

PSALM XLIV.

TITLE.—To the Chief Musician for the sons of Korah, Maschil.—*The title is similar to the forty-second, and although this is no proof that it is by the same author it makes it highly probable. No other writer should be sought for to father any of the Psalms when David will suffice, and therefore we are loth to ascribe this sacred song to any but the great Psalmist, yet as we hardly know any period of his life which it would fairly describe, we feel compelled to look elsewhere. Some Israelitish patriot fallen on evil times, sings in mingled faith and sorrow, his country's ancient glory and her present griefs, her traditions of former favour and her experience of pressing ills. By Christians it can best be understood if put into the mouth of the church when persecution is peculiarly severe. The last verses remind us of Milton's famous lines on the Massacre of the Protestants among the mountains of Piedmont.*

The song before us is fitted for the voices of the saved by grace, the sons of Korah, and is to them and to all others full of teaching, hence the title Maschil.

DIVISION.—From 1—3, the Lord's mighty works for Israel are rehearsed, and in remembrance of them faith in the Lord is expressed 4—8. Then the notes of complaint are heard 9—16, the fidelity of the people to their God is avowed, 17—22, and the Lord is entreated to interpose, 23—26.

EXPOSITION.

WE have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, *what* work thou didst in their days, in the times of old.

2 *How* thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them, *how* thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out.

3 For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.

1. "*We have heard with our ears, O God.*" Thy mighty acts have been the subjects of common conversation; not alone in books have we read thy famous deeds, but in the ordinary talk of the people we have heard of them. Among the godly Israelites the biography of their nation was preserved by oral tradition, with great diligence and accuracy. This mode of preserving and transmitting history has its disadvantages, but it certainly produces a more vivid impression on the mind than any other; to hear with the ears affects us more sensitively than to read with the eyes; we ought to note this, and seize every possible opportunity of telling abroad the gospel of our Lord Jesus *viva voce*, since this is the most telling mode of communication. The expression, "heard with our ears," may denote the pleasure with which they listened, the intensity of their interest, the personality of their hearing, and the lively remembrance they had of the romantic and soul-stirring narrative. Too many have ears but hear not; happy are they who, having ears, have learned to hear.

"*Our fathers have told us.*" They could not have had better informants. Schoolmasters are well enough, but godly fathers are, both by the order of nature and grace, the best instructors of their sons, nor can they delegate the sacred duty. It is to be feared that many children of professors could plead very little before God of what their fathers have told them. When fathers are tongue-tied religiously with their offspring, need they wonder if their children's hearts remain sin-tied? Just as in all free nations men delight to gather around the hearth, and tell the deeds of valour of their sires "in the brave days of old," so the people of God under the old dispensation made their families cheerful around the table, by rehearsing the wondrous doings of the Lord their God. Religious conversation need not be dull, and indeed it could not be if, as in this case, it dealt more with facts and less with opinions. "*What work thou didst in their days, in the times of old.*" They began with what their own eyes had witnessed, and then passed on to what were the traditions of their youth. Note that the main point of the history transmitted

from father to son was the work of God ; this is the core of history, and therefore no man can write history aright who is a stranger to the Lord's work. It is delightful to see the footprints of the Lord on the sea of changing events, to behold him riding on the whirlwind of war, pestilence, and famine, and above all to see his unchanging care for his chosen people. Those who are taught to see God in history have learned a good lesson from their fathers, and no son of believing parents should be left in ignorance of so holy an art. A nation tutored as Israel was in a history so marvellous as their own, always had an available argument in pleading with God for aid in trouble, since he who never changes gives in every deed of grace a pledge of mercy yet to come. The traditions of our past experience are powerful pleas for present help.

2. "*How thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand.*" The destruction of the Canaanites from the promised land is the work here brought to remembrance. A people numerous, warlike, gigantic and courageous, firmly established and strongly fortified, were driven out by a far feebler nation because the Lord was against them in the fight. It is clear from Scripture that God sent a plague (so that the land ate up the inhabitants thereof) and also a visitation of hornets against the Canaanites, and by other means dispirited them, so that the easy victories of Joshua were but the results of God's having worked beforehand against the idolatrous nation. "*And plantedst them.*" The tribes of Israel were planted in the places formerly occupied by the heathen. Hivites and Jebusites were chased from their cities to make room for Ephraim and Judah. The Great Wonderworker tore up by the roots the oaks of Bashan, that he might plant instead thereof his own chosen "*vineyard of red wine.*" "*How thou didst afflict the people.*" With judgments and plagues the condemned nations were harassed, by fire and sword they were hunted to the death, till they were all expelled, and the enemies of Israel were banished far away. "*And cast them out.*" This most probably refers to Israel and should be read, "*caused them to increase.*" He who troubled his enemies smiled on his friends ; he meted out vengeance to the ungodly nations, but he reserved of his mercy for the chosen tribes. How fair is mercy when she stands by the side of justice ! Bright beams the star of grace amid the night of wrath ! It is a solemn thought that the greatness of divine love has its counterpart in the greatness of his indignation. The weight of mercy bestowed on Israel is balanced by the tremendous vengeance which swept the thousands of Amorites and Hittites down to hell with the edge of the sword. Hell is as deep as heaven is high, and the flame of Tophet is as everlasting as the blaze of the celestial glory. God's might, as shown in deeds both of mercy and justice, should be called to mind in troublous times as a stay to our fainting faith.

3 "*For they got not the land in possession by their own sword.*" Behold how the Lord alone was exalted in bringing his people to the land which floweth with milk and honey ! He, in his distinguishing grace, had put a difference between Canaan and Israel, and therefore, by his own effectual power, he wrought *for* his chosen and *against* their adversaries. The tribes fought for their allotments, but their success was wholly due to the Lord who wrought with them. The warriors of Israel were not inactive, but their valour was secondary to that mysterious, divine working by which Jericho's walls fell down, and the hearts of the heathen failed them for fear. The efforts of all the men-at-arms were employed, but as these would have been futile without divine succour, all the honour is ascribed unto the Lord. The passage may be viewed as a beautiful parable of the work of salvation ; men are not saved without prayer, repentance, etc., but none of these save a man, salvation is altogether of the Lord. Canaan was not conquered without the armies of Israel, but equally true is it that it was not conquered by them ; the Lord was the conqueror, and the people were but instruments in his hands. "*Neither did their own arm save them.*" They could not ascribe their memorable victories to themselves ; he who made sun and moon stand still for them was worthy of all their praise. A negative is put both upon their weapons and themselves as if to show us how ready men are to ascribe success to second causes. "*But thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance.*" The divine *hand* actively fought for them, the divine *arm* powerfully sustained them with more than human energy, and the divine *smile* inspired them with dauntless courage. Who could not win with such triple help, though earth, death, and hell should rise in war against him ? What mattered the tallness of the sons of Anak, or the terror of their chariots of iron, they were as nothing when Jehovah arose for the avenging of Israel.

