THE IMPRECATORY PSALMS.

BY REV. W. A. JARREL, D.D., LL.D.,
STATION A, DALLAS, TEXAS.

To economize space, but few of the Holy Scriptures on which the truths of this article are based are quoted. The reader, therefore, will please study it with his Bible in hand.

See Ps. 35:8; 55:15; 69:24, 27; 109:10, 12, 13, 18, 19.

(1) The tender, forgiving character of David precludes understanding these Psalms as "mere spiteful vengeance." Surely, in the light of David having twice spared the life of Saul, when, with the bloody spirit of the Hun, and without any provocation or reason, he was seeking to murder him, we must interpret his writings as of anything else than the spirit of personal, private, "spiteful revenge."—1 Sam. 24:1-22; 26:5-21. The forgiving, noble spirit, of the writer of these Psalms, caused even as wicked a man as Saul to confess to him: "Thou art more righteous than I: for thou has rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil."—1 Sam. 24:17-19. And, on the second time when David had spared the life of Saul, who, notwithstanding David had previously so forgivingly spared his life, had continued to seek to murder him, Saul was so impressed with the forgiving and noble character of David, that he confessed: "I have sinned: return, my son David; for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul (life) was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly."—1 Sam. 26:21. This tender, forgiving character of David is shown so great as to be even a fault in his great life—in his dealings with Absalom and Shimei—1 Sam. 13:39; 18:33; 19:4-6, 21-23.

(2) The indorsement, by Jesus, of these Psalms cannot be harmonized with interpreting them as the "venom

of spite." He read them, prayed them, sung them and lived them.—Luke 20:42-44; 24:44-46; Matt. 26:30. Of this hymn, Adam Clarke says: "We know from universal consent of Jewish antiquity that it was composed of Psalms 113, 114, 117 and 118." So Bengel, C. W. Clark, the Comp. Commentary, and commentators generally. In part, these Psalms are imprecatory.—Psa. 113:48; the whole of Psa. 114; 118:6-13. Besides, of the two hundred and eighty-three New Testament quotations from the Old, one hundred and sixteen are from the Psalms; and the imprecatory nature runs through them all; at least, none of them free of being tinged with the spirit of imprecation. Just as the judicial is inseparable from the tenderness, the wisdom and the love of God throughout both the books of God—the natural and the revealed revelation of God.

(3) In none of the Psalms can be found more severe and terrible imprecations than are in the words of Jesus and of the Apostles.—Matt. 23:13-33; 25:30, 41-46; Mark 3:29; 13:40; Luke 16:23; Rom. 1:18, 32; 2:5; 1 Cor. 16:22; 2 Tim. 4:14; Jude 7; Rev. 15:7; 16:18, 19, 20:10.

(4) The saints in the intermediate world, in spirit, pray the imprecations of the Psalms.—Rev. 6:10.

(5) From the foregoing, it appears that, of both earth and paradise, the imprecatory Psalms are the nature and the voice of the righteous.

(6) Without exception, God commends the Psalms as a part of "the inspiration of God", that is "profitable for reproof, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works."—2 Tim. 3:16-18. The imprecatory Psalms are especially suited for this age of outcry against the infliction of justice, in both this world and in that which is to come.

(7) As King, in the place of Jehovah, and, as such, executing the justice of the law, these Psalms were uttered.

(8) Some of these Psalms—probably, all of them—were the inspired voice of God, prophetically pronouncing His judgments on obdurately wicked persons. The cases of Ahithophel and of Judas especially illustrate this proposition.—2 Sam. 16:21; 17:23; Acts 1:20.

(9) As a righteous man, in mind, in spirit, and identified with Jehovah, the Psalmist uttered the imprecatory Psalms. Cataline said: “An identity of wishes and aversions, this alone is true friendship”. So, the Psalmist says: “Do I not hate them, O Lord that hate thee . . . I count them MINE enemies”.—Without this personal identity with one’s family, state, church, human or divine ruler, there can be no loyalty to either.

