THE EXCELLENCE OF THE PSALMS.

AN ADDRESS,

BY

REV. DR. D. B. WILLSON,

Professor in Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Allegheny, Pa.

PITTSBURGH:

THE HUGH & SCHRADER COMPANY, PRINTERS, 222 WILD STREET.

1846.
The Excellence of the Psalms.

Opening Lecture of the Theological Seminary, Allegheny, Pa., September 17, 1858.

By Prof. D. B. Willson.

Gentlemen of the Theological Class:

My subject this evening is The Excellence of the Psalms.

May we say of them as John Arndt, the first of the Psalms, said: "What the heart is in man, that the Psalter is in the Bible." It is part of the word of God, part of that Scripture which is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works. It is a wonderful mosaic, whose pieces are of unequal age, the whole of matchless beauty. Of it, Delitzsch says: "This book has no equal in the expanse of time which it reflects, beginning with the wanderings in the wilderness, 1450 years before Christ, and reaching down to the building of the second temple, 800 years later." Bishop Wordsworth says of the fourth book of the Psalter (Psalms 88-150): "This book has a very comprehensive character. It goes back to Moses, and it goes forward to the captivity and to the return from it. It reaches from Moses to Malachi." Porsonus, another commentator on the Psalms, has written of them: "The history of the Psalms is the history of the church, and the history of every heart in which has burned the love of God. It is history not fully revealed in this world, but one which is written in heaven." * To the same purpose Tholuck has written: "What a record that would be, if one could write down all the spiritual experiences, the disclosures of the heart, the comforts and conflicts, which men in the course of ages have connected with the words of the Psalms! What a history if we could discover the place this book has occupied in the inner life of the heroes of the kingdom of God!" + Porsonus, already quoted, gives

+ Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Introduction, Sec. 1.
The Excellence of the Psalms.

us the reason of this boundless love: "The nature of the volume accounts for this, for it is in itself to a very great extent, the conserved of the soul with God. With its words, rather than with their own (they believe) have come before God. In these they have uttered their desires, their fears, their confessions, their aspirations, their sorrows, their joys, their thanksgivings. By these their devotion has been kindled and their hearts comforted. The Psalter has been, in the truest sense, the prayer book both of Jews and Christians." Even of one of the Psalms, the 51st, Dyer has said after giving many incidents: "Indeed the history of this Psalm is the history of the Christian soul, and in it the suffering and sinning of all ages have found the expression of their own unworthiness and the comfort that comes from a true confession."

I shall gather what I have to say of The Excellence of the Psalms under two heads: 1. The Use of the Psalms in the Past—how dear they have been to believers in all ages! The Contents of the Psalms—how full of the truth of God! I shall close by speaking of the Benefit of the Use of the Psalms—to ourselves and others. Let us, then, the Use of the Psalms in the Past—how dear they have been to believers in all ages! I repeat the words of P CC.: "The Psalter has been, in the truest sense, the prayer book both of Jews and Christians." We can do little more than confirm this by a few instances. At the close of the tenth century before Christ, Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, began to reign over Judah. He was the godly son of a godly father. He did much to restore the true religion in his kingdom. In the latter part of his reign, Mosh and Amnon came against him. Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast, and offered in the house of the Lord the earnest prayer recorded in II Chronicles, the 20th chapter. He also equipped the army for battle, and the 21st verse tells us: "He appointed singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth forever." The strain of the 158th Psalm stirred their hearts, as they went out to a battle that was a full victory. "So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet; for his God gave him rest round about," verse 30. There came troubles again to Judah on account of sin. They were sent into captivity, and afterward restored. In the second month of the second year of the return began Zerubbabel and Joshua and the rest of the returned captives, and appointed the Levites to set forward the work of the house of the Lord. When the builders laid the foundation of the temple, they set the priests and Levites to work to praise the Lord, and they sang together by course in praise and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, for his mercy endureth forever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid," Ezra 3. The familiar Psalm that had been used by the Levites at the dedication of the temple by Solomon stirred the hearts of this saved remnant, II Chron. 3:13. Then Nehemiah came from Persia and cast in his lot with the people of Jerusalem, and became the governor. He wrought for reformation, for a revival of the true religion, for purity. "The wall was built, and the poets and the singers and the Levites were appointed," (Nehemiah 7:1), and the 12th chapter makes note: "In the days of David and Asaph of old there were chief of the singers and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God, and all Israel in the days of Zerahiah, and in the days of Nebuchadnezzar gave the portion of the singers." In the days of the Jewish revolt against the Syrian kings, the army of Judas Maccabees sang the Psalms already noted, the 158th, after they had disconfounded Georgeus and his host, I. Maccabees 4:24. So also in II Maccabees 10:38, we read, after Gonsam was taken: "When this was done, they praised the Lord with Psalms and thanksgivings, who had done so great things for them, and given them the victory." All these instances are of public occasions, the record of memorable events. These Psalms ministered as well to the family and personal religious life of Old Testament saints.