“*Because thou hadst a favour unto them.*” Here is the fountain from whence every stream of mercy flows. The Lord’s delight in his people, his peculiar affection, his distinguishing regard—this is the mainspring which moves every wheel of a gracious providence. Israel was a chosen nation, hence their victories and the scattering of their foes ; believers are an elect people, hence their spiritual blessings and conquests. There was nothing in the people themselves to secure them success, the Lord’s favour alone did it, and it is ever so in our case, our hope of final glory must not rest on anything in ourselves, but on the free and sovereign favour of the Lord of Hosts.

4 Thou art my King, O God : command deliverances for Jacob.

5 Through thee will we push down our enemies : through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us.

6 For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.

7 But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us.

8 In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever. Selah.

4. “*Thou art my King, O God.*” Knowing right well thy power and grace my heart is glad to own thee for her sovereign prince. Who among the mighty are so illustrious as thou art ? To whom, then, should I yield my homage or turn for aid ? God of my fathers in the olden time, thou art my soul’s monarch and liege Lord. “*Command deliverances for Jacob.*” To whom should a people look but to their king ? he it is who, by virtue of his office, fights their battles for them. In the case of our King, how easy it is for him to scatter all our foes ! O Lord, the King of kings, with what ease canst thou rescue thy people ; a word of thine can do it, give but the command and thy persecuted people shall be free. Jacob’s long life was crowded with trials and deliverances, and his descendants are here called by his name, as if to typify the similarity of their experience to that of their great forefather. He who would win the blessings of Israel must share the sorrows of Jacob. This verse contains a personal declaration and an intercessory prayer ; those can pray best who make most sure of their personal interest in God, and those who have the fullest assurance that the Lord is their God should be the foremost to plead for the rest of the tried family of the faithful.

5. “*Through thee will we push down our enemies.*” The fight was very close, bows were of no avail, and swords failed to be of service, it came to daggers drawing, and hand to hand wrestling, pushing and tugging. Jacob’s God was renewing in the seed of Jacob their father’s wrestling. And how fared it with faith then ? Could she stand foot to foot with her foe and hold her own ? Yea, verily, she came forth victorious from the encounter, for she is great at a close push, and overthrows all her adversaries, the Lord being her helper.

“*Through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us.*” The Lord’s name served instead of weapons, and enabled those who used it to leap on their foes and crush them with jubilant valour. In union and communion with God, saints work wonders ; if God be for us, who can be against us ? Mark well that all the conquests of these believers are said to be “*through thee,*” “*through thy name :*” never let us forget this, lest going a warfare at our own charges, we fail most ignominiously. Let us not, however, fall into the equally dangerous sin of distrust, for the Lord can make the weakest of us equal to any emergency. Though to-day we are timid and defenceless as sheep, he can by his power make us strong as the firstling of his bullock, and cause us to push as with the horns of unicorns, until those who rose up against us shall be so crushed and battered as never to rise again. Those who of themselves can scarcely keep their feet, but like little babes totter and fall, are by divine assistance made to overthrow their foes, and set their feet upon their necks. Read Christian’s fight with Apollyon, and see how

“ The man so bravely played the man
He made the fiend to fly.”

6. “*For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.*” Thy people Israel, under thy guidance, shouldered out the heathen, and gained their land, not by skill of weapons or prowess of arms, but by thy power alone ; therefore will we renounce for ever all reliance upon outward confidences, of which other

men make such boast, and we will cast ourselves upon the omnipotence of our God. Bows having been newly introduced by king Saul, were regarded as very formidable weapons in the early history of Israel, but they are here laid aside together with the all-conquering sword, in order that there may be room for faith in the living God. This verse, in the first person singular, may serve as the confession of faith of every believer renouncing his own righteousness and strength, and looking alone to the Lord Jesus. O for grace to stand to this self-renunciation, for, alas! our proud nature is all too apt to fix its trust on the puffed-up and supposititious power of the creature. Arm of flesh, how dare I trust thee? How dare I bring upon myself the curse of those who rely upon a man?

7. "*But thou hast saved us from our enemies.*" In ages past all our rescues have been due to thee, O God. Never hast thou failed us. Out of every danger thou hast brought us. "*And hast put them to shame that hated us.*" With the back of thy saving hand thou hast given them a cuff which has made them hide their faces; thou hast defeated them in such a manner as to make them ashamed of themselves to be overthrown by such puny adversaries as they thought the Israelites to be. The double action of God in blessing his people and confounding his enemies is evermore to be observed; Pharaoh is drowned, while Israel passes through the sea; Amalek is smitten, while the tribes rejoice; the heathen are chased from their abodes while the sons of Jacob rest beneath their vine and fig-tree.

8. "*In God we boast all the day long.*" We have abundant reason for doing so while we recount his mighty acts. What blessed boasting is this! it is the only sort of boasting that is bearable. All other manna bred worms and stank except that which was laid up before the Lord, and all other boasting is loathsome save this glorying in the Lord, which is laudable and pleasing. "*And praise thy name for ever.*" Praise should be perpetual. If there were no new acts of love, yet ought the Lord to be praised for what he has done for his people. High let the song be lifted up as we bring to remembrance the eternal love which chose us, predestinated us to be sons, redeemed us with a price, and then enriched us with all the fulness of God.

"*Selah.*"—A pause comes in fitly here, when we are about to descend from the highest to the lowest key. No longer are we to hear Miriam's timbrel, but rather Rachel's weeping.

9 But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies.

10 Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy: and they which hate us spoil for themselves.

11 Thou hast given us like sheep *appointed* for meat; and has scattered us among the heathen.

12 Thou sellest thy people for nought, and dost not increase *thy wealth* by their price.

13 Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us.

14 Thou makest us a byword among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people.

15 My confusion *is* continually before me, and the shame of my face hath covered me,

16 For the voice of him that reproacheth and blasphemeth; by reason of the enemy and avenger.

9. "*But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame.*" Here the patriot bard begins to contrast the past glories of the nation's history with its present sadness and distress; which he does not ascribe to the death of some human champion, or to the accidents of war, but solely and alone to the withdrawal of Israel's God. It seemed to the mourner that Jehovah had grown weary of his people and put them away in abhorrence, as men lay aside leprous garments, loathing the sight of them. To show his displeasures he had made his people to be ridiculed by the heathen, whose easy victories over their largest armies covered Israel with disgrace. Alas! for a church and people when the Lord in the active energy of his Spirit withdraws

from them, they want no greater shame or sorrow. He will not cast away his people finally and totally, but many a church has been left to defeat and disgrace on account of sin, and therefore all churches should be exceedingly watchful lest the like should happen to themselves. Poverty and distress bring no shame on a people, but the Lord's absence takes from a church everything which can exalt and ennoble. "*And goest not forth with our armies.*" If the Lord be not the leader, of what avail are strong battalions? Vain are the combined efforts of the most zealous workers if God's arm be not revealed. May none of us in our churches have to mourn over the ministry, the Sabbath school, the missionary work, the visiting, the street preaching, left to be carried out without the divine aid. If our great ally will not go with us our defeat is inevitable.

