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own case. And when we have carefully considered them we shall find in them, I think, no coldness, no sarcasm, no heartless attempt to censure and condemn Job, but a genuine endeavour to "admonish" him, as he himself had admonished many (Chap. iv. 3, 4), to strengthen his languid hands and to reknit his sinking knees. S. COX.

THE SIXTEENTH PSALM.

THIS Psalm has several very difficult and disputed passages, which cannot be exhaustively discussed without the use of a learned apparatus more proper to a critical commentary than to the pages of this magazine. I confine myself, therefore, in the main, to an attempt to trace out the train of thought, and to illustrate the Psalmist's argument by comparison and contrast with other views set forth in the Old Testament. In points of grammar, I must ask the reader to take some things for granted, or to verify them for himself.

The title of the Psalm is too obscure and of too little authority to be taken as the starting-point of our exegesis. The word *michtam* is probably a musical term; and, at any rate, all such interpretations as "a golden psalm," "an inscription, epitaph, or epigrammatic poem," "an unpublished poem," are devoid of proof and probability. The words "of David" are also no sure guide. They perhaps imply that the collectors of the Psalter derived this psalm from an earlier collection of "Psalms of David and other Poems;" but they certainly cannot

be taken as authoritative. The Psalm must be allowed to speak entirely for itself.

The Psalmist begins with a prayer and a plea:

Verse 1.—*Preserve me, O God, for I have committed myself to thee.*

The Hebrew verb which the Authorized Version renders, "in thee do I *put my trust*," does not indicate a subjective frame of mind, an attitude of trust and expectancy, but an objective relation of the Psalmist to God as his King and Protector. In a non-religious sense the word is used of a vassal who attaches himself to a suzerain in order to enjoy his protection. (Judges ix. 15; Isa. xxx. 2.) So the religious use of the term rests on the theocratic conception of God's covenant with his people. The Psalmist does not rest on the vague plea of modern subjectivity—"Save me, for I believe, and trust that Thou wilt save me." Nor, on the other hand, does he plead any merit toward God to be recompensed by help in his present necessity. He pleads a covenant relation to God. He is Jehovah's vassal, and his King is identified with his cause, so that he can claim with confidence the help and protection to which the honour of God's name is pledged in virtue of his grace and truth. Thus the plea of our verse, and of such parallel passages as Psa. vii. 1; xxxi. 1; lxxi. 1; cxli. 8, is essentially one with the plea, "for thy name's sake" (Psa. xxv. 11; xxxi. 3); "for the glory of thy name" (Psa. lxxix. 9). This is the form which appropriating faith takes in the Old Testament. Resting on the historical covenant of God with Israel, on the fact that Jehovah has chosen a people for Himself upon earth, the Psalmists

claim the benefits of this covenant grace in the consciousness that, with integrity of heart, they commit themselves to God in loyal obedience. This act of faith resting on the covenant is indivisible from a loyal acceptance of the sovereignty of God's will as expressed in the covenant law. (Psa. xvii. xxvi.)

Verses 2, 3.—I say of Jehovah, "Thou art my Lord;
My weal is not beyond Thee:"
Of the saints that are in the land,
"They are the nobles, in whom is all my delight."

The italics of the English version, *O my soul*, rest on a mere Rabbinical conceit, and are unnecessary if for *thou hast said* we substitute *I say*, which is quite admissible grammatically. The second half of verse 2 is more puzzling. The Authorized Version has followed a Jewish commentator, the elder Kimchi; and the Prayer-book Version, which agrees with the Septuagint and Vulgate, is not very different in its general sense. But a rendering more suitable to the context was adopted by some of the best ancient interpreters, who express the sense, "My weal is not apart from thee." Grammatical precision demands a slight modification of this view. Taken quite literally, the Psalmist's words are, "My weal is not additional to thee." Not merely is God the source of all his weal, but everything which he recognizes as a true good, God actually contains within Himself. (Cf. Psa. lxxiii. 25.)

In the third verse the Hebrew text appears to have suffered a slight corruption. The Authorized Version ignores a small but important word (המה), which can hardly be assumed to be a mere pleonasm.

The only commentator, I believe, who has given an altogether easy grammatical rendering of the Hebrew text as it stands is Hitzig, and he has succeeded only by a hypothesis as to the occasion and general scope of the psalm, in which no one has been bold enough to follow him. Hitzig supposes that the Psalm was written by David to accompany the gifts taken from the spoil of Amalek which he distributed to the elders of Judah. (1 Sam. xxx.) The verse may then be rendered, "These [gifts I dedicate] to the saints in the land, even the nobles," &c.

But while the verse as it stands is hopelessly puzzling, the omission of a single letter (ו, = *and*, after *earth*) gives an excellent sense, and to this critical remedy, which perhaps has some countenance from the old Versions, several of the most cautious commentators have betaken themselves. He who seeks his sole good in God can value men only in their relation to Jehovah, but to those who are God's people he will cling with hearty love. This is the sense of the Psalmist's assertion that the "holy in the land" are in his eyes "noble," invested with reverend dignity, and at the same time objects of his delight. (Cf. Psa. xv. 4.)

Verse 4.—*Many are their sorrows who purchase other gods.*
Their drink offerings of blood will I not offer,
Nor take their names upon my lips.

