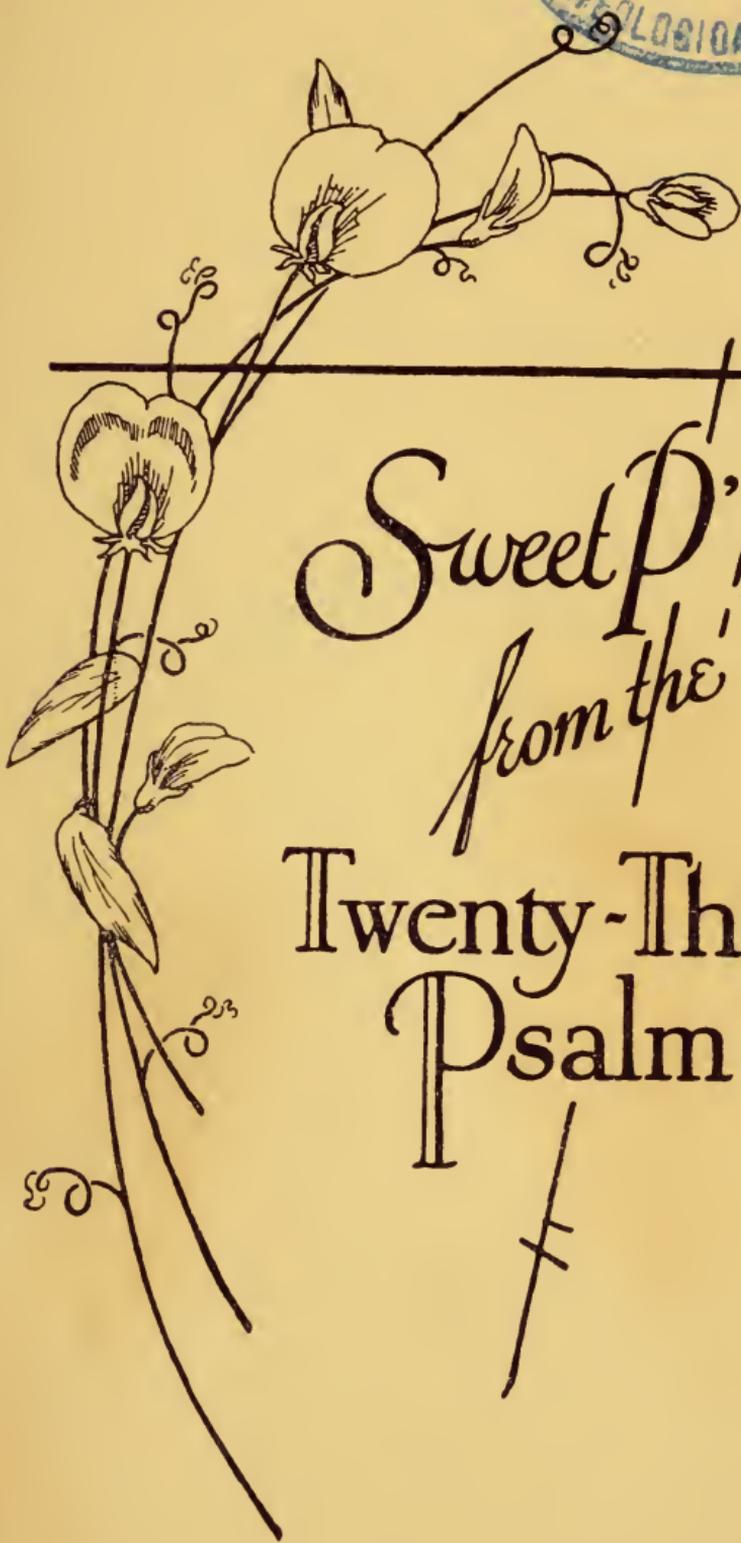


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Sweet Peas
from the
Twenty-Third
Psalm..

Mrs. J. Hal Smith



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*W*E ARE indebted to Rev. Charles Inglis, D.D., of London, for the suggestion which has led to the outline of these studies. The list of words beginning with "P" and also the first list under heading "Position" are much after his plan though we are not sure they entirely agree with his list.

