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THE EXPOSITOR.

AN APOLOGY FOR THE VINDICTIVE PSALM.

(PSALM CIX.)

I do not propose in the present paper to deal with any of the so-called "Vindictive" or "Imprecatory" Psalms, except *the* "Imprecatory" Psalm *par excellence*—the 109th. For a satisfactory explanation—or, perhaps I should say, for such explanation as has hitherto been offered—of the fierce, passionate, and apparently malevolent expressions contained in such Psalms as the 35th, 40th, 55th, 58th, 59th, 69th, 137th, and 140th, I must be content—for the present, at any rate—to refer my readers to the Commentaries, and especially to those of Calvin, Perowne, and Kay. I am now concerned only with one Psalm—the one which is, confessedly, by far the most difficult and painful of its class.

The explanation which I have to offer of this seemingly mysterious¹ and, certainly as it stands, most distressing and perplexing composition—a composition which even the most loyal and devout Christian cannot read without certain uncomfortable

¹ "*Mysterious*" was the one word written opposite this Psalm in the pocket Bible of a late devout and popular writer. It represents the utter perplexity with which it is very generally regarded.

misgivings; which some Christians, to the writer's certain knowledge, have expunged from the Bible of their private devotions, and which many Churchmen hear with compressed lips, and sometimes with ostentatious silence, when it is chanted in the church at evensong—the explanation of it here submitted, though new probably to most of our readers, is not new in itself. It was suggested to me in outline, some years ago, by a well-known Jewish Rabbi; and another Rabbi has since informed me that it is the received interpretation amongst his co-religionists. (I am bound to say, however, that, so far as my reading extends, I have not found it in any of the great Jewish Commentators, with the one exception of Mendelssohn.) As far as I can discover, it first appeared in this country in the pages of Dr. Sykes's exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is adopted by the learned Hebraists, Kennicott, Lowth, and J. D. Michaelis, and is noticed with approval by Dr. Adam Clarke. It was advanced in Italy just one hundred years ago, by Saverio Mattei, who confesses, however, to having derived it from an earlier writer. He says that, after consulting all the fathers and all the divines, both [Roman] Catholic and Protestant, the first who afforded him any satisfactory hint was Marco Marino. It appears to have suggested itself quite independently to the Rev. W. Keate, who advocated it, though with indifferent ability, in a sermon preached in 1794. It is noticed, but only to be summarily dismissed as untenable, by Dr. Durell (*“Critical Remarks on the Psalms,”* &c.), and by the American writer Hibbard, and

with somewhat more respect by Merrick. With these exceptions, I do not remember to have seen it mentioned elsewhere. Most modern writers on the Psalms appear not even to have heard of it.¹ After revolving it in my mind, however, for a much longer period than that prescribed by the Latin poet to impatient authors, I am more than ever convinced that it is *a* legitimate, if not indeed the *only* legitimate, and consistent explanation. Nor am I without hopes of bringing the candid and unprejudiced reader to a similar conclusion.

The Psalm, then, to begin with, is—*pace* Ewald—one of David's. So we gather from the superscription (לְדָוִד), and from one ancient version, the Syriac, which furthermore informs us that it was composed by him on the occasion of the revolt of Absalom. Some of the Rabbins, however,—Aben Ezra and Kimchi, for example,—believe it to have been directed, not against Absalom or Ahithophel, but against Doeg the Edomite, or possibly against Saul. It is immaterial to my present purpose which of these views the reader accepts, though I have strong reasons, as I shall hope to shew presently, for believing it to have been suggested by, or rather during, the rebellion of Absalom. It is also worth noting that the superscription, “to the Chief Musician,” to the Precentor (לְמַנְצֵחַ), proves it to have been designed, such as it is, for the Tabernacle or Temple service of song.

¹ It is briefly referred to in the *second* edition of Dr. Perowne's valuable work. It is also advocated in the Rev. C. Taylor's “Gospel in the Law,”—a work which I had not the good fortune to see till long after this Paper was written. It is mentioned, *en passant*, in the “Speaker's Commentary.”

The next point to be observed is, that part of the 8th verse of the Psalm ("Let another take his office") is quoted loosely by St. Peter (Acts i. 20) along with the 25th verse of the 69th Psalm ("Let their habitation be desolate," &c.), and is by him cited as a prophecy or an illustration—*which* it remains to consider—of the fate of Judas Iscariot. I mention this here because it has been held by some to be conclusive against the interpretation I am about to advocate. What is the *true* value and significance of the quotation I shall examine by and by.

Now the usual explanation of the Psalm is, it is almost needless to say, that which is given in the digest or argument prefixed to it in our English Bibles, viz., that "David, complaining of his slanderous enemies, under the person of Judas, devoteth them." It is, in other words, that it was David who pronounced all these imprecations—there are some five-and-twenty of them; that he levelled them *primarily* against some personal enemy then living, and *prophetically* against Judas Iscariot. The learned disagree, indeed, as to the object of these curses; but they are all, with the few exceptions I have instanced above, of one opinion as to the author of them. They are unanimous in ascribing them to David. I shall hope to shew, however, that there are serious, if not indeed insuperable, objections to supposing that these rancorous execrations ever proceeded from him, and I shall try to establish that so far from their having been *heaped by him upon his enemies, they were really heaped by his enemies upon him.*

But before I endeavour to *prove* this from the internal structure, &c., of the Psalm, I venture to ask whether there is not an antecedent improbability that David—that magnanimous and generous prince, that man after God's own heart—should have uttered and recorded, and possibly adapted to music, such language, even with regard to his bitterest foes, as that which we find here?

