

PSALM 119

- 158 I beheld traitors and felt loathing—
because thy (WORD)¹¹⁹ had they not kept.
159 O see that thy PRECEPTS I have loved—
Jehovah! according to thy kindness quicken me.
160 The sum of thy word is truth—
and to the ages are all¹²⁰ thy righteous DECISIONS.

[21. THE EIGHTFOLD SIN (OR SHIN).]

- 161 Princes have persecuted me without cause—
but of thy WORD¹²¹ hath my heart stood in awe.
162 Joyful am I over thy PROMISE—
like the finder of spoil in abundance.
163 Falsehood I hate and abhor—
thy (STATUTES)¹²² I love.
164 Seven times a day have I praised thee—
because of thy righteous DECISIONS.
165 Blessing in abundance¹²³ have the lovers of thy LAW—
with nothing to make them stumble.
166 I have hoped for thy salvation Jehovah—
and thy COMMANDMENTS have I done.
167 My soul hath kept thy TESTIMONIES—
and I have loved them greatly.
168 I have kept thy PRECEPTS (and thy testimonies)—¹²⁴
for all my ways are before thee.

[22. THE EIGHTFOLD TAU.]

- 169 Let my ringing¹²⁵ cry come near before thee Jehovah!—
according to thy WORD cause me to understand.
170 Let my supplications come in before thee—
according to thy PROMISE deliver me.
171 Let my lips pour forth praise—
because thou teachest me thy STATUTES.
172 Let my tongue sing (in faithfulness)
of thy rightful DECISIONS.¹²⁶

119. M.T.: "promise"—in ver. 154: "word" not otherwise in stanza.

120. Some cod. (w. Aram., Sep., Syr., Vul.): "all"—Gn. M.T.: "is each of."

121. MSS. and versions vary between "word" and "words"—cp. Gn.

122. M.T.: "law"—in ver. 165: "statutes" not otherwise in stanza.

123. Or: "great peace," "great prosperity."

124. Clearly redundant. "Implying variant readings at an early date"—

Br.

125. Or: "piercing."

126. M.T.: "Let my tongue sing thy promise—for all thy commandments are righteous." "Promise" is in ver. 170; and "commandments" in ver. 176.

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- 173 Let thy hand be ready to help me—
for thy PRECEPTS have I chosen.
174 I have longed for thy salvation O Jehovah!
and thy LAW is my delight:
175 Let my soul live and it shall praise thee—
and let thy (TESTIMONIES)¹²⁷ help me.
176 I have strayed like a wandering sheep seek thou thy
servant—¹²⁸
for thy COMMANDMENTS have I not forgotten.

PARAPHRASE

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Happy are all who perfectly follow the laws of God.

2 Happy are all who search for God, and always do His will,

3 Rejecting compromise with evil, and walking only in His paths.

4 You have given us Your laws to obey—

5 Oh, how I want to follow them consistently.

6 Then I will not be disgraced, for I will have a clean record.

7 After You have corrected¹ me I will thank You by living as I should!

8 I *will* obey! Oh, don't forsake me and let me slip back into sin again.²

9 How can a young man stay pure? By reading Your word and following its rules.

10 I have tried my best to find You—don't let me wander off from Your instructions.

11 I have thought much about Your words, and stored them in my heart so that they would hold me back from sin.

12 Blessed Lord, teach me Your rules.

13 I have recited Your laws,

14 And rejoiced in them more than in riches.

127. M.T.: "decision." In some cod. (w. 3 ear. pr. edns., Aram., Sep., Vul.): "decisions" (pl.)—Gn. "Decisions" needed in ver. 172.

128. "If I should go astray—like a lost sheep seek thy servant; for," etc.—Del. "I wander like a lost sheep; seek thy servant"—Carter. "I have gone erringly astray like lost sheep: seek thy servant; for," etc.—Leeser. "I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost; O seek thy servant; for," etc.—Dr.

1. Literally, "when I learn (have experienced) Your righteous judgments."

2. Literally, "Oh forsake me not utterly."

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15 I will meditate upon them and give them my full respect.

16 I will delight in them and not forget them.

17 Bless me with life³ so that I can continue to obey You.

18 Open my eyes to see wonderful things in Your word.

19 I am but a pilgrim here on earth; how I need a map—
and Your commands are my chart and guide.

20 I long for Your instructions more than I can tell.

21 You rebuke those cursed proud ones who refuse Your
commands—

22 Don't let them scorn me for obeying You.

23 For even princes sit and talk against me, but I will
continue in Your plans.

24 Your laws are both my light and my counselors.

25 I am completely discouraged—I lie in the dust. Revive
me by Your Word.

26 I told You my plans and You replied. Now give me
Your instructions.

27 Make me understand what You want; for then I shall
see Your miracles.

28 I weep with grief; my heart is heavy with sorrow; en-
courage and cheer me with Your words.

29, 30 Keep me far from every wrong; help me, undeserving
as I am, to obey Your laws, for I have chosen to do right.

31 I cling to Your commands and follow them as closely
as I can. Lord, don't let me make a mess of things.

32 If You will only help me to want Your will, then I will
follow Your laws even more closely.

33, 34 Just tell me what to do and I will do it, Lord. As
long as I live I'll wholeheartedly obey.

35 Make me walk along the right paths for I know how
delightful they really are.

36 Help me to prefer obedience to making money!

37 Turn me away from wanting any other⁴ plan than Yours.
Revive my heart toward You.

38 Reassure me that Your promises are for me; for I trust
and revere You.

39 How I dread being mocked for obeying; for Your laws
are right and good.

40, 41, 42 I long to obey them! Therefore in fairness re-
new my life, for this was Your promise—yes, Lord, to save me!

3. Literally, "deal bountifully that I may live."

4. Literally, "from beholding vanity."

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Now spare me by Your kindness and Your love. Then I will have an answer for those who taunt me, for I trust Your promises.

43 May I never forget Your words; for they are my only hope.

44, 45, 46 Therefore I will keep on obeying You forever and forever, free within the limits of Your laws. I will speak to kings about their value; and they will listen with interest and respect.

47 How I love Your laws! How I enjoy Your commands!

48 "Come, come to me," I call to them, for I love them and will let them fill my life.

49, 50 Never forget Your promises to me Your servant; for they are my only hope. They give me strength in all my troubles; how they refresh and revive me!

51 Proud men hold me in contempt for obedience to God, but I stand unmoved.

52 From my earliest youth I have tried to obey You; Your Word has been my comfort.

53 I am very angry with those who spurn Your commands.

54 For these laws of Yours have been my source of joy and singing through all these years of my earthly pilgrimage.

55 I obey them even at night and keep my thoughts, O Lord, on You.

56 What a blessing this has been to me—to constantly obey.

57 Jehovah is mine! And I promise to obey!

58 With all my heart I want Your blessings. Be merciful just as You promised.

59, 60 I thought about the wrong direction in which I was headed, and turned around and came running back to You.

61 Evil men have tried to drag me into sin, but I am firmly anchored to Your laws.

62 At midnight I will rise to give my thanks to You for Your good laws.

63 Anyone is my brother who fears and trusts the Lord and obeys Him.

64 O Lord, the earth is full of Your lovingkindness! Teach me Your good paths.

65 Lord, I am overflowing with Your blessings, just as You promised!

66 Now teach me good judgment as well as knowledge! For Your laws are my guide.

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67 I used to wander off until You punished me; now I closely follow all You say.

68 You are good and do only good; make me follow Your lead!

69 Proud men have made up lies about me, but the truth is that I obey Your laws with all my heart.

70 Their minds are dull and stupid, but I have sense enough to follow You.

71, 72 The punishment You gave me was the best thing that could have happened to me, for it taught me to pay attention to Your laws. They are more valuable to me than millions in silver and gold!

73 You made my body, Lord; now give me sense to heed Your laws.

74 All those who fear and trust in You will welcome me because I too am trusting in Your Word.

75, 76, 77 I know, O Lord, that Your decisions are right and that Your punishment was right and did me good. Now let Your lovingkindness comfort me, just as You promised. Surround me with Your tender mercies, that I may live. For Your law is my delight.

78 Let the proud be disgraced, for they have cut me down with all their lies. But I will concentrate my thoughts upon Your laws.

79 Let all others join me, who trust and fear You, and we will discuss Your laws.

80 Help me to love Your every wish; then I will never have to be ashamed of myself!

81 I faint for Your salvation; but I expect Your help, for You have promised it.

82 My eyes are straining to see Your promises come true. When will You comfort me with Your help?

83 I am shriveled like a wineskin in the smoke, exhausted with waiting. But still I cling to Your laws and obey them.

84 How long must I wait before You punish those who persecute me?

85, 86 These proud men who hate Your truth and laws have dug deep pits for me to fall in. Their lies have brought me into deep trouble. Help me, for You love only truth.

87 They had almost finished me off, yet I refused to yield and disobey Your laws.

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88 In Your kindness, spare my life; then I can continue to obey You.

89 Forever, O Lord, Your Word stands firm in heaven.

90, 91 Your faithfulness extends to every generation, like the earth You created; it endures by Your decree, for everything serves Your plans.

92 I would have despaired and perished unless Your laws had been my deepest delight.

93 I will never lay aside Your laws, for You have used them to restore my joy and health.

94 I am Yours! Save me! For I have tried to live according to Your desires.

95 Though the wicked hide along the way to kill me, I will quietly keep my mind upon Your promises.

96 Nothing is perfect except Your words.

97 Oh, how I love them. I think about them all day long.

98 They make me wiser than my enemies, because they are my constant guide.

99 Yes, wiser than my teachers; for I am ever thinking of Your rules.

100 They make me even wiser than the aged.

101 I have refused to walk the paths of evil for I will remain obedient to Your Word.

102, 103 No, I haven't turned away from what You taught me: Your words are sweeter than honey.

104 And since only Your rules can give me wisdom and understanding, no wonder I hate every false teaching.

105 Your words are a flashlight to light the path ahead of me, and keep me from stumbling.

106 I've said it once and I'll say it again and again: I will obey these wonderful laws of Yours.

107 I am close to death at the hands of my enemies; oh, give me back my life again, just as You promised me.

108 Accept my grateful thanks and teach me Your desires.

109 My life hangs in the balance, but I will not give up obedience to Your laws.

110 The wicked have set their traps for me along Your path, but I will not turn aside.

111 Your laws are my joyous treasure forever.

112 I am determined to obey You until I die.

113 I hate those who are undecided whether or not to obey You; but my choice is clear—I love Your law.

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114 You are my refuge and my shield, and Your promises are my only source of hope.

115 Begone, you evil-minded men. Don't try to stop me from obeying God's commands.

116 Lord, You promised to let me live! Never let it be said that God failed me.

117 Hold me safe above the heads of all my enemies; then I can continue to obey Your laws.

118 But You have rejected all who reject Your laws. They are only fooling themselves.

119 The wicked are the scum You skim off and throw away; no wonder I live to obey Your laws!

120 I tremble in fear of You; I fear Your punishments.

121 Don't leave me to the mercy of my enemies, for I have done what is right; I've been perfectly fair.

122 Commit Yourself to bless me! Don't let the proud oppress me!

123 My eyes grow dim with longing for You to fulfill Your wonderful promise to rescue me.

124 Lord, deal with me in lovingkindness, and teach me, Your servant, to obey;

125 For I am Your servant; therefore give me common sense to apply Your rules to everything I do.

126 Lord, it is time for You to act. For these evil men have violated Your laws,

127 While I love Your commandments more than the finest gold.

128 Every law of God is right, whatever it concerns. I hate every other way.

129 Your laws are wonderful; no wonder I obey them.

130 As Your plan unfolds, even the simple can understand it.

131 No wonder I wait expectantly for each of Your commands.

132 Come and have mercy on me as is Your way with those who love You.

133 Guide me with Your laws so that I will not be overcome by evil.

134 Rescue me from the oppression of evil men; then I can obey You.

135 Look down in love upon me and teach me all Your laws.

136 I weep because Your laws are disobeyed.

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137 O Lord, You are just and Your punishments are fair.

138 Your demands are just and right.

139 I am indignant and angry because of the way my enemies have disregarded Your laws.

140 I have thoroughly tested Your promises and that is why I love them so much.

141 I am worthless and despised, but I don't despise Your laws.

142 Your justice is eternal for Your laws are perfectly fair.

143 In my distress and anguish, Your commandments comfort me.

144 Your laws are always fair; help me to understand them and I shall live.

145 I am praying with great earnestness; answer me, O Lord, and I will obey Your laws.

146 "Save me," I cry, "for I am obeying."

147 Early in the morning, before the sun is up, I was praying and pointing out how much I trust in You.

148 I stay awake through the night to think about Your promises.

149 Because You are so loving and kind, listen to me and make me well again.

150 Here come these lawless men to attack me;

151 But You are near, O Lord; all Your commandments are based on truth.

152 I have known from earliest days that Your will never changes.

153 Look down upon my sorrows and rescue me, for I am obeying Your commands.

154 Yes, rescue me and give me back my life again just as You have promised.

155 The wicked are far from salvation for they do not care for Your laws.

156 Lord, how great is Your mercy: oh, give me back my life again.

157 My enemies are so many. They try to make me disobey; but I have not swerved from Your will.

158 I loathed these traitors because they care nothing for Your laws.

159 Lord, see how much I really love Your demands. Now give me back my life and health because You are so kind.

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160 There is utter trust in all Your laws; Your decrees are eternal.

161 Great men have persecuted me, though they have no reason to, but I stand in awe of only Your words.

162 I rejoice in Your laws like one who finds a great treasure.

163 How I hate all falsehood but how I love Your laws.

164 I will praise You seven times a day because of Your wonderful laws.

165 Those who love Your laws have great peace of heart and mind and do not stumble.

166 I long for Your salvation, Lord and so I have obeyed Your laws.

167 I have looked for Your commandments and I love them very much;

168 Yes, I have searched for them. You know this because everything I do is known to You.

169 O Lord, listen to my prayers; give me the common sense You promised.

170 Hear my prayers; rescue me as You said You would.

171 I praise You for letting me learn Your laws.

172 I will sing about their wonder, for each of them is just.

173 Stand ready to help me because I have chosen to follow Your will.

174 O Lord, I have longed for Your salvation and Your law is my delight.

175 If You will let me live, I will praise You; let Your laws assist me.

176 I have wandered away like a lost sheep; come and find me for I have not turned away from Your commandments.

EXPOSITION

The "Descriptive Title" prefixed to this psalm may make the inadequate impression, that here we have an excessively artificial composition; and a cursory perusal of the psalm itself may awaken the further apprehension, that this artificially constructed series of sayings is wearisomely monotonous. The instant correction of these plausible forebodings is desirable. The monotone, whose existence cannot be denied, is that of a lullaby by which a troubled soul may be softly and sweetly hushed to rest. The art is so exquisite that, when familiarised, it not only gratifies the taste, but aids the judgment, and

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ministers to the hunger of the spirit. This psalm, so far as it is a song at all, is one composed in mournful measure. It is, however, a soliloquy rather than a song. It is a study set to the murmuring of the sea. Its repetitions are like the recurring waves of light by which new satellites are discovered in the ancient heavens. In truth, it reveals a soul in close communion with God; and its art resolves itself into the measured movements of an eagle's wings by which is sustained its nearness to the sun.

The art is undeniably there: *visibly* there—in the eight-fold *aleph*, the eight-fold *beth*, and so on to the end of the Hebrew alphabet of twenty-two letters, yielding in all one hundred and seventy-six verses; *credibly* there—in the eight synonyms which continue changefully pealing like so many bells till full measure has been given; and *possibly* there—in the closing assonances in *ka* and *ee* which some critics deem they discover in the original, though now buried beneath numberless transpositional inadvertences committed by editors and copyists not sufficiently on the alert to safeguard so many stylistic beauties.

But the art is subservient to the sense. Even the grouped initial letters are luminous with concentrated rays of light. For instance, the *aleph* bursts forth, once and again, with impassioned benedictions on the head of the man of God—at once rebuking those who fancy that art cannot minister to devout feeling; the humble linguistic "peg," *waw*, shews how nimbly it can suggest logical continuity of thought; the serpent-like *teth*, harmless as a dove, and full of all "goodness," makes the dweller in its stanza feel that it is "good" to be here; the *ayin* has an "eye" to the beautiful, and opens fresh "fountains" of gladness; and, to name no more, the *zadhe* looks well to it that "righteousness" shall be strong, and "right" on every side be done.

Then those eight synonyms—even though we have lost for the present the poetry of the system by which, chorus-like, they change places—how logically expansive and expanding they are! They are the sworn foes of over-narrowness of definition, and irresistibly demand that grace be permitted to temper law. For what, let us ask, is the master-thought of the psalm? A weighty question truly, and one to which the synonyms must be heard in reply. The verbs—to *love*, to *hate*, to *run*, to *keep*, to *quicken*, etc.—all have their quota of evidence to tender; but they cluster about their nouns, and chiefly about those sturdy synonyms—*law*, *precept*, *word*, etc.—which dominate the landscape. If we

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start with ever so narrow a concept of *law*, for example,—then we have to hearken to *testimony*, with its “witness” to the love of God as well as to the duty of man. If we begin with the *written* “word,” as we very well may, by starting at *statute*, from a root meaning “to engrave,”—then the question comes—whether we must not include the *oral* “word” as well, seeing that the psalmist speaks of *waiting for it* (74, 81, 114, 147), which he would not need to do if it were already in his hand. *The word written and oral*—so far, at least, we must go. But we find the *word stationed in the heavens*; its synonymous *promise* assuring us that Jehovah hath *established the earth so that it standeth*; and its synonymous *decisions* evidently applying to all created things in *heaven and earth*, and causing them all to obey as *Jehovah’s servants*. We are thus uplifted to the altitude of Jehovah’s *WILL*—*written, oral, or effectuated* only, by the silently working power of God. THE KEY-NOTE OF ALL THE SYNONYMS IS, THEREFORE, JEHOVAH’S WILL HOWEVER MADE MANIFEST.

This conclusion at once places us at the psalmist’s own angle of vision, and explains how it is that his whole soul is aflame with affection for an object so variously named as by these eight synonyms. But it does more. It justifies our adoption of a new synonym—or at least it vindicates our search for one, so as not to render both *dabhar* and *’imrah* by the one English term “word.” The presumption is that in some way they perceptibly differ, or they would not both be employed. “Saying” for *’imrah* would have commended itself but for the feeling that it leaned over too much to the sense of “familiar proverb.” Finding, therefore, that the usage of this term has generally an especially gladsome set of words in association with it (as tracing it through the Table will shew), we have ventured on the welcome word *promise* as its suitable English representative. There is one restriction to be placed on all these synonyms; and that is, that they must be held to have a regulative bearing on human character and conduct. The manner of the man they make is always an essential question throughout the psalm. The psalmist’s one absorbing passion is to be conformed to Jehovah’s will. The word “promise,” therefore, can only be accepted in so far as it submits to this limitation. But, to this rule, it easily conforms; since divine “promises” are often, in their very wording, directory of human conduct; and even when no condition is expressed, one nevertheless is mostly implied. Indeed, it may perhaps safely be said, and dutifully borne in

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mind, that as a rule Jehovah's promises *are* conditional; and only when it is distinctly protested by Himself that they are absolutely unconditional, can they wisely be so held. There is perhaps not more than a single instance to be discovered in the accompanying Table in which the rendering of *'imrah* needs to be subdued to "saying."

Thus far our effort after exposition has been directed chiefly to the helping of the student to use the Table of Synonyms with pleasure and profit. It is needless to remind him that there are several other veins of interest running through the psalm: as, for instance the words descriptive of sacred study and meditation, and those displaying the moods and tenses of affection and devotion and holy living.

But all these lines of inquiry fall into a secondary place when compared with the familiar question of authorship; which, in this case, becomes one of unusual interest—unless, indeed, it is at once vetoed as a bootless inquiry. The present writer,—forgetting that he had already, when commenting on Pss. 1 and 19, committed himself to an opinion as to the authorship of this psalm also,—started to deal with this extraordinary composition with an open mind as to its probable author; and could not help being at once rather fascinated by the opinion of Thrupp that Daniel wrote it. But, little by little, the plausibility of this conclusion melted away before continuous meditation on the circumstantial evidence, which, it should be noted, is in this case unusually voluminous. Here is a man admitting us into his closet, and permitting us to hearken to the prolonged outpouring of his soul before Jehovah; in the course of which he not only reflects the character and aspirations and struggles of his own soul, but makes so many allusions to his enemies and affords so many indications of his relations to them and their attitude and endeavours regarding him, that it becomes feasible that with due patience we shall discover with something like moral certainty *who he is*. And, in point of fact, the situation ultimately becomes so patent, that we are persuaded that only one man in the field of sacred story fits the situation and fulfils its many-sided demands. But, in order to make this discovery, we need to have studied the psychology of the previous psalms with some persistence and insight. If we have already caught glimpses of THE MAN, without foreseeing whither they would lead us; but now at length realise a SITUATION exactly fitted for him, and, so far as we can judge, for no other possible writer

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of a psalm like the present, we may hope for the patience of our readers, before the strength of our persuasion that we have found the author, is condemned. Those fellow-students who have accompanied us in our investigation of Pss. 31, 35; 42, 43, will anticipate the avowal that here again we are on the track of PRINCE HEZEKIAH. We say "prince" advisedly; for it is only by antedating Hezekiah's ascension to the throne; by reflecting that he must have been prince before he became king; by assuring ourselves that he must have had a history before he began to reign, that certainly he did not burst forth from oblivion an already strong man of God without decision of character previously formed or moral culture previously pursued; that probably he had had a godly mother; that possibly he had quite easily and naturally come under the tutorial care of the prophet Isaiah with whom we know he was intimate in after years; that, almost certainly, he had long had access to the royal library in which the archives of Israel and the psalms of David were stored; that as a king's son he would be well-educated, would have leisure at command, and could easily secure assistance in any pursuit in which he might care to indulge;—it is only when we put these things together, that we begin to conceive of the situation as it really must have been formed by the circumstances and conditions of Hezekiah's younger days. These are by no means all the formative influences on which we can reckon. The life and doings of his father Ahaz are known to us: his vanity—his timidity—his inclinations towards idolatry—his readiness to use his priests as patrons of his apostate doings and his ministers as the tools of his innovating designs: these things are well known to us. Then we have our knowledge of human nature to furnish an element of guidance. We can readily conceive how the pious and faithful Hezekiah would be a thorn in his father's side; a reflection on his father's instability; a rebuke to the sycophantic courtiers who would be only too ready to connive at his father's questionable courses; and, moreover, how, *less than a word* from such a father against such a son would serve as a cloak under which those courtiers who chiefly wished to curry favour with the reigning monarch would little by little develop into persecutors of the pious prince and, it may be, secure his banishment from court, or at least his retirement into country life. Then, too, we must remember that Hezekiah did not begin to reign till he was twenty-five; and if we date his conscious manhood and perceptible self-assertion

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no further back than to eighteen years of age, that gives us seven ample years for culture in music and song, abundant leisure for searching among the library scrolls and tablets, and for *writing acrostics of any length*. Hezekiah, at five-and-twenty, would practically be as old as most of his compeers at fifty.

If now we bring into comparison with these conditions the indications afforded by the psalm itself, we become more and more amazed at the correspondence between the two sets of circumstances. Daniel, it is true, had enemies of high rank (23, 161) watchful and treacherous (61, 85, 110, 150; 118, 158): Hezekiah's enemies were all this; and, besides, had one characteristic which Daniel was not confronted with in Babylon: Hezekiah's enemies were faithless to the Divine Law, which they nevertheless knew (118, 150, 158); and this alone puts Daniel out of court as having any claim to be considered the author of this psalm. Not only were this writer's enemies acquainted with the law of Jehovah, but they were frustrators of it (126); and it is no wonder that our author was both indignant at their conduct (53) and deeply grieved by it (136). Hezekiah's privileged position, in having access to the Library of the Law, fully justified him in promising that those who *turned* (or *returned*) to him should know Jehovah's testimonies (79). He could tell them as well as any scribe. Accustomed, as prince, to enjoy the benefit of competent counsellors, in dark days of apostacy he would be glad to find *counsellors* in his much-loved sacred books (24). His position made him well aware of the value of wealth; and, therefore, it was no empty comparison when he preferred the knowledge of Jehovah's will to *all riches*, to *thousands of gold and silver* (14, 36, 72, 127). If Hezekiah was ever banished to the upper reaches of the Jordan, as appears probable (Ps. 42), we can perceive an especial fitness in the allusion here (54) to his "house of sojourn," made vocal with "melodies" in honour of Jehovah's "statutes"; and at the same time can appreciate his sense of distance from Jehovah's house which he so greatly loved (41, 77). It is only needful to add, that in spite of the appearance of age in the author of this psalm which has persuaded several commentators into the inference that he was at least a middle-aged man, the balance of evidence contained in the comparisons and positive assertion of the psalm itself (99, 100, 141) is decidedly in favour of the conclusion that he was still a young man when he composed it; and we can well believe what an unspeakable solace it was to the ban-

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ished prince Hezekiah thus to beguile the weary hours in constructing this work of sacred art—which probably, merely as literature, has few if any equals in the world. The references appended to the text above, calling attention to the third stanza of Ps. 35, will add another item of circumstantial evidence, which tends to make the inference, that Hezekiah wrote this psalm as well as that stanza, well-nigh irresistible.

It was hoped to close this merely introductory "Exposition" with the foregoing paragraph. But the psalm refuses to be hastily dismissed. By this time it has cast over us a spell which is not easily broken. We began with something akin to a defence of the psalm from the suspicion of necessarily being dry, because so obviously artificial and inevitably monotonous. But, little by little, how completely has such an anticipation vanished. How full the psalm is of passion; how many sidelights on character does it convey; how gem-like many of its single sentences have come to sparkle in our eyes, commending themselves as texts and mottoes, memorable words of warning and cheer; how charmingly its biographical contributions, profusely scattered through its stanzas, have opened up to us the engrossing incidents which probably bestudded a single good man's life; and especially how profound are the historical and theological problems to which it effectively introduces us. Only to instance a single biographical suggestion, and an unexpected theological inquiry:—What have we before us in the way of personality, but a young man, who at least once went astray; whose sin seems to have become known to those who wished him ill, who very probably magnified his offence, procuring by their evil tongues a punishment which, directly or indirectly, nearly cost the young prince his life: this same young man, being led to bethink him of his ways, to turn his feet into the way of Jehovah's testimonies, and ever after to serve his pardoning God with an enthusiasm and thoroughness which converted his ill-wishers into crafty and persistent persecutors. Some such personal history as this floats before us, as the kaleidoscope of alphabetical reminiscence continues its aphoristic suggestions. The theological inquiry alluded to is no less profound than that which concerns itself with the beginnings and fluctuations of the divine life in the human soul. This same young man, was he already a backslider in the divine life when he first egregiously went astray; or did he suddenly fall into unforeseen and unexpected temptation and as quickly experience recovery to Divine

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favour, thenceforth to walk more guardedly than before in the narrow way of Jehovah's commandments? We cannot exactly know; nor would we, if we could, brood over the diagnosis of his sin. The thing that interests us is, the simple fact, that eleven times over in the course of this psalm is reference made to the quickening of the spiritual life within him (namely in vers. 25, 37, 40, 50, 88, 93, 107, 149, 154, 156 and 159); which interest is intensified into sustained wonder, that the contact of Jehovah's WILL, which we are so ready to denominate LAW, and to regard as "killing" rather than "giving life," should have been so largely instrumental in bringing this psalmist's soul into conscious nearness to God. As closely related Scripture words often qualify each other; so it would seem do related human experiences, though far removed in point of time and condition, limit each other so materially as to require careful adjustment before we finally pronounce on the whole psychological question involved. In other words: How can we harmonise the condemnatory and slaying effects of "law" as portrayed in the Seventh of Romans with the life-giving functions discharged by "law" in the one hundred and nineteenth psalm? Doubtless, there is perfect harmony between them: but how seldom do we allow a steady eye on that harmony to guard us from exaggerations when we are engrossed in either the one sphere of thought or the other. It may be added that, intimately entwining itself with these biographical and theological questions, is another, which, though closely related, is nevertheless distinct: namely, the historical problem of growing spirituality in the nation of Israel. Many writers plausibly argue that these remarkable approximations of Old Testament spirituality to that of New Testament times, can only have resulted from the long and severe discipline of the Exile. Grant that assumption, as regards the nation as a nation, does it hold good also and equally of individuals? We need not disturb the foregone conclusion which goes so far to solve the mystery of pain, namely that the highest form of goodness can be produced only from the refining process of suffering; and yet we may discover, that the painful schooling of a nation is mostly or always heralded by the stern discipline of individuals. From this point of view, the enquiry becomes pertinent, how far the best of the pre-exilic kings were perfected by suffering; or, to close in upon the problem offered by this psalm: If we assume that such a chastened composition as the one-hundred-and-nineteenth psalm

PSALM 119

could only have sprung from the soil of sanctified suffering, it is still open to us to conclude that the Young Prince Hezekiah had himself graduated in that school; and that he, out of the treasures of a varied and instructive experience, stored and wrought up into exquisite form during a period of ample leisure, produced this unique sacred composition—which not being a Temple Song was not earlier introduced in the Psalter, and being in an especial sense a piece of private autobiography was not readily placed at the public service; but which some such discerning Scribe as Ezra has, under Divine Guidance, saved from permanent oblivion.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How answer the charge that this psalm is “wearisomely monotonous”? Rotherham uses two or three beautiful figures of speech to answer this charge. Discuss them.
2. There are two devices used to give art and beauty (as well as structure) to this psalm. What are they?
3. What is the “master-thought of the psalm”? How is an answer reached to the above question?
4. The writer of the psalm is “aflame with affection” for the object of this psalm. What is it? Why so concerned about it?
5. There are nine synonyms instead of eight. Why? What is the ninth?
6. The study of all 176 verses of this psalm is a life-long pursuit. Consider what is said here about the study and meditation on the word of God. What about holy living as seen in this psalm?
7. There is some possibility that Daniel was the writer of this psalm. Why rejected?
8. Hezekiah is the writer of the psalm with hardly a question of doubt in the mind of Rotherham. Do you agree? Discuss.
9. At what time in the life of Hezekiah was this written? Hezekiah’s resources for writing were very good. What were they?
10. The life and doings of Ahaz could relate to this psalm. How?
11. Consider the details given as to the enemies of Hezekiah and of Daniel. How compared and related to this psalm?
12. The place of the writing is also discussed. What is said?

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13. There is an intriguing biographical inference to the author in the psalm. What is it?
14. What theological question could be raised here? How answered? (It is important—do *not* ignore it!)
15. The historical problem of growing spirituality in the nation of Israel is here mentioned. What is said about it?

PSALM 120

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Peace versus War.

ANALYSIS

(See Inserted Headlines.)

(Lm.) Song of the Steps.

(A GRATEFUL KING'S MEMORIAL.)

- 1 Unto Jehovah in the distress that befell me
I called and he answered me:—
- 2 "Jehovah! oh rescue my soul—
from the lip of falsehood
from the tongue of deceit."

(A BELLIGERENT COUNSELLOR'S WARLIKE SPEECH.)

- 3 "What shall one give to thee and what shall one add to thee,
thou tongue of deceit?
- 4 Arrows of a warrior—
sharpened with glowing coals of broom!"¹

(THE PEACEFUL KING'S LAMENT.)

- 5 "Ah! woe is me! that I sojourn with Meshech—²
that I dwell among the tents of Kedar!³
- 6 Full long hath my soul had her dwelling
with haters⁴ of peace!

1. "The broom shrub makes the best charcoal, and therefore the best coal to burn and glow"—Br.

2. "The Moschi . . . in Assy. times they dwelt in W. (or N.W.) Armenia"—O.G.

3. "Tribes of nomads in Arabian desert"—O.G.

4. So (pl.) some cod. (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn. M.T.: "a hater" (sing.)

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7. I am peace! but when I speak
they [are] for war!"

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 120

In my troubles I pled with God to help me and He did!

2 Deliver me, O Lord, from liars.

3 O lying tongue, what shall be your fate?

4 You shall be pierced with sharp arrows and burned with glowing coals.¹

5, 6 My troubles pile high among these haters of the Lord, these men of Meshech and Kedar. I am tired of being here among these men who hate peace.

