

PSALM XII.

TITLE. *This Psalm is headed, "To the Chief Musician upon Sheminith, a Psalm of David," which title is identical with that of the sixth Psalm, except that Neginoth is here omitted. We have nothing new to add, and therefore refer the reader to our remarks on the dedication of Psalm VI. As Sheminith signifies the eight, the Arabic version says it is concerning the end of the world, which shall be the eighth day, and refers it to the coming of the Messiah: without accepting so fanciful an interpretation, we may read this song of complaining faith in the light of His coming who shall break in pieces the oppressor. The subject will be the better before the mind's eye if we entitle this Psalm: "GOOD THOUGHTS IN BAD TIMES." It is supposed to have been written while Saul was persecuting David, and those who favoured his cause.*

DIVISION.—*In the first and second verses David spreads his plaint before the Lord concerning the treachery of his age; verses 3 and 4 denounce judgments upon proud traitors; in verse 5, Jehovah himself thunders out his wrath against oppressors; hearing this, the Chief Musician sings sweetly of the faithfulness of God and his care of his people, in verses 6 and 7; but closes on the old key of lament in verse 8, as he observes the abounding wickedness of his times. Those holy souls who dwell in Mesech, and sojourn in the tents of Kedar, may read and sing these sacred stanzas with hearts in full accord with their mingled melody of lowly mourning and lofty confidence.*

EXPOSITION.

HELP, LORD; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men.

2 They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: *with* flattering lips *and* with a double heart do they speak.

"*Help, Lord.*" A short, but sweet, suggestive, seasonable, and serviceable prayer; a kind of angel's sword, to be turned every way, and to be used on all occasions. Ainsworth says the word rendered "help," is largely used for all manner of saving, helping, delivering, preserving, etc. Thus it seems that the prayer is very full and instructive. The Psalmist sees the extreme danger of his position, for a man had better be among lions than among liars; he feels his own inability to deal with such sons of Belial, for "he who shall touch them must be fenced with iron;" he therefore turns himself to his all-sufficient Helper, the Lord, whose help is never denied to his servants, and whose aid is enough for all their needs. "*Help, Lord,*" is a very useful ejaculation which we may dart up to heaven on occasions of emergency, whether in labour, learning, suffering, fighting, living, or dying. As small ships can sail into harbours which larger vessels, drawing more water, cannot enter, so our brief cries and short petitions may trade with heaven when our soul is wind-bound, and business-bound, as to longer exercises of devotion, and when the stream of grace seems at too low an ebb to float a more laborious supplication. "*For the godly man ceaseth;*" the death, departure, or decline of godly men should be a trumpet-call for more prayer. They say that fish smell first at the head, and when godly men decay, the whole commonwealth will soon go rotten. We must not, however, be rash in our judgment on this point, for Elijah erred in counting himself the only servant of God alive, when there were thousands whom the Lord held in reserve. The present times always appear to be peculiarly dangerous, because they are nearest to our anxious gaze, and whatever evils are rife are sure to be observed, while the faults of past ages are further off, and are more easily overlooked. Yet we expect that in the latter days, "because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold," and then we must the more thoroughly turn from man, and address ourselves to the Churches' Lord, by whose help the gates of hell shall be kept from prevailing against us. "*The faithful fail from among the children of men;*" when godliness goes, faithfulness inevitably follows; without fear of God, men have no love of truth. Common honesty is no longer common, when common irreligion leads to universal godlessness. David

had his eyes on Doeg, and the men of Ziph and Kellah, and perhaps remembered the murdered priests of Nob, and the many banished ones who consorted with him in the cave of Adullam, and wondered where the state would drift without the anchors of its godly and faithful men. David, amid the general misrule, did not betake himself to seditious plottings, but to solemn petitionings; nor did he join with the multitude to do evil, but took up the arms of prayer to withstand their attacks upon virtue.

"*They speak vanity every one with his neighbour.*" They utter that which is vain to hear, because of its frivolous, foolish, want of worth; vain to believe, because it was false and lying; vain to trust to, since it was deceitful and flattering; vain to regard, for it lifted up the hearer, filling him with proud conceit of himself. It is a sad thing when it is the fashion to talk vanity. "Ca' me, and I'll ca' thee," is the old Scotch proverb; give me a high-sounding character, and I will give you one. Compliments and fawning congratulations are hateful to honest men; they know that if they take they must give them, and they scorn to do either. These accommodation-bills are most admired by those who are bankrupt in character. Bad are the times when every man thus cajoles and cozens his neighbour. "*With flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.*" He who puffs up another's heart, has nothing better than wind in his own. If a man extols me to my face, he only shows me one side of his heart, and the other is black with contempt for me, or foul with intent to cheat me. Flattery is the sign of the tavern where duplicity is the host. The Chinese consider a man of two hearts to be a very base man, and we shall be safe in reckoning all flatterers to be such.

