

PSALM LXXIII.

TITLE.—A Psalm of Asaph. *This is the second Psalm ascribed to Asaph, and the first of eleven consecutive Psalms bearing the name of this eminent singer. Some writers are not sure that Asaph wrote them, but incline to the belief that David was the author, and Asaph the person to whom they were dedicated, that he might sing them when in his turn he became the chief musician. But though our own heart turns in the same direction, facts must be heard; and we find in 2 Chron. xxix. 30, that Hezekiah commanded the Levites to sing "the words of David and of Asaph the seer;" and, moreover, in Nehemiah xii. 46, David and Asaph are mentioned together, as distinct from "the chief of the singers," and, as it would seem, as joint authors of psalmody. We may, therefore, admit Asaph to be the author of some, if not all, of the twelve Psalms ascribed to him. Often a great star which seems to be but one to the eyes of ordinary observers, turns out upon closer inspection to be of a binary character; so here the Psalms of David are those of Asaph, too. The great sun of David has a satellite in the moon of Asaph. By reading our notes on Psalm Fifty, in Vol. II., the reader will glean a little more concerning this man of God.*

SUBJECT.—Curiously enough this Seventy-third Psalm corresponds in subject with the Thirty-seventh; it will help the memory of the young to notice the reversed figures. The theme is that ancient stumbling-block of good men, which Job's friends could not get over; viz.—the present prosperity of wicked men and the sorrows of the godly. Heathen philosophers have puzzled themselves about this, while to believers it has too often been a temptation.

DIVISIONS.—In verse 1 the Psalmist declares his confidence in God, and, as it were, plants his foot on a rock while he recounts his inward conflict. From 2 to 14 he states his temptation; then, from 15 to 17 he is embarrassed as to how to act, but ultimately finds deliverance from his dilemma. He describes with awe the fate of the ungodly in verses 18—20, condemns his own folly and adores the grace of God, 21—24, and concludes by renewing his allegiance to his God, whom he takes afresh to be his portion and delight.

EXPOSITION.

TRULY God is good to Israel, *even* to such as are of a clean heart.

1. "Truly," or, more correctly, *only*, "God is good to Israel." He is only good, nothing else but good to his own covenanted ones. He cannot act unjustly or unkindly to them; his goodness to them is beyond dispute, and without mixture. "Even to such as are of a clean heart." These are the true Israel, not the ceremonially clean but the really so; those who are clean in the inward parts, pure in the vital mainspring of action. To such he is, and must be, goodness itself. The writer does not doubt this, but lays it down as his firm conviction. It is well to make sure of what we do know, for this will be good anchor-hold for us when we are molested by those mysterious storms which arise from things which we do not understand. Whatever may or may not be the truth about mysterious and inscrutable things, there are certainties somewhere; experience has placed some tangible facts within our grasp; let us, then, cling to these, and they will prevent our being carried away by those hurricanes of infidelity which still come from the wilderness, and, like whirlwinds, smite the four corners of our house and threaten to overthrow it. O my God, however perplexed I may be, let me never think ill of thee. If I cannot understand thee, let me never cease to believe in thee. It must be so, it cannot be otherwise, thou art good to those whom thou hast made good; and where thou hast renewed the heart thou wilt not leave it to its enemies.

2 But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.

3 For I was envious at the foolish, *when* I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

4 For *there are* no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.

5 They *are* not in trouble as *other* men ; neither are they plagued like *other* men.

6 Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain ; violence covereth them as a garment.

7 Their eyes stand out with fatness : they have more than heart could wish.

8 They are corrupt, and speak wickedly *concerning* oppression : they speak loftily.

9 They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.

10 Therefore his people return hither : and waters of a full *cup* are wrung out to them.

11 And they say, How doth God know ? and is there knowledge in the most High ?

12 Behold, these *are* the ungodly, who prosper in the world ; they increase *in* riches.

13 Verily I have cleansed my heart *in* vain, and washed my hands in innocency.

14 For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.

2. Here begins the narrative of a great soul-battle, a spiritual Marathon, a hard and well-fought field, in which the half-defeated became in the end wholly victorious. "*But as for me.*" He contrasts himself with his God who is ever good ; he owns his personal want of good, and then also compares himself with the clean in heart, and goes on to confess his defilement. The Lord is good to his saints, "*but as for me,*" am I one of them ? Can I expect to share his grace ? Yes, I do share it ; but I have acted an unworthy part, very unlike one who is truly pure in heart. "*My feet were almost gone.*" Errors of heart and head soon affect the conduct. There is an intimate connection between the heart and the feet. Asaph could barely stand, his uprightness was going, his knees were bowing like a falling wall. When men doubt the righteousness of God, their own integrity begins to waver. "*My steps had well nigh slipped.*" Asaph could make no progress in the good road, his feet ran away from under him like those of a man on a sheet of ice. He was weakened for all practical action, and in great danger of actual sin, and so of a disgraceful fall. How ought we to watch the inner man, since it has so forcible an effect upon the outward character. The confession in this case is, as it should be, very plain and explicit.

3. "*For I was envious at the foolish.*" "The foolish" is the generic title of all the wicked : they are beyond all other fools, and he must be a fool who envies fools. Some read it, "the proud ;" and, indeed, these, by their ostentation, invite envy, and many a mind which is out of gear spiritually, becomes infected with that wasting disease. It is a pitiful thing that an heir of heaven should have to confess "I was envious," but worse still that he should have to put it, "I was envious at the foolish." Yet this acknowledgment is, we fear, due from most of us. "*When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*" His eye was fixed too much on one thing ; he saw their present, and forgot their future, saw their outward display, and overlooked their soul's discomfort. Who envies the bullock his fat when he recollects the shambles ? Yet some poor afflicted saint has been sorely tempted to grudge the ungodly sinner his temporary plenty. All things considered, Dives had more cause to envy Lazarus than Lazarus to be envious of Dives.

4. "*For there are no bands in their death.*" This is mentioned as the chief wonder, for we usually expect that in the solemn article of death, a difference will appear, and the wicked will become evidently in trouble. The notion is still prevalent that a quiet death means a happy hereafter. The Psalmist had observed that the very reverse is true. Careless persons become case-hardened, and continue presumptuously secure, even to the last. Some are startled at the approach of judgment, but many more have received a strong delusion to believe a lie. What with the surgeon's drugs and their own infidelity, or false peace, they glide into eternity

without a struggle. We have seen godly men bound with doubts, and fettered with anxieties, which have arisen from their holy jealousy; but the godless know nothing of such bands: they care neither for God nor devil. "*Their strength is firm.*" What care they for death? Frequently they are brazen and insolent, and can vent defiant blasphemies even on their last couch. This may occasion sorrow and surprise among saints, but certainly should not suggest envy, for, in this case, the most terrible inward conflict is infinitely to be preferred to the profoundest calm which insolent presumption can create. Let the righteous die as they may, let my last end be like theirs.

5. "*They are not in trouble as other men.*" The prosperous wicked escape the killing toils which afflict the mass of mankind; their bread comes to them without care, their wine without stint. They have no need to enquire, "Whence shall we get bread for our children, or raiment for our little ones?" Ordinary domestic and personal troubles do not appear to molest them. "*Neither are they plagued like other men.*" Fierce trials do not arise to assail them: they smart not under the divine rod. While many saints are both poor and afflicted, the prosperous sinner is neither. He is worse than other men, and yet he is better off; he ploughs least, and yet has the most fodder. He deserves the hottest hell, and yet has the warmest nest. All this is clear to the eye of faith, which unriddles the riddle; but to the bleared eye of sense it seems an enigma indeed. They are to have nothing hereafter, let them have what they can here; they, after all, only possess what is of secondary value, and their possessing it is meant to teach us to set little store by transient things. If earthly good were of much value, the Lord would not give so large a measure of it to those who have least of his love.

6. "*Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain.*" They are as great in their own esteem as if they were aldermen of the New Jerusalem; they want no other ornament than their own pomposity. No Jeweller could sufficiently adorn them; they wear their own pride as a better ornament than a gold chain. "*Violence covereth them as a garment.*" In their boastful arrogance they array themselves; they wear the livery of the devil, and are fond of it. As soon as you see them, you perceive that room must be made for them, for, regardless of the feelings and rights of others, they intend to have their way, and achieve their own ends. They brag and bully, bluster and browbeat, as if they had taken out a license to ride roughshod over all mankind.

7. "*Their eyes stand out with fatness.*" In cases of obesity the eyes usually appear to be enclosed in fat, but sometimes they protrude; in either case the countenance is changed, loses its human form, and is assimilated to that of fatted swine. The face is here the index of the man: the man has more than suffices him; he is glutted and surfeited with wealth, and yet is one of the wicked whom God abhorreth. "*They have more than heart could wish.*" Their wishes are gratified, and more; their very greediness is exceeded; they call for water, and the world gives them milk; they ask for hundreds, and thousands are lavished at their feet. The heart is beyond measure gluttonous, and yet in the case of certain ungodly millionaires, who have rivalled Sardanapalus both in lust and luxury, it has seemed as if their wishes were exceeded, and their meat surpassed their appetite.

8. "*They are corrupt.*" They rot above ground; their heart and life are depraved. "*And speak wickedly concerning oppression.*" The reek of the sepulchre rises through their mouths; the nature of the soul is revealed in the speech. They choose oppression as their subject, and they not only defend it, but advocate it, glory in it, and would fain make it the general rule among all nations. "Who are the poor? What are they made for? What, indeed, but to toil and slave that men of education and good family may enjoy themselves? Out on the knaves for prating about their rights! A set of wily demagogues are stirring them up because they get a living by agitation. Work them like horses, and feed them like dogs; and if they dare complain, send them to the prison or let them die in the workhouse." There is still too much of this wicked talk abroad, and, although the working classes have their faults, and many of them very grave and serious ones too, yet there is a race of men who habitually speak of them as if they were an inferior order of animals. God forgive the wretches who thus talk. "*They speak loftily.*" Their high heads, like tall chimneys, vomit black smoke. Big talk streams from them, their language is colossal, their magniloquence ridiculous. They are Sir Oracle in every case, they speak as from the judge's bench, and expect all the world to stand in awe of them.

9. *"They set their mouth against the heavens."* Against God himself they aim their blasphemies. One would think, to hear them, that they were demi-gods themselves, and held their heads above the clouds, for they speak down upon other men as from a sublime elevation peculiar to themselves. Yet they might let God alone, for their pride will make them enemies enough without their defying him. *"And their tongue walketh through the earth."* Leisurately and habitually they traverse the whole world to find victims for their slander and abuse. Their tongue prowls in every corner far and near, and spares none. They affect to be universal censors, and are in truth perpetual vagrants. Like the serpent, they go nowhere without leaving their slime behind them; if there were another Eden to be found, its innocence and beauty would not preserve it from their filthy trail. They themselves are, beyond measure, worthy of all honour, and all the rest of mankind, except a few of their parasites, are knaves, fools, hypocrites, or worse. When these men's tongues are out for a walk, they are unhappy who meet them, for they push all travellers into the kennel: it is impossible altogether to avoid them, for in both hemispheres they take their perambulations, both on land and sea they make their voyages. The city is not free from them, and the village swarms with them. They waylay men in the king's highway, but they are able to hunt across country, too. Their whip has a long lash, and reaches both high and low.

10. *"Therefore his people return hither."* God's people are driven to fly to his throne for shelter; the doggish tongues fetch home the sheep to the Shepherd. The saints come again, and again, to their Lord, laden with complaints on account of the persecutions which they endure from these proud and graceless men. *"And waters of a full cup are wrung out to them."* Though beloved of God, they have to drain the bitter cup; their sorrows are as full as the wicked man's prosperity. It grieves them greatly to see the enemies of God so high, and themselves so low, yet the Lord does not alter his dispensations, but continues still to chasten his children, and indulge his foes. The medicine cup is not for rebels, but for those whom Jehovah Rophi loves.

