness of his feelings, which prompted the voice of thanksgiving during even the shades of night; now his sleep is taken away by the severity of his disease, and the anguish of his soul, which was augmented by the contrast with his past happiness." — *Walford.*

The last clause of the verse, *And my spirit will search diligently,* admits of a twofold exposition. The word חפש, *chaphas,* for *search diligently,* [771] being in the masculine gender, and the word רוה, *ruach,* for *spirit,* being sometimes feminine, some commentators suppose that the name of *God* is to be understood, and explain the sentence as if the Psalmist had said, There is nothing, O Lord! so hidden in my heart into which thou hast not penetrated. And God is with the highest propriety said to search the spirit of the man whom he awakens from his indolence or torpor, and whom he examines by acute afflictions. Then all hiding — places and retreats, however obscure, are explored, and affections before unknown are brought into the light. As, however, the gender of the noun in the Hebrew language is ambiguous, others more freely translate, MY *spirit hath searched diligently.* This being the sense which is most generally embraced, and being, at the same time, the most natural, I readily adopt it. In that debate, of which the inspired writer makes mention, he searched for the causes on account of which he was so severely afflicted, and also into what. his calamities would ultimately issue. It is surely highly profitable to meditate on these subjects, and it is the design of God to stir us up to do this when any adversity presses upon us. There is nothing more perverse than the stupidity [772] of those who harden themselves under the scourges of God. Only we must keep within due bounds, in order that we may not be swallowed up of over much sorrow, and that the unfathomable depth of the Divine judgments may not overwhelm us by our attempting to search them out thoroughly. The prophet's meaning is, that when he sought for comfort in all directions, he could find none to assuage the bitterness of his grief.

Psalm 77:7-10

7. Will the Lord cast off [773] for ever? and will he be favorable no more? **8.** Is his mercy quite gone for ever? Doth his oracle fail from generation to generation? **9.** Hath God forgotten, to be merciful?

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"The verb חפש, *chaphas*, signifies such an investigation as a man makes who is obliged to *strip himself* in order to do it. Or, *to lift up coverings*, to search fold by fold; or, in our phrase, *to leave no stone unturned* The Vulgate translates, *et scopebam spiritum meum* As *scopebam* is no pure Latin word, it may probably be taken from the Greek, σκοπεω, *scopeo*, 'to look about, to consider attentively.' It is, however, used by no author but St Jerome, and by him only here, and in Isaiah 14:23, 'And I will sweep it with the besom of destruction;' 'scopabo eam in scopa terens.' Hence we see that he has formed a verb from the noun *scopae*; *a sweeping brush* or *besom*." — *Dr Adam Clarke*

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"La stupidite brutale." — *Fr.* "The brutish stupidity."

773

"Ou, sera-il eslongne." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, will he be at a distance."

Hath he shut up his compassions in anger? Selah. **10.** And said, My death, [774] the years [775] of the right hand of the Most High.

7. and **8.** *Will the Lord cast off for ever?* The statements here made undoubtedly form a part of the searchings which engaged the Psalmist's mind. He intimates that he was almost overwhelmed by a long succession of calamities; for he did not break forth into this language until he had endured affliction for so long a period as hardly to venture to entertain the hope that God would in future be favorable to him. He might well argue with himself whether God would continue to be gracious; for when God embraces us with his favor, it is on the principle that he will continue to extend it towards us even to the end. He does not properly complain or find fault with God, but rather reasoning with himself, concludes, from the nature of God, that it is impossible for him not to continue his free favor towards his people, to whom he has once shown himself to be a father. As he has traced all the blessings which the faithful receive from the Divine hand to the mere good pleasure of God, as to a fountain; so a little after he adds the Divine goodness, as if he had said, How can we suppose it possible for God to break off the course of his fatherly layout, when it is considered that he cannot divest himself of his own nature? We see, then, how by an argument drawn from the goodness of God, he repels the assaults of temptation. When he puts the question, *Doth his word or oracle fail?* he intimates that he was destitute of all consolation, since he met with no promise to support and strengthen his faith. We are indeed thrown into a gulf of despair when God takes away from us his promises in which our happiness and salvation are included. If it is objected, that such as had the]Law among their hands could not be without the word of God, I answer, that on account of the imperfection of the former dispensation, when Christ was not yet manifested, [776] special promises were then necessary. Accordingly, in Psalm 74:9, we find the faithful complaining that they saw not any longer their wonted signs, and that there was no longer a prophet who had knowledge of the time among them. If David was the penman of this psalm, we know that in matters of doubt and perplexity it was usual with him to ask counsel from God, and that God was accustomed to grant him answers. If he was deprived of this source of alleviation in the midst of his calamities, he had reason to bewail that he found no oracle or word to sustain and strengthen his faith. But if the psalm was composed

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"C'est, ma maladie." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, my disease *or* sickness."

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"Ou, changemens." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, changes."

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"Qu'a cause de l'infirmite du temps, (ascavoir avant la manifestation de Christ)." — *Fr.*

by some other inspired prophet, this complaint will suit the period which intervened between the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity and the coming of Christ; for, during that time, the course of prophecy was in a manner broken off, and there was none endued with any peculiar gift of the Holy Spirit to raise up the hearts of those who were cast down, or to support and keep them from falling. In addition to this, it sometimes happens that although the word of God is offered to us, it yet does not enter into our minds, in consequence of our being involved in such deep distress, as to prevent us from receiving or admitting the smallest degree of comfort. But I embrace the former sense, which is, that the Church was now without those special announcements of prophecy with which she had formerly been favored, and that as she still depended upon the mere sight of the shadows of that economy, she stood constantly in need of fresh supports. From this we may gather the profitable lesson, that we ought not to be unduly disquieted, if God should at any time withdraw his word from us. It should be borne in mind, that he tries his own people by such wonderful methods, that they imagine the whole of Scripture to be turned from its proper end, and that although they are desirous to hear God speaking, they yet cannot be brought to apply his words to their own particular case. This, as I have said, is a distressing and painful thing; but it ought not to hinder us from engaging in the exercise of prayer.

9. *Hath God forgotten to be merciful?* The prophet still continues debating with himself the same subject. His object, however, is not to overthrow his faith, but rather to raise it up. He does not put this question, as if the point to which it refers were a doubtful matter. It is as if he had said, Hath God forgotten himself? or, hath he changed his nature? for he cannot be God unless he is merciful. I indeed admit that he did not remain unshaken as if he had had a heart of steel. But the more violently he was assailed, the more firmly did he lean upon the truth, That the goodness of God is so inseparably connected with his essence as to render it impossible for him not to be merciful. Whenever, therefore, doubts enter into our minds upon our being harassed with cares, and oppressed with sorrows, let us learn always to endeavor to arrive at a satisfactory answer to this question, Has God changed his nature so as to be no longer merciful? The last clause, *Hath he shut up or restrained his compassions in his anger?* is to the same effect. It was a very common and notable observation among the holy patriarchs, That God is long — suffering, slow to wrath, ready to forgive, and easy to be entreated. It was from them that Habakkuk derived the statement which he makes in his song,

"Even in his anger he will be mindful of his mercy." (Habakkuk 3:2)

The prophet, then, here comes to the conclusion, that the chastisement which he felt would not prevent God from being again reconciled to him, and returning to his wonted manner of bestowing blessings upon him, since his anger towards his own people endures only for a moment. Yea, although

God manifests the tokens of his anger, he does not cease most tenderly to love those whom he chastises. His wrath, it its true, rests continually upon the reprobate; but the prophet, accounting himself among the number of God's children, and speaking of other genuine believers, justly argues from the impossibility of the thing, that the temporary displeasure of God cannot break off the course of his goodness and mercy.

10. *And I said, My death, the years of the right hand, etc.* This passage has been explained in various ways. Some deriving the word חלותי, *challothi,* from חלה, *chalah,* which signifies *to kill,* consider the prophet as meaning, that being overwhelmed with an accumulation of calamities, the only conclusion to which he could come was, that God had appointed him to utter destruction; and that his language is a confession of his having fallen into despair. Others translate it *to be sick, to be infirm* or *enfeebled,* which is much more agreeable to the scope of the passage. [777] But they differ with respect to the meaning. According to some interpreters, the prophet accuses and reproves himself for his effeminacy of mind, and for not setting himself more manfully to resist temptation. [778] This exposition may be admitted; for the people of God ordinarily gather courage after having for a time wavered under the shock of temptation. I, however, prefer a different interpretation, namely, that this was a disease merely temporary, and on this account, he compares it indirectly to death; even as it is said in Psalm 118:18,

"The Lord hath chastised me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death." Also, "I shall not die, but live." (Psalm 118:18)

He, therefore, I have no doubt, unburdens himself by cherishing the confident persuasion, that although he was at present cast down, it was only for a season, and that therefore it behoved him patiently to endure this

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Walford translates, "Then I said, My disease is this. "Such," he observes, "is the exact rendering of the text. Some painful disease had befallen him, which was heightened by the depression of his spirits, which deprived him of mental vigor and energy, and clothed every object in the blackest colours. ... 'I said, This is my disease.' My mind is oppressed by the mortified feelings of my corporeal frame, and on this account, the changes by which the hand of God has affected me appear in the darkest colours, and I am ready to give up every hope that he will ever display his goodness to me as he formerly did."

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According to this view, he refers to what he had said in the 7th, 8th, and 9th verses, in which he seemed to arrive at the conclusion, that there would never be an end to his present afflictions, as if the decree had gone forth, and God had pronounced a final and irreversible sentence. But here he checks and corrects himself for having given utterance to such language, and recalls his thoughts to more just and encouraging sentiments respecting God. He acknowledges his sin in questioning or yielding to a feeling of suspicion in reference to the divine love, and the truth of the divine promises; and confesses that this flowed from the corruption of his nature, and the weakness of his faith; that he had spoken rashly and in haste; and that taking shame and confusion of face to himself, he would now desist and proceed no farther.

sickness or disease, since it was not mortal. Nor are commentators agreed in the explanation of the second clause. Those who connect this verse with the preceding verses, think that the prophet was reduced to such a state of despondency at first, that he looked upon himself as utterly undone; and that afterwards he lifted up his head at times, even as those who are thrown into the deep in a shipwreck repeatedly rise above the water. Besides, they would have this to be understood as a word of encouragement addressed by some one to the prophet, desiring him to call to remembrance the years in which he had experienced that God was merciful to him. But it will be more appropriate to understand it thus:, Thou hast no reason to think that thou art now doomed to death, since thou art not laboring under an incurable disease, and the hand of God is wont to make whole those whom it has stricken. I do not reject the opinion of those who translate שנות, *shenoth,* by *changes;* [779] for as the Hebrew verb שנה, *shanah,* signifies *to change,* or *to do a thing again and again,* the Hebrews have taken from it the word שנות, *shenoth,* which they employ to denote *years,* from their revolving character, from their turning round, as it were, in the same orbit. But in whatever way we may understand it, the comfort of which I have spoken will remain firm, which is, that the prophet, assuring himself of a favorable change in his condition, does not look upon himself as doomed to death. Others give a somewhat different interpretation, arriving at it in another way: [780] as if the prophet had said, Why shouldst thou not patiently endure the severity of God at this time, when hitherto he has cherished thee by his beneficence? even as Job said,

"Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not
also receive evil?" (Job 2:10)

But it is more probable that the prophet directs his view to the future, and means that it became him to await the years or revolutions of the right hand of the Most High, until lie should afford clear and undisputed evidence of the return of his favor towards him.

Psalm 77:11-14

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Walford translates the verse thus: —

"Then I said, My disease is this,
The change of the right hand of the High God."

"There is no authority," he observes, "for the version, 'I will remember the years;' his meaning is, the power of God has changed and altered my condition; from a state of health and peace, he has brought me into disease, and pain, and sorrow. This, he says, he will remember, so as to inspire some hope that the power which had brought low would again raise him up."

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Our Author seems to refer to those interpreters who, as in our English version, make the supplement, *But I will remember*, before the words, "the years of the right hand of the Most High."

> **11.** I will remember the works of God: surely I will remember thy wonderful works from the beginning. **12.** I will also meditate on all thy works, and I will muse on thy doings. **13.** Thy ways, O God! are in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God? **14.** Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast made known thy strength among the peoples.

11. *I will remember the works of God.* The prophet now, inspired with new courage, vigorously resists the temptations, which had so far prevailed against him as well nigh to overwhelm his faith. This remembering of the works of God differs from the remembering of which he had previously spoken. Then he contemplated from a distance the divine benefits, and he found the contemplation of them inadequate to assuage or mitigate his grief. Here he takes hold of them, so to speak, as assured testimonies of God's everlasting grace. To express the greater earnestness, he repeats the same sentence, interjecting an affirmation; for the word כי, *ki,* is here used simply to confirm or enhance the statement. Having then, as it were, obtained the victory, he triumphs in the remembrance of the works of God, being assuredly persuaded that God would continue the same as he had shown himself to be from the beginning. In the second clause, he highly extols the power which God had displayed in preserving his servants: *I will remember thy wonderful works from the beginning. He* employs the singular number, *thy secret,* or *thy wonderful work;* but I have not hesitated to correct the obscurity by changing the number. We will find him soon after employing the singular number to denote many miracles. What he means in short is, that the wonderful power of God which he has always put forth for the preservation and salvation of his servants, provided we duly reflect upon it, is sufficient to enable us to overcome all sorrows. Let us learn from this, that, although sometimes the remembrance of the works of God may bring us less comfort than we would desire, and our circumstances would require, we must nevertheless strive, that the weariness produced by grief may not break our courage. This is deserving of our most careful attention. In the time of sorrow, we are always desirous of finding some remedy to mitigate its bitterness; but the only way by which this can be done is, to cast our cares upon God. It, however, often happens, that the nearer he approaches us, the more, to outward appearance, does he aggravate our sorrows. Many, therefore, when they derive no advantage from this course, imagine that they cannot do better than forget him. Thus they loathe his word, by the hearing of which their sorrow is rather embittered than mitigated, and what is worse, they desire that God, who thus aggravates and inflames their grief, would withdraw to a distance. Others, to bury the remembrance of him, devote themselves wholly to worldly business. It was far otherwise with the prophet. Although he did not immediately experience the benefit which he could have desired, yet he still continued to set God. before his view, wisely supporting his faith by the reflection, that as God changes neither his love

nor his nature, he cannot but show himself at length merciful to his servants. Let us also learn to open our eyes to behold the works of God; the excellence of which is of little account in our estimation, by reason of the dimness of our eyes, and our inadequate perception of them; but which, if examined attentively, will ravish us with admiration. The Psalmist repeats in the 12th verse, that he will meditate continually upon these works, until, in due time, he receive the full advantage which this meditation is calculated to afford. The reason why so many examples of the grace of God contribute nothing to our profit, and fail in edifying our faith, is, that as soon as we have begun to make them the subjects of our consideration, our inconstancy draws us away to something else, and thus, at the very commencement, our minds soon lose sight of them.

13. *Thy ways, O God! are in the sanctuary.* Some translate *in holiness,* and they are led to do this, because it seems to them a cold and meagre form of expression to say, that *God's ways are in his sanctuary* But as the rules of grammar will not easily admit of this, we must inquire whether a profitable truth may not be drawn from the term *sanctuary,* which is the proper signification of the original word בקדש, *bakkodesh.* Some are of opinion that this is an abrupt exclamation, as if it had been said, *O God, who art in the sanctuary! O thy ways!* but of this I do not approve; for they do violence to the words of the prophet. The clause should be read in one connected sentence, and the word *sanctuary* is to be taken either for heaven or for the temple. I am rather inclined to refer it to heaven, conceiving the meaning to be, that the ways of God rise high above the world, so that if we are truly desirous to know them, we must ascend above all heavens. Although the works of God are in part manifest to us, yet all our knowledge of them comes far short of their immeasurable height. Besides, it is to be observed, that none enjoy the least taste of his works but those who by faith rise up to heaven. And yet, the utmost point to which we can ever attain is, to contemplate with admiration and reverence the hidden wisdom and power of God, which, while they shine forth in his works, yet far surpass the limited powers of our understanding. If it is objected, that it is wrong to attempt to confine to heaven the ways of God, which are extended through the whole world, the answer is easy; for although there is not a single corner of the globe in which God does not exhibit some proof of his power and operation, yet the wonderful character of his works escapes the eyes of men. If any would rather understand *sanctuary* as meaning the temple, it may be noticed, that we have met with an almost similar sentence in Psalm 73:16, 17,

"*When* I thought to know this, it was too painful for me,
until I went into the sanctuary of God."

The temple, indeed, in which God manifested himself was, as it were, a heaven on earth. [781] It is now obvious that the meaning of the

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inspired writer is, that as at the commencement he had uttered distressing complaints, so now, having attained to a calm and settled state of mind, he admires and adores the high ways of God, and conscious of his own weakness, quietly and modestly keeps himself within the bounds prescribed to him, not permitting himself to judge or pass sentence upon the secret judgments of God according to the dictates of his carnal understanding. He therefore immediately after exclaims, *Who is so great a God as our God?* By this comparison, he does not mean that there are many gods, but he indirectly rebukes the deep infatuation of the world who, not contented with the only true God whose glory is so conspicuous, invent for themselves many gods. If men would look upon the works of God with pure eyes, they would be led without much difficulty to rest with satisfaction in him alone.

14. *Thou art the God that doest wonders.* The Psalmist confirms the preceding sentence, proving the greatness of God from the wonderful character of his works. He does not speak of the hidden and mysterious essence of God which fills heaven and earth, but of the manifestations of his power, wisdom, goodness, and righteousness, which are clearly exhibited, although they are too vast for our limited understandings to comprehend. Literally, the words are, *Thou art the God that doest a Wonder*; but the singular number is here evidently put for the plural, an instance of which we have seen before. From this we learn that the glory of God is so near us, and that he has so openly and clearly unfolded himself, that we cannot justly pretend any excuse for ignorance. He, indeed, works so wonderfully, that even the heathen nations are inexcusable for their blindness. For this reason it is added, *Thou hast made known thy strength among the peoples.* This has an immediate reference to the deliverance of the Church; but, at the same time, it shows that the glory of God, which he had clearly and mightily displayed among the nations, could not be despised without the guilt of grievous impiety having been incurred.

Psalm 77:15-20

15. Thou hast redeemed thy people by thy arm, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah. **16.** The waters saw thee, O God! the waters saw thee; they were afraid, yea even the deeps trembled. **17.** The clouds poured out waters, the heavens [or skies] sent forth a sound: thy arrows also went abroad. **18.** The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven; the lightnings illumined the world: the earth trembled and shook. **19.** Thy ways are in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters: and thy footsteps are not known. **20.** Thou didst lead thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

"*Thy way, O God! is in the sanctuary*; the temple, the Church of God, where he takes his walks and manifests himself, and where the reasons of his providence and dealings with his people are opened and made known unto them." — *Dr Gill.*

15. *Thou hast redeemed thy people by thy arm.* The Psalmist here celebrates, above all the other wonderful works of God, the redemption of the chosen people, to which the Holy Spirit everywhere throughout the Scriptures invites the attention of true believers, in order to encourage them to cherish the hope of their salvation. It is well known that the power of God was at that time manifested to the Gentiles. The truth of history, indeed, through the artifice of Satan, was corrupted and falsified by many fables; but this is to be imputed to the wickedness of those in whose sight those wonderful works were wrought, who, although they saw them, chose rather to blind their eyes and disguise the truth of their existence, than to preserve the true knowledge of them. [782] How can we explain the fact that they made Moses to be I know not what kind of a magician or enchanter, and invented so many strange and monstrous stories, which Josephus has collected together in his work against Apion, but upon the principle that it was their deliberate purpose to bury in forgetfulness the power of God? It is not, however, so much the design of the prophet to condemn the Gentiles of the sin of ingratitude, as to furnish himself and others of the children of God matter of hope as to their own circumstances; for at the time referred to, God openly exhibited for the benefit of all future ages a proof of his love towards his chosen people. The word *arm* is here put metaphorically for power of an extraordinary character, and which is worthy of remembrance. God did not deliver his ancient people secretly and in an ordinary way, but openly, and, as it were, with his arm stretched forth. The prophet, by calling the chosen tribes *the sons of Jacob and Joseph,* assigns the reason why God accounted them as his people. The reason is, because of the covenant into which he entered with their godly ancestors. The two tribes which descended from the two sons of Joseph derived their origin from Jacob as well as the rest; but the name of Joseph is expressed to put honor upon him, by whose instrumentality the whole race of Abraham were preserved in safety. [783]

16. *The waters saw thee, O God!* Some of the miracles in which God had displayed the power of his arm are here briefly adverted to. When it is said that the *waters saw God,* the language is figurative, implying that they were moved, as it were, by a secret instinct and impulse to obey the divine command in opening up a passage for the chosen people. Neither the sea nor the Jordan would have altered their nature, and by giving place have

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"Neantmoins il faut imputer cela a la malice de ceux qui ayans veu la chose eux-mesmes de leurs yeux, ont mieux aime s'esblouir la veue et desguiser le faict, que d'en entretenir la pure cognoissance." — *Fr.*

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"The reason of Joseph's being coupled with Jacob is, that as the Israelites derived their birth from Jacob, so they were sustained by Joseph in Egypt, who became to them a second parent." — *Walford.*

spontaneously afforded a passage to them, had they not both felt upon them the power of God. [784] It is not meant that they retired backward because of any judgment and understanding which they *possessed,* but that in receding as they did, God showed that even the inanimate elements are ready to yield obedience to him. There is here an indirect contrast, it being intended to rebuke the stupidity of men if they do not acknowledge in the redemption of the Israelites from Egypt the presence and hand of God, which were seen even by the waters. What is added concerning *the deeps* intimates, that not only the surface of the waters were agitated at the sight of God, but that his power penetrated even to the deepest gulfs.

17. *The clouds poured out waters.* As the noun מים, *mayim,* cannot be taken in the construct state, the verb, I have no doubt, is put transitively; but it makes little difference as to the sense, whether we take this view, or read as if מים, *mayim,* were in the construct state and the verb passive; that is, whether we read, *The clouds poured out waters,* or, *The waters of the clouds were poured out.* The meaning obviously is, that not only the sea and the river Jordan, but also the waters which were suspended in the clouds, yielded to God the honor to which he is entitled, the air, by the concussion of the thunder, having poured forth copious showers. The object is to show, that, to whatever quarter men turn their eyes, the glory of God is illustriously manifested, that it is so in every part of creation, above and beneath, from the height of heaven to the depths of the sea. What history is here referred to is involved in some degree of uncertainty. [785] Perhaps it is that which is recorded in Exodus 9:23; where we are informed, that hail mingled with thunder and lightning was one of the dreadful plagues inflicted upon the Egyptians. *The arrows which went abroad* are, no doubt, to be taken metaphorically for lightnings. With this verse we are to connect the following, in which it is said, that *the voice of the thunder was heard in the air, and that the lightnings illumined the world, so that the earth trembled* The amount is, that at the departure of the people from Egypt, ample testimony was borne to the power of God, both to the eyes and the ears of men; peals of thunder having been heard in every quarter of the heavens, and the whole sky having shone with flashes of lightning, while at the same time the earth was made to tremble.

19. *Thy ways are in the sea.* The miracle which was wrought in drying up the Red Sea is here again described in different phraseology. What, properly

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"'The waters of the Red Sea,' says Bishop Horne, 'are here beautifully represented as endued with sensibility; as seeing, feeling, and being confounded, even to the lowest depths, at the presence and power of their great Creator, when he commanded them to open a way, and to form a wall on each side of it, until his people were passed over.' This, in fact, is true poetry; and in this attributing of life, spirit, feeling, action, and suffering, to inanimate objects, there are no poets who can vie with those of the Hebrew nation." — *Mant.*

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speaking, refers to the Israelites is applied to God, under whose protection and guidance they passed dry-shod through the midst of the Red Sea. It is declared that a path had been opened up for them in a very strange and unusual manner; for the sea was not drained by the skill of man, nor was the river Jordan turned aside from its ordinary course into a different channel, but the people walked through the midst of the waters in which Pharaoh and his whole army were soon after drowned. On this account, it is said, that *the footsteps of God were not known,* for no sooner had God made the people to pass over than he caused the waters to return to their accustomed course. [786]

The purpose for which this was effected is added in the 20th verse, — the deliverance of the Church: *Thou didst lead thy people like a flock.* [787] And this deliverance should be regarded by all the godly as affording them the best encouragement to cherish the hope of safety and salvation. The comparison of the people to *sheep,* tacitly intimates that they were in themselves entirely destitute of wisdom, power, and courage, and that God, in his great goodness, condescended to perform the office of a shepherd in leading through the sea, and the wilderness, and all other impediments, his

As in the three preceding verses the deliverance of the chosen people from Egypt, and the drying up of the Red Sea, to make a way for them to pass through, are the subjects celebrated, it is very natural to suppose that the 17th and 18th verses refer to the tempestuous rain, the thunder, lightning, and earthquake, by which God testified his wrath against the Egyptians, and by which that ruthless host were filled with dismay, when they went into the midst of the Red Sea after the Israelites. Of these particular circumstances, we have indeed no distinct information in the narrative of Moses; but from a comparison of what is here stated, with what is said in Exodus 14:24, "And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians," it seems highly probable that they took place on that occasion. With this corresponds the representation given by Josephus of this part of Jewish History. "As soon as ever the whole Egyptian army was within it, the sea flowed to its own place, and came down with a torrent raised by storms of wind, and encompassed the Egyptians. Showers of rain also came down from the sky, and dreadful thunders and lightning, with flashes of fire. Thunder-bolts also were darted upon them; nor was there any thing which used to be sent by God upon men, as indications of his wrath, which did not happen at that time; for a dark and dismal night oppressed them." — *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book II. chapter 16, section 3.

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"*Thy footsteps are not known*; not by the Egyptians, who essayed to follow after the people of Israel, with the Lord at the head of them, nor by any since; for the waters returned and covered the place on which the Israelites went as on dry ground; so that no footsteps or traces were to be seen at all ever since; and such are the ways of God, many of them in providence as well as in grace, Romans 11:33." — *Dr Gill.*

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"After the sublime and awful imagery of the four preceding verses, in which thunders and lightnings, storms and tempests, rain, hail, and earthquakes, the ministers of the Almighty's displeasure, are brought together and exhibited in the most impressive colours; nothing can be, more exquisite than the calmness and tranquillity of this concluding verse, on which the mind reposes with sensations of refreshment and delight." — *Mant.*

poor flock, which were destitute of all things, that he might put them in possession of the promised inheritance. This statement is confirmed, when we are told that Moses and Aaron were the persons employed in conducting the people. Their service was no doubt illustrious and worthy of being remembered; but God displayed in no small degree the greatness of his power in opposing two obscure and despised individuals to the fury and to the great and powerful army of one of the proudest kings who ever sat on a throne. What could the rod of an outlaw and a fugitive, and the voice of a poor slave, have done of themselves, against a formidable tyrant and a warlike nation? The power of God then was the more manifest when it wrought in such earthen vessels. At the same time, I do not deny that it is here intended to commend these servants of God, to whom he had committed such an honorable trust.

Psalm 78

PSALM 78

To comprehend many things within small compass, it is to be observed, that in this psalm there are two leading topics. On the one hand, it is declared how God adopted for himself a Church from the posterity of Abraham, how tenderly and graciously he cherished it, how wonderfully he brought it out of Egypt, and how varied were the blessings which he bestowed upon it. On the other hand, the Jews, who were so much indebted to him for the great blessings which he had conferred upon them, are upbraided for having from time to time perversely and treacherously revolted from so liberal a father; so that his inestimable goodness was clearly manifested, not only in his free adoption of them at first, but also in continuing by the uninterrupted course of his goodness to strive against the rebellion of so perfidious and stiff-necked a people. Moreover, mention is made of the renewal of God's grace, and as it were of a second election which he made when he chose David out of the tribe of Judah to sway the scepter over the kingdom of Israel.

Asaph giving instruction.

Psalm 78:1-6

1. Hearken, O my people! to my law: [788] incline your ears to the words of my mouth. **2.** I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old time: **3.** What we have heard and known,

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"Ou, ma doctrine." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, my doctrine, *or* instruction."

and our fathers have related to us. **4.** We will not conceal from their children in the generation to come, recounting the praises of Jehovah, and his power, and the wonderful works which he has done. **5.** He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel: for he commanded our fathers to make them known to their children: **6.** That the generation to come might know them, and that the children to be born should arise and declare them to their children.

1. *Give ear, O my people! to my law.* From the close of the psalm, it may with probability be conjectured, that it was written long after the death of David; for there we have celebrated the kingdom erected by God in the family of David. There also the tribe of Ephraim, which is said to have been rejected, is contrasted with, and set in opposition to, the house of David. From this it is evident, that the ten tribes were at that time in a state of separation from the rest of the chosen people; for there must be some good reason why the kingdom of Ephraim is branded with a mark of dishonor as being illegitimate and bastard. [789]

Whoever was the inspired writer of this psalm, he does not introduce God speaking as is thought by some, but he himself addresses the Jews in the character of a teacher. It is no objection to this that he calls the people *his people,* and the law *his law;* it being no uncommon thing for the prophets to borrow the name of Him by whom they were sent, that their doctrine might have the greater authority. And, indeed, the truth which has been committed to their trust may, with propriety, be called *theirs.* Thus Paul, in Romans 2:16, glories in the gospel as *his gospel,* an expression not to be understood as implying that it was a system which owed its origin to him, but that he was a preacher and a witness of it. I am somewhat doubtful whether interpreters are strictly correct in translating the word תורה*, torah,* by law. [790] The meaning of it seems to be somewhat more general, as appears from the following clause, where the Psalmist uses the phrase, *the*

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Calmet refers the composition of this psalm to the days of Asa, who, aided by the Syrians, obtained a signal victory over the Israelites, and brought back to the pure worship of God many out of the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon. See 2 Chronicles 15 and 16. Schnurrer supposes, that the special purpose for which it was composed was, to celebrate a decisive victory which had been gained over the kingdom of Ephraim or Israel by Abijah, the king of Judah during the reign of Jeroboam. Walford thinks this opinion highly probable. "There is," say's he, "an eulogy passed upon David at the conclusion of the psalm, which makes it likely that the author of it wished to conciliate the favor of the whole people towards David's successors, from whom Jeroboam had revolted: and in verse 9th, there is a reference to Ephraim which affords some degree of evidence in support of Schnurrer's hypothesis. Whatever may be thought of this hypothesis, we cannot hesitate to admit that the psalm itself is clear, pungent, and persuasive, and must have been felt to be so by the persons for whose use it was written."

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We have seen that Calvin, on the margin of the French version, reads *instruction*, and this reading is adopted by Street, Fry, Morison, and Walford.

words of my mouth, in the same sense. If we consider with what inattention even those who make great professions of being the disciples of God listen to his voice, we will admit that the prophet had good reason for introducing his lessons of instruction by a solemn call of attention. He does not, it is true, address the unteachable and obstinate, who frowardly refuse to submit themselves to the word of God; but as even true believers themselves are generally too backward to receive instruction, this exhortation, so far from being superfluous, was highly necessary to stir up the sluggish and inactive among them.

To secure for himself the greater attention, he declares it to be his purpose to discuss subjects of a great, high, and difficult character. The word משל, *mashal,* which I have translated *a parable,* denotes grave and striking sentences, such as adages, or proverbs, and apophthegms. [791] As then the matter itself of which we treat, if it is weighty and important, awakens the minds of men, the inspired penman affirms that it is his purpose to utter only striking sentences and notable sayings. The word חידות, *chidoth,* which, following others, I have rendered *enigmas,* is here used, not so much for dark sentences, as for sayings which are pointed and worthy of special notice. [792] He does not mean to wrap up his song in ambiguous language, but clearly and distinctly to dwell both upon the benefits of God and the ingratitude of the people. Only, as I have said, his design is to stimulate his readers to weigh and consider more attentively the subject propounded. This passage

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See volume 2, page 238, note 2.

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Walford translates חידות, *chidoth*, "all impressive record." His version of the first and second verses is,

"Hear, O my people! my instruction:
Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth with an instructive speech,
I will utter an impressive record of ancient times."

"The words *law*, *parable*, and *dark sayings*," he observes, "which are found in the English translation of verses 1st and 2d, are not appropriate to the recitals which are contained in the psalm. They are here altered for others, which are in agreement with the subjects which follow, and may be supported by the usage of the original words which are employed." Similar is Street's note on this place. He translates חידות, *chidoth*, "pointed truths," and objects to its being translated *dark sayings* "There is nothing obscure in the psalm," says he, "it contains instructive historical truth, but no enigma. Therefore, the rendering of the English Bible, *dark sayings*, does not seem to be right. The Septuagint renders the word διηγημα, Ezekiel 17:2, and that rendering would suit this place better than προθληματα I have endeavored to express the relation of the word to חדד, *acutum est.*" See volume 2 of this work, page 238, note 3. But as Dimock observes, "The several transactions of the Mosaical covenant hereafter recited, might be well called *parables* and *dark speeches*, or, as Arabic, *mysteries*, considered as types or figures of the Christian; and viewed in this light, afford ample matter of contemplation, serving not only as a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, but to keep us steadfast in faith and obedience to David our king."

is quoted by Matthew, (Matthew 13:35,) and applied to the person of Christ, when he held the minds of the people in suspense by parables which they could not understand. Christ's object in doing so, was to prove that he was a distinguished prophet of God, and that thus he might be received with the greater reverence. Since he then resembled a prophet because he preached sublime mysteries in a style of language above the common kind, that which the sacred writer here affirms concerning himself, is with propriety transferred to him. If in this psalm there shines forth such a majesty as may justly stir up and inflame the readers with a desire to learn, we gather from it with what earnest attention it becomes us to receive the gospel, in which Christ opens and displays to us the treasures of his celestial wisdom.

3. *What we have heard and known.* There seems to be some discrepancy between what the Psalmist had stated in the commencement, when he said that he would speak of great and hidden matters, and what he now adds, that his subject is a common one, and such as is transmitted from one age to another by the father to the son. If it was incumbent upon the fathers to recount to their children the things here spoken of, these things ought, of course, to have been familiarly known to all the people, yea, even to those who were most illiterate, and had the weakest capacity. Where, then, it may be said, are the enigmas or dark sentences of which he has just now made mention? I answer, that these things can easily be reconciled; for although the psalm contains many things which are generally known, yet he illustrates them with all the splendor and ornaments of diction, that he may the more powerfully affect the hearts of men, and acquire for himself the greater authority. At the same time, it is to be observed, that however high may be the majesty of the Word of God, this does not prevent the benefits or advantages of it from reaching even to the unlearned and to babes. The Holy Spirit does not in vain invite and encourage such to learn from it: — a truth which we ought carefully to mark. If God, accommodating himself to the limited capacity of men, speaks in an humble and lowly style, this manner of teaching is despised as too simple; but if he rise to a higher style, with the view of giving greater authority to his Word, men, to excuse their ignorance, will pretend that it is too obscure. As these two vices are very prevalent in the world, the Holy Spirit so tempers his style as that the sublimity of the truths which he teaches is not hidden even from those of the weakest capacity, provided they are of a submissive and teachable disposition, and bring with them an earnest desire to be instructed. It is the design of the prophet to remove from the mind all doubt respecting his sayings, and for this purpose, he determines to bring forward nothing new, but such subjects as had been long well known, and received without dispute in the Church. He accordingly not only says *we have heard,* but also *we have known.* Many things are rashly spread abroad which have no foundation in truth; yea, nothing is more common than for the ears of men to be filled with fables.

It is, therefore, not without cause that the prophet, after having spoken of the things which he had heard, at the same time, refers in confirmation of their truth to undoubted testimony. He adds, that the knowledge of these subjects had been communicated to the Jews by *their fathers.* This does not imply, that what is taught under the domestic roof is always faultless; but it is obvious, that there is afforded a more favorable opportunity of palming upon men forgeries for truth, when things are brought from a distant country. What is to be principally observed is, that all fathers are not here spoken of indiscriminately, but only those who were chosen to be God's peculiar people, and to whom the care of divine truth was intrusted.

4. *We will not conceal them from their children in the generation to come.* Some take the verb נכחד, *nechached,* in the *nephil* conjugation, and translate it, *they are not concealed or hidden.* But it ought, according to the rules of grammar, to be resolved thus: — *We will not conceal them from our posterity,* implying, that what we have been taught by our ancestors we should endeavor to transmit to their children. By this means, all pretense of ignorance is removed; for it was the will of God that these things should be published from age to age without interruption; so that being transmitted from father to child in each family, they might reach even the last family of man. The end for which this was to be done is shown — that *they might celebrate the praises of Jehovah, in the wonderful works which he hath done*

5. *He established a testimony in Jacob.* [793] As the reception or approbation of any doctrine by men would not be a sufficient reason for yielding a firm assent to its truth, the prophet proceeds farther, and represents God as the author of what he brings forward. He declares, that the father's were not led to instruct their children in these truths under the mere impulse of their own minds, but by the commandment of God. Some understand the words, *He hath established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel,* as implying that God had established a decree in Jacob, to be observed as an inviolable rule, which was, that the deliverance divinely wrought for the people should be at all times in the mouth of every Israelite; but this seems to give too restricted a sense. I therefore consider *statute,* or *testimony,* and *law,* [794] as referring to the written law, which, however, was partly given for this end, that by the remembrance of their deliverance, the people, after having been once gathered into one body, might be kept in their allegiance to God. The meaning then is, that God not only acquired a right to the Jews as his people by his mighty power, but that he also sealed up his grace, that the knowledge of it might

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Horsley considers this verse as a parenthesis.

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Dr Adam Clarke, by *a testimony* understands the various *ordinances*, *rites*, and ceremonies prescribed by the laws and by the word *law*, the *moral law.*

never be obliterated. And, undoubtedly, it was then registered as it were in public records, when the covenant was ratified by the written law, in order to assure the posterity of Abraham that they had been separated from all other nations. It would have been a matter of very small importance to have been acquainted with, or to have remembered the bare history of what had been done, had their eyes not been, at the same time, directed to the free adoption and the fruit of it. The decree then is this, That the fathers being instructed in the doctrine of the law themselves, should recount, as it were, from the mouth of God, to their children, that they had been not only once delivered, but also gathered into one body as his Church, that throughout all ages they might yield a holy and pure obedience to him as their deliverer. The reading of the beginning of the second clause of the verse properly is, *Which he commanded, etc.* But the relative אשר, *asher, which,* I have no doubt, is here put by way of exposition for *namely,* or *that is, he commanded,* etc. I have translated it *for,* which amounts to the same thing.

6. *That the generation to come might know them.* In this verse, the Psalmist confirms what he had said concerning the continued transmission of divine truth. It greatly concerns us to know, that the law was given not for one age only; but that the fathers should transmit it to their children, as if it were their rightful inheritance, in order that it might never be lost, but be preserved to the end of the world. This is the reason why Paul, in 1 Timothy 3:15, asserts that "the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth;" by which he does not mean that the truth of itself is weak, and stands in need of foreign supports, but that God extends and diffuses it by the instrumentality of his ministers, who when they faithfully execute the office of teaching with which they are invested, sustain the truth, as it were, upon their shoulders. Now, the prophet teaches us, that it is our bounden duty to use our endeavors that there may be a continual succession of persons to communicate instruction in divine truth. It is said of Abraham before the law was written, Genesis 18:19,

"I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment;"

and after his death, this was enjoined upon the patriarchs as a necessary part of their duty. No sooner was the law delivered, than God appointed priests in his Church to be public masters and teachers. He has also testified by the prophet Isaiah, that the same is to be observed under the New Testament dispensation, saying,

"My Spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, from henceforth and for ever." (Isaiah 59:21)

In the passage before us, however, a particular injunction is given to the fathers on this point — each of them is enjoined diligently to instruct his

own children, and all without distinction are taught, that their exertions in transmitting the name of God to their posterity will be most acceptable to Him, and receive his highest approbation. By the words, *That the children to be born should arise,* is not denoted a small number of individuals; but it is intimated, that the preachers of divine truth, by whose efforts pure religion may flourish and prevail for ever, will be as numerous as those who are born into the world.

Psalm 78:7-11

> **7.** That they might set their hope [795] in God, and not forget the works of God; but keep his commandments. **8.** And that they might not be as their fathers, a rebellious [or an apostatising] and a provoking generation; a generation which directed not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not faithful towards God. **9.** The children of Ephraim, being armed and shooting with the bow, turned back in the day of battle. **10.** They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law. **11.** And they forgat his works, and the wonders which he had shown them.

7. *That they might set their hope in God.* Here the Psalmist points out the use to which the doctrine which he had stated should be applied. In the first place, the fathers, when they find that on the one hand they are instrumental in maintaining the pure worship of God, and that on the other, they are the means of providing for the salvation of their children, should, by such a precious result of their labors, be the more powerfully stirred up to instruct their children. In the second place, the children on their part, being inflamed with greater zeal, should eagerly press forward in the acquisition of divine knowledge, and not suffer their minds to wander in vain speculations, but should aim at, or keep their eyes directed to, the right mark. It is unhappy and wretched toil to be

"ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of
the truth," (2 Timothy 3:7.)

When, therefore, we hear for what purpose the law was given, we may easily learn what is the true and most successful method of deriving benefit from it. The inspired writer places *trust* first, assigning it the highest rank. He then requires the observance of the holy commandments of God; and he puts in the middle the remembrance of the works of God, which serves to confirm and strengthen faith. In short, what he means is, that the sum of heavenly wisdom consists in this, that men, having their hearts fixed on God by a true and unfeigned faith, call upon him, and that, for the purpose of maintaining and cherishing their confidence in him, they exercise themselves

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"כסלם, *kislam*, *their hope*, or *their constancy* כסל, *folly*, by antiphrasis, *constancy*." — *Bythner*

in meditating in good earnest upon his benefits; and that then they yield to him an unfeigned and devoted obedience. We may learn from this, that the true service of God begins with faith. If we transfer our trust and confidence to any other object, we defraud him of the chief part of his honor.

8. *And that they might not be as their fathers, a rebellious and provoking generation.* The Psalmist here shows still more distinctly how necessary this sermon was, from the circumstance that the Jews were exceedingly prone to revolt from God, if they were not kept in subjection by powerful restraints. He takes it as a fact, which could not be questioned, that their hearts were in no respect better than the hearts of their fathers, whom he affirms to have been a treacherous, rebellious, crooked and disobedient race. They would, therefore, immediately backslide from the way of God, unless their hearts were continually sustained by stable supports. The experience of all ages shows that what Horace writes concerning his own nation is true every where: —

"Ætas parenturn, pejor avis, tulit
Nos nequiores, mox daturos
Progeniem vitiosiroem."
Odes, *Book III. Ode vi.*

"The age that gave our fathers birth,
Saw them their noble sires disgrace:
We, baser still, shall leave on earth
The still increasing guilt of our degenerate race."
Boscawen'Translation.

What then would be the consequence, did not God succor the world which thus proceeds from evil to worse? As the prophet teaches the Jews from the wickedness and perverseness of their fathers, that they stood in need of a severe discipline to recall them from the imitation of bad examples, we learn from this, how great the folly of the world is, in persuading itself that the example of the fathers is to be regarded as equivalent to a law, which ought, in every case, to be followed. He does not here speak of all people without distinction, but of the holy and chosen race of Abraham; nor does he rebuke a small number of persons, but almost the whole nation, among whom there prevailed excessive obstinacy, as well as perverse forgetfulness of the grace of God, and perfidious dissimulation. He does not mention merely the fathers of one age, but he comprehends a period stretching back into a remote antiquity, that persons may not take occasion to excuse themselves in committing sin, from the length of time during which it has prevailed. We must therefore make a wise selection from amongst the fathers of those whom it becomes us to imitate. It being a work of great difficulty to remove the disposition to this perverse imitation of the fathers, towards whom the feeling of reverence is naturally impressed on the minds of their successors, the prophet employs a multiplicity of terms to set forth the aggravated wickedness of the fathers, stigmatising them as chargeable with apostasy,

provocation, treachery, and hypocrisy. These are very weighty charges; but it will be evident from the sequel that they are not exaggerated. The word הכין, *hechin,* which I have rendered *directed,* is by some translated *established,* but in my opinion, the meaning rather is, that God's ancient people always turned aside from God into crooked by-paths. Also, in what follows, instead of reading *whose spirit was not faithful towards God,* some read *whose spirit leaned not upon God.* [796] But it is better to follow the former interpretation, That they were not faithfully and steadfastly devoted to God, although they had solemnly sworn allegiance to him. The Papists make use of this passage as an argument to prove that man has the power of bending his own heart, and directing it either to good or evil as he pleases; but this is an inference from it which cannot stand examination for a single moment. Although the prophet justly blames those who have not directed their heart aright, his object is not expressly to speak of what men can do of themselves. It is the special work of God to turn to himself the hearts of men by the secret influence of his Holy Spirit. It does not however follow from this, that they will be exempted from blame, when their own lust and depravity draw them away from God. Moreover, from the sins which are here reproved, we should learn in what way he would have us to obey and serve him. In the first place, we must lay aside all obstinacy and take his yoke upon us; [797] and, secondly, we must clothe ourselves with the spirit of meekness, bring the affections of the heart to the obedience of God, and follow after uprightness, and that not with the fervor of a mere transient impulse, but with unfeigned and unwavering steadfastness.

9. *The children of Ephraim being armed, and shooting with the bow.* The sacred writer sets before us an example of this unfaithfulness in the children of Ephraim. As those who are pertinaciously set upon doing evil are not easily led to repentance and reformation by simple instruction, the punishments with which God visited the children of Ephraim are brought forward, and by these it is proved that they were reprobates. Since they were a warlike people, it was an evidence of the divine displeasure for them to turn their backs in battle. And it is expressly declared, that they were skillful *in shooting with the bow;* [798] for it is an additional stigma to represent such as were armed with weapons to wound their enemies at a distance as

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"The Syriac version reads, 'And confided not in the God of its spirit,' translating נאמנה, [the word which Calvin renders 'was faithful,'] by a masculine verb; and this indeed the sense will very well bear, and the change of genders is not unusual, and God is frequently known by that title, 'the God of the spirits of all flesh.' See Numbers 16:22." — *Hammond*

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"Premierement il faut que nous ostions toute obstination, avant que nous puissions avoir les cols propres pour recevoir son joug." — *Fr.* In the first place, we must lay aside all obstinacy before we can bend our necks to receive his yoke.

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fleeing through fear. From this, it is the more abundantly manifest that they had incurred the displeasure of God, who not only deprived them of his aid, but also made their hearts effeminate in the hour of danger.

Here the question may be raised, Why the children of Ephraim only are blamed, when we find a little before, all the tribes in general comprehended in the same sentence of condemnation? Some commentators refer this to the slaughter of the sons of Ephraim by the men of Gath, who came forth against them to recover their cattle of which they had been despoiled, 1 Chronicles 7:20, 21, 22. [799] But this exposition is too restricted. Perhaps the kingdom of Israel had fallen into decay, and had been almost ruined when this psalm was composed. It is therefore better to follow the opinion of other interpreters, who think, that by the figure synecdoche, the children of Ephraim are put for the whole people. But these interpreters pass over without consideration the fact, which ought not to be overlooked, that the Ephraimites are purposely named because they were the means of leading others into that rebellion which took place when Jeroboam set up the calves, (1 Kings 12:25-33.) What we have already said must be borne in mind, that towards the close of the psalm, the rejection of the tribe of Ephraim is, not, without cause, contrasted with the election of the tribe of Judah. The children of Ephraim are also here spoken of by way of comparison, to warn the true children of Abraham from the example of those who cut themselves off from the Church, and yet boasted of the title of the Church without exhibiting holy fruits in their life. [800] As they surpassed all the other tribes in number and wealth, their influence was too powerful in beguiling the simple; but of this the prophet now strips them, showing that they were deprived of the aid of God.

Of the Ephraimites shooting with the bow, or being archers, we have an intimation in Genesis 49:24, where, in Jacob's blessing on Joseph, the father of Ephraim, it is said, "His bow abode in strength."

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Dr Morison supposes, that the history here referred to, is that of the Israelites going up contrary to the divine command to take possession of the promised land, when, for their temerity, they were smitten and humbled before their enemies. (Deuteronomy 1:42.) "The tribe of Ephraim," he observes, "is doubtless specially singled out, because they were the most warlike of all the chosen tribes, and because, perhaps, they led on the other tribes to the fatal act of rebellion against the expressed will of the God of Israel." This, perhaps, may be considered as receiving some support from comparing the number of the tribe of Ephraim (Numbers 2:19) when they came out of Egypt, with their number when taken in the plains of Moab, at the termination of their wanderings in the wilderness, (Numbers 26:37.) At the former period, they amounted to 40,500, at the latter, to 32,500, eight thousand less; whereas, during those forty years the other tribes had considerably increased.

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"Sans en monstrer les fruicts en leur vie." — *Fr.*

10. *They kept not the covenant of God.* This is the reason assigned for the Ephraimites turning their backs in the day of battle; and it explains why the divine assistance was withheld from them. Others, it is true, were guilty in this respect as well as they, but the vengeance of God executed on that tribe, which by its influence had corrupted almost the whole kingdom, is purposely brought forward as a general warning. Since then the tribe of Ephraim, in consequence of its splendor and dignity, when it threw off the yoke, encouraged and became as it were a standard of shameful revolt to all the other tribes, the prophet intended to put people on their guard, that they might not suffer themselves in their simplicity to be again deceived in the same manner. It is no light charge which he brings against the sons of Ephraim: he upbraids them on account of their perfidiousness in despising the whole law and in violating the covenant. Although he employs these two words, *law* and *covenant,* in the same sense; yet, in placing *the covenant* first, he clearly shows that he is speaking not only of the moral law, the all-perfect rule of life, but of the whole service of God, of the truth and faithfulness of the divine promises, and of the trust which ought to be reposed in them, [801] of invocation, and of the doctrine of true religion, the foundation whereof was the adoption. He therefore calls them covenant-breakers, because they had fallen from their trust in the promises, by which God had entered into covenant with them to be their Father. Yet he afterwards very properly adds *the law,* in which the covenant was sealed up, as it were, in public records. He aggravates the enormity of their guilt by the word *refuse,* which intimates that they were not simply carried away by a kind of thoughtless or inconsiderate recklessness, and thus sinned through giddiness, want of knowledge or foresight, but that they had purposely, and with deliberate obstinacy, violated the holy covenant of God.

11. *And they forgat his works.* This shameful impiety is here represented as having originated in ingratitude, inasmuch as they wickedly buried, and made no account of the deliverance wrought for them, which was worthy of everlasting remembrance. Truly it was stupidity more than brutish, or rather, as it were, a monstrous thing, [802] for the Israelites to depart from God, to whom they were under so many and strong obligations. Nor would it have been possible for them to have been so bewitched by Satan, had they not quite forgotten the many miracles wrought in their behalf, which formed so many bonds to keep them in the fear of God and in obedience to him. That no excuse might be left for extenuating their guilt, the prophet ennobles those works by applying to them the term *wonderful,* thereby

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"De la verite et fidelite des promesses, et de la foy qu'on y doit adjouster." — *Fr.*

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"A la verite une telle stupidite estoit plusque brutale, ou plustost comme une chose monstrueuse." — *Fr.*

intimating, that God's manner of acting was not of a common kind, so as easily to account for their gradually forgetting his works, but that the Israelites had perversely and wickedly shut their eyes, that they might not be restrained in their sinful course, by beholding the glory of God.

Psalm 78:12-16

> **12.** He wrought marvellously [or he did wondrous things] in the sight of their fathers; in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. [803] **13.** He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through, and made the waters to stand as an heap. **14.** And he led them by a cloud in the day; and all the night by the light of fire. **15.** He clave the rocks in the wilderness: and made them to drink in great deeps. **16.** And he brought forth streams from the rock, and made the waters to run down like rivers.

12. *He wrought marvellously in the sight of their fathers.* The Psalmist is still to be regarded as condemning the posterity of the Israelites for their guilt; but he very properly, at the same time, begins to speak of the first ancestors of the nation, intimating, that the whole race of them, even from their first original, were of a perverse and rebellious disposition. But having remarked that the children of Ephraim had fallen into apostasy, because they had forgotten the wonderful works of God, he continues to prosecute the same subject. Meanwhile, as I have said, he makes a very happy transition to speak of the fathers, whom it was his object to include in the same condemnation. In the first place, he adverts to the miracles which were wrought in the midst of the land of Egypt, previous to the departure of the people from it. To recall these the more vividly to the mind, he names a place

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Zoan was the ancient capital of Egypt where the Pharaohs resided. Its great antiquity appears from the expression used respecting Hebron, in Numbers 13:22, where, to set forth the antiquity of that city, in which Abraham the tenth from Noah dwelt, it is said, that it "was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt." Zoan is twice specified in this psalm, here and in verse 43d, (though not mentioned in the history of the plagues in the book of Exodus,) as the scene of the wonderful works wrought on Pharaoh and the land of Egypt by Moses. This may mean, that these miracles were performed there in the sight of Pharaoh. Or *the field* or country *of Zoan*, may be put poetically for Egypt in general. Thus, in other poetical parts of Scripture, Zoan is sometimes used instead of Egypt, as in Isaiah 19:11, 13, where "the princes of Zoan" just mean the counsellors of Pharaoh; and in Isaiah 30:4, where, when God's ancient people are represented as sending to Egypt for relief, it is said, that their "princes were at Zoan." Zoan is rendered by the Chaldee טאנים, by the LXX. Τανις, by the Vulgate Tanis, and by the Coptic Tane, from the Coptic *ten*, plain, flat, level; being situated on the low ground of the Delta, on one of the Eastern branches of the Nile, bearing its own name, near a large lake, now called the Lake of Menzala, 44 miles west of Pelusium, 169 miles east of Alexandria, and three miles from the Mediterranean. There are ruins still remaining to mark the site of *Zoan* or *Tanis*, called *San* by the Arabs, comprising broken obelisks, capitals of the Corinthian order, a granite monument, etc. These ruins, however, are not thought to be of the highest antiquity.

which was highly celebrated — *the field of Zoan.* He next comes to speak of the passage through the sea, where he repeats what was brought under our notice in the previous psalm, that the order of nature was reversed when the waters stopped in their course, and were even raised up into solid heaps like mountains. In the third place, he declares, that after the people had passed through the Red Sea, God still continued to be their guide in their journey; and that this might not be a mere temporary deliverance, he graciously continued to stretch forth his hand to bestow upon them new testimonies of his goodness. It being a difficult and wearisome thing for them to pursue their journey through dry and sandy regions, it was no ordinary blessing to be protected from the heat of the sun by the intervention of a cloud. This, however, was to them a pledge of more distinguished grace. God hereby testified, that this people were under his protection, until they should reach the heavenly inheritance. Accordingly, Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 10:2, that there was a kind of baptism administered to the people in that cloud, as also in their passing through the sea; the fruit of which is not limited to this frail and transitory life, but extends even to everlasting salvation.

15. *He clave the rocks in the wilderness.* The Psalmist produces another evidence of the fatherly love by which God testified the greatness of the care which he exercised about the welfare of this people. It is not simply said that God gave them drink, but that he did this in a miraculous manner. Streams, it is true, sometimes issue from rocks, but the rock which Moses smote was completely dry. Whence it is evident, that the water was not brought forth from any spring, but that it was made to flow from the profoundest deeps, as if it had been said, from the very center of the earth. Those, therefore, who have interpreted this passage as meaning, that the Israelites drank in the bottomless deeps, because the waters flowed in great abundance, have failed in giving the true explanation. Moses, in his history of the miracle, rather enhances its greatness, by intimating, that God commanded those waters to come gushing from the remotest veins.

The same truth is confirmed in the following verse, in which it is stated, that where there had not been a single drop of water before there was a large and mighty river. Had there only sprung out of the rock a small rivulet, ungodly men might have had some apparent ground for cavilling at, and underrating the goodness of God, but when the water gushed out in such copious abundance all on a sudden, who does not see that the ordinary course of nature was changed, rather than that some vein or spring which lay hidden in the earth was opened?

Psalm 78:17-22

> **17.** Yet they continued still to sin against him, to provoke the Most High in the wilderness. **18.** And they tempted God in their heart, by asking food for their soul. [804] **19.** And they spake against God: they

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said, Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? **20.** Behold! he smote the rock, and the waters gushed out; and streams overflowed. Can he give bread also? Can he prepare flesh for his people? **21.** Therefore Jehovah heard, and was wroth: and a fire was kindled in Jacob: and wrath also ascended against Israel? [805] **22.** Because they believed not in God, nor trusted in his salvation.

17. *Yet they continued still to sin against him.* The prophet, having briefly declared how God, by a continual succession of benefits, had clearly manifested the greatness of his love towards the children of Abraham, now adds, that after having been laid under such deep and solemn obligations to him, they, as was natural to them, and according to their customary way, wickedly rebelled against him. In the first place, he accuses them of having provoked him grievously, by pertinaciously adding iniquity to iniquity; and then he points out the particular kind of the provocation with which they were chargeable. By the word *provoke,* he intimates, that it was no light offense which they had committed, but wickedness so heinous and aggravated as not to be endured. From the place in which it was committed, he aggravates the enormity of the sin. It was in the very wilderness, whilst the remembrance of their deliverance was yet fresh in their memory, and where they had every day full in their view tokens of the presence of God, and where even necessity itself should have constrained them to yield a true and holy obedience — it was in that place, and under these circumstances, that they repressed not their insolence and unbridled appetite. [806] It was then, certainly, a proof of monstrous infatuation for them to act in such a wanton and disgraceful manner as they did, at the very time when their want of all things should have proved the best remedy for keeping them under restraint, and to do this even in the presence of God, who presented before them such manifestations of his glory as filled them with terror, and who allured them so kindly and tenderly to himself.

18. *And they tempted God in their heart.* This is the provocation of which mention is made in the preceding verse. Not that it was unlawful for them simply to ask food, when constrained to do so by the cravings of hunger. Who can impute blame to persons, when being hungry, they implore God to supply their necessities? The sin with which the Israelites were chargeable consisted in this, that not content with the food which He had appointed them, they gave loose reins to their lusts. He, at that time, had begun to feed

"Ou, a leur cupidite." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, for their lust."

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"The term *ascended* is figurative, derived from the ascending of the breath, in vehement gusts of agitation and anger." — *Walford.*

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"Qu'ils n'ont point reprime leur insolence et appetit desordonne." — *Fr.*

them with manna, as we shall again see by and by. It was their loathing of that sustenance which impelled them eagerly to desire new food, as if they disdained the allowance assigned them by their heavenly Father. This is what is meant when it is said that *they asked food for their soul* [807] They were not reduced to the necessity of asking it by hunger; but their lust was not satisfied with living on the provision which God had appointed for them. On this account, it is declared, that *they tempted God,* overpassing, as they did, the bounds within which he had limited them. Whoever, undervaluing and despising the permission or license which He grants, gives full scope to his own intemperate lust, and desires more than is lawful, is said to tempt God. He acts as if he would subject Him to his own caprice, or questioned whether He could do more than he is pleased really to do. God has power to accomplish whatever he wills; and assuredly, the person who would separate the power of God from his will, or represent him as unable to do what he wills, does all he can to rend him in pieces. Those are chargeable with doing this, who are set upon trying whether he will grant more than he has given them permission to ask. That, therefore, the lust of the flesh may not stir us up to tempt him, let us learn to impose a restraint upon our desires, and humbly to rest contented within the limits which are prescribed to us. If the flesh is allowed to indulge itself without control, we will not be satisfied with ordinary bread, but will often, and in many ways, murmur against God.

19. *And they spake against God. The prophet had said that they tempted God in their heart;* [808] and now he adds, that they were not ashamed openly to utter with their impure and blasphemous tongues, the impiety which they had inwardly conceived. From this, it is the more abundantly manifest that malignity and wickedness had taken entire possession of their hearts. Thus we see how lust conceives sin, when it is admitted into the soul with unhallowed consent. Afterwards the sin develops itself farther, even as we see the Israelites proceeding to such a length of profane wantonness, as to call in question the power of God, as if they made no account of it, any farther than as it ministered to their lust. By the *table prepared* which is spoken of, is to be understood the dainty food, which was their ordinary fare in Egypt. A single dish did not satisfy their appetite. They were not

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The word נפש, *nephesh*, for *soul*, has great latitude of signification. It sometimes signifies the sensitive or animal appetites, as in this passage. The people had their wants abundantly supplied, and yet they remained unsatisfied and querulous. It is therefore said, that *they demanded meat* לנפשם, *for their souls*; *i e.*, not for their real wants, which they might rationally and lawfully desire to have supplied, but to gratify their sensitive and carnal appetites. Our English Bible, and Calvin on the margin of the French version, give a very happy translation, *They tempted God, by asking meat for their lust*

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"'They tempted God with their heart,' that is, heartily, or with all their soul." — *Walford.*

contented unless they could gratify themselves with great abundance and variety. When it is said in the following verse, *Behold! God smote the rock, and the waters gushed out, etc.*, this, I have no doubt, is the language of bitter irony, with which the prophet taunts their unblushing insolence. It is not very likely that they spake in this manner; but he relates, as it were, with their mouth, or in their person, the things which took place before their eyes.

21. *Therefore Jehovah heard, and was wroth.* This hearing of God implies full and perfect knowledge; and it is a figure taken from earthly judges, who cannot punish criminals until they have become thoroughly acquainted with the cause. He is said to hear his own people, when he shows his favor and mercy towards them by granting their requests; and, on the other hand, he is said to hear those blasphemies which he does not allow to pass unpunished. To remove all ground for thinking that the divine wrath was unduly severe, the enormity of the guilt of the Israelites is again described as manifested in this, that *they believed not God, nor trusted in his salvation.* It is here taken as an indisputable point, that promises were made to them to which they ought to have yielded an assent, which, however, they were prevented from yielding by the extreme infatuation with which they were carried away. *To trust in the salvation of God,* is to lean upon his fatherly providence, and to regard him as sufficient for the supply of all our wants. From this we learn not only how hateful unbelief is in the sight of God, but also, what is the true nature of faith, and what are the fruits which it produces. Whence is it that men quietly submit themselves to Him, but because they are persuaded that their salvation is singularly precious in his sight, and are fully assured that he will give them whatever is needful for them? It is thus that they are led to surrender themselves to him, to be governed according to his good pleasure. Faith, then, is the root of true piety. It teaches us to hope for, and to desire every blessing from God, and it frames us to yield obedience to him; while those who distrust him must necessarily be always murmuring and rebelling against him. The scope of the prophet is this, that the pretences to faith which are made by those who do not hope for salvation from God, rest upon false grounds; for when God is believed in, the hope of salvation is speedily produced in the mind, and this hope renders to him the praise of every blessing.

Psalm 78:23-25

23. But he had commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven, **24.** And had rained down manna [809] upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. **25.** Man had eaten the bread of the mighty: he had sent them meat to the full.

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23. *But he had commanded the clouds from above.* It is a mistake to suppose that this miracle is related merely in the way of history. The prophet rather censures the Israelites the more severely from the consideration, that although fed to the full with manna, they ceased not to lust after the dainties which they knew God had denied them. It was the basest ingratitude to scorn and reject the heavenly food, which, so to speak, associated them with angels. Were a man who dwells in France or Italy to grieve and fret that he has not the bread of Egypt to eat, nor the wine of Asia to drink, would he not make war against God and nature, after the manner of the giants of old? Much less excusable was the inordinate lust of the Israelites, whom God not only furnished with earthly provision in rich abundance, but to whom he also gave the bread of heaven for their support. Had they even endured hunger for a lengthened period, propriety and duty would have required them to ask food with more humility. Had they been supplied with only bran and chaff to eat, it would have been their bounden duty to have acknowledged that in the place where they were — in the wilderness — this was no ordinary boon of Heaven. Had only coarse bread been granted them, they would have had sufficient reason for thanksgiving. But how much stronger were their obligations to God, when he created a new kind of food, with which, by stretching out, as it were, his hand from heaven, he supplied them richly and in great abundance? This is the reason why the manna is called *corn of heaven,* and *bread of the mighty* Some explain the Hebrew word אבירים*, abbirim,* as denoting *the heavens,* [810] an opinion which I do not altogether reject. I, however, prefer taking it for *angels,* as it is understood by the Chaldee interpreter, and some others who have followed him. [811] The miracle is celebrated in high terms, to present the impiety of the people in a more detestable light; for it was a much more striking display of divine power for manna to be rained down from heaven, than if they had been fed either with herbs or fruits, or with other increase of the earth. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10:3, calls the manna *spiritual meat,* in a different sense — because it was a figure and symbol of Christ. But here the design of the prophet is to reprove the twofold ingratitude of the people, who despised not only the common food which was produced from the ground, but also the bread of angels. Some have translated the verbs in the past tense, *He commanded the clouds — he opened the doors of heaven — he rained down*

The manna received its name, either from מנה, *manah*, *he prepared*, *appointed*, *distributed*, to intimate that this food was prepared by God for the Israelites, and was their appointed portion which was daily distributed to them by measure; or, it is from the words מן הוה, *huh man*, *What is this*? Exodus 15:16, ן being used for ה in euphony. This was the question which they asked when they first saw this species of food, not knowing what it was.

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Abu Walid and Kimchi read, "the bread of heaven."

811

manna, etc [812] But to remove all ambiguity, I have thought it preferable to translate the verbs in the preterpluperfect tense, *He had commanded, he had opened, he had rained,* to enable my readers the better to understand that the prophet does not here simply relate this history, but recalls it to remembrance for another purpose, as a thing which happened long ago.

Psalm 78:26-31

26. He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens; and by his power he raised up the south wind. **27.** And he rained upon them flesh as dust, and feathered fowl [813] as the sand of the sea; **28.** And he caused it to fall in the midst of his camp, [814] round about his tabernacles. **29.** And they did eat and were filled, and he gave them their desire. **30.** They were not estranged from their desire: the meat was still in their mouth, **31.** When the wrath of God ascended against them, and slew the fat ones among them, and brought low the chosen of Israel.

26. *He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens.* We have here related how God granted the request of his people. This does not imply that he favourably regarded their fretful desires, but that he showed by the effect that it was in his power to do what they believed it to be impossible for him to accomplish. From this, we may perceive how injudiciously some expositors here join together *the flesh* and *the manna.* The reason why the flesh was given was altogether different from that for which the manna was

The Chaldee paraphrase of the expression, *the bread of the mighty*, is, "the food that descends from the dwelling of angels;" so that, according to this view, it signifies no more than, "corn of heaven," by which the manna is described in the preceding verse. Dr Geddes and Williams observe, that the Hebrew word אבירים, *abbirim*, never signifies *angels*, but persons of the higher classes, the *rich*, the *great*, the *noble*; and that the meaning of the Psalmist is, that the Israelites found in the manna a dainty, delicate food, such as might suit the palates of the great; that it was bread fit for princes; the best, the choicest of bread. This agrees with Simonis' rendering of the phrase, "cibus nobilium, scilicet principum; hoc est, cibus exquisitus, delicatus, eximius." Such also is the view taken by Fry, Walford, and others. If by אבירים, *abbirim*, *the mighty,* angels should be understood, as it is rendered in all the ancient versions, the meaning will be substantially the same; for the manna, by an obvious poetical figure, may be called *the bread of angels*, to denote food of the most exquisite kind; just as Paul speaks of *the tongues of angels*, (1 Corinthians 13:1,) to indicate eloquence of the highest order.