We make the transition to the New Testament by quoting Bishop William Alexander, of Derry: "Those strains of prayer or praise spring freely from the stock of David's life, and are current in some degree by the soil in which their roots are plunged. Yet they are not exclusively the record of one life or of one spirit. We know the names of the shapes that move across the stage of the fevered life—Sam, Dorg, Ailtonkop, Shinto, Josh, and the rest. Yet they are not mentioned. Something sealed his lips. Some restraining influence was at work as effectually as if a voice had said, "These Psalms are to be sung in centuries inconceivably distant. They are to be used at funerals grander than Abraham's, in temples visiter than your imagination has dreamed of. They are to set to music and as you have never heard, under skies upon which you have never looked. They are to be the heritage of man wherever there is sin or sorrow; wherever there is a sigh of penitence, or a voice of yearning offered up to God. Keep them free, therefore, from that which is merely base and personal." The Psalms are fitted for the inner life of saints, first, in a Jewish, then in a universal church. Believers under the Old Testament used them as Jonah did, not merely repeating them, but naturally interweaving phrases after phrase into the web of their own thought and language. To the Virgina-Mother the Magnificat proves that the Psalter was Bible, Prayer Book, Hymn Book all in one. And when we pass to the Catholic Church, the different moods of David and the other Psalmists answer to the heart of the mass."

First of all we think of our Lord, of him whose coming had been foretold, of him of whom it is written: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; who in

* Psalm—Monicae, page 297.
the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong entreaties to him who was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." 43 What a part the Psalms fill among the prophecies of Christ! Matthew 22: 41-44 reads: "While the Psalms were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, what think ye of Christ? Whose Son is he? They say unto him, the Son of David. He saith unto them, how then doth David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, the Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his Son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any questions." These Psalms, which we convincingly consider of him, were in his heart. In their words, he voiced his praise of God. Wordsworth in his commentary on the 11th Psalm says what should make us pause and reflect: "The Psalter was the Hymn Book and Prayer Book of Christ." It satisfied him. Coleridge in his Table Talk, refers to the use of the 23rd Psalm by our Saviour on the cross, and then adds: "Whether Christ did audibly repeat the whole or not, it is certain, I think, that he did it mentally, and said about what was sufficient to enable his followers to do the same. The words are still in the same manner, the first line of a common hymn would be understood as a reference to the whole. Above all, I am thankful for the thought which suggested itself to my mind, while I was reading this beautiful Psalm, viz: that we should not exclusively think of Christ as the Logos united to human nature, but likewise as a perfect man united to the Logos. This distinction is most important in order to conceive, much more appropriately to feel, the conduct and exertion of Jesus." 44 Soul of Davus was this: "And he took the words of this. To him Jesus said: "Rise and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which I have seen and heard of the Lord, to whom also I will deliver thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee." Acts 26: 16, 17. He was not deficient in the heavenly vision. The Macedonian cry brought him to Philippus. He and Silas were arrested at the clamer of the people. They were beaten with many stripes. The jailer thrust them into the inner prison and made their feet fast in the stocks. How were their souls exercised? What could express the emotion of their hearts? The precious Psalms. "But on rising up Paul and Silas praised, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them," Acts 16: 25. Of this passage, Dr. Hackett says in his Commentary: "Their prayers and praises were not distinct acts (hence the form of the expressions, praying, they praised God), but their worship consisted chiefly of thanksgiving, the language of which they would derive more or less from the Psalms." While Dean Howson writes: "What it was that they sang, we know not," he immediately adds: "But the
* Hebrews 5: 5, 6.