11. *"And they say, How doth God know?"* Thus dare the ungodly speak. They flatter themselves that their oppressions and persecutions are unobserved of heaven. If there be a God, is he not too much occupied with other matters to know what is going on upon this world? So they console themselves if judgments be threatened. Boasting of their own knowledge, they yet dare to ask, *"Is there knowledge in the most High?"* Well were they called foolish. A God, and not know! This is a solecism in language, a madness of thought. Such, however, is the acted insanity of the graceless theists of this age; theists in name, because avowed infidelity is disreputable, but atheists in practice beyond all question.

I could not bring my mind to accept the rendering of many expositors by which this verse is referred to tried and perplexed saints. I am unable to conceive that such language could flow from their lips, even under the most depressing perplexities.

12. *"Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world."* Look! See! Consider! Here is the standing enigma! The crux of Providence! The stumbling-block of faith! Here are the unjust rewarded and indulged, and that not for a day or an hour, but in perpetuity. From their youth up these men, who deserve perdition, revel in prosperity. They deserve to be hung in chains, and chains are hung about their necks; they are worthy to be chased from the world, and yet the world becomes all their own. Poor purblind sense cries, Behold this! Wonder, and be amazed, and make this square with providential justice, if you can. *"They increase in riches;"* or, strength. Both wealth and health are their dowry. No bad debts and bankruptcies weigh them down, but robbery and usury pile up their substance. Money runs to money, gold pieces fly in flocks; the rich grow richer, the proud grow prouder. Lord, how is this? Thy poor servants, who become yet poorer, and groan under their burdens, are made to wonder at thy mysterious ways.

13. *"Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain."* Poor Asaph! he questions the value of holiness when its wages are paid in the coin of affliction. With no effect has he been sincere; no advantage has come to him through his purity, for the filthy-hearted are exalted and fed on the fat of the land. Thus foolishly will the wisest of men argue, when faith is napping. Asaph was a seer, but he could not see when reason left him in the dark; even seers must have the sunlight of revealed truth to see by, or they grope like the blind. In the presence of temporal circumstances, the pure in heart may seem to have cleansed themselves altogether in vain,

but we must not judge after the sight of the eyes. "*And washed my hands in innocency.*" Asaph had been as careful of his hands as of his heart; he had guarded his outer as well as his inner life, and it was a bitter thought that all this was useless, and left him in even a worse condition than foul-handed, black-hearted worldlings. Surely the horrible character of the conclusion must have helped to render it untenable; it could not be so while God was God. It smelt too strong of a lie to be tolerated long in the good man's soul; hence, in a verse or two, we see his mind turning in another direction.

14. "*For all the day long have I been plagued.*" He was smitten from the moment he woke to the time he went to bed. His griefs were not only continued, but renewed with every opening day, "*And chastened every morning.*" This was a vivid contrast to the lot of the ungodly. There were crowns for the reprobates and crosses for the elect. Strange that the saints should sigh and the sinners sing. Rest was given to the disturbers, and yet peace was denied to the peace-makers. The downcast seer was in a muse and a maze. The affairs of mankind appeared to him to be in a fearful tangle; how could it be permitted by a just ruler that things should be so turned upside down, and the whole course of justice dislocated.

Here is the case stated in the plainest manner, and many a Christian will herein recognise his own experience. Such knots have we also sought to untie, and have sadly worn our fingers and broken our teeth. Dear-bought has our wisdom been, but we have bought it; and, henceforth, we cease to fret because of evil-doers, for the Lord hath showed us what their end will be.

15 If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend *against* the generation of thy children.

16 When I thought to know this, it *was* too painful for me.

17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; *then* understood I their end.

15. "*If I say, I will speak thus.*" It is not always wise to speak one's thoughts; if they remain within, they will only injure ourselves; but, once uttered, their mischief may be great. From such a man as the Psalmist, the utterance which his discontent suggested would have been a heavy blow and deep discouragement to the whole brotherhood. He dared not, therefore, come to such a resolution, but paused, and would not decide to declare his feelings. It was well, for in his case second thoughts were by far the best. "*I should offend against the generation of thy children.*" I should scandalise them, grieve them, and perhaps cause them to offend also. We ought to look at the consequences of our speech to all others, and especially to the church of God. Woe unto the man by whom offence cometh! Rash, undigested, ill-considered speech, is responsible for much of the heart-burning and trouble in the churches. Would to God that, like Asaph, men would bridle their tongues. Where we have any suspicion of being wrong, it is better to be silent; it can do no harm to be quiet, and it may do serious damage to spread abroad our hastily formed opinions. To grieve the children of God by appearing to act perfidiously and betray the truth, is a sin so heinous, that if the consciences of heresy-mongers were not seared as with a hot iron, they would not be so glib as they are to publish abroad their novelties. Expressions which convey the impression that the Lord acts unjustly or unkindly, especially if they fall from the lips of men of known character and experience, are as dangerous as firebrands among stubble; they are used for blasphemous purposes by the ill-disposed; and the timid and trembling are sure to be cast down thereby, and to find reason for yet deeper distress of soul.

16. "*When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me.*" The thought of scandalising the family of God he could not bear, and yet his inward thoughts seethed and fermented, and caused an intolerable anguish within. To speak might have relieved one sorrow, but, as it would have created another, he forbore so dangerous a remedy; yet this did not remove the first pangs, which grew even worse and worse, and threatened utterly to overwhelm him. A smothered grief is hard to endure. The triumph of conscience which compels us to keep the wolf hidden beneath our own garments, does not forbid its gnawing at our vitals. Suppressed fire in the bones rages more fiercely than if it could gain a vent at the mouth. Those who know Asaph's dilemma will pity him as none other can.

17. "*Until I went into the sanctuary of God.*" His mind entered the eternity where God dwells as in a holy place, he left the things of sense for the things invisible,

his heart gazed within the veil, he stood where the thrice holy God stands. Thus he shifted his point of view, and apparent disorder resolved itself into harmony. The motions of the planets appear most discordant from this world which is itself a planet; they appear as "progressive, retrograde, and standing still;" but could we fix our observatory in the sun, which is the centre of the system, we should perceive all the planets moving in perfect circle around the head of the great solar family. "*Then understood I their end.*" He had seen too little to be able to judge; a wider view changed his judgment; he saw with his mind's enlightened eye the future of the wicked, and his soul was in debate no longer as to the happiness of their condition. No envy gnaws now at his heart, but a holy horror both of their impending doom, and of their present guilt, fills his soul. He recoils from being dealt with in the same manner as the proud sinners, whom just now he regarded with admiration.

18 Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.

19 How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors.

20 As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.

18. The Psalmist's sorrow had culminated, not in the fact that the ungodly prospered, but that God had arranged it so: had it happened by mere chance, he would have wondered, but could not have complained; but how the arranger of all things could so dispense his temporal favours, was the vexatious question. Here, to meet the case, he sees that the divine hand purposely placed these men in prosperous and eminent circumstances, not with the intent to bless them but the very reverse. "*Surely thou didst set them in slippery places.*" Their position was dangerous, and, therefore, God did not set his friends there but his foes alone. He chose, in infinite love, a rougher but safer standing for his own beloved. "*Thou castedst them down into destruction.*" The same hand which led them up to their Tarpeian rock, hurled them down from it. They were but elevated by judicial arrangement for the fuller execution of their doom. Eternal punishment will be all the more terrible in contrast with the former prosperity of those who are ripening for it. Taken as a whole, the case of the ungodly is horrible throughout; and their worldly joy instead of diminishing the horror, actually renders the effect the more awful, even as the vivid lightning amid the storm does not brighten but intensify the thick darkness which lowers around. The ascent to the fatal gallows of Haman was an essential ingredient in the terror of the sentence—"hang him thereon." If the wicked had not been raised so high they could not have fallen so low.

19. "*How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment!*" This is an exclamation of godly wonder at the suddenness and completeness of the sinners' overthrow. Headlong is their fall; without warning, without escape, without hope of future restoration! Despite their golden chains, and goodly apparel, death stays not for manners but hurries them away; and stern justice unbribed by their wealth hurls them into destruction. "*They are utterly consumed with terrors.*" They have neither root nor branch left. They cease to exist among the sons of men, and, in the other world, there is nothing left of their former glory. Like blasted trees, consumed by the lightning, they are monuments of vengeance; like the ruins of Babylon they reveal, in the greatness of their desolation, the judgments of the Lord against all those that unduly exalt themselves. The momentary glory of the graceless is in a moment effaced, their loftiness is in an instant consumed.

20. "*As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.*" They owe their existence and prosperity to the forbearance of God, which the Psalmist compares to a sleep; but, as a dream vanishes so soon as a man awakes, so the instant the Lord begins to exercise his justice and call men before him, the pomp and prosperity of proud transgressors shall melt away. When God awakes to judgment, they who despise him shall be despised; they are already "such stuff as dreams are made of," but then the baseless fabric shall not leave a wreck behind. Let them flaunt their little hour, poor unsubstantial sons of dreams; they will soon be gone; when the day breaketh, and the Lord awakes as a mighty man out of his sleep, they will vanish away. Who cares for the wealth of dream-

land? Who indeed but fools? Lord, leave us not to the madness which covets unsubstantial wealth, and ever teach us thine own wisdom.

21 Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins.

22 So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.

23 Nevertheless I *am* continually with thee: thou hast holden *me* by my right hand.

24 Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.

21. The holy poet here reviews his inward struggle and awards himself censure for his folly. His pain had been intense; he says, "*Thus my heart was grieved.*" It was a deep-seated sorrow, and one which penetrated his inmost being. Alexander reads it, "My heart is soured." His spirit had become embittered; he had judged in a harsh, crabbed, surly manner. He had become atrabilious, full of black bile, melancholy, and choleric; he had poisoned his own life at the fountain-head, and made all its streams to be bitter as gall. "*And I was pricked in my reins.*" He was as full of pain as a man afflicted with renal disease; he had pierced himself through with many sorrows; his hard thoughts were like so many calculi in his kidneys; he was utterly wretched and woebegone, and all through his own reflections. O miserable philosophy, which stretches the mind on the rack, and breaks it on the wheel! O blessed faith, which drives away the inquisitors, and sets the captives free!

22. "*So foolish was I.*" He, though a saint of God, had acted as if he had been one of the fools whom God abhorreth. Had he not even envied them?—and what is that but to aspire to be like them? The wisest of men have enough folly in them to ruin them unless grace prevents. "*And ignorant.*" He had acted as if he knew nothing, had babbled like an idiot, had uttered the very drivels of a witless loon. He did not know how sufficiently to express his sense of his own fatuity. "*I was as a beast before thee.*" Even in God's presence he had been brutish, and worse than a beast. As the grass-eating ox has but this present life, and can only estimate things thereby, and by the sensual pleasure which they afford, even so had the Psalmist judged happiness by this mortal life, by outward appearances, and by fleshly enjoyments. Thus he had, for the time, renounced the dignity of an immortal spirit, and, like a mere animal, judged after the sight of the eyes. We should be very loth to call an inspired man a beast, and yet, penitence made him call himself so; nay, he uses the plural, by way of emphasis, and as if he were worse than any one beast. It was but an evidence of his true wisdom that he was so deeply conscious of his own folly. We see how bitterly good men bewail mental wanderings; they make no excuses for themselves, but set their sins in the pillory, and cast the vilest reproaches upon them. O for grace to detest the very appearance of evil!

23. "*Nevertheless I am continually with thee.*" He does not give up his faith, though he confesses his folly. Sin may distress us, and yet we may be in communion with God. It is sin beloved and delighted in which separates us from the Lord, but when we bewail it heartily, the Lord will not withdraw from us. What a contrast is here in this and the former verse! He is as a beast, and yet continually with God. Our double nature, as it always causes conflict, so is it a continuous paradox: the flesh allies us with the brutes, and the spirit affiliates us to God. "*Thou hast holden me by my right hand.*" With love dost thou embrace me, with honour ennoble me, with power uphold me. He had almost fallen, and yet was always upheld. He was a riddle to himself, as he had been a wonder unto many. This verse contains the two precious mercies of communion and upholding, and as they were both given to one who confessed himself a fool, we also may hope to enjoy them.