10. "*Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy.*" The humiliating consciousness that the Lord has left them soon makes men cowards. Flight closes the fight of those who have not the Lord in the van. "*And they which hate us spoil for themselves.*" After defeat and retreat, comes spoliation. The poor, vanquished nation paid a terrible penalty for being overcome; plunder and murder desolated the conquered land, and the invaders loaded themselves with every precious thing which they could carry away. In spiritual experience we know what it is to be despoiled by our enemies; doubts and fears rob us of our comforts, and terrible forebodings spoil us of our hopes; and all because the Lord, for wise purposes, sees fit to leave us to ourselves. Alas! for the deserted soul; no calamity can equal the sorrow of being left of God, though it be but for a small moment.

11. "*Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat.*" As sheep are slaughtered for food, so were the people slain in flocks, with ease, and frequency. Not with the dignity of sacrifice, but with the cruelty of the shambles, were they put to death. God appeared to give them up like sheep allotted to the butcher, to abandon them as the hireling abandons the flock to wolves. The plaint is bitterly eloquent. "*And hast scattered us among the heathen.*" Many were carried into captivity, far off from the public worship of the temple of God, to pine as exiles among idolaters. All this is ascribed to the Lord as being allowed by him, and even appointed by his decree. It is well to trace the hand of God in our sorrows, for it is surely there.

12. "*Thou sellest thy people for nought.*" As men sell merchandise to any one who cares to have it, so the Lord seemed to hand over his people to any nation who might choose to make war upon them. Meanwhile no good result was perceptible from all the miseries of Israel; so far as the Psalmist could discover, the Lord's name received no honour from the sorrows of his people; they were given away to their foes as if they were so little valued as not to be worth the ordinary price of slaves, and the Lord did not care to gain by them so long as they did but suffer. The woe expressed in this line is as vinegar mingled with gall: the expression is worthy of the weeping prophet. "*And dost not increase thy wealth by their price.*" If Jehovah had been glorified by all this wretchedness it could have been borne patiently, but it was the reverse; the Lord's name had, through the nation's calamities, been despised by the insulting heathen, who counted the overthrow of Israel to be the defeat of Jehovah himself. It always lightens a believer's trouble when he can see that God's great name will be honoured thereby, but it is a grievous aggravation of misery when we appear to be tortured in vain. For our comfort let us rest satisfied that in reality the Lord is glorified, and when no revenue of glory is manifestly rendered to him, he none the less accomplishes his own secret purposes, of which the grand result will be revealed in due time. We do not suffer for nought, nor are our griefs without result.

13. "*Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbours.*" Scorn is always an intensely bitter ingredient in the cup of the oppressed. The taunts and jeers of the victors pain the vanquished almost as much as their swords and spears. It was a mystery indeed that God should suffer his royal nation, his peculiar people, to be taunted by all who dwelt near them. "*A scorn and a derision to them that are round about us*" The down-trodden people had become a common jest; "as base as Israel," cried the cruel tongue of the tyrant: so ordinary had the scorn become that the neighbouring nations, though perhaps equally oppressed, borrowed the language of the conquerors, and joined in the common mockery. To be a derision to both strong and weak, superiors, equals, and inferiors, is hard to bear. The tooth of scoffing bites to the bone. The Psalmist sets forth the brutality of the enemy in many words, in order to move the pity of the Lord, to whose just anger he traced all the sorrows of his people; he used the very best of arguments, for the sufferings of

his chosen touch the heart of God far more readily than any other reasonings. Blessed be his name, our great Advocate above knows how to avail himself of this powerful plea, and if we are at this hour enduring reproach for truth's sake, he will urge it before the eternal throne; and shall not God avenge his own elect? A father will not long endure to see his children despitefully entreated; he may put up with it for a little, but his love will speedily arouse his anger, and then it will fare ill with the persecutor and reviler.

14. "*Thou makest us a byword among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people.*" The lamentation is here repeated. They had sunk so low that none did them reverence, but universally and publicly they were treated as infamous and despicable. Those who reviled others dragged in Israel's name by the way as a garnish to their insults, and if perchance they saw one of the seed of Jacob in the street they used lewd gestures to annoy him. Those whose heads were emptiest wagged them at the separated people. They were the common butts of every fool's arrow. Such has been the lot of the righteous in ages past, such is their portion in a measure now, such may be yet again their heritage in the worst sense. The world knows not its nobility, it has no eye for true excellence: it found a cross for the Master, and cannot be expected to award crowns to his disciples.

15. "*My confusion is continually before me.*" The poet makes himself the representative of his nation, and declares his own constant distress of soul. He is a man of ill-blood who is unconcerned for the sorrows of the church of which he is a member, or the nation of which he is a citizen; the better the heart the greater its sympathy. "*And the shame of my face hath covered me.*" One constant blush, like a crimson mantle, covered him both before God and man, he felt before God that the divine desertion was well deserved, and before man, that he and his people were despicable indeed now that heavenly help was gone. It is well for a nation when there still exists in it men who lay to heart its sin and shame. God will have pity on his chastened ones, and it is a pledge thereof when he sends us choice ministers, men of tenderness, who make the people's case their own.

16. "*For the voice of him that reproacheth and blasphemeth.*" It seems that from mocking the people of God, the adversaries advanced to reviling God himself, they proceeded from persecution to the sin which is next of kin, namely blasphemy. "*By reason of the enemy and avenger.*" The enemy boasted of avenging the defeats of their forefathers; they took revenge for the ancient victories of Israel, by insulting over the now fallen people. Here was a sad plight for a nation to be placed in, but it was by no means a hopeless case, for the Lord who brought all this evil upon them could with equal ease release them from it. So long as Israel looked alone to her God, and not to her own arm, no foe could retain her beneath his foot; she *must* arise, for God was on her side.

17 All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant.

18 Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way;

19 Though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death.

20 If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god;

21 Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart.

22 Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter.

17. "*All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee.*" Here the Psalmist urges that Israel had not turned away from her allegiance to Jehovah. When in the midst of many griefs we can still cling to God in loving obedience, it must be well with us. True fidelity can endure rough usage. Those who follow God for what they get, will leave him when persecution is stirred up, but not so the sincere believer; he will not forget his God, even though the worst come to the worst. "*Neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant.*" No idol was set up, the ordained worship was not relinquished, God was still nationally acknowledged,

and therefore the Psalmist is more earnest that the Lord should interpose. This and the succeeding verses are suitable for the lips of martyrs, indeed the entire Psalm might be called the martyr's complaint. Not for sin but for righteousness did the saints suffer, not for falsehood but for truth, not for forsaking the Lord but for following hard after him. Sufferings of such a sort may be very terrible, but they are exceedingly honourable, and the comforts of the Lord shall sustain those who are accounted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake.