7 I am for peace, but they are for war, and my voice goes unheeded in their councils.

EXPOSITION

If we assume the correctness of Dr. Thirtle's solution of the title of the following fifteen psalms, as on broader grounds we deem ourselves entitled to do, we ought to find the contents of the psalms themselves continually verifying that conclusion. We shall accordingly call attention, in the quietest way possible, to the passing indications afforded, that the so-called "Songs of Degrees," or "Songs of Ascents," more exactly *Songs of the Steps*, are commemorative of the two-fold deliverance—of Israel from the Assyrians, and of Israel's King from the premature death with which he was threatened by Jehovah. We need not suppose them all composed in celebration of the particular crisis when the sign of the Dial-steps was vouchsafed, so long as, in a general way, they are all such as Hezekiah might have either written or adapted to the various events of his reign, and employed especially to commemorate its crowning deliverance. Should two or three of these psalms approve themselves as written to celebrate Hezekiah's great Passover-feast to which he invited the Northern Tribes with a chequered and yet encouraging response, so much the better; since no one can doubt that the king would naturally desire to memorialise his efforts after the reunion of the Tribes; and then, besides, the larger the area from which our circumstantial evidence as to authorship is de-

1. Literally, "with coals of the broom tree."

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rived, the more convincing ought to be the result when the converging rays of light are brought to a focus.

It is easy to recognise the probability that, for some time after he began to reign, Hezekiah had about him counsellors who, without being actually disloyal to him, were quite unable to take his exalted views of the reality of Jehovah's protection of Israel; and, consequently, how naturally it came about that when, in the earlier days of the Assyrian Invasion, the King's whole soul was set for *peace*, by reason of his confident trust in Jehovah, his courtiers were some of them utterly unable to follow his counsels; and, indeed, were only moved by his pacific assurances to fiercer denunciations of the foe. This apprehension of the state of the atmosphere at Hezekiah's Court, forms an apt preparation for the first psalm in the series. Kirkpatrick's explanation of the strikingly figurative language employed in the course of this psalm may usefully guard us from stumbling at the outset.

"*Meshech*, mentioned in Gen. 10:2 as a son of Japheth, was a barbarous people living between the Black Sea and the Caspian, probably the Moschi of Herodotus (iii. 94) and Mushki of the Assyrian inscriptions: *Kedar*, mentioned in Gen. 25:13 as the second son of Ishmael, was one of the wild tribes which roamed through the Arabian desert, 'whose hand was against every man' (Gen. 16:12). Obviously the psalmist cannot mean to describe himself as actually living among peoples so remote from one another, but applies these typical names of barbarian tribes to his own compatriots, as we might speak of Turks and Tartars."

These "Turks and Tartars" were in Hezekiah's Court, and the king was getting weary of them. It is submitted that the very terms of the psalm exactly suit such a situation, and not at all the state of affairs during the Exile, or after it in the neighborhood of Jerusalem.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The following fifteen psalms are commemorative of a two-fold deliverance. What is it?
2. In what place in this psalm are the counsellors of Hezekiah found?
3. Who is the "*Meshech*" of verse 5?
4. How did Hezekiah feel God would deliver Israel? How was Israel delivered?

PSALM 121

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Jehovah the True Helper and Keeper of Israel.

ANALYSIS

(See Inserted Headlines.)

(Lm.) Song of the Steps.

(THE KING, SEEING JERUSALEM SURROUNDED
BY AN ARMY.)

- 1 "I keep lifting mine eyes unto the mountains—
whence cometh my help?"

(STRONG COUNSELLOR'S ASSURANCE.)

- 2 "Help¹ is from Jehovah—
maker of heaven and earth!"

(WEAK COUNSELLOR'S PIOUS WISH.)

- 3 "May he not² suffer thy foot to slip!
may he that keepeth³ thee not² slumber!"

(STRONG COUNSELLOR'S RE-ASSURANCE.)

- 4 "Lo! neither⁴ will slumber nor⁴ sleep
the Keeper of Israel.
- 5 Jehovah—thy Keeper—Jehovah
is thy shade on thy right hand:
- 6 By day the sun shall not smite thee,
nor the moon by night.
- 7 Jehovah will keep thee from every evil—
he will keep thy person,⁵

1. Merely omitting the suffix *yod* from the noun for "help" converts this verse into a timely positive assurance.

2. The subjective or deprecativ negative is here used, and by the headline is dramatically accounted for.

3. N.B. how the "strong counsellor" catches up this word and repeats it five times.

4. In contrast with the negative in ver. 3, that here used is positive, and states a fact.

5. Heb. *nephesh*: U.: "soul." We need to be reminded how frequently *nephesh* means "person"—in good contrast, here, with "goings."

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- 8 Jehovah will keep thy going out and thy coming in—
from henceforth and to the ages!"⁶

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 121

Shall I look to the mountain gods for help?

2 No! My help is from Jehovah who made the mountains!
And the heavens too!

3, 4 He will never let me stumble, slip or fall. For He
is always watching, never sleeping.

5 Jehovah Himself is caring for you! He is your defender.¹

6 He protects you day and night.

7 He keeps you from all evil, and preserves your life.

8 He keeps His eye upon you as you come and go, and
always guards you.

EXPOSITION

Notwithstanding his strong faith in Jehovah, Hezekiah's confidence would naturally be tried as the Assyrians approached the sacred city. Jerusalem was surrounded by mountains; and to these the King would instinctively lift up his eyes to see whether the Assyrians were coming; and, in moments of distress, might well ask—whence his *help* could come. Such a strong man as Isaiah would be at hand to assure him; and ver. 2 would be worthy of *him* and of the occasion. It is easy to apprehend how a weaker counsellor might thereupon express the pious wish that Jehovah's help might not fail, but in such terms as tended rather to weaken the King's faith than to strengthen it. The first adviser, therefore, renews his assurances of Jehovah's help in more vigorous and ample terms. *Lo!* says he,—*Look you!*—as of some open and manifest truth—and then he proceeds with his re-assurance in positive terms of utmost vigour; accumulating the Divine titles to confidence, figuratively picturing the pervading presence of Jehovah's protection, playing with the word employed by his weaker friend—*Keeper*—till it echoes with triumphant faith. Then, too, the very word *keep* is exquisitely fitted to the position of a king who could not move—

6. Cp. Intro., Chap. III., "Ages."

1. Literally, "your shade at your right hand."

PLAMLS 121 AND 122

but must wait till he should "see the salvation of God." How much easier thus to apply the words, than to force the accustomed thought of help coming from the mountains of Judæa to bring the returning exiles out of Babylon.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Verse one of this psalm is very much misunderstood. The help *does not* come from the hills—from whence? Discuss.
2. Who would give help and assurance to Hezekiah? (i.e. besides God)
3. There seems to be two counsellors in this psalm. What does each say? Who are they?

P S A L M 1 2 2

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Tribes Welcomed to the Passover.

ANALYSIS

(See Inserted Headlines.)

(Lm.) Song of the Steps—By David¹
(A PILGRIM'S REMINISCENCE OF THE
START FROM HOME.)

- 1 I rejoiced with those who were saying to me:—
"To the house of Jehovah we go!"

(A BAND OF PILGRIMS' OUTBURST OF
TRIUMPH ON ARRIVAL.)

- 2 Standing are our feet—
within thy gates—
O Jerusalem!

(THE PILGRIMS, ADMIRING THE CITY, ARE
REMINDING OF ITS RELIGIOUS USE.)

- 3 Jerusalem!
She that hath been built up a veritable city,
Joined for her part into a unity:

1. Some cod. (w. Aram., Sep., Vul.) omit: "By David"—Gn.

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- 4 Whither have come up tribes—
The tribes of Yah—
A testimony to Israel—
To give thanks to the name of Jehovah.

(SURPRISED OBSERVATION OF JUDICIAL PREPARATIONS.)

- 5 Surely there have they placed seats² for justice!
seats² for the house of David!

(PRAYERS SUGGESTED FOR JERUSALEM'S PEACE.)

- 6 Ask ye the peace of Jerusalem:—
"Quiet be they who love thee!
7 let there be peace within thy walls!
quietness within thy palaces!"

(AN INDIVIDUAL'S EAGERNESS TO JOIN.)

- 8 "For the sake of my brethren and my friends
do pray let me speak:—
'Peace be within thee!
9 For the sake of the house of Jehovah our God
let me seek to secure a blessing for thee.' "

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 122

I was glad for the suggestion of going to Jerusalem, to the Temple of the Lord.

2, 3 Now we are standing here inside the crowded city.

4 All Israel—Jehovah's people—have come to worship as the law requires, to thank and praise the Lord.

5 Look! There are the judges holding court beside the city gates, deciding all the people's arguments.

6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. May all who love this city prosper.

7 O Jerusalem, may there be peace within your walls and prosperity in your palaces.

8 This I ask for the sake of all my brothers and my friends who live here;

9 And may there be peace as a protection to the Temple of the Lord.

2. Or: "thrones."

PSALM 122
EXPOSITION

It will be noticed that some authorities omit the ascription of this psalm to *David*; and, judging from internal evidence, nothing can well be imagined more perfectly fitting, for its primary occasion, than to view it as King Hezekiah's welcome to the Northern Tribes whom he had invited to join in the celebration of his great Passover. The completeness of its adaptation to that memorable occasion cannot be exaggerated. Down to the minutest detail, it approves itself as worthy of the man who conceived it, and the occasion for which it was first intended.

Imagine, then, the profound satisfaction with which a godly Northerner heard one after another of his neighbours declaring his intention to respond to good King Hezekiah's invitation, by going up to the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem. That gives the *motif* of the first brief stanza, ver. 1.

Think, further, of the feelings of a band of such pilgrims when they first found themselves standing within the gates of the Sacred City. Naturally, the first person singular has given place to the first person plural—the *I* of isolated reception of the news of intention to go, is exchanged for the *our* of companionship in the triumph of actual arrival. Every word tells exactly as written: *Standing—are our feet—within thy gates—O Jerusalem!* We can perceive the thrill of emotion with which the feet of the pilgrims press the hallowed ground. That is our second stanza.

The newly-arrived gaze around them in silent astonishment and admiration, as if perchance they had hitherto only been accustomed to the straggling houses of a country village, and had never seen a real city before. "*Jerusalem!* and this is she!—*she that hath been built*, compact and continuous, as a *city worthy of the name*; every dweller in close touch with his neighbour, for fellowship in need, in worship, and in mutual defence; Jerusalem—striking *symbol of unity*. We, of the Tribes have been scattered and divided,—but our beloved Jerusalem is ONE!" So may we appreciate the first half of the third stanza.

Fine the tact of poetic vision, that sees the chance of here introducing a skilful and strong reminder of the duty of the Tribes to their Mother City. Nothing so prosy and pedagogic as to say, "Whither the tribes ought regularly to come up, as for centuries they have not done": nothing so *awkward as that* comes from the poet's pen; but rather the gracious recognition

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that they *have responded* to the King's invitation; since here, in fact, they are; as Northerner, having already greeted Northerner in Jerusalem, rejoices to know: *Whither have come up tribes*. Moreover, these *tribes* that *have come up*, are not aliens and rebels; oh no! *but tribes of Yah*, that had a right to come—a *testimony to Israel*, by the original ordinance, making for national unity; and how much more *telling a testimony* now, when men from all quarters are once more joining in bearing it. They have come, not to be reprimanded for their long absence, but to join in the soul-cementing bonds of united *praise to Jehovah*—their ancestors' still Living God. That excellent stroke of poetic policy completes our third stanza.

If any one thing, more than another, should elicit our admiration of the Divine Tact of this psalm-writer, it is the way in which he succeeds in bringing in—as by means of a casual observation—the most delicate of reminders that the holy people, who are *religiously* one, should be *judicially*, and therefore *civilly*, one also. It is not hinted that a notice had been seen exhibited at the street-corners, to the effect that "All coming to Jerusalem to worship are expected to bring with them their civil causes to be tried by the rightful present Representatives of the Beloved King David." No! it is—as to its actual poetic form—not an authoritative notice at all; but merely a sojourner's surprised and significant observation of something in the city he has seen. But what has he seen? Nothing more than *empty chairs*, placed in the public area set apart as forum. But those empty chairs are eloquent; for they are chairs of state. "*Surely, there, have they placed seats for justice: seats for the house of David!*" so remarks the pilgrim as he passes by, impressed by the sight, the profound meaning of which he thoughtfully ponders.

But a truce to object-lessons and moralisings prompted by them. The great Feast is rapidly reaching its climax of UNITED INTERCESSION. Here are fitting prayers suggested. The city as a whole filling every mind, "*Ask ye the peace of Jerusalem,*" says the poet: and in so doing, such things as the following, it will be seasonable that ye say:—"Quiet be they who love thee: may they 'lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and gravity.' *Let there be peace within thy walls*, O Jerusalem—whatever storms may rage in foreign lands. And *quietness itself*—in purest distillation—*be within thy palaces* of state and power." All of which, the student of the psalm can amplify according to his own sense of fitness.

PSALMS 122 AND 123

But the closing stanza must not be missed nor slurred over; for, in truth, it asks to be read with a delicate meaning discovered between its lines. For who is the INDIVIDUAL that closes the psalm? Who is he that, having so thoughtfully provided for the spiritual wants of others, now begs to be heard for himself:—"begs," we say, advisedly; since no scholar can deny that a homely *passion of importunity* is there, in the Hebrew, which sooner than let the mere English reader miss we have ventured to represent by the quaint form of request, "*Do pray let me speak*"? Who is this, then, with a heart so large that he can, within the compass of two closing sentences, take in with loving embrace his *brethren and friends* and likewise, with worshipful concern, *the house of Jehovah*? Is it not the author of the psalm himself, who can no longer be restrained from speaking for himself; and who, for some of us, by the fitness of every word of the psalm to the man and to the occasion, has virtually signed his name, KING HEZEKIAH?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the particular occasion of this psalm? We are invited to use our imagination as to the circumstances.
2. An appreciation for the nation is obtained by this visit. How?
3. There is "an excellent stroke of poetic policy in the third stanza. What is it?"
4. How was the religious, judicial and civil unity of Israel suggested?
5. Give several phrases as to the *united intercession*.
6. The writer of the psalm has an individual request at the close of the psalm. What is it?

P S A L M 1 2 3

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The King's Response to the Injunction to Lift up
his Eyes as High as Heaven.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., ver. 1, An Individualistic Couplet by way of Response to the Exhortation in Ps. 121:2. Stanza II., ver. 2, Israel unites in getting into an

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Attitude of Earnest Waiting on Jehovah; which, in Stanza III., vers. 3, 4, Finds expression in Importunate Entreaty.

(Lm.) Song of the Steps.

- 1 "Unto thee have I uplifted mine eyes,
O thou who art enthroned in the heavens!"
- 2 Lo! as the eyes of menservants unto the hand of their lord,
as the eyes of a maidservant unto the hand of her lady
So our eyes are unto Jehovah our God,
until that he be gracious unto us.
- 3 "Be gracious unto us O Jehovah be gracious unto us,
for greatly are we sated with contempt:
- 4 Exceedingly sated on her part is our soul—²
with the scorn of the arrogant,
the contempt of the proudest oppressors."

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 123

O God enthroned in heaven, I lift my eyes to You.

2 We look to Jehovah our God for His mercy and kindness just as a servant keeps his eyes upon his master or a slave girl watches her mistress for the slightest signal.

3, 4 Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy. For we have had our fill of contempt and of the scoffing of the rich and proud.

EXPOSITION

Most naturally, King Hezekiah, who is a skilful leader in psalmody as well as a worthy example of devotion, leads off this psalm; which comes out well as a Response to the Assurance in 121:2—"Help is from Jehovah—maker of heaven and earth."

The second verse gathers up into congregational expression a representation of a waiting and watching attitude towards Jehovah which is at once homely, beautiful and suggestive. These worshippers, though on earth, are led to regard themselves as attendants in presence of their Heavenly King; full in his view; awaiting his pleasure. As personal attendants await in silence the slightest expression of the will of their superior; watching the pointing finger which says "Go," the open

1. Cp. Intro., Chap. III., "Soul."

PSALMS 123 AND 124

palm which says "Bring," the beckoning movement which says "Come"; so, says the psalmist, even with such profound respect and watchful attention are *our eyes unto Jehovah our God, until that he be gracious unto us*. Surely, a comparison as suggestive as it is beautiful. Such servants know their master's or mistress's ways—the meaning of each familiar gesture. They need no loud word of formal command: all they require is, to catch the slightest hint of the superior's WILL as the sufficient signal for obedience. And so, the least word from Isaiah for instance, would be intimation enough for both the King and his people:—without (say) going to the Pentateuch, or to Mount Sinai, for a formal "Thus saith the Lord."

This adjustment of the mental attitude of the worshipping nation towards Jehovah is then at once merged in importunate entreaty. The plea is pointedly put—*Be gracious unto us, O Jehovah*,—and emphatically repeated—*be gracious unto us*; and then weighted with a reason: *for greatly are we sated with contempt*. "Oh! we have had enough of this vile and blaspheming Rabshakeh and his imperious master." We all know the story. Fancy the foreigner on our own soil; and ourselves at the time in certain and miraculously attested covenant relation with the Maker of heaven and earth! and should *we* not have importuned our God in some such strains as these?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This is a "response psalm"; a response to what?
2. A beautiful court scene is here given—i.e. a scene in the court of King Jehovah. What is involved?
3. How beautifully is obedience to God here suggested. Discuss.
4. What is meant by the phrase ". . . greatly are we sated with contempt"?

P S A L M 1 2 4

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Sudden and Complete Deliverance Acknowledged
as Jehovah's Own Work.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-5, Israel taught to Recognize and Remember the Extent

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of her Danger as figured by On-rushing Waters. Stanza II., vers. 6-8, Praise offered for Deliverance as from a Beast of Prey and from a Fowler's Trap.

(Lm.) Song of the Steps.

- 1 "If it had not been Jehovah who was for us"—
oh let Israel say—
- 2 "If it had not been Jehovah who was for us,
when man rose up against us
- 3 Then alive had they swallowed us up
in the glow of their anger against us;
- 4 Then the waters had washed us away,
the torrent had gone over our soul;
- 5 Then had gone over our soul the waters so proud."
- 6 Blessed be Jehovah!
who gave us not over as a prey to their teeth.
- 7 Our soul like a bird hath escaped from the trap of the
fowlers,
the trap is broken and we are escaped.
- 8 Our help is in the name of Jehovah,
maker of heaven and earth.

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 124

If the Lord had not been on our side (let all Israel admit it), if the Lord had not been on our side,

2, 3 We would have been swallowed alive by our enemies,
destroyed by their anger.

4, 5 We would have drowned beneath the flood of these
men's fury and pride.

6 Blessed be Jehovah who has not let them devour us.

7 We have escaped with our lives as a bird from a hunter's
snare. The snare is broken and we are free!

8 Our help is from the Lord who made heaven and earth!

EXPOSITION

Of the three conceivable situations which have been thought of as originating this striking and beautiful psalm, the first fits not at all, the second fits but awkwardly, the third fits admirably—as glove to hand for which it was made. The

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first, is the deliverance from Babylon; the second, that from the conspiracy of the little surrounding nations to Nehemiah and his brethren after their return to the homeland; and these, it will be perceived, are exilic and post-exilic: of comparatively late date for inclusion in Israel's Psalter. The third, is the deliverance of Judah from the Assyrian invader Sennacherib, which carries back the psalm into Hezekiah's times, and places it alongside of its companions, the other "Songs of the Steps."

As to the first of these occasions, suffice it to say that Judah was not about being *swallowed up* in Babylon since they had long sojourned there, had built houses, and practised their religion in their foreign home; and on the other hand their return from Babylon was not in the least like being snatched from the teeth of a beast of prey or being set free from a broken *trap* or *snare* with an instant and complete liberation. Kirkpatrick plainly sees this, and his words are worth recording here. "It is commonly supposed," says he, "to be the thanksgiving of the returned exiles for deliverance from the Babylonian captivity. No less event, it is urged, could have evoked such strong emotion." It is well that he notes this strong emotion. "But the language of the psalm," he continues, "points rather to some sudden danger which had been providentially averted, than to a blow which had actually fallen." And then he goes on to emphasise "the danger which menaced the restored community when Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem." But neither was this danger so sudden, nor was deliverance so definite, instant, and complete as to answer to the description of the psalm. Turn back to the deliverance from the Assyrian invasion and the Divine overthrow of Sennacherib's army in a single night, and then how apt and impressive the Psalmist's description of both danger and deliverance; how abundantly justified the "strong emotion" which the psalm unmistakably betrays. More than this. The invasion of Palestine by Assyria had been actually foretold by Isaiah (8:6-8) in terms precisely similar to those of the first stanza of this psalm; so that when the psalmist speaks of *the waters so proud* which had threatened to engulf Judah, he may excusably be thought to have had the very terms of Isaiah's prediction in mind, as he had spoken of "the waters strong and many of the River (Euphrates)," rolling on throughout Judah, overflowing and passing along "till unto the neck he shall reach." Thirtle is amply justified in thus commenting upon the psalm before us:—"It is all true

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of Hezekiah and his experiences during the Assyrian invasion. The first four verses reflect the desperate character of the situation, when there was no resource but Jehovah. David was enabled to effect many escapes; the great escape of Hezekiah is outlined in his remarkable story. That it was comparable to a bird securing its freedom after being imprisoned in a cage (ver. 7a) may be gathered from the boastful words of Sennacherib himself, as appearing in the well-known Taylor cylinder ('Records of the Past,' Second Series, vol. vi., pp. 90, 91): 'Hezekiah of Judah . . . I shut up like a caged bird in Jerusalem, his royal city . . . He was overwhelmed by the fear of the brightness of my lordship (lines 11-30)'—Thirtle, "Old Testament Problems," pp. 41, 42.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the three possible situations for the setting of this psalm?
2. Show how the first and second situations could not fit the psalm.
3. Even archeology confirms Rotherham's position on this psalm. Discuss.

PSALM 125

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Trust in Jehovah Encouraged in Presence of the Invader.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, Jerusalem Safe under Jehovah's Protection. Stanza II., ver. 3, The Sceptre of the Lawless One will be Removed. Stanza III., vers. 4, 5, Prayer for the Good, a Threatening for Such as Yield to the Enemy, and a Benediction on Israel.

(Lm.) Song of the Steps.

- 1 They who trust in Jehovah
are like Mount Zion which cannot be shaken.
- 2 To the ages sitteth Jerusalem enthroned—
mountains round about her;

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And Jehovah is round about his people—
from henceforth and to the ages.

- 3 Surely he will not let the sceptre of the lawless one¹ rest—
on the lot of the righteous,
To the end the righteous may not thrust forth
on perversity their hand.
- 4 Oh do good Jehovah unto such as are good—
even to such as are upright in their hearts;
- 5 But as for such as turn aside their crooked ways
Jehovah will lead them forth with the workers of iniquity!²
Peace upon Israel!

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 125

Those who trust in the Lord are steady as Mount Zion,
unmoved by any circumstance.

2 Just as the mountains surround and protect Jerusalem, so
the Lord surrounds and protects His people.

3 For the wicked shall not rule the godly, lest the godly
be forced to do wrong.

4 O Lord, do good to those who are good, whose hearts
are right with the Lord;

5 But lead evil men to execution. And let Israel have
quietness and peace.

EXPOSITION

Each stanza in this psalm bears witness to the presence of the Invader. The word for *trust* in ver. 1 is the same as that found in 2 Ch. 32:10. Ver. 3 assumes that the sceptre of the foreigner is at present resting on Israel's inheritance; but is a source of danger to the wavering. In ver. 5 we catch sight of those who are coquetting with the enemy and running into the danger of being involved in his ruin: as the Assyrians—such as are left—are about to be led away in shame to their own land, so let all renegades in Israel beware lest they too be *led forth* with the authors of all this *trouble*. *Mount Zion* itself stands firm amidst her surrounding *mountains*: so let

1. So some cod. (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn. M.T.: (changing a vowel-point): "lawlessness."

2. Or: "mischief" ("naughtiness"—Dr.)

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Jehovah's people rest trustful under Jehovah's strong protection. "The political situation was one which called for the encouragement ministered by the words; and the conduct of Hezekiah in the day of adversity shows the mighty influence of Isaiah's advice and the prevailing efficacy of his prayers"—Thirtle, O.T.P., 44.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Read II Chro. 32:10 and discuss its application to this psalm.
2. Even when Sennecharib was about to conquer Jerusalem there were those who were "coquetting with the enemy"—how do we know this?
3. How do the prayers of Isaiah relate to this psalm?

P S A L M 126

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Invader Gone: the First Sowing Begun.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, The Deliverance of Zion calls forth the Jubilations of her People, and the Frank Acknowledgment of Neighbouring Nations. Stanza II., vers. 4-6, Prayer for the Renewed Culture of the Devastated Land.

(Lm.) Song of the Steps.

- 1 When Jehovah turned the fortunes¹ of Zion
we became like men dreaming:
- 2 Then was filled with laughter our mouth,
and our tongue with ringing cries.
Then said they among the nations—
"Great things hath Jehovah done with these!"
- 3 Great things hath Jehovah done with us—
we are full of joy!
- 4 Oh turn Jehovah our fortunes—
as channels in the south country.
- 5 They who are sowing with tears—
with ringing cries may they reap!

1. Or: (ml. though less prob.): "the captivity"—see Exposition.

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- 6 Though one goeth forth and weepeth—
bearing a trail of seed²
Let him come in with ringing cries—
bringing his sheaves.

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 126

When Jehovah brought back His exiles to Jerusalem, it was like a dream!

2 How we laughed and sang for joy. And the other nations said, "What amazing things the Lord has done for them."

3 Yes, glorious things! What wonder! What joy!

4 May we be refreshed¹ as by streams in the desert.

5 Those who sow tears shall reap joy.

6 Yes, they go out weeping, carrying seed for sowing and return singing, carrying their sheaves.

EXPOSITION

It may readily be conceded that, if the opening line of this psalm had been followed by a suitable sequel, the reference might easily have been to a return from literal captivity. But when we examine the usage of the expression "to turn captivity" in various places,—including especially Job 42:10 and Ezekiel 16:53, 55,—and find how "captivity" came sometimes to mean great misfortune or misery, and "turning captivity" to express the idea of turning the fortunes of any one to a former condition of prosperity,—we may well hesitate long enough to examine the context. Now it cannot be denied that the context, in this case, points to some sudden turn of fortune, or relief from distress, such as to appear incredible to the recipients of the blessing; and, at the same time, such as to be so patent to onlooking *nations* as to call forth their frank and admiring acknowledgment of the signal interposition of Israel's God. We need not deny the possibility, or probability, that when the successive companies of Jewish captives in Babylon received permission to return to their own land, the news may have appeared to them to be too good to be true, and they may

2. That is, a small quantity, which can ill be spared because of the want at home, bringing tears to the eyes of the sower.

1. Literally, "Restore our fortunes, Lord."

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have seemed to themselves like men who were *dreaming*; nevertheless, we are not aware that we possess any historical record to that effect. And when we further inquire into the allusion, supposed to be made in this psalm, as to the effect of Israelitish emancipation on surrounding and observant nations, we must acknowledge that nothing in the Ezra-Nehemiah narratives in anywise appears like a verification of this glad song. Here, in this psalm, we have an apparently frank and ungrudging acknowledgement, by foreigners, of Jehovah's interposition for his people; and this acknowledgement is gladly repeated and confirmed by the beneficiaries, as though with a smile of recognition at the courtesy of the admission. Anything more unlike this than the snarling and suspicious and intriguing behaviour of Sanballat and his associates cannot be imagined. There may, of course, have been a brief and passing smile on the face of the neighbouring nations, when they witnessed the arrival of the Jews in their own land; but history is as silent as the grave about it, and therefore it is hard to believe that it should have thus become embalmed in one of Israel's songs.

A similar line of observation may be taken with respect to the second half of the psalm. It is quite true, that returned captives would naturally, soon after their home-coming, have to turn their attention to the cultivation of their recovered lands; and it is possible, that they had to go about their task with aching hearts. But, again, we have no record of all this; and least of all have we any reason to suppose that the returned exiles were so nearly confronted by *famine* as to find it difficult to procure seed for sowing. And yet that is precisely the view which this psalm presents.

On both counts, therefore, we have reason to suspect the view-point afforded by the assumption that these psalms are post-exilic.

Take back the origin of this psalm to the days of Hezekiah, and all is changed; both stanzas of the psalm find firm bases of fact on which to rest. We *know* that the nations honoured Hezekiah and Israel after the overthrow of the Assyrians (2 Ch. 32:22, 23); and we *know* that, before the deliverance, Israel had begun to suffer severely from famine (2 Ch. 32:11); and that it was an anxious question how the people should be fed until they could again grow their own corn (Isa. 37:30, 31).

And thus the evidence of the pre-exilic origin of these beautiful psalms grows upon our hands.

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The usual historical setting for this psalm is seriously called in question by Rotherham. He has two reasons for doing so. Discuss them.
2. Rotherham concedes the possibility of a post-exilic date but doubts it. Discuss.
3. Read II Chr. chapter 32 and Isaiah chapter 37. Discuss your agreement (or disagreement) with Rotherham.

P S A L M 1 2 7

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

In Relief of Domestic and Civic Anxiety.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, Jehovah's Blessing Succeeds our Endeavours, Allays our Anxieties, and Gives us Sleep. Stanza II., vers. 3-5, Children a Gift from Jehovah.

(Lm.) Song of the Steps—By Solomon.

- 1 Except Jehovah build the house
in vain¹ will its builders have toiled thereon:
Except Jehovah watch the city
in vain¹ will the watchman have kept awake.
- 2 It is vain¹ for you who early rise who late take rest,
who eat the bread of wearisome toil:
So would he give his beloved ones² sleep.³
- 3 Lo! an inheritance from Jehovah are sons,
a reward is the fruit of the womb:
- 4 As arrows in the hand of a warrior
so are the sons of the youth.
- 5 How happy the man who hath filled his quiver with them!
they shall not be put to shame,—
Surely they will speak with enemies in the gate.

(Nm.)

1. Or: "For unreality."

2. So (pl.) some cod. (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn. M.T. (sing.).

3. Thus w. Per., rather than "in sleep"—preferred by O.G. 446a, Dav. Heb. Syntax 97, Br. and others.

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PARAPHRASE

PSALM 127

Unless the Lord builds a house, the builders' work is useless.
Unless the Lord protects a city, sentries do no good.

2 It is senseless for you to work so hard from early morning until late at night, fearing you will starve to death; for God wants His loved ones to get their proper rest.

3 Children are a gift from God; they are His reward.

4 Children born to a young man are like sharp arrows to defend him.

5 Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them. That man shall have the help he needs when arguing with his enemies.¹

EXPOSITION

The object and argument of this psalm are plain. Its object is, to allay carking care; and its argument is, that Jehovah cares for us—that the need of his blessing in order to the prosperity of our most arduous enterprises, should lead us to rest in him, since that is his way of leading us, that is how he would have us shew our trust in him. His benefactions are not deprecated: on the contrary, their value is picturesquely and impressively extolled; for how could anything surpass, for beauty and force, the picture of a yet able but ageing father, emboldened by the rally to him of stalwart sons, ready to speak with the enemy, either in judicial witness and plea on the forum, or by bold parley with the foe before striking the ready blow? Yet at the root of even this imposing tree of prosperity lay Jehovah's blessing. For it is thus that we grasp the unity of the psalm, in dissent from those critics who would divide it into two incoherent portions.

In vain, says the poet with threefold emphasis, your most toilsome work, your most wearisome watch, your most protracted restlessness, except you have Jehovah's blessing. It is by teaching you this lesson,—it is *thus*,—it is *so*,—that your loving heavenly Father *would give you sleep*.