24. "*Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel.*" I have done with choosing my own way, and trying to pick a path amid the jungle of reason. He yielded not only the point in debate, but all intention of debating, and he puts his hand into that of the great Father, asking to be led, and agreeing to follow. Our former mistakes are a blessing, when they drive us to this. The end of our own wisdom is the beginning of our being wise. With HIM is counsel, and when we come to him, we are sure to be led aright. "*And afterward.*" "Afterward!" Blessed word. We can cheerfully put up with the present, when we foresee the future. What is around

us just now is of small consequence, compared with afterward. "*Receive me to glory.*" Take me up into thy splendour of joy. Thy guidance shall conduct me to this matchless terminus. Glory shall I have, and thou thyself wilt admit me into it. As Enoch was not, for God took him, so all the saints are taken up—received up into glory.

25 Whom have I in heaven *but thee?* and *there is none* upon earth that I desire beside thee.

26 My flesh and my heart faileth: *but* God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.

27 For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee.

28 But *it is* good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works.

25. "*Whom have I in heaven but thee?*" Thus, then, he turns away from the glitter which fascinated him to the true gold which was his real treasure. He felt that his God was better to him than all the wealth, health, honour, and peace, which he had so much envied in the worldling; yea, He was not only better than all on earth, but more excellent than all in heaven. He bade all things else go, that he might be filled with his God. "*And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.*" No longer should his wishes ramble, no other object should tempt them to stray; henceforth, the Everliving One should be his all in all.

26. "*My flesh and my heart faileth.*" They had failed him already, and he had almost fallen; they would fail him in the hour of death, and, if he relied upon them, they would fail him at once. "*But God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*" His God would not fail him, either as a protection or a joy. His heart would be kept up by divine love, and filled eternally with divine glory. After having been driven far out to sea, Asaph casts anchor in the old port. We shall do well to follow his example. There is nothing desirable save God; let us, then, desire only him. All other things must pass away; let our hearts abide in him, who alone abideth for ever.

27. "*For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish.*" We must be near God to live; to be far off by wicked works is death. "*Thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee.*" If we pretend to be the Lord's servants, we must remember that he is a jealous God, and requires spiritual chastity from all his people. Offences against conjugal vows are very offensive, and all sins against God have the same element in them, and they are visited with the direst punishments. Mere heathens, who are far from God, perish in due season; but those who, being his professed people, act unfaithfully to their profession, shall come under active condemnation, and be crushed beneath his wrath. We read examples of this in Israel's history; may we never create fresh instances in our own persons.

28. "*But it is good for me to draw near to God.*" Had he done so at first he would not have been immersed in such affliction; when he did so he escaped from his dilemma, and if he continued to do so he would not fall into the same evil again. The greater our nearness to God, the less we are affected by the attractions and distractions of earth. Access into the most holy place is a great privilege, and a cure for a multitude of ills. It is good for all saints, it is good for me in particular; it is always good, and always will be good for me to approach the greatest good, the source of all good, even God himself. "*I have put my trust in the Lord God.*" He dwells upon the glorious name of the Lord Jehovah, and avows it as the basis of his faith. Faith is wisdom; it is the key of enigmas, the clue of mazes, and the pole star of pathless seas. Trust and you will know. "*That I may declare all thy works.*" He who believes shall understand, and so be able to teach. Asaph hesitated to utter his evil surmises, but he has no diffidence in publishing abroad a good matter. God's ways are the more admired the more they are known. He who is ready to believe the goodness of God shall always see fresh goodness to believe in, and he who is willing to declare the works of God shall never be silent for lack of wonders to declare.

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS.

Whole Psalm.—The Seventy-third Psalm is a very striking record of the mental struggle which an eminently pious Jew underwent, when he contemplated the respective conditions of the righteous and the wicked. Fresh from the conflict, he somewhat abruptly opens the Psalm with the confident enunciation of the truth of which victory over doubt had now made him more and more intelligently sure than ever, that “*God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart.*” And then he relates the most fatal shock which his faith had received, when he contrasted the prosperity of the wicked, who, though they proudly contemned God and man, prospered in the world and increased in riches, with his own lot, who, though he had cleansed his heart and washed his hands in innocency, had been “*plagued all the day long and chastened every morning.*” The place where his doubts were removed and his tottering faith re-established, was “*the sanctuary of God.*” God himself was the Teacher. What, then, did he teach? By what divinely imparted considerations was the Psalmist reassured? Whatever is the proper rendering of the fourth verse; whether, “*There are no sorrows (tending) to their death,*” or, “*There are no sorrows until their death,*”—their whole life to the very last is one unchequered course of happiness—that verse conveys to us the Psalmist’s *mistaken* estimate of the prosperity of the wicked, before he went into the sanctuary of God. The true estimate, at which he afterwards arrived, is found in verses 18—20. Now, admitting (what, by the way, is somewhat difficult of belief, inasmuch as the sudden and fearful temporal destruction of *all* or even the *most* prosperous cannot be made out) that the end of these men “*means only and always their end in this world,* we come to the conclusion that, in the case of the wicked, this Psalm does not plainly and undeniably teach that punishment awaits them after death; but only that, in estimating their condition, it is necessary, in order to vindicate the justice of God, to take in their whole career, and set over against their great prosperity the sudden and fearful reverses and destruction which they not unfrequently encounter. But, in turning to the other side of the comparison, the case of the righteous, we are *not* met by the thought, that as the prosperity of the wicked is but the preparation for their ruin, the raising higher the tower that the fall may be the greater, so the adversity of the godly is but an introduction to worldly wealth and honour. That thought is not foreign to the Old Testament writers. “*Evil-doers shall be cut off;*” writes one of them, “*but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth.* For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.” Psalm xxxvii. 9—11. *But it is not so much as hinted at here.* The daily chastening may continue, flesh and heart may fail, but God is good to Israel notwithstanding: he is their portion, their guide, their help while they live, and he will take them to his glorious presence when they die. “*Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.*” The New Testament has nothing higher or more spiritual than this. The reference of the last clause to happiness after death is, I believe, generally acknowledged by Jewish commentators. They left it to the candour of Christian expositors to doubt or deny it.—*Thomas Thomason Perowne, in “The Essential Coherence of the Old and New Testaments.” 1858.*

Whole Psalm.—In Psalm Seventy-three the soul looks *out*, and reasons on what it sees there; namely, successful wickedness and suffering righteousness. What is the conclusion? “*I have cleansed my heart in vain.*” So much for looking about. In Psalm Seventy-seven the soul looks *in*, and reasons on what it finds there. What is the conclusion? “*Hath God forgotten to be gracious?*” So much for looking in. Where, then, should we look? Look *up*, straight up, and *believe* what you see there. What will be the conclusion? You will understand the “*end*” of man, and trace the “*way*” of God.—*From “Things New and Old, a Monthly Magazine.” 1858.*

Whole Psalm.—In this Psalm, the Psalmist (Asaph) relates the great difficulty which existed in his own mind, from the consideration of the wicked. He observes (verses 2 and 3), “*As for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*”

In the fourth and following verses he informs us what, in the wicked, was his temptation. In the first place, he observed, that they were *prosperous*, and all things went well with them. He then observed their *behaviour* in their prosperity, and the use which they made of it; and that God, notwithstanding such abuse, *continued* their prosperity. Then he tells us by what means he was helped out of this difficulty, viz., by going into the *sanctuary* (verses 16 and 17), and proceeds to inform us what considerations they were which helped him, viz.—1. The consideration of the *miserable end* of wicked men. However they prosper for the present, yet they come to a woeful end at last (verses 18—20). 2. The consideration of the *blessed end* of the saints. Although the saints, while they live, may be afflicted, yet they come to a happy end at last (verses 21—24). 3. The consideration that the godly have a much *better portion* than the wicked, even though they have no other portion but God; as in verses 25, 26. Though the wicked are in prosperity, and are not in trouble as other men; yet the godly, though in affliction, are in a state infinitely better, because they have God for their portion. They need desire nothing else; he that hath God hath all. Thus the Psalmist professes the sense and apprehension which he had of things: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." In the twenty-fourth verse the Psalmist takes notice how the saints are happy in God, both when they are in this world and also when they are taken to another. They are blessed in God in this world, in that *he guides them by his counsel*; and when he takes them out of it they are still happy, in that *he receives them to glory*. This probably led him to declare that he desired *no other portion*, either in this world or in that to come, either in heaven or upon earth.—*Jonathan Edwards*.

Verse 1.—"Truly:" it is but a particle; but the smallest filings of gold are gathered up. Little pearls are of great price. And this small particle is not of small use, being rightly applied and improved. First, take it (as our translators give it us) as a *note of asseveration*. "Truly." It is a word of faith, opposite to the Psalmist's sense and Satan's injections. Whatsoever sense sees or feels, whatsoever Satan insinuates and says; yet precious faith with confidence asserts, "*Truly, verily God is good.*" He is not only good in word, but in deed also. Not only seemingly good, but certainly good. Secondly, consider it as an *adversative particle*, "*Yet,*" so our old translation. Ainsworth renders it, *yet surely*; taking in the former and this together. And then the sense runs thus: How ill soever things go in the world, how ill soever it fares with God's church and people amongst men, *yet God is good to Israel*. Thirdly, some conceive that the word carries *admiration*. Oh, how good is God to Israel. Where expressions and apprehensions fail, there the Psalmist takes up God's providences with admiration. Oh, how wonderfully, how transcendently good is God to Israel!

This "*yet*" (as I conceive) hath a threefold reference to the body of the Psalm. For as interpreters observe, though these words are set in the beginning, yet they suggest the conclusion of the Psalmist's conflict. And the Psalmist seems to begin somewhat abruptly: "*Yet God is good.*" But having filled his thoughts with his former foiles and fears, and now seeing himself in a safe condition both for the present and the future, he is full of confidence and comfort; and that which was the strongest and chiefest in his heart now breaks out first: "*Yet God is good.*" 1. This "*yet*" relates unto his sufferings, verse 14: "*All the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.*" Notwithstanding the variety and frequency of the saint's sufferings, "*yet God is good.*" Though sorrow salutes them every morning at their first awaking, and trouble attends them to bed at night, "*yet God is good.*" Though temptations many and terrible make batteries and breaches upon their spirits, "*yet God is good to Israel.*" 2. This "*yet*" reflects upon his sinnings, the frettings and wranglings of his distempered heart (verses 2, 3, and verse 21). Though sinful motions do mutiny in the soul against God's wise administrations, though there be foolish, proud quarrellings with divine providences, and inexcusable distrust of his faithful promises; though fretfulness at others' prosperity and discontent at their own adversity, "*yet God is good.*" Israel's sinful distempers cause not the Almighty to change the course of his accustomed goodness. While corruptions are kept from breaking out into scandal, while the soul contends against them, and is humbled for them (as the Psalmist was), this conclusion must be maintained: "*yet God is good.*" 3. This "*yet*" looks back upon his misgivings. There had been distrustful despondency upon the good man's heart. For from

both the premises (viz., his sufferings and sinnings) he had inferred this conclusion, verse 13, "*Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.*" As if he had said, "I have kept fasts, observed Sabbaths, heard sermons, made prayers, received sacraments, given alms, avoided sins, resisted temptations, withstood lusts, appeared for Christ and his cause and servants in vain: yea, his heart had added an asseveration (*verily*) to this faithless opinion, but now he is of another mind: "*Yet God is good.*" The administrations of God are not according to the sad surmises of his people's misgiving hearts. For, though they through diffidence are apt often to give up their holy labours as lost, and all their conscientious care and carriage as utterly cast away; "*yet God is good to Israel.*"—*Simeon Ash, in a Sermon entitled "God's Incomparable Goodness unto Israel."* 1647.

