

PSALM CXLI.

TITLE.—A Psalm of David. *Yes, David under suspicion, half afraid to speak lest he should speak unadvisedly while trying to clear himself; David slandered and beset by enemies; David censured even by saints, and taking it kindly; David deploring the condition of the godly party of whom he was the acknowledged head; David waiting upon God with confident expectation. The Psalm is one of a group of four, and it bears a striking likeness to the other three. Its meaning lies so deep as to be in places exceedingly obscure, yet even upon its surface it has dust of gold. In its commencement the Psalm is lighted up with the evening glow as the incense rises to heaven; then comes a night of language whose meaning we cannot see; and this gives place to morning light in which our eyes are unto the Lord.*

DIVISION.—*The Psalmist cries for acceptance in prayer (verses 1, 2); then he begs to be kept as to his speech, preserved in heart and deed, and delivered from every sort of fellowship with the ungodly. He prefers to be rebuked by the gracious rather than to be flattered by the wicked, and consoles himself with the confident assurance that he will one day be understood by the godly party, and made to be a comfort to them (verses 3—6). In the last verses the slandered saint represents the condition of the persecuted church, looks away to God and pleads for rescue from his cruel enemies, and for the punishment of his oppressors.*

EXPOSITION.

LORD, I cry unto thee: make haste unto me; give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee.

2 Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

1. "*LORD, I cry unto thee.*" This is my last resort: prayer never fails me. My prayer is painful and feeble, and worthy only to be called a cry; but it is a cry unto Jehovah, and this ennobles it. I have cried unto thee, I still cry to thee, and I always mean to cry to thee. To whom else could I go? What else can I do? Others trust to themselves, but I cry unto thee. The weapon of all prayer is one which the believer may always carry with him, and use in every time of need. "*Make haste unto me.*" His case was urgent, and he pleaded that urgency. God's time is the best time, but when we are sorely pressed we may with holy importunity quicken the movements of mercy. In many cases, if help should come late, it would come too late; and we are permitted to pray against such a calamity. "*Give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee.*" See how a second time he talks of crying: prayer had become his frequent, yea, his constant exercise: twice in a few words he says, "I cry; I cry." How he longs to be heard, and to be heard at once! There is a voice to the great Father in every cry, and groan, and tear of his children: he can understand what they mean when they are quite unable to express it. It troubles the spirit of the saints when they fear that no favourable ear is turned to their doleful cries: they cannot rest unless their "unto thee" is answered by an "unto me." When prayer is a man's only refuge, he is deeply distressed at the bare idea of his failing therein.

"That were a grief I could not bear,
Didst thou not hear and answer prayer;
But a prayer-hearing, answering God
Supports me under every load."

2. "*Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense.*" As incense is carefully prepared, kindled with holy fire, and devoutly presented unto God, so let my prayer

be. We are not to look upon prayer as easy work requiring no thought, it needs to be "set forth"; what is more, it must be set forth "before the Lord," by a sense of his presence and a holy reverence for his name: neither may we regard all supplication as certain of divine acceptance, it needs to be set forth before the Lord "as incense," concerning the offering of which there were rules to be observed, otherwise it would be rejected of God. "*And the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.*" Whatever form his prayer might take his one desire was that it might be accepted of God. Prayer is sometimes presented without words by the very motions of our bodies: bended knees and lifted hands are the tokens of earnest, expectant prayer. Certainly work, or the lifting up of the hands in labour, is prayer if it be done in dependence upon God and for his glory: there is a hand-prayer as well as a heart-prayer, and our desire is that this may be sweet unto the Lord as the sacrifice of eventide. Holy hope, the lifting up of hands that hang down, is also a kind of worship: may it ever be acceptable with God. The Psalmist makes a bold request: he would have his humble cries and prayers to be as much regarded of the Lord as the appointed morning and evening sacrifices of the holy place. Yet the prayer is by no means too bold, for, after all, the spiritual is in the Lord's esteem higher than the ceremonial, and the calves of the lips are a truer sacrifice than the calves of the stall.

So far we have a prayer about prayer; we have a distinct supplication in the two following verses.

3 Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.

4 Incline not my heart to *any* evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties.

5 Let the righteous smite me; *it shall be* a kindness: and let him reprove me; *it shall be* an excellent oil, *which* shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also *shall be* in their calamities.

6 When their judges are overthrown in stony places, they shall hear my words; for they are sweet.

3. "*Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth.*" That mouth had been used in prayer, it would be a pity it should ever be defiled with untruth, or pride, or wrath; yet so it will become unless carefully watched, for these intruders are ever lurking about the door. David feels that with all his own watchfulness he may be surprised into sin, and so he begs the Lord himself to keep him. When Jehovah sets the watch the city is well guarded: when the Lord becomes the guard of our mouth the whole man is well garrisoned. "*Keep the door of my lips.*" God has made our lips the door of the mouth, but we cannot keep that door of ourselves, therefore do we entreat the Lord to take the rule of it. O that the Lord would both open and shut our lips, for we can do neither the one nor the other aright if left to ourselves. In times of persecution by ungodly men we are peculiarly liable to speak hastily, or evasively, and therefore we should be specially anxious to be preserved in that direction from every form of sin. How condescending is the Lord! We are ennobled by being door-keepers for him, and yet he deigns to be a door-keeper for us.

4. "*Incline not my heart to any evil thing.*" It is equivalent to the petition, "Lead us not into temptation." O that nothing may arise in providence which would excite our desires in a wrong direction. The Psalmist is here careful of his heart. He who holds the heart is lord of the man; but if the tongue and the heart are under God's care all is safe. Let us pray that he may never leave us to our own inclinations, or we shall soon decline from the right.

"*To practise wicked works with men that work iniquity.*" The way the heart inclines the life soon tends: evil things desired bring forth wicked things practised. Unless the fountain of life is kept pure the streams of life will soon be polluted. Alas, there is great power in company: even good men are apt to be swayed by association; hence the fear that we may practise wicked works when we are with wicked workers. We must endeavour not to be with them lest we sin with them. It is bad when the heart goes the wrong way alone, worse when the life runs in the evil road alone; but it is apt to increase unto a high degree of ungodliness when the backslider runs the downward path with a whole horde of sinners around him. Our practice will be our perdition if it be evil; it is an aggravation of sin rather than an excuse for it to say that it is our custom and our habit. It is God's practice to

punish all who make a practice of iniquity. Good men are horrified at the thought of sinning as others do; the fear of it drives them to their knees. Iniquity, which, being interpreted, is a want of equity, is a thing to be shunned as we would avoid an infectious disease. "*And let me not eat of their dainties.*" If we work with them we shall soon eat with them. They will bring out their sweet morsels, and delicate dishes, in the hope of binding us to their service by the means of our palates. The trap is baited with delicious meats that we may be captured and become meat for their malice. If we would not sin with men we had better not sit with them, and if we would not share their wickedness we must not share their wantonness.

