

PSALM LVI.

TITLE.—To the Chief Musician. *That mighty minstrel by degrees acquired a noble repertoire of hallowed songs, and set them all to music. Upon Jonath-elem-rechokim—this was probably the title of the tune, as we should say Old Hundred, or Sicilian Mariners. Perhaps the title may however belong to the Psalm, and if so it is instructive, for it has been translated “the silent dove in distant places.” We have here the songs of God’s servant, who rejoices once more to return from banishment, and to leave those dangerous places where he was compelled to hold his peace even from good. There is such deep spiritual knowledge in this Psalm that we might say of it, “Blessed art thou David Bar-jonas, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee.” When David plays the Jonah he is not like the prophet of that name; in David the love of the dove predominates, but in Jonah its moaning and complaining are most notable. Michtam of David. This is the second golden Psalm: we had the first in Psalm xvi., to which this Psalm has a great likeness, especially in its close, for it ends in the joyful presence. A golden mystery, the gracious secret of the life of faith is in both these Psalms most sweetly unveiled, and a pillar is set up because of God’s truth. When the Philistines took him in Gath. He was then like a dove in strangers’ hands, and on his escape he records his gratitude.*

DIVISIONS.—In verses 1 and 2, he pours out his complaint; in verses 3 and 4 he declares his confidence in God; in verses 5 and 6 he returns to his complaining, but pleads with earnest hope in verses 7—9, and sings a grateful song from verse 10 to the close.

EXPOSITION.

BE merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresses me.

2 Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High.

“Be merciful unto me, O God.” In my deep distress my soul turns to thee, my God. Man has no mercy on me, therefore double thy mercy to me. If thy justice has let loose my enemies, let thy mercy shorten their chain. It is sweet to see how the tender dove-like spirit of the Psalmist flies to the tenderest attribute for succour in the hour of peril. “For man would swallow me up.” He is but thy creature, a mere man, yet like a monster he is eager for blood, he pants, he gapes for me; he would not merely wound me, or feed on my substance, but he would fain swallow me altogether, and so make an end of me. The open mouths of sinners when they rage against us should open our mouths in prayer. We may plead the cruelty of men as a reason for the divine interposition—a father is soon aroused when his children are shamefully entreated. “He fighting daily oppresses me.” He gives me no interval—he fights daily. He is successful in his unrighteous war—he oppresses me, he crushes me, he presses me sore. David has his eye on the leader of his foes, and lays his plaint against him in the right place. If we may thus plead against man, much more against that great enemy of souls, the devil. We ask the Lord to forgive us our trespasses, which is another way of saying, “Be merciful unto me, O God,” and then we say, “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” The more violent the attack of Satan the stronger our plea for deliverance.

2. “Mine enemies would daily swallow me up.” Their appetite for blood never fails them. With them there is no truce or armistice. They are many, but one mind animates them. Nothing I can do can make them relent. Unless they can quite devour me they will never be content. The ogres of nursery tales exist in reality in the enemies of the church, who would crush the bones of the godly, and make a mouthful of them if they could. “For they be many that fight against me.” Sinners are gregarious creatures. Persecutors hunt in packs. These wolves of the

church seldom come down upon us singly. The number of our foes is a powerful plea for the interposition of the one Defender of the faithful, who is mightier than all their bands. These foes of the gracious are also keen-eyed, and ever on the watch, hence the margin calls them "observers." "*O thou most High.*" Thus he invokes against the lofty ones of the earth the aid of one who is higher than the highest. Some translate the words differently, and think that the writer means that his foes assailed him from the high places in which pride and power had placed them. Saul, his great foe, attacked him from his throne with all the force which his high position placed at his disposal: our comfort in such a case is near to hand, for God will help us from a higher place than our proudest foes can occupy. The greatness of God as the Most High is a fertile source of consolation to weak saints oppressed by mighty enemies.

3 What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.

4 In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.

"*What time I am afraid.*" David was no braggart, he does not claim never to be afraid, and he was no brutish Stoic free from fear because of the lack of tenderness. David's intelligence deprived him of the stupid heedlessness of ignorance, he saw the imminence of his peril, and was afraid. We are men, and therefore liable to overthrow; we are feeble, and therefore unable to prevent it; we are sinful men, and therefore deserving it, and for all these reasons we are afraid. But the condition of the Psalmist's mind was complex—he feared, but that fear did not fill the whole area of his mind, for he adds, "*I will trust in thee.*" It is possible, then, for fear and faith to occupy the mind at the same moment. We are strange beings, and our experience in the divine life is stranger still. We are often in a twilight, where light and darkness are both present, and it is hard to tell which predominates. It is a blessed fear which drives us to trust. Unregenerate fear drives from God, gracious fear drives to him. If I fear man I have only to trust God, and I have the best antidote. To trust when there is no cause for fear, is but the name of faith, but to be reliant upon God when occasions for alarm are abundant and pressing, is the conquering faith of God's elect. Though the verse is in the form of a resolve, it became a fact in David's life, let us make it so in ours. Whether the fear arise from without or within, from past, present, or future, from temporals, or spirituals, from men or devils, let us maintain faith, and we shall soon recover courage.