I freely allow there are dark, very dark, passages in David's life; I am constrained to admit that in other Psalms he has used words, imprecations, which it is extremely difficult to justify; but nowhere else do we find anything comparable to this. There is here, unless I am much mistaken, a pitiless hate, a refined and insatiable malignity, which it is very difficult to reconcile with his character and conduct on other occasions. For it is not merely that the author of these curses (whoever he may have been) denounces some material disaster against the object of them (whoever he may have been)—as is done in the 11th verse ("Let the extortioner catch all that he hath, and let strangers spoil his labour"); it is not merely that speedy death is denounced against him (as in the 8th and 9th verses, "Let his days be few; . . . let his children be fatherless"); it is not merely that temporal misery and ruin are imprecated upon this man's *children* (as in the 10th and 12th verses, "Let his children be continually vagabonds and beg; . . . neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children"); it is not merely that for them too, as for him, swift destruction is prayed for (as in verse 13, "Let his posterity be cut off, and in the generation following let their

name be blotted out"): it is—and it is this which makes it so revolting—it is that *moral*; if not indeed *spiritual*, misfortune, the ruin of man in his relations to his God, is denounced against him. We see this in verse 7, "When he shall be judged let him be condemned, and *let his prayer become sin*;"¹ while, in verses 14, 15, a similar curse is actually directed against his *parents* and *progenitors*, "Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out. Let them be before the Lord continually, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth." Now is it likely, I would ask, is it consistent with what we know of David's character, that such terrific curses—curses of which Mattei says that the *Thyestææ preces* are mild in comparison, and of which Mazzochi writes, "*quæ nec sine pilorum horrore legi possunt*"—curses designed to shut for ever God's door of mercy against the man and his race, were ever pronounced by David—David who, of all men, so much needed mercy himself? Compare with these relentless, these gluttonous, I had almost said these fiendish curses, his language and bearing on other occasions, and then say whether the man who spoke there can be the same man who speaks here. Can this be the generous hero who twice spared the life of the enemy who was seeking his life? Can this be the man who congratulated himself that he had been saved from avenging himself and shedding Nabal's blood? the man who, when Shimei cursed,

¹ Fallor, si majus aliquod maledictum jactari possit in hominem, quam ut taliter fiant ejus vota et sacrificia et orationes ut nequeat distingui inter illa et crimina.—*Corderius*.

merely said, "Let him curse;" the man who cried to God, "Lo, *I* have sinned, and *I* have done wickedly; but these sheep, what have they done? Let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me and against my father's house"? I maintain, then,¹ though it is an argument which I should not wish to press, that there is an *à priori* improbability that these cruel pitiless imprecations ever proceeded from David's lips. But let us now turn to the Psalm itself, and let us carefully and dispassionately examine its structure and statements:

1. The first thing that strikes us as we read it is that it divides itself into three sections, viz., verses 1-5, 6-19, 20-31; and that, of these, the middle one is of a very different complexion from the other two. One obvious difference may be stated here. In the two extreme sections the adversaries of the Psalmist are spoken of in the plural (as, *e. g.*, in verse 3, "*They* compassed about me," &c., and in verses 20, 29, "Let mine *adversaries*"), whereas in the middle section the pronouns are all in the singular; *i. e.*, the adversary is but one, "Let *him* be condemned" (verse 7); "*He* loved cursing" (verse 17).

2. We observe, secondly, that this section, which refers throughout to one person, and *only one*, is pre-

¹ It will probably be objected that in other Psalms, allowed to be David's, there are imprecations almost as sweeping and virulent. My answer is, that I have failed to discover anything like them, except it be in the one instance of Psa. lxi. 28, 29, and that, as regards these two verses, I am inclined to think they afford a parallel to the imprecations we are now discussing; *i. e.*, that they are not David's, but are merely *quoted* by him. His dying injunctions respecting Joab and Shimei again, whatever construction may be put upon them, are surely not to be compared with the curses of this Psalm. *They* do not, at any rate, overstep the line of physical retribution, nor do they include innocent parents and children in the doom of the guilty

cisely the portion which contains the imprecations. They begin with the use of the singular and they end with it.¹

3. Not only is this section different in its grammatical structure from the rest of the Psalm, but it also differs—unless I am much mistaken—from the spirit in which David generally writes. We miss here, for example, that continual reference to the Divine Being, to his presence and help, which characterizes his compositions. In the entire section there are but two references to the Sacred Name, and it is not absolutely necessary to suppose that the other breathings of vengeance were prayers addressed to God.

But let us now examine these different sections in detail. The *second*, as we have seen, is a tissue of imprecations. The *first* will be found to consist chiefly of complaints to God of the lies, the calumnies, the hatred of the Psalmist's adversaries. The *last* is composed partly of appeals to God to protect him against his adversaries (verses 21, 26), partly of complaints of the misery and distress to which they have reduced him (verses 22–25); and, finally, of expressions of his confidence that God will help and deliver him (verses 30, 31). Such are their general features. As to their details:

In the 1st verse we find the Psalmist imploring the aid and interference of Almighty God. "Hold

¹ It may be well to point out here that verses 28, 29, though they seem to contain modified imprecations, do not do so in reality, for the imperatives, "Let mine adversaries," &c., should rather be translated as *futures*. That is to say, they are *predictions* of what will be, not prayers for what the writer wished to be. Dr. Perowne renders them as *present* tenses.

not thy peace," he cries, "O God of my praise." There is something, he intimates, which calls for God's intervention; something has happened which makes it desirable that God (the God whom he has long served and "praised") should speak out in his behalf. The 2nd verse explains what this is. It is that wicked men are *slandering* him: it is because they are circulating *falsehoods* against him. "For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened *against me*;¹ they have spoken against me with a lying tongue." Observe, he here tells us, as distinctly as can be, that *he* is made the butt, the object, of slander and abuse. In the 3rd verse, as if to make this thought still more prominent, he repeats his statement, and somewhat amplifies it: "They compassed me about also with words of hatred, and fought against me without a cause." Notwithstanding, he says, that he has done nothing to deserve their hatred, they stab him on every side with their invectives, and war against him with their words.² In the 4th verse we have, substantially, a repetition of the same complaint. "For my love" (i.e., *instead* of, in *return* for, my love, פְּחַדִּי אֶתְבָּרִי), "they are my adversaries;" while the latter part of the verse describes his conduct towards them. "But I give myself unto *prayer*" (or, as the Original puts it with telling brevity, "but I . . . prayer").³ What did the Psalmist do—what had he done, when men reproached and calumniated him?

¹ In the Hebrew some stress is laid on the words "against me," (עָלַי פְּתָחוּ).

² "A blow with a word strikes deeper than a blow with a sword."—*Whichcote*.

³ Cf. *Psa.* cxx. 7: "I . . . peace."