3 The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, *and* the tongue that speaketh proud things :

4 Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail ; our lips *are* our own : who *is* lord over us ?

Total destruction shall overwhelm the lovers of flattery and pride, but meanwhile how they hector and fume! Well did the apostle call them "raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame." Free-thinkers are generally very free-talkers, and they are never more at ease than when railing at God's dominion, and arrogating to themselves unbounded license. Strange is it that the easy yoke of the Lord should so gall the shoulders of the proud, while the iron bands of Satan they bind about themselves as chains of honour: they boastfully cry unto God, "Who is lord over us?" and hear not the hollow voice of the evil one, who cries from the infernal lake, "I am your lord, and right faithfully do ye serve me." Alas, poor fools, their pride and glory shall be cut off like a fading flower! May God grant that our soul may not be gathered with them. It is worthy of observation that flattering lips, and tongues speaking proud things, are classed together: the fitness of this is clear, for they are guilty of the same vice, the first flatters another, and the second flatters himself, in both cases a lie is in their right hands. One generally imagines that flatterers are such mean parasites, so cringing and fawning, that they cannot be proud; but the wise man will tell you that while all pride is truly meanness, there is in the very lowest meanness no small degree of pride. Cæsar's horse is even more proud of carrying Cæsar, than Cæsar is of riding him. The mat on which the emperor wiped his shoes, boasts vaingloriously, crying out, "I cleaned the imperial boots." None are so detestably domineering as the little creatures who creep into office by cringing to the great; those are bad times, indeed, in which these obnoxious beings are numerous and powerful. No wonder that the justice of God in cutting off such injurious persons is matter for a Psalm, for both earth and heaven are weary of such provoking offenders, whose presence is a very plague to the people afflicted thereby. Men cannot tame the tongues of such boastful flatterers; but the Lord's remedy if sharp is sure, and is an unanswerable answer to their swelling words of vanity.

5 For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD ; I will set *him* in safety *from him that puffeth* at him.

In due season the Lord will hear his elect ones, who cry day and night unto him, and though he bear long with their oppressors, yet will he avenge them speedily. Observe that the mere oppression of saints, however silently they bear it, is in

itself a cry to God: Moses was heard at the Red Sea, though he said nothing; and Hagar's affliction was heard despite her silence. Jesus feels with his people, and their smarts are mighty orators with him. By-and-by, however, *they* begin to sigh and express their misery, and then relief comes post-haste. Nothing moves a father like the cries of his children; he bestirs himself, wakes up his manhood, overthrows the enemy, and sets his beloved in safety. A *puff* is too much for the child to bear, and the foe is so haughty, that he laughs the little one to scorn; but the Father comes, and then it is the child's turn to laugh, when he is set above the rage of his tormentor. What virtue is there in a poor man's sighs, that they should move the Almighty God to arise from his throne. The needy did not dare to speak, and could only sigh in secret, but the Lord heard, and could rest no longer, but girded on his sword for the battle. It is a fair day when our soul brings God into her quarrel, for when his bare arm is seen, Philistia shall rue the day. The darkest hours of the Church's night are those which precede the break of day. Man's extremity is God's opportunity. Jesus will come to deliver just when his needy ones shall sigh, as if all hope had gone for ever. O Lord, set thy *now* near at hand, and rise up speedily to our help. Should the afflicted reader be able to lay hold upon the promise of this verse, let him gratefully fetch a fulness of comfort from it. Gurnal says, "As one may draw out the wine of a whole hog'shead at one tap, so may a poor soul derive the comfort of the whole covenant to himself through one promise, if he be able to apply it." He who promises to set us in safety, means thereby preservation on earth, and eternal salvation in heaven.

6 The words of the LORD *are* pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times.

7 Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever.