The rendering *hasten* given in the Authorized Version implies a change of pointing. The verb means properly to "acquire by barter," and those Israelites are meant who have given up Jehovah

in exchange for false gods. (Cf. Jer. ii. 11.) The unhappiness of those who forsake the true God appears here as the necessary converse of the assurance of perfect weal and blessedness in Jehovah. That the singer has in his eye an actual class of his countrymen who had exchanged the all-sufficient God for vain idols is plain. But the assurance that their lot is a lot of many sorrows is not drawn from experience. The tone in which the singer protests that he will have no share in their worship seems rather to imply that they were then in the ascendant, so that a strong temptation to join them was held forth to the man who could not oppose to their seductions the certainties of fellowship with the living God. But to him who has tasted the fulness of joys that is found in the presence of Jehovah (verse 11) it is an inevitable inference that divorce from God must mean abundance of sorrows. And as the contemplation of God as his perfect weal led the Psalmist in verse 3 to express his loving attachment to God's people, so, in a manner strictly parallel, contemplation of the false gods as the principle (if we may so express it) of infinite sorrow leads at once to a burst of aversion from them and their worshippers :

I will not pour out their bloody libations,
Nor will I take their names upon my lips.

This parallelism is most sharply brought out if we suppose, as is otherwise natural, that *their* libations and *their* names mean the libations which the idolaters pour out and the names which they bear on their lips. In Semitic antiquity the very name of a god included a predication of his power, dignity, or vir-

tues; so that even to utter such names as Baal and Molech, that is, *Lord* and *King*, was an act of homage. Hence the precept in Exodus xxiii. 13 (comp. Hosea ii. 17; Zech. xiii. 2), and hence, too, the substitution by later historians of Bosheth, *shameful thing*, for Baal, *Lord*, even in proper names.

The name of a god is of course mainly uttered in prayer, in praise, or in oaths. A more formal act of worship is specified as the pouring out of bloody libations. In the Levitical ritual libations had a very subordinate place, but in the idolatrous worship practised in Israel the drink-offering must have had higher importance, as appears from many references in the Prophets. In particular, libations and incense offered on the house tops formed a frequent feature of domestic idolatry, especially of star worship. (Jer. xix. 13; xxxii. 29; xliv. 17, 18.) The libation was supposed to be actually drunk by the gods (Deut. xxxii. 38), and thus the expression might easily be extended to include the blood of sacrifices, which even in the worship of Jehovah were poured out almost exactly in the same way as libations of wine (cf. Lev. iv. 7 with Sirach l. 15), and was supposed by unenlightened worshippers to be the drink of the deity (Psa. l. 13). It is natural therefore to suppose that libations of sacrificial blood are the offerings here alluded to. But the Psalmist clearly desires to indicate that the bloody offerings in question are in their own nature hideous, marking the worship to which they pertain as detestable. A libation of ordinary animal blood could hardly appear in this light to a Hebrew accustomed to the legal operations with the blood of sacrifices. Nor does it seem

legitimate to suppose, as some commentators have done, that in the Heathen rites alluded to part of the bloody libation was drunk by the worshippers. The natural explanation is to take *blood* in the sense of *human blood* (Hos. vi. 8; Isa. lix. 3). The allusion is to such cruel religions as those of Molech and Chemosh, and the Psalmist gathers up in a single phrase the full horror of a faith which recognized such hideous offerings.

In the first four verses of the Psalm the singer has laid down in general terms the principle of his trust in God and his welfare in Him, deducing the relation to the saints on the one hand and the heathen Israelites on the other which this principle involves. In what follows he returns to his personal relation to God, which he develops in various directions and with great richness and depth.

Verse 5.—*Jehovah is the portion of my share and of my cup. Thou holdest my lot in thy hand.*

The words which are here translated by *portion* and *share* represent respectively a share viewed as a thing measured out and a share assigned by lot (*helek*). The former is frequently used of a portion of food, the latter of a share of spoil or of land—the conquered land of Canaan having been divided by lot. Here, however, we are not to seek a metaphor taken from the usage of either word when standing alone. According to a common Hebrew idiom *the portion of my allotment* means simply the portion allotted to me —*my allotted share.* But a share must be a share of something, and this is indicated by adding *and of my cup.* The sense is, Jehovah is the portion which by

lot has been assigned to me to satisfy my thirst. All the desires and necessities of man's higher life are naturally represented by hunger and thirst, but especially by thirst, as the keener and subtler appetite. Thus we read of a thirst for God's word (Amos viii. 11, 12); but especially the longing of the soul for personal communion with God is spoken of as the thirsting of the soul for the living God. (Psa. xli. 2.) Conversely the joys of this fellowship are "a river of delights" flowing from the fountain of life which is with God, and from which He gives his people to drink. (Psa. xxxvi. 8, 9.) Or, since all these delights are summed up in Him who is Himself the fountain of living waters (Jer. ii. 13), God in Himself is the portion of the believer's cup. What now is added to this idea when we are told that Jehovah as the believer's portion—that is, Jehovah when He presents Himself to man as the satisfaction of all his needs—is a "portion assigned by lot"? Clearly the essence of distribution by lot is that the recipient does not choose for himself. What he receives is determined, not by chance, for that is not at all the Hebrew idea of a lot, but by a higher and Divine destiny. The notion, therefore, as Ewald rightly suggests, is that of prevenient grace. That this idea is not arbitrarily read into the passage appears more clearly from the epithet Portion (*ḥelek, allotted* portion) of Jacob applied to Jehovah in Jeremiah x. 16. This epithet is to be understood by the aid of Deuteronomy iv. 19, where we read that God *allotted* (*ḥalak*) the various false gods to the Gentile nations, whereas (verse 20) "you he took, and brought you out of the iron furnace to be a people appropriated

to himself." When, therefore, the individual believer in the Psalms calls God "my portion" (*ḥelḳi*, Psa. cxix. 57; cxlii. 5), this is simply an application to the personal religious life of the truth, so plainly vindicated by history for the national religious life of Israel, that we did not seek and choose God, but that God has sought and chosen us.