We are also indebted to a book, "The Shepherd Psalm," by Rev. F. B. Meyer, D.D., which has furnished us valuable thoughts and quotations.

—Mrs. J. Hal Smith.



Sweet P's from the Twenty-Third Psalm

IT WAS Dr. Charles Inglis, of England, whom I first heard suggesting the "Sweet P's from the Twenty-third Psalm." Since then I have been studying them for myself and have a desire to share them with others. Note that every word in the list begins with "P." Here they are. What a blessed bunch!

Position—shown by the whole Psalm.

Possession—"The Lord is my Shepherd."

Provision—"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters."

Progress—"He leadeth me."

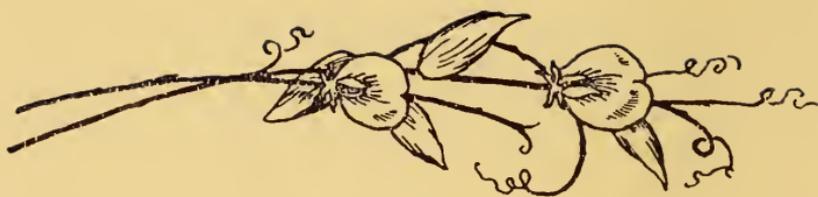
Protection—"Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me."

Preparation—"Thou preparest a table before me."

Privilege—"Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over."

Prospect—"I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

We want to take up these Sweet P's one by one and study them. They are very fragrant and precious.



Position

He who has committed himself to the care of the Shepherd of the 23d Psalm is in a wonderful position:

Over me.....My Shepherd.
Beneath me... The green pastures.
Beside me.....The still waters.
Within me.....No fear.
Before me.....A prepared table.
Around me.... Mine enemies.
Upon me.....The anointing oil.
Following me.. Goodness and mercy.
Beyond me....The house of the Lord forever.

We have on every side the evidence of tender care. How truly the ancient writer of this Psalm understood the heart of his Shepherd. I want us to see by comparing the above lines, one by one, with the words of our Lord Himself, spoken a thousand years later.

“I am the good Shepherd.” John 10:11.

“He shall be saved, and shall go in and out and find pasture.” John 10:9.

“And he arose and rebuked the wind and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the

wind ceased, and there was a great calm.”
Mark 4:39.

“Fear not, little flock.” Luke 12:32.

“That ye may eat and drink at my table
in my kingdom.” Luke 22:30.

“Behold I give you power . . . over
all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall
by any means hurt you.” Luke 10:19.

“Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost
. . . And ye shall receive power after
that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.” Acts 1:
5 and 8.

“I lay down my life for the sheep . . .
And I give unto them eternal life; and they
shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck
them out of my hand.” John 10:15 and 28.

“In my Father’s house are many mansions
. . . I go to prepare a place for you.
And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will
come again and receive you unto myself, that
where I am there ye may be also.” John 14:
2, 3.





Possession

“The Lord is MY Shepherd.” The whole significance of this best loved psalm rests in the little pronouns “my” and “me.” How different it would sound to read, “The Lord is a shepherd.” Just as it makes a difference whether we say, “this is *a* child” or “this is *my* child;” “this is *a* home” or “this is *my* home.” That little word “my” denotes all the difference between a saved and lost soul, all the difference between heaven and hell.

“The LORD is MY shepherd.” Who is this Lord? It is Jehovah of the Old Testament—the holiest name among the ancient Hebrews. It is Jesus of the New Testament, who says, “I am the good shepherd and know my sheep.” *He* is *my* shepherd, *I* am *His* sheep. Blessed mutual ownership! This Jehovah-Jesus who stretches out the heavens and guides the stars in their courses, yet who stoops to bless a little child, is *my* shepherd. He who laid the foundations of the earth and holds the lightning in His grasp and yet says, “The hairs of your head are numbered,” is *my* shepherd. This Jehovah-Jesus, with all His infinite power and tender sympathy and deathless love and endless life, is *my* shepherd. We are magnificently owned.

“The LORD IS MY SHEPHERD.” The All-powerful is the All-loving, too. As a shepherd He guides, guards, feeds, and comforts with His “Fear not, dear little flock,” while He leads them onward to a sure fold.