5. "*Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness.*" He prefers the bitterness of gracious company to the dainties of the ungodly. He would rather be smitten by the righteous than feasted by the wicked. He gives a permit to faithful admonition, he even invites it—"let the righteous smite me." When the ungodly smile upon us their flattery is cruel; when the righteous smite us their faithfulness is kind. Sometimes godly men rap hard; they do not merely hint at evil, but hammer at it; and even then we are to receive the blows in love, and be thankful to the hand which smites so heavily. Fools resent reproof; wise men endeavour to profit by it. "*And let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head.*" Oil breaks no heads, and rebuke does no man any harm; rather, as oil refreshes and perfumes, so does reproof when fitly taken sweeten and renew the heart. My friend must love me well if he will tell me of my faults: there is an unction about him if he is honest enough to point out my errors. Many a man has had his head broken at the feasts of the wicked, but none at the table of a true-hearted reprover. The oil of flattery is not excellent; the oil so lavishly used at the banquet of the reveller is not excellent; head-breaking and heart-breaking attend the anointings of the riotous; but it is otherwise with the severest censures of the godly: they are not always sweet, but they are always excellent; they may for the moment bruise the heart, but they never break either it or the head. "*For yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.*" Gracious men never grow wrathful with candid friends so as to harbour an ill-feeling against them; if so, when they saw them in affliction, they would turn round upon them and taunt them with their rebukes. Far from it; these wisely grateful souls are greatly concerned to see their instructors in trouble, and they bring forth their best prayers for their assistance. They do not merely pray for them, but they so closely and heartily sympathize that their prayers are "in their calamities," down in the dungeon with them. So true is Christian brotherhood that we are with our friends in sickness or persecution, suffering their griefs; so that our heart's prayer is in their sorrows. When we can give good men nothing more, let us give them our prayers, and let us do this doubly to those who have given us their rebukes.

6. This is a verse of which the meaning seems far to seek. Does it refer to the righteous among the Israelites? We think so. David surely means that when their leaders fell never to rise again, they would then turn to him and take delight in listening to his voice. "*When their judges are overthrown in stony places, they shall hear my words; for they are sweet.*" And so they did: the death of Saul made all the best of the nation look to the son of Jesse as the Lord's anointed; his words became sweet to them. Many of those good men who had spoken severely of David's quitting his country, and going over to the Philistines, were nevertheless dear to his heart for their fidelity, and to them he returned nothing but good-will, loving prayers, and sweet speeches, knowing that by-and-by they would overlook his faults, and select him to be their leader. They smote him when he erred, but they recognized his excellences. He, on his part, bore no resentment, but loved them for their honesty. He would pray for them when their land lay bleeding at the feet of their foreign enemies; he would come to their rescue when their former leaders were slain; and his words of courageous hopefulness would be sweet in their ears. This seems to me to be a good sense, consistent with the context. At the same time, other and more laboured interpretations have their learned admirers, and to these we will refer in our notes from other authors.

7 Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth, as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth.

8 But mine eyes are unto thee, O GOD the Lord: in thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute.

9 Keep me from the snares *which* they have laid for me, and the gins of the workers of iniquity.

10 Let the wicked fall into their own nets, whilst that I withal escape.

7. David's case seemed hopeless : the cause of God in Israel was as a dead thing, even as a skeleton broken, and rotten, and shovelled out of the grave, to return as dust to its dust. "*Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth.*" There seemed to be no life, no cohesion, no form, order, or headship among the godly party in Israel : Saul had demolished it, and scattered all its parts, so that it did not exist as an organized whole. David himself was like one of these dried bones, and the rest of the godly were in much the same condition. There seemed to be no vitality or union among the holy seed ; but their cause lay at death's door. "*As when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth.*" They were like wood divided and thrown apart : not as one piece of timber, nor even as a bundle, but all cut to pieces, and thoroughly divided. Leaving out the word "wood," which is supplied by the translators, the figure relates to cleaving upon the earth, which probably means ploughing, but may signify any other form of chopping and splitting, such as felling a forest, tearing up bushes, or otherwise causing confusion and division. How often have good men thought thus of the cause of God ! Wherever they have looked, death, division, and destruction have stared them in the face. Cut and cloven, hopelessly sundered ! Scattered, yea, scattered at the grave's mouth ! Split up and split for the fire ! Such the cause of God and truth has seemed to be. "Upon the earth" the prospect was wretched ; the field of the church was ploughed, harrowed, and scarified : it had become like a wood-chopper's yard, where everything was doomed to be broken up. We have seen churches in such a state, and have been heart-broken. What a mercy that there is always a place above the earth to which we can look ! There lives One who will give a resurrection to his cause, and a reunion to his divided people. He will bring up the dead bones from the grave's mouth, and make the dried faggots live again. Let us imitate the Psalmist in the next verse, and look up to the living God.

8. "*But mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord.*" He looked upward and kept his eyes fixed there. He regarded duty more than circumstances ; he considered the promise rather than the external providence ; and he expected from God rather than from men. He did not shut his eyes in indifference or despair, neither did he turn them to the creature in vain confidence, but he gave his eyes to his God, and saw nothing to fear. Jehovah his Lord is also his hope. Thomas called Jesus Lord and God, and David here speaks of his God and Lord. Saints delight to dwell upon the divine names when they are adoring or appealing. "*In thee is my trust.*" Not alone in thine attributes or in thy promises, but in thyself. Others might confide where they chose, but David kept to his God : in him he trusted always, only, confidently, and unreservedly. "*Leave not my soul destitute*"; as it would be if the Lord did not remember and fulfil his promise. To be destitute in circumstances is bad, but to be destitute in soul is far worse ; to be left of friends is a calamity, but to be left of God would be destruction. Destitute of God is destitution with a vengeance. The comfort is that God hath said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee."

9. "*Keep me from the snares which they have laid for me.*" He had before asked, in verse 3, that the door of his mouth might be kept ; but his prayer now grows into "Keep me." He seems more in trouble about covert temptation than concerning open attacks. Brave men do not dread battle, but they hate secret plots. We cannot endure to be entrapped like unsuspecting animals ; therefore we cry to the God of wisdom for protection. "*And the gins of the workers of iniquity.*" These evil workers sought to catch David in his speech or acts. This was in itself a piece of in-equity, and so of a piece with the rest of their conduct. They were bad themselves, and they wished either to make him like themselves, or to cause him to seem so. If they could not catch the good man in one way, they would try another ; snares and gins should be multiplied, for anyhow they were determined to work his ruin. Nobody could preserve David but the Omniscient and Omnipotent One : he also will preserve us. It is hard to keep out of snares which you cannot see, and to escape gins which you cannot discover. Well might the much-hunted Psalmist cry, "Keep me."

10. "*Let the wicked fall into their own nets, whilst that I withal escape.*" It may not be a Christian prayer, but it is a very just one, and it takes a great deal of grace

to refrain from crying *Amen* to it ; in fact, grace does not work towards making us wish otherwise concerning the enemies of holy men. Do we not all wish the innocent to be delivered, and the guilty to reap the result of their own malice ? Of course we do, if we are just men. There can be no wrong in desiring that to happen in our own case which we wish for all good men. Yet is there a more excellent way.

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS.

