
A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

THE FIRST PSALM.

1. The Author of the Psalm.

No Scripture of the Old Testament is dearer to the Christian heart than that which contains the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs of the Hebrew Church. And yet, familiar as the Psalter is to us, and though we set so high a value upon it, for want of a scientific acquaintance with its contents, much of its beauty and force are lost even to those of us who love it most. Happily it is quite possible for good men to get much good, and even the purest spiritual good, from inspired writings with which they have no critical acquaintance; but those who are most independent of the aids of criticism are precisely those who are most thankful for them: those who habitually find spiritual nutriment in the Psalms will be the first to welcome whatever casts new light upon them or evolves new meaning from them. A man, as he strolls through field and copse, may take the sincerest delight in the beauty and fragrance of the wild flowers which spring beside his path, although he be ignorant of their very names and quite unable to distinguish the one from the other by their differences of structure and habit; but if he master the rudiments of botanical science, if he acquaint himself with their names, seasons, habitats, if he learn to mark the specialties of structure by which they are related and differenced, he will both be apt to discover them where he had not been wont to find them, and be sure to have his interest in them greatly enhanced. And it is thus with the reader of Scripture. Any thoughtful and devout man may find spiritual teaching and refreshment in the Psalms,

for instance, although he be ignorant of the very rudiments of historical and literary criticism; but let him master those rudiments, nay, let him only have the results of learned and sympathetic criticism placed within his reach, and these flowers of inspired song will take a new interest and an added beauty in his eyes, and disclose charms and meanings he had not recognized in them before.

Let us take as an illustration the very first psalm in the Psalter, not because it is by any means a favourable illustration, but because it is a familiar and therefore a convenient one. The first question we ask about it is, Who wrote this Psalm? A simple question enough, and yet, apparently, an unanswerable question. For the Psalm has no superscription. No one of the inspired writers either claims it for himself or attributes it to any of his brethren. And yet how much depends on the authorship! If we know who wrote a song, the character of the writer largely helps us to the meaning of his words. If we know *who* wrote a song, we know approximately *when* it was written; and the spirit and conditions of the age in which he lived go far to interpret what he wrote. And this is just as true of inspired as of any other songs; for, though the truth of God is one and the same in all ages, yet He reveals that one unchanging truth in many forms, adapting its forms to the needs and capacities of the age to which it is addressed. Not only did the one Divine truth take very different forms in times so far apart as those of Moses and of Christ; there is an amazing difference in its forms even in times so near to each other and so closely related as those of David and Solomon, as we see the moment we compare Solomon's proverbs with David's psalms. In point of time there is but a single generation between them; and yet how vast is the interval between them both in substance and in style!

We may be sure, therefore, that if we could answer the question, Who wrote the first Psalm? if we could thus

determine its date as well as its authorship, the answer would largely help us in reading and interpreting the Psalm.

Must we, then, give up all hope of obtaining a help so valuable? By no means. So long, indeed, as we come to the study of Holy Writ in a reflective and devout mood, there is hardly any question to which we should despair of finding an answer, if that answer will be really helpful to us. And as for *this* question, there is an answer to it, so probable as to be almost certain, at the service of any reader who will be at the pains of looking for it. Indeed I know of few better exercises to which a novice in the study of the Word could be put than that of discovering this answer for himself. The facts on which it rests are not recondite; it tasks no scholarship to reach them, requires nothing but a little thought and observation; and, though the evidence is circumstantial rather than direct, it lies on the very surface of the Psalm, and may be found by any who will but seek it.

It is with the hope of shewing the ordinary reader how, simply by using his own brain and heart on facts either perfectly familiar to him or well within his reach, he may find new meaning and new interest in many Scriptures, that I proceed to indicate the chain of cumulative evidence and the simple and obvious course of reasoning by which the authorship of this Psalm is determined, and its verses are made to grow more significant.