4. "*In God I will praise his word.*" Faith brings forth praise. He who can trust will soon sing. God's promise, when fulfilled, is a noble subject for praise, and even before fulfilment it should be the theme of song. It is in or through God that we are able to praise. We praise as well as pray in the Spirit. Or we may read it—in extolling the Lord one of the main points for thanksgiving is his revealed will in the Scriptures, and the fidelity with which he keeps his word of promise. "*In God I have put my trust.*" Altogether and alone should we stay ourselves on God. What was a gracious resolve in the former verse, is here asserted as already done. "*I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.*" Faith exercised, fear is banished, and holy triumph ensues, so that the soul asks, "What can flesh do unto me?" What indeed? He can do me no real injury; all his malice shall be overruled for my good. Man is flesh, flesh is grass—Lord, in thy name I defy its utmost wrath. There were two verses of complaint, and here are two of confidence; it is well to weigh out a sufficient quantity of the sweet to counteract the sour.

5 Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts *are* against me for evil.

6 They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul.

5. "*Every day they wrest my words.*" This is a common mode of warfare among the ungodly. They put our language on the rack, they extort meanings from it which it cannot be made fairly to contain. Thus our Saviour's prophecy concerning the temple of his body, and countless accusations against his servants, were founded on wilful perversions. They who do this every day become great adepts in the art. A wolf can always find in a lamb's discourse a reason for eating him. Prayers

are blasphemies if you choose to read them the wrong way upwards. "*All their thoughts are against me for evil.*" No mixture of good will tone down their malice. Whether they viewed him as a king, a Psalmist, a man, a father, a warrior, a sufferer, it was all the same, they saw through coloured glass, and could not think a generous thought towards him. Even those actions of his which were an undoubted blessing to the commonwealth, they endeavoured to undervalue. Oh, foul spring, from which never a drop of pure water can come!

6. "*They gather themselves together.*" Firebrands burn the fiercer for being pushed together. They are afraid to meet the good man till their numbers place terrible odds against him. Come out, ye cowards, man by man, and fight the old hero! No, ye wait till ye are assembled like thieves in bands, and even then ye waylay the man. There is nothing brave about you. "*They hide themselves.*" In ambuscade they wait their opportunity. Men of malice are men of cowardice. He who dares not meet his man on the king's highway, writes himself down a villain. Constantly are the reputations of good men assailed with deep-laid schemes, and diabolical plots, in which the anonymous enemies stab in the dark. "*They mark my steps,*" as hunters mark the trail of their game, and so track them. Malicious men are frequently very sharp-sighted to detect the failings, or supposed failings, of the righteous. Spies and *mouchards* are not all in the pay of earthly governments, some of them will have wages to take in red-hot coin from one who himself is more subtle than all the beasts of the field. "*When they wait for my soul.*" Nothing less than his life would content them, only his present and eternal ruin could altogether glut them. The good man is no fool, he sees that he has enemies, and that they are many and crafty; he sees also his own danger, and then he shows his wisdom by spreading the whole case before the Lord, and putting himself under divine protection.

7 Shall they escape by iniquity? in *thine* anger cast down the people, O God.

8 Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: *are they* not in thy book?

9 When I cry *unto thee*, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God *is* for me.

7. "*Shall they escape by iniquity?*" Will such wickedness as this stand them in good stead? Can it be that this conduct shall enable them to avoid the sentence of earthly punishment? They slander the good man to screen themselves—will this avail them? They have cunningly managed hitherto, but will there not be an end to their games? "*In thine anger cast down the people, O God.*" Trip them up in their tricks. Hurl them from the Tarpeian rock. A persecuted man finds a friend even in an angry God, how much more in the God of love! When men seek to cast us down, it is but natural and not at all unlawful to pray that they may be disabled from the accomplishment of their infamous designs. What God often does we may safely ask him to do.

8. "*Thou tellest my wanderings.*" Every step which the fugitive had taken when pursued by his enemies, was not only observed but thought worthy of counting and recording. We perhaps are so confused after a long course of trouble, that we hardly know where we have or where we have not been; but the omniscient and considerate Father of our spirits remembers all in detail, for he has counted them over as men count their gold, for even the trial of our faith is precious in his sight. "*Put thou my tears into thy bottle.*" His sorrows were so many that there would need a great wine-skin to hold them all. There is no allusion to the little complimentary lachrymatories of fashionable and fanciful Romans, it is a robust metaphor by far; such floods of tears had David wept that a leathern bottle would scarce hold them. He trusts that the Lord will be so considerate of his tears as to store them up as men do the juice of the vine, and he hopes that the place of storage will be a special one—"thy bottle," not a bottle. "*Are they not in thy book?*" Yes, they are recorded there, but let not only the record but the grief itself be present to thee. Look on my griefs as real things, for these move the heart more than a mere account, however exact. How condescending is the Lord! How exact his knowledge of us! How generous his estimations! How tender his regard!

