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Edited by the

REV. ARTHUR E. GREGORY.

THE PRAISES OF ISRAEL.

BY

W. T. DAVISON, M.A., D.D.

London:

CHARLES H. KELLY, 2, CASTLE ST., CITY RD., E.C. ;
AND 66, PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

1893.

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THE
PRAISES OF ISRAEL:

AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE STUDY OF THE PSALMS.

BY

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Conjugi

meae

Dilectissimae

P R E F A C E.

THE size and scope of this volume have involved an appearance of dogmatism upon debated questions very far from the mind of the writer. It has often been necessary to give results, without the processes that have led up to them. It has been impossible even to quote, much less discuss, the views of scholars for whom I entertain the highest respect, but whose conclusions I have not been able to accept. The literature of the Psalms is portentously large, and it would take considerable space even to enumerate the writers to whom I am under obligation. But I have freely consulted and used very various authorities, from Augustine and Calvin to Ewald and Delitzsch, Perowne and Kay, Bâthgen and Schultz, Driver and Cheyne, Kirkpatrick and Robertson Smith. The title adopted for this brief Introduction, which is drawn from the striking language of Ps. xxii. 3, and is indeed but

a literal rendering of the current Hebrew name for the Psalter, has been used as a sub-title by Canon Cheyne, in his *Book of Psalms, a New Translation with Commentary*, a work to which I am the more glad to express a general indebtedness, because I have been unable to follow its learned author in many of his critical conclusions as published in his Bampton Lectures. From the *Midrash Tehillim*, recently made more accessible in Wünsche's edition, and the "Christian Midrash" from patristic writers embodied in the pages of Drs. Neale and Littledale, it is at least possible to learn how the Psalms have been understood, or misunderstood, during centuries of Jewish and Christian interpretation. Both from "mystical" exegetes on the one hand, and from "rationalistic" theorists on the other, not a little may be learned by one who is anxious to understand the Psalms on their spiritual and literary sides respectively.

But the Psalter is its own best commentary, and nothing is more refreshing than to turn from reading *about* the Psalms, to ponder the book itself. If the readers of this little volume lay it down with any added zest for drinking at the Fountain-head, its end will be abundantly answered.

W. T. D.

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THE PRAISES OF ISRAEL.

THE PRAISES OF ISRAEL.



INTRODUCTION.

THE Psalter is a Bible within a Bible. It is so, because in it beats the very heart of the Old Testament and of all spiritual religion. But perhaps in no respect is the saying more true than in this, that the Book of Psalms, while itself a whole possessing a marvellous unity, is at the same time an organic whole, consisting of a number of independent and mutually related parts, and exhibiting all the characteristics of growth and development. It is not merely a collection of sacred poems, it is a collection of collections, an anthology of the flowers of divine song among the Hebrews during many centuries. But the selection is not one of a hundred and fifty gems of literature,—though the judgment of ages has given to the Psalms an exceedingly high place as human compositions,—but of the lyric

poems best adapted to express and guide the religious life of Israel, most suitable for the worship of God and the instruction of men. They present a number of sparkling points of light in the long line of that Revelation of Himself which God has made to men, always in man and by man; and especially in that portion of His progressive revelation by which God spoke to the world through Israel.

This remarkable book is not merely a Jewish anthology. More than any book of the Old Testament, it has been "baptized into Christ." In the music which sounds from the harp of Israel, the over-tones are Christian. The harmonics or over-tones, by which an endless range of quality is conferred on a fundamental tone in music, must not overpower it, or the note loses both in truth and sweetness. But the richness and fulness of the note is due to its over-tones, and the Christian cannot listen to the strains of the Psalms without hearing the exquisite vibrations of promises greeted from afar, and a Voice sounds in his ear telling how "all things must needs be fulfilled which are written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and IN THE PSALMS concerning Me."

Moreover, the Psalms speak the language of universal devotion. The religious poems of the Vedas and the liturgies of the Zendavesta were

for an age and for a nation, Israel's hymns are for the world and for all time. When they cease to be read, man will have ceased to be religious. Believers in God and the human soul, who grapple with the problems of this difficult life, who bend under its burdens and long for emancipation from its evils, who know the mystic joys of penitence and the unspeakable enlargement of the spirit in its aspirations after righteousness and its enjoyment of personal communion with a personal God, will never exhaust the fulness of the Psalms, nor weary of their repetition.

Such a book deserves *study*. Rich enjoyment and spiritual profit are indeed to be drawn from it without minute and careful study. By virtue of its intrinsic excellence, the spirit of tender and fervent religious feeling breathed into it by the Divine Spirit, it will in and of itself continue to minister to the devotion of the world as no other book has ever done. For public worship and for private meditation it is inestimably precious to those who have little time and less opportunity for its close and systematic examination. But if it is true that to know this book as it ought to be known, we must love it; it is no less true that to love this book as it ought to be loved, we ought to know it through and through. It cannot be well known by the mere reader, however devout and

prayerful. The light which slumbers dully in the uncut stone, gleams in a hundred sparkling rays from the facets of the brilliant. Increase of knowledge need not imply, and ought never to induce, diminished enjoyment of beauty or abatement of devotional feeling. The botanist need lose nothing of "the splendour in the grass, the glory in the flower," because he has studied its history and analysed its parts. The poetry and beauty of tree and hill and stream are fully open only to those who know their place in the universe and understand their significance. The scholar may allow his religion to evaporate while he is analysing the book which embodies it, but the devout student knows how study will deepen devotion, while devotion enhances the delights of study. Those who know the Psalms most intimately can make the best use of them.

Such study needs to be pursued afresh in every generation, but for some reasons particularly in our own. Unfortunately it has come to be called "Criticism," a word with anything but sacred associations; and even "Higher Criticism," which ignorant people take to imply a tone of conceited superiority towards the sacred Scriptures. It can hardly be too often repeated that Biblical criticism means only reasoned judgment concerning the human and literary side of the Bible, based upon

the most complete investigation. There is nothing new about it; the oldest traditional opinion was new once. There is nothing necessarily abstract and erudite about it; the processes may be for the few, but the results are little worth if they are not capable of being understood by the many. There is certainly nothing necessarily rationalistic or destructive about it, though to too great an extent, minute, thorough, exhaustive investigation of the facts has been left to men with rationalistic tendencies. It is true there is a Biblical criticism which is emphatically new, which is nothing if not erudite, and which has thus far done little but destroy. It has touched the Psalter, as it has touched every book of the Bible, and its finger-marks have not improved the page. But it is both foolish and wicked to create a prejudice against Biblical criticism, because some eminent Biblical critics have analysed a literature rather than expounded a sacred text. There is a great work to be done in our day by men who can preserve the depth of their religious feeling and the fidelity of their allegiance to God, while keeping their minds open to new light concerning the nature and significance of the Revelation which the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has made of Himself in Nature, in History, and in Holy Scripture. Methods of Biblical study, as of

all study, have improved rapidly of late. New sources of information have opened up, old truth has been presented in new and improved setting. The Book of Psalms is inseparably identified with the religion of Israel, and much has been learned during the last half-century concerning the history and significance of that religion which was to prepare in the wilderness the way of the Lord. If some time-honoured traditional views have to be set aside,—by no means so many as some would have us think, for none of them must be lightly discarded,—much more than compensation will be gained by a clearer and more accurate understanding of the facts of history and the nature of the Scripture record. A fresh reading of the familiar and beloved Psalms may bring here and there a ray of new light, a glimpse of new meaning, a breath of fresh religious inspiration given by the Spirit who of old moved those holy men to write. If fresh interest be awakened, fresh benefit cannot fail to follow.

These pages will be by no means critical in their character. Where the literary aspect of the Psalms is concerned, criticism, in the sense of judgment after careful examination, is necessary, and to avoid it would be a species of cowardice. But the reader of the Psalms desires to be introduced as little as possible to “doubtful disputations.” It is difficult

to avoid these altogether in the present state of public opinion. On the one hand, we are met by the confident dogmatism of theorists who expect crude conjectures to be accepted as axioms; on the other, by the unintelligent tenacity of some pious men who damage the defence of the faith by contending for details of traditional opinion *about* the Bible, as if these formed part of the book itself. Nothing but good can come of examination, if it be at the same time thorough and reverent. Difference of opinion there must be; what St. Paul calls *ἔρις*, strife, *θυμοί*, ebullitions of temper, *αἰρέσεις*, the organising of parties, there need not be. It is unseemly to wrangle in the vestibule of the temple. The measure of uncertainty which attaches to the decision of critical questions concerning the Psalms and the date and circumstances of their composition, should make it easier to pass beyond them to the upper air of reverent meditation, "to where, beyond these voices, there is peace."

Whoever wrote these sacred poems, and under whatever circumstances they were written, they bring us into the presence of God. We stand at the portals of a sanctuary, and can hear the soul-subduing strains of heavenly music within. It is through the Psalms that we learn to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life. "The

Psalm," says Basil in often-quoted words, "is the rest of the soul, the minister of peace. It stilleth the stir and swell of the thoughts, it assuageth the passions and chasteneth the waywardness of the desires. To this purpose were those harmonious tunes of psalms devised for us, that they who are children in years, or as yet unripe in virtue, might, when they think they sing, learn. O the wise conceit of that heavenly Teacher, who by His skill hath found out a way that while we sing psalms, we may drink in knowledge to profit!"

"What is there," echoes Richard Hooker, more than a thousand years afterwards, "necessary for man to know, which the Psalms are not able to teach? Heroical magnanimity, exquisite justice, grave moderation, exact wisdom, repentance unfeigned, unwearied patience, the mysteries of God, the sufferings of Christ, the terrors of wrath, the comforts of grace, the works of Providence over this world, and the promised joys of that world which is to come, all good necessarily to be either known, or done, or had, this one celestial fountain yieldeth. Let there be any grief or disaster incident into the soul of man, any wound or sickness named, for which there is not in this treasure-house a present comfortable remedy at all times ready to be found." "The Psalms," said the late Dean Church, "are a pillar of fire and

light in the history of the early world." Round that pure flame clouds and mists, some thick and dark, others brightly touched with a thousand pleasing colours of fancy and speculation, are continually gathering, till the light itself cannot be distinctly seen. That the light of the Psalter may be seen more clearly, in order that He may be seen more clearly of whose celestial glory it is but a single earthly ray, is the object of the following chapters.

CHAPTER I.

THE COMPILATION OF THE PSALTER.

A TRUE hymn-book is not made, it grows. An individual or a synod may collect a number of poetical compositions, but a book which stands in living relation with the worship of a living Church has a life of its own. Favourite hymns are not made such by the decisions of an ecclesiastical council. The real hymn-book, with its roots struck deep in the life and affections of a spiritual community, will itself exhibit the life and growth of an organism. And the history of such a book, where it can be traced, will teach many lessons concerning the history and religion of such a community. The history of the hymns in the Roman and Parisian Breviaries is long, somewhat intricate, and very instructive. The book still called "Wesley's Hymns" has a long history behind it. Its proper title, "A Hymn-book for the use of the people called Methodists,

with a new Supplement," takes us back to 1875, when the new supplement was prepared; to 1830, when an earlier supplement was added; and to 1780, when John Wesley published the first edition of a book which itself was but the last of a long and interesting series of hymn-books put forth since the issue in 1753 of "Hymns and Spiritual Songs for Real Christians of all Denominations." Furthermore, hymns are specially liable to alteration and modification. If, as Mr. Stopford Brooke has lately been showing, early lays like the Anglo-Saxon epic of Beowulf, exhibit layers or strata of verse embedded in them, pointing back to centuries before the date assigned to the poem, much more is this likely to be the case with sacred songs handed down for generations by oral tradition, and then incorporated with others for the purposes of public worship. These are peculiarly likely to exhibit traces of modification and adaptation, so that hymnology, with the study of history it implies, has become almost a science.¹

A close examination of the Psalter reveals even such a history. The account of the processes does not lie upon the surface; we have not a number of "editions," each with its title-page and date; but some at least of the stages through which

¹ Remarkably illustrated in the recent voluminous *Diction-ary of Hymnology*, edited by Mr. Julian.

this wonderful book passed before it was handed on as a sacred heirloom in its present form, may be traced out by careful research.

We have used the word hymn-book for the moment as interchangeable with Psalter. This is not strictly correct, and there are important differences between the history we are about to sketch, and that of a Christian hymnary. The word Psalm (Greek $\psiαλμός$, Hebrew *mizmor*) indicates by its derivation a composition set to music. The action implied both in the Hebrew and the Greek roots, is the touching of the strings of the harp, then the word comes to indicate the music thus produced, and lastly, the verses sung to musical accompaniment. But, properly speaking, the psalm is not to be confused with the hymn. "The psalm might be a *De Profundis*," says the late Archbishop Trench, "the story of man's deliverance, or a commemoration of mercies which he had received; and of a spiritual song the same might be said; the hymn must always be more or less of a *Magnificat*, a direct address to the praise and glory of God."¹ Some of the Psalms are, according to the title current among the Jews, literally *Tehillim*, the *praises* of Israel; others, as the subscription to Psalm lxxii. and the titles of lxxxvi., xc., and cii. indicate, are *prayers*,

¹ *Synonyms of the New Testament*, p. 286.

either from the depths or from the level tablelands of life, up to those celestial heights from whence comes man's help; others are *songs*, like Psalms cxx.—cxxxiv., with an emphasis laid upon their being chanted by the human voice. Some are narrative in character, like lxxviii., cv., cvi.; some didactic, like the 50th Psalm; others elegiac, like the 6th, the 38th, the 55th. But, whether the strain be *Venite Exultemus* or *Miserere Domine*, one Name rules the whole, one spirit pervades it. "Holiness to the Lord" is written on the doorposts of the house, on the beams of its chambers and the lily-work of its carved pillars. Any attempt to analyse or classify these strains according to their subject-matter breaks down, as we find rapture blend with pleading, or the night of sorrow lose itself in the morning of joy, mood succeeding mood and experience passing into experience more rapidly than the sunshine and rain that blend and pass in the sweet confusion of an April morning. The rehearsal of God's "mighty acts," which one generation tells to another, breaks suddenly away into penitence for national sin or an outburst of thanksgiving which abundantly utters the memory of His great goodness. The only key to the unity of the whole is found in the words with which St. Paul concludes one of his great arguments concerning God in

history: "Of Him and through Him and unto Him are all things. To Him be the glory for ever!"

Under what circumstances, then, has the present collection of Psalms been made, and what signs are there of preliminary stages through which the final result has been reached? The division of the Psalter into five books, made so clear in our Revised Version, is very old; some think it is to be traced as far back as the time of the Chronicles, in the fourth century before Christ. The *Midrash Tehillim*¹ opens with a glowing comparison between the lawgiver and the king, the five books of the Pentateuch and the five books of the Psalms, the blessing of Moses and the blessing of David. The comparison has since been a favourite one with commentators, who have written, like Delitzsch, of "the fivefold book of the congregation to Jehovah, as the Law is the fivefold book of Jehovah to the congregation"; or like Wordsworth, who calls the Psalter "a poetical Pentateuch, set to music in Hebrew history, the subject of the oratorio being Messiah Himself." This fivefold division is marked by the doxologies which occur at xli. 13, lxxii. 18, lxxxix. 52, and cvi. 48, respectively. But it is necessary to examine much more closely in order to understand

¹ Ed. Wünsche, p. 2.

the exact significance and bearing of this obvious fivefold division.

A clear indication at the outset that the Psalter as we have it is a collection of collections, not precisely corresponding with the traditional five books, is found in the existence of duplicate forms of the same psalm. With slight variations, the exact nature of which is worth noticing, Psalm liii. is identical with Psalm xiv.; Psalm lxx. with Psalm xl. 13-17; while Psalm cviii. consists of a combination of lvii. 7-11, with lx. 5-12. Some of the variations arise from a difference of text; others appear to show what we have other reasons for concluding, that these sacred poems were modified and adapted for new use in new circumstances, to express new, though kindred feelings. A close comparison of the two "editions" of Psalm xviii., as found in 2 Samuel xxii. and in the Psalter, is very instructive. Further examples of the free use made of previous compositions, the matter-of-fact way in which borrowing and adaptation was practised, may be found in Psalm lxxxvi., which is almost made up of quotations, and in Psalm cxliv. A striking example of the way in which psalms might be blended and put into the mouth of a speaker, as an appropriate expression of his feelings, is found in 1 Chronicles xvi. 7-36. The chronicler does not, it is true,

as our A.V. implies, directly attribute this psalm, which is made up of parts of xcvi., cv., and cvi., to David. The seventh verse is translated in R.V.: "Then on that day did David first ordain to give thanks unto the Lord, by the hand of Asaph and his brethren," and the meaning of the Hebrew appears to be that David then for the first time enjoined upon Asaph and his brethren the duty of leading the formal thanksgivings of the congregation. It would appear that the words which follow, which it is impossible to believe that David composed, are inserted as an appropriate illustration of his object and aims in arranging the music of the sanctuary.

Another interesting phenomenon, illustrating the way in which psalms were edited or adapted, is the variation found in the names of God used in different parts of the Psalter. In Book i. the name Jehovah occurs 272 times, Elohim 15; in Book ii. the case is reversed, Elohim occurring 164 times, Jehovah 30 times. In the 3rd book the facts are somewhat more complicated, there being an Elohistic section and a Jehovistic section discernible; while in the two last books the name Jehovah is paramount, occurring 339 times, while Elohim, used absolutely and of the true God, occurs but once or twice. The exact significance of these facts is still in dispute. They cannot be

accidental. Nor is it likely that some psalmists used chiefly one name of God, and that the groups of psalms were arranged accordingly. It may have been that at certain times or amongst a certain school of writers the use of one name predominated; but it is much more probable that it is due to the hand of an editor. For example, Psalm l. 7 is taken from Exodus xx. 2; several verses in Psalm lxxviii. from Numbers x. and Judges v. Psalm lxxi. 19 is taken from Exodus xv. 11, and in each case the name Elohim is substituted for the name Jehovah. This change has been sometimes carried out even at the cost of the true meaning. For instance, in Exodus xx. 2, "I am Jehovah, thy God," is intelligible; but the relation between the names is altogether lost in Psalm l. 7, "I am God, thy God." The supposition that the change of names was due to a compiler is almost proved by the fact that in Psalms ^{xiv.} liii. and ^{xl.} lxx. we have what may be called a Jehovistic and an Elohist edition of the same psalm. Sometimes, however, a passage is borrowed without change of name, as lxxxvi. 14 from liv. 4, 5, and Psalm cviii. from Psalms lvii. and lx., according to their present style. This is thought to prove that Psalms liv., lvii., and lx. were not merely written earlier, but brought together by this same collector, when Psalms

lxxxvi. and cviii. were fixed in their present places.¹

It is not easy to explain the significance of these facts. At one time the hypothesis obtained that the name Elohim was a mark of antiquity, and certain theories as to the composition of the Pentateuch hinged upon its use. But the view that dates of documents could be determined by the use of Divine names has been given up. The names Elohim and Jehovah have, of course, a distinct theological significance, but it is impossible to press this distinction as if it were always observed in actual use, though some commentators have attempted to do so. On the other hand, it is altogether unsatisfactory to ascribe the usage, as some have done, to "a compiler's whim." We are compelled at present simply to note the facts and draw the conclusion that the Psalms, as we have them, have been edited, and for some reason, not now clearly traceable, the names of God regulated or changed.

Is it possible, then, by these and other means to trace out the process by which we now have 150 psalms arranged in five books? The first book contains 41 psalms, all of which are inscribed "to David," except the four following. The first Psalm is prefatory. The second at one time seems to have

¹ Ewald, *Psalms*, vol. i. p. 9.

appeared as a continuation of the first. In the text of Acts xiii. 33 an important MS. styles it the first Psalm. The tenth is a kind of appendix to the ninth, forming with it an imperfect acrostic. The thirty-third is ascribed to David in the LXX. In the second book Psalms xlii.—xlix. are ascribed to the sons of Korah; l. to Asaph; li.—lxxi. to David (except lxvi., lxvii., lxxi. anonymous); and lxxii. to Solomon. In the third book we find, first, a group of psalms, lxxiii.—lxxxiii. attributed to Asaph; lxxxiv., lxxxv., lxxxvii., and lxxxviii. are Korahitic; one psalm only, lxxxvi., is ascribed to David, and lxxxix. to Ethan. In the fourth book, one psalm, xc., is ascribed to Moses; two, ci. and ciii., to David, and the rest are anonymous. In the fifth book, out of 43 psalms, 15 (only 11 in the LXX.) are ascribed to David, one to Solomon, and the rest are anonymous.

At the end of the 72nd Psalm, in addition to the doxology, a subscription is found, "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." The meaning of this in itself is clear enough, as it marks the end of a collection of Davidic psalms; but its position is peculiar. The psalm to which it is affixed is ascribed to Solomon, while a number of non-Davidic psalms are found in the second book, which ends here, and many Davidic psalms, as we have seen, occur in the later books. It seems

likely, therefore, that this compiler's note is now somewhat out of place. Ewald has a somewhat elaborate theory on the subject, which we need not transcribe; while the following account of the process which has led to the present arrangement is given by Professor Robertson Smith in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

- (a) The formation of the *first* Davidic collection, with a closing doxology (i.-xli.).
- (b) The formation of the *second* Davidic collection, with doxology and subscription (li.-lxxii.).
- (c) The formation of a twofold Levitical collection (xlii.-xlix. Korahitic; l, lxxiii.-lxxxiii. Asaphic).
- (d) An Elohist redaction and combination of (b) and (c).
- (e) The addition to (d) of a non-Elohist supplement and doxology (lxxxiv.-lxxxix.).
- (f) The formation of the *third* collection (xc.-cl.).¹

We can at least follow this scheme so far as to find in the first three books, consisting of 89 psalms, four groups or collections, two Davidic, two Levitical, with a brief appendix. What, then, is the nature of the remaining two books, which many scholars regard as forming but one collection?

It is clear that here also subordinate groups may be traced out, though it is by no means certain that they all existed as separate collec-

¹ See *Old Test. in Jewish Church*, 2nd ed., p. 201.

tions. We turn to Psalms cxx.-cxxxiv., and find a group of fifteen "Songs of Degrees," as they are called in A.V., more properly "Songs of Ascents," R.V., or "Pilgrim-Songs." They are clearly marked off from the rest by a family likeness in style, subject and treatment, while the form in which the title occurs seems to show that they formed at one time a separate collection. The plural word "Ascents," given in the title of the separate psalms, seems to point to a general title, "Songs of Ascents," from which each separate inscription has been derived. In any case the Pilgrim-Songs form a distinct group of psalms well worthy of separate study.

Another group, each beginning with the word *Hodu*, "Give thanks," is found in Psalms cv.-cvii., and two similar groups of *Hallelujah* psalms in cxi.-cxiii., cxlvi.-cl. With these we may compare the *Maschil* groups, xlii.-xlv. and lii.-lv., and the *Michtam* group, lvi.-lx. In these latter cases, however, it is tolerably clear that we find only the grouping of the compiler; the meaning of the words *Maschil* ("didactic"?) and *Michtam* ("golden"?) being doubtful, and there being little or no connection in the subject-matter of the psalms thus designated.

We need not pursue this subject into further detail, though, taking the collections separately,

it is interesting to notice the marks of thought and care in the arrangement of each, and to trace out indications of the principle or principles observed. The mode of arranging poems varies. In the Koran, what appears to us the singular principle is followed, of placing the longer Suras first, the shortest last. (It is probable, however, that we have traces of this in the arrangement of the Hebrew prophets.) In the Vedas, the poems which contain invocations to the same divinity, or prayers of a similar character, are placed together. In modern times it is almost taken for granted that the chronological order ought to prevail, and in the Psalter it is true that *in the main* the earliest psalms are found in the former books, those of the middle period in the middle books, and the latest in the last. So, to some extent, with the collections severally. But (as, e.g., in Wordsworth's arrangement of his own poems) the topical principle is sometimes preferred, and it may be traced in the juxtaposition of certain psalms. Less appropriate, according to our modern way of thinking, is an arrangement by means of 'catchwords,' according to which psalms containing some word or phrase which has caught the attention of the compiler are placed together. So with Psalms i. and ii., which the late Bishop Wordsworth considered were placed

together because of the occurrence of such words as *way* in i. 6 and ii. 12, and *meditate* in i. 2 and ii. 1, these phrases being, as the mystical commentator delighted to observe, "like the golden taches which coupled together the curtains of the tabernacle." Delitzsch makes much of this principle of connection in a separate pamphlet which he has written on the subject, and in his Commentary. Thus Psalms xxxiv. and xxxv., so essentially different from one another, are supposed to be placed side by side, because in these only is the mention of "the angel of the Lord"; while the link between lv. and lvi. is attributed (strangely enough) to the mention of the "dove" in lv. 6, and in the inscription of lvi., where the direction is given that the psalm should be sung to the tune of "The dove of the distant terebinths"!

Very fanciful have been some of the meanings read by devout commentators into the arrangement of the Psalms. Augustine wrote that the order of the Psalms seemed to him to contain the secret—*magni sacramenti*—of "a great and holy mystery." Chrysostom says that "the more the organic structure of the Psalms is analysed, the more will it be recognised that it is pre-adjusted by the Holy Spirit to the doctrines of the gospel of Christ." Wordsworth follows, as may be imagined, on the same track, and the extracts from the Fathers,

given in Neale and Littledale, exhibit the same principle, sometimes carried to an almost absurd extreme. A moderate example is found in the exposition which makes the position of Psalms xxii.—xxix. to depend upon their reference to the work of Christ in redemption. Psalm xxii. is understood to refer to the passion of Christ; xxiii. to His being the Good Shepherd who leads through the valley of the shadow of death; xxiv. to the ascension; xxv. to His intercession; xxvi.—xxviii. to His grace in the communion of His Church; and xxix. to the work of the Holy Spirit, who blesses His people with peace!

Another writer¹ works out at some length the supposed principle of arrangement, that “spiritual affinity, not chronological order, mainly determines the sequence of the Psalms”; while yet another² ingeniously divides the Psalter into seven books—three “Amen books” and three “Hallelujah books,” with one central “Amen-Hallelujah book” between them. The 89 Psalms of the first three books, he tells us, are clearly of a Messianic character, a Messianic psalm (xlv.) being found in the middle of the whole, with two alphabets (2×22) of psalms on either side; a psalm of the Messianic King (ii.) meeting us at the beginning, and another (lxxxix.)

¹ Fausset, *Studies in the 150 Psalms*, p. 60.

² Forbes, *Studies in the Book of Psalms*, pp. 7, 86.

at the end of the whole. These examples are given simply to illustrate the way in which a devout fancy has, in almost every generation, delighted to find its own meanings in this beloved and suggestive book. It may have been pleasant and profitable to pious souls thus to trace out what seemed to them the subtle significance of the curves of beauty forming the pattern in the embroidered work of the Psalter. But all these ingenious fancies cannot be right in their attempts to expound the hidden meaning of the Divine Spirit. It does not require much examination to see that all are mistaken. Not in this direction must we look if we would rightly understand the Book of the Praises of Israel. A very real testimony, as we shall see, may be found in the Psalms to the Lord Jesus Christ, without our allowing devout imagination to take the place of reason. The Psalms were certainly not thrown together at random, but in their arrangement no single principle is discernible. The order of time is, within certain limits, observed; but chronological arrangement is very greatly modified by other conditions, chiefly by the circumstances of collection; whilst in several instances a verbal or a topical connection appears to have led to the precise sequence adopted.

At what times these several collections were made, it is not easy to say. We may, however,

mark out certain limits within which the gradual compilation took place. If the view which has so long obtained, that the Canon of the Old Testament was closed in the time of Ezra, could be established, the *terminus ad quem*, or limit on the hither side, could be easily fixed. It is now, however, generally held by scholars that, while the Canon of the *Torah*, or Law—the first of the three great divisions of the Jewish Scriptures—was closed soon after the return from captivity, that of the *Nebim*, or Prophets, was not fixed till the third century before Christ; while that of the *Cethubim* (Hagiographa), or Writings, was not finally closed till a century later.¹ The Book of Psalms headed this third section of the Jewish Scriptures, and, as the question of dates is of considerable importance in connection with that of authorship and the relation of the Psalms to the religious life of the Jewish Church, we must linger on it long enough to point out a few chief landmarks.

Without discussing obscure questions concerning the Old Testament Canon, it is certain that the prologue to Ecclesiasticus, the date of which can be fixed with considerable certainty, gives us one

¹ See Professor Ryle's *Canon of the Old Testament*, and the article "Canon," in the new edition of Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. i. p. 500.

such landmark. The grandson of Jesus, son of Sirach, author of the Book of Wisdom, which has come to be called "Ecclesiasticus," translated the work into Greek B.C. 132, and prefixed a short introduction, which is of great importance in our inquiry. Three times over, in the compass of twenty or thirty lines, this writer divides the Scriptures into the well-known three parts, in such phrases as these: "the things which have been delivered unto us by the Law and the Prophets, and by others that have followed their steps"; "the reading of the Law and the Prophets, and other books of our Fathers"; "not only these things, but the Law itself and the Prophets, and the rest of the books, have no small difference, when they are spoken in their own language." This appears distinctly to imply that the LXX. translation into Greek of the three parts of the Old Testament Canon was completed before B.C. 132. The translation of the Law, we know, began a century earlier, but it is not so certain when the translation of the "Writings" was finished. A fair interpretation of this passage, however, leads us to conclude that the Greek translation of the Psalter was complete by this date. This is confirmed by the fact that Psalm lxxix. is quoted as Scripture, with the usual formula, in 1 Maccabees vii. 16, the date of which is about 125 B.C.

If we may assume that the Greek translation of the Psalms (the contents of the book being practically identical with the Hebrew) was complete at the date named, the collection in Hebrew must have taken place at least a generation earlier. The early part of the second century before Christ is, therefore, the latest date at which we can fix the compilation of the whole Psalter, the collection of the psalms contained in the fifth book being earlier still. Some scholars hold that the division into five books was known to the writer of 1 Chronicles. They rely upon a comparison of 1 Chronicles xvi. 36 with Psalm cvi. 48. It would certainly appear likely that the chronicler had before him a collection corresponding to our fourth book of Psalms, for he interweaves into his song of thanksgiving portions of the 105th, 96th, and 106th Psalms successively. It would appear, also, that he had before him the 106th Psalm, *with* its doxology. Now this, according to the view of the doxologies generally accepted, that they did not form part of the original psalm, but were added by the compiler, would prove at least that the fourth book had been compiled by the middle of the fourth century before Christ. Others do not accept this view of Psalm cvi. 48, holding that the doxology, in this instance, formed part of the original psalm. We cannot, therefore, assert that such

advance in the work of collection had been made by B.C. 330, though the scanty evidence forthcoming points in that direction.

Turning now to the beginning of the work, may we assume that the first book was compiled in the pre-Exilic period? This question, like that we have just been discussing, is complicated by the question of authorship, which we have yet to consider. But, without entering upon it in detail, it may be said in general that the presence of the 1st Psalm, which all allow was added as a preface to a "Davidic" collection, and the character of which points very distinctly to post-Exilic times, renders it unlikely that the collection was made till after the Return from Captivity. This is confirmed by the prayer in Psalm xiv. 7:—

"O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!
When Jehovah turneth the captivity of His people,
Jacob shall rejoice,
And Israel shall be glad."

It is possible, but not probable, that an earlier than the Babylonish captivity is here referred to. The 33rd Psalm, again, which has not the "Davidic" signature in the Hebrew, is almost certainly of late date. In Psalm xxv., ver. 22 breaks the acrostic arrangement, and was in all probability appended by a post-Exilic compiler. These and other considerations make it tolerably certain

that the *terminus a quo*, or the date of the commencement of the process of arranging the Psalms as we have them, is to be found in the period after the Return from Captivity, probably the middle of the fifth century before Christ.

Within these three centuries, therefore, or somewhere between 450 and 175 B.C., the pious work of gathering together the prayers and praises of Israelitish saints was begun, carried on, and brought to the issue which has given to the world the Book of Psalms. This does not exclude the possibility, or probability, that the compilers of the first and second books had in their possession not only a number of separate pre-Exilic psalms, but smaller collections already formed. Nor does it exclude the possibility that after the formation of a collection, later psalms may have been added at a later date.¹ Further light upon more detailed questions connected with the compilation will be shed upon the subject by an examination into the age of individual psalms, to which we now turn.

¹ To take another illustration from the Wesleyan Hymn-book, compare the hymns marked with an asterisk, which "were not in the editions published during the lifetime of Mr. Wesley."

CHAPTER II.

THE AGE AND AUTHORSHIP OF THE PSALMS.

THE question as to the date and authorship of the several psalms is not so important for the purposes of religious edification as it is sometimes represented. The universality, and if one may so say, the timelessness of the Psalter are amongst its prominent characteristics. The personal elements which the Psalms contain is soon lost in the impersonal, the finite in the infinite. The singer seldom lingers long amidst the streets of the city, within the limits of a single nation or country, among the fields and the homesteads; he soon wings his flight into the upper air, from whence the whole familiar landscape dwindles to a mere speck. The psalmist, of all men, is alone with God and his own soul. The name of a saint does not determine the character of his religion, and the busiest critic may hesitate to intermeddle with the secret devotion of the heart.

But a second glance shows us that this view must be modified. The writers of these sacred lyrics are men of Israel; the occasions of their poems are known, or may be partly ascertained; the poems themselves are often unintelligible apart from the history of the Jewish nation, and some of them are inextricably interwoven with it. A historical background for the Psalms is naturally sought for, and for many reasons is most desirable, if it can be supplied. Professor Cheyne thinks such a background is necessary in order to preserve the Psalms in the affections of Christendom. "Whether we seek this in the life of David and his successors, or in the larger life of the Church-nation, seems from the point of view of dramatic interest, unimportant. But let no one give up the one background unless he is prepared to adopt the other. As mere academical exercises, by not merely unnamed but unknown individuals, the Psalms will neither edify the Church nor charm the literary student." ¹

Now we are not here concerned with "dramatic interest," nor prepared to admit that if we do not know the name or even the age of the writer of the 51st Psalm, it sinks to the level of an "academic exercise." Its value to him who reads it in the inner chamber, "having shut to the door," is the same,

¹ *Origin and Contents of the Psalter*, p. 276.

whether it expresses the passion of penitence which shook David's soul after his great sin, or the collective confession of the Jewish Church-nation. Some of the chief favourites with the devout Christian, the 42nd, the 91st, and the 116th, carry with them no distinct historical associations.

There are, however, many other considerations to be taken into account. The importance of the subject of this chapter for the history of religion in Israel is very great. Those who are anxious to prove a natural development in the history of Judaism from what is called a "monolatry," but little removed from Polytheism, to the spiritual worship of Jehovah, attained only in the latest stages of Jewish history, obviously find the Psalms stand in their way. A late date for the whole of the Psalter becomes necessary, and the question of its age as propounded by Wellhausen is "not whether it contains any post-Exilic psalms, but whether any are pre-Exilic." This question is answered by Canon Cheyne virtually in the negative. He admits no Davidic psalms, and but one, the 18th, with great hesitation, as written before the Exile. This extreme view is not shared by many scholars, and it represents a violent reaction from the tradition of the Jewish and the Christian Church, which attributes half the

Psalms to David's own pen, and regards the first three books of the Psalter as substantially expressing the religious feelings of the Jews during the earlier part of the monarchy. Let us examine the data at our disposal for coming to an approximate decision, remembering that an approximate decision, based on probable evidence, is all that we can expect at this distance of time to attain, in the case of compositions furnishing so few directly historical references.

