

PSALM XI.

SUBJECT.—Charles Simeon gives an excellent summary of this Psalm in the following sentences :—“ The Psalms are a rich repository of experimental knowledge. David, at the different periods of his life, was placed in almost every situation in which a believer, whether rich or poor, can be placed ; and in these heavenly compositions he delineates all the workings of the heart. He introduces, too, the sentiments and conduct of the various persons who were accessory either to his troubles or his joys ; and thus sets before us a compendium of all that is passing in the hearts of men throughout the world. When he penned this Psalm he was under persecution from Saul, who sought his life, and hunted him ‘ as a partridge upon the mountains.’ His timid friends were alarmed for his safety, and recommended him to flee to some mountain where he had a hiding-place, and thus to conceal himself from the rage of Saul. But David, being strong in faith, spurned the idea of resorting to any such pusillanimous expedients, and determined confidently to repose his trust in God.”

To assist us to remember this short, but sweet Psalm, we will give it the name of “ THE SONG OF THE STEDFAST.”

DIVISION. From 1 to 3, David describes the temptation with which he was assailed, and from 4 to 7, the arguments by which his courage was sustained.

EXPOSITION.

IN the LORD put I my trust : how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain ?

2 For, lo, the wicked bend *their* bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart.

3 If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do ?

These verses contain an account of a temptation to distrust God, with which David was, upon some unmentioned occasion, greatly exercised. It may be, that in the days when he was in Saul’s court, he was advised to flee at a time when this flight would have been charged against him as a breach of duty to the king, or a proof of personal cowardice. His case was like that of Nehemiah, when his enemies, under the garb of friendship, hoped to entrap him by advising him to escape for his life. Had he done so, they could then have found a ground of accusation. Nehemiah bravely replied, “ Shall such a man as I flee ? ” and David, in a like spirit, refuses to retreat, exclaiming, “ *In the Lord put I my trust : how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain ?* ” When Satan cannot overthrow us by presumption, how craftily will he seek to ruin us by distrust ! He will employ our dearest friends to argue us out of our confidence, and he will use such plausible logic, that unless we once for all assert our immovable trust in Jehovah, he will make us like the timid bird which flies to the mountain whenever danger presents itself. How forcibly the case is put ! The bow is bent, the arrow is fitted to the string : “ Flee, flee, thou defenceless bird, thy safety lies in flight ; begone, for thine enemies will send their shafts into thy heart ; haste, haste, for soon wilt thou be destroyed ! ” David seems to have felt the force of the advice, for it came home to *his soul* ; but yet he would not yield, but would rather dare the danger than exhibit a distrust in the Lord his God. Doubtless, the perils which encompassed David were great and imminent ; it was quite true that his enemies were *ready to shoot privily* at him ; it was equally correct that the very *foundations* of law and justice were *destroyed* under Saul’s unrighteous government : but what were all these things to the man whose trust was in God alone ? He could brave the dangers, could escape the enemies, and defy the injustice which surrounded him. His answer to the question, “ What can the righteous do ? ” would be the counter-question, “ What cannot they do ? ” When prayer engages God on our side, and when faith secures the fulfilment of the promise, what cause can there be for flight, however cruel and mighty our enemies ? With a sling and a stone, David had

smitten a giant before whom the whole hosts of Israel were trembling, and the Lord, who delivered him from the uncircumcised Philistine, could surely deliver him from King Saul and his myrmidons. There is no such word as "impossibility" in the language of faith; that martial grace knows how to fight and conquer, but she knows not how to flee.

4 The LORD *is* in his holy temple, the LORD's throne *is* in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men.

5 The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.

6 Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: *this shall be* the portion of their cup.

7 For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.

David here declares the great source of his unflinching courage. He borrows his light from heaven—from the great central orb of deity. The God of the believer is never far from him; he is not merely the God of the mountain fastnesses, but of the dangerous valleys and battle plains.

"*Jehovah is in his holy temple.*" The heavens are above our heads in all regions of the earth, and so is the Lord ever near to us in every state and condition. This is a very strong reason why we should not adopt the vile suggestions of distrust. There is one who pleads his precious blood in our behalf in the temple above, and there is one upon the throne who is never deaf to the intercession of his Son. Why, then, should we fear? What plots can men devise which Jesus will not discover? Satan has doubtless desired to have us, that he may sift us as wheat, but Jesus is in the temple praying for us, and how can our faith fail? What attempts can the wicked make which Jehovah shall not behold? And since he is in his holy temple, delighting in the sacrifice of his Son, will he not defeat every device, and send us a sure deliverance?

"*Jehovah's throne is in the heavens;*" he reigns supreme. Nothing can be done in heaven, or earth, or hell, which he doth not ordain and over-rule. He is the world's great Emperor. Wherefore, then, should we flee? If we trust this King of kings, is not this enough? Cannot he deliver us without our cowardly retreat? Yes, blessed be the Lord our God, we can salute him as Jehovah-nissi; in his name we set up our banners, and, instead of flight, we once more raise the shout of war.

