

PSALM 23 OVERVIEW

There is no inspired title to this psalm, and none is needed, for it records no special event, and needs no other key than that which every Christian may find in his own bosom. It is David's Heavenly Pastoral; a surpassing ode, which none of the daughters of music can excel. The clarion of war here gives place to the pipe of peace, and he who so lately bewailed the woes of the Shepherd tunefully rehearses the joys of the flock. Sitting under a spreading tree, with his flock around him, like Bunyan's shepherd boy in the Valley of Humiliation, we picture David singing this unrivalled pastoral with a heart as full of gladness as it could hold; or, if the psalm be the product of his after years, we are sure that his soul returned in contemplation to the lonely water brooks which rippled among the pastures of the wilderness, where in early days she had been wont to dwell. This is the pearl of psalms whose soft and pure radiance delights every eye; a pearl of which Helicon need not be ashamed, though Jordan claims it. Of this delightful song it may be affirmed that its piety and its poetry are equal, its sweetness and its spirituality are unsurpassed.

The position of this psalm is worthy of notice. It follows the twenty-second, which is peculiarly the Psalm of the Cross. There are no green pastures, no still waters on the other side of the twenty-second psalm. It is only after we have read, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" that we come to "The Lord is my Shepherd." We must by experience know the value of blood shedding, and see the sword awakened against the Shepherd, before we shall be able truly to know the Sweetness of the good Shepherd's care. It has been said that what the nightingale is among birds, that is this divine ode among the psalms, for it has sung sweetly in the ear of many a mourner in his night of weeping, and has bidden him hope for a morning of joy. I will venture to compare it also to the lark, which sings as it mounts, and mounts as it sings, until it is out of sight, and even then is not out of hearing. Note the last words of the psalm - "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever;" these are celestial notes, more fitted for the eternal mansions than for these dwelling places below the clouds. Oh that we may enter into the spirit of the psalm as we read it, and then we shall experience the days of heaven upon the earth!

EXPOSITION

Verse 1. The Lord is my shepherd. What condescension is this, that the infinite Lord assumes towards his people the office and character of a Shepherd! It should be the subject of grateful admiration that the great God allows himself to be compared to anything which will set forth his great love and care for his own people. David had himself been a keeper of sheep, and understood both the needs of the sheep and the many cares of a shepherd. He compares himself to a creature weak, defenceless, and foolish, and he takes God to be his Provider, Preserver, Director, and, indeed, his everything. No man has a right to consider himself the Lord's sheep unless his nature has been renewed for the scriptural description of unconverted men does not picture them as sheep, but as wolves or goats. A sheep is an object of property, not a wild animal; its owner sets great store by it, and frequently it is bought with a great price. It is well to know, as certainly David did, that we belong to the Lord. There is a noble tone of confidence about this sentence. There is no "if" nor "but", nor even "I hope so"; but he says, "The Lord is my shepherd." We must cultivate the spirit of assured dependence upon our heavenly Father. The sweetest word of the whole is that monosyllable, "My." He does not say, "The Lord is the shepherd of the world at large, and leads forth the multitude as his flock", but "The Lord is my shepherd;" if he be a Shepherd to no one else, he is a Shepherd to me; he cares for me, watches over me, and preserves me. The words are in the present tense. Whatever be the believer's position, he is even now under the pastoral care of Jehovah. The next words are a sort of inference from the first statement - they are sententious and positive - I shall not want. I might want otherwise, but when the Lord is my Shepherd he is able to supply my needs, and he is certainly willing to do so, for his heart is full of love, and therefore "I shall not want." I shall not lack for temporal things. Does he not feed the ravens, and cause the lilies to grow? How, then, can he leave his children to starve? I shall not want for spirituals, I know that his grace will be sufficient for me. Resting in him he will say to me, "As your day so shall your strength be." I may not possess all that I wish for, but "I shall not want." Others, far wealthier and wiser than I, may want, but "I shall not." "The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." It is not only "I do not want," but "I shall not want." Come what may, if famine should devastate the land, or calamity destroy the city, "I shall not want." Old age with its feebleness shall not bring me any lack, and even death with its gloom shall not find me destitute. I have all things and abound; not because I have a good store of money in the bank, not because I have skill and wit with which to win my bread, but because "The Lord is my shepherd." The wicked always

want, but the righteous never; a sinner's heart is far from satisfaction, but a gracious spirit dwells in the palace of content.

David has left no sweeter Psalm than the short twenty-third. It is but a moment's opening of his soul; but, as when one, walking the winter street sees the door opened for some one to enter, and the red light streams a moment forth, and the forms of gay children are running to greet the comer, and genial music sounds, though the door shuts and leaves the night black, yet it cannot shut back again all that the eyes, the ear, the heart, and the imagination have seen - so in this Psalm, though it is but a moment's opening of the soul, are emitted truths of peace and consolation that will never be absent from the world. The twenty-third Psalm is the nightingale of the Psalms. It is small, of a homely feather, singing shyly out of obscurity; but, oh! it has filled the air of the whole world with melodious joy, greater than the heart can conceive. Blessed be the day on which that Psalm was born! What would you say of a pilgrim commissioned of God to travel up and down the earth singing a strange melody, which, when one heard, caused him to forget whatever sorrows he had? And so the singing angel goes on his way through all lands, singing in the language of every nation, driving away trouble by the pulses of the air which his tongue moves with divine power. Behold just such an one! This pilgrim God has sent to speak in every language on the globe. It has charmed more griefs to rest than all the philosophy of the world. It has remanded to their dungeon more felon thoughts, more black doubts, more thieving sorrows, than there are sands on the seashore. It has comforted the noble host of the poor. It has sung courage to the army of the disappointed. It has poured balm and consolation into the heart of the sick, of captives in dungeons, of widows in their pinching griefs, of orphans in their loneliness. Dying soldiers have died easier as it was read to them; ghastly hospitals have been illuminated; it has visited the prisoner, and broken his chains, and, like Peter's angel, led him forth in imagination, and sung him back to his home again. It has made the dying Christian slave freer than his master, and consoled those whom, dying, he left behind mourning, not so much that he was gone, as because they were left behind, and could not go too. Nor is its work done. It will go singing to your children and my children, and to their children, through all the generations of time; nor will it fold its wings till the last pilgrim is safe, and time ended; and then it shall fly back to the bosom of God, whence it issued, and sound on, mingled with all those sounds of celestial joy which make heaven musical for ever. *Henry Ward Beecher, in "Life Thoughts."*

This Psalm may well be called David's pastoral, so daintily has he struck upon the whole string, through the whole hymn. It is a noble Psalm, written and sung by David, not when he fled into the forest of Hareth (1 Samuel 22:5), as some Hebrews will have it; but when as having overcome all his enemies, and settled his kingdom, he enjoyed great peace and quiet, and had one foot, as it were, upon the battlements of heaven. The Jews at this day use for most part to repeat this Psalm after they are sat down to meat. *John Trapp.*

Augustine is said to have beheld, in a dream, the one hundred and nineteenth Psalm 119 rising before him as a tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God. This twenty-third may be compared to the fairest flowers that grew around it. The former has even been likened to the sun amidst the stars - surely this is like the richest of the constellations, even the Pleiades themselves! *John Stoughton, in "The Songs of Christ's Flock", 1860.*

Some pious souls are troubled because they cannot at all times, or often, use, in its joyous import, the language of this Psalm. Such should remember that David, though he lived long, only wrote one twenty-third Psalm. Some of his odes do indeed express as lively a faith as this, and faith can walk in darkness. But where else do we find a whole Psalm expressive of personal confidence, joy, and triumph, from beginning to end? God's people have their seasons of darkness and their times of rejoicing. *William S. Plumer.*