18. "*Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way.*" Heart and life were agreed, and both were true to the Lord's way. Neither within nor without had the godly sufferers offended; they were not absolutely perfect, but they were sincerely free from all wilful transgression. It was a healthy sign for the nation that her prophet-poet could testify to her uprightness before God, both in heart and act; far oftener the case would have worn quite another colour, for the tribes were all too apt to set up other gods and forsake the rock of their salvation.

19. "*Though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons.*" Though utterly crushed and rendered desolate and driven as it were to associate with creatures such as jackals, owls, serpents, which haunt deserted ruins, yet Israel remained faithful. To be true to a smiting God, even when the blows lay our joys in ruinous heaps, is to be such as the Lord delighteth in. Better to be broken by God than from God. Better to be in the place of dragons than of deceivers. "*And covered us with the shadow of death.*" The language is very strong. The nation is described as completely enveloped in the dense darkness of despair and death, covered up as though confined in hopelessness. Yet the claim is made that they still remained mindful of their God, and a glorious plea it is. Better death than false of faith. Those who are true to God shall never find him false to them.

20. An appeal is now made to the omniscience of God; he is himself called in to bear witness that Israel had not set up another god. "*If we have forgotten the name of our God.*" This would be the first step in apostasy; men first forget the true, and then adore the false. "*Or stretched out our hands to a strange god.*" Stretching out the hands was the symbol of adoration or of entreaty in prayer; this they had not offered to any of the idols of the heathen.

21. "*Shall not God search this out?*" Could such idolatry be concealed from him? Would he not with holy indignation have detected unfaithfulness to itself, even had it been hidden in the heart and unrevealed in the life? "*For he knoweth the secrets of the heart.*" He is acquainted with the inner workings of the mind, and therefore this could not have escaped him. Not the heart only which is secret, but the secrets of the heart, which are secrets of the most secret thing, are as open to God as a book to a reader. The reasoning is that the Lord himself knew the people to be sincerely his followers, and therefore was not visiting them for sin; hence, then, affliction evidently came from quite another cause.

22. "*Yea,*" i.e., assuredly, certainly, "*for thy sake,*" not for our offences, but for obeying thee; the trials of these suppliants came upon them because they were loyal to their God. "*Are we killed all the day long.*" Persecution never ceased to hound them to the death, they had no respite and found no door of escape; and all in God's behalf, because they would not forsake their covenant God and King. "*We are counted as sheep for the slaughter;*" as if we were only meant to be killed, and made on purpose to be victims; as if it were as easy and as innocent a thing to slay us as to slaughter sheep. In this and following verses we clearly hear the martyr's cry. From Piedmont and Smithfield, from St. Bartholomew's massacre and the dragoonades of Claverhouse, this appeal goes up to heaven, while the souls under the altar continue their solemn cry for vengeance. Not long shall the church plead in this fashion, her shame shall be recompensed, her triumph shall dawn.

23 Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? arise, cast us not off for ever.

24 Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our affliction and our oppression?

25 For our soul is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the earth.

26 Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercies' sake.

23. "*Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord?*" God sleepeth not, but the Psalmist puts it so, as if on no other theory he could explain the divine inaction. He would fain see the great Judge ending oppression and giving peace to the holy, therefore does he cry "*Awake;*" he cannot understand why the reign of tyranny and the oppression of virtue are permitted, and therefore he enquires, "*Why sleepest thou?*" *Arise.* This is all thou needest to do, one move of thine will save us. "*Cast us not off for ever.*" Long enough hast thou deserted us; the terrible effects of thine absence are destroying us; end thou our calamities, and let thine anger be appeased. In persecuting times men are apt to cry, Where is the God of Israel? At the thought of what the saints have endured from their haughty enemies, we join our voices in the great martyr cry, and sing with the bard of Paradise:—

"Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
Even those who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones.
Forget not: in thy book record their groans
Who were thy sheep."

24. "*Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and forgettest our afflictions and our oppression?*" Not petulantly, but piteously and enquiringly, we may question the Lord when his dealings are mysterious. We are permitted to order our case with arguments, and plead the right before the face of the august Majesty. Why, Lord, dost thou become oblivious of thy children's woes? This question is far more easily asked than answered; it is hard, indeed, in the midst of persecution to see the reason why we are left to suffer so severely.

25. "*For our soul is bowed down to the dust.*" Our heart is low as low can be, as low as the dust beneath the soles of men's feet. When the heart sinks, the man is down indeed. Heart-sorrow is the very heart of sorrow. "*Our belly cleaveth unto the earth.*" The man is prone upon the earth, and he is not only down, but fastened down on the earth and glued to it. It is misery, indeed, when the heart cannot escape from itself, is shut up in its own dejection, and bound with the cords of despondency. God's saints may be thus abject, they may be not only in the dust, but on the dunghill with Job and Lazarus, but their day cometh, and their tide will turn, and they shall have a brave summer after their bitter winter.

26. "*Arise for our help.*" A short, but sweet and comprehensive prayer, much to the point, clear, simple, urgent, as all prayers should be. "*And redeem us for thy mercies' sake.*" Here is the final plea. The favour is redemption, the plea is mercy; and this, too, in the case of faithful sufferers who had not forgotten their God. Mercy is always a safe plea, and never will any man find a better.

"Were I a martyr at the stake,
I'd plead my Saviour's name,
Intreat a pardon for his sake,
And urge no other claim."

Here ends this memorable Psalm, but in heaven its power ends not, but brings down deliverance for the tried people of God.

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS.

Whole Psalm.—On a survey of this Psalm, it would seem not to admit of a doubt that the speakers are of the race of Israel; and yet expositors for the most part have found much difficulty in so understanding it, in this—the natural sense—so as even to be compelled to abandon it, owing to the impossibility of fixing on any period in the history of that people which would furnish an occasion for it, and verify its language. Thus, it cannot be referred to the times of the Babylonish captivity; for to this it is objected, and with reason, first, that verses 11 and 14 represent the speakers as "*scattered among the nations,*" and "*a byword among the peoples,*" whereas their exile was then confined to one country; and, secondly, that in verses 17—21 there is an assertion of faithful adherence to the worship of

the true God, which he is called to witness as acquitting the sufferers of having brought the evil on themselves, while that captivity was a punishment of the nation for their apostasy, and especially for the grievous sin of idolatry. And the same objections lie to interpreting it with reference to the times of Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabees; beside that, the history of the canon of Scripture is decisive against assigning so late a date to any of the Psalms. Still less can the times of David be looked to for the occasion, since, though religion was then pure, there was, on the other hand, no dispersion of the nation nor any calamity such as to warrant the lamentation, "Thou hast cast us off, and put us to shame. . . . Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat," etc. Whence it appeared that there was no alternative but to consider the Psalm as exclusively the language of the Christian church, and, in her primitive days, as the period at once of her greatest purity and suffering.—*William de Burgh*.