Verse 1.—David opens the Psalm abruptly, and from this we learn what is worthy of particular notice, that, before he broke forth into this language, his mind had been agitated with many doubts and conflicting suggestions. As a brave and valiant champion, he had been exercised in very painful struggles and temptations; but, after long and arduous exertion, he at length succeeded in shaking off all perverse imaginations, and came to the conclusion that *yet God is gracious to his servants, and the faithful guardian of their welfare.* Thus these words contain a tacit contrast between the unhallowed imaginations suggested to him by Satan, and the testimony in favour of true religion with which he now strengthens himself, denouncing, as it were, the judgment of the flesh, in giving place to misgiving thoughts with respect to the providence of God. We see, then, how emphatic is this exclamation of the Psalmist. He does not ascend into the chair to dispute after the manner of the philosophers, and to deliver his discourse in a style of studied oratory; but, as if he had escaped from hell, he proclaims with a loud voice, and with impassioned feeling, that he had obtained the victory.—*John Calvin.*

Verse 1 (*first clause*).—

Yet sure the gods are good: I would think so,
If they would give me leave!
But virtue in distress, and vice in triumph,
Make atheists of mankind.

Dryden.

Verse 1.—"*God is good.*" There is a beauty in the name appropriated by the Saxon nations to the Deity, unequalled except by his most reverential Hebrew appellation. They called him "God," which is literally, "THE GOOD." The same word thus signifying the Deity, and his most endearing quality.—*Turner.*

Verse 1.—"*God is good.*" Let the devil and his instruments say what they will to the contrary, I will never believe them; I have said it before, and I see no reason to reverse my sentence; "*Truly God is good.*" Though sometimes he may hide his face for awhile, yet he doth that in faithfulness and love; there is kindness in his very scourges, and love bound up in his rods; he is good to Israel: do but mark it first or last: "The true Israelite, in whom there is no guile, shall be refreshed by his Saviour." The Israelite that wrestles with tears with God, and values his love above the whole world, that will not be put off without his Father's blessing, shall have it with a witness: "He shall reap in joy though he may at present sow in tears. Even to such as are of a clean heart." The false-hearted hypocrite, indeed, that gives God only his tongue and lip, cap and knee, but reserves his heart and love for sin and the world, that hath much of compliment, but nothing of affection and reality, why let such a one never expect, while in such a state, to taste those reviving comforts that I have been treating of; while he drives such a trade, he must not expect God's company.—*James Janeway.* 1636—1674.

Verse 1.—"*Even to such as are of a clean heart.*" Purity of heart is the characteristic note of God's people. Heart-purity denominates us the Israel of God; it makes us of Israel indeed; but all are not Israel which are of Israel." Romans ix. 6. Purity of heart is the jewel which is hung only upon the elect. As chastity distinguisheth a virtuous woman from an harlot, so the true saint is distinguished from the hypocrite by his heart-purity. This is like the nobleman's star or garter, which is a peculiar ensign of honour, differing him from the vulgar; when the bright star of purity shineth in a Christian's heart it doth distinguish him from the formal professor. . . .

God "*is good*" to the pure in heart. We all desire that God should be good to

us ; it is the sick man's prayer : " The Lord be good to me." But how is God good to them ? Two ways. 1. To them that are pure all things are sanctified, Titus i. 15 : " To the pure all things are pure ;" estate is sanctified, relations are sanctified ; as the temple did sanctify the gold and the altar did sanctify the offering. To the unclean nothing is clean ; their table is a snare, their temple-devotion a sin. There is a curse entailed upon a wicked man (Deut. xxviii. 16), but holiness removeth the curse, and cuts off the entail : " to the pure all things are pure." 2. The clean hearted have all things work for their good. Romans viii. 28. Mercies and afflictions shall turn to their good ; the most poisonous drugs shall be medicinal ; the most cross providence shall carry on the design of their salvation. Who, then, would not be clean in heart ?—*Thomas Watson*.

Verse 2.—"But as for me." Literally, it is, *And I*, which ought to be read with emphasis ; for David means that those temptations which cast an affront upon the honour of God, and overwhelm faith, not only assail the common class of men, or those who are endued only with some small measure of the fear of God, but that he himself, who ought to have profited above all others in the school of God, had experienced his own share of them. By thus setting himself forth as an example, he designed the more effectually to arouse and incite us to take great heed to ourselves.—*John Calvin*.

Verse 2.—Let such also as fear God and begin to look aside on the things of this world, know it will be hard even for them to hold out in faith and in the fear of God in time of trial. Remember the example of David, he was a man that had spent much time in travelling towards heaven ; yet, looking but a little aside upon the glittering show of this world, had very near lost his way, his feet were almost gone, his steps had well nigh slipt.—*Edward Elton*. 1620.

Verse 2.—He tells us that his "*feet were almost gone.*" The word signifies to bow, or bend under one. " My steps had well nigh slipped," or poured out, kept not within their true bounds ; but like water poured out, and not confined, runs aside. Though these expressions be metaphorical, and seemingly dark and cloudy, yet they clearly represent unto us this truth, that his understanding was misguided, his judgment was corrupt, his affections disordered, turbulent, and guilty of too great a passion ; and this, the consequents (verse 22 in which he acknowledges himself ignorant, foolish, and brutish) do sufficiently evidence. Our understanding and judgment may well bear the comparison to feet, for as the one, in our motion, supports the body, so the other, in human actions and all employments, underprops the soul. The affections, also, are as paths and steps ; as these of the feet, so these are the prints and expressions of the judgment and mind.—*Edward Parry*, in "*David Restored.*" 1660.

Verse 2.—"Almost gone." There is to be noted that the prophet said he was almost gone, and not altogether. Here is the presence, providence, strength, safeguard, and keeping of man by Almighty God, marvellously set forth. That although we are tempted and brought even to the very point to perpetrate and do all mischief, yet he stays us and keeps us, that the temptation shall not overcome us.—*John Hooper*. 1495—1555.

Verses 2—14.—But the prosperity of wicked and unjust men, both in public and in private life, who, though not leading a happy life in reality, are yet thought to do so in common opinion, being praised improperly in the works of poets, and all kinds of books, may lead you—and I am not surprised at your mistake—to a belief that the gods care nothing for the affairs of men. These matters disturb you. Being led astray by foolish thoughts, and yet not being able to think ill of the gods, you have arrived at your present state of mind, so as to think that the gods do indeed exist, but that they despise and neglect human affairs.—*Plato*.

Verse 3.—"I was envious at the foolish," etc. If we consider with ourselves how unlikely a thing it is to grow big with riches, and withal to enter through the eye of a needle, how unusual a thing it is to be emparadised in this life and yet enthroned in that to come, it will afford us matter of comfort if we are piously improsperous as well as of terror if we are prosperously impious. We should be taught by the precept of the prophet David not to fret ourselves because of evildoers, nor to be envious against the workers of iniquity ; for " The prosperity of fools shall but destroy them," saith Solomon, and " the candle of the wicked shall be put out." Prov. xxiv. 1, 2, 19, 20. Prosperity it seems is a dangerous weapon, and none but the innocent

should dare to use it. The Psalmist himself, before he thought upon this, began to envy the prosperity of wicked men.—*William Crouch*, in "*The Enormous Sin of Covetousness detected.*" 1708.

Verse 3.—"I was envious at the foolish." Who would envy a malefactor's going up a high ladder, and being mounted above the rest of the people, when it is only for a little, and in order to his being turned over and hanged? That is just the case of wicked men who are mounted up high in prosperity; for it is so only that they may be cast down deeper into destruction. It would be a brutish thing to envy an ox his high and sweet pasture, when he is only thereby fitted for the day of slaughter. Who would have envied the beasts of old, the garlands and ribbons with which the heathen adorned them when they went to be sacrificed? These external ornaments of health, wealth, pleasures, and preferments, wherewith wicked men are endowed, cannot make their state happy, nor change their natures for the better. Whatever appearance these things make in the eyes of the world, they are but like a noisome dunghill covered with scarlet, as vile and loathsome in God's sight as ever. How quickly is the beauty of earthly things blasted. "The triumphing of the wicked is short." Job xx. 5. They live in pleasures on the earth for awhile, but God "sets them in slippery places," from whence they soon slide into perpetual pain and anguish. They have a short time of mirth, but they shall have an eternity of mourning.—*John Willison*.

Verse 3.—"For I was envious at the foolish." The sneering jest of Dionysius the younger, a tyrant of Sicily, when, after having robbed the Temple of Syracuse, he had a prosperous voyage with the plunder, is well known. "See you not," says he to those who were with him, "how the gods favour the sacrilegious?" In the same way the prosperity of the wicked is taken as an encouragement to commit sin; for we are ready to imagine that, since God grants them so much of the good things of this life, they are the objects of his approbation and favour. We see how their prosperous condition wounded David to the heart, leading him almost to think that there was nothing better for him than to join himself to their company, and to follow their course of life.—*John Calvin*.

Verse 3.—"Envious." If you are touched with envy at seeing the peace of the wicked, shut your eyes, do not look at it, for envious eyes think anything vast on which they gaze. Actius Sincerus, a man of rare wit and great reputation, when in the presence of king Frederic, witnessed a discussion among physicians on what would most effectually sharpen the eyesight? The fumes of fennel, said some; the use of a glass, said others; some one thing, some another: but I, said he, replied, Envy. The doctors were astonished, and much amusement afforded to the audience at their expense. Then I continued: Does not Envy make all things seem larger and fuller? And what could be more to your purpose than that the very faculty of seeing should itself be made greater and stronger.—*Thomas Le Blanc*.

Verse 3.—"The prosperity of the wicked." Socrates, being asked what would be vexatious to good men, replied, "The prosperity of the bad." What would vex the bad? "The prosperity of the good."—*Thomas Le Blanc*.

Verse 3.—Diogenes, the cynic, seeing Harpalus, a vicious fellow, still thriving in the world, he was bold to say that wicked Harpalus's living long in prosperity was an argument that God had cast off his care of the world, that he cared not which end went forward. But he was a heathen. Yet, for all that, the lights of the sanctuary have burnt dim; stars of no small magnitude have twinkled; men of eminent parts, famous in their generation for religion and piety, have staggered in their judgment to see the flourishing estate of the wicked. It made Job to complain, and Jeremiah to expostulate with God; and David was even ready to sink in seeing the prosperity of ungodly men: to see the one in wealth, the other in want; the one honourable, the other despised; the one upon a throne, the other on a dunghill.—*John Donne*.

Verse 4.—"There are no bands in their death," etc. That is, when they die, they die in their strength, they do not pine away with long and tedious sickness; they live in pleasure, and die with ease. They are not bound to their beds, and tied down with the cords of chronicall, lingering diseases.—*Joseph Caryl*.

Verse 4.—"There are no bands in their death," etc. It is not their lot to look upon frequent and bitter deaths, like the righteous, nor is there in their affliction any firmness or permanence. If at any time affliction falls upon them, they are speedily delivered from it. Moreover, whatever calamity happens to them, they

have the strength and support of riches ; and, elevated by their wealth, they appear to forget their troubles.—*Cornelius Jansenius*. 1510—1576.

Verse 4.—"There are no bands in their death." The Hebrew word חַבְלֵי מוֹתֵיכֶם signifieth a band which is knotted or tied ; and then the sense may be, they have not that which might bind them over unto a speedy and troublesome death ; hence, *Castellio* writes, *non sunt necessitates quæ eos enecent*, there are no necessities which threaten their death—such as variety of distempers, sicknesses, and diseases, those messengers of death. *Aquila*, therefore, renders the word *חַבְלֵי מוֹתֵיכֶם* *δυσπραγείας*, there are no pangs or distempers ; no sorrows or sicknesses, saith *Ainsworth* : they are *not bound over to death or execution* by the variety of diseases, or by the power of injury of others. The prophet, by telling us "*their strength is firm*," expounds this phrase, and lets us know that these wicked men had lives spun of *even threads*, without danger of *ravelling or breaking*. They had lusty bodies, strong limbs, sound vitals, without agonies or ruptures ; lived as those that had no cause to fear death ; and when they expired, it was without much antecedent pain ; they fell as ripe apples from the tree.—*Edward Parry*.