Verse 1. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Let them say that will, "My lands shall keep me, I shall have no want, my merchandise shall be my help, I shall have no want;" let the soldier trust to his weapons, and the husbandman to his labour; let the artificer say to his are, and the tradesman to his trade, and the scholar to his books, "These shall maintain me, I shall not want." Let us say with the church, as we both say and sing, "The Lord is my keeper, I shall not want." He that can truly say so, condemns the rest, and he that desires more than God, cannot truly say, the Lord is his, the Lord is this shepherd, governor and commander, and therefore I shall not want. *John Hull, in "Lectures on Lamentations", 1617.*

Verse 1. The Lord is my shepherd; I want nothing: thus it may be equally well rendered, though in our version it is in the future tense. *J. R. Macduff, in "The Shepherd and his Flock", 1866.*

Verse 1. The Lord is my shepherd. We may learn in general from the metaphor, that it is the property of a gracious heart to draw some spiritual use or other from his former condition. David himself having sometimes been a shepherd, as himself confesses when he says, "he took David from the sheepfold from following the sheep," etc., himself having been a shepherd, he beholds the Lord the same to him. Whatever David was to his flock - watchful over them, careful to defend them from the lion and the bear, and whatsoever thing else might annoy them, careful of their pasturage and watering, etc., the same and much more he beholds the Lord to himself. So Paul: "I was a persecutor, and an oppressor: but the Lord had mercy on me." This we may see in good old Jacob: "With this staff," says he, "I passed over Jordan;" and that now God had blessed him and multiplied him exceedingly. The doctrine is plain; the reasons are, first, because true grace makes no object amiss to gather some gracious instruction: it skills not what the object be, so that the heart be gracious; for that never wants matter to work upon. And secondly, it must needs be so, for such are guided by God's Spirit, and therefore are directed to a spiritual use of all things. *Samuel Smith's "Chiefe Shepherd", 1625.*

Verse 1. Shepherd. May this sweet title persuade Japhet to dwell in the tents of Shem: my meaning is, that those who as yet never knew what it was to be enfolded in the bosom of Jesus, who as yet were never lambs nor ewes in Christ's fold, consider the sweetness of this Shepherd, and come in to him. Satan deals seemingly sweet, that he may draw you into sin, but in the end he will be really bitter to you. Christ, indeed, is seemingly bitter to keep you from sin, hedging up your way with thorns. But he will be really sweet if you

come into his flock, even notwithstanding your sins. You look into Christ's fold, and you see it hedged and fenced all about to keep you in from sin, and this keeps you from entering; but, oh! let it not. Christ, indeed, is unwilling that any of his should wander, and if they be unwilling too, it's well. And if they wander he will fetch them in, it may be with his shepherd's dog (some affliction); but he will not be, as we say, dogged himself. No, he is and will be sweet. It may be, Satan smiles, and is pleasant to you while you sin; but know, he will be bitter in the end. He that sings serene like now, will devour lion like at last. He will torment you and vex you, and be burning and bitterness to you. O come in therefore to Jesus Christ; let him be now the shepherd of your soul. And know then, he will be sweet in endeavouring to keep you from sin before you commit it; and he will be sweet in delivering you from sin after you have committed it. O that this thought - that Jesus Christ is sweet in his carriage to all his members, to all his flock, especially the sinning ones, might persuade the hearts of some sinners to come in to his fold. *John Durant, 1652.*

Verse 1. Feedeth me, or is my feeder, my pastor. The word comprehends all duties of a good herd, as together feeding, guiding, governing, and defending his flock. *Henry Ainsworth.*

Verse 1. The Lord is my shepherd. Now the reasons of this resemblance I take to be these: - First, one property of a good shepherd is, skill to know and judge aright of his sheep, and hence is it that it is a usual thing to set mark upon sheep, to the end that if they go astray (as of all creatures they are most subject to wander), the shepherd may seek them up and bring them home again. The same thing is affirmed of Christ, or rather indeed Christ affirms the same thing of himself, "I know them, and they follow me." John 10:27 . Yea, doubtless, he that has numbered the stars, and calls them all by their names, yea, the very hairs of our head, takes special notice of his own children, "the sheep of his pasture", that they may be provided for and protected from all danger. Secondly, a good shepherd must have skill in the pasturing of his sheep, and in bringing them into such fruitful ground, as they may battle and thrive upon: a good shepherd will not suffer his sheep to feed upon rotten soil, but in wholesome pastures... Thirdly, a good shepherd, knowing the straying nature of his sheep, is so much the more diligent to watch over them, and if at any time they go astray, he brings them back again. This is the Lord's merciful dealing towards poor wandering souls... Fourthly, a good shepherd must have will to feed his sheep according to his skill: the Lord of all others is most willing to provide for his sheep. How

earnest is Christ with Peter, to "feed his sheep," urging him to it three several times! Fifthly, a good shepherd is provided to defend his flock... The Lord is every way provided for the safety and defence of his sheep, as David confesses in Psalm 23:4, Thy rod and your staff they comfort me. And again, "I took to me two staves" (says the Lord), "the one I called Beauty, and the other I called Bands; and I fed the flock." Zechariah 11:7. Sixthly, it is the property of a good shepherd, that if any of his sheep be weak and feeble, or his lambs young, for their safety and recovery he will bear them in his arms. The Lord is not wanting to us herein. Is. 40:11. And lastly, it is the property of a good shepherd to rejoice when the strayed sheep is brought home. The Lord thus rejoices at the conversion of a sinner. Lk. 15:7. *Samuel Smith.*

Verse 1. The Lord is my shepherd. I notice that some of the flock keep near the shepherd, and follow wherever he goes without the least hesitation, while others stray about on either side, or loiter far behind; and he often turns round and scolds them in a sharp, stern cry, or sends a stone after them. I saw him lame one just now. Not altogether unlike the good Shepherd. Indeed I never ride over these hills, clothed with flocks, without meditating upon this delightful theme. Our Saviour says that the good shepherd, when he puts forth his own sheep, goes before them, and they follow. John 10:4. This is true to the letter. They are so tame and so trained that they follow their keeper with the utmost docility. He leads them forth from the fold, or from their houses in the villages, just where he pleases. As there are many flocks in such a place as this, each one takes a different path, and it is his business to find pasture for them. It is necessary, therefore, that they should be taught to follow, and not to stray away into the unfenced fields of corn which lie so temptingly on either side. Any one that thus wanders is sure to get into trouble. The shepherd calls sharply from time to time to remind them of his presence. They know his voice, and follow on; but, if a stranger call, they stop short, lift up their heads in alarm, and, if it is repeated, they turn and flee, because they know not the voice of a stranger. This is not the fanciful costume of a parable, it is simple fact. I have made the experiment repeatedly. The shepherd goes before, not merely to point out the way, but to see that it is practicable and safe. He is armed in order to defend his charge, and in this he is very courageous. Many adventures with wild beasts occur, not unlike that recounted by David (1 Sam. 17:34-36), and in these very mountains; for though there are now no lions here, there are wolves in abundance; and leopards and panthers, exceeding fierce, prowl about the wild wadis. They not infrequently attack the flock in the very presence of the shepherd, and he must be ready to do battle at a moment's warning. I have

listened with intense interest to their graphic descriptions of downright and desperate fights with these savage beasts. And when the thief and the robber come (and come they do), the faithful shepherd has often to put his life in his hand to defend his flock. I have known more than one case in which he had literally to lay it down in the contest. A poor faithful fellow last spring, between Tiberias and Tabor, instead of fleeing, actually fought three Bedouin robbers until he was hacked to pieces with their khanjars, and died among the sheep he was defending. Some sheep always keep near the shepherd, and are his special favourites. Each of them has a name, to which it answers joyfully, and the kind shepherd is ever distributing to such, choice portions which he gathers for that purpose. These are the contented and happy ones. They are in no danger of getting lost or into mischief, nor do wild beasts or thieves come near them. The great body, however, are mere worldlings, intent upon their mere pleasures or selfish interests. They run from bush to bush, searching for variety or delicacies, and only now and then lift their heads to see where the shepherd is, or, rather where the general flock is, lest they get so far away as to occasion a remark in their little community, or rebuke from their keeper. Others, again, are restless and discontented, jumping into everybody's field, climbing into bushes, and even into leaning trees, whence they often fall and break their limbs. These cost the good shepherd incessant trouble. *W. M. Thomson, in "The Land and the Book."*