Verse 6.—What a contrast between the vain words of man, and the pure words of Jehovah. Man's words are yea and nay, but the Lord's promises are yea and amen. For truth, certainty, holiness, faithfulness, the words of the Lord are pure as well-refined silver. In the original there is an allusion to the most severely-purifying process known to the ancients, through which silver was passed when the greatest possible purity was desired; the dross was all consumed, and only the bright and precious metal remained; so clear and free from all alloy of error or unfaithfulness is the book of the words of the Lord. The Bible has passed through the furnace of persecution, literary criticism, philosophic doubt, and scientific discovery, and has lost nothing but those human interpretations which clung to it as alloy to precious ore. The experience of saints has tried it in every conceivable manner, but not a single doctrine or promise has been consumed in the most excessive heat. What God's words are, the words of his children should be. If we would be Godlike in conversation, we must watch our language, and maintain the strictest purity of integrity and holiness in all our communications.

7. To fall into the hands of an evil generation, so as to be baited by their cruelty, or polluted by their influence, is an evil to be dreaded beyond measure; but it is an evil foreseen and provided for in the text. In life many a saint has lived a hundred years before his age, as though he had darted his soul into the brighter future, and escaped the mists of the beclouded present: he has gone to his grave unreverenced and misunderstood, and lo! as generations come and go, upon a sudden the hero is unearthed, and lives in the admiration and love of the excellent of the earth; preserved for ever from the generation which stigmatised him as a sower of sedition, or burned him as a heretic. It should be our daily prayer that we may rise above our age as the mountain-tops above the clouds, and may stand out as heaven-pointing pinnacle high above the mists of ignorance and sin which roll around us. O Eternal Spirit, fulfil in us the faithful saying of this verse! Our faith believes those two assuring words, and cries, "*Thou shalt,*" "*thou shalt.*"

8 The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted.

8. Here we return to the fount of bitterness, which first made the Psalmist run to the wells of salvation, namely, the prevalence of wickedness. When those in power are vile, their underlings will be no better. As a warm sun brings out noxious flies, so does a sinner in honour foster vice everywhere. Our turf would not so swarm with abominables if those who are styled honourables did not give their

countenance to the craft. Would to God that the glory and triumph of our Lord Jesus would encourage us to walk and work on every side; as like acts upon like, since an exalted sinner encourages sinners, our exalted Redeemer must surely excite, cheer, and stimulate his saints. Nerved by a sight of his reigning power we shall meet the evils of the times in the spirit of holy resolution, and shall the more hopefully pray, "Help, Lord."

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS.

Verse 1.—"Help, Lord." 'Twas high time to call to heaven for help, when Saul cried, "Go, kill me up the priests of Jehovah" (the occasion as it is thought of making this Psalm), and therein committed the sin against the Holy, as some grave divines are of opinion. 1 Sam. xxii. 17. David, after many sad thoughts about that slaughter, and the occasion of it, Doeg's malicious information, together with the paucity of his fast friends, and the multitude of his sworn enemies at court, breaks forth abruptly into these words, "Help Lord," help at a dead lift. The Arabic version hath it, *Deliver me by main force*, as with weapons of war, for "the Lord is a man of war." Ex. xv. 3.—*John Trapp*.

Verse 1.—"The faithful." "A faithful man," as a parent, a reprovcr, an adviser, one "without guile," "who can find?" Prov. xx. 6. Look close. View thyself in the glass of the word. Does thy neighbour or thy friend, find thee *faithful* to him? What does our daily intercourse witness? Is not the attempt to speak what is agreeable oft made at the expense of truth? Are not professions of regard sometimes utterly inconsistent with our real feelings? In common life, where gross violations are restrained, a thousand petty offences are allowed, that break down the wall between sin and duty, and, judged by the divine standard, are indeed guilty steps upon forbidden ground.—*Charles Bridges*, 1850.

Verse 1.—A "faithful" man must be, first of all, faithful to himself; then, he must be faithful to God; and then, he must be faithful to others, particularly the church of God. And this, as it regards ministers, is of peculiar importance. *Joseph Irons*, 1840.

Verse 1.—Even as a careful mother, seeing her child in the way when a company of unruly horses run through the streets in full career, presently whips up her child in her arms and taketh him home; or as the hen, seeing the ravenous kite over her head, clucks and gathers her chickens under her wings; even so when God hath a purpose to bring a heavy calamity upon a land, it hath been usual with him to call and cull out to himself, such as are his dearly beloved. He takes his choice servants from the evil to come. Thus was Augustine removed a little before Hippo (wherein he dwelt) was taken; and Paræus died before Heidelberg was sacked; and Luther was taken off before Germany was overrun with war and bloodshed.—*Ed. Dunsterville in a Sermon at the Funeral of Sir Sim. Harcourt*, 1642.