Psalms of David have ever been dear to those who suffer; they have instilled both Jew and Christian in the language of prayer and praise. And the Psalms abound in such sentences as these—"The Lord looked down from his sanctuary; out of heaven did the Lord behold the earth: that he might hear the cry of his servants who have fallen in their distress."—O let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoner come before thee; according to the greatness of thy power, preserve those that are appointed to die!"—"The Lord helps them to right that suffer wrong: the Lord helps them that are deserted; the Lord stainless for the righteousness." Such sounds as these were new in a Roman dungeon. 46 From the Apostolic Age on, the Psalms have voiced the mourning of the martyrs and confessors of Jesus. Think of what Adoniasaus endured for the truth's sake, what service he rendered to the church of Christ. This witness for the truth, referring to the 11th Psalm, recommended it to Marcellus as most appropriate for the Christian who, for the name of his Master, is enduring the attacks of enemies or suffering from the calumnies of friends. I pass on to Reformation times. Of the Huguenots it is noted, when they assembled on Saturday night for family prayer, the head of the listening household used to read the 23rd Psalm in cheerful tones. 47 Marc's version of the Psalms, so dear to the Protestant French, became popular even at court. He used with Calvin at Geneva for a time. The words of Luther to his friend Mithnachus, in season of discouragement, are known to us all: "Come, Philip, let us sing the 46th Psalm." And of the 1105 Psalm he said, that it is worthy to be set in a frame of gold and diamonds, so full it is of Christian thought and divine instruction, and of all the Psalms the very crown and chief. The fifth verse is like a rich, wondrous mine, from which flow Christian instruction and wisdom, faith, hope and confidence, the like to which no other scripture supplies. John Howie, of Leith, tells us of John Knox: "He was his ordinary practice to read every day certain verses of the Psalms of David, the whole of which he passed regularly once a month." The same writer says in his account of the scholarly George Buchanan, confined in a monastery by papal inquisition: "Is this confinement he ceased himself with that unvarnished paraphrase of the Psalms of David, which placed him first among modern Latin poets, and will continue to be read with delight as long as the language in which they are written is understood." The news of the scattering of the Spanish Armada, in 1588, reached Edinburgh, Robert Browne took the 76th Psalm as his text, preparing a running commentary on its words, as most fitting the event. Dr. Binnie, in his work, The Psalms: Their History, Teach-

* The Life and Epistles of Paul, chapter 6.
1 A Song of Life or Death. Melodies on Psalm 22, by G. W. McCoo, page 8.
1a Scott Wortons, pp. 185, 197.
1b Scott Wortons, p. 297.
The Excellence of the Psalms.

ing, etc. (p. 91), says of it: "Times without number this Psalm has been sung, as furnishing the finest expression of the thoughts and feelings of God's people in view of deliverances wrought for them." He adds what no Scotchman can forget: "When the Covenanters at Drumlog closed their ranks to meet the onset of Caverhouse and his dragoons, they sang the opening verses to the tune of Martyrs."

Without further detail of history, I close this part of this address with the words of W. E. Gladstone, in his Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age, (II, 526): "But most of all does the Book of Psalms refine the challenge of philosophical or poetical composition. In that land for well nigh 3,000 years the piety of saints has found its most refined and choicest food—to such a degree, indeed, that the rank and quality of the religious frame may, in general, be tested at least negatively by the height of its relish for them. There is the whole music of the human heart, when teased by the hand of the Muses, in all the notes that whisper or that swell, for every hope and fear, for every joy and pang, for every form of strength and languor, of disquietude and rest. There are developed all the innermost relations of the human soul to God, built upon the platform of a covenant of love and oneness that fast its foundation in the Messiah, while in this particular and elevated book, it was permitted to anticipate his coming. Thus dear has been the Psalms through the ages, to the people of God. Its thoughts have filled their hearts, and its words their mouths in praise to God."