"*His eyes behold.*" The eternal Watcher never slumbers; his eyes never know a sleep. "*His eyelids try the children of men:*" he narrowly inspects their actions, words and thoughts. As men, when intently and narrowly inspecting some very minute object, almost close their eyelids to exclude every other object, so will the Lord look all men through and through. God sees each man as much and as perfectly as if there were no other creature in the universe. He sees us always; he never removes his eye from us; he sees us entirely, reading the recesses of the soul as readily as the glancing of the eye. Is not this a sufficient ground of confidence, and an abundant answer to the solicitations of despondency? My danger is not hid from him; he knows my extremity, and I may rest assured that he will not suffer me to perish while I rely alone on him. Wherefore, then, should I take the wings of the timid bird, and flee from the dangers which beset me.

"*The Lord trieth the righteous:*" he doth not hate them, but only tries them. They are precious to him, and therefore he refines them with afflictions. None of the Lord's children may hope to escape from trial, nor, indeed, in our right minds, would any of us desire to do so, for trial is the channel of many blessings.

" 'Tis my happiness below
Not to live without the cross;
But the Saviour's power to know,
Sanctifying every loss.

* * * * *
Trials make the promise sweet;
Trials give new life to prayer;
Trials bring me to his feet—
Lay me low, and keep me there.

Did I meet no trials here—
 No chastisement by the way—
 Might I not, with reason, fear
 I should prove a cast-away!

Bastards may escape the rod,
 Sunk in earthly vain delight;
 But the true-born child of God
 Must not—would not, if he might."

William Cowper.

Is not this a very cogent reason why we should not distrustfully endeavour to shun a trial?—for in so doing we are seeking to avoid a blessing.

"*But the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth:*" why, then, shall I flee from these wicked men? If God hateth them, I will not fear them. Haman was very great in the palace until he lost favour, but when the king abhorred him, how bold were the meanest attendants to suggest the gallows for the man at whom they had often trembled! Look at the black mark upon the faces of our persecutors, and we shall not run away from them. If God is in the quarrel as well as ourselves, it would be foolish to question the result, or avoid the conflict. Sodom and Gomorrah perished by a fiery hail, and by a brimstone shower from heaven; so shall all the ungodly. They may gather together like Gog and Magog to battle, but the Lord will rain upon them "an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone:" Ezek. xxxviii. 22. Some expositors think that in the term "horrible tempest," there is in the Hebrew an allusion to that burning, suffocating wind, which blows across the Arabian deserts, and is known by the name of Simoom. "A burning storm," Lowth calls it, while another great commentator reads it "wrathwind;" in either version the language is full of terrors. What a tempest will that be which shall overwhelm the despisers of God! Oh! what a shower will that be which shall pour out itself for ever upon the defenceless heads of impenitent sinners in hell! Repent, ye rebels, or this fiery deluge shall soon surround you. Hell's horrors shall be your inheritance, your entailed estate, "the portion of your cup." The dregs of that cup you shall wring out, and drink for ever. A drop of hell is terrible, but what must a full cup of torment be? Think of it—a cup of misery, but not a drop of mercy. O people of God, how foolish is it to fear the faces of men who shall soon be faggots in the fire of hell! Think of their end, their fearful end, and all fear of them must be changed into contempt of their threatenings and pity for their miserable estate.

The delightful contrast of the last verse is well worthy of our observation, and it affords another overwhelming reason why we should be steadfast, unmovable, not carried away with fear, or led to adopt carnal expedients in order to avoid trial. "*For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness.*" It is not only his office to defend it, but his nature to love it. He would deny himself if he did not defend the just. It is essential to the very being of God that he should be just; fear not, then, the end of all your trials, but "be just, and fear not." God approves, and, if men oppose, what matters it? "*His countenance doth behold the upright.*" We need never be out of countenance, for God countenances us. He observes, he approves, he delights in the upright. He sees his own image in them, an image of his own fashioning, and therefore with complacency he regards them. Shall we dare to put forth our hand unto iniquity in order to escape affliction? Let us have done with by-ways and short turnings, and let us keep to that fair path of right along which Jehovah's smile shall light us. Are we tempted to put our light under a bushel, to conceal our religion from our neighbours? Is it suggested to us that there are ways of avoiding the cross, and shunning the reproach of Christ? Let us not hearken to the voice of the charmer, but seek an increase of faith, that we may wrestle with principalities and powers, and follow the Lord, fully going without the camp, bearing his reproach. Mammon, the flesh, the devil, will all whisper in our ear, "Flee as a bird to your mountain;" but let us come forth and defy them all. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." There is no room or reason for retreat. Advance! Let the vanguard push on! To the front! all ye powers and passions of our soul. On! on! in God's name, on! for "the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS.

Whole Psalm.—The most probable account of the occasion of this Psalm is that given by Amyraldus. He thinks it was composed by David while he was in the court of Saul, at a time when the hostility of the king was beginning to show itself, and before it had broken out into open persecution. David's friends, or those professing to be so, advised him to flee to his native mountains for a time, and remain in retirement, till the king should show himself more favourable. David does not at that time accept the counsel, though afterwards he seems to have followed it. This Psalm applies itself to the establishment of the church against the calumnies of the world and the compromising counsel of man, in that confidence which is to be placed in God the Judge of all.—*W. Wilson, D.D., in loc., 1860.*