Our first business is to investigate the titles or inscriptions prefixed to the majority of the Psalms. If these are simply to be accepted as authoritative, our work is well-nigh done. But a little consideration will show that this is not the case. The position of these titles is like that of the subscriptions to St. Paul's Epistles;¹ they do not form a part of the original text, but they represent an early, though not contemporary tradition. That such titles were usual, we see from the headings to the lyrics in 2 Samuel xxii. 1 and xxiii. 1, and the ode in Habakkuk iii. We may also compare the titles given to separate utterances of the prophets, in Isaiah i. 1, ii. 1,

¹ The analogy is not quite complete, but it must be remembered that our comparative nearness to the New Testament times enables us to perceive the interval between the original documents and these afterthoughts.

xiii. 1, etc. It is practically certain that these inscriptions were not written by the authors of the Psalms themselves. In some instances the phraseology may be shown to be taken almost verbatim from the language of 1 Samuel, which was written considerably after the time of David, and the phenomena of the text in relation to the LXX version show that the titles must be the work of subsequent collectors or editors. At the same time, the measure of similarity that exists, not amounting to identity, between the Hebrew text and that of the LXX, shows that we possess in these titles traditions of very considerable antiquity, which are not to be lightly discarded, as they are by some modern critics, as utterly valueless. That a psalm was at a certain time attributed to David, even if not actually written by him, is a fact of some importance. If, however, we are not to assume the correctness of these titles, what amount of credence is to be given to them?

When they are examined, we find them to be of three kinds, referring (1) to the musical setting of the psalm; (2) to its authorship or composition; (3) to the historical circumstances which gave rise to it. On the first head, we need say at present only that these musical expressions are so ancient that the LXX translators did not under-

stand them, and have made some curious guesses as to their meaning. The musical notices are almost entirely absent in the later books, which argues a change of some importance with regard to the music of the temple-worship. If the Greek translation of the Psalms was made in the early part of the second century B.C., and the continuity of tradition was preserved, as we know it was, from generation to generation in Palestine, and so to the Jews in Egypt, the fact that Alexandrian Jews did not understand these musical notes would seem to point to a pre-Exilic date for them, or, at least, shows that we are in the presence of a very early tradition.

Without, however, pressing this point, which is disputed by some, and requires more discussion than we can give it, let us examine the direct references to authorship, assuming for the moment that the "of David" (Heb. "to David") implies that the psalm is ascribed to David as its author. In the Massoretic, or traditional Hebrew text, 1 psalm is attributed to Moses, 73 to David, 2 to Solomon, 12 to Asaph, 11 to the sons of Korah, 1 to Heman, and 1 to Ethan, while in 14 cases historical circumstances are added. The LXX translators ascribe 14 or 15 to David where the Hebrew does not do so, while 4 that are attributed to David in the Hebrew are without a title in the

Greek. The LXX also add some further references, usually obscure and often curious. Thus the 27th Psalm is said to have been written by David "before his anointing"; the 96th was written by David "when the house was being built, after the captivity"; lxxvi. and lxxx. are said to have reference to "the Assyrian"; while a number of the titles in the Greek indicate the day of the week on which certain psalms were recited in public worship. In the Hebrew, the 92nd Psalm is shown to have been appointed for the Sabbath-day, but the Greek gives also the 24th for the first day of the week, the 48th for the second, and the 93rd for the day before the Sabbath, when the work of creation and of settling the earth with its new inhabitants was finished.

Passing by for the moment Psalm xc., which is attributed to Moses, it will be convenient to test the value of the titles by examining those in which psalms are ascribed to David. A superficial examination would enable us to divide these into cases (1) where the evidence for Davidic authorship preponderates; (2) those which *may* have been written by David; and (3) those which, as they stand, could not have come from his pen. Taking the latter class first, we may say that the language of Psalm cxxxix. puts Davidic authorship quite out of the question. The number of

Aramaisms is so considerable, and the peculiarities of language such that it must be one of the latest of all the Psalms. It is not often that a linguistic argument can be used to determine date, but here its applicability is unquestionable. Equally strong is the argument against cxliv., as it stands; but the psalm is not improbably a composite one, the latter part of late date,—the mention of David by name in verse 10 is not conclusive,—while the former may have been written by David, though it is more likely to be a later imitation of his style. Psalms cxxii. and cxxiv., by indubitable internal evidence, belong to the time of the Restoration; cxxii. 5 even mentioning “the thrones of the house of David.” In cviii. we have a composite psalm, post-Exilic, but possibly embodying an earlier fragment. The 86th Psalm, beautiful as it is, is little more than a mosaic of passages found in other psalms, some of them certainly later than David’s time. The 53rd Psalm, a reproduction of the 14th, contains a direct reference to the Captivity, as in all probability does li. 18.¹ In these cases, however, there

¹ In the modern Jewish Prayer-book, in the order for morning service in the synagogues, there occurs a prayer, “that the holy temple may speedily be rebuilt in our days,” and the Hebrew word for “rebuild” is the same as that used for “build” in li. 18.

may have been a liturgical addition affixed to an earlier composition. In Psalms v. 7, lxiii. 3, lxix. 10, and cxxxviii. 2, we have a reference to the temple, which, in the opinion of most critics, is fatal to Davidic authorship. A word is used, the root of which indicates a capacious building, its proper meaning is "palace," and it is used scores of times in the Old Testament of the temple. Some scholars, however, think it may refer to the Davidic tabernacle, which may have been splendid in its construction; and if it were ever so mean, it was undoubtedly the palace of a great King¹ (cf. 1 Sam. i. 9, and see Psalm xi., 4). Psalms xx. and xxi. are not the addresses of a king to his people, but the prayers of a people for their king. In other psalms, *e.g.* xii., xxv., xxxvii., xxxviii., the circumstances, when examined, seem very inappropriate to David at any period of his history; and it is certainly very difficult to match the expressions of Psalms lv.-lix. with the several circumstances under which they are said to have been composed.

On the other hand, there is strong evidence for the belief that David wrote the 18th Psalm. As this is a crucial point, and much depends on its decision, it must be examined somewhat closely. In 2 Samuel xxii. 1 we have a distinct statement

¹ So Delitzsch *in loco*; see i. 161, E. Tr.

which confirms the historical title of Psalm xviii. : " And David spake unto the Lord the words of this song in the day that the Lord delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul." Some critics will not admit this as independent evidence, or, at least, as early evidence, because 2 Samuel xxi.-xxiii. appears to form a kind of appendix to the book, added at a later date. The word "appendix" does not properly describe the nature of this section. It is, however, distinguished from the continuous flow of the narrative, which it undoubtedly interrupts. It consists of certain illustrative extracts, some historical, some poetical, inserted from earlier, perhaps contemporary documents. This was in all probability done by the compiler of 1 and 2 Samuel, but if due to a later hand, there is still no ground for saying that the passage "only proves that the poem was conjecturally ascribed to the idealised David not long before the Exile." The evidence of 2 Samuel xxii. may not have the force of contemporary evidence, but it undeniably represents a tradition which takes us back within a couple of centuries of David's time, and which not improbably rests on contemporary documents. Unless there be some strong antecedent presumption against Davidic psalms altogether, this evidence must be

considered conclusive. A close comparison of the two texts seems to show that the form in II Samuel is the earlier of the two, or both may have been taken from some earlier authority, such as the Annals of David, which we know existed, though they have not come down to us (1 Chron. xxix. 29, 30). The internal evidence confirms the statement of the title. There is nothing in the psalm inconsistent with Davidic authorship, and it is exceedingly difficult to find any one else of whom such words could have been used, while it has all the freshness and force of an original and early composition. An advanced critic,¹ who is very ready to assign the latest possible date to every psalm, says of this one: "If it was not written by David, it must have been composed in his name, and by one who was able to transpose himself in thought into his situation and mood; and who could have been this contemporary and highly endowed poet?"

As a matter of fact, no one would hesitate about admitting the Davidic authorship of the 18th Psalm, if there were not some powerful antecedent considerations at work on the other side. What arguments can be alleged against it? The history of poetry amongst the Hebrews shows that the art of poetical composition was quite

¹ Hitzig, quoted by Delitzsch.

sufficiently far advanced for such an ode to be produced at this time. The triumphant song of Exodus xv. and the song of Deborah in Judges v. are admitted, even by extreme critics, to be fragments of earlier poesy; they also allow that David wrote the elegy over Saul and Jonathan given in 2 Samuel i. The religious tone of 2 Samuel i. and 2 Samuel xxii. is no doubt different, for an elegy differs from a psalm, but the man who composed the one poem was certainly able to produce the other. There is no allusion in the psalm inconsistent with the history of the times, as usually happens in verses idealising a national hero. Even the mention of David's own name is not a valid objection to his authorship, though some think that ver. 50 is a later addition to the original.

Further, it is allowed that for many centuries David had at least the reputation of being the founder of psalmody in Israel. In 2 Samuel xxiii. 1 he is described as being "lovely (or pleasant) in Israel's songs of praise"; 1 Samuel xvi. 18 describes his youthful skill upon the harp; 1 Chronicles xxiii. 5 and 2 Chronicles xxix. 25 describe his introducing stringed instruments into the service of the sanctuary to accompany the psalms that were sung there. Nehemiah xii. 36 refers to "the musical instru-

ments of David, the man of God"; while Amos vi. 5 shows that much earlier than this David's musical instruments had become proverbial. It was not, however, a mere association of David's name with instruments of music, as many modern critics assert. The word used in 2 Samuel xxiii. 1 implies more than this, and the single illustration of the Lamentation in 2 Samuel i. is enough to prove that David was no mere skilled musical executant. The early character of the tradition which constituted him "the sweet Psalmist of Israel" has been shown, and by the time that Hebrews iv. 7 was written, and indeed long before then, the whole Psalter was called after him and recognised by the simple name "David." Is it likely that he composed no sacred songs? If he did, is it likely that they all perished? The permanence of songs as literature is well known. The fragments contained in the early books of the Old Testament are an illustration of this. The care with which oral traditions of all kinds were handed on amongst the Jews and other Eastern nations is matter of history. But the memory is especially tenacious of poetry, of lyrical poetry more than of other kinds of verse, of sacred lyrics, especially when used in public worship and often repeated, most of all. Why, then, should it be assumed that every trace

of David's sacred compositions has passed away, when external and internal evidence so markedly point to Psalm xviii. as his?

It is said that the personal character of David renders it unlikely or even impossible that he should write such highly spiritual compositions as this and some other psalms attributed to him. It is coming to be assumed by many modern critics—for no proof is offered—that our ideas concerning David must be altogether altered. Renan sneers at those “pious souls who fancy they have been in spiritual communion with this bandit”; and Canon Cheyne means much the same thing when he describes David in somewhat more courtly language as a “versatile condottiere, chieftain, and king”¹ whom later ages have learned to idealise. But surely it is a shallow view of history and of human nature which seeks to “simplify” our ideas of David by explaining away the religious aspects of his many-sided character. Canon Cheyne says, “More easily could Karl the Great have written St. Bernard's hymn, than the David of the Books of Samuel the 51st Psalm!”² Curiously enough, Charlemagne is the very character selected by Bishop Alexander as presenting an interesting historical

¹ *Origin of the Psalter*, p. 211.

² *Aids to Devout Criticism*, p. 28.

parallel to David. In his establishment of material order, in the bloodshed which stains his name, in the sensuous side of his character which led him into sins of the flesh, in his personal prowess, and the tenderness of his family affection, Charles the Great often recalls the generous-hearted and passionate David. The parallel is made more striking by Charles's intense love of church music, psalmody, and chanting; and Bishop Alexander adds, "The most singular resemblance of the whole is, that an obstinate conviction of the inner sanctity of the man, in spite of all drawbacks, pierces through the scandals that darken round his path, and a cry goes up in Christian churches to that strange saint, *Sancte Carole, ora pro nobis!*"¹ The difference between the two aspects of David is obvious, and has often enough pointed what Carlyle calls the "shallow" sneer, "Is this your man according to God's own heart?" The advanced critics of modern days seem to admit that the sneer is justified. They explain that "after God's own heart" means nothing more than fitted to accomplish a great national task, and that David was merely one "in whom the God of Israel had found the qualities of a captain or leader"; as if even the national work for the chosen people

¹ *Witness of the Psalms to Christ*, p. 90.

Israel could have been accomplished by a strong hand without a great heart and a devout spirit. But even in the historical narrative we have evidence of David's fine and tender feelings. His magnanimity, generosity, and affectionateness in human relations, and the very vehemence of his feelings when he was wrong, quite prepare us for the religious susceptibility and nobility of moral character manifested in the 18th Psalm. The analysis of the critic fails here in its dealing with the complexities of the human heart and human life. Much nearer the mark is Edward Irving when he comments on the manifoldness of David's character and the near kinship of strong passions which to a superficial observer appear inconsistent or contradictory. "His harp was full-stringed, and every angel of joy and sorrow swept over the chords as he passed; but the melody always breathed of heaven. And such oceans of affection lay within his breast, as could not always slumber in their calmness. For the hearts of a hundred men strove and struggled together within the narrow continent of his single heart; and will the scornful men have no sympathy for one so conditioned, but scorn him, because he ruled not with constant quietness the unruly host of diverse natures which dwelt within his single soul?"¹ It

¹ Works, vol. i. p. 416.

is not a peculiarity of the biblical portraiture of David that in it are joined "bursts of great heart and slips in sensual mire." There is a close connection between the clauses in the description of David in his last days, "the anointed of the God of Jacob and the sweet Psalmist of Israel," and till evidence of another kind is forthcoming, we shall prefer to the "two Davids" of the critic's analysis the description of the son of Sirach, who blends in a single breath the victories of the hero and the music of the poet: "He brought to nought the Philistines his adversaries, and brake their horn in sunder unto this day. In all his works he praised the Holy One most high with words of glory; with his whole heart he sung songs, and loved Him that made him."¹

Evidence of another kind is supposed to be forthcoming in the views now gaining currency concerning the religious history of Israel. This would lead us into the discussion of questions quite beyond our scope. It is often assumed by writers of a certain school that spiritual religion of a high type was impossible so early as the time of David. The literary analysis of Old Testament documents and the analogy of other nations are supposed alike to point to a development in the history of Israelitish religion which

¹ Ecclus. xlvi. 7, 8.

makes Davidic psalms impossible. Without entering upon a wide field of discussion, we may be content with pointing to the writings of the eighth-century prophets Amos and Hosea, and the prophecies admitted to be written by Isaiah. The state of religious feeling implied in those utterances presupposes a long previous history, such as leaves abundant room for Davidic psalms two hundred years before. And this without pressing the indubitable point, that ever in the history of religion great souls are "before their time," as the loftiest peaks catch the earliest rays of the sun-rising. So much may be said by those who do not believe in the supernatural or the influence of the Spirit of God fitting a prince like David for a great and varied work, so that he manifested qualities not altogether to be accounted for by a regular "development" traceable by nineteenth-century canons, and accounted for by natural laws. All who believe in supernatural manifestations of a living God must repudiate *ab initio* views which would assimilate the history of religion in Israel to those of surrounding nations. And, to return to our immediate subject, one evidence of the erroneous character of such views will, we believe, be found in the Book of Psalms.

If, then, the 18th Psalm was written by David,

what follows? It by no means follows that we must accept the evidence of the titles as a whole, for in many cases these appear to embody a much later tradition, and are sometimes clearly contradicted by the testimony of the psalms themselves. But it does follow that the *à priori* objection to Davidic psalms is removed. The man who wrote this psalm might have written any one of the hundred and fifty, so far as religious insight and literary ability are concerned. We gain, moreover, certain criteria of style and subject-matter, which may help us in inquiring into the authorship of other psalms. There is a vigour and energy about the 18th Psalm, a certain distinction or magnificence, what artists would call "breadth," about the style of this noble ode, which is fairly recognisable, and quite removed from the smooth and often tame and conventional flow of the mass of post-Exilic compositions. It by no means follows, however, that every psalm which exhibits marks of David's style has come down to us just as it left his pen. The tendency to adapt and modify hymns is proved to have obtained in the case of several psalms, by the facts already adduced. We may expect, therefore, to find Davidic fragments embedded in later psalms, and additions or modifications made in undoubted Davidic compositions.

If it were clear that the titles represented an early tradition, and in every case where David's name is mentioned were intended to imply Davidic authorship, the simplest plan would be to travel carefully through the list, and ascribe to David every psalm in which there is nothing strikingly inconsistent with his having written it. But the facts being as they are, the sifting must be conducted somewhat differently. If there be anything in (1) the language, (2) the style, (3) the historical allusions, or (4) the religious position of the writer, which does not suit Davidic authorship, the statements of the titles must be disregarded. But these canons may be more or less stringently applied. The first cannot be often used, for in the state of the Hebrew text as it has come down to us, linguistic considerations avail little towards determining date. The argument from style is one on which little reliance can be placed, though it should count for something. In many psalms historical allusions hardly occur, and the views of critics differ considerably concerning the history of religion in Israel. Consequently, we cannot be surprised to find considerable difference of opinion amongst scholars as to the number of Davidic psalms that have come down to us. It is clear, however, that tradition has estimated that number very much too high.

Canon Cheyne, as we have seen, does not admit any Davidic psalms. Bâthgen specifies three,—the 3rd, 4th, and 18th—though he speaks doubtfully of the former two. Schultz, in the earlier editions of his *Old Testament Theology*, attributed 10 or 12 psalms to David, but now appears to regard the 18th alone as certainly his. Ewald specifies 17, in the following order: xi., vii., xxiv. 7–10, xxiv. 1–6, xv., ci., xxix., xix. 1–6, xviii., cx., lx. 6–10, xviii., xxxii., iii., iv., ii., cxliv. 12–15. Delitzsch includes more than 40 psalms as in all probability Davidic. These last two scholars, each in his own way, were giants in the patient and comprehensive study of the Old Testament, but the views of the latter altered in some respects towards the close of his life, and, had he lived, his estimate of the number of Davidic psalms would probably have been considerably diminished. It is impossible, with the evidence before us, to speak definitely, but perhaps the truth lies somewhere between the estimates of Ewald and Delitzsch. David can hardly have written fewer than ten, and probably did not write more than twenty, of the psalms that have come down to us.

We have assumed thus far that the phrase *l'David* ("of David," literally "to David"), in the titles, implies strictly Davidic authorship. This is, however, by no means certain. It may indicate

authorship; but it is also used in the phrase "For the Precentor," and can hardly be understood literally of authorship in the case of the sons of Korah. We have seen that the general title of the group of psalms known as "Songs of Ascents" was subsequently prefixed to each separate psalm in the collection; and it is by no means improbable that the same took place in the first book, which contains several of David's compositions, so that in a collection which was primarily and nominally Davidic, many psalms acquired the title *l' David*, though in the first instance it was known that David did not write them. It is probable, on several grounds, that this title was used with a considerable measure of latitude, that the psalms called "Davidic" were not always understood to be David's own composition, any more than the "Korahitic" psalms were understood to be actually composed by the family or descendants of Korah.¹ The title seems to have been prefixed in some cases where the name of David occurring in the psalm (see cxxii. 5), or some other characteristic, was likely to remind the reader of the great founder of Israelitish psalmody. The use of the expression in the New Testament of Psalm xcv., which on almost any supposition could not have

¹ See the remarks of Canon Driver on this subject, *Introduction to Old Testament Literature*, p. 359.

been written by David, will illustrate this. It is quite possible that the phrase *l' David* was sometimes at least used in a sense similar to that occurring in the title of Psalm cii., which is styled "A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed and poureth out his complaint before the Lord," and it would then indicate a composition befitting the character and circumstances of David. Without discussing the subject in detail, which is impossible within present limits, it may be said that in all probability this explanation best suits the title of Psalm xc., "A prayer of Moses, the man of God," and of lxxii., which is said to be "of Solomon." The prayers of the latter psalm, by whomsoever written, were much more likely to be written in reference to Solomon as a type of the Messianic king, than by Solomon as petitions on his own account, even if his authorship were admissible on other grounds. It may be said in favour of this looser interpretation of the title, "A psalm of David," that in the LXX, Psalm cxxxviii. (cxxxvii.) is called a "Davidic" psalm of Haggai and Zechariah, and Psalm cxxxvii. (cxxxvi.) a "Davidic" psalm of Jeremiah.¹ In many cases,

¹ In the modern Jewish Prayer-book the title, "A Song of degrees of David," stands before an evidently modern psalm compiled for liturgical purposes, the first words of which are taken from Psalm cxxii. 1.

however, as in the 34th Psalm, it is difficult to detect any connection between title and contents; and the substitution of Abimelech for Achish, in spite of the plausible explanations that have been given of it, appears rather to result from a confusion in the mind of the compiler.

Twelve Psalms (l. and lxxiii.—lxxxiii.) are described as “of Asaph.” Asaph was a Levite, descended from Gershom, Levi’s second son, and he is named as being set by David “over the service of song after that the ark had rest . . . in the midst of the tent that David had pitched for it” in Zion (see 1 Chron. vi. 31, xvi. 1). In connection with two colleagues, Heman and Jeduthun (Ethan), he is said to have ministered in the same way at the high place of Gibeon (1 Chron. xv. 17, xvi. 39 f.). He is also called a Seer (2 Chron. xxix. 30), and several writers have remarked upon the prophetic character of some of the psalms (*e.g.* l. and lxxiii.) ascribed to him. It is quite certain, however, that Asaph cannot have written all the psalms inscribed with his name. Psalms lxxiv. and lxxix., which describe the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple, or, as some think, calamities still later in date, are said to be “of Asaph,” a contemporary of David. The explanation has been given that this title includes the descendants, or

those belonging to the "school" of Asaph (Neh. xi. 22). It is more likely, however, that the use of the title points, as Bishop Perowne suggests, to a recognised similarity of style and coincidence of thoughts, without any regard being paid to difference in date and historical considerations generally. Dr. Perowne adds, as an alternative, "Perhaps there may have been originally a small separate collection entitled 'Psalms of Asaph,' into which others, at a later period, may have crept. How easily this might have occurred, we see from the whole history of hymnology."¹ Others² regard Asaph rather as the founder of a musical school than as psalmist or seer, and hold that the psalms entitled *l'Asaph* were delivered to the Asaphic school to set to music and sing in the public services, the name Asaph being used generally for the family of Asaph, as Aaron is for the family of Aaron in 1 Chronicles xii. 27, xxvii. 17. On the whole, the second of the theories suggested by Perowne seems the most probable; it appears to commend itself to Canon Driver, and if it be accepted it confirms the view taken in these pages of the title *l'David*.

The next group consists of Psalms xlii.—xlix., lxxxiv., lxxxv., lxxxvii., and lxxxviii., which are

¹ *The Psalms*, vol. i. pp. 96, 99.

² So Messrs. Jennings and Lowe, vol. i. pp. 11-14.

inscribed with the name of "the sons of Korah." These belonged to the Kohathite section of the Levites, and filled the offices of singers (2 Chron. xx. 19) and of "door-keepers" or "porters" in the temple (1 Chron. xxvi. 1), the latter an office of considerable dignity. As in the case of the Asaphic psalms, it is matter of debate whether the sons of Korah were understood to be the authors of the psalms attributed to them, or whether the title indicates only a collection of psalms in the possession of the Levitical guild of that name in the time of the second temple. A certain similarity may, however, be detected in the members of this, as of the last group. The philosophic, meditative, didactic strain of many of the Asaphic psalms finds its counterpart in the brightness, fire, and vehemence of several in the Korahitic group.¹ There are, however, points of resemblance as well as of contrast in these two minor collections. Both groups are for the most part national, not personal, in their character, and there breathes through them, as seems appropriate in Levitical psalms, an ardent longing for the sanctuary and delight in its solemnly joyful services. With these psalms may fitly be

¹ As long ago as the time of Origen these characteristics were noticed. He refers to them as remarked upon by "the old interpreters."

joined the 88th, which has a double title. It is ascribed to Heman the Ezrachite, and also to the sons of Korah.¹ The 89th bears the name of Ethan the Ezrachite, who must not be confounded with Ethan (Jeduthun), the third of David's great singers. The 88th Psalm remarkably violates the character of cheerfulness ascribed to the Korahitic psalms. It is the gloomiest in the whole Psalter, the only one in which no single ray of light—unless it be one gleam in the first verse, soon lost in gloom—breaks through the clouds, such as from time to time envelop the singers of strains sweet, but often sad. Lord Bacon said, "If you listen to David's harp, you shall hear as many hearse-like airs. as carols." But who can read the Psalter without feeling that in its music the carols prevail?

Between the time of David and the Captivity there appear to have been two periods at which there was a temporary revival of psalmody—during the reigns of Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah. The chronicler tells us that the former strengthened the kingdom of Judah both externally and internally, and gives an interesting description of a kind of royal commission of princes, Levites, and

¹ Hence, either Heman was a Korahite, or there has been confusion in the names, or (most probably) the sons of Korah were not regarded as authors.

priests, for the instruction and improvement of the people. "And they taught in Judah, having the book of the law of the Lord with them; and they went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people" (2 Chron. xvii. 9). Hezekiah appears to have paid special attention to the temple music. "He set the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David . . . Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praises unto the Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer" (2 Chron. xxix. 25, 30). His care for sacred literature is evidenced by the note in Proverbs xxv. 1 concerning the proverbs of Solomon, which "the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out." Contemporary evidence of the state of religion and culture in his time is furnished by the writings of Isaiah, while the wonderful deliverance from the power of Assyria during the invasion of Sennacherib was well calculated to stir patriotic and grateful religious feeling. There is some evidence, moreover, that in the northern kingdom of Israel during the eighth century religious literature was not wholly lacking. But little trace of the productions of this period is clearly discernible in the Psalter. The 20th and 21st Psalms belong to the period of the monarchy,

but whether David or a subsequent king is the subject of them does not appear. The same may be said of the 2nd Psalm, which will be considered later on. The 72nd Psalm was probably written during the heyday of monarchical power. The 42nd bears clear traces of its North Israelitish origin (ver. 6), but its date is in all probability later than the period we are now concerned with. The 45th Psalm celebrates the nuptials of a prince, in language which makes it no mere earthly epithalamium, but prepares the mind for the higher aspects of such an event. What prince is referred to, however, is a question not easily answered. Almost every conceivable period has been fixed on, from Solomon (Perowne and Hupfeld), Ahab (Hitzig), and Joram (Delitzsch), down to the latest specimen of critical ingenuity furnished by Professor Cheyne, who makes the royal bridegroom to have been Ptolemy Philadelphus! The little group, xlvi.—xlviii., and perhaps lxxvi., celebrate the marked interposition of Jehovah in that deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib, which signalled the reign of Hezekiah. The 75th Psalm, in which the ruler declares his intention of quelling arrogant ungodliness amongst his subordinate officers, may well be placed in Hezekiah's reign; while the 82nd, with its reproof of unjust judges, belongs to the close of the monarchy, or a still

later period. The 78th may be placed with some confidence during the period of the monarchy; the historical allusions of the 83rd are very difficult to trace, but a large number of commentators place the 87th in the time of Hezekiah.

There must have been a close connection between the spirit of prophecy in its golden age and the spirit of psalmody. The lyric in Isaiah xii. and the ode in Habakkuk iii. strikingly illustrate this. But it is not easy to trace it out, and tradition gives us no help. It is noteworthy that no psalms are attributed to any of the prophets, except that in the LXX three or four are attributed to Jeremiah, Haggai, and Zechariah. Such psalms as xxii. and lxix., if not written by Jeremiah, are characteristic of the times in which his lot was cast and the spirit of his prophecies. The connection in language between Psalm i. and Jeremiah xvii. 7, 8, probably points to a post-Exilic date for the psalm, but it is often very difficult in such a case of parallelism to determine relative priority. The 50th Psalm is distinctly prophetic in spirit. The same may be said of the 62nd, 39th, and 40th, and several others. The psalms which deal with the perennial problems of human life, that form the subject of the Book of Job, and are touched upon from time to time by certain prophets,—such as Psalms xxxix., xlix., lxxiii., and lxxvii.,—require

separate discussion. Some of them probably date from the decline of the monarchy, while others cannot have been written till after the Exile.

Sorrow as well as joy finds a natural relief in music and song. The Exile was a period of national humiliation, but in many respects it prepared the way for national regeneration; and, according to many writers, it marks almost the birth of true spiritual life among the chosen people. We are prepared, therefore, to find the impress of this great crisis upon the psalmody of the time, and we are not disappointed. The little Book of Lamentations—called by the Jews by the quaintly pathetic title *Echah* (How!), the key-word of the opening verses—gives us a specimen of an elaborate elegy belonging to this period. By whomsoever written, the date of this long acrostic poem, so finished in its rhythm and diction, can be approximately fixed; and it furnishes a strong argument for the existence of a considerable body of pre-Exilic poetry. If in the sixth century before Christ such a poem as this was possible, it is almost absurd to make all the previous centuries silent as regards psalmody, or to suppose that while psalms were plentifully composed, they have all unaccountably perished.

The psalms which have come down to us from this period date rather from the Restoration than

from the Exile itself. Those which have special reference to the Captivity are such as the 102nd, when probably the light of deliverance was dawning; the 80th, with its description of the deserted and desolated vineyard; and the 137th, with its passionate love for Jerusalem, and equally passionate hatred of its enemies. The 120th perhaps describes the cry of the captives, and the 121st may have reference to the long journey homewards; the 126th contemplates a deliverance not yet complete (ver. 4); while the 85th celebrates its joyful consummation. The restoration of the temple is naturally marked by an outburst of thanksgiving and song. The 118th Psalm (assigned by Canon Cheyne, on insufficient evidence, to the time of Simon the Maccabec) appears to give fitting expression to the feelings of the time, while a number of psalms are associated with it (cxiii.-cxviii.) under the name of the Hallel, which probably belong to the same period. The splendid group of the Psalms of the Theophany (xcvi.-c.), and the *Venite Exultemus* (xcv.), which for so many centuries has stood in the forefront of Jewish and Christian liturgies, together with the Hallelujah Psalms (cxlvi.-cl.), which close the Psalter, represent the liturgical service of the second temple. We must not linger to attempt the arrangement of these under the earlier and later Persian periods

(B.C. 520-330), and the Greek period (330-170), if indeed that be possible. Our historical information after the times of Ezra and Nehemiah is scanty, and the psalms belonging to the later period of Jewish history contain few historical references, so that any attempt to be precise in fixing dates is vain. The psalms mentioned above are given as specimens only of the sacred minstrelsy of a period which, so far as extant psalms are concerned, is the most prolific of all.

The question has often been discussed, whether any psalms are to be assigned to the time of the Maccabees (*circa* 165 B.C.), and a new aspect has been given to it by the fact of a Bampton lecturer attributing the whole of the Psalter to post-Exilic times, and placing a considerable section of it¹ so late as the Maccabean period. This question had previously been answered in the negative by such scholars as Bleek and Ewald, while a large number of commentators, *e.g.* Calvin, Perowne, and Delitzsch, incline to admit three or four psalms as Maccabean, including xlv., lxxiv., and lxxix. It is not possible to discuss the question at length here. It may be enough to say that there is nothing in the history of the Old Testament Canon,

¹ Twenty-five psalms, viz. xx., xxi., xxxiii., xlv., lx., lxi., lxiii., lxxiv., lxxix., lxxxiii., ci., cviii., cxv.-cxviii., cxxxv.-cxxxviii., cxlv.-cl.

as now understood, to prevent the inclusion of psalms of so late a date. But it is remarkable that those which are fixed upon as most appropriate to this period occur in the earlier books. Canon Cheyne, it is true, following Reuss and Olshausen, assigns the greater portion of the Psalter to the third and second centuries before Christ, but his reasoning is speculative in the highest degree. He names the following as criteria of Maccabean psalms:¹ (1) "Some fairly distinct allusions to Maccabean circumstances," which are hard to find in more than two or three psalms for those who read with unbiassed eyes; (2) "a uniquely strong Church feeling," a test which is bound up with views concerning the "I" of the psalms, which will fall to be considered later; (3) "an intensity of monotheistic faith," which cannot be said to be exclusively characteristic of Maccabean times; and (4) "an ardour of gratitude for some unexampled stepping forth of the one Lord Jehovah into history," as if such divine interpositions had never been known till the times of Judas and Simon, or as if the Jews at this period were grateful and devout beyond the measure of the prophets and psalmists of earlier days. It is possible that Psalm xlv. must be assigned to this period, on ac-

¹ *Origin of the Psalter*, p. 16.

count of its strong protestations of national innocence; lxxiv., on account of the mention of "synagogues" (ver. 8) and the complaint of the decay of prophecy (ver. 9); and lxxix., because of the close parallel between many of its expressions and the descriptions of 1 Maccabees. But it is also possible that the calamities and sorrowful experiences of these psalms may be referred to an earlier period, while the difficulties arising from their style and language, as well as their place in the Psalter, make the supposition of their Maccabean origin not altogether easy to accept.

Our knowledge of the Maccabean period, and such literary products of that time as have come down to us, render it improbable that any considerable portion of the Psalter should be assigned to it. It seems strange, to begin with, if twenty-five notable psalms were written at this time, that we have no trace of a tradition to that effect. If the extra-canonical book known as "The Psalms of Solomon" were written, as has been supposed, in the times of Antiochus Epiphanes, this would be conclusive against the Maccabean origin of any canonical psalms. The opinion of scholars now, however, inclines to bring the work down to the time of Pompey (B.C. 48).¹ Even so, the tone and

¹ See the recent admirable edition of these Psalms by Professor Ryle and Mr. James. 1891.

character of these "Psalms of the Pharisees" makes strongly against a late date for any considerable number of the canonical psalms. The tendencies of religious thought which resulted in the "Psalms of the Pharisees" must have been operative for more than half a century before they were written. The Messianic expectations, the views of a future life, and the politico-religious ideas embodied in these apocryphal compositions, require a very considerable interval of time to separate them from the widely differing tone and spirit of the latest psalms in the canonical collection.¹

These are only scattered notes or hints upon a wide and difficult subject. All that seems to be quite clear at present is, that the older traditional view, represented by a literal acceptance of the inscriptions, seems to be impossible on the one hand; while on the other, there is no adequate ground for the views of the extreme critics, who exclude the possibility of Davidic, or even pre-Exilic, psalms, and make the Psalter in the most literal sense "the hymn-book of the Second Temple." That its arrangement and compilation are due to the pious care of post-Exilic times, and

¹ Professor Kirkpatrick holds this to be a valid argument; but it is strongly contested by Canon Cheyne. See *Aids to Devout Criticism*, pp. 135, 136.

that a much larger proportion of the Psalms than has generally been allowed was actually composed in this period, seems clearly proved. But no evidence has been alleged to disprove the position that the Book of Psalms is an anthology of the best sacred lyrics of Israel during many centuries, from David onwards. A nucleus of the whole collection is Davidic, and pre-Exilic strains prevail in the earlier books. The views concerning the Psalter which are now fashionable amongst scholars rest very largely upon views concerning the history of religion in Israel, which are far from being proved, and which would revolutionise a large part of the Old Testament. As a recent writer well says: "By one stroke the tongue of ancient Israel is struck dumb, as the pen is dashed from its hand, these artless lyrics are deprived of their spontaneousness, and a great gulf is fixed between the few, which a niggardly criticism admits to be of early date, and the full volume of devotional song which in many tones was called forth by the shifting situations of olden times."¹ To attempt to reduce the varied strains of several collections of sacred lyrics to the dead level of one period, which was neither lofty in its religious character nor vigorously original in its literature, shows mistaken views

¹ Robertson, *Early Religion of Israel*, p. 474.

of art, as well as a misunderstanding of the history of religion.

But having said so much as to the *general* character of the Psalter, we must be content to leave the *details* of age and authorship in considerable uncertainty. Exact historical information has not come down to us, and the great majority of the psalms by no means determine their own date. When external evidence fails, and critics are left to use their own judgment, we know what to expect. The diversity would be amusing, if it were not bewildering. Ewald ascribes to David a psalm which Cheyne pronounces to have been written in honour of Simon the Maccabee. The 90th Psalm has been assigned by critics of highest repute alike to Moses and to a post-Exilic writer, separated from one another by more than a thousand years. The 68th Psalm is described at the same time as one of the earliest and as one of the latest psalms; Delitzsch refers it to the time of David, Hitzig to the time of Jehoshaphat, and Reuss to the pre-Maccabean Greek age. As Riehm observes,¹ who could tell from internal evidence alone whether a familiar hymn were by Luther or Paul Gerhardt, Tersteegen or Angelus Silesius? Who would have ascribed the well-known German hymn "Jesus meine

¹ *Einleitung*, ii. pp. 190, 193.

Zuversicht" to Princess Louisa of Brandenburg? And we might add, what keenly critical hymnologist could discover from internal evidence that "The God of Abraham praise" was written by Thomas Olivers, an obscure Methodist shoemaker? Enough is known concerning the age and authorship of the Psalms to enable us to read them intelligently; enough remains still uncertain to invite our patient study, and to prevent us from losing in minute considerations of time and place the fruitful and abiding lessons of spiritual and eternal truth.