Verse 4.—By "*bands*" we may understand, any heavy burdens, which are wont to be bound on them upon whom they are laid ; and so, by way of analogy, and grievous pains or torturing diseases. "*Their strength is firm*," continues vigorous till their death.—*Thomas Fenton*.

Verse 4.—"In their death." It comes upon them in vigorous health, for they are strong and robust, and drag not out a sickly existence through continuous complaints. Some regard the bands of death as hindrances, as if it were said—They suddenly die, in a moment, nor are they racked with pains, as in Job xxi. 13. It is considered the highest felicity for the profane, when they have enjoyed the pleasures and the pomp of life, to descend in an instant to the grave. Even Julius Cæsar, on the day before he was slain, declared that it seemed to him to be a happy death to die suddenly and unexpectedly. Therefore, according to these interpreters, David complains that the ungodly, without the vexations of disease, pass on to death by a smooth and tranquil course ; but there is more truth in the opinion of those who, reading both clauses of the verse together, their strength is firm, and there are no bands to death, think that they are not dragged to death like captives ; for since diseases overcome our strength, they are so many messengers of death to admonish us of our frailty. They are not, therefore, in vain compared to chains with which God binds us to his yoke lest vigour and strength should incite us to be froward. "*But their strength is firm.*"—*Franciscus Valabius*.

Verse 4.—Men may die like lambs and yet have their place for ever with the goats.—*Matthew Henry*.

Verse 5.—"They are not in the trouble of men," for God has given them over to the desires of their own hearts, that they who are filthy may be filthy still : like a sick man, are they, to whom a wise physician forbids nothing, since the disease is incurable.—*Gerhohus*.

Verse 5.—"Other men." Hebrew, אָדָם *Adam* : the whole human race.—*A. R. Fausset*.

Verse 6.—A chain of pearl doth not better become their necks, nor the richest robes adorn their backs, than sin doth, in their judgments, become and suit their souls ; they glory in their shame. Plato saith of Protagoras that he boasted, whereas he had lived sixty years, he had spent forty years in corrupting youth. They brag of that which they ought to bewail.—*George Swinnoek*.

Verse 6.—"Violence covereth them as a garment." They wear it, and shew it openly as their garment. See the like phrase of cursing, Ps. cix. 18, 19. But the meek, and godly, cover themselves otherwise, Eph. iv. 24 ; Col. iii. 10, 12, 14, etc.—*John Richardson*.

Verse 7.—"Their eyes." "A man may be known by his look," saith the son of Sirach, *Eccles. xix. 29*. The choleric, the lascivious, the melancholy, the cunning, etc., frequently bear their tempers and ruling passions strongly marked on their countenances : but more especially doth the soul of a man look forth at his "*eyes*."—*George Horne*.

Verse 7 (first clause).—They sink others' eyes into their heads with leanness, while their own eyes "*stand out with fulness.*"—*Thomas Adams.*

Verse 8.—"*They are corrupt.*" Prosperity, in an irreligious heart, breeds *corruption*, which from thence is emitted by the breath in conversation, to infect and taint the minds of others.—*George Horne.*

Verse 8.—"*They speak wickedly concerning oppression.*" Indeed, we see that wicked men, after having for some time got everything to prosper according to their desires, cast off all shame, and are at no pains to conceal themselves, when about to commit iniquity, but loudly proclaim their own turpitude. "What!" they will say, "is it not in my power to deprive you of all that you possess, and even to cut your throat?" Robbers, it is true, can do the same thing; but then they hide themselves for fear. These giants, or rather inhuman monsters, of whom David speaks, on the contrary not only imagine that they are exempted from subjection to any law, but, unmindful of their own weakness, foam furiously, as if there were no distinction between good and evil, between right and wrong.—*John Calvin.*

Verse 9.—"*Their tongue walketh through the earth.*" This shows the boundless and unlimited disorder of the tongue. The earth carries a numerous offspring of men, who are of several habits, states, and conditions, which give occasion of variety of discourses and different kinds of language. These men spare none: "*Their tongue walketh through the earth,*" and leaves nothing unspoken of. If men be *poor*, they talk of oppressing and mastering of them; if they *oppose*, they discourse of violence and suppressing. . . . If in this perambulation they meet with *truth*, they darken it with lies and home-made inventions; if with *innocence*, they brand it with false accusations and bitter aspersions; if with a strict government and *good laws*, then they cry, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us;" if with *religion*, they term it *heresy*, or superstition; if with *patience*, they term it obstinacy and perverseness; if with the *church*, they think of nothing less than devouring it, and cry, "Let us take the houses of God in possession;" if with the thoughts of a resurrection, and of future hopes, "Let us eat and drink," cry they, "for to-morrow we shall die." Thus no corner is left unsearched by their *abusive tongue, which walks through the earth.* . . . They may walk over the earth, but they will "*set their mouth against the heavens.*" Here they say, stand fixed and resolute, and take that place, as a special white they would hit.—*Edward Parry.*

Verse 10.—"*Therefore his people return hither.*" It seems impossible to ascertain, with any degree of precision, the meaning of this verse, or to whom it relates. Some think it intends those people who resort to the company of the wicked, because they find their temporal advantage by it; while others are of opinion that the people of God are meant, who, by continually revolving in their thoughts the subject here treated of, namely, the prosperity of the wicked, are sore grieved and forced to shed tears in abundance. Mr. Mudge translates the verse thus: "*Therefore let his (God's) people come before them, and waters in full measure would be wrung out from them;*" that is, should God's people fall into their hands, they would squeeze them to the full, they would wring out all the juice out of their bodies. He takes *waters in full measure* to have been a proverbial expression.—*Samuel Burder.*

Verse 11.—"*How doth God know?*" etc. Men may not disbelieve a Godhead; nay, they may believe there is a God, and yet question the truth of his threatenings. Those conceits that men have of God, whereby they mould and frame him in their fancies, suitable to their humours, which is a thinking that he is such a one as ourselves (Psalm l.), are streams and vapours from this pit, and the "*hearts of the sons of men* are desperately set within them to do evil" upon these grounds; much more when they arise so high as in some who say: "*How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?*" If men give way to this, what reason can be imagined to stand before them? All the comminations of Scripture are derided as so many theological scarecrows, and undervalued as so many pitiful contrivances to keep men in awe.—*Richard Gilpin.*

Verse 11.—Ovid thus speaks in one of his verses: "*Solicitor nullos esse putare deos;*" I am tempted to think that there are no gods.

Verse 14.—“*All the day long have I been plagued,*” etc. Sickly tempers must have a medicinal diet : to be purged both at spring and fall will scarce secure some from the malignity of their distempers. The Lord knows our frame, and sees what is usually needful for every temper ; and when he afflicts most frequently, he does no more than he sees requisite.—*David Clarkson.*

Verse 14.—If a man be watchful over his own ways, and the dealings of God with him, there is seldom a day but he may find some rod of affliction upon him ; but, as through want of care and watchfulness, we lose the sight of many mercies, so we do of many afflictions. Though God doth not every day bring a man to his bed, and break his bones, yet we seldom, if at all, pass a day without some rebuke and chastening. “*I have been chastened every morning,*” saith the Psalmist. . . . As sure, or as soon, as I rise I have a whipping, and my breakfast is bread of sorrow and the water of adversity. . . . Our lives are full of afflictions ; and it is as great a part of a Christian’s skill to know afflictions as to know mercies ; to know when God smites, as to know when he girds us ; and it is our sin to overlook afflictions as well as to overlook mercies.—*Joseph Caryl.*

Verse 14.—The way to heaven is an *afflicted way*, a perplexed, persecuted way, *crushed close* together with crosses, as was the Israelites’ way in the wilderness, or that of Jonathan and his armour-bearer, that had a sharp rock on the one side and a sharp rock on the other. And, whilst they crept upon all four, flinty stones were under them, briars and thorns on either hand of them ; mountains, crags, and promontories over them ; *sic politur cælum*, so heaven is caught by pains, by patience, by violence, affliction being our inseparable companion. “The cross way is the highway to heaven,” said that martyr [Bradford] ; and another, “If there be any way to heaven on horseback, it is by the cross.” Queen Elizabeth is said to have swum to the crown through a sea of sorrows. They that will to heaven, must sail by hell-gates ; they that will have knighthood, must kneel for it ; and they that will get in at the strait gate, must crowd for it. “Strive to enter in at the strait gate,” saith our Saviour ; strive and strain, even to an *agony*, as the word signifieth. Heaven is compared to a hill ; hell to a hole. To hell a man may go without a staff, as we say ; the way thereto is easy, steep, strawed with roses ; ’tis but a yielding to Satan, a passing from sin to sin, from evil purposes to evil practices, from practice to custom, etc. *Sed revocare gradum*, but to turn short again, and make straight steps to our feet, that we may force through the strait gate, *hic labor, hoc opus est, opus non pulveris sed pulveris* ; this is a work of great pains, a duty of no small difficulty.—*John Trapp.*

Verse 15.—“*I should offend,*” etc. That is, I do God’s church a great deal of injury, which hath always been under afflictions, if I think or say, that all her piety hath been without hope, or her hope without effect. Others understand it to mean, I deceive the generation, *viz.*, I propound a false doctrine unto them, which is apt to seduce them. Others, “behold the generation,” etc. ; that is to say, notwithstanding all afflictions, it is certain that thou art a Father to the Church only ; which is sufficient to make me judge well of these afflictions ; I have done ill, and confess I have erred in this my rash judgment.—*John Diodati.*

Verse 17.—By the *sanctuaries of God* some, even among the Hebrews, understand the celestial mansions in which the spirits of the just and angels dwell ; as if David had said, This was a painful thing in my sight, until I came to acknowledge in good earnest that men are not created to flourish for a short time in this world, and to luxuriate in pleasures while in it, but that there condition here is that of pilgrims, whose aspirations, during their earthly pilgrimage, should be towards heaven. I readily admit that no man can form a right judgment of the providence of God but he who elevates his mind above the earth ; but it is more simple and natural to understand the word “*sanctuary*” as denoting celestial doctrine. As the book of the law was laid up in the sanctuary, from which the oracles of heaven were to be obtained, that is to say, the declaration of the will of God ; and as this was the true way of acquiring profitable instruction, David very properly puts *entering into the sanctuaries for coming to the school of God*, as if his meaning were this : Until God become my schoolmaster, and until I learn by his word what otherwise my mind, when I come to consider the government of the world, cannot comprehend, I stop short all at once, and understand nothing about the subject. When, therefore,

we are here told that men are unfit for contemplating the arrangements of divine providence, until they obtain wisdom elsewhere than from themselves, how can we attain to wisdom but by submissively receiving what God teaches us, both by his word and by his Holy Spirit? David by the word "*sanctuary*" alludes to the external manner of teaching, which God had appointed among his ancient people; but along with the word he comprehends the secret illumination of the Holy Spirit.—*John Calvin.*

Verse 17.—The joy of a wicked man is imperfect in itself, because it is not so as it seems to be, or it is not sincerely so. 'Tis not pure gold, but alloyed and adulterated with sorrow. It may look well to one that is bleary-eyed, but it will not pass for good to one that looks well to it. Let any one consider and weigh it well in the balance of the *sanctuary*, whither David went to fetch the scales for the same purpose, and he will find it too light by many grains. 'Tis not so within as it is without; no more than a mud wall that is plastered with white, or a stinking grave covered with a glorious monument. It is *εφρονος*, looking fair and smooth, like true joy; as a wounded member that is healed too soon (and you know how God by the prophet complains of the hurt of his people that was slightly healed, Jer. vi. 14), and it looks as well as any other part of the body; but, underneath, there is still a sore, which festers so much more, and is the worse, for that the outside is so well. Where pretences, and cloaks, and disguises are the fairest; there the knavery, and the poison, and the evil concealed are usually foulest.—*Zachary Bogart* (1625—1659), in "*Meditations of the Mirth of a Christian Life.*"