Verse 1.—"Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth," etc. :—

Back then, complainer, loathe thy life no more,
Nor deem thyself upon a desert shore,
Because the rocks the nearer prospect close.
Yet in fallen Israel are there hearts and eyes,
That day by day in prayer like thine arise;
Thou knowest them not, but their Creator known.
Go, to the world return, nor fear to cast
Thy bread upon the waters, sure at last
In joy to find it after many days.

John Keble, 1792—1866.

Verses 1, 2, 4.—Consider our markets, our fairs, our private contracts and bargains, our shops, our cellars, our weights, our measures, our promises, our protestations, our politic tricks and villanous Machiavelism, our enhancing of the prices of all commodities, and tell, whether the twelfth Psalm may not as fitly be applied to our times as to the days of the man of God; in which the feigning, and lying, and facing, and guile, and subtlety of men provoked the psalmist to cry out,

"*Help, Lord ; for there is not a godly man left : for the faithful are failed from among the children of men : they speak deceitfully every one with his neighbour, flattering with their lips, and speak with a double heart, which have said, With our tongue we will prevail ; our lips are our own : who is Lord over us ?*"—*R. Wolcombe. 1612.*

Verse 2.—" *They speak vanity every one with his neighbour : with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.*" The feigned zeal is just like a water-man, that looks one way and rows another way ; for this man *pretends* one thing and *intends* another thing ; as Jehu pretended the zeal of God's glory, but his aim was at his master's kingdom ; and his zeal to God's service was but to bring him to the sceptre of the kingdom. So Demetrius professed great love unto Diana, but his drift was to maintain the honour of his profession ; and so we have too many that make great show of holiness, and yet their hearts aim at other ends ; but they may be sure, though they can deceive the world and destroy themselves, yet not God, who knoweth the secrets of all hearts.—*Gr. Williams, 1636.*

Verse 2.—" *They speak vanity.*"—

Faithless is earth, and faithless are the skies !
Justice is fled, and truth is now no more !

Virgil's Æneid, IV. 373.

Verse 2.—" *With a double heart.*" Man is nothing but insincerity, falsehood, and hypocrisy, both in regard to himself and in regard to others. He does not wish that he should be told the truth, he shuns saying it to others ; and all these moods, so inconsistent with justice and reason, have their roots in his heart.—*Blaise Pascal.*

Verse 2.—" *With flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.*" There is no such stuff to make a cloak of as religion ; nothing so fashionable, nothing so profitable : it is a livery wherein a wise man may serve two masters, God and the world, and make a gainful service by either. I serve both, and in both myself, by prevaricating with both. Before man none serves his God with more severe devotion : for which, among the best of men, I work my own ends, and serve myself. In private, I serve the world ; not with so strict devotion, but with more delight ; where fulfilling of her servants' lusts, I work my end and serve myself. The house of prayer who more frequents than I ? In all Christian duties who more forward than I ? I fast with those that fast, that I may eat with those that eat. I mourn with those that mourn. No hand more open to the cause than mine, and in their families none prays longer and with louder zeal. Thus when the opinion of a holy life hath cried the goodness of my conscience up, my trade can lack no custom, my wares can want no price, my words can need no credit, my actions can lack no praise. If I am covetous it is interpreted providence ; if miserable, it is counted temperance ; if melancholy, it is construed godly sorrow ; if merry, it is voted spiritual joy ; if I be rich, it is thought the blessing of a godly life ; if poor, supposed the fruit of conscionable dealing ; if I be well spoken of, it is the merit of holy conversation ; if ill, it is the malice of malignants. Thus I sail with every wind, and have my end in all conditions. This cloak in summer keeps me cool, in winter warm, and hides the nasty bag of all my secret lusts. Under this cloak I walk in public fairly with applause, and in private sin securely without offence, and officiate wisely without discovery. I compass sea and land to make a proselyte ; and no sooner made, but he makes me. At a fast I cry Geneva, and at a feast I cry Rome. If I be poor, I counterfeit abundance to save my credit ; if rich, I dissemble poverty to save charges. I most frequent schismatical lectures, which I find most profitable ; from thence learning to divulge and maintain new doctrines ; they maintain me in suppers thrice a week. I use the help of a lie sometimes, as a new stratagem to uphold the gospel ; and I colour oppression with God's judgments executed upon the wicked. Charity I hold an extraordinary duty, therefore not ordinarily to be performed. What I openly reprove abroad, for my own profit, that I secretly act at home, for my own pleasure. But stay, I see a handwriting in my heart which damps my soul. It is charactered in these said words, " Woe be to you, hypocrites." *Matt. xxiii. 13.*—*Francis Quarles' " Hypocrite's Soliloquy."*