CHAPTER III.

THE POETRY OF THE PSALMS.

THE words "literature" and "poetry" are by no means adequate to describe the contents of the Psalter. But they represent one aspect of its character, and describe the *form* in which Divine treasure of highest value has been preserved for succeeding generations. A study of this form, a vessel so admirably adapted to hold and transmit its sacred contents, is indispensable to a proper understanding of the Psalms.

Hebrew poetry is almost entirely *lyric* in its character. Under this head may be included the varieties of *gnomic* verse, illustrated by the Book of Proverbs, *elegiac* poems like the Lamentations, and others, clearly distinguishable from the true lyrics of the Psalms. But epic and dramatic poetry are alike foreign to the genius of the nation. The Book of Job is only partially dramatic in form, and the Song of Songs is an idyll rather than a drama.

It is well known that rhyme is absent from ancient Hebrew poetry. In the Middle Ages some exquisite specimens of Hebrew rhyming poetry were produced; but we must pass to the tenth and eleventh centuries A.D. to find verses like those of Ibn Gebirol and Judah Halevi, who did for Hebrew what Adam of St. Victor and Bernard of Cluny did for Latin hymnody. In ancient Hebrew poetry alliteration is sometimes found, and more frequently assonance, *i.e.* the introduction of words having like-sounding syllables. But metre, in the proper sense of the word, such as is characteristic of most Western poetry, in which the lines are of a measured length, and consist of a definite number of syllables, or "feet," is unknown;¹ and verbal rhythm, where it occurs, is irregular and indefinable. Hebrew poetry consists in the rhythm of thought and the balance of sentences. But this implies a true rhythm, or "beat," though one of a much less regular kind than in Western classical poetry. "We might make a rough analogy by comparing the rhythmic movement of verse to the time beats of a clock or watch. Other languages divide the verses into measured feet, as a watch ticks off the seconds;

¹ Professor Bickell claims to have discovered the structure of Hebrew metre, and bases upon it a reconstruction of the text of the Book of Job.

but Hebrew opposes line to line with the longer, more solemn, and more majestic beat of the pendulum of a large clock."¹ Coleridge's "Christabel" is an attempt to introduce into English verse a less regular rhythm, as well as a less regular metre, than is customary.

The psalm is divided into lines, which are approximately and sometimes actually of the same length, and these are arranged in couplets or triplets or quatrains, which may be termed verses. These again may be combined into strophes or stanzas, a number of stanzas constituting the whole poem. But the balance is one of thought, not of sound or of measured feet, and the lines are so arranged that "thought corresponds to thought, in repetition or amplification, contrast or response." The irregularity of the Hebrew poem, which forms a mean between the strict order of metre on the one hand, and the still greater irregularity (itself not without order) of musical prose on the other, has a beauty and charm of its own. The thought proceeds not directly, but as by "the beat of alternate wings"; or rather, like the progress of a bird, which advances by a series of spiral flights, circling in the air as it rises skywards, or drops gently and gradually into its nest in the young April corn.

¹ Aglen, *Poetry of the Bible*, § 2, "Parallelism."

This feature of parallel structure is more or less discernible in the poetry of all nations. It represents a form of utterance naturally adopted in most languages to express thought, either with the added force of increased emphasis, or with the deepened tenderness of a lingering pathos. It is especially characteristic of uncultured nations, and is appropriately used by Longfellow in his "Indian Edda" of "Hiawatha," in which the simplicity of the language is more impressive than the polished versification of a classical style,—

"Ye who love the haunts of nature,
Love the sunshine of the meadow,
Love the shadow of the forest,
Love the wind among the branches,
And the rain-shower and the snow-storm,
And the rushing of great rivers
Through their palisades of pine-trees,
And the thunder in the mountains,
Whose innumerable echoes
Flap like eagles in their eyries ;—
Listen to these wild traditions,
To this song of Hiawatha !"

It may be observed, however, that the regularity of the lines detracts somewhat from the dignity of the style, and before long palls upon the ear. But this parallelism is not appropriate only in the comparatively inartistic productions of early

times, or poems which imitate them. It is often found in Shakespeare. There is a combined stateliness and pathos about its use in the well-known lines in which Richard II. abdicates his crown,—

“ Now mark me, how I will undo myself ;—
 I give this heavy weight from off my head,
 And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand,
 The pride of kingly sway from out my heart ;
 With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
 With mine own hands I give away my crown,
 With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
 With mine own breath release all duty's rites :
 All pomp and majesty do I forswear ;
 My manors, rents, revenues I forego ;
 God pardon all oaths that are broke to me !
 God keep all vows unbroke that swear to thee !”¹

It often appears in the most highly finished verse of the nineteenth century, perhaps of any century in the English language, that of Tennyson. In “ Love and Duty ” he writes of

‘ The slow, sweet hours that bring us all things good,
 The slow, sad hours that bring us all things ill ’ ;

where the parallelism is no less impressive than the lingering, reluctant movement of the long-drawn-out monosyllables. In the address to the Queen on the Prince Consort's death, forming the Dedication of the “ Idylls,” occur the familiar lines,—

¹ *Richard II.*, Act iv. Sc. 1, 203.

“ His love, unseen but felt, o’ershadow thee,
The love of all thy sons encompass thee,
The love of all thy daughters cherish thee,
The love of all thy people comfort thee,
Till God’s love set thee at his side again !”

But in Hebrew poetry the very absence of art enhances its sublimity and impressiveness. There is doubtless more artistic arrangement than appears upon the surface, but at its best it rises above the few and simple laws which it has imposed on itself, and rejoices in a freedom which yet remains within the bounds of law.

It is unnecessary to describe in detail all the varieties of structure that have been observed, as it is indeed impossible accurately to classify them. Bishop Lowth in modern times has worked out the subject with a fulness which has left all who have since laboured in the same field his debtors. His definition of parallelism is as follows: “ The correspondence of one verse or line with another, I call parallelism. When a proposition is delivered, and a second is subjoined to it, or drawn under it, equivalent, or contrasted with it in sense, or similar to it in the form of grammatical construction, these I call parallel lines; and the words or phrases answering to one another in the corresponding lines, parallel terms.” This opens the way for the subdivision into *synonymous*, *anti-*

thetic, and *synthetic* or *constructive* parallelism. A more elaborate classification is suggested by De Wette,¹ who distinguishes four kinds of parallelism—(1) That which consists in an equal number of words in each member, which is the original and perfect parallelism. (2) The unequal form, in which the number of words is not the same; divided into *a* simple, *b* composite, and other varieties. (3) Where both members are composite; with its subdivisions. (4) Rhythmical parallelism, which lies merely in the external form of the diction. Other divisions and subdivisions have been suggested, which it is tedious even to read. It is poor work to turn a garden into a herbarium.

Turning to examples, which teach us more than any abstract system of classification, we proceed from the simpler to the more complex. The simplest and most frequent of all is the arrangement in two lines, of which the second repeats or echoes the thought of the first,—

“The heavens are telling the glory of God,
The firmament sheweth His handywork.”—(xix. 1.)

“In green pastures He maketh me lie down,
By restful waters He leadeth me.”—(xxiii. 2.)

“Cast forth lightning and scatter them;
Shoot out Thine arrows and discomfit them.”
—(cxliv. 6.)

¹ See *Dictionary of the Bible*, “Hebrew Poetry,” vol. ii. p. 901.

Sometimes the second line emphasises and strengthens the first,—

“For thou dost bless the righteous ;
 Jehovah, with favour wilt Thou compass him as with
 a broad shield.”—(v. 12.)

“The waters saw Thee, O God ;
 The waters saw Thee, they writhed in pain.”
 —(lxxvii. 16.)

Sometimes the parallelism is in three members,—

“The wicked see it, and are grieved :
 They gnash with their teeth and melt away :
 The desire of the wicked shall perish.”—(cxii. 10.)

“Let all them that take refuge in Thee rejoice ;
 Let them ring out their joy for ever, because Thou
 defendest them :
 Let them also who love Thy name be joyful in
 Thee.”—(v. 11.)

An example of a quatrain, or verse of four lines,
 is found in the 30th Psalm,—

“For His anger is but for a moment,
 His favour for a life-time ;
 Weeping may come in to lodge at even,
 But in the morning (hark !) a ringing cry of joy !”
 —(xxx. 5.)

Or, with a slightly different relation between the
 members,—

“Jehovah, in Thy strength shall the king rejoice,
 And in Thy salvation how greatly shall he exult!
 Thou hast given him his heart's desire,
 And hast not withholden the request of his lips.”
 —(xxi. 1, 2.)

Or, arranged, as we should say, with alternate rhymes,—

“For, as the heaven is high above the earth,
 So mighty is His loving kindness over them that
 fear Him;
 As far as sunrise from sunset,
 Hath He removed our transgressions from us.”
 —(ciii. 11, 12.)

The so-called “antithetic” parallelism is only distinguished from the “synonymous” or “cognate” by the fact that the lines emphasise a thought rather by presenting a contrast, than by way of repetition or echo,—

“For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous,
 But the way of the wicked perishes.”—(i. 6.)

“Some (boast) of chariots and some of horses,
 But we will boast of the name of Jehovah our
 God.”—(xx. 7.)

Or thus, in a quatrain,—

“His mouth was smoother than butter,
 But his heart was war;
 His words were softer than oil,
 Yet were they drawn swords.”—(lv. 21.)

The term "synthetic" or "constructive" parallelism implies that the second line does not contain a repetition of the first, nor a contrast to it, but in some independent way completes it, and so builds up the thought of the whole. Here word does not answer to word, but "the idea is kept in view by the writer, while he proceeds to develop and enforce his meaning by accessory ideas and modifications,"—

"One thing do I ask of Jehovah,
That will I seek after;
That I may dwell in the house of Jehovah
All the days of my life,
To behold the pleasantness of Jehovah,
And to meditate in His temple."—(xxvii. 4.)

It is hardly worth while to invent another name, "introverted parallelism," for a slightly different arrangement of lines, corresponding to one another in a quatrain like the stanzas of "In Memoriam," the first and fourth pairing together, and the second and third,—

"The earth hath yielded her increase;
May God, our own God, bless us!
May God bless us,
And all the ends of the earth fear Him!"
—(lxvii. 6, 7.)

Or, in a more complicated form,—

“Unto Thee do I lift up mine eyes, O Thou that art seated in the heavens.

Behold, as the eyes of servants are upon the hand of their master,

As the eyes of a maiden are upon the hand of her mistress,

So our eyes are upon Jehovah our God, till He have pity upon us.”—(cxxxiii. 2.)

In some of these cases a different arrangement of lines might be adopted, and in many instances it is not easy to define the exact relation between the various members, which are nevertheless clearly related to one another, and help to build up one thought:—

“As for me, I am^r poor and helpless,
 Yet Jehovah thinketh upon me;
 Thou art my help and my deliverer,
 Make no tarrying, O my God.”—(xl. 17.)

There is no rule for the length of the separate lines. Canon Driver says that “upon an average the lines consist of seven or eight syllables, but, so far as appears, there is no rule upon the subject; lines may be longer or shorter as the poet may desire. . . . The didactic and historical psalms are more regular in structure than those which are of a more emotional character.”¹ It is clear that the shorter the line, the more bright and animated the strain; while the longer lines and

¹ *Introduction*, p. 343.

more laboured stanzas approximate to the comparative dulness and heaviness of prose. Compare, for instance,—

“ My heart is brimfull,
 Goodly is the theme ;
 I utter words,
 My work is for a king ;
 My tongue is a pen,
 Yea, a ready scribe.”—(xlv. 1.)

with the quotation above given from the 123rd Psalm, or the following from the 107th:—

“ Again, when they are minished and brought low
 By the pressure of misfortune and sorrow,
 He who poureth contempt upon princes,
 And maketh them wander in the wilderness, where
 there is no way :
 He setteth the needy on high from affliction,
 And maketh him families like a flock.”
 —(cvii. 39-41.)

In poetry, as well as in prose, variation in the character of the diction is discernible. Apart from the steady wave-like flux and reflux of the alternating clauses, there comes a period of high tides, and then again of neap-tides, when the flow of feeling ebbs; and, as Ewald says, there is a *standard* rhythm to which the verse returns when the diction flags from its loftier and more sublime

heights. But throughout there is variety, animation, change of pace and action. The form of the verse alters with the mood of the writer and the strain of his song. There is nothing stiff, wooden, mechanical: perhaps we should rather say, when these features do appear, it is a sign of decadence, and we pass from the golden age of Hebrew poetry to an age of silver, or even of copper. The earlier strains are the more vigorous and animated; in the later days decay sets in, and a more artificial and conventional style of verse prevails.

Verses build up strophes or stanzas. Some scholars have propounded elaborate theories on this subject. Even the more sober and moderate theorists undertake to arrange most of the psalms into regular stanzas, the lines of which observe regular lengths, thus: 4,6,7,7,6,4; or 6,6,6,6,7,7; like the modern hymns, the metre of which is styled 7's and 6's, or 6-8's. On this subject it does not become those who have not carefully studied the subject to say much; but the examples given suggest ingenuity in the critics rather than obvious regularity in the metrical arrangement of the psalm. If, however, the word "strophe" be understood to imply a poetical paragraph, in which are arranged with a good deal of irregularity a number of verses contributing to the working out

of one leading thought, the existence of this will at once be admitted. Such a division of a psalm into parts or stanzas is suggested by the frequent occurrence of refrains, such as the well-known,—

“Jehovah God of Hosts, is with us,
The God of Jacob is our tower of refuge.”
—(xlvi. 7, 11.)

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul?
And why disquieted within me?
Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him
Who is the help of my countenance and my God.”
—(xlii. 5, 11; xliii. 5.)

The liturgical refrains often recur. The response in the 136th Psalm occurs twenty-six times, as if weak and sinful men could hardly tire of repeating “For His mercy endureth for ever.” Another less obvious mark of organic structure in the Psalms may be illustrated from the exquisite little group of “Songs of Ascents.” It implies a progress by means of characteristic words or phrases, a mounting as by *steps* from thought to thought; a form of composition which some have thought gave rise to the name of the group. This can only be illustrated by printing at length one of these short but lovely psalms, italicising the phrases which are repeated, as in the “triolet,”

or "rondeau" of mediæval poetry, though not with the same regularity :—

" *Had not Jehovah Himself been on our side,*
 Let Israel now say—
Had not Jehovah Himself been on our side
 When men rose up against us :
Then they had swallowed us up alive,
 When their wrath was kindled against us.
Then the waters had overwhelmed us,
 The stream *had gone over our soul.*
Then had gone over our soul
 The proud-raging *waters.*

" Blessed be Jehovah, who gave us not up
 As a prey to their teeth !
 Our soul, like a bird hath it *escaped*
 Out of the *snare* of the fowlers :
 The *snare* was broken,
 And we—we *escaped.*
 Our help is in the name of Jehovah,
 Who made heaven and earth."—(cxxiv.)

The principle of the *Acrostic* is well known, but few English readers recognise how freely it is used in the Hebrew Psalter. The example of the 119th Psalm, in which are twenty-two stanzas, each with eight verses beginning with the same Hebrew letter, is familiar. But a similar arrangement is more or less observed in Psalms ix. and x., in which two verses occur to each letter, but the plan is imperfectly carried out ; also in xxv., with one verse to each letter, xxxiv., xxxvii., cxi., and

cxii. (in the last two cases only half a verse to a letter), and cxlv. Psalm cxi. has been thus arranged in English,¹ in order to exhibit the structure,—

“Hallelujah!

A dore will I the Lord with all my heart,
 B oth in the meeting of the upright and in the con-
 gregation.
 C onfessedly great are the deeds of the Lord ;
 D elighters in them search them out.
 E xcellent for honour and majesty is His work :
 F or evermore doth His righteousness endure.
 G racious and compassionate is the Lord,
 H is wonderful works hath He made to be remem-
 bered,” etc.

Leaving the purely literary structure of the Psalms, we shall do well to remember in all our study of them that they were made (for the most part) to be sung. Signs of this appear on every hand. No fewer than fifty-five psalms are inscribed “For the Chief Musician,” or Precentor. The nature of his work may be gathered from 1 Chronicles xv. 17–21, where Heman, Asaph, and Ethan are described as conductors, sounding aloud with cymbals; while certain other musicians were appointed vocally “to lead” the singing, to the accompaniment of psalteries for the soprano and

¹ By the late Professor Binnie. See his *Psalms, their History, Teachings, and Use*, 2nd ed. p. 142.

harps for the bass—as we should say, with violins and violoncellos. The LXX, it may be said in passing, everywhere translate the expression “For the Precentor” by εἰς τὸ τέλος (“for ever”?), confusing it with a similar Hebrew word and showing that they did not understand its meaning. In the passage from 1 Chronicles just quoted two terms occur, *Alamoth*, found also in Psalm xlvi. 1, and *Sheminith*, Psalm vi. 1, the meaning of which is now pretty clearly determined as corresponding to our “soprano” and “bass.” The frequently recurring term *Selah* has been very variously understood: it most probably indicates a musical interlude, not necessary of a *forte* or triumphant character, but varying with the subject-matter of the preceding or succeeding verses.

The musical instruments chiefly in use were—amongst stringed instruments, the *Kinnor*, the most ancient kind of harp (Ps. cxxxvii. 2); and the *Nebel*, usually translated psaltery (Ps. lvii. 8), probably a larger and improved variety of the same; amongst wind instruments the *Shophar* (Ps. xlvii. 5) and *Chatsotserah* (Ps. xcvi. 6), trumpets of different kinds, the former a long horn turned up at the extremity, the latter a straight trumpet of silver, terminating in a bell-mouth, a sacred rather than a martial instrument. Amongst instruments of percussion we find the

Toph and the *Tsetselim*, the tabret or timbrel (Ps. lxxxi. 2), and the cymbals (Ps. cl. 5), the latter being of two kinds, one characterised by its high pitch, and the other used for a loud-sounding accompaniment. Two general terms occur in the titles, *Neginoth* for stringed instruments (see Pss. iv., vi., liv. etc.; comp. lxi.), and *Nechiloth*, only in Psalm v., generally understood to mean flutes. Very probably the *Gittith* of Psalms viii., lxxxi., and lxxxiv. indicates a harp of some particular kind, named from the city of Gath.

The names of the tunes to which some of the psalms were sung have come down to us, but the names alone. These consist of two or three words, probably indicating the first words of a well-known song, or some popular melody, to which, especially in the earlier days, the psalm might be sung: *e.g.* "Death of the Son" (Ps. ix.), "The Hind of the Morning" (Ps. xxii.), "Lilies" (xlv. and lxix.; comp. lxxx.), "The Dove of the Distant Terebinths" (lvi.), while four (lvii.–lix., and lxxv.) are described as set to the air "Destroy not," which may perhaps be illustrated by Isaiah lxx. 8: "As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not, for a blessing is in it"; the words *Al-Tashcheth* being the opening words of a vintage-song. This mode of indicating tunes is intelligible enough to a generation accustomed

to speak of "Sicilian Mariners," "Fertile Plains," "Just as I am," or "Pax Dei," as names which recall familiar tunes, and need hardly be explained to those who even yet have not given up singing sacred words to the air of "Ye Banks and Braes," or "Robin Adair."

In early times, no doubt, the music and the singing were comparatively rude. There is no warrant, however, for the attempt now being made to bring down the institution of organized worship to the time of the Second Temple. The books of Chronicles, which, though late in date, rest, as we are expressly told, upon earlier documents, trace the beginnings of this organization to David. At the dedication of Solomon's temple, and again at the reconsecration of the temple under Hezekiah, the musical part of the service is expressly described (2 Chron. vii. 6 and xxix. 26). But it is quite consistent with the statements of Scripture, and probable on many other grounds, that the conduct of worship in pre-Exilic days was primitive and comparatively unorganized. A great improvement took place in post-Exilic days. The Book of the Law was arranged, edited, and taught as it had never been before; the writings of the prophets were gradually collected with reverent care; and so the fragments of earlier psalms, and various smaller collections of Davidic

and other sacred songs, were prepared for use in the more carefully arranged and more reverently conducted temple-worship. The outline of service during the second or third centuries before Christ is tolerably well known to us, even in its details. We touch upon it, only so far as it illustrates the structure and use of the psalms we are studying.

Some of the psalms were sung antiphonally, or by priests and Levites with responses from the congregation. This appears to have been very ancient (cf. Ex. xv. 20, 21); and the manner is expressly stated in Ezra iii. 11: "And they sang one to another" (A.V. "by course") "in praising and giving thanks to the Lord, saying, For He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord." The "two great companies that gave thanks and went in procession," mentioned in Nehemiah xii. 27 and 38, evidently sang antiphonally. One of the oldest psalms in the Psalter is of this kind. The late Dean Stanley describes,¹ with characteristically graphic power, the scene which took place when first the latter portion of Psalm xxiv. was chanted. "The long captivity of the Ark in Philistia . . .

¹ *Jewish Church*, vol. ii. pp. 71, 72. The passage quoted is condensed.

was now brought to an end. Accordingly, as the Ark stood beneath the walls of the ancient Jewish fortress, so venerable with unconquered age, the summons goes up from the procession to the dark walls in front. The ancient everlasting gates of Jebus are called to lift up their heads, their portcullis gates, stiff with the rust of ages. They are to grow and rise with the freshness of youth, that their height may be worthy to receive the new King of Glory."

I.

[Choir of Priests, approaching the gates.]

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
Lift yourselves up, ye ancient doors,
That the King of Glory may come in."

[Warders from within.]

"Who then is the King of Glory?"

[Choir of Priests.]

"Jehovah, strong and mighty;
Jehovah, mighty in battle."

II.

Priests. "Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
Lift yourselves up, ye ancient doors,
That the King of Glory may come in!"

Warders. "Who is He, the King of Glory?"

Priests. "Jehovah Sabaoth,
He is the King of Glory."

In the late liturgical psalms we have a number of

close approximation to the ancient hymnody of the temple, though certainly not without considerable alterations.”¹

This must not be viewed as mere antiquarian lore. A composition that is intended to be sung can only be half understood and appreciated when it is read. Music intensifies feeling of all kinds; and no one can feel the true responsive thrill to a *Miserere Domine* or a *Gloria in Excelsis* when he coldly reads them on the printed page. We cannot reproduce the Jewish music, and we need not spend much time over the meaning of ancient Jewish musical notation. But we must, if possible, bring with us the exalted mood of the worshipper in the great congregation as we join in the ringing cry of Psalm cxlviii., “Praise Jehovah—praise Him—praise Him!” or plead in the plaintive prayer of Psalm lxix.,—

“Save me, O God :

For the waters press in, even to my soul.

I am sunk in deep mire, where is no standing ;

I am come into deep waters, where floods overwhelm
me.”

The vivacity and rapid turns of expression which abound in the Psalms become intelligible when we remember the rapidly changing moods of even

¹ *The Temple, its Ministry and Services*, p. 57.

the best man's religious life; but they become full of meaning when we think of them as alternating like the movements in a concerted piece of music, and, so to speak, mark them with the *forte* and *piano* of a well-arranged chorus. It is the musician who takes the "two poor bounded words and makes them new,"—

“ Page after page of music turn,
And still they live and still they burn,
Eternal, passion-fraught, and free—
Miserere Domine! ”

So far as printed words can sway the feelings, and tune the reader to the strain of thanksgiving or supplication, teaching him the true note of penitential pathos or rapturous triumph, it is achieved by the language of the Psalter. But each psalm must be read with the heart as well as with the mind, and, as far as may be, with the imagination which recalls the scenes and circumstance under which it was intended to be *sung*.

Music entirely apart, the note of true poetry is struck in the Psalms, as at no other point in the long history of hymnology. The deficiencies of very bald and prosaic words are covered in some churches by elaborate music, but perhaps no music ever composed has been adequate to render the Psalms of David. If, with Words-

worth, we define poetry as "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge: the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science," or speak of it as "the first and last of all knowledge, immortal as the heart of man," it would be difficult to find in the whole range of literature a better example of poetry than many of the Psalms will furnish. If we take Milton's three characterising epithets, that poetry must be "simple, sensuous, passionate," again the Psalms occur to us as wonderfully fulfilling each of these conditions. The sublime simplicity of the Psalms needs no comment. The intense feeling, amounting to sacred passion, which burns in them is obvious at a glance. But it may not be so immediately clear how far the power and value of the Psalms depends upon what Milton means by the "sensuous" element, that avoidance of the abstract and metaphysical, the striking *concreteness* of the language which represents and embodies the most refined and spiritual thoughts. The God of metaphysics is not the God of the Bible, and especially not of the Psalms. The figures used are sometimes of the boldest. A fastidious taste might even carp at some of them as crude or coarse; some modern critics have a great deal to say about a "mythological element," as if the Psalmist had not risen above the con-

ceptions of the Vedas or the Orphic hymns. But the language used to express spiritual truth must always be more or less metaphorical, and in the Psalter we have happily a large measure of that mode of speech which always makes its way direct to the heart of the multitude, while there is nothing to offend or repel any right-minded reader. Who that reads the 18th Psalm aright can hesitate as to the true meaning, or still less as to the poetical grandeur of the description,—

“He rode upon a cherub and did fly,
 And flew swiftly upon the wings of the wind;
 He made darkness His covert, His pavilion round
 about Him,
 Dark waters, thick clouds of the sky.
 Out of the brightness before Him there passed thro’
 His clouds
 Hailstones and coals of fire.”—(xviii. 10–12.)

The crudity surely is in the critic who conceives that these and other descriptions of the God of Israel are to be construed literally, as if the Psalmist had hardly passed the stage of thought in which the primitive Aryan invokes Agni or Indra, or the Chinaman strives to appease the uncouth dragon of the storms. In the same psalm we find the most spiritual conceptions of God,—

“Fervently do I love thee,
 Jehovah, my strength! . . .
 As for God, His way is flawless:
 The word of Jehovah is tried:
 He is a shield unto all that take refuge in Him.”
 —(vers. 1, 30.)

It is not difficult to distinguish symbolic from mythological language, and it is a Divine *χάρισμα* characterising the Book of Psalms, that one of the most spiritual books in the world is one of the freest and boldest in its use of figure. “Metaphysic theologies,” says Isaac Taylor, “except so far as they take up the very terms of the Hebrew Scriptures, have hitherto shown a properly religious aspect in proportion as they have been unintelligible; when intelligible, they become, if not atheistic, yet tending in that direction.” Much of this boldness of figurative speech is patent to the English reader, but sometimes a most suggestive figure lies behind what appears a commonplace word. No irreverence is present in the representation given of the Divine Being choosing Jerusalem for His own habitation, when the Psalmist waxes very bold and uses words elsewhere descriptive of the covert of the wild beast and the lair of the lion,—

“In Salem is His leafy covert,
 And His rocky den in Zion.”—(lxxvi. 2.)

The free use of metaphor in the most ordinary conceptions of the Psalmist it would be superfluous to illustrate. Figures form not the fringe but the very web of his texture of wrought gold. The Psalms are in this respect in the Old Testament what the parables of our Lord are in the New. The didactic strain of the 1st Psalm breaks away in the third verse into a lovely picture of the terebinth by the water-brooks; the wicked, on the other hand, are like the light chaff on the mountain threshing-floor (i. 6), or like the whirling dust before the wind (lxxxiii. 13). When the Psalmist prays for forgiveness in the anguish of his penitence in Psalm li., he uses not one but half a score of figures to describe the cleansing for which he longs. The God in whom he trusts is to the Psalmist a Shepherd and a Guide, Light and Healing, a Rock of refuge and High Tower of defence, a living Fountain of refreshment for which he longs more eagerly than the wearied hart pants for cooling streams. The sun is to him as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, the very pastures "laugh for joy, they also sing."

How fitted the land of Palestine was to supply an abundance of the most vivid imagery for the concrete embodiment of religious feeling and spiritual truth, it is needless to say. "Palestine,

in the age of its wealth, was a sampler of the world: it was a museum country, many lands in one: the tread of the camel in two or three hours may now give the traveller a recollection of his own—come whence he may, from any country between the torrid zone and our northern latitudes. . . . In Palestine, such as it was of old, the soft graces of a rural scene, the vine-covered slopes, the plains, brilliant with flowers, the wooded glens and knolls sparkling with springs, and where the warbling of birds invites men to tranquil enjoyment—in Palestine, there is, or there was, ever at hand those material symbols of unearthly good which should serve to remind man of his destination to a world better and brighter than this. It was thus, therefore, that within limits so narrow as those of the land occupied by the Hebrew people, *provision had been made* (may we not use this phrase?) at once for supplying to its poets, in the greatest abundance and variety, the material imagery they would need; and for bringing within the daily experiences of the people every condition of the material world which could be made available for the purposes of a figurative literature. In these adjustments of the country to the people, and of both to the ulterior intention of a revelation for the world, we need not hesitate to recognise the Divine wisdom, making preparation in

a marked manner for so great and peculiar a work.”¹

With this thought it will be well to close this chapter. So long as we are studying the poetry and artistic form of the Psalms, we are dealing with that which under the guidance of the Divine Spirit was only a means to a great end. The highest flights of imagination, the utmost play of fancy, the richest wealth of metaphor, the most exquisite grace of diction, are all here subordinated to a higher aim and purpose. While lingering on these subjects,—which well repay diligent and loving study,—we are but in the outer courts of the temple. Sights and sounds which transcend all our imaginings, which defy the power of words to render them,—such as eye has not seen, nor ear heard, and which have not entered into the heart of man,—are open to the Psalmist who “beholds the fair beauty of Jehovah,” who is privileged to “be a guest in His tabernacle, and abide in His holy hill.” The doors of the inner sanctuary are open to him, but they will open also to the trembling knock of the humble and the meek. Be ours the grace to enter and adore!

¹ *Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, pp. 72, 73, 88.

CHAPTER IV.

THE THEOLOGY OF THE PSALTER—I. THE PSALMIST'S GOD.

IN entering the inner shrine of this temple of song, and trying to learn there some of the lessons it has to teach on the highest themes that can occupy the thoughts of man, some preliminary questions suggest themselves.

1. Do the Psalms form a real part of Divine revelation? It may be said that they contain emphatically the thoughts and feelings of men, rather than the teaching of God; that they embody the hopes and fears, the complaints and aspirations, of men, saintly, no doubt, men whose words may be read even in these latter days with great profit, but who certainly do not bring to us directly a Divine message. We cannot listen, it is said, to the Psalmist praying, as we listen to the prophet preaching; the prophet is the spokesman of Jehovah, the Psalmist at best is only the representative of humanity. The objection is a

natural one, and contains an element of truth, but it is superficial, and the distinction drawn is concerned with the form rather than the subject-matter of revelation. The later Jewish theologians distinguished between *Ruach hannebuah* and *Ruach hakkodesh*, the inspiration of the prophets and the inspiration of the writers of the Hagiographa; and undoubtedly there is a difference between the message which comes direct from Jehovah and the indirect reflection of His word and the knowledge of His will in the minds and lives of Old Testament saints. But all revelation in Scripture comes to us through men, and the Psalms are the echo of God's law in the religious experience of those who strove to be faithful to it, and as such, are quite as instructive in their place as the injunctions of the Law itself, or the message of the prophets commissioned to declare the mind of God to His people. The Holy Spirit may be conceived as operating from without or from within upon the mind of the inspired writer, though in both cases through and by means of the operation of the human mind. If from without, the messenger is comparatively passive, and has to carry the word "Thus saith the Lord": if from within, an illustration is furnished of what St. Paul described later in the Epistle to the Romans: "We know not how to pray as we

ought; but the Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." It is possible to pray in the Spirit and to give thanks in the Spirit, and the Psalms furnish abundant illustrations of both. Inspiration may be found as truly in prayer and praise as in prophecy, though it be of another kind, and may seem to be less immediately Divine. But the chronicler describes Heman as a "seer in the words of God" (1 Chron. xxv. 5) as well as a singer or poet (1 Chron. xv. 9); and numerous examples might be furnished, in which the work of the prophet merges in that of the Psalmist, or in which the Psalmist assumes the function of the prophet. We need guidance in religious feeling as well as in religious thought and active obedience, and the form of the Psalms, laying open the very fountains of religious experience, brings the operations of the Divine Spirit home very close to the reader's heart, because here are the words of God spoken not so much to man, as in man. Keble, in his preface to the *Christian Year*, says that "next to a sound rule of faith," there is nothing so important as "a sober standard of feeling,"—a characteristically Anglican utterance, for the spirit of Christianity is one of "power and love," as well as "of a sound mind." But a standard of religious feeling is given us in

the Psalter, and, besides this, views of God, and prayer, and thanksgiving, and utterances of the soul in the act of communion with God, which form a real part of Divine revelation, and are inestimably precious to every devout worshipper.

2. It will not perhaps be seriously objected that we cannot truly learn from the Psalms, because the language is poetical, and that to name the word "theology" in connection with them is to degrade their free, spontaneous utterance, bringing it into unnatural bondage to scientific system. Within certain limits this is true enough. The character of the Psalms must be borne in mind by every student. They are (happily) not cast in the form of a dogmatic treatise, though some commentators are apt to "break a butterfly on the wheel," and build up a metaphysical system out of a series of metaphors. But the beautiful, figurative, often highly charged language of the Psalms surely has a meaning. It is with that meaning, whether relating to God or man, Divine truth or human conduct, that we are now concerned. Theology has often been embodied in hymns; evangelical truth owed much to them in the time of Luther and at the Methodist revival. Provided we remember the nature of the book we are considering, it cannot be objected that we are dealing unfairly with

these spiritual songs, when we try to educe from them the spiritual truth they contain.

3. One other preliminary difficulty remains to be dealt with. May we treat this book as a homogeneous whole? If the view were adopted which would make it entirely a "monument of Church-consciousness" of the later Judaism, the pure product in thought and in construction of the period extending for two or three hundred years after the Exile, the book, it is said, might be regarded as one. But if the Psalms extend over a period of eight centuries or more, and express alike the feelings of a David and an Ezra, singers of the early monarchy and scribes of the second century before Christ, may these compositions be treated as one whole? Is no progress of religious thought discernible through all that period? The answer is, that in the main the religion of a spiritually minded Jew was one throughout these centuries of Israelitish history. Varying shades and tones of religious thought are perceptible, which Biblical theology should not be slow to recognise. Questions arise during the later stages which had hardly suggested themselves to earlier thinkers; further light of revelation was given upon some topics as the centuries advanced; but the God of Israel remained essentially the same, the mode of service was the same,

and the guiding principles of the religion did not vary. There was undoubtedly some progress in spirituality of conception concerning the Divine Being, in the idea of righteousness, in the study of the problems of life, in comprehension of God's designs, and in the hope of immortality; though great care is necessary in describing this progress, and the evolution of thought does not proceed along a few clear and simple lines. Consequently, in our study, it will be necessary sometimes to distinguish between the earlier and later psalms; but as in the linguistic treatment of the Hebrew, so in the examination of the thought of the Psalms, there is sufficient unity for us to treat the book as one whole, and the spirituality of its conceptions for the most part lifts us above considerations of time and place and circumstance.

The whole Psalter is the expression of joy or sorrow, desire or apprehension, in relation to the life of God in the soul of man. The chief questions, therefore, we have to ask are, What view of God is here taken; what view of man, in his personal religious life and in the religious life of the community? The present part of our subject falls naturally into three parts,—The Psalmist's God, the religious life in man as depicted in the Psalter, and the view therein taken of the Church and the world. The relation of the Psalms to the

New Testament, and their witness to Christ, may be reserved for separate consideration.