9. "When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back." So soon as I pray they shall fly. So surely as I cry they shall be put to the rout.

"So swift is prayer to reach the sky,
So kind is God to me."

The machinery of prayer is not always visible, but it is most efficient. God inclines us to pray, we cry in anguish of heart, he hears, he acts, the enemy is turned back. What irresistible artillery is this which wins the battle as soon as its report is heard! What a God is this who hearkens to the cry of his children, and in a moment delivers them from the mightiest adversaries! "*This I know.*" This is one of the believer's certainties, his axioms, his infallible, indisputable verities. "*For God is for me.*" This we know, and we know, therefore, that none can be against us who are worth a moment's fear. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Who will restrain prayer when it is so potent? Who will seek any other ally than God, who is instantly present so soon as we give the ordained signal, by which we testify both our need and our confidence?

10 In God will I praise *his* word: in the LORD will I praise *his* word.

11 In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.

12 Thy vows *are* upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee.

13 For thou hast delivered my soul from death: *wilt* not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?

10. "*In God will I praise his word.*" Now comes the thanksgiving. He is a wretch who, having obtained help, forgets to return a grateful acknowledgment. The least we can do is to praise him from whom we receive such distinguished favours. Does David here mean "by God's grace I will praise him?" If so, he shows us that all our emotions towards God must be in God, produced by him and presented as such. Or does he mean, "that which in God is most the object of my praise is his word, and the faithfulness with which he keeps it?" If so, we see how attached our hearts should be to the sure word of promise, and especially to *him* who is the WORD incarnate. The Lord is to be praised under every aspect, and in all his attributes and acts, but certain mercies more peculiarly draw out our admiration towards special portions of the great whole. That praise which is never special in its direction cannot be very thoughtful, and it is to be feared cannot be very acceptable. "*In the Lord will I praise his word.*" He delights to dwell on his praise, he therefore repeats his song. The change by which he brings in the glorious name of Jehovah is doubtless meant to indicate that under every aspect he delights in his God and in his word.

11. "*In God have I put my trust.*" This and the former verse are evidently the chorus of the Psalm. We cannot be too careful of our faith, or see too sedulously that it is grounded on the Lord alone. "*I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.*" Faith has banished fear. He views his foes in their most forcible character, calling them not *flesh*, but indicating them as *man*, yet he dreads them not; though the whole race were his enemies he would not be afraid now that his trust is stayed on God. He is not afraid of what they threaten to do, for much of that they cannot do; and even what is in their power, what they *can do*, he defies with holy daring. He speaks for the future, "I will not," for he is sure that the security of the present will suffice for days to come.

12. "*Thy vows are upon me, O God.*" Vows made in his trouble he does not lightly forget, nor should we. We voluntarily made them, let us cheerfully keep them. All professed Christians are men under vows, but especially those who in hours of dire distress have re-dedicated themselves unto the Lord. "*I will render praises unto thee.*" With heart, and voice, and gift, we should cheerfully extol the God of our salvation. The practice of making solemn vows in times of trouble is to be commended, when it is followed by the far less common custom of fulfilling them when the trouble is over.

13. "*For thou hast delivered my soul from death.*" His enemies were defeated in their attempts upon his life, and therefore he vowed to devote his life to God. "*Wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling?*" One mercy is a plea for another, for indeed it may happen that the second is the necessary complement of the first.

It little boots that we live, if we are made to fall in character by the thrusts of our enemies. As lief not be, as live to be bereft of honour, and fallen prostrate before my enemies. “*That I may walk before God in the light of the living,*” enjoying the favour and presence of God, and finding the joy and brightness of life therein. Walking at liberty, in holy service, in sacred communion, in constant progress in holiness, enjoying the smile of heaven—this I seek after. Here is the loftiest reach of a good man’s ambition, to dwell with God, to walk in righteousness before him, to rejoice in his presence, and in the light and glory which it yields. Thus in this short Psalm, we have climbed from the ravenous jaws of the enemy into the light of Jehovah’s presence, a path which only faith can tread.

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS.

Title.—The words “*Jonath-elem-rechokin*” may be rendered, *concerning the mute dove among them that are afar off, or in far places.*—*John Gill.*

Title.—“*Michtam.*” See also Explanatory Notes on Psalm xvi., in the “*Treasury of David,*” Vol. I., pp. 197, 198.