Verse 1. Shepherd. As we sat the silent hill sides around us were in a moment filled with life and sound. The shepherds led their flocks forth from the gates of the city. They were in full view, and we watched them and listened to them with no little interest. Thousands of sheep and goats were there, grouped in dense, confused masses. The shepherds stood together until all came out. Then they separated, each shepherd taking a different path, and uttering as he advanced a shrill peculiar call. The sheep heard them. At first the masses swayed and moved, as if shaken by some internal convulsion; then points struck out in the direction taken by the shepherds; these became longer and longer until the confused masses were resolved into long, living streams, flowing after their leaders. Such a sight was not new to me, still it had lost none of its interest. It was perhaps one of the most vivid illustrations which human eyes could witness of that beautiful discourse of our Lord recorded by John, "And the sheep hear the shepherd's voice: and he calls his own sheep by name, and leads them out. And when he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers", John 10:3-5. The shepherds

themselves had none of that peaceful and placid aspect which is generally associated with pastoral life and habits. They looked more like warriors marching to the battle-field - a long gun slung from the shoulder, a dagger and heavy pistols in the belt, a light battle axe or iron headed club in the hand. Such were the equipments; and their fierce flashing eyes and scowling countenances showed but too plainly that they were prepared to use their weapons at any moment. J. L. Porter, A.M., in "*The Giant Cities of Bashan*", 1867.

Verse 1. I shall not want. You must distinguish between absence, and between indigence. Absence is when something is not present; indigence or want, is when a needful good is not present. If a man were to walk, and had not a staff, here were something absent. If a man were to walk, and had but one leg, here were something whereof he were indigent. It is confessed that there are many good things which are absent from a good person, but no good thing which he wants or is indigent of. If the good be absent and I need it not, this is no want; he that walks without his cloak, walks well enough, for he needs it not. As long as I can walk carefully and cheerfully in my general or particular calling, though I have not such a load of accessories as other men have, yet I want nothing, for my little is enough and serves the turn...Our corruptions are still craving, and they are always inordinate, they can find more wants than God needs to supply. As they say of fools, they can propose more questions than twenty wise men can answer. They in James 4:3, did ask, but received not; and he gives two reasons for it: -

1. This asking was but a lusting: "ye lust and have not" (Psalms 23:4): another, they did ask to consume it upon their lusts (Psalms 23:3). God will see that his people shall not want; but he will never engage himself to the satisfying of their corruptions, though he does to the supply of their conditions. It is one thing what the sick man wants, another what his disease wants. Your ignorance, your discontents, your pride, your unthankful hearts, may make you to believe that you dwell in a barren land, far from mercies (as melancholy makes a person to imagine that he is drowning, or killing, etc.); whereas if God did open your eyes as he did Hagar's, you might see fountains and streams, mercies and blessings sufficient; though not many, yet enough, though not so rich, yet proper, and every way convenient for your good and comfort; and thus you have the genuine sense, so far as I can judge of David's assertion, I shall not want. *Obadiah Sedgwick*.

Verse 1. I shall not want. Only he that can want does not want; and he that cannot, does. You tell me that a godly man wants these and these things,

which the wicked man has; but I tell you he can no more be said to "want" them than a butcher may be said to want Homer, or such another thing, because his disposition is such, that he makes no use of those things which you usually mean. It is but only necessary things that he cares for, and those are not many. But one thing is necessary, and that he has chosen, namely, the better part. And therefore if he have nothing at all of all other things, he does not want, neither is there anything wanting which might make him rich enough, or by absence whereof, his riches should be said to be deficient. A body is not maimed unless it have lost a principal part: only things taken away cause a problem, not those that are merely negative. When we say, there is nothing wanting to such and such a creature or thing that a man has made, we mean that it has all that belongs necessarily to it. We speak not of such things as may be added for compliments or ornaments or the like, such as are those things usually wherein wicked men excel the godly. Even so it is when we say that a godly man wants nothing. For though in regard of unnecessary goods he be "as having nothing", yet in regard of others he is as if he possessed all things. He wants nothing that is necessary either for his glorifying of God (being able to do that best in and by his afflictions), or for God's glorifying of him, and making him happy, having God himself for his portion and supply of his wants, who is abundantly sufficient at all times, for all persons, in all conditions. *Zachary Bogan.*

Verse 2. He makes me to lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside the still waters. The Christian life has two elements in it, the contemplative and the active, and both of these are richly provided for. First, the contemplative. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. What are these "green pastures" but the Scriptures of truth - always fresh, always rich, and never exhausted? There is no fear of biting the bare ground where the grass is long enough for the flock to lie down in it. Sweet and full are the doctrines of the gospel; fit food for souls, as tender grass is natural nutriment for sheep. When by faith we are enabled to find rest in the promises, we are like the sheep that lie down in the midst of the pasture; we find at the same moment both provender and peace, rest and refreshment, serenity and satisfaction. But observe: "He makes me to lie down." It is the Lord who graciously enables us to perceive the preciousness of his truth, and to feed upon it. How grateful ought we to be for the power to appropriate the promises! There are some distracted souls who would give worlds if they could but do this. They know the blessedness of it, but they cannot say that this blessedness is theirs. They know the "green pastures", but they are not made to "lie down" in them. Those believers who have for years enjoyed a "full assurance of faith" should greatly bless their gracious God.

The second part of a vigorous Christian's life consists in gracious activity. We not only think, but we act. We are not always lying down to feed, but are journeying onward toward perfection; hence we read, he leads me beside the still waters. What are these "still waters" but the influences and graces of his blessed Spirit? His Spirit attends us in various operations, like waters - in the plural - to cleanse, to refresh, to fertilise, to cherish. They are "still waters", for the Holy Ghost loves peace, and sounds no trumpet of ostentation in his operations. He may flow into our soul, but not into our neighbour's, and therefore our neighbour may not perceive the divine presence; and though the blessed Spirit may be pouring his floods into one heart, yet he that sits next to the favoured one may know nothing of it.

"In sacred silence of the mind My heaven, and there my God I find."

Still waters run deep. Nothing more noisy than an empty drum. That silence is golden indeed in which the Holy Spirit meets with the souls of his saints. Not to raging waves of strife, but to peaceful streams of holy love does the Spirit of God conduct the chosen sheep. He is a dove, not an eagle; the dew, not the hurricane. Our Lord leads us beside these "still waters;" we could not go there of ourselves, we need his guidance, therefore it is said, "he leads me." He does not drive us. Moses drives us by the law, but Jesus leads us by his example, and the gentle drawing of his love.