The existence of God is here, as elsewhere in the Bible, not proved, but taken for granted. It is so in the first chapter of Genesis. The world needs to be accounted for, not God. He is the "self-evident presupposition of every beginning." So is it with what some hold to be the first line in the Psalter so far as chronological order is concerned—"Fervently will I love thee, Jehovah, my strength" (xviii. 1); so also with the last—"Let everything that hath breath praise Jehovah. Praise ye Jehovah" (cl. 6). David does not lay a metaphysical foundation for this fundamental article of his creed; he throws it down like a gage of defiance against the adversaries, chants it like a pæan of battle, "Jehovah liveth, and blessed be my rock!" (xviii. 46). It is the "fool," the man who carries the unwisdom of his irreligiousness into his theories of life as well as into his conduct, who "says in his heart, There is no God" (xiv. 1). There is a reason for this. Ungodliness in action brings arrogance in thought; the wicked man holds his head high, but not high enough to see the Divine judgments, which are too high in heaven for him to see (x. 5). Hence "There is no God—this is the sum of all his thoughts" (x. 4). This is a matter on which

the Psalmist will hardly condescend to argue; if he lingers on it for a moment, it is to press home certain unanswerable questions which are addressed to the arrogant ungodly. These have lowered themselves till they can hardly claim the name or dignity or consideration of men, they are the "brutish" among the people (xciv. 8),—

"He that planteth the ear, shall He not hear?
 He that formed the eye, shall He not see?
 He that instructeth the nations, shall not He correct,
 Even He that teacheth man knowledge?"

—(xciv. 9, 10.)

The modern philosophy of the Unconscious, and the fundamental scepticism of the agnostic, would alike have been unintelligible to the Psalmist, who furnishes in popular language arguments which are philosophically impregnable, and which anticipate the doctrines of despair that have gained such strange currency in the nineteenth century. In the 94th Psalm they are destroyed before they are born. Teleological arguments, cosmological, anthropological, historical—all lie wrapped up in these cogent questionings, as the oak in the acorn.

Much is to be learned from the *names* of God used in the Psalter. The name to the Jew meant the revelation of character. It was not a mere form of speech when David cried, "O Jehovah

our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth!" But it is not safe to press on all occasions the etymological meaning of each of the Divine names. The etymology is indeed more or less uncertain, and, as with ourselves, some Divine names came amongst the Jews to be used synonymously and also indiscriminately. There are three kindred names, *El*, *Eloah*, and *Elohim*, which alike refer to the Deity as such, and are to be translated "God." The first of these in all probability celebrates the might of the "Strong One," the second and third point to an object of adoration and worship, but the original meaning of the roots has disappeared in the general meaning of "Deity, sublime and adorable." The second of these words, an artificial, peculiar form, though frequent in the Book of Job, hardly occurs at all in the Psalter; the first occurs some forty or fifty times, the third, as we have already seen, many hundreds of times. It is properly a plural, and while sometimes used in a secondary sense of angelic powers (see xcvi. 7, "Worship Him all ye gods"), or of heathen divinities (xcvii. 9, "Exalted far above all gods") the word is the standard generic one, in the Psalter as elsewhere in the Bible, for the Supreme Being. It is not a proper name of the God of Israel, but "when the God of Israel is called Elohim, He is thereby

simply described as Deity, as possessor of a nature which is absolutely sublime, and to which obedience and adoration are due from mortals."¹

The word *Adonai*, which means Lord, and is translated in E.V. by the word Lord (not printed in capitals, the latter being reserved as a rendering for the name Jehovah), is used with some frequency in the Psalter, but apparently without special reference to its etymological meaning. Two archaic names are also found: *Shaddai*, which means the Almighty, twice only (see lxviii. 15 and xci. 1); and *El Elyon*, God most high, about twenty times in all. Canon Cheyne, who in his earlier work on the Psalms, held that this name was "not a sure sign of post-Exilic date," in his later writings seems inclined to maintain that it is. For reasons we cannot now adduce, this seems hardly tenable. The word is used, as is well known, in Genesis xiv. 18, where Melchizedek is said to have been "priest of God most high," but this passage Professor Cheyne holds to be post-Exilic. In the Psalter this title is found in all parts, from the 7th Psalm to the 107th, but it is most frequent in the 2nd and 3rd, or, as they have been called, the Levitical books. A similar phrase is in use among other Semitic nations, and if there be any special connotation in the

¹ Schultz, *Old Testament Theology*, E. Tr., vol. ii. p. 127.

name, it is well given by the familiar English translation.

The personal name of the covenant God of Israel was JEHOVAH.¹ Mystery surrounds both the meaning and pronunciation of this word, but the prevalent opinion is no doubt the true one, that it signifies the Eternal, the Self-Existent, "He who is." No simpler or more sublime title could be given to God, expressing as it does a thought given elsewhere in the form "I, Jehovah, the first, and with the last; I am He" (Isa. xli. 4). It may very well have been an ancient name of God, but from the time of Moses onwards it had a special significance as the personal name of the covenant God of Israel. Elohim is the God of heaven and earth, all cosmical action of creation and preservation is due to Him; but Jehovah is the theocratic God, and all Divine activity connected with history, emphatically the history of the chosen people in relation to "the nations" outside, is properly referred to Jehovah. He is essentially and inviolably One. "The multiplicity of Divine powers broken up in polytheism is already summed up into unity in Elohim, but it is as Jehovah that God is first fully recog-

¹ Strictly speaking, the Tetragrammaton IHVH, with the vowels supplied from another word. But in English it seems better to write "Jehovah" than "Jahweh."

nised as one ; and thus monotheism is one of the cardinal doctrines of Mosaism—" I am Jehovah, thy God—thou shalt have none other gods beside me " (Ex. xx. 2, 3).¹ In the Psalter the distinction between these two great names of God is by no means lost sight of, but for reasons already explained, we cannot build upon it, as if it were always accurately observed and maintained. It is noteworthy that the last two books of the Psalter, eminently those of the post-Exilic period, use the name Jehovah almost entirely, since that was the time when the chosen people were most anxious to emphasise their separation from other peoples ; while in the late book Ecclesiastes and in the usage of the LXX, this name appears to be avoided, as too sacred for general use. The only other name it seems desirable to mention is that of *Sabaoth* ; the full title being " Jehovah, Elohim of Sabaoth," *i.e.* Jehovah, God of Hosts. The title includes the three meanings, God of armies, God of the starry host, and God of the angelic throng. Scholars are divided as to which of these is the primary meaning.² In either case the title is a great and

¹ Oehler, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. i. p. 154.

² Schrader and Schulz may represent those who advocate the first ; Ewald and others adopt the last ; the majority, including Kuenen, Delitzsch, and Cheyne, the second.

noble one, for to the eye of the Psalmist the hosts of heaven and earth are but parts of the empire of Him whose kingdom ruleth over all. In the same breath the Lord of Sabaoth is spoken of as ruling with wisdom and might, above and below,—

“For who in the skies can be compared unto Jehovah,
Who is like unto Jehovah among the sons of God?
O Jehovah, God of Hosts, who is a mighty one, like
unto Thee?

. . . Thou hast broken Rahab (Egypt) in pieces, as
one that is slain,

Thou hast scattered thine enemies with the arm of
thy strength.”—(lxxxix. 6, 8, 10.)

A satisfactory settlement of the whole etymological discussion is found in the words which follow: “The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine” (ver. 11). Jehovah is God of the hosts in earth below and in heaven above. The pious Israelite in time of danger and sudden calamity finds double assurance in the triumphant refrain, “Jehovah, God of hosts, is with us; the God of Jacob is our tower of refuge” (Ps. xlvi.). Sometimes different names are joined together, as in the description of the solemn appearance of the Judge, when earth and heaven are to testify together to His righteousness,—

“El Elohim Jehovah has spoken,
And called the earth from the rising of the sun to
the going down thereof.”—(l. 1.)

The titles here are cumulative, and indicate the God of sovereign power and universal worship, who is identified with the covenant God of Israel. It might appear that in ver. 7 the Elohist editor has marred the application of the words, which at once recall the solemn appeal of Deuteronomy v., "Hear, O Israel: I am Jehovah, thy God"; but the language of the psalm generally emphasises the truth that the speaker from this august judgment-seat is Elohim, God of the whole earth. That these names were often used interchangeably we find, for example, in the 86th Psalm, where the three names are found, Jehovah four times, Elohim four times, and Adonai seven times; in prayers where, without perceptibly altering the meaning, either of these might take the place of either of the others. The chief point to be borne in mind is the surpassing excellence of that Being who unites in His Person the glories to which so many glorious names severally testify.

Personal religion depends upon belief in a personal God. It is common in these days to raise metaphysical difficulties over the question of Divine personality, whether a characteristic which implies limitation can be asserted of the Supreme Being, and the like; but in the Psalms such questions are never raised. The Psalmist cannot conceive of a God without consciousness.

intelligence, and will. His is a God who thinks, knows, feels, and loves, who wills and acts, a God who speaks to men and to whom men can speak, who reveals Himself to mankind as the eternal "I Am," and with whom men may humbly but truly hold communion, echoing an eternal "Thou art." This feature must not too readily be taken as matter of course; for, strange though it may seem, in the history of religions, man has been unable, apart from the Scriptures,¹ to preserve in its purity belief in a personal God, and to hold the balance between Polytheism and the errors of earlier times on the one hand, and Materialism and Pantheism, with the errors of later times, on the other. The Bible—and pre-eminent among the books of the Old Testament, the Psalter—is the stronghold of those who believe in a personal God. The late Professor Clifford, with a melancholy realization of the blank in life created when he felt compelled to give up belief in Christianity and Theism, used the striking expression, "I have lost the Great Companion!" It is the glory of the Psalms that they bring us simply, directly, impressively into the very presence of Him who, though God over

¹ Mohammedanism is but a developed Judaism, reasserting a truth which man owes to Israel, encumbered with errors belonging to Arabia of the sixth century.

all, deigns to be the great Companion and Friend of His creature man. He it is who says to men, "I will counsel thee, with Mine eye upon thee" (xxxii. 8); who invites men to "seek Jehovah and His strength, seek His face evermore" (cv. 4). The Psalmist replies,—

"[Hast Thou not said] Seek ye my face?
My heart hath said unto Thee,
Thy face, Jehovah, will I seek."—(xxvii. 8.)

And well he may; for he is assured that, though "father and mother have forsaken him, Jehovah will take him up" (xxvii. 10, R.V.). The thoughts of God are graciously occupied with men, poor and needy though they be (xl. 17).

"How precious also are Thy thoughts to-me-ward, O God!

How great is their sum!

If I should count them, they are more in number
than the sand;

When I awake, I am still with Thee."

—(cxxxix. 17, 18.)

Hence it is possible for heavily-laden man to "roll his way upon Jehovah" (xxxvii. 5); to "cast upon Jehovah the burden" of his own often anxious or irksome lot, as well as the "heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world." If the Psalmist cannot understand the meaning of the riddle of life, he reasons and

pleads with a reiterated Why, O Lord? How long, O Lord? (Pss. lxxxviii. and xliii.). It is his one relief to "pour out his heart" (lxii. 8) before the God who hears prayer, for

"The eyes of Jehovah are toward the righteous,
And His ears are open unto their cry."
—(xxxiv. 15.)

Such a God is a refuge indeed: one who is "found exceedingly!" in time of trouble (xli. 1). If God could indeed be silent and deaf unto him, he would "become like them that go down into the pit" (xxviii. 1), the very light of life as if struck out.

In carrying out this thought, the Psalmist is not afraid of what in cumbrous modern phraseology are called anthropomorphism and anthropopathism. The Psalmist speaks as a man, because he thinks as a man, but he does not make God like a man when he uses terms which are necessary if man would vividly apprehend a mode of being which is above his comprehension. All the phrases which describe the eye and hand and arm of God, the wrath and pity and repentance of God, are used only from the practical point of view of one who, whatever is said or not said, will not lose his firm hold of the *living* God for whom his soul thirsts (xlii. 1). Sometimes the

figures are so bold, that if coined now, they would be held to be blasphemous.

“Awake, why sleepest Thou, O Lord?
 . . . Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face,
 And forgettest our affliction and our oppression?”
 —(xliv. 23, 24.)

Not long after the 44th Psalm was written, John Hyrcanus complained of these words as unworthy of God, and would not allow them to be recited in the liturgy. It was but a shallow criticism. Did the eager soul who cried aloud in the ears of the God of his fathers, and besought Him not to leave the children to the hands of the oppressor, need to be reminded that He slumbers not nor sleeps? Was Jehovah to him a Baal who might be musing, or journeying, or sleeping and needed to be awaked? Surely there is little danger of misunderstanding when we read the terrible words,—

“He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh,
 The Lord shall have them in derision.”—(ii. 4.)

Or even the still bolder metaphor,—

“Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep,
 Like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine.”
 —(lxxviii. 65.)

It is easy, from the elevation of modern enlightenment, to look down upon these “mythic

elements," and despise the crudity of such views of God. Let it be remembered that to this day, among earth's wisest sons, there is no language which brings God so near without lowering His majesty, which raises man so high while reminding him of his frailty, as the language of the Psalms. The figures of the Psalms, like the parables of the Saviour, contain spiritual truth for spiritual men. Others smile at them as Jewish myths, or stumble at them as gross anthropomorphisms. "To minds of the metaphysic class there is no conveyance of theistic axioms; to minds of the captious temperament there is none; to the sensual and sordid, the contumacious or the impious, there is none. These passages are as a stream of the effulgence of the upper heavens sent down through an aperture of dense cloud, to rest with a life-giving power of light and heat upon the dwelling of the humble worshipper. Whether this humble worshipper be one who turns the soil for his daily bread, or be the occupant of a professor's chair, it shall be the same theology that he thence derives: the former will not think to ask, and the latter will be better trained than to ask, how it is that the Omnipotent can be said either to be seated on a throne in the upper heaven, or to make earth His footstool."¹ These are not metaphysical or

¹ Taylor, *Spirit of Hebrew Poetry*, pp. 19, 20.

scientific truths, but religious realities; hence the perpetual freshness with which we turn to the sublimely simple figures of the Psalms from the laborious abstractions which are the product of the logical understanding, the delight of the pedant, and the despair of the weary and anxious heart, athirst for the living God. These "anthropomorphisms," as a master of Old Testament Theology has well observed, "are in no sense a dimming of the perfect idea of God; but they contain, although in a popular dress, the really positive part of the statements regarding Him. They become the more prominent the warmer religion becomes. While post-canonical Judaism, in its emptiness and baldness, shuns them, and the Alexandrian school, with its intellect dazzled by the splendour of Hellenic speculation, is ashamed to own them, Jesus shows them special favour."¹

The peril of mistaking metaphysical abstraction for reality was little known in the Psalmist's days. The nations round about Israel were not in danger of worshipping a soulless Entity, or making a god of Humanity with a capital H. They believed in personal gods, whom they had indeed made like unto themselves; and the religion of Israel was distinguished from those of surround-

¹ Schultz, *Old Testament Theology*. E. Tr., vol. ii. p. 109.

ing peoples, not so much by their conception of personality, as by the character of the Personality whom they worshipped. Here, again, it is the very simplicity of the Psalms which makes them so true and so valuable to religion. Later refinements of thought have enumerated sundry "attributes" of God, classified them into natural and moral, defined their relation one to another, and, in too many cases, the living God Himself has vanished amidst the aggregated clouds of an accumulation of abstract qualities. Nay, these have even been arranged one against the other,—love against justice (as if Divine love could be unjust or Divine justice unloving) and mercy against righteousness,—till the minds of men have become bewildered, and their vision of God has become dim and blurred. There is nothing of this in the Psalms. What we call natural attributes, omniscience and omnipresence, are portrayed, not from a metaphysical, but from a practical point of view, to indicate God's complete supremacy, His superiority to our limitations of place and time, knowledge and ignorance. The moral attributes of God are spoken of with the utmost freedom, in succession or simultaneously, with no *arrière pensée* of questioning concerning the exact nature of these qualities when ascribed to the Most High, or the way in which they can co-exist

side by side. The streams which for later generations flow apart in separate channels, for the Psalmist slumber placidly together in the great mountain-lake of Divine perfection, from which all alike take their rise.

The most elaborate description of the eternity of God ever penned by the most subtle metaphysician does not equal, either for truth or beauty, the majestic lines,—

“ Lord, Thou hast been our refuge
 In all generations.
 Before the mountains were brought forth,
 Or ever Thou gavest birth to the earth and the world;
 Even from everlasting to everlasting
 Thou art God.
 For a thousand years are in Thine eyes
 But as yesterday when it passeth,
 And as a watch in the night.”—(xc. 1, 2, 4.)

And still those who believe in what theologians call the transcendence and immanence of God in relation to the universe, turn back for its highest expression to words which have uttered the truth once for all,—

“ Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit?
 Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?
 If I climb into heaven, Thou art there;
 If I make my bed in hell, lo, Thou art there.

“ If I take the wings of the morning,
 And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
 Even there shall Thy hand lead me,
 And Thy right hand shall hold me.”

—(cxxxix. 7-10.)

There is no questioning how this can be possible for Him who “ dwelleth between the cherubim ” (lxxx. 1), who “ forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, and chose the tribe of Judah, the Mount Zion which He loved,” saying, “ This is my resting-place for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it ” (Pss. lxxviii. 60, 68, cxxxii. 4). For the spirit of the true worshipper there is no contrast between the splendours of the God that rules on high and the tenderness of Him who—

“ With scarce an intervention presses close
 And palpitatingly, His soul o’er ours.”

So at least it is with the Psalmist. He who “ telleth the number of the stars ” is He who “ healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds ” (Ps. cxlvii. 3, 4). He is “ nigh unto all them that call upon Him in truth.” And through all these centuries—except for the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has made the conceptions of the Psalmist possible and real—how much nearer have men approached to an expression of the fundamental truths of religion, what worthier conceptions of God have they

attained, how much nearer heaven have they climbed, than the godly men who, under the influence of the Spirit, poured out their souls in the music of the Psalms?

There is no need to dwell in detail upon the attributes of God celebrated in the Psalter; that, indeed, would mean to transcribe a large part of its contents. It is worth while, however, to illustrate the easy and natural *blending* of Divine attributes mentioned above, for here later generations have something to learn from the simple piety of devout Israel. Emphasis is laid continually upon one fundamental ethical quality:—

“Jehovah is righteous; He loveth righteousness;
The upright shall behold His face.”—(xi. 7.)

But in order to understand what is meant by righteousness, we turn elsewhere, and find in beautiful conjunction such celestial constellations as these:—

“Jehovah, thy lovingkindness reacheth unto the heavens;
Thy faithfulness unto the clouds.
Thy righteousness standeth like the mountains of God;
Thy judgments are a great deep:
Jehovah, Thou preservest man and beast.
How precious is Thy lovingkindness, O God!
That the children of men can take refuge under
the shadow of Thy wings.”—(xxxvi. 5-7.)

It is a true parallelism when we read,—

“ He loveth righteousness and judgment ;
 The earth is full of the lovingkindness of the Lord.”
 —(xxxiii. 5.)

He who “ is a righteous Judge, a God that hath indignation every day,”—as He looks upon a world in which is so much every day to rouse the wrath of the All-Pure,—is the same God whose “ mercy endureth for ever.” His immutability is not immobility. It is revealed in variations which yet are no changes, though they seem such amidst the changes of the wayward and fickle sons of men.

“ With the loving Thou shewest Thyself loving,
 With the perfect Thou shewest Thyself perfect,
 With the pure Thou shewest Thyself pure,
 And with the perverse Thou shewest Thyself forward.”—(xviii. 24, 25.)

In these lines stand the very pillars of the kingdom of truth and moral order; they explain, moreover, much of what seems like the irony of human history. There may lie a secret in them which every man cannot unravel, but there is no inconsistency in the Divine character thus limned with a few strokes. With Him is forgiveness; with Him is lovingkindness and plenteous redemption: but not that He may be slighted as

an easy and too-indulgent ruler, but "that Thou mayest be feared" (cxxx. 4). True religious reverence is reserved for Him who can both create and destroy, both punish and forgive. In Him, not once, but evermore,

"Mercy and truth are met together,
Righteousness and peace have kissed each other."
—(lxxxv. 10.)

Hence the paradox, which is none to him who reads with care,—

"Thine, too, Jehovah, is lovingkindness,
For Thou renderest to every man according to his
work."—(lxii. 12.)

Do men call this quality justice? The Psalmist teaches a deeper lesson. As Canon Cheyne says in one of the many admirable notes of his *Commentary*,—a book less known than it deserves, through the attention attracted by the extreme utterances of his *Bampton Lectures*,—
"Lovingkindness is that gracious quality which knits together the members of a community and the parties to a covenant; it is therefore not inconsistent with justice: indeed, it is one form of justice. Such a quality in its highest degree alone can unravel the tangled skein of human responsibility, and determine how much in each human life is the 'work' of the man, and how

much that of other members of the community.”¹ The point of view of the Psalmist here is one from which the moralist may learn a much-needed lesson.

There are two qualities ascribed to God in the Psalms, each of which it is difficult to render by a single word. The first of these is the one just referred to, *chesed*, best translated “lovingkindness”: the other is *anavah*, “gentleness,” or “lowliness.” The first indicates both the covenant-love of God to His people, and the response made to it by men who are faithful to the terms of that gracious covenant. This mutual relation clothes the various uses of the word with great beauty and suggestiveness, but it makes it particularly difficult to translate. Of it the Psalmist speaks when he says, “I have trusted in Thy lovingkindness”; explaining the word in the next verse—“For Jehovah hath dealt bountifully with me” (xiii. 5, 6). But it is often closely joined with faithfulness, as in Psalm xviii. 3, and can only be understood as the Divine side in a mutual relation between God and those who are called *chasidim*—translated “saints” (l. 5), “godly” (lxxxvi. 2)—the faithful, loving ones whose names stand in the covenant-bond, and

¹ *The Book of Psalms: A new Translation, with Commentary*, p. 172.

who seek to perform their part of its gracious requirements. The other word, *anavah*, is best defined by such a passage as this,—

“Who is like unto Jehovah our God,
Who dwelleth on high,
That humbleth Himself to regard the heavens and
the earth?”—(cxiii. 5.)

He who is high “hath respect unto the lowly” (cxxxviii. 6); He “thinketh on” the poor and needy (xl. 17); and David at the height of his earthly career says, in words that the lofty ones of earth are slow to repeat, “Thy gentleness (lowliness) hath made me great” (xviii. 35). Humility in the Most High? It is an anticipation of New Covenant revelation, manifested in yearning pity over weakness and frailty (ciii. 13, 14), in special care for the lonely, the helpless, the bowed down (cxlvi. 8, 9), in the patient sympathy which marks the wanderings of the homeless, which counts and treasures the tears of the sorrowful (lvi. 8), and binds up the wounds of those who through misfortune or foolish wilfulness have suffered in the severe battle of life. The binding of wounds needs the most tender and delicate touch; but the Lord of all does not disdain such gentle ministering. He supports the sufferer upon his couch of languishing, He “makes all his bed in his sick-

ness," or restores him to health. *Mi e'Adonai Elohēnu?* Who is like unto the Lord our God?

Bishop Westcott, in his exposition of St. John's Gospel, dwells very instructively upon certain pairs of words, such as "truth" and "witness," "judgment" and "life," which are characteristic of the evangelist's style. Such a pair of words is to be found in the Psalter—"Holiness" and "Glory." "Holiness," says Oetinger, "is hidden glory, and glory disclosed holiness."¹ Holiness is not a name for the perfection of God in general, but indicates rather that unique splendour of perfect *moral* character, which sets Him apart from the universe, and which claims the worship and devotion of a people, likewise set apart, bidden to be holy because He is holy. This forms the refrain of the 99th Psalm, *He is the Holy One* (vers. 3, 5, 9). The prophetic title "The Holy One of Israel" is found several times in the Psalter; while at the same time He is the King of Glory (xxiv. 7), the God of Glory (xxix. 3), His servants tell of "the glory of His kingdom" (cxlv. 11), and "the whole earth shall be filled with His glory" (lxxii. 19). His glory is the clear and splendid radiance of a character, the distinguishing feature of which is holiness. "To be holy and to be glorious, to be hallowed and to be glorified,

¹ Quoted in *Oehler*, i. 160.

correspond exactly, because in both cases the majesty of the self-revealing God is displayed and maintained before the world.¹ Such is the Psalmist's God. *Who is like unto Thee, O Lord?*

¹ Schultz, ii. 172.

CHAPTER V.

THEOLOGY OF THE PSALTER—II. GOD IN NATURE.

THIS subject deserves separate consideration, though in reality it belongs to that we have just completed. The Psalmist would hardly understand the distinction. The very use of the word "nature" separates our point of view from his. Nature and history both mean to him — GOD. Both are a part of His "works," in which God Himself is said to rejoice (civ. 31), which make the heart of the Psalmist glad, and in which he has learned to "triumph" (xcii. 4). There is no trace in the Psalter of that worship of the separate powers operative in parts of the great whole of nature, which is characteristic of the mythology of ancient Greece. There is no word in Hebrew corresponding to the modern Nature, which is the personified sum and order of cause and effect in the universe of which man forms a part. The attitude of modern physical science which investigates the links of sequence in the

material constitution of the universe, the attitude of philosophy, and the kindred though loftier attitude of theology, which search into the deeper causes of things, and strive to penetrate the secret of a higher order, are foreign to the attitude of the Psalmist, as he looks out upon the world. His is the attitude of Religion.

This does not mean, however, that what we call the poetic appreciation of nature is absent. In some sense this is a modern sentiment. The self-conscious pursuit of the picturesque over land and sea, the science of æsthetics, which teaches what fair sights it is proper to go into raptures over, and why, were unknown in the childhood of the world. But there was something far better. The frankly gazing eye of Wonder is the heritage of the child, too often forfeited by the man, and it is worth volumes of æsthetics. Iris is the child of Thaumás, said Plato; the keenest appreciation of beauty is born of wonder. "In wonder," said Coleridge, "all philosophy began; in wonder it ends; and admiration fills up the interspace." We have forgotten how to wonder, and only admire—a very different thing. The Psalmist will teach us the neglected lesson. The wondering, awestruck, delighted gaze with which he looks out upon natural beauty is visible, not only in the delicate and lingering touch with which

he paints the pictures of the 104th Psalm, the flashes of light which illumine certain verses of the 19th and the 29th, but in passing touches innumerable, which, because they are but touches, are apt to escape notice. Who but a poet, glancing from east to west, could have written, "Thou makest the outgoings of morning and evening to rejoice with ringing cries"? (lxv. 8). In the 7th verse of the same psalm the deep murmur of the sea sounds in the music of the verse, and is echoed by the multitudinous tumult of the peoples; while both are stilled by God. It is a poet, as well as a saint, who looks out upon the refreshing rains, and cries, "The river of God is full of water!" Keen appreciation of the manifold beauty of a vast world is marked by the very choice of words and their collection in the apostrophe,—

"Praise Jehovah from the earth,
 Ye dragons and all ye ocean-deeps;
 Fire and hail, snow and vapour,
 Stormy wind fulfilling His word."—(cxlviii. 7, 8.)

The magnificent description of the storm in xviii. 7-15 is not more perfect of its kind than the exquisite glimpses of beauty, small and perfect as miniatures, found in Psalms cxxvi. and cxxix.,—

"Weeping a man goeth on his way
 Bearing his handful of seed;
 With ringing cries of joy shall he come home,
 Bringing his sheaves with him."—(cxxvi. 6.)

The companion picture is not so pleasing, but it is quite as graphic. On the ill-compacted Eastern roofs grass will often spring up into a brief and purposeless existence, and Isaiah uses it to symbolise the short-lived prosperity of the wicked.¹ But it is the poet's hand which gives the added pathetic touch, recalling the happy scenes of hay-time and harvest in fields of grass and corn,—

“Let them be as the grass of the housetops,
 Which withereth before it be unsheathed :
 With which the mower filleth not his hand,
 Nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom ;
 And they that go by say not,
 The blessing of Jehovah be upon you !
 We bless you in the name of Jehovah !”
 —(cxxxix. 6-8.)

Order, with its attendant utility, is constantly observed by the Psalmist. The Hebrew has no word corresponding to *κόσμος*, the universe in the beauty of its ordered arrangement; but the singer of Israel could perceive that order both in the starry heavens above him and the shining landscape around. He can comment, from time to time, on “the grass that grows for the cattle, and the herb for the service of man.” He can discern the power displayed in the storm, the sublimity which belongs to the sterner aspects of nature ;

¹ Isa. xxxvii. 27.

but we need to be reminded of all these very real characteristics of the Psalms, because, as we read, they are all thrown into the shadow by the Vision of God. Truth and beauty and order are visible to the Psalmist, but only as a translucent veil through which shines the Divine glory. The raiment fashioned at the "whirring loom of time" can hardly be seen for the brightness of the countenance of Him who wears it.

The Psalms stand alone in the simplicity and directness with which they represent nature as but the garb of God. Nature may intoxicate with sensuous passion, or kindle intellectual enthusiasm, or soothe into a moral slumber; its highest function is to minister to spiritual insight. But this has been only too rarely illustrated in the history of humanity. In modern times, man, even when learning spiritual lessons from nature, looks upon her with sophisticated eyes. Two examples from modern poets will illustrate our meaning. When Wordsworth would describe the religious ecstasy of the Highland shepherd watching the sunrise amongst the splendours of the hills, he says,—

"In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.
No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request,

Rapt into still communion that transcends
 The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,
 His mind was a thanksgiving to the Power
 That made him ; it was blessedness and love !”¹

But how little does “the living God” shine forth from these lines. The poet is occupied wholly with man, with a human state of mind, which might be little more than the reverie of a Pantheist. Coleridge’s hymn in the valley of Chamonix, on the other hand, is explicit in its recognition of that Unseen Presence to which green vales owe their beauty, and icy cliffs their majesty :—

“Motionless torrents ! silent cataracts !
 Who made you glorious as the gates of heaven
 Beneath the keen full moon ? Who bade the sun
 Clothe you with rainbows ? Who, with living flowers
 Of loveliest blue, spread garlands at your feet ?
 God ! let the torrents, like a shout of nations,
 Answer, and let the ice-plains echo, GOD !
 God ! sing ye meadow streams with gladsome voice !
 Ye pine-groves, with your soft and soul-like sounds :
 And they too have a voice, yon piles of snow,
 And in their perilous fall shall thunder, GOD !”

But how artificial and self-conscious is this apostrophe, compared with the simple grandeur of the 19th Psalm ! To pass from one to the other is like passing from an elaborate painting

¹ *Excursion*, Book i.

to the fresh reality of the fields on a summer morning. The Psalms speak to us all the more impressively of the Divine in the world about us, because, while clear and unmistakable in their testimony, they are not too explicit. Nature is half picture and half curtain; it partly hides what it partly reveals. It hints, suggests, but discloses its inmost secrets only to those who watch the gleams of spiritual light which break for a moment through the clouds of the material universe, glance upon the trembling water, and vanish almost as soon as they appear. The charm and the spiritual lesson both lie in this partial revelation. "The cipher is not unintelligible; it lets out something. The Great Spirit, speaking by dumb representation to other spirits, intimates and signifies to them something about Himself, for if nature is symbolical, what it is symbolical about must be its author."¹ The Psalmist teaches more about nature's God than others who profess more, because, guided by the Spirit Himself, he sees directly, immediately, truly, and is content to let the rays of the Divine Revelation shine simply and directly through his words. The painted window may be gay with many colours, but it intercepts much of the light. The so-called Psalms of Nature are

¹ Mozley, *University Sermons*, on "Nature," p. 135.

not really such. They illustrate the Psalmist's way of viewing the universe, they are full of light as to the true meaning of nature, but that is not their primary subject. Take, for instance, the 8th Psalm. It ranges from the splendours of the nightly sky to the creatures that people the earth with animated life, and the fishes "that pass through the paths of the seas," and it celebrates, at the head of all animate creation, the dignity of man. But it is not a psalm of nature, nor even a psalm of humanity. As the first and last verses show, in the keynote struck at the opening, and struck again in octave at the close—it is a psalm of the glory and excellence of God in what He has done for His frail creature, man. Much, however, is to be learned from these few lines concerning the true significance of nature, man's place in nature, His true dignity, the way in which it is to be realized, and the place of nature and man alike in relation to Him who created both.

"Jehovah our Lord,
How glorious is Thy name in all the earth!"

The 19th is more truly a psalm of nature—the first part of it, that is, including verses 1-6. For the Psalm is probably a composite one; the two parts being different in rhythm and style, as well

as in tone and general character. Not that there is any reason in the juxtaposition of subjects to make us suppose that two fragments have been joined together; most appropriate and instructive is their combination, and well may the psalm be studied as one whole. The Psalmist does not stand alone in finding the glory of God both in the starry heavens above, and the moral law within; but the language used concerning the statutes and precepts of the written Law is most probably of later date than the time of David. The opening verses are full of the freshness and elasticity which marks David's style, and generations since have echoed their music,—

“There is no speech nor language,
 Their voice cannot be heard.
 Their strain has gone out through all the earth
 And their words to the end of the world.”—(iii. 4.)

But perhaps the most perfect expression of the Psalmist's view of God in nature, is found in that Psalm of the Storm, the 29th. It should be studied as a whole, for it is not a description of a thunderstorm, but an anticipation of the advent of God,—

I.

“Give unto Jehovah, O ye sons of God,
 Give unto Jehovah glory and strength!
 Give unto Jehovah the glory due unto His name,
 Worship Jehovah in holy apparel!

II.

The voice of Jehovah is over the waters :
 The God of glory thundereth,
 Even Jehovah over the great waters.
 The voice of Jehovah is in power ;
 The voice of Jehovah is in majesty.
 The voice of Jehovah breaketh the cedars,
 Yea, Jehovah breaketh in pieces the cedars of
 Lebanon.
 He maketh them to skip like a calf ;
 Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild-ox.
 The voice of Jehovah cleaveth out flames of fire :
 Jehovah shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh.
 The voice of Jehovah maketh the hinds to calve,
 And strippeth the forests bare ;
 And in His palace every one saith, GLORY !

III.

Jehovah sat as King over the Flood,
 Yea, Jehovah sitteth as King for ever.
 Jehovah will give strength unto His people,
 Jehovah will bless His people with peace.⁷

This grand psalm consists of Prelude, Theme, and Conclusion. Each part is artistically constructed, from the opening summons to the heavenly host to adore the King of Glory, who is about to appear in the majesty of the storm which heralds His approach, down to the triumphant serenity of the closing stanza, in which the hoarse roar of the thunder dies away

into silence, and He who is enthroned above all earthly storms blesses His people with peace. The keynote in the body of the psalm is "Hark—Jehovah!" His voice it is which fills the air and well-nigh stuns the ear, the glance of His lightnings which strips the forest and cleaves the strong cedars of Lebanon. The picture of the thunderstorm among the mountains could hardly be more vivid or impressive; yet who in reading the psalm thinks of thunder and lightning? The voice of Him who sitteth King for ever drowns all other notes, and in that great Temple-Palace of His which we call Nature, the only other sound audible is that echo which peals from every part and corner,—

"Everything in His temple saith, Glory!"

The most complete of these nature-psalms is of course, the 104th, which is indeed "an inspired oratorio of creation." No one can miss seeing that its groundwork is the first chapter of Genesis,—a theme on which it provides sublimely appropriate musical variations, from the *Fiat lux* of Genesis i. 3 echoed in the 4th verse, down to the mention of the brooding Spirit, Lord and Giver of Life (cf. Gen. i. 2 with Ps. civ. 30), and the joy of God in His creation (Gen. i. 4, 10, 18,

31) reflected in the 31st verse. The order of the days of creation is observed in the psalm,¹ while it contains a number of striking pictures of the scenery with which the writer was acquainted. The whole subject is treated with independent power, but with the same spirit of devout and lowly adoration which marks the first chapter of Genesis. Whether it be more truly a psalm of nature or a psalm of God, let the careful reader judge. It is not the sublimity of the figure that should chiefly strike us when we read the words,—

“ Who coverest Thyself with light as with a garment,
 Who stretchest out the heavens like a tent-curtain ;
 Who layeth the beams of His chambers upon the
 waters,
 Who maketh the clouds His chariot,
 Who walketh upon the wings of the wind,”

but the presence of Him in comparison with whose transcendent glory the loftiest imagery is low and poor, and the boldest flights of earthly speech tame and inadequate. The twenty-fourth verse contains what it is prosaic indeed to call the Psalmist's definition of nature, but it represents in brief compass the true thought of all these singers of Israel concerning nature, from David,

¹ There is only one exception ; in the mention of the sea and marine animals (ver. 25) after those of the dry land. But the reason is not far to seek, when the psalm is closely studied.

the leader of the choir, down to the most obscure member of the chorus in post-Exilic days.

“How manifold are Thy works, Jehovah!
In wisdom hast Thou made them all:
The earth is full of Thy creatures.”