Verse 1.—“*Be merciful.*” This is the second of the Psalms beginning with the miserere; the fifty-first being the first of them.—*C. H. S.*

Verse 1.—“*Be merciful unto me, O God.*” This is to me the one source of all my expectations, the one fountain of all promises: *Miserere mei, Deus, miserere mei.*—*Bernard, 1091—1157.*

Verse 1.—“*Be merciful.*” His first wrestling in prayer is with the check of his conscience, whether for his daily sins, or in particular for casting himself in such apparent danger, as to have ventured without probable security, to seek shelter among the enemies of the people of God, whose blood he himself had shed abundantly; for this rashness or other sins he begeth mercy.—*David Dickson.*

Verse 1.—“*Man.*” He uses the indefinite term *man* in this verse, though in the next he speaks of having many enemies, the more forcibly to express the truth, that the whole world was combined against him, that he experienced no humanity amongst men, and stood in the last necessity of divine help.—*John Calvin.*

Verse 1.—“*Would swallow me up.*” *Scoop me up* (as the Hebrew word soundeth); make but one draught of me or suck me in as a whirlpool, swallow me up as a ravenous wild beast.—*John Trapp.*

Verse 1.—“*He fighting daily.*” There is no morning on which we can arise and go forth into the world, and say, “*No enemy will come out against me to-day.*” There is no night in which we can retire from that world, and think to find safety in the solitude of our own chambers, and say, “*No evil can enter here.*”—*Barlon Bouchier, in “Manna in the Heart,” 1855.*

Verses 1, 2.—The same words are applicable to the situation and circumstances of David, pursued by his enemies; of Christ, persecuted by the Jews; of the church, afflicted in the world; and of the soul, encompassed by enemies, against whom she is forced to wage perpetual war.—*George Horne.*

Verse 2.—“*O thou most High.*” The Hebrew is not that rendered “*Most High*” in Ps. vii. 17; nor in our version is it ever rendered “*Most High*” in any other place, although found in the Hebrew Bible more than *fifty* times. There are but two other places where it is applied, as an epithet, to God; Ps. xcii. 8; Mic. vi. 6. It is commonly rendered *from above, on high, high places, high*; once *loftily*, Ps. lxxiii. 8. . . . The probable meaning is, they “*fight against me from the high places of authority, both in Jerusalem and in Gath,*” *q.d.*, mine enemies are in power.—*William S. Plumer’s “Studies in the Book of Psalms,” 1867.*

Verse 3.—“*What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.*” There is nothing like faith to help at a pinch; faith dissolves doubts as the sun drives away the mists. And that you may not be put out, know that your time for believing always is.

There are times when some graces may be out of use, but there is no time wherein faith can be said to be so. Wherefore faith must be always in exercise. Faith is the eye, is the mouth, is the hand, and one of these is of use all the day long. Faith is to see, to receive, to work, or to eat; and a Christian should be seeing or receiving, or working, or feeding all day long. Let it rain, let it blow, let it thunder, let it lighten, a Christian must still believe. "At what time," said the good man, "I am afraid, I will trust in thee."—*John Bunyan*.

Verse 3.—"What time I am afraid," etc. A divine spark may live in a smoke of doubts without a speedy rising into a flame. When grace is at the bottom of doubting, there will be reliance on Christ and lively petitions to him. Peter's faith staggers when he began to sink, but he casts a look and sends forth a cry to his Saviour, acknowledging his sufficiency; Matt. xiv. 30, "Lord, save me." Sometimes those doubtings strengthen our trust and make us take hold faster on God. Ps. lvi. 3, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee." This was a fear of himself or others, rather than a jealousy of God. Had he had unworthy suspicions of him, he would not have trusted him; he would not have run for remedy to the object of his fear. The waverings where faith is, are like the tossings of a ship fast at anchor (still there is a relying upon God), not like a boat carried by the waves of the sea to be dashed against a rock. If the heart stay on Christ in the midst of those doubtings, it is not an evil heart of unbelief. Such doubtings consist with the indwelling of the Spirit, who is in the heart, to perform the office of a Comforter against such fears and to expel those thick fumes of nature.—*Stephen Charnock*.

Verse 3.—"What time I am afraid," etc. I know not what to do, but I'll try my old way, 'tis good for me to draw near still; I'll do so still as I use to do; I'll cast myself down upon the free grace of Christ in the promises; I'll lay the weight of my sinking spirit there, I'll renew my hold, life, expectation there; this is my old path, I'll never be turned or beaten out here. This Christian in his strength may challenge all the gates of hell. This was David's course (Ps. lxxi. 5), "Thou art my trust from my youth," etc. Thence was it that he could say, "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee:" his shield and sword was always in his hand, therefore he could make use of it when fear and inward trouble offered themselves. "Afraid!" alas, who is not? but what course will you take then? Even what course you used to take, *i.e.*, believe; use faith always; and have it now.—*Elias Pledger* (—1676), in "*Morning Exercises*."

Verse 3.—"What time," etc. Literally, "What day." As "Man daily oppresseth me" (ver. 1), so "Every day, when I am afraid, I trust in thee."—*A. R. Faussel*.

Verse 3.—It is a good maxim with which to go into a world of danger; a good maxim to go to sea with; a good maxim in a storm; a good maxim when in danger on the land; a good maxim when we are sick; a good maxim when we think of death and the judgment—"What time I am afraid, I WILL TRUST IN THEE."—*Albert Barnes*.

Verse 3.—"I will trust in thee." Faith and fear stand together; and so fear and love.—*John Richardson*, 1654.

