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THE

CHURCHMAN

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ART. I.—PSALM II.

"I will declare the decree :
The Lord hath said unto me,
Thou art My son ;
This day have I begotten thee."—Psalm ii. 7.

THOUGH this Psalm is in the New Testament expressly ascribed to David, yet, in the absence of any superscription or other external note of authorship, we will let it speak for itself by its actual form and contents, before attempting to determine either the historical events, if any, out of which it sprang, or its prophetic application to an expected Messiah.

Even among the critics who differ most widely as to the date, authorship, and Messianic import of the Psalm, there is no difference as to its verbal meaning, except in a single sentence of the last verse, "Kiss the Son"—no difference whatever as to its surpassing beauty. The opening verses, it is truly said, show "the utmost art of Hebrew poetry." "The words seem to live and breathe, and the rhythm to paint the action."

The Psalm is, in fact, throughout a dramatic poem of singular force and beauty; the Spirit of prophecy has here enlisted in His service the highest powers of human genius. The action is carried on by a succession of speakers, who seem to live and move before us. Their voices are easily distinguished, and in their vivid language we can almost hear and see the changing scenes which they describe.

The Psalm opens abruptly with a question full of surprise and indignation, which hurries us at once into the midst of the action. A king of Israel, the Lord's anointed, has been recently enthroned on Mount Zion. But Israel is surrounded by heathen nations partially subdued, impatient of subjection, and hating the pure religion of Jehovah. They eagerly seize the

opportunity to revolt, before the new king is firmly settled in authority.

The king himself, strong in the assurance that the grace of God, which has set him in the kingdom, will be his protection against every foe—full, therefore, of a lofty sense of rightful authority and kingly power—beholds with astonishment the tumultuous gathering of the hostile league.

What can be the meaning of so mad an enterprise? What hope of resisting the God of Israel, the Lord of Hosts? In a sudden burst of indignation and amazement the king exclaims: "Why do the heathen rage, and the peoples imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed."

Then, still looking out upon the rebel hosts, the speaker pauses for a moment to listen to the distant voices which come wafted on the wind, and we hear the proud boasts with which they encourage themselves against Jehovah and His king: "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us."

The sound and the rhythm of their words correspond, says Delitzsch, to the hoarse murmur of hatred and defiance.

But now, in the second strophe, a new scene is presented, and the king's voice is heard again, as he turns from the wild tumult below and looks up to heaven. There, as if the clouds were suddenly rent asunder, he sees Jehovah seated on His throne, and laughing His enemies to scorn: "He that sitteth in the heaven laughs: Jehovah hath them in derision."

"There is something very awful," it has been truly said, "in the representation here given of God. First, as if in calm contempt, He laughs at the folly of His enemies, and then, in bitter derision," mocks their vain attempts.

We know the kind of criticism which is sometimes based upon such representations of Jehovah. This God of the Hebrews, it is said, is a creature of their own imagination, an enlarged personification of their own thoughts and feelings, stirred by all emotions and swayed by all passions of man's heart, and only wielding superhuman power to enforce the dictates of an arbitrary will.

But see how such objectors transgress one of the chief canons of their own criticism. They often tell us that, in interpreting the Scriptures, we must not turn rhetoric into logic, nor poetry into prose.

An excellent rule when rightly applied, and nowhere needed more than in those many passages of the poetical books, in which psalmist or prophet strives with all the powers of the imagination to realize the idea of a living God—to make us feel His presence and understand His thoughts as clearly and

as vividly as if we could actually see Him seated in the heavens, looking down upon the children of men, and judging their good or evil deeds, as we ourselves ought to judge them, speaking to us in the language of earth, and in all the varying tones of human feeling—in love or pity, in patience and forgiveness, in warning and remonstrance, in righteous anger or indignant scorn.

It is thus in the Psalm before us. Jehovah speaks as a mighty king, strong enough to despise the puny rage of His rebel subjects, but terrible in His anger if they will not be warned; for "then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure."