The whole Psalter is full of suggestion to the devout student of nature. Dante in his *Paradiso* cannot rise beyond the thought that light is but the shadow of God, and sacred poets of all generations have but enlarged the pictures which the inspired psalmists have painted in small panels with such exquisite skill. Let the Psalter be our companion on the summer holiday, as well as in the winter gloom, and we may learn afresh lessons which neither the nineteenth nor any century can outgrow. Let us “look up towards the higher hills, where the waves of everlasting green roll silently into their long inlets among the shadows of the pines; and we may, perhaps, at last know the meaning of those quiet words of the 147th Psalm: ‘He maketh grass to grow upon the mountains.’”¹

The confines of a large subject have been barely skirted. There is no need in the devout thought of modern days to try to return absolutely to the simple views of the Psalmist; that would be both impossible and undesirable. But we may learn the spiritual lesson which the Psalter so sweetly

¹ Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, iii. Part iv. ch. xiv.

and graciously teaches. We need not lay aside—we cannot, if we have made it our own—the knowledge which geology has given us of the strata of the earth and the processes of their formation, or that which astronomy has taught us of the movements of the orbs of heaven. We may understand more than the ancients of the growth and fertilization of the flowers, of the tides and currents of “this great and wide sea,” and look with very different eyes upon the “things creeping innumerable,” and “leviathan whom Thou hast made to take his pastime therein.” But the growth of knowledge furnishes no reason for the diminution of reverence. Shall we banish God from the universe because we have discovered more minute marks of Mind in one corner of it than the Psalmist could discern in a whole landscape? The Psalmist with his scanty knowledge sums up thus: “In wisdom Thou hast made them all.” The modern student could write a longer and more elaborate commentary on that great text; but, when all has been said, the wisest can but rest in the same conclusion:—

“God is Law, say the wise; O soul, and let us rejoice,
For if He thunder by law, the thunder is yet His
voice.”

The climax of the whole Psalter is found in the words: “Let everything that hath breath praise

the Lord." But the refrain is added, "Praise *ye* the Lord." If man, the high priest of creation, be silent, and the notes of his music be dumb in the great chorus of praise, surely the stones themselves would cry out to shame the folly of the creature who can find in God's great universe the tokens of no Being greater than himself.

CHAPTER VI.

THEOLOGY OF THE PSALTER—III. THE RELIGIOUS LIFE IN MAN.

THE task of portraying in a few pages the life of God in the human soul, as reflected in the Psalms, is obviously difficult, if not impossible. It is not an easy thing to photograph the waves of an ever-changing sea. But it is not only that the Psalms express for the most part moods, no one of which is adequately representative of the whole religious state of the writer, and that the variety of religious experience expressed in these lyrics is so great. A greater difference is to be discerned between the earlier and later psalms as regards personal religious life than was traceable in the subjects of the last two chapters. The religious life of David's time, though essentially the same as that of the post-Exilic period, differed in some important respects from it. Yet the scantiness of our knowledge makes it dangerous to lay down canons of distinction, and refer all psalms containing certain religious ideas to a

late date. There is considerable danger in this connection of arguing in a vicious circle. Some critics press the argument, without perceiving its fallacy, that such a psalm cannot have proceeded from David, because such ideas cannot so early have been in the possession of Israel. Moreover, detailed help from outside the Psalter is not forthcoming to enable us to fix the epoch of psalms by the thoughts they contain. If, as most scholars are now disposed to believe, the Pentateuch, in its present form, was not completed till after the Exile, it is nevertheless clear that the essential principles of the Mosaic law had been the heritage of Israel from the beginning, though the worship and life of the people had been all too little influenced by them. The utterances of the prophets in the eighth century B.C. presuppose a long religious history. Hosea and Amos speak not as innovators but as reformers, appealing to a religious knowledge which Israel possessed, but did not rightly use. We are unable to determine exactly the extent of that knowledge, and the actual condition of religious life in Israel at each successive stage. But the main features of spiritual life and experience, as understood by the Psalmist, can be traced in broad outline, and to these we now turn.

One of the first things that strikes us in pass-

ing from the teaching of the Psalms about God to their doctrine of man, is the ease and confidence with which the Psalmist divides mankind into righteous and wicked, and the extent to which he claims for himself a place with the "godly." There is an appearance of self-righteousness both about the way in which the Divine regard appears to be claimed as a right, and in the expectation of the overthrow of adversaries, who are assumed to be as evil as the Psalmist himself is upright. The whole subject of righteousness appears to be regarded with a less spiritual and discriminating eye than we might have expected. But we must look below the surface. It would, of course, be a great mistake to import into the Old Testament ideas of law and views of sin and righteousness derived from the New Testament. Close examination, however, will show us that the appearance of Pharisaic self-righteousness in the psalmists is altogether deceptive, though it is true that the Psalms exhibit a certain simplicity of conception which belongs to their age, and a less deep and thorough appreciation of the roots of evil in human nature than became possible in later days.

We may be startled, for example, to read,—

"Jehovah judgeth the peoples :

Judge me, O Jehovah, according to my innocence
And mine integrity that is in me.

“My shield over me is God,
Who saveth the upright in heart.”—(vii. 8, 10.)

Or, again,—

“I was also perfect towards Him,
And kept myself from iniquity ;
So Jehovah recompensed me according to my righteousness,
According to the cleanness of my hands in His eyesight.”—(xviii. 23, 24.)

The language of the 101st Psalm may perhaps be described as that of aspiration and lofty purpose rather than actual attainment, yet it savours of a self-confidence which seems to us hardly consistent with true righteousness for a man to say, “I will walk within my house with a perfect heart,” or to claim that he has walked in his integrity and trusted the Lord without wavering (xxvi. 1). Nor can it be said that this is merely the language of a Jew who is contrasting himself with the heathen round about him ; that the Psalmist is only claiming what might be called the formal or official righteousness implied in being a worshipper of Jehovah and one of God’s chosen people. The distinction between righteous and wicked does not correspond to that between Jew and Gentile, but often clearly refers to those within the borders of Israel.

Something must be allowed, no doubt, for a

possible misunderstanding of the words used. Such words as "perfect," "pure," "righteous," "godly," convey to our ears a meaning which the Psalmist hardly intended. We cannot readily divest them of a deep spiritual meaning. But the Psalmist meant little more than to claim the honesty of intention and general uprightness of purpose which characterises the man who is devoted to God and sincerely anxious to serve Him. This might easily be illustrated at length, but it is almost proved by the language of the 32nd Psalm, in which the writer confesses grievous sin before God, yet substantially claims, as regards his general character, a place among "the godly" (ver. 6), those "in whose spirit there is no guile" (ver. 1), and the "upright in heart" (ver. 11).

Still it remains true that under the Jewish dispensation even the most spiritual men to some extent rested, and were right to rest, upon God's covenant-love to Israel; so that if with an honest heart the Psalmist was striving to be faithful to the covenant, even though with many conscious errors and imperfections, he might justly use such language as has been quoted and claim his place in Jehovah's regard. A deeper sense of sin cleaving to the inmost nature may or may not be present; very frequently there is no sign of it; but in any case it is not to the immediate purpose

of the writer, who wishes to rank himself—a Christian would add, “however unworthy”—among the sincere followers of Jehovah and those who are seeking to fulfil their part in the gracious covenant He has made with Israel.

The standard by which judgment is pronounced is also simple and easily recognizable. For the most part there is no reference to the written law in its detailed precepts. In certain psalms such reference is very explicit, but these we have other reasons for supposing to be late in date, *e.g.* the 1st, the latter half of the 19th, and the whole of that remarkable hymn in praise of the law,—the 119th Psalm. In these and a few other cases we find expressions which show that the Psalmists knew, studied, and had learned to love God’s written word. In xix. 11, 12 the study of the law is expressly connected with the conviction of sin; a kind of anticipation of St. Paul’s “I had not known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet”; and in the 119th Psalm the “exceeding breadth” of the commandment, its purity, preciousness, and illuminating power are dwelt upon with all the fulness inspired by deep affection.

But for the most part this is not the case; the written word is not appealed to as the standard, nor named as the cause of conviction of sin. The

outline of duty is simple. The 15th and 24th Psalms propound the searching questions, who may be considered fit to be guests of the pure and holy Jehovah, and to dwell with Him in His holy place? The answers are the same in both cases,—

“He that hath clean hands and a pure heart,
Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity,
Nor sworn deceitfully.”—(xxiv. 4.)

Simple, but by no means superficial, is the morality of the *Torah* that the Psalmist follows. It is not an easy thing in any generation to “walk blamelessly, work righteousness, and speak truth in the heart” (xv. 2). Mark the searching simplicity of that last test. How many there are who claim all the privileges of “evangelical” righteousness, of whom, alas! it could hardly be said that they “speak truth in their heart.” We have the authority of St. James for saying that whoever satisfies the conditions which follow in ver. 3 as to the use of the tongue, is “a perfect man, and able to bridle the whole body.” Very characteristic, moreover, of the ethics of the Psalter is the often-repeated phrase, “upright in heart.” Rectitude of character, according to the revealed standard of right and wrong, tested by a man’s words and actions towards his fellows, and maintained in all good conscience in the sight of that God whose “eyes behold, whose eyelids try, the

children of men," is by no means a low standard of moral and spiritual life in any age. Happy those who can appeal with similar simplicity and confidence to the judgment of Him who sees and tries the hearts.

It must not be supposed, however, that the Psalmist aims only at what some are unwise enough to call "mere morality." Expressions of deep penitence are not common, especially in the earlier psalms. But they are found, and the language of contrition in the Psalms is as tender, fervent, and heart-stirring as the language of thanksgiving is buoyant and triumphant. If the 32nd and 51st Psalms were written by David, they both express sorrow for a gross and aggravated transgression. But the man whose "bones had wasted away" through his grief, his "moisture turned into the drought of summer," or who humbles himself in the dust before God, and acknowledges, whatever his offence in the sight of men, "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight," is a man who has entered into the true spiritual meaning of sin, and whose deep penitence is acceptable with God and a pattern to men. How does such a man approach the Most Holy God, and on what grounds does he expect to be heard and forgiven?

Not, assuredly, on the score of sacrifices and

burnt-offerings diligently presented to God. Not that these are slighted in the Psalter, or that the ceremonial element in religion is disparaged or discarded. There are not (relatively) many references to sacrifice, as there is no systematic reference to the written law; but it is not to be inferred that the writers of the Psalms were ignorant of, or ignored, either law or sacrifice. Occasionally we find direct mention of ceremonial observances.

“I will go into Thy house with burnt-offerings,
I will pay Thee my vows,
Which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath
spoken,
When I was in distress.
Burnt offerings of fatlings I will offer unto Thee,
With the sweet smoke of rams;
I will offer bullocks with goats.”—(lxvi. 13-15.)

“Bind the sacrifice with cords,” chants the thankful Church in the 118th Psalm, “even unto the horns of the altar.” These rites had their place in the religious life of Israel; they are so recognised in such passages as Psalm xx. 3, xliii. 4, li. 19, and were needful in order to preserve covenant-order and covenant-relationship under certain conditions. But nowhere do we find, as is so common in the Vedas and other ethnic scriptures, the fidelity and regularity with which sacrifice has been offered used as a plea with

God for forgiveness. The prophetic tone concerning sacrifice¹ is echoed in some of the psalms, and its efficacy with God as pertaining to the conscience distinctly disclaimed. "In sacrifice and offering Thou hadst no delight," says the 40th Psalm, "but open ears didst Thou make me," that I might hear and obey Thy will, and learn to find in it my delight. The 50th Psalm is conceived in the very spirit, almost the language of Isa. i.,—

"Would I eat bulls' flesh,
Or drink the blood of goats?
Offer unto God thanksgiving"

when things go well with thee, for in time of sin and sorrow—

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit :
A broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt
not despise."—(li. 17.)

Everywhere the Psalmist in his need casts himself upon the mercy of God. This cannot fail. The doctrine of atonement does not figure largely in the Psalter; faith is often mentioned, but it is not identical with the justifying faith of the New Testament. Yet the germ of evangelical teaching on these subjects is found in the Psalms, and a real preparation is made for it when its time

¹ See *e.g.* Isa. i., lviii.; Micah vi.; Hos. vi. 6; Jer. vii. 21.

should come. Everywhere the holiness, the spotless purity of Jehovah are recognised; He "executeth judgment," "loveth righteousness," but "the wicked and him that loveth violence His soul hateth." Yet the plea of the sinner rests ever upon the mercy of God, who "will not always chide," but with whom is "forgiveness" and "plenteous redemption." His plea is—

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness :

According to the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgression."—(iv. 1.)
ii.

The mercy of the Lord is "from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him," and He must evermore be praised who not only "healeth all thy diseases," but "forgiveth all thine iniquities." The way in which these two classes of statements are reconciled, the Psalmist does not stay to consider; but in asserting with equal and oft-repeated emphasis the inviolable righteousness and the inexhaustible mercy of the God in whom he trusts, he prepares the way for that Saviour, who alone could light up both with infinite meaning, and seal them both with eternal assurance in the gift of Himself as a Sacrifice for the sin of the world. Man is "born in sin, and shapen in iniquity," in God's sight "no flesh living is justified"; yet the psalmist who cries,

“Iniquities prevail against me,” can add with confidence, “As for our transgressions, Thou shalt purge them away.” It is clear, therefore, that for the full solution of the problem of sin and forgiveness, the generations must be content to wait.

The joy of assured forgiveness, however, the Psalmist does know. The brightest beatitude of the Old Testament is that pronounced upon the man “whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.”

“Waiting I had waited for Jehovah ;
 And He inclined unto me, and heard my cry.
 He brought me up also out of the pit of destruction,
 Out of the miry clay ;
 He set my feet upon a rock, and established my
 goings.
 And He hath put a new song in my mouth,
 Even praise unto our God.”—(xl. 1-3.)

This may possibly refer to deliverance from trouble, but neither the language itself, nor the context, points in this direction. It may be well, however, to notice that frequently in the Psalms it is not altogether easy to distinguish between spiritual and temporal trouble and deliverance. That essentially “Pauline” psalm, *De Profundis* (cxxx.), has been interpreted by many of the depths of sorrow, rather than of sin. Here again

what seems the simplicity or absence of discrimination in the Psalms commends itself to the experience of humanity. In how many a crisis of life does trouble bring to mind our sinfulness as we have never felt it in prosperity; and again, how does wrong-doing lead to a miry "slough of despond," a "pit of destruction," such as yawns unseen for those whose feet persist in seeking the crooked way. Spiritual deliverance is often expressed in figurative language, and those who feel the need of salvation for body and soul alike, who need to be rescued both from evil within and from the trouble without which it so constantly entails, find the language of the Psalms furnish a most appropriate litany.

There is no need to illustrate at length the joy of these saints of old time in communion with God; it is written on almost every page of the Psalter. But, considering the scantiness of revelation given them, considering also the character of the Law that had been given, its sternness against evil, and the emphasis laid upon the separation between a holy God and sinful man, it is remarkable to find language expressing such intensity of personal devotion, such closeness of spiritual communion, such confidence of access to God, and such tenderness of filial affection and intercourse.

“O God, Thou art my God ; earnestly do I seek Thee :
 My soul thirsteth for Thee,
 My flesh longeth for Thee,
 In a dry and thirsty land, where no water is. . . .
 For Thy lovingkindness is better than life (itself) :
 My lips shall praise Thee.
 ‘ For Thou hast been my help,
 In the shadow of Thy wings I shout for joy.
 My soul followeth hard after Thee :
 Thy right hand upholdeth me.”—(lxiii. 1, 3, 7, 8.)

Sometimes the longing is expressed for the worship and ordinances of God’s house, but the desire is always spiritual, and it is the presence of God which is the fountain of delight. The phrase in xlii. 2 and elsewhere, “appear before God,” is the recognised expression for joining in the worship of the tabernacle or the temple (see Ex. xxxiv. 23). The recollection of these gatherings does the Psalmist’s heart good.

“Let me remember these things, pouring out my soul,
 How I went with the throng,
 Leading them in procession to the house of God,
 With cries of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude
 keeping holy-day.”—(xlii. 4.)

The 84th Psalm has long stood as a standard expression of holy delight in public worship. The joys of the sanctuary overflow all the later psalms. It is difficult to find words to render the variety of phrases which describe the “joyful noise,” the

“ringing cries,” the “singing with melody,” the “high praises,” and thanksgivings with harp and psaltery and “high-sounding cymbals,” in the worship of Israel’s God.

But our immediate subject is the religious life of the individual, not of the community. The personal note both of joy and sorrow is often very intense. “The secret of Jehovah is with them that fear Him” (xxv. 14); He “keeps them secretly in His pavilion,” hides them “in the covert of His tent” (xxvii. 5). In times of trouble the Psalmist’s faith individualises and appropriates the Divine promises. “Our God” becomes “my God,” whether it be to express a fervently tender affection for “Jehovah, my strength” (xviii. 1), or a passionate clinging to One who seems to have forsaken him (xxii. 1). There is no need to fill these pages with the figures of speech in which God is described as a Rock and High Tower, a Helper and Deliverer, a Shield of defence, an abiding Refuge for His people. The figures are so familiar that they have almost ceased to be such, and all the devout imagination of succeeding centuries has failed to improve upon them.

These are the commonplaces of the Psalms. But let it not be forgotten that current coin was once molten metal. How brave and strong was

the faith of these tried and tempted sons of men, who could so hold fast truths amid sore distress and dire calamity as that in time they should become truisms. The pioneer in the forest makes the way easy for those who follow him; at length men tread a beaten road, and exclaim over the ease and smoothness of the journey. To understand some of these psalms we must pray over them in bodily or spiritual anguish, not casually read them while lounging in an easy-chair, or sauntering down a grassy path. Some of them were written in bodily torture, others within the shadow of overmastering fear, others under the cruel lash of oppression. Here is no "idle ore,"—

"But iron dug from central gloom,
And heated hot with burning fears,
And dipped in baths of hissing tears,
And battered with the shocks of doom
To shape and use."

A collection of poems cannot be read through at a sitting, nor a hundred pictures viewed in a single visit to a gallery. Each poem and picture has a history; it is, or should be, a fragment of a human soul. The agonies and the triumphs of the Psalms can only be fully understood by those who have passed through agony to triumph, but all can give to the several compositions patient and sympathetic study, as part of a history of a

human soul, so that each shall be like the face of a beloved and familiar friend.

Take the 71st Psalm, for example, which, to a superficial reader, opens so tamely,—

“In thee, Jehovah, have I put my trust,
Let me never be put to shame.”

Only “a cento of phrases from other psalms,” says the critic ; but a sympathetic study brings out a touching history. True, the opening words are quoted from the 31st Psalm, and the 22nd, 35th, and 40th are freely used. But when we examine the quotations, we find that the writer has woven them into a context of his own, and given to them quite a new character, casting them into his own mould, and penning for himself “A Prayer for Old Age.” The tone is plaintive but trustful, as becomes the physical weakness, the apparent afflictions, and the matured experience of an aged saint ; but it ends in gladness, and expresses in its mingled supplications and thanksgivings, a pathetic history of blended joy and sorrow through an anxious, but patient, and, at last, triumphant life. So with the rest. Whoever will take the pains to study even a familiar psalm afresh will find in it, as in a portrait by a master, some new significant trait or feature ; and no mood of religious experience can fail to find

somewhere in the Psalter its appropriate expression, its congenial strain of sacred music.

The outline of religious life presented in the Psalms is, we have seen, a simple one. But the facts of life are complex, and it could not be long before the faithful in Israel were brought to face some of the standing enigmas of human life. It may be some time in the history of an individual or a nation before these are felt to press keenly and severely, and to call for an immediate answer. The belief that God loves righteousness and hates iniquity, that He will punish the wicked and protect or deliver His servants, is seen ere long to be subjected to considerable strain. In actual fact, this seems often not to be the case. Retribution is not visible; if the righteous Judge does—as the Psalmist is sure He does—judge righteously, He does not make this by any means evident. But to question the fact of righteous retribution seemed to strike at the foundation of faith: to say that God “will not require it” was almost the same as to say “There is no God” (x. 4, 13). Still questioning does arise. The Psalmist does not check it as impious, but, with the spirit of true religion, brings his difficulty to God Himself, and pours out his heart in prayer. He pleads, in words that John Calvin was often heard to murmur, and which have often risen to the lips of

God's suffering and perplexed servants, *Quousque, Domine?* How long, O Lord?

“How long, Jehovah, wilt Thou forget me for ever?

How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me?

How long shall I keep anxious cares in my soul,

Having sorrow in my heart daily?

How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?”

—(xiii. 1, 2.)

But the question “Why?” is even more urgent and perplexing than the question “How long?” To see “the wicked in great power, spreading himself like a green tree in its native soil,” irresistibly suggests not only the question, How long is this to last? but, Why is it permitted at all? This is the great problem of the Book of Job. It cannot be argued out in a brief lyric as it is in a protracted dialogue, but the sharp pain of the religious difficulty is evidently felt quite as keenly by the man who utters only a single cry of expostulation. The difficulty is sometimes felt as national, sometimes as personal and individual; sometimes it takes the form, Why should the wicked prosper? sometimes, Why do the righteous suffer? Sometimes it is a question of fact which torments the inquirer, Will the balance ever be redressed? sometimes a question concerning the purpose or meaning of affliction, Why is this apparent injustice permitted meanwhile? But the

fact that moral character and lot or condition in life by no means always correspond, was specially impressed upon Israel in the later portion of its history, and has left its mark upon several of the psalms.

The solution of the problem reached is not final. This was not possible to the Old Testament saint. But peace of mind was from time to time attained, by means of partial solutions, or glimpses of the truth. This may be traced in two main directions. Let us examine the cases where the process of mind is described, through which peace and satisfaction was reached, as given in the 73rd and 77th Psalms.

The former noble psalm opens, characteristically enough, with what is really the conclusion: "Truly God is good to Israel." The first word is one not easy to translate; it implies the result of a long process of mental debate, and might be rendered "Yet surely," "And yet after all." It is a particle of tried and anxious, but ultimately victorious faith. The bitter heart-searching through which God's servant passes, and which had almost ended in the persuasion, "Verily, in vain have I cleansed my heart and washed my hands in innocency," has seldom been more graphically described. He pauses before allowing his feet to slip farther; "If I had said, I will

“speak thus, I should have been a traitor” to God and to God’s people. But how does relief come ?

“When I considered this, to understand it,
It was labour in mine eyes ;
Until I went into the sanctuary of God
And considered their latter end.”

The solution in the main is: the prosperity is but for a time, the feet of the wicked are in slippery places, ere long they will stumble and fall utterly ; while God will hold the hand of His faithful servant, guide him wisely, and afterwards receive him with honour. This is also the solution of Psalm xxxvii. (vers. 35 and 36, cf. 24 and 25) and of xcii. (7 foll.). It represents a true act of faith, inasmuch as the Psalmist possesses such confidence in the God of righteousness as to be convinced, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, that retribution is certain, and righteous judgment is only delayed for a time.

There is, however, a glimpse of another kind of solution given in the 73rd Psalm. It is implicitly contained in the triumphant exclamation of verses 25 and 26 : “Whom have I in heaven but Thee ?” If God Himself be the strength and portion of the failing heart, the Psalmist need not, will not complain ; He can put true gladness into the heart even of the sorrowing, “more than they have when their corn and wine increase.” “Verily, I say

unto you, they have received their reward." This thought, however, is not worked out, though in many passages we can see that it brought to the perplexed sufferer its own Divine consolation.

In the 77th Psalm both the difficulty and the solution are somewhat differently expressed. But the case is parallel throughout. The Psalmist passes through a night of anguish, for God seems to have forsaken and forgotten him. His doubts border upon despair. Is infinite mercy exhausted, and can the inviolable promise fail? Can a man trust in God and be deserted, and will his prayer be allowed to return like a vain echo into his own bosom?

"Then I said, This is my infirmity:

Let me remember the years of the right hand of
the Most High!

I will make mention of Jehovah,

For I will remember Thy wonders of old."

The recollection of the mighty deliverance wrought out for Israel at the Exodus comes to his mind. He tunes his harp to sing once more in the words of Miriam's song, "Jehovah hath triumphed gloriously." God's footsteps were in the very sea which seemed to threaten destruction. He rode upon the storm, and though by unknown ways, still He ever led His rebellious but beloved people like a flock by the hand of Moses and

Aaron. Abruptly the song ceases, but the clouds have passed, the victory is won. There was no need to add the lesson that the same God rules still, and that a heart thankful for the past should be trustful for the future. Another kind of Red Sea deliverance has been effected in the Psalmist's personal history, and henceforth the pillar of cloud and of fire will guide his soul, emancipated from a worse than Egyptian bondage.

Precious are records such as these. But it is impossible to help feeling that more is needed. The triumph of faith is enough for the individual; but the perplexed spirit, anxious to justify the ways of God to men, asks for more, for others' sakes, if not for its own. The problem is not solved by the fresh exercise of faith, only postponed. Is there no glimpse in the Psalter of light beyond? Was it given to old-time singers to see, if only for a moment, beyond the veil; and, when judgment in this life appeared to be so long delayed as practically to disappoint all his hopes, did the Psalmist here and there become a Seer, and anticipate a life to come in which the balance, so long awry, should finally be adjusted?

No revelation of a future life had been made to Israel. The current conception of *Sheol*, the vast Under-world, was that of a doubtful, pre-

carious, shadowy existence, not deserving the name of life in comparison with the brightness and vigour of these realms of day. The gloomy way in which death is often spoken of in other books of the Bible finds its echo in the Psalms.

“For in death there is no remembrance of Thee :
In Sheol who shall give Thee thanks ?”—(vi. 4, 5.)

“What profit is there in my blood when I go down
to the pit ?
Shall the dust praise Thee ? shall it declare Thy
truth ?”—(xxx. 9.)

“Wilt Thou perform wonders for the dead,
Or shall the shades arise and praise Thee ?
Shall Thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave,
And Thy faithfulness in Abaddon ?
Shall Thy wonders be made known in darkness,
And Thy righteousness in the land of forgetful-
ness ?”—(lxxxviii. 10–12.)

The strain of the 39th and 90th Psalms, which are plaintive without being melancholy, shows that the words above quoted were not the mere utterance of gloomy moods. The picture may be darkly painted because of the afflictions pressing at the time upon the Psalmist, but his view of what lay beyond death must be taken as it stands. He had no sure ground of hope beyond the grave, no clear declaration of a future life at all, still less any promise on which he could rest of joy

and blessedness for God's people surpassing the highest hopes of earth.

Yet here and there, faintly, occasionally, by no means prevailing, hope does arise. It springs, not from speculation, from vague surmise, from passionate desire,—all such hopes would be vain,—but from the high privileges God has already bestowed upon His servants, from His assured character, and from the nature of that gracious relation into which He has condescended to enter with His people. The Psalmist does indeed occasionally anticipate that profound reasoning which our Lord used to the Sadducees, and which He intimates they ought to have been prepared to find in the Scriptures they professed to revere—"God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." But so brief and occasional are the utterances, so ambiguous the language, and so trembling appears to be the hope entertained, that some interpreters have doubted whether it exists at all.

"For Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Sheol,

Nor suffer Thy beloved one to see the pit.

Thou wilt show me the path of life:

In Thy presence is fulness of joy,

In Thy right hand are pleasures for ever."

—(xvi. 10, 11.)

"As for me, let me behold Thy face in righteousness,

Let me be satisfied, when I awake, with Thine image!"—(xvii. 15.)

When and how did the Psalmist expect to "awake" and be satisfied with the vision and presence of God? Did he expect to be saved from the grave, or saved out of it and beyond it? When, as in the 73rd Psalm, the writer rejoiced that though heart and flesh should waste away, yet God would be his portion *for ever*, did he mean the words as the modern poet meant them,—

"Truth for truth and good for good! The Good, the
True, the Pure, the Just,
Take the charm *For ever* from them, and they
crumble into dust"?

The 49th Psalm might seem more explicitly to answer this question. It opens with a description of the inevitableness of death. The rich cannot buy immunity; such redemption of a life from the power of the grave is too costly, and however much men may boast of handing down their names to posterity, they must still go the way of all flesh.

"Like sheep, they are folded in Sheol:
Death shall be their shepherd:
And the upright shall tread them down in the
morning.
Their beauty shall be for Sheol to consume,
Till there be no dwelling for it.
But God will redeem my soul from the power of
Sheol,
For He shall receive me."—(xlix. 14, 15.)

The last lines seem conclusive, yet the gleam of celestial light fades as suddenly as it appeared, and the psalm closes with a reminder that the richest and most honourable are but like the brutes that perish. So slight and transient are these expressions of hope, that many have been disposed to explain them in terms of the present life. To do so, however, would be, we are convinced, mistaken exegesis and false psychology. The words, fairly interpreted, certainly point to a future state and to complete fruition in a life to come, though nothing is said of the mode in which it will be attained, and little of its character when attained. The argument that because a hope of future blessedness was not generally entertained in Israel, and that writers whose views of life were in the main what we know the psalmists' to have been *could* not rise to the height of such hopes, is untenable, even if the influence of supernatural revelation and insight be not taken into account. It is certain that the horizon of the psalmists' spiritual sky was for the most part dark on the side of the future life. It is certain also that gleams of light here and there illumine it. They are rays, but only scattered and passing rays, of a light that was afterwards to shine forth in unclouded and unfading splendour, and banish the night of ignorance and fear for ever.

The reasons for this reserve in revelation may not be entirely intelligible to us, but some of them are not far to seek. As regards the Psalter, we may at least perceive that it better answers its end as a liturgy of the spiritual life on earth, and as a discipline of the spirit in worship and communion with God, because it is concerned with the hopes and fears, the prayer and praise, the trials and deliverances of earth, without being irradiated by bright but perhaps distracting glimpses of glory to come. It is well for the soul to think of God, rather than heaven. Even when life and immortality were brought to light through the gospel, revelation is marked by reserves concerning a future state which it is not altogether difficult to explain. The faith of the psalmists who trusted in God and were not confounded, though oppressed by persecution, and unsupported by an assured prospect of everlasting life, should have a bracing and tonic effect upon our often languid and enervated religious life. The words which have strengthened the faith, animated the hope, and sustained the courage of so many generations, were written by men who were content to fight out their spiritual battles on the arena of the present life. They entered the lists and were not afraid; they fought and did not yield. In hope they believed

against hope. If the light of revelation which illumines our pathway is so much fuller than that accorded to the psalmists, it follows surely that our faith should be not less courageous, our victory not less assured and complete than theirs.

CHAPTER VII.

THEOLOGY OF THE PSALTER—IV. THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD.

THE Psalmist's personal life was but a part, perhaps a small part, of his life as a whole. He was a member of a community, one in which the uniting bonds were of a specially close and sacred character. It becomes therefore an interesting and by no means unimportant question, how far each psalmist wrote as an individual, and how far merely in the name of the Church—nation of which he formed a part? It is a question easier to ask than to answer. On the one hand, it probably never occurs at all to the majority of readers; so that what we may call the natural and obvious interpretation is to understand the "I" of the Psalms, wherever it occurs, as referring to the writer alone. There is, however at present a tendency amongst some scholars to go to the other extreme. It is said that "in most cases, even when the Psalmist uses the first person

singular, the speaker is really either the Church or a typical pious Israelite." The Psalter is said not only to belong altogether to the worship of the Second Temple, but to be "a monument of Church-consciousness," intelligible only on the ground that "Hebrew psalmists rarely disclose their personality, having their own private joys and sorrows, but not making them the theme of song."¹

It is not very difficult to show that neither of the extremes is tenable, whether the attempt be made to exclude the individual or the collective element from the psalmody of Israel; but it is by no means easy to draw a line between the instances in which the personal element prevails and those in which it is merged in the national. In many cases probably no such line can be drawn. But we shall miss much of the meaning of the Psalms if we fail to apprehend the distinction, and we shall run the risk of misinterpretation if we put the individual in place of the nation, or the nation in place of the individual. Our view of the so-called "Messianic" psalms, also, will be affected by the decision of this question. In any case, it is one in which the student of the Psalms must at least be able to see his bearings, and it claims attention therefore at this stage.

¹ Cheyne, *Origin of the Psalter*, pp. 258, 265.

In reading the Old Testament it is necessary always to remember that the principle of human individuality—the appreciation of the powers, privileges, and responsibilities of the individual—is much more fully developed in modern than it was in ancient times. This might be illustrated from the power given under Roman law to the father as head of the family, and from the fact that in Rome and Greece religion could hardly be called personal, but rather depended on national custom or formed a part of the political constitution. But in Oriental countries, and in still earlier times, the sense of common life, whether of family, tribe, or nation, was even stronger. Mozley has pointed out, in connection with the story of Abraham's intended sacrifice of Isaac, the "habitual sense of ownership" which pertained to the father in patriarchal times, as if wife and children were literally part of a man's property, their individual life being merged in his.¹ And when Israel was constituted a nation by the covenant of Sinai, the national bond then formed was no ordinary one. This nation had a special vocation, and was set apart for a special purpose. They were to be "a peculiar treasure" to Jehovah "from among all peoples . . . a kingdom of priests, an holy nation" (Ex. xix. 6). This special charac-

¹ *Ruling Ideas in Early Ages*, p. 49, etc.

teristic was conserved by all the provisions of the Law, it was fostered by the teachings of the prophets, and by the many promises given, not to separate individuals, but to the nation as a whole.

It has been said that it was only in the times of Jeremiah and Ezekiel that the importance of individual life began to be appreciated. It is certain that then attention was specially drawn to the subject, as Jeremiah xxxi. 29 and Ezekiel xviii. clearly show. Greater stress is laid upon individual responsibility, and the ethical problem implied in the punishment of the children for the sins of the fathers is by those prophets distinctly raised. But throughout the history of Israel the religious relation of the individual to God was undoubtedly very closely involved in the religious relation of the community with which each member was identified. It would not, perhaps, be easy to find a parallel to this in modern times; for the principle of individualism in these later centuries has been pushed to an extreme, while in the present generation a reaction in favour of collectivism is discernible. But we are accustomed to say, that in some representative men the whole spirit of a nation, or of an age, is embodied, so that they speak not so much for themselves as for their country or their generation. In such

cases, how far was Dante, or Milton, or Tennyson speaking for himself, and how far was he a spokesman for others? To answer that question is to penetrate further into a poet's consciousness than is possible to others, perhaps even to the poet himself. Sometimes, however, there is a conscious effort, in an orator for example, to speak not for himself only, but to merge personal feeling in that of the community. "This may be said, in its measure, of every writer, or speaker, or artist. The secret desire of his heart is to be at once individual and generic, both in one; his deepest, though it may well be an unconscious ambition, is to gather up in himself and be the mouthpiece of the thinking and feeling of, at any rate, his circle, and the wider the circle the greater satisfaction does he experience."¹

The use of the singular pronoun to represent a nation is not uncommon in Scripture. Edom is represented as saying to Israel: "Thou shalt not pass through me, lest I come out with the sword against thee" (Num. xx. 18). Moses speaks similarly in the name of Israel, "Let me pass through thy land" (Deut. ii. 27). The song of thanksgiving in Isaiah xii. is undoubtedly put into the lips of the nation: "And in that day thou shalt say, I will give thanks unto Thee, O Jehovah";

¹ Simon, *The Redemption of Man*, p. 137.

while in a similar passage "I" and "We" alternate, showing that they are interchangeable. "We have waited for Thee; to Thy name, and to Thy memorial is the desire of our soul. With my soul have I desired Thee in the night," etc. (Isa. xxvi. 8, 9). Perhaps the most striking example, however, and that which best illustrates our immediate subject, is found in the Book of Lamentations. The interchange between "we" and "I" in the first and third chapters of that book is very instructive. The speaker is certainly the despoiled and weeping nation, the desolated city: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, whom Jehovah hath afflicted in the day of His fierce anger. . . . For these things I weep; mine eye, mine eye runneth down with water. . . . The Lord is righteous; for I have rebelled against His commandment. . . . Remember my affliction and mine expulsion, the wormwood and the gall. . . . It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. . . . Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to Jehovah" (i. 12, 16, 18, iii. 19, 22, 40). In the Psalms themselves the same alternation is sometimes observed. "For I will not trust in my bow; nor shall my sword save me. But Thou hast saved us from our adversaries" (xliv. 7, 8). "Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads. . . .

