

PSALM CXXIX.

TITLE.—A Song of Degrees. *I fail to see how this is a step beyond the previous Psalm ; and yet it is clearly the song of an older and more tried individual, who looks back upon a life of affliction in which he suffered all along, even from his youth. Inasmuch as patience is a higher, or at least more difficult, grace than domestic love, the ascent or progress may perhaps be seen in that direction. Probably if we knew more of the stations on the road to the Temple we should see a reason for the order of these Psalms ; but as that information cannot be obtained, we must take the songs as we find them, and remember that, as we do not now go on pilgrimages to Zion, it is our curiosity and not our necessity which is a loser by our not knowing the cause of the arrangement of the songs in this Pilgrim Psalter.*

AUTHOR, ETC.—*It does not seem to us at all needful to ascribe this Psalm to a period subsequent to the captivity : indeed, it is more suitable to a time when as yet the enemy had not so far prevailed as to have carried the people into a distant land. It is a mingled hymn of sorrow and of strong resolve. Though sorely smitten, the afflicted one is heart-whole, and scorns to yield in the least degree to the enemy. The poet sings the trials of Israel, verses 1—3 ; the interposition of the Lord, verse 4 ; and the unblessed condition of Israel's foes, verses 5—8. It is a rustic song, full of allusions to husbandry. It reminds us of the books of Ruth and Amos.*

EXPOSITION.

MANY a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say :

2 Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth : yet they have not prevailed against me.

3 The plowers plowed upon my back : they made long their furrows.

4 The LORD is righteous : he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.

5 Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion.

6 Let them be as the grass *upon* the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up :

7 Wherewith the mower filleth not his hand ; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom.

8 Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the LORD *be* upon you : we bless you in the name of the LORD.

1. "*Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say.*" In her present hour of trial, she may remember her former afflictions and speak of them for her comfort, drawing from them the assurance that he who has been with her for so long will not desert her in the end. The song begins abruptly. The poet has been musing, and the fire burns, therefore speaks he with his tongue : he cannot help it, he feels that he must speak, and therefore "may now say" what he has to say. The trials of the church have been repeated again and again, times beyond all count : the same afflictions are fulfilled in us as in our fathers. Jacob of old found his days full of trouble ; each Israelite is often harassed ; and Israel as a whole has proceeded from tribulation to tribulation. "Many a time," Israel says, because she could not say how many times. She speaks of her assailants as "they," because it would be impossible to write or even to know all their names. They had straitened, harassed, and fought against her from the earliest days of her history—from her youth ; and they had continued their assaults right on without ceasing. Persecution is the heirloom of the church, and the ensign of the elect. Israel among the nations was peculiar, and this peculiarity brought against her many restless foes, who could never be easy unless they were warring against the people of God. When in Canaan, at the first, the chosen household was often severely tried ; in

Egypt it was heavily oppressed; in the wilderness it was fiercely assailed; and in the promised land it was often surrounded by deadly enemies. It was something for the afflicted nation, that it survived to say, "Many a time have they afflicted me." The affliction began early—"from my youth"; and it continued late. The earliest years of Israel and of the church of God were spent in trial. Babes in grace are cradled in opposition. No sooner is the man-child born than the dragon is after it. "It is," however, "good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth," and he shall see it to be so when in after days he tells the tale.

2. "*Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth.*" Israel repeats her statement of her repeated afflictions. The fact was uppermost in her thoughts, and she could not help soliloquizing upon it again and again. These repetitions are after the manner of poetry: thus she makes a sonnet out of her sorrows, music out of her miseries. "*Yet they have not prevailed against me.*" We seem to hear the beat of timbrels and the clash of cymbals here: the foe is derided; his malice has failed. That "*yet*" breaks in like the blast of trumpets, or the roll of kettledrums. "Cast down, but not destroyed," is the shout of a victor. Israel has wrestled, and has overcome in the struggle. Who wonders? If Israel overcame the angel of the covenant, what man or devil shall vanquish him? The fight was oft renewed and long protracted: the champion severely felt the conflict, and was at times fearful of the issue; but at length he takes breath, and cries, "Yet they have not prevailed against me." "Many a time;" yes, "many a time," the enemy has had his opportunity and his vantage, but not so much as once has he gained the victory.