Thus ushered in, the voice of the Lord Himself is heard, "mighty in operation," speaking in all the majesty of resistless power: "But *I* have set *My* king upon *My* holy hill of Zion."

The heathen may rage, but they shall not touch Mine anointed. The kings of the earth may set themselves in array, but in vain they conspire against My king. For I, even I Jehovah, have fixed his throne on Zion, and there "My hand shall hold him fast, My arm shall strengthen him. The enemy shall not be able to do him violence, the son of wickedness shall not hurt him."

Such is the meaning, as a later psalmist has taught us, of the few words which are here made to proceed out of the mouth of God. And then the first speaker, the anointed king himself, is heard again. Those words of Jehovah, so clear to *him*, and so full of promise and encouragement, must be explained both to his own people and to his enemies, that they may have no excuse for fighting against God.

"I will declare the decree: Jehovah hath said unto me, Thou art My son; this day have I begotten thee."

This "decree" of Jehovah is rightly regarded as an echo of the Divine oracle, which was conveyed by the prophet Nathan to David, when he wished to build a house for the Lord. There the promise concerning the seed of David runs thus: "He shall build a house for My name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be My son."

It is impossible to mistake the reference to that passage in the Psalm before us; compare the two last sentences of that promise with the two parts of this "decree:"

There—"He shall be My son;" here—"The Lord said unto me, Thou art My son."

There—"I will be to him a Father;" here—"This day have I begotten thee."

The resemblance both in thought and in expression is far too close to be accidental.

Here, then, we have found a sure mark for our guidance in the literal interpretation and primary application of the Psalm; it must have had its origin in some occasion closely connected with the promise which was revealed in a vision of the night to Nathan, and by him announced to David.

And this connection is confirmed, and more closely defined, by a comparison of the historical events of that early part of David's reign in Jerusalem, with the further contents of the promise, enlarged, as it is, and paraphrased both in Psalm ii. and in Psalm lxxxix.

Here we listen to Jehovah saying to the anointed King, His son, "Ask of Me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

"Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

Such language, we are told by one class of interpreters, is too lofty for any application to an earthly king; it "could not be uttered by any man without an impropriety"; it must, therefore, be understood directly and exclusively of the Messiah Himself.

But let us turn to the 89th Psalm, an acknowledged paraphrase of Nathan's vision; and there, in express reference to David himself, the promise runs, "I will beat down his enemies before his face, and plague them that hate him. In My name shall his horn be exalted; I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. Also I will make him My first-born, higher than the kings of the earth."

If we now turn to the history in the 2nd Book of Samuel, we find that the promise in the 7th chapter is immediately followed by the account of David's wars with the heathen nations round about him, and the destruction or submission of all his enemies. "He smote the Philistines and subdued them;" "he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive; and so the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts." "He smote the King of Zobah, as he went to recover his border," or rather "to re-establish his dominion at the river Euphrates"; he smote the Syrians of Damascus; he received the submission of the King of Hamath, and put garrisons in Edom, and he dedicated to the Lord the silver and gold of all nations whom he subdued, of Syria, and Moab, and the children of Ammon, and the Philistines and Amalek.

It is natural to ask with some surprise, how David could thus carry his arms in triumph to "the Euphrates" in face of the great Assyrian power. But here modern discoveries come

to our aid, and by an indirect and undesigned coincidence confirm the Scriptural account of the extent of David's conquests.

For a period of 150 years, including the reigns of David and Solomon, "the Assyrian empire sinks into obscurity, and the very names of its sovereigns are unknown." "The inscriptions," says Mr. George Smith, "afford us only one ray of light: they record that a disaster overtook the Assyrian arms;" defeated by the King of Syria, they "lost the whole region of the Euphrates."

"It is a curious fact," observes the historian, "that this period of decline in the Assyrian power synchronizes with the rise of the Hebrew monarchy.