Did he revile again? Did he render railing for railing? The received opinion is that he did *that* at least (in verses 6-19), if not worse. *He* says here, however, that he did nothing of the kind. He says he simply betook himself unto prayer. It will be well to remember this, as it has an important bearing on the question at issue. In the 5th verse he practically repeats what he has more than once alleged already, viz., that this evil-speaking has been unmerited and unprovoked. "And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love." Now, so far, it will be allowed, our Psalmist has not spoken one vindictive word against his adversaries; on the contrary, he has merely stated, and that again and again, that they have spoken false and vindictive words against him. And he has also told us that his attitude towards them is expressed in the one word "*prayer.*" But now, at the 6th verse, according to the received interpretation, a sudden change comes over him. Utterly forgetful of what he has just said about "love" and "prayer;" forgetful too of his just complaint of the hatred and hard words of his enemies, he proceeds to heap upon them, or rather (as is supposed) upon some *one* of them—for he no longer speaks of "*them,*" but of "*him*"—the most frightful and merciless anathemas. "Set thou a wicked man over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand." Then follows that string of shuddering curses in which the All-merciful God is entreated, by one so merciful and so much needing mercy as David, to shew no mercy to his enemy, but to scathe and ruin him and his, body and soul, for ever. Such is the usual exegesis of the Psalm.

Two questions, however, here suggest themselves to the careful reader. First, what are we to make of this sudden change from prayer to imprecation? Secondly, how are we to account for the abrupt transition from plural to singular?

Before suggesting any solution of these dilemmas, I must venture to remind the reader,—

1. That the Hebrew language, like the ancient Greek, has no clerical device, no conventional marks of any kind, to stamp a sentence as a quotation. "Inverted commas" were unknown to the ancients. The instances, consequently, are very numerous in the Bible where there is nothing to decide whether a sentence is a quotation or not—except the context.

2. Our translators, guided by the context, have indicated quotations in a large number of passages¹—and in some where the quotation is by no means obvious at first sight—by the insertion of the word "saying," or its equivalent, in italics.

3. The passages where the word *should* be supplied, or where quotation marks should be used, are still more numerous. I have counted a score of passages,² for example, in Perowne's translation of

¹ As for example, Psa. ii. 2; xxii. 7; xxvii. 8; xli. 8; lix. 7; cv. 15; cxxxvii. 3. Num. xxii. 10; xxiii. 7. 1 Sam. xviii. 22; xx. 16, 21. Job xv. 23. Prov. i. 21. Eccles. iv. 8. Cant. iii. 3; v. 2. Isa. xviii. 2. Jerem. vi. 17; xxxi. 3; xl. 5. Lam. ii. 15. Ezek. xxvii. 32. Dan. iv. 8. Hos. xiv. 8. This list is, of course, very imperfect. There are thirty such instances, some of them very striking, in the prophetic books alone.

² *E.g.*, Psa. ii. 6; xiv. 4 (very abrupt); xx. and xxi. (Liturgical Psalms); xxii. 22; xxxix. 4 (see Perowne's Note); xli. 5; xlvi. 10; lii. 6; lxxv. 2; lxxx. 6 ("The words of God follow without any indication of a change of speakers."—*Perowne*); lxxxvii. 4 ("We have the same abrupt introduction of the Divine speaker."—*Ib.*); lxxxix. 3; xci. 14; cxxxii. 3, 11.

the Psalms, where he employs either the one or the other. It will be evident, therefore, that nothing is more common in Holy Scripture than for us to find a quotation without anything but the sense to distinguish it as such.

4. It should also be stated that the Psalmists are very much in the habit of citing and transcribing the reproaches of their enemies. No doubt it afforded them consolation to acquaint their Almighty Friend and Helper with their sufferings in this respect. At any rate, they refer to the false accusations of their adversaries in a large number of passages; in not a few they repeat their *ipsissima verba*.¹

Now, can we not find in these facts an explanation of the break, of the abrupt transition, at verses 6 and 20 of this Psalm? Is it possible that the portion marked out by the double transition (for in verse 20 we have a change back from singular to plural as distinct as the change from plural to singular in verse 6),—is it possible that the middle section *i.e.*, the imprecatory portion of the Psalm, is a quotation, a citation, by David of the imprecations of his enemies? Is it possible that this perplexing and distressing Psalm presents us, after all, not with his maledictions upon them, but with their maledictions upon him?

Not only do I hold this interpretation to be quite legitimate, I hold it to be by far the more natural and reasonable interpretation, and that for the following reasons:—

¹ The following may serve as specimens, x. 6; xxii. 8; xxxv. 21; xli. 5; lxxi. 11; lxxiii. 11.

The supposition of a quotation is, to say the least, the most satisfactory way of accounting for the double transition just referred to. It is not contended that this break is absolutely inexplicable, except upon this supposition; for in Psa. lv. 12, *as it now stands*, we have a transition in some respects similar to that of verse 6, and *there* there is no quotation.¹ But in Psa. xiv. 4; xxii. 8; xli. 5; lxxv. 2; lxxxi. 6; lxxxvii. 4, we have also similar transitions; and in all these cases the Commentators (Perowne, *e.g.*) confess that we have quotations. But our averment is that this supposition avoids one or two serious difficulties: the difficulty of believing that the Psalmist can have passed, *per saltum*, from words of prayer and piety to words of bitter execration; the difficulty of accounting for the use of the singular, when hitherto he has invariably spoken of his adversaries in the plural, and the like; and we also aver that it affords the most easy and natural explanation of the Psalm. Insert the word "*saying*" at the beginning of verse 6, and all difficulties immediately vanish. Then everything is coherent and straightforward, and the 6th and following verses dovetail with the verses preceding. "They have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love, *saying*, Set thou a wicked man over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand," &c. He has been complaining of the "words of hatred," of the "lying tongues" of others; what can be more natural, what more in accordance with his custom,

¹ If Ewald's rearrangement of this Psalm be accepted, then we have no instance of any transition at all similar to that of Psa. cix. without a quotation, except Psa. xxxv. 8. See, however, Psa. xli. 6.

than that he should presently quote these "words of hatred" to Almighty God?