3. "*The plowers plowed upon my back.*" The scourgers tore the flesh as ploughmen furrow a field. The people were maltreated like a criminal given over to the lictors with their cruel whips; the back of the nation was scored and furrowed by oppression. It is a grand piece of imagery condensed into few words. A writer says the metaphor is muddled, but he is mistaken: there are several figures, like wheel within wheel, but there is no confusion. The afflicted nation was, as it were, lashed by her adversaries so cruelly that each blow left a long red mark, or perhaps a bleeding wound, upon her back and shoulders, comparable to a furrow which tears up the ground from one end of the field to the other. Many a heart has been in like case; smitten and sore wounded by them that use the scourge of the tongue; so smitten that their whole character has been cut up and scored by calumny. The true church has in every age had fellowship with her Lord under his cruel flagellations: his sufferings were a prophecy of what she would be called hereafter to endure, and the foreshadowing has been fulfilled. Zion has in this sense been ploughed as a field.

"*They made long their furrows:*"—as if delighting in their cruel labour. They missed not an inch, but went from end to end of the field, meaning to make thorough work of their congenial engagement. Those who laid on the scourge did it with a thoroughness which showed how hearty was their hate. Assuredly the enemies of Christ's church never spare pains to inflict the utmost injury: they never do the work of the devil deceitfully, or hold back their hand from blood. They smite so as to plough into the man; they plough the quivering flesh as if it were clods of clay; they plough deep and long with countless furrows; until they leave no portion of the church unfurrowed or unassailed. Ah me! Well did Latimer say that there was no busier ploughman in all the world than the devil: whoever makes short furrows, he does not. Whoever baulks and shirks, he is thorough in all that he does. Whoever stops work at sundown, he never does. He and his children plough like practised ploughmen; but they prefer to carry on their pernicious work upon the saints behind their backs, for they are as cowardly as they are cruel.

4. "*The Lord is righteous.*" Whatever men may be, Jehovah remains just, and will therefore keep covenant with his people and deal out justice to their oppressors. Here is the hinge of the condition: this makes the turning point of Israel's distress. The Lord bears with the long furrows of the wicked, but he will surely make them cease from their ploughing before he has done with them. "*He hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.*" The rope which binds the oxen to the plough is cut; the cord which bound the victim is broken; the bond which held the enemies in cruel unity has snapped. As in Psalm cxxiv. 7 we read, "the snare is broken; we are escaped," so here the breaking of the enemies' instrument of oppression is Israel's release. Sooner or later a righteous God will interpose, and when he does so, his action will be most effectual; he does not unfasten, but cuts asunder, the harness which the ungodly use in their labour of hate. Never has

God used a nation to chastise his Israel without destroying that nation when the chastisement has come to a close : he hates those who hurt his people even though he permits their hate to triumph for a while for his own purpose. If any man would have his harness cut, let him begin to plough one of the Lord's fields with the plough of persecution. The shortest way to ruin is to meddle with a saint : the divine warning is, " He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye."

5. "*Let them all be confounded and turned back that hate Zion.*" And so say we right heartily : and in this case *vox populi* is *vox Dei*, for so it shall be. If this be an imprecation, let it stand ; for our heart says " Amen " to it. It is but justice that those who hate, harass, and hurt the good should be brought to naught. Those who confound right and wrong ought to be confounded, and those who turn back from God ought to be turned back. Loyal subjects wish ill to those who plot against their king.

" Confound their politics,
Frustrate their knavish tricks,"

is but a proper wish, and contains within it no trace of personal ill-will. We desire their welfare as men, their downfall as traitors. Let their conspiracies be confounded, their policies be turned back. How can we wish prosperity to those who would destroy that which is dearest to our hearts ? This present age is so flippant that if a man loves the Saviour he is styled a fanatic, and if he hates the powers of evil he is named a bigot. As for ourselves, despite all objectors, we join heartily in this commination ; and would revive in our heart the old practice of Ebal and Gerizim, where those were blessed who bless God, and those were cursed who make themselves a curse to the righteous. We have heard men desire a thousand times that the gallows might be the reward of the assassins who murdered two inoffensive men in Dublin, and we would never censure the wish ; for justice ought to be rendered to the evil as well as to the good. Besides, the church of God is so useful, so beautiful, so innocent of harm, so fraught with good, that those who do her wrong are wronging all mankind and deserve to be treated as the enemies of the human race. Study a chapter from the " Book of Martyrs," and see if you do not feel inclined to read an imprecatory Psalm over Bishop Bonner and Bloody Mary. It may be that some wretched nineteenth century sentimentalist will blame you : if so, read another *over him*.