Whole Psalm.—This Psalm, like the one before it, is distinguished by a pregnant brevity and the use of rare expressions, while at the same time it is full of verbal and real coincidences with the other Psalms of David. These indications are so clear and undeniable, that a sceptical critic of great eminence (De Wette) pronounces it one of the oldest Psalms in the collection.—*Joseph Addison Alexander.*

Whole Psalm.—Few Psalms in so small a compass crowd together so many gems of precious and holy truth.—*Barton Bouchier.*

Whole Psalm.—Many commentators are strongly of opinion that this Psalm was written as a memorial of that very interesting scene in the life of David recorded in 1 Sam. xxiv., relating to his generous treatment of Saul. Though he had an opportunity of putting his cruel persecutor to death in the cave of Engedi, yet he spared his life, only cutting off his skirt, and not suffering his followers to touch him ; and when Saul had gone out of the cave, David, going out after him, remonstrated with him from some distance in the gentlest and most respectful language in regard to the injustice of his conduct towards him. It is thought that the sixth verse contains so express a reference to this very remarkable occurrence in David's history, as to leave little doubt that it was the occasion on which the Psalm was composed.—*James Anderson's Note to Calvin, in loc.*

Whole Psalm.—The imagery and allusions of the Psalm are in keeping ; viz., the oil which had lately anointed him ; and the watch before his mouth, etc., suggested by the watching at the mouth of the cave, though ultimately referring to the tabernacle service.—*John Jebb.*

Verse 1.—"LORD, I cry unto thee." Misbelief doth seek many ways for delivery from trouble ; but faith hath but one way,—to go to God, to wit, by prayer, for whatsoever is needful.—*David Dickson.*

Verse 1.—"LORD, I cry unto thee." No distress or danger, how great soever, shall stifle my faith or stop my mouth, but it shall make me more earnest, and my prayers, like strong streams in narrow straits, shall bear down all before them.—*John Trapp.*

Verse 1.—"Unto thee . . . unto me." Our prayer and God's mercy are like two buckets in a well ; while the one ascends, the other descends.—*Ezekiel Hopkins.*

Verse 1.—Note that the difference of tense, "*I have cried*" (Heb., LXX., and Vulgate) followed by "*when I cry*," signifies the earnest perseverance of the saint in prayer, never ceasing, so long as trouble lasts. And trouble does last so long as we are in the world ; wherefore the apostle teaches us to "*Pray without ceasing.*"—*Augustine and Bruno, in Neale and Littledale.*

Verses 1—5.—That the Psalmist was now in some distress, whereof he was deeply sensible, is evident from the vehemency of his spirit, which he expresseth in the reiteration of his request or supplication (verse 1) ; and by his desire that his "*prayer might come before the Lord like incense, and the lifting up of his hands as the evening sacrifice*" (verse 2). The Jewish expositors guess, not improbably, that in that allusion he had regard unto his present exclusion from the holy services of the tabernacle, which in other places he deeply complains of.

For the matter of his prayer in this beginning of the Psalm, it respecteth himself, and his deportment under his present condition, which he desireth may be harmless and holy, becoming himself, and useful to others. And whereas he was two ways liable to miscarry ; first, by too high an exasperation of spirit against his oppressors and persecutors ; and, secondly, by a fraudulent and pusillanimous compliance

with them in their wicked courses ;—which are the two extremes which men are apt sinfully to run into in such conditions : he prays earnestly to be delivered from them both. The first he hath respect unto in verse 3, "*Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth ; keep the door of my lips*" : namely, that he might not, under those great provocations which were given him, break forth into an unseemly intemperance of speech against his unjust oppressors, which sometimes fierce and unreasonable cruelties will wrest from the most sedate and moderate spirits. But it was the desire of this holy Psalmist, as in like cases it should be ours, that his heart might be always preserved in such a frame, under the conduct of the Spirit of God, as not to be surprised into an expression of distempered passion in any of his words or sayings. The other he regards in his earnest supplication to be delivered from it, verse 4 : "*Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity : and let me not eat of their dainties.*" There are two parts of his request unto the purpose intended. 1. That by the power of God's grace influencing his mind and soul, his heart might not be inclined unto any communion or society with his wicked adversaries in their wickedness. 2. That he might be preserved from a liking of, or a longing after those things, which are the baits and allurements whereby men are apt to be drawn into societies and conspiracies with the workers of iniquity ; "*And let me not eat of their dainties.*" See Prov. i. 10—14. For he here describeth the condition of men prospering for a season in a course of wickedness ; they firstly give up themselves unto the practice of iniquity, and then together solace themselves in those satisfactions of their lusts, with which their power and interest in the world do furnish them.

These are the "*dainties,*" for which an impotent longing and desire do betray the minds of unstable persons unto a compliance with ways of sin and folly : for I look on these "*dainties*" as comprising whatever the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, or the pride of life can afford. All these David prays to be delivered from any inclination unto ; especially when they are made the allurements of a course of sin. In the enjoyment of these "*dainties,*" it is the common practice of wicked men to soothe up, and mutually encourage one another in the way and course wherein they are engaged. And this completes that poor felicity which in this world so many aspire unto, and whereof alone they are capable. The whole of it is but a society in perishing sensual enjoyments, without control, and with mutual applauses from one another. This the Psalmist had a special regard unto when casting his eye towards another communion and society which he longed after (verse 5). He saw there not dainties but rebukes : he discerned that which is most opposite unto those mutual applauses and rejoicings in one another, which is the salt and cement of all evil societies, for he noticed rebukes and reproofs for the least miscarriages that shall be observed. Now whereas the dainties which some enjoy in a course of prosperous wickedness, are that alone which seems to have anything in it amongst them that is desirable, and on the other side rebukes and reproofs are those alone which seem to have any sharpness, or matter of uneasiness and dislike in the society of the godly, David balanceth that which seemeth to be sharpest in the one society, against that which seems to be sweetest in the other, and, without respect unto other advantages, prefers the one above the other. Hence, some read the beginning of the words, "*Let the righteous rather smite me,*" meaning, "*rather than that I should eat of the dainties of the ungodly.*" —John Owen.

Verse 2.—"*Let my prayer be set forth before thee.*" Margin, *directed*. The Hebrew word means to fit ; to establish ; to make firm. The Psalmist desires that his prayer should not be like that which is feeble, languishing, easily dissipated ; but that it should be like that which is firm and secure.—Albert Barnes.

Verse 2.—"*Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense.*" Literally, Let my prayer, incense, be set in order before Thee,—implying that prayer was in the reality what incense was in the symbol. . . . Passing to New Testament Scripture, though still only to that portion which refers to Old Testament times, we are told of the people without being engaged in prayer, while Zacharias was offering incense within the Sanctuary (Luke i. 10) ; they were in spirit going along with the priestly service. And in the book of Revelation the prayers of saints are once and again identified with the offering of incense on the golden altar before the throne. Rev. v. 8 ; viii. 3, 4.—Patrick Fairbairn, in "*The Typology of Scripture.*"

Verse 2.—"*Set forth.*" Prayer is knowing work, believing work, thinking work,

searching work, humbling work, and nothing worth if heart and hand do not join in it.—*Thomas Adam, 1701—1784.*

Verse 2.—“*Set forth before thee as incense,*” whose fragrant smoke still ascends upwards. But many times in the very ascent, whilst it strives up higher and higher, *infirmo phantasmate verberatur*, saith Gregory, “it is beaten back again by earthly imaginations which intervene,” and then is extenuated by degrees, and vanisheth to nothing. Therefore the prophet prays *ut dirigitur oratio*, “that his prayer may be set before God,” *ut stabilitur*; so some render it out of the Hebrew, “that it may be established,” that it may neither evaporate itself nor be whiffed about with the wind of vain and contrary imaginations, which come *ab extrinseco* [from without], and may corrupt it.—*Anthony Farindon.*