I will come into thy house with burnt offerings" (xlv. 12, 13).

It is quite clear, therefore, that the national "I" is of tolerably frequent occurrence; the question is, how far its use is to be admitted. It is possible that some psalms which were written as personal were so readily capable of wider use, that they were taken up and used in the national worship. This was not improbably the case with Psalm xxx., if we rightly understand the meaning of the title—"A Psalm: a Song for the Dedication of the House; [a psalm] of David." The order of words here is peculiar. It is difficult to fit the psalm into the life of David, either on the occasion of the consecration of Araunah's threshing-floor (which was not a house), or of his own palace on Zion. The probable explanation is that the psalm was used at that notable "dedication" of the temple after Judas Maccabeus had driven out the Syrians (1 Macc. iv. 52), in commemoration of which the festival of the "Dedication" (*Chanuccah*, the same word) has been held ever since. It is certain that this very psalm has for centuries formed part of the liturgical service used by the Jews at that annual festival. It was held, however, by the compiler to have been "Davidic," either as composed by David, or as belonging to a collection called by his name. If this be so, the

character of the psalm, which appears to be strongly personal, evidently commended itself in the second century before Christ as suitable for the community, and language which might seem to apply only to an individual recovering from sickness was held to be appropriate in the lips of the congregation giving thanks to God for the restoration of their fallen fortunes.

Be this as it may, the personal, national, and liturgical currents of feeling in the psalms certainly flow very close together, and sometimes mingle their waters. Professor Kirkpatrick says: "There are numerous exceptions, but it is in the first division (Book i.) that *personal* prayers and thanksgivings are chiefly to be found; in the second (Books ii. and iii.) prayers in special times of *national* calamity and thanksgivings in times of national deliverance; in the third (Books iv. and v.) psalms of praise and thanksgiving for general use in the temple services."¹ This generalization certainly holds good in the main. Some psalms may at once be set down as belonging to one or other of these categories. The 3rd and 4th, for example, which refer to the Psalmist's sleep and waking; the 6th, with its mention, not only of sickness, but imminent death; the 18th, with its unmistakable notes of personal devotion and

¹ *Psalms* (Cambridge Bible), vol. i., Introd. p. xliii.

triumph; the 27th, which speaks of desertion on the part of father and mother; the deliverances recorded in the group liv.-lix.; the 103rd, with its combination of personal and united thanksgiving; the 116th, the warm glow of which is chilled and lost if it be understood of an abstract Church-nation: these, with many others, clearly belong to the first class. On the other hand, the 44th is as clearly the cry of the nation in distress, as the 46th, 48th, and 76th are the anthems of the nation rescued from great peril. The liturgical element is quite as obvious in the groups of psalms xcv.-c., cxi.-cxv., and cxlv.-cl.

On the other hand, it is certain that in many cases the Psalms are neither distinctly personal nor distinctly national. The Psalmist writes as representative of a community in the sense that he refers only to such circumstances of trouble or joy as are common to him with the Church-nation to which he belongs, yet he uses the first person singular. There are times when "the separate resonance of any one breaker cannot be distinguished from the multitudinous murmur of the whole sea." We cannot draw lines of distinction by saying that the mention of sickness, or deliverance, or the confession of sin necessarily individualises a psalm; or that the personal element is excluded from such as refer to national calamities,

or united worship. The life of the individual in Israel was so bound up with that of the community in all its various occupations and experiences, that distinctions which would seem inevitable to us have little place in the Psalms. Sometimes, as in the Acrostic Psalms, the "I" is used in a vague, impersonal way, and the language of experience is not to be literally pressed (comp. Ps. xxv., cxix.). The 31st and 86th Psalms are examples of those in which personal language is used, but the writer may be speaking as a typical Israelite. In the Songs of Ascents, on the other hand, it is probable, in spite of the frequent recurrence of the word "I," that the personal element must be kept quite in the background. The 118th Psalm is almost certainly national in its character, and its significance is enhanced, instead of being diminished, by a reference to the circumstances of the newly restored people after the return from captivity.

But the tendency to "nationalize" the Psalms may be carried to an extreme. Eminent modern scholars, like Professors Driver, Cheyne, and Robertson Smith, take this course in relation to the 51st Psalm, thereby altering its whole character. The latter, for example, says that "from the Old Testament point of view, in which the experience of wrath and forgiveness stands generally in such

immediate relation to Jehovah's actual dealings with the nation, the whole thought of the psalm is most simply understood as a prayer for the restoration and sanctification of Israel in the mouth of a prophet of the Exile." The question cannot be argued here; but to mention one point only, it seems very unnatural to regard the "deliver me from blood-guiltiness" of verse 14 as meaning "mortal sin, such as, if it remains unatoned, withdraws God's favour from His land and people"; so that a prophet might offer the prayer, fearing that he "may have the guilt of lost lives on his head," or collective Israel, because "it was the guilt of blood equally with the guilt of idolatry that removed God's favour from His land."¹ The evidence of verses 18 and 19 are, of course, the great argument in favour of a post-Exilic date, but these may, with Ibn Ezra, Delitzsch, and Perowne, be regarded as a liturgical addition to a psalm which otherwise might appear to disparage sacrifice.

We cannot pursue the subject further. Just as in Romans vii., in the description of a man under the bondage of sin, it is not easy to decide how far St. Paul is speaking from his own past experience, and how far he is describing a typical case, so it will be found in many of the Psalms. The

¹ *Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, 2nd ed., Note E, p. 441.

Psalmist's consciousness, at once individual and generic, refuses to be analysed by the scalpel of the acutest critic. Sometimes, as in the case of the well-known hymn, "When all Thy mercies, O my God," a personal thanksgiving may be appropriately used by a community, except that here and there a verse betrays the individual character of its origin, and is unsuitable for liturgical use. But the more fully a writer is under the influence of the Spirit of God, the more completely his language is likely to lose what is minutely and incommunicably personal, and the more aptly and fully it will embody the experience of those who, like himself, are servants of God. Hence the combined individuality and universality of the Psalms, which forms one of their best-known characteristics.

What has been called the "Church-consciousness" appears very notably in the historical psalms. The use of history which is discernible in the Psalter cannot be paralleled outside Israel. We have already seen, in the case of the 77th Psalm, how an Israelite in personal trouble and perplexity found relief in recalling the national deliverance at the Exodus. The 114th Psalm, *In exitu Israel*, is not only a monument of God's goodness in the past, but a standing reminder of His continued presence with His people. The same thought may be traced into a number of

minute allusions in the Psalms and in the prophets. But upon occasion, the Psalmist launches out into lengthened historical reminiscences. The 78th Psalm is a good example of a blending of history, poetry, and religion, which is peculiar to Israel. The exordium gives a somewhat unexpected character to the composition, as we read,—

“Give ear, O my people, to my teaching,
 Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.
 I will open my mouth in a poem,
 I will utter riddles of the ancient time.”—(cxii.)

The *Torah*, or teaching of the lawgiver, the *Mashal*, or metrical utterance of the poet, and the *Chidah*, or wise, enigmatical saying of the philosopher, are here combined. We pass on to the poem thus introduced, and we find a *résumé* of history! But such a review of the past is possible only to a writer who was imbued with a strong conviction of the calling of Israel as a people, and who was guided by the Divine Spirit to present such a view of history as would help to preserve and hand on to later generations a deep sense of that high calling. So did Stephen in later days, “full of faith and the Holy Ghost,” summarise for a still higher purpose the history of God’s dealings with His people of old times, from the “Church in the wilderness” onwards, and he would have crowned that masterly summary of history with

its divinely-appointed top-stone, had not the fury of his hearers cut short his address. The 105th and 106th Psalms present similar matter specially arranged for liturgical purposes, beginning with *Hodu*, Give thanks, and ending with *Hallelujah*, Praise ye Jehovah!

This national consciousness, which blended so subtly and inextricably with the individual consciousness of the Israelite, affected his whole view of present, past, and future. The promises made by God to the nation are from time to time pleaded in the Psalms with a touching insistency. The 89th Psalm is a poetical plea of great beauty and fulness, based upon the message given to David through Nathan, 2 Samuel vii. 8–16. The language of promise is echoed and amplified, now cast into the mould of prayer, now dwelt upon for the encouragement of a later generation, when the bright hopes of happier days had been well-nigh lost in desolation and despair (verses 38–45). The blending of personal and national feeling could hardly be better brought out than in the closing verses,—

“Remember, Lord, the reproach of Thy servants ;
 How I do bear in my bosom the reproach of all
 the mighty peoples ;
 Wherewith thine enemies, Jehovah, have reproached,
 Wherewith they have reproached the footsteps of
 Thine anointed.”—(lxxxix. 50, 51.)

These promises are recalled at one time for the city's sake, at another, for the temple's sake. A good example of the latter is found in Psalm cxxxii., which beautifully illustrates what we may call the music of an echoed and re-echoed promise. It descends like a celestial message from the distant skies, but is caught up by the rocks and hills of earth, which re-sound and re-echo it again and yet again, unwilling to lose a single note of the gracious announcement till all its fulness of blessing has been realized.

It was impossible, however, that prophet and Psalmist should help feeling that Israel had not been faithful to the covenant, and that the original promises could not be fulfilled as they might have been. The "finest of the wheat" had been refused (lxxxi. 13-16); and it is of a part of Israel itself that the Psalmist often speaks, when he complains of being surrounded by the ungodly and the evil-doers, and those who forget Jehovah. He had discovered in bitterness of soul that "they are not all Israel which are of Israel," and a spiritual idea of the nation, the purified "remnant" of which Isaiah so often spoke, by whom salvation was to come, figures largely in many psalms. So marked is this in some cases, that upon it the theory has largely been based which attributes

many of the psalms to Maccabean times. It is true that the term "godly" (*chasidim*) came in those later days to be the name of a party, supposed to be specially jealous of national honour and zealous for Jehovah, who organized themselves for political action. But a long previous history had prepared the way for this. It would be an anachronism to drag down to so late a date every psalm which dwells upon this fundamental spiritual difference between two classes of men. It was rather a caricature of an earlier spiritual distinction, when men began to divide themselves into parties, and when the term "godly" was used as a badge of partisanship, or the nickname of a sect.

The separation of Israel to the service of God necessarily led to a separation from surrounding nations. Israel was the Church, all outside it the world. But the way in which this relationship was to be carried out was very differently apprehended at different periods of the history of the Jews; often it was altogether misapprehended. From the time when the children of Israel were bidden to wage a war of extermination against the Canaanites, down to the time when St. Paul's mention of the Gentiles to a Jewish audience raised such a storm of indignant rage, the exclusiveness of the Jews was matter of history.

But in the days of the Judges and the Kings, the people were by no means anxious fully to separate themselves from the nations around. They copied their manners, fell into their sins, and worshipped their gods. Still, throughout this whole period the idea of a special vocation was not lost sight of; and it was a source of national pride that Jehovah extended special favour to Israel, and the blessings of salvation were limited to those who belonged to the chosen people. It was only after the Captivity, however, that theory and practice began fully to coincide. That which all the teaching of the prophets had been unable to effect was learned in the school of humiliation and exile. Idolatry was never really hated among the people till after the Captivity in Babylon. Zeal for the observance of the law then came to be joined with an almost fanatical spirit of national exclusiveness. Israel's lesson was being effectively learned, but to a great extent in a wrong spirit. Permission was refused to the Samaritans to take part in rebuilding the temple. Mixed marriages were denounced as a heinous sin. Spiritual pride was fostered as well as loyalty to the law and to Jehovah. Consequently, the anticipations of the prophets who foretold the conversion of the nations faded out of sight, whilst the prophecies which described the overthrow and destruction of

God's enemies were eagerly dwelt upon. Israel had no doubt suffered much at the hands of the Gentile, but in strength and bitterness of feeling she more than repaid all in kind. The Book of Esther is one monument of a feeling which grew with the growth of the later Judaism, and formed a main characteristic of its life.

To a certain extent this severance was a historic necessity, and justifiable as an attempt to carry out the commands of God. These enjoined a complete separation in spirit from the customs and religious usages of heathen nations, and this could hardly have been carried out without a large measure of actual external separation. But bitter, narrow, revengeful feeling was by no means absent. Such a spirit, while natural enough under the circumstances, was in itself wrong, it was forbidden in set terms by the Law, and it helped to prevent the carrying out of the designs for which the "sanctification" of Israel had been enjoined. That Israel should be "a third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth" (Isa. xix. 23-25), was by no means in accordance with the mind of the later Judaism, which preferred to dwell upon the "new sharp threshing-instrument having teeth," with which the nations were to be scourged. The fierce zeal which marked the Maccabean period prepared the

way for the Pharisaism of our Lord's day, and for the fanaticism which heralded the downfall and "casting away" of the nation that had failed to realize God's high purpose for them, and for the world through their means.

These various shades of feeling towards the world of surrounding nations find their reflection in the Psalter. Sometimes the nations are represented as banded together against Jehovah, and as certain to incur punishment and overthrow. The 2nd, 9th, 21st, 68th, and many other psalms, will illustrate this. Sometimes a great ingathering of the nations is anticipated, as in the 22nd, 67th, and 87th Psalms. The last of these gives a remarkable picture of a great enrolment, in which the inhabitants of Egypt and Babylon, Tyre and Philistia, are to have their names registered in the roll of the citizens of Zion, Jehovah's favourite abode. In all probability this indicates a feeling which was more or less prevalent in the time of Hezekiah. But in some other psalms a very strong feeling of resentment and antipathy is expressed. The terrible language concerning Edom in the 137th Psalm is familiar. One of the arguments for a Maccabean date for the 74th and 79th Psalms is drawn from the character of the national feeling displayed in them.

“Pour out Thy wrath upon the heathen that know
Thee not,
And on the kingdoms that call not upon Thy
name.
And render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their
bosom
Their reproach wherewith they have reproached
Thee, O Lord.
So we, Thy people and sheep of Thy pasture,
Will give Thee thanks for ever :
We will show forth Thy praise to all generations.”
—(lxxix. 6, 12, 13.)

This brings us to the consideration of a feature in the Psalms which has always been felt to be a stumbling-block — the presence of what are called *Imprecatory Psalms*, and the frequent use of language which seems to countenance a vindictive spirit towards the enemies of Jehovah and Israel. The attempts which have been made to explain away the obvious meaning of these passages have not been successful. In the 109th Psalm, for example, an old explanation recently revived is that vers. 6–16 should be understood as the language of the adversary, the word “saying” being prefixed to show that the curses proceed from him, not from the servant of Jehovah. Apart from the anomaly of filling the greater part of a psalm with another’s blasphemies, this device could be but of very narrow application, and it does not remove the difficulty. Others have come

to the conclusion that only spiritual enemies are here intended, an interpretation which obviously fails in almost every case. Others have contended that the optatives expressing a wish or a prayer should rather be translated by futures, and the Psalms understood as prophecies of the calamities which are sure to come upon the wicked. But grammar will hardly admit of this, and even if it did, it would have to be conceded that the Psalmist seems to delight in the prospect which he so minutely describes. Laying aside, then, these well-meant but unavailing attempts at explanation, we are compelled to recognise the existence of a feature which markedly characterises Psalms vii., xxxv., lxix., and cix., and others in a less degree, that seems to form a blot upon the fair surface of the Psalter. In order that our appreciation and enjoyment of the Psalms be not altogether marred by it, it is needful to understand the true meaning of this language, and its place in the whole teaching of Revelation.

Let it be said, in the first place, that the strong feeling here depicted is not personal, but national. The fact that an individual speaks, often in the first person, gives a tone to the language in our ears which was not intended. Vindictive personal feeling was directly forbidden by the Law towards "strangers" as well as towards "neighbours"

(Lev. xix. 17, 18, 33, 34). The feeling towards Edom in the 137th Psalm is clearly national (ver. 7). If in some instances national distinctions are not referred to, the Israelites who are denounced are viewed even more directly as enemies of God. It is a virtue in the eyes of the writer of the 139th Psalm, who has just been describing so impressively the omniscience of God, that he cherishes these feelings of resentment.

“Do not I hate them, Jehovah, that hate Thee?
Do not I loathe those that rise up against Thee?
I hate them with perfect hatred,
I count them mine enemies.”—(cxxxix. 21, 22.)

This close identification of the speaker with the cause of God is only intelligible when we bear in mind what has been said in the earlier part of this chapter. It is perfectly true that the enemies of Israel were the enemies of Israel's God, and that a prophet or psalmist speaking not of his personal and private feelings, but in the name of the community, might desire and pray for their utter overthrow. As the 83rd Psalm expresses it, “They have said, Come, let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance. . . . Against THEE do they make a covenant. O, my God, make them like whirling dust, like stubble before the wind.”

It may be said, however, that it is not a

spiritual, but a material overthrow that is desired. The reply is obvious, that under the Jewish dispensation, and by reason of the very conditions of the conflict, a purely spiritual overthrow was inconceivable. No revelation of a future life and future judgment had been given. Retribution must be inflicted in this life, or not at all. Judgment was imperatively called for, none can deny this; in what other way was it to be manifested? But it is said further that the language used in many cases is unnecessarily severe and even repulsive. Something may be allowed for the manners and habits of the time; something for the idea that the Psalmist contemplates the completeness of the deliverance achieved, rather than the greatness of the suffering inflicted; something for the fact that we involuntarily read a deeper meaning into some of the harsh phrases used than was intended: and it must be added that in some of the very psalms complained of there is evidence of the existence of lofty and unselfish thoughts (vii. 3-5, xxxv. 13, cix. 4, 5), which shut out the possibility of the Psalmist's entertaining merely cruel and savage feelings in his breast.

But when all this has been said, it remains that the language spoken of cannot be justified in the light of later revelation. It is not certain that

all of it can be justified according to the standard of the Old Testament. Here and there personal feelings may have alloyed the purer zeal for God's cause, or in the phrases used a tone more severe and bitter than even under the circumstances was warrantable may be detected. But the main answer to objections is that in the education of the human race and the development of Divine purposes by stages, a state of things was permitted by Providence confessedly imperfect and unsatisfactory, which must be condemned in the light of the higher and purer law of Christ. When James and John desired to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritan village which refused to receive Christ, they exhibited the very spirit of these psalms. It was not personally vindictive, but it indicated a state of mind which it was one of Christ's main objects to supersede by one better and nobler. For a time it might seem almost to be necessary that the victories of truth should be won through war and bloodshed; and for the hardness of men's hearts, the lower standard needed to be enforced before the higher could be reached. But "among you it shall not be so"; and those who would be true children of the Father in heaven have a higher lesson to learn than even the Psalms can teach, one which in eighteen hundred years has been imperfectly

apprehended, and is far indeed from being learned yet.

Let it not be supposed, however, that Christians can afford to look down with anything of Pharisaic contempt upon the low standard of morality of benighted psalmists. The feeling which prompted the Imprecatory Psalms was not a lofty one; when compared with the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is low and narrow. But it is not wicked. It contains the saving salt of great moral earnestness and zeal for the right at all costs. This is not a feeling that any generation can afford to disparage. It is by no means too common to-day. The moral languor and laxity which goes by the name of "toleration," may be less acceptable in the sight of God, and less beneficial in the history of men, than the fierce feeling which stirs the whole soul to resentment at the sight of successful wrong-doing. It cannot be right now to wish that evil-doers should be "cut off" in the literal sense of the word; we wish rather that they may have full time for repentance. But the Psalmist who, two thousand five hundred years ago, prayed that God would destroy the wicked men who were hindering the truth and oppressing the righteous, stands in relation to his times only; where one apostle of Christ stood for a later generation when he wrote, "Abhor that

which is evil, cleave to that which is good"; and where another stood when he said, Such a man "receive not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." It may not be an easy thing to "hate the sin with all the heart, and yet the sinner love." But the difficulty is certainly not met by the moral inertia which professes to do both, but in reality does neither. Dante, says Browning,

"Loved well because he hated,
Hated the wickedness that hinders loving."

This is the only sense in which the Christian can adopt the language of the Psalmist who calls for Divine vengeance upon his enemies. If here and there the language appears to indicate that a personal and less worthy feeling has mingled with the higher and purer, let it be remembered, not in excuse but in extenuation, that, to be rightly understood, words should be read as they were written. In times of cruel oppression, when the saints of God have been driven from their homes, hunted, harried and exiled, robbed and imprisoned, tortured and slain, the language which proves such an offence to those who worship in cushioned pews, has been rightly entered into and understood. Such psalms have been dear to Huguenots,

Camisards, and Covenanters. English Christians for the most part echoed, not condemned, Milton's indignant denunciation of "the late massacre in Piedmont,"

"Avenge, O Lord, Thy slaughtered saints whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold!"

It is said that the very error of the Puritans was that their spirit savoured more of the Old Testament than the New. But both in the Psalmist and the Puritan there burned the flame of a passion for righteousness which in an evil world is always needed, and must never be suffered to die out. It will burn all the more clearly and ardently when it is no longer obscured by the acrid smoke of desire for personal vengeance, or a zeal in which the fierceness of man is at least as prominent as desire for the glory of God. In this as in much else, the very excellence of the Psalms points us to a still more excellent way. The child thinks as a child, feels as a child, speaks as a child, but "when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away." The only perfectly righteous Spirit that ever was clothed with mortal flesh is the only one in which love for sinners and patience with them has had its consummate and perfect work.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE WITNESS OF THE PSALMS TO CHRIST—I. THE PERSON OF THE SAVIOUR.

IT may perhaps seem strange that little or no reference has thus far been made to the New Testament, and the place which the Psalms occupy in a Christian's Bible. This method, however, has been purposely pursued. Whilst for the purposes of edification, it is important to put in the forefront the Christian aspects of Old Testament truth; for the purposes of study, it is necessary first to understand the Old Testament books themselves, and afterwards to examine into the relation of each to the whole of Revelation. We gain nothing by confusing prophecy with fulfilment, type with antitype, and reading New Testament thoughts into Old Testament utterances. If we begin with the Christian standpoint, or try to occupy it simultaneously with the historical, we fail to apprehend the true meaning of history, the true nature of prophecy, and the true

significance of the course through which the Divine education of the race is carried on. To the Christian, however, the subject of this chapter, at length reached in what is seen to be its true order, is of primary importance and of specially sacred interest.

The method of the early Christian Fathers—and within certain limits the traditional method of the whole Church Catholic for many centuries—was to treat the whole Psalter as Messianic, and make Christ the subject of every psalm. They “found Christ everywhere” in the Psalms, in the sense that in every psalm the Spirit of Christ was understood to be the speaker, human individuality not being indeed entirely excluded, but overruled, so that the true meaning of every verse was primarily Christian. The method of Augustine was to interpret each psalm—(1) Of Christ the Head; (2) of the whole Christ, including the Church His body; (3) of the private Christian. The 3rd Psalm may be taken as an illustration. The 5th verse, “I laid me down and slept: I awaked, for the Lord sustaineth me,” was understood of Christ’s death and resurrection, not only by Augustine, but by Aquinas representing the whole mediæval period, by Bede, Bonaventura, and very emphatically by Luther. He refuses to admit an historical interpretation,

and comments on the Hebrew of "I awaked," saying that the word means "I roused myself," and could only properly apply to our Lord's resurrection. In the case of the 34th Psalm, Augustine tells us that the true meaning of "David changed his behaviour before Abimelech" is that the true David came in a way that was not expected before "the kingdom of His Father" (so Abimelech is incorrectly translated), that is, the Jews. A later writer improves upon this by saying that our Lord has done this twice, once for all in the Incarnation, and again from time to time in the Holy Eucharist. Chrysostom says that the 38th Psalm, which speaks of sickness and death, and the corruption of the sufferer's wounds, is to be understood of Christ's Passion, Death, and Burial. Cassiodorus, who interprets viii. 6 of the dominion of Christ, finds in the "sheep" of verse 7 those whose business in Christ's Church is not to teach, but to learn, and in the "oxen" those who labour in the word and doctrine, while the "fowls of the air" are the saints who rise above the world, and the fishes are ordinary Christians born of water and the Holy Ghost!¹

We smile at such exaggerations, but it must

¹ Almost any number of such illustrations may be gathered from the Commentary on the Psalms, collected by Drs. Neale and Littledale from primitive and mediæval writers.

be borne in mind that the same principle of interpretation is still maintained by devout writers of various schools, including such universally respected divines as Bishops Wordsworth and Alexander on the one hand, and Mr. Spurgeon on the other. Modern writers avoid the more extreme applications of the principle, but they find the main current of teaching throughout the Psalter to be Christian, and delight chiefly in mystical interpretations, whilst those who insist upon a more literal treatment are apt to be styled shallow, cold, unfruitful, and "rationalistic." The *Speaker's Commentary*, for example, closes its Introduction with these words: "The Psalter emptied of Christ would still be a collection of lyrical poems of admirable beauty, breathing a pure and lofty devotion, representing in vivid colours the events and persons of the most remarkable people in the world's history. . . . But to the Christian as such, it would have no voice, no meaning."¹ No true Christian interpreter is likely wittingly to "empty the Psalms of Christ." But it becomes very important to know in what sense Christ fills them. Many of this school do not hesitate to ascribe to our Lord language in which the Psalmist humbly confesses his sins, interpreting the words of Christ as the great Sin-bearer of the world.

¹ Vol. iv. p. 168.

Nay, Bishop Alexander even ventures to put the strongest language of the Imprecatory Psalms into the lips of our blessed Saviour, holding that as spoken by Him such words "are Divine; they belong to Him in whose hands are life and death; the load is lifted off and laid upon One whose love is strong enough to bear the burden of their reproach."¹ Is this a legitimate way of dealing with the "load" which the apparently vindictive character of some psalms imposes? Surely the load laid upon faith by such a supposition is made tenfold greater.

On the other hand, in opposition to the extreme views of this devout but mistaken school, many modern writers seek to exclude from the Psalter all reference to the New Testament. For them the Psalms become a number of highly interesting fragments, illustrating the religion of the Hebrews at a period which historical science must determine. Either expressly or tacitly they exclude all consideration of supernatural influence; either explicitly or implicitly they deny the reality of prophecy. They find in the Psalms the expression in various forms of national hopes, some of which were never realized in any form, others of which were realized, but in a remote and unexpected way, in the abolition of Judaism and the found-

¹ *Witness of the Psalms to Christ*, pp. 40 and 48.

ing of Christianity upon its ruins. Whilst Bishop Alexander as Bampton Lecturer for 1876 laid down the high doctrine we have just quoted, Canon Cheyne, when filling the same office in 1889, hardly admits the application of the term Messianic even to a few psalms, adding that they are so only in a sense which is "psychologically justifiable," and that in his opinion they are "neither typically, nor in the ordinary sense, prophetically Messianic."¹ The phrase "psychologically justifiable" is apt to mean only that which can be justified by our ideas of psychology and the ordinary workings of the human mind, and so shuts out the possibility of inspiration as a power to lift man above himself. And if we shut out type and shut out prophecy from the Psalms, what of Christ remains?

Are these, then, the only alternatives before us? Either to strain the meaning of language in order to read a New Testament meaning into Old Testament words, or to shut out all connection between the Psalms and Christianity except such as may be traced in a parallel between certain Jewish ideas of the second century before Christ and the language of the New Testament? Must we choose between being irrational and rationalistic? Hardly. A sound method of interpretation

¹ *Origin of the Psalter*, p. 340.

bids us in the first instance examine each psalm in itself, interpreting its meaning as we would that of any other document written at a given period and for a given purpose. The first question to be asked is, What did the Psalmist mean, and what would be understood from his words by those amongst whom they circulated and by whom they were sung? A second and quite distinct question is, What did the Spirit of God mean, who guided these men to write thus and thus at a certain period of time, and so to take their part in the whole history of Revelation? Only when the revelation is completed can the position and function of each part of the record be properly understood. We must distinguish between interpretation and application. The meaning of the words themselves is one thing, an application of them, which may well be larger and fuller, wider and deeper than the original utterance, is quite another. The Divine meaning will appear none the less clearly and impressively if we deal with the historical meaning first. An attempt to anticipate the times and seasons of revelation does not honour God, and confuses our understanding of Scripture.

We cannot be better guided in this matter than by turning to the New Testament. A large number of quotations from the Psalms are found

in it, and our Lord Himself and His apostles will prove our best teachers. We have Christ's own words to show us that there is a witness to Himself of some kind in the Psalter, for He had been in the habit of telling His disciples that "all things must be fulfilled which were written in . . . the Psalms concerning me" (Luke xxiv. 44). In the course of His ministry on several occasions He made references to the Psalms as well as to other portions of the Old Testament; the evangelists do the same, and the apostles, both in sermons and epistles, freely follow His example. Now, in examining these quotations, we find that the sacred writers never enter upon historical, or what is now called critical discussion. That did not come within their scope, and would not have helped the great purpose they had in view. The Psalms are not quoted as "documents"; there is no inquiry as to their authorship; enough that they form part of a sacred book, to which appeal was wont to be made, whose authority was undisputed by those immediately addressed. Further, the passages quoted are adduced for the sake of the subject-matter, and in their bearing upon some facts or truths of the gospel as the message of salvation to men. In nearly all instances some fresh light is shed upon the Old Testament text, or some fuller exposition of it becomes possible

in view of that new Christian revelation which it was their main business to unfold.

So it was with our Lord's reference to "the stone which the builders rejected" (Matt. xxi. 42; cf. Ps. cxviii. 22), in which He was followed often by His apostles (Acts iv. 11, 1 Pet. ii. 6, etc.); so with the disciples when on the occasion of the cleansing of the temple, they "remembered that it was written, The zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up" (John ii. 17, Ps. lxix. 9); and so with the evangelist St. Matthew, who, in view of Christ's frequent use of parables, says He so spoke "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, I will open my mouth in parables" (Matt. xiii. 35, Ps. lxxviii. 2). The expression "that it might be fulfilled" was, it must be borne in mind, a common formula of quotation from Scripture amongst the Jews, by no means always applied to what we call the fulfilment of prophecy, and it is often used where an Old Testament passage receives a larger and deeper illustration from some event or teaching in the New. The relation subsisting between such passages is various, and cannot be reduced to a few rules, but there are some leading principles which it is easy to perceive and bear in mind.

Sometimes we find in the Old Testament a

direct prophecy of New Testament times, implying no reference at all to the immediate circumstances of the prophet's own time, but immediately anticipating the promised glories of a new age. Sometimes the relation is one of type and antitype, which implies a primary reference in psalm or prophecy to the historical circumstances of the time in which it was composed, but also an indirect reference to Christ, inasmuch as the whole Jewish dispensation was in a sense typical and preparatory, ordained by God's providence to make ready for the "bringing in of a better hope." In the latter case there seems to be implied what has been called a "double sense" in the words used, one having reference to the earlier and the other to the later dispensation. The phrase is a natural, but not a happy one. Properly speaking, there can be but one meaning to any sentence, and what is intended by this somewhat ambiguous phrase is that an application of the words transcending their obvious meaning as traced out by critical and historical exposition, may very justly be given to many passages of the Old Testament. Yet this higher meaning is not arbitrarily superinduced; it rests upon the historical meaning and arises out of it. It rests upon no "allegorical" system of interpretation, such as Jewish Kabbalists and Christian mystics have

drawn from the text of Scripture, and by means of which any words might be clothed with almost any conceivable meaning. The deeper meaning of the Old Testament passage rests upon the fact that there is a close relation between the Old and New Covenants, so ordered, that the Divine thoughts which were revealed but dimly and imperfectly to the Old Testament saints were at last fully and clearly made known in Christ. In Him is the goal of all the Old Testament history, the explanation of Old Testament problems, the culmination of Old Testament hopes and aspirations. Hence, while there is but one meaning to the words as they stand, which it should be the business of the interpreter first clearly to ascertain, a far larger and more complete realization of them is constantly to be found in Christ and the kingdom which He, according to promise, came to set up on earth. Augustine's saying that "The Old Testament is patent in the New, the New is latent in the Old," must not be understood to mean that the teaching of the New Testament is in some mystical, indefinable way wrapped up in the phraseology of the Old, but that the same principles are operative in both Covenants, while what is dark, vague, and incomplete in the earlier becomes in the later dispensation bright, clear, consummate, and final. A writer who is by no means

disposed to favour what is super-naturalistic says: "There is positively not one New Testament idea that cannot be conclusively shown to be a healthy and natural product of some Old Testament germ, nor any truly Old Testament idea which did not instinctively press towards its New Testament fulfilment."¹ But it is in the study of the fully developed plant, not in the examination of the seed, that we come to understand the construction and significance of the seed itself.

This perhaps needlessly long explanation prepares us to approach the study of what are called Messianic psalms from a right point of view. The Psalms are not primarily prophetic, though they contain a prophetic element. We must not look in them, however, for a mention of the "Messiah" by name. The word is not used in the Old Testament—with the doubtful exception of the difficult passage, Daniel ix. 25, 26—in the acceptance current in later days. It is used of David and his successors, "Jehovah's Anointed One," and even of Cyrus in Isaiah xlv. 1, but it is not found in the canonical Scriptures as a recognized name of the coming Saviour. In the "Psalms of Solomon," on the other hand, we find not only the expression "all shall be holy, and their King is

¹ Schultz, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. i. p. 52.

the Lord Messiah,"¹ but a full description of the character and work of the expected King. In the Psalter the testimony is not definite and explicit, but it is real, pervasive, and in a few passages very striking. Different methods of arranging and classifying the passages which directly or indirectly refer to Christ have been adopted by scholars. Delitzsch divides them into five classes, the directly eschatological, the typical Messianic, the typico-prophetical, and some others. Bishop Alexander speaks of (1) the subjectively Messianic, (2) the objectively Messianic, and (3) the ideal Messianic psalms.

Discarding as far as possible all technical phraseology, we may say at once that it does not appear to us that there are any psalms of Bishop Alexander's first class,² *i.e.* in which the suffering or glorified Saviour is Himself the speaker. There is no warrant for assuming, without very strong evidence, that any psalmist was so carried out of himself by the Spirit that his own individuality was lost, and the words

¹ xvii. 36. Many hold, however, that *Χριστὸς κύριος* is a mis-translation of the original Hebrew. See Ryle and James, p. 142.

² Including "the 16th, 22nd, 40th, 69th, and perhaps the 109th. Many others, pre-eminently xxiii., xxviii., xxx., xxxv., lxxi., cxx., cxlii., have been generally received by the Church in this sense until recent times." *Op. cit.* p. 34.

spoken through him are to be understood as in reality the language of Christ Himself. Many scholars of high rank and devout spirit have gone so far as to deny the existence of "objectively Messianic" psalms, *i.e.* psalms in which the Lord Jesus Christ is directly referred to in the spirit of prophecy. There is, however, at least one psalm in which this view appears to give the only satisfactory explanation of the words, the primary thought of the Psalmist being concerned not with the present but the far future. There are several more in which the primary reference of the Psalmist is to David or one of his successors, or to some event of Jewish history, but which contain higher flights of anticipation, couched in language that could not be intended for a mere monarch of Israel. And there is a still larger class which may well receive a Messianic or Christian application, since they are written in an idealizing strain, and the true goal of all the hopes of Israel and of mankind is to be found in Christ and His kingdom, to which psalmists and prophets dimly looked forward, and for which they were for the most part unconsciously preparing the way.

It will be impossible to do more than examine a few of the psalms, to show the general nature of the testimony to Christ which many offer, and

the way in which these should be understood by the devout Christian.