6. "*Let them be as the grass upon the housetops, which withereth afore it groweth up.*" Grass on the housetop is soon up and soon down. It sprouts in the heat, finds enough nutriment to send up a green blade, and then it dies away before it reaches maturity, because it has neither earth nor moisture sufficient for its proper development. Before it grows up it dies ; it needs not to be plucked up, for it hastens to decay of itself. Such is and such ought to be the lot of the enemies of God's people. Transient is their prosperity ; speedy is their destruction. The height of their position, as it hastens their progress, so it hurries their doom. Had they been lower in station they had perhaps been longer in being. " Soon ripe, soon rotten," is an old proverb. Soon plotting and soon rotting, is a version of the old adage which will suit in this place. We have seen grass on the rustic thatch of our own country cottages which will serve for an illustration almost as well as that which comes up so readily on the flat roofs and domes of eastern habitations. The idea is—they make speed to success, and equal speed to failure. Persecutors are all sound and fury, flash and flame ; but they speedily vanish—more speedily than is common to men. Grass in the field withers, but not as speedily as grass on the housetops. Without a mower the tufts of verdure perish from the roofs, and so do opposers pass away by other deaths than fall to the common lot of men ; they are gone, and none is the worse. If they are missed at all, their absence is never regretted. Grass on the housetop is a nonentity in the world : the house is not impoverished when the last blade is dried up : and, even so, the opposers of Christ pass away, and none lament them. One of the fathers said of the apostate emperor Julian, " That little cloud will soon be gone " ; and so it was. Every sceptical system of philosophy has much the same history ; and the like may be said of each heresy. Poor, rootless things, they are and are not : they come and go, even though no one rises against them. Evil carries the seeds of dissolution within itself. So let it be.

7. "*Wherewith the mower filleth not his hand ; nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom.*" When with his sickle the husbandman would cut down the tufts, he found

nothing to lay hold upon : the grass promised fairly enough, but there was no fulfilment, there was nothing to cut or to carry, nothing for the hand to grasp, nothing for the lap to gather. Easterns carry their corn in their bosoms, but in this case there was nothing to bear home. Thus do the wicked come to nothing. By God's just appointment they prove a disappointment. Their fire ends in smoke : their verdure turns to vanity ; their flourishing is but a form of withering. No one profits by them, least of all are they profitable to themselves. Their aim is bad, their work is worse, their end is worst of all.

8. "*Neither do they which go by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you : we bless you in the name of the Lord.*" In harvest times men bless each other in the name of the Lord ; but there is nothing in the course and conduct of the ungodly man to suggest the giving or receiving of a benediction. Upon a survey of the sinner's life from beginning to end, we feel more inclined to weep than to rejoice, and we feel bound rather to wish him failure than success. We dare not use pious expressions as mere compliments, and hence we dare not wish God-speed to evil men lest we be partakers of their evil deeds. When persecutors are worrying the saints, we cannot say, "The blessing of the Lord be upon you." When they slander the godly and oppose the doctrine of the cross, we dare not bless them in the name of the Lord. It would be infamous to compromise the name of the righteous Jehovah by pronouncing his blessing upon unrighteous deeds.

See how godly men are roughly ploughed by their adversaries, and yet a harvest comes of it which endures and produces blessing ; while the ungodly, though they flourish for a while and enjoy a complete immunity, dwelling, as they think, quite above the reach of harm, are found in a short time to have gone their way and to have left no trace behind. Lord, number me with thy saints. Let me share their grief if I may also partake of their glory. Thus would I make this Psalm my own, and magnify thy name, because thine afflicted ones are not destroyed, and thy persecuted ones are not forsaken.

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN SAYINGS.

Whole Psalm.—In the "degrees" of Christian virtue the Psalm corresponds to the tenth step, which is patience in adversity.—*H. T. Armfield.*

Whole Psalm.—The following incident in connection with the glorious return of the Vaudois under Henri Arnaud is related in Muston's "Israel of the Alps" :—"After these successes the gallant patriots took an oath of fidelity to each other, and celebrated divine service in one of their own churches, for the first time since their banishment. The enthusiasm of the moment was irrepressible ; they chanted the seventy-fourth Psalm to the clash of arms ; and Henri Arnaud, mounting the pulpit with a sword in one hand and a Bible in the other, preached from the Hundred and twenty-ninth Psalm, and once more declared, in the face of heaven, that he would never resume his pastoral office in patience and peace, until he should witness the restoration of his brethren to their ancient and rightful settlements."