1. The first point to be borne in mind is that, though the Psalter seems to be but one book, it really consists of *five* books, five successive collections of poems or hymns, which were given to the world—edited and published, as we should say—at five periods widely removed from each other. Each of these books closes, both in the English and the Hebrew Bibles, with a doxology, and is thus divided from that which follows it. By these doxologies we know where one book ends and another begins. The first book was probably

"published" in the reign of Solomon; the second and third not till the time of Hezekiah; the fourth and fifth not till after the captivity in Babylon. So that, instead of being a single book, by a single author, published by him in his lifetime, the Psalter is really a collection of five "books of praise," to each of which various authors contributed, and was published at various dates extending over five or six hundred years. Of this general fact there is no doubt, whatever diversities of opinion may obtain on other facts, or on the details of this fact, among the critics of different lands and ages. Neither in the synagogue nor in the church is there any authority which denies the Psalter to be five successive collections of psalms made at different dates, from that of Solomon to that of the return from the Captivity. Indeed both the Jewish and the Christian commentators have long harped on the fact that, as in the Hebrew law there are five books (what we call the Pentateuch), so in the Hebrew hymnal there is also a pentateuch, a fivefold songful response to the law that came by Moses.

And this undisputed fact helps us thus. The first Psalm has always been regarded as the prologue, preface, introduction, both to the first book, and to the whole Psalter. If then the Psalter, whether by the wisdom of God or by the device of man, is a fivefold response to the fivefold Law, what should we naturally expect to be the subject, the theme, of the very first Psalm, the psalm which introduces all the rest? What, but the very Law, or the praise of that very Law, to which the whole Psalter is a songful response? This *is* its theme. It sings the happy lot of the man who loves and keeps the Divine law; and contrasts with his happy lot the miserable doom of the man who breaks and scorns that law. And, surely, if the Psalter was intended to be a songful response to the Law, and to shew us how to make God's statutes our songs, no theme could be more appropriate than this. It strikes the keynote,

and gives the *motif*, of the grand and complex chorus which follows it.

2. The first book of the Psalter begins with Psalm i. and ends with Psalm xli., at the close of which we have the doxology: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting: Amen and Amen." Now this first collection or book consists, with only four exceptions, of Psalms attributed to David. Of the four anonymous psalms contained in it, our psalm is one. And the conclusion at which the critics have arrived is the very simple and reasonable one,—that whoever edited the first collection of David's psalms also wrote the psalm with which it opens, as a sort of editorial preface or introduction to all that came after it.

Who was this editor? Think. If the first collection of David's poems was published during the reign of Solomon, whom should we select as the most likely man to collect and give them to the world? We should select a poet; for who so fit as a poet to edit poems? We should select a man who was attached to the service of the temple, and bent on augmenting the splendour and charm of its liturgy and ritual, since *he* would feel a special and profound interest in the hymns that were to be introduced, or had been introduced, into its worship. We should select a man who loved David, and who therefore would spare no pains in collecting and publishing his poems in their most perfect form.

Now if we had to select such a man as this from Solomon's court, whither should we turn, whom should we choose? Should we not turn to the throne itself, and say to him that sat on it, "*Thou* art the man, thou of all men, for this task"? Solomon was himself a poet. If "he spake three thousand proverbs," "his songs were a thousand and five." Solomon loved the temple which he had built, and the worship in which he himself took so conspicuous a part. And Solomon loved the father who had loved him and

preferred him before all his sons, and would, we may be sure, delight to do him honour and to keep his memory green by collecting his psalms for public use. In short, all the indications, all the probabilities, point to Solomon as the editor of the first book of Psalms, and therefore as the author of the Psalm which stands first in it and introduces it.

3. But are there any facts which confirm these probabilities? There are several facts, great and small.

Here, for instance, is a most weighty fact. The whole tone, the moral and spiritual tone, of the first Psalm is that of the period which scholars know as that of the *Chokmah*, the time in which the *proverbial* Scriptures were written; the age in which men expressed their conceptions of truth in wise saws, weighty aphorisms, well balanced sentences, witty epigrams, in apologues and compressed parables; the age of which Solomon himself was the crowning illustration and ornament. Such a style of thought and art denotes a time of peace, leisure, reflection: for it is only when men are at leisure from themselves, from the frets of care and doubt, from the stings of the stronger and more terrible passions, that they seek to crowd and crystallize the experience of a lifetime into portable and precious jewels of speech, and to polish them till they dazzle all eyes. The first Psalm is characterized by this sententious, epigrammatic, proverbial style. In its very form it is, as Dr. Perowne has pointed out, "little more than the expansion of a proverb." Its tone is calm and composed. There is no throb of passion in it, no struggle with the difficult and terrible problems of human life, no sense even of its haunting and insoluble mysteries. It breathes none of that despondency, that passionate questioning of the equity of Divine Providence, that despair of vindicating the ways of God to men, which were bred in David's heart as he was hunted through the hills and forests by Saul, and in the poets of the Captivity by the miseries of defeat, exile, and