This construction of the first stanza is surely sufficiently satisfying to lead us to acquiesce in the conclusion of A.V., R.V. (text), P.B.V., Perowne, Carter,—that the noun "sleep" is what is called "the accusative of object"; in other words, that "sleep" is the very blessing which Jehovah is here represented

1. Literally, "When they speak with their enemies in the gate."

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as giving to his beloved ones. Nevertheless, it may be conceded to be, not only grammatically possible, but exegetically plausible and in a good degree satisfying, to render the word "sleep" as an "adverbial accusative" of time or manner—*in sleep*,—with R.V. (marg.), O.G., Davidson, Briggs, Leeser (*during sleep*); since it is perfectly true that the operations of nature are many of them still active, some of them especially active, while the worker is asleep, and not infrequently the plans of those with large enterprises on hand are advancing by leaps and bounds when the busy brain that originated them is sweetly at rest. Practically, the two constructions come nearly to the same thing; seeing that the likeliest way to get "sleep," is to be assured that all is going on well "during sleep." But *are* they going on well? Who knows, except Jehovah who never slumbers or sleeps (121:4)? Who can effectually prosper them, save the Maker of heaven and earth? Therefore, trust thou in Him—and rest.

The very geniality of this psalm, makes easy its assumed original application and intention, according to the theory favoured by the expositor. Quite taking is the suggestion of those who, from this psalm, picture the exiles rebuilding Jerusalem—the father aided by his numerous sons, speaking with and putting to shame or flight the troublesome Samaritans and others at Jerusalem's gate. Perhaps even more taking is the hint—that this psalm was first meant to encourage the *building* of an *ancestral house*, even the family of David, by one who had remained unmarried or a widower until about the time this *Song of the Steps* was written! This suggestion may attract to itself an especial interest if, with Thirtle (O.T.P. 49), we credit the Jewish tradition that King Hezekiah, after his recovery, married Isaiah's daughter Hephzibah; and if we conjecture, as we then may (2 K. 21:1), that this good king had yet to wait two or three years before there was born to him an heir! Even learned critics may forget to allow for the touch of nature which makes the whole world kin. In any case we have not yet felt any literary compulsion to carry the dating of these "Songs of the Steps" to a period so late as the Exile.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the one outstanding purpose of this psalm?
2. In verses three through five we have a picture of sons aiding

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and helping their father—but under what circumstances?
How do we know this is the proper application? Discuss.

3. How does the noon “sleep” have a very prominent part in the first half of this psalm? Discuss.
4. How related to the building of the Temple?

PSALM 128

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A Happy Home and a Prosperous Commonwealth.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, The Happy Home Described. Stanza II., vers. 4-6,
The Interest of the Commonwealth in Such a Home.

(Lm.) Song of the Steps.

- 1 How happy every one who revereth Jehovah—
who walketh in his ways!
- 2 The toil of thine own hands when thou eatest—
how happy for thee! and good for thine!
- 3 Thy wife—
like a fruitful vine in the recesses of thy house!
Thy children—
like plantings of olive-trees around thy table!
- 4 Lo! surely thus shall be blessed the man who revereth
Jehovah.
- 5 May Jehovah bless thee out of Zion;
and gaze thou upon the prosperity of Jerusalem,
- 6 And see thou sons to thy sons.
Peace be upon Israel!

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 128

Blessings on all who reverence and trust the Lord—on all
who obey Him!

2 Their reward shall be prosperity and happiness.

3 Your wife shall be contented in your home. And look at

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all those children! There they sit around the dinner table as vigorous and healthy as young olive trees.

4 That is God's reward to those who reverence and trust Him.

5 May the Lord continually bless you with heaven's blessings¹ as well as with human joys.²

6 May you live to enjoy your grandchildren! And may God bless Israel!

EXPOSITION

Every one can see how delightful a companion picture this psalm forms to that which has immediately preceded it. It overflows with tender admiration for the man who, in his home, realises to the full the richness of Jehovah's blessing: *How happy* (ml., *Oh the blessednesses of*) twice exclaims the psalmist: first thinking of the devout mind and the well-ordered life of the chief recipient of Jehovah's blessing; then passing on to the sturdy independence of the man in being permitted to earn his own livelihood and that of his wife and children. No idler is he; no mere dependent. *Happy for thee* to gain thine own bread by thy toil, and to have loving ones to share it with thee, and *good for thine*, to nestle under thy wing and multiply thy blessings: *thy wife, like a vine*—graceful, dependent, fruitful—in the recesses of thy house, her sheltered heaven on earth, where she prefers to be; *thy children like plantings*—still young—of olive-trees on the way to transplantation into homes of their own, but at present placed around thy table as its richest ornament.

His neighbours call attention to him (*Lo!*) as a witness to Jehovah's kindness and faithfulness, and as an encouragement to others. In fact, the State sends blessings into the Home; and the Home—such a home returns blessings to the State. On such homes, worshippers implore benedictions from Jehovah: out of such homes welcoming eyes behold *the prosperity of Jerusalem*. And so, back and forth, the blessing goes and comes: from *thee* outwards to *Jerusalem*, from Jerusalem inwards and upwards to thy *grandchildren*. Out of such happiness, in giving and receiving, come finally devout good wishes for all the people: *Peace be upon Israel!*

1. Literally, "from Zion."

2. Literally, "of Jerusalem."

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. It would seem that never in history was the theme of this psalm more needed in our nation. Discuss.
2. What prominent place does the wife have in this picture?
3. What effect upon neighboring nations would the devotion of Israel have?
4. Are we oversimplifying to suggest that in this psalm is the answer to our domestic and national dilemma?

P S A L M 129

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Israel's Thanks for Past Deliverances, and
Prayer for Continued Vindication.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-4, Israel's Experience of Vexation and Deliverance.
Stanza II., vers. 5-8, The Shame and Chagrin Awaiting all the Haters of Zion.

(Lm.) Song of the Steps.

- 1 "Full much have they harassed me from my youth"—
pray let Israel say:
- 2 "Full much have they harassed me from my youth—
but they have not prevailed against me.
- 3 Upon my back have ploughed the ploughers—
they have lengthened their field.¹
- 4 Jehovah is righteous—
he hath cut asunder the cords of the lawless."
- 5 Let them be put to shame and retreat backward—
all the haters of Zion!
- 6 Let them become as the grass of housetops—
which before it hath unsheathed doth wither,²
- 7 Wherewith hath filled his hand no reaper,
and his bosom no binder:
- 8 Neither have said the passers-by—

1. "Furrow-strip"—Del. A highly poetic description of the extent of country occupied by an invader.

2. As much as to say: "As grass withered before it unsheaths its ear, so let the Assyrians vanish before they unsheath a sword against Jerusalem."

PSALM 129

"The blessing of Jehovah be unto you!"

[nor heard in reply]

"We have blessed you in the name of Jehovah."^s

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 129

Persecuted from my earliest youth (Israel is speaking),

2 And faced with never-ending discrimination—but not destroyed! My enemies have never been able to finish me off!

3, 4 Though my back is cut to ribbons with their whips, the Lord is good. For He has snapped the chains that evil men had bound me with.

5 May all who hate the Jews be brought to ignominious defeat.

6, 7 May they be as grass in shallow soil, turning sear and yellow when half grown, ignored by the reaper, and despised by the binder.

8 And may those passing by refuse to bless them by saying, "Jehovah's blessings be upon you; we bless you in Jehovah's name."

EXPOSITION

The solidarity of Israel as a nation is here strikingly and even pathetically set forth. The *youth* of the nation is by implication traced back to Egypt; and her experience since then of trouble from without is gathered up into one sad memory. That is one aspect of the figure—the nation represented as an individual. Then the individualised nation is identified with the land in which she dwells; and the rude dealings of the invader with the land are figured as the ploughing of long furrows upon her bare back. How pathetically this latest memory pictures the ruthless doings of Sennacherib is evident. But deliverance has come; and the sudden liberation of the land from the invader is vividly set forth as *the cutting asunder of the cords* by which the slave had been held bound while the cruel lash was laid on. It was emphatically JEHOVAH who cut asunder those cords. The deliverance was not obtained by battle, nor by long journeying out of a foreign land.

3. "The last line should be printed as a return greeting from the reapers—Aglen.

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So let all Israel's enemies be vanquished, like these Assyrians, who have been *put to shame and have retreated backward* (comp. 2 K. 19:36). And now, further, Assyria is paid back in her own coin: she had spoken of the nations who were unable to resist her might as "grass on the housetops" (2 K. 19:26, Isa. 37:27); and here she is herself made the object of the contemptuous comparison, with an additional stroke of wit at her expense: *Let the haters of Zion be as the grass of the house tops, which before it hath unsheathed doth wither*. Assyria had not unsheathed her sword against Jerusalem! And no friendly greetings were likely to congratulate her on the harvest she had reaped in Jehovah's inheritance.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. There is something very pathetic about this psalm—What is it?
2. Why compress all the history of Israel into one sad memory picture? i.e. What was the immediate cause for this?
3. Compare II Kings 19:36; Isaiah 39:27 and show how it relates to verses five through eight.

PSALM 130

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Ransomed out of the Depths.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-2, The Fact of Supplication Narrated. Stanza II., vers. 3-4, The Terms of the Supplication Stated. Stanza III., vers. 5-6, The Urgency of the Supplication Described. Stanza IV., vers. 7-8, An Extension of the Supplication Urged.

(Lm.) Song of the Steps.

- 1 Out of the depths called I upon thee Jehovah!
- 2 "Sovereign Lord oh hearken unto my voice,
let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications:—
- 3 If iniquities thou shouldst mark¹ O Yah!
Sovereign Land!² who could stand?

1. Ml.: "watch." "Retainest"—Del.; "treasure up"—Leeser; "Wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss"—P.B.V.

2. Some cod. (w. 2 ear. pr. edns.): "Jehovah"—Gn.

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- 4 Surely with thee is Pardon—³
to the end thou mayest be revered.”⁴
5 I awaited Jehovah—
my soul waited for his word:⁵
6 My soul shewed her hope for Jehovah—
more than watchers for the morning—
watchers for the morning.
7 Hope thou O Israel for Jehovah;
for with Jehovah⁶ is Kindness,⁷
and plenteously with him is there ransoming:
8 He himself then will ransom Israel from all his iniquities.
(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

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- O Lord, from the depths of despair I cry for Your help:
2 “Hear me! Answer! Help me!”
3, 4 Lord, if You keep in mind our sins then who can ever
get an answer to his prayers? But You forgive! What an awe-
some thing this is!
5 That is why I wait expectantly, trusting God to help, for
He has promised.
6 I long for Him more than sentinels long for the dawn.
7 O Israel, hope in the Lord; for He is loving and kind,
and comes to us with armloads of salvation.
8 He Himself shall ransom Israel from her slavery to sin.

EXPOSITION

This psalm is known as one of the Seven Penitential psalms. It is in fact penitential, and therefore this classification need not be disturbed; but it might as accurately have been described as a Plea for Ransom, and in any case has characteristics all its own.

The course of our Expositions hitherto has specially prepared us for this psalm. Presuming that King Hezekiah wrote or selected it for a place in his series of “Songs of the Steps,”

3. Ml.: “the pardon”—qy. supply: “which we need.”

4. Cp. 119:38. And see Exposition.

5. Here shd. be the verse division.—Gn.

6. So some cod. (w. 1 ear. pr. edn.)—Gn.

7. Ml.: “the kindness”—qy. supply: “on which we rely.”

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we have only to turn to his commemorative "Writing" preserved in Isaiah 38, to discover a note harmonising with the present composition, in the grateful acknowledgement there preserved: "Thou hast cast, behind thy back, all my sin." The "sin" acknowledged there, prepares us for the *iniquities* presupposed here. Moreover, when we were led to attribute the authorship of Ps. 119 to Hezekiah, it was impossible not to be impressed with the well-known phenomenon of a good man passionately devoted to "Jehovah's will," and yet bearing about with him a chastening memory of personal sin. These two lines of observation respecting Hezekiah prepare us to expect that no collection of psalms would be considered by him even approximately complete, that did not include at least one penitential psalm.

Reaching the present psalm thus, by a path which quickens our expectation of discovering something fresh and valuable, we are not disappointed. It is indeed a remarkable composition: simple, beautiful, profound. It says but little, but it implies more than we can easily grasp. Its most striking feature is its twofold reference, first to an individual, and then to a nation. Neither of these references can justly be denied; although, in point of fact, the former has been strangely doubted, and the latter is perhaps seldom pressed home to its legitimate conclusion.

The precise nature of the junction between the national lesson and the individual, is perhaps not demonstrably clear. Did the psalmist leave his own petitions in the waiting stage, as requests not as yet answered; and so incite his people to join him in blended pleading for answers yet to be vouchsafed both to him and to them? Or does he, rather, as we incline to think—from his somewhat exuberant lingering over the *watchers for the morning*—give us leave to interpolate *there* his own implied reception of an answer of peace; in the inspiring strength of which he at once proceeds strongly to urge Israel to take heart and plead for *national redemption*? It is a nice point, but important to the translator; who, according to his solution of it, may, in ver. 1, say *called*, as of petitions by this time answered; or else, "have called," as of petitions still urged before the Divine throne. Again, in ver. 5, he may either say *I awaited*, as though now "awaiting" no longer, or "I have awaited"—implying the undertone, "and am awaiting still." Notwithstanding the fact that thus, throughout the psalm, there are delicate shades of meaning needing to be discriminated with unusual care, it would

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be quite a mistake to infer that there are no broad lessons plainly conveyed.

At every turn, there are suggestions which instantly strike and deeply impress, notwithstanding an affluence of meaning which is not put into words. For example: the familiar term *mark* referring to *iniquities* in ver. 3, seems to be as good a word as can be selected; and yet it is seen by every thoughtful reader to convey nothing less than this: "to *mark*, in order to remember; and to remember, in order to punish."

So, again, there is an exquisite fineness of implication in the delightful turn of the phrase *with thee*, which the Hebrew emphasises by the position assigned to it: *with thee is Forgiveness*, rather than, "thou dost forgive," or "thou canst forgive." No, *with thee*. It is as though Jehovah had a store of forgivenesses, as though he had a cherished delight in forgiving; as though it were just *like* him. And so, in the last stanza: with *Jehovah is kindness*, and *plenteously with him is there ransoming*—a little awkward, perhaps, in English; yet how richly suggestive: it seems to tell of that, *and the like of that*, continually going on. Phases of truth, these, which penitent souls sorely need to make their own.

Of another order, perhaps, is the profound statement of design in the Divine forgiving: *to the end thou mayest be revered*. We should not have been surprised to read, "to the end thou mayest be LOVED"; but *revered!*—that demands a little thought. Is it that we poor erring ones could not think of mere Infinite Power without hardening our hearts? As soon, however, as we admit the concurrent conception of Infinite Pity, then we dare *think*, then our adoration rises, then we *revere!*

Already we have caught a foreglimpse of the weighty close of the psalm. It is indeed a worthy close. Sudden is the transition from the individual to the nation, and yet not so sudden and strange as to throw doubt on the unity of authorship. Indeed, it is easy to see, that the mind at work in the second stanza is at work in the fourth; and that the *Forgiveness* of the second is worthily matched by the *Ransoming Kindness* of the fourth. Still, it is a climax. The forgiven individual ascends to a mighty daring when he addresses his *nation* in such terms as these. He has experience—he has faith—he has inspiration. He clearly means his own nation; for he beholds them laden with their own long-accumulated national burden of *iniquities*. What other nation under the sun would consent to be charged with those in-

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iniquities? It is only as the poet suns himself in the conception of *ransoming* being at home with *Jehovah*, that he rises to the crowning thought that *Jehovah himself* will ransom Israel from all his iniquities; and, if from his iniquities,—then why not also from his shame before the nations, his long, long exile from his own land?

Of the two great Old Testament words for redeeming, one (*ga'al*) “implies relationship” (O.G. 145), and the other (*pa dhah'*, that used here) carries with it the “underlying thought of payment” (O.G. 804). *Jehovah* is Israel's Kinsman-Redeemer; and he who of old gave Egypt for Israel's ransom (Isa. 43:3) will be able to find if he has not already “found a ransom” of such abiding worth that—in view of it, as a public justification—“Israel shall be saved in *Jehovah* with salvation to the ages” (Isa. 45:17, 25).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why include this psalm of repentance at this juncture?
2. This psalm implies much more than it says—give two examples.
3. How is both the individual and national need preserved and answered?
4. Why is the term “revered” used?
5. What is the climax and close of the psalm—how related to us?

P S A L M 131

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Sinking of Self in Seeking Israel's Welfare.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., ver. 1, Direct Protestation of Humility. Stanza II., ver. 2, The Weaning from Selfishness. Stanza III., ver. 3, Israel again Encouraged to Hope.

(Lm.) Song of the Steps—By David.

- 1 *Jehovah!* not haughty is my heart—
nor lofty are mine eyes;

PSALM 131

Neither have I moved among great things—
or among things too wonderful for me.

- 2 Surely I have soothed¹ and stilled² my soul—
like a weaned child concerning his mother:
Like the weaned child concerning myself is my soul.³
- 3 Hope O Israel for Jehovah—
from henceforth and unto the ages.⁴

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 131

Lord, I am not proud and haughty. I don't think myself better than others. I don't pretend to "know it all."

2. I am quiet now before the Lord, just as a child who is weaned from the breast. Yes, my begging has been stilled.

3 O Israel, you too should quietly trust in the Lord—now, and always.

EXPOSITION

The conclusion has everything in its favour, that David began this psalm, and Hezekiah finished it. The first stanza strongly commends itself as probably reflecting the feeling of David in view of the unlooked-for honour conferred on him when taken from the humble occupation of tending his father's sheep to be king over Israel. He had had no thought, no ambition, for such *great things*: they would have appeared *too wonderful for him*. So, we may well believe, David subsequently wrote—and sang; though how his little song originally ended we cannot know. Hezekiah, it would seem, discovered the unconsidered trifle, and added to it an adaptation which made it suit his own case with exquisite precision. If he had never felt the stirrings of personal ambition before, he was certainly lifted off his feet when he showed the messengers from Babylon all his treasures. He was sternly rebuked, prospectively punished,

1. Ml.: "smoothed."

2. Some cod. (w. Sep. and Vul.): "uplifted" (weRomamti instead of weDomamti)—Gn. True in itself and tempting; but, in view of context, not so likely.

3. "Like a weaned upon his mother, my soul is upon me as a weaned child"—Dr. So, in effect, Del., Per., Kp.; but Br.: "so is bountiful dealing upon my soul."

4. U.: "and unto times age-abiding."

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and—he humbled himself; but not without a struggle: he had to be weaned from Self, and has here described the process, with unsurpassable insight and delicacy. He had had to smooth and soothe his ruffled soul; and wean himself from any longer drawing sweet satisfaction from what Self could afford. Henceforth he must take a manlier part than nestle on the soft bosom of Self. He was weaned. And now he would wean Israel. Trouble awaited her in the future—this also now he knew. But, having in his previous song sung of ransom from iniquities, and of Jehovah himself as Ransomer, he must needs now again urge Israel, with tenderer pathos and with longer outlook than before, to *hope for Jehovah, from henceforth and unto the ages*. This loving call still woos Israel to hear.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How was this psalm composed?
2. David was “surprised by joy”—how?
3. There is a marvelous lesson of the life of Hezekiah described—what is it? Discuss.

P S A L M 132

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Davidic Dynasty Humbled and Exalted.

ANALYSIS

Stanza, vers. 1-10, Prayer by the Typical Messiah. Anti-Stanza, vers. 11-18, Promise for the Antitypical Messiah.

(Lm.) Song of the Steps.

- 1 Remember O Jehovah unto David—
all his humiliations:—
- 2 What he sware unto Jehovah—
vowed unto the Mighty One of Jacob:
- 3 “Verily I will not enter into the tent of my house—
I will not go up on the couch of my bed,
- 4 I will not give sleep to mine eyes—
nor to mine eyelids slumber:

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- 5 Until I find a place for Jehovah—
habitations for the Mighty One of Jacob."
- 6 "Lo! we heard of it in Ephrathah—
we found it in the fields¹ of the forest:
- 7 'We would fain enter into his habitations!
we would bow down at his footstool!'
- 8 'Arise! Jehovah to thy resting-place—
thou and the ark of thy strength:
- 9 Thy priests let them be clothed with righteousness—
thy men of kindness let them ring out their joy.'"
- 10 For the sake of David thy servant
do not turn away the face of thine Anointed One.²
- 11 Jehovah sware to David—
in truth will he not turn back from it:
"Of the fruit of thy body
will I seat on a throne for thee:
- 12 If thy sons keep my covenant—
and my testimonies which I shall teach them
Even their sons unto futurity—
shall sit on a throne for thee."
- 13 For Jehovah hath chosen Zion—
- 14 "This is my resting-place unto futurity—
here will I dwell for I have desired it:
- 15 Her provision will I abundantly bless—
her needy ones will I satisfy with bread;
- 16 Her priests also will I clothe with salvation,
and her men of kindness shall indeed ring out their joy.³
- 17 There will I cause to bud a horn unto David,
I have set in order a lamp for mine Anointed One:
- 18 His enemies will I clothe with shame—
but upon himself shall blossom his crown!"

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 132

Lord, do You remember that time when my¹ heart was so filled with turmoil?

2, 3, 4, 5 I couldn't rest, I couldn't sleep, thinking how I

1. Some cod. (w. 3 ear. pr. edns.): "field" (sing.)—Gn.

2. Cp. Intro., Chap. III., "Anointed."

3. Cp. Intro., Chap. III., "Kindness."

1. Literally, "David's soul."

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ought to build a permanent home for the Ark² of the Lord, a Temple for the mighty One of Israel. Then I vowed that I would do it; I made a solemn promise to the Lord.

6 First the Ark was in³ Ephrathah, then in the distant countryside of Jaar.

7 But now it will be settled in the Temple, in God's permanent home here on earth. That is where we will go to worship Him.⁴

8 Arise, O Lord, and enter Your Temple with the Ark, the symbol of Your power.

9 We will clothe the priests in white, the symbol of all purity. May our nation shout for joy.

* * * * *

10 Do not reject Your servant David—the king You chose for Your people.

11 For You promised me that my son would sit on my throne and succeed me. And surely You will never go back on a promise!

12 You also promised that if my descendants will obey the terms of Your contract with me, then the dynasty of David shall never end.

13 O Lord, You have chosen Jerusalem⁵ as Your home:

14 "This is My permanent home where I shall live," You said, "for I have always wanted it this way.

15 I will make this city prosperous and satisfy her poor with food.

16 I will clothe her priests with salvation; her saints shall shout for joy.

17 David's power shall grow, for I have decreed for him a mighty Son.⁶

18 I'll clothe His enemies with shame, but He shall be a glorious King."

EXPOSITION

Again are we enabled to realise how truly and helpfully previous psalms lead us forward to what still awaits us. That

2. Implied.

3. Literally, "Lo, we heard of it in Ehprathah."

4. Literally, "We will go into His tabernacles; we will worship at His footstool."

5. Literally, "Zion."

6. Literally, "a progeny."

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little snatch of a song, in praise of humility, which we have just dismissed,—how truly does it prepare us for the *humiliations of David*, with a reference to which this psalm opens.

But Jehovah humbles his loyal servants in order to fit them for the greater things to which they may not prematurely aspire; and if the Son of David who pens this psalm has schooled himself successfully into the spirit of the psalm we have just admired for its lessons of humility, he is thereby only the better prepared to lead us forward to the “wonderful things” to which this psalm conducts us.

Though he now only introduces it into his series of *Step Songs*, it has probably lain in his repertoire since those early days of his reign when, having cleansed the Temple, he anew dedicated it to the worship of Jehovah; installing priests and Levites in the zealous discharge of their duties, taking care suitably to clothe them with official garments, and bountifully to provide for their temporal needs. We can imagine no more congenial occasion than this, for the origin of this intensely Messianic psalm. Everything in that occasion and in this psalm favours their being thus brought together. Newly come to the throne, after some years of reproach and patient waiting, and godly self-discipline, the author cannot forget that he now stands in covenant line with his revered ancestor David, whose songs he has so often studied with delight. Having found vent for his reforming zeal by cleansing the temple and restoring its inspiring ritual, now to be renewed with accompanying songs,—what more natural to a born poet and an anointed prophet-king than to compose a psalm like this: a psalm in every way worthy of such an auspicious occasion? Note, especially, in glancing through the psalm with these incidents in view, how, notwithstanding the unfeigned humility which restrains him from once formally alluding to himself or indulging in so much as a first personal pronoun, the profound consciousness of Messianic heirship is upon him. For to whom but to himself can we suppose him to refer at the close of the first stanza, when, gathering up all that has gone before, he pleads: *For the sake of David thy servant—do not turn away the face of thine Anointed One.* With the fitting occasion for this prayer in our minds, we instinctively supply the unspoken burden of it: “Do not turn away his face, when he thus presents anew to thee thine own holy temple, cleansed, and vocal with thy praise.”

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By connecting this first climax, in ver. 10, with the opening words of the psalm, we grasp the indisputable fact that *this first stanza is a prayer: Remember . . . do not turn away.* All that comes between is pleading. As much as to say: "By all the devotion and enthusiasm and energetic service and consecrating forethought of my revered ancestor David, whose words and deeds I this day recall, and humbly mention as my pleading before thee,—O Jehovah, do not turn away my face."

Once we grasp the firm logic of this intercession, we can easily allow for the poetic freedom with which the details are filled in. Whether we are to accept the allusion to *Ephrathah* as to the name of a district large enough to include Kirjath-jearim where the ark was, or to understand David to refer to tidings of the whereabouts of the ark with which they were familiar in his youth in Bethlehem-ephrathah, becomes a matter of small importance. With a like sense of freedom as to details, we can, without disturbance to the general sense, understand the *we* of vers. 6 and 7 as proceeding originally from David, in recognition of the people who accompanied him when he went to fetch up the ark to Jerusalem; and, then, again we can hear David's own voice of invocation in vers. 8 and 9 even though the terms of the invocation were taken from the story of the original journeying of the ark through the wilderness, and again employed by Solomon on an intermediate occasion. All this poetic and highly picturesque filling in of the argument drawn from David and his times by no means robs this part of the psalm of its force as a mighty plea urged by King Hezekiah.

In like manner, the general sense of *promise granted in answer to prayer*, becomes evident as dominating the second half of the psalm (vers. 11-18), notwithstanding the sweep of its contents and the loftiness of its closing aspiration. The first half of the psalm led off with what David *swore* to Jehovah; the second half begins, its response, with what Jehovah *swore* to David. And therein—in that covenant-oath to David—lay promises yet unexhausted and which guarantee to Hezekiah, as being in the line of the covenant, all the favour he might need for himself and for the temple he this day hallows to Jehovah.

It is worthy of note how the interests of the throne and of the temple here again intertwine. The covenant, through Nathan, points to the throne (vers. 11 and 12); and then immediately the temple is introduced as in some way supporting

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the throne: *For Jehovah hath chosen Zion—hath desired it as a habitation for himself.* Such intertwining of the two interests has characterised the Davidic Covenant from the first; for was it not just when David proposed to build a *temple* that Jehovah promised him an abiding *throne*? Possibly there is in this more than meets the eye. Be that as it may, the blending of interests goes on quite to the end of the psalm: ver. 14—place; ver. 15—place; ver. 16—place; ver. 17—throne; ver. 18—throne and *crown*! That is the climax—*crown* the final word.

In these last 5 verses of 10 lines, the whole passion of the psalm is expressed; and the expression is in every way most beautiful and impressive. As to form, it is all direct divine speech: Jehovah's voice alone is heard throughout; and if the speech as a whole was never uttered before, then it may be taken as a new and complete revelation of things never before so connectedly divulged.

The original petitions of David are hereby represented as granted—reaffirmed—amplified. The *resting-place* reappears as *desired, found, perpetual*. The *priests* and *Levites* are heralded by *provision* in abundance and *satisfied needy ones*. The very clothing of the priests is enhanced from *righteousness* to *salvation*. The official *men of kindness*, the Levites, do INDEED ring out their joy, with reduplicated emphasis. Not only is what was asked in David's petitions now abundantly given; but more than was asked, at least so far as this psalm is concerned. For again, as already observed, the temple gives place to the throne: *There* (in that place) *will I cause to bud a horn unto David*—a living symbol of power. *His enemies will I clothe with shame, but upon himself shall blossom his crown*—a living symbol of royalty. Bold metaphors truly; but for that very reason fitting the ultimate climax of the psalm and causing us to feel instinctively that a greater than Hezekiah is here. They are, indeed, things "too wonderful" for him; and, therefore, here he leaves them unexplained. The THRONE in its PLACE, and the final HEIR on the throne, would all in due time be revealed.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does psalm 131 prepare us for psalm 132?
2. When was the psalm written? When was it used?
3. How is the term "Ephrathah" used in verse 6?
4. What is the gist or theme of the prayer in verse one through ten?

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5. What is the response or answer to the prayer as in verse eleven through eighteen?
6. In what sense or meaning is this psalm Messianic?

PSALM 133

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Brethren in Fellowship: a Charming Spectacle.

ANALYSIS

A Glimpse of Fraternal Reunion (ver. 1) suggests Comparison: (ver. 2) with the Descending Oil of Sacred Consecration; and (ver. 3) with the Descending Dew of Natural Refreshing.

(Lm.) Song of the Steps—By David.

- 1 Lo! how good and how delightful—
the dwelling¹ of brethren all together;²
- 2 Like the precious oil upon the head—
flowing down upon the beard the beard of Aaron—
which floweth down over the opening of his robe:
- 3 Like the dew of Hermon—
which floweth down over the mountains of Zion;
For there hath Jehovah commanded the blessing—
life unto the ages!

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 133

How wonderful it is, how pleasant, when brothers live in harmony!

2 For harmony is as precious as the fragrant anointing oil that was poured over Aaron's head, and ran down onto his beard, and onto the border of his robe.

3 Harmony is as refreshing as the dew on Mount Hermon, on the mountains of Israel. And God has pronounced this eternal blessing on Jerusalem,¹ even life forevermore.

1. Or: "remaining," "abiding."

2. "For brethren to dwell also together"—Dr.

1. Literally, "Zion."

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EXPOSITION

This beautiful psalm was manifestly prompted by a spectacle actually beheld. It points with the finger to some memorable scene, which lingers in the poet's mental vision. Probably nothing so perfectly answerable to the enthusiasm of this little snatch of song, has ever been suggested, as the Reunion of the Tribes on the occasion of Hezekiah's great passover. It is true the Northern Tribes were not so extensively represented at the feast as was desired; but those who came were welcome; and it is given to a seer to behold the ideal in the actual.

The stay in the sacred city was not long, but it was an *abiding* while it lasted: it brought brethren face to face who had never before seen each other; and, sweeping away prejudices and misunderstandings, cementing holy friendships by sacred service and song and by the giving and receiving of domestic courtesies, made the participants realise how truly they were brethren.

The comparisons employed to celebrate such reunion, converge to a single point, without losing their native attributes of many-sided suggestiveness. The precious perfumed oil, poured on Aaron's head, and not merely sprinkled on his garments as in the case of his sons, would naturally retain its symbolic fitness to suggest a gracious, delightfully fragrant, unseen influence; and in like manner the dew of Hermon would not lose its inherent adaptedness to convey the subsidiary ideas of copiousness and invigoration because of a further main point to be emphasised. Nevertheless, while these clustering conceptions around the figures employed need not be stripped off them, the single point to which both figures are directed should be firmly grasped. That point is the expansive and diffusive *descent* of the influence—of the invigoration—which is unmistakably urged home by the threefold use of the words *flowing down* or *descending*. The sacred oil *flows down* from the head to the beard, from the beard to the robe, and so by implication embraces and consecrates the whole man. The dew of the lofty summits of Mount Hermon *flows down* or *descends* (at times) not merely down upon that mountain's own spurs, but further and further down, until it reaches and rests upon the lowly Mount Zion in the south: which last point has been distinctly made credible by the observations of travelers in Switzerland and in Palestine. So, the poet would have us observe, the realisation of brotherly fellowship by those who are brethren, is

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an expanding and descending force, however gentle and unobserved; which reaches down far below the point of original bestowment of the grace. By the help of these simple analogies the mind of the reader climbs to higher things: to the rich influences descending from public worship into family life and into civic communities. The Christian will be forgiven if he is reminded of the ever descending grace which flows down from his Head in heaven: if a poetic Christian, he may indulge in a smile at the psalmist's adroitness in fetching one of his similes from the far North beyond where the Northern tribes dwelt, to their quite legitimate gratification; and, if at the same time he is a breezy Christian, possessing some breadth and flexibility of apprehension,—he will be unable to restrain himself from a feeling of additional pleasure that the spell of the psalmist's genius, having first appropriated a *sacred* symbol, then goes farther afield and presses a *secular* symbol into his service; reflecting that, even the dew of Hermon may benefit Zion, even as Christ is head over all things to his Church. Yet, when all comes to all, lowly Zion will be loftier in his eyes than Lebanon; for, *there, in Zion, hath Jehovah commanded the blessing even life for evermore.*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What particular event seems to fit this psalm?
2. What are the motivations and methods of fellowship and unity?
3. There are two beautiful figures of speech in this psalm—show how they perfectly accomplish their purpose.