Verse 1.—"Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth." 1. How old these afflictions are : "From my youth." Ay, from my infancy, birth and conception. 2. There is the frequency and iteration of these afflictions. They were oft and many : "many a time." 3. There is the grievousness of these afflictions, expressed by a comparison. "The plowers plowed upon my back : they made long their furrows." So these were old afflictions—from her youth. They were many a time : more times than can be numbered. And then they were grievous, even like iron ploughs, drawing deep and long furrows on their back.—*Alexander Henderson.*

Verse 1.—"Many a time have they afflicted me," etc. God had one Son, and but one Son, without sin ; but never any without sorrow. We may be God's children, and yet still under persecution : his Israel, and afflicted from our youth up. We may feel God's hand as a Father upon us when he strikes us as well as when he strokes us. When he strokes us, it is lest we faint under his hand ; and when he strikes us, it is that we should know his hand.—*Abraham Wright* (1611—1690), in "A Practical Commentary upon the Psalms."

Verse 1.—"They." The persecutors deserve not a name. The rich man is not named (as Lazarus is) because not worthy : Luke xvi. "They shall be written in the earth" : Jeremiah xvii. 13.—*John Trapp.*

Verse 1.—"They." In speaking of the enemies of Israel simply by the pronoun "they," without being more specific, the Psalmist aggravates the greatness of the evil more than if he had expressly named the Assyrians or the Egyptians. By not specifying any particular class of foes, he tacitly intimates that the world is filled with innumerable bands of enemies, whom Satan easily arms for the destruction of good men, his object being that new wars may arise continually on every side. History certainly bears ample testimony that the people of God had not to deal with a few enemies, but that they were assaulted by almost the whole world ; and further, that they were molested not only by external foes, but also by those of an internal kind, by such as professed to belong to the Church.—*John Calvin.*

Verse 1.—"They afflicted me." Why are these afflictions of the righteous ? Whence is it that he who has given up his Son to death for them, should deny them earthly blessings ? Why is faith a mourner so frequently here below, and with all that heroic firmness in her aspect, and hope of glory in her eye, why needs she to be painted with so deep a sorrow on her countenance, and the trace of continual tears on her cheek ? First, we reply, *for her own safety.* Place religion out of the reach of sorrow, and soon she would pine and perish. God is said to choose his people in the furnace, because they oftenest choose him there.

It is ever from the cross that the most earnest "My God" proceeds, and never is the cry heard but he speeds forth at its utterance, who once hung there, to support, to comfort, and to save.

As it is only in affliction God is *sought*, so by many it is only in affliction God is *known*. This, one of the kings of these worshippers of the Temple found. "When Manasseh was brought to affliction, then he knew that the Lord he was God" : 2 Chronicles xxxiii. 12, 13.

But, further, it is only by affliction *we ourselves are known*. What is the source of that profound and obstinate indifference to divine truth which prevails among men of the world, except the proud conviction that they may dispense with it ? It is only when they are crushed as the worm they are made to feel that the dust is their source ; only when earthly props are withdrawn will they take hold of that arm of omnipotence which Jesus offers, and which he has offered so long in vain.

While men know themselves, they *know their sin* also in affliction. What is the natural course and experience of the unbelieving of mankind ? Transgression, remorse, and then forgetfulness ; new transgression, new sorrow, and again forgetfulness. How shall this carelessness be broken ? How convince them that they stand in need of a Saviour as the first and deepest want of their being, and that they can only secure deliverance from wrath eternal by a prompt and urgent application to him ? By nothing so effectually as by affliction. God's children, who had forgotten him, arise and go to their Father when thus smitten by the scourge of sorrow ; and no sooner is the penitent "*Father, I have sinned*" spoken, than they are clasped in his arms, and safe and happy in his love.

It is, further, by affliction that the *world* is known to God's children. God's great rival is the world. The lust of the flesh, pleasure ; the lust of the eye, desire ; the pride of life, the longing to be deemed superior to those about us,—comprise everything man naturally covets. Give us ease, honour, distinction, and all life's good will seem obtained. *But what wilt thou do, when he shall judge thee ?* This is a question fitted to alarm the happiest of the children of prosperity.