"A powerful Syrian empire was founded at Zobah, and David, King of Israel, having defeated Hadad-ezer, King of Zobah, subdued all the kings as far as the river Euphrates.

"The Jewish power, now under David and Solomon, his son, took the place formerly occupied by the Assyrian monarchs; but on the breaking up of this empire on the death of Solomon the Jews at once lost their supremacy."

It is thus unquestionably true of David that God gave him the heathen for his inheritance, and that he ruled them with a rod of iron; true, also, in his conquests, extending from the sea-coast of Philistia to the border of Euphrates, that God did "set his hand in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers."

If, then, we are asked, What was the historical occasion of the Psalm? who the original of so vigorous and life-like a picture? we know not where to find in modern criticism a more reasonable or a more truly scientific answer than that which was given a hundred years ago by Herder in his "Spirit of the Hebrew Poetry."

He speaks of it as "a beautiful picture living and growing in every word. But whom does it fit? . . . Whom, according to the plain meaning of other Psalms, did God set as His son and vice-regent upon that holy hill (of Zion)? Who had so many enemies within and without the land of Judah as he? And who triumphed over all those enemies with such distinguished glory? . . . All expressions which occur here occur elsewhere also concerning David, and the whole purpose of the song, the aim for which it was *at the time* composed, is evidently adapted to the place and occasion.

"Nations equip themselves for war; they are threatened and warned; short respite is given them. Who does not see that the bow-string is drawn that the arrow may fly to a *present* mark? Set this mark a thousand years off, *without any occasion from the circumstances of the time*, and the bow is slack, the arrow flies up into the air.

"The finest lyrical structure of the most impressive song is

lost when . . . it is robbed of its local origin, its first proper aim and meaning."

An interpretation based upon such reasoning, and commended by the authority of such a name as Herder's, cannot be ascribed to any want of critical acumen or literary taste. And when we add that it is the interpretation held almost universally, not only by the Christian Fathers, but by the Jews of every age, from the later Psalmists even to our own day, we may fairly claim that those who assign a later date to the Psalm should show some very strong reason for their opinion.

Let us, then, proceed to notice first the chief objections that have been urged against the very ancient and well-approved tradition, which assigns the Psalm to David as its author, and then glance very briefly at the alternatives which have been suggested.

1. First let us hear Hupfeld and his latest editor, Nowack:

"The historical background of the Psalm will hardly admit of being ascertained. The reference to David is *impossible* on account of verse 6 ('Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion'), which presupposes a longer duration of the royal residence upon Zion."

We ask in vain, Why do the words "I have set my king on Zion" imply a long duration? The assumption is purely arbitrary; *how* arbitrary may be judged from the fact that so keen a critic as Reuss remarks on the same words, that "The author was, according to all the probabilities, a king residing at Jerusalem, perhaps *recently enthroned.*" The same opinion is more strongly expressed by Bleek: "The poet in his song had before his eyes only the king of Israel, who had *just at that very time* come to the throne."[1]

We may thus judge of the value of the one sole argument, on the strength of which Hupfeld ventures to pronounce the reference to David "impossible."

2. Not less futile is Hitzig's objection that the king in the Psalm is said to be "consecrated" or "anointed" upon Zion, and that David cannot therefore be intended because he was not "anointed" there.

But the original word has not the meaning thus forced upon it, and nearly all modern scholars support the rendering of our Authorized and Revised Versions, "Yet have I *set* My king upon My holy hill of Zion."

3. A third objection, that when David began to reign none of the neighbouring nations had yet been subdued, may be set aside by simply referring to the history:

When "Saul took the kingdom over Israel" (1 Sam. xiv.

[1] On Heb. i. 5, p. 112.

47), "he fought against all his enemies on every side," against Moab, and Ammon, and Edom, and the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines, "and whithersoever he turned himself *he vexed them*," or, according to another reading, "he was victorious." "And there was sore war against the Philistines all the days of Saul."