Whole Psalm.—S. Ambrose observes, that in former Psalms we have seen a prophecy of Christ's passion, resurrection, and ascension, and of the coming of the Holy Ghost, and that here we are taught that we ourselves must be ready to struggle and suffer, in order that these things may profit us. Human will must work together with divine grace.—*Christopher Wordsworth*.

Verse 1.—"We have heard with our ears," i.e., we have both heard and heeded it, with utmost attention and affection. It is not a *pleonasmus*, but an *emphasis* that is here used.—*John Trapp*.

Verse 1.—"Our fathers have told us." Hear this, saith Basil, ye fathers that neglect to teach your children such things as may work his fear and love in them, and faith to rely upon and seek to him in all times of danger. They made their mouths, as it were, books, wherein the mighty deeds of the Lord might be read to his praise, and to the drawing of their children's hearts unto him.—*John Mayer*.

Verse 1.—"What work thou didst." Why only "work" in the singular, when such innumerable deliverances had been wrought by him, from the passage of the Red Sea to the destruction of the hundred and eighty-five thousand in the camp of the Assyrians? Because all these were but types of that one great work, that one stretching forth of the Lord's hand, when Satan was vanquished, death destroyed, and the kingdom of heaven opened to all believers.—*Ambrose*.

Verse 1.—"What work thou didst." While the songs of other nations sing of the heroism of their ancestors, the songs of Israel celebrate the works of God.—*Augustus F. Tholuck*.

Verse 1.—Three necessary requirements for learning well: 1. Intention and attention in him who learns, "we have heard with our ears." 2. Authority in him that teaches, "our fathers have told us." 3. Love between the teacher and the taught, "our fathers."—*Hugo (Cardinal), quoted in Neale's Commentary*.

Verses 1, 2, 4, 8.—Children are their parents' heirs; it were unnatural for a father before he dies to bury up his treasure in the earth, where his children should not find or enjoy it; now the mercies of God are not the least part of his treasure, nor the least of his children's inheritance, being both helps to their faith, matter for their praise, and spurs to their obedience. "Our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, how thou didst drive out the heathen," etc. (ver. 1, 2); from this they ground their confidence; verse 4: "Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob;" and excite their thankfulness, verse 8: "In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever." Indeed, as children are their parents' heirs, so they become in justice liable to pay their parents' debts; now the great debt which the saint at death stands charged with, is that which he owes to God for his mercies, and, therefore it is but reason he should tie his posterity to the payment thereof. Thus mayest thou be praising God in heaven and earth at the same time.—*William Gurnall*.

Verse 2.—

'Thou with thine hand, hast driven out heathen,
And hast planted them;
The nations thou hast broken down,
But them thou hast engrafted.'

The two clauses of this verse stand in regular contrast. The first has the figure of rooting out one kind of tree, and planting another, as the Canaanites were rooted out of Palestine, and Israel was planted in their stead. (Compare Psalm lxxx. 8).

The second figure is that of cutting off bad branches, and engrafting others in their place, in the same root, which is Palestine again.—*Benjamin Weiss*.

Verse 3.—“*They got not the land in possession by their own sword.*” The Lord’s part in a work is best seen when man’s part, and all that he as an instrument hath done, or could have done in it, is declared null; being considered as separate from God who moved the instruments, and did work by them what he pleased.—*David Dickson*.

Verse 3.—“*Because thou hadst a favour unto them.*” Free grace was the fundamental cause of all their felicity. God loved them because he loved them. Deut. vii. 7. He chose them of his love, and then loved them for his choice.—*John Trapp*.

Verse 3.—God’s love to Israel was free, unmerited, and amazing, and he gave them a land for which they did not labour, and cities which they built not, and vineyards and oliveyards which they planted not. Josh. xxiv. 13. In some cases neither sword nor bow were used, but horns were the instruments of conquest. Josh. xxiv. 12. Since the fall of Adam all good things in the lot of any mere man are undeserved kindnesses.—*William S. Plumer*.

Verse 3 (last clause).—The prophet does not suppose any worthiness in the person of Abraham, nor imagine any desert in his posterity, on account of which God dealt so bountifully with them; but ascribes the whole to the good pleasure of God. . . . Nor does the Psalmist here treat of the general benevolence of God, which extends to the whole human race: but he discourses of the difference which exists between the elect and the rest of the world, and the cause of this difference is here referred to the mere good pleasure of God.—*John Calvin*.

Verse 4.—“*My king;*” apparently with a personal application to himself, the poet individually claiming his own place in the covenant between God and his people.—*J. J. Stewart Perowne*.

Verse 4.—“*Thou art my king, O God; command deliverances for Jacob.*” If there were no creature, no instrument in the world to help, yet would you not be at a loss in time of need, for he that is on the throne could do it alone. He can do all that ever you need, without any means or instruments. His bare word is sufficient, all-sufficient, for it, whatever it be, how great, how difficult, how impossible soever it seems. Such a power there is even in the word of the great King. There needs no more to deliver you, to deliver his people anywhere, how deep soever plunged, but only the *command* of him that sits on the throne. If the gospel, the interests of Christ, in these parts of the world, and the dear concerns of our souls, and the souls of posterity, were all as dry bones, in a more forlorn, and hopeless condition than they are, he could make all live with a word. He that is our King, that sits upon the throne, can command life into that which seems as far from living as a dry bone. While he keeps the throne, it is a senseless heart that fails through distrust of his power, even when all visible power and help fail.—*David Clarkson*.

Verse 5.—“*Through thee will we push down our enemies:*” literally, “We will toss them in the air with our horn;” a metaphor taken from an ox or bull tossing the dogs into the air which attack him.—*Adam Clarke*.

Verse 6.—“*I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me.*” By “*bow*” and “*sword,*” he meaneth all manner of weapons and warlike instruments whatsoever; and by “*saving,*” he meaneth delivering from dangers, speaking under the person of one (because all the faithful are but one body), in the name of all the rest.—*Thomas Wilcocks*.

Verse 6.—“*I will not trust in my bow,*” etc. I will not trust in *my own* sword or bow, but in the *sword* of the Divine Warrior, and in the *bow* of the Divine Archer, whose arrows are sharp in the heart of his enemies, as described in the next (Psalm xlv. 3—5), which is connected by that imagery with this Psalm, as well as by its inner meaning.—*Christopher Wordsworth*.

Verse 6.—The less confidence we have in ourselves or in anything beside God, the more evidence have we of the sincerity of our faith in God.—*David Dickson*.

Verses 6, 7.—The two verses correspond exactly to verse 3. As there, in reference to the past, the salvation was ascribed wholly to God, so here in reference to the future.—*E. W. Hengstenberg*.