Whole Psalm.—If one may offer to make a modest conjecture, it is not improbable this Psalm might be composed on the sad murder of the priests by Saul (1 Sam. xxii. 19), when after the slaughter of Abimelech, the high priest, Doeg, the Edomite, by command from Saul, "slew in one day fourscore and five persons which wore a linen ephod." I am not so carnal as to build the spiritual church of the Jews on the material walls of the priests' city at Nob (which then by Doeg was smitten with the edge of the sword), but this is most true, that "knowledge must preserve the people;" and (Mal. ii. 7), "The priests' lips shall preserve knowledge;" and then it is easy to conclude, what an earthquake this massacre might make in the foundations of religion.—*Thomas Fuller.*

Whole Psalm.—Notice how remarkably the whole Psalm corresponds with the deliverance of Lot from Sodom. This verse, with the angel's exhortation, "Escape to the mountains, lest thou be consumed," and Lot's reply, "I cannot escape to the mountains, lest some evil take me and I die." Genesis xix. 17—19. And again, "The Lord's seat is in heaven, and upon the ungodly he shall rain snares, fire, brimstone, storm and tempest," with "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire out of heaven;" and again, "His countenance will behold the thing that is just," with "Delivered just Lot . . . for that righteous man vexed his righteous soul with their ungodly deeds." 2 Peter ii. 7, 8.—*Cassiodorus (A.D., 560) in John Mason Neale's "Commentary on the Psalms, from Primitive and Mediæval Writers," 1860.*

Whole Psalm.—The combatants at the Lake Thrasymene are said to have been so engrossed with the conflict, that neither party perceived the convulsions of nature that shook the ground—

"An earthquake reeled unheeding away,
None felt stern nature rocking at his feet."

From a nobler cause, it is thus with the soldiers of the Lamb. They believe, and, therefore, make no haste; nay, they can scarcely be said to feel earth's convulsions as other men, because their eager hope presses forward to the issue at the advent of the Lord.—*Andrew A. Bonar.*

Verse 1.—"I trust in the Lord: how do ye say to my soul, Swerve on to your mountain like a bird?" (others, "O thou bird.") Saul and his adherents mocked and jeered David with such taunting speeches, as conceiving that he knew no other shift or refuge, but so betaking himself unto wandering and lurking on the mountains; hopping, as it were, from one place to another like a silly bird; but they thought to ensnare and take him well enough for all that, not considering God who was David's comfort, rest and refuge.—*Theodore Haak's "Translation of the Dutch Annotations, as ordered by the Synod of Dort, in 1618." London, 1657.*

Verse 1.—"With Jehovah I have taken shelter; how say ye to my soul, Flee, sparrows, to your hill?" "Your hill," that hill from which you say your help cometh: a sneer. Repair to that boasted hill, which may indeed give you the help which it gives the sparrow: a shelter against the inclemencies of a stormy sky, no defence against our power.—*Samuel Horsley, in loc.*

Verse 1.—"In the Lord put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?" The holy confidence of the saints in the hour of great trial is beautifully illustrated by the following ballad which Anne Askew, who was burned at Smithfield in 1546, made and sang when she was in Newgate:—

Like as the armed knight,
Appointed to the field,
With this world will I fight,
And Christ shall be my shield.

Faith is that weapon strong,
Which will not fail at need :
My foes, therefore, among
Therewith will I proceed.

As it is had in strength
And force of Christe's way,
It will prevail at length,
Though all the devils say nay.

Faith in the fathers old
Obtained righteousness ;
Which make me very bold
To fear no world's distress.

I now rejoice in heart,
And hope bids me do so ;
For Christ will take my part,
And ease me of my woe.

Thou say'st Lord, whose knock,
To them wilt thou attend :
Undo therefore the lock,
And thy strong power send.

More enemies now I have
Than hairs upon my head :
Let them not me deprave,
But fight thou in my stead.

On thee my care I cast,
For all their cruel spite :
I set not by their haste ;
For thou art my delight.

I am not she that list
My anchor to let fall
For every drizzling mist,
My ship substantial.

Not oft use I to write,
In prose, nor yet in rhyme ;
Yet will I shew one sight
That I saw in my time.

I saw a royal throne,
Where justice should have sit,
But in her stead was one
Of moody, cruel wit.

Absorbed was righteousness.
As of the raging flood :
Satan, in his excess,
Sucked up the guiltless blood.

Then thought I, Jesus Lord,
When thou shall judge us all,
Hard it is to record
On these men what will fall.

Yet, Lord, I thee desire,
For that they do to me,
Let them not taste the hire
Of their iniquity.

Verse 1.—“ *How say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain ?* ” We may observe, that David is much pleased with the metaphor in frequently comparing himself to a bird, and that of several sorts : first, to an eagle (Psalm cii. 5), “ My youth is renewed like the eagle's ; ” sometimes to an owl (Psalm cii. 6), “ I am like an owl in the desert ; ” sometimes to a pelican, in the same verse, “ Like a pelican in the wilderness ; ” sometimes to a sparrow (Psalm cii. 7), “ I watch, and am as a sparrow ; ” sometimes to a partridge, “ As when one doth hunt a partridge. ” I cannot say that he doth compare himself to a dove, but he would compare himself (Psalm lv. 6), “ O that I had the wings of a dove, for then I would flee away, and be at rest. ” Some will say, How is it possible that birds of so different a feather should all so fly together as to meet in the character of David ? To whom we answer, That no two men can more differ one from another, than the same servant of God at several times differeth from himself. David in prosperity, when commanding, was like an eagle ; in adversity, when contemned, like an owl ; in devotion, when retired, like a pelican ; in solitariness, when having no company, like a sparrow ; in persecution, when fearing too much company (of Saul), like a partridge. This general metaphor of a bird, which David so often used on himself, his enemies in the first verse of this Psalm used on him, though not particularising the kind thereof : “ *Flee as a bird to your mountain ;* ” that is, speedily betake thyself to thy God, in whom thou hopest for succour and security.

