

PSALM CXXV.

TITLE.—A Song of Degrees. *Another step is taken in the ascent, another station in the pilgrimage is reached: certainly a rise in the sense is here perceptible, since full assurance concerning years to come is a higher form of faith than the ascription of former escapes to the Lord. Faith has praised Jehovah for past deliverances, and here she rises to a confident joy in the present and future safety of believers. She asserts that they shall for ever be secure who trust themselves with the Lord. We can imagine the pilgrims chanting this song when perambulating the city walls.*

We do not assert that David wrote this Psalm, but we have as much ground for doing so as others have for declaring that it was written after the captivity. It would seem probable that all the Pilgrim Psalms were composed, or, at least, compiled by the same writer, and as some of them are certainly by David, there is no conclusive reason for taking away the rest from him.

DIVISION.—*First we have a song of holy confidence (1, 2); then a promise, 3; followed by a prayer, 4; and a note of warning.*

EXPOSITION.

THEY that trust in the LORD *shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.*

2 *As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever.*

3 *For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous; lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity.*

4 *Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts.*

5 *As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity: but peace shall be upon Israel.*

1. "*They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion.*" The emphasis lies upon the object of their trust, namely, Jehovah the Lord. What a privilege to be allowed to repose in God! How condescending is Jehovah to become the confidence of his people! To trust elsewhere is vanity; and the more implicit such misplaced trust becomes the more bitter will be the ensuing disappointment; but to trust in the living God is sanctified common sense which needs no excuse, its result shall be its best vindication. There is no conceivable reason why we should not trust in Jehovah, and there is every possible argument for so doing; but, apart from all argument, the end will prove the wisdom of the confidence. The result of faith is not occasional and accidental; its blessing comes, not to some who trust, but to all who trust in the Lord. Trusters in Jehovah shall be as fixed, firm, and stable as the mount where David dwelt, and where the ark abode. To move mount Zion was impossible: the mere supposition was absurd. "*Which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.*" Zion was the image of eternal steadfastness,—this hill which, according to the Hebrew, "*sits to eternity,*" neither bowing down nor moving to and fro. Thus doth the trusting worshipper of Jehovah enjoy a restfulness which is the mirror of tranquillity; and this not without cause, for his hope is sure, and of his confidence he can never be ashamed. As the Lord sitteth King for ever, so do his people sit enthroned in perfect peace when their trust in him is firm. This is, and is to be our portion; we are, we have been, we shall be as steadfast as the hill of God. Zion cannot be removed, and does not remove; so the people of God can neither be moved passively nor actively, by force from without or fickleness from within. Faith in God is a settling and establishing virtue; he who by his strength setteth fast the mountains, by that same power stays the hearts of them that trust in him. This steadfastness will endure "*for ever,*" and we may be assured

therefore that no believer shall perish either in life or in death, in time or in eternity. We trust in an eternal God, and our safety shall be eternal.

2. "*As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever.*" The hill of Zion is the type of the believer's constancy, and the surrounding mountains are made emblems of the all-surrounding presence of the Lord. The mountains around the holy city, though they do not make a circular wall, are, nevertheless, set like sentinels to guard her gates. God doth not enclose his people within ramparts and bulwarks, making their city to be a prison; but yet he so orders the arrangements of his providence that his saints are as safe as if they dwelt behind the strongest fortifications. What a double security the two verses set before us! First, we are established, and then entrenched: settled, and then sentinelled: made like a mount, and then protected as if by mountains. This is no matter of poetry, it is so in fact; and it is no matter of temporary privilege, but it shall be so for ever. Date when we please, "from henceforth" Jehovah encircles his people: look on us as far as we please, the protection extends "even for ever." Note, it is not said that Jehovah's power or wisdom defends believers, but he himself is round about them: they have his personality for their protection, his Godhead for their guard. We are here taught that the Lord's people are those who trust him, for they are thus described in the first verses: the line of faith is the line of grace, those who trust in the Lord are chosen of the Lord. The two verses together prove the eternal safety of the saints: they must abide where God has placed them, and God must for ever protect them from all evil. It would be difficult to imagine greater safety than is here set forth.