Verse 2.—“*As incense.*” That in general by *incense* prayer is signified, the Scripture expressly testifieth. And there is a fourfold resemblance between them: 1. In that it was *beaten and pounded* before it was used. So doth acceptable prayer proceed from a broken and contrite heart: Ps. li. 17. 2. *It was of no use until fire was put under it*, and that taken from the altar. Nor is that prayer of any virtue or efficacy which is not kindled by the fire from above, the Holy Spirit of God, which we have from our altar, Christ Jesus. 3. *It naturally ascended upwards towards heaven*, as all offerings in the Hebrew are called *אֲשֵׁרִי*, “ascensions,” risings up. And this is the design of prayer, to ascend unto the throne of God: “I will direct unto thee, and will look up”; that is, pray: Ps. v. 3. 4. *It yielded a sweet savour*; which was one end of it in temple services, wherein there was so much burning of flesh and blood. So doth prayer yield a sweet savour unto God; a savour of rest, wherein he is well pleased.—*John Owen.*

Verse 2.—“*As incense . . . as the evening sacrifice.*” Though this address of mine must necessarily want all that solemnity of preparation required in the service of thy holy Tabernacle, the cloud of incense and perfume, etc., the minchia or oblation of fine flour, etc., yet let the purity and fervour of my heart, and the innocency of my hands, now lifted up to thee in this sad hour of my distress, be accepted instead of all these, and prevail for deliverance and a safe retreat to me and my companions.—*Charles Peters (—1777), in “A Critical Dissertation on the Book of Job,” 1751.*

Verse 2.—“*As the evening sacrifice.*” This should be our daily service, as a lamb was offered up morning and evening for a sacrifice. But, alas! how dull and dead are our devotions! Like Pharaoh’s chariots, they drive on heavily. Some, like Balaam’s ass, scarce ever open their mouths twice.—*Thomas Adams.*

Verse 2.—“*My hands.*” Spreading forth our hands in believing and fervent prayer is the only way of grasping mercy.—*F. E., in “The Saints Ebenezer,” 1667.*

Verse 2.—In the gorgeous ceremonial worship of the Hebrews, none of the senses were excluded from taking part in the service. . . . The sense of smell occupied, perhaps, the most prominent place; for the acceptance of the worship was always indicated by a symbol borrowed from this sense: “The Lord smelled a sweet savour.” The prayer of the people ascended as incense, and the lifting up of their hands as the evening sacrifice. The offering of incense formed an essential part of the religious service. The altar of incense occupied one of the most conspicuous and honoured positions in the tabernacle and temple. . . . On this altar a censer full of incense poured forth its fragrant clouds every morning and evening; and yearly, as the day of atonement came round, when the high priest entered the holy of holies, he filled a censer with live coals from the sacred fire on the altar of burnt-offerings, and bore it into the sanctuary, where he threw upon the burning coals the “sweet incense beaten small,” which he had brought in his hand. Without this smoking censer he was forbidden, on pain of death, to enter into the awful shrine of Jehovah. Notwithstanding the washing of his flesh, and the linen garments with which he was clothed, he dare not enter the holiest of all with the blood of atonement, unless he could personally shelter himself under a cloud of incense.

It has been supposed by some writers that incense was invented for the purpose of concealing or neutralizing the noxious effluvia caused by the number of beasts slaughtered every day in the sanctuary. Other writers have attached a mystical import to it, and believed that it was a symbol of the breath of the world arising in praise to the Creator, the four ingredients of which it was composed representing the four elements. While a third class, looking upon the tabernacle as the palace of God, the theocratic King of Israel, and the ark of the covenant as his throne, regarded the incense as merely corresponding to the perfume so lavishly employed

about the person and appointments of an Oriental monarch. It may doubtless have been intended primarily to serve these purposes and convey these meanings, but it derived its chief importance in connection with the ceremonial observances of the Mosaic ritual from the fact of its being the great symbol of prayer. It was offered at the time when the people were in the posture and act of devotion; and their prayers were supposed to be presented to God by the priest, and to ascend to him in the smoke and odour of that fragrant offering. Scripture is full of allusions to it, understood in this beautiful symbolical sense. Acceptable, prevailing prayer was a sweet-smelling savour to the Lord; and prayer that was unlawful, or hypocritical, or unprofitable, was rejected with disgust by the organ of smell.

Doubtless the Jews felt, when they saw the soft white clouds of fragrant smoke rising slowly from the altar of incense, as if the voice of the priest were silently but eloquently pleading in that expressive emblem in their behalf. The association of sound was lost in that of smell, and the two senses were blended in one. And this symbolical mode of supplication, as Dr. George Wilson has remarked, has this one advantage over spoken or written prayer, that it appealed to those who were both blind and deaf, a class that are usually shut out from social worship by their affliction. Those who could not hear the prayers of the priest could join in devotional exercises symbolized by incense, through the medium of their sense of smell; and the hallowed impressions shut out by one avenue were admitted to the mind and heart by another.

The altar of incense stood in the closest connection with the altar of burnt-offerings. The blood of the sin-offering was sprinkled on the horns of both on the great day of annual atonement. Morning and evening, as soon as the sacrifice was offered, the censer poured forth its fragrant contents, so that the perpetual incense within ascended simultaneously with the perpetual burnt-offering outside. Without the live coals from off the sacrificial altar, the sacred incense could not be kindled; and without the incense previously filling the holy place, the blood of atonement from the altar of burnt-offering could not be sprinkled on the mercy-seat. Beautiful and expressive type of the perfect sacrifice and the all-prevailing intercession of Jesus—of intercession founded upon atonement, of atonement preceded and followed by intercession! Beautiful and expressive type, too, of the prayers of believers kindled by the altar-fire of Christ's sacrifice, and perfumed by his merits!—*Hugh Macmillan*, in "*The Ministry of Nature*," 1871.

Verse 3.—"Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth," etc. 1. A man would never use this language without a conviction of the *importance of the subject*. . . . Everything is transacted by speech, in natural, civil, and religious concerns: how much, therefore, depends on the good or evil management of the tongue! What an ardour of holy love and friendship, or of anger and malice, may a few words fan into a flame! The tongue is the principal instrument in the cause of God; and it is the chief engine of the devil; give him this, and he asks no more—there is no mischief or misery he will not accomplish by it. The use, the influence of it, therefore, is inexpressible; and words are never to be considered only as *effects*, but as *causes*, the operation of which can never be fully imagined. Let us suppose a case, I fear, but too common. You drop, in the thoughtlessness of conversation, or for the sake of argument or wit, some irreligious, sceptical expression—it lodges in the memory of a child, or a servant—it takes root in a soil favourable to such seed—it gradually springs up, and brings forth fruit, in the profanation of the Sabbath; the neglect of the means of grace; in the reading of improper books; in the choice of dangerous companions;—who can tell where it will end? But there is a Being who knows where it began. It will be acknowledged that some have it in their power, by reason of their office, talents, and influence, to do much more injury than others; but none are so insignificant as to be harmless.

2. A man would never use this language without a conviction that *he is in danger of transgression*. And if David was conscious of a liability to err, shall we ever presume on our safety? Our danger arises from the depravity of our nature. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked"; and "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" Our danger arises from the contagion of example. There is nothing in which mankind are more universally culpable than in the disorders of speech. Yet with these we are constantly surrounded; and to these we have been accustomed from our impressible infancy. We are in danger from the frequency of speech. "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin."