Seeing this counsel was both good in itself, and good at this time, why doth David seem so angry and displeas'd therat ? Those his words, “ *Why say you to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain ?* ” import some passion, at leastwise, a disgust of the advice. It is answered, David was not offended with the counsel, but with the manner of the propounding thereof. His enemies did it ironically in a gibing, jeering way, as if his flying thither were to no purpose, and he unlikely to find there the safety he sought for. However, David was not hereby put out of conceit with the counsel, beginning this Psalm with this his firm resolution, “ *In the Lord put I my trust : how say ye then to my soul,* ” etc. Learn we from hence, when men give us good counsel in a jeering way, let us take the counsel, and practise it ; and leave them the jeer to be punished for it. Indeed, corporal cordials may be envenomed by being wrapped up in poisoned papers ; not so good spiritual

advice where the good matter receives no infection from the ill manner of the delivery thereof. Thus, when the chief priests mocked our Saviour (Matt. xxvii. 43), "He trusteth in God, let him deliver him now if he will have him." Christ trusted in God never a whit the less for the fleere and flout which their profaneness was pleased to bestow upon him. Otherwise, if men's mocks should make us to undervalue good counsel, we might in this age be mocked out of our God, and Christ, and Scripture, and heaven; the apostle Jude, verse 18, having foretold that in the last times there should be mockers, walking after their own lusts.—*Thomas Fuller*.

Verse 1.—It is as great an offence to make a new, as to deny the true God. "*In the Lord put I my trust;*" how then "*say ye unto my soul*" (ye seducers of souls), "*that she should fly unto the mountains as a bird;*" to seek unnecessary and foreign helps, as if the Lord alone were not sufficient? "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and he that delivereth me, my God, and my strength; in him will I trust: my shield, the horn of my salvation, and my refuge. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, so shall I be safe from mine enemies." "Whom have I in heaven but thee," amongst those thousands of angels and saints, what Michael or Gabriel, what Moses or Samuel, what Peter, what Paul? "and there is none in earth that I desire in comparison of thee."—*John King*, 1608.

Verse 1.—In temptations of inward trouble and terror, it is not convenient to dispute the matter with Satan. David in Psalm xlii. 11, seems to correct himself for his mistake; his soul was cast down within him, and for the cure of that temptation, he had prepared himself by arguments for a dispute; but perceiving himself in a wrong course, he calls off his soul from disquiet to an immediate application to God and the promises, "Trust still in God, for I shall yet praise him;" but here he is more beforehand with his work; for while his enemies were acted by Satan to discourage him, he rejects the temptation at first, before it settled upon his thoughts, and chaseth it away as a thing that he would not give ear to. "*In the Lord put I my trust: how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?*" And there are weighty reasons that should dissuade us from entering the lists with Satan in temptation of inward trouble.—*Richard Gilpin*.

Verse 1.—The shadow will not cool except in it. What good to have the shadow though of a mighty rock, when we sit in the open sun? To have almighty power engaged for us, and we to throw ourselves out of it, by bold sallies in the mouth of temptation! The saints' falls have been when they have run out of their trench and stronghold; for, like the conies, they are a weak people in themselves, and their strength lies in the rock of God's almightiness, which is their habitation.—*William Gurnall*.

Verse 1.—The saints of old would not accept deliverances on base terms. They scorned to fly away for the enjoyment of rest except it were with the wings of a dove, covered with silver innocence. As willing were many of the martyrs to die, as to dine. The tormentors were tired in torturing Blandina. "We are ashamed, O Emperor! The Christians laugh at your cruelty, and grow the more resolute," said one of Julian's nobles. This the heathen counted obstinacy; but they knew not the power of the Spirit, nor the secret armour of proof which saints wear about their hearts.—*John Trapp*.

Verse 2.—"For, lo, the wicked bend their bow," etc. This verse presents an unequal combat betwixt *armed power, advantaged with policy*, on the one side; and *naked innocence* on the other. First, *armed power*: "*They bend their bows, and make ready their arrows,*" being all the artillery of that age; secondly, *advantaged with policy*: "*that they may privily shoot,*" to surprise them with an ambush unawares, probably pretending amity and friendship unto them; thirdly, *naked innocence*: if innocence may be termed naked, which is its own armour; "*at the upright in heart.*"—*Thomas Fuller*.