The second half of the verse contains a very unusual grammatical form, which has received a variety of explanations. The Authorized Version has probably taken the right view of the grammatical difficulty; but it is more expressive as well as more exact to translate the verb in its primary sense—"thou holdest my lot in thy hand." The sense is not merely that God disposes (casts) the believer's lot (which would be true also of the unbeliever), but that He holds it fast, that He retains it in his hand. (So the verb is used in Prov. iv. 4.) The Psalmist's lot is not merely determined by Jehovah, but abides with Him who is Himself the portion of his people. (Cf. verse 11.) Thus the clause is in full accord with the fundamental idea of the Psalm, which throughout sets forth what God *is* to the singer, and not merely what He *does* for him. The Authorized Version loses this shade of thought.

Verse 6.—*My share hath fallen to me among joys,*
Yea mine inheritance pleaseth me well.

Literally, "Portions (measured by the line) have fallen to me," &c. The sense is obvious from what precedes. The Psalmist's portion in which he delights is not the portion in the world which Providence has assigned to him, but the share which he has obtained

among the spiritual joys of God's presence. The inheritance, in like manner, is God Himself, or his grace and fellowship.

Verse 7.—I bless Jehovah that he giveth me counsel;
Yea, by night my reins admonish me.

The enjoyment and fellowship of God spoken of in the Bible is never mystical, but always moral. The Psalmist enjoys God as his portion not in a sentimental ecstasy which has nothing in common with daily life, but in the realization of Jehovah's constant presence with him as his counsellor in his duty and walk in the world. He blesses Jehovah that He giveth him counsel. How this constant guidance by God is realized is specified in the second clause of the verse. The reins are opposed to the mouth (Jer. xii. 2), as the heart to the lips (Isa. xxix. 13). Reins and heart are the region of the inmost personal life (Psa. vii. 9; xxvi. 2, &c.), and embrace various functions, intellectual as well as emotional, for which we have distinctive words. *Heart*, for example, stands for *conscience* (1 Sam. xxiv. 5; 2 Sam. xxiv. 10; Job xxvii. 6; compare 1 John iii. 20). So here the reins appear as the organ of the internal influences of God's Spirit on the believer. It is the voice of Jehovah that admonishes the Psalmist through his reins. These admonitions are given by night—in the time of quiet contemplation, when the inner voice is best heard. (Psa. iv. 4; lxiii. 6; Job iv. 13.)

Verse 8.—I set Jehovah continually before me;
When he is at my right hand I waver not.

The Psalmist, who rejoices in God as his portion,

and blesses Him for his continual guidance and counsel, necessarily makes Jehovah the constant object of his thoughts, and seeks to keep Him ever in view. And he looks to Jehovah not only as his guide but as a protector. The protector stands at the right hand of the protected (Psa. cix. 31 ; cxxi. 5), a figure perhaps derived from the way in which a warrior wearing a shield on his left arm would stand to protect another. (But compare also Isa. xli. 13; xlv. 1.)

Verse 9.—Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoiceth,
Yea, also my flesh shall dwell secure.

The translation, *My flesh shall rest in hope*, which is as old as the Septuagint, has led some Jewish and many Christian interpreters to understand this verse of the body resting after death in the hope of resurrection. But this translation is certainly false. The sense is correctly given by Calvin,—" Because God keeps our bodies as well as our souls, David is entitled to ascribe to his flesh a share in this benefit, so that it shall dwell secure." (Cf. 1 Thess. v. 23.)

What is said in the second half of the verse appears as an inference for the future drawn from the present experience of the first half. This relation of the parts of the verse is marked by a change of tense and by the use of a strong conjunction separating the two hemistichs. The joyous certainty of security in fellowship with God is given directly and intuitively to the believer only as a relation of his soul to God. But from this it is a necessary inference of faith that the whole man shall be kept by God, that body as well as soul shall be preserved free from the

fear of evil. This inference can be avoided only by religions which regard the bodily organism as the principle of evil—the prison of the soul, fettering its nobler instincts and dulling its spiritual perceptions. With such a view the Bible has no sympathy. A religion which lays so much stress on man's vocation to lordship over the creatures (Gen. i.; Psa. viii.) necessarily recognizes the bodily organism through which this vocation is realized as something more than a seat of low desires and crass senses. Not the soul, but the soul equipped with a body, constitutes man as God created him, and as He desires to restore him. The body, therefore, must share with the soul the immunity from evil which is insured by fellowship with God. So much is plain. The Psalmist's hope would not be all-sufficient if it embraced the soul and excluded the body. Carry out this thought to its just issue, and we cannot logically stop short of the doctrine of the resurrection. But we must not, therefore, hastily assume that the Psalmist's hopes took so precise a form. What we read in this Psalm is direct matter of faith not yet elaborated into formal dogma. And in studying the development of the idea in verses 10 and 11 we must be careful not to substitute a train of thought, which is easy to our New Testament standpoint, for those direct inferences of personal faith which are far more precious and fertile than those of dialectic.