I pass now to the IIId head, to speak of the Contents of the Psalms—how full are they of the truth of God! This is the secret of their excellence, with their marvellous adaptation to the human soul.

Martin Luther and the Book of Psalms, Pars Biblia—the little Bible. Paul Gerhard said: "The Psalms are a theater, where God allows us to behold both himself and his works; a most pleasant green field; a vast garden, where we see all manner of flowers; a paradise, where we see the most delicious flowers and fruits; a great sea, in which are costly pearls; a heavenly school, in which we have God for our teacher; a court of all Scripture; a sanctuary of divine grace, reflecting the love of our Heavenly Father, and the anatomy of our souls." Thirteen hundred years before Gerhard, Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, had said: "Although all divine Scripture breathes the grace of God, yet sweet beyond all others is the Book of Psalms...." History testifies, the holy teachers, prophecy announces, rebuke, threaten, exhort, reconcile, morally persuades; in the Book of Psalms we have the fruit of all these, and a kind of medecine for the salvation of man, . . . . What is more delightful than a Psalm? It is the benediction of the people, the praise of God, the thanksgiving of the multitude, the voice of the church, the harmonious confession of our faith.

Herein lies we set forth in strains of poetry the greatness of God, his glorious attributes, the folly of idolatry, the creative work of God, man's sin and fall, God's providential care, the Spirit's guidance, the waywardness of the wicked, the judgments of God, the incarnation, the saving work of Christ, his three-fold office as the Redeemer of men, his suffering even to death, his resurrection, his glorious ascension. I would speak more fully of Christ in the Psalms. I have already referred to the question of Jesus as to David's Son and Lord. The same 110th Psalm, whose first verse our Saviour thus employed, furnished to the writer of the Hebrews a text which occupies a most important section of that epistle: "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." In the verse before, he had quoted the second Psalm, as previously in chapter 1st: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." The same first chapter has references also to the 23rd, the 103d, the 104th and the 110th Psalm. On the day our Saviour rose from the dead, two discouraged disciples were making their way to Emmaus. Jesus joined himself to them, and first of all instructed them. Asking them, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" he began at Moses and all the Prophets, and expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. When he had disclosed himself to them and had vanished from their sight, they returned to Jerusalem and joined the company of the disciples. And it came to pass, when he had appeared to them, that he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father. When the Spirit was poured out upon them, the Apostles began to preach the gospel.... So the Apostle Peter in his Pentecostal sermon, after he had quoted the prophecy of Malachi, quoted the prediction of the Melchisedecian Priest: "Bishop of Milan," had said: "Although all divine Scripture breathes the grace of God, yet sweet beyond all others is the Book of Psalms...." History testifies, the holy teachers, prophecy announces, rebuke, threaten, exhort, reconcile, morally persuades; in the Book of Psalms we have the fruit of all these, and a kind of medicine for the salvation of man, . . . . What is more delightful than a Psalm? It is the benediction of the people, the praise of God, the thanksgiving of the multitude, the voice of the church, the harmonious confession of our faith.

"Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec." In the verse before, he had quoted the second Psalm, as previously in chapter 1st: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." The same first chapter has references also to the 23rd, the 103d, the 104th and the 110th Psalm. On the day our Saviour rose from the dead, two discouraged disciples were making their way to Emmaus. Jesus joined himself to them, and first of all instructed them. Asking them, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" he began at Moses and all the Prophets, and expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. When he had disclosed himself to them and had vanished from their sight, they returned to Jerusalem and joined the company of the disciples. And it came to pass, when he had appeared to them, that he charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father. When the Spirit was poured out upon them, the Apostles began to preach the gospel.... So the Apostle Peter in his Pentecostal sermon, after he had quoted the prophecy of Malachi, quoted the prediction of the Melchisedecian Priest: "For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before me, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved; therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope; because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the way of life: thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance." He then explained it. "Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and is made to stand on this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to one of his seeds, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before, spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither
right hand of the Father Almighty, the progress and history, the distresses and persecutions, the triumph and glory of the church, the gracious providence of Jesus Christ, his supremacy and Lordship over all nature, the height of his glory in the ascension, and the brightness of the Lord's blessing, as his coming in his kingdom which fulfills the Book of Psalms are themes that can never prove stale and uninteresting to the Christian heart. The longer the sentiments of this Book have been studied and used for purposes of praise and supplication in the worship of God, the dearer it becomes to the inner heart, and the contrast between it and other hymns becomes glaring in point of strength and richness, of grandeur and power to enlighten, confirm, and invigorate the Christian faith and hope, and lift the heart up to the holy joy and exultation, dignified and triumphant, with God, his people, and the world.