Verse 2. He makes me to lie down in green pastures, etc. Not only he has green pastures to lead me into, which shows his ability, but he leads me into them, which shows his goodness. He leads me not into pastures that are withered and dry, that would distaste me before I taste them; but he leads me into "green pastures", as well to please my eye with the verdure as my stomach with the herbage; and inviting me, as it were, to eat by setting out the meat in the best colour. A meat though never so good, yet if it look not handsomely, it dulls the appetite; but when besides the goodness, it has also a good look, this gives the appetite another edge, and makes a joy before enjoying. But yet the goodness is not altogether in the greenness. Alas! green is but a colour, and colours are but deceitful things; they might be green leaves, or they might be green flags or rushes; and what good were to me in such a greenness? No, my soul; the goodness is in being "green pastures", for now they perform as much as they promise; and as in being green they were a comfort to me as soon as I saw them, so in being green "pastures" they are a refreshing to me now as soon as I taste them. As they are pleasant to look on, so they are wholesome to feed on: as they are sweet to be tasted, so they are easy to be digested; that I am now, I think, in a kind of paradise and seem not to want anything, unless perhaps a little water with which now and then to wash my mouth, at most to take sometimes a sip: for though sheep be not great drinkers, and though their pastures being green, and full of sap, make drink the less needful; yet some drink they must have besides. And now see the great goodness of this Shepherd, and what just cause there is to depend upon his providence; for he lets not his sheep want this neither, but "he leads them besides still waters", not waters that roar and make a noise, enough to fright a fearful sheep, but waters "still" and quiet; that though they drink but little, yet they may drink that little without fear. And may I not justly say now, The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want? And yet perhaps there will be want for all this; for is it enough that he lead them into green pastures and beside still waters? May he not lead them in, and presently take them out again before their bellies be half full; and so instead of making them happy, make them more miserable? set them in a longing with the sight, and then frustrate them of their expectation? No, my soul; the measure of this Shepherd's goodness is more than so. He not only leads them into green pastures, but "he makes them to lie down" in them - he leads them not in to post over their meat as if they were to eat a passover, and to take it in transit; but, "he makes them to lie down in green pastures", that they may eat their fill and feed at leisure; and when they have done, "lie down" and take their ease, that their after reckoning may be as pleasing as their repast.

Sir Richard Baker.

Verse 2. He leads me. Our guiding must be mild and gentle, else it is drawing and driving, and no leading. Rather by an inward sweet influence to be led, than by and outward extreme violence to be forced forward... Touching what kind of cattle, to very good purpose, Jacob, a skilful shepherd, answered Esau (who would have had Jacob and his flocks have kept company with him in his hunting pace), Nay, not so, sir, said Jacob, it is a tender cattle that is under my hands, and must be softly driven, as they may endure: if one "should over drive them but one day", they would all die or be laid up for many days after. Genesis 33:13 . *Lancelot Andrewes*.

Verse 2. He leads me, etc. In ordinary circumstances the shepherd does not feed his flock, except by leading and guiding them where they may gather for themselves; but there are times when it is otherwise. Late in autumn, when the pastures are dried up, and in winter, in places covered with snow, he must furnish them food or they die. In the vast oak woods along the eastern sides of Lebanon, between Baalbek and the cedars, there are there gathered innumerable flocks, and the shepherds are all day long in the bushy trees, cutting down the branches, upon whose green leaves and tender twigs the sheep and goats are entirely supported. The same is true in all mountain districts, and large forests are preserved on purpose. *W. M. Thomson*.

Verse 2. Lie down - leads. Sitting Mary and stirring Martha are emblems of contemplation and action, and as they dwell in one house, so must these in one heart. *Nathanael Hardy*.

Verse 2. This short but touching epitaph is frequently seen in the catacombs at Rome, "In Christo, in pace" - (In Christ, in peace). Realise the constant presence of the Shepherd of peace. "HE makes me to lie down!" "HE leads me." *J. R. Macduff*.

Verse 2. (last clause). Easily leads, or comfortably guides me: it notes a soft and gentle leading, with sustaining of infirmity. *H. Ainsworth*.

Verse 2. Green pastures. Here are many pastures, and every pasture rich so that it can never be eaten bare; here are many streams, and every stream so deep and wide that it can never be drawn dry. The sheep have been eating in these pastures ever since Christ had a church on earth, and yet they are as full of grass as ever. The sheep have been drinking at these streams ever since Adam, and yet they are brim full to this day, and they will so continue till the sheep are no longer need them in heaven! *Ralph Robinson, 1656*.

Verse 2. Green pastures... beside the still waters. From the top of the mound (of Arban on the Khabour) the eye ranged over a level country bright with flowers, and spotted with black tents, and innumerable flocks of sheep and camels. During our stay at Arban, the colour of these great plains was undergoing a continual change. After being for some days of a golden yellow, a new family of flowers would spring up, and it would turn almost in a night to a bright scarlet, which would again as suddenly give way to the deepest blue. Then the meadows would be mottled with various hues, or would put on the emerald green of the most luxuriant of pastures. The glowing descriptions I had so frequently received from the Bedouins of the beauty and fertility of the banks of the Khabour were more than realised. The Arabs boast that its meadows bear three distinct crops of grass during the year, and the wandering tribes look upon its wooded banks and constant greensward as a paradise during the summer months, where man can enjoy a cool shade, and beast can find fresh and tender herbs, whilst all around is yellow, parched, and sapless. *Austin Layard, 1853.*

Verse 2. With guidance to green pastures, the psalmist has, with good reason, associated guardianship beside still waters: for as we can only appropriate the word through the Spirit, so we shall ordinarily receive the Spirit through the Word; not indeed only by hearing it, not only by reading it, not only by reflecting upon it. The Spirit of God, who is a most free agent, and who is himself the source of liberty, will come into the heart of the believer when he will, and how he will, and as he will. But the effect of his coming will ever be the realisation of some promise, the recognition of some principle, the attainment of some grace, the understanding of some mystery, which is already in the word, and which we shall thus find, with a deeper impression, and with a fuller development, brought home with power to the heart. *Thomas Dale, in "The Good Shepherd", 1847.*

Verse 2. Still waters; which are opposed to great rivers, which both affright the sheep with their noise, and expose them to the danger of being carried away, whilst they are drinking at them. *Matthew Poole.*

Verse 2. Still waters; Hebrew, "Waters of rests", such as sheep love to drink of, says Kimchi, because void of danger, and yielding a refreshing air. The doctrine of the gospel, like the waters of Siloe (Isaiah 8:8), run gently, but taste pleasantly. *John Trapp.*

Verse 3. He restores my soul. When the soul grows sorrowful he revives it; when it is sinful he sanctifies it; when it is weak he strengthens it. "He" does it. His ministers could not do it if he did not. His Word would not avail by itself. "He restores my soul." Are any of us low in grace? Do we feel that our spirituality is at its lowest ebb? He who turns the ebb into the flood can soon restore our soul. Pray to him, then, for the blessing - "Restore you me, you Shepherd of my soul!"

He leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. The Christian delights to be obedient, but it is the obedience of love, to which he is constrained by the example of his Master. "He leads me." The Christian is not obedient to some commandments and neglectful of others; he does not pick and choose, but yields to all. Observe, that the plural is used - "the paths of righteousness." Whatever God may give us to do we would do it, led by his love. Some Christians overlook the blessing of sanctification, and yet to a thoroughly renewed heart this is one of the sweetest gifts of the covenant. If we could be saved from wrath, and yet remain unregenerate, impenitent sinners, we should not be saved as we desire, for we mainly and chiefly pant to be saved from sin and led in the way of holiness. All this is done out of pure free grace; "for his name's sake." It is to the honour of our great Shepherd that we should be a holy people, walking in the narrow way of righteousness. If we be so led and guided we must not fail to adore our heavenly Shepherd's care.