The spiritual joy of the Psalmist, in his assured fellowship with God, carries with it the certainty of deliverance from bodily woe and relief from the fear of physical evil. Now, the spiritual joy in question

is essentially a positive good, while immunity of the flesh from the fear of evil is a negative thing in itself, and can appear as a positive good only when it takes the form of release from present distress and suffering. Absorbed in the enjoyment of God, the singer cannot turn aside to add, "And no ill shall assail my flesh," unless as a matter of fact his flesh is at present assailed by ills over which he rises victorious in the contemplation of his all-sufficing relation to God. And with this it agrees that in the first verse we found a prayer for preservation. The nature of the evil from which preservation is asked in verse 1, and grasped with assurance in the verse now before us, must of course remain obscure. But the thought of our verse seems most natural on the supposition that the Psalmist is exposed, not only to dangers which his faith enables him to despise, but to actual physical distress and pain, over which he rises in triumphant hope. Perhaps verse 4 justifies us in concluding that this suffering, whatever its nature, has come on the singer in connection with the divided state of Israel and the apparent prevalence of an idolatrous party. At least, his condition is such as to hold death before his eyes, and assurance of relief to his flesh is given to him only in the certainty that Jehovah will deliver his soul even from death and the grave. So he continues,—

Verse 10.—*For thou wilt not give up my soul to Sheol;*
Neither wilt thou suffer thy beloved to see the pit.

The rendering, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol," is followed by most of the Versions. But this is certainly wrong, and the Septuagint Version, quoted in Acts ii. 27, ought also in all probability to

be rendered, "Thou wilt not forsake my soul to Hades"; *i.e.*, so that it fall into the power of Hades. [Compare Psa. xxxvi. (xxxvii.) 33.—LXX.] In the second half of the verse the Versions understand *corruption*, instead of the *pit*. There are, in fact, two Hebrew words of the same form but of different origin. One is masculine, and means putrefaction or corruption (Job xvii. 14); the other is feminine, and means the *deep*, or the *pit*—an epithet, not of the grave, but of Sheol, or Hades. The parallelism demands the latter sense here; and, in truth, the other meaning hardly occurs, except in Job *l.c.*

Verse 11.—*Thou wilt shew me the path of life.*
Fulness of joy is in thy presence;
Delights are in thy right hand continually.

To the Psalmist deliverance from the fear of death presents itself, not as a mere negative thing, but as the positive conferring of life. The counterpart of seeing (*i.e.*, experiencing) the horrors of deep Sheol is that God makes him to know the path of life. So in the Proverbs the way of life is constantly contrasted with paths that lead down to death and Sheol (ii. 19; v. 6; xv. 24; &c.). The way of life is not merely a way that terminates in life, but such a way that the whole atmosphere surrounding him that walks in it is life and light. This can be no other than the way of righteousness (Prov. xii. 28), those straight paths of Jehovah in which the righteous walk while sinners stumble in them. This path of life is that in which verse 8) the Psalmist's eyes are fixed on Jehovah, and his steps are upheld by his guidance. It is, in the words of Psalm cxvi. 9, a walk before Jehovah in the land of the living. And so the

joys, without which life would not be life (cf. Deut. xxx. 15), and the satiating fulness of which makes this a perfect life, are those which can be enjoyed only in access to God, and which radiate on man from his countenance. *In thy presence*, is literally *beside thy countenance*. (Cf. Psa. cxl. 13; xxi. 6.) Here, then, we return to the thought that rules the whole Psalm. The joys of the righteous are not simply given by God, but consist in the enjoyment of God. They are the pleasures that are constantly and abidingly in his hand. So in Psalm xvii. the happiness of the Psalmist is to see God's face, to be satiated with his likeness. This is no metaphysical contemplation of God, no abstract intellectual act, but the moral enjoyment of fellowship with Jehovah, of his love and grace, of the smile of the Divine favour, the light of his gracious countenance lifted up on the believer. (Psa. iv. 6, 7.)

No consideration of these last verses can be complete without some discussion of their relation to the doctrine of immortality. Let me, with a view to this purpose, first resume the course of thought which we have traced in the Psalm.

The Psalmist has a direct and personal consciousness of a relation to God as *his Lord*, which forbids him to turn aside after idols, or in any way to conceive to himself a good beyond God, or a dignity beyond consecration to Him. For God is his inheritance—a portion awarded to him by supreme grace, and rich enough to satisfy all his desires. This portion he finds in ethical fellowship with God, in continually hearing his guiding voice, in setting Him

ever before his eyes, in being ever sustained by his unfailing hand. Such a relation to God bears in it all the elements of joy. It raises the singer victorious above all evil, raises him above the pains and sorrows of his physical state into the assurance that his flesh too shall rest secure from the fear of ill.