We must of necessity speak often ; but we often speak without necessity. Duty calls us to intermingle much with our fellow-creatures ; but we are too little in the closet, and too much in the crowd—and when we are in company we forget the admonition, “ Let every man be swift to hear, and slow to speak.”

3. A man would never use this language without a conviction of *inability to preserve himself*. The Bible teaches us this truth, not only doctrinally, but historically. The examples of good men, and men eminent in godliness, confirm it in the very article before us. Moses, the meekest man in the earth, “ spake unadvisedly with his lips.” You have heard of the patience of Job, but he “ cursed the day of his birth ” ; and Jeremiah, the prophet of the Lord, did the same. Peter said, “ Though all men should be offended because of thee, I will never be offended ; though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.” But how did he use his tongue a few hours after ? Then “ began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man ! ”

4. A man would never use this language without a conviction of *the wisdom of applying to God for the assistance he needs*. Prayer is the effect of our weakness, and the expression of our dependence. It confesses the agency of God. 1. In the first place—God is equal to our preservation. 2. His succours are not to be obtained without prayer. 3. Prayer always brings the assistance it implores.—*Condensed from W. Jay's Sermon on "The Regulation of the Tongue."*

Verse 3.—“ *Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth,*” etc. Watching and prayer are often joined together. We are best kept when recommended into God's hand. I do observe here, First, That unadvised and passionate speeches do easily drop from us in our troubles, especially in our persecution. Secondly, That a godly, conscientious man is very tender of these, as of all evil. He that would live in communion with God for the present, and hope to appear with comfort before him hereafter, is sensible of the least thing that tends to God's displeasure, and God's dishonour : this is the true spirit of one that will be owned by Christ at the last day. Thirdly, There is no way to prevent being provoked to impatience and rashness of speech, or any evil, but by keeping a watch, and renewing our obligations to God. Fourthly, Whoever would keep a watch must call in the aid and assistance of God's grace ; “ *Lord, set a watch before my mouth,*”—*Thomas Manton.*

Verse 3.—“ *Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth,*” etc. Thus holy men have kept the sessions at home, and made their hearts the foremen of the jury, and examined themselves as we examine others. The fear of the Lord stood at the door of their souls, to examine every thought before it went in, and at the door of their lips, to examine every word before it went out, whereby they escaped a thousand sins which we commit, as though we had no other work.—*Henry Smith.*

Verse 3.—“ *Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth.*” Nature having made my lips to be a door to my words, let grace keep that door, that no word may be suffered to go out which may any way tend to the dishonour of God, or the hurt of others.—*Matthew Henry.*

Verse 3.—“ *Set a watch,*” etc. Let a seal for words not to be spoken lie on the tongue. A watch over words is better than over wealth.—*Lucian.*

Verse 3.—“ *Keep the door of my lips.*” That it move not creaking and complaining, as on rusty hinges, for want of the oil of joy and gladness. David had somewhat to do with his tongue, as we see (Ps. xxxix. 1, 3) ; and when he had carted the ark, how untowardly he spake, as if the fault were more in God than himself, that there was such a breach made in Uzzah (1 Chron. xiii. 12). It was but need thus to pray.—*John Trapp.*

Verse 4.—“ *Incline not my heart to any evil thing,*” etc. The present pleasure and commodity of sin is in high estimation with the sinner, and much sweeter to him than what he may lawfully enjoy ; the pleasures of sin are his delicacies. No man can keep himself from being taken with the allurements of a sinful course, except the Lord preserve him : “ *Let me not eat of their dainties.*” The holiest men in Scripture have been most sensible of the impotency of their own free will, and of their inability to resist temptations, or to bring the principles of grace into action ; most diffident of themselves, most dependent upon God, most careful to make use of means, and conscientious in following of ordinances, as their prayers do testify : “ *Incline not my heart to any evil thing,*” etc.—*David Dickson.*

Verse 4.—“ *Incline not my heart.*” Heb. Let not be inclined my heart.—*John Jebb.*

Verse 4.—“ *My heart.*” That man is like Esau which had an inheritance, which

had a heart but now he hath not possession of his own; therefore, give God thy heart, that he may keep it; and not a piece of thy heart, not a room in thy heart, but thy heart. The heart divided, dyeth. God is not like the mother which would have the child divided, but like the natural mother, which said, rather than it should be divided, let her take all. Let the devil have all, if he which gave it be not worthy of it. God hath no cope-mate, therefore he will have no parting of stakes, but all or none; and therefore he which asks here thy heart, in the sixth of Deuteronomy and the fifth verse, asketh "all thy heart, all thy soul, and all thy strength"; thrice he requireth *all*, lest we should keep a thought behind. Yet it is *thy* heart, that is, a vain heart, a barren heart, a sinful heart, until thou give it unto God, and then it is the spouse of Christ, the temple of the Holy Ghost, and the image of God, so changed, and formed, and refined, that God calls it a new heart.

There is such strife for the heart as there was for Moses's body. "Give it me," saith the Lord; "give it me," saith the tempter; "give it me," saith the pope; "give it me," saith riches; "give it me," saith pleasure; as though thou must needs give it to some one. Now here is the choice, whether thou wilt give it to God or the devil; God's heart or the devil's heart; whose wilt thou be?—*Henry Smith*.

Verse 4.—"Let me not eat of their dainties." Sin is not only meat, but sweet meat; not only bread, but pleasant bread to an evil heart. Daniel for some weeks ate no pleasant bread; he ate bread to keep life and soul together, but he forbore feasting or good cheer. Sin is a feast to a carnal man, it is his good cheer, yea, it is "dainties" to him. David, speaking of wicked men says, "Incline not my heart to any evil thing, to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity: and let me not eat of their dainties." These "dainties" may be expounded either for the prosperity that comes in by wicked practices (some by wicked ways get not only their ordinary food but "dainties"); or those "dainties" are sin itself: they feasted themselves in doing evil: "LORD, let me not eat of their dainties." If that be their food I had rather starve than eat with them.—*Joseph Caryl*.

Verse 4.—"Their dainties." The enemies of David were sensual and luxurious; and they would have gladly admitted him to share in their banquets, if his character had resembled their own. He entreats to be preserved from inducement so to do.—*William Walford*.

Verse 5.—"Let the righteous smite me," etc. This verse is so obscure as to be almost unintelligible. According to the English versions, it expresses his willingness to be rebuked by good men for his benefit. But this sense is not only hard to be extracted from the words, but foreign from the context. Of the many contradictory interpretations which have been proposed the most probable is that which makes the sentence mean, that the sufferings endured by the good man, even at the hand of the wicked, are chastisements inflicted by a righteous God in justice and with mercy, and as such may be likened to a festive ointment, which the head of the sufferer should not refuse, as he will still have need of consolation and occasion to invoke God, in the midst of trials and of mischiefs yet to be experienced.—*Joseph Addison Alexander*.

Verse 5.—"Let the righteous smite me." The word *נָחַץ* is seldom used in Scripture but to signify a severe stroke which shakes the subject smitten, and causeth it to tremble; see Prov. xxiii. 35; 1 Sam. xiv. 16; Ps. lxxiv. 6; and it is used for the stroke of the hammer on the anvil in fashioning of the iron (Isa. xli. 7). Wherefore the word *נָחַץ* following may be taken adverbially, as a lenitive of that severity which this word importeth: "Let him smite me, but" *leniter, benignè, misericorditer*, "gently, kindly, friendly, mercifully:" and so some translations read the words, "Let the righteous smite me friendly, or kindly."—*John Owen*.