Verse 3. He restores my soul, etc. The subjects experimentally treated in this verse are, first, the believer's liability to fall, or deviate even within the fold of the church, else why should he need to be "restored?" Next, the promptitude of the Good Shepherd to interpose for his rescue. "He restores my soul." Then Christ's subsequent care to lead him in the paths of righteousness; and lastly, the reason assigned why he will do this - resolving all into the spontaneousness, the supremacy, the omnipotence of grace. He will do all for his own name's sake. *Thomas Dale.*

Verse 3. He restores my soul. The same hand which first rescued us from ruin, reclaims us from all our subsequent falls. Chastisement itself is blended with tenderness; and the voice which reproves, saying, "They have perverted their way, and forsaken the Lord their God," utters the kindest invitation, "Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." Nor is the voice unheard, and the call unanswered or unfelt. "Behold, we come to you; for you are the Lord our God." Jer 3:22. "When you said, Seek my face; my heart said to you, Your face, Lord, will I seek." *J. Thornton, 1826.*

Verse 3. He restores my soul. He restores it to its original purity, that was now grown foul and black with sin; for also, what good were it to have "green" pastures and a black soul! He "restores" it to its natural temper in affections, that was grown distempered with violence of passions; for alas! what good were it to have "still" waters and turbulent spirits! He "restores" it indeed to life, that was grown before in a manner quite dead; and who could "restore my soul" to life, but he only that is the Good Shepherd and gave his life for his sheep? *Sir Richard Baker.*

Verse 3. He shall convert my soul; turn me not only from sin and ignorance, but from every false confidence, and every deceitful refuge. He shall bring me forth in paths of righteousness; in those paths of imputed righteousness which are always adorned with the trees of holiness, are always watered with the fountains of consolation, and always terminate in everlasting rest. Some, perhaps, may ask, why I give this sense to the passage? Why may it not signify the paths of duty, and the way of our own obedience? Because such effects here mentioned never have resulted, and never can result, from any duties of our own. These are not green pastures, but a parched and blasted heath. These are not still waters, but a troubled stream. Neither can these speak peace or administer comfort when we pass through the valley and shadow of death. To yield these blessings is the exalted office of Christ, and the sole prerogative of his obedience. *James Hervey.*

Verse 3. He restores my soul: Hebrew. "He brings it back;" either,
1. From its errors or wandering; or,
2. Into the body, out of which it was even departing and fainting away. He revives or comforts me. *Matthew Poole.*

Verse 3. Paths of righteousness. Alas! O Lord, these "paths of righteousness", have a long time so little been frequented, that the prints of a path are almost clean worn out; that it is a hard matter now, but to find where the paths lie, and if we can find them, yet they are so narrow and so full of ruts, that without special assistance it is an impossible thing not to fall or go astray. Even so angels, and those no mean ones, were not able to go right in these "paths of righteousness", but for want of leading, went away and perished. O, therefore, Great Shepherd of my soul, as you are pleased of your grace to lead me into them, so vouchsafe with your grace to lead me in them; for though in themselves they be "paths of righteousness", yet to me they will be but paths of error if you vouchsafe not, as well to lead me in them, as into them. *Sir Richard Baker.*

Verse 3. Paths. In the wilderness and in the desert there are no raised paths, the paths being merely tracks; and sometimes there are six or eight paths running unevenly along side each other. No doubt this is what is figuratively referred to in Psalm 23:3 , "He leads me in the paths of righteousness", all leading to one point. *John Gadsby.*

Verse 3. For his name's sake. Seeing he has taken upon him the name of a "Good Shepherd", he will discharge his part, whatever his sheep be. It is not their being bad sheep that can make him leave being a "Good Shepherd", but he will be "good", and maintain the credit of "his name" in spite of all their badness; and though no benefit come to them of it, yet there shall glory accrue to him by it, and "his name" shall nevertheless be magnified and extolled. *Sir Richard Baker.*

Verse 4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me. This unspeakably delightful verse has been sung on many a dying bed, and has helped to make the dark valley bright times out of mind. Every word in it has a wealth of meaning.

Yea, though I walk, as if the believer did not quicken his pace when he came to die, but still calmly walked with God. To walk indicates the steady advance of a soul which knows its road, knows its end, resolves to follow the path, feels quite safe, and is therefore perfectly calm and composed. The dying saint is not in a flurry, he does not run as though he were alarmed, nor stand still as though he would go no further, he is not confounded nor ashamed, and therefore keeps to his old pace. Observe that it is not walking in the valley, but through the valley. We go through the dark tunnel of death and emerge into the light of immortality. We do not die, we do but sleep to wake in glory. Death is not the house but the porch, not the goal but the passage to it. The dying article is called a valley. The storm breaks on the mountain, but the valley is the place of quietude, and thus full often the last days of the Christian are the most peaceful of his whole career; the mountain is bleak and bare, but the valley is rich with golden sheaves, and many a saint has reaped more joy and knowledge when he came to die than he ever knew while he lived. And, then, it is not "the valley of death," but the valley of the shadow of death, for death in its substance has been removed, and only the shadow of it remains. Some one has said that when there is a shadow there must be light somewhere, and so there is. Death stands by the side of the highway in which we have to travel, and the light of heaven shining upon him throws a shadow across our path; let us then rejoice that there is a light beyond. Nobody is afraid of a shadow, for a shadow cannot stop a man's pathway even for a moment. The shadow of a dog cannot bite; the shadow of a sword cannot kill; the shadow of death cannot destroy us. Let us not, therefore, be afraid.

I will fear no evil. He does not say there shall not be any evil; he had got beyond even that high assurance, and knew that Jesus had put all evil away; but "I will fear no evil;" as if even his fears, those shadows of evil, were gone for ever. The worst evils of life are those which do not exist except in our imagination. If we had no troubles but real troubles, we should not have a tenth part of our present sorrows. We feel a thousand deaths in fearing one, but the psalmist was cured of the disease of fearing. "I will fear no evil", not even the Evil One himself; I will not dread the last enemy, I will look upon him as a conquered foe, an enemy to be destroyed, For you are with me. This is the joy of the Christian! "You are with me." The little child out at sea in the

storm is not frightened like all the other passengers on board the vessel, it sleeps in its mother's bosom; it is enough for it that its mother is with it; and it should be enough for the believer to know that Christ is with him. "You are with me; I have, in having you, all that I can crave: I have perfect comfort and absolute security, for you are with me."

Your rod and your staff, by which you govern and rule your flock, the ensigns of your sovereignty and of your gracious care - they comfort me. I will believe that you reign still. The rod of Jesse shall still be over me as the sovereign succour of my soul.

Many persons profess to receive much comfort from the hope that they shall not die. Certainly there will be some who will be "alive and remain" at the coming of the Lord, but is there so very much of advantage in such an escape from death as to make it the object of Christian desire? A wise man might prefer of the two to die, for those who shall not die, but who "shall be caught up together with the Lord in the air," will be losers rather than gainers. They will lose that actual fellowship with Christ in the tomb which dying saints will have, and we are expressly told that they shall have no preference beyond those who are asleep. Let us be of Paul's mind when he said that "To die is gain", and think of "departing to be with Christ, which is far better." This twenty-third psalm is not worn out, and it is as sweet in a believer's ear now as it was in David's time, let novelty hunters say what they will.