Verse 17.—"Then understood I." There is a famous story of providence in Bradwardine to this purpose. A certain hermit that was much tempted, and was utterly unsatisfied concerning the providence of God, resolved to journey from place to place till he met with some who could satisfy him. An angel in the shape of a man joined himself with him as he was journeying, telling him that he was sent from God to satisfy him in his doubts of providence. The first night they lodged at the house of a very holy man, and they spent their time in discourses of heaven, and praises of God, and were entertained with a great deal of freedom and joy. In the morning, when they departed, the angel took with him a great cup of gold. The next night they came to the house of another holy man, who made them very welcome, and exceedingly rejoiced in their society and discourse; the angel, notwithstanding, at his departure killed an infant in the cradle, which was his only son, he having been for many years before childless, and, therefore, was a very fond father of this child. The third night they came to another house, where they had like free entertainment as before. The master of the family had a steward whom he highly prized, and told them how happy he accounted himself in having such a faithful servant. Next morning he sent this his steward with them part of their way, to direct them therein. As they were going over the bridge the angel flung the steward into the river and drowned him. The last night they came to a very wicked man's house, where they had very untoward entertainment, yet the angel, next morning, gave him the cup of gold. All this being done, the angel asked the hermit whether he understood those things? He answered, his doubts of providence were increased, not resolved, for he could not understand why he should deal so hardly with those holy men, who received them with so much love and joy, and yet give such a gift to that wicked man who used them so unworthily. The angel said, I will now expound these things unto you. The first house where we came the master of it was a holy man; yet, drinking in that cup every morning, it being too large, it did somewhat unfit him for holy duties, though not so much that others or himself did perceive it; so I took it away, since it is better for him to lose the cup of gold than his temperance. The master of the family where we lay the second night was a man given much to prayer and meditation, and spent much time in holy duties, and was very liberal to the poor all the time he was childless; but as soon as he had a son he grew so fond of it, and spent so much time in playing with it, that he exceedingly neglected his former holy exercise, and gave but little to the poor, thinking he could never lay up enough for his child; therefore I have taken the infant to heaven, and left him to serve God better upon earth. The steward whom I did drown had plotted to kill his master the night following; and as to that wicked man to whom I gave the cup of gold, he was to have nothing in the other world, I therefore gave him something in this, which, notwithstanding, will prove a snare to him, for he will be more intemperate; and "let him that is filthy be filthy still." The truth of this story I affirm not, but the moral is very

good, for it shows that God is an indulgent Father to the saints when he most afflicts them; and that when he sets the wicked on high he sets them also in slippery places, and their prosperity is their ruin. Proverbs i. 32.—*Thomas White, in "A Treatise of the Power of Godliness."* 1658.

Verse 17.—*"Their end."* Providence is often mysterious and a source of perplexity to us. Walking in Hyde Park one day, I saw a piece of paper on the grass. I picked it up; it was a part of a letter; the beginning was wanting, the end was not there; I could make nothing of it. Such is providence. You cannot see beginning or end, only a part. When you can see the whole, then the mystery will be unveiled.—*Thomas Jones.* 1871.

Verse 18.—*"Slippery places."* The word in the original signifies *slick*, or *smooth*, as ice or polished marble, and is from thence by a metaphor used for flattery. Hence, Abenezra renders it, *In locis adulationis posuisti eos*: thou hast set them in places of flattery.—*Edward Parry.*

Verse 18.—They are but exalted, as the shellfish by the eagle, according to the naturalists, to be thrown down on some rock and devoured. Their most glorious prosperity is but like a rainbow, which showeth itself for a little time in all its gaudy colours, and then vanisheth. The Turks, considering the unhappy end of their viziers, use this proverb, "He that is in the greatest office is but a statue of glass." Wicked men walk on glass or ice, "thou hast set them in slippery places;" on a sudden their feet slip—they fall, and break their necks.—*George Swinnoek.*

Verses 18, 20.—Their banqueting-house is very *slippery*, and the feast itself a mere dream.—*Thomas Adams.*

Verse 19.—*"They are utterly consumed with terrors."* Their destruction is not only sudden, but entire; it is like the breaking in pieces of a potter's vessel, a sherd of which cannot be gathered up and used; or like the casting of a millstone into the sea, which will never rise more; and this is done "with terrors," either by terrible judgments inflicted on them from without, or with terrors inwardly seizing upon their minds and consciences, as at the time of temporal calamities, or at death, and certainly at the judgment, when the awful sentence will be pronounced upon them. See Job xxvii. 20.—*John Gill.*

Verse 19.—If thou shouldst live the longest measure of time that any man hath done, and spend all that time in nothing but pleasures (which no man ever did but met with some crosses, afflictions, or sicknesses), but at the evening of this life must take up the lodging in the "everlasting burnings" and "devouring fire" (Isaiah xxx. 14); were those pleasures answerable to these everlasting burnings? An English merchant that lived at Dantzic, now with God, told us this story, and it was true. A friend of his (a merchant also), upon what grounds I know not, went to a convent, and dined with some friars. His entertainment was very noble. After he had dined and seen all, the merchant fell to commending their pleasant lives: "Yea," said one of the friars to him, "we live gallantly indeed, had we anybody to go to hell for us when we die."—*Giles Firmin* (1617—1617), in *"The Real Christian, or, A Treatise of Effectual Calling."*

Verse 20.—*"As a dream when one awaketh."* The conception is rather subtle, but seems to have been shrewdly penetrated by Shakspeare, who makes the Plantagenet prince (affecting, perhaps, the airs of a ruler in God's stead) say to his discarded favourite—

"I have long dreamt of such a kind of man,
So surfeit-swelled, so old and so profane,
But being awake I do despise my dream."

Henry IV.

For as it is the inertness of the sleeper's will and intellect that gives reality to the shapes and figments, the very sentiments and purposes that throng his mind; so it seems, as it were, to be the negligence and oversight of the Moral Ruler that makes to prosper the wicked or inane life and influence. So Paul says, in reference to the polytheism of the ancient world: "and the times of this ignorance God winked at." Acts xvii. 30.—*C. B. Cayley, in "The Psalms in Metre."* 1860.

Verse 21.—*"Thus my heart was grieved,"* etc. Two similitudes are used, by which his grief and indignation or zeal are described. First, he says his heart boiled over like yeast. The passion which was stirred up in his thoughts he compares to

the yeast which inflates the whole mass, and causes it to swell or boil over. . . . The other simile is taken from the internal pains which *calculi* produce: "*I was pricked in my reins.*" They who have felt them are aware of the torture, and there is no need for a long description. It signifies that his great pain was mingled with indignation, and that this came fresh upon him as often as he looked upon the prosperity of the ungodly.—*Mollerus*.

Verse 21.—"Reins." Before all the other intestines there are the kidneys (רִיבֵּי, νεφροί), placed on both sides of the lumbar vertebræ on the hinder wall of the abdomen, of which the Scripture makes such frequent mention, and in the most psychically significant manner. It brings the tenderest and the most inward experience of a manifold kind into association with them. When man is suffering most deeply within, he is pricked in his kidneys ("reins"). When fretting affliction overcomes him, his kidneys are cloven asunder (Job xvi. 13; compare Lam. iii. 13); when he rejoices profoundly, they exult (Prov. xxiii. 16); when he feels himself very penetratingly warned, they chasten him (Psalm xvi. 7); when he very earnestly longs, they are consumed away with his body (Job xix. 27); As the omniscient and all-penetrating knower of the most secret hidden things of man, God is frequently called (from Psalm vii. 10 to the Apocalypse) the Trier of the hearts and reins; and of the ungodly it is said, that God is far from their reins (Jeremiah xii. 2), that is, that he, being withdrawn back into himself, allows not himself to be perceived by them.—*Franz Delitzsch*.

Verse 22.—"So foolish was I, and ignorant," etc. Is not a cavilling spirit at the Lord's dispensations bad, both in its roots and fruits? What are the roots of it but (1) ignorance; (2) pride, this lifteth up (Heb. ii. 4); (3) impatience, or want of waiting on God to see the issues of matters; so in Jonah iv. 8—11; (4) forgetfulness who the Lord is, and who man is that grumbles at his Maker, Lam. iii. 39, Rom. ix. 20. And as for the fruits, they are none of the best, but bad enough. Men are ready to flag in duty, yea, to throw it off, ver. 13, and Mal. iii. 14; yea, in the way to blaspheme God; see Job ii. 9; Mal. iii. 13; Rev. xvi. 9.—*Thomas Crane*, in "*A Prospect of Divine Providence.*" 1672.

Verse 22.—"I was as a beast before thee." I permitted my mind to be wholly occupied with sensible things, like the beasts that perish, and did not look into a future state, nor did I consider nor submit to the wise designs of an unerring providence.—*Adam Clarke*.

Verse 22.—"I was as a beast before thee." The original has in it no word of comparison; it ought to be rather translated, "*I was a very beast before thee,*" and we are told that the Hebrew word being in the plural number, gives it a peculiar emphasis, indicating some monstrous or astonishing beast. It is the word used by Job which is interpreted "behemoth,"—"I was a very monster before thee," not only a beast, but one of the most brutish of all beasts, one of the most stubborn and intractable of all beasts. I think no man can go much lower than this in humble confession. This is a description of human nature, and of the old man in the renewed saint, which is not to be excelled.—*C. H. S.*

Verse 22.—Among the many arguments to prove the penmen of the Scripture inspired by the Spirit of God, this is not the last and least—that the penmen of holy writ do record their own faults and the faults of their dearest and nearest relatives. For instance hereof, how coarsely doth David speak of himself: "*So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee.*" And do you think that the face of St. Paul did look the more foul by being drawn with his own pencil, when he says, "*I was a murderer, a persecutor, the greatest of sinners,*" etc. This is not usual in the writings of human authors, who praise themselves to the utmost of what they could, and rather than lose a drop of applause they will lick it up with their own tongues. Tully writes very copiously in setting forth the good service which he did the Roman state, but not a word of his covetousness, of his affecting popular applause, of his pride and vain glory, of his mean extraction and the like. Whereas, clean contrary, Moses sets down the sin and punishment of his own sister, the idolatry and superstition of Aaron his brother, and his own fault in his preposterous striking the rock, for which he was excluded the land of Canaan.—*Thomas Fuller*.

Verse 23.—"I am continually with thee," as a child under the tender care of a parent; and as a parent, during my danger of falling in a slippery path, "*thou hast holden me, thy child, by my right hand.*"—*George Horne*.

Verse 23.—“*I am continually with thee.*” He does not say that the Lord is continually with “his people,” and holds, and guides, and receives them; he says, “He is continually with me; He holds me; He will guide me; He will receive me.” The man saw, and felt, and rejoiced in his own personal interest in God’s care and love. And he did this (mark), in the very midst of affliction, with “flesh and heart failing;” and in spite too of many wrong and opposite, and sinful feelings, that had just passed away; under a conviction of his own sinfulness and folly, and, as he calls it, even “brutishness.” Oh! it is a blessed thing, brethren, to have a faith like this.—*Charles Bradley.* 1838.