Verse 11.—“*Like sheep appointed for meat.*” This very strongly and strikingly intimates the extent of the persecution and slaughter to which they were exposed; there being no creature in the world of which such vast numbers are constantly slaughtered as of sheep for the subsistence of man. The constancy of such slaughter is also mentioned in verse 22 as illustrating the continual oppression to which the Hebrews were subject.—*Killo's Pictorial Bible.*

Verse 11.—“*Like sheep appointed for meat,*” and not reserved for breeding or for wool.—*Arthur Jackson.*

Verse 12.—“*Thou sellest thy people for nought, and dost not increase thy wealth by their price.*” The sense is: Thou hast given thy people unto the power of their enemies without trouble, without causing the victory even to be dearly bought, as one who parts with a good for any price, which he despises and hates, desiring merely to get rid of it.—*E. W. Hengstenberg.*

Verse 12.—“*Thou sellest thy people for nought,*” etc. Referring to the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, Eusebius says: “Many were sold for a small price; there were many to be sold, but few to buy.”

Verse 12.—“*And dost not increase thy wealth by their price.*” Thou hast not advanced thy honour and service thereby; for thy enemies do not serve thee more and better than thy people, nor yet so much.—*Matthew Pool.*

Verse 12 (last clause). *Takest no money for them;* literally, *enhancest not the price of them,* as a seller usually does to the buyer.—*Daniel Cresswell.*

Verse 14. “*Thou makest us a byword;*” literally, *for a similitude,* *שׁוֹמֵר* stands here, as in the original passage (Deut. xxviii. 37), in the common signification, *similitude.* The misery of Israel is so great, that people would figuratively call a miserable man a Jew, just as liars were called Cretans; wretched slaves, Sardians. So far are the people from being now “blessed of the Lord” in whom according to the promise, all the heathen are to be blessed.—*E. W. Hengstenberg.*

Verse 15.—“*My confusion is continually before me.*” When the visible church is visited with sad calamities, the true members thereof are partakers of the trouble, and sorrow, and shame of that condition.—*David Dickson.*

Verse 17.—Eusebius, narrating the cruelties inflicted upon the *Christians* by the Eastern tyrant, Maximinus, says: “He prevailed against all sorts of people, the Christians only excepted, who contemned death and despised his tyranny. The men endured burning, beheading, crucifying, ravenous devouring of beasts, drowning in the sea, maiming and broiling of the members, goring and digging out of the eyes, mangling of the whole body; moreover, famine and imprisonment; to be short, they suffered every kind of torment for the service of God rather than they would leave the worship of God, and embrace the adoration of idols. Women also, not inferior to men through the power of the word of God, put on a manly courage, whereof some suffered the torments with men, some attained unto the like masteries of virtue.”—*From “The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus.”*

Verse 17.—“*Yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant.*” Although we cannot excuse ourselves from many other sins for which thou hast justly punished us, yet this we must say for ourselves, that through thy grace we have kept ourselves from apostasy and idolatry, notwithstanding all the examples and provocations, rewards proposed and promised, or punishments threatened to induce us thereunto; which we hope thou wilt graciously consider, and not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear.—*Matthew Pool.*

Verse 17.—If any of you would abide by Jesus Christ in this storm, try how ye have covenanted with him, and how ye have closed the bargain with him, and upon what terms. But I trow there are many of you in this age that are like young wanton folk, that run fast together and marry, but never take any account how they will keep house, but presently go to poverty and beggary. I trow it falls out so with many of you that are professors in this generation. Ye take up your religion, and ye wot not how, and ye cannot give an account how ye came by it. I will tell you, sirs; ye will abide no longer by Christ than till a storm blow, and then ye will quit him and deny his cause. Ye have need to take heed to this, for it will ruin your souls in the end of the day. But I shall tell you, sirs, the right way of covenanting with God. It is when Christ and the believer meet. Our Lord gives

him his laws, statutes, and commands, and he charges him not to quit a hoof of them. No; though he should be torn into a thousand pieces; and the right covenanter says, Amen.—*Alexander Peden's Sermon, 1682.*

Verses 17—19.—Neither the persecuting hand of men, nor the chastising hand of God, relaxed ancient singular saints. Believers resemble the *moon*, which emerges from her eclipse by keeping her motion, and ceases not to shine because the dogs bark at her. Shall we cease to be professors because others will not cease to be persecutors?—*William Secker.*

Verses 17—19.—The church having reported her great troubles, speaks it as an argument of much sincerity towards God, and strength of grace received from him: “*All this has come upon us*” (that is, all these common calamities and afflictions), “*yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way;*” as if she had said, These afflictions have been strong temptations upon us to cause us to decline from thy ways, but through grace we have kept our ground and remained constant in thy covenant, yea, “*though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death.*” As many, yea, most of the saints have improved under the cross, so there have been some, who either through their present unbelief, or forgetfulness of “the exhortation which” (as the apostle saith, Heb. xii. 5), “speaketh unto them as unto children,” have had their faintings or declinings under it.—*Joseph Caryl.*

Verse 18.—“*Our heart is not turned back.*” Serious piety has become a ludicrous subject with which the wanton wits of this atheistical world sport themselves; but behold the wisdom and goodness of God, exhibiting to the world undeniable testimonies of the truth of religion as often as the sincere professors thereof are brought to the test by afflictions from the hand of God, or persecutions from the hands of men. Lo! “here is the faith and patience of the saints;” here is their courage, meekness, and self-denial, shining as gold in the fire. They have the real proofs of it before their eyes. Instead of casting them into hell, and convincing them by eternal fire, he is pleased to cast his own people into the fire of affliction, that they who scoff at them may be convinced at an easier and cheaper rate. It is no new thing to see the enemies of religion brought over to embrace it by the constancy and faithfulness of the saints in their trials and sufferings for it. God grant that the atheism of this present generation do not occasion a more fiery trial to the people of God in it than they have yet suffered.—*John Flavel.*

Verse 18.—“*Our heart.*” The word לֵב or Greek $\kappa\alpha\rho\delta\iota\alpha$, that is rendered “*heart,*” both in the Old and New Testament, doth signify the understanding, the mind, will, affections, conscience, the whole soul. “*Our heart is not turned back.*” Our understandings and minds are the same as they were in a summer’s day, though now we be in a winter’s storm; though now we be afflicted, tossed, broken, and persecuted, yet notwithstanding, “*our heart is not turned back,*” our mind, will, affections, and conscience, our whole soul, is the same now as before.—*Thomas Brooks.*

Verse 19.—“*Though thou hast sore broken us in place of dragons,*” etc. Where men, comparable to dragons for their poison and cruelty, dwell particularly in Rome, and the Roman jurisdiction, both Pagan and Papal, the seat of Satan, the great red dragon, and of his wretched brood and offspring, the beast, to whom he has given his power; where the saints and followers of Christ have been sorely afflicted and persecuted, and yet have held fast the name of Christ, and not denied his faith. See Rev. ii. 13, and xii. 3. The wilderness is the habitation of dragons; and this is the name of the place where the church is said to be in the times of the Papacy, and where she is fed and preserved for a time, and times, and half-a-time. Rev. xii. 6, 14. “*And covered us with the shadow of death.*” As the former phrase denotes the cruelty of the enemies of Christ’s church and people, this their dismal afflictions and forlorn state and condition; and may have some respect to the darkness of Popery, when it was at the height, and the church of Christ was covered with it, there being very little appearances and breakings forth of gospel light anywhere.—*John Gill.*