Verse 4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. To "fear no evil", then, "in the valley of the shadow of death", is a blessed privilege open to every true believer! For death shall be to him no death at all, but a very deliverance from death, from all pains, cares, and sorrows, miseries and wretchedness of this world, and the very entry into rest, and a beginning of everlasting joy: a tasting of heavenly pleasures, so great, that neither tongue is able to express, neither eyes to see, nor ear to hear them, no, nor any earthly man's heart to conceive them. And to comfort all Christian persons herein, holy Scripture calls this bodily death a sleep, wherein man's senses be, as it were, taken from him for a season, and yet, when he wakes, he is more fresh than when he went to bed!... Thus is this bodily death a door or entering into life, and therefore not so much dreadful, if it be rightly considered, as it is comfortable; not a mischief, but a remedy for all mischief; no enemy, but a friend; not a cruel tyrant, but a gentle guide; leading us not to mortality, but to immortality! not to sorrow and pain, but to joy and pleasure, and that to endure for ever! *Homily against the Fear of Death, 1547.*

Verse 4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Though I were called to such a sight as Ezekiel's vision, a valley full of dead men's bones; though the king of terrors should ride in awful pomp through the streets, slaying heaps upon heaps, and thousands should fall at my side, and ten thousands at my right hand, I will fear no evil. Though he should level his fatal arrows at the little circle of my associates, and put lover and friend far from me, and my acquaintance into darkness, I will fear no evil. Yea, though I myself should feel his arrow sticking fast in me, the poison drinking up my spirits; though I should in consequence of that fatal seizure, sicken and languish, and have all the symptoms of approaching dissolution, still I will fear no evil. Nature, indeed, may start back and tremble, but I trust that he who knows the flesh to be weak, will pity and pardon these struggles. However I may be afraid of the agonies of dying, I will fear no evil in death. The venom of his sting is taken away. The point of his arrow is blunted, so that it can pierce no deeper than the body. My soul is invulnerable. I can smile at the shaking of his spear; look unmoved on the ravages which the unrelenting destroyer is making on my tabernacle; and long for the happy period when he shall have made a breach wide enough for my heaven aspiring spirit to fly away and be at rest. *Samuel Lavinton.*

Verse 4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. "I want to talk to you about heaven", said a dying parent to a member of his family. "We may not be spared to each other long. May we meet around the throne of glory, one family in heaven!" Overpowered at the thought, his beloved daughter exclaimed, "Surely you do not think there is any danger?" Calmly and beautifully he replied, "Danger, my darling! Oh, do not use that word! There can be no danger to the Christian, whatever may happen! All is right! All is well! God is love! All is well! Everlastingly well! Everlastingly well!" *John Stevenson.*

Verse 4. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. What not fear then? Why, what friend is it that keeps up your spirits, that bears you company in that black and dismal region? He will soon tell you God was with him, and in those slippery ways he leaned upon his staff, and these were the cordials that kept his heart from fainting. I challenge all the gallants in the world, out of all their merry, jovial clubs, to find such a company of merry, cheerful creatures as the friends of God are. It is not the company of God, but the want of it, that makes sad. Alas! you know not what their comforts be, and strangers meddle not with their joy. You think they cannot be merry when their countenance is so grave; but they are sure you

cannot be truly merry when you smile with a curse upon your souls. They know that he spoke that sentence which could not be mistaken, "Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness." Proverbs 14:13 . Then call your roaring, and your singing, and laughter, mirth; but the Spirit of God calls it madness. Ecclesiastes 2:2 . When a carnal man's heart is ready to die within him, and, with Nabal, to become like a stone, how cheerfully then can those look that have God for their friend! Which of the valiant ones of the world can outface death, look joyfully into eternity? Which of them can hug a faggot, embrace the flames? This the saint can do, and more too; for he can look infinite justice in the face with a cheerful heart; he can hear of hell with joy and thankfulness; he can think of the day of judgment with great delight and comfort. I again challenge all the world to produce one out of all their merry companies, one that can do all this. Come, muster up all your jovial blades together; call for your harps and viols; add what you will to make the concert complete; bring in your richest wines; come, lay your heads together, and study what may still add to your comfort. Well, it is done? Now, come away, sinner, this night your soul must appear before God. Well now, what say you, man? What! does your courage fail you? Now call for your merry companions, and let them cheer your heart. Now call for a cup, a whore; never be daunted, man. Shall one of your courage quail, that could make a mock at the threatenings of the Almighty God? What, so boon and jolly but now, and now down in the mouth! Here's a sudden change indeed! Where are your merry companions, I say again? All fled? Where are your darling pleasures? Have all forsaken you? Why should you be dejected; there's a poor man in rags that's smiling? What! are you quite bereft of all comfort? What's the matter? There's a question with all my heart, to ask a man that must appear before God tomorrow morning. Well, then, it seems your heart misgives you. What then did you mean of talk of joys and pleasures? Are they all come to this? Why, there stands one that now has his heart as full of comfort as ever it can hold, and the very thoughts of eternity, which do so daunt your soul, raise his! And would you know the reason? He knows he is going to his Friend; nay, his Friend bears him company through that dirty lane. Behold how good and how pleasant a thing it is for God and the soul to dwell together in unity! This it is to have God for a friend. "Oh blessed is the soul that is in such a case; yea, blessed is the soul whose God is the Lord." Psalms 144:15. *James Janeway.*

Verse 4. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. Any darkness is evil, but darkness and the shadow of death is the utmost of evils. David put the worst of his case and the best of his faith when he said,

Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; that is, in the greatest evil I will fear no evil... Again, to be under the shadow of a thing, is to be under the power of a thing... Thus to be under the shadow of death, is to be so under the power or reach of death, that death may take a man and seize upon him when it pleases. "Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death", that is, though I be so near death, that it seems to others death may catch me every moment, though I be under so many appearances and probabilities of extreme danger, that there appears an impossibility to escape death, "yet I will not fear." *Joseph Caryl.*

Verse 4. Valley of the shadow of death. A valley is a low place, with mountains on either side. Enemies may be posted on those mountains to shoot their arrows at the traveller, as ever was the case in the East; but he must pass through it. The psalmist, however, said he would fear no evil, not even the fiery darts of Satan, for the Lord was with him. The figure is not primarily, as is sometimes supposed, our dying moments, though it will beautifully bear that explanation; but it is the valley beset with enemies, posted on the hills. David was not only protected in that valley, but even in the presence of those enemies, his table was bountifully spread (Psalms 23:5). The Bedouin, at the present day often post themselves on the hills to harass travellers, as they pass along the valleys. *John Gadsby.*

Verse 4. I will fear no evil. It has been an ancient proverb, when a man had done some great matter, he was said to have "plucked a lion by the beard;" when a lion is dead, even to little children it has been an easy matter. As boys, when they see a bear, a lion, or a wolf dead in the streets, they will pull off their hair, insult over them, and deal with them as they please; they will trample upon their bodies, and do that to them being dead, which they dared not in the least measure venture upon whilst they are alive. Such a thing is death, a furious beast, a ramping lion, a devouring wolf, the eater up of mankind, yet Christ has laid him at his length, has been the death of death, so that God's children triumph over him, such as those refined ones in the ore of the church, those martyrs of the primitive times, who cheerfully offered themselves to the fire, and to the sword, and to all the violence of this hungry beast; and have played upon him, scorned and derided him, by the faith that they had in the life of Christ, who has subdued him to himself. *Martin Day, 1660.*

Verse 4. You are with me. Do you know the sweetness, the security, the strength of "You are with me"? When anticipating the solemn hour of death,

when the soul is ready to halt and ask, How shall it then be? can you turn in soul affection to your God and say, "There is nothing in death to harm me, while your love is left to me"? Can you say, "O death, where is your sting"? It is said, when a bee has left its sting in any one, it has no more power to hurt. Death has left its sting in the humanity of Christ, and has no more power to harm his child. Christ's victory over the grave is his people's. "At that moment I am with you," whispers Christ; "the same arm you have proved strong and faithful all the way up through the wilderness, which has never failed, though you have been often forced to lean on it all your weakness." "On this arm," answers the believer, "I feel at home; with soul confidence, I repose on my Beloved; for he has supported through so many difficulties, from the contemplation of which I shuddered. He has carried over so many depths, that I know his arm to be the arm of love." How can that be dark, in which God's child is to have the accomplishment of the longing desire of his life? How can it be dark to come in contact with the light of life? It is his rod, his staff; therefore they comfort. Prove him - prove him now, believer! it is your privilege to do so. It will be precious to him to support your weakness; prove that when weak, then are you strong; that you may be secure, his strength shall be perfected in your perfect weakness. Omnipotent love must fail before one of his sheep can perish; for, says Christ, "none shall pluck my sheep out of my hand." "I and my Father are one;" therefore we may boldly say, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me." *Viscountess Powerscourt*.