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"Les autres ont traduit les verbes par un temps passe, Il a commande aux nuees, Il a ouvert les portes du ciel, Il a fait pluvoir la Manne," etc. — *Fr.*

813

"Heb. 'fowl of wing;' *i.e.*, flying fowls, in distinction from domestic poultry." — *Williams.*

814

"Heb. *Of his camp*; either Israel's camp or God's camp; for seeing Israel was God's people, and he dwelt among them, their camp was his camp." — *Poole.*

given. God, in giving the manna, performed the office of a father; but by the flesh, he satisfied their gluttonous desires, that their very greediness in devouring it might choke them. It would not have been a difficult matter for God to have created quails in the midst of the wilderness; but he chose rather to bring them by the force of the winds, to teach the Israelites that all the elements are obedient to his command, and that the distance of places cannot prevent his power from immediately penetrating from the east even to the west. [815] That unbelieving people, therefore, were furnished with an undoubted proof of the power of *God,* from which they had malignantly detracted, in seeing all the elements of nature ready to obey and promptly to execute whatever he has commanded. Besides, he no doubt raised the winds according to the situation of the camp, although it would have been easy for him, without any means, to have presented flesh before them. It is stated, that *they did eat and were filled,* not only to intimate that God brought to them a large supply of birds, with which their bellies might be stuffed to the full; but also, that it was ungovernable lust which led them to ask flesh, and not a solicitude for having provision on which to live. It has been said above, that manna had been given them in the greatest abundance, but here it is intended expressly to censure their gluttony, in which they gave manifest proof of their unbridled appetite. God promises, in Psalm 145:19, as a peculiar privilege to those who fear him, that "he will fulfill their desire;" but it is in a different way that he is here said to have yielded to the perverse desires of the people, who had cast off all fear of him; for that which his favor and loving-kindness would have led him to refuse, he now granted them in his wrath. This is an example well worthy of our attention, that we may not complain if our desires are frowned upon and crossed by the secret providence of God when they break forth beyond bounds. God then truly hears us, when, instead of yielding to our foolish inclinations, he regulates his beneficence according to the measure of our welfare; even as in lavishing upon the wicked more than is good for them, he cannot, properly speaking, be said to hear them: he rather loads them with a deadly burden, which serves to cast them down headlong into destruction.

815

The Israelites were miraculously supplied with quails in the wilderness on two different occasions. The first occasion was upon the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from Egypt, and before they came to mount Sinai, Exodus 16:1, 12, 13. The second, which is the one here referred to, was at Kibroth-hattaavah, a place three days' journey beyond the desert of Sinai, in the beginning of the second year after their departure from Egypt, Numbers 10:11; and 11:31-35. In both instances, the quails were sent in consequence of the murmuring of the Israelites. But in the first instance, they came up and covered the camp of Israel only one evening, while in the second, they came up from the sea for a whole month. No token of the divine displeasure accompanied the first miracle, God having, in his compassion, forgiven their murmuring; but the second miracle was wrought in wrath, and attended with the infliction of the divine vengeance on that rebellious people, (Numbers 11:33.)

The Psalmist expresses this still more clearly, by adding immediately after, (verses 30, 31,) that this pampering proved fatal to them, as if with the meat they had swallowed the flame of the divine wrath. When he says that *they were not estranged from their lust,* this implies, that they were still burning with their lust. If it is objected that this does not agree with the preceding sentence, where it is said, that "they did eat, and were thoroughly filled," I would answer, that if, as is well known, the minds of men are not kept within the bounds of reason and temperance, they become insatiable; and, therefore, a great abundance will not extinguish the fire of a depraved appetite. Some translate the clause, *They were not disappointed,* and others, *They did not yet loathe their meat.* This last translation brings out the meaning very well; but it is too far removed from the signification of the Hebrew word זוּר, *zur,* which I have rendered *estranged.* The prophet intended to express in two words a present felt pleasure; for when God executed vengeance upon the people, they still indulged in the excessive gratification of the palate. [816] *The wrath of God* is said metaphorically *to ascend,* when he suddenly rises up to execute judgment; for when he apparently shuts his eyes and takes no notice of our sins, he seems, so to speak, to be asleep. The punishment was felt by persons of every condition among the Israelites; but *the fat ones* [817] and *the chosen* are expressly named, in order to exhibit the judgment of God in a light still more conspicuous. It did not happen by chance that the most robust and vigorous were attacked and cut off by the plague. As the strong are commonly deceived by their strength, and proudly exalt themselves against God, forgetting their own weakness, and thinking that they may do whatever they please, it is not surprising to find that the wrath of God burned more fiercely against such persons than against others.

Psalm 78:32-37

32. For all this they still sinned, and believed not his wondrous works
33. And he consumed their days in vanity, and their years in haste.
[818] **34.** When he slew them, then they sought him; they returned, and hastened early to God. **35.** And they remembered that God was their Rock, and that the High God was their Redeemer. **36.** And they

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"*While their meat was yet in their mouth*; the meat of the quails, while it was between their teeth, ere it was chewed, and before it was swallowed down, while they were rolling this sweet morsel under their tongues, and were gorging themselves with it, destruction came upon them; just as Belshazzar, while he was feasting with his nobles, in the midst of his mirth and jollity, was slain by the Persians, Daniel 5:1, 30." — *Dr Gill.*

817

Mr Mudge observes, that this clause should be translated, "Slew them amidst their fatnesses or indulgences." This is approved of by Lowth. Cocceius and Michaelis give a similar version.

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flattered him with their mouth, and lied to him with their tongue. **37.** But their heart was not right before him, neither were they faithful in his covenant

32. *For all this they still sinned.* It is a common proverb, that fools become wise when the rod is applied to them. Hence it follows, that those who have often been chastised of God, and yet are not thereby brought to repentance and amendment, are utterly to be despaired of. Such was the obstinacy of the Israelites here described. They could not be reformed by any of the afflictions which were sent upon them. It was a dreadful manifestation of the vengeance of God to see so many bodies of strong and vigorous men stretched dead on the ground. It was therefore a proof of monstrous obduracy, when they were not moved at such an appalling spectacle. By the expression *wondrous works,* is not only meant the plague just now spoken of: the other miracles, previously mentioned, are comprehended. There is, therefore, laid to the charge of the people a twofold wickedness; — they are accused not only of disbelieving the word of God, but also of despising the miracles which he wrought. For this reason, it is added, that their plagues were increased; even as God denounces and threatens by Moses, that he will deal sevenfold more severely with the obstinate and hardened who persevere in their wickedness.

33. *And he consumed their days in vanity.* As the Psalmist here speaks of the whole people, as if he had said, that all without exception were speedily consumed, from the least even to the greatest, this might with probability be referred to that most grievous punishment which was confirmed and ratified by the wrath of God — that they should all perish in the wilderness with only two exceptions, Joshua and Caleb; because, when already near the land of Canaan, they had turned back. That vast multitude, therefore, after they had shut against themselves the door of entrance into the Holy Land, died in the wilderness during the course of forty years. *Days* are put in the first place, and then *years;* by which it is intimated, that the duration of their life was cut short by the curse of God, and that it was quite apparent that they failed in the midst of their course. *Their days* then were consumed *in vanity;* for they vanished away like smoke: and *their years in haste,* because they passed swiftly away like a stream. The word בהלה, *behalah,* here translated *haste,* is by some rendered *terror.* I would rather prefer reading *tumult;* for it is undoubtedly meant that their life was taken away, as when in a tumult any thing is taken by force. [819] But I would not be disposed to

"This alludes to their appointed wanderings for forty years in the wilderness, as the punishment of their disobedience and rebellion; that all those who had left Egypt, and were grown to man's estate, were dead, with the exceptions of Caleb and Joshua." — *Warner.*

819

"Que leur vie a este emportee comme quand en tumulte on ravit quelque chose." — *Fr.*

change the word *haste,* which brings out the meaning more perspicuously. It was a display of righteous retribution, on account of their obstinacy, that their strength which made them proud, thus withered and vanished all on a sudden as a shadow.

34. *When he slew them, then they sought him.* By the circumstance here recorded, it is intended to aggravate their guilt. When under a conviction of their wickedness they acknowledged that they were justly punished, and yet did not with sincerity of heart humble themselves before God, but rather mocked him, intending to put him off with false pretences, their impiety was the less excusable. If a man who has lost his judgment does not feel his own calamities, he is excusable because he is insensible; but he who is forced to acknowledge that he is culpable, and yet always continues the same, or after having lightly sought pardon, in fair but deceitful words, suddenly returns to his former state of mind, manifestly shows by such hollowness of heart that his disease is incurable. It is here tacitly intimated, that the punishments, by which a people so obstinate were constrained to seek God, were of no common or ordinary kind; and we are informed, (verse 35, [820]) not only that they were convinced of wickedness, but also that they were affected with a sense and a remembrance of the redemption from which they were fallen. By this means they are the more effectually deprived of all excuse on the ground of ignorance. The language implies that they were not carried away inadvertently, or deceived through ignorance, but that they had provoked the wrath of God, by dealing treacherously, as it were with deliberate purpose. And, indeed, God opened their eyes with the view of more openly discovering their desperate wickedness, as if, shaking off their hypocrisy and flatteries, he drew them from their lurking-places into the light.

36. *And they flattered him with their mouth, and lied to him with their tongue.* Here they are charged with perfidiousness, because they neither confessed their guilt with sincerity of heart, nor truly ascribed to God the glory of their deliverance. We are not to suppose that they made no acknowledgement at all; but it is intimated that the confession of the mouth, as it did not proceed from the heart, was constrained and not voluntary. This is well worthy of being noticed; for from it we learn, not only the duty incumbent upon us of guarding against that gross hypocrisy which consists in uttering with the tongue, before men, one thing, while we think a different thing in our hearts, but also that we ought to beware of a species of hypocrisy which is more hidden, and which consists in this, that the sinner, being constrained by fear, flatters God in a slavish manner, while yet, if he could, he would shun the judgment of God. The greater part of men are

820

In the Hebrew Bible, a masoretic note is inserted after the 35th verse, הספר חצי, *chatsi ha-sepher*, *the middle of the book*, that is, with respect to verses.

mortally smitten with this disease; for although the divine majesty extorts from them some kind of awe, yet it would be gratifying to them were the light of divine truth completely extinguished. It is, therefore, not enough to yield an assent to the divine word, unless that assent is accompanied with true and pure affection, so that our hearts may not be double or divided. The Psalmist points out the cause and source of this dissimulation to be, that they were not *steadfast and faithful* By this he intimates, that whatever does not proceed from unfeigned purity of heart is accounted lying and deceit in the sight of God. Since this uprightness is every where required in the law, he accuses the people with being covenant-breakers, because they had not kept the covenant of God with that fidelity which became them. As I have observed elsewhere, there is always to be presupposed a mutual relation and correspondence between the covenant of God and our faith, in order that the unfeigned consent of the latter may answer to the faithfulness of the former.

Psalm 78:38-41

> **38.** Yet he, being merciful, expiated their iniquity, [821] and did not destroy them: and he multiplied to turn away his anger, and did not stir up all his wrath. **39.** And he remembered that they were flesh; a spirit [822] that passeth, and returneth not. **40.** How often did they provoke him in the desert, and grieve him in the wilderness! **41.** And they returned, and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel.

38. *Yet he, being merciful, expiated their iniquity.* To show the more fully that no means had succeeded in bending the Israelites, and causing them to return to a sound state of mind, we are now informed that, although God bare with their multiplied transgressions, and exercised his mercy in forgiving them, they had no less manifested their wickedness in abusing his benignity in every instance in which it was displayed, than they had shown themselves refractory and obstinate when he treated them with severity. At the same time, the reason is assigned why they did not utterly perish. They no doubt deserved to be involved in one common destruction; but it is declared that God mitigated his anger, that some seed of them might remain.

821

"יכפר, *yecapher*, made an *atonement* for their iniquity." — *Dr Adam Clarke*

822

"C'est a dire, souffle." — *Fr. marg.* "That is to say, a breath." Dr Adam Clarke translates, "the spirit goeth away, and it doth not return." "The present life," he observes, "is the state of probation; when, therefore, the *flesh*, the *body*, fails, the *spirit* goeth away into the eternal world, and returneth not hither again." He considers the translation in our English Bible, "a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again," to be a bad one, and that it may be productive of error; as if when a man dies, his being were ended, and death were an eternal sleep.

That none might infer, from these examples of vengeance which have been mentioned, that God had proceeded to punish them with undue severity, we are told that the punishments inflicted upon them were moderate — yea, mild, when compared with the aggravated nature of their wickedness. God kept back his hand, not looking so much to what they had deserved, as desiring to give place to his mercy. We are not, however, to imagine that he is changeable, when at one time he chastises us with a degree of severity, and at another time gently draws and allures us to himself; for in the exercise of his matchless wisdom, he has recourse to different means by which to try whether there is really any hope of our recovery. But the guilt of men becomes more aggravated, when neither his severity can reform them nor his mercy melt them. It is to be observed, that the mercy of God, which is an essential attribute of his nature, is here assigned as the reason why he spared his people, to teach us that he was not induced by any other cause but this, to show himself so much inclined and ready to pardon. Moreover, as he pardoned them not only in one instance, nor in one respect, it is affirmed that *he expiated their iniquity, that he might not destroy them;* and again, that although he had been oftentimes provoked, he yet ceased not to turn away his anger; and, finally, that he mitigated his chastisements, lest the people should be overwhelmed with the weight of them.

39. *And he remembered that they were flesh.* Another reason is now brought forward why God had compassion on the people, which is, his unwillingness to try his strength against men who are so constituted as to live only for a short period in this world, and who then quickly pass away; for the forms of expression here used denote the frailty by which the condition of men is made miserable. *Flesh* and *spirit* are frequently contrasted in the Scriptures; not only when *flesh* means our depraved and sinful nature, and *spirit* the uprightness to which the children of God are born again; but also when men are called *flesh,* because there is nothing firm or stable in them: as it is said in Isaiah, (Isaiah 31:3,) "Egypt is flesh, and not spirit." In this passage, however, the *words flesh* and *spirit* are employed in the same sense — *flesh* meaning that men are subject to corruption and putrefaction; and *spirit,* that they are only a breath or a fleeting shadow. As men are brought to death by a continual wasting and decay, the people are compared to a wind which passes away, and which, of its own accord, falls and does not return again. When we have run our race, we do not commence a new life upon the earth; even as it is said in Job,

"For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth and wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?" (Job 14:7)

The meaning, then, as we may now clearly perceive, is, that God, in the exercise of his mercy and goodness, bare with the Jews, not because they deserved this, but because their frail and transitory condition called forth his pity and induced him to pardon them. We shall afterwards meet with an almost similar statement in Psalm 103:13-16, where God is represented as being merciful to us, because he sees that we are like grass, and that we soon wither and become dry like hay. Now, if God find in us nothing but misery to move him to compassion, it follows that it is solely his own pure and undeserved goodness which induces him to sustain us. When it is affirmed that men *return not,* when they have finished the course of their life in this world, it is not meant to exclude the hope of a future resurrection; for men are contemplated only as they are in themselves, and it is merely their state on earth which is spoken of. With respect to the renovation of man to the heavenly life, it is a miracle far surpassing nature. In the same sense it is said, in another place, "His spirit goeth forth, and returneth not," (Wisdom 16:14;) language which implies that men, when they are born into the world, do not bring with them the hope of future restoration, which must be derived from the grace of regeneration.

40. *How often did they provoke him in the desert?* Here the preceding sentence is confirmed, it being declared that, as they had in so many instances provoked God in the wilderness, by the vast accumulation of their sins, [823] they must of necessity have perished a thousand times, had not God as often shown himself favorable and merciful towards them. The interrogatory form of the sentence expresses more significantly that they continued sinning without intermission. The word *wilderness* includes in it the circumstance both of place and of time. By this it is intended, first, to reprove their ingratitude, in that the memory of God's benefits, while still so fresh in their minds, and even the sight of them daily before their eyes, were not at least able to check them in their wickedness; and, secondly, to condemn their impetuous and infatuated recklessness, in heaping up such a multitude of sins within so short a period.

In the same sense it is added immediately after, (verse 41,) that *they returned* to their former ways, and *tempted God.* The word *return* does not here signify change, but a continued course of sinning. The heinous indignity which is done to God when men tempt him, is expressed by a

823

"They provoked God at least ten times, (Numbers 14:22,) during the first two years of their journey through the wilderness. 1. at the Red Sea, (Exodus 14:11, 12;) 2. at the waters of Marah, (Exodus 15:24;) 3. in the wilderness of Sin, (Exodus 15:2;) 4. when they kept the manna until the following day, (Exodus 16:10;) 5, when the manna was collected on the Sabbath, (Exodus 16:27;) 6. in Rephidim, where there was no water, (Numbers 20:2, 13;) 7. at Horeb, when a molten calf was made, (Exodus 32:1, etc.;) 8. at Taberah, (Numbers 11:1, 2, 3;) 9. when they lusted for flesh, (Numbers 11:4;) 10. when they murmured at the news brought by the men, who had been sent to search the land, (Numbers 14:1, etc.") — *Cresswell.*

beautiful metaphor. The Hebrew word תוה, *tavah,* signifies *to mark out* or *describe.* It is intimated, that when the people dared to limit the operations of God, according to their own pleasure, he was, as it were, shut up within bars of wood or iron, and his infinite power circumscribed within the narrow boundaries to which unbelief would confine it. And assuredly, whenever men do not go beyond their own understandings, it is as if they would measure God by their own small capacity, which is nothing else than to pull him down from his throne; for his Majesty must be brought into subjection to us, if we would have him to be regulated according to our own fancy.

Psalm 78:42-51

42. They remembered not his hand in the day that he delivered them from the oppressor: [824] **43.** When he set his signs in Egypt, and his miracles in the field of Zoan. **44.** When he turned their rivers into blood; and their streams, that they could not drink. **45.** He sent among them a mixture [825] which devoured them; and the frog which destroyed them. **46.** And he gave their fruit [or produce] to the

824

That is, Pharaoh, as the next verse shows. See Psalm 107:2.

825

This is the literal rendering of the original word ערב, *arob*, which is derived from the verb ערב, *arab*, *he mingled* It is not agreed among interpreters what is meant by this name given here, and in Exodus 8:21, and in Psalm 105:31, to one of the plagues which fell upon the Egyptians. The Chaldee has "a mixture of living creatures of the wood." "*A mixture*; a mixed collection of beasts," says Bythner. In our English Bible, it is "divers sorts of flies." Others read, "swarms of flies." Bishop Mant reads, "the ravening fly;" Fry, simply "the fly;" and Walford, "the horse-fly." "The Seventy," says Mant, "have rendered the original word translated 'fly,' when spoken of the Egyptian plague, constantly by κυνομυία, 'the dog-fly;' whence it is plain those translators thought it meant some particular species of fly, in opposition to those who are of opinion that it meant 'all sorts of flies.' (See Parkhurst on ערב.) What particular species was intended has been much doubted. Bruce, however, seems to have decided the question, and fixed the insect to be the Ethiopian fly, called Zimb, of which he has given a particular description. Some of its effects are thus represented by him. 'As soon as this plague appears, and their buzzing is heard, all the cattle forsake their food, and run wildly about the plain, till they die, worn out with fatigue, fright, and hunger. No remedy remains but to leave the black earth, and hasten down to the sands of Atbara; and there they remain, while the rains last, this cruel enemy not daring to pursue them further. Though his size be immense, as is his strength, and his body covered with a thick skin, defended with strong hair, yet even the camel is not capable of sustaining the violent punctures the fly makes with his pointed proboscis. When once attacked by this fly, his body, head, and legs, break out into large bosses, which swell, break, and putrefy, to the certain destruction of the creature. Even the elephant and rhinoceros, which, by reason of their enormous bulk, and the vast quantity of food and water they daily need, cannot shift to desert and dry places, as the season may require, are obliged to roll themselves in mud and mire; which, when dry, coats them over like armor, and enables them to stand their ground against this winged assassin.'" — *Mant*

caterpillar, [826] and their labor to the grasshopper. [827] **47.** And he destroyed their vines with hail, and their wild fig-trees [828] with hail

826

חסיל, *chasil*, which is derived from חסל, *chasal*, *to consume*, *eat up*, denotes a species of insect, so called from its devouring the fruits of the earth. But we are so little acquainted with the various kinds of destructive insects that ravage the Eastern countries, that it is somewhat difficult to determine the particular species meant by this term. It is distinguished from the locust in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple, 2 Chronicles 6:28, and in Joel 1:4, where it is mentioned as eating up what the locusts had left. Harmer is of opinion that it is the species of insects now called *sim* in Persia, referred to in the following extract from Sir John Chardin's Travels: — "Persia is subject to have its harvests spoiled by hail, by drought, or by insects, either locusts or small insects which they call *sim*, which are small white lice, which fix themselves on the foot of the stalk of corn, gnaw it, and make it die. It is rare for a year to be exempt from one or other of these scourges, which affect the ploughed lands and the gardens," etc. On this Harmer observes, "The enumeration by Solomon and that of this modern writer, though not exactly alike, yet so nearly resemble each other, that one would be inclined to believe these small insects are what Solomon meant by the word [חסיל, *chasil*] translated 'caterpillars' in our English version." — *Harmer's Observations*, volume 3, page 316. חסיל, *chasil*, is rendered βρουχος by the LXX., in 2 Chronicles 6:28, and by Aquila here, and also by the Vulgate in Chronicles and in Isaiah 33:4, and it is rendered by Jerome here, *bruchus*, "the chaffer," which every one knows to be a great devourer of the leaves of trees. The Syriac in Joel 1:4, 2:25, renders it, צרצורא, *tzartzooro*, which Michaelis, (Supplem. ad Lex. Heb., page 865,) from the Arabic צרצר, *tsartzar*, a cricket, interprets the *mole-cricket*, which, in its grub state, is also very destructive to corn, grass, and other vegetables, by cankering the roots on which it feeds. — See *Parkhurst's Lexicon* on חאל

827

The Hebrew word here translated "grasshopper" is, ארבה, *arbeh*, which properly means "locust." The locust receives no fewer than ten different names in Scripture, each of which indicates something characteristic. It is called ארבה, *arbeh*, from its extraordinary fecundity. No animal is more prolific; nor has Providence ever employed an agency more effective in destroying the fruits of the earth. Dr Russell, in his Natural History of Aleppo, observes that locusts "sometimes arrive in such incredible multitudes as it would appear fabulous to relate, destroying the whole of the verdure wherever they pass." A Traveller in Syria says, "That country, together with Egypt, Persia, and almost all the whole middle part of Asia, partakes in another scourge besides volcanoes and earthquakes, and that no less terrible; I mean those clouds of locusts of which travelers have spoken: the quantity of these insects is incredible to any man who has not seen it: the earth is covered by them for several leagues round. One may hear at a distance the noise they make in brousing the plants and trees, like an army plundering in secret. It would be better to be concerned with Tartars than these little destructive animals: one might say that fire follows their tract." — See *Parkhurst's Lexicon* on רבה,4.

828

stones. [829] **48.** And he gave up their cattle to the hail; and their flocks to thunderbolts. **49.** He sent upon them the fierceness of his wrath, fury, anger, and affliction, and sent evil angels among them. **50.** He made a way to his anger: he kept not their soul from death, and shut up their cattle

[830] to the pestilence. **51.** And he smote all the first-born in Egypt: the first-fruits of their strength [831] in the tents of Ham.

42. *They remembered not his hand.* The sacred writer still continues to upbraid the Israelites; for the simple remembrance of God's benefits might have restrained them, had they not wilfully and perversely forgotten whatever they had experienced. From this impious forgetfulness proceed waywardness and all rebellion. *The hand of God,* as is well known, is by the figure metonomy taken for his power. In the deliverance of the chosen tribes from Egypt here celebrated, the hand of God was stretched forth in a new and an unusual manner. And their impiety, against which the prophet now inveighs, was rendered the more detestable, from the fact that they accounted as nothing, or soon forgat, that which no length of time ought to have effaced from their memory. Farther, he recounts certain examples of the power of God, which he calls first *signs,* and then *miracles,* (verse 43,) that, by the recital of these, he may again rebuke the shameful stupidity of the people. By both these words he expresses the same thing; but in

The original word שקמותם, *shikmotham*, does not properly signify *the fig-tree*, but the *sycamore*, a tree which grows in Palestine, Arabia, and Egypt. It is different from the English sycamore, which is a species of maple. It bears fruit resembling the fig, whilst its leaves are like those of the mulberry-tree; whence its name, συκος, (*sycos*,) a fig-tree, and, μωρος, (*moros*,) a mulberry-tree. The sycamore was highly valued by the ancient Egyptians. It furnished them with wood for various purposes; it afforded a grateful shade by its wide-spreading branches; and the figs which it produced, it is not improbable, formed a principal part of the food of the common people. "Norden tells us the people for the greater part live upon these figs; thinking themselves well regaled when they have a piece of bread, a couple of sycamore-figs, and a pitcher filled with water from the Nile." — *Harmer's Observations*, volume 4, pages 4, 5. From this it is easy to conceive how severe and distressing the loss must have been which the Egyptians sustained "when their vines were destroyed with hail, and their sycamore-trees with frost or hailstones."

829

"בחנמל, *ba-chana-mal*, *in frost* A noun of four letters prefixed with ב; חנמל is read here only in Scripture. And what it may be is unknown. *Severe frost*, according to some; *a kind of hail*, according to others." — *Bythner*

830

The original word חיתם, *chayatham*, here rendered *their cattle*, is translated in our English Bible *their life* But in all the ancient versions it is *their cattle* The reference is to the plague which destroyed all the first-born in the land of Egypt. The first-born both of cattle, and of the Egyptians themselves, were involved in one common destruction. Exodus 12:29

831

"Ar. reads, בניהם, 'the first-fruits *of their children.*' See Exodus 12:29." — *Dimock*

the second clause of the verse, the word *miracles* gives additional emphasis, implying that, by such strange and unheard-of events, the Egyptians had at that time been stricken with such terror as ought not to have vanished so speedily from the minds of the Israelites.

44. *When he turned their rivers into blood.* The Psalmist does not enumerate in their order the miracles by which God gave evidence of his power in the deliverance of his people. He considered it enough to bring to their remembrance the well-known histories of these events, which would be sufficient to lay open the wickedness and ingratitude with which they were chargeable; nor is it necessary for us to stay long on these things, since the narrative of Moses gives a more distinct and fuller account of what is here briefly stated. Only I would have my readers to remember that, although God often punished the sins of the heathen by sending upon them hail and other calamities, yet all the plagues which at that time were inflicted upon the Egyptians were of an extraordinary character, and such as were previously unheard-of. A variety of words is therefore employed to enhance these memorable instances of the vengeance of God, as that *he sent upon them the fierceness of his wrath, fury, anger, and affliction* This accumulation of words is intended to awaken minds which are asleep to a discovery of so many miracles, of which both the number and the excellence might be perceived even by the blind themselves.

In the last place, it is added that God executed these judgments *by angels.* Although God has, according as it has pleased him, established certain laws, both in heaven and on earth, and governs the whole order of nature in such a manner as that each creature has assigned to it its own peculiar office; yet whenever it seems good to him he makes use of the ministration of angels for executing his commands, not by ordinary or natural means, but by his secret power, which to us is incomprehensible. Some think that devils are here spoken of, because the epithet *evil* or *hurtful* is applied to *angel.* [832] This opinion I do not reject; but the ground upon which they rest it has little solidity. They say that as God dispenses his benefits to us by the ministry of elect angels, so he also executes his wrath by the agency of

832

Aben Ezra supposes רעים מלאכי, *malachey raim*, to be Moses and Aaron, as *messengers of evil* to Pharaoh, who are so called because they previously warned him, and denounced the judgments of God against him, just as the Prophet Abijah makes use of a similar expression when the wife of Jeroboam came to him to inquire concerning her son: "I am a messenger to thee of hard things," 1 Kings 14:6. Fry also reads "messengers of evil," and has the following note: "Such is the literal meaning and exact rendering of מלאכי רעים, and not *evil angels*, which would be regularly רעים מלאכים. By these *messengers of evil*, I make no doubt, no more is meant than Moses and Aaron, who were charged with denunciations of wrath to Pharaoh, previously to the infliction of all the several plagues." Archbishop Secker, however, observes, that although רעים מלאכים would be the proper expression for *evil angels*, yet the plural of לאכ is sometimes written defectively מלאכי. The LXX. has, ἀποστολὼν δἰ ἀγγελων πονηρῶν, "a message by evil angels."

reprobate angels, as if they were his executioners. This I admit is partly true; but I deny that this distinction is always observed. Many passages of Scripture can be quoted to the contrary. When the army of the Assyrians laid siege to the holy city Jerusalem, who was it that made such havoc among them as compelled them to raise the siege, but the angel who was appointed at that time for the defense of the Church? (2 Kings 19:35.) In like manner, the angel who slew the first-born in Egypt (Exodus 11:5) was not only a minister and an executor of the wrath of God against the Egyptians, but also the agent employed for preserving the Israelites. On the other hand, although the kings of whom Daniel speaks were avaricious and cruel, or rather robbers, and turned all things upside down, yet the Prophet declares, (chapter 20:13,) that holy angels were appointed to take charge of them. It is probable that the Egyptians were given over and subjected to reprobate angels, as they deserved; but we may simply consider the angels here spoken of as termed *evil,* on account of the work in which they were employed, — because they inflicted upon the enemies of the people of God terrible plagues to repress their tyranny and cruelty. In this way, both the heavenly and elect angels, and the fallen angels, are justly accounted the ministers or executors of calamity; but they are to be regarded as such in different senses. The former yield a prompt and willing obedience to God; but the latter, as they are always eagerly intent upon doing mischief, and would, if they could, turn the whole world upside down, are fit instruments for inflicting calamities upon men.

50. *He made a way to his anger.* [833] To take away all excuse from this ungrateful people, whom the most evident and striking proofs of the goodness of God which were presented before their eyes could not keep in their obedience to him, it is here again repeated that the wrath of God overflowed Egypt like an impetuous torrent. The miracle adverted to is the last which was there wrought, when God, by the powerful hand of his angel, slew, in one night, all the first-born of Egypt. According to a common and familiar mode of speaking in the Hebrew language, the first-born are called *the beginning,* or *the first-fruits of strength.* Although the old advance to death as they decline in years, yet as they are in a manner renewed in their offspring, and thus may be said to recover their decayed strength, the term *strength* is applied to their children. And the first-born are called *the beginning* or *the first-fruits* of this strength, as I have explained more at large on Genesis 49:3. The houses of Egypt are called *the tents of Ham,* because

833

"*He levelled a path to his anger* פלס [the word for *levelled*] signifies to direct by a line or level; and when applied to a way, is understood to denote that the way is made straight and smooth, so as to leave no impediment to the passenger. See Poole's Synopsis and Le Clerc. The sense will be much the same whether we thus interpret the phrase, or suppose the anger of God to have taken its direction, παρὰ στάθμην, in a straight line, and by a level; that is, in the shortest way, without delay or deviation." — *Merrick's Annotations*

Misraim, who gave the name to the country, was the son of Ham, Genesis 10:6. Farther, there is here celebrated the free love of God towards the posterity of Shem, as manifested in his preferring them to all the children of Ham, although they were possessed of no intrinsic excellence which might render them worthy of such a distinction.

Psalm 78:52-58

> **52.** And he made his people to go forth like sheep, and led them in the wilderness like a flock. **53.** And he conducted them in safety, and they were not afraid: and the sea covered their enemies. **54.** And he brought them to his holy border, [literally to the border of his holiness,] this mountain, [834] which his right hand acquired. [835] **55.** He expelled the heathen from before them; and made them to fall into their part of the inheritance; [836] and made the children of Israel to dwell in their tents. **56.** And they tempted and provoked the Most High God, and kept not his testimonies. **57.** And they turned back and dealt treacherously, like their fathers: they turned back, like a deceitful bow. [837] **58.** And they provoked him to anger with their high places; and moved him to anger with their graven images.

834

"This mountain, *i.e.*, *Zion*; which the Psalmist might point to with his finger." — *Dimock.*

835

"Ou, possedee." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, possessed."

836

"Perhaps for נחלה, we should read נחלם, 'and he made them fall *in the lot* of their inheritance.' For it has been by some learned men conjectured, that the land of Canaan was originally the allotment of Heber and his descendants, and that the Canaanites had obtained it by *force and violence*; for which reason amongst others, they were expelled from it, and the Hebrews reinstated. See Genesis 11:15; 13:15; 1 Chronicles 1:24-27; and Bryant's Obs. But see Psalm 105:11, 12, 44, and Psalm 111:7." — *Dimock*

837

"רמיה כקשת, *like a deceitful bow* This comparison does not seem to convey a suitable idea either here or Hosea 7:16. Might we then venture to read in both places כאשת '*like a deceitful woman*?' backsliding Israel being often represented under the character of an adulteress. See Ezekiel 16:32. And the last line of the next verse strongly countenances this reading: 'and they made him jealous *with their images*.' See Exodus 20:5." — *Dimock* There is, however, no necessity for this conjectural emendation. The image employed is natural enough. "The Eastern bow," says Dr Adam Clarke, "which, when at rest, is in the form of aוסבּ , must be *recurred*, or *turned the contrary way*, in order to be what is called *bent* and *strung* If a person who is unskilful or weak attempt to *recurve* and string one of these bows, if he take not great heed, it will spring back and regain its quiescent position, and perhaps break his arm. And sometimes I have known it, when bent, to *start aside* — regain its quiescent position — to my no small danger; and, in one or two cases, to my injury. This image is frequently used in the Sacred Writings; but no person has understood it, not being acquainted with the Eastern *recurved bow*, which must be bent the contrary way, in order to be proper for use These Israelites, when brought out of their natural bent, soon recoiled, and relapsed into their former state."

52. *And he made his people to go forth like sheep.* The Psalmist again celebrates God's fatherly love towards the chosen people, whom, as we have elsewhere remarked, he compares to a flock of sheep. They had no wisdom or power of their own to preserve and defend themselves; but God graciously condescended to perform towards them the office of a shepherd. It is a singular token of the love which he bore towards them, that he did not disdain to humble himself so far as to feed them as his own sheep. What could a multitude who had never been trained up to the art of war do against powerful and warlike enemies? So far from having learned the art of war, the people, as is well known, had been employed, when in Egypt, in mean and servile occupations, as if they had been condemned to toil under the earth in mines or in quarries.

53. *And he conducted them in safety, and they were not afraid.* This does not imply that they relied on God confidently, and with tranquil minds, but that, having God for their guide and the guardian of their welfare, they had no just cause to be afraid. When at any time they were thrown into consternation, this was owing to their own unbelief. From this cause proceeded these murmuring questions to which they gave utterance, when Pharaoh pursued them, upon their leaving Egypt, and when they were "sore afraid:" "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness," (Exodus 14:11.) This security, then, is not to be referred to the feeling of this in the minds of the people, but to the protection of God, by which it came to pass that, their enemies having been drowned in the Red Sea, they enjoyed quiet and repose in the wilderness. Other benefits which God had bestowed upon them are here recited, and at the same time other transgressions with which they had been chargeable. This shows the more clearly their deep ingratitude. After having obtained possession of the inheritance which was promised them, as if they had been under no obligations to God, their hearts were always rebellious and untractable. The accomplishment, and, as it were, the concluding act of their deliverance, was the putting them in possession of the land of Canaan, from entering which they had precluded themselves, had not God determined, notwithstanding their wickedness, to complete, in all respects, the work which he had commenced. The land itself is called *the borders of God's sanctuary,* (verse 54,) because God, in assigning it to his people, had also consecrated it to himself. This, it is manifest, exhibits in a more heinous and aggravated light the iniquity of the people, who brought into that land the same pollutions with which it had been anciently defiled. What madness was it for the people of Israel, who knew that the old inhabitants of the country had been driven from it on account of their abominations, to strive to surpass them in

all kinds of wickedness? as if they had been resolved to do all they could to bring down upon their own heads that divine vengeance which they had seen executed upon others. The words *this mountain* are improperly explained by some as applying to the whole country of Judea; for although it was a mountainous country, there were in it plain and level grounds of large extent, both as to breadth and length. I have, therefore, no doubt, that by way of amplification the Psalmist makes honorable mention of mount Zion, where God had chosen a habitation for himself, and his chief seat. I indeed allow, that under this expression, by the figure synecdoche, a part is put for the whole; only I would have my readers to understand, that this place is expressly named, because from it, as from a source or fountain, flowed the holiness of the whole land. It is asserted that God, by his right hand, possessed or acquired this mountain; for the Hebrew verb קנה*, kanah,* may be understood in either of these senses: and this assertion is made, that the Israelites might not be lifted up with pride, as if they had achieved the conquest of the land, or had obtained the peaceable possession of it by their own power. As is stated in Psalm 44:3,

"They got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them, but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favor unto them." (Psalm 44:3)

55. *He expelled the heathen from before them; and made them to fall into their part of the inheritance.* These words are an explanation of the concluding sentence of the preceding verse: they describe the manner in which the land of Canaan was acquired, plainly intimating that the Israelites were not such a warlike race, nor those heathen nations so cowardly, as to render it an easy matter for the former to vanquish the latter, and that it would have been impossible for the former to have expelled the latter from the country, had they not been led on to victory under the conduct of God, and been aided by his power. Besides, it would have been unlawful for them to have taken possession of the country, had it not been the will of God that the first inhabitants should be deprived of it, and that strangers should be established in it in their room.

56. *And they tempted and provoked the Most High God.* Here they are upbraided for having, notwithstanding the many tokens of the divine favor by which they were distinguished, persevered in acting perfidiously: yea, even although God from time to time conferred upon them new benefits, to recover them to their allegiance to him, they, notwithstanding, by their rebellion, shook off his yoke. With respect to the word *tempt,* we have already explained its import. But it is added in general, that *they provoked God, because they had not kept his covenant* By this last clause, their open and gross rebellion is the more completely demonstrated; for, although they had been plainly taught their duty, they nevertheless refused to submit to the authority of God. The law is called *testimonies* or *agreements,* [838]

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because, as men enter into contracts upon certain conditions, so God, by his covenant, entered into a contract with this people, and bound them to himself. In speaking of them in this manner, there is pronounced upon them no light censure; but when they are charged in the next verse with apostasy and perfidiousness, that fills up the measure of their guilt. God had adopted them to be his people: they, on the other hand, despising his favor, voluntarily renounce it. He had gathered them together under his wings; and they, by their waywardness, scatter themselves in all directions. He had promised to be a father to them; and they refuse to be his children. He had shown them the way of salvation; and they, by going astray, willingly precipitate themselves into destruction. The prophet, therefore, concludes, that in every age they showed themselves to be an impious and wicked people. It is again to be noticed, that the fault which is most severely condemned in them is, that they too much resembled their fathers. This is particularly mentioned, to prevent any man from deceiving himself by supposing, that in indiscriminately imitating his ancestors he is doing right, and that he may not think of making use of their example as an argument for defending his own conduct. The instability of the people is next expressed by a very apposite figure, which Hosea also employs in Hosea 7:16. As archers are deceived when they have a bow which is too weak, or ill bent, or crooked and flexible, so it is stated, that this people *turned back,* and slipped away by their deceitful and tortuous craftiness, that they might not be governed by the hand of God.

58. *And they provoked him to anger with their high places.* We have here adduced the species of defection by which the Israelites afforded incontestable evidence that they refused to be faithful to God, and to yield allegiance to him. They had been sufficiently, and more than sufficiently warned, that the service of God would be perverted and contaminated, unless they were regulated in every part of it by the Divine Word; and now, disregarding his whole law, they recklessly follow their own inventions. And the fruits which uniformly proceed from the contempt of the law are, that men who choose rather to follow their own understanding than to submit to the authority of God, become wedded to gross superstitions. The Psalmist complains that the service of God was corrupted by them in two ways; in the first place, by their defacing the glory of God, in setting up for themselves idols and graven images; and, secondly, by their inventing strange and forbidden ceremonies to appease the anger of God.

Psalm 78:59-66

59. God heard it, and was wroth, and exceedingly abhorred Israel.
60. And he forsook the habitation of Shiloh, [839] the tabernacle where

"Ou, Convenances." — *Fr.*

839

he dwelt among men. **61.** And he delivered his strength into captivity, and his beauty into the hand of the enemy. **62.** And he shut up his people to the sword, and was wroth with his own inheritance. **63.** The fire devoured their chosen; [840] , and their virgins were not applauded. [841] **64.** Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation. **65.** But the Lord awoke as one asleep, as a mighty man that crieth out by reason of wine. **66.** And he smote his enemies behind; he put upon them everlasting disgrace.

59 *God heard it, and was wroth.* The prophet again shows that God, when he found that no good resulted from his long-suffering, which the people abused, yea, even treated with mockery, and perverted as an encouragement to greater excess in sinning, at length proceeded to inflict severe punishments upon them. The metaphor, which he borrows from earthly judges, is frequently to be met with in the Scriptures. When God is said *to hear,* it is not meant that it is necessary for him to make inquisition, but it is intended to teach us that he does not rush forth inconsiderately to execute his judgments, and thus to prevent any from supposing that he ever acts precipitately. The amount of what is stated is, that the people continued so pertinaciously in their wickedness, that at length the cry of it ascended to heaven; and the very weight of the punishment demonstrated the aggravated nature of the offense.

After it is said that Israel, whom God had loved so much, was become an abomination in his sight, it is added, (verse 60,) that they were bereft of the presence of God, which is the only source of true felicity and comfort under calamities of every kind. God, then, is said *to have abhorred Israel,* when he permitted the ark of the covenant to be carried into another country, as if he intended by this to indicate that he had departed from Judea, and bidden the people farewell. It is indeed very obvious, that God was not fixed to the outward and visible symbol; but as he had given the ark to be a token or sign of the close union which subsisted between him and the Israelites, in suffering it to be carried away, he testified, that he himself had also departed from them. Shiloh having been for a long time the abode of

Shiloh was a city in the tribe of Ephraim, (the son of Joseph,) where the tabernacle and the ark had for a long time their fixed abode; (see Joshua 18:1,) but from whence the ark was taken by the Philistines, in the time of Eli the priest.

840

"C'est, l'elite et la fleur du peuple." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, the choice and flower of the people."

841

Fry renders this verse: —

"A fire consumed their young men,
And their virgins had no nuptial song."

"הוללו, (*pro* הללו,) *laudatae, celebratoe sunt*, scil. epithalamiis." — *Simonis* "*Were not praised, i e.*, remained unmarried; as marriage songs were sung at nuptials." — *Bythner*

the ark, and the place where it was captured by the Philistines, (1 Samuel 4:11,) it is termed *the habitation* or *dwelling-place of God.* The manner of his residence, in short, is beautifully expressed in the next sentence, where Shiloh is described as his dwelling-place *among men.* God, it is true, fills both heaven and earth; but as we cannot attain to that infinite height to which he is exalted, in descending among us by the exercise of his power and grace, he approaches as near to us as is needful, and as our limited capacity will bear. It is a very emphatic manner of speaking to represent God as so incensed by the continual wickedness of his people, that he was constrained to forsake this place, the only one which he had chosen for himself upon the earth.

61. *And he delivered his strength into captivity.* In this verse, the same subject is prosecuted: it is declared, that *the strength* of God, by which the Israelites had been shielded and defended, was at that time *in captivity.* Not that his power could only be exerted in connection with the outward symbol; but instead of opposing their enemies as he had formerly done, it was now his will that the grace by which he had preserved his people should, so to speak, be led captive. This, however, is not to be understood as implying that the Philistines had made God their prisoner. The meaning simply is, that the Israelites were deprived of the protection of God, in consequence of which they fell into the hands of their enemies, even as an army is put to flight when the general is taken prisoner. The ark is also termed *the beauty of God;* because, being in himself invisible, he made it the symbol of his presence, or, as it were, a mirror in which he might be seen. It is a bold, and at first sight, an absurd hyperbole, to say that the strength of God was taken prisoner by the Philistines; but it is expressly used for the purpose of aggravating the wickedness of the people. As he had been accustomed mightily to display the power of his arm in aiding them, the offenses with which he had been provoked must have been of a very heinous character, when he suffered that symbol of his power to be forcibly carried away by a heathen army. We are taught by the prophet Jeremiah, (Jeremiah 7:12,) that what is here related of Shiloh, is addressed as a warning to all those who, flattering themselves upon false grounds, that they enjoy the presence of God, are lifted up with vain confidence: "But go ye now unto my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel." If, therefore, when God approaches us familiarly, we do not sincerely receive him with that reverence which becomes us, we have ground to fear that what happened to the people of Shiloh will happen also to us. So much the more disgusting, then, is the boasting of the Pope and his adherents, who support the claims of Rome as the special dwelling-place of God, from the fact, that the Church in former times flourished in that city. It is to be remembered, — what they seem to forget, — that Christ, who is the true temple of the Godhead, was born in Bethlehem, and brought up in Nazareth, and that he dwelt and preached

in Capernaum and Jerusalem; and yet the miserable desolation of all these cities affords a dreadful testimony of the wrath of God.

62. *And he shut up his people to the sword.* Other parts of the calamity which befell Israel in the time of the high priest Eli are here mentioned. God, in permitting the ark to be carried away, showed that he had withdrawn his favor from them. This was also demonstrated from the fact, that all the flower of the people — those who were in the prime and blush of manhood — were consumed by the wrath of God: which is expressed by *the fire devouring them.* But this language is metaphorical, as is evident from the history of the event referred to, which informs us, that those that perished who were of the chosen of Israel, to the number of thirty thousand men, fell by the sword of the enemy, and not by fire, (1 Samuel 4:10.) This figure points out the suddenness of the dreadful calamity. It is as if it had been said, They were destroyed in a moment, even as fire quickly consumes chaff and the dry leaves of trees. [842]

The great extent of this slaughter is heightened by another figure, which is, that for want of men, the maidens continued unmarried. This is the meaning of the clause, *Their virgins were not applauded;* the reference being to the nuptial songs which were wont to be sung at marriages in praise of the bride. To aggravate still more the unwonted and appalling nature of the calamity, it is added, that even *the priests,* whom God had taken under his special protection, perished indiscriminately with others. When it is said, that *the widows made no lamentation,* I would explain it as denoting, either that they themselves died first for sorrow, so that they had no opportunity of mourning for others, or else, that when led captive by their enemies, they were prohibited to mourn. By all these expressions, the object is to show, in a few words, that all kinds of calamities were heaped upon them. [843]

65. *But the Lord awoke as one asleep.* Some understand this as spoken of the Israelites, implying that the Lord awoke against them; and others, as spoken of their enemies. If the first sense is adopted, it need not excite our surprise, that the Israelites are termed, in the 66th verse, *the enemies of God,* even as they are so designated in Isaiah 1:24,

"Therefore, saith the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah! I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies." (Isaiah 1:24)

And thus the meaning will be, that the Israelites paid dearly for abusing the patience of God, by taking encouragement from it to indulge to greater

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"Que c'en a este fait en un moment, ainsi que le feu a incontinent consume de la paille ou des fueilles d'arbres bieu seiches." — *Fr.*

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That is, the order of enumerating first the judgments inflicted by God upon his own people, and then those inflicted upon their enemies.

excess in the commission of sin; for awaking suddenly, he rushed upon them with so much the greater fury. But as we find the prophets drawing their doctrine from Moses, and also framing their language according to his as a standard, the opinion of those who understand this and the following verse, as referring to the Philistines, is no less probable. The prophet here appears to have borrowed this order, from the song of Moses, (Deuteronomy 32:27,) where God declares, that while he punished his own people, he, at the same time, did not forget to repress their enemies. Since it is a common proverb, that the issue of wars is uncertain, if, after the enemies of the chosen tribes had obtained the victory, no change had happened to them, it would not have been so manifest, that what befell his own people was a punishment inflicted upon them by God. But when God, after having afflicted and humbled the Israelites, made his judgments to fall on their conquerors, without the instrumentality of man, beyond all human expectation, and contrary to what happens in the ordinary course of events; — from this it is the more plainly manifest, that when the Israelites were laid in the dust, it was the work of God, who intended thus to punish them. The prophet, however, at the same time, gives us to understand, that God was constrained, as it were, by necessity, to punish them with greater severity; because, in afterwards inflicting his judgments upon the Philistines, he gave abundant evidence of his regard to his covenant, which the Israelites might be very apt to think he had quite forgotten. Although he had, so to speak, taken the side of the Philistines for a time, it was not his intention utterly to withdraw his love from the children of Abraham, lest the truth of his promise should become void.

The figure of a drunken man may seem somewhat harsh; but the propriety of using it will appear, when we consider that it is employed in accommodation to the stupidity of the people. Had they been of a pure and clear understanding, [844] God would not have thus transformed himself, and assumed a character foreign to his own. When he, therefore, compares himself to a drunken man, it was the drunkenness of the people; that is to say, their insensibility that constrained him to speak thus: which was so much the greater shame to them. With respect to God, the metaphor derogates nothing from his glory. If he does not immediately remedy our calamities, we are ready to think that he is sunk into a profound sleep. But how can God, it may be said, be thus asleep, when he is superior in strength to all the giants, and yet they can easily watch for a long time, and are satisfied with little sleep? I answer, when he exercises forbearance, and does not promptly execute his judgments, the interpretation which ignorant people put upon his conduct is, that he loiters in this manner like a man

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"S'il eust eu un entendement rassis et bien dispose a escouter." — *Fr.* "Had they been possessed of a clear understanding, and disposed to listen."

who is stupified, and knows not how to proceed. [845] The prophet, on the contrary, declares, that this sudden awaking of God will be more alarming and terrible than if he had at the first lifted up his hand to execute judgment; and that it will be as if a giant, drunken with wine, should start up suddenly out of his sleep, while as yet he had not slept off his surfeit. Many restrict the statement in the 66th verse, concerning God's *smiting his enemies behind,* to the plague which he sent upon the Philistines, recorded in 1 Samuel 5:12. The phrase, *everlasting disgrace,* agrees very well with this interpretation; for it was a shameful disease to be afflicted with haemorrhoids in their hinder parts. But as the words, *They were smitten behind,* admit of a more simple sense, I leave the matter undecided.

Psalm 78:67-72

> **67.** And he rejected the tabernacle of Joseph, and chose not the tribe of Ephraim: **68.** But he chose the tribe of Judah, the mountain of Zion, which he loved: [846] **69.** And built his sanctuary like high places, and like the earth which he has established for ever. **70.** And he chose David his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: **71.** He took him froth following the suckling ewes, to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance: **72.** And he fed them in the uprightness of his heart, and guided them by the prudence of his hands.

67. *And he rejected the tabernacle of Joseph.* Those who suppose that the word *enemies,* in the 66th verse, applies to the Israelites, connect these verses with the preceding, and suppose the meaning to be, that the wound which God had inflicted upon them was incurable. But, preferring the other opinion, which regards the Philistines as spoken of, and the scope to be, that God, in punishing them so severely, evidently showed that the covenant which he had made with his people was not disannulled, since he had avenged himself in such an awful manner upon their enemies, the explanation which I would rather give is, that this is added by way of correction, as if it had been said, That God was not yet fully reconciled towards his people who

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"Les gens stupides prenent cela comme s'il s'arrestoit ainsi qu'un homme estonne, qui ne scait par ou commencer." — *Fr.*

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"The epocha to which the Psalmist brings down the Israelitish history was the exaltation of David, and the establishment of the royal and ecclesiastical pre-eminence of Judah and Jerusalem. Previous to that period, Ephraim was in some sort the leading tribe; and the first erection of the tabernacle in Shiloh, whither the tribes went up, gave to the sons of Joseph a kind of metropolitan dignity in Israel. Hence, this period is considered as the time of their precedency in the nation. But the children of Ephraim, or Israel, under their precedency, had been faithless to their trust, and in the day of trial, had not answered to their promise and professions. And to this was owing the low estate, in which the administrations of Samuel and David found the Church and people of Israel." — *Fry.*

had wickedly revolted from him, and that, as an evidence of this, there remained among them some traces of the punishment with which he had visited them. The meaning of the text, therefore, is, that when the ark was taken by the Philistines, God was, so to speak, asleep, having been made drunk by the sins of his people, so that he could no longer keep watch for their defense as he had been accustomed to do; and yet, that he did not continue long sunk in sleep, but that, whenever he saw the ungodly Philistines treating with mockery the glory of his majesty, this heinous insult awoke and provoked him, just as if a giant, having well supped, had awoke from his first sleep before he had recovered from the exciting effects of his wine; and that, at the same time, his anger had not been so provoked against this heathen and uncircumcised nation as to prevent him from exhibiting some signs of the chastisement which he had inflicted upon the wicked and ungrateful Israelites even to the end. The rejection spoken of amounts to this, that when God permitted his ark to be carried away to another place, the Israelites were thereby deprived of the honor with which, by special privilege, they had been previously distinguished.

There are two principal points which should here be particularly attended to; in the first place, when the Philistines were smitten with unseemly ulcers, the plainest evidence was afforded that when the Israelites were conquered by them, this happened solely because God willed it to be so. He did not recover new strength, or gather together a new army for the purpose of invading, some short time after, the Philistines who had been victorious, nor did he have recourse, in doing this, to foreign aid. The other point is, that although God stretched forth his hand against the Philistines, to show that he had still some remembrance of his covenant, and some care of the people whom he had chosen, yet in restoring the Israelites in some measure to their former state, he made the rejection of Shiloh a perpetual monument of his wrath. He, therefore, rejected the tribe of Ephraim; [847] not that he cast them off for ever, or completely severed them from the rest of the body of the Church, but he would not have the ark of his covenant to reside any longer within the boundaries of that tribe. To the tribe of Ephraim is here opposed the tribe of Judah, in which God afterwards chose for himself a dwelling-place.

Thus the prophet proceeds to show, that when the ark of the covenant had a resting-place assigned to it on mount Zion, the people were in a manner renewed; and this symbol of reconciliation being restored to them, they were recovered to the favor of God from which they had fallen. As God had, so to speak, been banished from the kingdom, and his strength led into captivity through the sins of the Israelites, they had need to be

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Shiloh, as formerly observed, was a city in the tribe of Ephraim, and it was rejected as the resting-place of the ark.

taught, by this memorial, that God had been so highly displeased with their wickedness, that he could not bear to look upon the place in which he had formerly dwelt. After this separation, although to teach the people to be more on their guard in time to come, there was not a full and perfect restitution, yet God again chose a fixed residence for his ark, which was a manifestation of wonderful goodness and mercy on his part. The ark, after its return, was carried from one place to another, as to Gath, Ekron, and other places, until mount Zion was pointed out by an oracle as its fixed abode; but this intervening period is not taken notice of by the prophet, because his design went no farther than to impress upon the memory, both the example of the punishment, and the grace of God, which was greater than any could have ventured to hope for. [848] That which is often repeated by Moses should also be remembered:

"But unto the place which the Lord your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come," etc., (Deuteronomy 12:5.)

Shiloh having acquired this renown, because the ark had dwelt there for a long time, when the ark was carried away into the country of the enemies of Israel, the minds of men were strangely perplexed, until they knew the place which God had chosen for its future residence. The ten tribes were not at that time rejected, and they had an equal interest in the kingdom and the priesthood with the tribe of Judah; but in process of time their own rebellion cut them off. This is the reason why the prophet says, in scorn, that the tribe of Ephraim was rejected, and that the tribe of Joseph, from whom it sprung, was not chosen.

68. *But he chose the tribe of Judah.* The meaning is, that God preferred the tribe of Judah to all the rest of the people, and chose from it a king, whom he might set over all the Israelites as well as the Jews. And he chose *the mountain of Zion,* appointing a certain spot upon it to be the seat of his sanctuary. That the cause of this choice might not be sought any where else but in God, it is particularly stated that the preferring of mount Zion to all other places, and the enriching of it in such a distinguished manner, proceeded entirely from the free and unmerited love of God. The relative *which* is here put instead of the causal adverb *for;* the meaning being, that the sanctuary of God was established there, not for any worthiness of the place, but solely because it was the good pleasure of God. It was proper that this second restitution of the people should be no less free than their first adoption was, when God made his covenant with Abraham, or when he delivered them from the land of Egypt. God's *love* to the place had a respect to men. From this it follows, that the Church has been gathered together from the beginning, and in all ages, by the pure grace and goodness

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"La grace de Dieu plus grande qu'on n'eust ose esperer." — *Fr.*

of God; for never have men been found to possess any intrinsic meritorious claims to his regard, and the Church is too precious to be left to depend upon the power of men.

69. *And built his sanctuary like high places.* [849] In this verse, what is intimated is simply this, that Mount Zion was singularly beautified; which, however, ought to be referred to the heavenly pattern. It was not the will of God that the minds of his people should be entirely engrossed with the magnificence of the building, or with the pomp of outward ceremonies; but that they should be elevated to Christ, in whom the truth of the figures of the former economy was exhibited. It is, therefore affirmed, that *the sanctuary was built like high places;* that is to say, it was conspicuous among all the high mountains: even as Isaiah (Isaiah 2:2,) and Micah, (Micah 4:1,) prophesying of the building of the new and spiritual temple, declare that it "shall be established in the tops of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills." And it is well known that fortresses were in those days erected upon high places. Zion is next compared to the entire mass of the globe: *He hath built his sanctuary like the earth,* [850] *which he has established for ever.* Some regions of the globe are visited by earthquakes, or perish by the opening of the earth, or are agitated by some violent commotion, or undergo some alteration; but the body of the earth itself continues always stable and unchanged, because it rests upon deep foundations. It is, therefore, here taught that the building spoken of was not temporary, like the sumptuous palaces of kings, which fall into ruins during the lapse of time, or are in danger of being destroyed by other means; but that it was founded to stand entire, even to the end of the world. If it is objected that the temple was destroyed by the Chaldeans and Assyrians, the answer is obvious, That the stability celebrated consists in Christ alone; for, if the ancient sanctuary, which was only a figure, is considered merely in itself, without any regard to that which it typified, it will be only an empty shadow. But as God intended it to be a pledge to show that Christ was to come, perpetuity is justly attributed to it. In like manner it is said, in another place, (Psalm 87:1,) "His foundation is in the holy mountains;" and in Isaiah, (Isaiah

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In our English Bible it is, "And he built his sanctuary like high palaces." On which Archbishop Secker has the following note: — "That God *built his tabernacle like high palaces*, is not a strong expression. *On high*, which Hare adopts, is better. And perhaps changing כ, into ב, would suffice for this sense. But the old versions have כ, and yet in the latter part of the verse they have ב, for כ. It is a remarkable anticipation to mention the temple, which Solomon built, before the mention of David."

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"*Like the earth*; the simile is intended to point out the fixedness of the *temple*, in opposition to the frequent *different* stations in which the tabernacle had been placed." — *Warner.*

14:32,) "The Lord hath founded Zion;" and again, in Psalm 74:2, God is said "to dwell in mount Zion," so that it should never be moved.

70. *And he chose David his servant.* After having made mention of the temple, the prophet now proceeds to speak of the kingdom; for these two things were the chief signs of God's choice of his ancient people, and of his favor towards them; and Christ also hath appeared as our king and priest to bring a full and perfect salvation to us. He proves that David was made king by God, who elevated him from the sheepfold, and from the keeping of cattle, to the royal throne. It serves in no small degree to magnify the grace of God, that a peasant was taken from his mean shepherd's cot, and exalted to the dignity of a king. Nor is this grace limited to the person of David. We are taught that whatever worth there was in the children of Abraham, flowed from the fountain of God's mercy. The whole glory and felicity of the people consisted in the kingdom and priesthood; and both these are attributed to the pure grace and good pleasure of God. And it was requisite that the commencement of the kingdom of Christ should be lowly and contemptible, that it might correspond with its type, and that God might clearly show that he did not make use of external aids in order to accomplish our salvation.

71. *He took him from following the suckling ewes, etc.* The grace of God is farther commended from the circumstance, that David, who was a keeper of sheep, was made the shepherd of the chosen people and heritage of God. There is an allusion to David's original condition; but the Spirit of God, at the same time, shows us the difference between good and lawful kings, and tyrants, robbers, and insatiable extortioners, by telling us that whoever would aspire to the character of the former must be like shepherds.

It is afterwards added, (verse 72,) that David had faithfully performed the duties of the trust committed to him. By this the prophet indirectly rebukes the ingratitude and perverseness of the people, who not only overturned the holy and inviolable order which God had established, but who had also, in shaking off his salutary yoke, thrown themselves into a state of miserable dispersion. What follows concerning *the prudence of David's hands* seems to be an improper form of expression. But it is intended forcibly to express, that he not only was successful in what he had undertaken, but that he was governed by the Spirit of God, which prevented him from putting his hand at random to any work which might come in his way, and led him prudently and skilfully to do that to which faith and duty called him; and thus, in the success of his undertakings, his wisdom appears more conspicuous than his good fortune.

Psalm 79

PSALM 79

This is a complaint and lamentation of the Church when severely afflicted; in which, while the faithful bewail their miserable and, in one sense, undeserved calamities, and accuse their enemies of cruelty, they acknowledge that, in another sense, they have been justly chastised, and humbly betake themselves to the divine mercy. Their confidence of obtaining this, they rest chiefly upon the fact, that they saw God's dishonor conjoined with their calamities, inasmuch as the ungodly, in oppressing the Church, blasphemed his sacred name.

A Psalm of Asaph.

This psalm, like others, contains internal evidence that it was composed long after the death of David. Some who ascribe it to him allege, in support of this opinion, that the afflictions of the Church have been here predicted by the spirit of prophecy, to encourage the faithful in bearing the cross when these afflictions should arrive. But there does not appear to be any ground for such a supposition. It is not usual with the prophets thus to speak historically in their prophecies. Whoever judiciously reflects upon the scope of the poem will easily perceive that it was composed either when the Assyrians, after having burnt the temple, and destroyed the city, dragged the people into captivity, or when the temple was defiled by Antiochus, after he had slaughtered a vast number of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Its subject agrees very well with either of these periods. Let us then take it as an admitted point, that this complaint was dictated to the people of God at a time when the Church was subjected to oppression, and when matters were reduced to the most hopeless condition. How cruelly the Assyrians

conducted themselves is well known. And under the tyranny of Antiochus, if a man dared simply to open his mouth in defense of the pure worship of God, he did it at the risk of immediately forfeiting his life.

Psalm 79:1-4

1. O God! the heathen [or the nations] have come into thy inheritance; they have defiled the temple of thy holiness; they have laid Jerusalem in heaps. **2.** They have given the dead bodies of thy servants for food to the fowls of the heaven; the flesh of thy meek ones to the beasts of the earth. **3.** They have shed their blood like water, around Jerusalem: and there was none to bury them. **4.** We have been a reproach to our neighbors; a scorn and a derision to them that are around us.

1. *O God! the heathen have come into thy inheritance.* Here the prophet, in the person of the faithful, complains that the temple was defiled, and the city destroyed. In the second and third verses, he complains that the saints were murdered indiscriminately, and that their dead bodies were cast forth upon the face of the earth, and deprived of the honor of burial. Almost every word expresses the cruelty of these enemies of the Church. When it is considered that God had chosen the land of Judea to be a possession to his own people, it seemed inconsistent with this choice to abandon it to the heathen nations, that they might ignominiously trample it under foot, and lay it waste at their pleasure. The prophet, therefore, complains that when the heathen *came into the heritage of God,* the order of nature was, as it were, inverted. The destruction of the temple, of which he speaks in the second clause, was still less to be endured; for thus the service of God on earth was extinguished, and religion destroyed. He adds, that *Jerusalem,* which was the royal seat of God, *was reduced to heaps.* By these words is denoted a hideous overthrow. The profanation of the temple, and the destruction of the holy city, involving, as they did, heaven-daring impiety, which ought justly to have provoked the wrath of God against these enemies — the prophet begins with them, and then comes to speak of the slaughter of the saints. The atrocious cruelty of these persecutions is pointed out from the circumstance that they not only put to death the servants of God, but also exposed their dead bodies to the beasts of the field, and to birds of prey, to be devoured, instead of burying them. Men have always had such a sacred regard to the burial of the dead, as to shrink from depriving even their enemies of the honor of sepulture. [851] Whence it follows, that

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If this psalm was written on the taking of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, or during the Babylonish captivity, it would appear, from this verse, that when the Chaldeans destroyed Jerusalem, they left the bodies of the slain unburied, to be devoured by beasts and birds of prey.

those who take a barbarous delight in seeing the bodies of the dead torn to pieces and devoured by beasts, more resemble these savage and cruel animals than human beings. It is also shown that these persecutors acted more atrociously than enemies ordinarily do, inasmuch as they made no more account *of shedding human blood than of pouring forth water.* From this we learn their insatiable thirst for slaughter. When it is added, *there was none to bury them,* this is to be understood as applying to the brethren and relatives of the slain. The inhabitants of the city were stricken with such terror by the indiscriminate butchery perpetrated by these ruthless assassins upon all who came in their way, that no one dared to go forth. God having intended that, in the burial of men, there should be some testimony to the resurrection at the last day, it was a double indignity for the saints to be despoiled of this right after their death. But it may be asked, Since God often threatens the reprobate with this kind of punishment, why did he suffer his own people to be devoured of beasts? We must remember, what we have stated elsewhere, that the elect, as well as the reprobate, are subjected to the temporal punishments which pertain only to the flesh. The difference between the two cases lies solely in the issue; for God converts that which in itself is a token of his wrath into the means of the salvation of his own children. The same explanation, then, is to be given of their want of burial which is given of their death. The most eminent of the servants of God may be put to a cruel and ignominious death — a punishment which we know is often executed upon murderers, and other despisers of God; but still the death of the saints does not cease to be precious in his sight: and when he has suffered them to be unrighteously persecuted in the flesh, he shows, by taking vengeance on their enemies, how dear they were to him. In like manner, God, to stamp the marks of his wrath on the reprobate, even after their death, deprives them of burial; and, therefore, he threatens a wicked king, "He shall be buried with the burial of all ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem," (Jeremiah 22:19; see also Jeremiah 36:30.) [852] When he exposes his own children to the like indignity, he may seem for a time to have forsaken them; but he afterwards converts it into the means of furthering their salvation; for their faith, being subjected to this trial, acquires a fresh triumph. When in ancient times the bodies of the dead were anointed, that ceremony was performed for the sake of the living whom they left behind them, to teach them, when they saw the bodies of the dead carefully preserved, to cherish in their hearts the hope of a better life. The faithful, then, by being deprived of burial, suffer no loss, when they rise by faith above these inferior helps, that they may advance with speedy steps to a blessed immortality.

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Similar threatenings are to be found in Isaiah 14:19, 20; Jeremiah 8:2.

4 *We have been a reproach to our neighbors.* Here another complaint is uttered, to excite the mercy of God. The more proudly the ungodly mock and triumph over us, the more confidently may we expect that our deliverance is near; for God will not bear with their insolence when it breaks forth so audaciously; especially when it redounds to the reproach of his holy name: even as it is said in Isaiah,

"This is the word which the Lord hath spoken concerning him, The virgin, the daughter of Zion hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed; and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel." (Isaiah 37:22, 23)

And assuredly *their neighbors,* [853] who were partly apostates, or the degenerate children of Abraham, and partly the avowed enemies of religion, when they molested and reproached this miserable people, did not refrain from blaspheming God. Let us, therefore, remember that the faithful do not here complain of the derision with which they were treated as individuals, but of that which they saw to be indirectly levelled against God and his law. We shall again meet with a similar complaint in the concluding part of the psalm.

Psalm 79:5-9

5. How long, O Jehovah! wilt thou be wroth for ever? Shall thy jealousy burn like fire? **6.** Pour out thy fury [854] upon the heathen [or the nations] who have not known thee, and on the kingdoms which call not upon thy name. **7.** For they have devoured Jacob, and made desolate his dwelling. [855] **8.** Remember not against us the iniquities

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Street, instead of "our neighbors," reads, "those that dwell among us;" and has the following note: — "Those foreigners who sojourn among us; לשכנינו, from שכן, *to inhabit or dwell*; γειτοσιν ἡμων, *our neighbors*, Septuagint. But that rendering does not sufficiently express the distressed and humbled state of Israel, as described in the Hebrew; they were so reduced, that not only neighboring nations, but even those foreigners who sojourned amongst them, had the insolence to deride them, even in their own country." Dr Adam Clarke explains, *We are become a reproach to our neighbors*, thus: "The Idumeans, Philistines, Phoenicians, Ammonites, and Moabites, all gloried in the subjugation of this people; and their insults to them were mixed with blasphemies against God."