Verses 3, 4.—Sometimes faith comes from prayer in triumph, and cries, *Victoria*. It gives such a being and existence to the mercy prayed for in the Christian's soul, before any likelihood of it appears to sense and reason, that the Christian can silence all his troubled thoughts with the expectation of its coming. So Hannah prayed, "and was no more sad." 1 Samuel i. 18. Yea, it will make the Christian disburse his praises for the mercy long before it is received. Thus high faith wrought in David. "At what time I am afraid, I will trust in thee," and in the next words, "In God I will praise his word;" that is, he would praise God for his promise before there was any performance of it to him, when it had no existence but in God's faithfulness and David's faith. This holy man had such a piercing eye of faith, that he could see the promise when he was at the lowest ebb of misery, so certain and unquestionable in the power and truth of God, that he could then praise God as if the promised mercy had been actually fulfilled to him.—*William Gurnall*.

Verse 4.—"In God I will praise his word." Or, praise him for his word; for the whole Scripture that was then in being.—*John Gill*.

Verse 4.—The best hold that faith can have of God, is to take him by "his word," however his dispensation seems to be; this will give satisfaction at length; for "In God I will praise his word," is as much as to say, albeit he withhold comfort

and deliverance from me, so that I cannot find what I would, yet let me have "his word," and I will give him the glory of all his attributes.—*David Dickson.*

Verse 4.—"I will not fear what flesh can do unto me." Fear not man, he is but flesh. Thou needest not, thou oughtest not to fear. Thou needest not. What, not such a great man; not such a number of men, who have the keys of all the prisons at their girdle; who can kill or save alive? No, not these; only look they be thy enemies for righteousness' sake. Take heed thou makest not the least child thine enemy, by offering wrong to him; God will right the wicked even upon the saint. If he offends he shall find no shelter under God's wing for his sin. This made Jerome complain that the Christians' sin made the arms of those barbarous nations which invaded Christendom victorious: *Nostris peccatis fortes sunt barbari.* But if man's wrath find thee in God's way, and his fury take fire at thy holiness, thou needest not fear though thy life be the prey he hunts for. Flesh can only wound flesh; he may kill thee, but not hurt thee. Why shouldst thou fear to be stripped of that which thou hast resigned already to Christ? It is the first lesson thou learnest, if a Christian, to deny thyself, take up thy cross, and follow thy master; so that the enemy comes too late; thou hast no life to lose, because thou hast given it already to Christ; nor can man take away that without God's leave; all thou hast is insured; and though God hath not promised thee immunity from suffering in this kind, yet he hath undertaken to bear the loss, yea, to pay thee a hundredfold, and thou shalt not stay for it till another world. Again, thou oughtest not to fear flesh. Our Saviour (Matt. x.) thrice, in the compass of six verses, commands us not to fear man: if thy heart quail at him, how wilt thou behave thyself in the list against Satan, whose little finger is heavier than man's loins? The Romans had *arma prælusoria*, weapons rebated, or cudgels, which they were tried at before they came to the sharp. If thou canst not bear a bruise in thy flesh from man's cudgels and blunt weapons, what wilt thou do when thou shalt have Satan's sword in thy side? God counts himself reproached when his children fear a sorry man; therefore we are bid sanctify the Lord, not to fear their fear.—*William Gurnall.*

Verse 4.—"I will not fear," etc. Eusebius tells us of a notable speech that Ignatius used when he was in his enemies' hands, not long before he was to suffer, which argued a raised spirit to a wonderful height above the world, and above himself. "I care," says he, "for nothing visible or invisible, that I might get Christ. Let fire, the cross, the letting out of beasts upon me, breaking of my bones, the tearing of my members, the grinding of my whole body, and the torments of the devils come upon me, so be it I may get Christ.—From *Jeremiah Burroughs' "Moses his Self-denyal,"* 1649.

Verse 4.—"What flesh can do," etc. It is according to the phrase of Scripture, when it would speak contemptibly of man and show him to be the lowest creature, to call him "flesh," to set forth the weakness that man is subject to.—*John Arrowsmith,* 1600—1660.

Verse 4 (last clause).—*Fear of man*—grim idol, bloody mouthed; many souls has he devoured and trampled down into hell! His eyes are full of hatred to Christ's disciples. Scoffs and jeers lurk in his eye. The laugh of the scorner growls in his throat. Cast down this idol. This keeps some of you from secret prayer, from worshipping God in your family, from going to lay your case before ministers, from openly confessing Christ. You that have felt God's love and Spirit, dash this idol to pieces. "Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die?" "Fear not, thou worm Jacob." "What have I to do any more with idols?"—*Robert Murray M'Cheyne,* 1813—1843.