hope deferred. The author's mind is as a quiet stream which clearly reflects in its bosom the tranquil shadows of a tranquil day. He is not agitated by doubt, nor torn by the struggle to reconcile his convictions with facts that seem to contradict them. He does not cry, "Why do the wicked prosper? or, why are the righteous cast down?" He is quite sure that the wicked will *not* prosper, that in the hour of trial they will prove as chaff on the mountain threshing-floors swept by the mountain winds. He is equally sure that the good *will* prosper, that they will be as the tree whose roots are nourished by an ever flowing stream, whose leaf does not wither, whose fruit does not fail. And this is precisely that simple uncomplicated theory of human life which we find reflected from every page of the Book of Proverbs; according to which a man has but to be wise, morally wise that is, and all will be well with him, and only foolish, *i.e.* bad, to come to a bad end. A theory so simple, so unqualified, which takes no note of the delays of Providence and the defeats of hope, in which the moral colours are not differentiated, but all things are either black or white, is possible only in a simple and tranquil time. Solomon, in the peaceful prosperous years with which his reign opened, and before the mournful shadows of doubt, bred of his tyranny and vices, which clouded his later years had darkened over him, may have held such a theory to be an adequate expression of his experience; but David, taught to think more largely by the troubled and turbulent life by which he was trained, would have found such a theory wholly inadequate, as would also those later Psalmists who saw their holy and beautiful city laid waste or were commanded to sing the Lord's songs in a strange land.

Here, then, is a new and grave reason for attributing the first Psalm to the Wise King. In form it is little more than a proverb such as those by which we know him best; while in substance it is but an expression of that simple

unqualified theory of human life which we find in his acknowledged writings and hardly anywhere else, least of all perhaps in the facts of our personal experience.

4. Can we lay our hands on any other evidence? On much, and it all points steadily in the same direction, though henceforth we must be content with evidence of a more minute and delicate kind.

In Verse 1, for example, the good man is described as one who did not "sit in *the scorner's* seat." Now the Hebrew word here rendered "scorner," which means a frivolous impudent person who scoffs at all that is sacred, is never once used in the whole Psalter except here; but in the Book of Proverbs it is in constant use. Indeed it is a Solomonic word, *i.e.*, a word characteristic of Solomon's time. It is used once in the Book of Job (which was probably *written* in Solomon's reign), and twice by Isaiah, who lived long after Solomon; but it occurs nearly a score of times in the Proverbs, and except in the first Psalm is not elsewhere to be found. So that from the fact that this word occurs here we may surely infer that the Psalm was not written before Solomon's age, and that very probably it was written by Solomon himself: how else did one of his characteristic words get into it?

5. In Verse 2 we have the good man described as one who is "*wont to meditate*" in God's law "day and night." Now quiet meditative habits indicate quiet peaceful times. When war and tumult are in the land, it is hardly a good man's part to bury himself in contemplation, however honourable the nature of his studies may be. When David summoned his followers to arms, he would hardly have accepted it as a valid excuse for absence that Joab, or Jashobeam, or Eleazar, or Abishai, or Benaiah had wandered off into the forest with "the book of the Law" in his hand, and had given strict orders that he was not to be disturbed in his pious seclusion. But in tranquil times,

such as those of the earlier and better years of Solomon, when every man "dwelt securely under his vine and under his figtree, none daring to make him afraid," a good man might habitually meditate on the Divine Law, and be honoured by the wise pacific king for his ardent pursuit of "wisdom." In short, the ideal of the Psalm was far more likely to be that of the later than of the earlier time, and suits no age of the Hebrew story so well as the tranquil, literary, scholastic age of Solomon.