There is a depth, a power, an intensity, a grandeur, a comprehensiveness and sublimity in the Psalms of the Bible which we look for in vain in Walt's imitation or any other imitation. This inimitable collection, made by the Spirit of God, possesses a power and power far beyond anything to be found in Walt's imitation, or any other collection of sacred songs, the production of uninspired men. 

Dr. Watts was himself greatly in error as to the views he took of the spirit and design of the Book of Psalms which led him to style many of them "turningPsalms," and represent them to be unsuitable to the Christian spirit. The future tense indicates often mere prophetic character, and the imperfect mood, judged by him as inappropriate to the Christian, when employed by the Saviour whom the literal David personated, possess a deep significance and gives a point and power to the denunciation contained in many of the Psalms by no means inconsistent with, but corroborative of the faith and hopes and spirit of the evangelical worshipper.

An intelligent use of the Book of Psalms for purposes of religious worship could not fail to guard congregations against the influx and influence of dangerous error and to keep before the mind the glorious Saviour who apprised his disciples that "all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Book of the Psalms concerning him." 

Luke 24: 44. The divine version throughout, in its reference to the contents of the Psalms, bears witness to their relation to Christ. For example, to the 2d Psalm: "Concerning the fall of the Gentiles, and prophetic allusions to the passion of the Messiah." To the 72nd Psalm: "A Psalm of David, when he made Solomon King; a prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah, and the calling of the Gentiles." Thus much for Christ in the Psalms. The fruits of his redemption are fully set forth. We need only recall the use the apostle Paul makes of the 35th Psalm in his argument as to justification by grace; and the adoption and sanctification of believers come before us in the 89th and 61st Psalms; while the writer of the Hebrews uses the 5th to impress the truth, that there remains a rest to the people of God, and the 16th Psalms furnish, as we have seen, the prophecy of the resurrection of the body of our Lord, who
The Excellence of the Psalms.

He singled out versus 59 as giving the turning point of man's character and destiny: "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." Of the 121st Psalm (of which Charles Spurgeon says, comparing all the Psalms to genii, we should like this to be a pear) Augustine wrote: "This should be received, not as the voice of one man singing, but as the voice of all who are the body of Christ. This temple of God, the body of Christ, the congregation of the faithful, has one voice. It is as it were one man who chanted the Psalms."

I now give the words of Delitzch as a summary: "It (the Book of Psalms) is without equal in the richness of the form and feeling of its poetry, for freshness of spirit and outpouring of the deepest emotion, for skill, for prayer to the triumphant hymn of victory. To this we may add that it is without equal for the richness of its contents. It embraces nature and history, heaven and earth, the world around and the world within us, the experience of God and all from the darkest abyss of trial to the summit of celestial joy. It is unequalled in the depths of its secret soul experiences, and the power of expressing it—not the palpable and superficial, but the root secrets of the inner life, ideal and real, abstract and concrete, individual and universal—and as it possesses the power of the Augustine of the Psalms, virtue of the Prophet, virtue of Christ in them, and for the inquiry of the commentator, a growing attention towards something ever fresh and new." This depth and fullness are from the Spirit of God.

I come now to speak.