And I find a minute but interesting confirmation of this view in three verbal coincidences which I observe between the first and second sections of the Psalm. In the 2nd verse we read, "For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me." But the Hebrew text, strictly rendered, would run here, "A mouth of *a wicked man* and a mouth of deceit" (פִּי רָשָׁע וּפִי מְרִמָּה) —"den Mund *eines Frevlers*," Ewald translates it). Now the natural expression, the words we might have expected (and which some consequently have proposed to substitute here for the Received Text in order to bring the two clauses into harmony), would have been פִּי רָשָׁע, "a mouth of *wickedness*." "Stier, however," says Perowne (vol. ii. p. 247), "thinks that the expression, 'mouth of the wicked' may have been purposely employed with reference to the wicked man against whom the Psalmist prays." Accepting this suggestion,—that the variation was made designedly for a special purpose,—the view I am advocating enables me to assign, as I venture to think, a more adequate reason for this curious change. For in verse 6—the first of the imprecations pronounced *against* the Psalmist, according to our supposition,—we read, "Set thou a wicked man" (רָשָׁע) "over him." Again, in verse 7, the second verse of the imprecations, we find, "When he is judged, let him be condemned," literally, "let him go forth a *wicked man*" (יֵצֵא רָשָׁע). In each of the two first verses of the imprecatory section, that is to say, we find the word "wicked" (רָשָׁע). Now, while allowing that the

change in verse 2 *might* have been made merely for the sake of the paronomasia, it would have been very awkward and inappropriate, to say the least, for the person who *pronounced* the imprecations to have made the change, because it could hardly have failed to suggest the idea that while he bitterly complained of the *פִּי רָשָׁע*, he was an exemplification of the *פִּי רָשָׁע* himself. Suppose, on the other hand, that the repeated mention of "a wicked man" (*רָשָׁע*) is made by his enemy, whose words he cites, and we can comprehend at once the object and propriety of the change. "They have opened against me a mouth of a *wicked man*; . . . saying, Set thou a *wicked man* over him; . . . let him come forth a *wicked man*."

A second verbal coincidence, which, taken with the preceding and with the still more remarkable ones to be presently noticed, makes this supposition almost a matter of certainty, is the following. In verse 4 we read, "They are my *adversaries*" (*אֲשֶׁר־בִּי*). In verse 6 we find, "Let an *adversary*" (Authorized Version, "Satan," *שָׂטָן*) "stand at his right hand." Now suppose both words to proceed from the *same mouth*, then we have the unfortunate circumstance that the man who has just before complained of his adversaries, here goes out of his way, by his unhappy choice of words, to lay himself open to the very charge which he makes against them. Suppose, on the other hand, that in the 6th verse he cites their calumnies, then how much greater is the force and appropriateness of the *אֲשֶׁר־בִּי* of verse 4, "They are my *adversaries*; . . . saying, Let an *adversary* stand," &c. The *complaint* of

verse 4 seems to have been suggested by the *curse* of verse 6.

The third coincidence still remains to be considered. In verse 4 the Psalmist declares that his one work has been, and will be, "*prayer*" (וַיְהִי תְפִלָּה). It is not by an accident, surely, that in the 7th verse—again at the very commencement of the imprecations—we find "Let his *prayer*" (תְּפִלָּתוֹ) "become sin."

Now suppose we grant that any *one* of these singular coincidences, taken separately, might well be accidental, is it within the range of probability that all *the three* can be so? Taken collectively, is not the presumption in favour of a designed deliberate reference almost overwhelming?

It is in the latter part of the Psalm, however, that we find the strongest confirmation of this view. The curses, as we have seen, extend to verse 19. With verse 20 comes another abrupt change. It is not strongly marked in our English Version, indeed, being obscured by the words in italics, which here, as so often elsewhere, only serve to darken the sense. Omitting these intercalary words, however, the verse stands, "This . . . the reward"—*i.e.*, this *will be* the reward¹—"of mine adversaries from the Lord, and"—observe—"of them that speak evil against my soul." No sooner do the curses terminate, that is to say, than we find the Psalmist complaining, as he did before they commenced, of those who "spoke evil against his soul." Now, allow that the preceding curses are those of his adversaries against him, and everything is natural and accordant.

¹ Perowne translates: "This is the reward," &c.

They *have* been speaking evil against his soul, *i. e.*, his life (שׂוֹנְאֵי). They have been praying that his "days may be few," &c. But according to the current interpretation, nothing could be more unfortunate and *mal-à propos* than these words. "Speak evil against my soul!" Nay, but it is the Psalmist has been speaking evil, and what evil! against *their* souls. He has been dealing out anathemas right and left, and now, forsooth, he complains of their cursing him, and says God will reward them for it. But, surely, if *they* will have a recompense for evil-speaking, *he* will not go unpunished! Observe, again, the transition to the plural, "Mine *adversaries*." But he has just been anathematizing *one* adversary, according to the received opinion! Above all, let us examine the Hebrew word which is here translated "*reward*." It is תְּשׁוּבָה, which Gesenius ('Thesaurus,' *s. v.*) says is the synonym for תְּפִלָּה, "work," and which he renders into Latin by (1) *quæ quis facit, agit*, and (2) *merces laboris*, and into German by "*Das Thun des Menschen*." In nine out of the eleven passages cited by him,¹ it is translated in our Version by "*work*" or "*labour*," in one passage, "*wages*," and in the remaining, which is the passage we are now discussing, "*reward*." The LXX. render it generally by ἔργον, once by πόνος, once by μόχθος, and once by μίσθος. They translate *this* passage, τὸν τοῦτο τὸ ἔργον τῶν ἐνδιαβαλλόντων με παρὰ Κυρίου; while the Vulgate renders it, "*Hoc opus eorum qui detrahunt mihi apud Dominum*." The primary, the almost invariable, meaning con-

¹ Prov. x. 16; xi. 18. Psal. xvii. 4; xxviii. 5. Isa. xl. 10; xlii. li. 8; lxxv. 7. Jerem. xxxi. 16. Levit. xix. 13.

sequently is "work," "doing;" the secondary and remotely-derived meaning is "wage for work." Now, assign the word its primary and usual meaning here, the meaning which both the LXX. and the Vulgate assign it, and it is conclusive in favour of the interpretation here advocated, "This"—the string of imprecations just quoted—"is the work of mine adversaries from the Lord." It is conclusive, because it is irreconcilable with the ordinary interpretation. Assign the word again its secondary meaning, *merces laboris*, "wage for work," and, though not so conclusive, it is equally apposite. "This"—the doom they have denounced against me—"shall be the reward, for their work,"—of imprecation, of "speaking evil against my soul"—"of mine adversaries from the Lord."