Verse 5.—"Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness," etc. Grace will teach a Christian to take those potions which are wholesome, though they be not toothsome. Faithful reproof is a token of love, and therefore may well be esteemed a kindness. Such wounding of a friend is healing, and so David might well call it "an excellent oil." And he did not only say so, which is easy and ordinary, but acted accordingly. He did not as the papists, who highly commend holy water, but turn away their faces when it comes to be sprinkled on them. When he had by sin, and continuance in it, so gangrened his flesh, and corrupted himself, that he was in danger of death, he suffered his sores to be thoroughly searched without regret. Nathan was the chirurgeon whom God employed to search that wound

which had divers mouths for festering in his soul ; and truly he did not dally with his patient, though he were a prince, but thrust his instrument to the bottom ; yet whatever pain it put him to, he took it patiently, and was so far from being angry with the prophet, that he made him one of his privy council. It is a sign of a polluted nature for a man, like a serpent, if he be but touched, to gather poison and vomit it up at the party. "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee" : Prov. ix. 8. —George Swinnoek.

Verse 5.—"Let the righteous smite me," etc. If the righteous smite us by reproofs, it must be taken as a kindness, and as a precious balsam, which doth not break our head, but heal us. Not that we are bound to belie ourselves in compliance with every man's censorious humour that will accuse us ; but we must be readier to censure ourselves than others, and readier to confess a fault than to expect a confession from others whom we reprove. Sincerity and serious repentance will be honourable in that person who is most careful to avoid sin, and most ready penitently to confess it when he hath been overcome, and truly thankful to those that call him to repentance ; as being more desirous that God and his laws and religion should have the glory of their holiness, than that he himself should have the undue glory of innocency, and escape the deserved shame of sin.

It is one of the most dangerous diseases of professors, and one of the greatest scandals of this age, that persons taken for eminently religious are more impatient of pain, though just, reproof than many a drunkard, swearer, or fornicator ; and when they have spent hours or days in the seeming earnest confession of their sin, and lament before God and man that they cannot do it with more grief and tears, yet they take it for a heinous injury in another that will say half so much against them, and take him for a malignant enemy of the godly who will call them as they call themselves.—Richard Baxter (1615—1691), in "The Morning Exercises."

Verse 5.—"Let the righteous smite me." If a righteous or a right-wise man smite and reprove, he will do it, 1. *Sine felle*, without gall, without bitterness. 2. *Sine publicatione*, without publishing, divulging, or telling it to the world. 3. *Sine contumelia*, without disgrace—to reform his friend, not to disgrace him. 4. *Sine adulatione*, without flattery. 5. *Non sine Deo*, not without God.—John Gore, in a Sermon entitled "Unknowne Kindnesse," 1635.

Verse 5.—"The righteous," etc. The minister cannot be always preaching ; two or three hours, may be, in a week, he spends among his people in the pulpit, holding the glass of the gospel before their faces ; but the lives of professors, these preach all the week long : if they were but holy and exemplary, they would be as a repetition of the preacher's sermon to their families and neighbours among whom they converse, and keep the sound of his doctrine continually ringing in their ears. This would give Christians an amiable advantage in doing good to their carnal neighbours by counsel and reproof, which now is seldom done, and when done it proves to little purpose, because not backed with their own exemplary walking. "It behoves him," saith Tertullian, "that would counsel or reprove another, to guard his speech with the authority of his own conversation, lest, wanting that, what he says puts himself to the blush." We do not love one that hath a stinking breath to come very near us ; such, therefore, had need have a sweet-scented life.

Reproofs are a good physic, but they have an unpleasant reception ; it is hard for men not to throw them back on the face of them that gives them. Now nothing is more powerful to keep a reproof from thus coming back than the holiness of the person that reproves. "Let the righteous smite me," saith David, "it shall be a kindness : and let him reprove me ; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head." See how well it is taken from such a hand, from the authority that holiness carries with it. None but a vile wretch will smite a righteous man with reproach for smiting him with a reproof, if softly laid on, and like oil fomented, and wrought into him, as it should, with compassion and love to his soul ! Thus we see how influential the power of holiness would be unto the wicked, neither would it be less upon our brethren and fellow-Christians. Holy David professed he would take it as a kindness for the righteous to smite him ; yea, as kindly as if he broke a box of precious oil upon his head, which was amongst the Jews a high expression of love.—William Gurnall.

Verse 5.—"It shall be a kindness" 1. It is a kindness *reducere erratum*, to bring back the wandering. 2. *Sanare ægrotum*, to recover the sick. 3. *Suscitare lethargum*, to awake, to stir up the lethargic, the sleepy. 4. *Ligare insanum*, to bind a mad-

man. 5. *Liberare perditum*, to save a lost man, one in imminent danger.—*John Gore*.

Verse 5.—“*It shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head.*” Some persons pride themselves on being blunt, or, as they call it, “*honest*”; but very blunt people do little good to others, and get little love to themselves. The Scriptures recommend gentleness and kindness. Reproof should fall like the dew, and not like the rushing hail-storm. The “*oil*” insinuates itself; the stone wounds and then rebounds. Christians should take heed of getting fond of the work of “*rebuking*.” Such “*spiritual constables*” do a great deal of mischief without intending it. They are in a church what a very witty and sarcastic person is in society, or what a tell-tale is in school; and approximate very closely to that class which the apostle terms “*busybodies in other men’s matters.*” Our manner must be tender and winning. The nail of reproof, says an old writer, must be well oiled in kindness before it is driven home. Meddling with the faults of others is like attempting to move a person afflicted with the rheumatic gout: it must be done slowly and tenderly, nor must we be frightened by an outcry or two. The great thing is to show the person that you really love him; and if you manifest this in the sight of God, he will bless your efforts, and give you favour in the sight of an erring brother.—*Christian Treasury*.

Verse 5.—“*It shall be an excellent oil.*” Certain oils are said to have a most salutary effect on the head; hence in fevers, or any other complaints which effect the head, the medical men always recommend oil. I have known people who were deranged, cured in a very short time by nothing more than the application of a peculiar kind of oil to the head. There are, however, other kinds which are believed, when thus applied, to produce delirium. Thus the reproofs of the righteous were compared to “*excellent oil,*” which produced a most salutary effect on the head. So common is this practice of anointing the head, that all who can afford it do it every week.

But, strange as it may appear, the crown of their heads is the place selected for the chastisement; thus owners of slaves, or husbands, or schoolmasters, beat the heads of the offenders with their knuckles. Should an urchin come late to school, or forget his lesson, the pedagogue says to some of the other boys, “*Go, beat his head!*” “*Begone, fellow! or I will beat thy head.*” Should a man be thus chastised by an inferior, he quotes the old proverb: “*If my head is to be beaten, let it be done with the fingers that have rings on*”; meaning a man of rank. “*Yes, yes; let a holy man smite my head! and what of that? it is an excellent oil.*” “*My master has been beating my head, but it has been good oil for me.*”—*Joseph Roberts*.