Verse 4.—Faith groweth valiant in fight; albeit it began like a coward, and staggered in the first conflict, yet it groweth stout, incontinent, and pulls its adversaries under foot: "In God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me."—*David Dickson.*

Verse 5.—"Every day they wrest my words;" or, they put my words to pain and grief, or, they painfully and grievously wrest my words. David's enemies took up what he spake, and put a new shape upon it; and this they did so vexingly, that they are said to "wrest" his words: a thing is vexed when it is wrested or wrought quite out of the form it before had. The same metaphor the apostle Peter useth in reference to doctrine, speaking of the Epistles of Paul, in which "are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest." or put

upon the rack; they painfully form his words, and represent them in a meaning which he never intended. 2 Pet. iii. 16. What is spoken may be right both in the matter and intendment of the speaker, yet another wrests, forms and fashions it in his own mould, and makes it bear a sense which the speaker never dreamed of.—*Joseph Caryl*.

Verse 5.—“*Every day they wrest my words,*” etc. Mr. Jewel, the Bishop of Salisbury, who, according to his life, died most godly and patiently, at the point of death used the versicle of the Hymn, “*Te Deum,*” “*O Lord, in thee have I trusted, let me never be confounded,*” whereupon, suppressing the rest, they published, that the principal champion of the heretics, in his very last words, cried he was confounded.—*Lord Bacon’s “Bible Thoughts.”*

Verse 5.—“*They wrest my words.*” Whatever Christ said in justification of himself was twisted to a meaning injurious to him. So it is still in the world, self-justification by words answers but little purpose with ungodly men.—*W. Wilson, D.D., 1860.*

Verse 6.—“*They mark my steps.*” Go whither I will, they are at my heels.—*William Nicholson (1671), in “David’s Harp Strung and Tuned.”*

Verse 8.—“*Put thou my tears in thy bottle.*” Among other things in the collection of Mr. Abbott, of Cairo, he had a lachrymatory, or tear bottle, which had been found in a tomb at Thebes. This interested me very much. The custom in old times was, when a person was ill, or in great distress, for his friends to go to see him, and take with them a tear bottle. Then, as the tears rolled down the cheeks of the sufferer, they were caught in these bottles, sealed up, and preserved as a memorial of the event. This is what David referred to in Psalm lvi. 8. “*Put thou my tears into thy bottle.*” But it implies much more than at first suggests itself, and much more than I can attempt to write. For instance, it is as if David had said, “*Visit me, and behold my tears;*” (“*O visit me with thy salvation!*”) for without such *visit* there could be no bottling of his tears. “*Thou tellest my wanderings; O visit me, and behold my anguish; put my tears into thy bottle,*” for “*they have been my meat day and night.*” Psalm xliii. 3. “*Keep them before thee, by way of remembrance, and when thou seest the bottle, O think of him whose tears it contains. Are they not in thy book?*” That is, God’s book of remembrance, that was written for those “*who thought upon his name*” (Mal. iii. 16), just as the kings of old used to keep a book of chronicles of important events. See Esther vi. 1—11.—*John Gadsby, 1860.*

[We insert this to show what has been said by others; but we do not think there is the slightest allusion to this piece of *Roman* etiquette in this text.—*C. H. S.*]

Verse 8.—“*My tear:*” the singular used collectively. “*In thy bottle:*” as if one should say, take care of my tears, as of a kind of wine that is very costly, and very pleasant to thee; or, that hereafter you may measure out to me just that quantity of joys: a metaphor from the keeper of a vineyard, who receives into his vessel the drops of the grapes pressed out by the wine-press of affliction. The word ⁷⁰ (*uter**) denotes the manner in which they preserved their wine. (1 Samuel xvi. 20; Joshua ix. 4, 13), and milk also (Judges iv. 19).—*Martin Geier.*

Verse 8.—“*Put thou my tears into thy bottle.*” What a sweet thought is suggested here of God’s remembrance of his peoples’ affliction! It is an interesting figure of speech, of *bottling their tears*. But the sense is, they are remembered. And woe will be to the man that offends one of God’s little ones on his account. What are now bottles of tears, will be poured out in the end as so many vials of wrath. But reader! think how the tears of Jesus have been treasured up when shedding for the sins of his people.—*Robert Hawker, 1753—1827.*

Verse 8.—“*Put thou my tears into thy bottle.*” It is the witty observation of one, that God is said in Scripture to have a bag and a bottle, a *bag* for our sins, and a *bottle* for our tears; and that we should help to fill this, as we have that. There is an allusion here in the original that cannot be Englished.—*John Trapp.*

Verse 8.—“*Are they not in thy book?*” While we remain in this vale of misery, God keeps all our tears in a bottle; so precious is the water that is distilled from penitent eyes: and because he will be sure not to fail, he notes how many drops there be in his register. It was a precious ointment wherewith the woman in the

* Leather or skin bottle.

Pharisee's house (it is thought Mary Magdalene) anointed the feet of Christ ; but her *tears*, wherewith she washed them, were more worth than her spikenard.—*Abraham Wright*, in "A Practical Commentary or Exposition upon the Book of Psalms," 1661.

Verse 9.—"When I cry." The cry of faith and prayer to God is more dreadful to our spiritual foes than the war-whoop of the Indian is to his surprised brother savages.—*Adam Clarke*.