Verse 23.—“*I am still with thee.*” The word translated *still* properly means *always*, and denotes that there had been no change or interruption in the previous relation of the parties. There is a perfectly analogous usage of the French *toujours*.—*Joseph Addison Alexander.*

Verse 24.—“*Thou shalt guide me.*” How are we to work our way in strange lands, if left entirely to our own resources? Hence it is, that so much is said in the Bible about guides, and that the Lord is called the guide of his people. They are in a foreign land, a land of pits and snares; and, without a good guide, they will be sure to fall into the one, or be caught in the other. “This God is our God, for ever and ever,” said the Psalmist; and not only so, but he *condescends* to “be our guide, and will be, even unto death” (Psalm xlviii. 14). Can we have a *better* guide? When a guide has been well recommended to us by those who have tried him, it is our wisdom to place ourselves unreservedly in his hands; and if he says our way lies to the right, it would show our folly to say we were determined to go to the left.—*John Gadsby.*

Verse 24.—“*Guide*” . . . “*receive.*” After conversion, God still works with us: he doth not only give grace, but actual help in the work of obedience: “He worketh all our works in us,” Isa. xxvi. 12. His actual help is necessary to direct, quicken, strengthen, protect and defend us. In our way to heaven, we need not only a rule and path, but a guide. The rule is the *law* of God; but the guide is the *Spirit* of God.—*Thomas Manton.*

Verse 24.—“*Afterward.*” After all our toil in labour and duty, after all our crosses and afflictions, after all our doubts and fears that we should never receive it; after all the hidings of his face, and clouds and darkness that have passed over us; and after all our battles and fightings for it, oh, then how seasonably will the reception of this reward come in: “*Thou wilt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.*” O blessed *afterwards*; when all your work is done, when all your doubts and fears are over, and when all your battles are fought; then, Oh then, ye shall receive the reward.—*John Spalding.*

Verse 24.—“*Receive me to glory.*” Mendelssohn in his *Beor*, has perceived the probable allusion in this clause to the translation of Enoch. Of Enoch it is said, (Gen. v. 24.) לקח אלהים אלהים, “God took him.” Here (Psalm lxxlii. 24), the Psalmist writes, קיבר אלהים. “Thou shalt take me to glory, or gloriously.” In another (Psalm xlix. 16) we read, כי ירצה. “For he (God) shall take me.” I can hardly think that the two latter expressions were written and read in their context by Jews without reference to the former.—*Thomas Thomason Peroune.*

Verse 25.—“*Whom have I in heaven but thee,*” etc. How small is the number of those who keep their affections fixed on God alone! We see how superstition joins to him many others as rivals for our affections. While the Papists admit in word that all things depend upon God, they are, nevertheless, constantly seeking to obtain help from this and the other quarter independent of him.—*John Calvin.*

Verse 25.—It pleased David, and it pleases all the saints, more that God is their salvation, whether temporal or eternal, than that he saves them. The saints look more at God than at all that is God’s. They say, *Non tua, sed te; we desire not thee, but thee, or nothing of thine like thee.* “*Whom have I in heaven but thee?*” saith David. What are saints? what are angels, to a soul without God? ‘Tis true of things as well as of persons. What have we in heaven but God? What’s joy without God? What’s glory without God? What’s all the furniture and riches, all the delicacies, yea, and all the diadems of heaven, without the God of heaven? If God should say to the saints, Here is heaven, take it amongst you, but I will withdraw myself, how would they weep over heaven itself, and make it a *Baca*, a valley of tears indeed. Heaven is not heaven unless we enjoy God. ‘Tis the

presence of God which makes heaven: glory is but our nearest being unto God. As Mephibosheth replied, when David told him, "I have said, thou and Ziba divide the land:" "Let him take all, if he will," saith Mephibosheth, I do not so much regard the land as I regard thy presence; "Let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace to his own house," where I may enjoy him. So if God should say to the saints, Take heaven amongst you, and withdraw himself, they would even say, Nay, let the world take heaven, if they will, if we may not have thee in heaven, heaven will be but an earth, or rather but a hell to us. That which saints rejoice in, is that they may be in the presence of God, that they may sit at his table, and eat bread with him; that is, that they may be near him continually, which was Mephibosheth's privilege with David. That's the thing which they desire and which their souls thirst after; that's the wine they would drink. "My soul," saith David (Psalm xlii. 2), "thirsteth for God, for the living God; when" (methinks the time is very long, when) "shall I come and appear before God?"—*Joseph Caryl.*

Verses 25, 26.—Gotthold was invited to an entertainment, and had the hope held out that he would meet with a friend whom he loved, and in whose society he took the greatest delight. On joining the party, however, he learned that, owing to some unforeseen occurrence, this friend was not to be present, and felt too much chagrined to take any share in the hilarity. The circumstance afterwards led him into the following train of thought: The pious soul, that sincerely loves and fervently longs for the Lord Jesus, experiences what I lately did. She seeks her Beloved in all places, objects, and events. If she find him, who is happier? If she find him not, who more disconsolate? Ah! Lord Jesus, thou best of friends, thou art the object of my love; my soul seeketh thee, my heart lengtheneth after thee. What care I for the world, with all its pleasures and pomps, its power and glory, unless I find thee in it? What care I for the daintiest food, the sweetest drinks, and the merriest company, unless thou art present, and unless I can dip my morsel in thy wounds, sweeten my draught with thy grace, and hear thy pleasant words. Verily, my Saviour, were I even in heaven, and did not find thee there, it would seem to me no heaven at all. Wherefore, Lord Jesus, when with tears, sighs, yearnings of heart, and patient hope, I seek thee, hide not thyself from me, but suffer me to find thee; for, "Lord! whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."—*Christian Sriver.*

Verse 26.—"*My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*" In which words we may take notice of five things. I. The order inverted. When he mentions his malady he begins with the failing of the flesh, and then of the heart; but when he reports the relief he begins with that of the heart. From hence observe that *when God works a cure in man (out of love) he begins with the heart—he cures that first.* And there may be these reasons for it. 1. Because the sin of the heart is often the procuring cause of the malady of body and soul. 2. The body ever fares the better for the soul, but not the soul for the body. 3. The cure of the soul is the principal cure. II. The suitability of the remedy to the malady. Strength of heart for failing of heart, and a blessed portion for the failing of the flesh. Observe, that *there is a proportionate remedy and relief in God for all maladies and afflictions whatsoever, both within and without. If your hearts fail you, God is strength; if your flesh fails you, or comforts fail you, God is a portion.* III. The prophet's interest; he calls God his portion. Observe, that *true Israelites have an undoubted interest in God:—He is theirs.* IV. The prophet's experience in the worst time. He finds this to be true, that when communicated strength fails, there is a never-failing strength in God. Observe, that *Christians' experiences of God's all-sufficiency are then fullest and highest when created comforts fail them.* V. There is the prophet's improvement of his experience for support and comfort against future trials and temptations. Observe, that *a saint's consideration of his experience of God's all-sufficiency in times of exigency, is enough to bear up and to fortify his spirit against all trials and temptations for the time to come.* Thus you may improve the text by way of observation; but there are two principal doctrines to be insisted on. First, that God is the rock of a saint's heart, his strength and his portion for ever. Secondly, that divine influence and relief passeth from

God to his people when they stand in most need thereof. 1st. God is the rock of a saint's heart, strength, and portion for ever. Here are two members or branches in this doctrine. 1. That God is the rock of a saint's heart, strength. 2. That God is the portion of a saint. Branch 1. God is the rock of a saint's heart, strength. He is not only strength, and the strength of their hearts, but the rock of their strength; so Isalah xvii. 10. Psalm lxii. 7, ⁷⁹, the same word that is used in the text, from hence comes our English word "sure." Explication. God is the rock of our strength, both in respect of our naturals and also of our spirituals: he is the strength of nature and of grace (Psalm xxvii. 1); the strength of my life natural and spiritual. God is the strength of thy natural faculties—of reason and understanding, of wisdom and prudence, of will and affections. He is the strength of all thy graces, faith, patience, meekness, temperance, hope, and charity; both as to their being and exercise. He is the strength of all thy comfort and courage, peace and happiness, salvation and glory. Psalm cxi. 7. "O God, the rock of my salvation." In three respects. 1st. He is the author and giver of all strength. Psalm xviii. 32: "It is God that girdeth me with strength." Psalm xxiv. 11: "He will give strength to his people." Psalm cxxxviii. 3; Psalm lxxviii. 35. 2ndly. He is the increaser and perfecter of a saint's strength; it is God that makes a saint strong and mighty both to do and suffer, to bear and forbear, to believe and to hope to the end; so Hebrews xi. 34: "Out of weakness they were made strong;" so 1 John ii. 14. And therefore is that prayer of Peter, 1 Peter v. 10. 3rdly. He is the preserver of your strength; your life is laid up in God. Col. iii. 3. Your strength is kept by the strength of God; so Psalm xci. 1. God doth overshadow the strength of saints, that no breach can be made upon it. Psalm lxiii. 7. "In the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice."—Samuel Blackerby. 1673.

Verse 26.—Oh, strange logic! Grace hath learned to deduce strong conclusions out of weak premises, and happy out of sad. If the major be, "My flesh and my heart faileth;" and the minor, "There is no blossom in the fig-tree, nor fruit in the vine," etc.; yet his conclusion is firm and undeniable: "The Lord is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever;" or, "Yet will I rejoice in the God of my salvation." And if there be more in the conclusion than in the premises, it is the better; God comes even in the conclusion.—John Sheffield, in "The Rising Sun." 1654.

Verse 26.—"My flesh and my heart faileth." They who take the expression in a bad sense, take it to be a confession of his former sin, and to have relation to the combat mentioned in the beginning of the Psalm, between the flesh and the spirit; as if he said, I was so surfeited with self-conceitdness that I presumed to arraign divine actions at the bar of human reason, and to judge the stick under water crooked by the eye of my sense, when, indeed, it was straight; but now I see that flesh is no fit judge in matters of faith; that neither my flesh nor heart can determine rightly of God's dispensations, nor hold out uprightly under Satan's temptations; for if God had not supported me my flesh had utterly supplanted me: "My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart." Flesh is sometimes taken for corrupt nature. Gal. v. 13. First, because it is propagated by the flesh (John iii. 6); secondly, because it is executed by the flesh (Rom. vii. 25); thirdly, because corruption is nourished, strengthened, and increased by the flesh. 1 John ii. 16. They who take the words in a good sense, do not make them look back so far as to the beginning of the Psalm, but only to the neighbour verse.—George Swinnoek.

Verse 26.—"God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." The Hebrew carrieth it, but God is the rock of my heart, i.e., a sure, strong, and immoveable foundation to build upon. Though the winds may blow, and the waves beat, when the storm of death cometh, yet I need not fear that the house of my heart will fall, for it is built on a sure foundation: God is the rock of my heart. The strongest child that God hath is not able to stand alone; like the hop or ivy, he must have somewhat to support him, or he is presently on the ground. Of all seasons, the Christian hath most need of succour at his dying hour; then he must take his leave of all his comforts on earth, and then he shall be sure of the sharpest conflicts from hell, and, therefore, it is impossible he should hold out without extraordinary help from heaven. But the Psalmist had armour of proof ready, wherewith to encounter his last enemy. As weak and fearful a child as he was, he durst venture a walk in the dark entry of death, having his Father by the hand: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me," Psalm xxiii. Though at the troubles of my life, and my

trial at death, my heart is ready to fail me, yet I have a strong cordial which will cheer me in my saddest condition: "*God is the strength of my heart.*"

"*And my portion.*" It is a metaphor taken from the ancient custom among the Jews, of dividing inheritances, whereby every one had his allotted portion; as if he had said, God is not only my rock to defend me from those tempests which assault me, and, thereby, my freedom from evil; but he is also my portion, to supply my necessities, and to give me the fruition of all good. Others, indeed, have their parts on this side the land of promise, but the author of all portions is the matter of my portion. My portion doth not lie in the rubbish and lumber, as theirs doth whose portion is in this life, be they never so large; but my portion containeth him whom the heavens, and heaven of heavens, can never contain. God is the strength of my heart, and my portion "*for ever*;" not for a year, or an age, or a million of ages, but for eternity. Though others' portions, like roses, the fuller they blow, the sooner they shed; they are worsted often by their pride, and wasted through their prodigality, so that at last they come to want—and surely death always rends their persons and portions asunder; yet my portion will be ever full, without diminution. Without alteration, this God will be my God for ever and ever, my guide and aid unto death; nay, death, which dissolveth so many bonds, and untie such close knots, shall never part me and my portion, but give me a perfect and everlasting possession of it.—*George Swinock.*