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"C'est, ire." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, anger."

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This and the preceding verse are almost exactly the same with Jeremiah 10:25. "Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name: for they have eaten up Jacob, and devoured him, and consumed him; and have made his habitation desolate." From this, some have thought that Jeremiah, who was one of the prophets of the captivity, was the inspired writer of this psalm.

of former times: make haste, let thy compassions prevent us; for we are exceedingly afflicted. **9.** Help us, O God of our salvation! for the glory of thy name; and deliver us, and be merciful to our sins, for thy name's sake.

5 *How long, O Jehovah! wilt thou be wroth for ever?* I have already observed that these two expressions, *how long* and *for ever,* when joined together, denote a lengthened and an uninterrupted continuance of calamities; and that there is no appearance, when looking to the future, of their coming to a termination. We may, therefore, conclude that this complaint was not ended within a month or two after persecution against the Church commenced, but at a time when the hearts of the faithful were almost broken through the weariness produced by prolonged suffering. Here they confess that the great accumulation of calamities with which they are overwhelmed, is to be traced to the wrath of God. Being fully persuaded that the wicked, whatever they may plot, cannot inflict injury, except in so far as God permits them — from this, which they regard as an indubitable principle, they at once conclude, that when he allows such ample scope to their heathen enemies in persecuting them, his anger is greatly provoked. Nor would they, without this persuasion, have looked to God in the hope that he would stretch forth his hand to save them; for it is the work of Him who hath given loose reins to draw in the bridle. Whenever God visits us with the rod, and our own conscience accuses us, it especially becomes us to look to His hand. Here his ancient people do not charge him with being unjustly displeased, but acknowledge the justice of the punishment inflicted upon them. God will always find in his servants just grounds for chastising them. He often, however, in the exercise of his mercy, pardons their sins, and exercises them with the cross for another purpose than to testify his displeasure against their sins, just as it was his will to try the patience of *Job,* and as he vouchsafed to call the martyrs to an honorable warfare. But here the people, of their own accord, summoning themselves before the Divine tribunal, trace the calamities which they endured to their own sins, as the procuring cause. Hence it may, with probability, be conjectured that this psalm was composed during the time of the Babylonish captivity. Under the tyranny of Antiochus Epiphanes, they employed, as we have previously seen, a different form of prayer, saying,

"All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way,"
(Psalm 44:17, 18.)

We are not to suppose that, in the passage now quoted, the faithful murmured against God, but they employ this language because they knew that he had another end in view than simply to punish their sins; for, by means of these severe conflicts, he prepared them for the prize of their high calling.

6. *Pour out thy fury upon the heathen, who have not known thee.* This prayer is apparently inconsistent with the rule of charity; for, while we feel anxious about our own calamities, and desire to be delivered from them, we ought to desire that others may be relieved as well as ourselves. It would seem, therefore, that the faithful are to be blamed in here wishing the destruction of unbelievers, for whose salvation they ought rather to have been solicitous. But it becomes us to bear in mind what I have previously stated, that the man who would offer up such a prayer as this in a right manner, must be under the influence of zeal for the public welfare; so that, by the wrongs done to himself personally, he may not suffer his carnal affections to be excited, nor allow himself to be carried away with rage against his enemies; but, forgetting his individual interests, he must have a sole regard to the common salvation of the Church, and to what conduces thereto. Secondly, he must implore God to grant him the spirit of discretion and judgment, that in prayer he may not be impelled by an inconsiderate zeal: a subject which we have treated more at large in another place. Besides, it is to be observed, that the pious Jews here not only lay out of consideration their own particular advantage in order to consult the good of the whole Church, but also chiefly direct their eyes to Christ, beseeching him to devote to destruction his enemies whose repentance is hopeless. They, therefore, do not rashly break forth into this prayer, that God would destroy these or other enemies, nor do they anticipate the judgment of God; but desiring that the reprobate may be involved in the condemnation which they deserve, they, at the same time, patiently wait until the heavenly judge separate the reprobate from the elect. In doing this, they do not cast aside the affection which charity requires; for, although they would desire all to be saved, they yet know that the reformation of some of the enemies of Christ is hopeless, and their perdition absolutely certain.

The question, however, is not yet fully answered; for, when in the seventh verse they arraign the cruelty of their enemies, they seem to desire vengeance. But what I have just now observed must be remembered, that none can pray in this manner but those who have clothed themselves with a public character, and who, laying aside all personal considerations, have espoused, and are deeply interested in, the welfare of the whole Church; or, rather, who have set before their eyes Christ, the Head of the Church; and, lastly, none but those who, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, have elevated their minds to the judgment of God; so that, being ready to forgive, they do not indiscriminately adjudge to death every enemy by whom they are injured, but only the reprobate. With regard to those who make haste in demanding the execution of the Divine vengeance before all hope of repentance is lost, Christ has condemned them as chargeable with inconsiderate and ill-regulated zeal, when he says,

"Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of,"
(Luke 9:55.)

Moreover, the faithful do not here simply wish the destruction of those who so wickedly persecuted the Church, but, using that familiarity which God allows them in their dealings with him, they set forth how inconsistent it would be did he not punish their persecutors, [856] and reason thus: Lord, how is it that thou afflictest us so severely, upon whom thy name is invoked, and sparest the heathen nations who despise thee? In short, they mean to say, that God has sufficient ground for executing his wrath elsewhere, since they were not the only people in the world who had sinned. Although it does not become us to prescribe to God the rule of his conduct, but rather patiently to submit to this ordination,

"That judgment must begin at the house of God"
(1 Peter 4:17;)

yet he permits his saints to take the liberty of pleading, that at least they may not be worse dealt with than unbelievers, and those who despise him.

These two sentences, *who have not known thee,* and *which call not upon thy name,* it is to be observed, are to be taken in the same sense. By these different forms of expression, it is intimated that it is impossible for any to call upon God without a previous knowledge of him, as the Apostle Paul teaches, in Romans 10:14,

"How, then, shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Romans 10:14)

It belongs not to us to answer, "Thou art our God," till He has anticipated us by saying, "Thou art my people," (Hosea 2:23;) but he opens our mouths to speak to him in this manner, when he invites us to himself. *Calling on the name of God* is often synonymous with prayer; but it is not here to be exclusively limited to that exercise. The amount is, that unless we are directed by the knowledge of God, it is impossible for us sincerely to profess the true religion. At that time the Gentiles everywhere boasted that they served God; but, being destitute of his word, and as they fabricated to themselves gods of their own corrupt imaginations, all their religious services were detestable; even as in our own day, the human invented religious observances of the blind and deluded votaries of the Man of Sin, who have no right knowledge of the God whom they profess to worship, and who inquire not at his mouth what he approves, are certainly rejected by Him, because they set up idols in his place.

8 *Remember not against us the iniquities of former times.* The godly Jews here confirm the sentiment which they had before briefly and obscurely touched upon, namely, that they had justly deserved the chastisements which had been inflicted upon them. And they present this prayer, because

856 "Mettans en avant l'absurdite qui en reviendroit, si Dieu ne punissoit les persecuteurs." — *Fr.*

they could only get relief from their calamities by obtaining reconciliation with God. This is the sovereign remedy for every kind of adversity; for so long as he is angry with even our prosperity turns out to be unproductive of advantage and happiness. By *the iniquities of former times,* some understand the sins committed by the fathers. Others think that the sins which the suppliants themselves committed in their childhood and youth are intended. But the expression, I presume, has a more extensive signification, containing a confession not only of one offense or two, and these only recently committed, but an acknowledgement that they had for a long time been involved, along with their fathers, in manifold and old transgressions. Thus they acknowledge a long continued stubbornness, in which they had hardened themselves against God. This acknowledgement corresponds with the rebukes which the prophets administered to them; for sacred history bears testimony that the punishment of the captivity was suspended until God had proved from experience that their perversity was incurable. Nor should it excite our surprise to find the children praying that God would not impute to them the iniquity of their fathers, when we consider that the law declares that God casts the sins of the fathers into the bosom of their children, and takes vengeance upon their iniquities unto the third and fourth generation, (Exodus 20:5.) The contrast between the expressions, *make haste,* and *the iniquities of former times,* is worthy of notice. Had God called the Israelites to a strict account for all the sins which they had committed during three or four hundred years before, the time of their deliverance would have been long delayed. The faithful, therefore, beseech him to forget their former offenses, and to make haste to succor them. As their sins proved the great obstacle and cause of delay, we may see the propriety with which they farther implore that *the compassions of God might speedily meet them.*

9 *Help O God of our salvation!* They again repeat in this verse, that whatever afflictions they endured were to be traced to the anger of God, and that they could have no comfort under them unless He were reconciled to them. Being deeply sensible that they had committed many transgressions, to strengthen their hope of obtaining pardon, they employ a variety of expressions. In the first place, as an argument to induce God to show them favor, they address him as *the God of their salvation.* In the second place, they testify that they bring nothing of their own to influence him to have mercy upon them; and that the only plea which they present before him is his own glory. From this we learn, that sinners are not reconciled to God by satisfactions or by the merit of good works, but by a free and an unmerited forgiveness. The observation which I have made a little before, and which I have explained more at length on the sixth psalm, is here to be kept in mind, — That when God visits us with the rod, instead of being merely desirous to be relieved from external chastisements, our chief concern ought to be to have God pacified towards us: nor should we follow the example of

foolish sick persons, who are anxious to have merely the symptoms of their disease removed, and make no account of being delivered from the source and cause of it. With respect to the word כפר, *chapper,* [857] which expositors translate, *Be merciful,* or *propitious,* I have had an opportunity of speaking in another place. It properly signifies *to cleanse,* or *expiate,* and is applied to sacrifices. Whenever, therefore, we desire to obtain the favor of God, let us call to remembrance the death of Christ; for "without shedding of blood is no remissions" (Hebrews 9:22.)

Psalm 79:10-13

10. Why should the heathen say, where is their God? Let the avenging of the blood of thy servants, which has been shed, be made known among the heathen in our sight. **11.** Let the sighing [or groaning] of the prisoner [858] come before thee, [or into thy presence:] and, according to the greatness of thy arm, reserve the children of death: [859] **12.** And recompense our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom [860] their reproach with which they have reproached thee, O Jehovah! **13.** And we thy people, and the sheep of thy pasture, will confess to thee [861] for ever; declaring thy praise from generation to generation.

10. *Why should the heathen say, Where is their God?* Here the people of God, in urging his name as a plea at the throne of grace: do so in a different sense from that in which they had urged it before. He extends his compassion towards us for his own name's sake; for, as he is merciful, and

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"כפר, *chapper*, *be propitiated*, or *receive an atonement* (הטאתינו על, *al chatoteinu*) *on account of our sins*." — *Dr Adam Clarke*

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Horsley, who guesses that this psalm was composed during the distresses of Manasseh's reign, supposes "the prisoner" to mean Manasseh.

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"C'est, les condamnez a mort." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, those who are condemned to death." "*Sons of death*, either those who were condemned to death because of their crimes, or condemned to be destroyed by their oppressors. Both these senses apply to the Israelites: they were sons of death, *i.e.*, worthy of death because of their sins against God. They were condemned to death, or utter destruction, by their Babylonish enemies." — *Dr Adam Clarke.*

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"*Sevenfold*, *i.e.*, in excessively great measure, — (comp. Genesis 4:15, 24; 1 Samuel 2:5,) — *into their bosom.* This is an allusion to the custom of folding the loose garment worn by the natives of Eastern countries, so as to make it a recipient of gifts. Comp. Psalm 35:13; Isaiah 65:6; Jeremiah 32:18; Luke 6:38." — *Cresswell.*

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"C'est, te rendrons graces." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, will give thee thanks."

will have our mouths stopped, that he alone may be accounted righteous, he freely pardons our sins. But here, the faithful beseech him that he would not allow his sacred name to be exposed to the blasphemies and insults of the wicked. From this we are taught that we do not pray in a right manner, unless a concern about our own salvation, and zeal for the glory of God, are inseparably joined together in our exercise. From the second clause of the verse, the same question may be raised which we have just now answered. Although God declares that he will execute vengeance upon our enemies, we are not warranted to thirst for revenge when we are injured. Let us remember that this form of prayer was not dictated for all men indiscriminately, that they might make use of it whenever impelled by their own passions, but that, under the guidance and instruction of the Holy Spirit, they might plead the cause of the whole Church, in common, against the wicked. If we would, therefore, offer up to God a prayer like this in a right manner, in the first place, our minds must be illuminated by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit; and, secondly, our zeal, which is often corrupted by the turbid affections of the flesh, must be pure and well-regulated; and then, with such a pure and well-tempered zeal, we may lawfully beseech God to show us, by evident examples, how precious, in his sight, is the life of his servants whose blood he avenges. The faithful are not to be understood as expressing any desire to be glutted with the sight of the shedding of human blood, [862] as if they longed greedily after it: they only desire that God would grant them some confirmation of their faith, in the exercise of his fatherly love which is manifested when he avenges the wrongs done to his own people. [863] It is farther to be noticed, that the appellation, *the servants of God,* is given to those who, nevertheless, were justly punished on account of their sins; for although he may chastise us, yet he does not forthwith cast us off, but, on the contrary, testifies thereby that our salvation is the object of his care. Again, we know that when the anger of God is extended over the whole body of the Church, as the good and the bad are mingled together in her, the former are punished in common with the latter, even as Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel, and others, were carried into captivity. They were not, it is true, altogether faultless; but it is certain that so great a calamity was not brought upon the Jews on their account. In their person, there was rather set forth a spectacle to the ungodly, that they might be the more deeply affected.

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"Car ce n'est pas que les fideles se veuillent yci souler a veoir espandre le sang humain." — *Fr.*

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"Laquelle apparoist quand il fait la vengence des outrages qu'on a faits aux siens." — *Fr.*

11. *Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee.* The people of God, I have no doubt, were in captivity when the Holy Spirit endited this prayer; and, therefore, the name of *prisoners* is applied to them all in general, because they were so shut up within the bounds of Assyria and Chaldea, that had they stirred one foot thence, they would have incurred the penalty of death. They are called *the children of death;* by which is meant, that they were appointed or condemned to death in respect of their captivity. This sentence, however, may not improperly be restricted to a small number who were shut up in prison under closer restraint. By this expression, it is intimated that those proud spirits who had before vaunted themselves against God, were now broken and effectually humbled. *The greatness of God's arm,* that is to say, the greatness of his power, [864] is implored; for without a signal and extraordinary interposition on his part, no hope could be entertained of the restoration of the Church.

12 *And render to our neighbors sevenfold.* We have already said enough on the subject of vengeance; and here the faithful show still more clearly, that they are not so much moved by the injuries done to themselves personally, as inflamed with a holy zeal when they see the sacred name of God blasphemed, and, as it were, torn in pieces by the wicked. If this affection reign in our hearts, it will easily moderate the ungovernableness of our flesh, and if the wisdom of the Spirit is added to it, our prayers will be in strict accordance with the just judgment of God.

In the last verse, the pious Jews declare that the fruit of their deliverance will be, that *the name of God will be celebrated;* and we ought not to desire our preservation or welfare for any other end. When he freely bestows upon us all things, the design for which he does this is, that his goodness may be made known and exalted. Now, these sufferers engage to make a grateful acknowledgement of their deliverance, and declare that this will not be done merely for a short time, but that the remembrance of it will be transmitted to their posterity, and pass, in continued succession, from age to age to the end of the world. The particular designation here given to them is also worthy of notice: *We are thy people, and the sheep of thy pasture* As the posterity of Abraham were chosen to celebrate the name of God, and that his praises might resound in Zion, what would have been the consequence had that people been destroyed, but that the memory of the name of God would have perished? This passage, there is no doubt, corresponds with that prophecy of Isaiah,

"This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise." (Isaiah 43:21)

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"C'est a dire, de la puissance de Dieu." — *Fr.*

Psalm 80

PSALM 80

This is a sorrowful prayer, in which the faithful beseech God that he would be graciously pleased to succor his afflicted Church. To excite him the more readily to grant them relief in their distressing circumstances, they compare these circumstances with the condition of the Church in her beginnings, when the Divine favor was conspicuously manifested towards her.

To the chief musician upon Sosannim Eduth. A Psalm of Asaph.

This psalm is almost similar to the preceding; but, in my apprehension it was composed in behalf of the ten tribes, after that kingdom began to be wasted by various calamities. It is not without reason that mention is expressly made of Joseph, Ephraim, and Manasseh. Some expositors allege, that in this there is an allusion to the situation and order of the camps of the chosen tribes in the wilderness, as described by Moses in Numbers 2:18-21; for Manasseh and Ephraim marched together on one side. [865] But it would have been strange to have passed over in silence the tribe of Judah, and also the holy city, and to have brought forward the tribes of Joseph, Manasseh, Ephraim, and Benjamin, had it not been intended to speak especially of the

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kingdom of Israel. [866] If it is objected, that the ten tribes from the time when they were cut off from the house of David had become degenerate, and that the worship of God was corrupted among them, I answer, that there dwelt among them, notwithstanding, many devout worshippers of God, who had not bowed the knee before Baal, nor abandoned themselves to the prevailing superstition, (1 Kings 19:18.) Accordingly, Amos (Amos 6:6) finds fault with the hard-heartedness which existed in the tribe of Judah, because there was none among them who was "grieved for the affliction of Joseph." It is also well known, that during the time of this defection, some prophets were sent to them to inspire them with the hope of deliverance. Although, then, the vast proportion of them were apostates, yet God did not cease to exercise his care over the seed which remained in the midst of them. And as formerly he had mitigated coming calamities, by promising beforehand his grace; so now, by dictating to the people a form of prayer, he confirms and

This is the opinion of Hammond, who supposes that this psalm "is a complaint of the troubles of God's Church and people, probably in time of captivity, or by way of prediction of it." "Why Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, and no other, are here named," says he, "must be learned from the order of the Israelites' march in the wilderness, Numbers 2. For there, next after the ark, the pledge of God's special presence and assistance, did these three tribes follow: 'Then the tabernacle of the congregation shall set forward,' etc., verse 17; 'On the west side (*i.e.*, next behind it) shall be the standard of the camp of Ephraim,' verse 18; 'and his host,' etc., verse 19. 'And by him shall be the tribe of Manasseh,' verse 20; 'and his host,' etc., verse 21. 'Then the tribe of Benjamin, and his host,' verses 22, 23. Now the returning from the captivity, the desire whereof is the business of this psalm, being a parallel to the delivery from Egypt, God's 'leading them back, stirring up himself, and coming to save them,' is very fitly. begged, and described in a style resembling the former rescue." Merrick accounts for Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh, being particularly specified, by supposing the psalm to have been written at a time when some enemy was advancing towards these tribes, which were contiguously situated, or was directing his march to Jerusalem, through their territories. "Such an occasion," he observes, "might make it very proper for the Psalmist to pray that the people of those tribes might particularly be made spectators of the divine interposition. If the psalm was not written on any such occasion, it may be most reasonable to suppose, that Benjamin, Joseph's only brother by the same mother, and Ephraim and Manasseh his sons, are in the second verse equivalent to Joseph; who, in the preceding verse, represents the whole posterity of Israel."

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The argument which Calvin here adduces in support of the opinion, that this psalm relates to the ten tribes which constituted the kingdom of Israel, in contradistinction to the kingdom of Judah, is evidently inconclusive. He seems to have forgotten the fact that the tribe of Benjamin, which is expressly specified, did not belong to the kingdom of Israel, but formed a part of the kingdom of Judah, — a fact which is altogether destructive of the argument by which he attempts to prove that the psalm relates exclusively or especially to the kingdom of Israel. The whole of God's ancient people seem therefore to be intended. It may farther be observed, that the calamities which are referred to are so extensive and general, as to render it in a high degree probable, that the entire body of that people are spoken of. This view is also confirmed, from the introduction of the similitude of a vine transplanted from Egypt. The subject of the psalm may be the same with that of the 79th — the calamitous condition into which the chosen people were brought by the arms of Nebuchadnezzar.

encourages them in the hope of obtaining his grace, until they found, from actual experience, that they had not been deceived by vain promises. From this, we perceive in what respect this and the preceding psalm differ from each other. If any one considers what I have now stated unsatisfactory, he is at liberty to adopt a different view. But I flatter myself, that whoever carefully weighs all the circumstances, will readily acquiesce in my opinion. I will not insist upon the words *Sosannim* and *Eduth,* having already, in Psalm 45th, stated the opinions of interpreters concerning them; nor is this a matter of so great importance as to render it necessary to expend much labor upon it. Besides, those who are most learned in antiquities adduce nothing but probable conjectures.

Psalm 80:1-3

1. Hearken, O Shepherd of Israel! who leadest Joseph like a flock: thou who sittest between the cherubim, shine forth. **2.** In the sight of Ephraim, and Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up [867] thy strength, and come to our deliverance. **3.** Turn us again, O God! cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.

1 *Hearken, O Shepherd of Israel!* The prophet, previous to his naming Manasseh and Ephraim, makes mention of Joseph; and why does he speak of Joseph rather than of Judah, but because it was his design to treat separately of the kingdom of Israel, the government of which was in the family and posterity of Joseph? Nor, since God sent special prophets among them, after he had stricken them with his rods, is there any inconsistency when, at the same time, the prayer is added, That God would gather together the remnant to himself. Moreover, that they might not delude themselves by trusting in their spurious worship, the prophet, by applying to God the appellation of *Him who sitteth between the Cherubim,* calls them back to the pure doctrine of the law. The mercy-seat was a pledge of the presence of God, where he had promised to be near his people to hear their prayers. This divinely instituted form, it was unlawful for men to change at their own pleasure. The Israelites, then, are admonished to return to their original state, if they would expect to find God gracious towards them. Besides, by the title which is here attributed to God, there is expressed his wonderful love towards men in humbling, and, so to speak, lowering himself in order to come down to them, and choose for himself a seat and habitation on the earth, that he might dwell in the midst of them. Properly speaking, God cannot be said to sit; nor is it to be supposed that it is possible for him, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, to be shut up in a certain

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The original word for "stir up" is, עוררה, *orera*, from עור, *ur*, *was excited* "This word," says Dimock, "seems to convey the idea of God's having been *asleep* during the Babylonish captivity. See Isaiah 51:9."

place, (1 Kings 8:27.) But, in accommodation to the infirmity of men, he is represented as placed between the two Cherubim, that the faithful might not imagine him to be far from them; and, consequently, be perplexed with doubt and apprehension in approaching him. At the same time, the remark which I have previously made must be borne in mind, that the Israelites are here furnished with a rule for enabling them to pray in a right manner, that they might be withdrawn from the worship of the god fabricated and set up by themselves at Dan and Bethel, and that, rejecting all superstitions, they might yield themselves to be guided by the true light of faith, and follow the Word of God.

3 *Turn us again, O God!* The meaning of this prayer is, Restore us to our former state. They had petitioned, in the preceding verse, that God would stir up his strength in the sight of Ephraim and Manasseh; and now they complain that they are but castaways until God succor them, and remedy their miserable dispersion. Some understand the words, *turn us again,* in a different way; namely, as a prayer that God would bestow upon them the spirit of regeneration. But this interpretation being too refined, it will be better, adhering to the former sense, to view the expression as meaning that the faithful, under the adversity with which they were afflicted, betake themselves to God, whose peculiar work it is to restore life to the dead. They acknowledge, on the one hand, that all their miseries were to be traced to this as their cause, that God, being angry on account of their sins, hid his face from them; and, on the other hand, they expect to obtain complete salvation solely through the Divine favor. It will be to us, they say, a resurrection indeed, if once thy countenance shine upon us. Their language implies, that provided God extended his mercy and favor to them, they would be happy, and all their affairs would prosper.

Psalm 80:4-7

4. O Jehovah, God of Hosts! how long wilt thou be incensed [868] against the prayer of thy people? **5.** Thou hast fed us with bread of tears; and hast given us tears to drink in great measure. **6.** Thou hast made us a strife to our neighbors: and our enemies laugh at us among themselves. **7.** Turn us again, O God of Hosts! and cause thy face to shine upon us, and we shall be saved.

4 *O Jehovah, God of Hosts!* God having in the Scriptures freely promised, and so often assured us, that the prayers of his people will not be disappointed, it may excite our surprise to find the faithful here alleging before him, that he continues unpacified, although they betake themselves to him. They complain not only that they are not heard, but also that

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Literally, "wilt thou smoke (with wrath;") *i.e.*, be very angry. — See Psalm 74:1.

he *is angry,* when they call upon him; as if he purposely rejected this religious service. Where, then, it may be said, is that promise recorded in Isaiah 65:24, "Before they call I will answer?" To this I would answer, That as God, by delaying to succor his people, tries their patience, the prophet, speaking according to the judgment of the flesh, represents him as deaf to their prayers. Not that it is proper for those who pray to rest in this opinion, which would throw an insuperable obstacle in their way to the throne of grace. It rather becomes them to strive to cherish, in opposition to it, the judgment of faith; and to penetrate even into heaven, where they may behold a hidden salvation. But still God permits them, the more effectually to disburden their minds, to tell him of the cares, anxieties, griefs, and fears, with which they are distressed. In the mention here made of *the smoke of God's wrath,* there appears to be an implicit allusion to the incense which was used in the sacrifices under the law. The smoke of the incense served to purify the air; but the Israelites complain that the heavens were so obscured by a different smoke, that their sighs could not come up to God.

5 *Thou hast fed us with bread of tears, etc.* By these forms of expression, they depict the greatness of their grief, and the long continuance of their calamities; as if they had said, We are so filled with sorrow, that we can contain no more. [869] They add, in the following verse that *they were made a strife to their neighbors* This admits of being explained in two ways. It means either that their neighbors had taken up a quarrel against them; or that, having obtained the victory over them, they were contending about the spoil, as is usually the case in such circumstances, each being eager to drag it to himself. The former interpretation, however seems to be the more suitable. The people complain that, whereas neighborhood ought to be a bond of mutual goodwill, they had as many enemies as neighbors. To the same purpose is their language in the second clause, *They laugh at us among themselves;* that is to say, They talk among themselves by way of sport and mockery at our adversities. To encourage and stir themselves up to repentance, they ascribe all this to the judgment of God, in whose power it is to bend the hearts of men. Since we are all at this day chargeable with the same sins, it is not surprising that our condition is in no degree better than was theirs. But the Holy Spirit having inspired the prophet to write this form of prayer for a people who felt their condition to be almost desperate, it serves to inspire us with hope and boldness, and to prevent us from giving up the exercise of prayer, under a consciousness of the greatness of our guilt. The seventh verse is a repetition of the third; and this repetition is undoubtedly intended as a means of surmounting every obstacle. God

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"There cannot," says Bishop Horne, "be a more striking picture of Zion in captivity! Her bread is dipped in tears; and her cup is filled to the brim with them: no time is free from grief and lamentation!"

did not here intend to endite for his people a vain repetition of words: his object was to encourage them, when bowed down under the load of their calamities, boldly to rise up, heavy though the load might be. This ground of support was often presented to them; and it is repeated the third time in the concluding verse of the psalm.

Psalm 80:8-13

> **8.** Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast expelled the heathen, and planted it. **9.** Thou hast cleansed the ground before it: thou hast rooted its roots, and it hath filled the land. **10.** The mountains were covered with its shadow, and its branches were like the cedars of God. [870] **11.** It extended its branches to the sea, and its shoots to the river. [871] **12.** Why then hast thou broken down its hedges, so that all who pass by the way pluck [or tear] it in pieces? **13.** The boar out of the forest [872] hath wasted it; [873] and the wild beast of the field hath eaten it up.

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The LXX. read this verse as follows. Εκάλυψενὅρη ἡ σκιὰ αὐτῶς, καὶ αί ἀναδενδράδες αὐτῶς τὰς κέδρους του Θεοῦ "The shadow thereof covered the hills, and the branches thereof [covered] the cedars of God." The LXX. seem to have read כסה, *casah*, *covered*, instead of כסו, *cossu*, *were covered* With this agree the versions of the Syriac, Arabic, and Vulgate; and this is the reading adopted by Hare, Houbigant, Lowth, and Horsley. "Is it an extravagant image of a flourishing vine," says Lowth, "to say, that it climbed up even the highest cedars, spread itself along the branches, and covered the very top of them?" "The image," says Merrick, "may, I think, well be allowed in the description of an allegorical vine, which is represented as stretching out her branches unto the sea, and her boughs unto the river; especially when compared with what Kaempfer says of some foreign vines. 'Maximum proventum vites tribuunt, quae nulla jutae cultura palmites per summa spargunt fastigia arborum.' — *Amoenitat Exot Fascic* 2, *Relat* 9, Section 2, page 390. The author of the History of the Piratical States of Barbary (published in 1750) informs us that some of the vines near Algiers 'climb to the tops of very lofty trees, and, extending themselves to others, form natural bowers,' page 163. And Beverley, in his History of Virginia, (page 116, ed. 2d,) affirms that he has seen great trees *covered* with single vines, and those vines almost hidden with grapes. [...] The vine's covering the cedars, in the Psalmist's description, might be intended to suggest an idea not only of its extent, but also of its sovereignty, (agreeably to what Musculus writes on the place: '*Operti fuerunt montes umbra ejus*, *et ramis ejus cedri Dei*: Ponit haec de potentia regni Israelitici,' etc.,) as a Greek poet has, from this very circumstance, represented the vine as the mistress of the trees. (Nonnus, *Dionysiac* L. 12, 278, 279.")

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The sea — the river — i.e., the Mediterranean, which was the Western, and the Euphrates, which was the Eastern boundary of Palestine. The Divine promise respecting the extent of the territory of the chosen people runs in these terms, (Deuteronomy 11:24,) "From the river Euphrates to the uttermost sea shall your coast be." And it was fulfilled in the days of Solomon, (1 Kings 4:21; Psalm 72:8.) In his time there were Hebrew colonies and garrisons near the river Euphrates.

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According to the Talmud, the middle letter of the word rendered *forest* in this verse, is the middle letter of the Hebrew Psalter.

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8 *Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt.* Under the figure of a vine, the singular grace which God was graciously pleased to exercise towards his people after he had redeemed them is celebrated; and this powerfully contributed to inspire them with the hope of being heard. For which of us can be so presumptuous as to dare to come into the presence of God until he himself has previously invited us? Now, he allures us to himself both by his benefits and by his word. The object in view in now presenting his liberality before him is, that he should not leave unfinished the work of his hands which he had commenced. It is indeed true that, without his word, the benefits which he has conferred upon us would make a faint impression upon our hearts; but when experience is added to the testimony of his word, it greatly encourages us. Now, the redemption of which mention is here made was inseparably connected with the covenant of God; for he had, even four hundred years before, entered into covenant with Abraham, in which he promised the deliverance of his seed. What is stated amounts in short to this, that it is unbecoming that God should now suffer the vine which he had planted and cultivated so carefully with his own hand to be wasted by wild beasts. God's covenant was not made to last only for a few days, or for a short time: when he adopted the children of Abraham, he took them under his keeping for ever. By the word *vine,* is intimated the high place which this people held in the estimation of God, who not only was pleased to hold them as his own inheritance, but who also distinguished them by peculiar honor, even as a vine excels all other possessions. When it is said that the *land* or *ground was cleansed,* this is a repetition of what had been previously stated, that the *heathen were cast out* to make room for the chosen people. Perhaps, however, the allusion is to the continual digging which vines require, in order to their being kept clean lest they should degenerate; this allusion being made with the view of showing how God had performed the part of a good husbandman towards his people, since, after having planted them, he did not cease to employ every means to cherish and preserve them. What is added immediately after, *Thou hast rooted its roots,* is not to be understood of the planting of it at first, but of the pains taken by God to propagate it, [874] which is a part of the culture of the vine. Whence it follows that *the*

The boar out of the forest hath wasted it. "This terrible animal is both fierce and cruel, and so swift, that few of the savage tribes can outstrip him in running. His chief abode, says Forbes, is in the forests and jungles; but, when the grain is nearly ripe, he commits great ravages in the fields and sugar plantations. That ferocious and destructive animal, not satisfied with devouring the fruit, lacerates and breaks with his sharp and powerful tusks the branches of the vine, or, with his snout, digs it up by the roots, pollutes it with his touch, or tramples it under his feet." — (*Paxton's Illustrations*, volume 2, page 66.) Homer complains of the ravages of this animal, (Iliad, 9. 535;) and Mr Ward remarks, that the buffaloes and wild hogs make the like ravages in the orchards of the Hindoos; to prevent which, men are placed day and night in proper situations to guard against them. — (*Ward's Hindoos*, volume 2, page 327.)

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mountains were covered with its shadow; for the whole country, although mountainous, was filled with inhabitants; so much did that people increase in number. The branches of this vine are compared to *the cedars of God,* that is, to the most beautiful and most excellent cedars; thereby to express still more vividly how eminently the seed of Abraham were blessed of God. The sea and the Euphrates, as is well known, were the divinely appointed boundaries of the land promised them for an inheritance.

12 *Why then hast thou broken down its hedges?* This is the application of the similitude; for nothing seems more inconsistent than that God should abandon the vine which he had planted with his own hand, to be rooted up by wild beasts. It is true that he often threatened and forewarned the people by his prophets that he would do this; but what constrained him to inflict upon them so strange and dreadful a species of punishment was, that he might render their ingratitude the more detestable. At the same time, it is not without reason that true believers are enjoined to take encouragement from such distinguished liberality on the part of God; that, even in the midst of this rooting up, they might at least hope that He, who never forsakes the work of his own hands, would graciously extend his care towards them, (Psalm 138:8.) The people were brought to desolation, on account of their own incurable obstinacy; but God did not fail to save a small number of shoots, by means of which he afterwards restored his vine. This form of supplicating pardon was, indeed, set forth for the use of the whole people, with the view of preventing a horrible destruction. But as very few sought to appease the wrath of God by truly humbling themselves before him, it was enough that these few were delivered from destruction, that from them a new vine might afterwards spring up and flourish. The indignity which was done to the Church is aggravated from the contrast contained in the words, when God, on the one hand, is exhibited to us as a vine-keeper, and when the destroyers of this vine, on the other, are represented to be not only all that pass by, but also the wild boars and other savage beasts. The word כרסם, *kiresem,* which I have translated *to waste,* is taken by some for *to fill the belly.* [875] This sense would very well agree with the present passage; but it is not supported by the ordinary meaning of the word.

Psalm 80:14-19

14. Return, I beseech thee, O God of Hosts! look down from heaven, and behold, and visit this vine, **15.** And the vineyard which thy

"Mais du travail qu'il avoit prins a la provigner." — *Fr.*

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"יכרסמנה, (*jechar-semenna,*) *will destroy it Targum*, *Will tear it up with its tusk Fut pih* From חרסם, *he cut off*, *cut down*, *consumed*, a quadriliteral, same as the Chaldaic קוסם. Occurs here only in Scripture, and, according to others, is compounded of כרש, *a belly*, as though וכרש, *will fill the belly from it.*" — *Bythner*

right hand hath planted, and upon [876] the branch [877] which thou hast strengthened for thyself. **16.** It is burnt with fire; it is cut down; [878] they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. **17.** Let thy hand be upon the Man of thy right hand, upon the Son of man whom thou hast strengthened for thyself. **18.** And we will not go back from thee: thou shalt quicken us, and we will call upon thy name. **19.** Turn us again, O Jehovah, God of Hosts! cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.

14. *Return, I beseech thee, O God of Hosts!* In these words it is intended to teach, that we ought not to yield to temptation although God should hide his face from us for a time, yea even although to the eye of sense and reason he should seem to be alienated from us. For, provided he is sought in the confident expectation of his showing mercy, he will become reconciled, and receive into his favor those whom he seemed to have cast off. It was a distinguished honor for the seed of Abraham to be accounted the vineyard of God; but while the faithful adduce this consideration as an argument for obtaining the favor of God, instead of bringing forward any claims of

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"Hammond thinks it most probable that על, *al*, *upon*, is an expletive, or that it may refer to ראה, *reeh*, *behold* or *look*, the last verb except one in the preceding verse, ראה על, *reeh al*, *look upon*

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The original word which Calvin renders *branch* is בן, *ben*, *son* "Where," says Horsley, "does בן signify a branch?" It is; however, so used in Genesis 49:22, where it is said, "Joseph is a fruitful בן, *ben*, *bough*, or *branch*, by a well." The reading of some MSS., and of the Septuagint, Vulgate, Syriac, Æthiopic, and Arabic versions, is *the son of man*, as in the 17th verse; and eighteen of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS. read בן אדם, *ben adam*, *son of man* It has been thought by many that Christ is here intended. Aben Ezra and R. Obadiah thus interpret the passage. The Chaldee paraphrase is, "And upon the King Messiah whom thou hast strengthened for thyself." Hare, Green, Horsley, and Morison, consider the last clause of this verse, "and the branch which thou hast strengthened for thyself," as a misplaced anticipation of the latter clause of the 17th verse.

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Horsley thinks that the word כסוחה, *kesuchah*, which Calvin renders as a verb, "it is cut down," is probably the noun סוחה, with the comparative כ, *caph*, prefixed — "It is consumed in fire like refuse;" and he refers to Parkhurst's Lexicon, under the roots, כסח, and סחה. "This verse," says he, "with the two preceding, should be thus rendered: —

'Return, we beseech thee, O God of Hosts!
Look down from heaven and behold, And visit this vine;
Even the plant which thine own right hand planted,
Burnt with fire like refuse. —
At the rebuke of thy countenance they shall perish,'"

— *they shall perish*: *They*, the spoilers of the vineyard, described under the image of the wild boar and beast in the 13th verse. "The Bishop's reading of verse 16," says Dr Morison, "is very satisfactory." "*They perish.* This should either be rendered as by our translators and Mr Ainsworth, and then the words refer to the vine of the Jewish Church; but if in the future, as by Bishop Horsley, it must refer to their heathen persecutors. Bishop Horne mentions both, and the original will admit of either." — *Williams.*

their own, they only beseech him not to cease to exercise his accustomed liberality towards them. The words, *from heaven,* have, no doubt, been introduced, that the faithful might find no difficulty in extending their faith to a distance, although God, from whom they had departed, was far from them; and, farther that if they saw no prospect of deliverance upon earth, they might lift up their eyes to heaven.

As to the word כנה, *cannah,* [879] in the beginning of the 15th verse, I readily acquiesce in the sense given of it by some who translate it, *a place prepared;* but as some think that there is a change in the Hebrew word of the letter ג, *gimel,* into כ, *caph,* so that the reading should be גנה, *gannah, a garden* or *vineyard,* we leave the reader to judge for himself. It is, however, certain that this is a metaphor akin to the former, by which is denoted the singular liberality of God in advancing this people, and causing them to prosper. The vine-branch which was planted by the hand of God is also called *the Man of his right hand.*

16 *It is burnt with fire.* The calamities of the people are now more clearly expressed. [880] It had been said that the Lord's vine was abandoned to the wild beasts, that they might lay it waste. But it was a greater calamity for it to be consumed with fire, rooted up and utterly destroyed. The Israelites had perfidiously apostatised from the true religion; but, as has been previously observed, they were still a part of the Church. We are accordingly warned by this melancholy example, of the severity of the punishment due to our ingratitude, especially when it is joined with obstinacy, which prevents the threatenings and rebukes of God, however sharp and severe they may be, from being of any benefit to us. Let us also learn from the same example, when the Divine anger is blazing all around, and even when we are in the midst of its burning flames, to cast all our sorrows into the bosom of God, who, in a wonderful manner, raises up his Church from the gulf of destruction. He would assuredly be ready not only to exercise without interruption his favor towards us, but also to enrich us with his blessings more and more, did not our wickedness hinder him. As it is impossible for him not to be angry at the many offenses which we have committed, it is an evidence of unparalleled mercy for him to extinguish the

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"Surely, כנה, should not be translated *vineyard*, but *plant*: and probably ו should be translated, or understood to mean, *even* See Noldius, *Sign.* 38." — *Arcbishop Secker* "Michaelis and Gesenius derive it from כנן, *texit*, with the suffix ה. Bochart considers it an Egyptian word. 'כנה, verto *plantam* ex sententia Bocharti (in Phaleg. lib. 1, cap. 15 and 16, edit. Leusd.) qui putat vocem esse Ægyptiacam. Nam, auctore Plutarcho in Iside, hederam Ægyptii χενόιριν, h. e. φυτὸν Οσιριδος, *plantam* Osiridis vocabant.' Dathe. De Rossi concurs." — *Rogers*' *Book of Psalms*, *etc.*, volume 2, 231.

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Under the same allegorical imagery the Prophet Ezekiel represents the afflicted state of his country, (Ezekiel 19:10, 12, 13.)

fire which we ourselves have kindled, and which has spread far and wide, and to save some portion or remnant of the Church, or, to speak more properly, to raise up even from the very ashes a people to call upon his name. It is again repeated that the Church *perished* not by the strength and arms of her enemies, but at the rebuke of God's countenance. Never can we expect any alleviation of our punishment, unless we are fully persuaded that we are justly chastised by the hand of God. It was a good sign of the repentance of these Israelites that, as is observed in Isaiah 9:12, "they looked to the hand of him who smote them."

17 *Let that hand be upon the Man of thy right hand.* Here the Psalmist repeats in plain words the prayer which he had expressed under the figure of a vineyard, pleading that God would defend, under his hand, *the Man of his right hand, and the Son of man whom he hath strengthened for himself* It is uncertain whether he speaks of the king alone, or whether the people also are included. Although Jeroboam was anointed to be king, yet he did not come to the possession of the royal dignity in a lawful way; and God never so approved of any of his successors, as to divest the posterity of David of the right and power of dominion. God, as we have seen in Psalm 78:67, did not choose the tribe of Ephraim. on the contrary, the scepter, by his immutable decree, was given to the house of Judah, as is plainly taught in the prophecy of Jacob, (Genesis 49:10.) It was therefore a base and wicked dismembering of the body, when the majority of the people revolted from the house of David, and submitted themselves to Jeroboam as their king. Such being the ease, why then, it may be said, is the king of Israel prayed for in this manner? For removing this difficulty, let it be observed, that although that kingdom had an untoward commencement, and God, as is stated in Hosea 13:11, gave them a king in his anger, yet he was afterwards pleased to tolerate its continuance; and the anointing of Jeroboam testified that he had ratified what had been unadvisedly and wickedly done by the tumult and rebellion of the people. The nation of Israel might therefore say that their king was created and established by God, who, with the view of remedying the rupture which had been made, added him as a sharer in the royal dignity to the children of David. By that rent the state of the people was greatly impaired; but, to prevent an entire overthrow, the erection of the ten tribes into a separate kingdom, under the sovereignty of Jeroboam, was, as it were, a pillar put under it by the secret counsel of God to uphold it.

I have, however, no hesitation in considering the whole body of the Church as comprehended under the expressions, *the Man of God's right hand, and the Son of man* The similar number is very properly made use of, it having been the Divine will that the chosen people should be as one man. For the same reason, the Apostle Paul also, in Galatians 3:16, lays great stress upon the words, *one seed;* for Ishmael, Esau, and others, were separated and scattered when God redeemed arm gathered together the seed of Abraham.

Thus, by *the Son of man* is to be understood the people whom God had adopted to himself, that they might be as one man. [881] But as this oneness depended upon the head, I readily admit that the phrase has a particular reference to the king, who preserved the greater part of the people from being involved in utter destruction. Here again the Prophet, in seeking to obtain the Divine favor, founds his argument and hope only upon the benefits which God had formerly conferred upon them. "Lord," as if he had said, "since it belongs to thee to perfect that which thou hast begun, preserve the king whom thou hast given us!"

In the 18th verse, the faithful engage, upon God's hearing them, gratefully to acknowledge his goodness, not only by rendering to him the sacrifice of praise, but also by their whole life. *Calling upon God's name,* is here to be understood of "the calves of the lips," (Hosea 45:3;) but when it is said, *We will not go back from thee,* this means the uniform and continued course of the whole life. The verse, however, may be interpreted thus: O Lord! we will continue in our obedience to thee, even when our circumstances, so far as we can perceive, are hopeless; never shall the sharpness of our calamities have the effect of driving us to apostasy from thee: and when we are restored by thy grace and power, we will magnify thy name. It would be superfluous to make any farther observations on the last verse, which is repeated for the third time.

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Muis, Walford, and others, in like manner, suppose these titles, *The Man of thy right hand*, and *The Son of man*, to belong to the people of Israel. Walford translates the 15th and 17th verses thus: —

"The scion, which thy right hand planted;
Even the branch, which thou madest strong for thyself.

Let thy support be extended to the Man of thy right hand;
To the Son of man, whom thou madest strong for thyself."

And he observes on the 17th verse, "The Psalmist here quits the figurative representation, and speaks literally of the people of Israel, whom God had chosen, and so greatly favored." "From comparing 2 Chronicles 36:22, 23; Isaiah 44:26-28; 45:1-11, and Jeremiah 25:12, 13," says Dimock, "with this verse, might not Jeremiah, or whoever was the author of this psalm, mean *Cyrus*, by these titles, who was prophesied of as the restorer of Israel, by *name*, above a hundred years before his birth?" It has been thought by others, and it is highly probable, that the phraseology here employed contains a mystic allusion to the Messiah. The pious Israelites were accustomed, in times of great calamity, to look forward with longing desire to the days of Him who should reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of whose kingdom there should be no end. These striking expressions, *The Man of thy right hand*, and *The Son of man*, apply in the fullest and most perfect sense to Christ. If *the Man of God's right hand* be the man placed there, to whom can the title apply but to him? for, "to which of the angels said God at any time, Sit on my right hand?" (Hebrews 1:3;) and much less has he said this of any Jewish king. As to the other appellation, *The Son of man*, it is one of Christ's most definite titles, being given to him in Scripture no less than seventy-one times; in sixty-seven instances by himself; once by Daniel; once by the martyr Stephen; and twice by the Apostle John in the Revelation. He it is, too, whom the Father has made strong for the salvation of his Church, and who will yet turn away iniquity from the chosen people, and restore them to a place in the Church, so that henceforth they "will not go back from God."

Psalm 81

PSALM 81

This psalm consists of two parts. Whoever was its author, he exhorts the people to remember the unparalleled grace of God towards them, in delivering them by his outstretched arm, and choosing them to be a kingdom of priests, and a peculiar Church to himself; that thus they may be excited devoutly to honor their deliverer, both by celebrating his praises, and by leading a holy life. God is next introduced as upbraiding them for their ingratitude in continuing obstinately to refuse to submit to the yoke of the law, notwithstanding the tender and gracious manner in which he allured them to himself.

To the chief musician upon Gittith. A Psalm of Asaph. [882]

Psalm 81:1-3

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1. Sing joyfully to God our strength sing with a loud voice: to the God of Jacob. **2.** Raise a song, [883] and bring forth the tabret, the pleasant harp, with the psaltery. [884] **3.** Sound the trumpet at the new moon; at the time appointed on the day of our sacrifice. [885] **4.** For this is a statute to Israel, a law to the God of Jacob. **5.** He set it for a testimony in Joseph, when he went forth over [or above] the land of Egypt: I heard a language which I understood not. **6.** I removed

There are various opinions as to the time and occasion of the composition of this psalm. Bishop Horsley observes, "It is certainly older than the time of David; for the use of Joseph's name, in the 5th verse, as the name of the whole nation, shows that it was composed before Judah became the principal tribe, while the place of worship was in the tribe of Ephraim; that is, among Joseph's descendants." "This, however," says Fry, "is not conclusive, as a psalm, whenever composed, referring to the events of those times, might use the same distinctions." According to Walford, it "was most likely written to be sung at some celebration of the feast of the Passover, during the reign of Jehoshaphat or of Hezekiah." But the generally received opinion is, that it was composed, in the first instance, for the feast of trumpets. This feast was celebrated on the first day of the month *Tisri*, which was the beginning of the Jewish year, answering to our September. It has been supposed by some, that this feast was appointed in commemoration of the creation of the world, which is conjectured to have been completed at that season of the year. The Hebrew months were lunar, and the first day of each month had its religious services, accompanied with sound of trumpets, Numbers 10:10; but the feast of trumpets was kept with additional sacrifices, Leviticus 23:24; Numbers 29:1. The trumpets were blown from sunrise until sunset. It appears from the book of the Jewish Liturgy, that this psalm is still sung at that feast. "It may have been used," observes Dr Adam Clarke, "in celebrating the feast of trumpets on the first of Tisri; the feast of tabernacles, on the fifteenth of the same month; the creation of the world; the feast of the new moons; and the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt; to all which circumstances it appears to refer."

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"*Take a psalm.* Ainsworth, *Take up a psalm.* Bishop Horsley says, 'The word (psalm) must in this place denote some musical instrument.' But, with all due deference to his Lordship, suppose a clergyman in the present day were to say to his clerk, 'Strike up a psalm!' (quite a similar phrase,) would the clerk understand him to mean a musical instrument? Certainly not." — *Williams.*

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For an account of these musical instruments, see Appendix.

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Hammond translates this verse thus, "Blow the trumpet on the first day of the month, on the new moon, on the day of our feast." "The word כהדש," says he, "must here be rendered, *in the beginning of the month*, that so ככסה, that follows, may be rendered, as it truly signifies, *in the new moon.* It is true, that from הדש, *new*, הדש indifferently signifies the *novilunium*, and *the first day of the month*; but here, *the new moon* being peculiarly expressed by כסה, to avoid tautology, הדש must be rendered *the new month*; i.e., *the first day of the month.* The Syriac sets this down here most expressly, 'In the beginning or first of the month, and in the new moon;' which, meeting always together, were festival among the Jews, and so the trumpet was to be sounded thereon." [Note: The Hebrew words and stems being discussed in this footnote require punctuation which cannot be shown using the OLBHEB font. The reader should refer to the original commentary for the actual puctuation. — *sg.*]

his shoulder from the burden; his hands were freed from the pots. [886]
7. Thou didst cry in trouble, and I delivered thee: I answered thee in the secret place of thunder: I proved thee at the waters of Meribah. Selah.

1 *Sing joyfully to God our strength.* This psalm, it is probable, was appointed to be sung on the festival days on which the Jews kept their solemn assemblies. In the exordium, there is set forth the order of worship which God had enjoined. They were not to stand deaf and dumb at the tabernacle; for the service of God does not consist in indolence, nor in cold and empty ceremonies; but they were, by such exercises as are here prescribed, to cherish among themselves the unity of faith; to make an open profession of their piety; to stir up themselves to continual progress therein; to endeavor to join, with one accord, in praising God; and, in short, to continue steadfast in the sacred covenant by which God had adopted them to himself.

Such having been the use of festival days under the law, we may conclude, that whenever true believers assemble together at the present day, the end which they ought to have in view is to employ themselves in the exercises of religion — to call to their remembrance the benefits which they have received from God — to make progress in the knowledge of his word — and to testify the oneness of their faith. Men only mock God by presenting to him vain and unprofitable ceremonies, unless the doctrine of faith go before, stirring them up to call upon God; and unless, also, the remembrance of his benefits furnish matter of praise. Yea, rather it is a profanation of his name, when people quench the light of divine truth, and satisfy themselves with performing mere outward service. Accordingly, the faithful are here not only enjoined to come together to the tabernacle, but are also taught the end for which they are to assemble there, which is, that the free and gracious covenant which God has made with them may be brought anew to their remembrance, for increasing their faith and piety, that thus the benefits which they have received from him may be celebrated, and their hearts thereby moved to thanksgiving. With respect to the *tabret, harp, and psaltery,* we have formerly observed, and will find it necessary afterwards to repeat the same remark, that the Levites, under the law, were justified in making use of instrumental music in the worship of God; it having been his will to train his people, while they were as yet tender and like children, by such rudiments, until the coming of Christ. But now when the clear light of the gospel has dissipated the shadows of the law, and taught us that God

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The word translated *pot* was, according to Kennicott, a large vessel in which the earth was mixed and worked up for making the bricks. The LXX. the Vulgate, Symmachus, Jerome, Street, Parkhurst, Ainsworth, Fry, Walford, and others, render the original word, by *the basket.* Parkhurst observes, that baskets might probably be employed both in carrying the earth of which the bricks were made, and also the bricks themselves.

is to be served in a simpler form, it would be to act a foolish and mistaken part to imitate that which the prophet enjoined only upon those of his own time. From this, it is apparent that the Papists have shown themselves to be very apes in transferring this to themselves. Under the *new moon,* by the figure synecdoche, is comprehended all the other high feasts. Sacrifices were daily offered; but the days on which the faithful met together at the tabernacle, according to the express appointment of the law, are called, by way of eminence, *the days of sacrifice.*

4 *For this is a statute to Israel.* To give the more effect to the preceding exhortation, it is here taught that this law or ordinance had been prescribed to God's ancient people, for the purpose of ratifying the everlasting covenant. And as in covenants there is a mutual agreement between the parties, it is declared that this *statute was given to Israel,* and that God, in contracting, reserved this for himself, as a right to which he was justly entitled.

5 *He set it for a testimony in Joseph.* The Hebrew word עדוה, *eduth,* is by some derived from עדה, *adah,* which signifies *to adorn;* and they translate it *the honor* or *ornament* of Joseph. But it rather comes from the verb עוד, *ud, to testify;* and the scope of the passage requires that it should be translated *a testimony* or *covenant.* Farther, when Joseph is named in particular, there is a reference to the first original of the chosen people, when, after the death of Jacob, the twelve tribes were distinguished. As the sovereignty had not at that time come to the tribe of Judah, and as Reuben had fallen from his right of primogeniture, the posterity of Joseph justly had the pre-eminence, on account of the benefits which he had been instrumental in conferring; having been the father and nourisher of his brethren and of the whole nation. Moreover, the sacredness of the covenant is commended by a special appeal to the fact, that at the time when God stipulated that this honor should be yielded to him, he had purchased that people to himself; as if it had been said, The condition upon which the people were delivered was, that they should assemble together on the days appointed for renewing the remembrance of the grace which had been exercised towards them. The words *when he went forth* will apply equally to God and to the people. [887] It is a common form of expression to speak of God as going forth before his people, as a shepherd goes before his flock, or as a general before his army. When it is said ABOVE *the land of Egypt,* some think there is an allusion to the situation of Judea, which was higher than that of Egypt; so that those who come out of Egypt to Judea ascend. But I understand the language as meaning simply, that the people, having God for their conductor, passed freely and without obstruction through the land of Egypt, the inhabitants having been so discouraged and dismayed as not

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"*When he went forth*, etc.; *i.e.*, When God went forth to destroy the first-born in all the land of Egypt, on account of which the passover was appointed." — *Walford.*

to dare to make any opposition to their passage. [888] The prophet enhances the blessing of their deliverance, when, speaking in the name of the whole people, he affirms that he had been rescued from profound barbarism*: I heard a language which I understood not.* [889] Nothing is more disagreeable than to sojourn among a people with whom we can hold no communication by language, which is the chief bond of society. Language being, as it were, the image and mirror of the mind, those who cannot employ it in their mutual intercourse are no less strangers to one another than the wild beasts of the forest. When the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 33:19) intends to denounce a very dreadful punishment, he says, "Thou shalt see a fierce people, a people of a deeper speech than thou canst perceive; of a stammering tongue, that thou canst not understand." Thus the people acknowledge that the benefit which God conferred was so much the more to be valued, because they were delivered from the Egyptians, with whose language they were unacquainted. [890]

6 *I have removed his shoulder from the burden.* Here God begins to recount the benefits which he had bestowed upon the Israelites, and the many ways in which he had laid them under obligations to him. The more galling the bondage was from which they had been delivered, the more desirable and precious was their liberty. When, therefore, it is affirmed that their burdens were so heavy that they stooped under them, and that they were doomed to the labor of making bricks, and to other slavish and toilsome occupations, the comparison of this their first state with their condition afterwards is introduced to illustrate the more strikingly the greatness of the blessing of their deliverance. Let us now apply this to ourselves, and elevate our minds to a higher subject, of which it was an image. As God has not only withdrawn our shoulders from a burden of brick, and not only

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"Going forth (עַל) over the land of Egypt seems to express dominion over it, which God exercised in bringing out the Israelites; and they were then in what may be called a state of superiority over the Egyptians, and went out with a high hand. Exodus 14:8; Numbers 33:3. And soon after that the law was given." — *Archbishop Secker*

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The Septuagint, Syriac, Vulgate, and all the versions except the Chaldee, have the third person, "*He* heard a language which *he* understood not;" Doederlein reads, "I heard a voice which I understood not;" and retaining the first person, interprets the words as an abrupt exclamation of the Psalmist upon feeling himself suddenly influenced by a divine afflatus, and upon hearing an oracle addressed to him by God, which consisted of what immediately follows, from the 6th verse to the close of the psalm, and which is spoken in the person of God. This voice he heard, but he did not understand it; that is, he did not fully comprehend its design and import.

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"The Egyptian language was not intelligible to the children of Jacob; for Joseph spake to his brethren by an interpreter, when he appeared as ruler of Egypt, and did not as yet choose to make himself known to them. See Genesis 42:23." — *Street.*

removed our hands from the kilns, but has also redeemed us from the cruel and miserable tyranny of Satan, and drawn us from the depths of hell, the obligations under which we lie to him are of a much more strict and sacred kind than those under which he had brought his ancient people.

7 *Thou didst cry in trouble, and I delivered thee.* Here the same subject is prosecuted. By their crying when they were in distress, I understand the prayers which they then offered to God. It sometimes happens that those who are reduced to extremity bewail their calamities with confused crying; but as this afflicted people still had in them some remains of godliness, and as they had not forgotten the promise made to their fathers, I have no doubt that they directed their prayers to God. Even men without religion, who never think of calling upon God, when they are under the pressure of any great calamity, are moved by a secret instinct of nature to have recourse to Him. This renders it the more probable that the promise was, as it were, a schoolmaster to the Israelites, leading them to look to God. As no man sincerely calls upon Him but he who trusts in him for help; this crying ought the more effectually to have convinced them that it was their duty to ascribe to Him alone the deliverance which was offered them. By *the secret place of thunder* some, in my opinion, with too much refinement of interpretation, understand that God by thundering rendered the groanings of the people inaudible to the Egyptians, that by hearing them the Egyptians might not become the more exasperated. But the meaning simply is, that the people were heard in a secret and wonderful manner, while, at the same time, manifest tokens were given by which the Israelites might be satisfied that they were succoured by the Divine hand. God, it is true, was not seen by them face to face; but the thunder was an evident indication of his secret presence among them. [891] To make them prize more highly this benefit, God upbraidingly tells them that they were unworthy of it, having given such a manifest proof *at the waters of Meribah,* [892] that they were of a wicked and perverse disposition, Exodus 17:7. Your wickedness, as if he had said, having at that time so openly shown itself, surely it must from this

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Bishop Lowth understands by "the secret place of thunder" the communication of the Israelites with God upon mount Sinai, the awfulness of which is expressed by these few words. (Lowth's Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews, volume 2, page 220.) Walford reads, "I answered thee by thunder, from a hidden retreat;" and he observes, that this contains "a reference to the majestic display on Sinai, where, though the symbols of the present Deity were seen and heard, the lightnings and thunders, he himself was concealed from all human view." The only objection which can be made against interpreting this of Sinai is, that the murmuring at Meribah, Exodus 17, was before the thundering on Sinai, Exodus 19; whereas here the thunder is mentioned first, and then what took place at Meribah in the end of the verse. But this objection is easily removed; for in the poetical compositions of Scripture strict order is not, always observed in the narration of facts. Thus in Psalm 83:9, the victory over the Midianites (Judges 7) is mentioned before that over Sisera, (Judges 4,) which was the victory first achieved.

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be incontrovertible that my favor to you did not proceed from any regard to your good desert. This rebuke is not less applicable to us than to the Israelites; for God not only heard our groanings when we were afflicted under the tyranny of Satan, but before we were born appointed his only begotten Son to be the price of our redemption; and afterwards, when we were his enemies, he called us to be partakers of his grace, illuminating our minds by his gospel and his Holy Spirit; while we, notwithstanding, continue to indulge in murmuring, yea, even proudly rebel against Him.

Psalm 81:8-12

> **8.** Hear, O my people! and I will protest to thee: [893] O Israel! if thou wilt hearken to me. **9.** Let there be no strange god in thee: neither worship thou a strange god. **10.** I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. **11.** But my people hearkened not to my voice, and Israel would none of me **12.** And I gave them up to the thoughts [894] of their own heart: they shall walk in their own counsels.

8 *Hear, O my people!* The more effectually to touch the hearts of the people, God is here invested with the character of a teacher, and introduced as speaking familiarly in the midst of the congregation; and this is done for the purpose of instructing them, that all assemblies are unprofitable and trifling in which the voice of God stirring up men to faith and true godliness is not uttered. But let us proceed to the consideration of the words. This

Literally "the waters of contradiction;" מריבה, *meribah*, from רוב, *rub*, *to quarrel*, being a noun signifying *contention*, *strife* It is therefore fitly used as the name of the place in the desert where the Israelites quarrelled with Moses. "The local specification," observes Bishop Mant, "as used in our Bible translation, is much more poetical than the rendering in the Common Prayer-Book, 'the waters of strife.'" "The mention of Meribah," says Lowth, "introduces another idea, namely, the ingratitude and contumacy of the Israelites, who appear to have been ever unmindful of the favors and indulgence of their heavenly Benefactor."

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Street reads, "and I will make a testimony with thee." "אעידה" says he, "is in the hiphil conjugation, which frequently signifies to make or cause a thing to be made. The ark is called *the ark of the testimony*, העדת ארון, Exodus 30:26, and *the ark of the covenant*, Joshua 3:6, and Exodus 25:21. Moses is commanded to put *the testimony* which God shall give him into the ark. It is plain, therefore, that the covenant and the testimony are the same." "*I will testify unto thee* I will, upon all occasions, give the oracular direction, so that thou shalt have no occasion to resort to other gods, nor shall any pretended god have power to harm thee." — *Horsley*

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"Ou, perversite, ou, durete." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, the perversity, or, the hardness." Hammond reads: "I gave them up unto the imaginations of their hearts." Horsley: "So I gave them up to the government of their own hearts." Fry: "And I gave them up to the desires of their heart." Walford: "Therefore I gave them up to the purposes of their heart."

preface was intended to teach in a few words, that festival days were not purely and rightly observed unless the people listened with attention to the voice of God. In order to consecrate their hands, feet, eyes, and their whole persons, to his service, it behoved them, in the first place, to open their ears to his voice. Thus the lesson is taught that he acknowledges as his servants those only who are disposed to become learners. By the word *protest* he intimates that he covenants after a solemn manner, thereby to give his words the greater authority. The clause which follows*, O Israel! if thou wilt hearken to me,* is, I presume, an abrupt expression, similar to what is frequently employed in pathetic discourses, the ellipse serving to express the greater earnestness. Some connect it with the following verse in this way, *O Israel! if thou wilt hearken to me, there will be no strange god in thee* But it is rather to be viewed as the language of regret on the part of God. He indirectly intimates that he distrusts this obstinate and rebellious people, and can hardly indulge the hope that they will prove obedient and teachable.

9 *Let there be no strange god* [895] *in thee.* Here there is propounded the leading article of the covenant, and almost the whole sum of it, which is, that God alone must have the pre-eminence. Some may prefer this explanation: O Israel! if thou wilt hearken to me, there is nothing which I more strictly require or demand from thee than that thou shouldst be contented with me alone, and that thou shouldst not seek after strange gods: and of this opinion I am far from disapproving. God by this language undoubtedly confirms the truth which he so frequently inculcates elsewhere in the law and the prophets, that he is so jealous a God as not to allow another to be a partaker of the honor to which he alone is entitled. But at the same time he teaches us that true religious worship begins with obedience. The order which Moses observes is different, Exodus 20:2, 4, and Deuteronomy 5:6, 8. In these passages God sets out with declaring that he is the God of Israel; and then he forbids them to make for themselves any new gods. But here the prohibition is put first, and then the reason of it is subjoined, which is, that the people ought to be abundantly satisfied with the God who had purchased them to be his people. Perhaps also he sets this in the front to prepare the way for his obtaining the throne of their hearts. He would first withdraw the people from superstitions, as these must necessarily be plucked up and cleared away before true religion can take root in our hearts.

10. *I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide.* God, by making mention of the deliverance which he had wrought for the people, put a bridle upon those whom he had taken under his protection, by which he might hold them bound to his service; and now he assures them, that with respect to the time to come, he had an

895 "Heathen, or foreign god." — *Hammond.*

abundant supply of all blessings with which to fill and satisfy their desires. The three arguments which he employs to induce the Israelites to adhere exclusively to him, and by which he shows them how wickedly and impiously they would act in turning aside from him, and having recourse to strange gods, are worthy of special attention. The first is, that he is *Jehovah.* By the word *Jehovah,* he asserts his claims as God by nature, and declares, that it is beyond the power of man to make new gods. When he says *I am Jehovah,* the pronoun I is emphatic. The Egyptians, no doubt, pretended to worship the Creator of heaven and of earth; but their contempt of the God of Israel plainly convicted them of falsehood. Whenever men depart from Him, they adorn the idols of their own invention with His spoils, whatever the specious pretexts may be by which they attempt to vindicate themselves. After having affirmed that he is Jehovah, he proves his Godhead from the effect and experience, — from the clear and irrefragable evidence of it in his delivering his people from Egypt, and especially, from his performing at that time the promise which he had made to the fathers. This is his second argument. The power which was displayed on that occasion ought not to have been contemplated apart by itself, since it depended upon the covenant, which long before he had entered into with Abraham. By that deliverance he gave a proof not less of his veracity than of his power, and thus vindicated the praise which was due to him. The third argument is, that he offers himself to the people for the time to come; assuring them, that, provided they continue to persevere in the faith, he will be the same towards the children as the fathers experienced him to be, his goodness being inexhaustible: *Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.* By the expression *open wide,* he tacitly condemns the contracted views and desires which obstruct the exercise of his beneficence. "If the people are in penury," we may suppose him to say, "the blame is to be entirely ascribed to themselves, because their capacity is not large enough to receive the blessings of which they stand in need; or rather, because by their unbelief they reject the blessings which would flow spontaneously upon them." He not only bids them open their mouth, but he magnifies the abundance of his grace still more highly, by intimating, that however enlarged our desires may be, there will be nothing wanting which is necessary to afford us full satisfaction. Whence it follows, that the reason why God's blessings drop upon us in a sparing and slender manner is, because our mouth is too narrow; and the reason why others are empty and famished is, because they keep their mouth completely shut. The majority of mankind, either from disgust, or pride, or madness, refuse all the blessings which are offered them from heaven. Others, although they do not altogether reject them, yet with difficulty take in only a few small drops, because their faith is so straitened as to prevent them from receiving an abundant supply. It is a very manifest proof of the depravity of mankind, when they have no desire to know God, in order that they may embrace him, and when they are equally disinclined to rest satisfied with him. He

undoubtedly here requires to be worshipped by external service; but he sets no value upon the bare name of Deity — for his majesty does not consist in two or three syllables. He rather looks to what the name imports, and is solicitous that our hope may not be withdrawn from him to other objects, or that the praise of righteousness, salvation, and all blessings, may not be transferred from him to another. In calling himself by the name *Jehovah,* he claims Godhead exclusively to himself, on the ground that he possesses a plenitude of all blessings with which to satisfy and fill us.