In those wars David had made his name terrible by many a grievous slaughter of Philistines, and Amalekites, and other nations. And so, "When the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines came up to seek David."

What could be more natural than that these and the other nations who had been so often defeated and partially subdued should rise up to attack the new king before he could unite all the armies of Israel under his sole command? Nor is this a mere conjecture; for the very same nations against whom Saul had to fight when he "took the kingdom over Israel," namely, Moab, and Ammon, and Edom, and the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines, are all found again, as we have already seen, among those whom David smote and subdued in the early part of his reign on Mount Zion. The supposed discrepancy between the history and the language of the Psalm is thus found to be, in fact, a strong confirmation of the truth of the description, "The kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us."

We may notice one other objection, based upon the supposition that in the Book of Samuel the promise, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to Me a son," refers to the *seed* of David, without including David himself, whereas the author of the Psalm, speaking in his own person, says, "The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art My son, this day have I begotten thee."

But the supposed difficulty disappears when we remember that the words "Thou art My son" are addressed to the Lord's anointed, just because he *is* the anointed, the divinely-chosen ruler of God's people. The divine sonship and the enduring kingdom are bound together in the same covenant and promise to David and to his seed for ever. "My king," "Mine anointed," and "My son," are only different expressions of the same relation to Jehovah, and in that relation David himself is expressly and emphatically included by the closing words of the promise, "Thine house and *thy kingdom* shall be established for ever before thee, *thy throne* shall be established for ever." If, therefore, each of his descendants, who by virtue of this promise succeeds to the throne of his father David, becomes at the same time heir of the promise, "Thou art My

son," it is because this filial relation to Jehovah was first bestowed on David himself, and none but he, to whom the promise was first spoken, could so properly and truly say, what he says in the Psalm, "The Lord hath said unto me, My son art thou: I have this day begotten thee."

With this consideration borne in mind, it will be enough for us to notice very briefly the alternatives proposed by those who refuse to acknowledge David as the author of the Psalm.

Not a few of these critics seek refuge in a purely negative opinion. It is impossible, they say, to determine either the occasion or the person to whom allusion is made. Reuss, who adopts this opinion, and who also rejects any reference to the Messiah, yet regards it as certain that the Psalm was composed in view of *some* real historical circumstance. "There is nothing," he adds, "which can peremptorily exclude the name of David, but neither is there anything which directly points to him"; and he refuses even to discuss the opinions of those critics who would in turn see here a Solomon, Uzziah, Hezekiah, or even an Alexander Jannæus.

To the first and to the last of these names, though for very different reasons, a word may perhaps be due.

Of Solomon's songs, which were a thousand and five, some few are probably to be found in our present Psalter. His poetic genius shines out in full splendour in the Canticles, a poem of which it has been truly said that "No pastoral poetry in the world was ever written so exquisite in its music, so bright in its enjoyment of nature, or presenting so true a picture of faithful love." This is a poem not unworthy to be called "The Song of Songs," as surpassing all others, *but* it is *very* different from the poetry of the Psalms—most different, we may add, from the poetry of this second Psalm, and by that difference we recognise the voice of a poet greater even than Solomon.

The bright and joyous tone of *his* glorious hymeneal, its exquisite music, its tenderness of feeling, its soft idyllic grace, all form the most complete and striking contrast to the warlike spirit that breathes through the abrupt and vehement language of a Psalm which "rings with the tramp of gathering armies,' the wild uproar of the camp, the scornful laughter of God's wrath, and the menacing tone of the poet's own warning to his enemies. He that thus speaks is not the "man of peace," but the warrior-king, "strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might." Just as little do the historical circumstances of Solomon's early reign correspond to the warlike tone of the Psalm. Of him the promise ran, "Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be a man of rest; and I will

give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quietness unto Israel in his days."