III. Of the Benefit of the Use of the Psalms. This portion of the word of God, used by saints before and since the coming of Christ, so rich in the instruction of doctrine and experience, must needs be most fruitful. Isaac Walton, in his pillar of the Psalms, has said: "In the frequent recurrence of the Psalms of David hath been noted to be a great part of the devotion of the primitive Christians; the Psalms having in them not only prayers and holy instruction, but the familiar communions of God's servants as may preserve, comfort and confirm our dependence on the power and providence of our Creator." Chisholm, one of the world's greatest scholars, says in his journal, in connection with an accident on the Seine with peril to himself and wife: "I could not but remember that place of Ambrose where he says: 'This is the peculiarity of the Psalter, that everyone can use the words, as if they were peculiarly and individually his own.' Bishop Alexander says: 'The soul, excited of sin, by seeing for pardon, the soul, lifted from the dust and 'liquidifying unto God,' finds his history in the Psalter. The soul of all the Psalms is in 'at anima corporator Domi'; the Psalms rise with a rapid hand over the whole scale of the affections of the human spirit seeking after God. We may pass the hardest judgment upon David; yet the intelligent, pure, and saintly, most holy souls—Augustine, St. Louis, Ken, Steele, Leighton—have found nothing more suitable in life or death than

* Hampton Lectures, page 249.
† Lee, Monson, page 79.
‡ The Psalms.
† Adrex, a long uni.
* Dr. Alexander's Hampton Lectures.
* Quoted by Porcrore.
The Excellence of the Psalms.

are the record of individual experience. Personal religion is the
issue in all ages. The depots of humanity remain unreserved by the
voices of ages which change the surface. This Psalm (he is speaking
of the 161st), written three thousand years ago, might have been writ-
ten yesterday; it describes the vicissitudes of spiritual life in an Eng-
lishman as truly as in a Jew. Not of an age, but for all time. If
desiring distant times, they must Christians of one age, met in
one place, with one accord. The same writer elsewhere gives ex-
pression to thoughts which though new, to any, as of record, may yet
be understood by all familiar with the Psalms, whether in reading or
use in praise: "The value of the public reading of the Psalms is,
that they express for us, indirectly, those deeper feelings which there
would be a sense of indelincency in expressing directly.
There are feelings of which we do not speak to each other; they are too
sacred and too delicate. Such are most of our feelings to God. If
we do speak of them, they lose their fragrance, become coarse; say,
there is a sense of indelincency and exposure. Now, the Psalms afford
precisely the right relief for this feeling: wrapped up in the forms of
poetry (metaphor, etc.), that which might seem exaggerated is excuse
by those who do not feel it, while they who do, can read them, ap-
plying them to their own feelings. Have they their soothing power?"
Person has this: "The pages of that book have often been blessed with the tears of those whose others deemed hard and cold, and whom they treated with suspicion and contempt. Those words have gone up to God, mingled with the sighs scarcely uttered in the heartbroken anguish of those whose Patriarchs called sinners, of those whose Christ was denounced as heretics or infidels, but who loved God and truth above everything else. Surely it is holy ground. We cannot profit by it unless we realize in a very
special manner the communion of saints, the reverence of the church
militant, and the church triumphant. We cannot pray the Psalms without having our hearts opened; our affections enlarged, our
thoughts drawn heavenwards. He who can pray them best is nearest
to God, knows most of the Spirit of Christ, is ripest for heaven." This
then is the closest fellowship, the truest union.
2. Growth in Christian activity. And this in every direction to
the outermost bounds of the influence of this life; and in this day
who can mark these bounds, with intelligence to and from every quar-
ter, and with ease access?
John Donne said of the Psalms: "The Psalms are the manna of the
church; as manna tasted to every man like that he liked best, so
do the Psalms minister instruction and satisfaction to every man, in
every emergency and occasion. David was not only a close prophet
of Christ himself; but of every particular Christian; he foresees what
he now do, and suffer and say."—What food have they been to the
most laborious of the ministry of Christ? I need
not go far back. Look in these times at the work of Charles H.
Spurgeon for nearly forty years in the great city of London. How
clear the Psalms were to him. "The Treasury of David" came from
his pen because the Psalms were precious to his soul. They were to
him heavenly manna, and strengthened by this food, he labored excel-
singly for God. The great hero, whose name I gave in the first part
of this address, were sustained by these Psalms as they read them
and sang them in praise of God.
The use of the Psalms promotes progress. The leaders in true
progress have used this heavenly manna. See what Calvin did for
the church, for civil and religious liberty. He says of the Psalms:
"If the reading of my commentary on this book brings as much
blessing to the church of God as I have got in the composition of it,
I shall not repent of the work. Not without reason have I been ac-
customed to call this book the anatomy of all the parts of the mind,
since there is no emotion of which anyone can be conscious, that is
not imaged here as in a glass. All the sorrows, troubles, fears,
doubts, hopes, pains, perplexities, stormy outbreaks, by which the
hearts of men are tossed, have here been depicted by the Holy Spirit
to the very life." Thoebuck says of John Jacob Moser that he was
equally renowned as a statesman and experienced as a Christian. He
had been in severe struggles for the right of his country, and had been on that account unwillingly impressed by his sovereign
for a period of two years." Here is what this Christian patriot says
of the Psalms: "Oh, how precious and dear was the possession of the
Psalms; how much comfort, light, and strength have they im-
pacted to my fainting soul! I often not only missed the way, but
lost the very trace of it. I sat down as if I had become petri-
fied. One word from the Psalms would awaken me. Like a sick
man, who, sitting on the pinions of that eagle, carried by her, I scaled
the rock, and beheld from that eminence the world, with its cares and
sorrows, stretched out beneath me. I acquired to think, infer, moun-
try, pray, wait, hope, and speak in the spirit of David; I thank
thee, O Lord, that thou has humbled me. I acquired to know and
understand the rights of God."
I was enabled with ease access to
express my gratitude for mercies which formerly I counted not as
blessings, but as my right and due." So he was nourished. Think
of what William Wilberforce did for the cause of Christ, and the
liberates of men. He wrote in his journal in 1803: "I am reading the
Psalms just now. What wonderful compositions, what proof of
the divine origin of the religion to which they belong! There is in
the world nothing else like them."
What have the Psalms done, what must they do for national reli-
gion? What an exhibit do they give of the majesty and power, the
rule and government of God; what exalted praise of his law; what
a setting forth of the dignity and authority of Christ, the grace
and benedictions of his sway! "Ask of me and I shall give thee the
heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for
The Excellence of the Psalms.