But let us pass on to the succeeding verses of this third section. The next verse, the 21st, surely betrays a very different spirit from that which breathes in these fierce anathemas. I do find in it something akin to the sentiment of verses 1 and 4, but nothing resembling the truculent spirit of verses 6-19. "But do thou for me, O God the Lord, for thy name's sake; because thy mercy is good, deliver thou me." How naturally such an appeal would come from the person reviled! how unbecoming it would be to the reviler! And, again (verse 22), "I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me." If David was the object of these curses, we can well understand his speaking thus—such reproaches might well have broken his heart; but it is difficult to believe that the man who now speaks so dejectedly, so submissively, is the same man who

but just now spoke so hotly and virulently. More than that, we observe in these words, as we think, a distinct and double reference to the charge of verse 16. He has there been accused of "persecuting the poor and needy" (עָנִי וְאֶבְיֹן). He here replies, as I understand him, that it is just the other way. He is rather the poor and needy who is persecuted. "For it is I who am poor and needy" (עָנִי וְאֶבְיֹן אֲנִי—עָנִי אֲנִי being emphatic = *ego hic*). He has also been accused, in the same verse, of persecuting "the broken-hearted."¹ Have we not a possible allusion to this in the following clause: "My heart is wounded within me"? Taken by themselves, it is true, the words do not present us with any striking coincidences; but taken in connection with the coincidence just pointed out, they are at least suggestive of a reference.

But the whole of this concluding section of the Psalm harmonizes, as it seems to me, with the first part, and is alien from the spirit of the second. The 23rd and 24th verses, *e.g.*, describe very forcibly the condition to which a man might easily be reduced by such enmity and such calumnies as those recorded in verses 6-19; but it seems hard to believe that one who has dealt out curses so courageously and self-reliantly should now, in almost the next breath, assume the attitude and language of complete and helpless dependence on God: should pray God, if I may use the expression, *in formâ pauperis*. Verse 25 again reminds us—not that he has reproached another, but of the reproaches of others heaped upon him: "I became a reproach

¹ See Perowne's translation of Verse 16.

unto them." The appeal for help in verse 26, too, would surely proceed much more fittingly from the subject than from the author of the imprecations. The 27th verse explains the 20th. In the latter we read: "This is the doing of mine adversaries from the Lord," *i. e.*, with the Lord's sanction and by his appointment (מִסֵּר יְהוָה). Cf. Josh. xi. 20, *Heb.*, and 2 Sam. xvi. 10). The 27th verse stands: "And they shall know that this is thy hand, that thou, Lord, hast done it." The 28th is still more to our purpose: "Let them curse, but bless thou." It is as if he said: "I have recited their imprecations against me—what matters it? they are welcome to curse, if only God blesses me." In the 29th verse I find two more verbal coincidences too striking to be passed over. The 18th verse reads: "He clothed" (וּלְבָשׁ) "himself with cursing." The 29th, taking up the word, replies: "Let mine adversaries be clothed" (וּלְבָשׁוּ) "with shame." The 19th verse, again—the last of the Imprecatory section—runs: "Let it be unto him as the garment that covereth" (וְעִטָּה) "him". This 29th verse makes reply: "Let them cover" (וְעִטּוּ) "themselves with their own confusion."

Now if we regard these different verses as having all proceeded from the same speaker, we are landed in this difficulty, that we have here a repetition so much weaker than the original as to have almost the effect of an anti-climax.¹ This difficulty attaches to the verse from the mere "change" from imprecation to the "expression of a wish," or rather to the statement of a fact; but it attaches, surely, in

¹ Perowne

a double degré when these verbal coincidences are taken into account. It comes, in fact, to this; that the Psalmist goes over the ground a second time, but strange to say, *tones everything down*. Regard the verses, on the other hand, as proceeding from different speakers, and this dilemma is avoided; the repetitions are easily accounted for; we have then words of imprecation echoed back in subdued and chastened words of prayer. But I find—unless I am much deceived—two more such coincidences in the last verse. The 6th verse, the head and front of the imprecations, contains the words, “Let Satan stand at his right hand.” This last verse, with a manifest reference surely to the 6th, reads: “For he shall stand” —*i. e.*, the Lord (see verse 30), not Satan—“at the right hand of the poor.” (See verse 22: “I am poor and needy.”) Again, the 7th verse reads: “When he shall be judged” (בְּהִשָּׁפָטוֹ), “let him be condemned.” The last verse, having these words in view, replies: “To save him from them that judge” (מִשֹּׁפְטֵי) “his soul.” Now, what can we conclude from these striking and repeated references, as well as from the sentiments which they embody, but that we have here the Psalmist’s meek rejoinder to the anathemas of his adversaries—his answer to them “out of their own mouths”? For these coincidences, I take it, are too many and too marked to permit the idea of their being accidental. The allusions in some cases are obvious. And their evidence, in its cumulative weight, is, as I submit, conclusive in favour of the view I have here advanced.

It now remains for me to notice one or two

objections which have been raised, or which may be raised, to this interpretation.

Two are stated by Merrick¹ :—

First. “That it is difficult to believe that the Inspired Author of the Psalm has repeated the impious speeches of his enemies through almost half the Psalm.”

Second. “That it is more difficult still to believe that any part of such impious speeches should be quoted as prophetic Scripture by an Apostle.”

As to the first of these the answer is obvious, viz., that if it be “difficult to believe that the Inspired Author of the Psalm” *quoted* these “impious speeches”—and it seems to be allowed that they are “impious”—it is surely less difficult than to believe that he himself *uttered* them. It must be easier to conceive that he repeated and *deprecat*ed them, than that he composed and *imprecat*ed them. But, secondly, I find no difficulty in regarding these words as a quotation. For it is the habit of the Psalmists—as we have already seen—to cite the very words of their enemies. And the *length* of the passage in question—half the Psalm, if you like—is hardly conclusive against its being a citation. In the 39th Psalm we have a quotation ten verses long,² and this is fourteen verses. Surely, the odd four verses are not to decide the question. Or, if they are, then let it be considered that in Psa. l. 7–22 we have two quotations covering *sixteen* consecutive verses.