Provision

“I shall not want” for *rest*, for “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.” “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Matthew 11:28.

“I shall not want” for *strength of spirit*, for “He restoreth my soul.”—“Strengthened with might by His spirit in the inner man.” Ephesians 3:16.

“I shall not want” for *a leader*, for “He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.”—“The lamb which is in the midst of the throne . . . shall lead them unto living fountains of waters.” Revelation 7:17.

“I shall not want” for *comfort*, for “thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”—“I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.” John 14:18.

“I shall not want” for *companionship*, for “Thou art with me.”—“Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” Matthew 28:20.

“I shall not want,” for *food*, for “Thou preparest a table before me.”—“That ye may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom.” Luke 22:30.

“I shall not want” for a *home*, for “I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”—“In my father’s house are many mansions . . . I go to prepare a place for you.” John 14:2.

And we may sum it all up by saying, “No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.” Psalm 84:11. There can be no want to His own, because *He* is the shepherd and He is able to give us *all sufficiency in all things*.





Progress

“He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.” Our shepherd Lord has no other paths in which to lead us but those of righteousness. Sometimes we wonder why we make such slow progress in His ways. The fault is not with Him but with us. Perhaps we grow careless and lag behind, or fearful and shrink back. More often, alas! we see something just outside the path which we wonder if it will not be worth our while to snatch at, especially if other good-looking sheep are doing it. We lose valuable time on these side trips, and swift progress is impossible. It is awfully dangerous business, too, for ravening wolves are on the alert for sheep astray. My! I wonder what would become of some of us, anyway, if we had not a Shepherd of infinite patience and love! If we want to make real progress we must resolutely follow the Shepherd, allowing as little space as possible to intervene between our footsteps and His. It takes some of us a long time to learn that thus, and only thus, can He lead on gloriously from grace to grace and from strength to strength and fill our lives with usefulness and blessedness.

We cannot see our Shepherd leader as did the disciples when they followed Him in the way going up to Jerusalem. We love Him whom

we have not seen. We follow an invisible leader. But this need not bring dismay. Not this invisibility but our adverse hearts and wills obstruct His guidance. Sincere heart devotion to Him will turn us to His paths as unerringly as the magnetic needle turns toward the pole, or as a material body rushes toward the center of gravity.

Sometimes He leads by paths that baffle us and make great demands upon our faith. But, whether beside the foaming torrent, up a rugged mountain steep, or through the valley of the shadow of death, we need not falter, for we know our Shepherd. "Whichever way He leads, it is the right way and the way home."

"For His name's sake." The honor of His name is involved in His pledge to us of leadership. "What is Thy name, O wondrous Shepherd?" Is it not "Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace?" And so by all Thy marvelous power, Thine unerring wisdom, Thy divine integrity and glory, Thy fatherly compassion; by everything in accordance with the exquisite loveliness of Thy character, we trust us to Thy leading. In Thy ways alone can we make true progress.

"March on, my soul, nor like a laggard stay;
March swiftly on, yet err not from the way
Where all the nobly wise of old have trod,
The path of faith made by the sons of God."



Protection

“Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” This would be bold boasting for a mortal creature if we had any less ground for it than the assurance, *“Thou art with me.”* We know the Shepherd’s presence *guarantees* protection and safety.

“Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.” We are comforted because we know the rod and staff are good to use for beating back our enemies and also to protect us from our own waywardness. With the rod He corrects and chastens us when we need it, with the staff He pulls us back again and again from dangers into which we are rushing headlong.

The path of life is, at the best, a perilous one to travel. There are many valleys through which we must pass even before we come to the last and darkest one. God has not promised that we shall always walk in the sunlight, nor that we shall be spared the perils common to our race. But His *“Thou art with me”* and *“Lo, I am with you always,”* give us clear confidence that we shall never pass through them alone.

Our Shepherd Lord has passed the dark valleys ahead of us, and *He went alone*. In the agony of Gethsemane He was alone. On Cal-

vary, even the Father turned His face and left Him to die in the darkness alone. The chill and terror of the shadows pierced His soul. But He never leaves one of His beloved sheep alone in its hour of shadow. "I am with you!" How the words still our fears and fill our souls with peace!