Lastly, then, the Psalms prepare for life's close. In the words of Alexander, who has been often quoted: "Is it (the Psalter) you will find him whom it is best to know—Jesus, your Lord and your God. And as time goes on—when you bow down in penitence; when you seek for pardon: when your head is bent in sorrow; when you lie on a bed of sickness; when your lips turn white and quiver as you kneel before your dead; as the solemn hour comes, when your spirit must pass into God's presence, it has treasures which will never fail you."

May I not instance here our Savior himself? Bishop Wordsworth, in his Commentary, dwelling on the 31st Psalm, the 5th verse, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit," says: "This Psalm is connected with the 22d Psalm. Both of these Psalms were used by Christ on the cross. From the 22d Psalm he derived those bitter words of anguish, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' From the present Psalm he derived those last words of love and trust which he uttered just before his death." Time would fail me to tell of the names of those who have used these words since Christ and the early martyrs. History notes them as the last words of Polyarn, Basili the Great, Bernard, Jerome of Prague, Lady Jane Grey, Melanchthon, George Herbert. John Huss often repeated them when at the stake. Ridley used them in the flames. Luther came ever them frequently at Eisenberg when in distress of body in approaching death. But I must close. The literature here is so great.

The Book of Psalms is the Church's Manual of Praise. The lowly Christian and the distinguished scholar alike may be satisfied. "We can appropriate the estimate of the Psalter accorded to an old Scotch woman. The 'Songs of Zion' had been her stay in times of trial, a means of spiritual refreshment, and an aid to her devotion for nearly a hundred years. A friend asked her whether she thought it wrong to sing hymns, and whether she would not like to unite in singing one. 'Aye, was her reply, 'I'm poor to begin the hymns when I have finished the Psalms.'" Moser, whose words are quoted by Tholuck as already given, has further said: "If my soul would keep holy day, the Psalms become my temple and my altar. Next to the writings of the New Testament, they are now to me my dearest and most precious book—the golden mirror, the cyphered book of the most blessed and fruitful knowledge, so thoroughly to understand them will be the occupation of eternity, and our second life will form their commentary."

"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."—Psalm 17:15.

"It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."—1 John 3:2.

* R. M. Sommervilles Tract on Psalmody.