Foremost on many grounds stands Psalm cx., chiefly because of our Lord's own use of it in argument with the Jews of His day. And first let it be said, that whilst of course as Christians we accept at once as final every declaration of our Lord where He explicitly pronounces upon a question, the colloquy recorded in Matthew xxii. 41-45 does not *necessarily* imply, as at first it may seem to do, that Christ gives the sanction of His authority to the Davidic authorship of the psalm. It was enough for His purpose that those whom He addressed believed the psalm to be written by David,¹ and of the Messiah, and His probing question—which neither in form nor in substance is an argument—seems intended to arouse the Pharisees and the multitudes to consider the real character of the Christ as portrayed by their own sacred Scriptures. “The inspired psalmist,” so He would say to them, “attributes to the Christ for whom you are looking a far higher position than that of David's son, a mere prince of Israel, who, as you suppose, will establish a kingdom on earth like that of David, enlarged and glorified. If a sacred writer, under

¹ “In the New Testament ‘Hymn of David’ and ‘Psalm’ are synonymous terms.”—Delitzsch, i. 117.

the influence of the Spirit, can speak, according to your own admission, of the Christ as David's Lord, sitting at Jehovah's right hand and ruling for ever as an exalted Priest-King, how comes it that you are still looking for a mere son of David, one who might fulfil in an earthly and material sense the promises given to David's house in 2 Samuel vii.?" Christ *may* have meant no more than this, just as in addressing the young ruler He said, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good save one, that is God," without thereby disclaiming Divinity for Himself.¹

So much it seemed desirable to say, lest the Davidic authorship of Psalm cx. should be considered as a kind of article of faith, to give up which implies either disowning our Lord's authority, or questioning His accuracy or knowledge. But it is undeniable that the words as they stand do apparently point to a Davidic authorship and a direct Messianic reference for this psalm. And, quite apart from New Testament considerations, there is not in the whole Psalter one psalm the internal evidence of which so strongly favours an immediate reference to the

¹ This view is held by a number of orthodox writers, amongst whom may be mentioned Neander, Orelli, the late Bishop Thirlwall, Mr. Gore (*Bampton Lecture*, p. 136), and Dr. Milligan (*Thinker*, vol. iii. p. 502.)

Messiah as the one before us. By several high authorities it is regarded as the only psalm of this kind. It opens thus,—

“Oracle of Jehovah to my Lord :

Sit Thou enthroned at My right hand,
Until I make Thine enemies a stool for Thy feet.

Jehovah shall stretch forth the rod of Thy strength
out of Zion :

Rule Thou in the midst of Thy foes !

Thy people are a willing sacrifice on Thy muster-day ;
In holy apparel, [like] dew from the womb of the
morning,

Thy young men [gather] to Thee.”

Now, whether this were written by David himself, or by Nathan, or other poet-seer of an early age, it must be regarded as a distinct prophecy. If language and style mean anything, it bears the marks of high antiquity. It contains not the mere expression of a Psalmist's hopes, but a direct message from God. It speaks of the Conquering King in words which could hardly have been suggested by any but the Davidic monarchy, yet which pass far beyond even the ideal conceptions of that monarchy. This Anointed One is to take his seat by the very side of Jehovah, sharing His glory, and triumphing over all enemies. His people are to offer a willing service ; the young men, bright in holy, festal attire, and countless as the drops of dew in the early dawn, are devoted

to him. But this monarch is to be a priest, and of no transient Aaronic type. Religious as well as secular supremacy is to be his. Conflict will be necessary before the final victory is won, but God Himself fights by his side, and the battle in which the Conquering Hero shares the toil and fatigue with his soldiers, drinking refreshment from the wayside stream, will be crowned with ultimate and abiding triumph.

Surely a remarkable utterance this, even amongst the roll of prophecies delivered by inspired seers. How impossible, it might well have been said, that the various elements in such a forecast should meet in the person of any son of David. How strikingly they find their meeting-place in the Person of David's Son and Lord, Priest-King over an abiding kingdom with an unfailing priesthood, man with men in their toil and battle, God with God in His majesty and glory, there is no need at length to describe. If prophecy be altogether a dream and illusion, this must be counted such; but if ever the Spirit of God lifted a seer of old time above not only the facts but even the hopes and expectations of his age, giving him a vision of One whose true glory he himself could not understand, it was in the case of the writer of the 110th Psalm. If the Psalter contained no further witness to Christ

than these few lines furnish, its testimony would be distinguished and memorable.

The distinction between psalms which are directly and those which are typically Messianic, depends upon the degree in which we can distinguish between words which speak directly and expressly of a coming King, transcending any actual son of David, and words which view the future only through the medium of the existing monarchy, idealized and glorified. Such a distinction is obviously a very fine one, and it is not to be wondered at if sometimes it is impossible to observe it. In the psalms next to be examined the best commentators differ as to the most appropriate designation; the majority, however, regarding them as typical, rather than directly prophetic.

The 2nd Psalm is one of the most striking of these. Happily the abiding value of the psalm does not depend upon our being able to fix the time and circumstances of its composition. In the New Testament it is spoken of as Davidic, and it is not easy to find any period of Israelitish history to which the words would be more appropriate. But, as matter of fact, the psalm is most easily interpreted if we understand that the Messianic King is contemplated from the outset. In any case the earthly type is very slightly adverted

to, and the Psalmist portrays with bold strokes, and, as it would seem, by means of direct prophetic vision, a picture of the triumphs of that scion of David's house to whom the promises of 2 Samuel vii. were given. If Psalm cx. depicts the glory of the King who was also a Priest, this describes the glory of the King who was emphatically a Son of God. Its dramatic force is obvious. The scene opens upon a vast crowd of angry and excited peoples, eagerly massing themselves together in revolt, under the proud leadership of "the world-rulers of this darkness," taking bold and hurried counsel together against Jehovah and the King who is one with Him,—

“Why do the nations tumultuously throng together,
 And the peoples meditate—vanity?
 The kings of the earth take their stand,
 And the rulers take counsel together
 Against Jehovah and His anointed—(saying),
*Let us rend asunder their bonds,
 Cast from us their cords.*
 He who sitteth throned in the heavens laughs,
 The Lord derides them.”

The rage of the revolting peoples is like the roar of the gathering storm. But like a single flash of lightning from above comes the terrible line describing the *laugh* of the Almighty, the Divine irony with which the senseless and impotent

raging of a whole world of nations is regarded, when they set themselves in puny rebellion against Him who rules above. His simple word is enough; it will stand in calm and unmoved strength against all the fury, all the counsel, all the passionate resolve of the rulers and their assembled peoples,—

“But I—I have established My King
Upon Zion, my holy mountain.”

[The King speaks:]

“I will announce the decree:
Jehovah said unto me, Thou art My Son,
This day have I begotten Thee.”

This keynote of Sonship prevails to the close. Victory is assured through the might of Jehovah solemnly pledged to the King, whose dignity and sovereignty depend on this, that He is God's Son and vicegerent. Lordship of the whole earth is to follow, and the kings of this world are warned to be wise in time, to bow down in homage before the Ruler who represents Jehovah, no less terrible to His enemies than gracious and benign to all who “take refuge in Him.”

That the writer of this psalm did not even glance at the position of the earthly king of Israel, to whom the glorious promises of 2 Samuel vii. had been given, is incredible. But it is

barely a glance that he gives. The field of the picture is occupied by another figure. This figure is wholly unlike even the best of the actual kings of Israel and Judah. Some of these possessed a measure of excellence; but the *kind* of excellence here described transcends their very aim and ideal. It is the picture of a king who is a true Son of God, marked out as such upon a definite occasion, "a Messianic birthday," when the dignity of Son was either for the first time conferred, or first revealed and understood, or first openly realized. What wonder that St. Paul, in his sermon in the synagogue at Antioch, and in writing to the Christians of Rome, saw in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead that great To-day in which the true Son of God was declared to be such with power; that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews exclaims: "To which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day I have begotten Thee?" and that Peter and John, when threatened by the rulers, rallied their confidence, and poured out their hearts in prayer to that God against whose Son Herod and Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, had gathered together in vain, seeing that Jehovah's decree had been authoritatively pronounced concerning Him, and assurance of this had been given to all men, in

that God had raised Him from the dead? The 2nd Psalm takes its rank as witness side by side with a well-known prophecy of Isaiah. Even the rebellious nations and kings are bidden to rejoice together, though with reverence and holy awe, because "Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder."

In two other psalms the figure of the earthly monarch is more clearly visible. In the 45th Psalm the events of his life, his marriage, pomp, and posterity, are depicted; in the 72nd the grace and beneficence of his extensive sway; but in both there is the idealizing touch which shows that whatever royal personage was in the first instance thought of, he was not viewed in and of himself. He possesses a dignity not his own; he is representative of a Royalty such as neither Israel nor any earthly nation had ever seen, such as Promise had pictured, and devout Hope might long for, but one upon which the poor reality furnished only a sad and ironical commentary. To put the marriage of Solomon with Hiram's daughter, or that of Joram of Judah with Athaliah of Israel, side by side with the epithalamium of the 45th Psalm is to indulge in a kind of mockery of Israel's greatness. The picture of Solomon's self-indulgence with his many wives and concubines, or

scenes descriptive of the Baal-worship which Athaliah introduced into Judah, or a representation of her wholesale massacre of the princes of the royal house, would form a dark foil to the gracious words of the 45th Psalm. The title, "To Solomon," inscribed before the 72nd Psalm breathes the very irony of history. If these psalms did nothing else, they would suggest the crying need of another kind of kingship than that which Israel and Judah knew, even in their best days; and happily, they do much more. Prayers or devout forecasts in their form, both are, in the light of the future as Christians can see it, prophecies and witnesses before the time. There is no need to strain the laws of exegesis in order to obtain from these psalms a real testimony to Christ. Psalm xlv. 6 has often been quoted as a proof from the Old Testament of the Divinity of Christ, and the Revisers have been censured for admitting into their margin a rendering which seems to cast doubt upon this. The language of the verse, if the text be sound, is indeed peculiar. Either (1) the word *Elohim* is to be understood as a vocative, which is the simplest grammatical construction and the ordinary translation adopted—"Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever." But in this case either (*a*) a direct address to Jehovah is intended, which is very unlikely; or (*b*) the

king is addressed as God in one line, while in the next we read of "God, thy God," which, as Bishop Westcott says in his note on Hebrew i. 8, is scarcely possible; or (c) *Elohim* must be used in a secondary sense, and illustrated by such passages as Exodus xxi. 6, xxii. 8, and Psalm lxxxii., a view which Delitzsch and Perowne appear to favour. Or (2) another construction must be found for *Elohim*. We need not recapitulate those which have been suggested, and each of them is open to objection. A large proportion of modern scholars, however, are convinced either that the text must be faulty or that one of these constructions must be adopted, so that the meaning would be as given in R.V. margin,—

"Thy throne is a throne of God for ever and ever,
A sceptre of equity is the sceptre of thy kingdom."

In any case this verse remains as a witness in some sense to Christ. Whether the person or the throne be spoken of as divine, and whatever the precise sense of "divine" be determined to be, an ideal king and kingship are here described, immeasurably above the highest attainments of Israelitish kings, but realized in a remarkable way in the Lord Jesus Christ. His own argument in John x. 34–36 concerning the judges who were called *Elohim*, but who proved such inadequate vice-

gerents of God, might well be applied to the 45th, as it actually was to the 82nd Psalm.

Psalm lxxii. is part prayer, part prediction. How much of it the petitioner ever expected to see realized in the monarch for whom he prayed, it would be hard to say. As we read, it seems as if the Psalmist had entirely forgotten the king and the king's son with whom he began, and though he does not soar so far above earth as the writers of the 2nd and 110th Psalms, "the light that never was on sea or land" illumines his whole picture. The witness to Christ here is the witness of need, of longing, of ardent hope, rising at last into confident expectation and assured proclamation. Such a King man needs and eagerly desires; may He come;—He will come;—He is coming!

"May abundance of corn be in the land,
On the top of the mountains may it wave;
It shall rustle with its fruit like Lebanon,
And the people out of the city shall bloom like grass
of the earth.

Let His name abide for ever;
As long as the sun let His name sprout forth.
And men shall be blessed in Him,
All nations shall call Him happy."

Where more suitably than after such words as these could come the doxology to Him "who alone

doeth wondrous things" ? Where except in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ is to be found such a monarch and such an empire ?

Another note, however, is struck in other psalms. It may not seem very remarkable that a Hebrew poet and patriot should pray for his king, and launch forth into anticipations of royal greatness only equalled by royal beneficence, using the hyperbole which is permitted to all poets laureate, and which finds its home in the current language of the East. Even so, it would not be difficult to show how high the 72nd Psalm soars above the highest flights of uninspired imagination when inditing royal odes. But the music of the Psalter contains other strains, unlike those of court musicians. Regal psalms stand side by side with Passion-psalms. These latter seem to descend as much lower than the depths of ordinary human suffering as those rise above the summits of human glory. The 22nd Psalm is ascribed in the title "to David," but it is difficult to believe that David wrote it, and in all probability it dates from the time of Jeremiah or the Exile. The language is personal in the sense that the speaker himself keenly feels the pangs which language seems hardly strong enough to describe. At the same time it is representative, it cannot be bounded by the limits of a mere individual life, a solitary

human heart. He who wrestles with his pain, and cries aloud in agony to the God who seems to have forgotten him, cries out from the depths of no mere individual grief. The words remind us of the unspeakable sorrows of the Lamentations. There is the same bold impersonation, the same vivid representation of actual physical sufferings, and the use of no less vivid figures to image forth the still more poignant sorrows of the heart. The speaker is scorned, mocked, threatened, persecuted, tortured, till he stands alone, an emaciated skeleton, amongst cruel foes hungering for his death. Yet such is his confidence in God that already the voice of thanksgiving breaks forth from his parched lips and stiffened tongue. God, who may appear to have forsaken His servant, has "not despised nor abhorred his affliction." Not only will he himself be delivered, and the congregation of the faithful give thanks, but all nations shall hear, and fear, and turn to the Lord, generation after generation shall pay their tribute to the God of his salvation. A sufferer who descends to such depths of misery, whose inmost heart vibrates with music of such piercing intensity, yet whose confidence in God is so invincible, whose triumph even in the midst of anguish is so complete, and who anticipates, not merely personal and national deliverance, but a universal chorus of the nations to celebrate the

praises of his Deliverer, is no ordinary man. Who speaks here, and of whom?

To Christians this psalm is sacred ground. The sign of the Cross is upon it. Its opening words were uttered by the Saviour of the world, as He passed into that horror of thick darkness through which His soul must needs travel who Himself bore the sins of the whole world. The mockers who stood around His cross levelled at Him the taunt of the 8th verse. The 14th and 15th describe, with strange exactitude, the intolerable thirst of the crucified. The meaning of the 16th verse is not certain, but the picture of verses 16-18, including the exposure, the painful nailing of hands and feet, the heartless eagerness of the persecutors casting lots for his raiment, and callous to his sufferings, could hardly have been more complete, had it been drawn by one who stood by the cross of Jesus of Nazareth.¹ Some of the expressions may be considered proverbial, such as any one suffering extreme outrage might use, but it is impossible to help seeing in the psalm a record divinely moulded to set forth, by means of a prophetic type, the sufferings of Him who saved others because Himself He would not save.

¹ The expression was used more than a thousand years ago: "Ut non tam prophetia quam historia videatur."—CASSIODORUS.

For if the first twenty verses had stood alone, it might have been possible to set down these details as nothing more than a remarkable coincidence. But they stand in close connection with a remarkable passage which anticipates the conversion of nations. True, the connection is not so clearly marked as in Isaiah liii. ; the psalm does not say in so many words that through the suffering comes the salvation. But it is irresistibly suggested. It trembles as it were upon the lips of the speaker, and almost escapes him in the last verse. But at the least it must be said that this remarkable turning to Jehovah is a sequence, if not a direct consequence, of the suffering, faith, and deliverance of him who began by being God-forsaken and ends by bringing a world to acknowledge God's righteousness. It is inevitable that in this case the light of the New Testament should pierce through the thin veil of Old Testament form and circumstance, and that the thought of the unknown psalmist who, amidst unknown sufferings, thus poured out his soul to God, should be quite overborne by the thought of that Sufferer in whom alone these words found their full meaning and realization. To adapt a phrase of Bishop Alexander, "the golden key" of this psalm assuredly "lies in a pierced Hand."

The same cannot, in our judgment, be said of

another psalm which is often joined with the 22nd, the 69th. Surely the exegesis must have a serious flaw in it which puts into the mouth of the holy Jesus, even as Sin-bearer, the words,—

“O God, Thou knowest my foolishness,
And my trespasses are not hid from Thee.”
—(lxix. 5.)

Equally abhorrent is the thought that He who on the cross prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” should be supposed in any remote sense to utter the words,—

“Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not ;
And make their loins continually to shake. . . .
Add iniquity unto their iniquity ;
And let them not come into Thy righteousness.
Let them be blotted out of the book of life,
And let them not come into Thy righteousness.”
—(lxix. 23, 27, 28.)

Nothing but an erroneous preconceived theory could bring any interpreter to such a pass ; it may serve as a warning to those who unduly identify the Old Testament with the New Testament standpoint, showing to what straits a mistaken and violent exegesis may lead. It was natural that the apostles should recall the words of the 9th verse of this psalm when Jesus drove the money-changers from the temple ; it is

beautifully appropriate that in Handel's passion-music the 20th verse should express the Saviour's lonely anguish; it is inevitable that a Christian, when he reads the 21st verse, should lift his eyes to the Sufferer upon Calvary, who drank indeed of the "vinegar," but would not touch the anodyne which in deadening pain would confuse the mind and becloud the spirit. As we read this 69th Psalm, we do indeed find a number of scattered links which help to bind Old Testament and New together, but we find also much that shows the contrast between the two dispensations. This psalm is no prophecy. The writer is not lifted out of "the multitude of his anxious thoughts within him," though in the midst of them Divine "comforts delight his soul." Before the psalm closes, the sufferer for righteousness' sake obtains a garland instead of ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. He gladly anticipates the time when Zion shall be delivered from her bondage, and the cities of Judah rebuilt, that God may dwell in them for ever. Glimpses of blessedness were granted to this sorely tried servant of God, but glimpses only. Some light from beyond shone in upon his soul, but much was as yet hidden from his eyes.

Of the psalms just passed in review, the 69th

cannot be termed Messianic, though it contains some interesting parallels with New Testament incidents and teaching, as well as many lessons concerning the suffering servants of God in all ages. In the 110th certainly, and the 2nd most probably, we have found psalms of the prophetic type, which directly contemplate a Messianic age and the person of a Messianic king. The 22nd, 45th, and 72nd are not prophetic in the same sense. They may be termed typically Messianic, if it is held that they contain anticipations of a coming anointed one, whose special work in accomplishing God's purposes for His chosen people is contemplated only through the medium of existing circumstances; an actually reigning king or a severely persecuted servant of God. If the 45th and 72nd Psalms, for instance, merely contain addresses to and prayers for certain actual rulers, couched in very lofty language, they cannot be termed Messianic at all. Thus many scholars regard them; but we have seen reason to take a higher view of their meaning, in which we have the support of the instructive passage, Hebrews i. 8, 9. The 22nd Psalm, again, we have classed as typically Messianic, because the writer, starting from his own personal sorrows, is led by the Spirit to pass beyond them, and to describe sufferings and resulting salvation which altogether

transcend the position of any individual Old Testament saint or even that of the ideal collective Israel.

We are far from having exhausted the witness of the Psalms to the Person of the coming Redeemer. But enough has been said to show the form in which that testimony is given, and the limits within which it may be legitimately gathered. It will be convenient to reserve for another chapter a few more illustrations of the way in which the Psalter foreshadows and anticipates the nature of the coming Redemption.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WITNESS OF THE PSALMS TO CHRIST—

II. THE COMING SALVATION.

IT would be a mistake to narrow the meaning of the word "Messianic" to such passages of Scripture only as contain a more or less explicit reference to the person of the Messianic King. It may be applied with perfect propriety to all that concerns the future kingdom of God, and the blessings which its coming would bring to God's people. In the prophecies of the Old Testament it is often impossible to separate between the promises which refer to "David's greater Son" in person, and those which describe the glory and blessedness of the kingdom He was to establish on the earth. The psalms which refer to the personality of the king are comparatively few; those in which coming salvation is eagerly anticipated, in which prayer is offered for its speedy realization, or some aspect of its glories is described, are many. In addition to the psalms

already enumerated, there are others, like the 89th and 132nd, in which the promises made to David and his seed are urged as a plea for the fulfilment of the Divine promises, either in the restoration of national prosperity or in the building of a house of God in which His presence might continually be manifested. But the person of the Messianic King was not so important in the view of the Israelite, in the period of which we are speaking, as the Christian naturally imagines it to be. Christ in Christianity means infinitely more than Messiah in Judaism. Hence the Messianic element in the Psalms cannot by any means be properly understood so long as the person of the Deliverer only is in question.

The faith of the Jew depended to a very large degree upon the confident expectation that the righteousness of God would be manifested by some striking exhibition of His power, by the overthrow of the nations with their idolatrous worship, and the vindication of the faithful, obedient, and often cruelly oppressed Israel. The hope of such deliverance was the very stay and staff of prophets and psalmists and people for centuries before Christ. The name "Messianic" kingdom in *Ha'Olam habba*, the glorious "Coming Age," is only a name for the time when all wrongs should be righted, all evil-doers put to

shame, and all the ideals of an often disappointed, but still hopeful nation be at last triumphantly realized. Now, in Christianity, the Lord Jesus Christ is the centre of all faith, the goal of all hopes, the realization of all ideals. Hence, in many passages of the Old Testament in which there is no mention of the Messiah, the New Testament writers, with perfect justice, trace a reference to the Lord of both covenants.

The 8th Psalm, for example, is not Messianic. It dwells upon the dignity of man, and the glory of God, who has put such high honour upon a creature in himself so frail and unworthy. The psalm does not pass outside the circle of these thoughts. But the Psalmist must have felt what the writer of the Hebrews expresses with so quiet a pathos, "We see not yet all things put under him." So far, indeed, from this, that in the Book of Job the Psalmist's exclamation, "What is man that Thou shouldest magnify him?" is uttered by the sufferer in a tone of bitter irony. Job would fain God let him alone (vii. 19), and did not honour him with so much notice. Despoiled of substance, friends, and health, he did not find himself in a position to rejoice in the dignity of man, as head and high priest of creation, "all things put under his feet." It is by no forced or arbitrary exposition, therefore, that

the Epistle to the Hebrews (ii. 6) finds the key to the realization of the 8th Psalm in "Manhood crowned in Jesus." We see not yet all things subjected to him, "but we behold Him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour." Not thus did the Psalmist anticipate that his words would be realized. Glory through shame, life through death,—these thoughts were not familiar to him as they have become in later days. None the less it is true that every one who would realize the true glory and dignity of man as the 8th Psalm described it, must seek it in the way Jesus the Christ has marked out once and for ever.

The 16th Psalm lends itself, with some differences, to a similar interpretation. The writer has been expressing in the strongest terms his joy and confidence in God. God is his portion and his stay; so long as He is at his right hand, he shall not be moved. This present support leads the Psalmist to express a confidence with regard to the future, which goes beyond the actual revelation at that time made to Israel. In and beyond the dark and unknown world of Sheol, God will preserve him, so that he shall tread the path of life, enter into fulness of joy, and be satisfied with pleasures for evermore. The phrase "Thine holy

[or godly, or beloved] one" is such as we find used constantly in this book for the Psalmist himself,¹ and does not convey the idea suggested by the printing of "thine Holy One" with capitals in the Authorised Version. So far, then, we have only the expression of a pious hope on the part of the Psalmist. But was it realized? In one sense, no. "The patriarch David," as St. Peter reminds us in his Pentecostal sermon, "both died and was buried, and his tomb" testified to the fact that he saw corruption. And yet the words were fulfilled in a higher and more glorious fashion in David's Son and Lord, and in and through him to David himself and all the sons of men. St. Paul in his sermon at Antioch (Acts xiii. 33) points the same lesson. David, indeed, "fell on sleep," but, "being a prophet," his words contain the germ of a higher truth than he himself could fully understand, one which was only fully developed in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. If the true dignity of man in this life can only be rightly understood and actually reached through the Christian redemption, so assuredly have life and immortality only been fully "brought to life through the gospel." The hope of the Psalmist

¹ See *supra*, p. 126. The alternative reading in the plural, "beloved or devoted ones," though not to be accepted, shows in what sense the words were probably understood at first.

becomes the faith of the Christian, the confident assurance of those who behold a Risen Saviour triumph over death and the grave. The 16th Psalm contains the seed, the 28th chapter of St. Matthew the glorious flower, and the 15th of 1 Corinthians points to the rich and abiding fruit.

As with the individual man, so with the Church. There are numerous anticipations scattered throughout the Psalms of the things that God has prepared for them that love Him. "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God." Recent expositors¹ have shown a disposition to find a Messianic reference in many places where we have not been accustomed to look for it, *e.g.* in the individual Psalmist's prayer for deliverance (vii., xxxv., etc.), and in the many songs of thanksgiving which belong to the worship of the Church-nation (cxiii., cxxxv., etc.). It is certain that the psalmists neither knew at what time, nor in what way, the promised deliverance would come, and it may well be that the hope of the coming Golden Age was often with them when we have not been in the habit of recognising it. In other cases the hope is clearly expressed, and the end is that for which Christians also look and long; the coming salvation is the same, but the

¹ For example, Stade, in a paper published in 1892 (*Zeitschrift für Theol. u. Kirche*, No. 5).

method by which it was to be attained was for the most part hidden from the psalmists' eyes. The 47th Psalm, for example, is a well-known hymn of praise in which the triumphs of the future are represented as if already attained.

“Clap your hands, all ye nations ;
Shout unto God with ringing cries,
For Jehovah is most high and terrible,
A great King over all the earth.
He subdueth the peoples under us,
And nations under our feet.
He chooseth our inheritance for us,
The excellency of Jacob whom He loveth.
God is gone up with a shout,
Jehovah with the sound of the trumpet.”—(1-5.)

The psalm has been used for centuries in the Christian Church as appropriate to Ascension Day. But it is poor exposition to fasten upon the phrase “gone up,” and leap to the conclusion that in the going up of God’s presence, as represented by the ark going up to Jerusalem, there is a prophetic reference to the Ascension of our Lord.¹ The 5th verse, in all probability, represents by a bold figure the return of God to the heaven from which He had descended to achieve a great victory for Israel. All that the psalm, as it stands, does,

¹ So Bossuet: “Ascendit Deus ; ascendit Arca propheticè ; ascendit Christus in cœlum.” Quoted by Wordsworth *in loco*.

is to celebrate in unusually triumphant notes this victory—perhaps over Sennacherib, see Pss. xlvi. and xlviii.—as a pledge that Israel's God will triumph at last over all nations. In the exultant figure of the last verse,—

“The princes of the peoples are gathered together
To be the people of the God of Abraham!”

The last words of all are an abrupt “He is highly exalted!” as if the music which has been proceeding *crescendo* from bar to bar ends *fortissimo* upon a high, sustained note, to express the glory of God and the triumph of Israel. The psalm is undoubtedly an anticipation of the Messianic kingdom; and the appropriateness of applying it to the Ascension of Christ lies in this, that just as the Jew pictured God descending to fight for His people, and when the victory was won, returning to His high throne to reign for ever over the nations; so—though little the Psalmist guessed at the truth—the establishment of the Messianic kingdom was actually due to the descent of the Most High God to dwell with man in mortal flesh, and in due time return to His throne on high, “from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool.”

The same idea meets us in the 68th Psalm, a splendid ode, deserving closer study than can here

be given to it. It is essentially a war-song or hymn of victory. The opening words are from the chant with which the children of Israel set forward on their march with the Ark, and the first strophe is in praise of God the Leader of armies. His glorious manifestations of Himself in the wilderness journeys are described in the next stanza, and subsequent victories in which God has intervened on behalf of His people are then pictorially, though somewhat enigmatically, described. In ver. 18 we read,—

“Thou hast ascended on high,
Thou hast led away Thy captives ;
Thou hast received gifts among men, yea, the rebellious,
That Jehovah God might have a dwelling among them.”

The use made of this passage by St. Paul is instructive. In Ephesians iv. 8 he applied it to the Ascension of Christ in a way which is seen to be most appropriate and suggestive, while at the same time it is a perfectly free adaptation of the original words. God is the Victor in the wars of Israel ; when He goes up in triumph, as if with the spoils of war, receiving homage from all, even those most opposed to His rule, He receives only in order that He may give. He takes up His abode amongst a reconciled and

peaceful people, and where He abides, blessings abound.

“Blessed be the Lord, who daily beareth our burden,
Even the God who is our salvation.”—(lxviii. 19.)

St. Paul, swift to discern spiritual analogies, marks how Christ had gone up on high, after His lowly descent “for us men and for our salvation,” but—with a freedom of touch which marks the master-hand that does not copy line for line, but deserts the exact outline that he may better reproduce the spirit of the whole picture—he notes that when our Saviour took His place above, He liberally *gave* instead of receiving, pouring out His Spirit and imparting spiritual gifts to His newly-founded Church, that God might indeed take up His gracious abode amongst the rebellious sons of men.¹

The anticipations of deliverance and glory for Zion in the Psalms are very numerous; but, as we have already seen, the horizon from time to time widened before the eye of the Psalmist, and the “nations” are represented as brought within the scope of Messianic blessings. The Psalter is the most catholic book of the Old Testament. When St. Paul is undertaking to prove that the

¹ For another interpretation of the passage in the psalm and its use by St. Paul, see Professor Findlay's admirable Commentary on Ephesians, pp. 229, 230.

gospel message was but a confirmation of the promises made unto the fathers, "that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy," half his proofs are from the Psalms. The first of these is from the 18th, one of the earliest of all, and shows that even when David was giving thanks to God for personal mercies and the establishment of his kingdom, his outlook, enlarged by the spirit of prophecy (which is the testimony of Jesus), included the nations in its scope, and in the last two verses of the psalm the Davidic kingdom loses itself easily and imperceptibly in a foretaste of the kingdom of Messiah. The other is taken from the shortest of psalms (cxvii.);—only four lines in length, and not strikingly distinctive in character, one thinks that it might have been passed over in the formation of a collection. Yet it strikes its own characteristic note in the chorus of thanksgiving, and stands in honourable association with the other scriptures which St. Paul quotes in Romans xv. to establish his great thesis.

“O praise Jehovah, all ye nations,
Laud Him, all ye peoples.
For His loving kindness is mighty over us,
And the truth of Jehovah endureth for ever!
Hallelujah!”

Such music was sung in the Second Temple; but who of those who worshipped could understand

how such praise to Israel's God was to be drawn from Greece and Egypt, Persia and Rome? How could Jehovah's praise indeed be sung in Antioch and Alexandria and that far Macedon from whence the European conqueror had set out to overrun the world of Asia? Especially, how were such triumphs to be brought about while Jehovah's worshippers were becoming more and more narrow, bigoted, and spiritually selfish? These questions the Psalmist did not ask, and it was by the power of a spirit lifting him far above the prejudices and limitations of his time and nation, that he sang in concert with his countrymen, "Praise Jehovah, ALL YE NATIONS; laud Him, ALL YE PEOPLES!"

There is another class of psalms in which clear reference is made to the Messianic kingdom, though the absence of any mention of the Messianic King prevents many readers from noticing them. Some may, perhaps, have been surprised by two quotations in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. In proving the excellence and dignity of the Son, and His superiority to the angels, the writer quotes seven passages from the Old Testament, of which six are from the Psalms. In the case of two of these the careful reader will be sure to ask the question, How comes it that the readers of this Epistle

could be satisfied with such quotations, seeing that in both cases the psalm speaks not of Messiah, but of Jehovah? The first is from the 97th Psalm,¹ which opens with the words "Jehovah reigneth"; and the Psalmist in the 7th verse exclaims, "Worship Him, all ye gods" (LXX, "all ye His angels"). By what law of exegesis can these words be applied to Jesus Christ? Again, in Hebrews i. 10-12 there occurs a long quotation from the 102nd Psalm. It contains a sublime address on the part of "the afflicted one," who in the early part of the psalm has poured forth the bitterness of his soul, and described the desolation and sorrow of the apparently deserted Church-nation. But his theme changes as (ver. 12) he exclaims, "But Thou, Jehovah, sittest as King for ever," and with a chastened gladness he anticipates the deliverance which the Eternal will accomplish for His people in His own good time.

"Of old Thou didst lay the foundations of the earth,
And the heavens are the work of Thy hands.
They shall perish, but Thou shalt endure:
Yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment;
As a vesture shalt Thou change them, and they shall
be changed;
But Thou art the same,
And Thy years shall have no end."—(cii. 25-27.)

¹ If the Old Testament passage in view be Deuteronomy xxxii. 43, the above argument is not substantially affected.

Noble and tender consolation for afflicted Jerusalem; but how does it prove the dignity of Messiah? The answer in both these cases is to be found in that enlargement of ideas concerning the Messianic kingdom of which mention was made above. All those passages which speak of the *manifestation* of Jehovah in the latter days for judgment upon earth should be understood, and were understood by the Jews, of the Messianic era. *God manifest*,—the Jew did not add *in the flesh*, but the thought was latent in his Scriptures,—that is, Messiah. “Jehovah is King upon earth” is the keynote of the 97th Psalm, and it is enough to transport the thoughts of the pious Jew to that Kingdom which formed the crown and centre of all his national and personal hopes. The group of psalms xvi.—c. are psalms of the Theophany, the appearance of Jehovah. And these represent, no less than psalms which point to the reign of a superhuman hero, one aspect of the work of Messiah, described, though without mention of the name, in the Old Testament. How these distinct aspects, as well as many others, were to be combined in one Person the Jew did not ask, or asking, failed to find an answer. This is one of the characteristics of prophecy, one of the marks of its Divine origin. Man can hope, and long, till longing breeds a

kind of eager expectation ; but he cannot indulge at various times in apparently quite discordant and inconsistent hopes, which yet in time blend themselves harmoniously in one inconceivable and consummate fulfilment. Such work belongs to Him whose name is Wonderful. It bears the impress of God.

A similar explanation must be given of the use of the 24th Psalm to celebrate the joy of the Christian upon Ascension Day. The majority of the Fathers agree with the exposition of Theodoret:¹ "In the 22nd Psalm we beheld Christ suffering ; we now see Him ascending into heaven, and we hear the choirs of angels singing, Lift up your heads, O ye gates—those gates which were never before lifted up to receive *man* within them, but are now opened to all through Christ, Very man as well as Very God, who has passed through them at the Ascension." According to this view as expressed by Bishop Wordsworth, whatever the consciousness of David in writing the psalm, the Holy Spirit intended us to see in it a distinct prophecy of the Ascension. Such a view, however, implies a bewildering exegesis and an unsatisfactory theory of inspiration. Christ may be found in this psalm without any artificial and unwarranted methods of interpretation. It has

¹ Quoted by Wordsworth, *in loco*.

been said that "to post-Exilic faith the dawn of the Messianic kingdom and the entrance of Jehovah into His temple are the same thing." In other words, just as the Jews of a later time found in the ancient song which announced the entrance of the King of Glory into the palace He had chosen for His abode, a fit representation of the appearance of that Deliverer for whose presence upon earth they longed, so most truly may Christians find in the words fit expression for their joy in the triumph of the Saviour. The same Divine thought is realized, but in a more perfect way. The 24th Psalm is not a prophecy, but its lofty words may receive a yet more lofty application as by faith we see the heavenly gates thrown open to admit the Ascended King of Glory. But the Apocalypse reminds us that not even yet is the Divine thought completely realized. Not yet has the time fully come when "the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell among them." But it is coming. And when that golden hour strikes, and HE appears again, "thousand thousand saints attending," many sons brought unto glory and made like their Lord, well may the ancient words be chanted once more: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift yourselves up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in." To understand the true

meaning of the original words is to understand their manifold application to the end of time.

The scattered references in the New Testament to separate verses of the Psalms are so many, that it is only possible here to draw attention to one feature which should be remembered in dealing with them. The use of a single phrase or verse or thought from a psalm to express a New Covenant truth, by no means warrants the application of the whole psalm to Christ. The principle seems too obvious to need mention. But for want of remembering it, wise men have gone astray. What can be more appropriate, for instance, than for the writer of Hebrews to quote the 40th Psalm, when he is expounding the true meaning of Old Testament sacrifice and its fulfilment in Christ? How suggestive the words, especially as found in the LXX: "Sacrifice and offering Thou wouldest not, but a body hast Thou prepared me. . . . Then said I, Lo, I come, to do Thy will, O God." But are we therefore to put into the mouth of the Saviour the words, "Innumerable evils have compassed me about, so that I am not able to look up"; or "He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay"? To ask such a question is to answer it. But the only principle on which it is justifiable to apply a portion of a psalm to Christ without

the rest, is the very simple and sound one, that we may make such an application where the same Divine idea is expressed both in psalm and gospel, the faint and wavering lines of the one having become firm and bold in the other, the shadowy outline of the psalm "fulfilled" into a glorious gospel-picture that cannot fade away.

