# Preface to Volume V (Psalms 111 - 119)

AT length I am able to present to the Christian public another part of "The Treasury of David." It has demanded longer labour than its predecessors, but that labour has been freely given to it; and to the utmost of my ability I have kept the volume up to the level of those which have gone before. In the production of this exposition I had far rather be long than lax; for I know by experience the disappointment which comes to readers when, after a promising beginning, they see a serious declension towards the end. The general acceptance given to this Commentary has placed me under a heavy obligation to do my best even to the end. Towards that end I am still proceeding with all possible diligence, and it is with great pleasure that I look forward to the speedy issue of the last volume of the work. Many labours distract me from this favourite employment, but I hope to press on with more speed than of late, if my life be spared. It would be imprudent to make too sure of that; for the most fragile Venice glass is not more brittle than human life:

"The spider's most attenuated thread

Is cord, is cable, to the tender film

Which holds our soul in life."

I have been all the longer over this portion of my task because I have been bewildered in the expanse of the One Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm, which makes up the bulk of this volume. Its dimensions and its depth alike overcame me. It spread itself out before me like a vast, rolling prairie, to which I could see no bound, and this alone created a feeling of dismay. Its expanse was unbroken by a bluff or headland, and hence it threatened a mono tonous task, although the fear has not been realized. This marvellous poem seemed to me a great sea of holy teaching, moving, in its many verses, wave upon wave; altogether without an island of special and remarkable state ment to break it up. I confess I hesitated to launch upon it. Other Psalms have been mere lakes, but this is the main ocean. It is a continent of sacred thought, every inch of which is fertile as the garden of the Lord: it is an amazing level of abundance, a mighty stretch of harvest-fields. I have now crossed the great plain for myself, but not without persevering, and, I will add, pleasurable, toil. Several great authors have traversed this region and left their tracks behind them, and so far the journey has been all the easier for me; but yet to me and to my helpers it has been no mean feat of patient authorship and research. This great Psalm is a book in itself: instead of being one among many Psalms, it is worthy to be set forth by itself as a poem of surpassing excellence. Those who have never studied it may pronounce it commonplace, and complain of its repetitions; but to the thoughtful student it is like the great deep, full, so as never to be measured; and varied, so as never to weary the eye. Its depth is as great as its length; it is mystery, not set forth as mystery, but concealed beneath the simplest statements; may I say that it is experience allowed to prattle, to preach, to praise, and to pray like a child-prophet in his own father's house?

My venerable friend, Mr. Rogers, has been spared to help me with his admirable suggestions; but Mr. Gibson, who so industriously translated from the Latin authors, has fallen asleep, leaving behind him copious notes upon the rest of the Psalms. Aid in the homiletical department has been given me by several of the ministers who were educated at the Pastor's College, and their names are duly appended to the hints and skeletons which they have supplied. In this department the present volume is believed to be superior to the former ones. May it prove to be really useful to my brethren, and my desire is fulfilled. I know so well the use of a homiletic hint when the mind is in search for a subject, that I have felt peculiar pleasure in supplying my readers with a full measure of such helps.

In hunting up rare authors, and making extracts from them, Mr. Keys has rendered me great assistance, and I am also a debtor to others who have cheerfully rendered me service when I have sought it. Burdened with the care of many institutions, and the oversight of a singularly large church, I cannot do such justice to my theme as I could wish. Learned leisure would be far more accurate than my busy pen can ever hope to be. If I had nothing else to think of, I would have thought of nothing else, and undivided energies could have accomplished what spare strength can never perform. Hence, I am glad of help; so glad, that I am happy to acknowledge it. Not in this thing only, but in all other labours, I owe in the first place all to God, and secondarily, very, very much to those generous friends who find a delight in making my efforts successful.

Above all, I trust that the Holy Spirit has been with me in writing and compiling these volumes, and therefore I expect that he will bless them both to the conversion of the unrenewed and to the edification of believers. The writing of this book has been a means of grace to my own heart; I have enjoyed for myself what I have prepared for my readers. The Book of Psalms has been a royal banquet to me, and in feasting upon its contents I have seemed to eat angels food. It is no wonder that old writers should call it,-- the school of patience, the soul's soliloquies, the little Bible, the anatomy of conscience, the rose garden, the pearl island, and the like. It is the Paradise of devotion, the Holy Land of poesy, the heart of Scripture, the map of experience, and the tongue of saints. It is the spokesman of feelings which else had found no utterance. Does it not say just what we wished to say? Are not its prayers and praises exactly such as our hearts delight in? No man needs better company than the Psalms; therein he may read and commune with friends human and divine; friends who know the heart of man towards God and the heart of God towards man; friends who perfectly sympathize with us and our sorrows, friends who never betray or forsake. Oh, to be shut up in a cave with David, with no other occupation but to hear him sing, and to sing with him! Well might a Christian monarch lay aside his crown for such enjoyment, and a believing pauper find a crown in such felicity.

It is to be feared that the Psalms are by no means so prized as in earlier ages of the Church. Time was when the Psalms were not only rehearsed in all the churches from day to day, but they were so universally sung that the common people knew them, even if they did not know the letters in which they were written. Time was when bishops would ordain no man to the ministry unless he knew "David" from end to end, and could repeat each Psalm correctly; even Councils of the Church have decreed that none should hold ecclesiastical office unless they knew the whole Psalter by heart. Other practices of those ages had better be forgotten, but to this memory accords an honourable record. Then, as Jerome tells us, the labourer, while he held the plough, sang Hallelujah; the tired reaper refreshed himself with the Psalms, and the vinedresser, while trimming the vines with his curved hook, sang something of David. He tells us that in his part of the world, Psalms were the Christian's ballads; could they have had better? They were the love-songs of the people of God; could any others be so pure and heavenly? These sacred hymns express all modes of holy feeling; they are fit both for childhood and old age; they furnish maxims for the entrance of life, and serve as watchwords at the gates of death. The battle of life, the repose of the Sabbath, the ward of the hospital, the guest-chamber of the mansion the church, the oratory, yea, even heaven itself may be entered with Psalms.

Finally, when I reach the last Psalm, it is my firm conviction that I shall find no truer closing words for myself than those of Bishop Horne, which I take liberty here to quote, using them as if they were my own, since they admirably express my present feelings and past experiences:--

"And now, could the author flatter himself that anyone would take half the pleasure in reading the following exposition which he hath taken in writing it, he would not fear the loss of his labour. The employment detached him from the bustle and hurry of life, the din of politics, and the noise of folly. Vanity and vexation flew for a season, care and disquietude came not near his dwelling. He arose fresh as the morning to his task; the silence of the night invited him to pursue it; and he can truly say, that food and rest were not preferred before it. Every Psalm improved infinitely upon his acquain tance with it, and no one gave him uneasiness but the last; for then he grieved that his work was done. Happier hours than those which have been spent on these meditations on the songs of Zion he never expects to see in this world. Very pleasantly did they pass, and they moved smoothly and swiftly along; for when thus engaged, he counted no time. The meditations are gone, but have left a relish and a fragrance upon the mind, and the remembrance of them is sweet."

Reader,

I am,

Thine to serve

For Christ's sake,

-C. H. Spurgeon