Verse 9 (first clause).—It was somewhat that when David prayed he was saved from his enemies. "I will call on the Lord : so shall I be saved from mine enemies." (2 Sam. xxii. 4) ; there is the *defensive* power of prayer ; but it is more that it puts enemies to the foil. "When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back" and be put to flight : there is the *offensive* power of prayer. In David's tower there was an armoury, *thalpijoth*, a place to hang swords with two edges, swords with two mouths (Cant. iv. 4) ; a defensive and an offensive edge. Both edges must be used by such as seek safety. Prayer is a sword with two edges. "Put up thy sword into his place," says Christ to Peter ; "for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Matt. xxii. 52. But he that takes not this sword may happen to perish by the sword ; and the drawing of this sword may save a man from perishing by the sword. Mark that last reason that our Saviour adds why Peter should put up his sword : "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels ?" (ver. 53.) As if he had said, If it were my mind to confound these mine enemies that now set upon me, I should not need thy sword to do it. I could pray to my Father, and could presently by prayer bring such forces into the field as should rout and scatter all mine enemies ; hereby implying, that if he would, he could do his enemies more damage and mischief by his prayers against them than by the sword and all instruments of war. Prayer is *twelve legions* strong, yea, twelve legions of angels strong against enemies.—*Jeremiah Dyke* (1620), in the *Righteous Man's Tower*.

Verse 9.—"This I know." Faith goeth upon solid grounds, and is not a fallible conjecture, but a sure knowledge.—*David Dickson*.

Verse 10.—"In God will I praise his word : in the Lord will I praise his word."—The first word, *Elohim*, is a name belonging to God as a judge, the second word, *Jehovah*, is a name of mercy. I will praise God whether he deal with me in a way of justice or in a way of mercy, when he hath thunder in his voice, as well as when he hath honey under his tongue. Oh, how should we praise God, and pleasure ourselves by such a frame !—*Stephen Charnock*.

Verse 10 (first clause).—By the assistance of God I shall be enabled to praise him for the performance of his promises.—*Symon Patrick*, 1626—1707.

Verse 12.—"Thy vows are upon me, O God." Whoever is conversant with the Psalms of David, will find him frequently making *vows*, and careful in paying them. When these words dropt from him he was just delivered out of a pressing danger among the Philistines, with whom he took shelter from the rage of King Saul, who unweariedly pursued him ; but he soon found that the remembrance of his past achievements to their damage was still so fresh amongst them, and they so exasperated thereupon, that his life was in constant danger. In his distress he flies to God, his wonted refuge, and sends up earnest addresses to him, *vowing* if he would open a way for his deliverance out of these new straits, he would show his grateful sense of so signal a mercy, by the exactness and accuracy of his future obedience. God hears and succours him ; and he thereupon gratefully looks back, endeavours to renew the sense of his former obligation to his great Deliverer, and to stir up himself by suitable returns, and so cries out, "*Thy vows are upon me, O God ;*" as if he should say, I resolve, O Lord, not to forget what was transacted while I was under my fears. Thou hast heard my cries, and I own myself firmly bound by my *vows*. I was serious and in earnest when I made them, and I will endeavour to show that I was so by my care to perform them. "*Thy vows,*" O God, made indeed on my part, but justly to be exacted on thine, "*are upon me,*" they do in reality hold me fast, and I desire not to be released. I am sensible I deserve to be stigmatised for a perfidious wretch if I ever forget them. This temper of holy David with reference to the *vows* he made on this occasion, should be ours

with reference to all the sacred *vows* we any way come under. All Christians, as such, are necessarily under *vows* to the blessed God; and particular circumstances may make it expedient for us to come under special engagements to him. But wherever they are such as that they may justly be denominated *vows of God, i.e.*, are such as his word will warrant; we should make holy David, as speaking in this text, our pattern, and set ourselves to imitate him, in seriously owning their binding force, and endeavouring to answer and pay them.—*Edmund Calamy, in "A Practical Discourse Concerning Vows,"* 1704.

Verse 12.—"Thy vows are upon me, O God." A well-composed *vow* will make thee more circumspect and wary in the general course of thy life. Such an influence it hath, as doth more directly work on one particular part, yet is not terminated to that particular only. Thus it was with David. These "*vows*" were made when he was in danger of his life, as it seemeth from verse 13: for when God heard him, he delivered his soul from death: for this he vowed praises in particular, and he will render them. But, withal, he takes himself to be hereby engaged to a more exact and circumspect walk before God in all duties; so he expresseth himself in the latter part of verse 13.—*Henry Hurst* (1629—1696), in "*The Morning Exercise at Cripple-gate,*" 1661.