"The wolf cometh." Yes, to all of our lives the wolf comes; and only to steal and to kill and to destroy. His hoarse growl would frighten us to death were it not that "Thou art with me!" Reverses in business may strip us of all our earthly possessions, but, "Thou art with me!" Friends we thought we could trust may prove false and break our hearts, but, "Thou art with me!" Death may snatch ruthlessly from us our dearest ones, leaving our hearts bare and quivering and bewildered, but, "Thou art with me!" We may "go down in swift overwhelming physical collapse, the gleam of the surgeon's knife may leap into the midnight imagination and fill the soul with horror at the uncertainty of its coming realization," but, "Thou art with me!" "The doors of some unspeakable institution may yawn and swallow up someone we would a million fold rather see in the grave at rest with God," but, "Thou art with me!" "Thou art my refuge!" "I will fear no evil!"

These valley experiences prove the quality of our faith, unveil the clear stars above us, and bring us very, very close to the Shepherd's side. O matchless and adorable Shepherd! protected by Thee, we can pass through a thousand perils unshaken and unafraid.



Preparation

"Thou preparest a table before me." How naturally one's mind turns from this "prepared table" to that early morning breakfast on the shores of Galilee! The disciples had toiled all night and had taken nothing. Weary, disappointed, "agitated with conflicting hopes and fears", they drew to the shore where stood His blessed feet and found that He had anticipated their need. A warm breakfast was awaiting them, of fish they did not catch, cooked by a fire they did not kindle, prepared by other hands than their own, and all ready to eat.

Sometimes our work fails and, because we have failed, we suppose His care has failed. These are some of the most heart-testing times in all our experience—when we are stripped of the ordinary means of support. Mr. James McConkey says: "This is the time when we come face to face with the fact that we are trusting the circumstances through which God usually works, and not in God Himself. We are thrown into a panic at the thought of trusting God alone." These times of pinch and test bring hot temptations to us to make "stones into bread"—to overreach in a deal, or to use trickery, or try to secure bread by other unlawful means. This, Jesus refused to do, and we cannot afford to do it, either. If our faith fail

not, an angel will touch us presently, saying, "Arise and eat." When shall we learn that the words, "Your Heavenly Father careth for you," have as much intrinsic value as the words, "Ten Dollars," stamped by the United States Government on a golden coin or a piece of paper?

He has prepared before us a spiritual table. He said, "My flesh is meat indeed and my blood is drink indeed." He is our Passover. Let us keep the feast. Our life in Him is symbolized by the Holy Sacrament. "With joy in our voices and triumph in our mien we stand around the table where Christ's flesh is the nourishment of all true hearts." We are very much too thoughtless of the necessity of feeding off of God's table for the nourishment of the spiritual life. There is plenty of activity but "a fatal lack of the holy meditation upon the person, the words, and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ." One who "lived deep" said: "One must by constant meditation on the great mysteries of incarnation and the redemption, plunge one's self more and more into the love of God, which is the greatest grace of one's life. I will occupy myself more and more with our Lord, with His earthly and divine life, with His hidden, suffering, and glorious life. May my own be hidden in God in Christ Jesus."

Isn't it a wonderful thought that He had everything we needed prepared for us even before we came into this world? An African Christian partly expressed it when in his prayer he said: "Lord, I thank you that you made my 'eat' before you made me." There was air prepared for us to breathe, water to drink,

food to eat, light for our eyes, parents to love and to care for us, and a Savior from our sins. By this we know that He will anticipate and prepare for our needs in the Greater Life which is to come. He said, "I go to prepare a place for you." There also is the "prepared table," and we have His promise, "Ye shall eat and drink with Me in My Kingdom."

Blessed preparation, both for time and eternity! We give Thee thanks, O Divine Shepherd!





Privilege

“He anointeth my head with oil.” Glorious privilege! It was an ancient custom in Eastern countries for a host to express his loving welcome by anointing his guests with costly and fragrant ointments. The fragrance clung to the garments for many days, reminding one of happy hours and the affection of true hearts. The Psalmist here expresses God’s welcome for His guest. He takes pains, at great cost to Himself, to show how pleased He is to welcome us at His prepared table.