Verse 4. Thy rod. Of the shepherd's rod there are three uses: -

1. Numerare oves - to reckon up or count the sheep; and in this sense they are said "to pass under the rod" (Leviticus 27:32), the shepherd tells them one by one. And even so are the people of God called the rod of his inheritance (Jeremiah 10:16), such as he takes special notice or account of. And take the words in this sense - Thy rod does comfort me - it holds well; "Though I am in such eminent dangers by reason of evil men, yet this is my comfort - I am not neglected of you; you dost not suffer me to perish; you take notice of me; you dost take and make an account of me; your special care looks after me."

2. Provocare oves: when the sheep are negligent and remiss in following or driving, the shepherd does, with his rod, put them on, quicken their pace. And in this sense also David says well, "Thy rod comforts me;" for it is a work which does breed much joy and comfort in the hearts of God's people, when God does put them out of a lazy, cold, formal walking, and does, some way or other, cause them to mend their pace, to grow more active and fervent in his

service and worship.

3.Revocare oves: the sheep sometimes are wanderers, idly and inconsiderately straying from the flock, grazing alone, and wandering after other pastures, not considering the dangers which attend them by such a separation and wandering; and, therefore, the shepherd does with his rod strike and fetch them in again, and so preserve them. In this sense also David might well say, "Your rod comforts me;" for it is a great comfort that the Lord will not leave his sheep to the ways of discomfort, but brings them off from sinful errings and wanderings, which always expose them to their greatest dangers and troubles. So that the words do intimate a singular part of God's governing, or careful providence of his flock. *Obadiah Sedgwick.*

Verse 4. Rod and staff. The shepherd invariably carries a staff or rod with him when he goes forth to feed his flock. It is often bent or hooked at one end, which gave rise to the shepherd's crook in the hand of the Christian bishop. With this staff he rules and guides the flock to their green pastures, and defends them from their enemies. With it also he corrects them when disobedient, and brings them back when wandering. This staff is associated as inseparably with the shepherd as the goad is with the ploughman. *W. M. Thomson.*

Verse 4. The psalmist will trust, even though all be unknown. We find him doing this in Psalm 23:4 : Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Here, surely, there is trust the most complete. We dread the unknown far above anything that we can see; a little noise in the dark will terrify, when even great dangers which are visible do not affright: the unknown, with its mystery and uncertainty, often fills the heart with anxiety, if not with foreboding and gloom. Here, the psalmist takes the highest form of the unknown, the aspect which is most terrible to man, and says, that even in the midst of it he will trust. What could be so wholly beyond the reach of human experience or speculation, or even imagination, as "the valley of the shadow of death", with all that belonged to it? but the psalmist makes no reservation against it; he will trust where he cannot see. How often are we terrified at the unknown; even as the disciples were, "who feared as they entered the cloud;" how often is the uncertainty of the future a harder trial to our faith than the pressure of some present ill! Many dear children of God can trust him in all known evils; but why those fears and forebodings, and sinkings of heart, if they trust him equally for the unknown? How much, alas! do we fall short of the true character of the children of God, in this matter of the unknown! A child practically acts upon

the declaration of Christ that "sufficient to the day is the evil thereof," we, in this respect far less wise than he, people the unknown with phantoms and speculations, and too often forget our simple trust in God. *Philip Power*.

Verse 4. For you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me. You shalt prepare a table before me, against them that trouble me. You have anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full. Seeing you are with me, at whose power and will all troubles go and come, I doubt not but to have the victory and upper hand of them, how many and dangerous soever they are; for your rod chastens me when I go astray, and your staff stays me when I should fall - two things most necessary for me, good Lord; the one to call me from my fault and error, and the other to keep me in your truth and verity. What can be more blessed than to be sustained and kept from falling by the staff and strength of the Most High? And what can be more profitable than to be beaten with his merciful rod when we go astray? For he chastens as many as he loves, and beats as many as he receives into his holy profession. Notwithstanding, while we are here in this life, he feeds us with the sweet pastures of the wholesome herbs of his holy word, until we come to eternal life; and when we put off these bodies, and come into heaven, and know the blessed fruition and riches of his kingdom, then shall we not only be his sheep, but also the guests of his everlasting banquet; which, Lord, you set before all them that love you in this world, and so anoint and make glad our minds with your Holy Spirit, that no adversities nor troubles can make us sorry. In this sixth part, the prophet declares the old saying amongst wise men, "It is no less mastery to keep the thing that is won, than it was to win it." King David perceives right well the same; and, therefore, as before in the Psalm he said, the Lord turned his soul, and led him into the pleasant pastures, where virtue and justice reigned, for his name's sake, and not for any righteousness of his own; so says he now, that being brought into the pastures of truth, and into the favour of the Almighty, and accounted and taken for one of his sheep, it is only God that keeps and maintains him, in the same state, condition, and grace. For he could not pass through the troubles and shadow of death, as he and all God's elect people must do, but only by the assistance of God, and, therefore, he says, he passes through all peril because he was with him. *John Hooper (martyr), 1495- 1555*.

Verse 4. By the way, I note that David amidst his green pastures, where he wanted nothing, and in his greatest ease and highest excellency, records the valley of misery and shade of death which might ensue, if God so would; and from that reckons of his safest harbour and firm repose, even in God alone.

And this is true wisdom indeed, in fair weather to provide for a tempest; in health to think of sickness; in prosperity, peace, and quietness, to forecast the worst, and with the wise ant, in summer to lay up for the winter following. The state of man is full of trouble, the condition of the godly man more. Sinners must be corrected, and sons chastised, there is no question. The ark was framed for the waters, the ship for the sea; and happy is the mariner that knoweth where to cast anchor; but, oh! blessed is the man that can take a right sanctuary, and knoweth whereupon to rely, and in whom to trust in the day of his need. I will not fear, for you are with me. In this Psalm, I take it, is rather vouched not what the prophet always performed, but what in duty must be performed, and what David's purpose was to endeavour to for the time to come. For after so many pledges of God's infinite goodness, and by the guidance of his rod and stay of his sheep hook, God willing, he would not fear, and this is the groundwork of his affiance. Peter in the gospel by our Saviour, in consideration of infirmity through fear denying his Master, is willed after his conversion by that favourable aspect of our Saviour, to confirm his brethren, and to train them in constancy; for truly God requires settled minds, resolute men, and confirmed brethren. So upon occasions past, David found it true that he should not have been heretofore at any time, and therefore professes, that for the time to come he would be no marigold servant of the Lord, to open with the sun and shut with the dew - to serve him in calmer times only, and at a need, to shoot neck out of collar, fearfully and faithlessly to slip aside or shrink away. Good people, in all heartless imperfections, mark, I pray you, that they who fear every mist that arises, or cloud that appears - who are like the mulberry tree, that never shoots forth or shows itself till all hard weather be past - who, like bystanders and lookers on, dare not venture upon, nor enter into, nor endeavour any good action of greatest duty to God, prince, or country, till all be sure in one side - are utterly reprov'd by this example. *John Prime, 1588.*

Verse 5. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. The good man has his enemies. He would not be like his Lord if he had not. If we were without enemies we might fear that we were not the friends of God, for the friendship of the world is enmity to God. Yet see the quietude of the godly man in spite of, and in the sight of, his enemies. How refreshing is his calm bravery!

You prepare a table before me. When a soldier is in the presence of his enemies, if he eats at all he snatches a hasty meal, and away he hastens to the fight. But observe: "You prepare a table," just as a servant does when she unfolds the damask cloth and displays the ornaments of the feast on an ordinary peaceful occasion. Nothing is hurried, there is no confusion, no disturbance, the enemy is at the door, and yet God prepares a table, and the Christian sits down and eats as if everything were in perfect peace. Oh! the peace which Jehovah gives to his people, even in the midst of the most trying circumstances!