Verse 2.—" *With flattering lips,*" etc. The world indeed says that society could not exist if there were perfect truthfulness and candour between man and man ; and that the world's propriety would be as much disturbed if every man said what he pleased, as it was in those days of Israelitish history, when every man did that

which was right in his own eyes. The world is assuredly the best judge of its own condition and mode of government, and therefore I will not say what a libel does such a remark contain, but oh, what a picture does it present of the social edifice, that its walls can be cemented and kept together only by flattery and falsehood.—*Barton Bouchier.*

Verse 2.—“*Flattering lips.*” The philosopher Bion being asked what animal he thought the most hurtful, replied, “That of wild creatures a tyrant, and of tame ones a flatterer.” The flatterer is the most dangerous enemy we can have. Raleigh, himself a courtier, and therefore initiated into the whole art of flattery, who discovered in his own career and fate its dangerous and deceptive power, its deep artifice and deeper falsehood, says, “A flatterer is said to be a beast that biteth smiling. But it is hard to know them from friends—they are so obsequious and full of protestations; for, as a wolf resembles a dog, so doth a flatterer a friend.”—*The Book of Symbols, 1844.*

Verse 2.—“*They speak with a double heart.*” The original is, “A heart and a heart:” one for the church, another for the change; one for Sundays, another for working-days; one for the king, another for the pope. A man without a heart is a wonder, but a man with two hearts is a monster. It is said of Judas “There were many hearts in one man;” and we read of the saints, “There was one heart in many men.” Acts. iv. 32. *Dabo illis cor unum*; a special blessing.—*Thomas Adams.*

Verse 2.—When men cease to be faithful to their God, he who expects to find them so to each other will be much disappointed. The primitive sincerity will accompany the primitive piety in her flight from the earth; and then interest will succeed conscience in the regulation of human conduct, till one man cannot trust another farther than he holds him by that tie. Hence, by the way, it is, that though many are infidels themselves, yet few choose to have their families and dependants such; as judging, and rightly judging, that true Christians are the only persons to be depended on for the exact discharge of social duties.—*George Horne.*

Verse 3.—“*The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips,*” etc. They who take pleasure in deceiving others, will at the last find themselves most of all deceived, when the Sun of truth, by the brightness of his rising, shall at once detect and consume hypocrisy.—*George Horne.*

Verse 3.—“*Cut off lips and tongues.*” May there not be here an allusion to those terrible but suggestive punishments which Oriental monarchs were wont to execute on criminals? Lips were cut off and tongues torn out when offenders were convicted of lying or treason. So terrible and infinitely more so are the punishments of sin.—*C. H. S.*

Verses 3, 4.—It need not now seem strange to tell you that the Lord is the owner of our bodies, that he has so much propriety therein that they are more his than ours. The apostle tells us as much. 1 Cor. vi. 20. “Glorify God in your bodies which are his.” Our bodies and every member thereof, are his: for if the whole be so, no part is exempted. And therefore they spake proud things, and presumptuously usurped the propriety of God, who said, “*Our lips are our own*;” as though their lips had not been his who is Lord and Owner of all, but they had been lords thereof, and might have used them as they list. This provoked God to show what right he had to dispose of such lips and tongues, by *cutting them off.*—*David Clarkson.*

Verse 4.—“*Who have said, With our tongues will we prevail; who is Lord over us?*” So it was: twelve poor and unlearned men on the one side, all the eloquence of Greece and Rome arrayed on the other. From the time of Tertullus to that of Julian the apostate, every species of oratory, learning, wit, was lavished against the church of God; and the result, like the well-known story of that dispute between the Christian peasant and the heathen philosopher, when the latter, having challenged the assembled fathers of a synod to silence him, was put to shame by the simple faith of the former “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I command thee to be dumb.” *Who is Lord over us?* “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?” Ex. v. 2. “What is the Almighty, that we should serve him?” Job. xxi. 15. “Who is that God that shall deliver you?” Dan. iii. 15.—*Michael Auggan, in J. M. Neale's Commentary.*