The second difficulty raised by Mr. Merrick is settled for us by the fact that not unsimilar words,

¹ Letter to Bishop Lowth, quoted by Keate.

² See Perowne's Note on Psalm xxxix. 4.

harsh and cruel words, to say the least, are quoted, and quoted apparently as prophetic Scripture, by another Apostle. St. Paul says (Gal. iv. 30): "Nevertheless, what saith the Scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." Now if Sarah's "grievous" envious words could be quoted as Scripture, surely these might be so quoted also.

But the question here presents itself: Are these words quoted as *prophetic Scripture*? It is allowed that they are referred to by St. Peter—we have admitted that already: but in what way? "It is written"—these are his words—"it is written in the Book of Psalms . . . his bishopric let another take." Well, it *is* written there. But because it is written there and quoted here, does it follow that it was a specific prophecy of the doom of Judas Iscariot? May it not have been quoted—as the Scriptures, we know, often were quoted—by way of accommodation? Nay, is it too much to say positively that it was so quoted? For consider: St. Peter here combines into one sentence fragments of two different Psalms: he changes a plural into a singular, to suit his purpose, viz., "*their* habitation" into "*his* habitation;" and, lastly, he changes "let none dwell in their tents" to "let no man dwell therein." Do not these facts prove that St. Peter cited the passage as apposite and illustrative, but by no means as prophetic?

But it is urged, in answer to this, that Acts i. 16 proves these words to have been prophetic. "This scripture must needs have been fulfilled" (ἐδεῖ

πληρωθῆναι τὴν γραφὴν ταυτην. κ.τ.λ.) “which the Holy Ghost spake before *concerning Judas.*” But the first question which suggests itself is: Does the “this scripture” of verse 16 refer to the two scriptures quoted in verse 20? It is more than doubtful whether it does. For, to begin with, the best manuscripts (ABC¹.) and versions omit the word “this” (ταύτην). (2) The reference in our English Bibles is to *Psa. xli. 9*, not to *Psa. cix. 8*; and some Commentators (Hammond, *e. g.*, in “Annotat.”) understand the Apostle to have had the former passage in view. But supposing we admit, for the sake of argument, that “this scripture spoken before by the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David,” *does* refer to the scripture quoted at verse 20, “his bishopric let another take,” &c.—this does not fasten the *authorship* (in the sense of the original utterance) of *Psa. cix. 8* upon him. That verse could, with perfect propriety, be spoken of as David’s, seeing that David compiled and arranged the whole Psalm, even if that particular expression happened to be a quotation. The Apostle found in the Greek copies of the Old Testament scriptures a Psalm, the 109th, ascribed, and rightly ascribed, to David. The whole of that Psalm he regarded as inspired scripture, just as St. Paul regarded Sarah’s scornful words as scripture. What, then, should hinder him from describing it as “spoken before by the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David”?

But suppose we go a step further and admit that this scripture *was* prophetic of Judas, does even that decide one way or the other as to the authorship of that part of the Psalm? It merely amounts

to this, that, by whomsoever uttered, it *foreshadowed* something relating to Judas Iscariot, and that it was *fulfilled* in him. But might not that something be foreshadowed, and in due course be fulfilled, though the words were originally spoken, not by David, but by David's enemy?

The argument that these words are prophetic, however, and that these curses, therefore, are all to be interpreted of Judas, seems to me to be fraught with difficulties. Not to insist upon the manifestly loose accommodating way in which the Apostle cites the words, and other similar considerations, this view lands us in the terrible dilemma of putting these anathemas into the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ. For if Judas is the person aimed at in these imprecations, then it follows that David, who denounced him, is herein a type of our Holy and Merciful Redeemer; and so we are compelled to believe that He who said of others "Father, forgive them," said of him, "Let his prayer become sin;" that He who charged his disciples to "love their enemies and to bless those who cursed them," Himself prayed, "Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out." So that we only shift the difficulty, and increase it a hundred-fold, if we adopt the supposition "favoured by the majority of Commentators, ancient and modern,"¹ that the Psalm is not "the language of David, but the language of Christ, exercising his office of Judge;" that it is, in fact, the prophetic foreshadowing of the solemn words, "Woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed; it were

¹ Perowne.

good for that man if he had not been born." Well does Perowne remark, "The strain which such a view compels us to put on much of the language of the Psalm ought to have led long since to its abandonment." But what shall we say of the strain which such a view compels us to put on the character of our Lord Christ? Which of us will presume to ascribe such "fierce vindictiveness" to Him?

We must now turn, however, to another objection, and one of a different character from the preceding. "Could such charges," it will be asked, "ever be made, could such curses ever be levelled, against David, against a man so well known, so popular, so highly distinguished as he?" My answer is, that not only *could* such charges be made, but very similar, if not indeed more serious, charges actually *were* made against him. In 2 Sam. xvi. 5-14 we have, I believe, a history of the very occasion when these curses were pronounced and of the circumstances which suggested the Psalm: "And when King David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the Son of Gera; he came forth, and *cursed still as he came*. . . . And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial: the Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the Lord hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man." I cannot help thinking that these cruel words, and the many more words like unto them which would be spoken at that season by

Shimei and others of the adherents of Absalom or of the partisans of the house of Saul, were the originals of the curses which the Psalmist has recorded, and recorded because of their very falsity and cruelty, in this 109th Psalm.

But let us now see whether we can discover anything in the Psalm which harmonizes with the history of 2 Sam. xvi., always remembering that the Psalmist has forewarned us that the charges brought against him were "lying" and "deceitful" (verse 2 ; cf. also Psa. xxxv. 11, and lxix. 12).