What so frequently and effectually shows the necessity of piety as the sharp teachings of affliction ? They show what moralists and preachers never could, that riches profit not in the day of death, that pleasures most fully enjoyed bring no soothing to the terrors which nearness to eternity presents, and that friends, however affectionate, cannot plead for and save us at the bar of God. "Miserable comforters are they all," and it is for the very purpose of inspiring this conviction, along with a belief that it is Jesus alone who can comfort in the hour of need, that affliction is sent to God's children.—*Robert Nisbet.*

Verse 1.—"From my youth." The first that ever died, died for religion ; so early came martyrdom into the world.—*John Trapp.*

Verses 1, 2.—1. The visible Church from the beginning of the world is one body, and, as it were, one man, growing up from infancy to riper age ; for so speaketh the church here : "*Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth.*" 2. The

wicked enemies of the church, they also are one body, one adverse army, from the beginning of the world continuing war against the church: "*Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth.*" 3. As the former injuries done to the church are owned by the church, in after-ages, as done against the same body, so also the persecution of former enemies is imputed and put upon the score of present persecutors: "*Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say.*" 4. New experience of persecution, when they call to mind the exercise of the church in former ages, serves much for encouragement and consolation in troubles: "*Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth, may Israel now say.*" 5. Albeit this hath been the endeavour of the wicked in all ages to destroy the church, yet God hath still preserved her from age to age: "*Yet they have not prevailed.*"—David Dickson.

Verses 1, 2.—When the prophet says twice, "*They have afflicted me,*" "*they have afflicted me,*" the repetition is not superfluous, it being intended to teach us that the people of God had not merely once or twice to enter the conflict, but that their patience had been tried by continual exercises.—John Calvin.

Verse 2.—"Many a time," etc. The Christian Church may adopt the language of the Hebrew Church: "Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth: yet they have not prevailed against me." What afflictions were endured by the Christian Church from her youth up! How feeble was that youth! How small the number of the apostles to whom our Lord gave his gospel in charge! How destitute were they of human learning, of worldly influence, of secular power! To effect their destruction, and to frustrate their object—the glory of God and the salvation of men—the dungeon and the mine, the rack and the gibbet, were all successively employed. The ploughers ploughed their back, and made long their furrows. Their property was confiscated; their persons were imprisoned; their civil rights were taken from them; their heads rolled on the scaffold; their bodies were consumed at the burning pile; they were thrown, amidst the ringing shouts of the multitude, to the wild beasts of the amphitheatre. Despite, however, of every opposition, our holy religion took root and grew upward. Not all the fury of ten persecutions could exterminate it from the earth. The teeth of wild beasts could not grind it to powder; the fire could not burn it; the waters could not drown it; the dungeon could not confine it. Truth is eternal, like the great God from whose bosom it springs, and therefore it cannot be destroyed. And because Christianity is the truth, and no lie, her enemies have never prevailed against her.—M. M'Michael.

Verse 2.—"Yet they have not prevailed against me." The words are the same as in Gen. xxxii. 28. The blessing won by Jacob, when he wrestled with the angel, remained on his descendants. During the long night of the Captivity the faithful had wrestled in faithful prayer; now the morning had appeared, and Israel was raised to a higher stage of privilege.—W. Kay.

Verse 2.—"Yet they have not prevailed against me." Israel prevailed with God in wrestling with him, and therefore it is that he prevails with men also. If so be that we will wrestle with God for a blessing, and prevail with him, then we need not to fear but we shall wrestle the enemies out of it also. If we be the people of God, and persist in wrestling against his enemies, we need not fear but that we shall be victorious.—Alexander Henderson.

Verse 3.—"The plowers plowed," etc. There does not seem to be any need to look for an interpretation of this in scourging or any other bodily infliction of pain; it seems to be "a figurative mode of expressing severe oppression." Roberts informs us that when, in the East, a man is in much trouble through oppressors, he says, "How they plough me and turn me up."—Ingram Cobbin, 1839.

Verse 3.—"The plowers plowed," etc. The great Husbandman who owns this plough (at least by whose permission this plough goes), is God. Not only is it God who makes your common ploughs to gang, and sends the gospel into a land, but it is God also who disposes and overrules this same plough of persecution. For without his licence the plough cannot be yoked; and being yoked, cannot enter to gang till he direct; and he tempers the irons, so that they cannot go one inch deeper than he thinks meet. When he thinks it time to quit work, then presently he cuts their cords, so that they cannot go once about after he thinks it time to quit work. Albeit when they yoke, they resolve to have all the land upside down, yet he will

let them plough no more of it than he sees meet. Now for the ploughmen of this plough, they are Satan and the evil angels; they hold the plough, and are goad-men to it; and they yoke in the oxen into the plough, and drive them up with their goads. And they have a sort of music also, which they whistle into their ears, to make them go the faster; and that is the allurements and provocations of the world. And for the oxen who draw into this plough, it may be princes when they turn persecutors of the kirk; it may be prelates; it may be politicians in the world: these are the oxen, Satan and the ill spirits inciting them, and stirring them up to go forward in their intended course. Then consider here that the plough and the ploughmen and oxen go about as God thinks meet; but what is it that they are doing in the meantime? Nothing else but preparing the ground for seed, and so the Lord employs them to prepare his people better to receive the seed of his word and of his Spirit.—*Alexander Henderson.*