This is plain to him. For the joys of God's fellowship are the joys of life. The poet is indeed incapable of conceiving any joy otherwise than as a life-joy. To him as to his whole nation, and to every man and every race which looks at these matters with fresh and natural vision, life is the potentiality of joy, and joy the manifestation and energy of life. And, again, he is incapable of associating life and joy with the shadowy existence of the disembodied soul in the land of darkness. We are accustomed to speak of the doctrine of Sheol as a doctrine of the immortality, the deathlessness, of the soul. But this is to read Old Testament teaching in the light of Western ideas. To a philosopher like Plato, who views the body only as a prison-house and a restraint, it is natural to speak of the life, the deathlessness, of the soul. But the Old Testament, as we have seen, has nothing in common with the estimate of the body and the bodily life on which such language rests. There is no reason to suppose that there ever was a time when the Hebrews held the annihilation of the soul in death. But the continued existence of the *Rephaim*—the weak and pithless shades that fill the realms of Sheol—is never thought of as life. Nay, it is the very contrary of life, opposed to it as darkness is to light, as shadow to substance, as weakness to strength, as inanity to joy. Nor does the develop-

ment of the hope of immortality in the religion of Revelation stand in any other than a negative relation to the doctrine of Sheol—except, of course, in so far as even that doctrine is at least a protest against absolute and crass materialism. The Bible vanquishes the fear of death, not by asserting the immortality of the soul against pure materialism, but by carrying the notion of life in its full and genuine sense beyond death, and so dispelling the dreary hopeless darkness of the land of silence and forgetfulness where Jehovah has set no memorial of Himself, where no voice is raised to praise Him, where love and hatred and envy are perished, where all the eager energies of life are sunk into oblivion and decay.[1]

How little the notion of life and immortality is attached by Scripture to the mere persistence of the soul after death may be readily seen by contrasting the use of the word *immortality* (*ἀθανασία*) in the New Testament with its familiar Platonic sense. Occurring only thrice in all, the word is once applied to God, who alone hath immortality (1 Tim. vi. 16), and twice to the immortality conferred on the mortal nature of those who at the second coming of Christ are clad with the heavenly and incorruptible body without tasting of death (1 Cor. xv. 53, 54).[2] And that our Lord Himself consistently carried out the Old Testament view, and never conceived of the continued existence of the soul as true life, is plain from Mark xii. 26, *seq.*, where the thesis that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, is taken

[1] Psa. cxv. 17 ; lxxxviii. 10, *seq.*; vi. 5 ; Eccles. ix. &c.

[2] The adjective *immortal* does not occur in the New Testament.

as a direct proof of the doctrine of the resurrection, not of the continued existence of the patriarchs in Sheol.

And so, to return to our Psalm, that life upheld by fellowship with God which the Psalmist actually feels within him, pulsating through every fibre of his nature, and lifting up his heart with that buoyant exultant joy which belongs only to intense consciousness of the highest potence of vitality—this glorious life not only stands in sharpest contrast to the gloom and weakness of Sheol, but wrestles victoriously with the fear of Sheol, and asserts even for the weak and suffering body the right, the certainty, of restoration and life. And, in truth, how can it be otherwise? For what is death save the weakening and failure of the energies of life? (Cf. Isa. xiv. 10.) If in Sheol all these energies are faded and cease, it is certain that so long as they are fresh and full death is absolutely excluded. And the life in which the Psalmist exults is not dependent on bodily things, but is drunk directly from fellowship with God. Therefore, the weakness of the body cannot quell the energy of life, but, conversely, the body cannot fail as long as God upholds the life, so long as He, true to his covenant love, refuses to forsake the Psalmist's soul and suffer it to sink into Sheol. In short, the continuance of *life*, as distinguished from the persistence of the soul after death, is to the Psalmist the indispensable condition of continued fellowship with God. But fellowship with God is not a thing of this world, subject to fate and fortune, compelled to bend before bodily weakness and physical decay. That fellowship is a sovereign, a life-giving energy, to which the power of death itself must yield.

The whole argument is most closely bound up with the unvarying Old Testament doctrine that in death there is no revelation of God, in Sheol no voice to praise Him (Psa. vi. xxx. &c.). In the words of Jesus, He is not the God of the dead but of the living. They cannot cease to live whom God has not ceased to love.

It is manifest that this is the very argument by which Jesus confounded the Sadducees, that it is the only argument which can raise the hope of immortality from an edifying speculation, a solemnizing probability, to an immediate and personal certainty of life. Like every argument by which immediate certainty can be produced it is strictly transcendental and ideal. But not only does the Psalmist construct his argument without reference to induction and experience, he reasons, we may say, in the teeth of all experience and all induction.

This fact has puzzled expositors and has tempted some to hamper the conclusion by limitations of which the Psalm itself gives no hint. Not the most pious Israelite, says Kurz ("Zur Theologie der Psalmen," p. 72), could think himself exempt from the invariable universality of the truth that all must die. The singer's hope must be subject to this necessary restriction. His certainty is only that he shall not be cut off in the midst of a life still strong to work and surrounded by tasks to which it is called. The singer, says Kurz, only hopes not to die till his work for God's kingdom is done.

Now, no one can deny that the Old Testament recognizes a great difference between the death by which a man is cut down in his prime (Isa. xxxviii.

10; Psa. cii. 24, &c.) and that which takes away the old man satiated with life (Authorized Version, *full of days*). The former is the most grievous of lots, the special punishment of the wicked (Psa. lv. 23), the sign of Jehovah's anger; the latter is contemplated with calmness, and recognized as a fit close to a life of felicity. (Job v. 26.)