"Let earth be all in arms abroad,
They dwell in perfect peace."

You anoint my head with oil. May we live in the daily enjoyment of this blessing, receiving a fresh anointing for every day's duties. Every Christian is a priest, but he cannot execute the priestly office without unction, and hence we must go day by day to God the Holy Ghost, that we may have our heads anointed with oil. A priest without oil misses the chief qualification for his office, and the Christian priest lacks his chief fitness for service when he is devoid of new grace from on high.

My cup overflows. He had not only enough, a cup full, but more than enough, a cup which overflowed. A poor man may say this as well as those in higher circumstances. "What, all this, and Jesus Christ too?" said a poor cottager as she broke a piece of bread and filled a glass with cold water. Whereas a man may be ever so wealthy, but if he be discontented his cup cannot run over; it is cracked and leaks. Content is the philosopher's stone which turns all it touches into gold; happy is he who has found it. Content is more than a kingdom, it is another word for happiness.

Verse 5. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. God does not at all depend upon wicked men in the benediction of his servant; they concur not with him, neither to initiate, for he alone is the cause; nor to assist, for he without them can bless his all: their malicious attempt against God's blessing of his people, is too impotent to frustrate God's intention and pleasure. An effectual impediment must not only have contrariety in it, but superiority: a drop of water cannot put out the fire, for though it has a

contrary nature, yet it has not greater power. Now the malice and contrivances of evil men are too short and weak for the divine intention of blessing, which is accompanied with an almighty arm. Evil men are but men, and God is a God; and being but men, they can do no more than men. The Lord will clear it to all the world, that he rules the earth, and that "his counsel shall stand;" and where he blesses, that man shall be blessed; and whom he curses, that man shall be cursed; that the creatures can do neither good nor evil; that his people are the generation of his care and love, though living in the midst of deadly enemies. *Condensed from Obadiah Sedgwick.*

Verse 5. In the presence of my enemies: they seeing and envying and fretting at it, but not being able to hinder it. *Matthew Poole.*

Verse 5. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. In the East the people frequently anoint their visitors with some very fragrant perfume; and give them a cup or glass of some choice wine, which they are careful to fill till it runs over. The first was designed to show their love and respect; the latter to imply that while they remained there, they should have an abundance of everything. To something of this kind the psalmist probably alludes in this passage. *Samuel Burder.*

Verse 5. You anoint my head with oil. Anointing the head with oil is a great refreshment. There are three qualities of oil - a smoothness to the touch, brightness to the sight, fragrancy to the smell, and so, gratifying the senses, it must needs cause delight to those anointed with it. To this Solomon alludes when persuading to a cheerful life, he says, "Let your head lack no ointment." How fully does this represent the Spirit's unction which alone rejoices and exhilarates the soul! It is called the "oil of gladness", and the "joy of the Holy Ghost." *Nathanael Hardy.*

Verse 5. You anoint my head with oil. It is an act of great respect to pour perfumed oil on the head of a distinguished guest; the woman in the gospel thus manifested her respect for the Saviour by pouring "precious ointment" on his head. An English lady went on board an Arabian ship which touched at Trincomalee, for the purpose of seeing the equipment of the vessel, and to make some little purchases. After she had been seated some time in the cabin, an Arabian female came and poured perfumed oil on her head. *Joseph Roberts.*

Verse 5. You anoint my head with oil. In the East no entertainment could be without this, and it served, as elsewhere a bath does, for (bodily) refreshment. Here, however, it is naturally to be understood of the spiritual oil of gladness. *T. C. Barth.*

Verse 5. You anoint my head with oil. You have not confined your bounty merely to the necessities of life, but you have supplied me also with its luxuries. In *"A plain Explanation of Difficult Passages in the Psalms"*, 1831.

Verse 5. You anoint my head with oil. The unguents of Egypt may preserve our bodies from corruption, ensuring them a long duration in the dreary shades of the sepulchre, but, O Lord, the precious perfumed oil of your grace which you dost mysteriously pour upon our souls, purifies them, adorns them, strengthens them, sows in them the germs of immortality, and thus it not only secures them from a transitory corruption, but uplifts them from this house of bondage into eternal blessedness in your bosom. *Jean Baptiste Massillon, 1663-1742.*

Verse 5. My cup overflows. He had not only a fulness of abundance, but of redundance. Those that have this happiness must carry their cup upright, and see that it overflows into their poor brethren's emptier vessels. *John Trapp.*

Verse 5. My cup overflows. Why does the Lord make you cup run over, but that other men's lips might taste the liquor? The showers that fall upon the highest mountains, should glide into the lowest valleys. "Give, and it shall be given you", is a maxim little believed. Luke 6:38. *William Secker.*

Verse 5. My cup overflows. Or as it is in the Vulgate: And my inebriating chalice, how excellent it is! With this cup were the martyrs inebriated, when, going forth to their passion, they recognised not those that belonged to them; not their weeping wife, not their children, not their relations; while they gave thanks and said, "I will take the cup of salvation!" *Augustine.*

Verse 6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. This is a fact as indisputable as it is encouraging, and therefore a heavenly truly, or "surely" is set as a seal upon it. This sentence may be read, "only goodness and mercy," for there shall be unmingled mercy in our history. These twin guardian angels will always be with me at my back and my beck. Just as when great princes go abroad they must not go unattended, so it is

with the believer. Goodness and mercy follow him always - all the days of his life - the black days as well as the bright days, the days of fasting as well as the days of feasting, the dreary days of winter as well as the bright days of summer. Goodness supplies our needs, and mercy blots out our sins.

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. "A servant abides not in the house for ever, but the son abideth ever." While I am here I will be a child at home with my God; the whole world shall be his house to me; and when I ascend into the upper chamber, I shall not change my company, nor even change the house; I shall only go to dwell in the upper storey of the house of the Lord for ever. May God grant us grace to dwell in the serene atmosphere of this most blessed Psalm!

Verse 6. I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. A wicked man, it may be, will turn into God's house, and say a prayer, etc., but the prophet would (and so all godly men must) dwell there for ever; his soul lies always at the throne of grace, begging for grace. A wicked man prays as the cock crows; the cock crows and ceases, and crows again, and ceases again, and thinks not of crowing till he crows again: so a wicked man prays and ceases, prays and ceases again; his mind is never busied to think whether his prayers speed or no; he thinks it is good religion for him to pray, and therefore he takes for granted that his prayers speed, though in very deed God never hears his prayers, nor no more respects them than he respects the lowing of oxen, or the grunting of hogs. *William Fenner, (1600-1640)*

Verse 6. I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. This should be at once the crown of all our hopes for the future, and the one great lesson taught us by all the vicissitudes of life. The sorrows and the joys, the journeying and the rest, the temporary repose and the frequent struggles, all these should make us sure that there is an end which will interpret them all, to which they all point, for which they all prepare. We get the table in the wilderness here. It is as when the son of some great king comes back from foreign soil to his father's dominions, and is welcomed at every stage in his journey to the capital with pomp of festival and messengers from the throne, until at last he enters his palace home, where the travel stained robe is laid aside, and he sits down with his father at his table. *A. Maclaren, 1863.*

Verse 6. Mark David's resolute persuasion, and consider how he came to it, namely, by experience of God's favour at sundry times, and after sundry manners. For before he set down this resolution, he numbered up divers benefits received of the Lord; that he fed him in green pastures, and led him

by the refreshing waters of God's word; that he restores him and leads him in the paths of righteousness; that he strengthened him in great dangers, even of death, and preserves him; that in despite of his enemies, he enriches him with many benefits. By means of all the mercies of God bestowed on him, he came to be persuaded of the continuance of the favour of God towards him. *William Perkins.*