3. "*For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous.*" The people of God are not to expect immunity from trial because the Lord surrounds them, for they may feel the power and persecution of the ungodly. Isaac, even in Abraham's family, was mocked by Ishmael. Assyria laid its sceptre even upon Zion itself. The graceless often bear rule and wield the rod; and when they do so they are pretty sure to make it fall heavily upon the Lord's believing people, so that the godly cry out by reason of their oppressors. Egypt's rod was exceeding heavy upon Israel, but the time came for it to be broken. God has set a limit to the woes of his chosen: the rod may light on their portion, but it shall not rest upon it. The righteous have a lot which none can take from them, for God has appointed them heirs of it by gracious entail: on that lot the rod of the wicked may fall, but over that lot it cannot have lasting sway. The saints abide for ever, but their troubles will not. Here is a good argument in prayer for all righteous ones who are in the hands of the wicked.

"*Lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity.*" The tendency of oppression is to drive the best of men into some hasty deed for self-deliverance or vengeance. If the rack be too long used the patient sufferer may at last give way; and therefore the Lord puts a limit to the tyranny of the wicked. He ordained that an Israelite who deserved punishment should not be beaten without measure: forty stripes save one was the appointed limit. We may therefore expect that he will set a bound to the suffering of the innocent, and will not allow them to be pushed to the uttermost extreme. Especially in point of time he will limit the domination of the persecutor, for length adds strength to oppression, and makes it intolerable: hence the Lord himself said of a certain tribulation, "except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."

It seems that even righteous men are in peril of sinning in evil days, and that it is not the will of the Lord that they should yield to the stress of the times in order to escape from suffering. The power and influence of wicked men when they are uppermost are used to lead or drive the righteous astray; but the godly must not accept this as an excuse, and yield to the evil pressure; far rather must they resist with all their might till it shall please God to stay the violence of the persecutor, and give his children rest. This the Lord here promises to do in due time.

4. "*Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts.*" Men to be good at all must be good at heart. Those who trust in the Lord are good; for faith is the root of righteousness, and the evidence of uprightness. Faith in God is a good and upright thing, and its influence makes the rest of the man good and upright. To such God will do good: the prayer of the text is but another form of promise, for that which the Lord prompts us to ask he virtually promises to give. Jehovah will take off evil from his people, and in the place thereof

will enrich them with all manner of good. When the rod of the wicked is gone his own rod and staff shall comfort us. Meanwhile it is for us to pray that it may be well with all the upright who are now among men. God bless them, and do them good in every possible form. We wish well to those who do well. We are so plagued by the crooked that we would pour benedictions upon the upright.

5. "*As for such as turn aside unto their crooked ways, the LORD shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity.*" Two kinds of men are always to be found, the upright and the men of crooked ways. Alas, there are some who pass from one class to another, not by a happy conversion, turning from the twisting lanes of deceit into the highway of truth, but by an unhappy declension leaving the main road of honesty and holiness for the bypaths of wickedness. Such apostates have been seen in all ages, and David knew enough of them; he could never forget Saul, and Ahithophel, and others. How sad that men who once walked in the right way should turn aside from it! Observe the course of the falsehearted: first, they look out for crooked ways; next, they choose them and make them "*their crooked ways*"; and then they turn aside into them. They never intend to go back unto perdition, but only to make a curve and drop into the right road again. The straight way becomes a little difficult, and so they make a circumbendibus, which all along aims at coming out right, though it may a little deviate from precision. These people are neither upright in heart, nor good, nor trusters in Jehovah, and therefore the Lord will deal otherwise with them than with his own people: when execution day comes these hypocrites and time-servers shall be led out to the same gallows as the openly wicked. All sin will one day be expelled the universe, even as criminals condemned to die are led out of the city; then shall secret traitors find themselves ejected with open rebels. Divine truth will unveil their hidden pursuits, and lead them forth, and to the surprise of many they shall be set in the same rank with those who avowedly wrought iniquity.

"*But peace shall be upon Israel.*" In fact the execution of the deceivers shall tend to give the true Israel peace. When God is smiting the unfaithful not a blow shall fall upon the faithful. The chosen of the Lord shall not only be like Salem, but they shall have salem, or peace. Like a prince, Israel has prevailed with God, and therefore he need not fear the face of man; his wrestlings are over, the blessing of peace has been pronounced upon him. He who has peace with God may enjoy peace concerning all things. Bind the first and last verses together: Israel trusts in the Lord (verse 1), and Israel has peace (verse 5).

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS.