And the event was a complete fulfilment of the promise, notwithstanding Ewald's elaborate attempt to prove the contrary by antedating the troubles of Solomon's reign. At his accession there is no trace of rebellion among the conquered nations, "no war or battle's sound," through all the wide empire, which David had brought into subjection.

Our best witness is Solomon himself; for when Hiram had heard that they had anointed him king in the room of his father, and sent messengers to congratulate him, Solomon made answer, "Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the name of the Lord his God for the wars which were about him on every side, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet. But now the Lord our God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is neither adversary nor evil occurrent."

Solomon, therefore, was not the newly-enthroned king against whom the heathen were tumultuously raging together, and who was to "dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

The last alternative to be noticed is due to Hitzig, who tries to prove, by an elaborate argument, that the Psalm must have been written about one hundred years before Christ by Jonathan, or Jannæus, who called himself Alexander, and added the title of King to that of High Priest. He was so detested by his own people, that, as Josephus tells us, when he stood at the altar at the Feast of Tabernacles, he was pelted with citrons, and reviled as the son of a female slave, unworthy to be a priest and to offer sacrifice. In his fury at this insult he ordered a massacre of 6,000 of his subjects; and to save himself from vengeance, shut himself up in the temple and fortified it with barricades.

For six years he waged war against his own citizens, and slew in that time no less than 50,000 of the Jews; and when at length he tried to appease their hatred, and asked them what ought to be done, all shouted out that "he must die." In the bitter war which ensued he was at last successful, and celebrated his triumph by an act of shameless and inhuman atrocity. He ordered about "800 of his prisoners to be crucified in the midst of the city, and slew their wives and children before their eyes, and watched the sight himself as he lay feasting and drinking in the midst of his concubines."[1]

This "son of a Thracian," as the brutal and drunken soldier

[1] Jos. Ant., XIII., xiv. 2; Bell. Jud., I., iv. 6.

was commonly called, is represented by Hitzig as the inspired poet who says in the Psalm, "Jehovah hath said unto me, Thou art My son, this day have I begotten thee." Such criticism may appear incredible, and lest I should be thought to exaggerate, I will translate his own words: "The deep and certain conviction in which he (Jannæus) ascended the throne appears to him as a word of God. As an orthodox king and high priest, he feels himself connected with Jehovah in the intimate relation expressed by sonship; and his duty and consequent right to enforce the service of Jehovah extends as far as Jehovah's claim to his own obedience."

Such is the ignominious depth to which the literary taste and historical judgment even of a great expert in Hebrew scholarship may possibly sink, under the force of preconceived antipathy to any real divine inspiration of Messianic prophecy!

From such criticism we may come back with increased satisfaction and conviction to the traditional belief of both the Jewish and the Christian Church, enshrined in the Scriptures of the New Testament. With them we say that David here prophesies of Christ; but how, and why? Not mechanically, as the unconscious instrument that gives sound to another's thoughts, but as a rational spiritual being taught of God, his mind enlightened by the Holy Ghost, and guided by his own experience of God's providence, to understand the thoughts of God, and his soul longing to realize and fulfil them. He knew, from the direct revelation brought to him by Nathan, that his earthly kingdom was the pledge and promise of a kingdom that should endure for ever. He knew that God had anointed him with His holy oil, and set him on His holy hill of Zion, that he might be both the type and the progenitor of that anointed Son of God whose throne should be as the days of heaven.

Thus the dark horizon, which hides the future from common eyes, was for him already glowing with the dawn of that light which "now shineth," and shall shine evermore "unto the perfect day."

Look at the Psalm from this point of view, and we readily understand how, for David, the glory of that greater kingdom seen afar was already casting back its glow upon every event that touched him in his kingly office, and in his typical character as the Lord's anointed.

It will thus appear quite natural that the language and imagery of the Psalm should have been suggested by the events of David's own reign, although "its words are too great and its tone too lofty" to be limited to such an application.

The "raging together" of the heathen, and the confederacy of hostile kings, were not the less real and natural in David'

own experience because, in the light of a Divine revelation, they imaged forth the spiritual revolt of an unbelieving world "against the Lord, and against His anointed."