But in order to determine how far these views admit of application to the train of thought laid down in our Psalm, it is necessary to consider their origin, and in particular to look at the religious contemplations with which they are bound up. If all considerations of the relation of God to man and of Divine retribution are set aside, the bitterness of death is naturally proportional to the intensity and sweetness of the life which it cuts short. When the failing energies of the old man forbid him to throw himself with zest into expectations for the future, or even to feel any keen relish in the sense of present life,[1] it is not unnatural for him to measure his sum of happiness by a retrospect of the past, and to confess himself, in Hebrew idiom, to have enjoyed his fill of life. And this vein of contemplation becomes more easy, and separates itself more completely from any spirit of querulousness, in a man whose days have been spent in the pursuit of larger interests than those of his own individual life; who has lived for others as well as for himself, for objects that do not die with him; and who, when unable to take any longer an active part in the furtherance of these objects, can bequeath his share in the future to the stronger generation of his sons and grandsons. And so, to

[1] Compare 2 Sam. xix. 35, *seq.*; Eccles. xii. 1.

the Israelite whose whole life was absorbed by intense devotion to the Theocracy, it was no small meed of happiness to see the good of Jerusalem all the days of his life; to see children's children and peace upon Israel. (Psa. cxxviii.)

It is obvious, however, that this picture of the things that go to make up a full life to which nothing remains to be added that can make it a matter of desire to live longer, contains more than the purely natural elements with which we started above. The good of Jerusalem, the peace of Israel, involve religious ideas, and the relation of these to the natural features of the conception must be looked at more closely. The thing, larger than himself, which claimed the service of the Israelite's life, and in which he sought the highest good in which it was possible for him to participate, was the Theocracy, the visible kingdom of God administered by the unfailing power of Jehovah, executing his covenant with the fathers in accordance with the law of his eternal righteousness. To Israel following Jehovah was promised all felicity, while rebellion was menaced with every woe. The effect of this ordinance was not, as some have superficially supposed, to reduce the whole religion of Israel to a selfish service of God for the sake of earthly reward. The precepts and promises of the Pentateuch, however personal in form, are not addressed to individuals as such, but to Israel collectively. The primary notions are those of national obedience and national reward; the ethical ideal is the establishment of national righteousness, and the felicity of the nation is the reward in which the felicity of the individual is to be found. The leading

blessings and chastisements rehearsed in such passages as Levit. xxvi., Deut. xxviii., good harvests or famine, peace or war, victory or defeat, and the like, are such as cannot visit the nation without involving the innocent along with the guilty. A religion which so fully recognizes the solidarity of the nation in all religious and moral interests, which places the hope of temporal felicity not simply in the maintenance of personal innocence, but in the establishment of social righteousness, does not lie open to the reproach of setting forth a mean and selfish ideal. No one who knows human nature will suppose it possible to induce a man to pursue a great social and ethical aim—the setting fast of righteousness in the earth—merely with a selfish view to his personal share in the temporal felicity with which righteousness is rewarded. The whole scheme is such as to make the moral aim the one absorbing thought of the godly Israelite, while the assurance of temporal felicity as the tangible reward of righteousness serves to give to all human faculties and desires their due recognition in harmony with the grand postulate of religion that the righteous God orders the whole universe in accordance with the law of righteousness.

It is manifest, then, that the whole tendency of this scheme was to carry the highest hopes and interests of the Israelite beyond himself. His life-work did not die with him, for it was devoted to the service of a covenant God in the pursuit of righteousness, the good of Israel. And when his work was over, when he had no more force to spend on the object so dear to him; when his children had risen up to fill his place, to inherit his duties and privileges; when, with

all this, he could say, looking back on the past, that he had seen the good of Jerusalem all the days of his life, and in this reflection realized as an actual fact of his experience the reality of God's righteous and gracious kingship, then his life possessed an æsthetic completeness and an intrinsic satisfactoriness which made its close at such a point natural and free from bitterness. He was satisfied with length of days (Psa. xci. 16), and, for the rest, he knew that the sons of God's servants shall dwell, and their seed be established, before Him. (Psa. cii. 28.)

Perhaps even the experience of God's goodness in participation in the good of Jerusalem was not so indispensable an element in this picture of a full life as may at first sight be supposed. Even national calamity conceived as judgment on national sin was a manifestation of God's righteousness, with a gracious as well as a penal meaning, to which the godly in Israel could not refuse their deepest sympathy. That the purifying judgments, directed according to the principle of joint responsibility for national sin, were shared by the godly man himself, could not destroy his sympathy with the Divine work, but rather was the only provision by which that sympathy could be purged from all selfish taint. And so, though the believer, whose life-work was done, might have to look back, not on placid years of God-fearing prosperity, but on a long and stern battle for the right, fought amidst much sin and much suffering, he had still no cause to think his life vain. God at least had upheld him in his work. He had carried it on to the end; amidst all that was dark in the dispensations of Providence it yet had been made

clear to him in his sorest troubles that Jehovah is righteous, and loveth righteous deeds.