Verse 4.—"Our lips are our own." If we have to do with God, we must quit claim to ourselves and look on God as our owner; but this is fixed in the hearts of men, We will be our own; we will not consent to the claim which God makes to us: "Our lips are our own." Wicked men might as well say the same thing of their whole selves; our bodies, strength, time, parts, etc., are our own, and who is Lord over us?—*John Howe.*

Verse 4.—From the faults of the wicked we must learn three contrary lessons; to wit: 1. That nothing which we have is our own. But, 2. Whatsoever is given to us of God is for service to be done to him. 3. That whatsoever we do or say, we have a Lord over us to whom we must be answerable when he calleth us to account.—*David Dickson.*

Verse 5.—"For the oppression of the poor," etc. When oppressors and persecutors do snuff and puff at the people of God, when they defy them, and scorn them, and think that they can with a blast of their breath blow them away, then God will arise to judgment, as the Chaldee has it; at that very nick of time when all seems to be lost, and when the poor, oppressed, and afflicted people of God can do nothing but sigh and weep, and weep and sigh, then the Lord will arise and ease them of their oppressions, and make their day of extremity a glorious opportunity to work for his own glory and his people's good. Matt. xxii. 6, 7. "And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city."—*Thomas Brooks.*

Verse 5.—Fear ye, whosoever ye be, that do wrong the poor; you have power and wealth, and the favour of the judges, but they have the strongest weapons of all, sighings and groanings, which fetch help from heaven for them. These weapons dig down houses, throw up foundations, overthrow whole nations.—*Chrysostom.*

Verse 5.—"For the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord." God is pleased to take notice of every grace, even the least and lowest, and every gracious inclination in any of his servants. To fear his name is no great matter, yet these have a promise. To think on his name less, yet set down in a "book of remembrance." God sets down how many good thoughts a poor soul hath had. As evil thoughts in wicked men are taken notice of—they are the first fruits of the evil heart (Matt. xv. 19)—so good thoughts are they which lie uppermost, and best discover a good heart. A desire is a small matter, especially of the poor man, yet God regards the desire of the poor, and calls a good desire the greatest kindness; "The desire of a man is his kindness." A tear makes no great noise, yet hath a voice, "God hath heard the voice of my weeping." It is no pleasant water, yet God bottles it up. A groan is a poor thing, yet is the best part of a prayer sometimes (Rom. viii. 26); a sigh is less, yet God is awakened and raised up by it. Psalm xii. 5. A look is less than all these, yet this is regarded (Jonah ii. 4); breathing is less, yet (Lam. iii. 56), the church could speak of no more; panting is less than breathing, when one is spent for lack of breath, yet this is all the godly can sometimes boast of. Psalm xlii. 1. The description of a godly man is oftentimes made from his least *quod sic*. Blessed are the poor, the meek, they that mourn, and they who hunger and thirst. Never did Hannah pray better than when she could get out never a word, but cried, "Hard, hard heart." Nor did the publican, than when he smote his breast and cried, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner." Nor Mary Magdalene, than when she came behind Christ, sat down, wept, but kept silence. How sweet is music upon the waters! How fruitful are the lowest valleys! Mourning hearts are most musical, lowest most fruitful. The good shepherd ever takes most care of his weak lambs and feeble sheep. The father makes most of the least, and the mother looks most after the sick child. How comfortable is that of our Saviour, "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish!" And that heaven is not to be entered but by such as are like the little child.—*John Sheffield, 1654.*

Verse 5.—"The oppression of the poor." Insolent and cruel oppressing of the poor is a sin that brings desolating and destroying judgments upon a people. God sent ten wasting judgments one after another upon Pharaoh, his people, and land, to revenge the cruel oppression of his poor people. "Rob not the poor, because he is poor: neither oppress the afflicted in the gate: for the Lord will plead their cause." Prov. xxii. 22, 23. To rob and oppress the rich is a great sin; but to

rob and oppress the poor is a greater ; but to rob and oppress the poor because he is poor, and wants money to buy justice, is the top of all inhumanity and impiety. To oppress any one is sin ; but to oppress the oppressed is the height of sin. Poverty, and want, and misery, should be motives to pity ; but oppressors make them the whetstones of their cruelty and severity, and therefore the Lord will plead the cause of his poor oppressed people against their oppressors without fee or fear ; yea, he will plead their cause with pestilence, blood, and fire. Gog was a great oppressor of the poor (Ezekiel xxxviii. 8—14), and God pleads against him with pestilence, blood, and fire (verse 22) ; “ and I will plead against him, with pestilence and with blood ; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire and brimstone.”—*Thomas Brooks*.