P S A L M 134

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Night Service in the Temple.

ANALYSIS

(See Inserted Headlines.)

(Lm.) Song of the Steps.

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(ADDRESSED TO NIGHT-WATCHERS IN THE TEMPLE.)

- 1 Lo! bless ye Jehovah all ye servants of Jehovah,
who stand in the house of Jehovah in the dark night:¹
- 2 Lift up your hands in holiness² and bless ye Jehovah.

(THEIR REPLY.)

- 3 May Jehovah bless thee out of Zion—[He who is] Maker of
heaven and earth!

(Nm.)³

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 134

Oh, bless the Lord, you who serve Him as watchmen in the Temple every night.

2 Lift your hands in holiness and bless the Lord.

3 The Lord bless you from Zion—the Lord who made heaven and earth.

EXPOSITION

The purpose and structure of this psalm are simple and evident. There is in the Temple a Night-service, which becomes the occasion of a charge from the people to the Levites who represent them, and of a benediction from the Levites on the people before they depart to their homes. There is a probable reference to such a service in 1 Ch. 9:33; and the priestly response is after the manner of Num. 6:24. The stair-like movement characteristic of the previous "Step-Songs" is perceptible in this psalm also, as witness the five-fold repetition of the name *Jehovah*, which, reverently uttered, would impart to this final song a suitable solemnity. That the *standing in the house of Jehovah* points to the ministrations of the officials of the Temple, is sufficiently evident from the following passages; namely, Deu. 10:8, 18:7, 1 Ch. 23:30 and 2 Ch. 29:11. Concerning the lifting up of hands in worship, Pss. 28:2, 44:20, 63:4, 88:9, 119:48, and 141:2, may be profitably compared; while, as to the accompanying words "in holiness" or "to the sanctuary," the preference of Delitzsch, with R.V. text, for the "accusative of direction"=*unto the sanctuary*, is perhaps not quite so plainly

1. So Br. "in the nights"—Dr.

2. Or: "unto the sanctuary."

3. See Ps. 135 (beginning).

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correct as the "accusative of definition"—*in holiness*, with R.V. margin; although the reason given by Aglen for the latter is scarcely conclusive. He says: "Since the servants of Jehovah are here addressed as standing in the sanctuary, this direction seems unreasonable." The unreasonableness disappears if we remember that the ministrants might be already standing within the Temple courts, and yet direct their uplifted hands toward the holy shrine. Still, *in holiness* appears the more obvious rendering; which becomes doubly acceptable when viewed as supplying the idea of "holy hands" in 1 Tim. 2:8. It remains only to add: that the simple structure of this psalm by no means pre-supposes the elaborate ritual of perambulating the Temple courts during the night, which the Talmud connects with the Second Temple. There is nothing here which the reforming King Hezekiah might not have arranged or restored.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This is the last of the fifteen psalms devoted to the *Song of the Steps*—it is appropriate that it be a night service in the temple—Read I Chronicles 9:33 and Numbers 6:24 to aid in visualizing the circumstances.
2. Delitzsch seems to see some objections to an in the temple worship. How does Rotherham answer the objection?
3. Are we to actually "lift up our hands" in the worship of our Lord? cf. I Timothy 2:8.

PSALM 135

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A Call to Temple-Worship.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-4, A Charge to the Levites to Lead in the Delightful Duty of Praise. Stanza II., vers. 5-7, A Personal Enforcement of this Duty—based on the Works of Creation. Stanza III., vers. 8-12, The Same—based on Israel's History. Stanza IV., vers. 13, 14, Jehovah's Name and Memorial a Guarantee of Future National Blessing. Stanza V., vers. 15-18, Reproach cast on Idols. Stanza VI., vers. 19-21, Four Classes called upon to Bless Jehovah.

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(P.R.I.) Praise ye Yah.¹

- 1 Praise ye the name of Jehovah,
praise O ye servants of Jehovah:
- 2 Who stand² in the house of Jehovah,
in the courts of the house of our God.
- 3 Praise ye Yah for good is Yahweh,³
make melody to his name for it is full of delight.
- 4 For Jacob hath Yah chosen for himself,
Israel as his own treasure.⁴
- 5 For I know that great is Jehovah,
and our sovereign Lord is beyond all gods:
- 6 All that Jehovah pleased hath he done—
in the heavens and in the earth,
in the seas and all resounding deeps:
- 7 Causing vapours to ascend from the end of the earth,
lightnings for the rain hath he made,
Bringing forth wind out of his treasuries.
- 8 Who smote the firstborn of Egypt—
from man unto beast,
- 9 He sent signs and wonders into thy midst O Egypt
on Pharaoh and on all his servants.
- 10 Who smote great nations,
and slew mighty kings:
- 11 Reaching to Sihon king of the Amorites,
and to Og king of Bashan,
and to all the kingdoms of Canaan;
- 12 And gave their land as an inheritance—
an inheritance to Israel his people.
- 13 Jehovah! thy name is to the ages,
Jehovah! thy memorial⁵ is to generation after generation;
- 14 For Jehovah will vindicate his people,
and on his servants have compassion.⁶
- 15 The idols of the nations are silver and gold,
the work⁷ of the hands of men:
- 16 a mouth have they—but do not speak,
eyes have they—but do not see,

1. See Ps. 105 headline (P.R.I.).

2. For this word, see Exp. of Ps. 134.

3. =Jehovah; both spelled thus to shew its relationship to "Yah."

4. Cp. Exo. 19:5.

5. Cp. Exo. 3:14, 15.

6. Cp. Deu. 32:36.

7. Some cod. (w. Sep., Vul.): "works" (pl.)—Gn.

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- 17 ears have they—but do not give ear,
nay there is no breath at all in their mouth.
18 Like them shall become they who make them—
every one who trusteth in them.
19 O house of Israel bless ye Jehovah,
O house of Aaron bless ye Jehovah,
20 O house of Levi bless ye Jehovah.
O ye who revere Jehovah bless ye Jehovah.
21 Blessed be Jehovah out of Zion—
who inhabiteth Jerusalem.

(Nm.)^s

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 135

Hallelujah! Yes, let His people praise Him, as they stand in His Temple courts.

3 Praise the Lord because He is so good; sing to His wonderful name.

4 For the Lord has chosen Israel as His personal possession.

5 I know the greatness of the Lord—that He is greater far than any other god.

6 He does whatever pleases Him throughout all of heaven and earth, and in the deepest seas.

7 He makes mists rise throughout the earth and sends the lightning to bring down the rain; and sends the winds from His treasures.

8 He destroyed the eldest child in each Egyptian home, along with the firstborn of the flocks.

9 He did great miracles in Egypt before Pharaoh and all his people.

10 He smote great nations, slaying mighty kings—

11 Sihon, king of Amorites; and Og, the king of Bashan; and the kings of Canaan—

12 And gave their land as an eternal gift to His people Israel.

13 O Jehovah, Your name endures forever; Your fame is known to every generation.

14 For Jehovah will vindicate His people, and have compassion on His servants.

8. See Ps. 136 (beginning).

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15 The heathen worship idols of gold and silver, made by men—

16 Idols with speechless mouths and sightless eyes.

17 And ears that cannot hear; they cannot even breathe.

18 Those who make them become like them! And so do all who trust in them!

19 O Israel, bless Jehovah! High priests of Aaron, bless His name.

20 O Levite priests, bless the Lord Jehovah! Oh bless His name, all of you who trust and reverence Him.

21 All people of Jerusalem,¹ praise the Lord, for He lives here in Jerusalem. Hallelujah!

EXPOSITION

With this psalm, we return to the series distinctively named "Hallels"; and may, from that circumstance, judge with considerable probability as to the bearings of the contents we may find in them. They are pre-eminently Temple psalms, almost certainly composed and not merely adapted for that purpose; and were probably written or collected and edited by King Hezekiah for the re-opening of the Cleansed Temple. How well—let us ask—do they answer to such an origin and design? Do they contain any features from which fitness for such an intention can fairly be inferred? Leaving these questions to receive incidental answers, let us look at the psalm now before us.

It is obviously fitted for its purpose. It is, as to contents, manifestly a *public* psalm, appealing to the whole people. It celebrates their favoured position (ver. 4); extols their covenant God, both as the God of all Creation (vers. 5-7), and as Author of their national Redemption, in bringing them out of Egypt and into the Promised Land (vers. 8-12); it brings up from Mosaic times (Ex. 3:14, 15), in its rich significance, the "Memorial" Name of their covenant God, which it sets forth in its promissory significance (vers. 13, 14); it pours reproach upon the idols of the nations, in a manner fitted to impress on Israelites the preciousness of their knowledge of the one Living and True God (vers. 15-18); and then, having previously at the outset, charged the Levites to lead in such delightful worship, it closes by solemnly calling upon the whole people, even including Gentile proselytes, to sustain *the house of Aaron and the house of Levi* in Jehovah's praise (vers. 19-21). It is, therefore, emphatically

1. Literally, "the Lord be blessed from Zion."

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a *national* song. Indeed, it has not a private or personal allusion in it—with one exception. That exception, however, is very observable. It consists of the sudden introduction, at ver. 5, of a personal note, on which probably no one lower than a King would have ventured. Who is this that presumes to say—*I know that great is Jehovah?* Any godly monarch in Israel, it is true, might thus have made prominent his own individuality. A Jehoshaphat, for example, on the one hand, or a Josiah, on the other, might have thus *authenticated* Jehovah's praise; or, of course, a Hezekiah—no smaller man nor less godly. Indeed, even for Hezekiah, one could almost wish for circumstantial evidence, dating this psalm late enough to clothe the speaker with such a strong assurance as would naturally spring from a recent recovery from sickness or a recent rescue from a foreign invader; and it is only when we recall our late conclusions respecting Hezekiah's youth, and the strong presumption thence arising that he experimentally *knew* Jehovah's power,—that we become reconciled to his thus magnificently saying "*I know.*" But recalling this, we do feel content to leave it as the greater probability that the good King did, for the occasion named, compose this psalm: the more so, for that we have no knowledge of the poetic and musical accomplishments of either Jehoshaphat or Josiah.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is meant by saying some psalms are "Hallels"?
2. What indications are in this psalm of its being a "public" psalm?
3. This is also a "national" song. Discuss such indication.
4. There is an exception to the public and national aspect of this psalm. What is it?

PSALM 136

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A Second Call to Temple-Worship, with Responses Inserted.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I, vers. 1-3, A Threefold Call for Thanks, based on the three leading Divine Names. Stanza II, vers. 4-6, the Call Continued, based on

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the General Wonders of Heaven and Earth. Stanza III., vers. 7-9, On the Ruling Lights of the Heavens. Stanza IV., vers. 10-12, On the Exodus from Egypt. Stanza V., vers. 13-15, On the Passage through the Red Sea. Stanza VI., vers. 16-22, On Guidance through the Wilderness into Israel's Promised Inheritance. Stanza VII., vers. 23-26, On Subsequent Deliverance from Low Estate, Adversaries, and Famine.

(P.R.I.) Praise ye Yah.

- 1 Give ye thanks to Jehovah—for he is good,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 2 Give ye thanks to the God of gods,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 3 Give ye thanks to the Sovereign Lord of lords,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 4 To him that doeth great wonders by himself alone,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 5 To him who made the heavens with understanding.
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 6 To him that stretched out the earth upon the waters,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 7 To him that made great lights,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 8 The sun to rule over the day,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 9 The moon and stars to rule over the night,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 10 To him that smote the Egyptians in their firstborn,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 11 And brought forth Israel out of their midst,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 12 With a firm hand and an outstretched arm,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 13 To him that divided the Red Sea into parts,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 14 And caused Israel to pass over through the midst thereof,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 15 And shook off Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 16 To him that led his people in the wilderness,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 17 To him that smote great kings,
For to the ages is his kindness.

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- 18 And slew majestic¹ kings,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 19 Even Sihon king of the Amorites,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 20 Also Og king of Bashan,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 21 And gave their land for an inheritance,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 22 An inheritance to Israel his servant,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 23 Who in our low estate was mindful of us,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 24 And rescued us² from our adversaries,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 25 Who giveth bread to all flesh,
For to the ages is his kindness.
- 26 Give ye thanks to the GOD of the heavens,
For to the ages is his kindness.

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 136

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His loving-kindness continues forever.

2 Give thanks to the God of gods, for His lovingkindness continues forever.

3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for His lovingkindness continues forever.

4 Praise Him who alone does mighty miracles, for His lovingkindness continues forever.

5 Praise Him who made the heavens, for His lovingkindness continues forever.

6 Praise Him who planted the water within the earth,¹ for His lovingkindness continues forever.

7 Praise Him who made the heavenly lights, for His loving-kindness continues forever;

8 The sun to rule the day, for His lovingkindness continues forever;

1. Br.: "noble."

2. Ml.: "tare us away."

1. Or, "who separated the earth from the oceans."

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9 And the moon and stars at night, for His lovingkindness continues forever.

10 Praise the God who smote the firstborn of Egypt, for His lovingkindness to Israel² continues forever.

11, 12 He brought them out with mighty power and up-raised fist to strike their enemies, for His lovingkindness to Israel² continues forever.

13 Praise the Lord who opened the Red Sea to make a path before them, for His lovingkindness continues forever,

14 And led them safely through, for His lovingkindness continues forever—

15 But drowned Pharaoh's army in the sea, for His lovingkindness to Israel² continues forever.

16 Praise Him who led His people through the wilderness, for His lovingkindness continues forever.

17 Praise Him who saved His people from the power of mighty kings, for His lovingkindness continues forever,

18 And killed famous kings who were their enemies, for His lovingkindness to Israel² continues forever;

19 Sihon, king of Amorites—for God's lovingkindness to Israel² continues forever—

20 And Og, king of Bashan—for His lovingkindness to Israel² continues forever.

21 God gave the land of these kings to Israel as a gift forever, for His lovingkindness to Israel² continues forever;

22 Yes, a permanent gift to His servant Israel, for His lovingkindness continues forever.

23 He remembered our utter weakness, for His lovingkindness continues forever.

24 And saved us from our foes, for His lovingkindness continues forever.

25 He gives food to every living thing, for His lovingkindness continues forever.

26 Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven, for His lovingkindness continues forever.

EXPOSITION

Though, in general purpose and in leading characteristics, this psalm is much like the preceding one, it nevertheless has several features of its own. It is a Hallel like the foregoing:

2. Implied.

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that is, it is expressly adapted to Temple worship; and, like that, broadly bases Jehovah's claims to worship on creation and (national) redemption. It is, however, special, in that it formally introduces, as ground for adoration, the three leading Divine names — *Jehovah*, *Elohim* ("God") and *Adonai* ("Sovereign Lord"); deals with the passage through the Red Sea by three distinct movements (*divided—caused to pass—shook off*); and, after falling back on the previous psalm by way of abbreviated quotation as to taking possession of Canaan, lastly brings forward *three* reminiscences, which throw a welcome sidelight on the time at which the psalm was probably composed. These three reminiscences are concerned with: (1) *a low estate*, (2) *a rescue from adversaries*, and (3) *a supply of bread*: just these—no others—no more: a cluster of coincidences, finding a striking verification in the times of King Hezekiah. (1) The *low estate* of the nation during the presence of the Assyrians in the land is manifest (cp. 2 K. 17:19-23, 19:3, 2 Ch. 29:8, 9); and is a phrase more exactly fitted for that application than for the Exile in Babylon, which surely was something more than a "low estate." (2) The *forcible rescue* from the Assyrians was unique; and the word is more suited to allude to that event than to permissions to captives to return to their land of their own free will. (3) As we have already been reminded by Ps. 126, there was a near approach to famine when the Assyrians were gone; and though the statement as to the provision of *bread* is here couched in general terms, yet a recent event might well have suggested such a grateful acknowledgement just here. Even Delitzsch, though clinging to a post-exilic origin to the psalm, sees here a reference "to a time in which they suffered from famine as well as slavery." "Invasion" and "famine" wholly meet the case, and then there is the "forcible rescue": respecting which Aglen's note is suggestive: "*Redeemed*.—Better, as in original, *snatched us from*. (Compare Ps. 7:2, used of a lion suddenly seizing his prey.)" So suddenly did Jehovah seize Sennacherib.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This psalm is much like the one preceding it but it has its own distinctive features. Discuss the similarities and differences.
2. Discuss the meaning and application of the three divine names; i.e. for our day.

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3. There are several triads in this psalm, three names, three stages of crossing the Red Sea; three reminiscences. Discuss the latter.
4. Once again this psalm is linked with a Hezekiah and Sennacherib. How?

P S A L M 137

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A Returned Levite's Memories of Babylon, Apostrophe to Jerusalem, and Imprecations on Edom and on Babylon.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, A Returned Captive's Record of the Declinature of Himself and Brethren to Sing Songs of Zion on Foreign Soil. Stanza II., vers. 4-6, To his Brethren, he excuses the Refusal and Apostrophises Jerusalem. Stanza III., ver. 7, He prays for the Punishment of Edom's Perfidy. Stanza IV., vers. 8, 9, He Bitterly Apostrophises Babylon.

(Nm.)

- 1 By the streams of Babylon
there we sat down yea we wept—
when we remembered Zion.
- 2 On¹ the poplars² in the midst thereof
we hung up our lyres.
- 3 For there asked our captors of us—
words of song!
And our spoilers—³
of gladness!⁴
"Sing to us of the Songs of Zion."
- 4 How could we sing the songs of Jehovah—
on a foreign soil?—

1. Or: "by." So Br.

2. So O.G. "*arab*", as is now established by botanists, denotes the *Populus Euphratica*, very young specimens of which with their narrow leaves may easily be confounded with willow underwood, upon a superficial inspection"—Delitzsch.

3. So Gt.; and so ("prob.") Dr.

4. Cp. ver. 6, same word. Here prob. "words" that is "of gladness" shd. again be understood from previous line.

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- 5 "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem
let my right hand play me false!"⁵
6 let my tongue cleave to my palate—
If I lift not up Jerusalem above mine own crowning
gladness."⁶
7 Remember O Jehovah, to the sons of Edom—
the day of Jerusalem!
Who kept saying "Lay bare!" "Lay bare!"
"as far as the foundation within her!"
8 O despoiling⁷ daughter of Babylon!—
how happy he who shall repay thee
the dealing which thou didst deal out to us!
9 how happy he who shall snatch away—
and dash to pieces—thy children—against the crag!
(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 137

Weeping, we sat beside the rivers of Babylon thinking of Jerusalem.

2 We have put away our lyres, hanging them upon the branches of the willow trees,

3, 4 For how can we sing? Yet our captors, our tormentors, demand that we sing for them the happy songs of Zion!

5, 6 If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her skill upon the harp. If I fail to love her more than my highest joy, let me never sing again.

7 O Jehovah, do not forget what these Edomites did on that day when the armies of Babylon captured Jerusalem. "Raze her to the ground!" they yelled.

8 O Babylon, evil beast, you shall be destroyed. Blessed is the man who destroys you as you have destroyed us.

9 Blessed is the man who takes your babies and smashes them against the rocks!¹

5. So *Gt.* (ml.) "fail" or "deceive." M.T.: "forget."

6. Same word as in ver. 3; and shd. by all means be rendered both times alike.

7. So *Gt.* "Targ., Pesh. and many moderns, read (with different vowels), *thou waster*"—Dr. M.T.: "that hast been despoiled."

1. Perhaps this could be paraphrased, "Blessed is he who invades and sacks your city."

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EXPOSITION

Is this the voice of a returned captive, or of one still in Babylon? If the former, as appears the natural conclusion from the references to a past time and a distant place—*there we sat down*,—then the further question arises, whether this sounds like the voice of an aged man who has dwelt nearly a lifetime in captivity, and who is therefore old and feeble, whose hand and tongue now falter from playing and singing the songs of Zion as once they did; or of one who has been permitted to return with vigour and delight to the crowning joys of home and the still higher joy of Levite work in Jerusalem? To this question also it will be easy to give the obvious answer, once we realise the strength of the position taken up by Thirle, when he reminds us of the devastation of many cities of Judah by the Assyrians in the days of King Hezekiah before Jerusalem was approached; of the fact that the kings of Assyria were also kings of Babylon; and of the likelihood that dwellers in the cities of Judah would actually be deported to Babylon, long before the great Exile in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. For certainly it is the obvious answer—to say, that the poet who writes this vigorous psalm has manifestly been a captive only long enough to realise the bitterness of exile and to return to the joys of home and the exhilaration of renewed Levitical functions in Jerusalem. Everything, down to the minutest shade of language and feeling, agrees with such an outlook.

Before verifying this, we may quote from Delitzsch his beautiful picture of the mourners by Babel's streams. "The psalm is evidently a song not written during the time of the Exile, but in recollection of it. The banks of rivers, like the shores of the sea, are a favorite haunt of such as deep grief drives away from the tumult of men into solitude: the boundary line of the river gives to solitude a secure background; the monotonous splashing of the waves nourishes the dull, melancholy alternation of thoughts and feelings; and at the same time the sight of the cool, fresh water exercises a soothing influence upon the consuming fever in the heart. The rivers of Babylon are the Tigris and Euphrates along with the tributary streams that feed them and the canals that connect them . . . As soon as they sat down in the loneliness of the river's banks they immediately began to weep, inasmuch as, at the sight of the so totally different nature around them, the remembrance of Zion only forced itself upon them all the more strongly, and their sorrow at being cut

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off from their native land indulged itself all the more freely, where no hostilely observant eyes repressed it."

How easily grafts itself into this picture the persuasion that these captives were Levites; and so, as practised singers, wedded to their lyres, had them with them in the land of their banishment; and were prone to use them, if only by stealth; sometimes in snatches of Temple-songs of joy, when secure in their homes, or otherwise, and indeed oft, for improvising dirges suited to their sorrow. They were skilled musicians, with melodious *tongues* and skilful *right-hands*, wherewith to lift the song and sweep the strings. Their furtive exercises in their favourite work had revealed their musical accomplishments to their heathen neighbours; who, following them to their lonely water-side haunts, begged of them to let them hear some of those ravishing strains of sacred joy which they had occasionally overheard. The request was pointed: not wailings by the water-side, was the kind of song requested; but genuine *songs of Zion*, which the harpists well knew meant the sacred *songs of Jehovah's* joyful praise.

This was a form of request with which compliance was not possible: the only answer was, with respectful but mournful gesture, to *hang up* their *lyres* on the neighbouring trees, as emphasising decisively the impossibility of granting that pointed request. The connecting *For* which opens the third verse of the psalm sufficiently indicates that such decisive action was the only reply then given; and, indeed, it is not easy to see how the words of the fourth verse could have been then spoken without needlessly provoking *captor-spoilers*; far less would prudent captives there and then indulge in the patriotic outbursts of vers. 5 and 6; which, indeed, could not but have seemed to the ears of foreign masters to breathe defiance. How unspeakably more natural to postpone the apostrophe to Jerusalem to a point of time after the accomplished return; and, with that transfer, to regard the preceding question also as spoken to the sympathetic ears of brethren at home, causing it to mean: "The feeling, that compliance would have been profanation, as you brethren can at once appreciate, is why no other answer to our captors was possible but to hang up our lyres on the neighbouring poplars."

It serves as an independent confirmation of this exegesis to rescue from dislocation the two connected occurrences of the word *gladness* as found in both ver. 3 and ver. 6. It is an exegetical sin against continuity of thought to render the original

PSALM 137

word first as *mirth* and then as *joy*. It was not mere secular "mirth" that was requested in ver. 3; but, as the parallelism shows, the sacred *gladness* audible in *the songs of Zion*, which were at the same time *the songs of Jehovah*. Every sensitive mind instinctively feels that, second only to the joy of regained Temple worship, would be, to the psalmist, the *crowning joy* of his recovered home; and that it is something worth saying to aver that the supreme joy of sacred service towered above even domestic blessedness.

This song has been described as "blended of tears and fire." We are easily touched by the "tears"; but the "fire" finds us less sympathetic. Nevertheless a strong appeal is made to our respectful considerateness, both by the prayer against Edom, and by the apostrophe to Babylon. Edom, the near neighbour and blood relation of Israel, brought on herself the bitter resentment of the prophets, as their piled-up reproaches attest (Amos 1:11, Obad. 10ff, Joel 3:19, Jer. 49:7ff, Lam. 4:21f, Eze. 25:2ff, 35:12ff, Isa. 34, 63:1f), and Babylon had already begun those cruelties in Israel and Judah (Jer. 50-51, Hab. 1:5-11 and others), which were yet to serve further as Jehovah's chastising rod on his faithless people. "The barbarous customs of Oriental warfare spared neither women nor children in a war of extermination. Cp. Isa. 13:16, Hos. 10:14, 13:16, Nah. 3:10, 2 Kings 8:12, Hom. II. 22:63. The stern law of retaliation demanded that Babylon should be treated as she had treated Jerusalem"—Kp. We cannot wonder that the demand of "blood for blood" had not then been hushed, when we consider how often even now, in cases of excited racial hatred, it still makes itself heard. The people of Jehovah had not then been led up to those difficult heights from which alone can come the prayer, "Father! forgive them; they know not what they do!" But Israel's Messiah has already led the way.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. There is quite a discussion as to the historical setting of this psalm. Just when was it written? Why?
2. The captive who wrote this psalm has certain distinct characteristics. Discuss two of them.
3. It would seem the shores of a river is a good place to mourn. Why? Why not sing—or even refuse to sing?

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4. Is the condemnation of Edom just? cf. Amos 1:11; Obadiah 10:11; Joel 3:19.
5. How was the law of retaliation applied to Babylon?

PSALM 138

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A King's Public Thanks for Advancement in Royal Dignity.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, Public Thanks for Unexpected Advancement and for the Lofty Feeling thereby imparted. Stanza II., vers. 4-6, Anticipations of the Homage of Other Kings to Jehovah, which is Traced to its Moral Cause. Stanza III., vers. 7-8, Assurance of the Coming Completion of Jehovah's Promises.

(Lm.) By David.

- 1 I will thank thee¹ with my whole heart,
before messengers divine² will I make melody unto thee:
- 2 I will bow down towards thy holy temple,³
and thank thy name for thy kindness and for thy
faithfulness;
for thou hast magnified above all thy name thy promise:⁴
- 3 In the day that I called thou didst answer me,
didst embolden me in my soul with strength.⁵
- 4 All the kings of the earth will thank thee Jehovah,
when⁶ they have heard the sayings of thy mouth;
- 5 And will sing of the ways of Jehovah,
because great is the glory of Jehovah:
- 6 Though lofty is Jehovah yet the lowly he regardeth,
but the haughty afar off doth he acknowledge.

1. Some cod. (w. Aram., Sep., Vul.) add: "Jehovah"—Gn.

2. Cp. 8:5, 29:1, 89:6-9.

3. Cp. 5:7.

4. So Del.; and cp. 119 (Table) for "promise." Well explained: "The fulfillment of Thy promise surpasses the renown of all Thy former mercies."
—Dr.

5. "Didst inspire me with courage—a lofty feeling permeated my soul"
—Del.

6. Or: "because."

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- 7 If I walk in the midst of distress thou revivest me:
over the wrath of mine enemies thou stretchest forth thy
hand,⁷
and thy right hand saveth me.
- 8 Jehovah will complete (all things)⁸ on my behalf:
Jehovah thy kindness is to the ages,—
the works⁹ of thine own hands do not discard.
(Lm.) to the Chief Musician.

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 138

Lord, with all my heart I thank You. I will sing Your praises before the armies of angels¹ in heaven.

2 I face Your Temple as I worship, giving thanks to You for all Your lovingkindness and Your faithfulness, for Your promises are backed by all the honor of Your name.²

3 When I pray, You answer me, and encourage me by giving me the strength I need.

4 Every king in all the earth shall give You thanks, O Lord, for all of them shall hear Your voice.

5 Yes, they shall sing about Jehovah's glorious ways, for His glory is very great.

6 Yet though He is so great, He respects the humble; but proud men must keep their distance.

7 Though I am surrounded by troubles, You will bring me safely through them. You will clench Your fist against my angry enemies! Your power will save me.

8 The Lord will work out His plans for my life—for Your lovingkindness, Lord, continues forever. Don't abandon me—for You made me.

EXPOSITION

The sudden reappearance of psalms ascribed *To David*, together with a survey of the literary field in which they present themselves, suggests the obvious conclusion, that an early psalter was concluded with the Hallel psalms 105-107; 111-118; 135-136; and 146-150; and that, subsequently, other psalms were

7. Some cod. (w. 2 ear. pr. edns. [1 Rabb.], Sep.): "hands" (pl.)—Gn.

8. So Dr. Cp. Ps. 57:2.

9. Some cod. (w. Syr.): "work" (sing.)—Gn.

1. Literally, "before the gods," or "before the idols."

2. Literally, "You have exalted Your word above all Your name."

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inserted among them. Of these subsequently inserted psalms, there are two groups assigned to "David"; namely, 108-110 and 138-145. Why they thus appear in two groups, rather than in one, is uncertain; but may easily have arisen from the order in which they were found, or the sources from which they were taken. The more urgent question is, how they came to be so belated in finding their way at all into the collected Praises of Israel.

Let us assume that we cannot now get to know this: is our ignorance material? There are many possible reasons why such a thing as so late a discovery of certain psalms might easily have happened. These two groups of Davidic psalms might have already appeared in other connections, and been regarded as sufficiently well preserved already; or they may have been stored at some spot or treasured in some library inaccessible to the earlier collectors of psalms. But the important point to note is, that no incident or accident of this kind is of sufficient weight to throw the smallest doubt upon the incorporated literary assignment of these psalms to David.

Because they are attributed to David, in closely-written and even continuous headlines, the presumption is that they came from his pen; and, unless we can establish the existence of an amount of Librarian carelessness or audacity which is inherently improbable, we ought not to set aside this presumption, save for good and strong cause.

Minute differences of style or orthography are seen to be insufficient reason for such discredit, as soon as proper consideration is given to the liberty known to have been taken by the Sopherim in controlling the Sacred Text. In the one known process of transliteration alone, they may have introduced orthographic peculiarities which it would be a great mistake to ascribe to a higher or earlier source, so as to disturb the question of original authorship.

Again: similarities to other psalms, may be due to such a cause as duplicate production from the author's own pen, who may have more than once given expression to similar sentiments, while in the same circumstances or in the same vein of feeling.

Once more: in some of these similar strains there may be special features which nowhere else appear; why not?

How these possibilities and cautions apply to the matter in hand will presently be seen.

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We have here more psalms attributed to David: are they sufficiently like him to allow us to accept them on their own profession? Do they dovetail into what we know of him already and into what we have from him elsewhere? In our many-sided care not to be misled, may we not justly beware of being prejudiced against an addition to our autobiographical materials? Let this be the spirit, then, in which we proceed to the consideration of this new and important batch of psalms ascribed "To David."

The first of the present series, namely the 138th, strikes us as not only an exceedingly bright and acceptable addition to those which have gone before; but as at once harmonising with what we know of David, and at the same time taking us a little beyond it.

The first stanza strikes just such a note as would be congenial to David's circumstances and sentiments soon after the communication to him of the Divine Oath by Nathan respecting the permanent continuance in his house of the Throne of Israel (2 Sam. 7). Just as here portrayed, he would then worship before the newly brought-in Ark; and it commends itself to us as eminently fitting, that such an advance in Jehovah's self-manifestation as was constituted by the new and unexpected promises contained in his newly received Covenant, should have at this time found unique expression in the line (ver. 2):

for thou hast magnified above all thy name thy promise; as to which see Driver's excellent comment at the foot of the text above. Corresponding with this, it is easy to conceive how almost dangerously life-like was the enhanced sense of *royal importance* as, in Delitzsch's apt words, "a lofty feeling permeated his soul."