Verse 5.—“*Oil, which shall not break my head.*” When I first took this text in hand, this seemed unto me a very strange and uncouth expression. If the Psalmist had said, *It shall be a stone that shall not break my head, etc.*, we had easily understood him; but to speak of an oil, or a balm, which we know to be so soft, so supple, so lithe and gentle an ointment, that he should speak of breaking his head with oil, it is strange. I confess it troubled me a while, till at length I conceived it might be spoken by contraries; as when a physician gives a patient some pectoral, or cordial, and saith, *Take this, it will not hurt you; his meaning is, it will help and do him good.* So this oil *shall not break my head*; that is, it shall heal it, being broken by my own corruption, by Satan’s temptations, and by the evil influence of such as flatter me in my sins.—*John Gore*.

Verse 5.—If David could say of his enemy that cursed him, “*Let him alone, for God hath bidden him to curse*”; much more safely mayest thou say of thy friend that reproves thee, “*Let him alone, for God hath bidden him to smite.*” And as the apostle saith of ministers, that God “*doth entreat you by us*”; so persuade yourselves that God doth reprove you by them.—*John Gore*.

Verse 5.—It was the saying of a heathen, though no heathenish saying, “*That he who would be good, must either have a faithful friend to instruct him, or a watchful enemy to correct him.*” Should we murder a physician because he comes to cure us; or like him worse, because he would make us better? The flaming sword of *reprehension* is but to keep us from the forbidden fruit of *transgression*. “*Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head.*” Let him smite me as with a hammer, for so the word signifies. A Boanerges is as necessary as a Barnabas.—*William Secker*.

Verse 5.—"Yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities." That is, if ever they who are my reprovers fall into calamity, though they may think they provoked me so by reproving me, that they have lost my love, and have cast themselves out of my prayers, or that I will never speak well of them or for them again; yet I will pray for them with all my heart, as their matter shall require. I will pray for them when they have most need of prayer, even "in their calamities." Some heighten the sense thus,—The more they sharpen their reproof, the more I think myself bound to pray for them. It shows an excellent spirit, not to be hindered from doing good to others by anything they do or speak against us, nor their sharpest (though perhaps mistaken) reproofs of us. Thus it was that that good man Job "prayed for his friends," who had spoken much against him, and not only reproved him without cause, but reproached him without charity.—*Joseph Caryl.*

Verse 6.—"When their judges are overthrown," etc. When the judgments in reserve for the leaders of my enemies shall come upon them, they will perceive too late how reasonable are my words, and wish that they had hearkened to them sooner.—*Joseph Addison Alexander.*

Verse 6.—"Overthrown." The verb rendered "overthrown" is used of Jezebel in 2 Kings ix. 33; "Throw her down. So they threw her down."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

Verse 6.—"They shall hear my words; for they are sweet." This is especially true of all the words which David spake by inspiration, or the Spirit of God spake to him; particularly in his book of Psalms, concerning the Messiah, the covenant of grace, and the blessings of it; of the rich experiences of grace he had, and the several doctrines of the gospel declared by him; which were sweet, delightful, and entertaining to those who have ears to hear such things; or those ears are opened to hear them, so as to understand them and distinguish them, but to others not.—*John Gill.*

Verse 6.—"They shall hear my words; for they are sweet." Those that slighted the word of God before, will relish it and be glad of it when they are in affliction; for that opens the ear to instruction. When the world is bitter the word is sweet. Oppressed innocence cannot gain a hearing with those that live in pomp and pleasure; but when they come to be overthrown themselves, they will have more compassionate thoughts of the afflicted.—*Matthew Henry.*

Verse 6.—"For they are sweet." They shall be pleasant; mild; gentle; equitable; just. After the harsh and severe enactments of Saul, after enduring his acts of tyranny, the people will be glad to welcome me, and to live under the laws of a just and equal administration. The passage, therefore, expresses confidence that Saul and his hosts would be overthrown, and that the people of the land would gladly hail the accession to the throne of one who had been anointed to reign over them.—*Albert Barnes.*

Verses 6, 7.—The mild and dutiful behaviour of David towards Saul and his friends are set together by way of contrast, in the strongest light, from the instances of each sort here produced. The first is, David's humanity towards Saul, in giving him his life at two several times, when he had it in his power to destroy him as he pleased. "Their judges have been dismissed in the rocky places; and have heard my words that they are sweet"; that is, "Their princes have been dismissed in safety, when I had them at an advantage in those rocky deserts; and only heard me expostulate with them in the gentlest words."

The other is, Saul's barbarity and cruelty towards David (or his friends, which is much the same) in the horrid massacre of Ahimelech and the priests, by the hand of Doeg the Edomite, done in such a savage manner, that he compares it to the chopping and cleaving wood; "Like as when one cutteth and cleaveth, so have our bones been scattered on the earth at the command of Saul"; for so I read the Hebrew words, *le-pi Saul, at the mouth*, that is, the command of Saul.

Should we suppose this passage to refer to the first time of David's sparing Saul, viz., when he had him in his power in the cave of *Engedi* (here called *jedé setay*), the sides of the rock, or the rocky places, the speech he made on this occasion when he called after Saul (and which is recorded in 1 Sam. xxiv., from the eighth to the sixteenth verse) might well be called *sweet* or *pleasant words*. For they set his own innocence and the king's unjust behaviour to him in so strong a light, and with all that gentleness and mildness, and even this hard-hearted prince could not

forbear being greatly affected with it for the present; and we are told (verses 16, 17) that "he lifted up his voice and wept."—*Charles Peters.*

Versè 7.—"Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth," etc. The primary reference may be to the slaughter of the priests by the command of Saul, 1 Sam. xxii. 16—19. The language, however, may be illustrative of the many massacres like that on the eve of St. Bartholomew, so numerous as to be scattered on the face of the earth, marking the passage of pious martyrs from this world to a better, and testifying where the blood of the slain shall be disclosed for the judgment of their murderers.—*W. Wilson.*

Versè 7.—"Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth," etc. Assuming the very extreme, it is a look of hope into the future: should his bones and the bones of his followers be even scattered about the mouth of Sheól (cf. the Syrian picture of Sheól: "the dust upon its threshold, 'al-eschâfeh," *Deutsche Morgenländ. Zeitschrift*, xx. 513), their soul below, their bones above—it would nevertheless be only as when one in ploughing cleaves the earth; i.e., they do not lie there in order that they may continue lying, but that they may rise up anew, as the seed that is sown sprouts up out of the upturned earth.—*Franz Delitzsch.*

Versè 7.—"Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth." That is to say, I and my company are in a dying condition, free among the dead; yea, if taken we should be put to most cruel deaths, hewn in pieces, or pulled limbmeal, and left unburied; and our dead bodies mangled by a barbarous inhumanity, as wood-cleavers make the shivers fly hither and thither. This is the perilous case of me and my partisans.—*John Trapp.*

Versè 7.—"Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth."—This seems to be strong eastern painting, and almost figurative language; but that it may be strictly true, the following extract demonstrates: "At five o'clock we left Garigana, our journey being still to the eastward of north; and, at a quarter past six in the evening, arrived at the village of that name, whose inhabitants had all perished with hunger the year before; their wretched bones being all unburied, and scattered upon the surface of the ground, where the village formerly stood. We encamped among the bones of the dead, as no space could be found free from them; and on the 23rd, at six in the morning, full of horror at this miserable spectacle, we set out for Teawa."—(*James Bruce's Travels.*) To the Jews such a spectacle must have been very dreadful, as the want of burial was esteemed one of the greatest calamities which could befall them.—*Burder's "Oriental Customs."*

Versè 7.—"Like one ploughing and cleaving in the earth." This clause may be explained not of cleaving wood but ploughing, to which the first verb is applied in Arabic. Like (one) ploughing and cleaving (making furrows) in the earth, not for the sake of mangling its surface, but to make it fruitful and productive, (so) our bones are scattered at the mouth of hell, as the necessary means of a glorious resurrection.—*Joseph Addison Alexander.*

Versè 7.—"Who can attend the digging of a grave, and view the ruins then disclosed, without exclaiming, "Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth, as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth"?"—*George Horne.*

Versè 8.—"Mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord." If you would keep your mind fixed in prayer, keep your eye fixed. Much vanity comes in at the eye. When the eyes wander in prayer the heart wanders. To think to keep the heart fixed in prayer, and yet let the eyes gaze abroad, is as if one should think to keep his house safe, yet let the windows be open.—*Thomas Watson.*

Versè 8.—"Leave not my soul destitute." The literal Hebrew is, *Pour not out my soul*, but keep it in thy cup of salvation.—*Agellius.* [Compare Isa. liii. 12: "He hath poured out his soul unto death."]