(10) As every good man says, in heart, Amen, to the vindication of law and government, in the execution of penal justice on the criminal, so do the imprecatory Psalms. Thus Milton prayed:

“Avenge, O Lord, the *scattered* saints,” etc.

Thus, the civilized world cried out for justice upon the Hun, while our boys sealed the cry with their life’s blood. God pity the person whose soul is not imprecatory, as well as otherwise! Joseph Cook says: “A renowned professor, who, as Germany thinks, has done more for New England theology than any man since Jonathan Edwards, was once walking in this city (Boston) with a clergyman of radical faith, who objected to the doctrine that the Bible is inspired, . . . on the ground of the imprecatory Psalms . . . The doubter would not be satisfied. The two came at last to a newspaper bulletin, on which the words were written,—the time was at the opening of our civil war,—‘Baltimore to be shelled at twelve o’clock’. ‘I am glad of it’, said the radical preacher; ‘And glad of it I am, too’, said his companion; but I hardly dare to say so, for fear you will say I am uttering an imprecatory psalm.’” Transcendentalism, by Joseph Cook, pp. 76-77. President Hibben, of Princeton University, uttered the spirit

of the imprecatory Psalms, in saying: "The test of the individual, the test of a nation, is the capacity for righteous indignation; when we are confronted with great moral wrongs we must oppose them with the anger that is like the flaming sword of the wrath of God."

The imprecatory Psalms, in the language of the Holy Scriptures, as they utter the voice of the judicial nature, of penal law in earthly government and of the Holy Scriptures, are summed up in: "Because he remembered not mercy to show mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might slay the broken in heart. As he loved cursing, so let it come upon him; as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him. As he clothed himself with cursing as with a garment, so let it come into his bowels like water, and like oil in his bones." (Psa. 109:16-19.) "Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee; according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those who are appointed to die: and render unto our neighbors seven-fold into their bosom, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord." (Psa. 79:10-12.) "I will not keep silence, but will recompense, even recompense into their bosoms your iniquities." (Isa. 65:6-7.) "If any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe."—Ex. 21:23-24. (Remember that this law was not given for private revenge—as enemies of the Bible represent—but for execution by the court of law—just as with us. As Tholuck and reliable interpreters agree, instead of repealing this law, Jesus only corrected its perversion. Or, to sum up the imprecative Psalms in the universal law of God, that no whining against can gainsay:—"God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."—Gal. 6:7. In exact line with the imprecatory Psalms is the universal demand of all right thinking people for no peace before the Hun is bound up to pay—so far as pos-

sible—for his devastation of homes, property, and for his worse than cruel murder, and unmentionable crimes. With thunder tones, the cry for *justice*, coming up from every battlefield, in this war, interprets and forever vindicates the imprecatory Psalms.

(11) The spirit and the letter of the imprecatory Psalms are farther vindicated in that one of the severest among them prays that, so far as possible, its judgments may be for the good of the offender in resultant reformation:—"Fill their faces with shame; *that* they may seek thy name, O Lord." *Psa.* 83, especially verses 16, 18.

(12) The imprecatory Psalms are to be understood as poems, in the strongly figurative and peculiar oriental style. Bold metaphors, and especially startling hyperboles, are characteristic of oriental style.—See Lowth's *Lectures on Hebrew poetry*, De Wette's *Introduction to the Old Testament*, and Dr. Conant on *Psalms*. Max Müller, who cannot be accused of "orthodoxy", one of the greatest of oriental scholars, says: "If we willfully misinterpret the language of the ancient prophets; if we persist in understanding their words in their outward and material aspect only," "the fault is ours, not theirs." "I believe it can be proved that more than half of the difficulties of religious thought owe their origin to this constant misinterpretation of ancient language and of ancient thought by modern thought."—*Lectures on Religion and Science*. The last point to this article is hardly necessary, for the others are sufficient.