6. There is another indication of authorship in this Psalm, the discovery of which is almost as curious as the evidence it yields. Mr. George Grove, whose interest in the geography and archæology of the Holy Land, and indeed in all that relates to the Hebrew Bible, is well known, when talking with an earnest student of the Word, suggested that Psalm i. must have been written by a man who either lived in Northern Palestine or was familiar with its scenery. For, said he, that image of the tree planted by the water-brooks, whose leaf does not wither because its roots are fed by a perpetual stream (Verse 3), would be far more likely to occur to one who knew the ever-flowing streams of the North than to an inhabitant oft he South, where the streams only run in winter and are soon dried up. This, naturally, struck the Biblical student as a happy suggestion, and set him thinking; and the upshot of his thoughts was this. David's life was spent very mainly in the southern districts of the Holy Land, where the brooks are speedily dried up by the heat of the sun; but Solomon had his summer palace in Lebanon, and must therefore have often passed through Galilee, and have been familiar with the northern streams which, fed by the mountain snows, run all the year round and keep the trees on their banks always green.

Now if we bring all these different lines of evidence to a focus, to whom does their blended light point, if not to

Solomon? Solomon must, we are quite sure, have been familiar with the tree by the stream with its bright constant foliage, though David may never have seen one. In Solomon's peaceful times, though not in David's nor for any a year after Solomon's death, a quiet meditative habit, such as that described in the second Verse of the Psalm, might naturally be described as a feature of the man ideally good. From Solomon's lip or pen Solomon's habitual word for the insolent scoffer at sacred things might be expected to fall. From Solomon too we might naturally look to receive a psalm proverbial in form, in style, in tone, and which expresses the very theory of human life laid down in the pithy sentences and pictorial apologues of his best-known writings. And, above all, if, as the critics affirm with one consent, this first book of Psalms was edited and published in Solomon's time, and the first psalm in it was composed by the editor as a preface to the whole collection, who so likely to edit that Book and write this Psalm as Solomon himself who loved his father David and would be glad to shew him honour; who was set on improving the service of the Temple choirs; and who, as himself a poet, would be the very man to see that his father's poems were published in their true and perfect forms? Were I a lawyer, and had I to prove authorship, I should be glad to have so clear a case as *that*, and should make myself quite easy as to the verdict, if at least I were pleading before a competent and unbiassed judge.

2. The Theme of the Psalm.

A PSALM, like a coin, may have an image though it have no superscription. This Psalm has no superscription which, telling us who wrote it, had thereby told us, at least in part, how to interpret it. Yet, if I am not much mistaken, we

have found the image of Solomon upon it, and can ourselves now furnish it with a superscription, which throws, as we have seen, no little light on its form, structure, tone, and the very illustrations it employs.

As for the theme of the Psalm, that is obvious enough. The good man and his fate, the bad man and his fate, in other words, the inevitable issues of moral conduct, this is the subject of the two vivid little word-pictures which Solomon paints.

First, we have *the good man* (Verses 1–3). He is set before us on the negative and on the positive sides of his character; we are told what he is not and what he is. On the negative side we are told that he does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful. The weaker sort of commentators are much impressed by the beauty of this first verse; but I doubt whether even they would have been so much impressed by it had they found it anywhere except in the Bible. There is a kind of climax in it indeed, a kind of literary feat; but the feat is a very simple one, belonging to the earlier stage of art; and surely it would not be difficult to match the climax from any author of good style. The happy or blessed man is he who does not *walk* in the way in which *restless and passionate men* habitually travel; still less does he take his *stand* once for all among *the habitual workers of iniquity*; and still less does he *sit down* content with the company of *the openly profane*, feeling himself at home with those who make a mock of sin. Three degrees of habit are indicated by the verbs "walk," "stand," "sit;" three degrees of evil by the nouns "wicked," "sinners," "scorners." Let us admit and admire the ingenuity and beauty of the verse, such as they are; but let us not claim more for the verse than it deserves, or go into raptures over it as over an unparalleled stroke of art. The writings of any real poet contain finer

passages than this; and the Bible so easily takes the first place in literature, and has so many rare and unexampled claims on our admiration, that of all books it least needs a forced or fictitious praise.

Of the positive side of the good man's character we are told that he delights in the law of Jehovah, and habitually meditates on it day and night. Not only does he withdraw from those whose evil communications might corrupt his good morals; not only does he yield the Divine law an outward deference and respect: he "delights in it after the inward man"; it is the food and aliment of his spirit as well as the rule of his life. He broods over it with a love which turns its statutes into his songs, and lifts his obedience to it into a happy freedom.