It will be admitted, then, that verses 1-5 would describe exactly the words and deeds of Shimei. His was a "mouth of a wicked man and a mouth of deceit;" his were "words of hatred and a lying tongue." But in addition to their words of hatred the Psalmist says his adversaries "fought" (literally, "warred," וִילָחֲמוּנִי, ἐπολέμησάν με, LXX.) against him. Now it is probable that the word is here used *figuratively*, of the war of *words*, as we have interpreted it above. But we see an additional reason for the word, or, rather, a special appropriateness in it, if our conjecture is a correct one, that it was used of Shimei and his party, for they, literally as well as tropically, "fought" against the Psalmist. But it is in the imprecations themselves that I find the closest correspondency between the Psalm and the History. We can well understand, *e.g.*, how verses 6, 7, may have been spoken by Shimei or some such adversary. David is now fleeing for his life (2 Sam. xvi. 11). They hope that before long he will be taken prisoner, and brought to trial and deposed. Hence the prayer,

“Set thou a wicked man over him” (הַיָּסֵד. Cf. הַמְּסֵרֵי, verse 8: upon which Perowne’s Note¹ is: “Set, that is in an official capacity; . . . appoint as judge, or set over him with power and authority to punish”), “and let an adversary stand at his right hand” (“let him not only have an unrighteous judge, but a malicious accuser.”—*Perowne*). “When he is judged, let him be condemned, and let his prayer” (to God for mercy and help) “become sin.” They know it is David’s wont to pray (cf. verse 4, “but I . . . *prayer*”). They here express the hope that his prayer may be disregarded. In verse 8, they pray for his deposition and speedy death. “Let his days be few, and his office” (הַמְּסֵרֵי, “implying that the person held a position of some importance.”—*Perowne*) “let another take.” So that we find all these imprecations have a peculiar suitability, if understood of King David at the time of his flight. The person against whom they were levelled had an office, an office from which some were trying to depose him: he was a pious man, one who would pray; he was not unlikely to have a judge and an accuser: surely it is none other than David who is here described to us. Passing on to verse 14, “Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out,” may we not find a clue to the interpretation of these words in the history of David’s ancestors, the history recorded in the Book of Ruth? For among his “fathers” (the word אָב has a very extended signification, and is used of *any male* ancestor, just as אִם is

¹ I quote these Notes because the support which they lend to this theory is quite unintentional, and therefore all the more powerful. Dr. Perowne is no advocate of the view taken here.

of any female) were Mahlon and Chilion, the sons of Elimelech. They had committed "iniquity" by intermarrying with Moabish women, and, according to Jewish belief,¹ had paid the penalty thereof in their premature death. His "mother" in a direct line was Ruth the Moabitess. Her marriage with Boaz was not esteemed to have been without sin (*cf.* Ruth iv. 12). It is to this sin, according to the Rabbins, that David refers when he says (Psa. li. 5), "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in *sin* did my mother conceive me." Now remembering that these genealogical facts were notorious, and considering the estimation in which the Jews held them, what could be more natural than for some follower or member of the house of Saul, resenting not merely the change of dynasty, but still more the intrusion upon the throne of one who was not of pure Hebrew blood, to cast this reproach in David's teeth, "Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered with the Lord, and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out"? When Boaz espoused Ruth to be his wife, he declared his object to be "that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren." The partisans of Saul remembering, it may be, these words, or at any rate deprecating their fulfilment, pray that "in the generation following their name may be blotted out" (verse 13; where observe the paronomasia, *אֶחָדָם*, *אֶחָדָם* and *אֶחָדָם*, *אֶחָדָם*, verse 14). And I am strengthened in this interpretation by observing that this supposition affords an explanation of what is otherwise almost inexplicable, *viz.*, the extension of the curses from the man to his ancestors and

¹ Targum on Ruth i. 5.

descendants. We can well understand why the members of the dispossessed house of Saul should desire the extinction of David's *race*; they had strong political reasons for desiring it: we can understand why *they* should pray that the "iniquity of his fathers might be remembered with the Lord." That iniquity, in their belief, had already received its partial recompense; it had cost two of his ancestors their lives; it had threatened the extinction of the family: they pray that it may now bear its full fruit, by bringing down the judgment of death on David's children, so that "their name may soon be blotted out."¹ All this is intelligible and consistent. But why David should so earnestly desire the complete excision, root and branch, of the family of Doeg or Ahithophel, or any of his enemies, it is difficult to conceive; and it is still harder to understand why he should comprehend the fathers and mother in his curse. I submit, then, that the explanation of verses 13, 14 by the history of *David's* ancestry, solves a difficulty which the received interpretation creates.

But let us pass on to the next verse: "Because that he remembered not to shew mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart."² Now, making allowance for the exaggeration and distortion inevitable to such charges as these, it is remarkable surely that this is precisely what David had done. The reader will have no difficulty in recalling events in David's

¹ "If I see rightly, the object [of the curse on the fathers] is to heighten its effects on the children."—*Perowne*.

² Perowne's translation is: "But persecuted the afflicted man and the poor, and the broken hearted, to put [them] to death."

life which would give a show of justice at least to this grave indictment. There was the one little ewe lamb of Uriah the Hittite, upon which, by his own shewing, he had "*had no pity*" (2 Sam. xii. 6). There was Uriah himself whom he had persecuted and slain¹ with the sword of the children of Ammon. And though David had no part in the assassination of the great captain of the house of Saul, Abner the son of Ner, and took measures to testify publicly his abhorrence of the deed (2 Sam. iii. 37), yet what so likely as that the "mouth of the wicked" should accuse him, notwithstanding, of conniving at his death? We know that Shimei *did* accuse him of being "a man of blood" and a "man of Belial:" surely that was as *grave* a charge as this of verse 16, and more than that, it is a very similar charge. The latter then may well have been the echo of the former.

But it will here be objected that whatever adaptation we may think we see in any of verses 6-16 to the case of David, surely there can be none in verses 17-19.² He was not a man, it will be said, who "loved cursing," or "who clothed himself with cursing." Such a charge is absurd when made against him. I answer, (1) Such a charge, however, is made against him by all those who ascribe the imprecations of this Psalm to him. (2) There are

¹ לְמוֹרֵת, verse 16 ("to do to death," Poel), would be a singularly fitting word to use of the murder of Uriah.

² The Authorized Version is here somewhat misleading. "The verbs cannot be rendered in these two verses, as in the English Version, as optatives. The tenses are past tenses, and have been so rendered by the LXX."—*Perowne*. "He has loved cursing," we may imagine some Shimei to have said; "and it came unto him," . . . "he clothed himself with cursing and it came," &c.

imprecations in other Psalms which, though very different in spirit and sweep from these, are indicative of a temper which might afford an unscrupulous adversary some grounds for affirming that "he loved cursing." (3) He expressly tells us that they "spoke against him" with "a lying tongue:" he prepares us beforehand, *i.e.*, for groundless and wanton accusations. So that if some of the curses appear to us to be altogether inapplicable to him; if the charge they contain against him is a pure and malicious invention, we see in this fact a positive corroboration of the views here advanced.