Whole Psalm.—In the degrees of Christian virtue, this Psalm represents the sixth step—the confidence which the Christian places in the Lord. "It teacheth us, while we ascend and raise our minds unto the Lord our God in loving charity and piety, not to fix our gaze upon men who are prosperous in the world with a false happiness."*—*H. T. Armfield, in "The Gradual Psalms," 1874.*

Whole Psalm.—This short Psalm may be summed up in those words of the prophet (Isaiah iii. 10, 11), "Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him." Thus are life and death, the blessing and the curse, set before us often in the Psalms, as well as in the law and in the prophets.—*Matthew Henry, 1662—1714.*

Verse 1.—"They that trust in the LORD." Note how he commandeth no work here to be done, but only speaketh of trust. In popery in the time of trouble men were taught to enter into some kind of religion, to fast, to go on pilgrimage, and to do such other foolish works of devotion, which they devised as an high service unto God, and thereby thought to make condign satisfaction for sin and to merit eternal life. But here the Psalmist leadeth us the plain way unto God, pronouncing this to be the chiefest anchor of our salvation,—only to hope and trust in the Lord;

and declaring that the greatest service that we can do unto God is to trust him. For this is the nature of God—to create all things of nothing. Therefore he createth and bringeth forth in death, life ; in darkness, light. Now to believe this is the essential nature and most special property of faith. When God then seeth such a one as agreeth with his own nature, that is, which believeth to find in danger help, in poverty riches, in sin righteousness, and that for God's own mercy's sake in Christ alone, him can God neither hate nor forsake.—*Martin Luther* (1483—1546), in "A Commentary on the Psalms of Degrees."

Verse 1.—"They that trust in the LORD." All that deal with God must deal upon trust, and he will give comfort to those only that give credit to him, and make it appear they do so by quitting other confidences, and venturing to the utmost for God. The closer our expectations are confined to God, the higher our expectations may be raised.—*Matthew Henry*.

Verse 1.—"They that trust," etc. Trust, therefore, in the Lord, *always, altogether, and for all things*.—*Robert Nisbet*, in "The Songs of the Temple Pilgrims," 1863.

Verse 1.—"Shall be as mount Zion." Some persons are like the sand—ever shifting and treacherous. See Matthew vii. 26. Some are like the sea—restless and unsettled. See Isaiah lvii. 20 ; James i. 6. Some are like the wind—uncertain and inconstant. See Ephesians iv. 14. Believers are like a mountain—strong, stable, and secure. To every soul that trusts him the Lord says, "Thou art Peter."—*W. H. J. Page*, 1883.

Verse 1.—"As mount Zion," etc.—Great is the stability of a believer's felicity.—*John Trapp*, 1601—1669.

Verse 1.—"Mount Zion, which cannot be removed," etc. Lieutenant Conder, reviewing Mr. Maudslay's important exploration, says, "It is especially valuable as showing that, however the masonry may have been destroyed and lost, we may yet hope to find indications of the ancient enceinte in the rock scarps which are imperishable." This is very true ; for, while man can destroy what man has made, the everlasting hills smile at his rage. Yet who can hear of it without perceiving the force and sublimity of that glorious description of the immobility of believers.

"They that trust in Jehovah are as mount Zion,
Which shall not be moved, it abideth for ever."

James Neil, in "Palestine Explored," 1882.

Verse 1.—"Cannot be removed," etc. They can never be removed from the Lord, though they may be removed from his house and ordinances, as sometimes David was ; and from his gracious presence, and sensible communion with him ; and out of the world by death : yet never from his heart's love, nor out of the covenant of his grace, which is sure and everlasting ; nor out of his family, into which they are taken ; nor from the Lord Jesus Christ, nor out of his hands and arms, nor from off his heart ; nor from off him, as the foundation on which they are laid ; nor out of a state of grace, either regeneration or justification ; but such abide in the love of God, in the covenant of his grace, in the hands of his Son, in the grace wherein they stand, and in the house of God for evermore.—*John Gill*, 1697—1771.

Verse 1.—"Abideth for ever." So surely as "Mount Zion" shall never be "removed," so surely shall the church of God be preserved. Is it not strange that wicked and idolatrous powers have not joined together, dug down this mount, and carried it into the sea, that they might nullify a promise in which the people of God exult ! Till ye can carry Mount Zion into the Mediterranean Sea, the church of Christ shall grow and prevail. Hear this, ye murderous Mohammedans !—*Adam Clarke*, 1760—1832.

Verse 1.—"Abideth." Literally, *sitteth* ; as spoken of a mountain, "lieth" or "is situated" ; but here with the following "for ever," used in a still stronger sense.—*J. J. Stewart Perowne*, 1868.