This is not the place for an attempt to develop these thoughts more precisely, to determine the exact extent to which the subordination of individual interests to the grand aim of setting fast God's righteousness on earth could enable the faith of the Old Testament to dispense with the confirmation of personal prosperity, even where there was no clear hope of resurrection to final retribution in the future consummation of God's kingdom. But one thing at least is clear: there is nothing in this whole line of contemplation which can render death at all tolerable to the man who still feels the energy of life fresh within him. There is at least one promise of the law to which it is impossible to give other than an individual reference—Exodus xxiii. 26: *The number of thy days will I fulfil.* Just in proportion as the whole intensity of the life of the godly was concentrated on the cause of God on earth, must it be to him absolute failure, and, therefore, absolute misery, to be excluded, I do not say from the triumph, but from the battle-field, of the great cause. To be cut off in the mid-time of his days, to be withdrawn to the land of darkness when he has still a voice to praise God and bear good witness to Him, to see Jehovah no longer in the land of the living (Psa. vi. xxx. cii.; Isa. xxxviii. &c.), that is a fate in which no drop of comfort can be found. It can have no other meaning than that God has refused to pardon the sufferer's sin, has refused to give him a place in his all-conquering host, a name in his holy army; that in hot anger He sweeps away his soul with

sinners and his life with men of blood (Psa. xxvi. 9.; lv. 23, &c.). Of course, it is not to be imagined that a sharp objective line can be drawn between a life which ends in due time, acknowledged by God and with the peaceful sense of acceptance with Him, and one which is broken off by God's anger, and implies rejection from his presence. The mere number of a man's years can never have been conceived to be an adequate criterion. Even in old age and grey hairs, the singer of Psalm lxxi. still cries eagerly that he may not be forsaken in failing strength, that he may be spared still to declare God's arm and might. Or, on the other hand, Elijah, in the prime of his days, after striking one great stroke for God's kingdom, can sit down and say: "Enough, Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers." But the distinction is none the less real because defined by a fluctuating and, in great measure, subjective boundary. A future state which has as its essential quality the cessation of all the energy and effort of life, can commend itself only as a place of rest (Isa. lvii. 2.), and so can appear other than evil only to the "wearied in strength" (Job iii. 17, margin), to the man all whose force for life on earth is spent, and who seeks no more than peaceful repose.

Now, we find many passages in the Old Testament in which these ideas are applied to the case of a man face to face with some deadly trouble. Sometimes the sufferer, who feels himself to be cut off in the midst of his days, is oppressed with a sense of rejection from God. (Isa. xxxviii.; Psa. lxxxviii.) At other times, while the affliction is keenly felt as an expression of God's wrath, the sufferer is able to

wrestle through the sense of wrath to assurance of forgiveness and restoration. (Psa. vi. xiii. xxx.) At other times we see less of struggle and more of placid, or even exultant, confidence that God does accept the person and the service of the singer, and that, therefore, he shall not die, but live, and recount the works of Jah. (Psa. cxviii. lxxi. cxvi.)

But in all these cases, I conceive, the argument is quite distinct from that of our Psalm. We have here no struggle between apprehension of God's wrath and hope in his salvation. Life is not pleaded for as a pledge of the forgiveness of the Psalmist's sin, the acceptance of his person and service. There is no trace of the thought, "Let me not die now, when my work is undone and my life imperfect, and when therefore thou canst end them only because thou rejectest them wholly." The whole Psalm moves in a serene atmosphere of the fullest assurance. The hope of continued life has no reference whatever to the singer's age or life-work, or anything that is in him. That hope is the direct fruit of God's continued love. It is impossible to suppose the Psalmist tacitly to add that though he hopes for life now, a day must come when life can no longer be an object of desire, when his wearied frame shall gladly sink into the grave. What makes life worth living is, on the view of this Psalm, not any energy that decays in old age, but that communion of love with God which can never fail.

It is objected that this argument, if it proves anything, proves too much—that if it gives assurance of recovery from one mortal sickness, it implies in general that physical death can have no hold on him

who stands in God's grace. But it is to be observed that life and death are here apprehended, not in their physical and empirical manifestation, but in their ideal qualities. The life which the Psalmist knows to be undying is *the continual energy of loving fellowship with God.* The death to which this life can never yield is the silence of the land of forgetfulness, where there is no revelation and no praise of God. These two ideas are embodied for the Psalmist under the form of life in this world, on the one hand, and death and Sheol on the other. Now the religious consciousness can never be satisfied by asserting a noumenal transcendental truth without applying it to actual phenomenal experience. The indissolubleness of the life in God is to the Psalmist a present reality. As such it must approve itself true under the present forms and conditions of his existence, that is, in physical life as contrasted with physical death. In no other way can he conceive the great truth as present and practical. It would be ridiculous for the inspired singer, who possesses an ideal truth in ideal certainty, to pause in the fulness of his faith, and reflect on the empirical fact that, after all, no man escapes death. He knows that he cannot yield to death in the only form in which he fears it, namely, as separation from God; and he conceives this immunity in the only form in which he has any means of conceiving it, namely as continued physical life. It is true that this persuasion is a paradox. It is true that so high a confidence, so unconditionally expressed, can reign to the exclusion of all doubt and fear only in a moment of highest elevation, and that the same

singer, under a sense of sin and weakness, of failing strength and of God's displeasure, must soon have passed through bitter experiences such as we read of in other psalms—experiences far removed from the joyful confidence and energy of the words before us. But so long as the strong sense of full loving communion with God which our Psalm expresses remains undimmed, no doubt can receive entrance. What we call physical impossibilities never had any existence for the faith of the Old Testament, which viewed every physical condition as implicitly obedient to Jehovah's law of righteousness. So long, then, as the Psalmist stands in unfailing fellowship with God he must live, and cannot cease to live. It is only when the sense of sin arises as the consciousness of *impeded* fellowship with God that there can arise at the same time a sense of uncertainty and limitation in the hope of life.