In the third section of the Psalm, the whole of which, it will be conceded, *would* have formed, even if it did not, a most appropriate prayer, under the circumstances in which the fugitive and broken-hearted king was then placed, I find the following marks of adaptation:—

1. The sentiment of verse 21,—“But do thou,” &c., is an exact parallel with that of David when he was cursed by Shimei. “It may be that the Lord will look upon mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day.” (2 Sam. xvi. 12.)

2. In verse 23 we read, “*I am gone* like the shadow,” &c. The original word (נִהְיֵיתִי) is rendered by Perowne (Note on verse 23), “I am made to go hence.” He also adds: “This passive form (which only occurs here) denotes *external compulsion*.” Consequently, the word would be a most appropriate one in the lips of a banished man, a man fleeing, as David then was, for his life. The same may be said of נִיַּעַרְתִּי, the next word, which

Perowne renders: "I have been *driven away* as the locust;" and which Gesenius translates, "to be shaken out, *i.e.*, *cast out from a land*" (*cf.* Job xxxviii. 13). Both words exactly describe the case of David at that juncture; both help to connect the Psalm accordingly with the period of the flight from Absalom.

3. Verse 24 runs: "My knees are weak through fasting." In 2 Sam. xvi. 14 we find—"And the king . . . came weary," &c. (פָּעִיפָּה, faint, *languescens*), and from 2 Sam. xvii. 29 we learn that subsequently at Mahanaim "the people was *hungry* and *thirsty* and weary in the wilderness." Surely we have here another tittle of evidence, of little consequence perhaps in itself, but not to be disregarded when taken in combination with other expressions. Surely, the History helps us to understand why David should describe himself as "weak through fasting," and speak of his flesh as "failing of fatness" (literally, "hath fallen away from fat.") And, therefore, when we read in verse 25, "I became a reproach unto them," can we resist the conclusion that it is the curses and reproaches of Shimei to which he is referring?

4. "Thou, Lord, hast done it" (verse 27). What have we here but the poetical version of 2 Sam. xvi. 10, "The Lord hath said unto him, Curse David"? Similarly, "Let them curse, but bless thou" (verse 28), is assuredly the echo of verses 11, 12 of the History, "Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be the Lord will . . . requite me good for his cursing this day."

5. In 2 Sam. xvii. 14, "For the Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel,"

we may see the promised realization of the Psalmist's confident hope expressed in verse 31, the concluding verse of the Psalm, "For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul."

We see, then, how the Psalm, from the first verse to the last, fits into the folds of the narrative of David's flight. The key turns without the slightest strain in the wards of the lock. Is it therefore an unwarrantable conclusion that Psalm cix. reflects the "hatred," the "lying," the "curses," the "prayers," of those terrible days "of trouble and rebuke and blasphemy," the days of Absalom's rebellion? and, consequently, have we not abundant grounds for believing that these "impious speeches" are not David's against Shimei, but those of Shimei and others against David?

But there is still a fraction more of evidence in favour of this view. We have seen that this Psalm was designed to be adapted to music and sung by the Tabernacle choir. The inscription proves this. How very probable that David, after his restoration, should entrust to the sweet singers, and through them consecrate to the high praises of God, a lyric which embalmed for all time the distress, the reproach, the agonized entreaties of those days of dethronement and despair.¹ How very unlikely that he should devote to such holy purposes a hymn which merely stereotyped his fierce hate, his passionate yearning for revenge, his cruel indiscriminating maledictions.

My "Apology" for the Vindictive Psalm is now

¹ Kennicott calls the Psalm "the thanksgiving of an innocent man."

before my readers. It is submitted to them with no little diffidence. It labours, or seems to labour, I am well aware, under the manifest disadvantage of being novel and in some sense, perhaps, original—a consideration which, with many minds, will suffice to ensure its summary rejection. We shall be reminded by some that “what is new is not true, and what is true is not new.” It will be asked by others—indeed, it has been asked already—whether it is possible that the Christian Church for so many hundred years can have been reading and chanting these curses as if they were David’s against Shimei, when all the time they are Shimei’s against David. But to this I think it may fairly be replied that we have no evidence that the now current interpretation has been received *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus*. The *ἔργον* of the LXX. and the *opus* of the Vulgate in verse 20 would seem to point the other way. It is possible, therefore, that the seemingly new interpretation is really the old, and that to adopt it is merely *stare super vias antiquas*. It cannot be denied, seeing that there are no outward and visible signs of a quotation in the Psalm, that the fact of the imprecatory section being a citation, if such were the fact, might easily be obscured and lost sight of. It is a mistake that the cursory unobservant reader would be almost sure to make. But allowing, as of course we must do, that for many centuries the curses were popularly and universally believed to have been David’s; while admitting that that is some presumption against this new interpretation, we deny that it is any proof of its falsity. For how many centuries was it believed that the world was created in six

solar days? For how many centuries was it an article of the faith that the sun went round the earth every four-and-twenty hours? Yet it is now admitted on all hands that the Bible teaches neither the one nor the other. It is quite possible, therefore, that the interpretation sanctioned by long prescription may be at fault on other questions as well as these.

“It is not at all incredible,” says Bishop Butler, “that a book which has been so long in the possession of mankind should contain many truths as yet undiscovered. . . . Possibly it might be intended that events, as they come to pass, should open and ascertain the meaning of several parts of Scripture.”¹

The interpretation, then, of the Vindictive Psalm must depend upon evidence, not upon authority.

JOSEPH HAMMOND.

THE BOOK OF RUTH.

V.—IN THE GATE.

Chapter iv. verses 1-22.

THE gates of ancient cities played many parts: they were guard-houses; they were markets; they were courts of justice; they were places for public deliberation and audience. Necessarily, therefore, they were massively built, with recessed chambers, or divans, in the sides, and often with chambers also above the arch. Here the inhabitants of the city were wont to assemble either for the transaction of business or to hear and tell the news. Here the

¹ “Analogy,” Part ii. chapter 3.