Verses 1, 2.—That which is here promised the saints is a perpetual preservation of them in that condition wherein they are ; both on the part of God, "he is round about them from henceforth even for ever" ; and on their parts, "they shall not be removed,"—that is, from the condition of acceptance with God wherein they are supposed to be,—but they shall abide for ever, and continue therein immovable unto the end. This is a plain promise of their continuance in that condition wherein they are, with their safety from thence, and not a promise of some other good thing provided that they continue in that condition. Their being compared to mountains,

and their stability, which consists in their being and continuing so, will admit no other sense. As mount Zion abides in its condition, so shall they; and as the mountains about Jerusalem continue, so doth the Lord continue his presence unto them.

That expression which is used, verse 2, is weighty and full to this purpose, "*The Lord is round about his people from henceforth even for ever.*" What can be spoken more fully, more pathetically? Can any expression of men so set forth the safety of the saints? The Lord is round about them, not to save them from this or that incursion, but from all; not from one or two evils, but from every one whereby they are or may be assaulted. He is with them, and round about them on every side that no evil shall come nigh them. It is a most full expression of universal preservation, or of God's keeping his saints in his love and favour, upon all accounts whatsoever; and that not for a season only, but it is "*henceforth,*" from his giving this promise unto their souls in particular, and their receiving of it, throughout all generations, "*even for ever.*"—*John Owen, 1616—1683.*

Verse 2.—"As the mountains are round about Jerusalem." This image is not realised, as most persons familiar with our European scenery would wish and expect it to be realised. Jerusalem is not literally shut in by mountains, except on the eastern side, where it may be said to be enclosed by the arms of Olivet, with its outlying ridges on the north-east and south-west. Anyone facing Jerusalem westward, northward, or southward, will always see the city itself on an elevation higher than the hills in its immediate neighbourhood, its towers and walls standing out against the sky, and not against any high back-ground such as that which encloses the mountain towns and villages of our own Cumbrian or Westmoreland valleys. Nor, again, is the plain on which it stands enclosed by a continuous though distant circle of mountains, like that which gives its peculiar charm to Athens and Innsbruck. The mountains in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem are of unequal height, and only in two or three instances—Neby-Samwil, Er-Rain, and Tuleil el-Ful—rising to any considerable elevation. Even Olivet is only a hundred and eighty feet above the top of Mount Zion. Still they act as a shelter: they must be surmounted before the traveller can see, or the invader attack, the Holy City; and the distant line of Moab would always seem to rise as a wall against invaders from the remote east. It is these mountains, expressly including those beyond the Jordan, which are mentioned as "standing round about Jerusalem," in another and more terrible sense, when, on the night of the assault of Jerusalem by the Roman armies, they "echoed back" the screams of the inhabitants of the captured city, and the victorious shouts of the soldiers of Titus.*—*Arthur Penrhyn Stanley (1815—1881), in "Sinai and Palestine."*

Verse 2.—"As the mountains are round about Jerusalem." Jerusalem is situated in the centre of a mountainous region, whose valleys have drawn around it in all directions a perfect net-work of deep ravines, the perpendicular walls of which constitute a very efficient system of defence.—*William M. Thomson, in "The Land and the Book," 1881.*

Verse 2.—"As the mountains are round about Jerusalem," etc. The mountains most emphatically stand "*round about Jerusalem,*" and in doing so must have greatly safeguarded it in ancient times. We are specially told that when Titus besieged the city, he found it impossible to invest it completely until he had built a wall round the entire sides of these mountains, nearly five miles long, with thirteen places at intervals in which he stationed garrisons, which added another mile and a quarter to these vast earthworks. "The whole was completed," says the Jewish historian, "in three days; so that what would naturally have required some months was done in so short an interval as is incredible."† Assaults upon the city, even then, could only be delivered effectively upon its level corner to the north-west, whence every hostile advance was necessarily directed in all its various sieges. To those familiar with these facts, beautifully bold, graphic, and forceful is the Psalmist's figure of the security of the Lord's people—

"The mountains are round about Jerusalem;
And Jehovah is round about his people,
Henceforth, even for evermore."

* Josephus. Bell. Jud. vi. 5, 1.

† Josephus. Wars of the Jews. Book v. chap. xii. section 2.