Verse 6.—“ *The words of the Lord are pure words,*” etc. How beautifully is this verse introduced, by way of contrast to what was said before concerning ! Do sinners talk of vanity ? let saints then speak of Jesus and his gospel. Do they talk impure words ? then let the faithful use the pure words of God, which like silver, the more used, the more melted in the fire, the more precious will they be. It is true, indeed, despisers will esteem both God and his word as trifling ; but oh, what an unknown treasure doth the word, the promises, the covenant relation of the divine things of Jesus contain ! They are more to be desired than gold, yea, than pure gold ; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.—*Robert Hawker*.

Verse 6.—“ *The words of the Lord are pure words,*” etc. They that purify silver to the purpose, use to put it in the fire again and again, that it may be thoroughly tried. So is the truth of God ; there is scarce any truth but hath been tried over and over again, and still if any dross happen to mingle with it, then God calls it in question again. If in former times there have been Scriptures alleged that have not been pertinent to prove it, that truth shall into the fire again, that what is dross may be burnt up ; the Holy Ghost is so curious, so delicate, so exact, he cannot bear that falsehood should be mingled with the truths of the gospel. That is the reason, therefore, why that God doth still, age after age, call former things in question, because that there is still some dross one way or other mingled with them ; either in the stating the opinions themselves, or else in the Scriptures that are brought and alleged for them, that have passed for current, for he will never leave till he have purified them. The doctrine of God’s free grace hath been tried over, and over, and over again. Pelagius begins, and he mingles his dross with it : he saith, grace is nothing but nature in man. Well, his doctrine was purified, and a great deal of dross purged out. Then come the semi-Pelagians, and they part stakes ; they say, nature can do nothing without grace, but they make nature to concur with grace, and to have an influence as well as grace ; and the dross of that was burnt up. The Papists, they take up the same quarrel, but will neither be Pelagians nor semi-Pelagians, yet still mingle dross. The Arminians, they come, and they refine popery in that point anew ; still they mingle dross. God will have this truth tried seven times in the fire, till he hath brought it forth as pure as pure may be. And I say it is because that truth is thus precious.—*Thomas Goodwin*.

Verse 6.—The Scripture is the sun ; the church is the clock. The sun we know to be sure, and regularly constant in his motions ; the clock, as it may fall out, may go too fast or too slow. As then, we should condemn him of folly that should profess to trust the clock rather than the sun, so we cannot but justly tax the credulity of those who would rather trust to the church than to the Scripture.—*Bishop Hall*.

Verse 6.—“ *The words of the Lord are pure words.*” Men may inspect detached portions of the Book, and please themselves with some things, which, at first view, have the semblance of conniving at what is wrong. But let them read it, let them read the whole of it ; let them carry along in their minds the character of the persons to which the different portions of it were addressed ; the age of the world, and the circumstances under which the different parts of it were written, and the particular objects which even those portions of it have in view, which to an infidel mind appear the most exceptionable ; and they may be rationally convinced that, instead of originating in the bosom of an impostor, it owes its origin to men who wrote “ as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” Let them scrutinise it with as much severity as they please ; only let their scrutiny be well informed, wisely directed, and with

a fair and ingenuous mind, and we have no fears for the issue. There are portions of it on which ignorance and folly have put constructions that are forced and unnatural, and which impure minds have viewed in shadows reflected from their own impurity. Montesquieu said of Voltaire, *Lorsque Voltaire lit un livre, il le fait, puis il écrit contre ce qu'il a fait*: "When Voltaire reads a book, he makes it what he pleases, and then writes against what he has made." It is no difficult matter to besmear and blot its pages, and then impute the foul stains that men of corrupt minds have cast upon it, to its stainless Author. But if we honestly look at it as it is, we shall find that like its Author, it is without blemish and without spot.—*Gardiner Spring, D.D.*