11. *But my people hearkened not to my voice.* God now complains, that the Israelites, whom he endeavored gently to allure to him, despised his friendly invitation; yea, that although he had for a long time continued to exhort them, they always shut their ears against his voice. It is not a rebellion of one day which he deplores: he complains, that from the very beginning they were always a stupid and hardened people, and that they continued to persevere in the same obstinacy. It is assuredly monstrous perverseness to exclude God from obtaining access to us, and to refuse to give him a hearing, when he is ready to enter into covenant with us, making the terms almost equal on both sides. To leave them no room for extenuating their guilt under the pretense of ignorance, he adds, that he was rejected with avowed and deliberate contempt: *Israel would none of me.* From this it is evident, that their minds were bewitched by the god of this world.

This is the reason why, as is stated in the following verse, *he gave them up to the hardness of their own heart,* or, as others translate it, *to the thoughts of their own heart.* The root שרר, *shorer,* from which the word rendered *thoughts* is derived, signifies properly *the navel* Accordingly, the translation is very appropriate, which takes this word either for the thoughts which are wrapped up in the hearts of men, or for the hardness which possesses the heart. It being, however, as is well known, a usual thing in the Psalms for the same thing to be twice repeated, I have preferred the word *thoughts,* because it follows immediately after, *They shall walk in their own counsels.* Besides, by these words, God testifies, that he justly punished his people, when he deprived them of good and wholesome doctrine, and gave them over to a reprobate mind. As in governing us by means of his word, he restrains us, as it were, with a bridle, and thereby prevents us from going astray after our own perverse imaginations, so, by removing his prophets from the Jews, he gave loose reins to their froward and corrupt counsels, by which they were led into devious paths. It is assuredly the most dreadful kind of punishment which can be inflicted upon us, and an evidence of the utter hopelessness of our condition, when God, holding his peace, and conniving at our perverseness, applies no remedy for bringing us to repentance and amendment. So long as he administers reproof to us, alarms us with the dread of judgment, and summons us before his tribunal, he, at the same time, calls upon us to repent. But when he sees that it is altogether lost labor to reason any longer with us, and that his admonitions have no effect,

he holds his peace, and by this teaches us that he has ceased to make our salvation the object of his care. Nothing, therefore, is more to be dreaded, than for men to be so set free from the divine guidance, as recklessly to follow their own counsels, and to be dragged by Satan wherever he pleases. The words, however may be viewed in a more extensive sense, as implying that the patience of God being worn out, he left his people, who, by their desperate perverseness, had cut off all hope of their ever becoming better, to act without restraint as they chose. It is a very absurd inference which some draw from this passage, that the grace of God is bestowed equally upon all men until it is rejected. Even at that time, God, while he passed by all the rest of the world, was graciously pleased to bring the posterity of Abraham, by peculiar and exclusive privilege, into a special relation to himself. At the present day, this distinction, I admit, has been abolished, and the message of the gospel, by which God reconciles the world to himself, is common to all men. Yet we see how God stirs up godly teachers in one place rather than in another. Still the external call alone would be insufficient, did not God effectually draw to himself those whom he has called. Further, as this passage teaches us, that there is no plague more deadly than for men to be left to the guidance of their own counsels, the only thing which remains for us to do is to renounce the dictates of carnal wisdom, and to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Psalm 81:13-16

> **13.** O if my people had hearkened to me! If Israel had walked in my ways! **14.** I would soon have brought their enemies low, and turned my hand against their adversaries. **15.** The haters of Jehovah would have lied to him, and their time should have been everlasting. **16.** I [896] would have fed them with the fat of corn: and I would have satisfied thee with honey from the rock.

13. *O if my people had hearkened to me!* By the honorable designation which God gives to the people of Israel, He exposes the more effectually their shameful and disgraceful conduct. Their wickedness was doubly aggravated, as will appear from the consideration, that although God called them to be his people, they differed nothing from those who were the greatest strangers to him. Thus he complains by the Prophet Isaiah,

"The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib:
but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."
(Isaiah 1:3)

896

In our English Bible it is, "*He* should have fed them." The LXX., Vulgate, and Syriac versions, Green, Walford, and others, read as Calvin does, "I would have fed them." "This is the preferable reading," says Walford, "as the common lection introduces a too sudden change of person."

The Hebrew particle לו, *lu,* which I have rendered *O if!* is not to be understood as expressing a condition, but a wish; and therefore God, I have no doubt, like a man weeping and lamenting, cries out, O the wretchedness of this people in wilfully refusing to have their best interests carefully provided for! He assumes the character of a father, and observing, after having tried every possible means for the recovery of his children, that their condition is utterly hopeless, he uses the language of one saddened, as it were, with sighing and groaning; not that he is subject to human passions, but because he cannot otherwise express the greatness of the love which he bears towards us. [897] The Prophet seems to have borrowed this passage from the song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:29, where the obstinacy of the people is bewailed in almost the same words: "Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" He means tacitly to upbraid the Jews, and to impress upon their minds the truth, that their own perverseness was the only cause which prevented them from enjoying a state of great outward prosperity. If it is objected, that God in vain and without ground utters this complaint, since it was in his power to bend the stiff necks of the people, and that, when he was not pleased to do this, he had no reason to compare himself to a man deeply grieved; I answer, that he very properly makes use of this style of speaking on our account, that we may seek for the procuring cause of our misery nowhere but in ourselves. We must here beware of mingling together things which are totally different — as widely different from each other as heaven is distant from the earth. God, in coming down to us by his word, and addressing his invitations to all men without exception, disappoints nobody. All who sincerely come to him are received, and find from actual experience that they were not called in vain. At the same time, we are to trace to the fountain of the secret electing purpose of God this difference, that the word enters into the heart of some, while others only hear the sound of it. And yet there is no inconsistency in his complaining, as it were, with tears, of our folly when we do not obey him. In the invitations which he addresses to us by the external word, he shows himself to be a father; and why may

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"Nothing," says Dr Adam Clarke on this verse, "can be more plaintive than the original: *sense* and *sound* are surprisingly united. I scruple not to say to him who understands the Hebrew, however learned, he has never found in any poet, Greek or Latin, a finer example of deep-seated grief, unable to express itself in appropriate words, without frequent interruptions of sighs and sobs, terminated with a mournful cry —

ול ימע עמש יל
לארשי יכרדב וכלהי
Loo-ghammee-shomeagh-lee
Yishrael-bid' rakee-yehallekoo!

"He who can give the proper guttural pronunciation to the letter ע, *ayin*; and gives the ו, *vau*, and the י, *yod*, their full Asiatic sound; and does not pinch them to death by a compressed and worthless European enunciation; will at once be convinced of the propriety of this remark."

he not also be understood as still representing himself under the image of a father in using this form of complaint? In Ezekiel 18:32, he declares with the strictest regard to truth, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth," provided in the interpretation of the passage we candidly and dispassionately take into view the whole scope of it. God has no pleasure in the death of a sinner: How? because he would have all men turned to himself. But it is abundantly evident, that men by their own free-will cannot turn to God, until he first change their stony hearts into hearts of flesh: yea, this renovation, as Augustine judiciously observes, is a work surpassing that of the creation itself. Now what hinders God from bending and framing the hearts of all men equally in submission to him? Here modesty and sobriety must be observed, that instead of presuming to intrude into his incomprehensible decrees, we may rest contented with the revelation which he has made of his will in his word. There is the justest ground for saying that he wills the salvation of those to whom that language is addressed, (Isaiah 21:12,) "Come unto me, and be ye converted." In the second part of the verse before us, we have defined what it is to hear God. To assent to what he speaks would not be enough; for hypocrites will grant at once that whatever proceeds from his mouth is true, and will affect to listen just as if an ass should bend its ears. But the clause is intended to teach us that we can only be said to hear God, when we submit ourselves to his authority.

14. *I would soon have brought their enemies low.* Here the Israelites are taught, that all the calamities which had befallen them were to be imputed to their own sins; for their enemies did not fight against them with any other strength than that with which they were supplied from above. God had promised that under his leading the chosen people would prove victorious over all their enemies; and now to take away all ground for charging him with violating his word, he affirms that he would not have failed to enable them to do this had he not been prevented by their sins. He doubtless intends tacitly to remind them that the victories which they had formerly achieved were not owing to their own military valor, but to Him under whose conduct they had been placed. Now, he tells them that he was not only kept back by their sins from putting forth his power to defend them, but that he was also compelled by their perverseness to rush against them with the sword in his hand, while he left their enemies to remain in undisturbed tranquillity.

15. *The haters of Jehovah would have lied to him.* Here the same thought is pursued, when the Israelites are informed that their enemies would have humbly submitted to their authority had not their impiety emboldened them to run to excess, when they shook off the yoke of God, and waxed wanton against him. In calling these enemies *the enemies of Jehovah,* it is intended to censure the folly of the Israelites in breaking the bond of the covenant made between God and them, and thereby separating themselves from him, and preventing him from forthwith engaging in war in their behalf against those who were alike their and his enemies. As earthly princes,

when they are disappointed of the assistance promised by their allies, are excited to enter into terms of agreement with their enemies, and in this way avenge themselves on those who have been found to be guilty of perjury and covenant-breakers; so God declares that he had spared his own enemies, because he had been treacherously and wickedly deceived by the people of Israel. Why does he permit his avowed enemies to remain unpunished, and cease for a time to maintain his own glory, if it is not because his object is to set them in contrast with his own rebellious and disobedient people, whom, by this means, he intends to subdue? The meaning of the word כחש, *cachash,* which we have rendered *lied,* has been explained in a previous psalm [898] . It is here intimated that peace with the reprobate cannot be looked for except in so far as God restrains their rage by hidden chains. A lion shut up in an iron cage still retains his own nature, but he is kept from mangling and tearing in pieces those who are not even more than five or six feet distant from him. Thus it is with respect to the wicked. They may greedily desire our destruction; but they are unable to accomplish what their hearts are set upon; yea God humbles and abases their fierceness and arrogance, so that they put on the appearance of gentleness and meekness. The amount of the whole is, that it was the fault of the Israelites themselves that their enemies prevailed against them, and insolently triumphed over them; whereas, had they continued the humble and obedient children of God, these enemies would have been in a state of subjection to them. When it is said, *their time should have been everlasting,* [899] the expression is to be referred to the promises; and so must the abundance of *wheat* and of *honey,* with which they would have been fully satisfied. God had solemnly declared that he would be their protector and guardian even to the end. The change, then, which so suddenly befell them is set before them as a matter of reproach, inasmuch as they had deliberately cast away all at once their happy state. The same remarks are applicable to the fruitfulness of the land. How is it to be accounted for that they suffered hunger in the land in which God had promised them abundance of wheat and honey, but because the blessing of God had been withheld on account of their iniquity? By *the fat of corn* [900] is meant, metaphorically, pure grain, unless it may be

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See volume 1, page 301.

899

"*Their time*, etc.: that is, the time, the continuance, the prosperity of my people, would have been durable." — *Warner.*

900

It is an usual phrase with the Hebrews to call the most esteemed part of anything חלב, *cheleb*, "the fat." The word is used with this combination in Deuteronomy 32:14; and is adopted again in Psalm 147:14. See also Genesis 45:18; Numbers 18:29; and Psalm 73:4. The translators of our English version have rendered it here "the finest of the wheat."

thought preferable to understand it of the finest wheat. Some are of opinion that the expression, *honey out of the rock,* is hyperbolical, implying that honey would have flowed from the very rocks rather than that God would have failed to satisfy his people. But as it is evident from sacred history that honey was found everywhere in the hollows of the rocks [901] so long as they enjoyed the blessing of God, the meaning simply is, that the grace of God would have continued to flow in an unbroken and uniform course, had it not been interrupted by the perverseness and wickedness of the people.

901

Palestine abounded in wild bees, which, living in the crevices of rocks, and in the hollows of trees, furnished honey in great plenty. To this there are frequent allusions in Scripture. In Deuteronomy 32:13, Moses, speaking of God's goodness to Israel in the song with which he closed his long and eventful career, says, "He made him suck honey out of the rock." As an evidence of the great abundance of wild honey in that country, we may refer to 1 Samuel 14:25, where it is said, "And all they of the land came to a wood, and there was honey upon the ground; and when the people were come to the wood, behold the honey dropped." In proof of the same point, reference may be also made to the fact, that a part of the food of John the Baptist in the wilderness was wild honey, which most probably he found in rocks or hollow trees. In Scripture, the country is frequently described by a familiar phrase, as "A land flowing with milk and honey;" and in Job 20:17, we meet with the strong expression of "Brooks, floods, and rivers of honey." Palestine is still remarkable for this natural production. It may be observed, that the change of person in this last verse from the third to the first is highly poetical.

Psalm 82

PSALM 82

As kings, and such as are invested with authority, through the blindness which is produced by pride, generally take to themselves a boundless liberty of action, the Psalmist warns them that they must render an account at the bar of the Supreme Judge, who is exalted above the highest of this world. After he has reminded them of their duty and condition, perceiving that he speaks to such as refuse to receive admonition, he calls upon God to vindicate his character as a righteous judge. [902]

A Psalm of Asaph.

Psalm 82:1-4

902

Kimchi thinks it probable that this psalm was written in the days of Jehoshaphat, and refers to 2 Chronicles 19:5-7, as indicating the time and occasion of its composition. We are there informed that Jehoshaphat; "set judges in the land, throughout all the fenced cities of Judah, city by city;" and in instructing them with regard to their duty, he uses nearly the same words as those in the beginning of this psalm. Dr Morison takes a different view. "This psalm," says he, "was composed in all probability in the days of Hezekiah, in reference to certain wicked magistrates, (2 Chronicles 29:30,) who had grievously perverted the administration of justice, who were guilty of great oppression, and who had done much to introduce a state of general national corruption. King Jehoshaphat had reformed several public abuses which had crept into the judicatories of Israel in his time, (2 Chronicles 19:7,) but before the reign of Hezekiah, things had reverted to their former unhappy condition; so that a public national reformation was loudly demanded. The psalm contains an exhortation to the judges of Israel, and a reproof for their negligence and oppression."

> **1.** God sitteth in the assembly of God: he will judge in the midst of the gods. [903] **2.** How long will ye judge unjustly? and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah. **3.** Determine the cause of the poor and the orphan; justify [904] the helpless and the destitute. **4.** Rescue the poor and the afflicted: deliver them out of the hand of the wicked.

1 *God sitteth in the assembly of God.* [905] It is unquestionably a very unbecoming thing for those whom God has been pleased to invest with the government of mankind for the common good, not to acknowledge the end for which they have been exalted above others, nor yet by whose blessing they have been placed in so elevated a station; but instead of doing this, contemning every principle of equity, to rule just as their own unbridled passions dictate. So infatuated are they by their own splendor and magnificence, as to imagine that the whole world was made only for them. Besides, they think that it would derogate from their elevated rank were they to be governed by moderate counsels; and although their own folly is more than enough to urge them on in their reckless career, they, notwithstanding, seek for flatterers to soothe and applaud them in their vices. To correct this arrogance, the psalm opens by asserting, that although men occupy thrones and judgment-seats, God nevertheless continues to hold the office of supreme ruler. God has made even a heathen and licentious poet bear testimony to this truth in the following lines: —

"Regum timendorum in proprios greges,
Reges in ipsos imperium est Jovis,
Clari giganteo triumpho,
Cuncta supercilio moventis."
Horatii, Carm. Liber in Ode i.

"Kings rule their subject flocks; great Jove
O'er kings themselves his reign extends,
Who hurl'd the rebel giants from above;
At whose majestic nod all nature bends."
Boscawen's Translation.

903

"Ou, il jugeras au milieu les dieux." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, he will judge in the midst the gods."

904

"C'est, faites justice." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, do justice to."

905

Horsley translates the first verse thus: —
"God standeth in the assembly;
God, in the midst of the gods, giveth sentence."
On which he has the following note: — "In what assembly? The assembly of his holy angels. The Psalmist, I think, poetically imagines the celestial court assembled for the business of this review of the proceedings of the earth's judges, and God, in the midst of his angels, taxing their iniquity, and awarding their punishment."

That the potentates of this world may not arrogate to themselves more than belongs to them, the prophet here erects a throne for *God,* from which he judges them all, and represses their pride; a thing which is highly necessary. They may, indeed, admit that they owe their elevation to royal power to the favor of God, and they may worship him by outward ceremonies, but their greatness so infatuates them that they are chargeable with expelling and casting him to a distance from their assembly, by their vain imaginations; for they cannot bear to be subject to reason and laws. Thus the design of the prophet was to deride the madness by which the princes of this world are bewitched, in leaving God no place in their assembly. The more effectually to overthrow this irrational self-confidence with which they are intoxicated, civil order is termed *the assembly of God;* for although the divine glory shines forth in every part of the world, yet when lawful government flourishes among men, it is reflected therefrom with pre-eminent lustre. I indeed grant that it is quite common for the Hebrews to adorn with the title of *God* whatever is rare and excellent. But here it would appear, from the scope of the passage, that this name of the Divine Being is applied to those who occupy the exalted station of princes, in which there is afforded a peculiar manifestation of the majesty of God; even as Solomon, in Proverbs 2:17, calls marriage "the covenant of God," from the peculiar sanctity by which that relation is distinguished.

In the second clause of the verse, it is not material whether we read, *He will judge in the midst of the gods,* or, *He will judge the gods in the midst.* The first construction, however, is the most easy and natural, That however much the rulers of the world may exalt themselves, they cannot in the least impair the authority of God, by divesting him of his sovereignty over them and of the government of all things, which he will ever retain as his inalienable prerogative. But here, as also a little after, the name *gods* is to be understood of *judges,* on whom God has impressed special marks of his glory. To apply it to angels is a fancy too strained to admit of serious consideration.

2 *How long will ye judge unjustly?* Many suppose that God is here introduced speaking, and that these are the words which he utters from his throne of judgment. But I would rather consider the prophet himself as the speaker, who, in order to prepare the way for administering a rebuke, had spoken in the manner in which he did in the first verse. Kings may lift up their heads above the clouds, but they, as well as the rest of mankind, are under the government of God; and such being the case, it is in vain for them arrogantly to struggle to obtain exemption from the obligations of reason. Yet this is what they do. Although tyrants are amongst the basest of men, and occupy their exalted station by detestable treason, yet if any servant of God has the fortitude to open his mouth against them, they immediately attempt to shelter themselves by appealing to the sacred name of God, as if great wrong had been done to them. Thus, whilst they

persuade themselves that they are privileged with exemption from the law to which the rest of mankind are subject, they endeavor to deprive the common people of divine truth and its ministers. In short, they think that there can be no sovereignty unless where uncontrolled license is enjoyed. But let this principle be once established, "That God rules among them," and then a way is opened up for the admission of divine truth. Accordingly, the prophet, after having thus laid a foundation for his authority, freely inveighs against princes, and reproves the very gross vice of selling themselves to those who unrighteously oppress the poor, and of being gained by bribes to pervert in their administration every principle of justice. He expressly names the *wicked;* for good men will never attempt to corrupt judges. Moreover, there is a certain devilish frenzy which infatuates the princes of the world, and leads them voluntarily to pay greater respect to wicked men than to the simple and innocent. Even supposing that the wicked continue inactive, and use no endeavors to obtain for themselves favor either by flattery, fraud, bribery, or other artifices; yet those who bear rule are for the most part inclined of themselves to the bad side. The reason why the prophet upbraids them is, that wicked men find more favor at their hands than the good and conscientious.

3 *Determine the cause of the poor and the orphan.* We are here briefly taught that a just and well-regulated government will be distinguished for maintaining the rights of the poor and afflicted. By the figure synecdoche, one part of equitable administration is put for the whole; for it cannot be doubted that rulers are bound to observe justice towards all men without distinction. But the prophet, with much propriety, represents them as appointed to be the defenders of the miserable and oppressed, both because such persons stand in need of the assistance of others, and because they can only obtain this where rulers are free from avarice, ambition, and other vices. The end, therefore, for which judges bear the sword is to restrain the wicked, and thus to prevent violence from prevailing among men, who are so much disposed to become disorderly and outrageous. According as men increase in strength, they become proportionally audacious in oppressing the weak; and hence it is that rich men seldom resort to magistrates for help, except when they happen to fall out among themselves. From these remarks, it is very obvious why the cause of the poor and needy is here chiefly commended to rulers; for those who are exposed an easy prey to the cruelty and wrongs of the rich have no less need of the assistance and protection of magistrates than the sick have of the aid of the physician. Were the truth deeply fixed in the minds of kings and other judges, that they are appointed to be the guardians of the poor, and that a special part of this duty lies in resisting the wrongs which are done to them, and in repressing all unrighteous violence, perfect righteousness would become triumphant through the whole world. Whoever thinks it not beneath him to defend the poor, instead of allowing himself to be carried hither and thither by favor,

will have a regard only to what is right. We may farther learn from this passage, that although magistrates may not be solicited for succor, they are accounted guilty before God of negligence, if they do not, of their own accord, succor those who stand in need of their interference. When iniquity openly prevails, and when, on account of it, sighs and lamentations are everywhere heard, it is in vain for them to pretend that they cannot redress wrongs, unless complaints are addressed to them. Oppression utters a sufficiently loud cry of itself; and if the judge, sitting on a high watch-tower, seems to take no notice of it, he is here plainly warned, that such connivance shall not escape with impunity.

Psalm 82:5-8

5. They know not, neither do they understand: they walk in darkness, although all the foundations of the earth are moved. **6.** I have said, Ye are gods, and all of you sons of the Most High. **7.** But ye shall die as a man; and ye shall fall, O princes: as one of the people. **8.** Arise, O God! Judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.

5 *They know not, neither do they understand.* [906] After having reminded princes of their duty, the Psalmist complains that his admonition from their infatuation is ineffectual, and that they refuse to receive wholesome instruction; yea, that although the whole world is shaken to its foundations, they, notwithstanding, continue thoughtless and secure in the neglect of their duty. He chiefly reprobates and condemns their madness as manifested in this, that although they see heaven and earth involved in confusion, they are no more affected at the sight than if the care of the interests of mankind did not belong to them, of which they are, notwithstanding, in an especial manner the chosen and appointed conservators. I have stated a little before, that what chiefly deprives them of understanding is, that, being dazzled with their own splendor, and perversely shaking off every yoke, no religious considerations have the effect of inclining them to moderation. All sound knowledge and wisdom must commence with yielding to God the honor which is his due, and submitting to be restrained and governed by his word. The last clause of the verse, *Although all the foundations of the earth are moved,* [907] is almost universally understood by interpreters in a different

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"The Psalmist having thus far addressed himself to the administrators of justice, as if wearied with his ineffectual remonstrance, here suddenly turns away and condemns their inattention and perverseness. The change of person is a natural indication of the earnestness of the speaker, and has a lively effect." — *Mant.*

907

"*All the foundations of the earth*, etc. Rather, *of the land*; that is, truth and justice, the foundation of all good government, and the only security of a state, are now altogether violated or disregarded." — *Warner.*

sense from that in which I have rendered it. They explain it as implying, that of all the calamities in the world the greatest is when princes neglect to execute the duties of their office; for it is the observance and prevalence of justice which constitutes the foundation on which the fabric of human society rests. Thus the sense, according to them, is, that the world is undermined and overthrown by the unjust tyranny of princes. I am far from rejecting this interpretation; but, as I have already hinted, I am more inclined to think, that we have here condemned the monstrous stupidity of judges, who can remain indifferent and unmoved in beholding the horrible confusion of civil society, yea even the very earth shaken to its foundations.

6 *I have said, ye are gods.* God has invested judges with a sacred character and title. This the prophet concedes; but he, at the same time, shows that this will afford no support and protection to wicked judges. He does not introduce them as speaking of the dignity of their office; but anticipating the style of reasoning which they would be disposed to adopt, he replies, "If you appeal to your dignity as an argument to shield you, this boasting will avail you nothing; yea, rather you are deceiving yourselves by your foolish confidence; for God, in appointing you his substitutes, has not divested himself of his own sovereignty as supreme ruler. Again, he would have you to remember your own frailty as a means of stirring you up to execute with fear and trembling the office intrusted to you." This verse may also be viewed as addressed by God himself to rulers, and as intimating, that, in addition to his clothing them with authority, he has bestowed upon them his name. This interpretation seems to agree with the language of Christ in John 10:34, where he speaks of those as called gods to whom the word of God came. The passage, however, may be appropriately resolved thus: *I grant that ye are gods, and the sons of the Most High* [908] But this does not materially alter the meaning. The object is simply to teach that the dignity with which judges are invested can form no excuse or plea why they should escape the punishment which their wickedness deserves. The government of the world has been committed to them upon the distinct understanding that they themselves also must one day appear at the judgment-seat of heaven to render up an account. The dignity, therefore, with which they are clothed is only temporary, and will pass away with the fashion of the world. Accordingly, it is added in the 7th verse, *But ye shall die as men.* You are armed with power, as if he had said, to govern the world; but you have not on that account ceased to be men, so as to be no longer subject to mortality. The last clause of the verse is translated by some expositors, *Ye shall fall like one of the princes;* [909] but in my opinion improperly. They

908

"*Ye are all the children of the Most High*, an Hebrew idiom, signifying men of the highest rank and power. Comp. Psalm 29:1; 89:7." — *Cresswell.*

909

think that it contains a threatening of the violent death which would befall these unrighteous judges, corresponding to the sentiment of these lines of a heathen poet: —

"Ad generum Cereris sine caede et sanguine pauci,
Descendunt reges, et sicca morte tyranni."

"Few kings and tyrants go down to Pluto, the son-in-law of Ceres, without being put to a violent death, before they have completed the ordinary term allotted to the life of mortal man." [910] That translation being forced, and not such as the words naturally suggest, I have no doubt that princes are here compared to the obscure and common class of mankind. The word *one* signifies any of the common people. Forgetting themselves to be men, the great ones of the earth may flatter themselves with visionary hopes of immortality; but they are here taught that they will be compelled to encounter death as well as other men. Christ, with the view of rebutting the calumny with which the Pharisees loaded him, quoted this text, John 10:34, 35, "Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken; say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?" By these words Christ did not mean to place himself among the order of judges; but he argues from the less to the greater, that if the name of God is applied to God's officers, it with much more propriety belongs to his only begotten Son, who is the express image of the Father, in whom the Father's majesty shines forth, and in whom the whole fullness of the Godhead dwells.

8 *Arise, O God! judge the earth.* The reason why this psalm concludes with a prayer has been already stated at the commencement. The prophet, finding that his admonitions and remonstrances were ineffectual, and that princes, inflated with pride, treated with contempt all instruction on the principles of equity, addresses himself to God, and calls upon Him to repress their insolence. By this means, the Holy Spirit furnishes us with ground of comfort whenever we are cruelly treated by tyrants. We may perceive no

This is the reading in our English Bible, on which Archbishop Secker remarks, "It seems needless to say that these princes shall fall like one of the princes." He thinks with Bishop Hare that the true reading is not השרים, *hassarim*, *the princes*, as in our present copies, but הרשים, *harsaim*, *the poor* The translation, however, given by Calvin, who takes השרים in the vocative case, *O ye princes*! and who, after the word כאחד, *cheachad*, for *as one of*, supplies *the people*, makes any alteration of the text unnecessary. Gataker also considers השרים, to be in the vocative case, which is approved by Horsley, Berlin, and others. Dathe takes השרים in the sense of *tyrants*, but brings no authority to prove that the word has this sense. Le Clerc, in the latter part of the verse, after *like one of*, supplies *the many*, reading, "And fall, O ye princes! like one of the many."

910

This is the translation given of these lines in the French version.

power on earth to restrain their excesses; but it becomes us to lift up our eyes to heaven, and to seek redress from Him whose office it is to judge the world, and who does not claim this office to himself in vain. It is therefore our bounden duty to beseech him to restore to order what is embroiled in confusion. The reason of this which immediately follows — *for thou shalt inherit all nations* — is understood by some as a prophecy concerning the kingdom of Christ, by whom God has brought all nations in subjection to himself. But it is to be viewed in a more extensive sense, as implying that God has a rightful claim to the obedience of all nations, and that tyrants are chargeable with wickedly and unjustly wresting from him his prerogative of bearing rule, when they set at nought his authority, and confound good and evil, right and wrong. We ought therefore to beseech him to restore to order the confusions of the world, and thus to recover the rightful dominion which he has over it.

Psalm 83

PSALM 83

The prophet implores the divine aid against the enemies of the Church, and, as an argument for obtaining this the more easily, he enumerates the many nations which had conspired together for the express purpose of exterminating the people of Israel, and thereby extinguishing the very name of the Church of God. To stir up himself and others to greater earnestness and confidence in prayer, he shows, by many examples, how mightily God had been wont to succor his servants.

A Song or Psalm of Asaph.

Psalm 83:1-4

1. O God! keep not silence with thyself; hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God! **2.** For, behold! Thy enemies are tumultuous: and those who hate thee have lifted up the head. **3.** They have formed a crafty design against thy people, and have consulted against thy hidden ones. **4.** They have said, Come and let us cut them off from being a nation; and let the name of Israel be no more remembered.

1 *O God! hold not thy peace.* It is very generally agreed among commentators, that this psalm was composed during the reign of king Jehoshaphat; and in this opinion I readily concur. That godly king, as is well known, had to engage in dreadful wars against multiplied hosts of enemies. Although the Ammonites and Moabites were the originators of the principal war in which he was engaged, yet they mustered forces not only from Syria, but also from distant countries, and the troops thus brought together well nigh overwhelmed Judea with their multitude. It would then

appear, from the long list of enemies, here enumerated, who had conspired together to destroy the people of God, that the conjecture is well-founded which refers the composition of this psalm to that occasion; [911] and sacred history informs us, that one of the Levites, under the influence of the Spirit of prophecy, gave the king assurance of victory, [912] and that the Levites sang before the Lord. In the midst of so great dangers, the whole nation, as well as the holy king, must have been involved in the deepest distress; and, accordingly, we have here a prayer full of earnestness and solicitude. These feelings prompted the repetition of the words which occur in the very opening of the psalm, *Hold not thy peace, Keep not silence, be not still* By this, the faithful would intimate, that if God intended to succor them, it behoved him to make haste, else the opportunity for doing so would be lost. It is unquestionably our duty to wait patiently when God at any time delays his help; but, in condescension to our infirmity, he permits us to supplicate him to make haste. What I have rendered, *keep not silence with thyself,* is literally *keep not silence to thyself,* which some translate by the paraphrase, *Hold not thy peace in thy own cause,* — an exposition which is too refined to be more particularly noticed. This form of expression is equivalent to saying, *Hold not thyself in.* Perhaps the particle is here superfluous, as it is in many other places.

2 *For, behold! thy enemies are tumultuous.* As an argument for enforcing the prayer of the preceding verse, it is affirmed that the faithful are oppressed both by the impetuous violence and the crafty policy of their enemies, which, to all human appearance, rendered their escape from death utterly hopeless. When it is said that *they are tumultuous* and *lift up the head,* the meaning is, that relying upon their own power, they behave themselves insolently and proudly. By this conduct on the part of their enemies, the minds of the people of God are greatly depressed, and the only way in which they can obtain relief, is by making their moan to Him whose continual work it is to repress the proud. When, therefore, the saints implore his aid, it is their ordinary course to lay before him the perverseness of their enemies. It is worthy of notice, that those who molest the Church are called *the enemies of God.*

It affords us no small ground of confidence that those who are our enemies are also God's enemies. This is one of the fruits of his free and gracious covenant, in which he has promised to be an enemy to all our enemies, —

911

Compare the 6th, 7th, and 8th verses of the psalm with 2 Chronicles 20:1, 10, 22; and the 12th verse of the psalm with the 11th verse of that chapter.

912

The name of this Levite was Jahaziel, and he is expressly said to be a prophet of the race of Asaph, 2 Chronicles 20:14. It is not unlikely that he is the same with Asaph, the author of this psalm.

a promise for which there is good cause, when it is considered that the welfare of his people, whom he has taken under his protection, cannot be assailed without an injury being, at the same the done to his own majesty. Meanwhile, let us live at peace with all men, as much as in us lies, and let us endeavor to practice uprightness in our whole deportment, that we may be able confidently to appeal to God, that when we suffer at the hands of men, we suffer wrongfully. The pride and violent assaults of our enemies may be combined with craftiness. But when such is the case, it becomes us to yield to God the honor which belongs to him, by resting satisfied that He can succor us; for to break the proud who foam out their rage, and to take the crafty in their own craftiness, is work which He has been accustomed to perform in all ages. To keep us from thinking that we are abandoned to the snares and traps of our enemies, the prophet here seasonably sets before us a consideration calculated to administer the highest consolation and hope, when he calls us *God's hidden ones* This expression is understood by some as meaning that the aid and protection which God extends to us, is not apparent to the eye of sense and reason; just as it is said elsewhere of the life of the people of God, that it is *hid,* (Colossians 3:3.) But this interpretation is too forced, and altogether inconsistent both with the scope of the passage and the natural construction of the words. The design of them is simply to teach that we are hidden under the shadow of God's wings; for although to outward appearance we lie open, and are exposed to the will of the wicked and the proud, we are preserved by the hidden power of God. [913] Accordingly, it is said in another Psalm, (27:5,)

"In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me." (Psalm 27:5)

It is, however, at the same time to be observed, that none are hid under the keeping and protection of God but those who, renouncing all dependence on their own strength, betake themselves with fear and trembling to Him. Such as under the influence of a flattering belief in the sufficiency of their own strength to resist, boldly enter the conflict, and, as if devoid of all fear, wax wanton, will ultimately suffer the consequences which result from inadequate resources. [914] We will then best consult our own safety by

913

The Hebrew word translated *thy hidden ones*, primarily means a *treasure*, and is so taken in Psalm 17:14. Accordingly, it is here rendered by Mudge, and French and Skinner, "thy treasured ones:" that is, thy peculiar people: those whom thou hast hitherto protected and kept in perfect safety, as in a place of security and secrecy. The Septuagint reads, κατὰ τῶν ἁγίων σου, "against thy saints." The word is also sometimes put for the sanctuary, as in Ezekiel 7:22. Some therefore think that the temple, and the treasures contained in it, are intended.

914

"Ils sentiront a la fin a leur grande honte, qu'ils estoyent desnuer de toute vertu." — *Fr.* "Will at length find, to their great shame, that they were destitute of all power."

taking shelter under the shadow of the Almighty, and, conscious of our own weakness, committing our salvation to him, casting it, so to speak, into his bosom.

4 *They have said, Come and let us cut them off from being a nation.* The wickedness of these hostile powers is aggravated from the circumstance, that it was their determined purpose utterly to exterminate the Church. This may be restricted to the Ammonites and Moabites, who were as bellows to blow up the flame in the rest. But the Hagarenes, the Syrians, and the other nations, being by their instigation affected with no less hatred and fury against the people of God, for whose destruction they had taken up arms, we may justly consider this vaunting language as uttered by the whole of the combined host; for having entered into a mutual compact they rushed forward with rival eagerness, and encouraged one another to destroy the kingdom of Judah. The prime agent in exciting such cruel hatred was doubtless Satan, who has all along from the beginning been exerting himself to extinguish the Church of God, and who, for this purpose, has never ceased to stir up his own children to outrage. The phrase, *to cut them off from being a nation,* signifies to exterminate them root and branch, and thus to put an end to them as a nation or people. That this is the meaning is more clearly evinced from the second clause of the verse, *Let the name of Israel be no more remembered* The compassion of God would in no small degree be excited by the circumstance that this war was not undertaken, as wars commonly have been, to bring them, when conquered, under the power of their enemies; but the object which the cruelty of their enemies aimed at was their entire destruction. And what did this amount to but to an attempt to overthrow the decree of God on which the perpetual duration of the Church depends.

Psalm 83:5-8

5. For they have consulted with the heart together; they have entered into a covenant [915] against thee. **6.** The tents of Edom, [916] and the

915

The Hebrew is יכרתו ברית, *berith yichrothu*, "they have cut a covenant." The verb is from כרת, *carath*, *he cut*, which, with the noun, ברית, *berith*, signifies *to strike a league*, or *to covenant* The phrase owes its origin to the custom which prevailed, in ancient times, of sacrificing an animal at the forming of solemn leagues, and dividing the victim in twain, the contracting parties passing between the two pieces; see volume 2, page 264, note. It is then affirmed of these combined enemies of the Jews, that *they had cut the covenant sacrifice*; that they had slain a sacrificial victim, divided it in twain, and passed between the pieces' thus mutually binding themselves to accomplish their hostile purpose.

916

That is, the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, (Genesis 25:30.) They were a pastoral people, and made great use of tents.

Ishmaelites [917] Moab [918] and the Hagarenes. [919] **7.** Gebal, [920] and Ammon, [921] and Amalek [922] the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre. **8.** Assur is also associated with them: they have been an arm to the sons of Lot. Selah.

5 *For they have consulted with the heart together.* The multiplied hosts which united their powers together to oppose the Church of God and to effect her overthrow, are here enumerated. As so many nations, formed into one powerful confederacy, were bent on the destruction of a kingdom not greatly distinguished by its power, the miraculous aid of God was indispensably necessary for the deliverance of a people who, in such extremity, were altogether unable to defend themselves. In circumstances apparently as hopeless good king Asa gave utterance to that truly magnanimous reflection:

917

The Ishmaelites were the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son, by Hagar the Egyptian, (Genesis 25:12-18.) They inhabited part of Arabia.

918

That is, the Moabites, the descendants of Moab, a son of Lot, by one of his daughters, (Genesis 19:37.)

919

The Hagarenes or Hagarites were the posterity of Abraham by Keturah, (who is supposed to have been Hagar,) whom he married after Sarah's death. They dwelt on the east of Gilead, in the vicinity of the Euphrates. In the days of Saul war was made upon them by the Reubenites, who, after having nearly destroyed them and expelled them from their country, dwelt in their tents, (1 Chronicles 5:10.) They seem again to have recruited their strength; but where they afterwards dwelt is not known. "They are probably the same," says Cresswell, "as the Saracens."

920

Gebal, which signifies a mountain, denotes, according to some, the Giblites, who inhabited a district on the Phoenician coast in the neighborhood of Tyre. They were a tribe of the Aborigines of Canaan, and are mentioned as left by Joshua to be conquered after his death, (Joshua 13:5.) They were of considerable service to Hiram, king of Tyre, in preparing materials for Solomon's temple, as we learn from 1 Kings 5:18, where the original word for *stone-squarers* is הגבלים *haggibelim*, *the Giblites*; and it would seem from Ezekiel's speaking of "the ancients of Gebal and the wise men thereof," (Ezekiel 27:9,) that they rose to no small degree of eminence. The ruins of an ancient city called by the natives Gibyle, situated upon the Mediterranean Sea between Tripoli and Sidon, are supposed to be those of the chief city of the Giblites. If so, these ruins attest its ancient grandeur to have been considerable. Others suppose that Gebal (the Gebalene of the Romans) was a mountainous district inhabited by the Edomites, and extending from the Dead Sea southward to Selal or Petra. By the Arabs it is called Djebal.

921

That is, the Ammonites, the descendants of Ammon, another of Lot's sons, by one of his daughters, (Genesis 19:38.) They dwelt in Arabia Petrea.

922

The Amalekites were a powerful people, who dwelt also in Arabia Petrea, between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea, or between Havilah and Shur, (1 Samuel 15:7,) south of Idumea, and east of the northern part of the Red Sea.

"Lord, it is nothing with thee to help whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O Lord our God! for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitudes"
(1 Chronicles 14:11.)

The same Spirit who inspired that pious king with such invincible fortitude dictated this psalm for the benefit of the whole Church, to encourage her with unhesitating confidence to betake herself to God for aid. And in our own day he sets before us these words, in order that no danger or difficulty may prevent us from calling upon God. When the whole world may conspire together against us, we have as it were a wall of brass for the defense of Christ's kingdom in these words, "Why do the heathen rage?" etc., (Psalm 2:1.)

It will be in no small degree profitable to us to contemplate this as an example in which we have represented to us, as in a mirror what has been the lot of the Church of God from the beginning. This, if rightly reflected upon, will keep us at the present day from being unduly dejected when we witness the whole world in array against us. We see how the Pope has inflamed the whole world against us with diabolical rage. Hence it is, that in whatever direction we turn our eyes, we meet with just so many hostile armies to destroy us. But when we have once arrived at a settled persuasion that no strange thing happens to us, the contemplation of the condition of the Church in old time will strengthen us for continuing in the exercise of patience until God suddenly display his power, which is perfectly able, without any created aid, to frustrate all the attempts of the world.

To remove from the minds of the godly all misgivings as to whether help is ready to be imparted to them from heaven, the prophet distinctly affirms that those who molest the Church are chargeable with making war against God, who has taken her under his protection. The principle upon which God declares that he will be our helper is contained in these words,

"He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye,"
(Zechariah 2:8.)

And what is said in another psalm concerning the patriarchs, is equally applicable to all true believers,

"Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm,"
(Psalm 105:15.)

He will have the anointing with which he has anointed us to be, as it were, a buckler to keep us in perfect safety. The nations here enumerated did not avowedly make war against him; but as, when he sees his servants unrighteously assaulted, he interposes himself between them and their enemies to bear the blows aimed at them, they are here justly represented as *having entered into a league against God* The case is analogous to that of the Papists in the present day. If any were to ask them, when they hold consultations for the express purpose of accomplishing our destruction, Whether they were stronger than God? they would immediately reply, That

they had no intention whatever of assaulting heaven in imitation of the giants of old. But God having declared that every injury which is done to us is an assault upon him, we may, as from a watch-tower, behold in the distance by the eye of faith the approach of that destruction of which the votaries of Antichrist shall have at length the sad and melancholy experience.

The expression, *to consult with the heart,* is by some explained, *to deliberate with the greatest exertion and earnestness of mind.* Thus it is quite common for us to say, that a thing is done with the heart which is done with earnestness and ardor of mind. But this expression is rather intended to denote the hidden crafty devices complained of a little before.

Some interpreters refer *the tents of Edom* to warlike furniture, and understand the words as meaning, that these enemies came well equipped and provided with tents for prolonging the war; but the allusion seems rather to be to the custom which prevailed among those nations of dwelling in tents. It is, however, a hyperbolical form of expression; as if it had been said, So great was their eagerness to engage in this war, that they might be said even to pluck their tents from the places where they were pitched.

I do not intend to enter curiously into a discussion concerning the respective nations here named, the greater part of them being familiarly known from the frequency with which they are spoken of in the sacred Scriptures. When it is said that Assur and the rest were *an arm to the sons of Lot,* this is evidently an additional aggravation of the wickedness of the sons of Lot. It would have been an act of unnatural cruelty for them to have aided foreign nations against their own kindred. But when they themselves are the first to sound the trumpet, and when of their own suggestion they invite the aid of the Assyrians and other nations to destroy their own brethren, ought not such barbarous inhumanity to call forth the deepest detestation? Josephus himself records, that the Israelites had passed through their borders without doing them any harm, sparing their own blood according to the express command of God. When the Moabites and Ammonites then knew that their brethren the Jews spared them, remembering that they were of the same blood, and sprung from one common parentage, ought they not also to have reciprocated so much kindness on their part as not to have embarked in any hostile enterprise against them? But it is, as it were, the destiny of the Church, not only to be assailed by external enemies, but to suffer far greater trouble at the hands of false brethren. At the present day, none are more furiously mad against us than counterfeit Christians.

Psalm 83:9-12

> **9.** Do to them as to the Midianites, [923] as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook Kishon. [924] **10.** They perished at Endor; they became manure for the earth. **11.** Make them and their princes like Oreb, and like Zeeb; [925] and like Zebah, and like Zalmunna, [926] all their princes. **12.** Who have said, Let us take in possession for ourselves the habitations of God.

9. *Do to them as to the Midianites.* The faithful, having complained of the very grievous oppressions to which they were subjected, with the view of inducing God the more readily to succor them, now call to their remembrance the many occasions on which he had afforded relief to his people, when brought into the most desperate circumstances. From this, it is an obvious inference, that God wisely delays his aid to his servants under oppression, that when they seem to be reduced to the last extremity, he may appear in a miraculous manner for their succor. The prophet, in this verse, mingles together two histories. Strict accuracy would have required him to have said in one connected sentence, *Do to them as to the Midianites at the brook Kishon.* But he inserts in the middle of this sentence, the slaughter of Jabin and Sisera. It was, however, of no great importance to distinguish particularly between the two histories. He considered it enough for his purpose, to bring to the remembrance of himself and other pious Jews, the miracles which God in the days of old had so often wrought in delivering his people. The great object aimed at is to show, that God, who had so often put his enemies to flight, and rescued his poor trembling sheep out of the jaws of wolves, was not now without the power of effecting the same deliverance. The wonderful manner in which he succoured his people by the hand of Gideon is well known: Judges 6 and 7; It might have seemed altogether ridiculous for Gideon to venture to engage in battle against a very powerful army, with no greater a number of men of war than three hundred, and these, be it observed, such as had been in a state of bondage during their whole lives, and whom the mere look of their lords might have thrown into consternation. And yet, it came to pass, that the

923

The Midianites derive their name from Midian, the son of Abraham, by Keturah, Genesis 25:2. The history here referred to is the complete defeat of that people by Gideon, Judges 7:21, 23.

924

Kishon is a torrent which flows from mount Tabor into the sea.

925

Oreb and Zeeb were two chiefs or generals of the Midianites, and were slain by the men of Ephraim in their pursuit of the Midianites, Judges 7:24, 25.

926

Zebah and Zalmunna were kings of Midian, whom Gideon, after having defeated their army, took prisoners and put to death, Judges 8:10-21.

Midianites perished by turning their swords against each other. The same goodness God displayed in the slaughter of Sisera and king Jabin, Judges 4:13. Barak, under the conduct of a woman, Deborah, discomfited them both, when, with a small handful of soldiers, he intrepidly gave battle to their mighty host. And Sisera, the general of the army, did not die bravely on the field of battle, but was smitten by the hand of a woman after he had retired to some hiding-place. That the faithful may not be overwhelmed with terror and fall into despair, they seasonably fortify themselves with these examples of deliverance, by which God had shown that in himself alone there resides a sufficiency of power to defend his people, whenever, destitute of the resources of human aid, they should betake themselves to him. From that astonishing and unwonted mode of granting deliverance, they came to the conclusion, that he is a wonderful worker in preserving his Church; in order to encourage themselves to entertain the fullest confidence, that in his breath alone they would have sufficient strength to overthrow all their enemies. Nor is it only in this passage that the slaughter of the Midianites is related for this purpose. Isaiah also (Isaiah 9:4) introduces it for confirming the truth of the Church's restitution: "For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian." When it is stated that *they became manure for the earth,* the expression may be explained as meaning, either, first, that their carcases lay rotting upon the earth; or, secondly, that they were trampled under foot as manure. This latter exposition is the most appropriate; but I do not reject the former. The reason why it is said, *They perished at Endor,* it is somewhat difficult to ascertain. The name, *Endor,* is to be found in Joshua 17:11; and it is probable, that the army of king Jabin was destroyed there. [927] The opinion entertained by some, that *Endor* is here used as an appellative, conveying the idea that their discomfiture was open and visible to the eye, is what I cannot approve.

12. *Who have said, Let us take in possession for ourselves the habitations of God.* These heathen enemies are again accused of treason against the King of heaven, in seizing upon his heritage like lawless robbers. They would not, we may be sure, avow in so many words that it was their intention to commit such a crime; but as they despised God, who, as they well knew, was worshipped by the people of Israel, they are here justly charged with

927

Endor is not mentioned in the account given of the discomfiture of Jabin's host, and the slaughter of Sisera, in Judges 4; but it appears from Joshua 17:11, which Calvin quotes, to have been a part of the portion which fell to the tribe of Manasseh. In that passage, Taanach and Megiddo are mentioned as districts adjoining to Endor. And in the song of Deborah, the kings of Canaan who fought on the occasion referred to, against the Israelites, are said to have fought "in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo," Judges 5:19. This may explain why they are said to have perished at Endor, which was near the place where Sisera's army were destroyed.

the guilt of endeavoring to dispossess Him of his own inheritance. And, without doubt, they profanely poured abuse upon the true God, of whose sacred majesty they entertained the greatest contempt, their minds being besotted with their own inventions. But even granting that they abstained from gross blasphemies, yet whatever harassing proceedings are carried on against the godly redound to the dishonor of God, who has taken them under his protection. The appellation, *the habitations* or *mansions of God,* which is applied to Judea, is a form of expression, containing no small degree of comfort. God has united himself to us, with the view of having an everlasting residence amongst us, or rather that he may set as high a value upon his Church, and account it as precious, as a householder does his possessions which are most valuable, and yield him a large revenue.

Psalm 83:13-18

> **13.** O my God! make them like a whirling ball, [928] like stubble before the wind. **14.** As fire burns a forest [929] and as the flame kindles the mountains, [930] **15.** So pursue them with thy tempest, [931] and terrify them with thy whirlwind. **16.** Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O Jehovah! **17.** Let them be ashamed, and terrified perpetually, and let them be confounded, and perish. **18.** And let them know that thou art, thy name Jehovah, thou alone the Most High over all the earth. [932]

928

"*Globum*," — *Lat* "*Une boule*," — *Fr* The word גלגל, *galeggal*, thus translated, is interpreted by Lowth, "any light thing *whirled* by the wind, chaff, thistle-down, etc." "גלגל seems here," says Archbishop Secker, "especially on comparing Isaiah 17:13, to be not a wheel, but some light matter, which the wind whirls round and blows away; *chaff*." In that passage of Isaiah, where the same Hebrew word occurs, the rendering in our English Bible is "a rolling thing;" and the marginal reading, "thistle-down." This verse affords a striking exhibition of the nothingness of combined nations before the Almighty. He can make them "like the thistle-down; like the stubble before the wind."

929

The allusion in this verse is to the fires, either accidental or designed, which frequently occur in hot and wooded countries, and which spread to a vast extent, devouring all before them, and continuing their ravages for a long time. Many Eastern and African travelers describe these formidable and alarming fires from personal observation; and such descriptions serve to give a more adequate idea than would otherwise offer itself to an European mind of the Psalmist's meaning. This language is an expressive image for wide and quick destruction.

930

"*Kindleth the mountains*, that is, the produce of the mountains, trees, plants, etc." — *Walford.*

931

"*Pursue them with thy tempest*, is an evident reference *to the dissipation of the chaff*, and what follows relates clearly to *the expansion of the flame*." — Note of Henley, in *Lowth's Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, volume 1, page 277.

932

13. *O my God! make them like a whirling ball.* As the ungodly, when they gird and prepare themselves for destroying the Church, are usually inflated with intolerable pride, the inspired bard beseeches God to put them to shame, it being impossible to abate their pride until they are laid prostrate, confounded, and shamefully disappointed. When he declares (verse 16) that, as the result of this, *they will seek the name of God,* he is not to be understood as speaking of their being brought to true repentance, or of their genuine conversion. I indeed admit that the first step to genuine repentance is when men, brought low by affliction, willingly humble themselves. But what is here meant is nothing more than a forced and slavish submission like that of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. It is a case of frequent occurrence for the wicked, when subdued by adversity, to give glory to God, for a short period. But they are soon again carried away with a frantic madness, which clearly discovers their hypocrisy, and brings to light the pride and rebellion which lurked in their hearts. What the prophet desires is, that the wicked may be compelled by stripes to acknowledge God, whether they will or no, in order that their fury, which breaks forth because they escape with impunity, may at least be kept under restraint. This is more clearly apparent from the 17th verse, where he distinctly prays that they may be destroyed for ever; which would not at all correspond with his previous statement, were it regarded as a prayer for their being brought to repentance. Nor does he needlessly heap together such a multiplicity of words. He does this partly because the reprobate, though often chastised, are nevertheless so incorrigible that ever and anon they are mustering up new strength and courage; and partly because there is nothing which it is more difficult to be persuaded of than that such as wallow at ease in great outward prosperity will soon perish. The cause to which this is to be attributed is just our not sufficiently apprehending the dreadful character of the vengeance of God which awaits the oppressors of the Church.

18. *And let them know that thou art, thy name Jehovah.* It is not the saving knowledge of God which is here spoken of, but that acknowledgement of him which his irresistible power extorts from the wicked. It is not simply said that they will know that there is a God; but a special kind of knowledge is laid down, it being intimated that the heathen who before held the true religion in contempt, would at length perceive that the God who made himself known in the Law, and who was worshipped in Judea, was the only true God. Still, however, it must be remembered, that the knowledge spoken of is only that which is of an evanescent character, having neither root nor

"The construction of the words in the close of the psalm lies most probably thus, וידעו, *and they shall know*, *i e.*, *it shall be known* by this means, כי אתה שמך יהוה, *thou art thy name Jehovah*, *i e.*, *that thou art what thy name Jehovah imports*; and what that is, is expounded in the remainder of the verse, עליון לבדך, *thou only the Most High over all the earth*; that being indeed the meaning of *Jehovah*, the infinite, eternal, and so the only supreme power over all the world." — *Hammond*

the living juice to nourish it; for the wicked will not submit to God willingly and cordially, but are drawn by compulsion to yield a counterfeit obedience, or, being restrained by him, dare not break forth into open outrage. This, then, is an experimental recognition of God which penetrates not to the heart, but is extorted from them by force and necessity. The pronoun אתה, *atah, thou,* is emphatic, implying a tacit contrast between the God of Israel and all the false gods which were the product of men's invention. The prayer amounts to this: Lord, make them to know that the idols which they have fabricated for themselves are no gods, and in fact are nothing. The despisers of God may indeed shun the light, and at one time may overcast themselves with clouds, while at another their may plunge into the deep and thick shades of darkness; but He pursues them, and draws them forth to the knowledge of himself, which they would fain bury in ignorance. And as the world indiscriminately and disgracefully applies his sacred name to its own trifling inventions, this profanation is corrected when it is added, *thy name Jehovah.* This implies that *being,* or *really to be,* is in the strict sense applicable to God alone; for although unbelievers may attempt to tear his glory to pieces, he continues perfect and unchanged. The contrast of which I have spoken, must be kept in mind by the reader. A nation has never existed so barbarous as not to have worshipped some deity; but every country forged particular gods for itself. And although the Moabites, the Edomites, and the rest of these nations, admitted that some power and authority belonged to the God of Israel, yet they conceived that this power and authority did not extend beyond the boundaries of Judea. Thus the king of Syria called him, "the God of the hills," (1 Kings 20:23.) This preposterous and absurd division of God's glory, which men make, is disproved by one word, and all the superstitions which at that time prevailed in the world are overthrown, when the Prophet attributes to the God of Israel, as well the essence of Deity as the name; for unless all the idols of the heathen are completely abolished, he will not obtain, alone and unshared, the name of Jehovah. Accordingly, it is added, *Thou alone art the Most High over all the earth;* a statement which is worthy of our most careful attention. The superstitious commonly think it enough to leave God his name, that is to say, two or three syllables; and in the meantime they fritter away his power, as if his majesty were contained in an empty title. Let us then remember that God does not receive that honor among men to which he is entitled, if he is not allowed to possess his own inherent sovereignty, and if his glory is obscured by setting up other objects against him with antagonist claims.

Psalm 84

PSALM 84

The Psalmist complains that nothing proved to him a source of greater distress than his being prevented from coming to the tabernacle, and his being banished from the assembly of the saints, where God was called upon. And yet he shows, that nothing can withstand the longing desires of the godly; and that, surmounting all obstacles, they will be constantly engaged in seeking God, and, so to speak, will make a way for themselves where there is none. [933] At length he expresses his desire to be restored to the tabernacle of God, and again testifies that a day spent in the tabernacle was in his estimation more to be prized [934] than to live for a long time in the society of unbelievers.

933

"Mais au contraire que par dessus tous empeschemens ils poursuyvront constamment a chercher Dieu, et par maniere de dire, se feront voye la ou il n'y en a point." — *Fr.*

934

"Il tesmoigne derechef qu'il estime plus de jouyer de ceste liberte d'assister avec les autres au tabernacle de Dieu, quand mesme il ne devroit vivre qu'un jour, etc." — *Fr.* "He again testifies, that to enjoy the liberty of assisting with others at the tabernacle of God for only one day was, in his estimation, more to be prized, etc."

To the chief musician upon Gittith. A Psalm of [935] the sons of Korah. [936]

The title of this psalm does not bear the name of David; but as its subject-matter is applicable to him, he was in all probability its author. Some think that it was composed by the sons of Korah, for his particular use; but to prove the groundlessness of this opinion, it is only necessary to advert to this one consideration, that David in his time was so eminently distinguished by the gift of prophecy as to be under no necessity of employing the Levites to perform a service for which he himself was so well qualified. The only difficulty to our ascribing it to David is, that mention is made of mount Zion, to which the ark of the covenant was not brought until he was put in peaceable possession of the kingdom. how after that, he was never deprived of the liberty of appearing before the ark with others, except once, and then only for a short time; namely, when he was under the necessity of betaking himself to flight on account of the rebellion raised against him by his son Absalom. [937] The contents of the psalm, however, indicate, that at the time of its composition, he had been compelled to wander long in different places as an exile. If we reflect that David recorded in psalms the persecutions he endured under Saul long after he was delivered from them, we will not be surprised to find him making mention of Zion in connection with them. Of the word *Gittith,* I have already spoken on the eighth psalm.

Psalm 84:1-4

1. How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Jehovah of Hosts! **2.** My soul longeth, [or greatly desireth,] yea, even fainteth after the courts of Jehovah: my heart and my flesh leap for joy towards the living God. **3.** The sparrow also hath found a house for herself, and the

935

"It is admitted that the Hebrew preposition here used (*lamed*) may be translated either *by*, *to*, or *for*. When applied to an individual, we consider it as marking the author by whom it was written, or the musician to whose care it was addressed, for adapting it to music. But when addressed to a company of choristers, as the sons of Korah, there seems no doubt but it was intended for them to sing it." — *Williams.*

936

The sons of Korah were the descendants of Korah, whom the earth swallowed up for striving against Moses and against the Lord. In the narrative of that event, we are informed that "the children of Korah died not," (Numbers 26:10.) They joined not with their father in his sedition, and therefore escaped his punishment. It appears from 1 Chronicles 9:19, and 26:1-19, that their posterity were employed as porters or keepers of the tabernacle and temple. They had also a place among the singers of the temple, (2 Chronicles 20:19.) Their name occurs in the title of nine psalms.

937

"Or est-il, que depuis ce temps-la, il ne perdit jamais la liberte de pouvoir comparoistre devant l'Arche avec les autres, si non une fois et pour bien peu de temps, c'est ascavoir quand il s'enfuit pour la persecution que luy faisoit son fils." — *Fr.*

swallow [938] a nest for herself, where she may place her young ones, O thine altars! Thou Jehovah of Hosts! my King, and my God. **4.** Blessed are they who dwell in thy house: they will be ever praising thee. Selah.

1 *How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Jehovah of Hosts!* David complains of his being deprived of liberty of access to the Church of God, there to make a profession of his faith, to improve in godliness, and to engage in the divine worship. Some would understand by the *tabernacles of God,* the kingdom of heaven, as if David mourned over his continuance in this state of earthly pilgrimage; but they do not sufficiently consider the nature of his present afflicted circumstances — that he was debarred from the sanctuary. He knew that God had not in vain appointed the holy assemblies, and that the godly have need of such helps so long as they are sojourners in this world. He was also deeply sensible of his own infirmity; nor was he ignorant how far short he came of approaching the perfection of angels. He had therefore good ground to lament over his being deprived of those means, the utility of which is well known to all true believers. His attention was, no doubt, directed to the proper end for which the external ritual was appointed; for his character was widely different from that of hypocrites, who, while they frequent the solemn assemblies with great pomp, and seem to burn with ardent zeal in serving God, yet in all this, aim at nothing more than by an ostentatious display of piety to obtain the credit of having performed their duty towards Him. David's mind was far from being occupied with this gross imagination. The end he had in view in desiring so earnestly to enjoy free access to the sanctuary was, that he might there worship God with

938

Bochart supposes דרור, to signify not the *swallow*, but some kind of wild *dove*; as he observes, that the Æthiopic version renders it the *ring-dove*, and the Septuagint, Vulgate, Chaldee, Syriac, and other ancient versions, the *turtle* These last probably render it *turtle* from the resemblance of the name to תור, *tur*, the common name of that bird. Merrick, in his version, translated it at first *turtle*, but afterwards substituted the more comprehensive name of *dove* instead of turtle, at the suggestion of Dr Lowth. "You have very good authorities for the *turtle*," says that learned Prelate: "my objection may be merely an English one. The bird which we know by that name is of all others the most retired and shyest; and hardly ever approaches any building, much less makes her nest in any frequented place. Does not this consideration render it an unfit image for the Psalmist's purpose here? The *dove*, which is only a more general name for the same bird, would not be liable to this objection." But to remove that difficulty relating to the turtle, Merrick quotes a passage from Sir H. Blunt's Voyage to the Levant, (page 186, ed. 5) in which that traveler says, that in Turkey, all birds are so tame from not being used to violence, that he had thrown his coat upon *turtle-doves* in the highway. "The Hebrew interpreters," says the Illustrated Commentary upon the Bible, "believe it is the swallow, and are followed by our version. The word means *freedom*, *deliverance*, and may be supposed to refer to the free manner in which the swallow flies. It is only mentioned again, at least by this name, in Proverbs 26:2; and is there also associated with the *tsippor*, which our version there renders *bird*, instead of *sparrow* In both texts, the meaning agrees better with the swallow than the turtle-dove."

sincerity of heart, and in a spiritual manner. The opening words are in the form of an exclamation, which is an indication of ardent affection; and this state of feeling is expressed still more fully in the second verse. Hence we learn, that those are sadly deficient in understanding who carelessly neglect God's instituted worship, as if they were able to mount up to heaven by their own unaided efforts.

I have observed, that in the second verse a more than ordinary ardor of desire is expressed. The first verb, כסף, *casaph,* signifies *vehemently to desire;* but not contented with this word, David adds, that *his soul fainteth after the courts of the Lord,* which is equivalent to our pining away, when, under the influence of extreme mental emotion, we are in a manner transported out of ourselves. He speaks only of the *courts* of the tabernacle, because, not being a priest, it was not lawful for him to go beyond the outer court. None but the priests, as is well known, were permitted to enter into the inner sanctuary. In the close of the verse, he declares, that this longing extended itself even to his body, that is, it manifested itself in the utterance of the mouth, the languor of the eyes, and the action of the hands. The reason why he longed so intensely to have access to the tabernacle was, to enjoy *the living God;* not that he conceived of God as shut up in so narrow a place as was the tent of the ark, [939] but he was convinced of the need he had of steps, by which to rise up to heaven, and knew that the visible sanctuary served the purpose of a ladder, because, by it the minds of the godly were directed and conducted to the heavenly model. And assuredly, when we consider that the sluggishness of our flesh hinders us from elevating our minds to the height of the divine majesty, in vain would God call us to himself, did he not at the same time, on his part, come down to us; or, did he not at least, by the interposition of means, stretch out his hand to us, so to speak, in order to lift us up to himself.

3 *The sparrow also hath found a house for herself, and the swallow a nest for herself.* Some read this verse as one continuous sentence, conveying the idea that the birds made their nests near the altars; [940] from which it might the more evidently appear how hard and distressing his condition was in being kept at a distance from them. This opinion seems to be supported from the circumstance, that immediately before the Hebrew word for *altars,* there is the particle את, *eth,* which is commonly joined with the accusative case. But as it is also sometimes used in exclamations, the prophet, I have no doubt, breaking off in the middle of his sentence all at once, exclaims, that nothing would be more grateful to him than to behold the altar of God. David then, in the first place, with the view of aggravating the misery of his condition, compares himself with the sparrows and swallows, showing

939

"Comme estort le pavillon de l'Arche." — *Fr.*

940

how hard a case it was for the children of Abraham to be driven out of the heritage which had been promised them, whilst the little birds found some place or other for building their nests. He might sometimes find a comfortable retreat, and might even dwell among unbelievers with some degree of honor and state; but so long as he was deprived of liberty of access to the sanctuary, he seemed to himself to be in a manner banished from the whole world. Undoubtedly, the proper end which we ought to propose to ourselves in living, is to be engaged in the service of God. The manner in which he requires us to serve him is spiritual; but still it is necessary for us to make use of those external aids which he has wisely appointed for our observance. This is the reason why David all at once breaks forth into the exclamation, *O thine altars! thou Jehovah of Hosts!* Some might be ready to say in reference to his present circumstances, that there were many retreats in the world, where he might live in safety and repose, yea, that

This is the sense given in our English Bible; to the accuracy of which Dr Adam Clarke objects. "It is very unlikely," says he, "that sparrows and swallows, or birds of any kind, should be permitted to build their nests, and hatch their young, in or about altars, which were kept in a state of the *greatest purity*, and where *perpetual fires* were kept for the purpose of sacrifice, burning incense, etc." He proposes to read the words beginning at the third verse and ending with *her young ones*, within a parenthesis, and to explain the remaining part of the verse as the conclusion of the sentence commencing at verse 2d; or to read the parenthesis as the close of verse 3d: "Even the sparrow hath found out a house, and the swallow (ring-dove) a nest for herself, where she may lay her young; *but I have no place either of rest or worship*." But though it cannot be reasonably supposed that these birds would be permitted to nestle about the altar itself, before which the priests were continually serving; yet it is not improbable that they were permitted to construct their nests in the houses near the altar. "The altar," says Dr Paxton, "is here by a synecdoche of a part for the whole, to be understood of the tabernacle, among the rafters of which, the sparrow and the swallow were allowed to nestle; or rather for the buildings which surrounded the sacred edifice where the priests and their assistants had their ordinary residence." — *Paxton's Illustrations of Scripture*, volume 2, pages 310, 355. Dr Morison, after quoting the criticism of Dr Clarke, observes, "I confess I see a great beauty in adhering to the sense given in the common version. Though the sparrow and ring-dove are represented as finding a nest for themselves at the altars of the sanctuary, it does not follow that the inspired writer intends any thing more than that, while he was exiled from the house of his God, these familiar birds had a home near that sacred spot where he had associated his chief joys." Parkhurst considers, that a comparison is intended; and that though the particles of similitude "as" and "so" are not in the Hebrew text, they are to be understood. And in the Hebrew Scriptures, there are many instances in which they are omitted, but where it is necessary to supply them to make an intelligible version. He translates as follows: "Even (as) the sparrow findeth her house, and the dove her nest, where she hath laid her young, (so, should I find,) thy altars, O Jehovah of Hosts! my King, and my God." According to this exposition, the Psalmist illustrates his vehement longing after the sacred tabernacle, and God's public worship, by the natural affection of birds, and by that joy and delight with which they return to their brood after they have been absent from them. (See Parkhurst's Lexicon on דרר,2.) Walford takes the same view. His version is: —

"As the sparrow findeth a house, and the swallow a nest,
Where she may place her offspring,
So may thy altars be my abode, O Jehovah of Hosts!
My King, and my God."

there were many who would gladly receive him as a guest under their roof, and that therefore he had no cause to be so greatly distressed. To this he answers, that he would rather relinquish the whole world than continue in a state of exclusion from the holy tabernacle; that he felt no place delightful at a distance from God's altars; and, in short, that no dwelling-place was agreeable to him beyond the limits of the Holy Land. This he would intimate, by the appellations which he gives to God, *My King, and my God.* In speaking thus, he gives us to understand that his life was uncomfortable and embittered, because he was banished from the kingdom of God. "Although all men," as if he had said, "should vie with each other in their eagerness to afford me shelter and entertainment, yet as thou art my King, what pleasure would it afford me to live in the world, so long as I am excluded from the territory of the Holy Land? And again, as thou art my God, for what end do I live but to seek after thee? Now, when thou castest me off, should I not despise every place of retreat and shelter which is offered me, however pleasant and delightful it may be to my flesh?"