These words must have been in Hebrew ears as sublime as they were comforting, and, when sung on the heights of Zion, inspiring in the last degree.—*James Neil.*

Verse 2.—“*The LORD is round about his people.*” It is not enough that we are compassed about with fiery walls, that is, with the sure custody, the continual watch and ward of the angels; but the Lord himself is our wall: so that every way we are defended by the Lord against all dangers. Above us is his heaven, on both sides he is as a wall, under us he is as a strong rock whereupon we stand: so are we everywhere sure and safe. Now if Satan through these munitions casts his darts at us, it must needs be that the Lord himself shall be hurt before we take harm. Great is our incredulity if we hear all these things in vain.—*Martin Luther.*

Verse 2.—“*From henceforth, even for ever.*” This amplification of the promise, taken from time or duration, should be carefully noted; for it shows that the promises made to the people of Israel pertain generally to the Church in every age, and are not to expire with that polity. Thus it expressly declares, that the Church will continuously endure in this life; which is most sweet consolation for pious minds, especially in great dangers and public calamities, when everything appears to threaten ruin and destruction.—*D. H. Mollerus, 1639.*

Verse 3.—“*The rod of the wicked.*” It is *their* rod, made for them; if God scourge his children a little with it, he doth but borrow it from the immediate and natural use for which it was ordained; their rod, their judgment. So it is called their cup: “This is the portion” and potion “of their cup.” Ps. xi. 6.—*Thomas Adams, in “An Exposition of the Second Epistle of Peter,” 1633.*

Verse 3.—“*For the rod of the wicked,*” etc. According to Gussetius, this is to be understood of a measuring rod; laid not on persons, but on lands and estates; and best agrees with the lot, inheritance, and estate of the righteous; and may signify that though wicked men unjustly seize upon and retain the farms, possessions, and estates of good men, as if they were assigned to them by the measuring line; yet they shall not hold them long, or always.—*John Gill.*

Verse 3.—“*For the rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous.*” No tyranny, although it appear firm and stable, is of long continuance: inasmuch as God does not relinquish the sceptre. This is manifest from the example of Pharaoh, of Saul, of Sennacherib, of Herod, and of others. Rightly, therefore, says Athanasius of Julian the Apostate, “That little cloud has quickly passed away.” And how quickly beyond all human expectation the foundations of the ungodly are overthrown is fully declared in Psalm xxxvii.—*Solomon Gesner, 1559—1605.*

Verse 3.—“*Shall not rest,*” that is to say, “lie heavy,” so as to oppress, as in Isa. xxv. 10, with a further sense of *continuance* of the oppression.—*J. J. Stewart Perowne.*

Verse 3.—“*Shall not rest,*” etc. The wrath of man, like water turned upon a mill, shall come on them with no more force than shall be sufficient for accomplishing God’s gracious purposes on their souls: the rest, however menacing its power may be, shall be made to pass off by an opened sluice. Nevertheless the trouble shall be sufficient to try every man, and to prove the truth and measure of his integrity.—*Charles Simeon (1759—1836) in “Horæ Homileticæ.”*

Verse 3.—“*The lot of the righteous.*” There is a fourfold lot belonging to the faithful. 1. The lot of the saints is the sufferings of the saints. “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution;” 2 Tim. iii. 12. 2. The lot of the saints is also that light and happiness they have in this world. The lot is “fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage;” Ps. xvi. 6. When David sat at the sheepfold, which was his lot, he was thus prepared for the kingdom of Israel which was given him by lot from God. 3. But more specially faith, grace, and sanctification; which give them just right and title to the inheritance of glory. Heaven is theirs now; though not in possession, yet in succession. They have the earnest of it; let them grow up to stature and perfection, and take it. 4. Lastly, they have the lot of heaven. Hell is the lot of the wicked: “Behold at eveningtide trouble; and before the morning he is not. This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us;” Isa. xvii. 14. Therefore it is said of Judas, that he went “to his own place”: Acts i. 25. “Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest; this shall be the portion of their cup.” Ps. xi. 6. But the lot of the righteous is faith, and the end of their faith the salvation of their souls. God gives them heaven, not for any foreseen worthiness in the receivers, for no worthiness of our own can make us our father’s

heirs ; but for his own mercy and favour in Christ, preparing heaven for us, and us for heaven. So that upon his decree it is allotted to us ; and unless heaven could lose God, we cannot lose heaven.