Verses 12, 13.—"Thy vows are upon me, O God." Passively, vows made to God, not by God; or the obligations of those vows and prayers which I have made and upon which I have received answers. Sacrifices of thanksgiving were called *vows*, as having been vowed to God upon the want, and to be paid upon the receipt, of mercy. Lev. i. 1, "If the sacrifice that is offered be a *vow*." Thy vows are upon me; the fruit of my vows, so that I stand indebted to God for the return of praise. "*Thou hast delivered.*" He understands some great danger wherein he had sunk had not God stood by him, and from a greater mercy, the deliverance of his soul from death, argues for a less, the keeping his feet from falling. "*That I may walk before God in the light of the living.*" By light of the living is meant life, which is called being enlightened with the "*light of the living.*" Job. xxxiii. 30. Sometimes eternal life in heaven. John viii. 12, "He that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." "*To walk before God.*" To walk obediently in the sight of God; with a respect to his presence; a walking unto all well pleasing. This is the last argument in the Psalm whereon he builds his strongest plea, as if he knew not what to urge if this should fail him; as if he should have said, Lord, I have had experience of thy wisdom in contriving, thy power in effecting, thy mercy in bestowing deliverance upon me, thy goodness in answering my vows and prayers. "*Thou hast delivered from death,*" a danger as great and unavoidable as death itself; O Lord, art not thou the same as thou wert? Art not thou still as wise to design, and as gracious to confer further mercy? Wilt thou not as certainly also deliver my feet from falling? The one contains his experience, the other the inference or conclusion he draws from it. Mercies received are in a special manner to be remembered. Mercies received are encouragements to ask, and strong grounds to hope for the mercies we want.—*Stephen Charnock.*

Verse 13.—"From falling," or, as more literally translated, from a *thrust*, or a *push*, by which one is caused to fall.—*O. Prescottt Hiller.*

Verse 13 (last clause).—*To walk in the presence of God* is partly under his eyes, his guidance and care, partly in particular, where God is wont to be *present*, where he is *worshipped* by his people, and scatters his blessings, opposed to his present state by which he was removed from the place of his worship and presence. Conf. 1 Sam. xxvi. 19, etc. Lastly, *to walk in the light of the living* denotes in general to live amongst those who live in the light, or who enjoy the light, as it is said elsewhere, in the land of the living—Psalm xxvii. 13; Isaiah xxxviii. 11; liii. 8; Ezekiel xxxii. 32; Psalm cxlii. 6—opposed to the *dead* or the *region of the dead*, who dwell in darkness. But in particular it signifies to live in a *safe* and *prosperous* state, whose well-known emblem is *light*.—*Hermann Venema.*

Verse 13 (last clause).—We cannot restrict this phrase to the light of mortal life; David's vows bound him to walk in the *light of spiritual life*, and also in the *light of eternal life*, of which by faith he was a partaker. And most commentators have applied this verse to the *light of glory* in the world to come, as the real and final object of the believer's conversation here on earth.—*W. Wilson, D.D.*

HINTS TO PREACHERS

Verses 2, 3.—I. *Fears are common to all men, at one time or another.* II. *Improper and inefficacious means of removing fear are often resorted to.* III. *There is here suggested a true and effectual method of removing fear.*—*Robert Morrison (1782—1834), in "A Parting Memorial."*

Verse 3.—"What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee." Whensoever we are afraid of any evil, we are still to put our trust in God. I. What is it to put our trust in God? 1. To keep our hearts from desponding or sinking down under any fears. 2. To comfort ourselves in God. 3. To expect deliverance from him. II. What is there in God we ought to put our trust in? 1. In his promises. 2. In his properties. His power, wisdom, justice, mercy, all-sufficiency. III. Why should we in all our fears put our trust in God? 1. Because there is none else can secure us from our fears. Whereas, 2. There are no fears but God can secure us from them, either by removing the thing feared, or by subduing the fear of the thing.—*Bishop Beveridge.*

Verse 3.—I. There is fear without trust. II. There is trust without fear. III. There is fear and trust united.—*G. R.*

Verse 7.—1. From iniquity there is an escape. II. By iniquity there is no escape. The mercy of God secures the one. The justice of God prevents the other.—*G. R.*

Verse 8.—Here are—I. *Manifold mercies, to reclaim from wanderings.* II. *Tender mercies, putting tears in a bottle.* III. *Covenant mercies, "Are they not," etc.*—*G. R.*

Verse 9.—I. *God is on the side of his people.* II. *He is known to be on their side.* III. *In answer to prayer he appears on their side.* IV. *When he appears enemies flee.* Or—1. *The fact, God is for me.* II. *The knowledge of that fact—"This I know."* III. *The use of that knowledge—"When I cry," etc.* IV. *The consequence of that use—"Mine enemies turn back."*—*G. R.*

Verse 10.—"I will praise God for his word." II. *In his word, as he is there revealed.* III. *By his word, "Thou hast put a song," etc.*

Verse 12.—Here is—I. *Past dedication.* II. *Present consecration.* III. *Future glorification.*—*G. R.*

Verses 12, 13.—You have here—1. *The commemoration of former mercies: "Thou hast delivered."* 2. *The confidence of future: "Wilt not thou."* 3. *The end of all: "To walk before God in the light of the living."*—*Stephen Charnock.*

Verse 13.—I. *The language of Gratitude—"Thou hast," etc.* II. *Of Faith—"Wilt not thou," etc.* III. *Of Hope—"That I may walk," etc.*—*G. R.*