Verse 2.—"For, lo, the ungodly bend their bow, and make ready their arrows within the quiver: that they may privily shoot at them which are true of heart." The plottings of the chief priests and Pharisees that they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill him. They bent their bow, when they hired Judas Iscariot for the betrayal of his Master; they made ready their arrows within the quiver when they sought "false witnesses against Jesus to put him to death." Matt. xxvi. 59. "*Them which are true of heart.*" Not alone the Lord himself, the only true and righteous, but his apostles, and the long line of those who should faithfully cleave to him from that time to this. And as with the Master, so with the servants: witness

the calumnies and the revilings that from the time of Joseph's accusation by his mistress till the present day, have been the lot of God's people.—*Michael Ayguan, 1416, in J. M. Neale's Commentary.*

Verse 2.—“*That they may secretly shoot at them which are upright in heart.*” They bear not their bows and arrows as scarecrows in a garden of cucumbers, to fray, but *to shoot*, not at stakes, but men; their arrows are *jacula mortifera* (Psalm vii.), deadly arrows, and lest they should fail to hit, they take advantage of the dark, of privacy and secrecy; they shoot *privily*. Now this is the covenant of hell itself. For what created power in the earth is able to dissolve that work which *cruelly and subtilly*, like Simeon and Levi, brothers in evil, are combined and confederate to bring to pass? Where subtilty is ingenious, insidious to invent, cruelty barbarous to execute, subtilty giveth counsel, cruelty giveth the stroke. Subtilty ordereth the time, the place, the means, accommodateth, concinnateth circumstances; cruelty undertaketh the act: subtilty hideth the knife, cruelty cutteth the throat: subtilty with a cunning head layeth the ambush, plotteth the train, the stratagem; and cruelty with as savage a heart, sticketh not at the dreadfulest, direfulest objects, ready to wade up to the ankles, the neck, in a whole red sea of human, yea, country blood: how fearful is their plight that are thus assaulted!—*John King.*

Verse 3.—“*If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?*” But now we are met with a giant objection, which with Goliath must be removed, or else it will obstruct our present proceedings. Is it possible that the *foundations of religion* should be destroyed? Can God be in so long a sleep, yea, so long a lethargy, as patiently to permit the ruins thereof? If he looks on, and yet doth not see these *foundations* when destroyed, where then is his *omniscency*? If he seeth it, and cannot help it, where then is his *omnipotency*? If he seeth it, can help it, and will not, where then is his *goodness and mercy*? Martha said to Jesus (John xi. 21), “*Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*” But many will say, Were God effectually present in the world with his aforesaid attributes, surely the *foundations* had not *died*, had not been *destroyed*. We answer negatively, that it is impossible that the *foundations of religion* should ever be *totally and finally destroyed*, either in relation to the church in general, or in reference to every true and lively member thereof. For the first, we have an express promise of Christ. Matt. xvi. 18. “*The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*” *Fundamenta tamen stant inconcussa Sionis.* And as for every particular Christian (2 Tim. ii. 19), “*Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are his.*” However, though for the reasons aforementioned in the objections (the inconsistency thereof with the attributes of God's omnipotency, omniscency, and goodness), the *foundations* can never totally and finally, yet may they partially be destroyed, *quoad gradum*, in a fourfold degree, as followeth. First, *in the desires and utmost endeavours of wicked men.*

They bring their $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} 1. \text{Hoc velle,} \\ 2. \text{Hoc agere,} \\ 3. \text{Totum posse.} \end{array} \right.$

If they *destroy* not the foundations, it is no thanks to them, seeing all the world will bear them witness they have done *their best* (that is, *their worst*), what their might and malice could perform. Secondly, *in their own vainglorious imaginations*: they may not only vainly boast, but also verily believe that they have *destroyed the foundations*. Applicable to this purpose, is that high rant of the Roman emperor (Luke ii. 1): “*And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.*” All the world! whereas he had, though much, not all in Europe, little in Asia, less in Africa, none in America, which was so far from being conquered, it was not so much as known to the Romans. But *hyperbole* is not a figure, but the ordinary language of pride; because indeed Augustus had very much, he proclaimeth himself to have all the world. . . . Thirdly, *the foundations may be destroyed* as to all outward visible illustrious apparition. The church in persecution is like unto a ship in a tempest; down go all their masts, yea, sometimes for the more speed they are forced to cut them down: not a piece of canvas to play with the winds, no sails to be seen; they lie close knotted to the very keel, that the tempest may have the less power upon them, though when the storm is over, they can hoist up their sails as high, and spread their canvas as broad as ever before. So the church in the time of persecution

feared, but especially *felt*, loseth all gayness and gallantry which may attract and allure the eyes of beholders, and contenteth itself with its own secrecy. In a word, on the work-days of affliction she weareth her worst clothes, whilst her best are laid up in her wardrobe, in sure and certain hope that God will give her a *holy* and *happy* day, when with joy she shall wear her best garments. Lastly they may be *destroyed* in the *jealous apprehensions* of the best saints and servants of God, especially in their melancholy fits. I will instance in no puny, but in a star of the first magnitude and greatest eminency, even Elijah himself complaining (1 Kings xix. 10): "And I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."—*Thomas Fuller*.

Verse 3.—"If." It is the only word of comfort in the text, that what is said is not *positive*, but *suppositive*; not *thetical*, but *hypothetical*. And yet this comfort which is but a spark (at which we would willingly kindle our hopes), is quickly saddened with a double consideration. First, impossible suppositions produce impossible consequences, "As is the mother, so is the daughter." Therefore, surely God's Holy Spirit would not suppose such a thing but what was feasible and possible, but what either had, did, or might come to pass. Secondly, the Hebrew word is not the conditional *im*, *si*, *si forte*, but *chi*, *quia*, *quoniam*, because, and (although here it be favourably rendered *if*), seemeth to import, more therein, that the sad case had already happened in David's days. I see, therefore, that this *if*, our only hope in the text, is likely to prove with Job's friends, but a miserable comforter. Well, it is good to know the worst of things, that we may provide ourselves accordingly; and therefore let us behold this doleful case, not as doubtful, but as done; not as feared, but felt; not as suspected, but at this time really come to pass.—*Thomas Fuller*.