It would be almost absurd to say that St. Paul in 2 Corinthians iv. 13 meant to adopt more of the 116th Psalm than the phrase "I believed, therefore have I spoken." He quotes these words, and these only, for his purpose. Why, then, should an elaborate and untenable structure of psalm-interpretation be built up upon the fact that the Saviour at the Last Supper quoted most appositely the words of the 41st Psalm: "He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me"? The treachery of the faithless Israelite of early days became, when full-blown, the base betrayal of a Judas Iscariot. The same is to be said of the quotation of Psalms lxix. 25 and cix. 8 in Acts i. 20. The summary of the 109th Psalm prefixed in the Authorised Version begins thus: "David, complaining of his slanderous enemies, under the person of Judas devoteth them"; and a long line of interpreters have found this meaning in the tremendous curses of that psalm, accumulating them on the head of the

man whose terrible title in history is "the Traitor." But to confuse text and application is simply to understand neither. The psalm once properly understood, the meaning of the dire parallel in St. Peter's address is plain, and the fate of Judas furnishes an awful commentary upon awful words. But Judaism and Christianity must be kept distinct, or we shall fail to understand either God's revelation to Israel, or His revelation in Christ, or the way in which the former prepared the way for the latter.

We close the treatment of a large subject before we have fairly entered upon it. The mine is a rich one for those who bring the right tools for excavation. The reverence and devoutness, the faith and Christian spirit of the "mystical" interpreters is so admirable, and there is so much to be learned from them, that anything like disparagement of them is painful. But devotion to Christ, a reverent appreciation of the close bonds which bind the Covenants together, and an implicit faith in the Spirit of revelation who inspired the sacred psalmists, can be better illustrated by sound methods of interpretation than by mistaken ones. Christ *must* shine through the Psalter to any Christian who thoroughly understands it. He is not only "the end of the law," but the goal of the Psalms. If the Law is a

παιδαγωγός, a slave-tutor, to conduct us to the school of Christ, the Psalter is the handmaiden who graciously leads us to His sacred Presence, and shows us the way to His very feet, making His lessons easier than ever to learn. Those who thus read the sacred minstrelsy of David and David's psalmist-choir can understand the "memorable words which Mr. Coleridge wrote upon the margin of his Prayer-book: "As a transparency on some night of public rejoicing, seen by common day, with the lamps from within removed, even such would the Psalms be to me, uninterpreted by the gospel.'" So interpreted, however, they are as Alpine peaks, already flushed by the rosy light of the dawn, which did but glimmer in beauty upon them, but for us has broadened out into the glorious noon of gospel day.

CHAPTER X.

THE USE OF THE PSALMS IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

THE Book of Psalms is the oldest and the only universal Christian hymn-book. The Lord Jesus Christ and His disciples sang Psalms cxiii.—cxviii. at the Last Supper, before “they went out unto the mount of Olives.” When Paul and Silas “sang hymns unto God” in the dungeon at Philippi, their backs sore from the Roman rods, and their hearts glad because “they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the Name,” there can be little doubt from what book their midnight songs were taken. St. James gives advice to Christians for all moods and states, and those who are “cheerful” he bids to sing the praises of the Giver of all joy to the accompaniment of the harp. What “psalms” they would be likely to sing it is not hard to guess. St. Paul, in writing to the Colossians, names three kinds of praise, “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,” which the Church

was to sing "in grace" unto God. He mentions at the same time a less obvious use of such united singing, bidding the Colossian Christians thus to "teach and admonish one another," or, as the words may mean, "themselves,"—as matter of fact, probably both together. The apostle, who knew the human heart as well as the mind of God, perceived that psalm-singing, rightly conducted, would tend to mutual edification as well as the Divine glory. A better commentary upon such words could perhaps hardly be found than the words of Augustine: "Oh, what accents did I utter unto Thee in those Psalms, and how was I kindled by them towards Thee, and on fire to rehearse them, if possible, through the world, against the pride of mankind. . . . How I would that they [the Manichæans] had then been somewhere near me, and, without my knowing that they were there, could have beheld my countenance and heard my words, when I read the 4th Psalm in that time of my rest, and how that psalm wrought upon me: 'When I called, the God of my righteousness heard me; in tribulation Thou enlargedst me. Have mercy upon me, O Lord, and hear my prayer.'"¹

Even more strikingly is the place of the Psalms in early Christian worship set forth in 1 Cor-

¹ *Confessions*, Bk. ix. § 4.

inthians xiv. Both prayer and singing are to be engaged in, not only *τῷ πνεύματι*, under the overmastering influence of the Divine Spirit leading captive the human spirit, but *τῷ νοῷ*, with the calm and self-possessed exercise of the intelligence which truly is a Divine gift. When the Corinthians gathered for worship, we are told, "each one hath a psalm," reminding us of Tertullian's description of the Love-feasts of a century later: "After washing of hands and the bringing in of lights, each is asked to stand forth and sing, as he can, a hymn to God, either one from the Holy Scriptures, or one of his own composing."¹ When the earliest Christian hymns were composed, it was on the model of the Psalms. The birth of the Saviour was ushered in by an outburst of such music. The *Gloria in Excelsis* of the angels is a kind of Christian Hallelujah. The *Magnificat* of the pure and meek Virgin-Mother, the *Benedictus* with which Zachariah unlocked his closed heart and silent tongue, were both echoes of the Psalms of the Old Testament. If, as many have thought, 1 Timothy iii. 16, 1 Timothy vi. 15, 16, 2 Timothy ii. 11, 12, are fragments of early Christian hymns, they are notable examples of the setting of new words to ancient music.

¹ *Apolog.* § 39.

Glimpses into early Christian interiors show us the saints, whether in praise or prayer, with the words of the Psalms on their lips. It was very early in the second century (A.D. 109) that Pliny described in his letter to Trajan the worship of the Christians in Bithynia, who "assembled on an appointed day at sunrise and sang responsively a song to Christ as God." Half a century afterwards, Justin Martyr gives a similar description of the Sunday¹ gatherings, and Ignatius exhorts the Romans to "form themselves into a choir in love, and sing praise to the Father in Christ Jesus."² In private, Christian hymns began very early to be used, but in public worship only the Psalms of the Scriptures were permitted up to the middle or end of the fourth century. Athanasius, in one of his letters,³ asks in detail why the Psalms are sung. Not, he answers, for pleasure, but partly to glorify God by diffusion of sound in the singing of psalms and hymns, thus obeying the precept to love God with all our strength. "And secondly, this musical and vocal accompaniment of the Psalms serves the purpose of bringing all our faculties, bodily, rational, intel-

¹ τῆ τοῦ Ἡλίου λεγομένη ἡμέρα, *Apol.* chap. lxvii. The psalms and hymns are mentioned in chap. xiii. See also Euseb., *H. Eccl.* v. 28.

² *Ad Rom.* § 2.

³ *Ad Marcellinum*, referred to by Wordsworth, *Intr.* p. iii.

lectual, and spiritual, into loving and harmonious sympathy and concert in the service of God, so that he who has the mind of Christ may become like a musical instrument, and, following the motions of the Holy Spirit, may obey Him both in his members and in his affections, and be wholly subservient to the will of God."

It has often been noticed that the Christian Church has grown repeatedly weary of her own hymns, even though for a time they have enjoyed great popularity, but that it has never tired of the Psalms of David. Assuredly, if repeated use could have worn the Psalms threadbare, they would have been worn out centuries ago. For hundreds of years the Psalter was literally chanted day and night without ceasing throughout the Catholic Church. In the fourth century, Chrysostom describes how at night "all other men are overpowered by natural sleep; David alone is active, and, congregating the servants of God into seraphic bands, turns earth into heaven and men into angels." We have the authority of Dr. Neale for saying that from the sixth century to the sixteenth, not only was the whole Psalter recited throughout every week by every ecclesiastic, but a number of psalms in addition equal in bulk to the 150 psalms, all told.¹ The canons

¹ *Comm. on the Psalms*, vol. i. pp. 4 and 5.

of the Eastern Church appear to have enjoined such a measure of recitation that, were it fully carried out, the daily portion could not have been accomplished in the twenty-four hours. In the fifth century the Patriarch of Constantinople refused to ordain any cleric who could not repeat "David" by heart. In the seventh century this was made an ordinance by the eighth Council of Toledo. In the Roman use, the recitation of the Psalter commences at Matins on Sunday. In the first Nocturn, after the 95th, which always commences the service, twelve psalms are said, in the second Nocturn three, in the third three, at Lauds five psalms. At Prime four, at Tierce, Sexts, and Nones, Psalm cxix. in portions, at Vespers five psalms, and at Compline four. The arrangement for week days, Sundays, and feast days ordinary and special, was most elaborate and complicated, so that it was not to be wondered at that our Reformers were so perplexed at "the number and hardness of the rules called the Pie," as to complain in the Introduction to the Prayer-book that "many times there was more business to find out what should be read, than to read it when it was found out."

Thus the mechanical arrangements of formal ecclesiasticism reverse the saying of the Psalmist, "Thy statutes have been my songs," and deter-

mine even its songs by statute. It is possible to turn even a delight into drudgery. But the delight both of individuals and of congregations in the singing of psalms is traceable century after century. Ambrose, complaining of the noise in church when the lessons were read, tells how silent the congregation became at the sound of the psalm. Theodoret says that, while most men knew nothing of the Scriptures generally, even uneducated people would repeat the Psalms by heart in the course of their common life. Jerome writes to Paula in words that have often been quoted: "The labourer while he holds the handle of the plough sings Alleluia; the tired reaper employs himself in the Psalms; and the vinedresser, while lopping the vines with his curved hook, sings something of David. These are our ballads in this part of the world; these (to use the common expression) are our love-songs." Nothing but a spirit of intense affection could have prompted the close study of the Psalter which is implied in the arrangements for its use in churches. The baptism of the Psalms into the spirit of Christ and Christianity was carried out in various ways, amongst the rest by a remarkable and interesting system of antiphons. The antiphon is the intercalation of some fragment or verse between the verses of the psalm which was

being sung; one choir taking the psalm, the other the antiphon. Sometimes these were taken from the psalm itself, but often, not.¹ In the recitation of the 2nd Psalm, for instance, the antiphon would be used, "The Lord said: Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten Thee." What an enrichment and emphasis is given to this psalm of Messianic Sonship by the twelvefold repetition of these characteristic words! What character again is given to the 21st Psalm by the intercalation at the end of every verse of the words, "Blessed art Thou, O Christ, our God"! The invitatory is but a modification of the antiphon; the words, "O come let us worship!" for example, being repeated nine times during the recitation of the 95th Psalm. These antiphons and invitatories varied with the Christian seasons, so that an Easter character might be given to a psalm through the antiphon, "The Lord hath risen indeed; Alleluia!" or an Advent character by the continual repetition of "The King, the Lord cometh!" As Dr. Neale says, the same psalm "could not at all these seasons be recited with the same feelings, in the same frame of mind. Its different emphases required to be brought out. The same sun-ray

¹ One of the best known of these, "In the midst of life we are in death," sung to the 22nd Psalm, has often been taken for Scripture language.

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from the Holy Ghost rested indeed at all times on the same words, but the prism of the Church separated that colourless light into its component rays; into the violet of penitence, the crimson of martyrdom, the gold of the highest seasons of Christian gladness."¹ The only relic of this beautiful but too highly elaborated usage which survives in Anglican worship is the repetition of the *Gloria Patri* at the end of each psalm. While the study of the precise usages of the various rituals may be left to ecclesiologists, the spirit which prompted such reverent study of the Psalms, the unwearied repetition of them in private and public worship, and the steeping of every stanza and every line with meaning in a profoundly Christian spirit, may well remain the heritage of the Church continually.

A copy of the Psalter marked with notes of the occasions on which a single devout soul has read it with profit, would form an interesting record; how much more if it were possible to gather the notices of all the saints whom its words have refreshed with the water of life! A single collection of such notices forms a considerable volume; and Dr. John Ker's *The Psalms in History and Biography*, from which some of the following incidents have been taken, makes a

¹ Vol. i. pp. 34, 35.

most interesting companion to the Psalter. So great is the wealth of illustrations of the part which the Psalms have fulfilled at important points in the history of devoted men, that it is difficult to know where to begin, more difficult still to know how to come to an end. Take, for example, the conversion of Augustine and John Wesley. Augustine tells us that before that memorable scene in which the voice came to him, *Tolle, lege*, Take up and read, he had just been pouring out his heart in prayer in words taken from the 6th, 13th, and 79th Psalms: "And Thou, O Lord, how long? How long, Lord, wilt Thou be angry for ever? Remember not our former iniquities"; adding words which Charles Wesley echoed fourteen hundred years afterwards in a well-known hymn, "Why not now, my God, my God?" The incidents of John Wesley's conversion are generally known. He has himself described the scene in Aldersgate Street on May 24, 1738, while "one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans," when he felt his heart "strangely warmed," and was led to trust in Christ alone for salvation. It is not, however, so generally known that the impression produced by the Pauline Epistle had been preceded by a deep impression produced in the afternoon by a "Pauline" psalm, the 130th. The anthem at

St. Paul's Cathedral was taken from that psalm: "Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord. . . . For with the Lord is mercy, and with Him is plenteous redemption."¹ Wesley found it, we are told, "full of comfort."

It is touching to remember that Robert Burns composed a metrical version of the 1st Psalm, which describes the fruitful tree by the streamlets and the "rootless stubble lost before the sweeping blast." Less well known is his version of the 90th Psalm, which gives, could he but have learned it, the true secret of stability in temptation.

"O Thou, the first, the greatest Friend
Of all the human race ;
Whose strong right hand has ever been
Their stay and dwelling-place !"

The 3rd Psalm was used by the Huguenots in the time of their persecutions for stationing their sentinels; when they could worship in safety, they sang Psalm cxxii.; and their war-song was Psalm lxviii. The 39th and 40th verses of the 18th Psalm, when sung as an anthem in church, decided Clovis in the sixth century to undertake that campaign against the Visigoths which probably changed the fortunes of Europe. The 117th was known by the Puritans as the "Dunbar

¹ *Journal*, vol. i. p. 103.

Psalm," sung by Cromwell and his army after the victory at Dunbar, September 3, 1650. The 76th was the Drumclog Psalm, in which the Covenanters overthrew Claverhouse and his troopers. Dr. Ker says that "the tune was the plaintive but lofty *Martyrs*."

"There arrows of the bow He brake,
The shield, the sword, the war:
More glorious Thou than hills of prey,
More excellent art far."

The 27th Psalm has brought comfort to many a downcast heart. The wife of Sir John Lawrence was obliged in 1858 to leave her husband to encounter the terrible dangers of the Indian Mutiny alone. She wrote afterwards of the day, January 6, 1858: "When the last morning of separation arrived, we had our usual Bible reading, and I can never think of the 27th Psalm, which was the portion we then read together, without recalling that sad time." How full of meaning the 2nd and 3rd verses, the 5th and 6th, the 10th and 11th, at such a moment! When Livingstone first went out as a missionary to Africa, his sister wrote of the occasion: "On the morning of November 17, 1840, we got up at five o'clock. David read the 121st and 135th Psalms, and prayed. My father and he walked to Glasgow to catch the Liverpool steamer."

The words of Psalm xxxiv. 10, "The young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing," were the last words written by Columba ere he died on the far island of Iona, on Sunday, June 9, 597. The 103rd Psalm was read every day in the family worship of the late John Angell James; and Izaak Walton gives a touching account of the comfort it brought to Bishop Sanderson on his deathbed. He tells us also that "'Twas Dr. Sanderson's constant practice every morning to entertain his first waking thoughts with a repetition of those very psalms that the Church hath appointed to be constantly read in the daily morning service, . . . and if the first fruits of his waking thoughts were of the world, he would arraign himself for it." How the Anglican bishop here joins hands with the ancient Rabbis, and with the Jewish king whose words were the guide and teacher of both! The *Midrash*, on Psalm lvii. 9, plays in its characteristic fashion upon the theme of David's awaking the morning with harp and lute, and adds, "R. Levi said, 'A harp used to hang opposite David's window, so that when the north wind arose about midnight, and blew upon it, it played of itself.' Thus when the Scripture says, 'And the minstrel played' (2 Kings iii. 15), we should rather read, 'When the instrument

played,' for the harp played of itself." ¹ It was in order that his own heart should be just such a harp, responsive to every breath of Divine influence, that David sang, anticipating the morning hours with music. To this end have his words echoed down the aisles of the Christian Church for centuries, and from many a secret chamber and many a sick bed besides that of the saintly Bishop Sanderson, have risen to heaven the strains of David's morning hymn,—

“My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed ;
I would fain sing and make melody.
Awake up, my glory ; awake, lute and harp,
I would awake the morning dawn !”

The Psalms associated with the latest hours of dying saints have a charm and significance of their own. Men of the most widely differing temperament and history meet here. “Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me,” were the last words of Sir William Hamilton, and almost the last of Edward Irving. They prompted one of the last poems of that arch-scoffer with the tender heart, Heinrich Heine. The 30th Psalm has proved a similar comfort to many in their extremity. The last words in Bishop Hannington's diary, the ink hardly dry when he was led out to death by Mwanga's men, were : “Thursday, Oct. 29 (1886).

¹ Ed. Wünsche, i. 324.

Eighth day's prison. I can hear no news, but was held up by Psalm xxx., which came with great power. A hyena howled near me last night, smelling a sick man, but I hope it is not to have me yet." The blessed Saviour uttered, as one of His last words from the cross, Psalm xxxi. 5, putting His own stamp upon it, by prefixing a single most significant word, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." It would be hard to say how many of Christ's followers have used the words after Him. The case of Stephen is recorded in Scripture. Dr. Kay mentions Polycarp, Basil, St. Bernard, St. Louis, Huss, Columbus, Luther, Melancthon, as having uttered the same words with their latest breath. Bishop Alexander adds the names of Silvio Pellico and the Princesse de Condé. Dr. Ker mentions, in addition, "that it was the parting word of John Knox, Jerome of Prague, . . . and of countless more."

But time would fail to tell how faithfully and abidingly the words of the Psalms have been embalmed in the sacred memories that gather round the life and death of Christian saints. They have been the stay and succour of faithful Christian men in the most diverse scenes. It is a far cry from Hyde Park Corner to the steppes of Mongolia. But there meets us, on the one hand, an extract from the diary of William Wilberforce,

quoted by Mr. Spurgeon, in which he records how, at the height of a political crisis in 1819, the statesman "walked from Hyde Park Corner, repeating the 119th Psalm with great comfort." And on the other hand is the record from a biography, but lately published, recording the experience of James Gilmour the missionary, alone (with Christ) in the filthy huts of the Mongols, self-banished from the comforts and advantages of civilization, and labouring for years with little or no encouragement. "When I feel I cannot make headway in devotion, I open in the Psalms, push out in my canoe, and let myself be carried along in the stream of devotion which flows through the whole book. The current always sets towards God, and in most places is strong and deep."¹ The strength and swiftness of that clear stream—one of the tributaries of the river that makes glad the city of God—has carried many a frail bark, many an anxious and weary spirit, Godwards and heavenwards to a haven of peace.

The versions of the Psalms into various languages are well-nigh innumerable. It is one of the first books of the Bible which the pioneer missionary undertakes to render into the vernacular. After the Gospels, the Psalter. Many of the versions have been notable. Some of the renderings

¹ *Life of Gilmour of Mongolia*, p. 281.

in the Latin Vulgate have passed into the language of Christendom. If Luther's words were "half-battles," none better deserves the name than his famous rendering of the 46th Psalm, *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*. The French version of Clement Marot has been consecrated a thousand times by the pious affection of the Huguenots, who baptized it with their tears, laid it up in their memories, sang it in their mountain sanctuaries, where they gathered in peril of their lives, and chanted its strains as their battle-cry, when turning to bay against their cruel persecutors. The version of Miles Coverdale in the Anglican Prayer Book, inaccurate as it is in details of translation, is yet so faithful to the original in spirit, so musical in expression, and has so endeared itself to the memories of generations of worshippers, that it has survived many subsequent translations, and is likely to live so long as an English Psalter is used.

Metrical versions have not for the most part been successful. The poorer the attempt, the greater the success. The very ruggedness of the old Scotch version is one of its chief recommendations. Probably the task of rendering the Psalms into metre is, as has been said by one of the most distinguished of those who have made the attempt, strictly speaking, impossible. The very structure

of the psalm favours a rhythmical, forbids a metrical version. "The more encouragement it gives to versions merely rhythmical, such as those of the Septuagint, the Vulgate, or the English Prayer-Book, the less chance does it leave of success in any modern metre, the form and tone of the two being not only different, but, generally speaking, irreconcilable."¹ The old version of Sternhold and Hopkins, published in Geneva in 1556, amidst the hottest fires of the Marian persecution, passed, we are told, through 309 distinct editions before it gave way, in 1698, to Tate and Brady. But Tate and Brady has disappeared, and the older version lingers yet in many memories. This is not much to be wondered at, if, in order to gain a certain superficial smoothness, the spirited old rendering of Psalm xviii. 10,—

"On cherub and on cherubim
Full royally he rode;
And on the wings of all the winds
Came flying all abroad,"

—was supposed to give way to

"The chariot of the King of kings,
Which active troops of angels drew,
On a strong tempest's rapid wings
With most amazing swiftness flew."

But the task of composing an adequate version

¹ Keble, Preface to *The Psalter in English Verse*, p. viii.

was difficult, if not impossible. The genius of Milton could not surmount it. His "Psalms, done into metre, wherein all, but what is in a different character, are the very words of the text, translated from the original," contain as many words in the "different character" as there are words in the ordinary type, inserted, often not very happily, to eke out the lines. A later poet, Keble, achieved somewhat better success in a version which is, however, very little known, and seems likely to pass into oblivion. As a specimen of his style may be quoted his rendering of the same verse from Psalm xviii.

"He bowed the heavens, the Lord came down,
Deep night His pathway covering,
On cherubs wafted He hath flown,
On wings of wind far hovering;
The dark His hiding-place He made,
Dark waters round, His curtain shade,
Dim air in darksome pillars."

The accuracy of Keble's version in rendering the Hebrew, and in the choice of appropriate epithets, can only be appreciated by careful examination. But Homer refuses to be bound with the chains of Pope's heroic couplets, and the vigour of the Psalms disappears in "Common Metre." The most successful attempts at what may be called the acclimatization of the Psalms in English verse

have been those in which the writer has striven rather to adapt than translate. Amongst them may be mentioned Watts' 90th Psalm, "O God, our help in ages past"; 146th, "I'll praise my Maker while I've breath"; and 100th, "Before Jehovah's awful throne." The familiar form of this last hymn, however, contains several improvements by Wesley, and even now hardly competes with the older rendering in Sternhold, "All people that on earth do dwell." The same may perhaps be said of the versions of the 23rd Psalm. Watts' "My Shepherd will supply my need," and the old Scotch version, "The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want," have beauties of their own; Charles Wesley's adaptation, "Jesus the good Shepherd is," is of another order, equally "beautiful in its time." Lyte's rendering of the 84th Psalm, and exquisite little fragment of the 31st, furnish good illustrations of this method of using the Psalms, as do Wesley's beautifully Christian adaptations of the 3rd Psalm and the 121st. But from the versions, as from the commentaries, we turn back to the book itself.

The secret of its power is not very far to seek, though it is difficult to compress into a few words. It lies partly in the central character of the theme—God and the human soul. Church and priest do not stand in the foreground here, nor even the law and the sanctuary. The restless soul draws

immediately near to Him for whom it was made, and in whom alone it can find rest. But in the treatment of this great theme the Psalter exhibits a blending of attributes which lift it distinctly and incomparably above all mere human compositions. There is a union of the broadest universality with the most intense individuality. There is a blending of joyousness with sorrow, sometimes bitter, sometimes tender, which moves the human heart that knows so much of both. There is a combination—such as marks only the works of highest genius, and none of these in the same profound, religious way—of complete simplicity with marvellous depth; the water is clear as crystal, but too deep for the longest line to fathom. The Psalter exhibits not only the “freshness of the early world” in which the latest children of civilization delight, but the freshness of the skies, without which all that is earthly soon grows stale and weary. It came from God, and it leads to God.

(1) The combination of universality with individuality is very striking. These two qualities are usually mutually exclusive. To realize catholicity without vagueness, and the intensity of personal feeling without the narrowness of personal limitations, and to combine these qualities for use both in public and in private worship, alike for the

purposes of praise and prayer,—this is the distinction of the Psalms. It is a remarkable fact that it should be possible still to debate the question whether the “I” of the Psalms is personal or natural. That so much may so well be said on both sides is proof positive of the combination of qualities now referred to. The secret lies partly in the enlargement of personal desires and affections accomplished in the heart by true religion, partly in the notable unity of the Jewish Church-nation in the first instance, and of the Christian Church, of which it was a prototype, in the second. Each has been chosen by God for a special purpose, and in the Divine favour bestowed, the perils passed through, the suffering endured, the supplications offered, and the deliverance effected, has been one in character, purpose, and destiny, like no other community on the face of the earth.

But the real cause of these and other characteristics named has been the operation of the Divine Spirit upon the minds of the psalmists. The Spirit makes free. “Where the Spirit of God is, there is liberty” from fetters of which man could not otherwise rid himself. Many limitations doubtless remain. The Spirit was bestowed according to the measure of the time; much was hidden from the psalmists, many obstacles shut them out from the full freedom with which the

Son makes free. But no influence but that of the Divine Spirit, exercised in a measure beyond that which saints in other ages have known, could have enabled these Jews, in many respects narrow and prejudiced, to produce a hymnary for the world and for all time. St. James says, "Is any among you merry? Let him sing psalms." For what mood of any truly religious soul is there not to be found an appropriate song in the Psalter? The apostle might indeed have said, "Is any among you afflicted? Let him make the Psalmist's prayers his own." Every kind of affliction and temptation that is common to man seems here to have been anticipated. If the sufferer is crushed by a heavy blow, so that he can hardly ask for relief, but only moan Godwards, the 6th and 88th Psalms will speak for him. If he is bold, Job-like, to reason out his difficulties before the Most High, he will find more consolation in the 77th Psalm than in the dialogues of the patriarch with Eliphaz and Zophar. Sometimes petitions are poured out in rapid succession, as in lxxxvi. 1-6, and cxliii. 7-12; sometimes a brief ejaculation, as in the 119th Psalm, speaks volumes. "I am Thine, save me," is short enough for the child to learn and understand; comprehensive enough for the thought and feeling of the wisest, sufficient in its scope for life, for death, and all that lies beyond.

The Psalter is a book of prayers, especially if prayer be not limited, as it should never be, to actual petitions. "The prayers of David, son of Jesse," contain much besides supplication. Yet prayers in the narrower sense form a large part of the book, and help to make it universal, for all men meet in the expression of deep need. The prayers of the Psalms are "prayers which, when once they have been learned, mingle with the memory in other years like the music of a nursery song, prayers which, like some mysterious vestment, fit every human soul in the attitude of supplication,—prayers for every time, place, and circumstance; for the bridal and the grave, the storm and the battle, the king and the peasant, the harlot sobbing on her knees on the penitentiary floor, and the saint looking through the lifted portals into the city of God; from the solitary soul on the hospital stretcher, and the thousands crowded in the great minster; prayer for the seasons when the Church looks upon the Crucified, and for those when He bursts the bars of the tomb, and ascends to His Father's throne. Such prayers the world has never seen but once."¹ They not only meet the felt need of the suppliant, but they prepare and purify his heart in the very act of offering them. To pray over the prayers of the Psalms is

¹ Bishop Alexander, *Witness of the Psalms*, p. 146.

a spiritual education. The very desires are winnowed, the longings are chastened, yet intensified. The voice of the petitioner changes its tone, as he schools it to utter, not his own crude requests, but the Spirit-taught pleadings of the Psalmist. Hence such prayers pass, as many do not, far beyond the walls of the chamber, the roof of the church, into the ears of the Most High. They form an acceptable sacrifice. The Psalmist prays,—

“Let my prayer be set forth as incense before Thee,
The lifting up of my hands as the evening
sacrifice.”—(cxli. 2.)

In Psalm v. 3 the figure suggested by the translation of the Authorised Version is that of the archer setting his arrow well upon the string, and raising his eye upwards ere he sends it flying to its mark. But the meaning of the Psalmist, who knew more of sacrifice than archery, undoubtedly is,—

“Jehovah, in the morning Thou shalt hear my voice ;
In the morning will I set in order my [sacrifice of]
prayer before Thee,
And will keep watch.”

The Christian who learns to pray in the school of Christ, and breathes the thoughts which the Spirit of Christ suggests, in the words of the Psalms, will not keep watch in vain for an answer of peace.

(2) There is no need to illustrate the buoyant

joyousness of the Psalter, or its notes of deep and poignant sorrow. But these are not days, if ever days were, in which men indulge in too much thanksgiving. Not many "cut short their petitions that they may be longer in praise." The habit of repeating the Psalms regularly, provided devotion be not lost in form, preserves the balance of the soul, and teaches the unthankful heart its deficiencies. But the feature which best deserves attention is the subtle *blending* of joy and sorrow. The fountains of tears and smiles are near together in human life. And the godly man, especially, finds his highest raptures tempered by the recollection of sins and unworthiness, while in his deepest sorrows he holds the key which will unlock the gate of joy. This might seem to imply that the Christian knows neither pure joy nor unmitigated sorrow, that his day is "neither clear nor dark." On the contrary, it is both. Nowhere in devotional literature is such exuberance of joy as in the Psalter, nowhere such sobs of anguished sorrow. But the blending of the two in a single psalm is often very wonderful. It is a shallow criticism that would separate the 27th Psalm into two parts simply because in it "triumph turns trouble." On the other hand, how delicately, naturally, yet gloriously does the "How long, O Lord, wilt thou forget me?" of the

13th Psalm pass into "I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath dealt bountifully with me." It is this blending of moods which makes the 30th Psalm so full of comfort to the mourner, and enables him to pass with the Psalmist from the Weeping which comes in as a guest during the night of trouble, to the Joy which enters with a glad shout in the morning.

(3) That simplicity and depth should be joined in the Psalms is perhaps not in itself remarkable. The deepest truths are the simplest, and the simplest are the deepest. Men are driven to simplicity in the great moments of life, however much they wrap themselves in the folds of cumbersome conventionalism whilst dealing with its surface details. The speech which pierces deep to the heart's core is that which comes direct from the heart's core, without the sophistications and affectations which encumber and obscure much of our mutual intercourse. But in the Psalter this union of depth and simplicity finds a supreme illustration. What can surpass the clear depth of such words as these,—

"With Thee is the fountain of life :

In Thy light do we see light."—(xxxvi. 9.)

The Rabbis have a striking saying: "Do God's will as if it were thy will, and thou shalt find

Him doing thy will as if it were His will." But the aphorism is second-hand. It is drawn from the profoundly simple utterance,—

"Delight thyself also in Jehovah,
And He shall give thee the petition of thy
heart."—(xxxvii. 4.)

A whole philosophy of life is condensed into the pregnant metaphor, "Light is sown for the righteous" (xcvii. 11); and a complementary truth is given in the equally brief and comprehensive words,—

"Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee,
The residue of wrath shalt Thou gird upon Thee."
—(lxxvi. 10.)

In times of great and varied need the simplest words are the most suggestive. What a world of meaning lay in the prayer of Psalm xliii. 5, when, at the time of the great Disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843, Chalmers rose in the midst of the dense congregation in Tanfield Hall, and gave out the words,—

"O send Thy light forth and Thy truth,
Let them be guides to me,
And lead me to Thy holy hill,
Even where Thy dwellings be."

How better can the perplexed ask for guidance

than in the condensed phrase of Psalm v. 8, "Make Thy way plain before my face"? There is material for half a dozen homilies in the word "Thy"; for man's prayers usually run "Make *my* way plain, O Lord." Horatius Bonar expands the thought aptly and beautifully in his hymn, "Thy way, not mine, O Lord"; but the simplicity of the text makes it more catholic and abiding than the details of the commentary.

The subject, however, is an endless one; we have but touched on some aspects of it, and those illustrations are the best which each man finds for himself. It remains only that we close with a few sentences as to the *Christian* method of using the Psalter for the purposes of devotion, etc. All good Christians realize that while, on the one hand, the Psalms rise far above the level of the ordinary religious life, yet, on the other, the loftiest height on which the psalmists stood was lower as regards knowledge of God, wealth of religious privilege, and scope of religious duty, than that attainable by the humblest Christian. "He that is least in the kingdom of heaven" is, or may be, greater than they. The spirit of the Psalms is nearer that of the New Testament than any other Old Testament book, because the Psalmists, more than any other writers, entered

into the depths of those spiritual truths which Christ came to reveal. But the whole horizon of spiritual truth has been indefinitely enlarged by the birth of David's Son and Lord, the coming of the Saviour of David and of all mankind. It is only when Christ dwells in the heart by faith that men become "strong to apprehend what is the length and depth and breadth and height" of that Divine love which to the psalmists was a dimly discerned and unknown sea. Instead, therefore, of reading prematurely a New Testament meaning into Old Testament words, the Christian interpreter brings all Old Testament words into the light of New Testament truth. Often he will find that the saints and seers of old time had, under the guidance of the Spirit, reached much nearer the high-water mark of the New Covenant than he had supposed possible. But in some points they fall conspicuously short; and in all points their teaching has been enriched, deepened, and explained by the fuller Revelation which prophets and psalmists alike "waited for, and sought, but never found." Christ is Lord of the Psalter, as He is of the whole Scripture, and the whole Revelation of God in nature and in man. "In Him all things consist or hold together"; and there are many truths in the Book of Psalms which could by no means "hold together,"

did they not find their unity and their true consummation in Him.

The Christian cannot dwell upon the teaching of the Psalms concerning the righteousness or the mercy of God, especially when the two are conjoined, without turning to the New Testament to explain the mode of that which the Psalmist only knew as a fact. The comparatively superficial character of the teaching of the Psalms concerning sin and forgiveness has already been noticed. Yet even on this subject there are hints—as in xix. 12, li. 4–6, cxliii. 2—which show that it is quite possible to underestimate the view of the Old Testament concerning sin. But only in the glowing light of the revelation of Divine Love in its fulness, only in the light of the Cross and Him who hung upon it, can the true heinousness of sin be seen, or the full depth of mercy be revealed. So it is only in the same light that the meaning of “sanctification”—a word often upon the lips of Old Testament saints—can be understood. That which the Psalmist could hardly comprehend while he prayed for it, the “willing spirit” of li. 12, the “princely heart of innocence,” as Keble calls it, the ability to rise by grace above even the power of temptation,—this, in its fulness, is a *χάρισμα* of the New Covenant. So with every virtue and all spiritual discipline.

The writer of the 131st Psalm gives an exquisite little picture of humility and resignation, unsurpassed perhaps in the Scriptures.

“Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul ;
Like a weaned child with his mother,
My soul is with me as a weaned child.”

But for the only abiding source of that humility, for an explanation of its true character and the power to attain it, we must turn to the New Testament, and learn to sit at His feet who said, “Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls.” The “godly sincerity” of the Old Testament saint is a priceless gift, but it pales in lustre before the *ἐπιλεικρίνεια*, the flawless crystal purity, of the New. And there is a whole range of virtues beyond the ken of the Psalmist, not comprised in “it was said to them of old time,” which belong to the very alphabet of duty under Him whose “I say unto you” brings with it indefinitely increased privilege, and imposes indefinitely increased obligation.

But the Lord of the Psalmist and of the Christian is One. Both Psalmist and Christian form a part of the one great family in Him who “hath made both one, and broken down the middle wall of partition” between them. Both

have had to face the same foes; both have conquered in the same strength; both trusted in the same Redeemer, whom the one saw but dimly in the twilight, while the other has been privileged with unveiled face to behold Him in His glory. Both Psalmist and Christian breathed the same prayers and sang the same songs of thanksgiving below; and both shall join in the new song before the throne, in praise of Him who is the Root and Offspring of David as well as the Bright and Morning Star—Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. ALLELUIA: FOR THE LORD GOD OMNIPOTENT REIGNETH!

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