Shall not this good man have a good time? Yes; he shall be like the Galilean tree, which, when beneath a fervid Eastern sky all else is parched and barren, stands in the bright strip of verdure on the margin of a perennial stream, its foot in the cool flowing water, its leaves green, its fruit abundant. Now *that* is really very beautiful even to us; the image is beautiful, I mean, even if we doubt the thought to be true; but to an Oriental, whose very life often depended on these green oases, with their water, shade, fruit, it would be still more beautiful and impressive than it is to us.

Then (Verses 4, 5) we have *the bad man* and his fate. He is "not so"; *i.e.*, all that has been predicated of the good man is denied of him. He does *not* meditate on the law, nor delight in it. He *does* walk with the wicked, and stand with the sinner, and sit with the scornful. And therefore he is like the dry withered tree rather than the tree with water flowing through its roots. Nay, even the dry tree is not dry enough to express his utter fruitlessness and unworth. He is, rather, like the chaff of the mountain threshing-floors, flung up into the air, to be caught and

driven away by every passing wind. Because he stands with sinners he does not and cannot stand in the Divine judgment; the verdict must go against him. Because he sits with scorners he shall not sit down in the congregation of the righteous, with those true Israelites who compose the family of the Lord. The good man will carry through whatever he attempts (Verse 6); for the Lord "knoweth his way," and regards his course with watchful care and love, as how should He not when He Himself is both the good man's way and his goal? But the bad man will fail in all he attempts, fail so utterly that the very way he took shall perish; he reaches no goal, and his very path, as he advances, crumbles and drops from beneath his feet.

This, then, is the theme of the Psalm; and its charm is to be found not in any ingenious parallelism or artful climax, but in these fresh natural images of the tree thriving by the water-brooks and of the chaff vanishing before the wind.

But, poetry apart, what are we to say to this simple, antique, unqualified theory of human life? Surely no man can read the Psalm, however much he may admire it, without asking: "But is it *true?* Is it not at best a very partial and imperfect statement of the facts of human life?" If we have had any experience of men and of the turns of fortune's wheel, we cannot but have seen that the good do not always thrive: the stream often leaves their roots, their leaves often wither, their fruit often fails; they are very far from carrying through all that they attempt. We cannot but admit that the bad do not always come to a bad end, an end visibly and confessedly bad, at least in this world; instead of being as chaff, the sport of every wind, they are often so solidly and firmly planted that the very storms which sweep away the hopes of the good fail to uproot them. And as we compare these indisputable facts with the unhesitating and unqualified assertions of the

Psalm, we are sometimes tempted to cry: "It is a charming picture, a beautiful dream. Would that it were true! Would that all the chaff *were* swept from this fair world by some strong wind of God!"

But consider: if *all* the chaff were swept out of the world, where should *we* be? what would become of *us?* Even if we have something of the fruitful tree in us, have we not also much that can only be compared to the dry worthless chaff? Must we not admit, then, shall we not be forward to admit, that few men are wholly and only bad, that, even in the worst, virtues are strangely blended with their vices, so that even they cannot be said to provoke an instant and unqualified condemnation? When we begin to complain of the world, and of God's ordering of the world, we shall do well to ask ourselves how far *we* are responsible for much that goes amiss in it. We say, "Good does not always come to the good, nor evil to the evil," calmly assuming that, were that the law of the Divine Providence, only good would come to us; whereas, so soon as we reflect, we know well enough that we are not so wholly good as to deserve that only good should befall us, and confess with shame and penitence that we are responsible for no little of the evil within and around us. We say: "Ah, what a happy world it would be if only the good were left in it, and God were to do them good all day long!" calmly assuming that *we* should be left in it: but should we?

Before we sigh and complain over the inequalities of Providence, let us at least remember, first, that we ourselves are not wholly good, and cannot therefore expect to receive nothing but good at the hand of the Lord; and, second, that we so little know in what our real good consists as that much which seems evil to us may even be best for us. When the strong winds blow, shaking and bruising us, it may be that they come to blow away that in us which is worthless as chaff. When the cool sweet waters recede

from our roots, it may be in order that our roots may follow them, get a larger grip of the ground, and so enable us to face storms before which we should otherwise succumb.