Verse 19.—“*Dragons.*” The word rendered *dragons*— דִּרְבָּן , *tannim*—means either a great fish, a sea monster, a serpent, a dragon, or a crocodile. It may also mean a jackal, a fox, or a wolf. De Wette renders it here *jackals*. The *idea* in the

passage is essentially the same, whichever interpretation of the word is adopted. The "*place of dragons*" would denote the place where such monsters are found, or where they had their abode: that is to say, in desolate places, wastes, deserts, old ruins, depopulated towns.—*Albert Barnes.*

Verse 20.—"Stretched out our hands to a strange god." The stretching out the hand towards an object of devotion, or an holy place, was an ancient usage among the Jews and heathens both, and it continues in the East to this time, which continuance I do not remember to have seen remarked. That this attitude in prayer has continued among the Eastern people, appears by the following passage from Pitts, in his account of the religion and manners of the Mohammedans. Speaking of the Algerines throwing wax candles and pots of oil overboard, as a present to some marabbot (or Mohammedan saint), Pitts goes on, and says, "When this is done, they all together hold up their hands, begging the marabbot's blessing, and a prosperous voyage." In the same page he tells us, "the marabbots have generally a little neat room built over their graves, resembling in figure their mosques or churches, which is very nicely cleaned, and well looked after." And in the succeeding page he tells us, "Many people there are who will scarce pass by any of them without lifting up their hand, and saying some short prayer." In like manner, he tells us, that at quitting the *Beat*, or holy house at Mecca, to which they make devout pilgrimages, "they hold up their hands towards the *Beat*, making earnest petitions."—*Harmer's "Observations."*

Verse 21.—"Shall not God search this out?" etc. Are there such variety of trials appointed to examine the sincerity of men's graces? How great a vanity, then, is hypocrisy! and to how little purpose do men endeavour to conceal and hide it! We say, murder will out; and we may as confidently affirm, hypocrisy will out. When Rebekah had laid the plot to disguise her son Jacob, and by personating his brother, to get the blessing, Jacob thus objects against it: "My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver, and I shall bring a curse upon me and not a blessing." And if he should say, But what if my father detect the cheat? How, then, shall I look him in the face? How shall I escape a curse? After the same manner every upright soul scares itself from the way of hypocrisy. If I dissemble, and pretend to be what I am not, my Father will find me out. There is no darkness nor shadow of death that can conceal the hypocrite; but out it will come at last, let him use all the art he can to hide it. . . . If men's works be not good, it is impossible they should be hid long. A gilded piece of brass may pass from hand to hand a little while, but the touchstone will discover the base metal; and if that does not, the fire will.—*John Flavel.*

Verse 21.—A godly man dares not sin secretly. He knows that God sees in secret. As God cannot be deceived by our subtlety, so he cannot be excluded by our secrecy.—*Thomas Watson.*

Verse 21.—In time of persecution for religion, nothing can counterbalance the terrors and allurements of the persecutors, and make a man steadfast in the cause of God, save the fear of God, and love to God settled in the heart; for the reason of the saints' steadfastness in this Psalm, is because God would have searched out their sin if they had done otherwise, "for he knoweth the secrets of the heart."—*David Dickson.*

Verse 22.—"Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long," etc. Leonard Schoener left, amongst other papers, the following admonition, to comfort all who were suffering for Christ's name:—

"We pray thee, O eternal God, to bow down thy gracious ear. Lord of Sabaoth, thou Lord of hosts, hear our complaint, for great affliction and persecution have prevailed. Pride has entered thine inheritance, and many supposed to be Christians, have united themselves therewith, and have thus brought in the abomination of desolation. They waste and destroy the Christian sanctuary. They have trodden the same under foot, and the abomination of desolation is worshipped as God. They have troubled thy holy city, thrown down thy holy altar, and slain her servants when they could lay their hands upon them. And now that we as a little flock are left, they have driven us into all thy lands with contempt and reproach. We are scattered as sheep having no shepherd. We have been compelled to forsake house and home. We are as night ravens which abide in the rocks; our chambers

are in holes and crags. They watch for us as fowls that fly in the air. We wander in the woods, they hunt us with dogs. They lead us away, seized and bound, as lambs that open not their mouths. They cry out against us as seditious persons and heretics. We are brought like sheep to the slaughter. Many sit oppressed, and in bonds which even decay their bodies. Some have sunk under their sufferings, and died without fault. Here is the patience of the saints in the earth. We must be tried by suffering here. The faithful have they hanged on trees, strangled, hewn in pieces, secretly and openly drowned. Not only men, but likewise women and maidens have borne witness to the truth, that Jesus Christ is the truth, the only way to eternal life. The world still rages, and rests not; it raves as if mad. They invent lies against us. They cease not their fires and murders. They make the world too narrow for us. O Lord, how long wilt thou be silent? How long wilt thou not judge the blood of thy saints? Let it come up before thy throne. How precious in thine eye is the blood of thy holy ones! Therefore have we comfort in all our need, a refuge in thee alone, and in none besides; but neither comfort, nor rest, nor peace on this earth. But he who hopeth in thee shall never be confounded. O Lord, there is no sorrow so great that can separate us from thee; therefore, without ceasing we call upon thee, through Christ thy Son our Lord, whom thou of thy free grace hast given us for our comfort. He hath prepared and made known to us the straight path, and the way to eternal life. Everlasting glory and triumph, honour and praise, be given unto thee, both now and to eternity, and let thy righteousness remain for ever. Let all the people bless thy holy name, through Christ the righteous Judge, who cometh to judge the whole world. Amen."—*From "A Martyrology of the Churches of Christ, commonly called Baptists. Edited by E. B. Underhill."* 1850.

Verse 22.—"*For thy sake are we killed.*" It is mercy to us, that when God might punish us for our sins, he doth make our correction honourable, and our troubles to be for a good cause—"For thy sake," etc.—*David Dickson.*

Verse 22.—"*For thy sake.*" This passage is cited by St. Paul, Rom. viii. 36, apparently from the LXX, an illustration of the fact that the church of God has in all ages been a persecuted church. But there is this remarkable difference between the tone of the Psalmist and the tone of the apostle: the former cannot understand the chastening, and complains that God's heavy hand has been laid without cause upon his people; the latter can rejoice in persecutions also, and exclaim, "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us."—*J. J. Stewart Perowne.*

Verse 22.—"*Killed.*" The word here used is not from *הָרַג*, but from *רָצַח*, which means to strangle: this is the rendering given in "*Lange's Biblewerk.*"

Verse 23.—"*Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord?*" and Psalm cxxi. 4, "*Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.*" If God at no time sleep, why doth the church call on him so often to awake? If he must be awakened from sleep, why doth the Psalmist say he never sleeps? Are not these places contradictory?