Versè 8.—"Leave not my soul destitute," or, "Cast not out my soul." That is, cast not my life away, as water, which is of no account, is cast out of a vessel containing it.—*Daniel Cresswell.*

Versè 8.—"Leave not my soul destitute." His soul knew what it was to be "destitute"; he had known the misery of spiritual beggary and soul poverty. It was not with him as natural poverty is with the rich, a matter of speculation, a mere matter of theory; but a matter of personal and painful experience. . . . It is in the margin "Make not my soul bare"; Strip me not of every hope; leave me not completely naked; abandon me not to nature's beggary and misery; let me not

go down into the pit with all my sins upon my head; leave not my soul destitute of pardon and peace.—*Joseph C. Philpot.*

Verses 8—10.—

O pour not out my soul, I pray,
From the dark snare preserve my way,
The chambers of the blind entangling net,
Which by my path the powers of evil set.

Behold them laid, the godless crew,
Low in the toils they darkly drew:
The while, with gathering heart and watchful eye,
I wait mine hour to pass victorious by.

John Keble.

Verse 9. 10.—“*Snares*,” “*Gins*,” “*Nets*.” The usual method of capturing or killing the lion in Palestine was by pitfalls or nets, to both of which there are many references in the Scriptures. The mode of hunting the lion with the nets was identical with that which is practised in India at the present time. The precise locality of the lion’s dwelling-place having been discovered, a circular wall of net is arranged round it, or if only a few nets can be obtained, they are set in a curved form, the concave side being towards the lion. They then send dogs into the thicket, hurl stones and sticks at the den, shoot arrows into it, fling burning torches at it, and so irritate and alarm the animal that it rushes against the net, which is so made that it falls down and envelops the animal in its folds. If the nets be few, the drivers go to the opposite side of the den, and induce the lion to escape in the direction where he sees no foes, but where he is sure to run against the treacherous net. Other large and dangerous animals were also captured by the same means. Another and more common, because an easier and a cheaper method, was, by digging a deep pit, covering the mouth with a slight covering of sticks and earth, and driving the animal upon the treacherous covering. It is an easier method than the net, because after the pit is once dug, the only trouble lies in throwing the covering over its mouth. But it is not so well adapted for taking beasts alive, as they are likely to be damaged, either by the fall into the pit, or by the means used in getting them out again. Animals, therefore, that are caught in pits are generally, though not always, killed before they are taken out. The net, however, envelops the animal so perfectly, and renders it so helpless, that it can be easily bound and taken away. The hunting net is very expensive, and requires a large staff of men to work it, so that none but a rich man could use the net in hunting.

Besides the net, several other modes of bird-catching were used by the ancient Jews, just as is the case at the present day. Boys, for example, who catch birds for their own consumption, and not for the market, can do so by means of various traps, most of which are made on the principle of the noose, or snare. Sometimes a great number of hair-nooses are set in places to which the birds are decoyed, so that in hopping about, many of them are sure to be entangled in the snares. Sometimes the noose is ingeniously suspended in a narrow passage which the birds are likely to traverse, and sometimes a simple fall-trap is employed.—*J. G. Wood.*

Verse 10.—“*Into their own nets*.” The word rendered “*nets*” occurs only in this place, as the closely corresponding word in Ps. xli. 10, which is rendered “*deep pits*,” occurs there only.—*Speaker’s Commentary.*

HINTS TO PREACHERS.

Verse 1.—I. The Perpetuity of Prayer: “I cry, I cry.” II. The Personality: “unto thee,” “unto me.” II. The Practicalness: “Make haste; give ear.”

Verse 1.—Holy haste. I. The saint hastening to God. II. The saint hastening God. III. God’s sure hastening to his help.—*W. B. H.*

Verses 1, 2.—I. Prayer put forth: 1. With urgency: “Make haste unto me.” 2. With fervency: “Give ear,” etc. II. Prayer set forth: “Let my prayer be set forth,” etc. When hearing is obtained there is composure and order in prayer.

When the fire is kindled the incense rises. III. Prayer held forth: "The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice," as constant and accepted.—*G. R.*

Verse 2.—True prayer acceptable as incense and as the evening sacrifice. It is spiritual, solemn, ordained of God, brings Christ to remembrance.

Verse 3.—I. The mouth a door. II. A watchman needed. III. The Lord fulfilling that office.

Verse 4.—Total abstinence from evil desires, practices, and delights.

Verse 4.—A prayer, I. For the repression of every evil tendency in the heart: "Incline not my heart," etc. II. For the prevention of any association with the wicked in their sinful works: "To practise," etc. III. For a holy contempt of the temporal pleasure or profit placed in our way through the sin of others: "Let me not eat," etc. Note, many who will not engage in a wicked act do not object to participate in its gains.—*J. F.*

Verse 4.—Deprecation of, I. Devil's desires. II. Devil's deeds. III. Devil's dainties.—*W. B. H.*

Verse 5.—Rebukes of good men. I. Invited. II. Appreciated: "it shall be a kindness." III. Utilized: "an excellent oil." IV. Cheerfully endured: "not break my head." V. Repaid, by our prayers for them in time of trouble.

Verse 5 (last clause).—"Intercessory Prayer." See "Spurgeon's Sermons," No. 1,049,

Verse 6.—I. Times of trouble will come to the careless. II. Then they will be more ready to hear the gospel. III. Then they will find sweetness in that which they formerly refused.

Verse 6.—A Desert Oasis. I. The world is a stony place, hard, barren. II. Often pride and self-trust suffer overthrowing there. III. Then words of God by his sent servant make an oasis in the desert.—*W. B. H.*

Verses 7, 8.—A cemetery scene. I. Dry bones of the dead about the grave. II. Weary bones of the aged and sick around the grave. III. all bones being from day to day made ready for the grave. IV. Bones finding rest in God: "mine eyes are unto thee, O God," etc.

Verse 8.—Expectation. Supplication.

Verse 9.—The snares. Who lay them? Why? Who so many? How are we to escape? "Keep me."

Verses 9, 10.—David prays, 1. That he may see God in his deliverance from his enemies, and 2. That they may see God in the frustration of their designs.—*G. R.*

Verse 10.—Great pains to little purpose. I. The making of nets, etc. II. The taking of God's antagonists in their own nets. III. The invariable escape of God's friends. Lesson: Nothing can prosper sin, or hurt godliness.—*W. B. H.*