Thus the paradox of our Psalm resolves itself in the one great Old Testament paradox—Jehovah, a God of boundless love and grace, admitting man into fullest fellowship with Himself, and yet a God who has no fellowship with sinners. A God merciful and gracious, but yet who cannot acquit the guilty. And so long as this paradox remained unsolved it was not possible for the Old Testament saints to reach a clear and consistent hope of immortality. They could only vibrate between opposing views. Where the sense of sin standing between man and God was swallowed up in the confidence of full acceptance they reached forth to the glorious hopes of our Psalm, and death and all evil vanished before the light of God's love. But when this brightness

passed away and the sense of sin and wrath lay heavy on them, when man's weakness and nothingness before God stamped all life as fleeting and shadowy, they sank back almost to despair (Psa. lxxxviii.), or at least lived almost habitually in a faith which contented itself with the thought that as all have sinned, all must die, and sought only to realize a sense of forgiveness and acceptance within the limits of this irrevocable doom. (Psa. xc. &c.)

The Psalter includes psalms which express the whole gamut of Old Testament feeling on the subject of death, and so bears witness, on the one hand, how little there was any fixed and settled doctrine on the topic; and, on the other hand, how wisely the Old Testament church refused to exclude from her liturgy any expression of religious feeling which, however paradoxical it might seem, bore its own reason within itself. That the sixteenth Psalm delineates an ideal which throughout the Old Testament dispensation was never realized fully,—that is, in a whole life,—but which only expressed the highest climax of subjective conviction, was not felt to detract from its religious truth. Nay, in religion the ideal *is* the true. The destiny of him who is admitted into full fellowship with God *is* life, and if that fellowship has never yet been perfectly realized it must be realized in time to come in the consummation of God's kingdom and righteousness. This, like other glorious promises of God, is deferred because of sin; but, though deferred, is not cancelled. Thus the psalm, originally an expression of direct personal persuasion, must necessarily, in its place in the Old Testament liturgy, have acquired a prophetic significance, and so must

have been accepted as parallel to such highest anticipations of eschatological prophecy as Isaiah xxv 8, "He hath swallowed up death for ever."

Individual worshippers participating in the Temple service of praise would not, in general, appropriate the psalm with the same feeling of immediate conviction which belongs to its original composition. The psalm, accepted as prophetic, could most readily have a personal application in so far as every Israelite might hope to see with his own eyes the glorious consummation of God's kingdom. This would be parallel to the way in which we find in the Apostolic Churches a wide-spread hope of living till the second coming of Christ. Or, failing this, it is probable that, even in Old Testament times, the psalm might be viewed in the light of that doctrine of the resurrection which appears in connection with the destruction of death in the prophecy quoted above (Isa. xxvi.), and which, at a later date, is formulated in the Book of Daniel.

We may say, then, that in the mouth of the Psalmist himself our psalm did not set forth a remote prophecy or a religious problem, but a truth of direct spiritual intuition. But accepted into the Old Testament liturgy as an expression of the faith of Israel, and so confronted with that experience of sin and imperfect communion with God of which the Old Testament was so sensible, it necessarily became part of a problem which runs through the whole dispensation, while at the same time it was a help towards the solution of the problem. Like other psalms in which the ideal is developed in the teeth of the empirical, it came to possess a prophetic value for

the Church, and it was felt to set forth truth only in so far as it was transferred from the present to the future.

Nor could it be otherwise so long as the psalm was taken on the lips of men who only in a passing ecstasy of faith could feel their fellowship with God to be absolute and indissoluble. So soon as this joyous consciousness is crossed by the sense of abiding and indwelling sin, the whole ground of the Psalmist's present conviction is broken. Where the soul is not wholly absorbed in God and the heart not united to do his will, there the life which is inalienable is not yet present in that force by which it triumphs over death and the grave.

But when He was manifested among men who bore unbroken through all his life the absolute consciousness of sinless fellowship with God, He in whom man was indeed bound to God by bonds indissoluble, then the words of the psalm were no longer an ideal of the future but a present and abiding reality. *Him God raised up, loosing the cords of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it* (Acts ii. 24).

The psalm is fulfilled in Christ, because in Christ the transcendental ideal of fellowship with God which the psalm sets forth becomes a demonstrated reality. And becoming true of Christ, the psalm is also true of all who are his, and in the Psalmist's claim to use it for himself the soundness of his religious insight is vindicated; for Christ faced death not only for Himself but as our Surety and Head. The bond that bound his life to God is also the bond to bind us to God. He identified Him-

self wholly with us and our sins. Laden with our guilt He descended into the valley of the shadow of death; and if his union with God is stronger than the power of death, it is because his righteousness is stronger than our sins.

Thus in Christ the ideal of life eternal in God, of a life superior to all destructive forces, is made a reality. It does not, indeed, become so under the very form in which our Psalmist conceives of it. We no longer feel entitled to argue from our acceptance with God to victory over physical disease and deliverance from physical death; but that is not because our hope is less high, but because in the light of the New Testament mere physical death is seen as a thing wholly disconnected with the spiritual death of alienation from God, which, under physical form, is the real evil over which the singer of our psalm feels himself victorious. It is our New Testament hope that death itself does not for a moment interrupt full and joyous life-fellowship with God. For the Christian, Sheol, the place of forgetfulness, exists no more, and the hope of them that live and of them that die alike is that we shall ever be with the Lord.

W. ROBERTSON SMITH.

ON THE EPISTLES OF ST. PETER.

THE SECOND EPISTLE.

AN inquiry such as we have hitherto been endeavouring to make into the characteristics of St. Peter's style must, when it comes to deal with the Second Epistle, be mainly directed against the objections of those who have concluded that this