4 *Blessed are they who dwell in thy house.* Here the Psalmist expresses more distinctly the proper and legitimate use of the sanctuary; and thus he distinguishes himself from hypocrites, who are sedulously attentive to the observance of outward ceremonies, but destitute of genuine heart godliness. David, on the contrary, testifies, that the true worshippers of God offer to him the sacrifice of praise, which can never be dissociated from faith. Never will a man praise God from the heart, unless, relying upon his grace, he is a partaker of spiritual peace and joy.

Psalm 84:5-7

5. Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; the ways are in their hearts. **6.** They passing through the valley of weeping, [941] will together make it a fountain; [942] the rain also will cover the cisterns,

941

"Ou, du meurier." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, of the mulberry-tree."

942

"Fontem ponent." — *Lat.* "La rendent *semblable* a une fontaine." — *Fr.*

[or reservoirs.] [943] **7.** They will go from strength to strength; [944] the God of gods will be seen in Zion.

5 *Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee.* David again informs us, that the purpose for which he desired liberty of access to the sanctuary was, not merely to gratify his eyes with what was to be seen there, but to make progress in faith. To lean with the whole heart upon God, is to attain to no ordinary degree of advancement: and this cannot be attained by any man, unless all his pride is laid prostrate in the dust, and his heart truly humbled. In proposing to himself this way of seeking God, David's object is to borrow from him by prayer the strength of which he feels himself to be destitute. The concluding clause of the verse, *the ways are in their hearts,* [945] is by some interpreted as meaning, That those are happy who walk in the way which God has appointed; for nothing is more injurious to a man

943

"Pools or reservoirs of water, as well as wells, are common in the Eastern deserts: the latter are supplied by springs, the former by rains, as here noticed: but both are to be found in considerable numbers in Judea, and are, according to Rauwolff, more numerous in these countries than springs that lie high; that is, than fountains and brooks of running water. Some of these have been made for the use of the people that dwell in the neighborhood; some for travelers, and especially those that travel for devotion; as for instance, such as go in pilgrimage to Mecca. The Psalmist appears to refer to provisions of this sort, made by the devout Israelites in the way of their progress to Jerusalem." — *Mant.*

This last clause has been very variously rendered. It has been understood by all the versions, in a different sense from that given to it by Calvin and our English version, which agrees with him. The Septuagint reads: "The law-giver will give blessings." Dr Adam Clarke: "Yea, the instructor is covered, or clothed with blessings." "God," says he, "takes care to give his followers teachers after his own heart, that shall feed them with knowledge: and while they are watering the people they are watered themselves." Mudge reads: "Even Moreh is clothed with ponds." He translates the 5th, 6th, and 7th verses thus: — "How happy the man whose strength is in thee! that travel the roads with their hearts. In the valley of Baca he maketh it a fountain; even Moreh is clothed with ponds. They walk from strength to strength; he appeareth before God in Zion." His note on these verses is as follows: — "I join the latter end of the 5th to the first word of the 6th, (so the Seventy direct, and the sense seems to require,) with a slight alteration into עברו; the change of number, I have often observed, is not to be regarded. 'How happy the man that feels himself invigorated by thee; that travels the roads that lead to Jerusalem, with full bent of heart! He goes through the valley of *Baca* as full of spirit as if it was cheered with a fountain of waters, and *Moreh*, as if it was filled with delicious ponds.' (Two desolate places I suppose, through which the road lay.) 'He grows lustier as he walks; he appears before God in Zion.'"

944

"Ou, de troupe en troupe." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, from company to company."

945

"Heb. *The ways are in his heart*; *i.e.*, the highways to the temple are the objects of his delight. In the former verses he had alluded to the happiness of the priests, etc., who were always engaged in the service of Jehovah; here he expresses the felicity of other *Israelites*, who frequented the worship of the temple." — *Dr Good's new Version of the Book of Psalms, with Notes.*

than to trust in his own understanding. It is not improperly said of the law, "This is the way, walk ye in it," Isaiah 30:21. Whenever then men turn aside, however little it may be, from the divine law, they go astray, and become entangled in perverse errors. But it is more appropriate to restrict the clause to the scope of the passage, and to understand it as implying, that those are happy whose highest ambition it is to have God as the guide of their life, and who therefore desire to draw near to him. God, as we have formerly observed, is not satisfied with mere outward ceremonies. What he desires is, to rule and keep in subjection to himself all whom he invites to his tabernacle. Whoever then has learned how great a blessedness it is to rely upon God, will put forth all the desires and faculties of his mind, that with all speed he may hasten to Him.

6 *They passing through the valley of weeping, will together make it a well.* The meaning of the Psalmist is, that no impediments can prevent the enlightened and courageous worshippers of God from making conscience of waiting upon the sanctuary. By this manner of speaking, he confirms the statement which he had previously made, That nothing is more desirable than to be daily engaged in the worship of God; showing, as he does, that no difficulties can put a stop to the ardent longings of the godly, and prevent them from hastening with alacrity, yea, even though their way should be through dry and barren deserts, to meet together to solemnise the holy assemblies. As the Hebrew word הבחא, *habbacha,* when the final letter is ה, *he,* signifies *tears,* and when the final letter is א, *aleph, a mulberry tree,* some here read *valley of tears,* and others, *valley of the mulberry.* The majority of interpreters adopt the first reading; but the other opinion is not destitute of probability. [946] There is, however, no doubt, that dry and barren deserts are here to be understood, in travelling through which, much difficulty and privation must be endured, particularly from the want of water; drink being of all other articles the most necessary to persons when travelling. David intended this as an argument to prove the steadfastness of the godly, whom the scarcity of water, which often discourages travelers from prosecuting their journey, will not hinder from hastening to seek God, though their way should be through sandy and and vales. In these words, reproof is administered to the slothfulness of those who will not submit to any inconvenience for the sake of being benefited by the service of God. They indulge themselves in their own ease and pleasures, and allow nothing to interfere with these. They will, therefore, provided they are not required to make any exertion or sacrifice, readily profess themselves to be the servants of God; but they would not give a hair of their head, or make the smallest sacrifice, to obtain the liberty of hearing the gospel preached, and of enjoying the sacraments. This slothful spirit, as is evident from daily

946

"Ou la cloche sonnera pour appeler les gens aux prieres publiques." — *Fr.*

observation, keeps multitudes fast bound to their nests, so that they cannot bear to forego in any degree their own ease and convenience. Yea, even in those places where they are summoned by the sound of the church-bell to public prayers [947] to hear the doctrine of salvation, or to partake of the holy mysteries, we see that some give themselves to sleep, some think only of gain, some are entangled with the affairs of the world, and others are engaged in their amusements. It is therefore not surprising, if those who live at a distance, and who cannot enjoy these religious services and means of salvation, without making some sacrifice of their worldly substance, remain lolling at home. That such may not live secure and self-satisfied in the enjoyment of outward prosperity, David declares, that those who have true heart religion, and who sincerely serve God, direct their steps to the sanctuary of God, not only when the way is easy and cheerful, under the shade and through delightful paths, but also when they must walk through rugged and barren deserts; and that they will rather make for themselves cisterns with immense toil, than be prevented from prosecuting their journey by reason of the drought of the country.

7 *They will go from strength to strength.* In this verse the same sentiment is repeated. Mount Zion being the place where, according to the appointment of the law, the holy assemblies were observed, after the ark of the covenant was removed thither, it is said, that the people of God will come to Zion in great numbers, provoking one another to this good work. [948] The word חיל, *chayil,* seldom signifies *a troop,* or *band of men,* but most commonly *power,* or *strength.* It will therefore be more in accordance with the ordinary use of the term, to translate, *They will go from strength to strength;* [949] implying, that the saints are continually acquiring

947

"Il dit que les fideles y viendront a grand foulle, et a l'envie l'un de l'autre, comme on dit." — *Fr.*

948

"Horsley reads, 'from wall to wall;' Merrick, 'from station to station;' others, 'from virtue to virtue,' in the military sense. All come to the same effect; they persevere through all difficulty or opposition, having their hearts set on reaching Zion's hill." — *Williams.* "I think with Gejerus that the Hebrew may be translated *from strength to strength*, (answerably to the words *from faith to faith*, Romans 1:17, and *from glory to glory*, 2 Corinthians 3:18,) and signify, that whereas other travelers grow more and more weary as they travel, each of the pious persons here described shall, by the refreshments administered to them, proceed from one degree of strength to another, *viresque acquiret eundo.* As Jerusalem is represented in the New Testament as a type of heaven, I see nothing irrational in supposing that the inspired writer might, in describing the ascent to Jerusalem, have in view also that spiritual progress which leads to the city which is above, the mother of us all. The words before us are certainly very applicable to the advances made in this progress, from strength to strength, from one stage of Christian perfection to another." — *Merrick's Annotations.*

949

"*Ailleurs.*" This supplement is not in the Latin version.

fresh strength for going up to mount Zion, and continue to prosecute their journey without weariness or fatigue, until they reach the wished-for place, and behold the countenance of God. If the word *troop* is preferred, the meaning will be, that not a few only will come, but numerous companies. The manner in which God manifested himself to his servants in the temple in old time, we have spoken of elsewhere, and especially on the 27th psalm, at the 4th and 5th verses. No visible image of God was there to be seen; but the ark of the covenant was a symbol of his presence, and genuine worshippers found from experience, that by this means they were greatly aided in approaching him.

Psalm 84:8-11

> **8.** O Jehovah, God of Hosts! hear my prayer: O God of Jacob! hearken. Selah. **9.** O God! our shield, behold; and look upon the face of thy Anointed. **10.** For better is one day in thy courts than a thousand elsewhere. [950] I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness. **11.** For Jehovah God is our sun and shield: Jehovah will give grace and glory: he will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly. O Jehovah of Hosts! blessed is the man who trusteth in thee.

8 *O Jehovah, God of Hosts! hear my prayer.* David, instead of acting like worldly men, who foolishly and unprofitably distress and torment themselves by inwardly cherishing their desires, very wisely directs his wishes and prayers to God. From this it is also evident, that he was not accustomed to indulge in ostentatious boasting, as is the case with many hypocrites, who present to outward appearance a wonderful ardor of zeal, while yet the omniscient eye of God sees nothing but coldness in their hearts. In the first place, he supplicates in general, that God would vouchsafe to hear him. He next anticipates a temptation which might very readily arise from his being at present apparently cut off from the Church, and wards it off, by associating and ranking himself with all true believers, under the protection of God. Had he not been a member of the Church, he could not have said generally, and as it were in the person of all its members, *Our shield.* Having made this statement, he uses language still more expressive of high privilege, adducing the royal anointing with which God had honored him by the hand of Samuel, 1 Samuel 16:12. These words, *Look upon the face of thy anointed,* are very emphatic, and yet many interpreters pass over them very frigidly. He encourages himself in the hope of obtaining the favor of God, from the consideration that he had been anointed king in compliance

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And therefore the verb הסתופף, *histopheph*, derived from this noun, signifies *to sit at the threshold*

with a divine command. Knowing, however, that his kingdom was merely a shadow and type of something more illustrious, there is no doubt, that in uttering these words, the object which he aspired after was, to obtain the divine favor through the intervention of the Mediator of whom he was a type. I am personally unworthy, as if he had said, that thou shouldest restore me, but the anointing by which thou hast made me a type of the only Redeemer will secure this blessing for me. We are thus taught, that the only way in which God becomes reconciled to us is through the mediation of Christ, whose presence scatters and dissipates all the dark clouds of our sins.

10. *For better is one day in thy courts than a thousand elsewhere.* Unlike the greater part of mankind, who desire to live without knowing why, wishing simply that their life may be prolonged, David here testifies, not only that the end which he proposed to himself in living was to serve God, but that in addition to this, he set a higher value on one day which he could spend in the divine service, than upon a long time passed among the men of the world, from whose society true religion is banished. It being lawful for none but the priests to enter into the inner and innermost courts of the temple, David expressly declares, that provided he were permitted to have a place at the porch, he would be contented with this humble station; for the Hebrew word סַף, *saph,* signifies a *door-post,* or the *threshold of a house.* [951] The value which he set upon the sanctuary is presented in a very striking light by the comparison, that *he would prefer having a place at the very doors of the temple, to his having full possession of the tents of wickedness,* the plain import of which is, that he would rather be cast into a common and unhonoured place, provided he were among the people of God, than exalted to the highest rank of honor among unbelievers. A rare example of godliness indeed! Many are to be found who desire to occupy a place in the Church, but such is the sway which ambition has over the minds of men, that very few are content to continue among the number of the common and undistinguished class. Almost all are carried away with the frantic desire of rising to distinction, and can never think of being at ease until they have attained to some station of eminence.

11. *Jehovah God is our sun and shield.* The idea conveyed by the comparison derived from the sun is, that as the sun by his light vivifies, nourishes, and rejoices the world, so the benign countenance of God fills with joy the hearts of his people, or rather, that they neither live nor breathe

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This explanation is adopted by Walford, who reads, "Jehovah giveth favor and honor." "The common gloss on these words," he observes, "is, that God first bestows grace on earth, and then glory in heaven. But this is an interpretation of the ear rather than of the understanding. The writer is evidently speaking of the present happy consequences of walking uprightly as he immediately says. The judgment of Calvin agrees with this statement."

except in so far as he shines upon them. By the term *shield* is meant, that our salvation, which would otherwise be perilled by countless dangers, is in perfect safety under his protection. The favor of God in communicating life to us would be far from adequate to the exigencies of our condition, unless at the same time, in the midst of so many dangers, he interposed his power as a buckler to defend us. The sentence immediately succeeding, *he will give grace and glory*, might be viewed as meaning, that those whom God has distinguished by his grace in this world, will at length be crowned with everlasting glory in his heavenly kingdom. But this distinction between grace and glory being, I am afraid, too refined, it will be preferable to explain the sentence as implying, that after God has once taken the faithful into his favor, he will advance them to high honor, and never cease to enrich them with his blessings. [952] This interpretation is confirmed by the following clause, *He will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly,* obviously teaching us, that God's bounty can never be exhausted, but flows without intermission. We learn from these words, that whatever excellence may be in us proceeds solely from the grace of God. They contain, at the same time, this special mark, by which the genuine worshippers of God may be distinguished from others, That their life is framed and regulated according to the principles of strict integrity.

The exclamation with which David concludes the psalm, *Blessed is the man who trusteth in thee,* seems to refer to the season of his banishment. He had previously described the blessedness of those who dwell in the courts of the Lord, and now he avows, that although he was for a time deprived of that privilege, he was far from being altogether miserable, because he was supported by the best of all consolations, that which arose from beholding from a distance the grace of God. This is an example well worthy of special attention. So long as we are deprived of God's benefits, we must necessarily groan and be sad in heart. But, that the sense of our distresses may not overwhelm us, we ought to impress it upon our minds, that even in the midst of our calamities we do not cease to be happy, when faith and patience are in exercise.

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"It is generally agreed, that the subject of this psalm is the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity; in celebrating which, the Psalmist is carried by a prophetic impulse to foretell a much greater deliverance by the coming of Christ." — *Dimock.*

Psalm 85

PSALM 85

God having afflicted his people with new troubles and calamities, after their return from their captivity in Babylon, they, in the first place, make mention of their deliverance as an argument why he should not leave unfinished the work of his grace. Then they complain of the long continuance of their afflictions. And, in the third place, inspired with hope and confidence, they triumph in the blessedness promised them; for their restoration to their own country was connected with the kingdom of Christ, from which they anticipated an abundance of all good things. [953]

To the chief musician, a Psalm of the sons of Korah.

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"עון נשאת, *nasata avon*, 'Thou hast borne, or carried away, the iniquity. An allusion to the ceremony of the *scape-goat*." — *Dr Adam Clarke* "It is a maxim among the Jewish doctors," says Hammond, "that captivity is one way of expiation, and so to return from thence was a sure indication that the sin for which it was inflicted was remitted or done away. This, saith Abarbanel, on Leviticus 16, was adumbrated in the *Azazel*, or *scape-goat*, which, as the other that was slain, was a *sin-offering*, as appears, Leviticus 16:5. 'He shall take two kids for a sin-offering.' And then the 'confessing the sins over him,' mentioned 16:21, ('Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, etc., putting them on the head of the goat: And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities into a land of separation,' 16:22,) shows that they were to carry their sins with them into the land of their captivity, meant by *the land of separation*, that *land* whatsoever it was, whither the Divine Providence had designed their deportation. From whence therefore being now returned, their *sins*, for which they were thus punished, are supposed to be left behind them, no more to be laid to their charge, if their return to their former *sins* do not cause them to be called to remembrance."

Psalm 85:1-4

> **1.** O Jehovah! thou hast been favorable to thy land: thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob. **2.** Thou hast taken away the iniquity [954] of thy people: thou hast covered all their sins. Selah. **3.** Thou hast turned away all thy anger: thou hast drawn back the fury of thy indignation. **4.** Turn us, O God of our salvation! and cause thy anger against us to cease.

1 *O Jehovah! thou hast been favorable to thy land.* Those who translate these words in the future tense, in my opinion, mar their meaning. This psalm, it is probable, was endited to be sung by the people when they were persecuted by the cruel tyranny of Antiochus; and from the deliverance wrought for them in the past, they were encouraged to expect in the future, fresh and continued tokens of the divine favor, — God having thereby testified, that their sins, however numerous and aggravated, could not efface from his memory the remembrance of his covenant, so as to render him inexorable towards the children of Abraham, and deaf to their prayers. [955] Had they not previously experienced such remarkable proofs of the divine goodness, they must necessarily have been overwhelmed with the load of their present afflictions, especially when so long protracted. The cause of their deliverance from captivity they attribute to the free love with which God had embraced the land which he had chosen for himself. Whence it follows, that the course of his favor was unintermitted; and the faithful also were inspired with confidence in prayer, by the reflection that, mindful of his choice, he had shown himself merciful to his own land. We have elsewhere had occasion to remark, that nothing contributes more effectually to encourage us to come to the throne of grace, than the remembrance of God's former benefits. Our faith would immediately succumb under adversity, and sorrow would choke our hearts, were we not taught to believe from the experience of the past, that he is inclined compassionately to hear the prayers of his servants, and always affords them succor when the exigencies of their circumstances require it; especially as there remains at all times the same reason for continuing his goodness. Thus the prophet happily applies to believers of his own day, the benefits which God in old time bestowed upon their fathers, because both they and their fathers were called to the hope of the same inheritance.

2 *Thou hast taken away the iniquity of thy people.* It was very natural for the faithful to feel alarmed and perplexed on account of their sins, and

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"Ne faire qu'il ne fust enclin et pitie envers les enfans d'Abraham pour exaucer leurs prieres." — *Fr.*

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"Ou, si est ce *que*." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, Yet."

therefore the prophet removes all ground for overwhelming apprehension, by showing them, that God, in delivering his people, had given an irrefragable proof of free forgiveness. He had before traced this deliverance to the mere good pleasure and free grace of God as its source; but after it was wrought, the iniquities of the people having separated between them and their God, and estranged them from him, it was necessary that the remedy of pardon should be brought to their aid. In saying that *their iniquities were taken away,* he does not refer to the faithful being reformed and purged from their sins, in other words, to that work by which God, sanctifying them by the Spirit of regeneration, actually removes sin from them. What he intended to say he explains immediately after. The amount, in short, is, that God was reconciled to the Jews by not imputing their sins to them. When God is said *to cover sins,* the meaning is, that he buries them, so that they come not into judgment, as we have shown more at large on the 32nd psalm, at the beginning. When, therefore, he had punished the sins of his people by captivity, it being his will to restore them again to their own country, he removed the great impediment to this, by blotting out their transgressions; for deliverance from punishment depends upon the remission of sin. Thus we are furnished with an argument in confutation of that foolish conceit of the Sophists, which they set forth as some great mystery, That God retains the punishment although he forgive the fault; whereas God announces in every part of his word, that his object in pardoning is, that being pacified, he may at the same time mitigate the punishment. Of this we have an additional confirmation in the following verse, where we are informed, that God was mercifully inclined towards his people, that he might withdraw his hand from chastising them. What answer in any degree plausible can be given to this by the Sophists, who affirm that God would not be righteous did he not, after he had forgiven the fault, execute punishment according to the strict demands of his justice? The sequence of the pardon of sin is, that God by his blessing testifies that he is no longer displeased.

4 *Turn us, O God of our salvation!* The faithful now make a practical application to themselves, in their present circumstances, of what they had rehearsed before concerning God's paternal tenderness towards his people whom he had redeemed. And they attribute to him, by whom they desire to be restored to their former state, the appellation, *O God of our salvation!* to encourage themselves, even in the most desperate circumstances, in the hope of being delivered by the power of God. Although to the eye of sense and reason there may be no apparent ground to hope favourably as to our condition, it becomes us to believe that our salvation rests secure in his hand, and that, whenever he pleases, he can easily and readily find the means of bringing salvation to us. *God's anger* being the cause and origin of all calamities, the faithful beseech him to remove it. This order demands our special attention; for so effeminate and faint-hearted in bearing adversity are we, that no sooner does God begin to smite us with his little finger,

than we entreat him, with groaning and lamentable cries, to spare us. But we forget to plead, what should chiefly engage our thoughts, that he would deliver us from guilt and condemnation; and we forget this because we are reluctant to descend into our own hearts and to examine ourselves.

Psalm 85:5-8

> **5.** Wilt thou be wroth against us for ever? wilt thou prolong thy displeasure from age to age? **6.** Wilt thou not turn again and quicken us? and thy people will rejoice in thee. **7.** Show us thy mercy, O Jehovah! and grant us thy salvation. **8.** I will hear what God Jehovah will speak: surely he will speak peace to his people and to his meek ones, and they will not turn again to folly.

5 *Wilt thou be wroth against us for ever?* Here the godly bewail the long continuance of their afflictions, and derive an argument in prayer from the nature of God, as it is described in the law, —

"The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin,"
(Exodus 34:6, 7,)

— a truth which has also been brought under our notice in Psalm 30:5, "For his anger endureth but a moment; in his favor is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." It thus becomes us, when we engage in prayer, to meditate upon the Divine promises that we may be furnished with suitable expressions. It may seem, at first view, that these devout Jews find fault with God, as if he exhibited his character to them in a light very different from that in which he was wont to exhibit it; but the object they had in view undoubtedly was to obtain, in the struggle they were resolutely maintaining against temptation, hope of relief from the contemplation of the nature of God; as if they laid it down as a fixed principle, that it is impossible for Him to be angry for ever. We may observe, by the way, that it is evident, from their praying in this manner, that they were weighed down with such an oppressive load of calamities, as to be almost unable any longer to endure them. Let us therefore learn, that although God may not immediately grant us manifest tokens of his returning favor, yet we must not cease to persevere in earnest prayer. If it is objected, that then God has promised in vain that his anger would be of short duration, I answer, that if we entertain suitable views of our own sins, his anger will assuredly appear to be always of short continuance; and if we call to remembrance the everlasting course of his mercy, we will confess that his anger endures but for a moment. As our corrupt nature is ever relapsing into the wanton indulgence of its native propensities, manifold corrections are indispensably necessary to subdue it thoroughly.

The godly, still dwelling on the same theme, ask, in the 6th verse, whether *God will not turn again and quicken them* Being fully convinced of the truth

of this principle, That the punishments with which God chastises his children are only temporary; they thereby encourage themselves in the confident expectation, that although he may be now justly displeased, and may have turned away his face from them, yet, when they implore his mercy, he will be entreated, and raising the dead to life again, will turn their mourning into gladness. By the word *quicken,* they complain that they almost resemble persons who are dead, or that they are stunned and laid prostrate with afflictions. And when they promise themselves matter of rejoicing, they intimate that in the meantime they are well nigh worn out with sorrow.

7. *Show us thy mercy, O Jehovah!* In these words there is the same contrast as in the preceding sentence. In supplicating that mercy may be extended to them, and deliverance granted them, they confess that they are deprived of all sense of both these blessings. Such having been the state of the saints in old time, let us learn, even when we are so oppressed with calamities as to be reduced to extremity, and on the brink of despair, to betake ourselves notwithstanding to God. *Mercy* is appropriately put in the first place; and then there is added *salvation,* which is the work and fruit of mercy; for no other reason can be assigned why God is induced to show himself our Savior, but that he is merciful. Whence it follows, that all who urge their own merits before Him as a plea for obtaining his favor, are shutting up the way of salvation.

8. *I will hear what God Jehovah will speak.* The prophet, by his own example, here exhorts the whole body of the Church to quiet and calm endurance. As he had burst forth under the influence of strong emotion into a degree of vehemence, he now restrains himself as it were with a bridle; and in all our desires, be they never so devout and holy, we must always beware of their running to excess. When a man gives indulgence to his own infirmity, he is easily carried beyond the bounds of moderation by an undue ardor. For this reason the prophet enjoins silence, both upon himself and others, that they may patiently wait God's own time. By these words, he shows that he was in a composed state of mind, and, as it were, continued silent, because he was persuaded that the care of God is exercised about his Church. Had he thought that fortune held the sovereignty of the world, and that mankind are whirled round by a blind impulse, he would not, as he does, have represented God as sustaining the function of governing. *To speak,* in this passage, is equivalent *to command,* or *to appoint.* It is, as if he had said, Being confident that the remedy for our present calamities is in the hand of God, I will remain quiet until the fit time for delivering the Church arrive. As then the unruliness of our passions murmur, and raise an uproar against God, so patience is a kind of silence by which the godly keep themselves in subjection to his authority. In the second clause of the verse, the Psalmist comes to the conclusion, that the condition of the Church will be more prosperous: *Surely he will speak peace to his people, and to his meek ones.* As God rules supreme over the affairs of men, he

cannot but provide for the welfare of his Church, which is the object of his special love. The word *peace,* we have elsewhere shown, is employed by the Hebrews to denote prosperity; and, accordingly, what is here expressed is, that the Church, by the Divine blessing, will prosper. Moreover, by the word *speak,* it is intimated that God will not fail to regard his promises. The Psalmist might have spoken more plainly of Divine Providence, as for instance in these terms, "I will look to what God will do;" but as the benefits bestowed upon the Church flow from the Divine promises, he makes mention of God's *mouth* rather than of his *hand;* and, at the same time, he shows that patience depends upon the quiet hearing of faith. When those to whom God speaks peace are not only described as *his people,* but also as *his meek ones,* this is a mark by which the genuine people of God are distinguished from such as bear merely the title of his people. As hypocrites arrogantly claim to themselves all the privileges of the Church, it is requisite to repel and exhibit the groundlessness of their boasting, in order to let them know that they are justly excluded from the promises of God.

And they will not turn again to folly. The particle rendered *and* has usually been explained in this way: *That they may not turn again to folly;* as if this clause were added to express the fruit of the Divine goodness. As God, in dealing graciously with his people, allures them to himself, that they may continue obedient to him, the prophet, as these interpreters contend, maintains that they will not again return to folly, because the Divine goodness will serve as a bridle to restrain them. This exposition is admissible; but it will be more suitable to refer the sentence to the whole subject comprised in the passage — to regard it, in short, as meaning, that after God has sufficiently chastised his Church, he will at length show himself merciful to her, that the saints, taught by chastisements, may exercise a stricter vigilance over themselves in future. The cause is shown why God suspends and delays the communications of his grace. As the physician, although his patient may experience some alleviation of his disease, keeps him still under medicinal treatment, until he become fully convalescent, and until, the cause of his disease being removed, his constitution become invigorated, — for to allow him all at once to use whatever diet he chose, would be highly injurious to him; — so God, perceiving that we are not completely recovered from our vices to spiritual health in one day, prolongs his chastisements: without which we would be in danger of a speedy relapse. Accordingly, the prophet, to assuage the grief with which the protracted duration of calamities would oppress the faithful, applies this remedy and solace, That God purposely continues his corrections for a longer period than they would wish, that they may be brought in good earnest to repent, and excited to be more on their guard in future.

Psalm 85:9-13

> **9.** Surely [956] his salvation is near to them that fear him, that glory may dwell in our land. **10.** Mercy and truth shall meet together; righteousness and peace shall kiss each other. **11.** Truth shall spring [or bud] out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. **12.** Likewise, Jehovah will grant prosperity: and our land shall yield her increase. **13.** Righteousness shall go before him; and set her steps in the way.

9 *Surely his salvation is near to them that fear him.* Here the Psalmist confirms the statement made in the preceding verse. He encourages both himself and other servants of God in the hope, that although to outward appearance God was far off from his people, yet deliverance was near at hand; because it is certain, that God secretly regards those whom he seems openly to neglect. If it is considered preferable to take the particle אך, *ach,* adversatively, Yet *his salvation,* etc., — a sense in which it is often used in Hebrew — the sentence will be fuller. The prophet had just now said, that God continues to lengthen out the chastisement of his people, when he perceives that they are too prone to fall anew into sin; and here, lest his slowness in removing the stroke of his hand should prove too much for their patience, he qualifies the above statement, by observing, that even when the Divine help seems slowest in coming it is then near at hand. *The glory* which in the second part of the verse he anticipates *will dwell in the land,* is undoubtedly set in opposition to the ruinous appearance it then presented to the eye, which was a token of the dreadful anger of God, and which consigned the land to ignominy and reproach. [957] By this language, therefore, he encourages himself and other genuine believers to repentance,

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Walford, who thinks that the composition of this psalm is referable to some period subsequent to the return of God's ancient people from Babylon, explains this concluding clause of the 9th verse as follows: — "The glory that is here spoken of is that which was formerly enjoyed, when they were surrounded on all sides by prosperity; and when especially they were favored with the tokens of the divine presence, in the performance of all the instituted worship of the sanctuary, when the ark, the temples etc., were in their pristine beauty and splendor."

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Mercy and *truth* are very generally applied by commentators to God; and the passage is understood as the celebration of the harmony of the divine attributes in the salvation of man. The description is one of great beauty and sublimity. "How admirable," says Bishop Lowth, in illustrating this verse, "is that celebrated personification of the divine attributes by the Psalmist; How just, elegant, and splendid does it appear, if applied only according to the literal sense, to the restoration of the Jewish nation from the Babylonish captivity! but if interpreted as relating to that sublimer, more sacred, and mystical sense, which is not obscurely shadowed under the ostensible image, it is certainly uncommonly noble and elevated, mysterious and sublime." — (*Lowth's Lectures on Hebrew Poetry*, volume 1, page 284.)

Dr Adam Clarke gives a turn to the text, which still more heightens its effect. "It would be more simple," says he, "to translate the original,

'Mercy and truth have met on the way;
Righteousness and peace have embraced.'

putting them in mind, that the grievous oppression, accompanied with insult and derision, to which they were subjected by the tyranny of their enemies, was to be ascribed entirely to their having driven away the salvation of God from them by their sins.

10. *Mercy and truth shall meet together.* Here the verbs are in the past tense; but it is evident from the scope of the passage, that they should be translated into the future. I cordially embrace the opinion which is held by many, that we have here a prophecy concerning the kingdom of Christ. There is no doubt, that the faithful lifted up their eyes to Him, when their faith had need of encouragement and support in reference to the restoration of the Church; and especially after their return from Babylon. Meanwhile, the design of the prophet is, to show how bountifully God deals with his Church, after he is reconciled to her. The fruits which he represents as springing from this reconciliation are, first, that *mercy and truth meet together;* and, secondly, that *righteousness and peace embrace each other* From these words, Augustine deduces a beautiful sentiment, and one fraught with the sweetest consolation, That the mercy of God is the origin and source of all his promises, from whence issues the righteousness which is offered to us by the gospel, while from that righteousness proceeds the peace which we obtain by faith, when God justifies us freely. According to him, *righteousness* is represented *as looking down from heaven,* because it is the free gift of God, and not acquired by the merit of works; and that it comes from heaven, because it is not to be found among men, who are by nature utterly destitute of it. He also explains *truth springing out of the earth* as meaning, that God affords the most incontestable evidence of his faithfulness, in fulfilling what he has promised. But as we ought rather to seek after the solid truth, than exercise our ingenuity in searching out refined interpretations, let us rest contented with the natural meaning of the passage, which is, that mercy, truth, peace, and righteousness, will form the grand and ennobling distinction of the kingdom of Christ. The prophet does not proclaim the praises of men, but commends the grace which he had before hoped for, and supplicated from God only; thus teaching us to regard it as an undoubted truth, that all these blessings flow from God. By the figure synecdoche, some parts being put for the whole, there is described in

This is a remarkable text, and much has been said on it: but there is a beauty in it, which I think has not been noticed.

"*Mercy* and *peace* are on one side: *truth* and *righteousness* on the other. *Truth* requires *righteousness*; *mercy* calls for *peace*.

"They meet together on the way; one going to make inquisition for sin, the other to plead for reconciliation. Having met, their differences on certain considerations (not here particularly mentioned) are adjusted: their mutual claims are blended together in one common interest; on which *peace* and *righteousness* immediately embrace. Thus *righteousness* is given to *truth*; and *peace* is given to *mercy*. "Now, *Where* did these meet? — In Christ Jesus. "When were they reconciled? — When He poured out His life on Calvary."

these four words all the ingredients of true happiness. When cruelty rages with impunity, when truth is extinguished, when righteousness is oppressed and trampled under foot, and when all things are embroiled in confusion, were it not better that the world should be brought to an end, than that such a state of things should continue? Whence it follows, that nothing can contribute more effectually to the promotion of a happy life, than that these four virtues should flourish and rule supreme. The reign of Christ, in other parts of Scripture, is adorned with almost similar encomiums. If, however, any one would rather understand *mercy and truth* as referring to God, I have no disposition to enter into dispute with him. [958] *The springing of truth out of the earth,* and *the looking down of righteousness from heaven,* without doubt imply, that truth and righteousness will be universally diffused, as well above as beneath, so as to fill both heaven and earth. It is not meant to attribute something different to each of them, but to affirm in general, that there will be no corner of the earth where these qualities do not flourish.

12. *Likewise, Jehovah will grant prosperity.* Some take this verse allegorically, and interpret it of the increase of spiritual blessings; but this does not agree with the particle גם, *gam,* rendered *likewise,* by which the prophet, in my opinion, intends to express the completeness of that blessedness of which he had spoken. He therefore mentions the *fruit of the earth,* as an additional proof of God's surpassing beneficence. The chief happiness of the Church is comprehended in these four blessings which he had specified; but the provision which is required for the support of our bodies ought not to be considered as unworthy of attention, provided our care about this matter is kept within proper bounds. If it is objected that these two subjects — the spiritual kingdom of Christ, and the fruitfulness of the earth, are improperly intermingled, it may be easily observed in reply, that there is nothing at all incongruous in this, when we consider that God, while he bestows upon his people spiritual blessings, gives them, in addition to these, some taste of his fatherly love, in the outward benefits which relate to the life of the body; it being evident from the testimony of Paul, that

"godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come," (1 Timothy 4:8.)

But let it be observed, that the faithful generally have only granted to them a limited portion of the comforts of this transitory life: that they may not be lulled asleep by the allurements of earth. I have therefore said, that, while on earth, they only taste of God's fatherly love, and are not filled with an overflowing abundance of the good things of this world. Moreover, we are taught from this verse, that the power and capacity of the earth to produce fruit for the sustenance of our bodies was not given to it once for all, — as the heathen imagine God at the first creation to have adapted each element

958 "Pource qu'on luy defend de se trouver en public et que chacun la repousse." — *Fr.*

to its proper office, while he now sits in heaven in a state of indolence and repose; — but that the earth is from year to year rendered fruitful by the secret influence of God, who designs hereby to afford us a manifestation of his goodness.

13. *Righteousness shall go before him.* The word *righteousness* is taken by some for *a righteous person;* but this is unnatural. Viewed in this light, the passage, indeed, contains the useful and important truth, That the righteous man will walk before God, and will make it his object to regulate all his actions according to the principles of moral rectitude. But there being no necessity for wresting the word *righteousness* so violently, it will be better to adopt the more correct and simple view, which is, that under the reign of Christ order will be so well established, that righteousness will walk before God, and occupy every path. The prophet seems thus to call back the attention of the faithful to what constitutes the chief elements of blessedness; for although God may grant to his servants an abundant supply of sustenance for the body, it is unbecoming for them to have their hearts set upon this. And in truth, one difference between us and the lower animals is, that God, instead of pampering and stuffing our bellies, for the mere gratification of our animal appetites, directs our views to higher and more important objects. When it is said that *righteousness shall go before God,* the meaning is, that the prevalence and unobstructed course of righteousness, which is equivalent to *setting her steps in the way,* is to be attributed to the appointment of God. Isaiah, on the contrary, complains that equity, instead of setting her steps in the way, is prohibited from making her appearance in public, and meets with a universal repulse. "And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter," (Isaiah 59:14.) In this psalm prayers and holy meditations, engaged in with the view of nourishing and confirming faith, together with praises and thanksgivings, are intermingled. It having been difficult in the judgment of carnal reason for David to escape from the distresses with which he was environed, he sets in opposition to its conclusions the infinite goodness and power of God. Nor does he simply request deliverance from his enemies; but he also prays that the fear of God may be implanted and firmly established in his heart.

Psalm 86

PSALM 86

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A Prayer of David.

Psalm 86:1-7

1. Incline thy ear, O Jehovah! answer me; for I am poor and needy. **2.** Preserve my soul, for I am meek: [959] O my God! save thy servant who trusteth in thee. **3.** Have mercy upon me, O Jehovah! for daily [960] do I cry to thee. **4.** Make glad the soul of thy servant; for to thee,

959

"Hezekiah, in the season of distress, 2 Kings 19:16, begins his prayer with these words: which may have occasioned the tradition of the Jews that he made use of this psalm on that occasion." — *Warner.*

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In our English version it is, "for I am holy." Cresswell would rather render, "for I am merciful and pious." "That," says he, "is the meaning of the Hebrew word, which the Septuagint and Jerome have rendered by *holy.* The Psalmist supplicates God's favor upon five several grounds, namely, his destitution, (verse 1;) his mercifulness and goodness, (verse 2;) his trust in God, (verse 2;) his prayerfulness, (verses 3, 4;) and God's goodness, (verse 5.") — *Cresswell.*

O Lord! [961] do I lift up my soul. **5.** For thou, O Lord! art good, and gracious, and of great mercy to all who call upon thee. **6.** Listen, O Jehovah! to my prayer, and attend to the voice of my supplications. **7.** In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee: for thou wilt answer me.

1. *Incline thy ear, O Jehovah!* Neither the inscription nor the contents of this psalm enable us to conclude with certainty what dangers David here complains of; but the psalm in all probability refers to that period of his life when he was persecuted by Saul, and describes the train of thought which then occupied his mind, although it may not have been written until after his restoration to a state of outward peace and tranquillity, when he enjoyed greater leisure. He does not without cause allege before God the oppressions which he endured as a plea for obtaining the divine favor; for nothing is more suitable to the nature of God than to succor the afflicted: and the more severely any one is oppressed, and the more destitute he is of the resources of human aid, the more inclined is God graciously to help him. That despair therefore may not overwhelm our minds under our greatest afflictions, let us support ourselves from the consideration that the Holy Spirit has dictated this prayer for the poor and the afflicted.

2. *Preserve my soul, for I am meek.* Here the Psalmist adduces two other arguments by which to stir up God to grant him succor, — his own gentleness towards his neighbors, and the trust which he reposed in God. In the first clause he may seem at first sight to make some pretensions to personal worth; yet he plainly shows that nothing was farther from his intention than to insinuate that by any merits of his own he had brought God under obligations to preserve him. But the particular mention made of his *clemency* or *meekness* tends to exhibit in a more odious light the wickedness of his enemies, who had treated so shamefully, and with such inhumanity, a man against whom they could bring no well-founded charge, and who had even endeavored to the utmost of his power to please them. [962] Since God then has avowed himself to be the defender both of good causes and of those who follow after righteousness, David, not without good reason, testifies that he had endeavored to exercise kindness and gentleness; that from this it may appear that he was basely requited by his enemies, when they gratuitously acted with cruelty towards a merciful man. But as it would not be enough

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"Ou, tout le jour." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, all the day."

962

Here, and in all the verses in this psalm where אדני, *Adonai*, occurs, many MSS. read יהוה, *Yehovah* We have before observed, (volume 1, page 13, note 2, and page 195, note,) that the Jews, out of reverence to the incommunicable name Jehovah, pronounce אדני where יהוה is in the text. It is, therefore, not improbable that יהוה is the true reading in all these places.

for our lives to be characterised by kindness and righteousness, an additional qualification is subjoined — that of *trust* or *confidence in God,* which is the mother of all true religion. Some, we are aware, have been endued with so high a degree of integrity, as to have obtained among men the praise of being perfectly just, even as Aristides gloried in having never given any man cause of sorrow. But as those men, with all the excellence of their virtues, were either filled with ambition, or inflated with pride, which made them trust more to themselves than to God, it is not surprising to find them suffering the punishment of their vanity. In reading profane history, we are disposed to marvel how it came to pass that God abandoned the honest, the grave, and the temperate, to the enraged passions of a wicked multitude; but there is no reason for wondering at this when we reflect that such persons, relying on their own strength and virtue, despised the grace of God with all the superciliousness of impiety. Making an idol of their own virtue they disdained to lift up their eyes to Him. Although, therefore, we may have the testimony of an approving conscience, and although He may be the best witness of our innocence, yet if we are desirous of obtaining his assistance, it is necessary for us to commit our hopes and anxieties to him. If it is objected, that in this way the gate is shut against sinners, I answer, that when God invites to himself those who are blameless and upright in their deportment, this does not imply that he forthwith repels all who are punished on account of their sins; for they have an opportunity given them, if they will improve it, for prayer and the acknowledgement of their guilt. [963] , But if those whom we have never offended unrighteously assail us, we have ground for double confidence before God.

3 *Have mercy upon me, O Jehovah!* The Psalmist again betakes himself to the mercy of God. The word חנן, *chanan,* which I have rendered *have mercy,* is substantially the same as to *gratify, to do a pleasure.* It is as if he had said, I bring no merit of my own, but humbly pray for deliverance solely on the ground of thy mercy. When he speaks of *crying daily,* it is a proof of his hope and confidence, of which we have spoken a little before. By the word *cry,* as I have already had occasion frequently to remark, is denoted vehemence and earnestness of soul. The saints do not indeed always pray with a loud voice; but their secret sighs and groanings resound and echo upwards, and, ascending from their hearts, penetrate even into heaven. The inspired suppliant not only represents himself as crying, but as persevering in doing so, to teach us that he was not discouraged at the first or second encounter, but continued in prayer with untiring earnestness. In the following verse, he expresses more definitely the end for which he besought God to be merciful to him, which was, that his sorrow might be

963

"Veu que luy qui estoit homme innocent, voire qui s'estoit efforce de tout son pouvoir a leur faire plaisir." — *Fr.*

removed. In the second clause, he declares that there was no hypocrisy in his crying; for he *lifted up his soul* to God, which is the chief characteristic of right prayer.

5 *For thou, O Lord! art good and propitious.* [964] We have here a confirmation of the whole preceding doctrine, derived from the nature of God. It would avail the afflicted nothing to have recourse to him, and to lift up their desires and prayers to heaven, were they not persuaded that he is a faithful rewarder of all who call upon him. The point upon which David now insists is, that God is bountiful and inclined to compassion, and that his mercy is so great, as to render it impossible for him to reject any who implore his aid. He calls God *propitious,* or ascribes to him the attribute of pardoning sin, which is a modification of his goodness. It were not enough for God to be *good* in general, did he not also extend to sinners his forgiving mercy, which is the meaning of the word סלה, *salach.* Farther, although David magnifies the plenteousness of God's mercy, yet he immediately after represents this plenteousness as restricted to the faithful who call upon him, to teach us that those who, making no account of God, obstinately chafe upon the bit, deservedly perish in their calamities. At the same time, he uses the term *all,* that every man, without exception, from the greatest to the least, may be encouraged confidently to betake himself to the goodness and mercy of God.

6 *Listen, O Jehovah! to my prayer.* From the earnest repetition of his former requests in this and the subsequent verse, it is evident that he was oppressed with no ordinary degree of grief, and also agitated with extreme anxiety, From this example, we are taught that those who, having engaged in prayer once, allow themselves immediately to give over that exercise, provided God does not at once grant them their desire, betray the coldness and inconstancy of their hearts. Nor is this repetition of the same requests to be thought superfluous; for hereby the saints, by little and little, discharge their cares into the bosom of God, and this importunity is a sacrifice of a sweet savor before Him. When the Psalmist says, *God will hear me when I cry in the day of trouble,* he makes a particular application to himself of the truth which he had just now stated, That God is merciful and gracious to all who call upon him.

Psalm 86:8-11

8. Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord! nor any that can work as thou workest. **9.** All the nations which thou hast made shall come and worship before thy face, O Lord! and shall give glory to thy name. **10.** For thou art great, and thou alone, O God! doest

964

"Quia illis ad manum est deprecatio." — *Lat.* "Car ils ont en main la priere et recognoissance de leur faute." — *Fr.*

wondrous things. **11.** Show me thy ways, O Jehovah! I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.

8 *Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord!* Here the Psalmist may be considered either as bursting forth into thanksgivings, after having obtained what he desired, or else as gathering courage and new strength for prayer. The latter opinion I am most inclined to adopt; but perhaps it may be preferable to regard both views as included. Some understand the word אלהום, *Elohim,* as denoting *angels — There is none like unto thee, O Lord! among the angels* — as if David compared them with the Most High God; but this does not seem to agree so well with the passage. He does not humble the angels, representing them as inferior gods, that they may give place to the power of God; but he holds up to contempt and derision all the false gods in whom the heathen world imagined some help was to be found; [965] and he does this because they could supply no evidence of their being gods from their works. Had he distributed the power of working between them and the true God in different degrees, assigning less to the former and more to the latter, he would not have attributed to God that which is naturally and exclusively his own. He therefore affirms, without qualification, that no characteristic of Deity could be perceived in them, or traced in any works performed by them. In calling us to the consideration of works, he clearly shows, that those who indulge in ingenious speculations about the occult or secret essence of God, and pass over the unequivocal traces of his majesty which are to be seen beaming forth in bright effulgence in his works, do but trifle and spend their time to no purpose. As the Divine nature is infinitely exalted above the comprehension of our understanding, David wisely confines his attention to the testimony of God's works, and declares that the gods who put forth no power are false and counterfeit. If it is objected that there is no comparison between God and the silly inventions of men, the answer is obvious, That this language is employed in accommodation to the ignorance of the generality of men. The effrontery with which the superstitious exalt the spurious fabrications of their own brain above the heavens is well known; and David very justly derides their madness in forging gods to themselves, which in reality are no gods.

9 *All nations which thou hast made shall come.* [966] If any would rather limit what is here stated to David's present case, this view does not seem liable to any material objection. He, in fact, often enhances the Divine goodness of which he himself had experience by the like magnificent strain. It may, however, be fitly extended to the universal power of God; but whether he speaks of the grace that was bestowed upon himself alone, or

965

The word for "and propitious" is וסלח, *vesallach*, which Bythner renders, "and a pardoner." It is from סלח, *salach*, *he forgave*, *pardoned*

966

treats, in general, of the works of God, we must bear in mind what has been observed in another place, that whenever he celebrates the prevalence of true godliness among the heathen, he has an eye to the kingdom of Christ, prior to whose coming God gave only the initial or dawning manifestation of his glory, which at length was diffused through the whole world by the preaching of the Gospel. David was not ignorant of the future calling of the Gentiles; but this being a doctrine with which Jewish ears were not familiar, that people would have felt it a disagreeable announcement, to have been told that the Gentiles should come to worship God indiscriminately with the children of Abraham, and, all distinction being removed, become partakers with them of heavenly truth. To soften the announcement, he asserts that the Gentiles also *were created by God,* so that it ought not to be accounted strange if they, being enlightened also, should at length acknowledge Him who had created and fashioned them.

10. *For thou art great, and thou alone, O God! doest wondrous things.* In this verse there is again repeated the cause which will bring all nations to worship before the Lord, namely, the discovery made of his glory by the *greatness of his works.* The contemplation of God's glory in his works is the true way of acquiring genuine godliness. The pride of the flesh would always lead it to wing its way into heaven; but, as our understandings fail us in such an extended investigation, our most profitable course is, according to the small measure of our feeble capacity, to seek God in his works, which bear witness of him. Let us therefore learn to awaken our understandings to contemplate the divine works, and let us leave the presumptuous to wander in their own intricate mazes, which, in the end, will invariably land them in an abyss from which they will be unable to extricate themselves. To incline our hearts to exercise this modesty, David magnificently extols the works of God, calling them *wondrous things,* although to the blind, and those who have no taste for them, they are destitute of attraction. In the meantime, we ought carefully to attend to this truth, That the glory of Godhead belongs exclusively to the one true God; for in no other being is it possible to find the wisdom, or the power, or the righteousness, or any of the numerous marks of divinity which shine forth in his wonderful works. Whence it follows, that the Papists are chargeable with rendering, as much as in them lies, his title to true Godhead nugatory, when despoiling him of his attributes they leave him almost nothing but the bare name.

"*Among the gods*, *i.e.*, among the gods of the Gentiles, such as Baal, Baal-berith, Baal-zebub, Dagon, Ashtoreth, Chemosh, Milcom, Nisroch, and especially, as R. Kimchi thinks, the heavenly bodies, the sun and the stars. Some commentators suppose that it may mean, *among angels*, or *among princes.* There is good reason for doubting, however, with Parkhurst, whether the word *Alaim* ever positively means princes, judges, or magistrates; and the passage (Judges 13:22) quoted by Buxtorf, to show that it sometimes means *an angel*, only proves that Manoah intended to say that he had seen God in the person of his angel. Comp. Psalm 89:7; 96:5." — *Cresswell.*

11. *Show me thy ways, O Jehovah!* David now rises higher, praying that he may be governed by the spirit of sound understanding, in order to his living a holy life, and that he may be strengthened in his endeavors thereto by the spirit of fortitude. He tacitly contrasts *the ways of God* with all the counsels which he could derive from carnal reason. In submitting himself to God, and in imploring Him to be his guide, he confesses that the only possible way by which we can be enabled to live a holy and an upright life is, when God goes before us, while we follow after him; and, accordingly, that those who deviate, let it be never so little, from the law through a proud conceit of their own wisdom, wander from the right path. This he more fully confirms, by adding immediately after, *I will walk in thy truth.* He pronounces all to be guilty of vanity and lying who observe not this rule of truth. Farther, his prayer to be taught in the ways of the Lord does not imply that he had been previously altogether ignorant of divine truth; but well aware of the much darkness — of the many clouds of ignorance in which he was still enveloped, he aspires after greater improvement. Let it also be observed, that he is not to be understood as speaking only of external teaching: but having the law among his hands, he prays for the inward light of the Holy Spirit, that he may not labor in the unprofitable task of learning only the letter; according as he prays in another place,

"Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law," (Psalm 119:18.)

If a prophet so distinguished, and so richly endued with the graces of the Holy Spirit, makes such a frank and cordial confession of his own ignorance, how great our folly if we feel not our own deficiency, and are not stirred up to greater diligence in self-improvement from the knowledge of our slender attainments! And, assuredly, the more progress a man has made in the knowledge of the true religion, the more sensible will he be that he is far from the mark. Secondly, it is necessary to add, that reading or hearing is not enough, unless God impart to us inward light by his Spirit.

In addition to this, the Psalmist desires that his heart may be framed for yielding obedience to God, and that it may be firmly established therein; for as our understanding has need of light, so has our will of uprightness. The original words which I have translated, *unite my heart,* are translated by some, *rejoice my heart*, as if the verb were from the root, חדה, *chadah, to rejoice;* [967] but it rather comes from יחד, *yachad, to unite* — a sense which is very suitable to the passage before us. [968] This word contains

967

"This verse has been considered, with great probability, as a prediction of the calling of the Gentiles under the messiah. See Romans 15:9." — *Warner.*

968

The reading of the LXX. is, "Let my heart rejoice," with which the Syriac agrees; and this sense is adopted by several critics, as Muis, Dr Durell, and others.

a tacit contrast, which has not been sufficiently attended to, between the unwavering purpose with which the heart of man cleaves to God when it is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the disquietude with which it is distracted and tossed so long as it fluctuates amidst its own affections. It is therefore indispensably requisite, that the faithful, after having learned what is right, should firmly and cordially embrace it, that the heart may not break forth in impetuous desire after unhallowed lusts. Thus, in the word *unite,* there is a very beautiful metaphor, conveying the idea, that the heart of man is full of tumult, drawn asunder, and, as it were, scattered about in fragments, until God has gathered it to himself, and holds it together in a state of steadfast and persevering obedience. From this also, it is manifest what free will is able to do of itself. Two powers are ascribed to it; but David confesses that he is destitute of both; setting the light of the Holy Spirit in opposition to the blindness of his own mind; and affirming that uprightness of heart is entirely the gift of God.

Psalm 86:12-17

> **12.** I will praise thee, O Lord my God! With all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for ever. **13.** For thy mercy has been great towards me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lower grave. [969] **14.** O God! the proud have risen up against me, and a company of mighty men have sought after my soul; and they have not set thee before them. **15.** And thou, O Lord! art God, merciful, ready to forgive, long-suffering, and abundant in mercy and truth. **16.** Look to me, and have pity upon me: give thy strength to thy servant, and save the son of thy handmaid. **17.** Make with me a sign for good: and my adversaries will see it [970] and be ashamed; for thou, O Jehovah! hast succoured and comforted me.

12. *I will praise thee, O Lord my God!* David engages, when he shall have experienced God to be in all respects a beneficent father, to yield to him the tribute of gratitude. He expressed in the preceding verse a desire to have his heart united to God, that he might fear him; and now he affirms it to be his resolution to publish or celebrate his praises, not only with the mouth or tongue, but also with sincere affection of heart; yea, even to continue with steadfast perseverance in that exercise.

969

Bishop Law would read, "Make my heart *one*, that it may fear thy name;" that is, says he, "Let the fear of thee be the *one* ruling disposition of my soul." — Quoted in Warner's Psalter, with Notes.

970

The original word here for *grave* is שאול, *sheol*; on which Mr Peters remarks, that if *sheol* here meant only a deliverance from death and the grave, the expression, *lower*, or lowest, would be quite unnecessary. "The lower grave" may, however, be a figurative expression for a state of the deepest distress.

In the 13th verse, he sets forth the reason of this, which is, because, in delivering him, God had given a singular and remarkable proof of his mercy. To place in a stronger light the greatness of this benefit, he describes the dangers from which he had been delivered, by the expression, *the lower grave;* as if he had said, I have not been held down by one death only, but have been thrust down into the lowest depths of the grave, so that my circumstances required the hand of God to be stretched out to me in a wonderful manner. By the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we are delivered from a still deeper abyss of death; and such being the case, our ingratitude will be inexcusable, unless each of us exercise himself to the utmost of his power in celebrating this deliverance. If David so highly magnified the name of God merely on account of the prolongation of his life for a short time, what praises are due for this unparalleled redemption by which we are drawn from the depths of hell and elevated to heaven? The Papists attempt to found an argument on this passage in support of their doctrine of Purgatory, as if that were an upper hell, while there was another lower; [971] but this argument is too rotten to stand in need of refutation.

14. *O God! the proud are risen up against me.* Instead of זדים, *zedim, the proud,* some read, זרים, *zarim, strangers;* and, undoubtedly, the Scriptures often employ this word to denote barbarous cruelty, so that it is the same as if it had been said, *the cruel.* I, however, prefer following the generally received reading. As between the Hebrew word זדים, *zedim, the proud,* and זרים, *zarim, strangers,* there is only the difference of a single letter, the one having the letter ד, *daleth,* where the other has the letter ר, *resh,* it is obvious that, from the similarity of these two letters, the former might easily have been changed into the latter. Besides, the word, *proud,* agrees better with the scope of the passage; for, in the same sense, the Psalmist immediately after applies the epithet, *strong,* to those who, with headlong impetuosity and fierceness, rushed upon him to destroy him; and we know that where pride reigns no moderation is observed. He expresses without figure what he had just now said respecting the grave. Being as a lamb in the midst of wolves, he would have been quickly swallowed up, had not God miraculously delivered him, as it were, from the jaws of death. In representing his enemies as having no regard to God, he means to set forth the extreme excess of their cruelty. The fury of our lusts, unless we are restrained by the fear of God and the sense of his judgment, will become so great as to dare any thing, however atrocious. For these calamities he seeks a remedy, in the Divine mercy, in the following verse.

971

Street reads, "That those who hate me may fear. The word יראו," he observes, "if considered without the points, may be the third person plural of ירא, *to fear*; but the authors of all the versions seem to have derived it from ראה, *to see* I read לטובך instead of לטובה."

15. *And thou, O Lord! art God, merciful, ready to forgive.* By immediately passing on to the celebration of these divine attributes, he would intimate, that we have adequate strength and protection against the audacity and rage of the wicked, in the divine goodness, mercy, and faithfulness. Perhaps, also, from his feeling that the wicked were scourges in the hand of God, he set before himself the divine goodness and mercy, to allay the excess of terror with which he might be seized; for this is the true and the only source of comfort, that although God chastise us he does not forget his mercy. This sentence, as is well known, is taken from Exodus 34:6, where we meet with a very remarkable description of the nature of God. First, he is called *merciful;* in the next place, *ready to forgive,* which he manifests by compassionating our distresses. In the third place, he is described as *long-suffering;* for he is not angry whenever an offense is committed against him, but pardons us according to the greatness of his loving-kindness. In short, he is said to be *abundant in mercy and truth;* by which I understand, that his beneficence is continually exercised, and that he is always true. He is indeed no less worthy to be praised on account of his rigour, than on account of his mercy; but as it is our wilful obstinacy alone which makes him severe, compelling him, as it were, to punish us, the Scriptures, in representing him as by nature merciful and ready to forgive, teach us, that if he is at any time rigorous and severe, this is, as it were, accidental to him. I am speaking, it is true, in popular language, and such as is not strictly correct; but still, these terms by which the divine character is described amount in effect to this, That God is by nature so gracious and ready to forgive, that he seems to connive at our sins, delays the infliction of punishment, and never proceeds to execute vengeance unless compelled by our obstinate wickedness. Why the *truth* of God is joined with his *mercy* has been considered in another place. As even those who are most generous sometimes desire to retract the promises which they have made, repenting of their too great facility, we who are accustomed unreasonably to judge of God by ourselves, distrust his promises. God therefore declares, that he is unlike men, because he is as firm to his purpose in abundantly performing whatever he has promised, as he is distinguished for promising liberally.

16. *Look to me, and have pity upon me.* Here the Psalmist makes a more distinct application to himself of what he had said concerning the divine mercy and goodness. As God is merciful, he assures himself that his welfare will be the object of the divine care. The second verb in the verse, חנן, *chanan,* which I have rendered *have pity,* signifies *to gratify, to do one a pleasure;* and is intended to convey the idea, that the succor which God affords to his people proceeds from his free goodness.

[972] Finally, the Psalmist concludes, that the only way in which he can be preserved is by the divine aid, which he seeks to obtain by prayer; and thus he confesses his utter destitution of any strength of his own. In applying to himself the appellation of *God's servant, and the son of his handmaid,* he does not boast of his own services, but urges as a plea, for obtaining greater favor at the divine hand, the long line of his ancestors, and the continual course of God's grace; setting forth, that he was from his mother's womb a household-servant of God, and, as it were, born one of his servants in his house: [973] a point of which we have already spoken elsewhere.

The last verse contains an additional confirmation of the statement, that he was in a manner forsaken of God. He would not have desired to be favored with some token of the divine favor, had he not been on all sides driven to despair, and had not the divine favor been hidden from him to try his patience. It was a proof of no ordinary steadfastness to maintain the conflict with this temptation, and to do this *so successfully,* as not to cease to descry light in the midst of darkness. He desires that *his enemies may be put to shame,* because they assailed his simplicity with mockery and scoffing, as if he had acted a foolish part by trusting in God. The miserable and distressing condition in which the Church was placed after the Babylonish captivity, might be apt to sink the minds of the godly into despondency; and, accordingly, the Holy Spirit here promises her restoration in a wonderful and incredible manner, so that nothing would be more desirable than to be reckoned among the number of her members.

972

"Comme si c'estoit un enfer plus haut, et qu'il y en eust un autre plus bas." — *Fr.*

973

"Et est pour monstrer que le secours que Dieu donne aux siens, procede de sa bonte gratuite." — *Fr.*

Psalm 87

PSALM 87

A Psalm or Song of the sons of Korah.

It is evident, from constant observation, that, so long as the children of this world are in prosperity, they are well satisfied with their condition, and mightily extol it, while they look upon the Church with proud contempt; and even after having endured calamities, they are not so subdued by them as to renounce the foolish presumption by which they are intoxicated. Meanwhile they recklessly despise all religion, and the worship of God, because, contenting themselves with pleasures, riches, and the splendor of honor, they fancy themselves to be happy without him. And then it often happens, that the Lord pampers them with all kind of good things, purposing at length to inflict upon them merited punishment for their ingratitude, when the fit season shall have arrived; while, on the contrary, he loads his Church with various and grievous afflictions, or, at least, keeps her in a low and despised condition, so that she may seem to herself to be miserable, or she is at least exposed to the contempt of others. That the faithful may not be deceived with this shadowy appearance of things, it is of importance to recall their attention to a different subject, that they may be persuaded of the truth of what is stated in Psalm 33:12,

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance."
(Psalm 33:12)

What we are taught in this psalm may be summed up in this, That the Church of God far excels all the kingdoms and politics of the world, inasmuch as she is watched over, and protected by Him in all her interests,

and placed under his government; that, in the first place, amidst the violent commotions and dreadful storms with which the whole world is often shaken, she may continue safe; and, in the second place, and principally, that being wonderfully preserved by the protection of the same God, she may at length, after the toil and struggle of a protracted warfare, be crowned with the triumphant laurels of her high calling. It is in truth a singular benefit of God, and at the same time, a signal miracle, that, amidst the great and various revolutions of the kingdoms of this world, he enlarges her continually from age to age, and preserves her from destruction; so that in the whole world there is nothing enduring but the Church. As, however, it often happens, that whilst the wicked abound in riches, and have lavished upon them worldly possessions and authority, the afflicted Church is tossed amidst many dangers, or rather, is so overwhelmed with impetuous floods as to seem to be entirely shipwrecked, her happiness must be considered as consisting principally in this, that she has reserved for her an everlasting state in heaven.

An attention to the time when this psalm was composed will contribute, in no small degree, to a clear understanding of its contents. Although the people had returned from their captivity in Babylon; although the Church of God had been again gathered together, and united into one body after a long dispersion; although the temple had been rebuilt, the altar set up, and the service of God restored; yet, as of a vast multitude of people, there was only a small portion remaining, which made the condition of the Church very low and despised, — as the number left was daily diminished by their enemies, — and as the temple was far inferior in magnificence to what it originally was; — all this being considered, the faithful had hardly any ground to entertain favorable hopes as to the future. It certainly seemed impossible that they would ever again be raised to their former state from which they had fallen. There was, therefore, reason to apprehend that the minds of the godly, both from the remembrance of the overthrow which they had already experienced, and from the weight of the present miseries with which they were oppressed, would faint and finally sink into despair. That they might not succumb under such heavy adversities, the Lord not only promises in this psalm that they would recover what they had lost, but also encourages them in the hope of an incomparable glory with which the Church should yet be invested, according to that prophecy of Haggai,

"The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former." (Haggai 2:9)

Last of all, it remains that we learn to accommodate this psalm to our own circumstances, and study to derive from it the lessons which it is fitted to convey. The consolation contained in it ought to have had such influence on the godly of that age, as to have made them not only stand erect in the midst of their adversities, but also to have raised them from the grave, and lifted them up to heaven. In the present day, when we know that

whatever was foretold by the Spirit has been fulfilled, we are more than ungrateful if the experience of the fathers, added to the words of the Spirit, does not more powerfully confirm our faith. It is impossible to express in language adequate to the subject the glory with which Christ beautified his Church by his advent. Then the true religion which before had been shut up within the narrow limits of Judea was spread abroad through the whole world. Then God, who had been known only by one family, began to be called upon in the different languages of all nations. Then the world, which had been miserably rent in pieces by innumerable sects of superstition and error, was gathered together into a holy unity of faith. Then all men, vying with each other, associated themselves in companies to the society of the Jews, whom they had before abhorred. Then the kings of the earth and their people voluntarily yielded themselves to the yoke of Christ; wolves and lions were converted into lambs; the gifts of the Holy Spirit were poured out upon the faithful, — gifts which far surpassed all the glory, all the riches, and grandeur, and precious ornaments of the world. [974] The body of the Church also was gathered together out of countries far distant from each other, and was increased and preserved in a wonderful manner. The gospel was spread far and wide within a period of time incredibly short, and equally extraordinary was the rich harvest of fruit with which the preaching of it was succeeded. Although, therefore, the renown of the Church had never been celebrated by this prophecy, yet the goodly and unequalled condition of that age, which may be called the Golden Age, clearly demonstrate that she was truly the heavenly kingdom of God. It was however requisite, even at that period, that the faithful should form their estimate of her excellence by something higher than carnal sense or reason. At the time when she flourished most, it was not purple, gold, and precious stones, which imparted to her the splendor which invested her, but the blood of martyrs. Rich she was in the graces of the Spirit, and yet poor and destitute of earthly possessions. Beautiful and glorious in holiness before God and the angels, she was nevertheless contemptible in the eyes of the world. Without she had many avowed enemies, who either exercised towards her fierce and cruel persecution, or by indirect acts practiced against her, the worst that craft could suggest; while within were alarms and treachery. In short, her dignity, venerable indeed, but yet spiritual, lay as yet hidden beneath the cross of Christ. The consolation, therefore, contained in this psalm was very seasonable, even at that time, for encouraging the faithful to wait for a more perfect state of the Church But the case stands otherwise with us. It has already long ago come to pass, [975] through the default of our fathers,

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"Que des le ventre de sa mere il est serviteur domestique de Dieu, et comme nay d'un sien serviteur en la maison." — *Fr.*

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that that renowned beauty of the Church has lain polluted and disfigured under the feet of the wicked. And at the present day, overwhelmed with the load of our sins, she groans under miserable desolation, under the scornful reproaches of the devil and the world, under the cruelty of tyrants, and under the wicked calumnies of enemies; so that the children of this world, who wish to live at ease, desire nothing less than to be accounted among the people of God. Whence we may perceive the more clearly how much benefit may be derived from this psalm; and, at the same time, how necessary it is to meditate upon it continually. The title does not so much refer to the authors of the psalm as to the chief musicians to whom it was committed to be sung. It is, however, possible that some Levite of the family of Korah composed it.

Psalm 87:1-3

1. His foundations are in the holy mountains. **2.** Jehovah loveth the gates of Zion above all the dwellings of Jacob. **3.** Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God! Selah.

1 *His foundations are in the holy mountains.* Those who conceive that Jerusalem is here meant, as if it were said to *be founded upon the holy mountains,* are in my judgment mistaken; for the relative is in the masculine gender. Some learned men, I am aware, defend this opinion, by supposing that the words, *the people,* are to be supplied, although it is the capital of Judea which is specified. But it is unnecessary for me to say any thing to prove what is apparent to all, that this exposition is forced. Some Jewish interpreters have thought it most probable that this opening sentence is to be referred to the psalm itself; and, accordingly, they explain *foundations* as denoting metaphorically the theme, or subject of the poem, because it treats of the holy city Jerusalem, which was situated upon mountains. But I am surprised that they should have been mistaken in a matter so very obvious. It being quite a common thing among the Hebrews to put a relative without its antecedent, [976] this manner of speaking ought not to seem harsh or strange. The name of God is mentioned a little after; and we know that he is everywhere represented as having founded Jerusalem.