ANSWER: It is one thing what the afflicted church cries in the heat of her sufferings, another thing what the Spirit of truth speaks for the comfort of the saints. It is ordinary for the best of saints and martyrs, during the storm, to go to God as Peter did to Christ at sea (sleeping in the stern of the ship), with such importunity in prayer as if the Lord were no more sensible of their agony than Jonah was of the mariners' misery, ready to perish in the turbulent ocean, and they cried out, What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise! Saints are so familiar with God in prayer, as if they were at his bedside.

THE SOUL'S APPLICATION.—O thou never-slumbering Watchman of the house of Israel, carest not thou that we perish? Awake, awake! put on strength, gird thyself, O thou arm of God! I know thou art up, but what am I the better except thou help me up? I know thou sleepest not as man doth, but what advantage hath my soul by that, except thou show thyself, that I way know thou art waking? Oh, it is I that am asleep! Thou seemest to sleep only to awaken me. O that I could watch with thee one hour, as thou bidd'st me; I should soon perceive then thy vigilancy over me for ever.—*William Streat in "The Dividing of the Hoof."* 1654.

Verse 23.—"*Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord?*" etc. The weakness of our faith is open to the temptation of supposing that God regards not the situation

of his people in the world; and the Spirit, who knows our infirmities, provides a petition suited to this trial, which expresses at the same time an expectation that God will arise to claim his people as his own.—*W. Wilson.*

Verse 25.—"For our soul is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the earth." We are as to body and soul, smitten and thrown down, glued as it were to the ground, so that we cannot raise ourselves up.—*E. W. Hengstenberg.*

Verse 25.—"For our soul is bowed down to the dust," etc. The speech is metaphorical, expressing the depth of their misery, or the greatness of their sorrow and humiliation. 1. The depth of their misery, with the allusion to the case of a man overcome in battle, or mortally wounded, and tumbling in the dust, or to a man dead and laid in the earth; as, "Thou hast brought me into the dust of death." Psa. xxii. 15. Sure we are, the expression importeth the extremity of distress and danger, either as a man dead or near death. 2. The greatness of their sorrow and humiliation; and so the allusion is taken from a man prostrate and grovelling on the ground, which was their posture of humbling themselves before the Lord, or when any great calamity befell them. As when Herod Agrippa died, they put on sackcloth and lay upon the earth weeping.—*Thomas Manton.*

HINTS TO PREACHERS.

Verse 1.—The encouraging traditions of church history. The days of yore.

Verse 1.—The parents' duty, and the children's privilege.

Verse 1.—Family conversation, the most profitable subject for it.

Verse 1.—The true glory of the good old times.

Verse 2.—The contrast; or, the dealings of God with saints and sinners.

Verse 3.—Free grace exalted. I. In putting a negative upon human power. II. In manifestations of divine energy. III. In its secret source, "*Because thou hadst a favour unto them.*"

Verse 3.—I. The creature laid low. II. The Lord exalted. III. Discriminating grace revealed.

Verse 3 (last clause).—The eternal well-spring of all mercy.

Verse 4.—I. Divine royalty acknowledged. II. Royal interposition entreated. III. Divine covenant hinted at, "*Jacob;*" or, the loyal subject seeking royal aid for the royal seed.

Verse 4.—Personal allegiance, and pleading intercession.

Verse 4.—"My King." This intends—I. My Ruler. II. My Honour. III. My Leader. IV. My Defender.

Verse 4.—The deliverances of Jacob, illustrated by his eventful life.

Verse 5.—Our enemies, in what ways we push them down, by what strength, and in what spirit.

Verse 5.—Our enemies, their activity, the closeness of their approach, the certainty of their overthrow, the secret of our strength.

Verse 6.—Relinquishment of outward trusts. "*My bow*" may miss its aim, may be broken, may be snatched away. "*My sword*" may snap, or grow blunt, or slip from my hold. We may not trust in our abilities, our experience, our shrewdness, our wealth, etc.

Verse 6.—Self-renunciation—the duty of saint and sinner.

Verse 7.—Accomplished salvation. How never achieved, "*But.*" By whom wrought, "*thou.*" When performed, "*hast.*" For whom, "*us.*" To what extent, "*from our enemies.*"

Verse 7.—Salvation completed, hell confounded, Christ exalted.

Verse 8.—Praise, its continuance—how to make it continual, how to manifest it perpetually, influence of its continuance, and reasons to compel us to abide in it.

Verse 9.—A lament for the declension of the church.

Verse 9.—In what sense God casts off his people, and why.

Verse 9 (last clause).—The greatest of all calamities for our churches.

Verse 12.—The human and divine estimate of the results of persecution.

Verse 12.—In answer to this complaint. I. God's people lose nothing eventually by their privations. II. The wicked gain nothing by their triumphs. III. God loses none of his glory in his dealings with either.—*G. Rogers.*

Verse 13.—Trial of cruel mockings; our conduct under them, comfort in them, and crown from them.

Verse 14.—Unholy proverbs or godless bywords.

Verse 15.—Confessions of a penitent.

Verse 17.—The trial, truth, and triumph of the godly.

Verse 17.—The faithful soul holding fast his integrity.

Verse 17.—What it is to be false to our covenant with God.

Verse 18 (first clause).—When we may be sure that our heart has not apostatised.

Verse 18.—I. The position of the heart in religion—it comes first. II. The position of the outer moral life in religion—it follows the heart. III. Necessity of the agreement of the two. IV. The need that both should be faithful to God.

Verse 18.—Connection between the heart and the life, both in constancy and apostasy.

Verse 18.—God's delight in the progress of the upright.—*Thomas Brooks.*

Upright hearts will hold on in the ways of God, and in the ways of well-doing, notwithstanding all afflictions, troubles, and discouragements, they meet withal.—

Thomas Brooks.

Verse 18.—"Thy ways." The ways of God are—1, *righteous ways*; 2, *blessed ways*; 3, *soul-refreshing ways*; 4, *transcendent ways*—ways that transcend all other ways; 5, *soul-strengthening ways*; and 6, sometimes *afflicted, perplexed, and persecuted ways*.—*Thomas Brooks.*

Verse 21.—Can he not? Will he not?

Verse 21.—A question and an assertion.

Verse 22.—I. Innocence in the midst of suffering, "sheep." II. Honour in the midst of shame, "for thy sake."—*G. Rogers.*

Verse 23.—The cry of a church in sad circumstances. The plaint of a deserted soul.

Verse 24.—Reasons for the withdrawal of divine comfort.

Verse 25.—The great need, the great prayer, the great plea.

Verse 26.—A fit prayer for souls under conviction, for saints under trial or persecution, and for the church under oppression or decay.