Verse 3.—"If the foundations," etc. My text is an answer to a tacit objection which some may raise; namely, that the righteous are wanting to themselves, and by their own easiness and inactivity (not daring and doing so much as they might and ought), betray themselves to that bad condition. In whose defence David shows, that if God in his wise will and pleasure seeth it fitting, for reasons best known to himself to suffer religion to be reduced to terms of extremity, it is not placed in the power of the best man alive to remedy and redress the same. "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" My text is hung about with mourning, as for a funeral sermon, and contains: First, a sad case supposed, "If the foundations be destroyed." Secondly, a sad question propounded, "What can the righteous do?" Thirdly, a sad answer implied, namely, that they can do just nothing, as to the point of re-establishing the destroyed foundation.—*Thomas Fuller*.

Verse 3.—"If the foundations be destroyed," etc. The civil foundation of a nation or people, is their laws and constitutions. The order and power that's among them, that's the foundation of a people; and when once this foundation is destroyed, "What can the righteous do?" What can the best, the wisest in the world, do in such a case? What can any man do, if there be not a foundation of government left among men? There is no help nor answer in such a case but that which follows in the fourth verse of the Psalm, "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men;" as if he had said, in the midst of these confusions, when as it is said (Psalm lxxxii. 5), "All the foundations of the earth are out of course;" yet God keeps his course still, he is where he was and as he was, without variableness or shadow of turning.—*Joseph Caryl*.

Verse 3.—"The righteous." The righteous indefinitely, equivalent to the righteous universally; not only the righteous as a single arrow, but in the whole sheaf; not only the righteous in their personal, but in their diffusive capacity. Were they all collected into one body, were all the righteous living in the same age wherein the foundations are destroyed, summoned up and modelled into one corporation, all their joint endeavours would prove ineffectual to the re-establishing of the fallen foundations, as not being man's work, but only God's work to perform.—*Thomas Fuller*.

Verse 3.—"The foundations." Positions, the things formerly fixed, placed, and settled. It is not said, if the roof be ruinous, or if the side walls be shattered, but if the foundations.

Verse 3.—"Foundations be destroyed." In the plural. Here I will not warrant my skill in architecture, but conceive this may pass for an undoubted truth: It

is possible that a building settled on several entire *foundations* (suppose them *pillars*) close one to another, if one of them fall, yet the structure may still stand, or rather hang (at the least for a short time) by virtue of the *complicaine*, which it receiveth from such foundations which still stand secure. But in case there be a total rout, and an utter ruin of all the *foundations*, none can fancy to themselves a possibility of that building's subsistence.—*Thomas Fuller*.

Verse 3.—"What can the righteous?" The *can* of the righteous is a limited *can*, confined to the rule of God's word; they can do nothing but what they can lawfully do. 2 Cor. xiii. 8. "For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth:" *Illud possumus, quod jure possumus*. Wicked men can do anything; their conscience, which is so wide that it is none at all, will bear them out to act anything how unlawful soever, to stab, poison, massacre, by any means, at any time, in any place, whosoever standeth betwixt them and the effecting their desires. Not so the righteous; they have a rule whereby to walk, which they will not, they must not, they dare not, cross. If therefore a righteous man were assured, that by the breach of one of God's commandments he might restore decayed religion, and re-settle it *statu quo prius*, his hands, head, and heart are tied up, he can do nothing, because *their damnation is just who say* (Rom. iii. 8), "Let us do evil that good may come thereof."

Verse 3.—"Do." It is not said, *What can they think?* It is a great blessing which God hath allowed injured people, that though otherwise oppressed and straitened, they may freely enlarge themselves in their thoughts.—*Thomas Fuller*.

Verse 3.—Sinning times have ever been the saints' praying times: this sent Ezra with a heavy heart to confess the sin of his people, and to bewail their abominations before the Lord. Ezra ix. And Jeremiah tells the wicked of his degenerate age, that "his soul should weep in secret places for their pride." Jer. xiii. 17. Indeed, sometimes sin comes to such a height, that this is almost all the godly can do, to get into a corner, and bewail the general pollutions of the age. "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" Such dismal days of national confusion our eyes have seen, when foundations of government were destroyed, and all hurled into military confusion. When it is thus with a people, "What can the righteous do?" Yes, this they may, and should do, "fast and pray." There is yet a God in heaven to be sought to, when a people's deliverance is thrown beyond the help of human policy or power. Now is the fit time to make their appeal to God, as the words following hint: "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven;" in which words God is presented sitting in heaven as a temple, for their encouragement, I conceive, in such a desperate state of affairs, to direct their prayers thither for deliverance. And certainly this hath been the engine that hath been instrumental, above any, to restore this poor nation again, and set it upon the foundation of that lawful government from which it had so dangerously departed.—*William Gurnall*.

Verse 4.—The infinite understanding of God doth exactly know the sins of men; he knows so as to consider. He doth not only know them, but intently behold them: "His eyelids try the children of men," a metaphor taken from men, that contract the eyelids when they would wistly and accurately behold a thing: it is not a transient and careless look.—*Stephen Charnock*.