Some by *the mountains* understand Moriah and Zion, [977] which were the two tops of a mountain cleft into two, but this is too forced. As the country

"Lesquels surmontoyent de beaucoup toute la gloire, toutes les richesses et magnificences et les precieux ornemens du monde." — *Fr.*

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"Il est advenu desja de pieca." — *Fr.*

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As examples of this, see 2 Samuel 1:19, 25; Psalm 114:2; Song of Solomon 1:2; Isaiah 23:1; 26:1, 3; 30:4; 41:2; 55:4; Jeremiah 33:2; Lamentations 3:1; Nahum 1:8.

was mountainous, we are rather to understand the prophet as having in his eye the several neighboring and contiguous mountains which formed a chain around Jerusalem; for we will see in another place that Jerusalem was surrounded by mountains, (Psalm 125:2.) The true and natural meaning then is, that God chose the holy mountains in order to found and erect his city in the midst of them. For a little after, in the prosecution of the subject, these words occur, "The Highest himself shall establish her." He is indeed the founder of other cities also; yet we do not read of him saying with respect to any other city,

"This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell; for I have desired it,"
(Psalm 132:14.)

There is this difference, which is always to be remembered, that while other cities were founded and built by the guidance and power of God, merely for the sake of civil government, Jerusalem was his peculiar sanctuary, and his royal seat. Isaiah also uses a similar form of expression, (Isaiah 14:32,) "The Lord hath founded Zion, and the poor of his people shall trust in it." Besides, although the whole country of Judea was consecrated to God, yet he is said to have rejected all the other cities, and to have chosen this one for himself in which to reign. Here the question is not about earthly polity, but spiritual government; for the pure religion, and the true worship of God, and the doctrine of godliness, were at that time to be found nowhere but in Jerusalem.

2 *Jehovah loveth the gates of Zion above all the dwellings of Jacob.* Here we are taught that all the excellence of the holy city depended on the free choice which God had made of it. With this agrees what is stated in Psalm 78:60, 67, that God rejected Shiloh, the tribe of Ephraim, and the tabernacle of Joseph, that he might dwell in Zion which he loved. The prophet then points out the cause why God preferred that one place before all others; and the cause which he assigns is, not the worth of the place itself, but the free love of God. If it is demanded why Jerusalem was so highly distinguished, let this short answer be deemed sufficient, *Because it so pleased God.* To this the divine love is to be traced as its source; but the end of such a choice was, that there might be some fixed place in which the true religion should be preserved, and the unity of the faith maintained, until the advent of Christ, and from which it might afterwards flow into all the regions of the earth. This, then, explains why the prophet celebrates Jerusalem as possessing the high distinction of having God for its master-builder, its founder and protector. Farther, he attributes to the divine favor and adoption whatever excellence it possessed above other places. In putting *Zion* for Jerusalem, and the *gates* for the whole compass of the city, there is a double synecdoche.

3 *Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God!* The reading literally is, *That which is spoken in thee are glorious things.* We must consider the design of the prophet, or rather the object of the Spirit of God, speaking by the mouth of the prophet. From the low and despised condition of the

whole people, from the many and terrible enemies who pressed hard upon them on all sides, from the small number who had sufficient courage to surmount the obstacles in their way, from the new and unlooked-for changes which were daily springing up, from the danger there was lest the state of affairs gradually sinking more and more into decay, should at length become desperate, it was difficult to cherish the hope that the holy city would be restored. That despair might not overcome the hearts of the faithful, and cause them to fail, there is set before them the supporting and consolatory consideration, that the Lord hath spoken differently concerning the future condition of the Church. Their attention, there can be no doubt, is called away from the present aspect of things, and directed to the promises which inspired them with the hope of the wonderful glory with which she should be adorned. Although, therefore, nothing appeared to the eye of sense and reason, calculated greatly to rejoice the heart, yet the prophet would have them encouraged by the word to stand as it were on a watch-tower, waiting patiently for the fulfillment of what God had promised. In this way they were admonished, first, to direct their attention to the ancient prophecies, and to keep in remembrance, especially those which are contained in Isaiah from the fortieth chapter (Isaiah 40) to the end of the book; and, secondly, to give ear to the servants of God, who at that time preached the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Whence it follows that a right judgment cannot be formed of the happiness of the Church, except when we estimate it according to the standard of God's word.

Psalm 87:4-6

4. I will make mention of Rahab, [978] and Babel among them that know me: behold the Philistines, and Tyre, with Ethiopia, [979] he is born there! [980] Selah. **5.** And it shall be said of Zion, Man and man is born in her: and the Most High himself will establish her. **6.** The Lord will recount when he writeth the peoples, he is born there. Selah.

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Warner, who adopts this opinion, observes: — "Though the hills round about Jerusalem (Psalm 125:2) were all *holy*, from their proximity to the *holy city*, yet those of Zion and Moriah (Psalm 48:2) were more especially so, as on them were built the tabernacle, the palace of David, and the temple of Solomon."

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Rahab is a poetical name of Egypt, (Isaiah 30:7; 51:9; Psalm 87:4; 89:11.) It signifies *pride* or *fierceness*, and seems to have been given to Egypt by the Jews, in memorial of the cruel tyranny which had been exercised over them by the Egyptians during their bondage among that people.

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"*Ethiopia*, the land of Cush, which was in Arabia." — *Williams.*

4 *I will make mention of Rahab and Babel.* The name of *Rahab* is put for Egypt in many other parts of Scripture; and this signification is very suitable to the present passage, the object of which is to portray the magnificent amplitude of the Church, which as yet was only matter of hope. It is therefore said that those who formerly were deadly enemies, or entire strangers, shall not only become familiar friends, but shall also be ingrafted into one body, that they may be accounted citizens of Jerusalem. In the first clause it is said, *I will make mention of Egypt and Babylon among my household.* In the second, it is added, that the Philistines, Tyrians, and Ethiopians, who hitherto had been so much at variance with the people of God, shall now be brought into as cordial harmony with them as if they were Jews by birth. What a glorious distinction of the Church, that even those who held her in contempt shall come flocking to her from every quarter, and that those who desired to see her completely cut up and destroyed, shall consider it the highest honor to have a place among the number of her citizens, and to be accounted such! All of them shall voluntarily renounce their own countries in which they had before proudly boasted. Wherever they may have been born, whether in Palestine, or Ethiopia, or Tyre, they shall profess themselves citizens of the holy city.

The Hebrew doctors explain this passage as meaning, that there shall spring from other nations very few who shall excel either in mental endowment or in virtuous attainment, but that in Israel such persons will be very numerous. Scarcely, say they, will there be found among the Tyrians, the Egyptians, the Ethiopians, and other nations, a man to each of them worthy of praise; so that if such an one be found among them, he may be pointed at with the finger, on account of his rarity; but *in Zion man and man shall be born;* [981] that is to say, the number of such men among the Jews shall be great. Christian doctors are almost unanimous in referring these words to Christ, and think that the cause is here assigned why those who hitherto were strangers, and even mortal enemies to each other, are now to be numbered among the citizens of Jerusalem, namely, because Christ shall be born there, [982] whose office it is to gather together into the unity of faith and hope of eternal life, men who were scattered like members torn from the body. The first of these interpretations being altogether forced, needs no refutation. Moreover, it is very evident that the Jews, actuated by a foolish ambition, wrest this passage as it were purposely. The exposition

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"These nations, as amongst those best known to the Jews, typify the entire Gentile world; and are intended to declare the accession of all the earth to the faith of Christianity." — *Tucker.*

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"*But of Zion it shall be said*, He and He *were born there*; *i.e.*, not one, but many men of note." — *Geddes.*

of the Christian doctors is, at first sight, plausible from its ingenuity; but it is destitute of solidity. The words clearly imply, that whatever nation men may belong to, they shall willingly renounce their own country, to be enrolled in the Register of the chosen people. When it is said, that *they are born there,* this does not mean that they are natives of the country, and have been brought up in it from their birth, but that they are its citizens. What is added afterwards, *The Most High himself will establish her,* may, with equal propriety, be translated, *will order her;* it being the work of God specially to govern his Church by his word.

5 *And it shall be said of Zion, Man and man is born in her.* It is asserted, in the 4th verse, That new citizens shall be gathered into the Church of God from different parts of the world; and here the same subject is prosecuted. Another figure is however employed, which is, that strangers by birth shall be accounted among the holy people, just as if they were descended from Abraham. It had been stated in the preceding verse, that the Chaldeans and Egyptians would be added to the household of the Church; and that the Ethiopians, Philistines, and Tyrians, would be enrolled among her children. Now, it is added, by way of confirmation, that the number of the new progeny shall be exceeding great, so that the city which had been for a time uninhabited, and afterwards only half filled with a few people, shall be crowded with a vast population. The prophet Isaiah describes more at length what is here promised, in a few words,

"Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes: for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited." (Isaiah 54:1)

Also,

"Lift up thine eyes round about, and see; all they gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters shall be nursed at thy side."
(Isaiah 60:4)

And, in the 44th chapter, at the 5th verse, we meet with almost the same language as in the passage before us, or at least what comes very near to it: "One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." Nor is the word *born* inappropriately employed to express the fact, that the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and such like, shall be of the flock of God's people. Although Zion was not the place of their natural birth, but they were to be grafted into the body of the holy people by adoption; yet as the way by which we enter into the Church is a second

birth, this form of expression is used with great propriety. The condition upon which Christ espouses the faithful to himself is, that they should forget their own people and their father's house, (Psalm 45:11,) and that, being formed into new creatures, and born again of incorruptible seed, they should begin to be the children of God as well as of the Church, (Galatians 4:19.) And the ministry of the Church, and it alone, is undoubtedly the means by which we are born again to a heavenly life. By the way, we should remember the difference which the Apostle sets forth as subsisting between the earthly Jerusalem, — which, being herself a bondwoman, brings forth children also in bondage, — and the heavenly Jerusalem, which brings forth free children by the instrumentality of the Gospel.

In the second part of the verse, there is expressed the stability and enduring character of Zion. It often happens, that in proportion to the rapidity with which cities rise to distinguished eminence, is the shortness of the continuance of their prosperity. That it may not be thought that the prosperity of the Church is of such a perishable and transitory nature, it is declared, that *the Most High himself will establish her* It is not surprising, as if it had been said, to find other cities shaken, and subject from time to time to a variety of vicissitudes; for they are carried round with the world in its revolutions, and do not enjoy everlasting defenders. But it is the very reverse with respect to the new Jerusalem, which, being founded upon the power of God, will continue even when heaven and earth shall fall into ruins.

6 *The Lord will recount, when he writeth the peoples.* The meaning is, that Zion will acquire such renown as to excite all men with the greatest earnestness to desire to be admitted into the number and rank of her citizens. It is a highly honorable condition which is spoken of, the language implying, that when God shall take a census of the people on whom he will be graciously pleased to confer the highest honor, he will write them as belonging to Zion, rather than to Babylon or any other cities; for to be one of the common people among the citizens of Zion, will be a greater distinction than to be invested with the highest rank anywhere else. We are, at the same time, taught that the cause to which we are to trace the sudden elevation of these aliens to so great honor, is the favor of God. Those who are the bondslaves of Satan and of sin will assuredly never be able to obtain, by any efforts of their own, the right of citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem. It is the Lord's peculiar work to divide people into their respective ranks, distinguishing one from another, as seemeth good to him, all men being on a level by nature. This passage is to be understood as referring to effectual calling. God, it is true, wrote the names of his children in the Book of Life before the creation of the world; but he enrols them in the catalogue of his saints, only when, having regenerated them by the Spirit of adoption, he impresses his own mark upon them.

Psalm 87:7

7. And the singers as the players upon instruments: all my springs are in thee. [983]

The meaning of this verse is obscure, partly from its abrupt brevity, and partly from the ambiguity of one word. The word *springs* is, beyond all controversy, to be here taken metaphorically; but interpreters are not agreed as to the explanation of the metaphor. Some understand it as denoting *hopes,* some *affections,* and others *thoughts.* Did the idiom of the language admit, I would willingly subscribe to the opinion of those who translate it *melodies* or *songs.* But as this might be considered unsupported by the usage of the Hebrew term, I am rather inclined to adopt, as most suitable to the subject in hand, the opinion that *lookings* is the proper translation, the root of the word signifying *an eye.* It is as if the Psalmist had said, I will always be earnestly looking, as it were, with fixed eyes upon thee.

Let us now inquire what is meant by the other clause, *The singers as the players upon instruments.* This, it is true, is an abrupt form of expression; but the sense, about which there is a general agreement, is, that so great will be the ground for rejoicing, that the praises of God will resound in Zion continually, with the energy of the living voice, as well as with musical instruments. This, then, is a confirmation of what was spoken before concerning the glorious restoration of Zion; for by the greatness of the joy, and the manifold harmony and melody of praises, is portrayed the happiness which shall prevail in the midst of it. At the same time, we have here described the great design of all the gifts which God has conferred upon his Church with so liberal a hand; namely, that the faithful, by hymns and songs, should testify their remembrance of his benefits and gratefully acknowledge them. [984] The Hebrew word חוללים, *cholelim,* which we have rendered *the players upon instruments,* is translated by some, *those who*

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Horsley, who takes this view, translates —

"And every one shall say of Zion,
He was born there:"

on which he has the following note: — "*Unusquisque*, every one. Every one shall confess, to the honor of the Israelites, that the Savior was a native Jew." Dimock objects to this, observing that Christ was not born at Jerusalem.

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dance to the sound of instruments. [985] But this is a matter of no great importance, it being enough to consider the meaning, in short, as this, that there will be a continual concert of God's praises in the Church, where he unfolds the treasures of his grace, and that the faithful will be heard singing successively and in response. Moreover, the prophet shows his singular love to the Church, and the singular care and zeal which he exercised about her, to encourage and stir up all the godly, by his example, to cultivate and manifest the same zeal, agreeably to what is stated in another psalm,

"If I forget thee, O Jerusalem! let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." (Psalm 137:5)

All our affections are then settled on the Church, when, gathered in from the vague and vain objects by which they are distracted, and regarding with indifference the honors, pleasures, riches, and pageantries of the world, they find enough to engage and satisfy them in the spiritual glory of Christ's kingdom, and in that alone.

Cresswell connects the second clause of this verse with the first, in this manner: — "Singers also, and players upon the pipe, shall chant, 'All my wells are in thee;'" *i.e.*, says he, "all my sources of refreshment, of hope, and of salvation, are in thee, O Zion!" He adds, "The phrase, *wells of salvation*, occurs in Isaiah 12:3, the Hebrew word being the same as that which, in our two English versions of the Psalms, is translated *springs* and *fountains*." Walford connects the two clauses in the same manner, "They sing with musical instruments, 'All my springs are in thee.'" "The persons who are here said to sing," he observes, "accompanied by musical instruments, are the people spoken of in verse 6. They are described as uniting in a joyful song of praise and thanksgiving; and the burden of their song is, 'All my springs are in thee.' Springs or fountains are a constant image for the blessings which are productive of refreshment and happiness. These new-born converts are, therefore, represented as joining the universal Church, and offering ascriptions of praise to God, who is the overflowing source of all the streams of good, which refresh and bless the people."

985

"Afin que les fideles en chantant Pseaumes et Cantiques monstrent la souvenance qu'ils ont des benefices receus, et luy en facent recognoissance." — *Fr.*

Psalm 88

PSALM 88

This psalm contains very grievous lamentations, poured forth by its inspired penman when under very severe affliction, and almost at the point of despair. But he, at the same time, whilst struggling with sorrow, declares the invincible steadfastness of his faith; which he displayed in calling upon God to deliver him, even when he was in the, deep darkness of death. [986]

A Song or Psalm of the sons of Korah. To the chief musician upon Machalath, to make humble. An instruction of Heman, the Ezrahite.

Heman, whose name appears in the inscription, is probably the same person who is mentioned in sacred history, 1 Kings 4:31, where Solomon, when commended for his wisdom, is compared with Ethan, Heman, Chalcol, and Darda. [987] It is, therefore, not surprising that a man, so highly distinguished by the spirit of wisdom, was the author of this psalm. Some

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"*As well the singers as players*, or *dancers*, *shall be there*; *i e.*, the whole chorus of joy and praise. Dr Chandler renders it, 'They shall sing like those that lead up the dance;' *i e.*, with joy and exultation." — *Williams* Symmachus and Aquila translate the text:—...Και ἀδοντες ὡς χωροι, πασαι πηγαι εν σοι:"And they shall sing as in leading up a dance; 'All my fountains are in thee.'"

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translate מהלת-על, *al-machalath, upon infirmity;* [988] but it is probable, according to the ordinary use of the word, that it denotes either some instrument of music, or the beginning of some song. [989] Of the other words I have already sufficiently spoken elsewhere. Moreover, it is of importance to bear in mind, that in the person of one man there is presented to our view an example at once of rare affliction and of singular patience. God, in so sorely exercising Heman, whom he had adorned with such excellent gifts to be an example to others, did not do this for the sake of his servant only. His object was to present common matter of instruction to all his people. Carrying out this object, Heman ascending, as it were, an elevated stage, testifies to the whole Church his infirmities as well as his faith and constancy. It greatly concerns us to look upon such a distinguished servant of God, and one who was so eminently adorned with the graces of the Holy Spirit, thus overwhelmed with so heavy a burden of afflictions as made him mournfully complain that he differed nothing from a dead man, — it greatly concerns

There are various opinions as to the occasion of the composition of this psalm. Dr Kennicott conceives it to be the prayer of a person shut up in a separate house because of the leprosy, who seems to have been in the last stage of that distemper; this disease, under the Mosaic dispensation, having been supposed to come from the immediate stroke of God. Kimchi is of opinion that it was written in the name of the Jewish people during the captivity, in the language of a poor slave under his chains. Bishop Patrick supposes that Heman, the author of it, was during the same period cast into a dark prison, (see verses 5, 6,) or, that he was otherwise as miserably treated, as if he had been in a dungeon; and that he here bewails his private calamity.

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The Heman mentioned in that text has been supposed by some to be the son of Zerah, one of Judah's sons, by his daughter-in-law Tamar, spoken of in 1 Chronicles 2:6. If these two passages refer to the same persons, then as the grandchildren of Judah are called in 1 Kings 4:31, the sons of Mahol, it would follow that Mahol was either another name of Zerah or the name of his wife. If this Heman was the author of the psalm before us, and if Ethan, his brother, wrote the subsequent psalm, as they lived at least one hundred and seventy years before Moses, these poems are the oldest poetical compositions extant, and the most ancient part of divine revelation. This, however, is far from being certain. Heman, the grandson of Judah, may have been the author of the 78th psalm; but the 79th could not have been written by Ethan, his brother, as it speaks of transactions that took place long after his time, at least as late as the days of David, who is particularly mentioned in it. Calvin obviously considers this Heman to have lived in the time of David or Solomon. There is a person of the same name who was constituted by David one of the chiefs of the sacred singers, 1 Chronicles 25:1. But he was a Levite, whereas the present Heman is called an Ezrahite, which is understood to denote a descendant from Zerah, the son of Judah. If, therefore, the chief musician in the time of David be intended, some transcriber must have erroneously applied to him the term *Ezrahite*. But if the psalm, as is supposed by many, was written during the Babylonish captivity, it must have been written by a different person.

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Street renders the title, "An instructive psalm in sickness, through affliction, by Aiman, the Ezrahite." He observes, "מחלה, *sickness*, is used, Exodus 23:25. The word מהלת, is the construct form of it." He adds — "The title thus translated agrees with the matter contained in the psalm."

us, I say, to look on this spectacle, that our distresses, however grievous, may not overwhelm us with despair; or if we should at times be ready to faint through weariness, care, grief, sorrow, or fear, that we may not on that account despond, especially when we see that it is not without the highest effort that the holy prophet emerges from this profound darkness into the cheering light of hope. We should rather rest assured that the Spirit of God, by the mouth of Heman, has here furnished us with a form of prayer for encouraging all the afflicted who are, as it were, on the brink of despair to come to himself.

Psalm 88:1-5

1. O Jehovah! God of my salvation! I cry day and night before thee. **2.** Let my prayer come into thy presence: incline thy ear to my cry; **3.** For my soul is filled with troubles; and my life is drawing near to the grave. **4.** I am numbered with them that go down to the pit: I have been as a man who hath no strength: **5.** Free among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom thou rememberest no more, and who are cut off from thy hand.

1 *O Jehovah! God of my salvation!* Let me call upon you particularly to notice what I have just now stated, that although the prophet simply, and without hyperbole, recites the agony which he suffered from the greatness of his sorrows, yet his purpose was at the same time to supply the afflicted with a form of prayer that they might not faint under any adversities, however severe, which might befall them. We will hear him by and by bursting out into vehement complaints on account of the grievousness of his calamities; but he seasonably fortifies himself by this brief exordium, lest, carried away with the heat of his feelings, he might become chargeable with complaining and murmuring against God, instead of humbly supplicating Him for pardon. By applying to Him the appellation of *the God of his salvation,* casting, as it were, a bridle upon himself, he restrains the excess of his sorrow, shuts the door against despair, and strengthens and prepares himself for the endurance of the cross. When he speaks of his crying and importunity, he indicates the earnestness of soul with which he engaged in prayer. He may not, indeed, have given utterance to loud cries; but he uses the word *cry,* with much *propriety',* to denote the great earnestness of his prayers. The same thing is implied when he tells us that he continued crying *days and nights.* Nor are the words *before thee* superfluous. It is common for all men to complain when under the pressure of grief; but they are far from pouring out their groanings before God. Instead of this, the majority of mankind court retirement, that they may murmur against him, and accuse him of undue severity; while others pour forth their cries into the air at random. Hence we gather that it is a rare virtue to set God before our eyes, that we may address our prayers to him.

3 *For my soul is filled with troubles.* These words contain the excuse which the prophet pleads for the excess of his grief. They imply that his continued crying did not proceed from softness or effeminacy of spirit, but that from a due consideration of his condition, it would be found that the immense accumulation of miseries with which he was oppressed was such as might justly extort from him these lamentations. Nor does he speak of one kind of calamity only; but of calamities so heaped one upon another that his heart was filled with sorrow, till it could contain no more. He next particularly affirms that his life was not far from the grave. This idea he pursues and expresses in terms more significant in the following verse, where he complains that he *was,* as it were, dead. Although he breathed still among the living, yet the many deaths with which he was threatened on all sides were to him so many graves by which he expected to be swallowed up in a moment. And he seems to use the word גבר*, geber,* which is derived from גבר*, gabar, he prevailed,* or *was strong,* [990] in preference to the word which simply signifies *man,* — the more emphatically to show that his distresses were so great and crushing as to have been sufficient to bring down the strongest man.

5 *Free among the dead, lie the slain who lie in the grave.* The prophet intended to express something more distressing and grievous than common death. First, he says, that *he was free among the dead,* because he was rendered unfit for all the business which engages human life, and, as it were, cut off from the world. The refined interpretation of Augustine, that Christ is here described, and that he is said to be free among the dead, because he obtained the victory over death by a special privilege, that it might not have dominion over him, has no connection with the meaning of the passage. [991] The prophet is rather to be understood as affirming, that having finished the course of this present life, his mind had become disengaged from all worldly solicitude; his afflictions having deprived him of all feeling. [992] In the next place, comparing himself with *those who have been wounded,* he bewails his condition as worse than if, enfeebled by calamities, he were going down to death by little and little; for we are naturally inspired with horror at the prospect of a violent death.

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See volume 2, page 320, note 2. Some consider the words לענות מחלת, *Machalath Leannoth*, which Calvin renders "Machalath, to make humble," as together denoting an instrument of music. "For my part," says Dr Morison, "I lean to the idea that these words are intended to denote some musical instrument of the plaintive order; and in this opinion Kimchi and other Jewish writers perfectly agree. They assert that it was a wind-instrument, answering very much to the flute, and employed mainly in giving utterance to sentiments of grief, upon occasions of great sorrow and lamentation."

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גבר *geber*, therefore, denotes a *man* "when in vigorous manhood; who is neither a boy nor an old man, yet it is applied to Balaam, when old, in Numbers 24:4." — *Bythner*

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What he adds, that *he is forgotten of God, and cut off from his hand* or *guardianship,* is apparently harsh and improper, since it is certain that the dead are no less under the Divine protection than the living. Even wicked Balaam, whose purpose it was to turn light into darkness, was, nevertheless, constrained to cry out,

"Let me die the death of the righteous,
and let my last end be like his," (Numbers 23:10.)

To say, then, that God is no longer mindful of man after he is dead, might seem to be the language of a heathen. To this it may be answered, That the prophet speaks according to the opinion of the generality of men; just as the Scriptures, in like manner, when treating of the providence of God, accommodate their style to the state of the world as presented to the eye, because our thoughts ascend only by slow degrees to the future and invisible world. I, however, think, that he rather gave utterance to those confused conceptions which arise in the mind of a man under affliction, than that he had an eye to the opinion of the ignorant and uninstructed part of mankind. Nor is it wonderful that a man endued with the Spirit of God was, as it were, so stunned and stupified when sorrow overmastered him, as to allow unadvised words to escape from his lips. Although faith in the truth that God extends his care both to the living and the dead is deeply rooted in the hearts of all his genuine servants, yet sorrow often so overclouds their minds as to exclude from them for the time all remembrance of his providence. From perusing the complaints of Job, we may perceive, that when the minds of the godly are preoccupied with sorrow, they do not immediately pierce to the consideration of the secret providence of God, which yet has been before the subject of their careful meditation, and the truth of which they bear engraven on their hearts. Although the prophet, then, was persuaded that the dead also are under the Divine protection, yet, in the first paroxysm of his grief, he spoke less advisedly than he ought to have done; for the light of faith was, as it were, extinguished in him, although, as we shall see, it soon after shone forth. This it will be highly useful particularly to observe, that, should we be at any time weakened by temptation, we may, nevertheless, be kept from falling into despondency or despair.

Psalm 88:6-9

6. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in dark places, in the deeps. **7.** Thy indignation lieth heavy upon me; and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves. Selah. **8.** Thou hast removed my acquaintances from me: thou hast made me to be abhorred by them: I am shut up

"'Free among the dead,' *inter mortuos liber*," says Dr Adam Clarke, "has been applied by the Fathers to our Lord's voluntary death: all others were *obliged* to die; He alone *gave up his life*, and could take it again, (John 10:18.) He went into the grave and came out when he *chose*. The dead are *bound* in the grave: *He* was *free*, and not obliged to continue in that state as they were."

that I cannot go forth. **9.** My eye mourneth because of my affliction;
I invoke thee, O Jehovah! daily: I stretch out my hands to thee.

6 *Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit.* The Psalmist now acknowledges more distinctly, that whatever adversities he endured proceeded from the Divine hand. Nor indeed will any man sincerely betake himself to God to seek relief without a previous persuasion that it is the Divine hand which smites him, and that nothing happens by chance. It is observable that the nearer the prophet approaches God the more is his grief embittered; for nothing is more dreadful to the saints than the judgment of God.

Some translate the first clause of the 7th verse, *Thy indignation hath approached upon me;* and the Hebrew word סמך, *samach,* is sometimes to be taken in this sense. But from the scope of the passage, it must necessarily be understood here, as in many other places, in the sense of *to surround,* or *to lie heavy upon;* for when the subject spoken of is a man sunk into a threefold grave, it would be too feeble to speak of the wrath of God as merely approaching him. The translation which I have adopted is peculiarly suitable to the whole drift of the text. It views the prophet as declaring, that he sustained the whole burden of God's wrath; seeing *he was afflicted with His waves.* Farther, as so dreadful a flood did not prevent him from lifting up his heart and prayers to God, we may learn from his example to cast the anchor of our faith and prayers direct into heaven in all the perils of shipwreck to which we may be exposed.

8 *Thou hast removed my acquaintances from me.* He was now destitute of all human aid, and *that* also he attributes to the anger of God, in whose power it is either to bend the hearts of men to humanity, or to harden them, and render them cruel. This is a point well worthy of our attention; for unless we bear in mind that our destitution of human aid in any case is owing to God's withdrawing his hand, we agitate ourselves without end or measure. We may indeed justly complain of the ingratitude or cruelty of men whenever they defraud us of the just claims of duty which we have upon them; but still this will avail us nothing, unless we are thoroughly convinced that God, being displeased with us, takes away the means of help which he had destined for us; just as it is easy for him, whenever he pleases, to incline the hearts of all men to stretch forth their hand to succor us. The prophet, as an additional and still more grievous element in his distressed condition, tells us that his friends *abhorred him.* [993] Finally, he concludes

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by observing, that he could perceive no way of escape from his calamities: *I am shut up that I cannot go forth.* [994]

9. *My eye mourneth because of my affliction.* To prevent it from being supposed that he was iron-hearted, he again repeats that his afflictions were so severe and painful as to produce manifest traces of his sorrow, even in his countenance and eyes — a plain indication of the low condition to which he was reduced. But he, notwithstanding, testifies that he was not drawn away from God, like many who, secretly murmuring in their hearts, and, to use a proverbial expression, chafing upon the bit, have nothing farther from their thoughts than to disburden their cares into the bosom of God, in order to derive comfort from Him. In speaking of *the stretching out of his hands,* he puts the sign for the thing signified. I have elsewhere had an opportunity of explaining the import of this ceremony, which has been in common use in all ages.

Psalm 88:10-13

10. Wilt thou perform a miracle for the dead? shall the dead [995] arise to praise thee? Selah. **11.** Shall thy loving kindness be declared in the

This verse has been supposed to contain a reference to the condition of the leper under the law, which much resembled the picture here drawn. חפשי, *chophshi*, from חפש, *chophash*, "is *free*," says Hammond, ("in opposition to *servitude*,) *manumitted*, *set at liberty* The use of this word may more generally be taken from 2 Chronicles 26:21, where of Uzziah, being a leper, it is said, that he dwelt, החפשית בית, 'in an house of freedom, for he was cut off from the house of the Lord.' The meaning is, that after the manner of the lepers, he was excluded from the temple, and dwelt, ירושלם מן בר, saith the Chaldee, there, in some place without Jerusalem, which is therefore called the 'house of freedom,' because such as were there were exempt from the common affairs, and shut up from the conversation of men. And in comparison with these, they that are, as it were, dead and laid in their graves, are here said to be free, *i e.*, removed from all the affairs and conversation of the world."

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"This verse," observes Dr Adam Clarke, "has been supposed to express the state of a leper, who, because of the infectious nature of his disease, is separated from his family, — is abominable to all, and at last shut up in a separate house, whence he does not come out to mingle with society." "Heman means," says Walford, "either that the character of his disease was such that men could not endure to be near him, or that the state of his mind was so disordered that he became wearisome and intolerable; perhaps he includes both."

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According to Cresswell, the meaning of this clause is, "That the Psalmist confined himself to his house from the fear of encountering, if he were abroad, the revilings of his former friends." Walford explains it as follows — "Either his state of feeling was such as induced him to withdraw himself altogether from society, or he was so environed by hopeless misery, that he regarded himself as a wretch confined in a dungeon, whence he could not escape." Horsley reads, "I am shut up apart, and am not permitted to come out." He observes, that *shut up apart* is the proper sense of כלא, and adds, that "when it denotes confinement, it always implies solitary confinement."

grave? thy truth in destruction? [996] **12.** Shall thy wonders be known in darkness? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? **13.** But to thee have I cried, O Jehovah! and in the morning my prayer shall come before thee. [997]

10. *Wilt thou perform a miracle for the dead?* By these words the prophet intimates, that God, if he did not make haste to succor him, would be too late, there being scarce anything betwixt him and death; and that therefore this was the critical juncture, if God was inclined to help him, for should the present opportunity not be embraced another would not occur. He asks how long God meant to delay, — if he meant to do so till death intervened, that he might raise the dead by a miracle? He does not speak of the resurrection at the last day, which will surpass all other miracles, as if he called it in question; yet he cannot be vindicated from the charge of going to excess, for it does not belong to us to prescribe to God the season of succouring us. We impeach his power if we believe not that it is as easy for him to restore life to the dead as to prevent, in proper season, the extreme danger which may threaten us from actually lighting upon us. Great as has been the constancy of the saints, it has always had some mixture of the infirmity of the flesh, which has rendered it necessary for God, in the exercise of his fatherly clemency, to bear with the sin with which even their very virtues have been to a degree contaminated. When the Psalmist asks, *Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave?* he does not mean that the dead are devoid of consciousness; but he pursues the same sentiment which he had previously stated, That it is a more seasonable time to succor men, whilst in the midst of danger they are as yet crying, than to raise them up from their graves when they are dead. He reasons from what ordinarily happens; it not being God's usual way to bring the dead out of their graves to be witnesses and publishers of his goodness. To God's *loving-kindness* or *mercy* he annexes his *truth* or *faithfulness;* for when God delivers his servants he gives a confirmation of his faithfulness to his promises. And, on the other hand, he is influenced to make his promises by nothing but his own pure goodness. When the prophet affirms, that the divine faithfulness as well as the divine goodness, power, and righteousness, *are not known in the*

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The Hebrew word for *the dead*, in the first clause of the verse, is מתים, *methim*; here it is רפאים, *rephaim* This last "Hebrew word," says Parkhurst, "means 'dead bodies reduced,' or 'resolved into their original dust.' I know not (he adds) of any one English word that will express it: *remains*, or relics, come as near to it as any that I can recollect. It is several times put after מתים, 'the dead,' as of more intense signification." (See Parkhurst's Lexicon,רפא, 2.) "Mortui, qui vivere desierunt, manes, proprie *flaccidi*." — *Simonis* According to Dr Adam Clarke, רפאים, *rephaim*, means "the manes or departed spirits." The Chaldee paraphrases this word "the carcases that are putrefied in the dust."

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"C'est, la mort." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, death."

land of forgetfulness, some deluded persons foolishly wrest the statement to support a gross error, as if it taught that men were annihilated by death. He speaks only of the ordinary manner in which help is extended by God, who has designed this world to be as a stage on which to display his goodness towards mankind.

13. *But to thee have I cried, O Jehovah!* There may have been a degree of intemperateness in the language of the prophet, which, as I have granted, cannot be altogether vindicated; but still it was a sign of rare faith and piety to persevere as he did with never-failing earnestness in prayer. This is what is meant when he says, that *he made haste in the morning;* by which he would have us not to imagine that he slowly and coldly lingered till he was constrained by dire necessity. At the same time, he modestly intimates by these words, that his pining away in long continued miseries was not owing to his own sluggishness, as if he had not sought God. This is an example particularly worthy of notice, that we may not become discouraged if it happen sometimes that our prayers are for a time unsuccessful, although they may proceed from the heart, and may be assiduously persevered in.

Psalm 88:14-18

14. Wherefore, O Jehovah! wilt thou reject my soul? and hide thy face from me? **15.** I am afflicted, and ready to die from my youth; I have suffered thy terrors by doubting. **16.** Thy wraths have passed over me: thy terrors have cut me off. **17.** They have daily encompassed me like waters: they have surrounded me together. **18.** Thou hast put far from me friend and companion: and my acquaintances are darkness. [998]

14. *Wherefore, O Jehovah! wilt thou reject my soul?* These lamentations at first sight would seem to indicate a state of mind in which sorrow without any consolation prevailed; but they contain in them tacit prayers. The Psalmist does not proudly enter into debate with God, but mournfully desires some remedy to his calamities. This kind of complaint justly deserves to be reckoned among the unutterable groanings of which Paul makes mention in Romans 8:26. Had the prophet thought himself rejected and abhorred by God, he certainly would not have persevered in prayer. But here he sets forth the judgment of the flesh, against which he strenuously and magnanimously struggled, that it might at length be manifest from the result that he had not prayed in vain. Although, therefore, this psalm does not end with thanksgiving, but with a mournful complaint, as if there remained no place for mercy, yet it is so much the more useful as a means of keeping us in the duty of prayer. The prophet, in heaving these sighs, and

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Or prevent thee — Come before the usual hour of morning prayer. — See Mark 1:35.

discharging them, as it were, into the bosom of God, doubtless ceased not to hope for the salvation of which he could see no signs by the eye of sense. He did not call God, at the opening of the psalm, *the God of his salvation,* and then bid farewell to all hope of succor from him.

The reason why he says that *he was ready to die* [999] *from his youth,* (verse 15,) is uncertain, unless it may be considered a probable conjecture that he was severely tried in a variety of ways, so that his life, as it were, hung by a thread amidst various tremblings and fears. Whence also we gather that *God's wraths and terrors,* of which he speaks in the 16th verse, were not of short continuance. He expresses them in the 17th verse as having encompassed him *daily.* Since nothing is more dreadful than to conceive of God as angry with us, he not improperly compares his distress to a flood. Hence also proceeded his *doubting.* [1000] for a sense of the divine anger must necessarily have agitated his mind with sore disquietude. But it may be asked, How can this wavering agree with faith? It is true, that when the heart is in perplexity and doubt, or rather is tossed hither and thither, faith seems to be swallowed up. But experience teaches us, that faith, while it fluctuates amidst these agitations, continues to rise again from time to time, so as not to be overwhelmed; and if at any time it is at the point of being stifled, it is nevertheless sheltered and cherished, for though the tempests may become never so violent, it shields itself from them by reflecting that God continues faithful, and never disappoints or forsakes his own children.

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"C'est, se cachent." — *Fr. marg.* "That is, hide themselves." Walford reads, "The darkness of death is my associate;" on which he has the following note: — "*The darkness of death.* I take this literally to mean, 'My acquaintance, or he that knoweth me, is darkness personified:' — orcus, abaddon."

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The original word for "ready to die" is גוע, *goveang* It is literally, *I labour*, or *pant for breath*, *I breathe with pain and difficulty*, as a person in great affliction and distress. The verb sometimes signifies *to expire*; but it does not so strictly express as imply *death*, from the obstruction of breathing that accompanies it. (See Parkhurst's Lexicon, גגע, 1, 2.)

Psalm 89

PSALM 89

The prophet who wrote this psalm, whoever he was, in approaching the throne of grace to make supplication to God in behalf of the afflicted Church, lays down, as an encouragement both to himself and the rest of the faithful to cherish good hope, the covenant which God had made with David. He then adverts in general to the Divine power which is discerned in the whole government of the world. And next, he calls to remembrance the redemption in which God had given an everlasting testimony of his fatherly love towards his chosen people. Thence, he again returns to the covenant made with David, in which God had promised to continue his favor towards that people for ever, for the sake of their king. Finally, he subjoins a complaint that God, as if he had forgotten his covenant, abandoned his Church to the will of her enemies, and, in the midst of strange disaster and mournful desolation, withheld all succor and consolation.

An instruction of Ethan, the Ezrahite.

Who this Ethan was, to whom this psalm is ascribed, is somewhat uncertain. If we should consider him to have been one of the four eminent men to whom Solomon is compared for his distinguished wisdom, (1 Kings 4:31) [1001] the argument or subject of the poem will not agree with his time; unless we suppose him to have survived Solomon, and bewailed the sad and mournful division which occurred after the death of that monarch, and which

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The Hebrew verb for "doubting" is, אפונה, *aphunah* It means "to turn this way and that," as a person in great distress, not knowing, as we say, which way to turn himself. (See Parkhurst's Lexicon, פנה, 8.)

proved the commencement and prelude of future ruin. The people, it is true, after being divided into two kingdoms, continued still to exist safe as before; but as that rupture dissolved the unity established by God, what ground of hope could any longer remain? Besides, the prosperity and welfare of the whole body depended upon their having one head, from their allegiance to whom the ten tribes had wickedly revolted. What a horrible spectacle was it to behold that kingdom, which might have flourished in unimpaired vigor, even to the end of the world, disfigured and miserably rent asunder, at the close of the life of one man! Who would not have thought that the holy oracle was deceptive and vain, the truth of which seemed to be overthrown in so short a time? If, therefore, the Ethan above referred to should be regarded as the author of this psalm, the complaints contained in it must be applied to that period, in which not only the throne of David was weakened, but in which also the great mass of the people apostatised from God, while those who were brethren proceeded to work each other's ruin by mutual and intestine discord. This certainly appears to me to be the most probable conjecture in this doubtful case. Some think that the author, speaking under the influence of the Spirit of prophecy, predicts the calamities which were to befall the people: but this opinion may be easily refuted by the context itself, where the inspired bard expressly bewails the first unhappy alteration which took place in the kingdom, in consequence of the conspiracy of Jeroboam.

Psalm 89:1-4

> **1.** I will sing of the mercies of Jehovah for ever: with my mouth will I celebrate thy truth from generation to generation. **2.** For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thou shalt establish the heavens, thy truth is in them. [1002] **3.** I have made a covenant with my chosen: I have sworn to David my servant, **4.** I will establish thy seed for ever, and will build up thy throne from age to age. Selah.

1 *I will sing of the mercies of Jehovah for ever.* It must be borne in mind, as I have just now observed, that the Psalmist opens with the praises of God, and with calling to mind the Divine covenant, to encourage the faithful to

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The Ethan celebrated in that passage, according to some, is the same person who is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 2:6, as the grandson of Judah. (See page 406, note 2.) But that this psalm could not have been written by him is evident, as we have there observed, from several allusions contained in it to events which happened even posterior to the days of David. A person of this name was one of the chief musicians in the time of David, (1 Chronicles 25:1,) but he was a Levite; whereas this Ethan is called an Ezrahite. Nichols thinks it probable that the author, like Heman, was of the family of Zerah, and wrote this psalm during the captivity, most likely in the time of Jehoiakim, whose misfortunes he seems here to describe in a spirit of despondency, notwithstanding the promises made to David.

strengthen their faith against the formidable assaults of temptation. If when we set about the duty of prayer some despairing thought, at the very outset, presents itself to us, we must forcibly and resolutely break through it, lest our hearts faint and utterly fail. The design of the prophet, therefore, was to fortify the minds of the godly at the very commencement, with stable and substantial supports, that, relying on the Divine promise, which, to outward appearance, had almost fallen to the ground, and repelling all the assaults of temptation with which their faith was severely shaken, they might with confidence hope for the re-establishment of the kingdom, and continue perseveringly to pray for this blessing. From the sad spectacle of begun decay, [1003] which Ethan beheld, listening to the dictates of carnal reason, he might have thought that both himself and the rest of God's believing people were deceived; but he expresses his determination to celebrate the mercies of God which at that time were hidden from his view. And as it was no easy matter for him to apprehend and acknowledge the merciful character of God, of whose severity he had actual experience, he uses the plural number, *the Mercies of God,* that by reflecting on the abundance and variety of the blessings of Divine grace he might overcome this temptation.

2 *For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever.* He assigns the reason why he perseveres in singing the Divine praises in the midst of adversities; which is, that he does not despair of the manifestation of God's loving-kindness towards his people, although at present they were under severe chastisement. Never will a man freely open his mouth to praise God, unless he is fully persuaded that God, even when he is angry with his people, never lays aside his fatherly affection towards them. The words *I have said,* imply that the truth which the inspired writer propounds was deeply fixed in his heart. [1004] Whatever, as if he had said, has hitherto happened, it has never had the effect of effacing from my heart the undoubted hope of experiencing the Divine favor as to the future, and I will always continue steadfastly to cherish the same feeling. It is to be observed, that it was not without a painful and arduous conflict that he succeeded in embracing by faith the goodness of God, which at that time had entirely vanished out of sight; — this we say is to be particularly noticed, in order that when God at any time

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Ainsworth's translation of this last clause is both literal and elegant. "The heavens, thou wilt establish thy faithfulness in them." Dr Kennicott, in his Remarks on Select Passages of the Old Testament, here refers to verses 37, 38, "where," says he, "it appears that the sun, the moon, and the bow in the sky, were the tokens of confirmation given by God to the covenant made with David." "The meaning of this passage," says Warner, "appears to be, that the constancy of the celestial motions, the regular vicissitudes of day and night, and alternations of the seasons, were emblems of God's own immutability."

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"Ex tristi ruinae spectaculo." — *Lat.* "Voyant ce commoncement pitoyable d'une ruine." — *Fr.*

withdraws from us all the tokens of his love, we may nevertheless learn to erect in our hearts *that everlasting building of mercy,* which is here spoken of, — a metaphor, by which is meant that the Divine mercy shall be extended, or shall continue till it reach its end or consummation. In the second clause of the verse something must be supplied. The sense, in short, is, that the Divine promise is no less stable than the settled course of the heavens, which is eternal and exempt from all change. By the word *heavens* I understand not only the visible skies, but the heavens which are above the whole frame of the world; for the truth of God, in the heavenly glory of his kingdom, is placed above all the elements of the world.

3 *I have made a covenant with my chosen.* [1005] The more effectually to confirm himself and all the godly in the faith of the Divine promise, he introduces God himself as speaking and sanctioning, by his authority, what had been said in the preceding verse. As faith ought to depend on the Divine promise, this manner of speaking, by which God is represented as coming forward and alluring us to himself by his own voice, is more forcible than if the prophet himself had simply stated the fact. And when God in this way anticipates us, we cannot be charged with rashness in coming familiarly to him; even as, on the contrary, without His word we have no ground to presume that he will be gracious to us, or to hope, at the mere suggestion of our own fancy, for what he has not promised. Moreover, the truth of the promise is rendered still more irrefragable, when God declares that he had made a covenant with his servant David, ratified by his own solemn oath. It having been customary in ancient times to engrave leagues and covenants on tables of brass, a metaphor is here used borrowed from this practice. God applies to David two titles of distinction, calling him both *his chosen* and *his servant.* Those who would refer the former appellation to Abraham do not sufficiently attend to the style of the Book of Psalms, in which it is quite common for one thing to be repeated twice. David is called *the chosen of God,* because God of his own good pleasure, and from no other cause, preferred him not only to the posterity of Saul, and many distinguished personages, but even to his own brethren. If, therefore, the cause or origin of this covenant is sought for, we must necessarily fall back upon the Divine election.

The name of *servant,* which follows immediately after, is not to be understood as implying that David by his services merited any thing at the hand of God. He is called *God's servant* in respect of the royal dignity, into which he had not rashly thrust himself, having been invested with the government by God, and having undertaken it in obedience to his lawful

1005

"The word אמרתי, 'I have said,' is used, in the Book of Psalms, to express two things; either a fixed purpose, or a settled opinion of the person speaking. The Psalmist, therefore, delivers the whole of this second verse in his own person, and introduces not God speaking till the next verse." — *Horsley*

call. When, however, we consider what the covenant summarily contains, we conclude that the prophet has not improperly applied it to his own use, and to the use of the whole people; for God did not enter into it with David individually, but had an eye to the whole body of the Church, which would exist from age to age. The sentence, *I will establish thy throne for ever,* is partly to be understood of Solomon, and the rest of David's successors; but the prophet well knew that perpetuity or everlasting duration, in the strict and proper sense, could be verified only in Christ. In ordaining one man to be king, God assuredly did not have a respect to one house alone, while he forgot and neglected the people with whom he had before made his covenant in the person of Abraham; but he conferred the sovereign power upon David and his children, that they might rule for the common good of all the rest, until the throne might be truly established by the advent of Christ.

Psalm 89:5-8

5. And the heavens shall praise thy wondrous work, O Jehovah! thy truth [1006] also in the congregation of the saints. **6.** For who in the clouds [or in heaven] can be compared to Jehovah? who among the sons of the gods [1007] is like to Jehovah? **7.** God is very terrible [1008] in the assembly of the saints, and to be feared above all who are around him. **8.** O Jehovah! God of Hosts, who is a strong God as thou art? and thy truth is round about thee.

5. *And the heavens shall praise thy wondrous work.* The prophet, having spoken of God's covenant, even as faith ought to begin at the word, now descends to a general commendation of his works. It is, however, to be

1006

"Comp. 2 Samuel 7:11, etc. In 5:3 and 5:4, the Psalmist introduces God as speaking on a subject which he resumes in 5:34; so that the intervening verses may be considered as parenthetical." — *Cresswell.*

1007

" — *and thy truth*" — Le Clerc thinks that the word *men* should here be supplied, *and men thy truth*; in which case, the congregation of the saints will have its proper meaning — an assembly of the pious upon earth; and the Psalmist thus describes both angels and men as praising God." — *Cresswell.*

1008

"Literally *who is he among the sons of Alim*, (or of Gods, as in Psalm 29:1,) *i.e.*, according to Suicer, the powerful, the princes of the earth. *Ale*, in the singular number, is used to signify God in Deuteronomy 32:17; Job 3:4, 23, (and in other places of that book;) Daniel 11:38; Habakkak 3:3. But it may be doubted whether its plural, *Alim*, ever means, as *Aleim* does, the true God. We have, however, *the sons of Aleim*, *for chief men*, in Genesis 6:2, and for angels in Job 1:6; in which sense some commentators have understood *the sons of Alim* both here and in Psalm 29:1, and with them agrees the Chaldee interpreter of this place. In Habakkak 1:11, *Ale* is used in speaking of the false god of the Chaldeans; and Parkhurst is of opinion, that by *the sons of Alim* are meant those kings who worshipped material divinities, such as the sun." — *Cresswell.*

observed, that when he treats of the wonderful power of God, he has no other end in view than to exalt and magnify more highly the holiness of the covenant. He exclaims, that this is the God who has rightful claims to be served and feared, who ought to be believed, and upon whose power the most unhesitating confidence may be reposed. The words *wondrous work,* in the first clause, I would therefore limit to the power which God displays in preserving and maintaining his Church. The heavens, it is true, are most excellent witnesses and preachers of God's wonderful power; but from attending to the scope of the passage, it will be still more evident, that the encomiums here pronounced have all a special reference to the end of which I have spoken. Some interpreters judiciously explain the word *heavens,* of the angels, among whom there is a common joy and congratulation in the salvation of the Church. This interpretation is confirmed from the last clause of the verse, in which it is asserted, that *God's truth will be celebrated in the congregation of the saints* There is no doubt, that the same subject is here prosecuted, and that by the word *truth,* it is intended to signalise the remarkable deliverances by which God had manifested his faithfulness to the promises made to his servants.

6 *For who in the clouds can be compared to Jehovah?* The prophet now proceeds to illustrate farther what he had said respecting God's wonders, and exclaims emphatically, *Who in the clouds can be compared to God?* The reason why he speaks of *the clouds,* or *heaven,* is because, what is not surprising, nothing is to be found upon the earth which can at all approach the glory of God. Although man excels other living creatures, yet we see how contemptible and miserable his condition is, or rather, how full it is of shame and reproach. Whence it follows, that under heaven there is no excellence which can compete with that of God. But when we ascend to heaven, immediately ravished with admiration, we conceive of a multitude of gods, which do away with the true God. The last clause of the verse, in which it is said, *that among the sons of the gods there is none like the true and only God,* is an explanation of the first. The opinion of some, that by *the clouds,* or *the heavens,* is to be understood the sun, moon, and stars, is disproved by the context itself. The amount then is, that even in the heavens, God alone has the entire pre-eminence, having there none as a companion or equal. The appellation *the sons of the gods* is here given to angels, because they neither have their origin from the earth, nor are clothed with a corruptible body, but are celestial spirits, adorned with a Divine glory. It is not meant that they are a part of the Divine essence or substance, as some fanatics dream; but as God displays his power in them, this title is attributed to them, to distinguish between their nature and ours. In short, although a greater majesty shines forth in the angels than in other creatures, at the contemplation of which we are ravished with admiration, yet come they not near God, so as to obscure and impair his glory by their excellence, or to share with him in the sovereignty of the universe. This

is a point worthy of our careful attention; for, although God everywhere declares in his word that the angels are only his servants, and always ready to execute his commands, yet the world, not contented with having only one God, forges for itself a countless number of deities.

To the same effect is the following verse, in which it is affirmed, that *God is very terrible in the assembly of the saints.* In these words is censured that devilish superstition, to which almost all men are prone, of exalting angels beyond measure, and without reason. But if the angels themselves tremble, and are afraid before the Divine Majesty, why should they not be regarded as subjects, and kept in their own rank, that God alone may have the sovereignty entirely to himself? Farther, when they are represented as *around God,* the meaning is, that they surround his royal throne like body-guards, and are always ready to execute his behests. In the subsequent verse the same thing is repeated yet again, *Who is a strong God as thou art?* and this is done, that at least the fear of the Divine Majesty may teach us to beware of robbing him of the honor which belongs to him. That we may not, however, by too much fear, be prevented from approaching him, some portion of sweetness is intermingled with this description, when it is declared, that *his truth is to be seen round about him on all sides;* by which we are to understand, that God is always steadfast in his promises, and that whatever changes may happen, he nevertheless continues invariably true, both before and behind, on the right hand and on the left. [1009]

Psalm 89:9-14

9. Thou governest the pride of the sea: when the waves thereof rise up, thou restrainest them **10.** Thou hast overthrown Egypt, as a wounded man; [1010] with thy mighty arm [literally, with the arm of thy strength] thou hast scattered thy enemies. **11.** The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine: thou hast made the world, and the fullness thereof. **12.** Thou hast created the north [1011] and the south:

1009

Ainsworth reads, "God is daunting terrible." The original word is נערץ, *naarats*, from ערץ, *arats*, *he was broken*, *bruised*, *terrified.* "An epithet of God," says Bythner "as though breaking all things."

1010

Hammond's explanation of the words, *And thy truth is round about thee*, conveys a striking and beautiful idea. "The elegance of the phrase (which is poetical) seems to be taken," says he, "from the style of angels, verse 7th, where they are described as they that encompass God; signifying, that as they wait upon God, and execute his will, so, far above the strength of those, God's fidelity, his care to perform his promise exactly encompasses him, is ready prest to perform all that he hath ever promised to do." — *Hammond.*

1011

[1012] Tabor and Hermon [1013] shall rejoice in thy name. **13.** Thou hast a mighty arm: thou wilt strengthen thy hand, thou wilt exalt thy right hand. **14.** Righteousness and judgment are the place of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

9. *Thou governest the pride of the sea.* I have already observed that what the prophet has hitherto spoken generally concerning the power of God, is to be referred to the miracle of the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, which he now celebrates in express terms. According to the interpretation of some, God is said to still the impetuous waves of the sea, because he does not suffer it to break forth and overflow the whole world by a deluge. But I would read the 9th and 10th verses connectedly, and would understand the prophet as speaking of the Red Sea, which God divided to make a way for the chosen tribes to pass over. The Psalmist adds immediately after, that all *the land of Egypt was overthrown as a wounded man* By these words he magnifies the grace of God, which was displayed in the deliverance of the Church. He intended, there can be no doubt, to set before his own mind and the minds of others, the paternal love of God, to encourage both himself and others to have recourse to Him for succor, with the greater freedom and alacrity. And in affirming that *God had broken in pieces his enemies with his mighty arm,* he concludes from the past experience of the Church, that

Horsley renders the clause thus: — Thou hast crushed Rahab, that she lies gasping with her wounds; and has the following note: — "The word חלל," [for *lies gasping with her wounds*,] "as it is used here, and in Psalm 88:5, signifies not a dead carcass, but a person left for dead, under his wounds, upon the field of battle; a person so wounded, as to be fallen, and incapable of rising to defend himself, or annoy the enemy. It answers exactly to the Greek word, τραυματιας, by which the LXX. render it. We have no corresponding word in the English language." Dr Adam Clarke reads, "Thou, like a hero, hast broken down Egypt;" and observes, "Dr Kennicott has largely proved, that חלל, *chalal*, which we render *wounded*, *slain*, etc., means a *soldier*, *warrior*, *hero*; and it is certain that this sense agrees better with it than the other in a great number of places."

1012

"The Hebrew word for 'the north,' is derived from a root signifying 'to hide, conceal.' The 'north' is probably so named; because in our northern hemisphere of the earth, the sun appears to move from east to south, and from south to west, and, towards mid-day, is at all times of the year southerly; whence the north side of a building, tree, or mountain, is usually 'concealed' or 'hidden' from his direct rays, and is, as we express it, in the shade. (See Parkhurst on צפן, 4.) Simonis, also, assigns this as the reason of the name, in the judgment of some critics, or, in that of others, because the north is covered with snow, and of others again, with darkness; and so the Greek word for darkness, ζοφος, is continually used by Homer for the north: for the ancients thought that the north was always buried in gloom and thick darkness." — *Mant*

1013

The original word ימין, *yamin*, for "the south," signifies literally "the right hand." As the Hebrews, when they engaged in prayer, turned their faces eastward, they called the East פנים, *the face*, and the West, אחור, *the hinder part The South*, therefore, would necessarily be *on their right hand*; and hence, ימים, *yamin*, came to be used to denote *the south*

his mode of acting will be always similar, whenever in his infinite wisdom he sees it to be required.

11 *The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine.* He again repeats, the third time, that the same God who had been the deliverer of the chosen people exercises supreme dominion over the whole world. From the fact that God created all things, he concludes, that it is He who actually presides over, and controls whatever takes place in heaven and in earth. It would be absurd to suppose, that the heavens, having been once created by God, should now revolve by chance, and that things should be thrown into confusion upon the earth either at the will of men, or at random, when it is considered that it belongs to God to maintain and govern whatever he has created; unless, like the heathen, we would imagine that he enjoys himself in beholding all the works of his hand, in this beautiful theater of the heaven and the earth, without giving himself any farther trouble about them. In speaking of *the south* and *the north,* and also of the mountains, *Tabor* and *Hermon,* the prophet accommodates his language to the unrefined apprehension of the common people: as if he had said, there is no part of the fabric of the world which does not reverence and honor its Creator. I also connect with this the next verse, which affirms, that *the arm of God is furnished with power, his hand with strength, and that his right hand is exalted* Some resolve the two last clauses of the verse into the form of a prayer, *Strengthen thy hand, lift up thy right hand;* but this seems too much removed from the mind of the prophet, who, with the simple view of encouraging all the godly, celebrates the inconceivable power of God.

14. *Righteousness and judgement are the place of thy throne.* These encomiums serve more effectually to confirm the hope of true believers than if the Divine power alone had been presented to our view. Whenever mention is made of God, it behoves us to apply our minds principally to those attributes of his nature which are specially fitted for establishing our faith, that we may not lose ourselves by vainly indulging in subtile speculations, by which foolish men, although they may minister to their own mental recreation, make no advances to the right understanding of what God really is. The prophet, therefore, in allusion to the insignia and pomp of kings, declares that *righteousness and judgment* are the pillars of the throne on which God sits conspicuous in sovereign state, and that *mercy* and *truth* are, as it were, his pursuivants; as if he had said, "The ornaments with which God is invested, instead of being a robe of purple, a diadem, or a scepter, are, that he is the righteous and impartial judge of the world, a merciful father, and a faithful protector of his people." Earthly kings, from their having nothing in themselves to procure for them authority, and to give them dignity, [1014] are under the necessity of borrowing elsewhere what will invest them therewith; but God having in himself an all-sufficiency, and

1014

standing in no need of any other helps, exhibits to us the splendor of his own image in his righteousness, mercy, and truth.

Psalm 89:15-18

> **15.** Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound! [1015] they shall walk, O Jehovah! in the brightness of thy countenance. **16.** In thy name shall they daily rejoice; and in thy righteousness shall they glory. **17.** For thou art the glory of their strength; and in thy favor shall our horn be exalted. **18.** For to Jehovah [1016] is our buckler; and our King is to the Holy One of Israel.

15. *Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound.* Here the same train of reflection concerning the Church is pursued, not only because unbelievers are blind to the consideration of God's works, but also because the prophet has no other purpose in view than to inspire the godly with good hope, that they may with confidence rely upon God, and not be discouraged by any adversities from boldly calling upon him. It is declared that those are happy to whom it is given to rejoice in God; for although all men in common are sustained and nourished by his liberality, yet the feeling of his paternal goodness is far from being experienced by all men in such a manner as to enable them, from a certain persuasion that he is favorable to them, to congratulate themselves upon their happy condition. It is, therefore, a singular privilege which he confers upon his chosen ones, to make them taste of his goodness, that thereby they may be encouraged to be glad and rejoice. And, in fact, there is not a more miserable condition than that of unbelievers, when by their brutish insensibility they trample under foot the Divine benefits which they greedily devour; for the more abundantly God pampers them, the fouler is their ingratitude. True happiness then consists

Tabor is a mountain of Judea, and *Hermon* (Psalm 133:3) of Syria, the former to the west, and the latter to the east of the Jordan; so that they may be considered as put for the East and the West. Accordingly, the Chaldee paraphrase is, "Thou hast created the desert of the north, and the inhabitants of the south; Tabor on the west, and Hermon on the east, sing praises to thy name." "These mountains," says Warner, "were at a considerable distance from each other. This indicates, that the most distant parts of the land shall be equally blessed; have a like cause of rejoicing."

1015

"Pource qu'ils n'ont rien au dedans qui leur acquiere authorite et donne majeste." — *Fr.*

1016

"O the blessednesses of the people that know the joyful sound; that are spared to hear the sound of the trumpet on the morning of the jubilee, which proclaims deliverance to the captives, and the restoration of all their forfeited estates!" — *Dr Adam Clarke.* "But let us not forget," says Dr Morison, "that the trumpet of jubilee was a type of the proclamation of peace and salvation by Jesus Christ. How happy they who, when the gospel trumpet is blown by the heralds of salvation, are enabled to recognize its joyful sound."

in our apprehending the Divine goodness which, filling our hearts with joy, may stir us up to praise and thanksgiving.

The prophet afterwards proves from the effect, that those who with joy and delight acknowledge God to be their father are blessed, because they not only enjoy his benefits, but also, confiding in his favor, pass the whole course of their life in mental peace and tranquillity. This is the import of *walking in the light of God's countenance:* it is to repose upon his providence from the certain persuasion that he has a special care about our well-being, and keeps watch and ward effectually to secure it. The expressions *rejoicing in his name,* and *glorying in his righteousness,* are to the same purpose. The idea involved in them is, that believers find in God abundant, yea more than abundant, ground to rejoice and glory. The word *daily* appears to denote steadfast and unwavering perseverance; and thus there is indirectly censured the foolish arrogance of those who, inflated only with wind and presuming on their own strength, lift up their horns on high. Standing as they do upon an insecure foundation, they must at length inevitably fall. Whence it follows, that there is no true magnanimity nor any power which can stand but that which leans upon the grace of God alone; even as we see how Paul (Romans 8:31) nobly boasts, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" and defies all calamities both present and to come.

17. *For thou art the glory of their strength.* The same sentiment is confirmed when it is declared, that God never leaves his faithful servants destitute of strength. By the appellation *the glory of their strength,* which is ascribed to him, is meant that they are always so sustained by his present aid as to have just ground to glory in him; or which amounts to the same thing, that his power appears always glorious in aiding and sustaining them. They are, however, at the same time, reminded of the duty of yielding to God all the praise of their being preserved in safety. If this is true as to the present life, it is much more truly applicable to the spiritual life of the soul. Farther, the more highly to magnify this instance of God's liberality, we are taught, at the same time, that it depends entirely upon his good pleasure, there being no other cause of it. [1017] Whence it follows, that they are wholly bound and indebted to Him who is induced by his free bounty alone to continue to extend to them his help.

18. *For to Jehovah is our buckler.* As the chief protection of the people was in the person of their king, it is here expressly shown, that the maintenance of the welfare of the faithful by his instrumentality is the gift of God. But it is to be noticed, that the prophet's mind was not so fixed upon this temporal and transitory kingdom as to neglect, at the same

1017

"The Hebrew ליהוה, must be rendered *of* or *from the Lord*, in both places in this verse: 'Of the Lord is our shield *or* defense;' 'Of the Lord, *or* from him,' *i e.*, of his appointment, 'is our King.'"— *Hammond*

time, to consider the end of it, as we shall presently see. He knew that it was only on account of Christ that God made his favor to flow upon the head of the Church, and from thence upon the whole body. And, in the first place, while he calls the king metaphorically *a buckler*, — a figurative expression frequently employed in Scripture, — he confesses that when the people are defended by his hand and working, it is nevertheless done by the providence of God, and is thus to be traced to a higher source than human agency. The same thing is again repeated in the second clause, in which it is affirmed, that the king was given by God to govern the people; and that, therefore, the defense which comes from the king is a blessing of God. Moreover, we must remember that what is said of this kingdom, which was a shadow of something greater, properly applies to the person of Christ, whom the Father has given to us to be the guardian of our welfare, that we may be maintained and defended by his power.

Psalm 89:19-23

> **19.** Then thou spakest in vision to thy meek ones, [1018] and saidst, I have laid help upon a mighty one; I have exalted one chosen from among the people. **20.** I have found David my servant; with my holy oil [literally with the oil of my holiness] have I anointed him. **21.** Therefore, my hand shall be established with him: my arm also shall strengthen him. **22.** The enemy shall not exact upon him, [1019] nor shall the son of iniquity afflict him. **23.** And I will break in pieces his oppressors before his face; and I will strike those who hate him.

19. *Then thou spakest in vision to thy meek ones.* The Psalmist now declares at greater length why he said that the king, set over the chosen people for the preservation of the public good, was given them from heaven; namely, because he was not chosen by the suffrages of men, nor usurped at his own hand the supreme power, nor insinuated himself into it by corrupt arts, but was elected by God to be the instrument of maintaining the public good, and performed the duties of his office under the auspices and conduct of God. The design of the prophet, as we shall shortly see more clearly, is to distinguish this Divinely-appointed king from all other kings. Although what Paul teaches in Romans 13:1, is true, "There is no power but of God;" yet there was a great difference between David and all earthly kings who have acquired sovereign power by worldly means. God had delivered the scepter to his servant David immediately with his own hand, so to speak,

1018

"Sans qu'il y en ait aucune autre cause." — *Fr.*

1019

The word in the Hebrew Bible for "thy meek ones" is in the singular number; but in the ancient versions, and in sixty-three MSS. of Dr Kennicott's collection, and seventy-one of De Rossi's, it is in the plural number.

and had seated him on the royal throne by his own authority. The particle אז, *az,* which properly signifies *then,* is taken also for *long since,* or *in old time.* The meaning, therefore, is, that whereas some are born kings, succeeding their fathers by right of inheritance, and some are elevated to the royal dignity by election, while others acquire it for themselves by violence and force of arms, God was the founder of this kingdom, having chosen David to the throne by his own voice. Farther, although he revealed his purpose to Samuel, yet as the plural number is here used, implying, that the same oracle had been delivered to others, we may certainly conclude that it had been communicated to other prophets that they might be able, with one consent, to bear testimony that David was created king by the Divine appointment. And, indeed, as other distinguished and celebrated prophets lived at that time, it is not very probable that a matter of so great importance was concealed from them. But Samuel alone is named in this business, because he was the publisher of the Divine oracle and the minister of the royal anointing. As God in those days spake to his prophets either by dreams or *by visions,* this last mode of revelation is here mentioned.

There next follows the substance or amount of the Divine oracle, That God had furnished with help the strong or mighty one whom he had chosen to be the supreme head and governor of the kingdom. David is called *strong,* not because naturally and in himself he excelled in strength, (for, as is well known, he was of small stature, and despised among his brethren, so that even Samuel passed him over with neglects) but because God, after having chosen him, endued him with new strength, and other distinguished qualities suitable for a king; even as in a parallel case, when Christ chose his apostles, he not only honored them with the title, but at the same time bestowed the gifts which were necessary for executing their office. And at the present day he imparts to his ministers the same grace of his Spirit. The strength of David, then, of which mention is here made, was the effect of his election; for God, in creating him king, furnished him at the same time with strength adequate for the preservation of the people. This appears still more distinctly from the second clause, where this invincible strength is traced to its source: *I have exalted one chosen from among the people.* All the words are emphatic. When God declares that he *exalted* him, it is to intimate the low and mean condition in which David lived, unknown and obscure, before God stretched out his hand to him. To the same effect is the expression which follows, *from among the people.* The meaning is, that he was at that time unnoted, and belonged to the lowest class of the people, and gave no indications of superior excellence, being the least esteemed of his father's children, in whose country cottage he held the humble office of a herdsman. [1020] By the word *chosen,* God calls us back to the consideration

1020

"L'ennemi n'aura puissance sur luy." — *Fr.* "The enemy shall not have power over him."

of his own free will, as if he forbade us to seek for any other cause of David's exaltation than his own good pleasure.