In the second stanza of the psalm, we come upon something which seems at once new and apt: a sentiment not so clearly expressed elsewhere, but which nevertheless we are glad to perceive could find lodgment in David's mind. That the kings of the earth should do homage to David's Heir—this we have already perceived, as from Pss. 72 and 89; but that those kings should, for themselves, rejoice in the *sayings of Jehovah's mouth*, and should, in the right of their own joy, *sing of his ways* because of *the greatness of his glory*—this is peculiarly acceptable: most of all acceptable, and of charming interest, because of the implied peculiarity, that such enthusiasm would be roused even in the minds of *kings* by Jehovah's supreme *regard* for

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the *lowly*. How this strikes a note not unknown to David, because probably taught him by Samuel, may be seen by reference to 18:20-27 with our Exposition thereof.

But, as the third stanza makes us feel, we have not done with David—the historical David—who, by little turns of expression peculiarly his own, lets us know that, while he is not yet finally out of *trouble*, he is confident that his covenant God *will complete all things on his behalf*. As in the earlier psalms of David which passed under Hezekiah's co-editing care, so this also is well handed over to the *Chief Musician*, which makes us feel quite at home, satisfied that the choirs will be well instructed how to deal with this addition to their Temple treasures.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is suggested by the sudden reappearance of psalms ascribed to David?
2. "There are many possible reasons" why these psalms of David are so late in appearing. Discuss at least one possible reason.
3. The literary critic is quick to see another author or redactor in any difference in expression. Show how this is a false practice.
4. This psalm well illustrates II Samuel 17. How?
5. A new thought concerning David is found in the second stanza. What is it?
6. "He who began a good work will perfect it." How does this thought apply to David?

PSALM 139

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

An Individual submits Himself to Jehovah's All-Searching Eye.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-6, Jehovah's Knowledge considered as Taking into View every Form of Human Activity. Stanza II., vers. 7-12, There is No Escaping that Knowledge by Distance or Darkness. Stanza III., vers. 13-18, Based upon the Creatorship of each Individual, Jehovah's Knowledge rises

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to Precious Purposes Realisable by Fellowship with Him in a Higher Life.
 Stanza IV., vers. 19-24, The Lesson thus Learned produces a Passionate
 Espousal of Jehovah's honour, which feeling, however, is Jealously Guarded
 by Prayer.

(Lm.) By David—Psalm.

- 1 Jehovah! thou hast searched me and knowest:—
- 2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising,
 thou understandest my purpose from afar.
- 3 My journeying and my resting hast thou traced out,¹
 and with all my ways art thou familiar.
- 4 When (as yet) there is no speech in my tongue
 lo! Jehovah thou knowest it all.
- 5 Behind and before hast thou shut me in,
 and hast laid upon me thine outspread hand.
- 6 Too wonderful is thy² knowledge for me,
 inaccessible! I cannot attain to it.
- 7 Whither can I go from thy spirit?
 or whither from thy face can I flee?
- 8 If I ascend the heavens there art thou,
 and if I spread out hades as my couch behold thee!
- 9 I mount the wings of the dawn,
 settle down in the region behind the sea
- 10 Even there thy hand leadeth me.
 and thy right hand holdeth me.
- 11 If I say—"Only let darkness shut me in,³
 and the light about me be night"
- 12 Even darkness would not darken from thee,
 and night like day would shine,—
 so the darkness as the light.
- 13 For thou thyself didst originate the first rudiments of my
 being,⁴
 didst weave me together⁵ in the womb of my mother.
- 14 I thank thee that thou hast shewn thyself fearfully
 wondrous,—⁶

1. So Sep. Or (Heb.): "winnowed."

2. "Thy" in Sep. and Vul.

3. So Gt. M.T.: "bruise me."

4. Ml.: "my reins."

5. Or (less prob.): "screen me."

6. So it shd. be (w. Sep. and Syr.)—Gn.

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- wonderful are thy works,
and my soul knoweth [it] well.
- 15 My frame⁷ was not hid from thee
when I was made in secret,
was skilfully wrought⁸ in the underparts of the earth:⁹
- 16 Mine undeveloped substance¹⁰ thine eyes beheld,
and in thy book all of them were written—
even days preordained,—
and for it¹¹ one among them.
- 17 To me then how precious thy purposes O GOD!
how numerous have become their heads!
- 18 I would recount them—beyond the sands they multiply!
I awake—and my continued being¹² is with thee.
- 19 Wouldst thou O God slay the lawless one!—
then ye men of bloodshed depart from me!—
- 20 Who speak of thee wickedly,
have uttered for unreality thy name.¹³
- 21 Must not I hate them who hate thee O Jehovah?
And them who rise up against thee must I not loathe?
- 22 With completeness of hatred do I hate them,
as enemies have they become to me.
- 23 Search me O GOD and know my heart,
try me and know my disquieting¹⁴ thoughts;
- 24 And see if there be any hurtful way in me,
and lead me in a way age-abiding.¹⁵

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician.

7. Ml.: "my bone."

8. If the initial "r" in Heb. was an accidental repetition from the previous word (wh. ends w. that letter), then we might render the word so shortened: "I arose." And this might convey a double allusion to race origin and individual origin.

9. "The secret laboratory of the origin of earthly existence"—(Cp. Job 1:21, Sir. 40:1)—Del.

10. Ml.: "my ball"—as yet unrolled! Br. conjectures *grl* (instead of *glm*) "my lot."

11. Namely, "for my undeveloped substance": "one among them," namely, "among preordained days." So, prob., if w. Del. we prefer the Heb. marginal reading (in one recension) *welo*=*waw*, *lamed*, *waw*; otherwise, if we follow M.T., *welo*=*waw*, *lamed*, *aleph* (same pronunciation), we must say: "And NOT one among them."

12. Ml.: "my continuance."

13. So Gt.: cp. Exo. 20:7.

14. Cp. 94:19.

15. That is, "a way enduring or holding on to the ages." In contrast with the "way" that "vanishes," 1:6. Cp. "the path of life," 16:11.

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PARAPHRASE
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O Lord, You have examined my heart and know everything about me.

2 You know when I sit or stand. When far away You know my every thought.

3 You chart the path ahead of me, and tell me where to stop and rest! Every moment, You know where I am!

4 You know what I am going to say before I even say it.

5 You both precede and follow me, and place Your hand of blessing on my head.

6 This is too glorious, too wonderful to believe!

7 I can *never* be lost to Your Spirit! I can *never* get away from God!

8 If I go up to heaven You are there; if I go down to the place of the dead, You are there.

9 If I ride the morning winds to the farthest oceans,

10 Even there Your hand will guide me, Your strength will support me.

11 If I try to hide in the darkness, the night becomes light around me!

12 For even darkness cannot hide from God; to You the night shines as bright as day. Darkness and light are both alike to You.

13 You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body, and knit them together in my mother's womb.

14 Thank You for making me so wonderfully complex! It is amazing to think about. Your workmanship is marvelous—and how well I know it.

15 You were there while I was being formed in utter seclusion!

16 You saw me before I was born and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe. Every day was recorded in Your Book!

17, 18 How precious it is, Lord, to realize that You are thinking about me constantly! I can't even count how many times a day Your thoughts turn towards me!¹ And when I waken in the morning, You are still thinking of me!

* * * * *

1. Literally, "how precious are Your thoughts to me."

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19 Surely You will slay the wicked, Lord! Away, blood-thirsty men! Begone!

20 They blaspheme Your name and stand in arrogance against You—how silly can they be?

21 O Lord, shouldn't I hate those who hate You? Shouldn't I be grieved with them?

22 Yes, I hate them, for Your enemies are my enemies too.

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart, test my thoughts.

24 Point out anything You find in me that makes You sad, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

EXPOSITION

This beautiful and heart-searching psalm may be conveniently regarded as resolving itself into four Stanzas of six verses each, as set forth in our Analysis.

I. *Jehovah's Knowledge considered as taking into view every form of human activity.* A survey which includes a man's *downsitting* when his day's work is done, his *uprising* when his night's rest is over, and his chief *purpose* during the twenty-four hours; which traces his *journeying* from place to place, his *resting* at noon and at night, and his *ways* of deporting himself wherever he may be,—may be said to touch in general terms on all the forms which individual activity can assume. If, to these specifications, are added those processes of the mind which prepare for *speech*, and which prompt and guide the *tongue* in its utterance,—we may conclude that nothing of importance remains uncomprehended in this brief enumeration. Nevertheless, there is yet another aspect under which individual activity may be viewed; and that is, its narrow limitation. There are on every side bounds which it cannot overpass; an individual's *downsittings* and *uprisings* can only attain a certain number, and then they must cease; and so with all his forms of activity. Such limitation is graphically set forth in the simplest and most picturesque language: *Behind and before hast thou shut me in, and hast laid on me thine outspread hand.* This reflection, by so far, enhances the thoroughness of Jehovah's knowledge of me. He knows all the movements I can make, and he himself strictly limits those movements; which emphasises the main point, which is, that Jehovah knows every individual thoroughly: knows, with first-hand knowledge; as the result of personal search and tracing and testing; knows, by anticipation, even the as yet unspoken words that are coming. It is not

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surprising that the psalmist realises how such knowledge surpasses any knowledge which he himself possesses: *Too wonderful is thy knowledge for me.*

II. *There is no Escaping that Knowledge by Distance or Darkness.* The psalmist first tests the question, whether by *Distance* he can hide himself from God. No: not by distance: whether the distant *height*, or the distant *depth*, or the distant *breadth*: the distant and dazzling height of *heaven*; or the dim, dark depth of *hades*, the underworld of the dead; or the hazy remoteness of the shores and islands *behind* the *hinder* Mediterranean Sea: escape to any of these distances will be no escape from Jehovah; who is above, below, beyond; present everywhere—present, in the diffused vitality of his *spirit*, present, in the personal capacity of revealing his *face* in wrath or love. The poet is only testing the question in all the forms his thoughts can appreciate. He does not say he wishes to escape: in fact, he almost implies that he does not; for, in putting the case, merely to test the possibility, he rather assumes the love than the wrath of the Omnipresent One: *There, thy hand leadeth me, and thy right hand holdeth me.* But, if he *would* escape, he *could* not—that is his main point.

Having tested the question of escape from God's knowledge by means of "Distance," he next propounds the question whether by means of *Darkness* such escape were possible. Again he concludes in the negative. *Darkness is no darkness to Jehovah.*

III. *Based upon the Creatorship of Each Individual, Jehovah's Knowledge rises to Precious Purposes realisable by Fellowship with Him in a Higher Life.*

This comprehensive summary of the third stanza of our psalm is not more comprehensive than the particulars which it seeks to express. Nevertheless, being highly charged with meaning, it may be helpful to draw out its main points in the form of three distinct propositions.

1. Jehovah's knowledge of men is based upon his creatorship of each individual.

2. His creatorship of each individual comprehends benevolent purposes with respect to them.

3. His benevolent purposes with respect to each individual require for their realisation the advantages of a higher life than the present.

1. *Jehovah's knowledge of men is based upon his creatorship of each individual.* The causal word *For*=*Because*, which

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opens this stanza, strictly and properly leads up to this conception: "Thou hast such an intimate knowledge of me as neither change of activity, nor distance, nor darkness can obstruct, *because* thou didst make me: *because* I am thy creature: *because* thou art my creator." This is the first strong and clear point in this third stanza of our psalm. Observe that it is clearly and strongly expressed. It is expressed by almost every form of language by which the idea could be conveyed: *He originated the first rudiments of my being*. Then he carries on the formative work so begun: *He wove me together*. He constructed my *bony framework*. Moreover he yet further advanced his handiwork to completion, by *skilfully* imparting the whole *variegated web-work* of nerves and blood-vessels. We need not trust too much to a single form of expression; but it may safely be said that at least three times over in this short paragraph is Jehovah's creatorship of the human body affirmed. Sum them all up, and put them in their proper connection of thought, by saying: He knows me thoroughly because he made me. He made, not only my spirit, but my body also.

We are not going too far when we individualise, and say: "He made *me*. He made *my* body." We are not going too far, because *precisely that* is what the psalmist says.

But does he not also generalise, and speak of the origin of the *race* under cover of the origin of the *individual*? The correct answer to that plausible question would seem to be this: Yes, he does also generalise; but without withdrawing his individualisation. He refers to the *literal mother's womb* of the individual, as well as—probably and allusively—to the figurative mother's womb here glanced at under the terms *underparts of the earth*. We need not deny the allusion. It is the easiest and happiest way of accounting for the introduction of that remarkable expression; which it may be observed is also found in the Septuagint and Vulgate: As the race was originally brought forth out of the underparts of the earth, so the individual is, at birth, brought forth from the maternal concealment answering thereto. But such an allusion does not dominate the passage: the psalm distinctly and repeatedly affirms the Divine Creatorship of the body of each individual human being.

The importance of this teaching will be evident to every thoughtful mind. The consequences which follow from it may, without exaggeration, be described as tremendous. To say that **BEHIND EVERY HUMAN BIRTH DIVINE CAUSATION IS IMPLIED** is to

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make a statement which may undoubtedly be abused. But, on the other hand, still more deplorable consequences will result from denying it. The alternative—that of cutting any single creature adrift from its Creator—must at all costs be avoided.

Jehovah created the race: Jehovah creates every individual of the race. Jehovah is the Father of our spirits—doubtless with special immediateness, beautifully symbolised by the directness with which each breathing thing draws its breath from God. But, though not without creaturely intervention, yet through “the fathers of our flesh,” Jehovah’s creatorship takes effect: his power and wisdom and love are operative in the production of our individual bodies also. It is this which the third stanza of our psalm so strongly teaches, and the more thoroughly and fearlessly we appropriate the solemn thought, the more shall we have ultimate cause for rejoicing.

Jehovah knows me thoroughly, because he made me; and he made my body as well as my spirit—he made the whole man, the entire compound psychic individual.

This is not to say that even he, at my first birth, brought a clean thing out of an unclean; but it is to say, that my first birth, with all its drawbacks, lays a foundation for a second: a second birth whose very object will be to bring a clean thing out of an unclean. Creation may be followed by destruction; but that is not its object. Creation may be followed by salvation.

2. *Jehovah’s creatorship of each individual comprehends benevolent purposes respecting each.* What is it but Jehovah’s individual creatorship which calls forth the significant line which now comes before us?

To me, then, how precious thy purposes, O God!

Having employed the word “purpose,” in ver. 2, in relation to man, we are bound in consistency to use it now, in ver. 17, in relation to God, the word being the same in the original. God has not only “thoughts” about us when individually creating us, but purposes, and because these purposes are *precious*, therefore we must assume them to be benevolent; purposes of good and not of evil; of salvation, and not of destruction. Some, indeed, prefer the qualifying word “weighty” here instead of “precious”; but as “precious” is the more customary and obvious rendering, we shall hold ourselves warranted to abide by that more inspiring word until driven out of it. Inasmuch, however, as the immediately following context confirms the preferred and

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customary rendering, we have no fear of being driven out of the welcome conception of a benevolent Divine purpose in connection with every human birth.

It is quite true that the psalmist with great emphasis asserts the individuality of his own appreciation of God's benevolent purposes in his creation. *To me, then, how precious!* and he had every right to do this. "*To me, knowing thee as I know thee;*" "*To me, then, considering this matter as I have done, and pondering deeply upon it as I have pondered,—how precious thy purposes are!*" But is this to shut others out from the same appreciation; or, is it, rather, to invite them to follow him? Let us beware of narrowing the ground of the exclamation so as to cut it away from under any man's feet. Suffice it, then, to observe—that the psalmist neither says nor implies, "Because I am a good man, therefore are thy purposes such as they are, therefore are they precious to me." No! the whole spirit of the stanza, and of the psalm hitherto, suggests the simpler and broader ground: "Because I am a man, and because thou didst make me to be a man, therefore are thy purposes to me as man so precious."

3. *Jehovah's benevolent purposes with respect to each individual require for their realisation the advantages of a higher life than the present.* Nearly everything here turns on the bearing of the word *awake*; although something also turns upon the fact that the words *I am still* may give place to a more literal rendering, *my continuance*, which more literal rendering may justly assume the significant form, *my continued being*, as we see from Ps. 104:33: *I awake—my continued being is with thee.* Chiefly, the decision turns upon the scope or intention of the word *awake*. Does the psalmist intend to imply that he had nearly or quite fallen asleep under the weight of his profound meditation, but that when he roused himself he still found himself revolving the old problem,—found him *with God* in the sense of still thinking about him? Or does he rather rise to a higher thought—that of awaking to a higher life than the present?

We may and must dismiss the former as purely fanciful: there is nothing sleepy about what has gone before—all is alert, wakeful; with no indication even of weariness in the mind of the psalmist. Besides which, there is something essentially feeble in reducing the weighty words *with thee* to mean no more

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than thinking about thee; since they more properly mean in company with thee—in thy presence.

On the other hand there are attractive parallels for investing the word "awake" with a far richer meaning; such as, "Awake and sing ye that dwell in the dust" (Isa. 26:19), "many of the sleepers in the dusty ground shall awake" (Dan. 12:2), and especially—

As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness,
I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness.

—Ps, 17:15.

Who can deny that, so to understand the words of our psalm, is to bring its third stanza to an altogether worthy conclusion? The whole context is strong, and favours a strong conclusion. Particularly strong and suggestive are the two lines falling between the two great words *purposes* and *awake*: *how numerous have become the heads of them, namely thy purposes; and—I would recount them—beyond the sands they multiply*. Only regard the *purposes* as finding final culmination in the bestowment of IMMORTAL LIFE; only regard the *awaking* as being the GREAT AWAKING to that life; and then this multiplication of the Divine "purposes" is abundantly accounted for. The "purposes" culminating in the Great Awakening naturally multiply on both sides of that climax: on this side, and on that; as leading up to it, and as carrying us beyond it. He who "purposes" to bestow on me immortality, will he not "purpose" to prepare me for that priceless boon? Will he not "purpose" redemption, "purpose" sanctification, "purpose" the necessary discipline of suffering, "purpose" victory over temptation? So that we may well exclaim, *How numerous the purposes leading me up to the Great Awakening!* And again, will that Great Awakening not itself lead on to further and higher and still multiplying results? Does Jehovah "purpose" to awake me to an idle, sterile life? When I am awakened, will there be nothing for me to do, no lost ones to seek and save, no new worlds to conquer, no new victories to achieve, no new songs to sing, no new book of nature's secrets to open? Verily, it is as the psalmist says, *How the heads of coming possibilities in the future multiply beyond the sands?*

On every ground, therefore, are we emboldened to conclude, that this *Awaking* is THE GREAT AWAKING TO IMMORTALITY. On the ground of the utter feebleness of the *alternative view*, which fancies that this wakeful psalmist fell asleep; on the ground

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of the felt *preciousness* of these Divine *purposes*; and on the ground of their abundant *multiplication*, which can never so prolifically multiply as when clustered about Jehovah's greatest gift, age-abiding life:—on all these substantial grounds we choose this conclusion, and rest in it, that the climax of this third stanza does really mean—I *awake* to immortal life—and find that *my continued being* is to be enjoyed in fellowship *with thee* my loving Creator!

IV. *The lesson thus learned produces a Passionate Espousal of Jehovah's honour: which feeling, however, is Jealously Guarded by Prayer.*

That is what we really have here, in the final stanza of our psalm: let us brush aside everything which hinders our seeing it.

Granted that the language employed is, some of it, such as we could not use: simply because we are not in the psalmist's circumstances. What were those circumstances?

As this question necessarily throws us back on the problem of authorship, it may be permitted us to say: that this "Study" was commenced under the impression that DAVID HIMSELF was the Writer of the whole of this psalm, the manifest difference in tone between the first three stanzas and the last being sufficiently accounted for by the easy supposition, that three-fourths of the psalm were written by David in his comparatively early and untroubled days, and the last part, after his days of conflict had set in; but that, on closer consideration of the peculiar language of the fourth stanza and contemplation of the circumstances—the whole state of things—thereby implied, the modified conclusion was reached, that, while David probably wrote the major part of the psalm, namely its continuously calm stanzas one, two, and three, being probably the whole original psalm, and abundantly entitling the psalm as a whole to bear his honoured name, it was his descendant HEZEKIAH who, having drunk in the existing psalm, in letter and spirit, then added to it the present fourth stanza. The sufficient reason for this modification may be allowed to stand thus: the fourth stanza does *not exactly suit* any known circumstances through which David passed, but *does exactly and most wonderfully fit* the peculiar condition of things which existed in the days of Hezekiah. So much for clearness being premised, the case may be thus stated, looking steadfastly and with a single eye to the exact language of this the fourth stanza of the psalm.

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These are the words of a responsible King in Israel: with a foreign invader trampling down the land; leaving his subjects little chance of exercising the most ordinary rights of citizenship, and still less of maintaining the appointed central worship in Jerusalem; many of the Levites being beleaguered in the cities where are their homes, and consequently being unable to ascend to the holy city to attend there to their sacerdotal duties. All this, observe, simply because of this same Invader—this lawless foreigner—who will, if he can, dethrone Israel's rightful monarch, and draw the people away from their allegiance to Jehovah himself. And now the question is:—If, under these circumstances, the King prays—*Wouldst thou, O God, slay the lawless one!* is he doing wrong? Deserves he to lose our sympathies? Can we condemn him? Note, that he does not propose to *slay the lawless one* himself; he merely commits him to the judgment of God: *Slay him, O God!* Is that a wrong prayer for Israel's King, under such circumstances.

But let us be at pains to take in the whole situation. There is a war-party in Israel, who are prepared to rush forward into *blood-shed*, with or without Jehovah's permission. We know them; we have met with them before: we have heard their peace-loving King lament that he dwelt among them: bitterly complaining of them in such terms as these, "*I am peace; but when I speak, they are for war!*" (Ps. 120). These are the men to whom the devout monarch here says threateningly in a significant aside: *then, ye men of blood-shed, depart from me!* As much as to say, "Once the Lawless One is slain by God's hand, your excuses for plunging into a wilful war will be silenced; and, depend upon it, I shall hasten to rid myself of your hated presence in my Court."

Not only was there a war-party in Israel, but that war-party was composed of *profane* men—men *who spake* of Jehovah *wickedly*, who tried to maintain *falsehoods* by the irreverent use of *his* holy name: men, in a word, who *hated* Jehovah! Those are the men whom this praying, Jehovah-loving monarch has to confront. And we ask, was he wrong in drawing a line at them? Could he do otherwise than exclaim, in loyalty to the God whom he adored and loved: *Must I not hate them who hate thee, O Jehovah?* There is no paltry, personal animosity in the language. In point of fact, these men might have been the king's own enemies, but of that he takes no account. Wholly on public grounds—solely for Jehovah's

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sake—he *accounts* them as his own enemies. That—no more, no less—is what the language expresses.

And so we claim to have brushed aside all obstructions to the reception of the large and solemn lesson here conveyed. It is an object-lesson; and is nothing less than this: That when a man rightly appreciates the *precious purposes* which his Creator cherishes towards him, then is he propelled by the highest moral compulsion to love him in return; to vindicate his honour; and to count his Creator's enemies as his own.

Yet, in such a passionate espousal of Jehovah's honour, there undoubtedly lurks a subtle danger: lest the public hate should take up into itself personal animosity; let an abhorrence of men's godless principles and animus should overlook the yet lingering preciousness of their personalities, not yet, it may be, wholly corrupt and finally abandoned.

And it is submitted, that this is one of the finest things in this matchless psalm; namely, that the psalmist is fully aware of this danger; and makes a determined stand against it, by voluntarily submitting himself to the searching eye of his heart-searching God; imploring to know whether there is in him—even by way of mixed motives—*any hurtful way*; and seeking to be Divinely *led into a way*—up to and through the great Awakening—to the pure life that shall *abide to the ages*.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Perhaps this is the most meaningful of all the psalms. Please read it and the exposition on it with this thought in mind. Discuss why you believe this psalm has meaning for you.
2. Someone said, "for the Christian, nothing happens in his life by accident, all is under God's hand of intent." The first six verses of this psalm surely confirm this thought. Discuss.
3. Not only does God know all my movements, "he himself strictly limits those movements," discuss this thought.
4. Does man have a strong temptation to run away and hide? Why? Is this true of all men?
5. There are various attempts to get away from God . . . to put distance between you and God. Discuss some modern-day applications of this.
6. Every fifth man in America is emotionally sick—i.e. ac-

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cording to some statistics—is this an attempt to escape God in the darkness? Discuss other forms of darkness. *Most of all*; discuss not only the futility of this effort but the needlessness of it.

7. What a tremendous thought! Not only did God create man, but He took a personal interest in creating each one. Discuss how very complete is the interest of our Creator in each one of us.
8. What is involved in the expression the “underparts of the earth”?
9. God has a plan and purpose for every life, is this taught in this psalm? Discuss.
10. How do the first and second births relate?
11. How is the word “precious” used in this psalm?
12. How is the word “awake” here used?
13. The multiplicity of the purposes of God is a strong argument for immortality. How so?
14. Rotherham has an interesting thought about the writing of the fourth stanza. Discuss.
15. Who was the “lawless one”? Why to be slain? Was this merciful?
16. What protection did the psalmist seek against the lawless one?

PSALM 140

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Deliverance from Slandrous and Violent Enemies
Implored and Expected.




ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, Rescue from Violent Slanderers Besought. Stanza II., vers. 4, 5, The Plottings of the Slanderers Indicated. Stanza III., vers. 6-8, Personal Relation to Jehovah and His Past Mercies Pleaded. Stanza IV., vers. 9-11, Prayer becomes Impassioned Imprecation. Stanza V., vers. 12, 13, Calm Assurance at length comes of Complete Vindication.

(Lm.) A Psalm—By David.

- 1 Rescue me Jehovah from evil men,
from the man of violent deeds wilt thou preserve me:

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- 2 Who have devised evil things in [their] heart,
every day they stir up wars:
- 3 They have sharpened their tongue like a serpent,
the venom of the viper¹ is under their lips. 
- 4 Keep me Jehovah from the hands of the lawless one,
from the man of violent deeds. wilt thou preserve me,—
who have devised to give a thrust unto my footsteps.
- 5 Proud men have hid a trap for me and nooses,
they have spread a net by the side of the track,—
lures have they set for me. 
- 6 I have said unto Jehovah—"My GOD art thou!
oh give ear, Jehovah to the voice of my supplications.
- 7 Jehovah Sovereign Lord my stronghold of salvation,
thou hast been a screen to my head in the day of arms.
- 8 Do not grant Jehovah the desires of the lawless one,
his device do not promote." 
- 9 If they who encompass me lift up their head⁸
let the mischief of their own lips cover them:
- 10 Let him rain upon them⁴ live coals,
into the fire let him cast them—
into the place of flowing waters that they rise not again.
- 11 The slanderer⁵ shall not be established in the land,
the man of violence let calamity hunt him in great haste.⁶
- 12 I know that Jehovah will execute the right of the humbled,
the vindication of the needy.
- 13 Surely righteous ones shall give thanks unto thy name,
upright ones shall dwell in thy presence.

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 140

O Lord, deliver me from evil men. Preserve me from the violent,

2 Who plot and stir up trouble all day long.

3 Their words sting like poisonous snakes.

1. Or? "spider"—O.G. "The meaning of the Heb. word is uncertain"—Dr.

2. Cp. Intro., Chap. III., "Selah."

3. So Del. divides the verses.

4. So *Gt.*, cp. 11:7.

5. *ML.*: "man of tongue."

6. So Del., "With thrust upon thrust."—O.G., Dr.

PSALM 140

4 Keep me out of their power. Preserve me from their violence, for they are plotting against me.

5 These proud men have set a trap to catch me, a noose to yank me up and leave me dangling in the air; they wait in ambush with a net to throw over and hold me helpless in its meshes.

6, 7, 8 O Jehovah, my Lord and Savior, my God and my shield—hear me as I pray! Don't let these wicked men succeed; don't let them prosper and be proud.

9 Let their plots boomerang! Let them be destroyed by the very evil they have planned for me.

10 Let burning coals fall down upon their heads, or throw them into the fire, or into deep pits from which they can't escape.

11 Don't let liars prosper here in our land; quickly punish them.

12 But the Lord will surely help those they persecute; He will maintain the rights of the poor.

13 Surely the godly are thanking You, for they shall live in Your presence.

EXPOSITION

The situation indicated by this psalm is clearly Davidic. The very fact that *slander* is the primary weapon relied upon by the writer's enemies is enough to make us suspect who the writer is; and when *violence* is seen waiting on slander, ready to strike as soon as slander has succeeded in doing its poisonous work, we have instantly all the conditions required by the psalm vividly brought before our minds: that is, as soon as we think of *David at Saul's court* as the sufferer and Petitioner of the psalm. There is no need to risk a universal negative, by denying that any other man ever lived in whose history these peculiar conditions met; but the doubt may be confidently expressed, that it would be extremely difficult to imagine a second hero able to meet the requirements here indicated. He must be a believer in Jehovah—a man of prayer—a man who has been under arms—a man who can point to past divine deliverances—a man whose life is at the mercy of a slanderous tongue—and, to forbear further specification, a man whose rescue from present peril will cause righteous men to thank Jehovah and dwell securely in his presence. David fulfils all these conditions; and, not knowing where to find another who does this, we may well

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hold ourselves justified in accepting the traditional ascription of authorship to be well sustained.

The reader who pleases to turn to our exposition of Ps. 69 will see how far we are from offering an unqualified defence of the imprecations which several of the psalms contain; but the above considerations respecting the peculiar conditions which met in David, may suggest in great strength the plea that it is no wonder that, *in his circumstances*, he did call to Jehovah for heavy judgments on his enemies. David—notwithstanding his reverent and tender scruples against lifting up a finger to injure his tyrannical master, Saul—was, after all, looking forward to the personal occupancy of the throne of the kingdom, and where, then, could he naturally desire these turbulent enemies to be, if not swept away by the judicial visitations of Jehovah? How else could he look forward to a kingdom in which the *humbled* and *needy* should be *vindicated*, and men be free to *dwell* in safety and *thankfulness* in Jehovah's *presence*? In those circumstances probably no man living is now placed.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This is described as an "imprecatory psalm"; what is meant by this expression? How is it to be understood?
2. Show how appropriate this psalm is to David's experience.
3. In David's circumstance we can understand his desire, as here expressed. Discuss.

PSALM 141

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A Temptation to Conspiracy Shunned.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, Prayer for Guarded Speech. Stanza II., vers. 4, 5, Danger from Proffered Hospitalities. Stanza III., vers. 6, 7, Guarded Admissions. Stanza IV., vers. 8-10, Prayer for Personal Preservation.

(Lm.) Psalm—By David.

- 1 Jehovah I have called upon thee, oh haste thou unto me:
oh give ear to my voice when I call unto thee.

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- 2 Prepared be my prayer as incense before thee,
the uplifting of my hands as the grain-offering of the
evening.
- 3 Oh set thou Jehovah a guard to my mouth,
oh watch thou over the door of my lips.
- 4 Let not my heart incline unto a matter of wrong,
to practise practices in lawlessness with men who are
working iniquity,—¹
so shall I not taste of their dainties.
- 5 Let a righteous man smite me in kindness and rebuke me,
but the oil of the lawless let it not anoint my head;²
for still my prayer must be against their wrongs.
- 6 "When their judges have been let fall by the side of a crag
then have they hearkened to my sayings, in that they are
mild:"³
- 7 "As one plougheth and furroweth the earth
scattered are our bones at the mouth of hades."
- 8 For unto thee Jehovah Sovereign Lord are mine eyes,
in thee have I taken refuge do not pour out my life.⁴
- 9 Keep me out of the clutches of the trap they have laid for me,
and the lures of the workers of iniquity.⁵
- 10 Let lawless men fall into the snares thereof:
I shall rejoice⁶ while I pass by.

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 141

Quick, Lord, answer me—for I have prayed. Listen when
I cry to You for help!

2 Regard my prayer as my evening sacrifice and as incense
wafting up to You.

3 Help me, Lord, to keep my mouth shut and my lips sealed.

4 Take away my lust for evil things; don't let me want to
be with sinners, doing what they do, sharing their dainties.

1. Or: "mischief" ("naughtiness"—Dr.).

2. So Sep.: thus intelligibly leading on to what follows.

3. So Fuerst. U.: "sweet," "pleasant," "delightful."

4. U.: "soul."

5. Or: "mischief" ("naughtiness"—Dr.).

6. So Br., reading *'hd* instead of *yhd*. "So by an easy emendation of a
difficult text, which varies in Heb. and Sep., and is variously interpreted in
versions."