Verse 4.—"His eyes behold," etc. God searcheth not as man searcheth, by enquiring into that which before was hid from him; his searching is no more but his beholding; he seeth the heart, he beholdeth the reins; God's very sight is searching. Heb. iv. 13. "All things are naked and opened unto his eyes," τετραχηλισμένα, *dissected or anatomised*. He hath at once as exact a view of the most hidden things, the very entrails of the soul, as if they had been with never so great curiosity anatomised before him.—*Richard Alleine*, 1611—1681.

Verse 4.—"His eyes behold," etc. Consider that God not only sees into all you do, but he sees it to that very end that he may examine and search into it. He doth not only behold you with a common and indifferent look, but with a searching, watchful, and inquisitive eye: he pries into the reasons, the motives, the ends of all your actions. "The Lord's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men." Rev. i. 14, where Christ is described, it is said, *his eyes are as a flame of fire*: you know the property of fire is to search and make trial of those things which are exposed unto it, and to separate the dross from the pure metal: so, God's eye is like fire, to try and examine the actions of men: he

knows and discerns how much your very purest duties have in them of mixture, and base ends of formality, hypocrisy, distractedness, and deadness : he sees through all your specious pretences, that which you cast as a mist before the eyes of men when yet thou art but a juggler in religion : all your tricks and sleights of outward profession, all those things that you use to cozen and delude men withal, cannot possibly impose upon him : he is a God that can look through all those fig-leaves of outward profession, and discern the nakedness of your duties through them.—*Ezekiel Hopkins, D.D.*

Verse 4.—“*His eyes behold,*” etc. Take God into thy counsel. Heaven overlooks hell. God at any time can tell thee what plots are hatching there against thee.—*William Gurnall.*

Verse 4.—“*His eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men.*” When an offender, or one accused for any offence, is brought before a judge, and stands at the bar to be arraigned, the judge looks upon him, eyes him, sets his eye upon him, and he bids the offender look up in his face ; “*Look upon me,*” saith the judge, “*and speak up :*” guiltiness usually clouds the forehead and clothes the brow ; the weight of guilt holds down the head ! *the evil doer hath an ill look,* or dares not look up ; how glad is he if the judge looks off him. We have such an expression here, speaking of the Lord, the great Judge of heaven and earth : “*His eyelids try the children of men,*” as a judge tries a guilty person with his eye and reads the characters of his wickedness printed in his face. Hence we have a common speech in our language, such a one *looks suspiciously,* or, *he hath a guilty look.* At that great gaol-delivery described in Rev. vi. 16, All the prisoners cry out *to be hid from the face of him that sat upon the throne.* They could not look upon Christ, and they could not endure Christ should look on them ; the eyelids of Christ try the children of men. . . . Wickedness cannot endure to be under the observation of any eye, much less of the eye of justice. Hence the actors of it say, “*Who seeth us ?*” It is very hard not to show the guilt of the heart in the face, and it is as hard to have it seen there.—*Joseph Caryl.*

Verse 5.—“*The Lord trieth the righteous.*” Except our sins, there is not such plenty of anything in all the world as there is of troubles which come from sin, as one heavy messenger came to Job after another. Since we are not in paradise, but in the wilderness, we must look for one trouble after another. As a bear came to David after a lion, and a giant after a bear, and a king after a giant, and Philistines after a king, so, when believers have fought with poverty, they shall fight with envy ; when they have fought with envy, they shall fight with infamy ; when they have fought with infamy, they shall fight with sickness ; they shall be like a labourer who is never out of work.—*Henry Smith.*

Verse 5.—“*The Lord trieth the righteous.*”—Times of affliction and persecution will distinguish the precious from the vile, it will differenciate the counterfeit professor from the true. Persecution is a Christian’s touchstone, it is a *lapis tydius* that will try what metal men are made of, whether they be silver or tin, gold or dross, wheat or chaff, shadow or substance, carnal or spiritual, sincere or hypocritical. Nothing speaks out more soundness and uprightness than a pursuing after holiness, even then when holiness is most afflicted, pursued, and persecuted in the world : to stand fast in fiery trials argues much integrity within.—*Thomas Brooks.*

Verse 5.—Note the singular opposition of the two sentences. God hates the wicked, and therefore in contrast he loves the righteous ; but it is here said that he tries them : therefore it follows that to try and to love are with God the same thing.—*C. H. S.*

Verse 6.—“*Upon the wicked he shall rain snares.*” Snares to hold them ; then if they be not delivered, follow fire and brimstone, and they cannot escape. This is the case of a sinner if he repent not ; if God pardon not, he is in the snare of Satan’s temptation, he is in the snare of divine vengeance ; let him therefore cry aloud for his deliverance, that he may have his feet in a large room. The wicked lay snares for the righteous, but God either preventeth them that their souls ever escape them, or else he subverteth them : “*The snares are broken, and we are delivered.*” No snares hold us so fast as those of our own sins ; they keep down our heads, and stoop us that we cannot look up : a very little ease they are to him that hath not a seared conscience.—*Samuel Page, 1646.*

Verse 6.—“*He shall rain snares.*” As in hunting with the lasso, the huntsman

casts a snare from above upon his prey to entangle its head or feet, so shall the Lord from above with many twistings of the line of terror, surround, bind, and take captive the haters of his law.—C. H. S.