But, again, if we judge human life fairly and according to our best convictions, we shall probably come to a conclusion similar to that of the Psalmist, and even identical with it, though we may not express it in so absolute and unqualified a form. We see many exceptions, or many apparent exceptions to the rule, but still we do hold it for a rule of life, that goodness thrives and reaches a good end, while badness languishes, tends to, and actually comes to, a bad end. By neither path perhaps do men reach their end *at once*, or soon. The ungodly, the sinner, and the scorner may swagger by us, and, with the world, the flesh, and the devil to help them, they may make a brave show for a time; but, if we watch them carefully, we shall see their "way" perishing behind and even under their feet, so that they cannot hark back even when they see the place of their torment before them, and can only with great labour and peril climb up into some better way. And, for a time, the good man, as he sits meditating on the law of the Lord, or delights to do his will with busy hand and eager foot, may see the world go by him, or hear its laugh of contempt, and feel lonely, hurt, forsaken. But has he lost so very much in losing the company, the smile and approval, of the world? Others grow rich, he keeps poor; others win reputation, he remains unknown; but if his character has been really formed by the Law in which he studies and delights, if in these brief hours of time he has really laid hold on eternal life, if he can smile at Fortune and her wheel because all changes, whether adverse or prosperous, bring him nearer to God, is he very much to be pitied for his loss? *What* has he lost after all? He has lost "the chaff," which is the sport of every wind, and which at last the wind of death must carry away. What has he gained? He has gained a

place by that stream of living waters which carries life, fertility, fruitfulness, wherever it flows. The man who is sincerely good grows ever better, while the man who is really bad grows ever worse. Goodness tends to *life* in its highest sense; and badness to *death* in its saddest sense.

In these terms, or such as these, we all, even the most sceptical of us, express the general conclusion to which our personal observation and experience of life have led us. Why, then, should not the Psalmist express his conclusion in similar terms? When there is need, or occasion, we qualify our general conclusion in various ways. We point out, for instance, that the connection between moral goodness and outward ease and success is by no means invariable; or we warn men that the painful results of bad actions and bad habits may not at once appear. And, in all probability, there were times when even Solomon himself felt that his general conclusion must be qualified in similar ways; nay, we know that there were such times, for in his other writings we often find him qualifying it, or even seeming to distrust it. But we should not expect to find the whole truth of Providence, in all its aspects and qualifications, compressed into so brief a Psalm as this, or indeed into any single scripture. It should be enough for us that the Psalm states one aspect of the truth in vigorous and attractive forms. And surely it is true that, on the whole, goodness is fruitful, wickedness barren; that goodness tends to life, wickedness to death. It is a truth on which we ourselves act so often as we refuse any pleasure or gain which can only be had by doing wrong, so often as we suffer pain or loss in order to do that which is right.

Least of all should this truth be questionable to those who hold the Christian Faith. For *our* view extends beyond the bounds of time. Even if we cannot see that the good, nourished by a living stream, prosper in this world

and are fruitful in proportion to their goodness, we nevertheless believe that in the better country and through the years of eternity whatsoever they do will prosper. Even if we are foolish enough to grudge the sinner the sinful indulgences by which he is degraded, we nevertheless believe that hereafter, when men are brought to the threshing floor, and He whose fan is in his hand shall throughly purge his floor, the wicked will prove to be but as chaff before the wind. While we are here, good and evil are so subtilly and strangely blended in our character that we cannot hope to enjoy an unmixed happiness. If good comes to us through our goodness, evil must come to us through our sins, that we may be chastened from them and compelled to renounce them. But hereafter, we hope to enter, by the grace of God, through a pure goodness, into a pure blessedness; and to become purely good is even more attractive to us than to be always happy. If, planted by the river of life, we may bring forth a little fruit, and ever more abundant fruit, fit for the use of God and man, we crave no higher blessedness. And this hope we may safely cherish if, conscious of much that is still weak and barren and evil in our nature, we are sincerely aspiring and endeavouring after goodness and usefulness and purity. The hope of a growing goodness and a growing fruitfulness we *have*, indeed, even now and here; for who so weak but that he may do a little good, and ever a little more? and amid all that is defective in our present service we have this great consolation and hope, that we look for better things in that better world in which we are to become what we would be, perfect in love and in all the fruits of love.

And yet, whether for purposes of argument or as a basis for our personal hopes, I doubt whether it is well to linger much or often on even this great and consolatory thought. Certainly we best vindicate the large moral conclusion of this Psalm as we fall back on the familiar conviction that

character is destiny; and that hence, even now and here, a Divine justice is apparent in every human life.