Here, then, consider how the lottery of Canaan may shadow out to us that blessed land of promise whereof the other was a type.—*Thomas Adams.*

Verse 3.—“*Lest the righteous put forth their hands unto iniquity.*” Lest overcome by impatience, or drawn aside by the world’s allurements or affrightments, they should yield and comply with the desires of the wicked, or seek to help themselves out of trouble by sinister practices. God (saith Chrysostom) acts like a lutanist, who will not let the strings of his lute be too slack, lest it mar the music, nor suffer them to be too hard stretched or screwed up, lest they break.—*John Trapp, 1601—1669.*

Verse 3.—“*Lest the righteous put forth their hands,*” etc. The trial is to prove faith, not to endanger it by too sharp a pressure ; *lest*, overcome by this, even the faithful put forth a hand (as in Gen. iii. 22), to forbidden pleasure ; or (as in Exod. xxii. 8), to contamination : through force of custom gradually persuading to sinful compliance, or through despair of good, as the Psalmist (see Ps. xxxvii. and lxxiii.) describes some in his day who witnessed the prosperity of wicked men.—*The Speaker’s Commentary, 1871—1881.*

Verse 4.—“*Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good.*” The Midrash here calls to mind a Talmudic riddle :—There came a good one (Moses, Ex. ii. 2) and received a good thing (the Tôra, or Law, Prov. iv. 2) from the good one (God, Ps. cxlv. 9) for the good ones (Israel, Ps. cxxv. 4).—*Franz Delitzsch, 1871.*

Verse 4.—“*Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good.*” A favourite thought with Nehemiah. See Nehemiah ii. 8, 18 ; v. 19 ; xiii. 14, 31 : “Remember me, O my God, for good,” the concluding words of his book.—*Christopher Wordsworth, 1872.*

Verse 4.—“*Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good.*” They consult their own good best, who do most good. I may say these three things of *those who do good* (and what is serving God but doing of good ? or what is doing good but serving God ?). First, they shall receive true good. Secondly, they shall for ever hold the best good, the chief good ; they shall not only spend their days and years in good ; but when their days and years are spent, they shall have good, and a greater good than any they had, in spending the days and years of this life. They shall have good in death, they shall come to a fuller enjoyment of God, *the chief good*, when they have left and let fall the possession of all earthly goods. Thirdly, they that do good shall find all things working together for their good ; if they have a loss they shall receive good by it ; if they bear a cross, that cross shall bear good to them.—*Joseph Caryl, 1602—1673.*

Verse 4.—“*Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good,*” etc. Perhaps it may not prove unprofitable to enquire, with some minuteness, who are the persons for whom prayer is presented, and who have an interest in the Divine promises. They are brought before us under different denominations. In the first verse, they are described as trusting in the Lord : in the second verse, they are described as the Lord’s people : in the third verse, they are called the righteous : in the fourth verse, they are called good and upright in heart : and in the fifth verse, they are called Israel. Let us collect these terms together, and endeavour to ascertain from them, what is their true condition and character, for whose security the Divine perfections are pledged. And while a rapid sketch is thus drawn, let each breathe the silent prayer, “Search me, O God, and know my heart ; try me, and know my thoughts ; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”—*N. M’Michael, in “The Pilgrim Psalms,” 1860.*

Verse 4.—“*Do good, O LORD, unto those that be good.*” Believers are described as “good.” The name is explained by the Spirit as implying the indwelling of the Holy Ghost and of faith. It is proof that no guile is harboured in their hearts. Prayer is made that God would visit them with goodness. This prayer indited by the Spirit amounts to a heavenly promise that they shall receive such honour.—*Henry Law, in “Family Devotion,” 1878.*

Verse 4.—“*Them that be good.*” Oh, brethren, the good in us is God in us. The inwardness makes the outwardness, the godliness the beauty. It is indisputable that it is Christ in us that makes all our Christianity. Oh, Christians who have no Christ in them—such Christians are poor, cheap imitations, and hollow shams—

and Christ will, with infinite impatience, even infinite love, fling them away.—*Charles Stanford, in a Sermon preached before the Baptist Union, 1876.*

Verse 4.—“*Upright in their hearts.*” All true excellence has its seat here. It is not the good action which makes the good man: it is the good man who does the good action. The merit of an action depends entirely upon the motives which have prompted its performance; and, tried by this simple test, how many deeds, which have wrung from the world its admiration and its glory, might well be described in old words, as nothing better than splendid sins. When the heart is wrong, all is wrong. When the heart is right, all is right.—*N. M. Michael.*

Verse 4.—“*Upright.*” Literally, *straight*, straightforward, as opposed to all moral obliquity whatever.—*Joseph Addison Alexander (1809—1860), in “The Psalms Translated and Explained.”*