Verse 6.—“*He shall rain snares,*” etc. He shall rain upon them when they least think of it even in the midst of their jollity, as rain falls on a fair day. Or, he shall rain down the vengeance when he sees good, for it rains not always. Though he defers it, yet will it rain.—*William Nicholson, Bishop of Gloucester, in “David’s Harp Strung and Tuned,”* 1662.

Verse 6.—“*Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest.*” The strange dispensation of affairs in this world is an argument which doth convincingly prove that there shall be such a day wherein all the *involucra* and entanglements of providence shall be clearly unfolded. Then shall the riddle be dissolved, why God hath given this and that profane wretch so much wealth, and so much power to do mischief: is it not *that they might be destroyed for ever*? Then shall they be called to a strict account for all that plenty and prosperity for which they are now envied; and the more they have abused, the more dreadful will their condemnation be. Then it will be seen that God gave them not as mercies, but as “*snares.*” It is said that God “*will rain on the wicked snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest:*” when he scatters abroad the desirable things of this world, riches, honours, pleasures, etc., then he rains “*snares*” upon them; and when he shall call them to an account for these things, then he will rain upon them “*fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest*” of his wrath and fury. Dives, who caroused on earth, yet, in hell could not obtain so much as one poor drop of water to cool his scorched and flaming tongue: had not his excess and intemperance been so great in his life, his fiery thirst had not been so tormenting after death; and therefore, in that sad item that Abraham gives him (Luke xvi. 25), he bids him “*remember, that thou, in thy lifetime, receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.*” I look upon this as a most bitter and a most deserved sarcasm; upbraiding him for his gross folly, in making the trifles of this life his good things. Thou hast received thy good things, but now thou art tormented. Oh, never call Dives’s purple and delicious fare *good things*, if they thus end in torments! Was it good for him to be wrapped in purple who is now wrapped in flames? Was it good for him to fare deliciously who was only thereby fattened up against the day of slaughter?—*Ezekiel Hopkins.*

Verse 6.—“*Snares, fire and brimstone, storm and tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup.*” After the judgment follows the condemnation: pre-figured as we have seen, by the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. “*Snares:*” because the allurements of Satan in this life will be their worst punishments in the next; the fire of anger, the brimstone of impurity, the tempest of pride, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. “*This shall be their portion;*” compare it with the Psalmist’s own saying, “The Lord himself is the portion of my inheritance and my cup.” Psalm xvi. 5.—*Cassiodorus, in J. M. Neale’s Commentary.*

Verse 6.—“*The portion of their cup.*” Heb., the allotment of their cup. The expression has reference to the custom of distributing to each guest his mess of meat.—*William French and George Skinner, 1842.*

Verse 7.—That God may give grace without glory is intelligible; but to admit a man to communion with him in glory without grace, is not intelligible. It is not agreeable to God’s holiness to make any inhabitant of heaven, and converse freely with him in a way of intimate love, without such a qualification of grace: “*The righteous Lord loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright;*” he looks upon him with a smiling eye, and therefore he cannot favourably look upon an unrighteous person; so that this necessity is not founded only in the command of God that we should be renewed, but in the very nature of the thing, because God, in regard of his holiness, cannot converse with an impure creature. God must change his nature, or the sinner’s nature must be changed. There can be no friendly communion between two of different natures without the change of one of them into the likeness of the other. Wolves and sheep, darkness and light, can never agree. God cannot love a sinner as a sinner, because he hates impurity by a necessity of nature as well as a choice of will. It is as impossible for him to love it as to cease to be holy.—*Stephen Charnock.*

HINTS TO PREACHERS.

Verse 1.—Faith's bold avowal, and brave refusal.

Verse 1.—Teacheth us to trust in God, how great soever our dangers be; also that we shall be many times assaulted to make us put far from us this trust, but yet that we must cleave unto it, as the anchor of our souls, sure and steadfast.
—*Thomas Wilcocks.*

Verse 1.—The advice of cowardice, and the jeer of insolence, both answered by faith. Lesson—Attempt no other answer.

Verse 2.—The craftiness of our spiritual enemies.

Verse 3.—This may furnish a double discourse. I. *If God's oath and promise could remove*, what could we do? Here the answer is easy. II. *If all earthly things fail*, and the very State fall to pieces, what can we do? We can suffer joyfully, hope cheerfully, wait patiently, pray earnestly, believe confidently, and triumph finally.

Verse 3.—Necessity of holding and preaching foundation truths.

Verse 4.—The elevation, mystery, supremacy, purity, everlastingness, invisibility, etc., of the throne of God.

Verses 4, 5.—In these verses mark the fact that the children of men, as well as the righteous, are tried; work out the contrast between the two trials in their design and result, etc.

Verse 5.—“*The Lord trieth the righteous.*” I. Who are tried? II. What in them is tried?—Faith, love, etc. III. In what manner?—Trials of every sort. IV. How long? V. For what purposes?

Verse 5.—“*His soul hateth.*” The thoroughness of God's hatred of sin. Illustrate by providential judgments, threatenings, sufferings of the Surety, and the terrors of hell.

Verse 5.—The trying of the gold, and the sweeping out of the refuse.

Verse 6.—“*He shall rain.*” Gracious rain and destroying rain.

Verse 6.—The portion of the impenitent.

Verse 7.—The Lord possesses righteousness as a personal attribute, loves it in the abstract, and blesses those who practise it.