Verse 3.—God fails not to sow blessings in the furrows, which the plowers plow upon the back of the church.—*Jeremy Taylor, 1613—1667.*

Verse 3.—“*The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows.*” When the Lord Jesus Christ was in his suffering state, and during his passion, these words here predicted of him were most expressly realized. Whilst he remained in the hands of the Roman soldiers they stript him of his raiment; they bound him with cords to a pillar; they flogged him. This was so performed by them, that they made ridges in his back and sides; they tore skin and flesh, and made him bare even to the bone, so that his body was like a ploughed field; the gashes made in it were like ridges made in a ploughed field; these were on his back. “*The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows.*” Whilst every part of our Lord’s sorrows and sufferings is most minutely set forth in the sacred hymns, Psalms, and songs, contained in what we style the Book of Psalms, yet we shall never comprehend what our most blessed Lord, in every part of his life, and in his passion and death, underwent for us: may the Lord the Spirit imprint this fresh expression used on this subject effectually upon us. Our Lord’s words here are very expressive of the violence of his tormentors and their rage against him, and of the wounds and torments they had inflicted on him.

What must the feelings of our Lord have been when they made such furrows on his back, that it was all furrowed and welted with such long wounds, that it was more like a ploughed field than anything else. Blessings on him for his grace and patience, it is “with his stripes we are healed.”—*Samuel Eyles Pierce.*

Verse 3.—“*They made long their furrows.*” The apparent harshness of this figure will disappear if it be considered to refer to severe public scourgings. To those who have been so unhappy as to witness such scourgings this allusion will then appear most expressive. The long weals or wounds which the scourge leaves at each stroke may most aptly be compared either to *furrows* or (as the original admits) to the *ridges between the furrows*. The *furrows* made by the plough in the East are very superficial, and (although straight) are usually carried to a great length, the fields not being enclosed as in this country.—*John Kitto, in “The Pictorial Bible.”*

Verse 4.—“*The Lord is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked;*” *i.e.*, he has put an end to their domination and tyranny over us. In the Hebrew word which is rendered “*cords*” there is a reference to the *harness* with which the oxen were fastened to the plough; and so to the *involved machinations and cruelties* of the enemy. The Hebrew word properly denotes thick *twisted cords*; figuratively, intertwined wickedness; Micah vii. 3. “*The cords of the wicked,*” therefore, signify their *power, dominion, tyranny, wickedness, and violence*. These cords God is said “*to have cut,*” so that *he should have made an end*; and, therefore, “*to have cut*” for ever, so that they should never be reunited.—*Hermann Venema.*

Verse 4.—“*He hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.*” The enemies’ power has been broken; *God has cut asunder the cords of the wicked*, has cut their gears, their traces, and so spoiled their ploughing; has cut their scourges, and so spoiled their lashing; has cut the bands of union, by which they were combined together; he has cut the bands of captivity, in which they held God’s people. God has many ways of disabling wicked men to do the mischief they design against his church, and shaming their counsels.—*Matthew Henry.*

Verse 4.—“*He hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.*” He repeateth the same praise of God in delivering his church from oppression of the enemy, under the

similitude of cutting the cords of the plough, which tilleth up another man's field. Whence learn, 1. The enemies of the church do no more regard her than they do the earth under their feet, and do seek to make their own advantage of her, as usurpers use to do in possessing and labouring of another man's field. "*The plowers plowed upon my back.*" 2. The Lord useth to suffer his enemies to break up the fallow ground of his people's proud and stiff hearts with the plough of persecution, and to draw deep and long furrows on them: "*They made long their furrows.*" 3. What the enemies do against the church the Lord maketh use of for manuring the church, which is his field, albeit they intend no good to God's church, yet they serve in God's wisdom to prepare the Lord's people for receiving the seed of God's word; for the similitude speaketh of their tilling of the church, but nothing of their sowing, for that is reserved for the Lord himself, who is owner of the field. 4. When the wicked have performed so much of God's husbandry as he thinketh good to suffer them, then he stoppeth their design, and looseth their plough. "*He hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked.*"—*David Dickson.*