Verse 6.—"The words of the Lord are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." The expression may import two things: first, the infallible certainty of the word; and, secondly, the exact purity. First, the infallible certainty of the word, as gold endureth in the fire when the dross is consumed. Vain conceits comfort us not in a time of trouble; but the word of God, the more it is tried, the more you will find the excellency of it—the promise is tried, as well as we are tried, in deep afflictions; but, when it is so, it will be found to be most pure, "The word of the Lord is tried; he is a buckler to all those that trust in him" (Prov. xxx. 5); as pure gold suffers no loss by the fire, so the promises suffer no loss when they are tried, but stand to us in our greatest troubles. Secondly, it notes the exact perfection of the word: there is no dross in silver and gold that hath been often refined; so there is no defect in the word of God.—*Thomas Manton.*

Verse 6.—Fry thus translates this verse:—

The words of Jehovah are pure words—
Silver refined in the crucible—
Gold, seven times washed from the earth.

though sometimes applied to express the purity of silver, is more strictly an epithet of gold, from the peculiar method made use of in separating it from the soil by repeated washings and decantations.—*John Fry, in loc.*

Verse 6.—"Seven times." I cannot but admit that there may be a mystic meaning in the expression "seven times," in allusion to the seven periods of the church, or to that perfection, implied in the figure seven, to which it is to be brought at the revelation of Jesus Christ. This will be more readily allowed by those who admit of the prophetic interpretation of the seven epistles of the Book of Revelation. *W. Wilson, D.D., in loc.*

Verse 8.—"When the vilest men are exalted:" Heb., *vilities, ovrīdavoī*, the abstract for the concrete, *quisquiliæ, ovrīdavoī*. Oft, empty vessels swim aloft, rotten posts are gilt with adulterate gold, the worst weeds spring up bravest. Chaff will get to the top of the fan, when good corn, as it lieth at the bottom of the heap, so it falls low at the feet of the fanner. The reason why wicked men "walk" on every side, are so brisk, so busy (and who but they?) is given to be this, because losels and rioters were exalted. See Prov. xxviii. 12, 18, and xxix. 2. As rheums and catarrhs fall from the head to the lungs and cause a consumption of the whole body, so it is in the body politic. As a fish putrefies first in the head and then in all the parts, so here. Some render the text thus, "When they (that is, the wicked) are exalted," it is a "shame for the sons of men," that other men who better deserve preferment, are not only slighted, but vilely handled by such worthless ambitionists, who yet the higher they climb, as apes, the more they discover their deformities.—*John Trapp.*

Verse 8.—Good thus translates this verse:—

Should the wicked advance on every side;
Should the dregs of the earth be uppermost?

The original is given literally, *ovh* means "fœces, fœculences, dregs." *ovh* is here an adverb, and imports *uppermost*, rather than *exalted*.—*J. Mason Good, in loc.*

HINTS TO PREACHERS.

Verse 1.—"Help, Lord." I. The Prayer itself, short, suggestive, seasonable, rightly directed, vehement. II. Occasions for its use. III. Modes of its answer. IV. Reasons for expecting gracious reply.

First two clauses.—Text for funeral of an eminent believer.

Whole verse.—I. *The fact bewailed*—describe godly and faithful, and show how they fail. II. *The feeling excited*. Mourning the loss, fears for church, personal need of such companions, appeal to God. III. *The forebodings aroused*. Failure of the cause, judgments impending, etc. IV. *The faith remaining*: "Help, Lord."

Verse 1.—Intimate connection between yielding honour to God and honesty to man, since they decline together.

Verse 2 (first clause).—A discourse upon the prevalence and perniciousness of vain talk.

The whole verse.—Connection between flattery and treachery.

"A double heart." Right and wrong kinds of hearts, and the disease of duplicity.

Verse 3.—God's hatred of those twin sins of the lips—Flattery and Pride (which is self flattery). Why he hates them. How he shows his hatred. In whom he hates them most. How to be cleansed from them.

Verse 3, 4.—I. *The revolt of the tongue*. Its claim of power, self-possession, and liberty. Contrast between this and the believer's confession, "we are not our own." II. *The method of its rebellion*—"flattery, and speaking proud things." III. *The end of its treason*—"cut off."

Verse 5.—The Lord aroused—How! Why! What to do! When!

Last clause.—Peculiar danger of believers from those who despise them and their special safety. Good practical topic.

Verse 6.—The purity, trial, and permanency of the words of the Lord.

Seven crucibles in which believers try the word. A little thought will suggest these.

Verse 7.—Preservation from one's generation in life and for ever. A very suggestive theme.

Verse 8.—*Sin in high places specially infectious*. Call to the rich and prominent to remember their responsibility. Thankfulness for honourable rulers. Discrimination to be used in choice of our representatives, or civic magistrates.