Verse 28.—"*It is good for me to draw near to God.*" When he saith '*tis good*, his meaning is '*tis best*. This positive is superlative. It is more than good for us to draw nigh to God at all times, it is best for us to do so, and it is at our utmost peril not to do so; "*For, lo,*" saith the Psalmist (verse 27), "*they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee.*" It is dangerous to be far from God, but it is more dangerous to go far from him. Every man is far off by nature, and wicked men go further off: the former *shall perish*, the latter *shall be destroyed*. He that fares best in his withdrawals from God, fares bad enough; therefore, it is best for us to draw nigh unto God. He is the best friend at all times, and the only friend at sometimes. And may we not say that God suffers and orders evil times, and the withdrawals of the creature, for that very end, that we might draw nearer unto him? Doth he not give up the world to a spirit of reviling and mocking that he may stir up in his people a spirit of prayer?—*Joseph Caryl.*

Verse 28.—"*It is good*;" that is, it puts in us a blessed quality and disposition. It makes a man to be like God himself; and, secondly, "*it is good*," that is, it is comfortable; for it is the happiness of the creature to be near the Creator; it is beneficial and helpful. "*To draw near.*" How can a man but be near to God, seeing he filleth heaven and earth: "*Whither shall I go from thy presence?*" Psalm cxxxix. 7. He is present always in power and providence in all places, but graciously present with some by his Spirit, supporting, comforting, strengthening the heart of a good man. As the soul is said to be *tota in toto*, in several parts by several faculties, so God, is present to all, but in a diverse manner. Now we are said to be near to God in divers degrees: *first*, when our *understanding is enlightened*; *intellectus est veritatis sponsa*; and so the young man speaking discreetly in things concerning God, is said not to be far from the kingdom of God, Mark xii. 34. *Secondly, in minding*: when God is present to our minds, so that the soul is said to be present to that which it mindeth; contrarily it is said of the wicked, that "*God is not in all their thoughts,*" Psalm x. 4. *Thirdly, when the will upon the discovery of the understanding comes to choose the better part, and is drawn from that choice to cleave to him*, as it was said of Jonathan's heart, "*it was knit to David,*" 1 Sam. xviii. 1. *Fourthly, when our whole affections are carried to God*, loving him as the chief good. Love is the firstborn affection. That breeds desire of communion with God. Thence comes joy in him, so that the soul pants after God, "*as the hart after the water springs,*" Psalm xli. 1. *Fifthly, and especially, when the soul is touched with the Spirit of God working faith*, stirring up dependence, confidence, and trust on God. Hence ariseth sweet communion. The soul is never at rest till it rests on him. Then it is afraid to break with him or to displease him; but it groweth zealous and resolute, and hot in love, stiff in good cases; resolute against his enemies. And yet this is not all, for God will have also the outward man, so as the whole man must present itself before God in word, in sacraments; speak of him and to him with reverence, and yet with strength of affection mounting up in prayer,

as in a fiery chariot ; hear him speak to us ; consulting with his oracles ; fetching comforts against distresses, directions against maladies. *Sixthly*, and especially, we draw near to him *when we praise him* ; for this is the work of the souls departed and of the angels in heaven, that are continually near unto him. The prophet here saith, "*It is good for me.*" How came he to know this ? Why, he had found it by experience, and by it he was thoroughly convinced.—*Richard Sibbes*.

Verse 28.—"To draw near to God." It is not one isolated act. It is not merely turning to God, and saying, "I have come to him." The expression is "*draw.*" It is not a single act ; it is the drawing, the coming, the habitual walk, going on, and on, and on, so long as we are on earth. It is, therefore, an habitual religion which must be pressed and enforced upon us.—*Montagu Villiers*. 1855.

Verse 28.—"To draw near to God." To draw near to God, I. A man should make his peace with God, in and through the Mediator Jesus Christ ; for, until once that be done, a man must be said to be far from God, and there is a partition-wall standing betwixt God and him. It is the same with that advice given by Eliphaz to Job : "*Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace : thereby good shall come unto thee,*" Job xxii. 21. Be friends with God, and all shall be well with you. II. It is to seek more after communion and fellowship with God, and to pursue after intimacy and familiarity with him ; and to have more of his blessed company with us in our ordinary walk and conversation ; according to that word, "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound : they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance," Psalm lxxxix. 15. III. As it stands here in the text, it is the expression of one who hath made up his peace already, and is on good terms with God ; and doth differ a little from what the words absolutely imply ; and so we may take it thus, I. It implies the confirming or making sure our interest in God, and so it supposeth the man's peace to be made with God ; for, whoever be the author of this Psalm, it supposeth he has made his peace ; and, therefore, in the following words it is subjoined, "*I have put my trust in the Lord,*" etc. ; that is, I have trusted my soul unto God, and made my peace with him through a mediator. It is "*good,*" whatever comes, it is always "*good*" to be "*near to God,*" that way, and to be made sure in him. II. It implies to be more conformed unto the image of God, and, therefore, this nearness to him is opposed to that of being far from God. It is good, says he, to draw near to God in my duty ; when so many are far from him. III. It implies, to lay by all things in the world, and to seek fellowship and communion with God, and to be more set apart for his blessed company, and to walk with him in a dependence upon him as the great burden-bearer, as he who is to be all in all unto us. In a word, to draw near unto God, is to make our peace with him, and to secure and confirm that peace with him, and to study a conformity unto him, and to be near unto him in our walk and conversation ; in our fellowship, and whole carriage, and deportment, to be always near unto him.—*William Guthrie*.

Verse 28.—The Epicurean, says Augustine, is wont to say, *It is good for me to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh* : The Stoic is wont to say, *For me it is good to enjoy the pleasures of the mind* : The Apostle used to say (not in words, but in sense), *It is good for me to cleave to God.*—*Lorinus*.

Verse 28.—"The Lord God." The names "*The Lord Jehovah*" are a combination expressive of God's sovereignty, self-existence, and covenant relation to his people.—*Joseph Addison Alexander*.

HINTS TO PREACHERS.

Whole Psalm.—It containeth the godly man's *trial*, in the former part of it, and his *triumph*, in the latter part of it. We have, I. The grievous conflict between the flesh and the spirit, to the 15th verse. II. The glorious conquest of the spirit over the flesh, to the end.—*G. Swinnoek*.

Whole Psalm.—I. The cause of his distemper. II. The cure of it. III. The Psalmist's carriage after it.—*G. Swinnoek*.

Verse 1.—The true Israel, the great blessing, and the sureness of it : or, the proposition of the text expounded, enforced, and applied.

Verse 1 (first clause).—Israel's receipts from God are, I. For quantity, the greatest; II. For variety, the choicest; III. For quality, the sweetest; IV. For security, the surest; V. For duration, the most lasting.—*Simeon Ash.*

Verse 2.—I. How far a believer may fall. II. How far he shall not fall. III. What fears are and what are not allowable.

Verse 2.—A retrospect of our slips; prospect of future danger; present preparation for it.

Verse 4.—Quiet deaths: the cases of the godly and ungodly distinguished by the causes of the quiet, and the unreliableness of mere feelings shown.

Verse 5.—The bastard's portion contrasted with that of the true son.

Verse 7.—The dangers of opulence and luxury.

Verse 8.—Connection between a corrupt heart and a proud tongue.

Verse 10.—I. The believer's cup is bitter. II. It is full. III. Its contents are varied "waters." IV. It is but a "cup," measured and limited. V. It is the cup of "his people," and, consequently, works good in the highest degree.

Verse 11.—The atheist's open question; the oppressor's practical question; the careless man's secret question; and the fearful saint's fainting question. The reasons why it is ever asked, and the conclusive reasons which put the matter beyond question.

Verse 12.—This verse suggests solemn enquiries for persons who are growing rich.

Verse 14.—The frequent and even constant chastisements of the righteous; the necessity and design thereof; and the consolations connected therewith.

Verse 15.—How we may bring injury on the saints; why we should avoid so doing, and how.

Verse 17.—I. Entrance into the place of fellowship with God, its privileges, and the way thereto. II. Lessons learned in that hallowed place; the text mentions one. III. Practical influence of the fellowship, and the instruction.

Verses 17, 18.—The sinner's end; See "Spurgeon's Sermons," No. 486.

Verse 18.—"Thou didst set them in slippery places." I. It implies that they were always exposed to sudden, unexpected destruction. As he that walks in slippery places is every moment liable to fall, he cannot foresee one moment whether he shall stand or fall the next; and when he does fall, he falls at once without warning. II. They are liable to fall of themselves, without being thrown down by the hand of another; as he that stands or walks on slippery ground needs nothing but his own weight to throw him down. III. There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell but the mere pleasure of God.—*Jonathan Edwards.*

Verse 19.—The first sight and sense of hell by a proud and wealthy sinner, who has just died in peace.

Verses 18—20.—The end of the wicked is, I. Near: "Thou hast set," etc. It may happen at any time. II. Judicial: "Thou bringest," etc. III. Sudden: "How are they," etc. IV. Tormenting: "They are utterly consumed," etc. V. Eternal: Left to themselves; gone from the mind of God; and disregarded as a dream when one awaketh. No after act respecting them, either for deliverance or annihilation.—*G. R.*

Verse 20.—The contemptible object:—a self-righteous, or boastful, or persecuting, or cavilling, or wealthy sinner when his soul is called before God.

Verse 22.—Our folly, ignorance, and brutishness. When displayed. What effect the fact should have upon us; and how greatly it illustrates divine grace.

Verse 23.—I. God does not forsake his people when they forsake him: "Nevertheless I am continually," etc. II. God does not lose his hold on them when they lose their hold on him: "Nevertheless thou hast holden," etc.—*G. R.*

Verses 22—25. I. The Psalmist's confession concerning the flesh. II. The faithful expressions of the spirit. III. The conclusion of the whole matter. See "Spurgeon's Sermons," No. 467.

Verses 23, 24.—I. What he says of the present: "I am continually with thee." II. What he says of the past: "Thou hast holden me," etc. III. What he says of the future: "Thou shalt guide," etc.—*W. Jay.*

Verses 23, 24.—Communion, upholding, on-leading, reception to glory, four glorious privileges; especially as bestowed on one who was grieved, foolish, ignorant, and a beast. Note the contrasts.

Verse 24.—The Enoch walk, and the Enoch reception into glory.

Verse 25.—God the best portion of the Christian.—*Jonathan Edwards' Works*, Vol. II., pp. 104—7.

Verse 25.—Heaven and earth ransacked to find a joy equal to the Lord himself. Let the preacher take up various joys and show the inferiority.

Verse 26.—I. The Psalmist's complaint: "My flesh and my heart falleth." II. His comfort: "But God," etc. Or, we may take notice, I. Of the frailty of his flesh. II. Of the flourishing of his faith. Doctrine 1. That man's flesh will fail him. The highest, the holiest man's heart will not always hold out. The prophet was great and gracious, yet his flesh failed him. Doctrine 2. That it is the comfort of a Christian, in his saddest condition, that God is his portion.—*G. Swinnoek*.

Verse 26.—"The Fading of the Flesh."—*Swinnoek's Treatise*. [*Nichol's Puritan Series*.]

Verse 26.—Where we fail and where we cannot fail.

Verse 27.—I. The sad conditions. II. The terrible punishments. III. The implied consolations.

Verse 28.—To draw near to God is our wisdom, our honour, our safety, our peace, our riches.—*Thomas Watson's Sermon*, "The Happiness of Drawing near to God." 1669. See also, "The Saint's Happiness," *R. Sibbes's Sermon*.

Verse 28.—David's conclusion; or, the saint's resolution.—*R. Sibbes*.

Verse 28.—I. The language of prayer: "It is good," etc. II. Of faith: "I have put," etc. III. Of praise: "That I may declare."—*G. R.*

Verse 28.—See "Spurgeon's Sermons," Nos. 287—8, "Let us pray." No. 879, "An assuredly good thing."