Verse 5.—If any one be desirous to accept these words, "*Let them be confounded and turned backward,*" as they sound, he will devoutly explain the imprecation: that is to say, it may be an imprecation of good confusion, which leads to repentance, and of turning to God from sin; thus Bellarmine. There is a confounding by bringing grace, glory, and turning from the evil way. Thus some enemies and persecutors of the Christians have been holily confounded and turned to the faith of Christ; as St. Paul, who full of wrath and slaughter was going to Damascus that he might afflict the believers, but was graciously confounded on the road.—*Thomas Le Blanc.*

Verse 5.—"*Let them all be confounded.*" Mr. Emerson told a convention of rationalists once, in this city, that the morality of the New Testament is scientific and perfect. But the morality of the New Testament is that of the Old. "Yes," you say; "but what of the imprecatory Psalms?" A renowned professor, who, as Germany thinks, has done more for New England theology than any man since Jonathan Edwards, was once walking in this city with a clergyman of a radical faith, who objected to the doctrine that the Bible is inspired, and did so on the ground of the imprecatory Psalms. The replies of the usual kind were made; and it was presumed that David expressed the Diviue purpose in praying that his enemies might be destroyed, and that he gave utterance only to the natural, righteous indignation of conscience against unspeakable iniquity. But the doubter would not be satisfied. The two came at last to a newspaper bulletin, on which the words were written,—"*Baltimore to be shelled at twelve o'clock.*" "I am glad of it," said the radical preacher; "I am glad of it." "And so am I," said his companion, "but I hardly dare say so, for fear you should say that I am uttering an imprecatory Psalm."—*Joseph Cook, in Boston Monday Lectures. "Transcendentalism."*

Verse 5.—"*And turned back;*" from pursuing their designs and accomplishing them; as the Assyrian monarch was, who had a hook put into his nose, and a bridle in his lips, and was turned back by the way he came: Isaiah xxxvii. 29.—*John Gill.*

Verse 5.—"*All those who hate Zion.*" Note that he does not say, All who hate me; but "*all who hate Zion.*" Thus the saints are not led to this from the desire of revenge, but from zeal for the people of God, so that they pray for the confusion and repression of the ungodly.—*Wolfgang Musculus.*

Verse 6.—"*Let them be as the grass upon the housetops.*" They are rightly compared to "*grass on the housetops;*" for more contemptuously the Holy Ghost could not speak of them. For this grass is such, that it soon withereth away before the sickle be put into it. Yea, no man thinketh it worthy to be cut down, no man regardeth it, every man suffereth it to brag for a while, and to show itself unto men from the housetops as though it were something when it is nothing. So the wicked persecutors in the world, which are taken to be mighty and terrible according to the outward show, are of all men most contemptible. For Christians do not once think of plucking them up or cutting them down; they persecute them not, they revenge not their own injuries, but suffer them to increase, to brag and glory as much as they list. For they know that they cannot abide the violence of a vehement wind. Yea, though all things be in quietness, yet as grass upon the housetops, by little and little, withereth away through the heat of the sun, so

tyrannies upon small occasions do perish and soon vanish away. The faithful, therefore, in suffering do prevail and overcome; but the wicked in doing are overthrown, and miserably perish, as all the histories of all times and ages do plainly witness.—*Martin Luther.*

Verse 6.—“*Like grass upon the housetops.*” The flat roofs of the Eastern houses “are plastered with a composition of mortar, tar, ashes, and sand,” in the crevices of which grass often springs. The houses of the poor in the country were formed of a plaster of mud and straw, where the grass would grow still more freely: as all the images are taken from country life, it is doubtless to country dwellings that the poet refers.—*J. J. Stewart Perowne.*

Verse 6.—“*Like grass upon the housetops.*” The enemies of Zion may have an elevated position in the nation, they may seem to promise growth, but having no root in themselves, like the hearers on the stony ground, give no promise of fruit. Their profession dies away and leaves no benefit to the church, as it claims no blessing from others.—*William Wilson (1783—1873), in “The Book of Psalms, with an Exposition.”*

Verse 6.—“*Grass upon the housetops.*” In the morning the master of the house laid in a stock of earth, which was carried up, and spread evenly on the top of the house, which is flat. The whole roof is thus formed of mere earth, laid on and rolled hard and flat. On the top of every house is a large stone roller, for the purpose of hardening and flattening this layer of rude soil, so that the rain may not penetrate; but upon this surface, as may be supposed, grass and weeds grow freely, but never come to maturity. It is to such grass the Psalmist alludes as useless and bad.—*William Jowett, in “Christian Researches in Syria and the Holy Land,” 1825.*