The little company of first Christians, to whom Peter and John reported the fierce threatening of the Jewish Council, saw in the events of their day an actual fulfilment of David's description of "the rulers taking counsel together"; "for of a truth, Lord, against Thy Holy Child Jesus both Herod and Pontius Pilate, and the Gentiles and people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done."

But even that fulfilment, they well knew, was not final; it was itself typical and prophetic of the long-enduring struggle, in which all the powers of evil are leagued together against the Lord and His Christ, saying, "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us."

Nor was his sonship to a Heavenly Father less real to David because announced in words whose *highest sense* could neither be applied to angels nor to men, but only as the New Testament has taught us to apply it, to the true eternal Son, whom God raised up from the dead, "as it is also written in the second Psalm, *Thou* art My son, this day have I begotten thee."

Again, the promise, "I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for thy possession," was not the less full of encouragement to David, in his task of subduing the enemies of Israel, because it foretold for his seed a dominion too great for any earthly monarch.

And when we are told that "the Christian idea of the Messiah is different from that which is here presented," because "Christ does not rule the nations with a rod of iron," we answer that the "iron staff" is the symbol of the irresistible power ascribed to the Messiah alike in the expectation of the Jews, and in the faith of Christians.

Of the sense in which the Jews interpreted this second Psalm, and the prophecies connected with it, we have unquestionable evidence in the so-called Psalms of Solomon, written rather less than fifty years before the birth of Christ: "Thou, Lord, didst choose David to be king over Israel, and swearest unto him concerning his seed for ever, that his kingdom should not fail before Thee."

But sinners "in the pride of victory have cast down the throne of David"; and so there follows a prayer for Israel: "Behold, O Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, at the time which Thou, O God, knowest, that Thy servant may reign over Israel. . . . May He thrust out the sinners from His inheritance, and with 'a rod of iron' break them all in pieces like a potter's vessel."

In the visions of the Apocalypse the "iron rod" is still the usual symbol of Christ's power:

"I saw heaven opened, and behold! a white horse, and He that sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and make war"; but we all know the picture of that majestic, awful presence, the eyes as a flame of fire, the head with many crowns, the vesture dipped in blood, the sharp sword going out of His mouth wherewith He shall smite the nations, "and He shall rule them with a rod of iron," when He treadeth "the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."

Can any man still say this is not "the Christian idea of the Messiah"? True, it is an aspect of His countenance which none need ever behold. For mark how even on the Psalmist's lips the warning of destruction is followed quickly by the pleading voice of Mercy: "Be wise now therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son"—or if any choose a different rendering—"lay hold on instruction," or "offer pure worship, lest He be angry, and ye perish in the way—for His anger may soon be kindled.

"Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him."

E. H. GIFFORD.

ART. II.—CHRIST ALONE "IMMACULATE" IN HIS CONCEPTION, AND IN HIS LIFE.[1]

THE controversy on the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which, after raging for two centuries with the greatest virulence between the Dominican and Franciscan orders, was suspended by the prohibitory constitution of Sixtus IV. (*Grave nimis*) in 1483, reached its acutest stage just two years before, when the former General of the Dominicans, Vincentius de Bandelis à Castronovo, produced his exhaustive treatise "De Singulari Puritate et Prærogativâ Conceptionis Salvatoris nostri Jesu Christi," in which he claims the prerogative of a conception without sin, as belonging distinctively and exclusively to Christ.

In this treatise, which represents a disputation held before the Duke Hercules of Este at Ferrara, the author adduces the testimonies of 260 of the greatest divines of the Western Church in every age, in defence of the unique and exclusive prerogative of the Saviour, who alone, as "conceived by the

[1] A review of the rare treatise of Vincentius de Bandelis à Castronovo on the "Singular Purity and Prerogative of the Conception of our Saviour Jesus Christ."