20 *I have found David my servant.* The prophet confirms the same proposition, That there was nothing of royalty in David, who owed all to the sovereignty of God in preventing him by his grace. Such is the import of the word *found,* as if God had said, When I took him to elevate him, this proceeded entirely from my free goodness. The name *servant,* therefore, does not denote any merit, but is to be referred to the divine call. It is as if God had said, that he confirmed and ratified by his authority the sovereign power of David; and if He approved it, its legitimacy is placed beyond all doubt. The second clause of the verse affords an additional confirmation of God's free election: *With my holy oil have I anointed him.* This anointing, which was not the fruit of David's own policy, but which he obtained contrary to all expectation, was the cause of his elevation to the estate of royalty. God then having of himself, and according to his mere good pleasure, anticipated David, that he might anoint him king by the hand of Samuel, he justly declares that *he found him.* It is afterwards added, that he will be the guardian and protector of this kingdom of which he was the founder; for it is not his usual way to abandon his works after having commenced them, but, on the contrary, to carry them forward by a continued process of improvement to their completion.

22 *The enemy shall not exact upon him.* [1021] Here it is declared in express terms, that although David may not be without enemies, the power of God will be always ready to maintain and defend him, that he may not be oppressed with unrighteous violence. It is accordingly affirmed, that David will not be tributary to his enemies, as he who is vanquished in battle is constrained to grant such conditions of peace as his conqueror may dictate, however injurious to himself these may be. When his enemies are called *sons of iniquity,* it is tacitly intimated, that this government will be so exempt from tyranny and extortion, that whoever shall attempt to overthrow it will be involved in the perpetration of wrong and wickedness. The amount is, that David and his successors will be so secure and strongly fortified by the divine protection, that it will be impossible for their enemies to treat them as they would wish. In regard to the fact, that God suffered this kingdom to be greatly afflicted, so that David's successors were constrained to pay a vast amount of tribute to foreign and heathen kings, it is not at variance with this promise; for, although the power of the kingdom was reduced, it was enough that the root still remained, until Christ came, in whose hand the kingdom was at length firmly established. As both the

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"Quum ultimus esset in rustico tugurio, et inter pecuarios." — *Lat.* "Veu qu'il estoit le plus petit en la maison de son pere, et qu'en ce mesnage de village il estoit de ceux qui gardoyent les bestes." — *Fr.*

king and the people wickedly rejected this singular blessing of God, the kingdom was often shaken through their own default, afterwards impaired, and finally ruined. Yet God, to confirm his oracle concerning the perpetuity of this kingdom, ceased not all along to cherish and preserve some hope, by contending against their ingratitude. Besides, when mention is made of David's *haters* and *oppressors,* it is intimated, that this throne will not be privileged with exemption from annoyances and troubles, inasmuch as there will be always some who will rise up in hostility against it, unless God set himself in opposition to them.

Psalm 89:24-29

24. My truth and my mercy shall be with him: and in my name shall his horn be exalted. **25.** And I will set his hand in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. [1022] **26.** He shall cry to me, Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation. **27.** I will also make him my first-born, [1023] higher than the kings of the earth. **28.** And I will keep my mercy for him for ever, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. **29.** And I will establish his seed for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.

24 *My truth and my mercy shall be with him.* God shows that he will continue to exercise without intermission that grace which he had manifested towards David at first. These words are as if he had said, that to prove himself faithful to his word, he would be always gracious and bountiful. Thus We see that God, not only at the outset, furnished David with testimonies of his goodness, but that he always continued to deal with him in the same merciful way. This has a reference to the whole Church of Christ, so that the divine goodness is manifested in the whole course of our salvation, and not only at our first entrance upon it, as these shufflers and sophists the Sorbonists foolishly talk. [1024] *The horn* of David denotes here, as it often does in other places, his glory, dignity, and power. The meaning therefore is, that by the grace of God, this kingdom shall always flourish and prosper.

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"The allusion appears to us to be made to a cruel and unjust creditor, who exacts not only his just debts, but some exaggerated demand, with usurious interest, which was not permitted." — *Williams.*

1023

This means, that David's power should extend from the Mediterranean, or Great Sea, to the river Euphrates. Gejerus and Le Clerc have illustrated this passage from a speech addressed to Alexander by the Scythian ambassadors, in Q. Curtius, 50, 7." Si Dii habitum corporis tui aviditati animi parem esse voluissent, orbis te non caperet; altera manu orientem, altera occidentem contingeres." "If the gods had given thee a body proportionable to thy insatiable mind, the world would not be able to contain thee. Thou wouldst stretch forth one hand to the furthest extremities of the east, and the other to the utmost west."

1024

25. *And I will set his hand in the sea.* The vast extent of the kingdom is here adverted to. As the people by their wickedness had, as it were, blocked up the way, and intercepted the blessing of God, their inheritance was more limited than the promise implied. But now God declares, that during the reign of David, it will be again enlarged, so that the people shall possess the whole country, from the sea even to the river Euphrates. From this we gather, that what God had promised by Moses was fulfilled only in the person of David, that is to say, from his time. [1025] By *the rivers* may be understood, either the Euphrates alone, which is cut into many channels, or the other neighboring rivers on the coast of Syria.

26. *He shall cry to me, Thou art my Father.* In this verse it is declared, that the chief excellence of this king will consist in this, that he will be accounted the Son of God. This indeed is a title of honor, which is applied to all whom God ordains to be kings, as we have seen in a previous psalm,

"I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High:" (Psalm 82:6)

but in the passage before us, something special is expressed of the holy king whom God had chosen, and it is intended to say, that he will be the son of God in a different sense. We shall immediately see in the subsequent verse, how he is placed in a higher rank than the kings of the earth, although they may sway the scepter over a larger extent of country. It was therefore a privilege peculiar to only one king in this world, to be called the Son of God. Had it been otherwise, the apostle reasoned not only inconclusively but absurdly, in quoting this text as a proof of the doctrine, that Christ is superior to the angels:

"I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son," (Hebrews 1:5.)

Angels, and kings, and all who are regenerated by the Spirit of adoption, are called *sons of God;* but David, when God promises to take him for his son, is, by singular prerogative, elevated above all others to whom this designation is applied. This is still more apparent from the following verse, in which he is called *God's first-born,* because he is higher than all the kings of the earth; and this is an honor which transcends all the dignity both of men and angels. If it is objected, that David being a mortal man could not be equal to the angels, the obvious answer is, that if he is considered

"*I will make him my first-born*; *i.e.*, as the eldest son of a family ranks the highest, and receives the most from his father, so shall David be first in the order of kings, who, when they are legitimate sovereigns, may be regarded as the sons of God, their common Father: comp. Genesis 27:1, etc.; Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 21:17; Psalm 2:7; Colossians 1:15. In Isaiah 14:30, by *the first-born of the poor*, is meant the extreme of that class, they who are the poorest of the poor." — *Cresswell.*

1025

"Sicuti nugantur Sophistae." — *Lat.* "Comme gazouillent ces brouillons et Sophistes de Sorbonistes." — *Fr.*

in himself, he cannot justly be elevated to the same rank with them, but with the highest propriety he may, in so far as for a time he represented the person of Christ.

28. *And I will keep my mercy to him for ever.* We see how God frequently repeats, that he had set up the kingdom of David with the express design of establishing it for ever. By placing *his mercy* first in order, and then adding *his covenant,* he points out the cause of this covenant, intimating in one word, that it is gratuitous, and that his grace is not only the foundation on which it rests, but also the cause why it is preserved inviolate. The amount is, that God will be always merciful to David, in order that his covenant may never fail. From this it follows, that its inviolability depends upon the mere good pleasure of God. In the next verse, God expresses the effect of his truth, declaring, that the posterity of David will sit for ever on the royal throne. There being nothing under heaven of long continuance, *the days of heaven* is an expression employed to denote everlasting duration. Whence it follows, that this prophecy cannot have its full accomplishment in any till we come to Christ, in whom alone, in the strict and proper sense, this everlasting duration is to be found.

Psalm 89:30-37

30. If his children shall forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments;
31. If they violate [1026] my ordinances, and keep not my statutes;
32. Then will I visit their transgression with my rod, [1027] and their iniquity with stripes. **33.** But my loving-kindness will I not withdraw from him; nor suffer my faithfulness to fail, [literally, nor will I lie in my truth.] **34.** My covenant will I not break, nor alter that which hath proceeded from my lips. **35.** Once have I sworn by my holiness, That I will not lie [1028] to David. **36.** His seed shall endure for ever; and his throne as the sun before me. **37.** It shall be established for ever as the moon, and a faithful witness in the heaven. [1029] Selah.

30. *If his children shall forsake my law.* The prophet proceeds yet farther, declaring, that although the posterity of David should fall into sin, yet God

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"C'est a dire, de son temps."

1027

The original word for "they violate" is יחללו, *yechallelu*, from חלל, *chalal*, *he perforated* or *pierced through* "When said of sacred things, *he profaned*, *violated*, *polluted*, *prostituted*, as though, *pierced through* divine things." — *Bythner*

1028

"In virga." — *Lat.* "Avec *ma* verge." — *Fr.*

1029

Heb. 'if I lie,' the most solemn form of negative in that language." — *Williams.*

had promised to show himself merciful towards them, and that he would not punish their transgressions to the full extent of their desert. Moreover, to give the promise the greater efficacy, he always introduces God speaking, as if he presented to him a request corresponding with the precise words and express articles of his covenant. [1030] It was very necessary that this should be added; for so easily do we slide into evil, and so prone are we to continual falls, that unless God, in the exercise of his infinite mercy, pardoned us, there would not be a single article of his covenant which would continue steadfast. God, therefore, seeing that it could not be otherwise, but that the posterity of David, in so far as it depended upon themselves, would frequently fall from the covenant, by their own fault, has provided a remedy for such cases, in his pardoning grace.

Farther, as it is profitable for men to be subjected to divine correction, he does not promise that he will allow them to escape unpunished, which would be to encourage them in their sins; but he promises, that in his chastisements he will exercise a fatherly moderation, and will not execute vengeance upon them to the full extent which their sins deserve. It is also to be observed, that he promises pardon, not only for light offenses, but also for great and aggravated sins. It is not without cause that he uses these forms of expression, *to forsake his law, to violate his statutes, not to walk in his judgments,* and *not to keep his commandments* Nor is it without cause that he uses the word *transgression,* or perfidiousness, and *iniquity.* We see, then, that the patience and lenity of God, by which he reconciles to himself the posterity of David, is extended even to sins of the most heinous and aggravated description.

This passage teaches us, that when God adopts men into his family, they do not forthwith completely lay aside the flesh with its corruptions, as is held by some enthusiasts, who dream, that as soon as we are grafted into the body of Christ, all the corruption that is in us must be destroyed. Would to God that we could all on a sudden change our nature, and thus exhibit that angelic perfection which they require! But as it is quite apparent, that we are far from such an attainment, so long as we carry about with us this tabernacle of flesh, let us bid adieu to that devilish figment, and let us all betake ourselves to the sanctuary of forgiveness, which is at all times open for us. God, unquestionably, is speaking of the household of his Church; and yet it is declared, with sufficient plainness, in the promise which he makes of

1030

"The whole passage, beginning with 'I have laid help,' in verse 19, to the end of verse 37, may be considered as a paraphrase of what God had said unto David, (2 Samuel 7:8, etc.,) through the mouth of Nathan. The promises herein recited, we know from history, had their fulfillment only in Jesus Christ. The Psalmist, therefore, in the next subsequent verses, contemplating the calamities of his nation, indulges in the language of complaint." — *Cresswell.*

pardoning their offenses, that they will transgress and be guilty of revolting from him.

To limit what is here said to the ancient people of Israel, is an exposition not only absurd, but altogether impious. In the first place, I take it as a settled point, which we have already had occasion often to consider, that this kingdom was erected to be a figure or shadow in which God might represent the Mediator to his Church: and this can be proved, not only from the testimony of Christ and the apostles, but it may also be clearly and indubitably deduced from the thing considered in itself. If we set Christ aside, where will we find that everlasting duration of the royal throne of which mention is here made? The second from David, in the order of succession, was despoiled of the greater part of the kingdom, so that out of twelve tribes he retained scarcely one tribe and a half. Afterwards, how many losses did this kingdom thus greatly reduced sustain, and by how many calamities was it defaced, until at length the king and the whole body of the people were dragged into captivity, with the utmost ignominy and reproach? And I pray you to consider where was the dignity of the throne, when the king, after his sons were put to death before his eyes, was himself treated as a criminal? (2 Kings 25:7.) The Jews were indeed afterwards permitted to dwell in their own country; but it was without the honor and title of a kingdom. Accordingly, Ezekiel (Ezekiel 21:27) declares thrice, that the crown shall be laid in the dust, "until he come whose right it is." The obvious conclusion then is, that perpetuity, as applied to this kingdom, can be verified in Christ alone. And, in fact, what access could the Jews of old time have had to God, or what access could we in the present day have to him, did not the Mediator come between us and him, to cause us find favor in his sight?

It now remains that we apply to ourselves the qualities of this kingdom of which we have been speaking. As its everlasting duration leads us to the hope of a blessed immortality, and its invincible strength inspires our minds with tranquillity, and prevents our faith from failing, notwithstanding all the efforts which Satan may put forth against us, and notwithstanding the numerous forms of death which may surround us; so the pardon which is here promised belongs to the spiritual kingdom of Christ: and it may be equally gathered from this passage, that the salvation of the Church depends solely upon the grace of God, and the truth of his promises. If it is objected, that those who are regenerated by the Spirit of God never totally fall away, because the incorruptible seed of the word abides in them, I grant that this is an important truth. It is not, however, a total apostasy which is here spoken of — not such as implies the entire extinction of godliness in the individual chargeable with it. But it sometimes happens that the faithful cast off the yoke of God, and break forth into sin in such a manner, as that the fear of God seems to be extinguished in them; and such being the case, it was necessary that He should promise the pardon even of heinous sins, that

they might not upon every fall be overwhelmed with despair. Thus David seemed, to outward appearance, to be wholly deprived of the Spirit of God, whom he prays to be restored to him. The reason why God leaves hope of pardon even for detestable and deadly transgressions is, that the enormity of our sins may not keep us back or hinder us from seeking reconciliation with him. From this, we are led to condemn the undue severity of the fathers, who scrupled to receive to repentance those who had fallen for the second or third time. Due care must indeed be taken lest, by too great forbearance, loose reins should be given to men to commit iniquity; but there is no less danger in an extreme degree of rigour. It is to be observed, that when God declares that he will show himself merciful towards sinners, who have violated his law, and broken his commandments, he purposely employs these odious terms to excite our hatred and detestation of sin, and not to entice us to the commission of it. Still, however, we must understand the passage as amounting to this, That although the faithful may not in every instance act in a manner worthy of the grace of God, and may therefore deserve to be rejected by him, yet he will be merciful to them, because remission of sins is an essential article promised in his covenant. And, indeed, as God in his law requires us to perform what exceeds our power, all that he promises in it is of no avail to us, to whom it can never be accomplished. Hence Paul, in Romans 4:14, affirms, "If the inheritance come by the law, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect." To this also belong these words of Jeremiah,

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; (which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord;) but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Farther, since God does not adopt us as his children, to encourage us to take liberty to commit sin with the greater boldness, mention is here made at the same time of chastisement, by which he shows that he hates the sins of his children, and, warning them of what they have deserved in offending him, invites and exhorts them to repentance. This fatherly chastisement then, which operates as medicine, holds the medium between undue indulgence, which is an encouragement to sin, and extreme severity, which precipitates persons into destruction. Here the inspired writer adverts to the prophecy recorded in 2 Samuel 7:14, where God declares that in chastising his own people, he will proceed after the manner of men —

"If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men." (2 Samuel 7:14)

God there speaks of his chastising his people after the manner of men, either because the anger of a father in correcting his children proceeds from love, — for he sees that otherwise he would fail in promoting their good; or it contains a contrast between God and men, implying, that in the task of chastising he will proceed with moderation and gentleness; for, were he to put forth his strength, he would immediately bring us to nothing, yea, he could do this simply by moving one of his fingers. The scope of both passages undoubtedly is, that whenever God punishes the sins of true believers, he will observe a wholesome moderation; and it is therefore our duty to take all the punishments which he inflicts upon us, as so many medicines. On this point, the Papists have egregiously blundered. Not understanding the true end and fruit of chastisements, they have imagined that God proceeds herein as if avenging himself upon sinners. Whence arose their satisfactions, and from these again proceeded pardons and indulgences, by which they endeavored to redeem themselves from the hand and vengeance of God. [1031] But God has nothing else in view than to correct the vices of his children, in order that, after having thoroughly purged them, he may restore them anew to his favor and friendship; according to the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:33, which affirm that the faithful "are chastened of the Lord, that they should not be condemned with the world." For this reason, lest they should be overwhelmed with the weight of chastisement, he restrains his hand, and makes considerate allowance for their infirmity. Thus the promise is fulfilled, That *he does not withdraw his loving-kindness from* his people, even when he is angry with them; for, while he is correcting them for their profit and salvation, he does not cease to love them. It is, however, to be observed, that there is a change of person in the words. After it is said, *If his children shall forsake my law,* etc., it is at length subjoined, *My loving-kindness or mercy will I not withdraw from Him.* It ought surely to have been said, *them* instead of *him,* since it is *children* in the plural number who are before spoken of. But it is very probable that this form of expression is purposely employed to teach us that we are reconciled to God only through Christ; and that if we would expect to find mercy, we must seek for it from that source alone. What follows in the end of the verse, *I will not suffer my faithfulness to fail,* is more emphatic than if it had been said that God will be true to what he has said. It is possible that God's promise may fail of taking effect, and yet he may continue faithful. For example, the law is true and holy, and yet of what advantage is it to us that salvation is promised in the law, when no human being can ever obtain salvation by it? God then in this passage leads us farther; promising that his covenant shall be steadfast and

1031

"Acsi ex conceptis pacti verbis cum eo ageret." — *Lat.* "Comme s'il luy presentoit requeste suyvant les propres mots et articles expres de son alliance." — *Fr.*

effectual, not only because he will be faithful on his part, but also because he will keep his people from falling away through their own inconstancy.

34 *My covenant will I not break.* As the true knowledge of God's mercy can only be obtained from his word, he enjoins us to keep our eyes intently fixed upon his covenant. The more excellent and invaluable a blessing it is, "Never to be rejected after having been once adopted by him," the more difficult it is for us to believe its truth. And we know how many thoughts from time to time present themselves to our minds, tempting us to call it in question. That the faithful, therefore, may not harass themselves beyond measure in debating in their own minds whether or no they are in favor with God, they are enjoined to look to the covenant, and to embrace the salvation which is offered to them in it. God here commends to us his own faithfulness, that we may account his promise sufficient, and that we may not seek the certainty of our salvation any where else. He had said above, *If the children of David break my statutes;* and now, alluding to that breach, he declares that he will not requite them as they requite him, *My covenant will I not break,* implying, that although his people may not altogether act in a manner corresponding to their vocation, as they ought to do, he will not suffer his covenant to be broken and disannulled on account of their fault, because he will promptly and effectually prevent this in the way of blotting out their sins by a gratuitous pardon. He is still pursuing the illustration of the preceding proposition, *I will not suffer my faithfulness to fail;* promising not only to be faithful on his side, as we say, but also that what he has promised shall take full effect, in despite of all the impediments which men may cast in the way; for he will strive against their sins, that by means of them the fruit of his goodness may not be prevented from reaching them. When the Jews, by their ingratitude and treachery, revolted from him, the covenant was not disannulled, because it was founded upon the perfect immutability of his nature. And still, at the present day, when our sins mount even to the heavens, the goodness of God fails not to rise above them, since it is far above the heavens.

35. *Once have I sworn by my holiness.* God now confirms by an oath what he previously stated he had promised to David; from which it appears that it was not a matter of small importance; it being certain that God would not interpose his holy name in reference to what was of no consequence. It is a token of singular loving-kindness for him, upon seeing us prone to distrust, to provide a remedy for it so compassionately. We have, therefore, so much the less excuse if we do not embrace, with true and unwavering faith, his promise which is so strongly ratified, since in his deep interest about our salvation, he does not withhold his oath, that we may yield entire credence to his word. If we do not reckon his simple promise sufficient, he adds his oath, as it were, for a pledge. The adverb *once,* [1032] denotes that the oath is irrevocable, and that therefore we have not the least reason

1032

to be apprehensive of any inconstancy. He affirms that he sware *by his holiness,* because a greater than himself is not to be found, by whom he could swear. In swearing by Him, we constitute him our judge, and place him as sovereign over us, even as he is our sovereign by nature. It is a more emphatic manner of expression for him to say, *by my holiness,* than if he had said, *by myself,* not only because it magnifies and exalts his glory, but also because it is far more fitted for the confirmation of faith, calling back, as it does, the faithful to the earthly habitation which he had chosen for himself, that they might not think it necessary for them to seek him at a distance; for by the term *holiness,* I have no doubt, he means *the sanctuary.* And yet he swears by himself, and by nothing else; for, in naming the temple which he had appointed as his seat, he does not depart from himself; but, merely accommodating his language to our rude understandings, swears by his holiness which dwells visibly upon earth. With respect to the elliptical form of the oath, we have seen, in a previous psalm, that this was a manner of swearing quite common among the Hebrews. Thus they were warned that the name of God was not to be used without due consideration, lest, by using it rashly and irreverently, they should draw down upon themselves the Divine vengeance. The abrupt and suspended form of expression was, as it were, a bridle to restrain them, and give them opportunity for reflection. It is no uncommon thing for God to borrow something from the common custom of men.

36. *His seed shall endure for ever.* There now follows the promise that the right of sovereignty shall always remain with the posterity of David. These two things — his offspring and his throne, are conjoined; and by these words the everlasting duration of the kingdom is promised, so that it should never pass to those who were of a strange and different race. The sun and the moon are produced as witnesses; for although they are creatures subject to corruption, they yet possess more stability than the earth or air; the elements, as we see, being subject to continual changes. As the whole of this lower world is subject to unceasing agitation and change, there is presented to us a more steadfast state of things in the sun and moon, that the kingdom of David might not be estimated according to the common order of nature. Since, however, this royal throne was shaken in the time of Rehoboam, as we have before had occasion to remark, and afterwards broken down and overthrown, it follows that this prophecy cannot be limited to David. For although at length the outward majesty of this kingdom was put an end to without hope of being re-established, the sun ceased not to shine by day, nor the moon by night. Accordingly, until we come to Christ, God might

"Par lesqnels moyens ils ont pensé se racheter pour eschapper la main et vengence de Dieu." — *Fr.*

seem to be unfaithful to his promises. But in the branch which sprung from the root of Jesse, these words were fulfilled in their fullest sense. [1033]

Psalm 89:38-45

> **38.** But thou hast abhorred and rejected him; thou hast been angry against thy anointed. **39.** Thou hast made the covenant of thy servant to cease; [1034] thou hast profaned his crown to the earth. **40.** Thou hast broken down all his walls; thou hast made his fortresses a ruin. **41.** All who pass by the way have spoiled him: he has been a reproach to his neighbors. **42.** Thou hast exalted the right hand of his oppressors; thou hast caused all his enemies to rejoice. **43.** Thou hast also blunted the edge of his sword, and hast not made him to stand in battle. **44.** Thou hast effaced his splendor, and cast his throne to the ground. **45.** Thou hast shortened the days of his youth; thou hast covered him with shame. Selah.

38. *But thou hast abhorred and rejected him.* Here the prophet complains that in consequence of the decayed state of the kingdom, the prophecy appeared to have failed of its accomplishment. Not that he accuses God of falsehood; but he speaks in this manner, that he may with all freedom cast his cares and griefs into the bosom of God, who permits us to deal thus familiarly with him. It doubtless becomes us to frame our desires according to the divine will; but that person cannot be said to pass beyond due bounds who humbly laments that he is deprived of the tokens of the divine favor, provided be does not despair, or rebelliously murmur against God; and we shall afterwards see that the prophet, when he blesses God at the close of the psalm, affords a proof of tranquil submission, by which he corrects or qualifies his complaints. Whoever, therefore, that Rabbin was who maintained that it is unlawful to recite this psalm, he was led by a

1033

"*Once.* Emphatic. It needs not to be repeated: nor will be." — *Walford.*

1034

"There is a very obvious and important observation to be made on the description of the apparent change that had taken place in the conduct of God towards the family and descendants of David. The extraordinary promises which had been given to that prince were certainly not accomplished in the fortunes of his descendants, the kings of Judah; nor shall we be able to discover how the truth of these promises is to be sustained without an admission of their being given in reference to the Messiah, that spiritual king, who 'was born of the seed of David, according to the flesh.' When we take the assurances which were made to David, and which pledged to him the perpetuity of his kingdom, in this sense, the mystery is disclosed, and the difficulty is completely removed: 'the loving-kindness of God has not been withdrawn from him, nor has his faithfulness failed.' David has still a royal successor, though the genealogy of his posterity is lost upon earth; a successor who will endure for ever, and whose throne will be perpetuated in glory, not merely as long as the sun and the moon continue, but will still be rising in splendor, when those lights of heaven shall be extinguished, and the new heaven and the new earth shall witness the imperishable glories of the Son of God." — *Walford.*

foolish and impious peevishness to condemn what God bears with in his children. In taking this liberty of expostulating with God, the prophet had no other object in view than that he might the more effectually resist distrust and impatience, by unburdening himself in the divine presence. Farther, the words, *Thou hast abhorred and rejected him,* if criticised according to the rules of the Greek and Latin language, will be pronounced inelegant; for the word which is most emphatic is put first, and then there is added another which is less emphatic. But as the Hebrews do not observe our manner of arrangement in this respect, the order here adopted is quite consistent with the idiom of the Hebrew language. The third verb contains the reason of this change on the part of God, teaching us that the king was rejected because God was incensed against him. It is thought by some that there is here a recital of the mockery in which the enemies of the chosen people indulged, an opinion which they adopt to avoid the difficulty arising from viewing this severe kind of complaint, as uttered by the Church, which proved such a stumbling-block to the Rabbin above referred to, that on account of it he condemned the whole psalm. But it is to be observed, that the prophet speaks according to the common feeling and apprehension of men; while at the same time he was fully convinced in his own mind, that the king who had been once chosen by God could not be rejected by him.

In the same sense we ought to understand what follows (verse 39) concerning the disannulling of the covenant — *Thou hast made the covenant of thy servant to cease.* The prophet does not charge God with levity and inconstancy: he only complains that those notable promises of which he had spoken had to appearance vanished and come to nought. Whenever the faithful put the question,

"How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord?" "Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord?"
(Psalm 13:1; 44:23; 79:5,)

they assuredly are not to be understood as attributing forgetfulness or sleep to him: they only lay before him the temptations which flesh and blood suggest to them in order to induce him speedily to succor them under the infirmity with which they are distressed. It is not then wonderful, though the prophet, amidst such horrible desolation, was affected by the infirmities to which human nature is so liable in such circumstances, and thus prompted to make the assertion, that what God promised was far from being manifestly realised. When he saw all things going contrary to the Divine promise, he was not a man so steel-hearted as to remain unmoved at so pitiable and confused a spectacle. But coming freely into the Divine presence, he seeks a remedy that he might not be swallowed up with sorrow, which would have been the case had he indulged in secret repining, and neglected this means of alleviation. What is added in the close of the verse, *Thou hast cast his crown to the earth,* does not seem to apply to the time of Rehoboam, unless, perhaps, the dismemberment of the kingdom may be denoted by the casting

of the crown to the earth. The statements which are made immediately after must necessarily be referred to some greater calamity. If this is admitted, the author of the psalm must have been a different person from Ethan, who was one of the four wise men, of whom mention is made in the sacred history, (2 Kings 4:31.) In so doubtful a case, I leave every one to adopt the conjecture which appears to him the most probable.

40. *Thou hast broken down all his walls.* The prophet, although he might easily have found another cause to which to impute the breaking down and razing of the fortifications, yet under the influence of devout and sanctified feeling acknowledges God to be the author of this calamity; being fully convinced that men could not at their pleasure have destroyed the kingdom which God had set up had not the Divine anger been kindled. Afterwards speaking metaphorically, he complains that the kingdom was exposed as a prey to all passers-by, resembling a field or garden, of which the walls were broken down, and the ground laid open to depredation. As an aggravation of a calamity which in itself was sufficiently grievous, the additional indignity is brought forward, that the king *was a reproach to his neighbors.* The worldly and the profane, there can be no doubt, finding an opportunity so much according to their wishes, derided him, saying, Is this that king of God's choice, a king more excellent than the angels, and whose throne was to continue as long as the sun and the moon should endure? As these railings recoiled upon God himself, the prophet justly complains of the reproachful derision with which God's Anointed was treated, whose dignity and royal estate were ratified and confirmed by heavenly anointing.

42 *Thou hast exalted the right hand of his oppressors.* Here he states that God took part with the enemies of the king; for he was well aware that these enemies could not have prevailed but by the will of God, who inspires some with courage, and renders others faint-hearted. In short, in proportion to the number of the calamities which had befallen the chosen people, was the number of the evidences of their having been forsaken by God; for, so long as he continued his favor, the whole world, by all their machinations, were unable to impair the stability of that kingdom. Had it been said that the enemies of the king obtained the victory, the statement would have been quite true; but it would not have been a mode of expression so obviously fitted to exalt the Divine power; as it might have been thought that men setting themselves in opposition to God had, by their own power, forced their way, and effected their purpose, even against those who enjoyed his protection. Accordingly, the prophet reflects with himself, that unless the Divine anger had been incensed, that kingdom which God had erected could not have been reduced to a condition so extremely wretched.

45. *Thou hast shortened the days of his youth.* Some would explain this sentence as meaning, that God had weakened the king, so that he faded or withered away at his very entrance upon the flower of youth, and was

exhausted with old age before reaching the period of manhood. [1035] This exposition may be regarded as not improbable; but still it is to be observed, in order to our having a clearer understanding of the mind of the prophet, that he does not speak exclusively of any one individual, but compares the state of the kingdom to the life of man. His complaint then amounts to this, That God caused the kingdom to wax old, and finally to decay, before it reached a state of complete maturity; its fate resembling that of a young man, who, while yet increasing in strength and vigor, is carried away by a violent death before his time. This similitude is highly appropriate; for the kingdom, if we compare the state of it at that period with the Divine promise, had scarce yet fully unfolded its blossom, when, amidst its first advances, suddenly smitten with a grievous decay, its freshness and beauty were defaced, while at length it vanished away. Moreover, what we have previously stated must be borne in mind, that when the prophet complains that the issue does not correspond with the promise, or is not such as the promise led the chosen people to expect, he does not, on that account, charge God with falsehood, but brings forward this apparent discrepancy for another purpose — to encourage himself, from the consideration of the Divine promises, to come to the throne of grace with the greater confidence and boldness; and, while he urged this difficulty before God, he was fully persuaded that it was impossible for Him not to show himself faithful to his word. As the majority of men drink up their sorrow and keep it to themselves, because they despair of deriving any benefit from prayer so true believers, the more frankly and familiarly they appeal to God in reference to his promises, the more valiantly do they wrestle against their distrust, and encourage themselves in the hope of a favorable issue.

Psalm 89:46-48

46. How long, O Jehovah? wilt thou hide thyself for ever? shall thy fury burn like fire? **47.** Remember of what age I am! [1036] why shouldst thou have created all the sons of men in vain? [1037] **48.** What

1035

"Ou, as quitte l'alliance de ton serviteur." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, thou hast quitted the covenant of thy servant."

1036

Some of the Jewish interpreters take this view, and suppose the allusion to be to king Jehoiachin, (2 Kings 24:8.) Kennicott infers from the expression, "Thou hast shortened the days of his youth," that this portion of the psalm refers to Ahaz, who died at thirty-six years of age.

1037

"'Remember at what an age *or* time of life I am.' Or, 'of what duration,' or, 'how fleeting,' חלר, (by a transposition of letters from חרל, *he ceased*,) denotes the present time rapidly passing away. Or, the short race of our life; or this world, 'the fashion of which passeth away,' (1 Corinthians 7:31.)" — *Bythner*

man shall live, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul [or life] from the hand of the grave? [1038] Selah.

46. *How long, O Jehovah? wilt thou hide thyself for ever?* After having poured forth his complaints respecting the sad and calamitous condition of the Church, the Psalmist now turns himself to prayer. Whence it follows that the language of lamentation to which he had hitherto given utterance, although it emanated from carnal sense, was nevertheless conjoined with faith. Unbelievers, in the agitation of trouble, may sometimes engage in prayer, yet whatever they ask proceeds from feigned lips. But the prophet, by connecting prayer with his complaints, bears testimony that he had never lost his confidence in the truth of the Divine promises. With respect to this manner of expression, *How long, for ever?* we have spoken on Psalm 79:5, where we have shown that it denotes a long and continued succession of calamities. Moreover, by asking *How long God will hide himself,* he tacitly intimates that all will be well as soon as God is pleased to look upon his chosen people with a benignant countenance. In the second clause of the verse, he again mentions as the reason why God did not vouchsafe to look upon them with paternal favor, that his anger was incensed against them. The obvious conclusion from which is, that all the afflictions endured by us proceed from our sins; these being the scourges of an offended God.

47 *Remember how short my time is.* After having confessed that the severe and deplorable afflictions which had befallen the Church were to be traced to her own sins as the procuring cause, the prophet, the more effectually to move God to commiseration, lays before him the brevity of human life, in which, if we receive no taste of the Divine goodness, it will seem that we have been created in vain. That we may understand the passage the more clearly, it will be better to begin with the consideration of the last member of the verse, *Why shouldst thou have created all the sons of men in vain?* The faithful, in putting this question, proceed upon an established first principle, That God has created men and placed them in the world, to show himself a father to them. And, indeed, as his goodness extends itself even to the cattle and lower animals of every kind, [1039] it

1038

Ainsworth reads, "O call thou to remembrance how transitory I am; into what vain state thou hast made all the sons of Adam."

1039

This appeal respecting the universality of death, and the impossibility of avoiding it, meets with a ready response in the bosom of every child of Adam, however exalted or humble his lot. And, when death has once seized on its victim, all the wealth, power, and skill of the world cannot spoil the grave of its dominion. The admirable lines of Gray, in his celebrated Elegy, furnish a very good comment on this verse: —

"The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Await alike th' inevitable hour: —
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

cannot for a moment be supposed, that we, who hold a higher rank in the scale of being than the brute creation, should be wholly deprived of it. Upon the contrary supposition, it were better for us that we had never been born, than to languish away in continual sorrow. There is, moreover, set forth the brevity of the course of our life; which is so brief, that unless God make timely haste in giving us some taste of his benefits, the opportunity for doing this will be lost, since our life passes rapidly away. The drift of this verse is now very obvious. In the first place, it is laid down as a principle, That the end for which men were created was, that they should enjoy God's bounty in the present world; and from this it is concluded that they are born in vain, unless he show himself a father towards them. In the second place, as the course of this life is short, it is argued that if God does not make haste to bless them, the opportunity will no longer be afforded when their life shall have run out.

But here it may be said, in the first place, that the saints take too much upon them in prescribing to God a time in which to work; and, in the next place, that although he afflict us with continual distresses, so long as we are in our state of earthly pilgrimage, yet there is no ground to conclude from this that we have been created in vain, since there is reserved for us a better life in heaven, to the hope of which we have been adopted; and that, therefore, it is not surprising though now our life is hidden from us on earth. I answer, That it is by the permission of God that the saints take this liberty of urging him in their prayers to make haste; and that there is no impropriety in doing so, provided they, at the same time, keep themselves within the bounds of modesty, and, restraining the impetuosity of their affections, yield themselves wholly to his will. With respect to the second point, I grant that it is quite true, that although we must continue to drag out our life amidst continual distresses, we have abundant consolation to aid us in bearing all our afflictions, provided we lift up our minds to heaven. But still it is to be observed, in the first place, that it is certain, considering our great weakness, that no man will ever do this unless he has first tasted of the Divine goodness in this life; and, secondly, that the complaints of the people of God ought not to be judged of according to a perfect rule, because they proceed not from a settled and an undisturbed state of mind, but have always some excess arising from the impetuosity or vehemence of the affections at work in their minds. I at once allow that the man who measures the love of God from the state of things as presently existing, judges by a standard which must lead to a false conclusion;

"for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," (Hebrews 12:6.)

"Can storied urn, or animated bust,
Back to its mansions call the fleeting breath?
Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull cold ear of Death?"

But as God is never so severe towards his own people as not to furnish them with actual experimental evidence of his grace, it stands always true that life is profitless to men, if they do not feel, while they live, that He is their father.

As to the second clause of the verse, it has been stated elsewhere that our prayers do not flow in one uniform course, but sometimes betray an excess of sorrow. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that the faithful, when immoderate sorrow or fear occupies their thoughts and keeps fast hold of them, experience such inattention stealing by degrees upon them, as to make them for a time forget to keep their minds fixed in meditation upon the life to come. Many think it very unaccountable, if the children of God do not, the first moment they begin to think, immediately penetrate into heaven, as if thick mists did not often intervene to impede or hinder us when we would look attentively into it. For faith to lose its liveliness is one thing, and for it to be utterly extinguished is another. And, doubtless, whoever is exercised in the judgments of God, and in conflict with temptations, will acknowledge that he is not so mindful of the spiritual life as he ought to be. Although then the question, *Why shouldst thou have created all the sons of men in vain?* is deduced from a true principle, yet it savours somewhat of a faulty excess. Whence it appears that even in our best framed prayers, we have always need of pardon. There always escapes from us some language or sentiment chargeable with excess, and therefore it is necessary for God to overlook or bear with our infirmity.

48. *What man shall live, and shall not see death?* This verse contains a confirmation of what has been already stated concerning the brevity of human life. The amount is, that unless God speedily hasten to show himself a father to men, the opportunity of causing them to experience his grace will no longer exist. The original word גבר, *geber,* which we have translated *man,* is derived from the verb גבר, *gabar, he was strong,* or *he prevailed;* and the sacred writer employs this word, the more forcibly to express the truth, that no man is privileged with exemption from the dominion of death.

Psalm 89:49-52

> **49.** O Lord! where are thy former mercies? thou hast sworn to David in thy truth. **50.** O Lord! Remember the reproach of thy servants: I have sustained in my bosom all the reproaches of mighty peoples; **51.** With which thy enemies, O Jehovah! have reproached thee; with which they have reproached the footsteps of thy Messiah, [or thy Anointed.] **52.** Blessed be Jehovah for ever! Amen, and Amen.

49. *O Lord! where are thy former mercies?* The prophet encourages himself, by calling to remembrance God's former benefits, as if his reasoning were, That God can never be unlike himself, and that therefore the goodness which he manifested in old time to the fathers cannot come to an end. This

comparison might indeed make the godly despond, when they find that they are not dealt with by him so gently as he dealt with the fathers, did not another consideration at the same time present itself to their minds — the consideration that he never changes, and never wearies in the course of his beneficence. As to the second clause of the verse, some interpreters connect it with the first, by interposing the relative, thus: — *Where are thy former mercies* which *thou hast sworn?* In this I readily acquiesce; for the sense is almost the same, although the relative be omitted. God had given evident and indubitable proofs of the truth of the oracle delivered to Samuel; [1040] and, therefore, the faithful lay before him both his promise and the many happy fruits of it which had been experienced. They say, *in truth,* that they may with the greater confidence apply to themselves, whatever tokens of his liberality God had in old time bestowed upon the fathers; for they had the same ground to expect the exercise of the Divine goodness towards them as the fathers had, God, who is unchangeably the same, having sworn to be merciful to the posterity of David throughout all ages.

50. *O Lord! remember the reproach of thy servants.* They again allege, that they are held in derision by the ungodly, — a consideration which had no small influence in moving God to compassion: for the more grievous and troublesome a temptation it is, to have the wicked deriding our patience, that, after having made us believe that God is not true in what he has promised, they may precipitate us into despair; the more ready is he to aid us, that our feeble minds may not yield to the temptation. The prophet does not simply mean that the reproaches of his enemies are to him intolerable, but that God must repress their insolence in deriding the faith and patience of the godly, in order that those who trust in him may not be put to shame. He enhances still more the same sentiment in the second clause, telling us, that he was assailed with all kind of reproaches by *many peoples,* or by *the great peoples,* for the Hebrew word רבים, *rabbim,* signifies both *great* and *many*

Moreover, it is not without cause, that, after having spoken in general of the servants of God, he changes the plural into the singular number. He does this, that each of the faithful in particular may be the more earnestly stirred up to the duty of prayer. The expression, *in my bosom,* is very emphatic. It is as if he had said, The wicked do not throw from a distance their insulting words, but they vomit them, so to speak, upon the children of God, who are thus constrained to receive them into their bosom, and to bear patiently this base treatment. Such is the perversity of the time in which we live, that we have need to apply the same doctrine to ourselves; for the earth is full of profane and proud despisers of God, who cease not

1040

"Sur les asnes et chevaux, et autres bestes brutes." — *Fr.* "To asses and horses, and other brute beasts."

to make themselves merry at our expense. And as Satan is a master well qualified to teach them this kind of rhetoric, the calamities of the Church always furnish them with matter for exercising it. Some take *bosom* for the secret affection of the heart; but this exposition seems to be too refined.

51. *With which thy enemies, O Jehovah! have reproached thee.* What the Psalmist now affirms is, not that the wicked torment the saints with their contumelious language, but that they revile even God himself. And he makes this statement, because it is a much more powerful plea for obtaining favor in the sight of God, to beseech him to maintain his own cause, because all the reproaches by which the simplicity of our faith is held up to scorn recoil upon himself, than to beseech him to do this, because he is wounded in the person of his Church; according as he declares in Isaiah,

"Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed; and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel." (Isaiah 37:23)

That wicked robber Rabshakeh thought that he scoffed only at the wretched Jews whom he besieged, and whose surrender of themselves into his hands he believed he would soon witness; but God took it as if he himself had been the object whom that wicked man directly assailed. On this account also, the prophet calls these enemies of his people *the enemies of God;* namely, because in persecuting the Church with deadly hostility, they made an assault upon the majesty of God, under whose protection the Church was placed.

In the second clause, by *the footsteps of Messiah* or *Christ* is meant the coming of Christ, even as it is said in Isaiah 52:7,

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!" (Isaiah 52:7)

The Hebrew word עקב, *akeb,* sometimes signifies *the heel;* but here, as in many other passages, it signifies *the sole of the foot.* Others translate it *the pace* or *step,* but this gives exactly the same sense. There can be no doubt, that *footsteps,* by the figure synecdoche, is employed to denote *the feet;* and again, that by *the feet,* according to the figure metonomy, is meant the coming of Christ. The wicked, observing that the Jews clung to the hope of redemption, and patiently endured all adversities because a deliverer had been promised them, disdainfully derided their patience, as if all that the prophets had testified concerning the coming of Christ had been only a fable. [1041] And now also, although he has been once manifested to the world, yet as, in consequence of his having been received up into the glory of heaven, he seems to be far distant from us, and to have forsaken his Church, these filthy dogs scoff at our hope, as if it were a mere delusion.

1041

"De la revelation faite a Samuel." — *Fr.*

52. *Blessed be Jehovah for ever!* I am surprised why some interpreters should imagine, that this verse was added by some transcriber in copying the book, affirming, that it does not correspond with the context: as if the language of praise and thanksgiving to God were not as suitable at the close of a psalm as at the opening of it. I have therefore no doubt, that the prophet, after having freely bewailed the calamities of the Church, now, with the view of allaying the bitterness of his grief, purposely breaks forth into the language of praise. As to the words *Amen, and Amen,* I readily grant, that they are here employed to distinguish the book. [1042] But whoever composed this psalm, there is no doubt, that by these words of rejoicing, the design of the writer was to assuage the greatness of his grief in the midst of his heavy afflictions, that he might entertain the livelier hope of deliverance.

1042

Or, as if our Redeemer were slow-paced, halt, or lame, and his Church should never behold his steps. With this agrees the Chaldee paraphrase: — "The slowness of the footsteps of the feet of thy Messiah or anointed." Kimchi renders, "the delays of the Messiah;" "the discourse," he observes, "being of those who say that he will never come." A similar style of speech has been employed by the enemies of the gospel, as Calvin goes on to observe, who scoffingly asked in the days of the apostles, and who still ask, "Where is the promise of his coming?" 2 Peter 3:4.

Psalm 90

PSALM 90

As Moses is about to treat as well of the brevity and miseries of human life, as of the punishments inflicted upon the people of Israel, in order to minister some consolation for assuaging the grief and fear which the faithful might have entertained upon observing the operation of the common law, to which all mankind are subject, and especially, upon considering their own afflictions, he opens the psalm by speaking of the peculiar grace which God had vouchsafed to his chosen tribes. He next briefly recites, how wretched the condition of men is, if they allow their hearts to rest in this world, especially when God summons them as guilty sinners to his judgment seat. And after he has bewailed, that even the children of Abraham had experienced for a time such severity, that they were almost consumed with sorrow, confiding in God's free favor, by which He had adopted them to himself, he prays that He would deal towards them in a merciful and gracious manner, as he had done in times past, and that he would continue even to the end the ordinary course of his grace.

A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.

It is uncertain whether this psalm was composed by Moses, or whether some one of the prophets framed it into a song for the use of the people, from a formula of prayer written by Moses, and handed down from age to age. It is, however, highly probable, that it is not without some ground ascribed to Moses in the title; and since psalms were in use even in his time, I have no doubt that he was its author. [1043] Some maintain that the reason why his name appears in the inscription is, that it was sung by his posterity;

1043

but I cannot see why they should have recourse to such a groundless conceit. The epithet, *The man of God,* given to Moses, which is immediately added, clearly confutes them. [1044] This honorable designation is expressly applied to him, that his doctrine may have the greater authority. If conjectures are to be admitted, it is probable, that when the time of his death drew near, he endited this prayer to assuage the prolonged sorrow under which the people had almost pined away, and to comfort their hearts, under the accumulation of adversities with which they were oppressed. Although the wonderful goodness of God shone brightly in their deliverance from Egypt, which, burying the miseries formerly endured by them, might have filled them with joy; yet we know that, soon after, it was extinguished by their ingratitude; so that for the space of not less than forty years, they were consumed with continual languor in the wilderness. It was therefore very seasonable for Moses at that time to beseech God that he would deal mercifully and gently with his people, according to the number of the years in which he had afflicted them.

Psalm 90:1-2

1. O Lord! thou hast been our dwelling-place, from generation to generation. **2.** Before the mountains were brought forth, and before thou hadst formed the earth and the world, [1045] even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

1 *O Lord! thou hast been our dwelling-place.* In separating the seed of Abraham by special privilege from the rest of the human family, the Psalmist magnifies the grace of adoption, by which God had embraced them as his children. The object which he has in view in this exordium is, that God would now renew the grace which he had displayed in old time towards the holy patriarchs, and continue it towards their offspring. Some commentators think that he alludes to the tabernacle, because in it the

"Pour faire la fin de ce livre troisieme." — *Fr.* "As a conclusion to this third Book." The Psalter, as we have before observed, has been divided by the Hebrews into five books. This is the end of Book 3. See volume 2, page 126, note.

1044

All the ancient versions ascribe this psalm to Moses, and it is generally agreed, that it was written by him. To him also, R. Selomo, and other Jewish commentators, ascribe the nine following psalms; for which they do not appear to have any other foundation but their own absurd canon of criticism, by which they assign all anonymous psalms to that author whose name last occurred in a preceding title. It is evident, for instance, that the 99th psalm, in which the prophet Samuel is mentioned, could not have been written by Moses.

1045

Man of God was a common designation of the Jewish prophets: comp. Judges 13:6; 1 Samuel 2:27; 9:6.

majesty of God was not less conspicuous than if he had dwelt in the midst of the people; but this seems to me to be altogether out of place. He rather comprehends the whole time in which the Fathers sojourned in the land of Canaan. As the tabernacle had not yet continued for the space of forty years, the long duration here mentioned — *our dwelling-place from generation to generation* — would not at all be applicable to it. It is not then intended to recount what God showed himself to be towards the Israelites from the time that he delivered them from Egypt; but what their fathers had experienced him to be in all ages, even from the beginning. [1046] Now it is declared that as they had always been pilgrims and wanderers, so God was to them instead of a dwelling-place. No doubt, the condition of all men is unstable upon earth; but we know that Abraham and his posterity were, above all others, sojourners, and as it were exiles. Since, then, they wandered in the land of Canaan till they were brought into Egypt, where they lived only by sufferance from day to day, it was necessary for them to seek for themselves a dwelling-place under the shadow of God, without which they could hardly be accounted inhabitants of the world, since they continued everywhere strangers, and were afterwards led about through many windings and turnings. The grace which the Lord displayed in sustaining them in their wanderings, and shielding them with his hand when they sojourned among savage and cruel nations, and were exposed to injurious treatment at their hands — this grace is extolled by Moses in very striking terms, when he represents God as an abode or dwelling-place to these poor fugitives who were continually wandering from one place to another in quest of lodgings. This grace he magnifies from the length of time during which it had been exercised; for God ceased not to preserve and defend them for the space of more than four hundred years, during which time they dwelt under the wings of his protection.

2 *Before the mountains were brought forth.* Moses designs to set forth some high and hidden mystery, and yet he seems to speak feebly, and, as it were, in a puerile manner. For who does not know that God existed before the world? This we grant is a truth which all men admit; but we will scarcely find one in a hundred who is thoroughly persuaded that God remains unchangeably the same. God is here contrasted with created beings, who, as all know, are subject to continual changes, so that there is nothing stable under heaven. As, in a particular manner, nothing is fuller of vicissitude than human life, that men may not judge of the nature of God by their own fluctuating condition, he is here placed in a state of settled and undisturbed tranquillity. Thus the everlastingness of which Moses speaks

1046

"*The earth and the world.* The latter of those words properly means, the habitable world; that part of the earth which, by its fertility, is capable of supporting inhabitants." — *Walford.*

is to be referred not only to the essence of God, but also to his providence, by which he governs the world. Although he subjects the world to many alterations, he remains unmoved; and that not only in regard to himself, but also in regard to the faithful, who find from experience, that instead of being wavering, he is steadfast in his power, truth, righteousness, and goodness, even as he has been from the beginning. This eternal and unchangeable steadfastness of God could not be perceived prior to the creation of the world, since there were as yet no eyes to be witnesses of it. But it may be gathered *a posteriori;* for while all things are subject to revolution and incessant vicissitude, his nature continues always the same. There may be also here a contrast between him and all the false gods of the heathen, who have, by little and little, crept into the world in such vast numbers, through the error and folly of men. But I have already shown the object which Moses has in view, which is, that we mistake if we measure God by our own understanding; and that we must mount above the earth, yea, even above heaven itself, whenever we think upon him.

Psalm 90:3-8

> **3.** Thou shalt turn man to destruction, and shalt say, Return, ye sons of Adam. **4.** For a thousand years in thy sight are as yesterday when it is gone, and as a watch in the night. **5.** Thou carriest them away as with a flood, they will be a sleep: in the morning he shall grow as grass: **6.** In the morning it shall flourish and grow: at the evening it shall be cut down, and shall wither. **7.** For we fail by thy anger, and are affrighted by thy indignation. **8.** Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, and our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.

3 *Thou shalt turn man to destruction.* Moses, in the first place, mentions how frail and transitory is the life of man, and bewails its miseries. This he does, not for the purpose of quarrelling with God, but as an argument to induce him the more readily to exercise his mercy, even as he is elsewhere said to pardon mortal men, when he considers of what they are made, and remembers that they are but dust and grass, (Psalm 103:14.) he compares the course of our life to a ring or circle, because God, placing us upon the earth, turns us about within a narrow circuit, and when we have reached the last point, draws us back to himself in a moment. Others give a different interpretation, namely, that God leads men forth to death, and afterwards restores them at the resurrection. But this subtilty is far-fetched, and does not harmonise with the context. We have here laid down a simple definition of our life, that it is, as it were, a short revolution in which we quickly complete our circle, the last point of which is the termination of our earthly course. This account of human life sets in a clearer light the gracious manner in which God deals with his servants, in adopting them to be his peculiar people, that he may at length gather them together into his everlasting inheritance. Nor is it in vain that it is added, by way of contrast, (verse

4,) *that a thousand years in God's sight are as yesterday* Although we are convinced from experience that men, when they have completed their circle, are forthwith taken out of the world, yet the knowledge of this frailty fails in making a deep impression upon our hearts, because we do not lift our eyes above the world. Whence proceeds the great stupidity of men, who, bound fast to the present state of existence, proceed in the affairs of life as if they were to live two thousand years, but because they do not elevate their conceptions above visible objects? Each man, when he compares himself with others, flatters himself that he will live to a great age. In short, men are so dull as to think that thirty years, or even a smaller number, are, as it were, an eternity; nor are they impressed with the brevity of their life so long as this world keeps possession of their thoughts. This is the reason why Moses awakens us by elevating our minds to the eternity of God, without the consideration of which we perceive not how speedily our life vanishes away. The imagination that we shall have a long life, resembles a profound sleep in which we are all benumbed, until meditation upon the heavenly life swallow up this foolish fancy respecting the length of our continuance upon earth.

As men are thus blinded, Moses sets before their view God as their judge. O Lord! as if he had said, if men would duly reflect upon that eternity from which thou beholdest these inconstant circlings of the world, they would not make so great account of the present life. But as, instead of seriously considering what is true duration, they rather wilfully turn away their eyes from heaven, this explains why they are so stupid, and look upon one day as if it were a hundred years. Moses' apostrophe to God is emphatic, implying that his patience being exhausted at seeing us so thoughtless, he addresses himself to God; and that it was labor to no purpose for him to speak to the deaf, who would not be taught that they were mortal, no, not even by the proofs of this, which experience was constantly presenting before them. This text is quoted by the Apostle Peter in a sense somewhat different, (2 Peter 3:8,) while at the same time he does not pervert it, for he aptly and judiciously applies the testimony of Moses in illustration of the subject of which he is there treating. The design of Moses is to elevate the minds of men to heaven by withdrawing them from their own gross conceptions. And what is the object of Peter? As many, because Christ does not hasten his coming according to their desire, cast off the hope of the resurrection through the weariness of long delay, he corrects this preposterous impatience by a very suitable remedy. He perceives men's faith in the Divine promises fainting and failing, from their thinking that Christ delays his coming too long. Whence does this proceed, but because they grovel upon the earth? Peter therefore appropriately applies these words of Moses to cure this vice. As the indulgence in pleasures to which unbelievers yield themselves is to be traced to this, that having their hearts too much set upon the world, they do not taste the pleasures of a celestial eternity; so impatience proceeds

from the same source. Hence we learn the true use of this doctrine. To what is it owing that we have so great anxiety about our life, that nothing suffices us, and that we are continually molesting ourselves, but because we foolishly imagine that we shall nestle in this world for ever? Again, to what are we to ascribe that extreme fretfulness and impatience, which make our hearts fail in waiting for the coming of Christ, but to their grovelling upon the earth? Let us learn then not to judge according to the understanding of the flesh, but to depend upon the judgment of God; and let us elevate our minds by faith, even to his heavenly throne, from which he declares that this earthly life is nothing. Nor does Moses simply contrast a thousand years with one day, but he contrasts them with *yesterday,* which is already gone; for whatever is still before our eyes has a hold upon our minds, but we are less affected with the recollection of what is past. In regard to the word *watch,* the ancients, as is well known, were accustomed to divide the night into four watches, consisting of three hours each. [1047] To express still more forcibly how inconsiderable that which appears to us a long period is in God's eyes, this similitude is added, That a thousand years in his sight differ nothing from three hours of the night, in which men scarcely know whether they are awake or asleep.

5 *Thou carriest them away as with a flood.* Moses confirms what he had previously said, That men, so long as they are sojourners in this world, perform, as it were, a revolution which lasts only for a moment. I do not limit the expression to *carry away as with a flood to* calamities of a more grievous kind, but consider that death is simply compared in general to a flood; for when we have staid a little while in the world, we forthwith fall into the grave and are covered with earth. Thus death, which is common to all, is with propriety called *an inundation.* While we are breathing the breath of life, the Lord overflows us by death, just as those who perish in a shipwreck are engulfed in the ocean; so that death may be fitly called an invisible deluge. And Moses affirms, that it is then evidently seen that men who flatter themselves that they are possessed of wonderful vigor in their earthly course, are only as a sleep. The comparison of *grass* which is added, amounts to this, That men come forth in the morning as grass springs up, that they become green, or pass away within a short time, when being cut down, they wither and decay. The verbs in the 6th verse being in the singular number, it is better to connect them with the word *grass.* But they may also be appropriately referred to each man; and as it makes

1047

"'Our home' — or 'our dwelling-place.' This image seems to have a particular reference to the unsettled condition of the Israelites before their establishment in the Land of Promise. 'Strangers and pilgrims as we have hitherto been, in every succeeding generation, from the days of Abraham; first sojourners in Canaan; then bondsmen in Egypt; now wanderers in this dreary waste; we nevertheless find the comforts of a home and settlement in thy miraculous protection.'" — *Horsley*

little difference as to the sense of the text, whether we make *grass* or *each man* the nominative to the verbs, I am not disposed to expend much labor upon the matter. This doctrine requires to be continually meditated upon; for although we all confess that nothing is more transitory than our life, yet each of us is soon carried away, as it were, by a frantic impulse to picture to his own imagination an earthly immortality. Whoever bears in mind that he is mortal, restrains himself, that instead of having his attention and affections engrossed beyond measure with earthly objects, he may advance with haste to his mark. When we set no limit to our cares, we require to be urged forward by continual goadings, that we may not dream of a thousand lives instead of one, which is but as a shadow that quickly vanishes away.

7 *For we fail by thy anger.* Moses makes mention of the anger of God advisedly; for it is necessary that men be touched with the feeling of this, in order to their considering in good earnest, what experience constrains them to acknowledge, how soon they finish their course and pass away. He had, however, still another reason for joining together the brevity of human life and the anger of God. Whilst men are by nature so transitory, and, as it were, shadowy, the Israelites were afflicted by the hostile hand of God; and his anger is less supportable by our frail natures, which speedily vanish away, than it would be were we furnished with some tolerable degree of strength.

8 *Thou hast set our iniquities before thee.* To show that by this complaint he is far from intending to murmur against God, he asserts that the Divine anger, however terrible it had been, was just, inasmuch as the people had provoked it by their iniquities; for those who, when stricken by the Divine hand, are not brought to genuine humiliation, harden themselves more and more. The true way to profit, and also to subdue our pride, is to feel that He is a righteous judge. Accordingly Moses, after having briefly taught that men by nature vanish away like smoke, gathers from thence that it is not to be wondered at if God exanimates and consumes those whom he pursues with his wrath. The manner of the expression by which God is described as showing the tokens of his anger is to be observed — *he sets the iniquities of men before his eyes* Hence it follows, that whatever intermission of punishment we experience ought in justice to be ascribed to the forbearance of. God, who buries our sins that he may spare us. The word עלומים, *alumim,* which I have rendered *our secret sins,* is translated by some, *our youth;* [1048] as if Moses had said that the faults committed in youth are brought to remembrance. But this is too forced, and inconsistent with

1048

"In the Indies," says Sir John Chardin, "the parts of the night are made known, as well by instruments (of music,) in great cities, as by the rounds of the watchmen, who, with cries and small drums, give notice that a fourth part of the night is passed. Now, as these cries awaked those who had slept all that quarter part of the night, it appeared to them but as a moment." — *Harmer's Observations*, volume 1, page 333. If this psalm was the production of Moses, it is observable that night watches were in use in his time.

the scope of the passage; for it would destroy the contrast between *secret sins* and *the light of God's countenance,* by which Moses intimates that men hide themselves in darkness, and wrap themselves in many deceits, so long as God does not shine upon them with the light of his judgment; whereas, when he draws them back from their subterfuges, by which they endeavor to escape from him, and sets before his eyes the sins which they hide by hypocrisy, being subdued by fear and dread, they are brought sincerely to humble themselves before him.

Psalm 90:9-10

> **9.** For all our days are passed away in thy indignation: we have spent our years as it were a thought. [1049] **10.** In the days of our years there are threescore years and ten: and if through strength they are fourscore years, yet is their pride but labor and grief; for it [1050] swiftly passes by, and we fly away.

9. *For all our days are passed away in thy indignation.* This might be viewed as a general confirmation of the preceding sentence, That the whole course of man's life is suddenly brought to an end, as soon as God shows himself displeased. But in my opinion Moses rather amplifies what he has said above concerning the rigour of God's wrath, and his strict examination of every case in which he punishes sin. He asserts that this terror which God brought upon his people was not only for a short time, but that it was extended without intermission even to death. He complains that the Jews had almost wasted away by continual miseries; because God neither remitted nor mitigated his anger. It is therefore not surprising to find him declaring that their years passed away like a *tale,* when God's anger rested upon them so unremittingly.

10. *In the days of our years there are threescore years and ten.* He again returns to the general doctrine respecting the precariousness of the condition of men, although God may not openly display his wrath to terrify them. "What," says he, "is the duration of life? Truly, if we reckon all our years, we will at length come to threescore and ten, or, if there be some who are stronger and more vigorous, they will bring us even to fourscore." Moses uses the expression, *the days of our years,* for the sake of emphasis; for when the time is divided into small portions, the very number itself deceives us, so that we flatter ourselves that life is long. With the view of overthrowing

1049

Archbishop Secker supposes that this may be the reading, and refers to Job 20:11.

1050

"Ou, une parolle." — *Fr. marg.* "Or, a word." Dr Adam Clarke reads, "We consume our years like a groan;" and observes, "We live a dying, whining, complaining life; and at last a *groan* is its termination! How amazingly expressive!"

these vain delusions, he permits men to sum up the many thousand days [1051] which are in a few years; while he at the same time affirms that this great heap is soon brought to nothing. Let men then extend the space of their life as much as they please, by calculating that each year contains three hundred and sixty-five days; yet assuredly they will find that the term of seventy years is short. When they have made a lengthened calculation of the days, this is the sum in which the process ultimately results. He who has reached the age of fourscore years hastens to the grave. Moses himself lived longer, (Deuteronomy 34:7,) [1052] and so perhaps did others in his time; but he speaks here of the ordinary term. And even then, those were accounted old men, and in a manner decrepit, who attained to the age of fourscore years; so that he justly declares that it is the robust only who arrive at that age. He puts *pride* for *the strength* or *excellence* of which men boast so highly. The sense is, that before men decline and come to old age, even in the very bloom of youth they are involved in many troubles, and that they cannot escape from the cares, weariness, sorrows, fears, griefs, inconveniences, and anxieties, to which this mortal life is subject. Moreover, this is to be referred to the whole course of our existence in the present state. And assuredly, he who considers what is the condition of our life from our infancy until we descend into the grave, will find troubles and turmoil in every part of it. The two Hebrew words עמל, *amal,* and און, *aven,* which are joined together, are taken passively for *inconveniences* and *afflictions;* implying that the life of man is full of labor, and fraught with many torments, and that even at the time when men are in the height of their pride. The reason which is added, *for it swiftly passes by, and we fly away,* seems hardly to suit the scope of the passage; for felicity may be brief, and yet on that account it does not cease to be felicity. But Moses means that men foolishly glory in their excellence, since, whether they will or no, they are constrained to look to the time to come. And as soon as they open their eyes, they see that they are dragged and carried forward to death with rapid haste, and that their excellence is every moment vanishing away.

Psalm 90:11-13

11. Who knoweth the power of thy anger? and according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. **12.** Teach us so [1053] to number our days, and we shall apply our hearts to wisdom. **13.** Return, O Jehovah! how long? Be pacified towards thy servants.

1051

"Pource que nostre vie." — *Fr.* "For our life."

1052

In the Latin version it is, "multa annorum millia;" "many thousand years." But this is evidently a mistake, which the French version corrects, reading "beaucoup de milliers de jours."

1053

11. *Who knoweth, the power of thy anger?* Moses again returns to speak of the peculiar afflictions of the Israelites; for he had also on this occasion complained before of the common frailty and miseries of mankind. He justly exclaims that the power of God's wrath is immeasurably great. So long as God withholds his hand, men wantonly leap about like runaway slaves, who are no longer afraid at the sight of their master; nor can their rebellious nature be reduced to obedience in any other way than by his striking them with the fear of his judgment. The meaning then is, that whilst God hides himself, and, so to speak, dissembles his displeasure, men are inflated with pride, and rush upon sin with reckless impetuosity; but when they are compelled to feel how dreadful his wrath is, they forget their loftiness, and are reduced to nothing. What follows, *According to thy fear, so is thy wrath,* is commonly explained as denoting that the more a man is inspired with reverence towards God, the more severely and sternly is he commonly dealt with; for "judgment begins at the house of God," (1 Peter 4:17.) Whilst he pampers the reprobate with the good things of this life, he wastes his chosen ones with continual troubles; and in short, "whom he loveth he chasteneth," (Hebrews 12:6.) It is then a true and profitable doctrine that he deals more roughly with those who serve him than with the reprobate. But Moses, I think, has here a different meaning, which is, that it is a holy awe of God, and that alone, which makes us truly and deeply feel his anger. We see that the reprobate, although they are

Moses, as we learn from the passage to which Calvin refers, "was an hundred and twenty years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated." He was eighty years old when God made him captain of the chosen people; and Aaron was eighty-three years old before he was made High Priest, Exodus 7:7. These, and a few other similar cases, have led many to conclude that the age of eighty was not considered at that time the age of decrepitude; and consequently that this psalm, which limits the average length of human life to seventy or eighty years, must be of a later date than the time of Moses. But this is no valid argument against his being its penman. According to Calvin, seventy or eighty years was at that time, in general, the utmost limits of human life; and the longevity of Moses and some others who exceeded that limit was an exception to the general rule. If this should be called in question, it might be observed that this psalm treats of the afflictions and brevity of life, not in reference to all men absolutely, but with respect to the Israelites in particular, who, on account of their murmuring at the report of the spies who had been sent to spy out the land of Canaan, and other sins, provoked God to swear in his wrath that the carcases of all that were numbered of them according to their whole number, from twenty years old and upwards, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua, should fall in the wilderness during the forty years of their wandering in it, (Numbers 14:27-29.) Few of them, therefore, could have exceeded or even reached the age of fourscore years. It has been thought by some that at that time human life all over the world was reduced to the measure here specified, as its average standard. "The decree which abbreviated the life of man as a general rule to seventy or eighty years," observes Dr J. M. Good, "was given as a chastisement upon the whole race of Israelites in the wilderness. It does not appear that the term of life was lengthened afterwards. Samuel died about seventy years old, David under seventy-one, and Solomon under sixty; and the history of the world shows that the abbreviation of life in other countries was nearly in the same proportion."

severely punished, only chafe upon the bit, or kick against God, or become exasperated, or are stupified, as if they were hardened against all calamities; so far are they from being subdued. And though they are full of trouble, and cry aloud, yet the Divine anger does not so penetrate their hearts as to abate their pride and fierceness. The minds of the godly alone are wounded with the wrath of God; nor do they wait for his thunderbolts, to which the reprobate hold out their hard and iron necks, but they tremble the very moment when God moves only his little finger. This I consider to be the true meaning of the prophet. He had said that the human mind could not sufficiently comprehend the dreadfulness of the Divine wrath. And we see how, although God shakes heaven and earth, many notwithstanding, like the giants of old, treat this with derision, and are actuated by such brutish arrogance, that they despise him when he brandishes his bolts. But as the Psalmist is treating of a doctrine which properly belongs to true believers, he affirms that they have a strongly sensitive feeling of the wrath of God which makes them quietly submit themselves to his authority. Although to the wicked their own conscience is a tormentor which does not suffer them to enjoy repose, yet so far is this secret dread from teaching them to humble themselves, that it excites them to clamor against God with increasing frowardness. In short, the faithful alone are sensible of God's wrath; and being subdued by it, they acknowledge that they are nothing, and with true humility devote themselves wholly to Him. This is wisdom to which the reprobate cannot attain, because they cannot lay aside the pride with which they are inflated. They are not touched with the feeling of God's wrath, because they do not stand in awe of him.