It must be admitted, indeed, that that Justice does not take, in every life, the obvious and dramatic forms which it often took in ancient and simpler times, when men were not crowded together as they are now, and their several lots did really, and much more largely, depend on the presence or absence of the moral and industrial virtues. If honesty is still the best policy, and virtue its own reward, it must be confessed that honesty often fails to win houses and lands, and that virtue does not always force its way to honour and distinction. Under our present conditions many a rogue thrives, even to the day of his death; and many an honest and good man is cabined and confined in narrow uncongenial circumstances, till he too lies down in the grave. It is still quite as difficult as it was in Paley's days to keep both a conscience and a carriage. It is only in a large rough way that men's conditions are adjusted to their characters. It is only as we look at them on a large scale, or in the long run, that we see men rewarded according to their deeds, according to their deserts. If we follow any man into eternity, or if we take into our view whole classes and nations of men—in which the sons may suffer for their fathers' sins, or profit by their virtues—we may see, if we will, that it is well with the good and ill with the bad. But to our impatience it often seems but cold comfort to hear that in eternity, if not in time, justice will be done; to our selfishness it often seems no comfort at all that justice *is* done on a large rough scale, if, meantime, and to us individually, justice is not done. Nay, a bad selfish man may be quite content that the world at large should lose so that he may gain; while the sceptic or unbeliever, or even the mere careless man of the world, may nerve himself to "jump the life to come," if only he may get his own way in the life that now is. What we most want therefore,

whether for the comfort of the righteous, or to convict and restrain the unrighteous, is the assurance, not that justice will be done, but that justice *is* done between man and man; not even that justice is done on a large scale, in the history of classes and communities, but that, by an inevitable and invariable necessity, justice enters into and moulds the lot of every man that breathes, whatever his class, whatever his race. Could we reach and hold fast such a conviction as this, we should do much more than vindicate the truth of our Psalm; we should go far towards removing the shadows from human life and justifying the ways of God with men.

Is then such an assurance as this within our reach? Within our reach! It is in our very hands the moment we consider human life and experience as a whole, and not merely in its constituent parts; the moment we take Plato's advice and "look within," instead of looking around us.

Character is destiny, not Fortune. That which is within a man really determines his lot, not the outward haps and mishaps of life. Our experience of life, and of the vast system of things in which we are placed, with all its good and ill, all its happiness and misery, is determined for every man by the kind of life to which he addicts himself. The life, the whole experience, of the man who delights himself in the Divine law is very different to that of the man who walks in the counsel of the ungodly, or stands in the way of sinners, or sits in the scorner's seat. The life of an honest man is very different from that of a rogue, that of a generous man from that of a churl, that of a kind man from that of a selfish man, that of a pure-minded man from that of an impure. Quite apart from the consequences of this life in the world to come, it has consequences here and now which set differences of the most vital kind between man and man. And "no confusion ever takes place"; the experience which belongs to one kind of man never falls to

the lot of another kind; the impure man, for example, never gets the experience of the pure man. There is no flaw, no hitch, in the arrangements by which these different sorts of lives are kept as distinct from each other as different species of plants are, or different orders of animal life. In short, the law which determines what sort of experience every man shall have, and which affixes one set of results to one course of action and another to another, is as constant and invariable as a law of nature; nay, it is itself a law of nature, *i.e.* a law of God.[1] The real differences between men are *in the men themselves*, not in their fortunes; in their several characters, not in their unlike conditions. Their experience of life, and their view of life, does not depend on the accidents of station, or on the events which befall them, but on differences of nature, disposition, aim.

Thus, in the impressive words of the author I have just cited, "justice is done between man and man where justice is sure, and where it is perfect, *in themselves*"; and when we complain that justice is not done here and now, it is because we do not look deep enough, and inward enough, to find it. And so true is this that, as we all feel, the very worst injustice would be done, if the experience of one kind of man were or could be allotted to another; for what more cruel and intolerable fate could befall a genuinely good and upright man than that he should be condemned to become a rogue however prosperous, or a hypocrite however successful?

It is true, then, and it is a truth which no one can question, that, in some good measure, every man gets the due reward of his deeds even in the present world, in their different experience of life, in their several capacities of enjoying that which is good in it and acquiring its best wealth.