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5 Let the godly smite me! It will be a kindness! If they reprove me, it is medicine! Don't let me refuse it. But I am in constant prayer against the wicked and their deeds.

6, 7 When their leaders are condemned, and their bones are strewn across the ground¹ then these men will finally listen to me and know that I am trying to help them.

8 I look to You for help, O Lord God. You are my refuge. Don't let them slay me.

9 Keep me out of their traps.

10 Let them fall into their own snares, while I escape.

EXPOSITION

Some close connection between this psalm and the previous has been generally seen by Expositors, and indeed must be admitted on the evidence; but the situation has materially changed. There—in the foregoing psalm—the danger to the psalmist arose from the slanderous tongues of others; here, the danger apprehended is from an incautious use of his own tongue. And this perception helps us to seize the nature of the change which has come over the psalmist's enemies. Before, they wished to ensure his downfall by falsely accusing him to his master, whose permission they sought to employ violence towards the object of their hatred. Now, however, a deeper plot endangers his life. It is not for their royal master that they really care, but for themselves; and they have conceived the dark project of employing David to assassinate Saul. With the assassin, indeed, they will make short work, and place their nominee on the throne of Israel. Such is the plot.

The evidence of it is not historic, but circumstantial, and springs exclusively from the thoroughness with which such a situation accounts for the extraordinary difficulties which attach themselves to the language of the psalm: whose words, though obscure in places, are by no means so difficult to decipher, as is the connection of thought which binds them together. The psalm, in fact, is incoherent, until its main drift is detected; but, when that is discovered, difficulties materially diminish.

There were men at Saul's court wicked and unscrupulous enough for any crime consistent with their own safety and ambition: to wit, Cush the Benjamite and Doeg the Edomite.

1. Literally, "As when one plows and cleaves the earth, our bones are scattered at the mouth of Sheol."

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David may have unwittingly so far put himself into their power as unintentionally to lead them to contemplate the possibility of making him wholly subservient to their nefarious designs. It would be surprising if he had never betrayed, in their presence, how sorely he felt the wrong that Saul was all along doing him; and, in particular, the king's cruel slaughter of the priests of Nob may have extorted from his noble soul—in his enemies' hearing—some such identification with the sufferers as is implied in the fraternising language of one significant line in our psalm:—

Scattered are our bones at the mouth of hades;

for, in truth, the slaughter at Nob was great, and in the hasty burial of the slain, it may easily have happened that the bones of the victims were left to be upturned by some neighbouring farmer as he made his furrow in the field. How easily may David have more than once expressed so keen a regret over this horrible incident, as to betray the undoubted truth, that his sympathies were much more with the slain than with the slayer; and, so, how plausibly may an occasion have been given to those whose hatred of him was very much in the proportion of the love of others, his friends.

Only, now, their policy is not so much the slanderous use of their own tongues to Saul, as the inducing of David so to add to his lamentations over his master's cruelty as to improve their chance of inciting him to conspire against him. To this end, they flatter and court him; they invite him to a feast, and will undoubtedly entertain him well, not forgetting to *anoint his head* as an honoured guest!

This is the plot, through which the psalmist sees; of which he stands in wholesome dread; against which he prays in tones of rhythmic passion, to which he attunes his inevitable lyre. *That*, we instinctively feel, is how this psalm was produced.

Look through it carefully from this point of view and see how naturally it yields up at least the principal portion of its contents when set to this key-note, and how eloquently forcible those contents, in that case, become.

Like Daniel, at a later time, David feels that he must needs be circumspect even in his prayers; lest his enemies, overhearing him, manufacture treason out of his devotions. He is therefore urgent in this particular request:

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Jehovah, I have called upon thee, oh haste thou unto me:
oh give ear to my voice when I call unto thee.

He proceeds to crave that there may be no unguarded word in his devotions, but all be as orderly and circumspect as the ordering of a morning or evening sacrifice.

Prepared be my prayer as incense before thee,
the uplifting of my hands as the grain-offering
of the evening.

How so? the answer immediately follows:—

Oh set thou Jehovah a guard to my mouth,
oh watch thou over the door of my lips.

The reason for this prayerful caution has already become obvious.

The second stanza is naturally a little more explicit:—

Let not my heart incline unto a matter of wrong;
and would it not be “WRONG” to take away Saul’s life? We know how David’s soul would recoil from the thought!

Moreover, there will be foreigners in this feast whose heathenish *practices* cannot for a moment be trusted. The whole thing is *lawless*; and by teachings and ceremonies of *lawlessness* will it be sustained. So the psalmist apprehends, and wisely resolves:—

So shall I not taste of their dainties.

“I will come under no social obligation to them.”

Let a righteous man smite me—it were a kindness,—
let him even rebuke me!

“It would do me no harm.”

But the oil of the lawless—let it not anoint my head!

“By such courtesies I might be overcome; and I would by no means have it so: I cannot consent to unnerve my soul from praying continually against the enormous *wrong* which they are plotting.”

Is the next stanza enigmatic? It may be so; and may have been intentionally so left.

“When their judges have been let fall by the side of a
crag,
then have they hearkened to my sayings, in that they
are mild.”

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"Did I ever say this? And do they, according to the idiom of our tongue [as plural of intensity], take me to have meant, that *Our great Judge, Saul*, might be *let fall from a crag*? And do they suppose that my further meaning was: That, when the present monarchy is removed by Divine Visitation upon the Great Offender, then they will turn to me in approval of my sayings; will admit that what I had repeatedly said was well within bounds,—was reasonable,—was *mild* in comparison with what I might have said?" It is conceivable, that, while the psalmist saw how easily his enemies could thus intensify and exaggerate the meaning of these sayings so as to make them appear treasonable, the Spirit of Prophecy may have prevented his withdrawing them.

It is further possible that some link of speech has fallen out of this stanza, which, if recovered, would make easily intelligible the present bare four lines: of which a merely conjectural paraphrase has thus been submitted. And it is highly probable, as a little ago was suggested, that the psalmist would have frankly admitted that he had identified himself with the priests who had so fearfully suffered for his sake at Nob.

Our admission that this short stanza of the psalm is decidedly enigmatic, and may include one or even two proverbial sayings to which we have lost the clue, does not by any means throw the remainder of the psalm into obscurity. In any case, if the glimpse we have obtained of the origin of this psalm be correct—we cannot be surprised to find the psalmist moved by the gravity of his danger to renewed entreaties for Jehovah's protection. If his enemies could only involve him in a plot TO TAKE AWAY SAUL'S LIFE, the *pouring out of his own life* would speedily follow! Cruel, indeed were *the clutches of the trap they had laid for him*. But by Jehovah's help in keeping his heart right, and his eyes open, and his resolve firm not to accept of their festivities—either their anointing oil for his head or their dainties for his palate—he could calmly hope to pass by the danger unharmed.

Perhaps it may, without presumption, be allowable to submit in conclusion,—that the dating by some eminent critics of the composition of this psalm within that period of David's life covered by the revolt of Absalom, utterly fails to find foothold in the first stanza of the psalm. The fundamental pre-supposition furnished by that stanza is by no means thereby met. No such critical danger at that time attached to any words

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which might fall from David's lips: no emissaries were waiting to run and report them to Absalom; and, if there had been, Absalom had not yet obtained any power to avenge them. By throwing the scene back to the days of Saul, all is changed; and the feasibility of thus obtaining a suitable situation to call forth the psalm is so patent as to render inexcusable the resort of some critics to a post-exilic period, and the violent expedient of turning the suppliant of the psalm into a nation. Leave the individualistic feature of the psalm intact; and the nation can then help itself by appropriating its own condition whatever it finds likely to contribute to its edification.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the definable similarity between this psalm and the preceding one?
2. What is the dark plot of these enemies of David's?
3. What real purpose did these men have in their plot? Who were the possible perpetrators?
4. How had David (possibly) unwittingly put himself in their power?
5. "Scattered are our bones at the mouth of hades"—how shall we understand this expression. Discuss.
6. David feels even his devotion could be a danger to him—how so?
7. The thought of daily personal devotions—i.e. prayer and the meditation on His Word is assured as the practice of David and others. Are we less in need than they? Why do we fail in this privilege?
8. What a sore temptation are social obligations! As with David so with us. How shall we protect ourselves from them?
9. There seems to be an enigmatic stanza in this psalm. Where is it? What does it mean?
10. Show how other possible solutions as to the setting of this psalm fail to properly interpret it.

PSALM 142

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Loud Outcries in a Cave Succeed Guarded Petitions at Court.

PSALM 142

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, A Loud-Voiced Prelude. Stanzas II. and III., vers. 3, 4, Severity of the Late Trial at Court. Stanza IV., ver. 5, Final Prayer before Flight. Stanza V., ver. 6, Want Before, Pursuers Behind. Stanza VI., ver. 7, Faith Brightens the Prospect.

(Lm.) An Instructive Psalm—By David—
When he was in the Cave—a Prayer.

- 1 With my voice¹ to Jehovah I cry,
with my voice¹ to Jehovah I make supplication:
- 2 I pour out before him my complaint,²
my distress before him I declare.
- 3 Though my spirit fainted upon me
yet thou approvedst my path:
In the way which I was accustomed to walk
they had hidden a trap for me.
- 4 I looked to the right-hand and saw—³
that there was none who for me had regard.
Escape had vanished from me,
there was none to care for my life.⁴
- 5 I cried unto thee O Jehovah,
I said "Thou art my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living."
- 6 Oh attend unto my piercing cry,
for I am brought very low:
Rescue me from my pursuers,
for they are stronger than I.
- 7 Oh bring forth out of the dungeon my soul,
to give thanks to thy name.
For my sake will the righteous wear crowns,⁵
for thou wilt deal bountifully with me.

(Nm.)

1. Or: "aloud."

2. Or: "murmuring," "soliloquy."

3. "The ancient versions, nearly without exception, have here the first person"—Per. The imperative—which Per. himself, after Jerome, approves—brings forward the request into the cave, and thereby renders it so unmeaning as to discredit the ancient headline. See our Exposition.

4. U.: "soul." See Intro., Chap. III., "Soul."

5. "On account of me the righteous shall adorn themselves with crowns, i.e., they shall triumph on account of me"—Del. "Crown themselves because of me"—R.V. (marg.). "Put out crowns because of me (i.e., appear wearing crowns, fig. for 'triumph')"—Dr.

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PARAPHRASE

PSALM 142

How I plead with God, how I implore His mercy, pouring out my troubles before Him.

3 For I am overwhelmed and desperate, and You alone know which way I ought to turn to miss the traps my enemies have set for me.

4 (There's one—just over there to the right!) No one gives me a passing thought. No one will help me; no one cares one whit what happens to me.

5 Then I prayed to Jehovah. "Lord," I pled, "You are my only place of refuge. Only You can keep me safe.

6 Hear my cry, for I am very low. Rescue me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me.

7 Bring me out of prison, so that I can thank You. The godly will rejoice with me for all Your help."

EXPOSITION

This psalm triumphantly vindicates its library head-line, both as to author and as to occasion. The slandering of David to his master had already done its deadly work, and probably led to previous flights from Saul's presence. But now, to slanders, have succeeded flatteries, and deep-laid schemes to involve David in conspiracy, as revealed in the previous psalm. To aggravate the perils of David's position, Jonathan seems to have been absent from Court, probably sent on some expedition which kept him away from Saul's *right-hand*, and deprived David of the one friend at Court on whom he could rely. Under these circumstances, David—no doubt with a chosen band of men around him—betook him to flight: this time probably to the caves of En-gedi (1 Sam. 24), if we may assume that his resort to the cave of Adullam (1 Sam. 22) had fallen earlier in his chequered career. It is surprising how thoroughly this psalm yields up its varied contents to our apprehension when once it is let into a situation substantially such as is thus indicated. Each stanza contributes something to the verisimilitude of the whole.

Stanza I. is a mere prelude, but at once affords a contrast to the extreme caution in prayer revealed in the foregoing psalm. That prayer, we may well believe, was uttered, not only in circumspect words, but in subdued tones; but the caution of that prayer now gives place to the abandon of this, and twice

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over we are assured that this psalm was uttered *aloud*. Far away among the south-eastern hills, interned in the far-reaching caves of En-ge-di (according to Del., "such a labyrinthine maze of passages and vaults, that the torches and ropes of explorers have not to the present time been able to reach the end"), his faithful scouts ready to give him warning of the least appearance of danger, the psalmist could here sweep his strings with a will and plainly reveal in words the varying moods of his deeply exercised mind.

Stanza II. records from the recent past a violence of mental disturbance consistent with an instinctive and almost unreasoned but strong concentration of resolve, taking the short form: "Not treason, but flight." That plot was too infamous for parleying: flight only could be trusted to parry the insidious blow.

Stanza III. strikingly suggests, that, if only Jonathan had been at his father's *right-hand*, the extremity of flight might have been averted, or at least postponed. Who, that remained, *cared* for the Bethlehemite's *life*?

Stanza IV., which gives meaning to the flight, suggests, by its unexpected brevity, the connecting link between the past and the present in the form of an unexpressed sequel, furnishing a strong lead up to what is to follow: As much as to say: "My flight, O Jehovah, is into thine own arms: because thou art *my refuge*, I thus take refuge in thee; because thou art *my portion in the land of the living*, my trust is, that I shall not find these caves to be the caves of death: therefore am I here."

Stanza V. picks up the thread. Companions in arms cause their leader anxious care. Among rocks and caves, provisions soon run short. Of this, David is well aware; and his trust is in Jehovah for his men as well as himself. But the emergency is great, and prayer becomes a *piercing cry*; for, says the careful commander, *I am brought very low*. Besides, discovery by Saul's soldiers might mean unequal battle or renewed flight. *Rescue me from my pursuers, for they are stronger than I*. All is vivid: realistic. This is no child's play. These are not dreams.

But Stanza VI. reminds us that, in this prolonged conflict, great moral issues are at stake. Saul stands for force and self-will: David, for faith and the will of Jehovah. "The poet's way of looking at his own fate and that of his enemies in a not merely ideal, but in a divinely ordained causal, connection with the general end of the two powers that are opposed to one

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another in the world, is one of the characteristic features of the Psalms of David written at the time of his persecution by Saul"—Del. Hence, in passing, the importance of holding fast the true Davidic origin of these psalms; hence moreover, the cogency of the reminder, in this final stanza, that David is being Divinely enabled to grasp the issues involved. Not without a struggle, but with it; not without prayer, but with it and through it, does David here rise to the assurance that he shall yet be *brought out* of this *Dungeon*, for such literally it is; that, for his deliverance, he will *give thanks unto Jehovah's name*; and that *the righteous*, who, though conspicuous by their absence from Saul's Court, are nevertheless to be found scattered throughout the land, shall joyfully acknowledge how *bountifully* Jehovah hath *dealt* with the hero who is now leading them on to the abiding victory of faith and patience.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is David in a cave? Which one?
2. Why such a loud protest? Song becomes a grand vehicle for prayer, praise, soliloquy, instruction, etc? How do we personally (not congregationally) use it today?
3. Show the connection and meaning of stanza two, three, and four.
4. Stanza five indicates the very real danger involved. Discuss.
5. David has assurance of ultimate victory, but not because of himself—nor by his own efforts. Discuss.

PSALM 143

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Continued Concealment in the Cave: its Griefs and its Gains.


ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, Remarkable Pleadings and Deprecation. Stanza II., vers. 3, 4, How the Trial Tries. Stanza III., vers. 5, 6, How the Student Studies. Stanza IV., vers. 7-12, How the Petitioner Perseveres in Prayer.

(Lm.) Psalm—By David.

- 1 Jehovah hear thou my prayer,
oh give ear unto my supplications,—
in thy faithfulness answer me in thy righteousness;

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- 2 And do not enter into judgment with thy servant,
for no one living can appear just before thee.
- 3 For a foe hath pursued my soul,¹
hath crushed to the earth my life;
hath made me dwell in dark places—
like the ancient dead;²
- 4 And my spirit hath fainted upon me,
in the midst of me astounded is my heart.
- 5 I have remembered the days of aforetime,
I have talked to myself of all thy doings,—³
on the works⁴ of thy hand I soliloquise:
- 6 I have spread out my hands unto thee,
my soul is like⁵ a weary land for thee. 
- 7 Haste thee answer me Jehovah, my spirit languisheth,—
do not hide thy face from me,
or I shall be made like them who are going down into the pit.
- 8 Let me hear in the morning thy kindness,
for in thee do I trust:
Let me know the way wherein I should walk,
for unto thee have I uplifted my soul.
- 9 Rescue me from my foes Jehovah!
for thee have I waited.⁶
- 10 Teach me to do thy pleasure for thou art my God,
let thy good spirit⁷ lead me in a level land.⁸
- 11 For the sake of thy name Jehovah wilt thou revive me?
in thy righteousness wilt thou bring forth out of distress
my soul?
- 12 And in thy kindness wilt thou exterminate my foes,
and destroy all the adversaries of my soul:
because I am thy servant.

(Nm.)

1. Or: "person."

2. Or: "like the dead of (by-gone) ages."

3. So (pl.) some cod. (w. 1 ear. pr. edn., Aram., Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn.
M.T.: "doing" (sing.)

4. So (pl.) some cod. (w. 3 ear. pr. edns., Aram., Sep., Vul.)—Gn.
M.T.: "work" (sing.)

5. So M.T. Some cod. (w. 7 ear. pr. edns.): "in"—Gn.

6. Or: "hoped"—so *Gt.* M.T. (obscure).

7. Ml.: "Thy spirit a good one."

8. Some cod. (w. 1 ear. pr. edn.): "way." Others (w. Syr.): "path."
Cp. 27:11—Gn.

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PARAPHRASE
PSALM 143

Hear my prayer, O Lord; answer my plea, because You are faithful to Your promises.¹

2 Don't bring me to trial! For as compared with You, no one is perfect.

3 My enemies chased and caught me. They have knocked me to the ground. They force me to live in the darkness like those in the grave.

4 I am losing all hope; I am paralyzed with fear.

5 I remember the glorious miracles You did in days of long ago.

6 I reach out for You. I thirst for You as parched land thirsts for rain.

7 Come quickly, Lord, and answer me, for my depression deepens; don't turn away from me or I shall die.

8 Let me see Your kindness to me in the morning, for I am trusting You. Show me where to walk, for my prayer is sincere.

9 Save me from my enemies, O Lord, I run to You to hide me.

10 Help me to do Your will, for You are my God. Lead me in good paths, for Your Spirit is good.

11 Lord, saving me will bring glory to Your name. Bring me out of all this trouble because You are true to Your promises.

12 And because You are loving and kind to me, cut off all my enemies and destroy those who are trying to harm me; for I am Your servant.

EXPOSITION

This psalm is obviously an advance upon the previous. The psalmist is still *dwelling in dark places*; but his continued hiding among the rocks leads him to compare himself with *the ancient dead*, forgotten of their old associates. The protraction of this state of things brings peculiar trials and special exercises of mind. It is one thing to take flight from foes, and put forth those active powers of mind which are roused to meet emergencies as they arise; but quite another thing to remain for some time in banishment. When long-looked-for deliverance is delayed, the most heroic may become impatient; and a more leisurely

1. Literally, "answer me in faithfulness and righteousness."

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consideration of the causes and ends of protracted trial may favour an anxious weighing of problems not before pondered. It is evident that David found it so; and, accordingly, this psalm gives tokens of the stress and strain upon his mind; and, amidst the overhanging gloom, freshness of thought is seen in exercise, grappling with old problems in new forms and pondering questions not before considered.


Stanza I. of this psalm urges pleas which have not quite lately come before us; and one, besides, which, when let into David's living and connected history, may be regarded as newly projected into his experience. In other words, the pleas that Jehovah would be *faithful* and *righteous* in delivering his servant, may on reflection be recognised as forms of thought with which the psalter has already made us familiar. Even when blessings sought originate in purest favour, as soon as they are held forth in *promises*, the holder of the promises may plead with Jehovah to be "faithful" to his word. And where, as in David's case in contrast with that of Saul, loyal devotion is regarded as putting Jehovah to the test, to sustain the devotion he himself has called into exercise, even a humble petitioner may wax bold to remind Jehovah of his "righteousness," as a reason for not failing to rescue him from trials which fidelity has occasioned. So far we readily recall reflections which make us feel to be on familiar ground.

It is true that *the sense of sin which shrinks from the severity of Divine justice* is, in like manner, not at all a new concept to the student of the psalter; for this is only the last of a *series* of penitential psalms. But the point of our present reflection is, that, though last in the order of place in the book, this penitential psalm is probably the first in the order of experience in the life of the psalmist—so far as we can judge. David is yet a young man. The great and deplorable sins of his later life have not yet cast their shadows over his soul. But here, in the gloom of the rocks amongst which he is hiding, the seeming delay of Jehovah to deliver him, drives him into himself with such heart-searching as to draw from him the protest, that, when all comes to all, *no one living can appear just before a holy and heart-searching God*. It is well to note this psychological moving force, in estimating the contribution which the psalter makes to our knowledge of the human soul and Jehovah's general dealings with the consciences of men.

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Stanza II. sharply recalls us to the actual world in which David lived. To all appearance, his *foe*, Saul—of whom it would be pedantic not to think in this connection—has the upper hand of him: it is *he* who is *crushing his life to the earth* and driving him to hide in these *dark places*. At times his *courage* forsakes him: his *mind* is bewildered. Was it for this that he had been anointed of Samuel; for this, that the Spirit of Sacred Minstrelsy had so oft and so mightily come upon him?

Stanza III. widens our outlook: it reveals the banished young soldier as a man of meditation. How many of its treasures Sacred History had laid at his feet we know not; but a sufficient selection of them, evidently, to enable him to *remember the days of aforetime*. Some familiarity with the contents of the Book of Exodus, would warrant him to say to Jehovah—*I have talked to myself of all thy doings*; and a similar general knowledge of the story of Genesis, complemented as it must have been by his own open-air observations of nature by day and by night, would naturally prepare him to add—*On the works of Thy hands I soliloquise*. With oriental proneness to gesture in devotion, and with a shepherd's alertness to observe when a land wants water and how barren it is without it,—his meditations prompt his prayers as he adds—*I have spread out my hands unto thee, my soul is like a weary land for thee*. Very natural—if the devoutness was there, to awaken his thoughts and unseal his lips.

We may not be too sure that the mysterious word *Selah*, which our sign  represents, has yet yielded up its secret; but, assuming, as our sign by its form is intended to suggest, that it somehow has practically the effect of at once pointing backwards and forwards, as if to say, "These things being so, then note well what follows," we are entitled to note how suggestive is the translation which is now made in the psalm (Cp. Intro., Chap. III., "*Selah*"). All, so far, may be regarded as preliminary; but now, with rapid movements of desire, petition follows petition, at the rate of two per verse, to the very end of the psalm,—which, therefore, we have not cared to subdivide: *Haste thee answer me—do not hide—let me hear—let me know—rescue—teach—lead—revive—bring forth—exterminate—destroy*: each petition being sustained by a cogent reason why it should be granted; and all wound up with the crowning reason, which explains so much: *because I am Thy servant*. There are several salient points in this volley of petitions: among which

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should be noted the firm grip taken of facts, for, to all seeming, David and his men were *at death's door*; the care with which conduct is placed under Divine direction—"Shall I go further away? remain where I am? or hope shortly to return?" *Let me know the way wherein I should walk*; and the facility with which the psalmist's mind ascends to the high level of Divine teaching, which, under the circumstances, cannot mean less than—"So may *thy spirit* influence my spirit, that my ways, in the whole scope and drift of them, may *please thee*; and I meanwhile may find the *way* of Duty to be *plain and accessible*." For the most startling thing of all, we are by this time measurably prepared: To David's quick vision, it by this time began plainly to appear, that either he or Saul must be slain. How far he was, by word or deed, from himself moving a finger to slay Saul; how far from tolerating the doing of the deadly deed by others; all this we well know. All the same, as surely as he knew he was *Jehovah's servant*, and his cause Jehovah's cause, so surely is now borne in upon him the conviction, irresistibly intensified into a prayer: *And in Thy kindness wilt thou exterminate my foes, and destroy all the adversaries of my soul, because I am thy servant*. Let no man repeat this prayer until he is as sure as David was that no other issue is possible. Nevertheless, let no man shrink from appropriating and administering the spiritual tonic consisting in the assurance, soon to come before us in the most benevolent and sympathetic of Spiritual Songs: *Jehovah preserveth all them who love Him—but all the lawless He destroyeth*.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In this psalm, David is still hiding in a cave, but he has problems here not before considered. What are they?
2. There are two concepts in stanza one with which we are familiar and one we have not before considered. Discuss them.
3. Saul surely seems to have the advantage, mention two or three.
4. David evidently had a copy of the law of the Lord with him in the cave. What indications are there that this is true?
5. The word "Selah" seems to signal the expression of the deepest meaning or purpose of this psalm. Discuss.
6. There is in this psalm a veritable valley of petitions. List three or four of them.

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7. David's basic problem was not that he was hiding in a cave. As to his future, what did he need to know?
8. At this time, it evidently became clear to David that to overcome his foe, what must finally take place?

PSALM 144

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

From David's Psalms are Selected Strains, by one of his Sons,
Emboldening him to Plead for Deliverance from Foreigners.
An Appendix anticipates Happy Times.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, Blessing rendered to Jehovah in language taken from Psalm 18. Stanza II., vers. 3, 4, Confession of Man's Insignificance and Frailty, as found in Psalms 8 and 39. Stanzas III. and IV., vers. 7-11, Petitions for Deliverance from Foreigners in Terms Suggested by Psalm 18 and rising to *Refrain* fervour. Stanza V., vers. 12-15, An Appendix, picturing the Temporal Benefits Resulting from the Realisation by a People that Jehovah is Their God.

(Lm.) By David.

- 1 Blessed be Jehovah my rock!
who teacheth my hands to war,
my fingers to fight:
- 2 My kindness and my fastness,
my lofty retreat and my deliverer—mine,
my shield and he in whom I have taken refuge,
who subdueth my people¹ under me.
- 3 Jehovah! what was an earth-born that thou shouldst
acknowledge him?
the son of a mere man that thou shouldst take account
of him?²
- 4 An earth-born resembleth a vapour,³
his days are like a shadow that passeth away.

1. A sp. vr. (sevir): "subdueth peoples" (pl.). In some cod. (w^h Aram. and Syr.): "peoples" is both written and read. Cp. 18:47—Gn.

2. Cp. 8:4.

3. Or: "breath."

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- 5 Jehovah! bow thy heavens and come down,
touch the mountains that they smoke:
- 6 Flash forth a flash and scatter them,
send out thy arrows and confuse them:
- 7 Stretch forth thy hand⁴ from on high;—
*Snatch me away and rescue me—
out of many waters,
out of the hand of the sons of a foreigner:*
- 8 *Whose mouth speaketh unreality,
and whose right-hand is a right-hand of falsehood.*
- 9 O God! a song that is new would I fain sing unto thee;
with a lute of ten-strings would I fain play unto thee:—
- 10 Who giveth victory⁵ to kings,
who snatched away David his servant from the hurtful
sword.
- 11 *Snatch me away and rescue me
out of the hands of the sons of a foreigner:
Whose mouth speaketh unreality,
and whose right-hand is a right-hand of falsehood.*
- 12 When our sons are like plants well-grown while yet young,
Our daughters like corners carved according to the
construction of a palace;
- 13 Our garners full pouring out from one kind to another,
Our flocks multiplying by thousands by myriads in the open
fields,
- 14 Our kine great with young no premature births,—⁶
With no goings forth to war and no cries of alarm in our
broad-ways
- 15 *How happy the people when they have it thus!
How happy the people when Jehovah is their God!*

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 144

Bless the Lord who is my immovable Rock. He gives me strength and skill in battle.

2 He is always kind and loving to me; He is my fortress,

4. So (sing.) in some cod. (w. 1 ear. pr. edn., Aram., Sep., Syr., Vul.)
—Gn. M.T.: "hands" (pl.).

5. Or: "salvation."

6. So Br. with probable correctness.

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my tower of strength and safety, my deliverer. He stands before me as a shield. He subdues my people under me.

3 O Lord, what is man that You even notice him? Why bother at all with the human race?¹

4 For man is but a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.

5 Bend down the heavens, Lord, and come. The mountains smoke beneath Your touch.

6 Let loose Your lightning bolts, Your arrows, Lord, upon Your enemies, and scatter them.

7 Reach down from heaven and rescue me; deliver me from deep waters, from the power of my enemies.

8 Their mouths are filled with lies; they swear to the truth of what is false.

9 I will sing You a new song, O God, with a ten-stringed harp.

10 For You grant victory to kings! You are the one who will rescue Your servant David from the fatal sword.

11 Save me! Deliver me from these enemies, these liars, these treacherous men.

* * * * *

12, 13, 14, 15 Here is my description of² a truly happy land where Jehovah is God:

Sons vigorous and tall as growing plants.

Daughters of graceful beauty like the pillars of a palace wall.

Barns full to the brim with crops of every kind.

Sheep by the thousands out in our fields.

Oxen loaded down with produce.

No enemy attacking the walls, but peace everywhere.

No crime in our streets.

Yes, happy are those whose God is Jehovah.

EXPOSITION

This psalm is manifestly both adapted and composite. It is seen to be *adapted*: inasmuch as Stanzas I. and II. are based upon Davidic psalms, altered to suit a later set of circumstances than those to which the original psalms applied; and inasmuch as these are followed by special petitions, in Stanzas III. and IV., directly springing out of those altered conditions. On the face of it, the psalm is *composite*; the Appendix speaking for itself,

1. Literally, "or the son of man that You take account of him?"

2. Implied.

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as being, both in form and substance, disjointed from what has gone before, couched in a wholly different vein, with no formal allusions to anything which has preceded it, and not only disconnected, but clearly incomplete, having no introduction of its own: nevertheless a most pleasing and worthy Appendix, with a reason for its present position which the thoughtful mind can easily supply—as much as to say, “Only let our God answer our foregoing petitions, and then we may hope for the realisation of the happy state of things which the following extract so beautifully portrays.”

We need not hesitate long before concluding that, in all likelihood, King Hezekiah was the adapter—almost the author—of vers. 1-11; inasmuch as the emergency which prompts the prayer is evidently caused by the presence of the *foreigner* in the land. Not even the gathering of the surrounding nations against Jehoshaphat so well meets the case; for the extreme annoyance and humiliation caused by the boastful *mouth* and the tyrannous *right-hand* of the enemy are far more like the experience due to a present and persistent invader like the Assyrians, than would be the mere gathering of Moab and Ammon, however alarming that gathering might be.

Assuming, then, that here we see the adapting hand of Hezekiah, it is only due to him to observe how wisely and well he has done his adapting work. If the reader of this Exposition will only have well in mind the sources indicated in our “Analysis” he will be able to appreciate the verifying observations which follow, though briefly expressed.

In Stanza I., the compiler simply pours forth adorations which suggest that he has just been reading the great triumphal song of his ancestor which we know as Ps. 18: adorations calculated to inspire confidence in the urgent petitions he is now about to urge.

In Stanza II., we have a singular combination of allusions, well befitting the humility of one who realises his personal littleness and unworthiness, in view of the largeness of the mercies for which he is about to ask.

In Stanza III., we come to petitions proper, the boldness of the figures of speech in which would surprise us, even though we know Hezekiah to be a poet, were it not that we can see he has been dwelling on the extraordinary imagery of the 18th Psalm: not exactly quoting its language, which indeed first appeared as thanksgiving for victories and deliverances already

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vouchsafed, but remoulding it into the form of present petitions to suit the existing dire emergency. As if conscious that he had been drawing largely on an "old" song, the writer longs to launch upon a *new song*; and instantly bounds into the present by recognising victories heretofore granted to kings, and *the snatching away of David, his servant, from the hurtful sword*,—a clear enough indication that it is not the language of David himself that we are now reading, but that of another, who finds inspiration in David's memory.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. There are three previous psalms quoted in this one. Which ones? For what purpose?
2. Who is the author of this psalm? Why not Jehoshaphat?
3. What part of this psalm is a "new song"? Discuss its meaning.