12. *Teach us so to number our days.* Some translate to *the number of our days,* which gives the same sense. As Moses perceived that what he had hitherto taught is not comprehended by the understandings of men until God shine upon them by his Spirit, he now sets himself to prayer. It indeed seems at first sight absurd to pray that we may know the number of our years. What? since even the strongest scarcely reach the age of fourscore years, is there any difficulty in reckoning up so small a sum? Children learn numbers as soon as they begin to prattle; and we do not need a teacher in arithmetic to enable us to count the length of a hundred upon our fingers. So much the fouler and more shameful is our stupidity in never comprehending the short term of our life. Even he who is most skillful in arithmetic, and who can precisely and accurately understand and investigate millions of millions, is nevertheless unable to count fourscore years in his own life. It is surely a monstrous thing that men can measure all distances without themselves, that they know how many feet the moon is distant from the center of the earth, what space there is between the different planets; and, in short, that they can measure all the dimensions both of heaven and earth; while yet they cannot number threescore and ten years in their own case. It is therefore evident that Moses had good reason to beseech God for ability to perform

what requires a wisdom which is very rare among mankind. The last clause of the verse is also worthy of special notice. By it he teaches us that we then truly apply our hearts to wisdom when we comprehend the shortness of human life. What can be a greater proof of madness than to ramble about without proposing to one's self any end? True believers alone, who know the difference between this transitory state and a blessed eternity, for which they were created, know what ought to be the aim of their life. No man then can regulate his life with a settled mind, but he who, knowing the end of it, that is to say death itself, is led to consider the great purpose of man's existence in this world, that he may aspire after the prize of the heavenly calling.

13. *Return, O Jehovah! how long?* After having spoken in the language of complaint, Moses adds a prayer, That God, who had not ceased for a long time severely to punish his people, would at length be inclined to deal gently with them. Although God daily gave them in many ways some taste of his love, yet their banishment from the land of promise was a very grievous affliction; for it admonished them that they were unworthy of that blessed inheritance which he had appointed for his children. They could not fail often to remember that dreadful oath which he had thundered out against them,

"Surely they shall not see the land which I sware unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it: But as for you, your carcases, they shall fall in this wilderness,"
(Numbers 14:23, 32.) [1054]

Moses, no doubt, combines that sore bondage which they had suffered in Egypt with their wanderings in the wilderness; and therefore he justly bewails their protracted languishing in the words *how long?* As God is said to turn his back upon us, or to depart to a distance from us, when he withdraws the tokens of his favor, so by his return we are to understand the manifestation of his grace. The word נחם, *nacham,* which we have translated *be pacified,* signifies to *repent,* and may therefore not improperly be explained thus: Let it repent thee concerning thy servants. According to the not unfrequent and well known phraseology of Scripture, God is said to repent, when putting away men's sorrow, and affording new ground of gladness, he appears as it were to be changed. Those, however, seem to come nearer the mind of the Psalmist who translate, *Comfort thyself over thy servants;* for God, in cherishing us tenderly, takes no less pleasure in us than does a father in his own children. Now that is nothing else than to be

1054

"There is an ambiguity in כן, as it denotes either *so* or *rightly* Hence the interpretation is twofold; either 'so make us to know that we may cause a heart of wisdom to come,' *i e.*, so instruct us that we may acquire a wise heart. Or, 'teach us to number our days rightly,' etc. LXX. give it another and distorted interpretation." — *Bythner*

pacified or propitious, as we have translated it, to make the meaning the more obvious.

Psalm 90:14-17

> **14.** Satiate us early [1055] with thy goodness, and we will be glad and rejoice all our days. **15.** Make us joyful according to the days of our affliction; according to the years in which we have seen evil. **16.** Let thy work appear towards thy servants, and thy glory upon their children. **17.** And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and direct the work of our hands upon us; yea, direct thou the work of our hands.

16 *Let thy work appear towards thy servants.* As God, when he forsakes his Church, puts on as it were a character different from his own, Moses, with much propriety, calls the blessing of protection which had been divinely promised to the children of Abraham *God's proper work.* Although, therefore, God's work was manifest in all the instances in which he had punished the perfidiousness, ingratitude, obstinacy, unruly lusts, and unhallowed desires of his people, yet Moses, by way of eminence, prefers before all other proofs of God's power, that care which he exercised in maintaining the welfare of the people, by which it was his will that he should be principally known. This is the reason why Paul, in Romans 9:23, especially applies to the Divine goodness the honorable title of "glory." God indeed maintains his glory by judging the world; but as nothing is more natural to him than to show himself gracious, his glory on that account is said to shine forth chiefly in his benefits. With respect to the present passage, God had then only begun to deliver his people; for they had still to be put in possession of the land of Canaan. Accordingly, had they gone no farther than the wilderness, the lustre of their deliverance would have been obscured. Besides, Moses estimates the work of God according to the Divine promise; and doing this he affirms that it will be imperfect and incomplete, unless he continue his grace even to the end. This is expressed still more plainly in the second clause of the verse, in which he prays not only for the welfare of his own age, but also for the welfare of the generation yet unborn. His exercise thus corresponds with the form of the covenant,

"And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenants to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee,"
(Genesis 17:7.)

1055

The great mortality constantly taking place among them could not but remind them of this oath. Dimock calculates that the number of persons who died in the wilderness, from twenty years old and upwards, was one year with another near 15,000.

By this example we are taught, that in our prayers we ought to extend our care to those who are to come after us. As God has promised that the Church will be perpetuated even to the end of the world, — a subject which was brought under our notice in the preceding psalm, — this ought, in a special manner, to lead us in all the prayers by which we commend the welfare of the Church to him, to include, at the same time, our posterity who are yet unborn. Farther, the words *glory* and *beauty* are to be particularly noticed: from which we learn that the love which God bears towards us is unparalleled. Although, in enriching us with his gifts he gains nothing for himself; yet he would have the splendor and beauty of his character manifested in dealing bountifully with us, as if his beauty were obscured when he ceases to do us good. In the clause immediately succeeding, *Direct the work of our hands upon us,* Moses intimates that we cannot undertake or attempt anything with the prospect of success, unless God become our guide and counsellor, and govern us by his Spirit. Whence it follows, that the reason why the enterprises and efforts of worldly men have a disastrous issue is, because, in not following God, they pervert all order and throw everything into confusion. Nor is the word עלינו, *alenu, upon us,* superfluous; for although God converts to good in the end whatever Satan and the reprobate plot and practice against him or his people; yet the Church, in which God rules with undisturbed sway, has in this respect a special privilege. By his providence, which to us is incomprehensible, he directs his work in regard to the reprobate externally; but he governs his believing people internally by his Holy Spirit; and therefore he is properly said to order or direct the work of their hands. The repetition shows that a continual course of perseverance in the grace of God is required. It would not be enough for us to be brought to the midst of our journey. He must enable us to complete the whole course. Some translate, *confirm* or *establish;* and this sense may be admitted. I have, however, followed that translation which was more agreeable to the context, conceiving the prayer to be that God would direct to a prosperous issue all the actions and undertakings of his people.

Psalm 91

PSALM 91

In this psalm we are taught that God watches over the safety of his people, and never fails them in the hour of danger. They are exhorted to advance through all perils, secure in the confidence of his protection. The truth inculcated is one of great use, for though many talk much of God's providence, and profess to believe that he exercises a special guardianship over his own children, few are found actually willing to intrust their safety to him.
1056

Psalm 91:1-4

1. He that dwelleth in the secret place of the High One shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. **2.** I will say to Jehovah, He is my hope and my fortress: my God; in him will I hope. **3.** Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, from the noxious pestilence. **4.** He shall protect thee with his wings, and under his feathers shalt thou be safe; his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

1 *He that dwelleth in the secret place of the High One.* Some Hebrew interpreters read the three first verses as one continuous sentence, down to the words, *he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler* The whole would then run thus — "He who dwells in the covert of the Most High, and abides under his shadow, to him will I say of Jehovah, that he is his hope and

1056

"*Early*, after the dark night of afflictions." — *Ainsworth.*

defense, and the God in whom he may safely rest, for he shall deliver him from the snare," etc. This is evidently a forced construction to put upon the verses, and the reason which has led some to adopt it is weak and insufficient. They consider that the first verse repeats the same thing twice, and therefore conveys no proper meaning. But this is a great mistake; for the inspired penman of the psalm, whoever he may have been, states two ideas quite distinct, That he who is hid under the Divine protection occupies a safe and secure position, where no hostile weapon can reach him. Or should the verse be read — *He who has God to be the guardian of his safety shall rest under the shadow of God;* still the second clause would retain an emphatic meaning, for the power of God would be contrasted with that weak defense which man is able to extend. Those, too, who dwell in the secret place of God are here said by the Psalmist to dwell under his shadow, in the sense that they experience to what a rich extent his protection reaches. Men generally seek out a great-variety of hiding-places, having recourse to one or another, according as the calamities are different which threaten to overtake them; but here we are taught that the only safe and impregnable fortress to which we can betake ourselves is the protection of God. He contrasts the security of those who trust in God with the vanity of all other confidences by which we are apt to delude ourselves.

In the second verse he repeats the truth which he had already inculcated, showing at the same time that he speaks from his personal feeling and experience as a believer. This is very necessary in one who would be a teacher; for we cannot communicate true knowledge unless we deliver it not merely with the lips, but as something which God has revealed to our own hearts. [1057] The Psalmist accordingly gives evidence, that what he had taught in the preceding verse accorded with his own inward experience. Some read, *I will say* concerning *the Lord,* and the Hebrew prefix, ל, *lamed,* may be so rendered; but the other translation which I have given conveys the more forcible meaning. The believer does more than simply resolve to make God his fortress; he draws near in the trust of the Divine promises, and familiarly addresses God. This confidence in prayer affords an additional proof how securely the people of God can dwell under his shadow. This holy species of boasting constitutes the very highest triumph of faith, when we betake ourselves to God without fear under our worst trials, and are fully persuaded that he answers all our prayers, nay, that we have in him a sufficiency and a superabundance of help.

In verse third the Psalmist expresses his assurance that the trust of which he had spoken would not be vain and delusory, but that God would prove at all times the deliverer of his people. He is evidently to be considered as addressing himself, and in this way encouraging his own heart to hope in the Lord. Some think that by the *snare of the fowler,* spoken of here in connection with *the pestilence,* is to be understood hidden mischief as

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distinguished from open aggression, and that the Psalmist declares the Divine protection to be sufficient for him, whether Satan should attack him openly and violently or by more secret and subtle methods. I would not reject this interpretation; for though some may think that the words should be taken in their simpler acceptation, the Psalmist most probably intended under these terms to denote all different kinds of evil, and to teach us that God was willing and able to deliver us from any of them.

4 *He shall protect thee with his wings.* This figure, which is employed in other parts of Scripture, is one which beautifully expresses the singularly tender care with which God watches over our safety. When we consider the majesty of God, there is nothing which would suggest a likeness such as is here drawn between him and the hen or other birds, who spread their wings over their young ones to cherish and protect them. But, in accommodation to our infirmity, he does not scruple to descend, as it were, from the heavenly glory which belongs to him, and to encourage us to approach him under so humble a similitude. Since he condescends in such a gracious manner to our weakness, surely there is nothing to prevent us from coming to him with the greatest freedom. By *the truth of God,* which, the Psalmist says, would be his *shield* and *buckler,* we must understand God's faithfulness, as never deserting his people in the time of their need; still we cannot doubt that he had in his eye the Divine promises, for it is only by looking to these that any can venture to cast themselves upon the protection of God. As, without the word, we cannot come to the enjoyment of that Divine mercy of which the Psalmist had already spoken, he now comes forward himself to bear witness in behalf of it. Formerly, under the comparison of a *fortress,* he had taught that by trusting in God we shall enjoy safety and security;

This psalm is allowed to be one of the finest in the whole collection. "Could the Latin or any modern language," says Simon de Muis, "express thoroughly all the beauties and elegancies as well of the *words* as of the *sentences*, it would not be difficult to persuade the reader that we have no poem, either in Greek or Latin, comparable to this Hebrew ode." It is supposed by some to have been composed by Moses on the same occasion as the preceding; but others think it was written by David on the occasion of the pestilence which was inflicted upon the people as a punishment of his sin in numbering them, (2 Samuel 24.) It is ascribed to David in the Septuagint, Chaldee, Vulgate, Syriac, Arabic, and Æthiopic versions. Its subject-matter affords us no assistance in determining who was its inspired author, or on what occasion it was written. "There is, however, no reason," says Walford, "to regret our unacquaintedness with these particulars, as the poem is so clear and intelligible, that nothing in it can be mistaken or misunderstood. The purpose of it is to illustrate the safety and happiness which result from the knowledge of God, and the exercise of a steadfast dependence upon his promise and grace. The sentiments are expressed with great force and beauty; and dead indeed must be the soul to every emotion of spiritual and heavenly delight that fails to be impressed by its truth, or to aim at the acquirement of such faith and reliance upon it as will alone render it productive of the peace and tranquillity of mind which it is intended to bestow. The learned Michaelis is of opinion that this psalm was to be recited in alternate parts by two choruses or sets of singers responding to each other, and that God himself is introduced in verse 14 as taking part of the performance." It is supposed by the Jews to relate to the Messiah. See Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10, 11.

now he compares God to a *shield,* intimating that he will come between us and all our enemies to preserve us from their attacks.

Psalm 91:5-8

5. Thou shalt not fear for the terror of the night; for the arrow that flieth by day; **6.** For the destruction that walketh in darkness; for the pestilence [1058] which wasteth at noon-day. [1059] **7.** A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; it shall not come nigh thee. **8.** Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked.

5 *Thou shalt not fear for the terror of the night.* The Psalmist continues to insist upon the truth which I have just adverted to, that, if we confide with implicit reliance upon the protection of God, we will be secure from every temptation and assault of Satan. It is of importance to remember, that those whom God has taken under his care are in a state of the most absolute safety. Even those who have reached the most advanced experience find nothing more difficult than to rely upon Divine deliverance; and more especially when, overtaken by some of the many forms in which danger and death await us in this world, doubts will insinuate themselves into our hearts, giving rise to fear and disquietude. There was reason, therefore, why the Psalmist should enter upon a specification of different evils, encouraging the Lord's people to look for more than one mode of deliverance, and to bear up under various and accumulated calamities. Mention is made of *the fear of the night,* because men are naturally apprehensive in the dark, or because the night exposes us to dangers of different kinds, and our fears are apt at such a season to magnify any sound or disturbance. The *arrow,* rather than another weapon, is instanced as flying by day, for the reason apparently that it shoots to a greater distance, and with such swiftness, that we can with difficulty escape it. The verse which follows states, though in different words, the same truth, that there is no kind of calamity which the shield of the Almighty cannot ward off and repel.

7 *A thousand shall fall at thy side.* [1060] He proceeds to show that, though the state of all men may to appearance be alike, the believer has the

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"Car ceste est la vraye cognoissance, laquelle nous pouvons bailler aux autres de main en main, quand nous mettons en avant ce que Dieu nous a revele, non point des levres taut seulement: mais aussi du profond du coeur." — *Fr.*

1059

The original word, which Calvin renders "the pestilence," is rendered in the Syriac "the blowing wind." Fry's version has "the blast." "The *simoon*, or hot wind of the desert," he observes, "a phenomenon in those regions too remarkable to have escaped the divine poet in enumerating the sources of danger to human life." This wind being hot and burning in its effects, when it blows at noon-day, must be still more fatal.

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special privilege of being exempted from evils of an imminent and impending nature; for it might be objected that he was but man, and, as such, exposed with others to death in its thousand different forms. To correct this mistake, the Psalmist does not hesitate to assert that, when universal ruin prevails around, the Lord's children are the objects of his distinguishing care, and are preserved amidst the general destruction. The lesson is one which is needed by us all, that, though naturally subject to the common evils which are spread around, we are privileged with a special exemption which secures our safety in the midst of dangers. In the verse succeeding more is meant than merely that the believer will have personal experience of the truth which the Psalmist had stated, actually feeling and seeing with his own eyes that God manages his defense; a new argument is brought forward in support of the truth, which is this, that God, as the righteous judge of the world, cannot but punish the wicked according to their sins, and extend protection to his own children. There is much that is dark in the aspect of things in this world, yet the Psalmist hints that, amidst all the confusion which reigns, we may collect from what we see of God's judgments, that he does not disappoint the expectations of his believing people. He must be considered, however, as addressing those who have eyes to see, who are privileged with the true light of faith, who are fully awake to the consideration of the Divine judgments, and who wait patiently and quietly till the proper time arrive; for most men stagger and confuse their minds upon this subject, by starting to precipitate conclusions, and are prevented from discovering the providence of God by judging according to sense. It becomes us too to be satisfied with apprehending the judgments of God only in some imperfect measure while we remain upon earth, and leaving him to defer the fuller discovery of them to the day of complete revelation.

Psalm 91:9-12

9. Because thou, Jehovah, art my protection; thou hast made the Most High thy refuge. [1061] **10.** There shall no evil befall thee, and no plague shall come nigh thy dwelling. **11.** For he has given his

"Verses 5 and 6. Jos. Scaliger explains, in Epis. 9, these two verses thus: — *Thou shalt not fear*, מפהר, *from consternation by night*, מחף, *from the arrow flying by day*, מדבר, *from pestilence walking at evening*, מקטב, *from devastation at noon* Under these four he comprehends all the evils and dangers to which man is liable. And as the Hebrews divide the four and twenty hours of day and night into four parts, namely, evening, midnight, morning, and mid-day, so he understands the hours of danger to be divided accordingly: in a word, 'that the man, who has made God his refuge,' is always safe, day and night, at every hour, from every danger." — *Bythner*

1061

As a signal instance of this preservation, Bishop Horne adduces the well known and exemplary conduct of the good Bishop of Marseilles, who, during the plague in that city in 1720, When nature sickened, and each gale was death, though in constant attendance on the infected and dying thousands, entirely escaped the contagion.

angels charge concerning thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. **12.** They shall bear thee upon their hands, lest thou dash thy foot upon a stone,

9 *Because thou, Jehovah, art my protection.* He dwells at this length in commendation of the providence of God, as knowing how slow men naturally are to resort to God in a right manner; and how much they need to be stimulated to this duty, and to be driven from those false and worldly refuges in which they confide. There is a change of person frequently throughout this psalm: thus, in the first verse, he addresses God, and afterwards addresses himself. God he styles *his protection,* — in this manner, by his own example, recommending others to have recourse to God as their help. So, afterwards, he addresses himself, that he may be the better persuaded of the sincerity of his inward affection. The true method of testing our faith is to turn our thoughts inward upon ourselves, and, when no human eye sees us, to search our own spirits. If, not content with having to do with God only, we turn our eyes to men, it is almost impossible to prevent pride from insinuating itself into the room of faith. He speaks of accounting God to be his *house* or *refuge,* because he defends us from every evil, as in Psalm 90:1. This verse may be considered as connected with that which follows, and as stating the cause or reason of what is there asserted; for it is added, *There shall no evil befall thee.* And how are coming evils averted, but just by our resting with confidence in the protection of God? Troubles, it is true, of various kinds assail the believer as well as others, but the Psalmist means that God stands between him and the violence of every assault, so as to preserve him from being overwhelmed. The Divine guardianship is represented as extending to the whole *household* of the righteous; and we know that God comprehends under his love the children of such as he has adopted into his fatherly favor. Or, perhaps, the term may be taken in its simpler sense, and nothing more be intended than that those who choose God for their refuge will dwell safely in their *houses.*

11 *For he has given his angels charge concerning thee.* This is added by the Psalmist expressly with the view of obviating any fears which might arise from our infirmity; so that we cannot fail to be struck with the benignant condescension of God in thus not only forgiving our diffidence, but proposing the means by which it may be best removed. Does he exhibit himself to us as a fortress and shield, proffer the shadow of his protection, make himself known to us as a habitation in which we may abide, and stretch out his wings for our defense — surely we are chargeable with the worst ingratitude if we are not satisfied with promises so abundantly full and satisfactory? If we tremble to think of his majesty, he presents himself to us under the lowly figure of the hen: if we are terrified at the power of our enemies, and the multitude of dangers by which we are beset, he reminds us of his own invincible power, which extinguishes every opposing force. When even all these attempts to encourage us have been tried, and he finds that we

still linger and hesitate to approach him, or cast ourselves upon his sole and exclusive protection, he next makes mention of the angels, and proffers them as guardians of our safety. As an additional illustration of his indulgent mercy, and compassion for our weakness, he represents those whom he has ready for our defense as being a numerous host; he does not assign one solitary angel to each saint, but commissions the whole armies of heaven to keep watch over every individual believer. It is the individual believer whom the Psalmist addresses, as we read also Psalm 34:7 — that "angels encamp round about them that fear him." We may learn from this that there is no truth in the idea that each saint has his own peculiar guardian angel; and it is of no little consequence to consider, that as our enemies are numerous, so also are the friends to whom our defense is intrusted. It were something, no doubt, to know that even one angel was set over us with this commission, but it adds weight to the promise when we are informed that the charge of our safety is committed to a numerous host, as Elisha was enabled, by a like consideration, to despise the great army of adversaries which was arrayed against him, (2 Kings 6:16.) Nor is this inconsistent with passages of Scripture, which seem to speak as if a distinct angel were assigned to each individual. It is evident that God employs his angels in different ways, setting one angel over several whole nations, and again several angels over one man. There is no necessity that we should be nice and scrupulous in inquiring into the exact manner in which they minister together for our safety; it is enough that, knowing from the authority of an apostle the fact of their being appointed ministers to us, we should rest satisfied of their being always intent upon their commission. We read elsewhere of their readiness to obey and execute the commands of God; and this must go to strengthen our faith, since their exertions are made use of by God for our defense.

The Psalmist, in the passage now before us, speaks of members of the Church generally; and yet the devil did not wrest the words when, in his temptation in the wilderness, he applied them particularly to Christ. It is true that he is constantly seeking to pervert and corrupt the truth of God; but, so far as general principles are concerned, he can put a specious gloss upon things, and is a sufficiently acute theologian. It is to be considered that when our whole human family were banished from the Divine favor, we ceased to have anything in common with the angels, and they to have any communication with us. It was Christ, and he only, who, by removing the ground of separation, reconciled the angels to us; this being his proper office, as the apostle observes, (Ephesians 1:10,) to gather together in one what had been dispersed both in heaven and on earth. This was represented to the holy patriarch Jacob under the figure of a ladder, (Genesis 28:12;) and, in allusion to our being united into one collective body with the angels, Christ said,

"Afterwards ye shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending," (John 1:51.)

The Psalmist adds, *all your ways* in the plural number, to convey to us more distinctly that wherever we go we may expect that the angels shall always extend their guardianship to us. The course of our life is subject to many windings and changes, and who can tell all the storms by which we are liable to be tossed? It was necessary, therefore, to know that the angels preside over all our particular actions and purposes, and thus to be assured of their safe-conduct in whatever quarter we might be called to move. This expression, however, *your ways,* was, in all likelihood, intended to enjoin upon us a due consideration and modesty, to warn us against tempting God by any rash step, and admonish us to confine ourselves within the bounds of our proper calling. For should we commit ourselves recklessly, and attempt things which the promise of God does not warrant us to undertake, aspiring at what is presumptuous, and opposed to the Divine will, we are not to expect that the angels will become ministers and helps to our temerity. Satan would appear to have craftily omitted this clause when he tempted Christ rashly to throw himself down from the temple.

12 *They shall bear thee upon their hands.* He gives us a still higher idea of the guardianship of the angels, informing us, that they not only watch lest any evil should befall us, and are on the alert to extend assistance, but bear up our steps with their hands, so as to prevent us from stumbling in our course. Were we to judge indeed by mere appearances, the children of God are far from being thus borne up aloft in their career; often they labor and pant with exertion, occasionally they stagger and fall, and it is with a struggle that they advance in their course; but as in the midst of all this weakness it is only by the singular help of God that they are preserved every moment from falling and from being destroyed, we need not wonder that the Psalmist should speak in such exalted terms of the assistance which they receive through the ministrations of angels. Never, besides, could we surmount the serious obstacles which Satan opposes to our prayers, unless God should bear us up in the manner here described. Let any one combine together the two considerations which have been mentioned, — our own utter weakness on the one hand, and on the other the roughness, the difficulties, the thorns which beset our way, the stupidity besides which characterises our hearts, and the subtlety of the evil one in laying snares for our destruction, — and he will see that the language of the Psalmist is not that of hyperbole, that we could not proceed one step did not the angels bear us up in their hands in a manner beyond the ordinary course of nature. That we frequently stumble is owing to our own fault in departing from him who is our head and leader. And though God suffers us to stumble and fall in this manner that he may convince us how weak we are in ourselves, yet, inasmuch as he does not permit us to be crushed or altogether overwhelmed, it is virtually even then as if he put his hand under us and bore us up.

Psalm 91:13-16

> **13.** Thou shalt walk over the lion and asp, the young lion and dragon shalt thou trample under feet. **14.** Because he hath trusted in me, I will deliver him; because he hath known my name, I will set him on high. **15.** He shall call upon me, and I shall answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and glorify him. **16.** With length of days will I satisfy him, and I will show him my salvation.

13. *Thou shalt walk over the lion and asp.* The same truth is here expressed in different words. He had already spoken of the obstacles which Satan throws in our course under the figure of a *stone.* Now he speaks of the formidable troubles to which we are exposed in the world under the figures of the *asp, lion, young lion,* and *dragon* So long as we are here we may be truly said to walk amongst wild beasts, and such as threaten us with destruction. And in this case what would become of us did not God promise to make us victorious over the manifold evils which everywhere impend us? None who seriously considers the temptations to which he is liable will wonder that the Psalmist, with the view of removing apprehension from the minds of the Lord's people, should have adopted the language of hyperbole; nor indeed will he say that it is the language of hyperbole, but a true and exact representation of their case. We boast much of our courage so long as we remain at a distance from the scene of danger; but no sooner are we brought into action, than in the smallest matters we conjure up to ourselves lions, and dragons, and a host of frightful dangers. The Psalmist accommodates his language to this infirmity of our carnal apprehension. The Hebrew word שחל, *shachal,* which in the Septuagint is rendered *asp,* [1062] signifies *a lion,* and such repetition in the second member of the sentence is usual in the Hebrew. There is therefore no occasion for seeking any nice distinction which may have been intended in specifying these four different kinds of animals; only by *the lion* and *young lion* we are evidently to understand more open dangers, where we are assailed by force and violence, and by *the serpent* and *dragon* hidden mischiefs, where the enemy springs upon us insidiously and unexpectedly, as the serpent from its lurking place. [1063]

14. *Because he hath trusted in me, I will deliver him.* It may prevent any feeling of disgust or weariness under the repetition and enlargement of the Psalmist upon his present subject, to remember, that, as I have already

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Calvin's reading of this verse is different from that of our English Bible. According to it, *thou*, in the first clause, refers to the Psalmist; while, according to him, it is to be understood of God. Hammond gives a similar version. "Because thou, O Lord! art my hope; thou hast made the Most High thy help *or* refuge." All the ancient versions understand the first clause as spoken of God. In the Septuagint it is σὺ Κύριε ἡ ἔλπις μου, "thou, O Lord! art my hope." Similar is the reading of the Chaldee, the Syriac, and Vulgate. But the last member of the verse, "thou hast made the Most High thy refuge," is generally referred to the Psalmist, and regarded as a part of a soliloquy to which, when alone, his soul gave utterance.

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observed, he is influenced in this by a due consideration of our weakness, ever indisposed, as we are upon the approach of danger, to exercise a due reliance upon the providence of God. With this view he now introduces God himself as speaking, and confirming by his own voice what had already been asserted. And here it is noticeable that God, in declaring from heaven that we shall be safe under the wings of his protection, speaks of nothing as necessary on the part of his people but hope or trust. For the Hebrew verb חשק, *chashak,* which signifies to desire, or love, or, as we commonly express it, to find our delight in any object, means here to rest with a sweet confidence in God, and rejoice in his favor. He engages to extend us assistance, if we seek him in sincerity. The language implies that we must be continually surrounded by death and destruction in this world, unless his hand is stretched out for our preservation. Occasionally he assists even unbelievers, but it is only to his believing people that his help is vouchsafed, in the sense of his being their Savior to the true extent of that term, and their Savior to the end. Their *knowing the name* of God is spoken of in connection with their trust and expectation; and very properly, for why is it that men are found casting their eyes vainly round them to every quarter in the hour of danger, but because they are ignorant of the power of God? They cannot indeed be said to know God at all, but delude themselves with a vague apprehension of something which is not God, a mere dead idol

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ἀσπιδα. The most ancient versions correspond in this respect with the Septuagint, as the Vulgate, St Jerome's, Apollinaris', the Syriac, Arabic, and Æthiopic versions, rendering שחל, *shachal*, not by *the lion* but by *the asp*, though they are not agreed as to the particular kind of asp which is intended. This opinion is adopted by the learned Bochart, (Hieroz. volume 3, lib. 3, cap. 3,) who thinks it probable that throughout the verse serpents only are spoken of, and other interpreters have concurred in the same view. He thinks שחל, *shachal*, rendered "the lion," is the *black serpent*, or hoemorhous; and כפיר, *kepher*, rendered "young lion," has been supposed to be the *cenchris*, which Nicander (*Theriac*, 5, 463) calls λέων ἄιολος, *the spotted lion*, because he is speckled, and, like the lion, raises his tail when about to fight, and bites and gluts himself with blood. Bochart objects to *the lion* and *young lion* being meant, on the ground of the incongruity of animals of so very different a nature as lions and serpents being joined together; and observes, that to *walk upon the lion* seems not a very proper expression, as men do not in walking tread on lions as they do on serpents. But *the lion* and the *young lion*, the rendering of later interpreters, correspond to each other, and preserve the parallelism for which the Hebrew poetry is distinguished, and the reasons assigned by Bochart for setting it aside seem insufficient. The lion and the serpent are formidable animals to contend with; and Satan, one of the enemies to be "put in subjection under the feet of Christ," is, in the New Testament, compared both to the lion and the dragon, (1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 12:9.) "Let it be added," says Merrick, "that the Hebrew text says nothing of *walking upon the lion*, but has the word תדרך, which strictly signifies *calcabis*, *thou shalt tread*; and as *to trample on the nations*, and *to make his enemies his footstool*, are expressions used to signify the subduing and triumphing over them; to tread on the lion and the serpent may be understood in the same sense."

Cresswell thinks it probable that the language of this verse is proverbial. "The course of human life," he remarks, "is in Scripture compared to a journey; and the dangers described in this verse were common to the wayfaring man in the Psalmist's time and country."

substituted for him in their imaginations. As it is a true knowledge of God which begets confidence in him, and leads us to call upon him; and as none can seek him sincerely but those who have apprehended the promises, and put due honor upon his name, the Psalmist with great propriety and truth represents this knowledge as being the spring or fountain of trust. That the doctrine which he teaches was needful we may learn from the senseless and erroneous manner in which the Papists speak of faith. While they inculcate an implicit adherence to God, they bury the word which opens up the only access which men can have to him. The expression to *exalt* or *lift up on high* means no more than to keep in a state of safety or security; but the reason of this metaphor is, that God preserves his people in an extraordinary manner, raising them, as it were, to some high and impregnable fortress.

15. *He shall call upon me.* He now shows more clearly what was meant by trusting in God, or placing our love and delight in him. For that affection and desire which is produced by faith, prompts us to call upon his name. This is another proof in support of the truth, which I had occasion to touch upon formerly, that prayer is properly grounded upon the word of God. We are not at liberty in this matter, to follow the suggestions of our own mind or will, but must seek God only in so far as he has in the first place invited us to approach him. The context, too, may teach us, that faith is not idle or inoperative, and that one test, by which we ought to try those who look for Divine deliverances, is, whether they have recourse to God in a right manner. We are taught the additional lesson, that believers will never be exempt from troubles and embarrassments. God does not promise them a life of ease and luxury, but deliverance from their tribulations. Mention is made of his *glorifying* them, intimating that the deliverance which God extends, and which has been spoken of in this psalm, is not of a mere temporary nature, but will issue at last in their being advanced to perfect happiness. He puts much honor upon them in the world, and glorifies himself in them conspicuously, but it is not till the completion of their course that he affords them ground for triumph. It may seem strange that *length of days* should be mentioned in the last verse as promised to them, since many of the Lord's people are soon taken out of the world. But I may repeat an observation which has been elsewhere made, that those Divine blessings which are promised in relation to the present perishing world, are not to be considered as made good in a universal and absolute sense, or fulfilled in all according to one set and equal rule. [1064] Wealth and other worldly comforts must be looked upon as affording some experience of the Divine favor or goodness, but it does not follow that the poor are objects of the Divine

1064

"Dei benedictiones quae ad hanc caducam vitam spectant, non esse perpetuas, neque aequali tenore fluere." — *Lat.* "Ne sont pas perpetuelles, et ne descoulent pas d'un fil continuel." — *Fr.*

displeasure; soundness of body and good health are blessings from God, but we must not conceive on this account that he regards with disapprobation the weak and the infirm. Long life is to be classed among benefits of this kind, and would be bestowed by God upon all his children, were it not for their advantage that they should be taken early out of the world. [1065] They are more satisfied with the short period during which they live than the wicked, though their life should be extended for thousands of years. The expression cannot apply to the wicked, that they are *satisfied with length of days;* for however long they live, the thirst of their desires continues to be unquenched. It is life, and nothing more, which they riot in with such eagerness; nor can they be said to have had one moment's enjoyment of that Divine favor and goodness which alone can communicate true satisfaction. The Psalmist might therefore with propriety state it as a privilege peculiarly belonging to the Lord's people, that they are *satisfied with life.* The brief appointed term is reckoned by them to be sufficient, abundantly sufficient. Besides, longevity is never to be compared with eternity. The salvation of God extends far beyond the narrow boundary of earthly existence; and it is to this, whether we live or come to die, that we should principally look. It is with such a view that the Psalmist, after stating all the other benefits which God bestows, adds this as a last clause, that when he has followed them with his fatherly goodness throughout their lives, he at last shows them his salvation.

1065

"*With long life*, etc. This was a blessing often pledged to good men during the Mosaic dispensation; though we cannot understand it as being universally accomplished, because God at that, as at every subsequent period, has reserved to himself, and to his own wisdom, 'the times and the seasons.'" — *Walford.*

Psalm 92

PSALM 92

This psalm contains an exhortation to praise God, and shows how much ground we have for this exercise from the works of God, insisting, especially, upon his justice, displayed in the protection of his people, and the destruction of the wicked. By such truth it encourages to the practice of righteousness, and preserves us from fainting under the cross of Christ, by proposing to our view a happy issue out of all our afflictions. To deter us, on the other hand, from the commission of iniquity it declares that sinners, however they may prosper for a time, will speedily be destroyed.

A Song for the Sabbath-day.

> Psalm 92:1-4
>
> **1.** It is good to give thanks unto Jehovah, to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High! **2.** To show forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness in the night, **3.** Upon the psaltery, and upon the hand instrument, with the song upon the harp. **4.** For thou, Jehovah, hast made me glad in thy works; I will triumph in the works of thy hands.

1 *It is good to give thanks unto Jehovah.* There is no reason to doubt that the Jews were in the habit of singing this psalm, as the inscription bears, upon the Sabbath-day, and it is apparent, from different passages, that other psalms were applied to this use. As the words may be read literally in the Hebrew, *it is good for giving thanks unto the Lord,* some interpreters, founding upon the letter ל, *lamed,* prefixed to the verb, understand the Psalmist to mean that it was good to have a certain day set apart for

singing the praises of God — that it was a useful arrangement by which one day had been chosen to be occupied by the Lord's people in celebrating his works. But it is well known that this letter, when prefixed, is merely the ordinary mark of the infinitive mood — and I have given what is obviously the simple meaning. The reason why the Psalmist appropriated this psalm to the Sabbath is sufficiently obvious. That day is not to be holy, in the sense of being devoted to idleness, as if this could be an acceptable worship to God, but in the sense of our separating ourselves from all other occupations, to engage in meditating upon the Divine works. As our minds are inconstant, we are apt, when exposed to various distractions, to wander from God. [1066] We need to be disentangled from all cares if we would seriously apply ourselves to the praises of God. The Psalmist then would teach us that the right observance of the Sabbath does not consist in idleness, as some absurdly imagine, but in the celebration of the Divine name. The argument which he adduces is drawn from the profitableness of the service, for nothing is more encouraging than to know that our labor is not in vain, and that what we engage in meets with the Divine approbation. In the succeeding verse, he adverts to the grounds which we have for praising God, that we may not imagine that God calls upon us to engage in this service without reason, or simply in consideration of his greatness and power, but in remembrance of his *goodness* and *faithfulness,* which should inflame our hearts to such exercise, if we had any proper sense and experience of them. He would have us consider, in mentioning these, that not only is God worthy of praise, but that we ourselves are chargeable with ingratitude and perversity should we refuse it. We are the proper objects of his faithfulness and goodness, and it would argue inexcusable indifference if they did not elicit our cordial praises. It might seem a strange distinction which the Psalmist observes when he speaks of our announcing God's goodness in the *morning,* and his faithfulness *at night.* His goodness is constant, and not peculiar to any one season, why then devote but a small part of the day to the celebration of it? And the same may be said of the other Divine perfection mentioned, for it is not merely in the night that his faithfulness is shown. But this is not what the Psalmist intends. He means that beginning to praise the Lord from earliest dawn, we should continue his praises to the latest hour of the night, this being no more than his goodness and faithfulness deserve. [1067] If we begin by celebrating his goodness, we must next take up the subject of his faithfulness. Both will occupy our continued praises, for they stand mutually

1066

"Car selon que nos pensees sont volages, si elles sont distraittes ca et la, elles s'alienent facilement de Dieu."

1067

"Que si nous commencons au matin de louer Dieu, il faut continuer ses louanges jusques a la derniere partie de la nuit; pource que sa bonte et fidelite meritent cela." — *Fr.*

and inseparably connected. The Psalmist is not therefore to be supposed as wishing us to separate the one from the other, for they are intimately allied; he would only suggest that we can never want matter for praising God unless indolence prevail over us, and that if we would rightly discharge the office of gratitude, we must be assiduous in it, since his goodness and his faithfulness are incessant.

In the fourth verse, he more immediately addresses the Levites, who were appointed to the office of singers, and calls upon them to employ their instruments of music — not as if this were in itself necessary, only it was useful as an elementary aid to the people of God in these ancient times. [1068] We are not to conceive that God enjoined the harp as feeling a delight like ourselves in mere melody of sounds; but the Jews, who were yet under age, were astricted to the use of such childish elements. The intention of them was to stimulate the worshippers, and stir them up more actively to the celebration of the praise of God with the heart. We are to remember that the worship of God was never understood to consist in such outward services, which were only necessary to help forward a people, as yet weak and rude in knowledge, in the spiritual worship of God. A difference is to be observed in this respect between his people under the Old and under the New Testament; for now that Christ has appeared, and the Church has reached full age, it were only to bury the light of the Gospel, should we introduce the shadows of a departed dispensation. From this, it appears that the Papists, as I shall have occasion to show elsewhere, in employing instrumental music, cannot be said so much to imitate the practice of God's ancient people, as to ape it in a senseless and absurd manner, exhibiting a silly delight in that worship of the Old Testament which was figurative, and terminated with the Gospel. [1069]

4 *Because thou, Jehovah, hast made me glad.* The Psalmist repeats the truth that the Sabbath was not prescribed as a day of idleness, but a season when we should collect our whole energies for meditation upon the works of God. He intimates, at the same time, that those are best qualified for celebrating the praises of God who recognize and feel his fatherly goodness, and can undertake this service with willing and joyful minds. His language implies that the goodness and faithfulness of God, which he had already mentioned, are apparent in his works upon a due examination of them. What produces joy in our hearts is the exhibition which God gives of himself as a Father, and of his deep and watchful anxiety for our welfare; as, on the other hand, the cause of our brutish indifference is our inability to savor or

1068

"Mais pource que c'estoit un rudiment fort utile au peuple ancien." — *Fr.*

1069

relish the end designed in the works of God. [1070] As the universe proclaims throughout that God is faithful and good, it becomes us to be diligently observant of these tokens, and to be excited by a holy joy to the celebration of his praise.

Psalm 92:5-8

5. O Jehovah! how magnificent are thy works! thy thoughts are very deep. **6.** The foolish man shall not know them, neither shall the man void of wisdom understand them. **7.** When the wicked flourish as the grass, and all the workers of iniquity spring up, that they may perish for ever. **8.** And thou, O Jehovah! art exalted for evermore.

5 *O Jehovah! how highly exalted are thy works!* The Psalmist, having spoken of the works of God in general, proceeds to speak more particularly of his justice in the government of the world. Though God may postpone the punishment of the wicked, he shows, in due time, that in conniving at their sins, he did not overlook or fail to perceive them; and though he exercises his own children with the cross, he proves in the issue, that he was not indifferent to their welfare. His reason for touching upon this particular point seems to be, that much darkness is thrown upon the scheme of Divine Providence by the inequality and disorder which prevail in human affairs. [1071] We see the wicked triumphing, and applauding their own good fortune, as if there

But although Calvin held the use of instrumental music in public worship to be inconsistent with the genius of the Christian dispensation, he regarded the celebration of the praises of God with the melody of the human voice as an institution of great solemnity and usefulness. He knew that psalm-singing is sanctioned by the apostles, and that music has a powerful influence in exciting the mind to ardor of devotion; and to him belongs the merit of having, with the advice of Luther, formed the plan of establishing, as a principal branch of public worship in the Reformed Churches, the singing of psalms, translated into the vernacular language, and adapted to plain and easy melodies, which all the people might learn, and in which they all might join. Immediately upon the publication of Clement Marot's version of David's Psalms into French rhymes at Paris, he introduced it into his congregation at Geneva, set to plain and popular music; and it soon came into universal use throughout the numerous congregations of the Reformed Church of France. At length Marot's Psalms formed an appendix to the Catechism at Geneva, and became a characteristic mark or badge of the Calvinistic worship and profession. Marot's translation, which did not aim at any innovation in the public worship, and which he dedicated to his master Francis I., and the ladies of France, received at first the sanction of the Sorbonne, as containing nothing contrary to sound doctrine. But Calvin knew the character of the book better than the doctors of the Sorbonne, and having, by his influence, obtained its introduction into the worship of the Protestant Church of France, it contributed so much, in consequence of its extraordinary popularity, to the advancement of the Reformed cause in that country, that it was interdicted under the most severe penalties; and, in the language of the Romish Church, psalm-singing and heresy became synonymous terms. — *Warton's History of English Poetry*, volume 3, pages 164, 165.

1070

"Comme aussi la cause de nostre paresse brutale est, que nous avons perdu tout goust quand il est question dee savourer la fin des oeuvres de Dieu."

1071

was no judge above, and taking occasion from the Divine forbearance to run into additional excesses, under the impression that they have escaped his hand. The temptation is aggravated by that stupidity and blindness of heart which lead us to imagine that God exerts no superintendence over the world, and sits idle in heaven. It is known, too, how soon we are ready to sink under the troubles of the flesh. The Psalmist, therefore, intentionally selects this as a case in which he may show the watchful care exerted by God over the human family. He begins, by using the language of exclamation, for such is the dreadful distemper and disorder by which our understandings are confounded, that we cannot comprehend the method of God's works, even when it is most apparent. We are to notice, that the inspired penman is not speaking here of the work of God in the creation of the heavens and earth, nor of his providential government of the world in general, but only of the judgments which he executes amongst men. He calls the works of God great, and his thoughts deep, because he governs the world in quite another manner than we are able to comprehend. Were things under our own management, we would entirely invert the order which God observes; and, such not being the case, we perversely expostulate with God for not hastening sooner to the help of the righteous, and to the punishment of the wicked. It strikes us as in the highest degree inconsistent with the perfections of God, that he should bear with the wicked when they rage against him, when they rush without restraint into the most daring acts of iniquity, and when they persecute at will the good and the innocent; — it seems, I say, in our eyes to be intolerable, that God should subject his own people to the injustice and violence of the wicked, while he puts no check upon abounding falsehood, deceit, rapine, bloodshed, and every species of enormity. Why does he suffer his truth to be obscured, and his holy name to be trampled under foot? This is that greatness of the Divine operation, that depth of the Divine counsel, into the admiration of which the Psalmist breaks forth. It is no doubt true, that there is an incomprehensible depth of power and wisdom which God has displayed in the fabric of the universe; but what the Psalmist has specially in view is, to administer a check to that disposition which leads us to murmur against God, when he does not pursue our plan in his providential managements. When anything in these may not agree with the general ideas of men, we ought to contemplate it with reverence, and remember that God, for the better trial of our obedience, has lifted his deep and mysterious judgments far above our conceptions.

6 *The foolish man shall not know them.* This is added with propriety, to let us know that the fault lies with ourselves, in not praising the Divine judgments as we ought. For although the Psalmist had spoken of them as deep and mysterious, he here informs us that they would be discerned

"Pource que la confusion difforme laquelle se voit en la vie des hommes, obscurcit grandement l'ordre de la providence de Dieu."

without difficulty, were it not for our stupidity and indifference. By *the foolish,* he means unbelievers in general, tacitly contrasting them with believers who are divinely enlightened by the word and Spirit. The ignorance and blindness to which he alludes have possession of all without exception, whose understandings have not been illuminated by Divine grace. It ought to be our prayer to God, that he would purge our sight, and qualify us for meditation upon his works. In short, the Psalmist vindicates the incomprehensible wisdom of God from that contempt which proud men have often cast upon it, charging them with folly and madness in acting such a part; and he would arouse us from that insensibility which is too prevalent, to a due and serious consideration of the mysterious works of God.

7 *When the wicked flourish as the grass.* He points out, and exposes, by a striking and appropriate figure, the folly of imagining that the wicked obtain a triumph over God, when he does not, it may be, immediately bring them under restraint. He makes an admission so far — he grants that they spring up and flourish — but adds immediately, by way of qualification, that they flourish, like the grass, only for a moment, their prosperity being brief and evanescent. In this way he removes what has been almost a universal stumbling-block and ground of offense; for it would be ridiculous to envy the happiness of men who are doomed to be speedily destroyed, and of whom it may be said, that to-day they flourish, and to-morrow they are cut down and wither, (Psalm 129:6.) It will be shown, when we come to consider the psalm now quoted, that the herbs to which the wicked are compared are such as grow on the roofs of houses, which want depth of soil, and die of themselves, for lack of nourishment. In the passage now before us, the Psalmist satisfies himself with using simply the figure, that the prosperity of the wicked draws after it the speedier destruction, as the grass when it is full grown is ready for the scythe. There is an antithesis drawn, too, between the shortness of their continuance and the everlasting destruction which awaits them; for they are not said to be cut down that they may flourish again, as withered plants will recover their vigor, but to be condemned to eternal perdition. [1072] When he says of God, that he sits *exalted for evermore,* some understand him to mean, that God holds the power and office of governing the world, and that we may be certain nothing can happen by chance when such a righteous governor and judge administers the affairs of the world. Various other meanings have been suggested. But it seems to me that the Psalmist compares the stability of God's throne with the fluctuating and changeable character of this world, reminding us that we must not judge of Him by what we see in the world, where there is nothing of a fixed and

1072

"Comme s'il disoit qu'ils ne sont point retranchez, afin que sur le prim-temps ils rejettent derechef, ainsi que les herbes mortes reprenent nouvelle vigueur, mais qu'ils sont condamnez a perdition eternelle. — *Fr.*

enduring nature. God looks down undisturbed from the altitude of heaven upon all the changes of this earthly scene, which neither affect nor have any relation to him. And this the Psalmist brings forward with another view than simply to teach us to distinguish God from his creatures, and put due honor upon his majesty; he would have us learn in our contemplations upon the wonderful and mysterious providence of God, to lift our conceptions above ourselves and this world, since it is only a dark and confused view which our earthly minds can take up. It is with the purpose of leading us into a proper discovery of the Divine judgments which are not seen in the world, that the Psalmist, in making mention of the majesty of God, would remind us, that he does not work according to our ideas, but in a manner corresponding to his own eternal being. We, short-lived creatures as we are, often thwarted in our attempts, embarrassed and interrupted by many intervening difficulties, and too glad to embrace the first opportunity which offers, are accustomed to advance with precipitation; but we are taught here to lift our eyes unto that eternal and unchangeable throne on which God sits, and in wisdom defers the execution of his judgments. The words accordingly convey more than a simple commendation of the glorious being of God; they are meant to help our faith, and tell us that, although his people may sigh under many an anxious apprehension, God himself, the guardian of their safety, reigns on high, and shields them with his everlasting power.

Psalm 92:9-11

9. For, lo! thine enemies, O Jehovah! for, lo, thine enemies shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered. [1073] **10.** But my horn shalt thou exalt, like the horn of an unicorn: [1074] I have been

1073

Hammond reads "separated," and supposes that this may be a judicial phrase, denoting the discrimination made betwixt men, as that which will be effected betwixt the sheep and the goats at the last day. Matthew 25:32 — "All the nations shall be gathered together or assembled before him" as a judge, "and, ἀφοριεῖ αὐτους ἀπ᾽ αλλήλων, he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd, ἀφορίζει, separates the sheep from the goats." For this interpretation we have the authority of the Chaldee, which paraphrases the clause thus, "In the world to come the workers of iniquity shall be separated from the congregation of the just." If this sense is admitted, the passage corresponds with these words in the fifth verse of the first psalm, "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." The LXX., however, render the original word, יתפרדו, *yithparedu*, by διασκορπισθήσονται, "shall be scattered;" and the Syriac gives a similar version. Thus it may denote the *scattering* of enemies, which have been vanquished in battle and put to flight.

1074

profusely anointed with fresh oil. [1075] **11.** And mine eyes shall see it on mine enemies: mine ears shall hear it upon those who rise up against me, upon those who persecute me.

9 *For, lo! thine enemies, O Jehovah!* From what was already said in the verse preceding, the Psalmist concludes it to be impossible that God should not overthrow his enemies. This, as I have already observed, clearly shows that it was his design to establish our faith under the strong temptations to which it is subjected, and, more especially, to remove that offense out of the way, which has disturbed the minds of many, and led them astray; — we refer to the prosperity of the wicked, and its effect in attaching a certain perplexity to the judgments of God. As our faith is never called to a more sharp and arduous trial than upon this point, the Psalmist delivers the truth, which he announces with much force of expression, using both exclamations and repetition. First, he declares the destruction of God's enemies to be as certain as if it had already taken place, and he had witnessed it with his own eyes; then he repeats his assertion: and from all this we may see how much he had benefited by glancing with the eye of faith beyond this world to the throne of God in the heavens. When staggered in our own faith at any time by the prosperity of the wicked, we should learn by his example to rise in our contemplations to a God in heaven, and the conviction will immediately follow in our minds that his enemies cannot long continue to triumph. The Psalmist tells us who they are that are God's enemies. God hates none without a cause; nay, so far as men are the workmanship of his hand, he embraces them in his fatherly love. But as nothing is more opposed to his nature than sin, he proclaims irreconcilable war with the wicked. It contributes in no small degree to the comfort of the Lord's people, to know that the reason why the wicked are destroyed is, their being necessarily the

The horn is worn over all the East, and is the symbol of strength and power. It adorns the heads of all princely personages in Oriental mythology. Large horns, representing the glory of deity, are planted on the heads of their idols, or placed in their hands. The horn is therefore frequently employed in Scripture as the emblem of power and authority; and when the Psalmist affirms that God would exalt his horn, it expresses his assurance of victory over his enemies. As to the animal meant by "the unicorn," great variety of interpretations has obtained both among ancient and modern critics. The most probable opinion is that of Bochart, who, supporting himself by numerous quotations from Arabian and other Eastern writers, concludes that the ראם, *reem*, of Scripture, is a species of wild goat of a snow-white color, having long and sharp horns, and distinguished by carrying their heads very high.

1075

"The verb in the Hebrew expresses much more than a superficial unction, viz., a penetration of the whole substance of the man's person by the oil. See Parkhurst's Lexicon, under בל: — *fresh oil*; rather *invigorating oil*." — *Horsley* The original word for *fresh* signifies *green* But, as Harmer observes, "We are not to suppose the Psalmist means oil of a green color. We are to understand the word as signifying precious, fragrant oil, such as princes in times of prosperity were anointed with." — *Harmer's Observations*, volume 3, page 257.

objects of God's hatred, so that he can no more fail to punish them than deny himself. [1076]

The Psalmist, shortly afterwards, shows that he intended this to be a ground of comfort and hope under all cares, griefs, anxieties, and embarrassments. He speaks under the figure of *oil* of enjoying Divine blessings, and by *green* or *fresh* oil is meant, such as has not become corrupted, or unfit for use by age. It is noticeable that he appropriates, and improves for his own individual comfort, that grace of God which is extended to all the Lord's people without exception; and would teach us by this that mere general doctrine is a cold and unsatisfactory thing, and that each of us should improve it particularly for himself, in the persuasion of our belonging to the number of God's children. In one word, the Psalmist promises himself the protection of God, under whatever persecutions he should endure from his enemies, whether they were secret, or more open and violent, that he may encourage himself to persevere with indefatigable spirit in the world's conflict. We may judge from this how absurd is the opinion of the Rabbin, who conjectured that Adam was the author of this psalm [1077] — as if it were credible that his posterity should have set themselves up in rebellion against him.

Psalm 92:12-13

1076

"Qu'il faut necessairement qu'ils soyent hays de Dieu, lequel ne se peut renoncer soy mesme."

1077

These Rabbins say that Adam composed it immediately after the creation before the Sabbath. The Chaldee paraphrase entitles the psalm, "A hymn or song which the first man spoke concerning the Sabbath-day." But had it been a composition of Adam's, one would think it should have been placed at the head of this collection of psalms. Besides, there were no musical instruments at that time for this psalm to be sung upon, (see verse 3;) for Tubal was the father of them that handle the harp and organ; nor, as Calvin observes, had Adam numerous enemies and wicked men who rose up against him, to which reference is made in verses 7, 9, 11. We may therefore justly regard the Jewish tradition, which ascribes the composition of this psalm to Adam, as fabulous, having no other foundation but the invention and fancy of some of their Rabbins.

12. The righteous shalt flourish like the palm-tree, [1078] he shall be multiplied as the cedar in Lebanon. [1079] **13.** Those who are planted in the house of Jehovah shall flourish in the courts of our God. **14.** They shall still bud forth in old age; they shall be fat and green; **15.** That they may show that Jehovah is upright, my rock, and that there is no iniquity in him.

12 *The righteous shall flourish like the palm-tree.* He now passes to the consideration of another general truth, That though God may exercise his people with many trials, subject them to hardships, and visit them with privations, he will eventually show that he had not forgotten them. We need not be surprised that he insists so explicitly and carefully upon this point, as nothing is more difficult than for the saints of God to entertain expectations of being raised up and delivered when they have been reduced almost to the state of the dead, and it does not appear how they can live. Some think the cedar is mentioned from the fragrancy of its smell, and the palm for the sweetness of its fruit; but this is too subtile a meaning to attach to the words. The sense seems simply, that though the righteous may appear for a time to be withered, or to have been cut down, they will again spring up with renewed vigor, and flourish as well and as fair in the Church of God as the stateliest trees upon Lebanon. The expression which is employed — *planted in the house of the Lord* — gives the reason of their vigorous growth; nor is it meant that they have merely a place there, (which can be said even of hypocrites,) but that they are firmly fixed, and deeply rooted in it, so as to be united to God. The Psalmist speaks of *the courts* of

1078

The palm is one of the noblest and most beautiful of trees. It is more remarkable than any other tree for its *straight*, *upright* growth, and hence its Hebrew name תמר *tamar* It frequently rises to the height of more than a hundred feet; and its leaves, when it arrives at maturity, are often six or eight feet in length, and broad in proportion. At the age of thirty it attains its greatest vigor, and continues in full strength and beauty for seventy years longer, producing every year about three or four hundred weight of dates. It is crowned at the top with a large tuft of spiralling leaves about four feet long, which never fall off, but always continue in the same flourishing verdure. And it has been said that when loaded with any weight it possesses the quality of resisting it, and of rising upwards and bending the contrary way, to counterbalance the pressure. This tree, then, so distinguished for its uprightness, loftiness, fecundity, longevity, perpetual verdure, and power of resistance, is employed with great elegance to express the spiritual beauty, elevation, fruitfulness, constancy, patience, and victory of the righteous.

1079

The cedars of Lebanon are a favourite image with the sacred writers. They grow to a prodigious size, rise to an enormous height, and spread their branches to a great extent, affording a grateful shade. They continue to flourish for more than a thousand years; and, when cut down, their wood is so durable that it has obtained the reputation of being incorruptible. How striking, then, the image, "The righteous shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon," like that massy, lofty, umbrageous, and incorruptible tree, which continues to flourish from generation to generation, which survives empires, and is still vigorous when a thousand years have passed over it.

the Lord, because none but the priests were allowed to enter the holy place; the people worshipped in the court. By *those who are planted* in the Church he means such as are united to God in real and sincere attachment, and insinuates that their prosperity cannot be of a changeable and fluctuating nature, because it is not founded upon anything that is in the world. Nor indeed can we doubt that whatever has its root, and is founded in the sanctuary, must continue to flourish and partake of a life which is spiritual and everlasting. It is in this sense that he speaks of their *still budding forth,* and being *fat,* even in old age, when the natural sap and juices are generally dried up. The language amounts to saying that they are exempt from the ordinary lot of men, and have a life which is taken from under the common law of nature. [1080] It is thus that Jacob, speaking of the great renovation which should take place in the Church, mentions, that at that happy period he who was an hundred years old should be a child, meaning that, though old age naturally tends to death, and one who has lived a hundred years is upon the very borders of it, yet in the kingdom of Christ; a man would be reckoned as being merely in his childhood, and starting in life, who entered upon a new century. This could only be verified in the sense, that after death we have another existence in heaven.

15. *That they may show that Jehovah is upright.* It is evident from this verse that the great object of the Psalmist is, to allay that disquietude of mind which we are apt to feel under the disorder which reigns apparently in the affairs of this world; and to make us cherish the expectation, (under all that may seem severe and trying in our lot, and though the wicked are in wealth and power, flourish, and abound in places and distinctions,) that God will bring light and order eventually out of confusion. *That they may show,* it is said particularly, *that the Lord is upright;* for through the influence of our corruption we are apt to conclude, when things do not proceed as we would wish in the world, that God is chargeable not only with neglect but with unrighteousness, in abandoning his people, and tolerating the commission of sin. When God displays his justice in proceeding to execute vengeance upon the wicked, it will be seen at once, that any prosperity which they enjoyed was but the forerunner of a worse destruction in reserve for them. The Psalmist, in calling God *his rock,* shows a second time that he reckoned himself amongst the number of those in whom God would illustrate his justice by extending towards them his protection.

1080

"*They shall still bring forth fruit in old age.* Being thus planted and watered, they shall not only bring forth the fruits of righteousness, but shall continue and go on to do so, and even when they are grown old; contrary to all other trees, which, when old, cease bearing fruit; but so do not the righteous; grace is often in the greatest vigor when nature is decayed; witness Abraham, Job, David, Zechariah, and Elisabeth, and good old Simeon, who went to the grave like shocks of corn fully ripe." — *Dr Gill.*

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- Ne sont pas perpetuelles, et ne descoulent pas d'un fil continuel: 789
- Neantmoins il faut imputer cela a la malice de ceux qui ayans veu la chose eux-mesmes de leurs yeux, ont mieux aime s'esblouir la veue et desguiser le faict, que d'en entretenir la pure cognoissance: 573
- N'ont peu trouver leurs mains: 551
- On scait assez par les histoires le brocard duquel usa anciennement un tyran de Sicile nomme Denis le jeune, quand apres avoir pille le temple de Syracuses, il se mit sur la mer, et veit qu'il avoit fort bon vent pour naviger: 495
- Ont rugi comme lions: 523
- Or est-il, que depuis ce temps-la, il ne perdit jamais la liberte de pouvoir comparoistre devant l'Arche avec les autres, si non une fois et pour bien peu de temps, c'est ascavoir quand il s'enfuit pour la persecution que luy faisoit son fils: 679
- Or la vocation exterieure est yci adjointe a l'election, afin que nul n'imagine que les brebis soyent tousjours errantes sans estre recueillies en la bergerie: car l'adoption gratuite de Dieu se declare: 374
- Ou la cloche sonnera pour appeler les gens aux prieres publiques: 685
- Ou vanite: 75
- Ou, a cause de la frayeur: 555
- Ou, a la confusion de celuy qui m'a guette: 291
- Ou, a leur cupidite: 590

- Ou, a plusieurs: 460
- Ou, arrestez, demeurez coy: 161
- Ou, as quitte l'alliance de ton serviteur: 758
- Ou, assemble la congregation: 541
- Ou, aux grans qui sont meschans: 25
- Ou, bouilloneront: 311
- Ou, changemens: 566
- Ou, Convenances: 610
- Ou, courrez-vous sus l'homme: 341
- Ou, dames d'honneur: 147 149
- Ou, de mon salut: 55
- Ou, de troupe en troupe: 684
- Ou, des puissans et robustes: 281
- Ou, dire obscur: 189
- Ou, dit de moy: 85
- Ou, du meurier: 683
- Ou, elle fust blanche: 404
- Ou, establi: 533
- Ou, feront entendre: 365
- Ou, figure: 197
- Ou, fortifiez: 430
- Ou, gouverneur: 325
- Ou, hebergeray: 291
- Ou, il jugeras au milieu les dieux: 659
- Ou, ils iront et viendront: 311
- Ou, J'ay transgresse contre la generation de tes enfans: 505
- Ou, la force et le fil: 430

- Ou, le Leban: 485
- Ou, l'excellence, c'est, les agneaux plus beaux et plus gras: 28
- Ou, l'heritage de ceux: 336
- Ou, ma doctrine: 577
- Ou, me mangeant: 281
- Ou, me resueilleray: 294
- Ou, mettez gloire a sa louan: 381
- Ou, mis en oubli: 126
- Ou, ne demandent qu'a m'oster la vie: 284
- Ou, pasturages: 377
- Ou, perversite, ou, durete: 649
- Ou, possedee: 607
- Ou, pour Solomon: 473
- Ou, pource qu'il aura veu: 305
- Ou, quand: 357
- Ou, que tes bien aimez soyont delivrez: 325
- Ou, quels deserts: 161
- Ou, qui vient a bont de ses entreprises: 19
- Ou, range: 166
- Ou, rouge: 547
- Ou, sa force est a toy, je me tiendray coy: ou, ma force est a toy: 311
- Ou, sentence grave: 189
- Ou, sera-il eslongne: 565
- Ou, si est ce que: 691
- Ou, s'enfleront: 158
- Ou, ta charge: 276
- Ou, tombe: 276

- Ou, tout le jour: 130
- Ou, tout le jour: 701
- Ou, trembleront: 365
- Ou, tuerie: 112
- Ou, une parolle: 772
- Ou, vauneant et desbauche, ou, meschant: 65
- Ou, vos espines: 302
- Palais: 185
- Par lesqnels moyens ils ont pensé se racheter pour eschapper la main et vengence de Dieu: 754
- Par lesquelles ils taschent d'espouvanter les simples: 36
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- Par: 541
- Parquoy c'a este une vertu a David plus qu'humaine: 464
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- Pour faire : 555
- Pour faire la fin de ce livre troisieme: 766
- Pour raison de la condition et estat qu'il avoit de Dieu: 98
- Pour un homme reprouve et forclos d'esperance de salut: 91
- Pource que la confusion difforme laquelle se voit en la vie des hommes, obscurcit grandement l'ordre de la providence de Dieu: 795
- Pource que nostre vie: 773
- Pource qu'il ne leur semble point avis qu'ils ayent rien de commun avec les autres hommes, mais pensent estre quelque chose a part, et comme des petis dieux: 500

- Pource qu'ils n'ont rien au dedans qui leur acquiere authorite et donne majeste: 741
- Pource qu'on luy defend de se trouver en public et que chacun la repousse: 698
- Pourveu que nous laissions la providence de Dieu tenir sa procedure par les degrez, qu'il a determinez en son conseil secret: 490
- Premierement il faut que nous ostions toute obstination, avant que nous puissions avoir les cols propres pour recevoir son joug: 585
- Prests a estre par eux devorez: 128
- Promis a la maison de David: 144
- Quand Dieu feit que de la roche saillit un cours d'eau pour la necessite du peuple: 536
- Quand d'icelle ils entrent a rendre louanges a Dieu: 126
- Quand elle se lamentant de ce qu'on le faisoit-mourir a tort: 135
- Quand j'auray prins assignation: 541
- Que comme les neiges font blanchir ceste montagne, laquelle de soy est obscure et noire, ainsi quand il a pleu a Dieu d'oster l'obscurite qu'apportoit l'affliction des ennemis, lors on a veu la terre reluire d'un lustre naif, et par maniere de dire, porter une face joyeuse: 408
- Que c'en a este fait en un moment, ainsi que le feu a incontinent consume de la paille ou des fueilles d'arbres bieu seiches: 613
- Que des le ventre de sa mere il est serviteur domestique de Dieu, et comme nay d'un sien serviteur en la maison: 713
- Que le formulaire des prieres qui ils font aux saincts: 134
- Que le monde tourne a l'aventure, et (comme on dit) est gouverne par fortune: 492
- Que leur vie a este emportee comme quand en tumulte on ravit quelque chose: 597
- Que l'oeuvre en laquelle Dieu vent singulierement estre recognu juste, c'est in procurant les choses qui appartienent a nostre salut, et a nous maintenir en sauvete: 184
- Que si nous commencons au matin de louer Dieu, il faut continuer ses louanges jusques a la derniere partie de la nuit; pource que sa bonte et fidelite meritent cela: 792

- Que tout vient a l'aventure: 504
- Qui convertissent en diffame et blasme le desir que les fideles ont de sa gloire: 436
- Qui ne soucient pas beaucoup d'estre privez de ces moyens: 104
- Qu'a cause de l'infirmite du temps, (ascavoir avant la manifestation de Christ): 566
- Qu'il faut necessairement qu'ils soyent hays de Dieu, lequel ne se peut renoncer soy mesme: 799
- Qu'il y avoit un service divine special et different de ce qui se faisoit ailleurs: 527
- Qu'ils n'ont point reprime leur insolence et appetit desordonne: 590
- Qu'ils prenent plaisir a contempler leur puissance et grandeur, et sy mirent, comme qui voudroit se pourmener a loisir sur la glace: 510
- Qu'ils sont alienez et bannis de la presence de Dieu: 450
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- Rigoureusement et outrageusement: 545
- Sa: 313
- Sans en monstrer les fruicts en leur vie: 586
- Sans qu'il y en ait aucune autre cause: 743
- Sans specifier le lieu: 117
- Se abusans par leur folie a porter envie aux meschans, et les vouloir ensuyvre: 502
- Selon les divers changements qu'on voit au monde: 348
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- si non toy: 517

- Si nous regardons combien ils devorent de temps par leur vaine confiance: 304
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- Sont grandes ou infinies: 75
- Sont los moyens pour nous faire trouver grace envers Dieu: 374
- Soulagera: 90
- Suivant cela, nous devons toute notre vie porter engrave en notre entendement le lavement spirituel, lequel Christ nous a une fois represente au baptesme: 354
- Sur les asnes et chevaux, et autres bestes brutes: 762
- S'il eust eu un entendement rassis et bien dispose a escouter: 614
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