[1] For some of the thoughts, and even for some of the words in this and the next two paragraphs, I am indebted to a noble discourse on "Gods Many Among Christians," by the Rev. John Service of Inch.

The law which metes out their reward to them, since it works in the very inmost depths of character, is invariable and universal: you can no more gather a good man's experience from a bad man's life than you can gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles. That law has also this marked characteristic of a law of Nature, that, working always and everywhere, it also works with the most delicate precision and truth. "Among the good on the one hand, among the evil on the other, none even of the nicest shades of character are lost in all the seeming confusion of earthly things; but the meek have their experience, and the proud have theirs, and the pure have theirs, and the unforgiving and unkind and ungenerous have theirs. In being what he is, whether good or evil, and irrespective of all that may happen to him here or hereafter—so the eternal Justice has decreed—every man has his reward." There is therefore no need for the alarm felt by some good men, no room for the fear lest justice should fail, even if all stories of God's mercy, or man's reading of them, should be true. Justice can never fail. Even though there were no future "place of torment"; even though there should be, as some contend, doors of escape from it, or bridges over the "great gulf" which divides it from the heavenly shore; yet, since every man carries his own fate in his own character, bears his doom in his very self, no man can possibly escape his doom, no man can possibly separate himself from his fate. There is, and must be, an eternal distinction between the good and the bad. Only as character is changed, purified, sweetened, elevated, can we rise into a happier and fuller experience of the salvation of God.

In large measure, then, the theology—if it ought not rather to be called the morality—of this Psalm is true; it is verified by the fact that even in the present world justice is in large measure done between man and man: in the fact that as a man *is*, so his experience of life is: in the

fact that, as a man who is insensible to the beauty of nature or art loses much of the charm of life, so a man who is dead to the charms of truth, righteousness, kindness, self sacrifice, loses the true good and wealth of life, even though he be unconscious of the loss. I do not say that this justice is perfect; for perfect justice may demand that all our conditions, outward as well as inward, should be drawn into conformity with our several characters: and this we see not yet. But in the large invariable fact that every man's experience and enjoyment of life, and even his real possession of the world around him,[1] varies as his character varies, we have an infallible proof that even now already Justice is at work upon us; as well as the sure and solemn pledge that hereafter it will do its perfect work upon us, and draw our whole external environment into harmony with our inward character and life.

Meantime, it will be well for us to dwell much and often on the Divine Justice which shapes our experience, and in large measure our very lot, in *this* world. We shall do well to recognize and enforce the fact insisted on in our Psalm, that our true gains and losses, our real happiness and misery, our substantial wealth and penury, depend on what we are in ourselves. We shall do well to teach our children, or our congregations, to hate that which is evil and to follow after that which is good, not only because their choice will determine their future condition, but also because it does and must determine their present state, their use, experience, and enjoyment of life in this world; because the good of being good is in *being* good, and not in outward success or even in freedom from inward remorse; because the evil of being evil is in *being* evil, and not only in the loss or misery it breeds. For if we base our homilies to them and our exhortations on this ground, we are building on a rock from which no storm of change, and no stress of doubt, will ever

[1] See EXPOSITOR, *First Series*, vol. iv. pp. 256 *et seq.*

dislodge them; we are teaching them a truth, a fact, which all their after experience of life can only confirm, and which will grow the more true to them the more they see of men and cities. Science is with us, as well as revelation. Even the most sceptical of men, even those who reject the Gospel story as an incredible or outworn fable, believe as earnestly as we do, that character determines fate; that what a man is determines, not only what he will be, but what his present experience of life must be; that to be weak and bad is to be miserable, to lose the true wealth of life, and miss its supreme joy; while to be good, pure, upright, kind, generous, is to gain that wealth and secure that joy.

In teaching this truth therefore, in insisting—in the spirit, if not in the words, of the Psalmist—on the Divine Justice which regulates our present lives, and makes each man's experience answer to his character, we are teaching a truth which can never be brought into doubt even to those whose minds are all clouded with doubt. Into whatever critical and inauspicious conditions they may shift, into whatever strange and infected latitudes they may sail, here is a fact that can never grow questionable to them; a truth which they can never let go, or which will never let go of them; and yet a fact, a truth which, as they study, receive, and act upon it, may yet bring them back to God; nay, *must* bring them back to God, and ensure his blessing on them in the very proportion in which they recognize it and shape their course by it.

S. Cox.