PSALM 145

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

An Alphabetical Psalm in Praise of Jehovah's Greatness,
Goodness and Righteousness.

ANALYSIS

Naturally, this psalm falls into 21 Couplets (and Verses), the letter *nun* being absent from the Hebrew Text. Further division is not easy; but by restoring the missing letter, as indicated at the foot of ver. 13, the psalm might be resolved into Three Groups of Seven Couplets each, leaving the letter *tau*—the twenty-second—to head an Application of the Whole Psalm to the Psalmist himself and to All Flesh. Even so, however, this grouping would be merely formal, and not indicated by any corresponding division of topics. By accident rather than design, the dominant subject of each would be Jehovah's Greatness, Goodness, and Righteousness; and it may be of practical service to note this.

(Lm.) Praise—By David.

- 1 I will exalt thee my God O king—
and would fain bless thy name to the ages and beyond.

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- 2 Every day will I bless thee—
and would fain praise thy name to the ages and beyond.
- 3 Great is Jehovah and to be praised exceedingly—
and his greatness is unsearchable.
- 4 Generation to generation will laud thy works—
and thy heroic deeds will they tell.
- 5 The stateliness of the glory of thy majesty will men speak—¹
and of thy wonders would I fain soliloquise.
- 6 And the might of thy fearful acts will men affirm—
and of thy greatness will I tell.
- 7 The memory of the abundance of thy goodness will men
pour forth,—
and thy righteousness will they ring out.
- 8 *Gracious and compassionate is Jehovah—
slow to anger and great in kindness.*
- 9 Good is Jehovah to all—
and his compassions are over all his works.
- 10 All thy works Jehovah thank thee—
and thy men of kindness bless thee.
- 11 The glory of thy kingdom they affirm—
and thy heroic might they speak.
- 12 To make known to the sons of men his heroic acts
and the glory of the stateliness of his kingdom.
- 13 Thy kingdom is a kingdom of all ages—²
and thy dominion is over all succeeding generations.³
- 14 Jehovah is ready to uphold all who are falling—
and to raise up all who are bowed down.
- 15 The eyes of all for thee do wait—
and thou givest them their food in its season.
- 16 Thou openest thy hand—⁴
and satisfiest every living thing with good will.⁵
- 17 Righteous is Jehovah in all his ways—
and kind in all his works.⁶

1. So it shd. be (and so the verse be divided) (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn.

2. So literally: "of all olamim" (pl.).

3. In some MSS. this verse is here found:—

Faithful is Jehovah in all his words—
and kind in all his works.

and so in Sep., Syr., and Vul.—Gn. This would supply the missing initial letter *nun*.

4. Some cod. (w. 1 ear. pr. edn., and Sep.): "hands" (pl.)—Gn.

5. So Dr. But Del.: "with favour."

6. Or: "doings."

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- 18 Near is Jehovah to all who call upon him—
to all who call upon him in truth.
19 The pleasure of them who revere him he fulfilleth—
and their cry for help he heareth and saveth them.
20 Jehovah preserveth all them who love him—
but all the lawless he destroyeth.
21 The praise of Jehovah my mouth doth speak—
and let all flesh bless his holy name
to the ages and beyond.⁷

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 145

I will praise You, my God and King, and bless Your name each day and forever.

3 Great is Jehovah! Greatly praise Him! His greatness is beyond discovery!

4 Let each generation tell its children what glorious things He does.

5 I will meditate about Your glory, splendor, majesty and miracles.

6 Your awe-inspiring deeds shall be on every tongue; I will proclaim Your greatness.

7 Everyone will tell about how good You are, and sing about Your righteousness.

8 Jehovah is kind and merciful, slow to get angry, full of love.

9 He is good to everyone, and His compassion is intertwined with everything He does.

10 All living things shall thank You, Lord, and Your people will bless You.

11 They will talk together about the glory of Your kingdom and mention examples of Your power.

12 They will tell about Your miracles and about the majesty and glory of Your reign.

13 For Your kingdom never ends. You rule generation after generation.

7. U.: "to times age-abiding." &c. Many MSS. (w. 1 ear. pr. edn.) here add:—

And we will bless Yah—

from henceforth and unto the ages—praise ye Yah.

Cp. Ps. 115:18—Gn.

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14 The Lord lifts the fallen and those bent beneath their loads.

15 The eyes of all mankind look up to You for help; You give them their food as they need it.

16 You constantly satisfy the hunger and thirst of every living thing.

17 The Lord is fair in everything He does, and full of kindness.

18 He is close to all who call on Him sincerely.

19 He fulfills the desires of those who reverence and trust Him; He hears their cries for help and rescues them.

20 He protects all those who love Him, but destroys the wicked.

21 I shall praise the Lord and call on all men everywhere to bless His holy name forever and forever.

EXPOSITION

This delightful psalm, by its contents reminds us of Ps. 103; and, by both its contents and its form, of Ps. 34. It is surprising to find how easily the psalmist follows his alphabetical initialing of the verses without shewing constraint in his composition.

Passing on to the contents of the psalm, considered on their merits, it is eminently satisfactory to observe the restraint to which the enthusiasm of the writer submits itself. This is no mere adulation of the Almighty. The man that wrote this song was not aware of the shadows which frequently throw this life into gloom. He knew that the *compassions* of Jehovah towards the miserable were often called into exercise: that poor footsore and purblind travellers along life's journey were not infrequently in danger of *falling*; and many times needed help to prevent their being too long *bowed down*. And this is well: otherwise the very brightness of the psalm might have dazed the eyes of the sick and the weary.

However, behind the sympathetic tenderness of the psalm there is perceptible an element of strength which is fitted to act as a moral tonic on minds afflicted with indecision concerning right and wrong. Jehovah is *righteous* as well as *kind*. The very *heroic acts* by which Jehovah had so often delivered Israel, had undoubtedly fallen as heavy blows on tyrants and invaders who richly deserved to be smitten. It would be culpable carelessness for the singer of this song, utterly to forget the dark

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side of the cloud whose silver lining now causes him so much genuine delight.

This psalm is noted among psalms for the universality of its terms. Not excluding beasts from the bountiful care of their Creator, how should it exclude men of any name or nation? *Good is Jehovah to all—and his compassions are over all his works*; not over and beyond his works—too high above them to benefit them—but *over*, protectingly and for blessing. That it should be immediately added: *All thy works thank thee*, seems almost too good to be true; too favourable a verdict to be pronounced upon men's response to Jehovah's goodness; too much like a verdict constructively framed in their favour, beyond their deserving. We could more easily accept the verdict if regarded as awarded to the lower creation—to the singing of the bird, the roaring of the lion and even the braying of the ass—than when taken to refer to "men made in the likeness of God"; those inferior creatures after their kind and in their own way, may be regarded as thanking their creator for what he has done for them; but these intelligent creatures, called men,—how can it be said of *them—all thy works thank thee*? As we cannot deny their inclusion among Jehovah's "works," we can only leave the statement, as a condescending construction put by a loving Creator on the common joy which men feel in view of the mercies which bestrew their path. Even beyond their intention, Jehovah will count their instinctive gladness as "thanks" rendered to him: if he can do no better with them he will class them with those lower creatures who *unconsciously* "thank" him. He seeks for more. He would have all men to become receivers and reflectors of his own kindness—his *hasidim*—*his men of kindness*, in whose hearts gratitude dwells and in whose lives benevolence overflows; men who go beyond thanks, men who *bless* Jehovah, and speak well of his name.

We confess we are amazed at the latitude of construction to which the psalm itself thus conducts us; but it has sterner things in store for us. There is a discipline in life that lies behind all this. Men cannot go on for ever, receiving God's gifts and remaining unmoved: they must either be melted into saints or hardened—by their own resistance—into sinners. They are under the law of love. Let them resist that—knowingly and persistently—and they must ultimately become *lawless*! And, against such, the stern announcement of this benevolent psalm has gone forth in tones of thunder:—

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Jehovah preserveth all them who love him—
but all the lawless he destroyeth.

That is the last word of the last stanza of the psalm. There is nothing beyond it, saving an application by the psalmist to himself and to all flesh: nothing to tone this down or explain it away: it seems and it sounds absolute and final.

It confirms other psalm-deliverances that have gone before. We have already learned (Ps. 37) that "there is a future for the man of peace. But transgressors have been cut off together, the future of lawless men hath been cut off"; and from Ps. 73—"Lo! they who have gone far from thee shall perish, Thou wilt have exterminated every unchaste wanderer from thee." Small reason, then, is there in the Psalms as a collection, to blunt the prudent fear which this psalm is fitted to call into exercise.

And the less so, rather than the more, in consequence of the grandeur and the permanence of Jehovah's Kingdom. Jehovah's rule is all-pervading and ever-abiding. Men cannot escape his dominion. His own character is perfect and unchanging; his aim is to make men morally like himself—to bring a clean thing out of an unclean, to reform, remake, renew; to educate for immortality, and then bestow the boon. While his own character is perfect and unchanging, its manifestation to finite beings, under discipline, may require ages. To chastise them for their sins, and yet convince them that he is love, and to transform them into his own image,—this *may* be the work of ages: who can tell? Only the Infinite Searcher of Hearts can determine when all hope is past, and nothing is left but to destroy, to exterminate. He can create and he destroy; and none but he. It is something, then, of incalculable moment, to learn from his own lips what are the issues involved.

The close of this psalm goes back to its commencement. It ends with "I"—multiplied into the race, *all flesh*: it began with "I"—*I will exalt, would fain bless; will bless, would fain praise*. But very significantly and instructively was this beginning made; for all at once, by way of *desire*, the psalmist went bounding off beyond the narrow limits of the present life: *I would fain bless and praise thy name to the ages and beyond!* "For ever and ever will the poet thus extol God and bless His name; because the praising of God is his deepest need, in this devotion to the ever-living King he forgets his own mortality—this impulse of the soul, an impulse begotten by God himself,

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towards the praising of the God to whom the soul owes its origin, in which praise it finds its noblest enjoyment, is indeed a practical proof of a life after death"—Del. So it is indeed, to those in whom it exists; for see with what complete logic this one psalm proves it. Do I really *desire* to bless and praise Jehovah to the ages? Is that, in truth, my feeling towards him? Then the *desire* shall be granted; for again in this psalm it is written—*The pleasure of them who revere him he fulfilleth; and their cry for help he heareth and saveth them.* There is, therefore, both theoretic and practical safety in such a hope.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In this alphabetical psalm there are only 21 of the 22 letters. Why?
2. What are the three possible main divisions of this psalm?
3. This psalm can act as a tonic for certain needy persons. Who are they?
4. Are we to understand from this psalm that even the lower animals thank Jehovah? How so?
5. How wondrously good, kind, and righteous is our God. What should be the response of man? What is his response?
6. There seems to be a grand proof of immortality in this psalm. Discuss.

P S A L M 146

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Twelve Reasons for Trusting in Jehovah.

ANALYSIS

Having, in Response to the Public Reader's Invitation, stirred up his Own Soul to Praise Jehovah all his Life Long (vers. 1, 2), the Psalmist urges a Caution against Trusting in Nobles (vers. 3, 4); and then (vers. 5-10) Felicitates the Man who makes the God of Jacob his Help—for a Series of Twelve Reasons, which he Poetically Unfolds.

(P.R.I.) Praise ye Yah.

- 1 Praise Jehovah O my soul!

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- 2 I would fain praise Jehovah while I live,
I would harp¹ to my God while I have being.²
- 3 Do not ye trust in nobles—
in a son of the earth-born who hath no salvation;³
- 4 Forth goeth his spirit⁴ he returneth to his ground,
in that day his thoughts⁵ perish.⁶
- 5 How happy is he who hath the God of Jacob as his help,
whose hope is on Jehovah his God:
- 6 who made heavens and earth
the sea and all that is in them,—
the One who keepeth truth to the ages;
- 7 who executeth justice for the oppressed,
who giveth bread to the hungry;
Jehovah who releaseth the bound,
- 8 Jehovah who giveth sight to the blind,
Jehovah who lifteth up the bowed down,
Jehovah who loveth the righteous,
- 9 Jehovah who preserveth sojourners,—
fatherless and widow restoreth;
but the way of lawless ones he bendeth aside.⁷
- 10 Jehovah reigneth to the ages,
Thy God O Zion to generation after generation.

(Nm.)⁸

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 146

Praise the Lord! Yes, really praise Him!

2 I will praise Him as long as I live, yes, even with my dying breath.

3 Don't look to men for help; their greatest leaders fail;

4 For every man must die. His breathing stops, life ends,
and in a moment all he planned for himself is ended.

1. Or: "make melody."

2. Cp. 104:33.

3. Or: "deliverance."

4. Or: "breath," Cp. 104:29, 30.

5. "Fabrications"—Aglen; "purposes"—P.B. R.V. mgn.

6. Similarly: "Be not afraid . . . To-day he shall be lifted up, and to-morrow he shall in nowise be found, because he is returned unto his dust, and his thought is perished"—1 Mac. 2:63 (R.V.)

7. Thwarting it, and causing it to vanish. Cp. 1:6.

8. See 147 (beginning).

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5 But happy is the man who has the God of Jacob as his helper, whose hope is in the Lord his God—

6 The God who made both earth and heaven, the seas and everything in them. He is the God who keeps every promise.

7 And gives justice to the poor and oppressed, and food to the hungry. He frees the prisoners,

8 And opens the eyes of the blind; He lifts the burdens from those bent down beneath their loads. For the Lord loves good men.

9 He protects the immigrants, and cares for the orphans and widows. But He turns topsy-turvy the plans of the wicked.

10 The Lord will reign forever. O Jerusalem,¹ your God is King in every generation! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!

EXPOSITION

The indications of authorship contained in this psalm are probably best met by supposing the principal portion of it to have been penned by Hezekiah, and the caution against trusting in nobles to have been added in the days of Nehemiah. Setting aside for the moment the excepted verses (3, 4) the psalm as a whole admirably suits the time and spirit of Hezekiah: the individuality of the opening lines, together with the inclusion of instrumental music, well agrees with the strongly devout and musically accomplished personality of the good King; and so does the enthusiasm with which Jehovah's worthiness of his people's confidence is amplified in the later verses: we can almost hear him saying, *Happy is the man*—"yea, and I am that man"; and then, as we read on, we are not only reminded of Hezekiah's favourite habit of alluding to Jehovah as *maker of heaven and earth*, but under nearly all the lines we can feel pulsating the rich experience of the same monarch, not failing to be reminded of the example which he had recently witnessed, in the overthrow of Sennacherib, of a *lawless* foreigner whose way had been *bent aside* into the pathless waste of destruction.

If this conclusion be accepted as sufficiently probable, then we shall naturally conclude that the caution against trusting in nobles—improbable from the pen of Hezekiah—was added after the exile, when, as remarked under Ps. 118, Nehemiah had good cause to distrust the nobles of Judah (Neh. 6:17-19).

It is a question of detail—but of some interest in exegesis

1. Literally, "Zion."

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—to ask in what relation *nobles* (ver. 3) stand to the common *son of the earth-born* mentioned in the next line: are “nobles” distinguished from “common men,” or simply declared to be themselves but “common men”—mere mortals like the rest of mankind? If we make two classes out of the verse then “nobles” are left without any reason assigned why *they* should not be trusted. It seems better, therefore, to refrain from supplying a “nor” with the A.V. (and R.V.) (without acknowledgment of its being such) or an (“or”) with Dr., and to regard the second line as giving a conclusive reason why even “nobles” should not be trusted: as much as to say—“each of whom is a mere mortal like others, and what he may *think* to do for you, he may not live to accomplish.”

Another question of still greater critical nicety, is whether it is better to translate *ruah* in ver. 4 as *breath* or *spirit*. If the one implies the other, as suggested by a comparison of Gen. 2:7 with Ec. 12:7, then it does not really matter—provided the double inclusion, by marginal alternative or otherwise, be borne in mind.

Delitzsch well reminds us that this “How happy” of ver. 5 is the last of twenty-five occurrences of the original word (which means that) in the psalms. He also beautifully remarks on 9c: “Only one line is devoted to this manifestation of Jahve in the capacity of penal judge. For He rules in love and wrath, with most delight, however, in love.”

The critical reader will excuse the very elementary observation—submitted to help the uncritical—that it is sometimes convenient in the enumerations of the psalms, as elsewhere, to count the *verbs* which in their rich variety impart so much life to the composition: as for instance here:—1 *made*, 2. *keepeth*, 3. *executeth*, 4. *giveth*, 5. *releaseth*, 6. *giveth sight* (lit. *openeth*), 7. *lifteth up*, 8. *loveth*, 9. *preserveth*, 10. *restoreth*, 11. *bendeth aside*, 12. *reigneth*. So that we are well within our right in entitling this psalm—“Twelve reasons for trusting in Jehovah.”

And finally it may be assumed that no reader will fail to observe the keen appreciation of the gracious name *Jehovah* shewn by its five-fold emphatic repetition in vers. 7-9.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This psalm has some very helpful reasons for trusting in Jehovah, but before these are considered, the psalmist must be in the mood for praising God. How is this achieved?

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2. Who is the author, and what is the circumstance of this psalm?
3. Why not trust in nobles?
4. List six of the twelve reasons for trusting in Jehovah. Make these reasons personal.

PSALM 147

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Praise for the Restoration of Jerusalem and for Israel's Pre-eminence: with Grateful Recognition of Rain and of Spring.

ANALYSIS

After the Repetition and Expansion of the "Public Reader's Invitation" (ver. 1), Jehovah is Praised as the Builder, Healer and Restorer of Jerusalem (vers. 2-6); as the Sender of Rain (vers. 7-11), of Security, Peace and Plenty, and of Winter and Spring (vers. 12-18); and as the Author of Israel's Pre-eminence (vers. 19, 20).

(P.R.I.) Praise ye Yah.

- 1 Praise ye Yah¹ for it is good,²
make melody³ to our God for it is full of delight:
Comely is praise!
- 2 Builder of Jerusalem is Jehovah,
the outcasts of Israel he gathereth:
- 3 He who granteth healing to the broken in heart
and a binding up to their wounds:
- 4 who counteth out a number to the stars,
to all of them names he calleth:
- 5 Great is our Sovereign Lord and of abounding strength,
and to his understanding there is no calculation.⁴
- 6 Restorer of the humble is Jehovah,
abasing lawless ones down to the ground.
- 7 Respond ye to Jehovah with a song of thanksgiving,
make melody to our God with the lyre:

1. Prob. a choir's repetition of P.R.I.—see Exposition.

2. Cp. 92:1.

3. So *Gt.* [i.e. imper. pl.] as in 135:3.

4. Or: reckoning, ml. number.

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- 8 who covereth the heavens with clouds,
 who prepareth for the earth rain;
 who causeth mountains to sprout grass;
- 9 Who giveth to cattle their food,
 to young ravens when they call:
- 10 Not in the heroic strength of the horse doth he delight,
 nor in the legs of a man hath he pleasure;
- 11 Pleased is Jehovah with them who revere him,
 with them who wait for his kindness.
- 12 Laud O Jerusalem Jehovah,
 Praise thou thy God O Zion,
- 13 For he hath strengthened the bars of thy gates,
 hath blessed thy children within thee:
- 14 Who placeth as thy boundary peace,
 with the marrow of wheat doth satisfy thee.
- 15 Who sendeth his saying to the earth,
 very swiftly runneth his word;
- 16 Who giveth snow like wool,
 hoar frost like ashes he scattereth;
- 17 Who casteth down his ice⁵ like morsels,
 Before his cold who can stand?
- 18 He sendeth forth his word and melteth them,
 he causeth a blowing of his wind there's a trickling of
 waters.
- 19 Who declareth his word to Jacob,
 his statutes and his decisions to Israel.
- 20 He hath not done thus to any nation,
 and decisions⁶ he maketh not known to them.⁷

(Nm.)⁸

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 147

Hallelujah! Yes, praise the Lord! How good it is to sing
 His praises! How delightful, and how right!

2 He is rebuilding Jerusalem and bringing back the exiles.

3 He heals the broken-hearted, binding up their wounds.

4 He counts the stars and calls them all by name.

5. "As hailstones or as sleet"—Del.

6. Cp. 119, Table.

7. So it shd. be (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn.

8. See 148 (beginning).

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5 How great He is! His power is absolute! His understanding is unlimited.

6 The Lord supports the humble, but brings the wicked into the dust.

7 Sing out your thanks to Him; sing praises to our God, accompanied by harps.

8 He covers the heavens with clouds, sends down the showers and makes the green grass grow in mountain pastures.

9 He feeds the wild animals and the young ravens cry to Him for food.

10 The speed of a horse is nothing to Him. How puny in His sight is the strength of a man.

11 But his joy is in those who revered Him; those who expect Him to be loving and kind.

12 Praise Him, O Jerusalem! Praise Your God, O Zion!

13 For He has fortified your gates against all enemies, and blessed your children.

14 He sends peace across your nation, and fills your barns with plenty of the finest wheat.

15 He sends His orders to the world. How swiftly His word flies.

16 He sends the snow in all its lovely whiteness, and scatters the frost upon the ground,

17 And hurls the hail upon the earth. Who can stand before His freezing cold?

18 But then He calls for warmer weather, and the spring winds blow and all the river ice is broken.

19 He has made known His laws and ceremonies of worship to Israel—

20 Something He has not done with any other nation; they have not known His commands.

* * * * *

Hallelujah! Yes, praise the Lord!

EXPOSITION

Notwithstanding its almost certain post-exilic date and its evidently composite character, this is a beautiful and useful psalm. It would seem disingenuous not to admit that in all probability it received its present form and some of its strains in the post-exilic period, and was provided to celebrate the great Restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah. It is almost equally

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certain that it was constructed, in part, of pre-existing materials: at least, this hypothesis would best account for the incorporation in it of what appear to be two fragments—one by way of thanksgiving for *rain* after drought, and the other in grateful recognition of the return of *spring* after a severe winter: both of which are not likely to have appeared side by side in one and the same original psalm.

The opening lines are unusually suggestive as to the remarkable repetition of the compound word—or rather the phrase—"hallelujah" (properly *hallelu Yah*) in connection with these late Hallel psalms. Some critics simply treat them as double "hallelujah" psalms, each one beginning *and* ending with that word. As soon, however, as we accept Dr. Ginsburg's opinion, as an expert, in favour of treating the word as a phrase, and the phrase as constituting the Public Reader's Invitation to join in the responses, we seem to be driven to form some other conclusion as to the reduplication—for as such it appears in Dr. Ginsburg's Hebrew Bible. In the present instance, the simplest theory would appear to be this: the first "hallelujah" may be regarded as the original invitation proper, to be *said* rather than *sung* by the prelector; and the second as a choir's taking up and repeating of the invitation—passing it on to the people, so to speak—at the same time expanding it into a small introductory stanza ending with *Comely is Praise*. The reason which supports this suggestion is, the unlikelihood that a psalm should begin with the word *For* (as Del., Per. and Dr. begin this psalm).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This is one of the latest psalms. At what time was it composed? How composed?
2. Why does Rotherham spend so much time and space on the use of the word "hallelujah"?
3. What shall we say of the present practice of attributing to "nature" the snow-frost-rain, etc.?

PSALM 148

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Praise Invoked from All Creation.

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ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-6, All Things in Heaven called upon to Praise Jehovah
—for Reasons Given. Stanza II., vers. 7-14, All Things on Earth, in Like
Manner: with a Specification of the Special Mercies and Duties of Israel.

(P.R.I.) Praise ye Yah.

- 1 Praise ye Yah.¹
Praise ye Jehovah from the heavens,
praise him in the heights;
- 2 praise him all ye his messengers,
praise him all ye his hosts;²
- 3 praise him sun and moon,
praise him all ye stars of light;
- 4 praise him ye heavens of heavens,
and ye waters above the heavens:—
- 5 Let them praise the name of Jehovah,
for he commanded and they were created;
- 6 And he stationed them perpetually to the ages,—
a statute he gave and they do not transgress.
- 7 Praise ye Jehovah from the earth:
sea-monsters³ and all resounding deeps;
- 8 fire and hail snow and vapour,⁴
blast of tempest executing his word;
- 9 ye mountains and all hills,
fruit-trees and all cedars;
- 10 thou wild beast and all cattle,
crawling creature and bird of wing;
- 11 kings of earth and all peoples,
rulers and all judges of earth;
- 12 young men yea even maidens,⁵
old men together with children:—
- 13 Let them praise the name of Jehovah,
for exalted is his name alone,—
his majesty is over earth and heavens;

1. Possibly a repetition of "P.R.I." by mistake. But prob. a choir's repetition as suggested in Exposition of previous Psalm.

2. So *read* in cod. wh. write "host" (sing.). Some cod. both *read* and *write* "hosts" (pl.)—Gn.

3. "Dragons"—Br.

4. "Or steam, smoke (Gen. 19:28, Ps. 119:83), alluding probably to phenomena accompanying a thunderstorm in mountain-regions"—Dr.

5. Or: "virgins."

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- 14 And he hath uplifted a horn for his people,—
a theme of praise for all his men of kindness,
for the sons of Israel a people near him.

(Nm.)^c

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 148

Praise the Lord, O heavens! Praise Him from the skies!

2 Praise Him, all angels, all the armies of heaven.

3 Praise Him sun and moon, and all you twinkling stars.

4 Praise Him, skies above. Praise Him, vapors high above
the clouds.

5 Let everything He has made give praise to Him! For
He issued His command, and they came into being;

6 He established them forever and forever. His orders
will never be revoked.

7 And praise Him down here on earth, you creatures of
the ocean depths.

8 Let fire and hail, snow, rain, wind and weather, all obey.

9 Let the mountains and hills, the fruit trees and cedars,

10 The wild animals and cattle, the snakes and birds,

11 The kings and all the people, with their rulers and their
judges,

12 Young men and maidens, old men and children—

13 All praise the Lord together. For He alone is worthy.
His glory is far greater than all of earth and heaven.

14 He has made His people strong, honoring His godly ones
—the people of Israel, the people closest to Him.

* * * * *

Hallelujas! Yes, praise the Lord!

EXPOSITION

This psalm is remarkable for its universal sweep, its unrivalled grandeur, and its national application. With clearly marked consecutiveness, it appeals first to the *heavens* (ver. 1) and then to the *earth* (ver. 7). In the fewest possible words it touches upon all things and beings above and below: poetically investing *things* with the intelligence of *persons*, provoking the interesting inquiry how this feature of the psalm is meant to

6. See Exposition of 147.

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be understood. And yet it finally gravitates to *Israel*, as the appointed (earthly) leader in the praises of the universe. The filling in of this outline gives occasion for many felicities of order and grouping: the *order* observed, beginning with the heavens and then descending to the earth, by a reverse movement, ascends again from the *earth* to the *heavens* (ver. 13). The *grouping* shows such subtle methods as—setting a species first, i.e., *messengers* (ver. 2a), a species of heavenly intelligences, and then *hosts* (ver. 2b), including both “messengers” and “attendants” (Ps. 103:20, 21); and such delightful juxtapositions as *young men* and *maidens*, (ver. 12a) and such charming contrasts as *old men* and *children* (ver. 12b): in the doing of which, resorting to the refinements of a passing compliment to maidenly modesty, by the delicate touch of a *yea even*; as much as to suggest that, though maidens may characteristically oft remain silent, yet, when Jehovah’s praises call on them to join, they need not hesitate to respond; and by the equally delicate *together with* of the next line, which has the effect of summoning groups of little ones to their grandsires’ knees. Both order and grouping are honoured by the way in which the breathless enumerations of objects in heaven and on earth are severally followed by deliberately drawn-out and restful reasons *why* those invoked should respond in praise. In the closing of the first stanza, the permanence of *law* is made prominent: *he commanded—he stationed—a statute he gave*, leading up to the significant fact, so beneficent in its results—*they do not transgress*. Alas for all concerned, if they did! So used as we are to the beneficent regularities of nature that our minds instinctively shrink from the unimaginable crudities and endless mishaps of “chance worlds.” “They do not transgress!” And so “the sun knows” the “place” (and the time) of his going in—to the inch and to the moment; or, if *he* does not know, *we* know, for him and of him, that he will *not transgress*. But when we make the rapid run of the second stanza from monsters to men, we begin to catch glimpses of a still softer light. We are, doubtless, still under the reign of law; but the law is becoming elevated from the law that controls matter to the law that governs mind. And mind perceives the name and fame of Jehovah. The atmosphere in which mind lives is appreciative knowledge. No knowledge in the creature: no name for the Creator. No eye to see: no glory seen, no praise forthcoming: no reciprocal love.

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But how of created things that are not endowed with mind? Can *they too* praise? Yea, in their own way. Unconsciously; or, at best, half-consciously: dependent on Man to interpret their sighings and their songs. As the song of the bird is to the songster's uncomprehended ecstasy, so is the intelligent and sympathetic adoration of man to the instinctive impulse of the bird: its expression and interpretation.

This intimate relation between man who knows Jehovah's name and the creatures beneath him who—so far as we can tell—know it not, is deep-seated in the divinely appointed nature of things. As we voice their joys, they share our sorrows. They not only grow and sing, but they also shudder and groan. The sparrow falls dead, leaving its unprotected brood to perish; but not without our Father. And he has appointed that all creation—which at present is "sighing together and travailling-in-birth throes together until the present—shall, at the manifestation of the sons of God, be freed from the bondage of the decay into (not quite the glory, but) the freedom of the glory of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19-21). But everything in its own order: the Sons of God first, and creation afterwards. Everything in its own order: Israel first, and the nations afterwards. Hence, not by lapse or collapse, this magnificent psalm finds its climax in ISRAEL: prophetically declaring that Israel's God *hath uplifted a horn for his people*, (which constitutes) *a theme of praise for all his—hasidhim—his men of kindness*; the Levites, first; then, as represented by them, all Jehovah's ideal Israel—for the real will yet be transfigured into the ideal—a *people near him*, and through whom he can act on the nations (Cp. Intro., Chap. III., "Kindness").

Meanwhile, where is the Church? Is that forgotten? Nay: but, throwing our minds back into the time and atmosphere of these "songs of Israel" before we give our answer, we reply: The Church is at present "hidden in God"; "hidden away from the ages and the generations" (Eph. 3); and, therefore, "hidden away" from the writers of these psalms. And woe betide us if we exegetically call the Church out of its divine concealment before its time. The presumption of so doing will be avenged at our hands—no later on than in the very next psalm (Cp. Intro., Chap. III., "Kingdom").

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. All creation is called upon to express thanks and wonder at the goodness and greatness of our God. Is it happening? Discuss.
2. God has commanded, stationed, the physical creation. How did it (has it) responded? What lesson for us?
3. We could not imagine a world of chance and yet this is very much what the evolutionary concept of creation would ask us to believe. Discuss.
4. The law of the mind is involved in the second stanza of this psalm. Discuss.
5. There will come a time when all creation will be delivered from the limitations now upon it. Discuss cf. Romans 8:10-21.

PSALM 149

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A New Song for Israel, which Others may Not Sing.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, A Well-Defined People Addressed. Stanza II., vers. 4-6, A Well-Defined Time Indicated. Stanza III., vers. 7-9, A Well-Defined Work Described.

(P.R.I.) Praise ye Yah.¹

- 1 Sing ye to Jehovah a song that is new,
his praise in the assembly of his men of kindness.²
- 2 Glad be Israel in his great Maker,
let the sons of Zion exult in their King:
- 3 Let them praise his name in the dance,
with timbrel and lyre let them make melody unto him.
- 4 Since Jehovah is taking pleasure in his people,
adorneth the humble ones with victory³

1. Apparently doubled. See Exposition of 147.

2. Cp. Intro., Chap. III., "Kindness."

3. Or: "salvation."

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- 5 Let the men of kindness exult with glorying,⁴
let them ring out their joy at their great Habitation:⁵
6 Let extollings of GOD be in their throat,
and a sword of two-edges be in their hand.
7 To execute an avenging on the nations,
chastisements on the peoples;
8 To bind their kings with chains,
their honourables with fetters of iron;
9 To execute on them the sentence written⁶
a stateliness it is for all his men of kindness.⁷

(Nm.)⁸

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 149

Hallelujah! Yes, praise the Lord! Sing Him a new song.
Sing His praises, all His people.