Verse 7.—“*The mower filleth not his hand,*” etc. The grain was rather pulled than cut, and as each handful was taken the reaper gave it a flourishing swing up into his bosom.—*Mrs. Finn, in “Home in the Holy Land,” 1866.*

Verse 7.—“*He that bindeth sheaves his bosom.*” A practice prevails in hot climates of sending out persons into the woods and other wild places to collect the grass, which would otherwise be wasted; and it is no uncommon thing in the evening to see groups of grass-cutters in the market, waiting to dispose of their bundles or sheaves, which are often so large that one is disposed to wonder how they could have been conveyed from the woods upon one man’s shoulders.—*Maria Calcott, in “A Scripture Herbal,” 1842.*

Verse 8.—The latter expressions are most refreshingly Arabic. Nothing is more natural than for them, when passing by a fruit-tree or corn-field loaded with a rich crop to exclaim, “*Barak Allah!*” God bless you! We bless you in the name of the Lord!—*W. M. Thomson.*

HINTS TO PREACHERS.

Verse 1.—Affliction as it comes to saints from men of the world. I. Reason for it—enmity of the serpent’s seed. II. Modes of its display—persecution, ridicule, slander, disdain, etc. III. Comfort under it. So persecuted they the prophets: so the Master. It is their nature. They cannot kill the soul. It is but for a time, etc.

Verses 1 and 2.—I. How far persecution for righteousness’ sake may go. 1. It may be great: “*afflicted*” “*afflicted.*” 2. It may be frequent: “*Many a time.*” 3. It may be early: “*From my youth.*” II. How far it cannot go. 1. It may seem to prevail. 2. It may prevail in some degree. 3. It cannot ultimately prevail. 4. It shall cause that to which it is opposed increasingly to prevail.—*G. R.*

Verses 1—4.—Israel persecuted but not forsaken. Persecution. I. Whence it came: “*they.*” II. How it came: “*Many a time,*” “*from my youth,*” severely: “*afflicted,*” “*ploughed.*” III. Why it came. Human and Satanic hatred, and Divine permission. IV. What came of it: “*not prevailed*”—to destroy, to drive to despair, to lead to sin. God’s righteousness manifested in upholding his people, baffling their foes, etc.

Verses 1—4. The enemies of God's church. I. Their violence: "The plowers plowed," etc. II. Their persistency: "Many a time . . . from my youth." III. Their failure: "Yet they have not prevailed." IV. Their great opponent: "The Lord . . . hath cut asunder."—*J. P.*

Verse 3.—I. Literally fulfilled. 1. In Christ. Matt. xxvii. 26; xx. 19; Mark xv. 15; Luke xviii. 33; John xix. 1. 2. In his followers. Matt. x. 17; Acts xvi. 23; 2 Cor. vi. 5; xi. 23, 24; Heb. xi. 36. And frequently in subsequent persecutions. II. Figuratively. In secret calumnies both in Christ and his followers.—*G. R.*

Verse 4.—Israel's song of triumph. I. The Lord is righteous in permitting these afflictions to come upon his people. II. He is righteous in keeping his promise of deliverance to his people. III. He is righteous in visiting the enemies of his people with judgment.—*W. H. J. P.*

Verse 5.—I. An inexcusable hatred described: "hate Zion," God's church and cause. For, 1. Her people are righteous. 2. Her faith is a gospel. 3. Her mission is peace. 4. Her very existence is the world's preservation. II. An inveterate sinfulness indicated: "Them that hate Zion." For, whatever moral virtues they may boast of, they must be, 1. Enemies to the human race. 2. In defiant opposition to God. 3. Perversely blind, as Saul, or radically vile. 4. Devil-like. III. An instinctive feeling of a good man expressed: "Let them all be," etc. Prompted by, 1. His love to God. 2. Love to man. 3. Love to righteousness. Hence, its existence is in itself a pledge that the righteous God will respect and comply with it.—*J. P.*

Verses 5—8.—I. The characters described. 1. They do not love Zion. They say not, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of thine house," etc. 2. They hate Zion—both its King and its subjects. II. Their prosperity: "As the grass," etc. III. Their end. 1. Shame: "Let them be confounded." 2. Loss: "Turned back." 3. Disappointment. No mowing; no reaping. 4. Dishonour. Unblessed by others as well as in themselves.—*G. R.*

Verses 6—9.—The wicked flourishing and perishing. I. Eminent in position. II. Envid in prosperity. III. Evanescent in duration. IV. Empty as to solidity. V. Excepted from blessing.