This anointing with oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Priests were anointed and set apart in holy ministry for the people. Kings were anointed to their offices. Thus the anointing of the Spirit signifies both *sanctification for service* and *power*. It prepares one for a life of true intercession. We must *“Pray in the Spirit.”* *“We know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us.”* We also need the *power* of the Holy Spirit. *“The man of Love is God’s anointed sovereign.”* God anointed Jesus with the Holy Ghost and with *power* and Jesus said, *“Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.”* A new power comes into life—power to witness for Christ, power to love, to serve, to be humble and Christlike. He hath

anointed us to be kings and priests unto God the Father “*by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.*”

“This anointing makes a glad heart. ‘He hath anointed me with the oil of gladness above my fellows!’ The need of the world is gladness—shining faces, glad smiles, hopeful words, cheering toilers through the night; feet elastic with joy as if bathed in its very fulness.” Then our fellows will be attracted by something in us “which they cannot emulate or understand, and they will ask us to tell them the secret of a joy which the world cannot touch because its springs are hidden in a land where winter’s frost is unknown.”

“*The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you.*” “Have you experienced it, my reader? Or is this the bitter lack of your life?”

“*My cup runneth over.*” How like a bountiful God! With Him the cup is always an overflowing cup; “the calf is always the fatted calf; the robe is always the best robe; the joy is unspeakable; the peace passeth understanding;” the grace abundant, that we may have “all-sufficiency in all things.” It is the lavishness of love, He gives more than we need, that the overflow may fall on others and bless them.

Life’s cups are various, some of gold, some of silver, some of tin or glass. But even those with tin cups may drink the sweetest draughts of heavenly joy. And those with golden cups have the same privilege. Christ has taken the

“cup of trembling.” He Himself drank that bitter cup that He might give us one of blessedness. Our greatest joys have come through His sufferings, and we must “never forget the cost at which our brightest moments are made possible.”

These are our privileges at His table—the heavenly anointing and the overflowing cup. Blessed Host, we humbly thank Thee!





Prospect

The prospect is as bright as the promises of God. There is the sure "Celestial Escort" of *goodness* and *mercy*, and then *the house of the Lord forever*.

"Surely," says the Psalmist. He knows there is no doubt about it because God's love is infinite and changeless.

"*Goodness and mercy shall follow me.*" Not goodness alone, for we are sinners, we need many things besides forgiveness, but each with the other linked. They are the personified attributes of God; they are Himself in all the tenderest manifestations of His love and pity toward men. We may not realize they are near. We may fancy ourselves surrounded by objects of dread without comfort or hope, yet there, closely following us, though unseen, are the glorious forms of God's infinite goodness and tender mercy. We may ignore their presence, but they will not depart. Even when we wander, they follow, and are never satisfied until they have brought us back to home and safety.

"*All the days of my life.*" There lie the future days enveloped in impenetrable mists which only part as we advance. What may they not bring to us? There will be glad days, sad days, days of sickness and suffering, lonely

days, weary days, birthdays, death-days, marriage days, anniversaries of a dead past which refuses to be forgotten. But there will never come a day in which God will not be at our side with His goodness and mercy.

"I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Nothing here abides. We think we have homes, but winds or fire destroy them or adversity comes and they must be sold. We think we have loved ones, but they go away and never return. Our hearts reach out for something that abides; something of which we can be sure; some place where nothing can blight our hopes, nor rob us of our true possessions. A strange homesickness sometimes steals over us and we sigh:

"O for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!"

And this is the answer to our longings: *"The house of the Lord forever."* That will be home! What charm there is in the word! What makes home? Not the building, the furniture, nor the gardens. No, these alone are but empty solitudes. *Home is where the loved ones are.* Some day amid the welcoming shouts and songs of angel harpists the whole family in Heaven and earth shall be gathered home forever and forever, never to part again! never again to go out! never again to break up the happy home circle! Better than the fondest memories of the past, is this prospect of the future. We shall behold His face within the glorious portals and be reunited with those whom "we have loved long since and lost awhile." "Blessed are the homesick, for they shall reach home!"

Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the rapturous prospect.

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Sweet P's from the Twenty-third Psalm.

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