Verse 5.—“*Such as turn aside unto their crooked ways.*” This is the anxiety of the pastor in this pilgrim song. The shepherd would keep his sheep from straggling. His distress is that all in Israel are not true Israelites. Two sorts of people, described by the poet, have ever been in the church. The second class, instead of being at the trouble to “withstand in the evil day,” will “put forth their hands unto iniquity.” Rather than feel, they will follow the rod of the wicked. They will “turn aside unto their crooked ways,” sooner than risk temporal and material interests.—*Edward Jewitt Robinson, in “The Caravan and the Temple,” 1878.*

Verse 5.—“*Such as turn aside unto their crooked ways.*” All the ways of sin are called “crooked ways,” and they are our own ways. The Psalmist calls them “their crooked ways”; that is, the ways of their own devising; whereas the way of holiness is the Lord’s way. To exceed or do more; to be deficient or do less, than God requires, both these are “crooked ways.” The way of the Lord lies straight forward, right before us. “Whoso walketh uprightly shall be saved; but he that is perverse (or crooked) in his ways shall fall at once”: Prov. xxviii. 18. The motion of a godly man is like that of the kine that carried the ark: “Who took the straight way to the way of Beth-shemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left”: 1 Sam. vi. 12.—*Joseph Caryl.*

Verse 5.—“*Crooked ways.*” The ways of sinners are “crooked”; they shift from one pursuit to another, and turn hither and thither to deceive; they wind about a thousand ways to conceal their base intentions, to accomplish their iniquitous projects, or to escape the punishment of their crimes; yet disappointment, detection, confusion, and misery, are their inevitable portion.—*Thomas Scott, 1747—1821.*

Verse 5.—*The Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity.*” They walked according to the prince of the air, and they shall go where the prince of the air is. God will bring forth men from their hiding-places. Though they walk among the drove of his children, in procession now, yet if they also walk in by-lanes of sin, God will rank them at the latter day, yea, often in this world, with the workers of iniquity. They walk after workers of iniquity here before God, and God will make manifest that it is so before he hath done with them. The reason, my brethren, why they are to be reckoned among workers of iniquity, and as walkers among them, though they sever themselves from them in respect of external conversation, is, because they agree in the same internal principle of sin. They walk in their lusts: every unregenerate man doth so. Refine him how you will, it is certain he doth in heart pursue “crooked ways.”—*Thomas Goodwin, 1600—1679.*

Verse 5.—Sometimes God takes away a barren professor by permitting him to fall into open profaneness. There is one that hath taken up a profession of the worthy name of the Lord Jesus Christ, but this profession is only a cloak; he secretly practiseth wickedness; he is a glutton, or a drunkard, or covetous, or unclean. Well, saith God, I will loose the reins of this professor, I will give him up to his vile affections. I will loose the reins of his sins before him, he shall be entangled with his filthy lusts, he shall be overcome of ungodly company. Thus they that turn aside to their own crooked ways, “the Lord shall lead them forth with the workers of iniquity.”—*John Bunyan, 1628—1688.*

Verse 5.—“*But peace shall be upon Israel.*” Do you ask, What is the peace upon Israel? I answer:—First, the peace of Israel, that is, of a believing and holy soul, is from above, and is higher than all the disturbances of the world; it rests upon him, and makes him calm and peaceful, and lifts him above the world: for upon him rests the Holy Spirit, who is the Comforter; who is essential love and uncreated peace. Secondly, the peace of a believing and holy soul is *internal*; for it is sent

down from heaven upon his head, flows into his heart, and dwells there, and stills all agitations of mind. Thirdly, the peace of a believing and holy soul, is also *external*. It is a fountain of Paradise watering all the face of the earth; Gen. ii. 6: you see it in the man's face and life. Fourthly, the peace of a believing and holy soul is *divine*: for chiefly, it maintains peace with God. Fifthly, the peace of a believing and holy soul is *universal*: to wit, with neighbours, with God, with himself: in the body, in the eyes, in the ears, in tasting, smelling, feeling, in all the members, and in all the appetites. This peace is not disturbed by devils, the world, and the flesh, setting forth their honours, riches, pleasures. Sixthly, the peace of a believing and holy soul is peace *eternal* and never interrupted; for it flows from an eternal and exhaustless fountain, even from God himself.—*Condensed from Le Blanc, 1599—1669.*

Verse 5.—"Israel." The Israelites derived their joint names from the two chief parts of religion: Israelites, from Israel, whose prayer was his "strength" (Hosea xii. 3), and Jews, from Judah, whose name means "praise."—*George Seaton Bowes, in "Illustrative Gatherings," 1869.*

HINTS TO PREACHERS.