2 O Israel, rejoice in your Maker. O people of Jerusalem,
exult in Your King.

3 Praise His name by marching together to the Temple,¹
accompanied by drums and lyre.

4, 5 For Jehovah enjoys His people; He will save the humble.
Let His people rejoice in this honor. Let them sing for joy
as they lie upon their beds.

6, 7 Adore Him, O His people! And take a double-edged
sword to execute His punishment upon the nations.

8 Bind their kings and leaders with iron chains,

9 And execute their sentences.

* * * * *

He is the glory of His people. Hallelujah! Praise Him!

EXPOSITION

The well-defined *People* is the Ideal Nation of Israel; the
well-defined *Time* is the time of Israel's Restoration to Jehovah's
favour, when that people again realise that Jehovah is indeed

4. Or: "with (ascriptions of) glory"—O.G. 459. Cp. 29:9.

5. So Br. w. probability: departing by one letter from M.T.: i.e., sh-k-n
instead of sh-k-b.

6. "Viz, by prophets, in such passages as Mic. 4:13, Is. 41:15f, Joel
3:12-14"—Dr.

7. M.T. adds: "Praise ye Yah."

8. Apparently doubled. See Exposition of 147.

1. Literally, "Let them praise His name in the dance."

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their King; and the well-defined *Work* is the work of punishing Gentile nations. The lines along which legitimate interpretation should run are reasonably clear; but, by a corrupted exegesis, the scope of this psalm has been so perverted, that the *Sword* has been placed in unauthorised hands, and the earth has been drenched with human blood, shed without Divine Authority. The secret of the mischief has lain in substituting the Church for Israel; and this, again, has resulted from the corruption of a Church which has forgotten her own especial calling, and mistakenly deemed herself to be the Kingdom, and has vain-gloriously vaulted herself into a place in the Prophetic Word never designed for her.

Happily, expositors are beginning to discover the mistake, and to trace back to it the deplorable consequences which have ensued; though it may be doubted whether they can be said to have laid the axe to the root of the tree so long as they call the nation of Israel a "Church." The following extract from Delitzsch will lay bare the terrible results which have sprung from this mistaken application of the Word of God:—

"The New Testament spiritual Church cannot pray as the Old Testament state Church prays here. Under the delusion that it could be used as a prayer without any spiritual transformation, Psalms cxlix. has been the pass-word of the most horrible aberrations. By means of this Psalm Caspar Scioppius in his *Classicum belli sacri*, which, as Bakius says, is written not with ink but with blood, inflamed the Roman Catholic princes to the Thirty Years' religious war. And within the Protestant Church Thomas Munzer by means of this Psalm stirred up the War of the Peasants. One can easily see that the Christian cannot directly appropriate such a psalm, without disavowing the apostolic admonition: *ta hopla tees strateias heemon ou sarkika* [the weapons of our warfare are not carnal] (2 Cor. 10:4)."

The serious question arises, whether, in view of such consequences of a mistaken exegesis as are here disclosed, it would not be better to leave off altogether the habit of speaking of the Old Testament Nation as a CHURCH; and, instead of merely abstaining from *directly* appropriating such a psalm as this, would it not be more reverent and far safer to *abstain altogether* from appropriating it? Why appropriate it at all? It is not for us. Nevertheless, we can learn much from it. We can gather therefrom lessons which are by no means yet exhausted; and if some "Jew-baiting" communities would only listen to

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Jehovah's voice ringing through it, they would not be surprised to hear their rulers calling out to them, with genuine concern, "Hands off!"

It may not be out of place to observe that there is enough in this psalm to prevent even the favoured nation itself from hastily taking up the "sword," though it were in self-defence. Let them make reasonably sure that Jehovah is again *favours his people*, and intends to *adorn the humble ones with victory!* When Jehovah wills them to "thresh," he will not fail to say unto them "Arise!" Besides which, it has yet to be emphasised, that even upon Israel a restriction is placed which further safeguards the power of the "sword," as commissioned by this psalm. This restriction has already been respected by the qualifying term "ideal" in the phrase "ideal Israel": it is only to "ideal Israel" that the commission to use the "sword" is here prophetically given. Now, as the "ideal Israel" is necessarily a purified and godlike Israel—the real nation, indeed, but the real nation as morally qualified for the stern and critical task of punishing Gentile kings and nations,—it is important that this restriction to the mission of the "sword" be thoroughly grasped and tenaciously held.

Note then, first, that the restriction is well in evidence hereabouts in the Psalms. Recall how strongly it appeared at the close of the last psalm (148). The perfect tense there may perhaps be safely taken as the prophetic perfect of anticipation: *He hath uplifted a horn for his people*—the "horn" being a well-known symbol of royal power and prowess. This "horn" Jehovah will have given to "his people": say,—naturally, in a Hebrew psalm,—*"to his people Israel."* But in what moral condition are "his people" to be when this "horn" of power is restored to them? It is to be observed that the restoration is to be *a theme of praise for all Jehovah's men of kindness*. It follows, that it will be an event which will fill Jehovah's "men of kindness" with joy.

His *men of kindness!* but *who are they?* They are His *hasidhim*: THE RECEIVERS AND REFLECTORS OF HIS OWN DIVINE KINDNESS. It is not difficult to define them: our only misfortune is, that we have not a single word to denote them; and, in the last resort, *that* is doubtless our own fault; for if we had been awake to the immense importance—within the realm of the Old Testament—of the *idea*, the happy word to express it would surely have been agreed upon before now; and English readers

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would not have been suffered to lose themselves amid such a variety of renderings of this Hebrew designation as "holy ones," "pious ones," "godly ones," "favoured ones," &c., &c. Surely the idea and the character embodying it, should by no means be allowed to escape us. Just here, the restriction implied is vital.

So, then, Jehovah's "men of kindness" will rejoice and give "praise" when a "horn" is again "uplifted" for "his people"; which presupposes their confidence that "his people" are *prepared* to wield the "sword" in strict accord with Jehovah's will. And the next line in Ps. 148 confirms this confidence; for by the very way in which it follows on, without a conjunction, such as "and" or "moreover," that line—the last of the psalm—is turned into *an expansion of the foregoing*; and so implies that "the sons of Israel," AS A BODY, will have become "men of kindness"; in other words, will have become Jehovah's "ideal nation"; the perception of which prepares us for the splendid climax—*a people near him*—morally near him, and not merely by outward privilege and profession: ONLY TO SUCH A PEOPLE, hath Jehovah here promised to raise up a horn of power and prowess.

All of which brings us, on a full-flowing tide, over the bar at the entrance of our present psalm, the redoubtable 149th: *Sing ye to Jehovah a song that is new*; and indeed it is "new," even to Israel,—so new and peculiar that no others than Jehovah's "ideal Israel" *have any right to sing it with self-appropriation*. The same restrictive peculiarity immediately reappears as the psalmist, in the second line, says: *his praise in the assembly of his men of kindness*. These peculiarly godlike men have now become an "assembly"; and, from what follows, we may infer that they are the whole national assembly of *humble ones* who have borne the sin and the curse and the shame of centuries: JEHOVAH'S IDEAL ISRAEL. These are the men to whom alone it is possible, without fanaticism, to have, at one and the same time, *the extollings of God in their throat, and a sword of two edges in their hand!*

With a remarkable—and indeed quite an unusual—maintenance of descriptive power the final stanza of this ominous psalm conducts us steadily up to its unique and amazing climax: *To execute—chastise—bind—execute the sentence written* (and we thank Dr. Driver for referring us to such appropriate parallels for showing what that "sentence" is) *is a stateliness for all his men of kindness!* thus, once more and finally, holding

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us to the Divinely imposed restriction of this unique commission to *such* men—to *these* men—and to *no others*. “A stateliness”: a quite unusual and significant word, whose peculiar value the psalms have recently taught us. As “glory” is an attribute of “majesty,” so is “stateliness” an attribute of the “glory” of “majesty” (Ps. 145:5). Such “stateliness”—such “magnificence,” as the Sep. in some places has it—has Jehovah in reserve for “his men of kindness.” Some day a relieved world will wake up to discover how Jehovah himself has displayed his own kindness in thus forcibly sweeping away centuries of oppression and wrong. Let all tyrants beware!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This is a most interesting psalm, at least the sometimes tragic use made of it is of real interest, Rotherham feels it has been very much misused. What is the basic mistake?
2. “There is not Church in the Old Testament”. How is this thought to be understood. Discuss.
3. Rotherham evidently believed the physical nation of Israel was to (will) be used by God. How? When? Why? Where?
4. Who are “His men of kindness”? What is their work?
5. In the analysis of this psalm we learn of a new song for Israel. When will they sing it? For what reason? Is there another way of interpreting this psalm? Discuss.

P S A L M 1 5 0

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

An Expansion and Enforcement of the “Public Reader’s Invitation” to the People to Join in the Responses in the Temple-Worship.

ANALYSIS

1. “The Public Reader’s Invitation”—*Hallelu-yah*, “Praise ye Yah,” is first given in the Usual Way at the Head of the Psalm. 2. Then follow Ten Lines of Expansion: consisting of (a) a Ten-fold Repetition of the Invitation *hallelu*, “praise ye”; (b) a Ten-fold Statement of the Object of Praise—once by the familiar Divine Name EL, “the Mighty One,” and nine

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times by the use of the pronoun "him," referring back to "El" and virtually repeating it; (c) a Ten-fold use of the Hebrew preposition *beth*, "in" or "with"—employed four times to denote GROUNDS OR REASONS for praise, and six times to bring in ACCOMPANIMENTS of praise. 3. These ten steps thus lead up to the Eleventh Line, which constitutes THE CLIMAX OR GRAND IMPERATIVE OF THE PSALM; and consists of another form of the verb *ballel*, "to praise" (namely, the third person feminine imperfect or incipient) agreeing with the feminine noun *neshamah* (literally "breath," more freely "breather"), which—with its qualifying word "all" or "every"—should be rendered, "Every one who hath breath," "Let EVERY ONE WHO HATH BREATH [the 'subject' emphatically preplaced for emphasis] praise Yah. 4. The Twelfth Line of the psalm—whether, with M.T., consisting of one occurrence of the phrase *hallelu-yah*, or, after Briggs' conjecture, of three occurrences, to fill out the line—being, as it is, a bare Repetition of the Primary Invitation, makes no further demand on Exposition, as it can only enhance the General Effect. It is only by close adherence to the true character of (i) the Primary Invitation, and (ii) the Expanded Commentary thereon, that this twelfth line, in either form, is saved from being Superfluous.

(P.R.I.) Praise ye Yah¹

- 1 Praise ye GOD for² his holiness,³
Praise ye him for the spreading out⁴ of his strength,
- 2 Praise ye him for his heroic deeds,
Praise ye him for the abundance of his greatness;
- 3 Praise ye him with⁵ the blast of the horn,
Praise ye him with lute and lyre;
- 4 Praise ye him with timbrel and dance,
Praise ye him with strings and pipe;⁶
- 5 Praise ye him with cymbals of clear tone,
Praise ye him with cymbals of loud clang;
- 6 Let every one who hath breath praise Yah.
Praise ye Yah. [Praise ye Yah. Praise ye Yah.]⁷

(Nm.)

1. Apparently doubled. See Exposition of 147.

2. N.B.: "in view of"="for."

3. So P.B.V. "Sanctity"—Br.

4. So Br.

5. N.B.: "In and through the accompaniment of"="with."

6. Or: "flute"; or "organ" in the simple sense of a collection of reeds.
See Exposition.

7. "Should be thrice repeated for measure"—Br.

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PARAPHRASE
PSALM 150

Hallelujah! Yes, praise the Lord! Praise Him in His Temple, and in the heavens He made with mighty power.¹

2 Praise Him for His mighty works. Praise His unequalled greatness.

3 Praise Him with the trumpet and with lute and harp.

4 Praise Him with the timbrels and processional. Praise Him with stringed instruments and horns.

5 Praise Him with the cymbals, yes, loud clanging cymbals.

6 Let everything alive give praises to the Lord! *You* praise Him!

* * * * *

Hallelujah!

EXPOSITION

As this psalm is unique and makes urgent demands on exegesis, the reader will not be surprised if this endeavour to interpret it extend beyond the length which the brevity of the psalm may have led him to anticipate. For clearness, and to enable MORE and LESS critical readers respectively to find their own, it will be convenient to divide the Exposition into two parts: I. A Critical Defence of the Title, Text and Translation; and II. A Practical Interpretation of the psalm as thus presented.

I. A CRITICAL DEFENCE OF THE TITLE,
TEXT AND TRANSLATION.

1. As to the TITLE here presented, it is respectfully submitted: That this psalm is *not* a "Doxology," and that the continued classification of it as such diverts attention from its true character. As this conclusion rests mainly on Dr. Ginsburg's opinion that the phrase *hallelu-yah* was, originally, not one word but two, which together constituted the "Public Reader's Invitation" to the People to join in the Responses in Temple Worship (Ginsburg's Intro., pp. 375-381), it is necessary that this Expert Opinion be well kept in mind; since it is only when that opinion is accepted as sufficiently valid to form a basis of reasoning, that the character of this psalm as an Expansion and Enforcement of that Invitation can be expected to disclose itself. The thoroughness with which, on that assumption, it does

1. Literally, "in the firmament of His power."

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vindicate itself, is the sufficient justification of the ultimate conclusion reached as to the character of this psalm.

2. Next, as to TEXT, it is necessary to say: That the extraordinary symmetry of this psalm, coupled with the notorious confusion into which the Hebrew letters *beth* and *kaph* are known from the ancient versions to have not infrequently fallen, through infirmities incident to copying, conducts to the assured conviction that the NINE occurrences of the preposition *beth* in this psalm must have been originally TEN, and that the Syriac version is right in having preserved the ten intact. This strong conviction is similar to that of which a critic of modern hymns becomes conscious, when, in examining a new hymn-book, he observes a hymn, otherwise perfect in its rhymes, utterly breaking down in one particular verse. As he would exclaim, "Impossible and Incredible!" so any one with a fair amount of sensitiveness to symmetry of form and a passing acquaintance with the incidents of textual transmission, becomes irresistibly possessed by the persuasion that the one straggling *kaph* in this psalm is neither more nor less than a clerical error, however ancient, and the more so, that the irregularity serves no good purpose whatever, seeing that the difference between "in view of," "for" and "according to" cannot in the circumstances be made evident to the common mind.

3. In respect of TRANSLATION, two points claim attention: the rendering of the ten *beths*; and, that of the word *neshamah* in the climax of the psalm.

(a) Manifestly, the ten *beths* should be rendered as uniformly as possible: which at once throws out the "upon" (of A.V. and R.V.) before the two classes of "cymbals," as a perfectly gratuitous variation; seeing that Jehovah may be praised "with" as well as "upon" any musical instrument. Unfortunately we cannot have a perfectly uniform rendering of *beth*, simply because this Hebrew preposition is broader than our "with," easily looking in such two directions as "in view of" = "for" and "with" (the help or accompaniment of), but beyond these two meanings there is, in this psalm, no need to go; as will be seen as soon as we are prepared to deal vigorously with lines one and two, and (with Briggs), *without change of consonants*, say: *for his holiness, for the spreading out of his strength*. We shall then have four good, strong, uniform lines:

Praise ye GOD for his holiness,
Praise ye him for the spreading out of his strength,

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Praise ye him for his heroic acts,
Praise ye him for his abundant greatness.

Against the introduction—with many translations—of *place* in the first line, may be urged: that it is first, needless; secondly, feeble; thirdly, puzzling: Needless, inasmuch as the extension of Jehovah's praise through space (and place) is fully and grandly wrought out in Ps. 148; feeble, because, if we merely say "in his sanctuary," no mention is made of the beings who dwell in that sanctuary; and puzzling, because we are left in doubt *which* sanctuary is intended, the earthly or the heavenly, as to which expositors are very uncertain—at least they come to diverse conclusions. But by accepting the four lines as a four-fold reference to the attributes and activities of the Mighty One, an obviously stable foundation is laid on which His praise may rest. *Praise him in view of=for*—all these.

(b) As to the important noun *neshamah*, in the climax of the psalm, which—preceded by the little qualifying word *kol*, "the totality of," "the whole of," "all," or "every"—is literally "every breath," more freely "every breather": the one important question is, Does it mean "Every ONE who hath breath," or "Every THING that hath breath? In other words, Does it (poetically) include animals; or is it strictly and properly confined to mankind? It will probably become evident that it does include all mankind, and is not limited to Hebrew worshippers, even though Temple worship is all the time in view. If we conclude that it is confined to mankind, it will still be left over to ask, in the second part of our Exposition, WHY this peculiar phrase is employed to denote mankind, rather than simply "all nations," "all men," or "all flesh." In answer to the primary question here submitted, it may be said, with confidence: That the word under consideration is here confined to mankind—for the following reasons: (i) it stands alone, and is not one of a *series* which conceivably might leave this term over to mean animals: (ii) the whole context is charged to the full with the notion of human personality. *Praise ye!* eleven times repeated (including the Public Reader's Invitation), so that, if the eleven-fold appeal of the *ye* be to MEN, then the climax, which is the emphasised sum of all that has gone before, must still mean MEN, and cannot be poetically lavished on animals; (iii) other examples may be found in which "every breath" or "every breather" is limited to human kind; as for example Deu. 20:16, 18; Josh. 11:11, 14,

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confirmed by Isa. 57:16, wherein *neshahmoth*, the plural of the term before us, is clearly synonymous with the "souls" of men (not animals). We may, then safely rest in the translation: *Let every ONE who hath breath praise Yah.*

II. A PRACTICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE PSALM AS THUS PRESENTED.

We at once find ourselves in a practical atmosphere, if we resume where just now we left off. Frankly admitting—as we have already admitted—that we are (metaphorically) within the Temple area, that we have just heard the "Public Reader" in the Temple Courts give the "Invitation" *Praise ye Yah*; and that we are now (in all probability) listening to a Levitical or Orchestral *prolongation* of the Reader's Invitation,—granting all this, we are constrained nevertheless to maintain that we have been brought under no restrictive influences which can rightfully cramp the terms "Every one who hath breath," so that they shall mean no more than "Every Hebrew."

In support of this protest we offer the following reasons:—
(a) The psalmist avoids all the many current designations by which he could have restricted his appeal to Hebrews; such as "Men of Israel," "Sons of Zion," "Seed of Jacob," and the like: instead of which he says, simply and broadly, "Every one who hath breath." (b) Previous psalms have already familiarised us with a class of worshippers outside Hebrews; as where (Ps. 115:9-11, 135:19, 20)—after exhaustively classifying all Israel—we are taken outside Israel by the familiar New Testament designation, "Ye that revere God." (c) Other psalms, unquestionably prophetic (and therefore probably carrying us beyond the present Church dispensation into the coming age of the Kingdom) have thrown open the Temple Courts to all nations, or all the earth; and invited them to enter and bow down (Ps. 100:1-4; see "Exposition."). (d) The prophetic word from Isaiah's hands (56:7) distinctly predicts that "My house, a house of prayer shall be called, for all the peoples" (cp. Isa. 66:18-23). For these reasons it is plainly not permissible to restrict the description "Every one who hath breath" to any narrower limits than ALL MANKIND.

But why should this peculiar description have been selected, and not one of the more obvious phrases, such as "All nations," "All men," or "All flesh"? This we now proceed to indicate by submitting the following proposition: *The praises of Jehovah*

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primarily call for Song; and for the production of song Breath is essential; hence the inherent fitness of couching the Invitation in these terms rather than any others.

The primary appeal made by the songs of Israel is to the Human Voice, to articulate them. They are not mere sounds, but senses; they celebrate, among other things, the doings and perfections of Jehovah; they appeal to the mind of the listener through his ear. No artificial sounds can articulate them. *Song is essential to the praise of Jehovah; and Breath is essential to song.*

The present psalm, which may be described as the magnified appeal of Hebrew praise, is absolutely true to this master-thought. The Public Reader's appeal is not to musical instruments, but to musical men. He does, indeed, call for "music," because he calls for "praise" in Song; and mere brute sound is not Song; is not, cannot be, intelligent, simultaneous, harmonious, melodious Song. Therefore he appeals to men with minds, men capable of adoring purpose. But MEN standing first and foremost, first and last, in his call. He calls on them for "tuneful" *breath*. But they must *have* breath; and therefore the Orchestral Amplification rises to its climax on that clear note. Eleven times "Praise ye, (O men)": never once, "Praise ye (O instruments)"!

And this reduces all instrumentation to its right dimensions: in rendering the praises of Israel, instrumentation is always, everywhere, evermore secondary and subservient. To guide, prolong, sustain the HUMAN VOICE, is its only place here.

But in this, its legitimate, subservient relation to the human voice, instrumentation is not only permitted but *invited*!—Divinely invited. And there is this further to be said in passing: That no musical instrument can play itself, nor play at all until a human soul moves it to its subservient end.

According to this Divine Ideal of Sacred Song, it is Man who is sounding the high praises of Jehovah all the while: Man *with* the instrument, Man *in* the instrument. All good instrumental music throbs and thrills with human intelligence.

There is something unspeakably pathetic, and immeasurably instructive, in this final appeal to "Every one who hath breath." When a man's "breath" departs, his power of song in this world is at an end. When, amid the advancing infirmities of old age, his "breath" for song fails him, and he is compelled to excuse himself from complying with this Invitation, by pleading: "I

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would fain, O Divine Master, respond to thy call; but alas, I have no available breath,"—may we not believe that his excuse will be accepted? If he is compelled to lean on OTHERS, but still puts his own mind into the song which he has to leave others to sing,—will he not be accepted? If he has a HARP, and his right hand has not yet lost its cunning, and he throws his soul into the strings and by them climbs to Jehovah's throne in adoration,—will he not be accepted? The very pathos of old age illustrates and accentuates the principle. He who is aged and infirm is, with others, invited to sing; but, if he cannot, what then? He is invited to play; but if he cannot, what then? Is there in the Divine Code no such thing as a "Law of Liberty"? Happily, "to his own Master he standeth or falleth." Meanwhile, and all the while, the gracious Invitation goes on resounding through the ages, and to earth's remotest bounds,—*Let every one who hath breath praise Yah!*

Before we close, a particularisation of the "accompaniments" of praise here enumerated may be acceptable:—

- 1.—Horn, Heb. *shophar*: the curved horn, prob. at first a ram's horn, which "was used by watchmen, warriors, etc., as well as priests"—O.G., 348. To be distinguished from the straight silver trumpets for the use of the priests (Num. 10:1-10, the only instance of which in the Psalms is 98:6). It is remarkable that this is the only instrument still in use which goes back to Mosaic times.
- 2.—Lute, Heb. *nebhel*: prob. smaller than the lyre, and occasionally more elaborate (33:2, 144:9). In O.G. named also "portable harp, guitar." For uniformity of rendering, see under next word.
- 3.—Lyre, Heb. *kinnor*: prob. larger than the lute, and fitted by its deeper and louder tones to accompany the bass voices in the Temple worship (I Ch. 15:21). "Lyre" is the only name given it in O.G. Hence, throughout this translation of the Psalm, this distinction has been uniformly observed—"lute" for *nebhel* and "lyre" for *kinnor*.
- 4.—Timbrel, Heb. *toph*: the well-known tambourine or hand-drum, chiefly used as an accompaniment to

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"dancing"; and, therefore, favouring that translation of the next word.

- 5.—Dance, Heb. *mahol*: "dance" is the only meaning given in Fuerst, T.G., and O.G.: in the last of which it is followed by the words—"accompanied by Timbrel (*toph*) and sometimes other instruments." Stainer inclines to "flute" (*Bible Educator*, ii., 70): in favour of whose opinion it may be said—that thereby absolute uniformity is secured for all six lines; and, if EIGHT of the items specified are instruments, and not mere accompaniments, why not the NINTH?
- 6.—Strings, Heb. *minnim*: so O.G.; regarded by Stainer as a generic name for stringed instruments (*Bible Educator*, ii., 72).
- 7.—Pipe, Heb. *'ugabh*: in O.G., "reed pipe or flute," or "a Pan's-pipe" or "organ"—"made up of several reeds together." Stainer evidently concludes that, although the *'ugabh* may have been originally a simple collection of reeds, a syrx, or Pan's-pipe, yet it afterwards was developed into the parent of our modern organ, and was identical with the *magrepha* mentioned in the Talmud. "This organ," says Steiner, "for it is entitled to the name . . . was capable of producing 100 sounds. These were brought under the control of the player by means of a *clavier* or key-board. Its tones were said to be audible at a very great distance" (*Bible Educator*, ii., 73).
- 8.—Cymbals of clear tone, Heb. *zilzelei-shama'*.
- 9.—Cymbals of loud clang, Heb. *zilzelei-teru'ah*: There is a general agreement among scholars in favour of substantially the above distinction. It is quite conceivable that the "clanging" cymbals may have found their place in Temple worship by serving to drown and overpower all other noises, and so secure universal silence throughout the Temple courts; in which case the "clear-sounding" cymbals could be appropriated to the service of beating time, and possibly of making other concerted signals.

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If the main position respecting the foregoing psalm is correct, several corollaries follow from it: one of them is this—*That we must look elsewhere than here for the actual response of the people.* The more sure we are that this psalm is none of it of the nature of a response, but all of it of the nature of a continued appeal for a response, the more urgently it becomes us to indicate the kind of thing which would constitute such a response—in other words, which would serve as an appropriate answer to this appeal. Fortunately, we have not to look far to discover what we seek. The refrain of Ps. 136 is just what we want. On the face of it, that refrain is a people's response. It is in itself, not a call for praise, but praise: what is therein said is evidently uttered in Jehovah's praise, and appears in no other light. Its brevity renders it adapted to a people's lips. Every one, having heard it, could remember it. Its frequent repetition indelibly engraved it on every recollection. Being known to all, and perfectly familiar, it was available on any occasion, at a moment's notice. All could join in it. Infant voices could lisp it; feeble voices could utter it; faltering voices could sustain it; uncultured voices could pronounce it. Calling only for faith and gratitude, and of course the pure intention of obedience to Jehovah's claims—it called for no more, as a condition for the appropriation of its God honouring sentiment. It was heart-searching enough to test the deeply tried, who would have to draw upon all their faith and patience and hopefulness, before they could sincerely affirm it; and at the same time it was comprehensive and emphatic enough to suit the bounding hearts and hopes of such as realised that they were laden with mercies.

How popular and general it became in the praises of Israel is evident from a comparison of such passages as I Ch. 16:24, 41, 2 Ch. 5:13, 7:3, 6, 20:21, Ezr. 3:11, Pss. 106:1, 107:1, 118:1-4, 29, 135:3-4, 136 throughout, Jer. 33:11. Some of these passages suggest that the Levites led the people in the rendering of this response, and nothing is inherently more likely. The people would need some signal as to the precise time when their reply should be given; and, it may be, the indication of some note on which they might pitch their voices. Moreover, this hypothesis—that the people's responses were led by the Levites—at once very simply disposes of a difficulty which might otherwise be raised as an objection to the general view of this psalm here given. But for this explanation, it might have been asked

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—"How can this psalm be a continued appeal to the people? If so, then the people are invited to play the various instruments of music: is not that very unlikely?" The sufficient answer is ready: "They are invited to do this by the hands of the Levites—their Divinely appointed Representatives and Helpers": which explanation falls into line with the general teaching of the Psalms throughout—that the Levites were the tribal embodiment of the Ideal Israel. But none of these considerations would alter the character of the popular response itself: it would be and remain brief—direct—comprehensive—fundamental.

Perhaps Israel had other popular responses, worded differently—a little expanded or a little contracted; and it is quite possible that out of the Psalms themselves examples of such other responses may be discriminated and commended to our attention. Meanwhile, the above well-sustained example (from Ps. 136) may settle beyond reasonable question the difference between an Appeal for a Response—whether said or sung, whether coming from one or many voices; and the Reply to that Appeal in the form of the Response itself.

Another thing that follows from our main position respecting the character of this last psalm is this: that *instead of being considered as fixed here by way of a doxology*—a character we have seen it does not bear—it *should be regarded* as well placed here, indeed, for convenience having to appear somewhere,—but as being *by original intention* MOVABLE, *adapted to be lifted into any other position where its presence might be desired*. So that, whenever and wherever the Public Reader might give his Invitation, then and there, by means of this short psalm, A SINGER, A CHOIR, OR THE WHOLE ORCHESTRA MIGHT ENFORCE HIS INVITATION.

This alone would account for the twofold appearance of the original compound hallelujah in connection with these last five psalms; which critics have classified as, so to speak, Double HALLELUJAH PSALMS. The so-called "Double Hallelujah" may be taken either as a mistaken repetition or more probably as a double putting forth of one and the same Invitation; first to be said, and then to be sung; first to be uttered by one voice, and then to be uttered by many voices—without change of destination or alteration of significance, its destination being, both ways, *to the people*, and its significance being, both times, that of an Appeal—a Call—an Invitation for a Response. This dis-

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poses of all the "doublings" of the phrase *halleluyah* in this part of the psalter.

In fine, the peculiar character of the last psalm is alone sufficient to account for the appearance of *halleluyah* at the end of that psalm as well as at its beginning. The psalm itself being nothing else than an Invitation, though Expanded, there could be no possible reason to hinder the repetition of it in brief. It would still remain for the people to respond and say:—

For he is good,
For to the ages is his kindness.

With the disappearance of the Hebrew compound word *hallelu-yah* from the end of this psalm, and from all the previous places where it occurs, and the setting down in its stead of its exact English equivalent, is completed a process of thoroughness in translation in behalf of which a good defence can be made. No one doubts that *proper names* should be *transferred* in the process of translation; and therefore it is admittedly right—as indeed it is absolutely necessary—to pass on into English the abbreviated Divine Name *Yah*, a shortened form of *Yahweh* (commonly pronounced *Jehovah*); but when this is done, there is no more reason for reproducing the Hebrew word *hallelu* twice in this psalm than in the remaining nine (practically ten) times of its occurrence. Now as no one dreams of saying, in ver. 1, "*Hallelu* God," and then "*Hallelu* him" for nine times more in succession,—the inconsistency of retaining *Hallelu* at all becomes evident,—that is to say, becomes evident the moment it is admitted that *hallelu-yah* is a phrase and not a word, a phrase with a meaning, a meaning intended to serve a practical purpose. Not *then* to TRANSLATE it, is to convert it into a flourish, which may mean anything or nothing according to the fancy of the reader; and meanwhile it is to miss, one knows not how much guidance to the knowledge of the ancient Temple worship. If the foregoing Exposition of this mis-named "Doxology" has served its purpose, it has already corrected and safeguarded several phrases in the psalm itself; and has probably further opened the way to valuable conclusions which cannot at present be foreseen. For one thing, it has—even within the compass of this short psalm—emphasised the subserviency of accompaniments of worship, as towards worship proper, to a degree which could not have been attained in any other way. It is only when

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we know what the Public Reader's Invitation *means*, that we can see how his *meaning* is caught up, repeated, and emphasised by all that follows. Practically the appeal of the psalm might almost as well have been addressed to musical instruments, instead of being addressed mainly and sustainedly, throughout, to worshipful and musical men.

In this particular instance, as in so many others, fidelity may appear to entail loss; but let us rest assured that in all such cases, temporary loss means permanent gain. We may lose our blessed word "Hallelu-jah"; and, after it, several other idols may have gradually to disappear; but lasting advantage will more than compensate for any sacrifice, if we thereby learn more thoroughly than ever how all aids to public devotion may be transformed and uplifted by the devout intelligence and intentions of worshipful men.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. At the opening of several of the psalms is a little phrase addressed to the "Public Reader". Who is this person? Why address him?
2. If this psalm is *not* a doxology, what is it?
3. There seems to be some question as to the proper translation, or transmission of the text. What is it?
4. How much importance is there (i.e. to the average reader) in the technical discussion of the use of the Hebrew words? Discuss.
5. To the practical use and understanding of this psalm, we ask; "When was this psalm used? Where? If in the Hebrew Temple are all mankind," called upon to praise God?
6. There is a strong discussion of the use of the human voice in singing. How shall we understand the sentence; "all good instrumental music throbs and thrills with human intelligence."
7. What of the aged man who can neither sing nor play his praise to Jehovah?
8. There are eight (or seven) musical instruments defined by Rotherham—in one definition we have a justification for our present organ. Do you agree? Discuss.
9. What possible response was given to this psalm? How was it given?
10. What suggestion was made as to the possible frequent use of this psalm? How can we use it today?