Whole Psalm.—I. The mark of the covenant: "They that trust." II. The security of the covenant (verses 1, 2). III. The rod of the covenant (verse 3). IV. The tenor of the covenant (verse 4). V. The spirit of the covenant,—*"peace."*

Verse 1.—See "Spurgeon's Sermons," No. 1,450: "The Immortality of the Believer."

Verses 1, 2.—I. The believer's singularity: he trusts in Jehovah. II. The believer's stability: "abideth for ever." III. The believer's safety: "As the mountains," etc.

Verse 2.—The all-surrounding presence of Jehovah the glory, safety, and eternal blessedness of his people. Yet this to the wicked would be hell.

Verse 2.—See "Spurgeon's Sermons," Nos. 161-2: "The Security of the Church."

Verse 2.—The endurance of mercy: "From henceforth even for ever."

Verse 2.—Saints hemmed-in by infinite love. I. *The City and the Girdle, or the symbols separated.* 1. Jerusalem imaging God's people. Anciently chosen; singularly honoured; much beloved; the shrine of Deity. 2. The Mountain Girdle setting forth Jehovah: Strength; All-sidedness; Sentinel through day and night. II. *The City within the Girdle, or the symbols related.* 1. Delightful Entanglement. The view from the windows! (Jehovah "round about.") To be lost must *break through God!* Sound sleep and safe labour. 2. Omnipotent Circumvallation, suggesting—God's determination; Satan's dismay. This mountain ring immutable.—*W. B. Haynes.*

Verse 3.—Observe, I. The Permission implied. The rod of the wicked may come upon the lot of the righteous. Why? 1. That wickedness may be free to manifest itself. 2. That the righteous may be made to hate sin. 3. That the righteousness of God's retribution may be seen. 4. That the consolations of the righteous may abound. 2 Cor. i. 5. II. The Permanency denied: "The rod . . . shall *not rest*," etc. Illustrate by history of Job, Joseph, David, Daniel, Christ, martyrs, etc. III. The Probity tried and preserved: "Lest the righteous put forth," etc., by rebelling, sinful compromise, etc. 1. God will have it tried, to prove its worth, beauty, etc. 2. But no more than sufficiently tried.—*John Field.*

Verses 3, 4.—I. The good defined: "The upright in heart;" such as do not "turn aside," and are not "workers of iniquity." II. The good distressed: by "the rod of the wicked." III. The good delivered: "Do good"; fulfil thy promise (verse 3).—*W. H. J. Page.*

Verse 4.—I. What it is to be good. II. What it is for God to do us good.

Verse 5.—Temporary Professors. I. The crucial test: "They turn aside." II. The crooked policy: they make crooked ways their own. III. The crushing doom: "led forth with workers of iniquity."

Verse 5.—Hypocrites. I. Their ways: "crooked." 1. Like the way of a winding stream, seeking out the fair level, or the easy descent. 2. Like the course of a tacking ship, which skilfully makes every wind to drive her forward. 3. Ways constructed upon no principle but that of pure selfishness. II. Their conduct under trial. They "turn aside." 1. From their religious profession. 2. From their former companions. 3. To become the worst scorers of spiritual things, and the most violent calumniators of spiritually-minded men. III. Their doom: "The Lord shall," etc. 1. In the judgment they shall be classed with the most flagrant sinners; "with the workers of iniquity." 2. They shall be exposed by an irresistible power: "The Lord shall lead them forth." 3. They shall meet with terrible execution with the wicked in hell.—*J. Field.*

Verse 5 (last clause).—To whom peace belongs. To "Israel"; the chosen, the once wrestler, the now prevailing prince. Consider Jacob's life after he obtained the name of Israel; note his trials, and his security under them as illustrating this text. Then take the text as a sure promise.

Verse 5 (last clause).—Enquire, I. Who are the Israel? 1. Covenanted ones. 2. Circumcised in heart. 3. True worshippers. II. What is the peace? 1. Peace of conscience. 2. Of friendship with God. 3. Of a settled and satisfied heart. 4. Of eternal glory, in reversion. III. Why the certainty ("shall be")? 1. Christ has made peace for them. 2. The Holy Spirit brings peace to them. 3. They walk in the way of peace.—*J. Field.*
