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insists on the glory inherent in Christ's vocation. And in doing so he is in harmony with himself in his whole manner of presenting truth. In his view of the glory of Christ there is the same duality we found in his view of the Christian era. The world-to-come is future, and it is here; even so the exaltation of Christ is in heaven, and yet also on earth.

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STUDIES IN PRACTICAL EXEGESIS.

I.

PSALM XXXII.

THIS 32nd psalm was the favourite of two great men, who, different as they were, agreed in their deep sense of sin and their exaltation of grace—St. Augustine and Martin Luther. It was their favourite, because it was one of the penitential psalms, and both of them had learned the sweetness and the bliss of repentance, which, in its purest and truest form, is "the eager and enthusiastic struggle of the soul to reach and fasten itself to God."[1] Both of them have, not only blistered this psalm with their tears, but tried to sing it to the bright allegro music which they overheard from the angels' harps. How could they sing the penitential psalms to doleful chants when they had caught sweet fragments of the angelic melodies? For "*there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*"

But St. Augustine and Luther are not the only noted persons who have loved this psalm. God's word is like the sword at the garden of Eden; it turns every way, and

[1] Rev. Phillips Brooks,

sometimes pierces where you would least expect it. As if to show that the most frivolous follies do not shut out heaven-sent glimpses of the deeper and more serious side of life, this psalm was also a favourite with Diana of Poitiers,[1] whose name has such a doubtful sound in French history. No one who has used this psalm for himself can afford to be a Pharisee, and look down on those who travel in the miry ways of the world. God may see many latent possibilities of good in those of whom we are tempted to despair, and a work of grace may be going on in the soul which some providential event may suddenly bring to a surprising maturity. It would be no kindness to condone the vices of worldlings, but our Saviour teaches us to be as hopeful as we can, and to divide mankind not into the saved and the unsaved, but into the children who live in the home-like sense of God's fatherhood, and those who, through ignorance or folly, have wandered away into a far land.

Yes; those who seem to be at the top of human happiness are not on this account to be congratulated. You know that fine old English poem of Sir Henry Wotton's, called "The Character of a Happy Life." Well, the psalmist here tells us how *he* would describe this character. All men seek happiness; but the only durable happiness is that of the truly righteous, that is, of the forgiven man. Loud as are the songs in the houses of luxury, there are carols whose note of joy is purer and deeper.

"*Be joyful in Jehovah, and exult, ye righteous*"; for "*happy* are ye, *whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.*"

How full of meaning are these verses when taken together! How far they soar above the melancholy and

[1] On the remarkable popularity of the Huguenot Psalter, see Henry's *Leben Johann Calvins*, ii. 161. The gentlemen and ladies of the court had each their favourite psalms (even Queen Catherine de Medicis).

incomplete wisdom of Ecclesiastes! "Weary of earth and laden with (his) sin," the wise man wrote the results of his sad experience, and among them he mentions this—that "there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not" (Eccles. vii. 20). It is true, the author of the 14th psalm had said so before; but then the psalmists and prophets belong to the little flock of those who have given up all for God, and who are sometimes thought to be too severe on those who still cling to worldly pleasures. To the testimony of Ecclesiastes no exception can be taken. He had tried the world, and found that, in his experience, the few good men were absolutely lost among the crowd of bad. "*One man among a thousand have I found*" (Eccles. vii. 28). He does not tell us what this rare product of humanity was like. I think I can supply his omission. If this "one man" really kept his head above the tide of wickedness in the age of Ecclesiastes, it was not as a product of humanity that he did so, but as a penitent and forgiven sinner. He was like the author of the 32nd psalm, who had not indeed escaped sin, but who had taken his sin direct to God for forgiveness. He too has written down his impressions, and they are more satisfactory, though less copious, than those of Ecclesiastes. Shall we study them together for a few minutes?

It is clear that some grievous trouble had befallen the psalmist. Whether it was a purely personal trouble, or whether it was one which he shared with his fellow countrymen, I know not; at any rate, it was one which *he* felt acutely. Now we know that there are two different effects produced by trouble. Either it makes us trust God all the more, according to that fine saying, "*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*"[1] This effect however

[1] Job xiii. 15. An "inspired mistranslation," as I have ventured to call it. See *Variorum Bible* on the passage.

it can only produce if the set of the will and the affections is towards God and the moral law. Or it reveals to us the dreadful fact that we do not love God, and so becomes to us the punishment of our rebellion. The psalmist's trouble at first produced this latter result. He tells us that he could do nothing but cry out all day long, "Oh, how cruel God is!" He thought: "'Great plagues may be proper for the ungodly,' but I am not one of that class. I have been constantly to Jehovah's temple; I have punctually brought my sacrifices; I have given tithes of my corn, my wine, and my oil; and this is all the return that I get!" He did *not* say this; for he may have remembered that verse of Job,—

"*Why dost thou strive against him?*
For he giveth not account of any of his matters" (Job xxxiii. 13).

You see, he could not frame his lips to prayer; but at least he would not blaspheme. He had no true love of God, but he felt at times that after all he might be misapprehending his Maker. And so perhaps this unspoken prayer went up—you will find it in the same book of Job—"*Show me wherefore thou contendest with me*" (Job x. 2). And immediately the prayer was answered. Was it by the help of a prophet that the sufferer found out his unrepented sin? or was it the imperious voice of conscience which at last made itself heard? The former is the old but uncritical view adopted by Robert Burns in that truly sacred poem, *The Cottar's Saturday Night*,—

> "Or how the royal bard did groaning lie
> Beneath the stroke o' Heaven's avenging ire."

I prefer the latter, because it is the most natural, and suits the words of the psalm best. Surely there is nothing kept back; the psalmist tells us the whole history of his repentance:

"I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity I covered not;
I said, I will confess my transgressions unto Jehovah,
And so thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

Now let us try to understand the psalmist. How did he know that God had forgiven his sin? He says nothing about sacrifices. I suspect that he felt at this moment as all men who are deeply concerned about their souls must feel, that no ritual performance as such could have any real effect upon God; that he must throw himself absolutely upon God's mercy, trusting simply and solely in His pardoning love. But even then, how could he know that God had pardoned him? Perhaps he felt it, you may say; but how could he trust his feelings? I am certain that no ancient Israelite would have trusted his feelings. "*The Jews require a sign,*" says St. Paul (1 Cor. i. 22); and this expresses a characteristic quality of the Jewish nation. The Apostle Thomas was a typical Israelite. The sceptical spirit, which had been modified in the other apostles, seems to have existed in him in all its original force. The psalmist must have required a sign that his transgression was really forgiven, and his sin covered. Well, there can hardly be a doubt as to what that sign was. It was the removal of that outward misfortune which had first led him to think that he had sinned. There is nothing more pathetic than the limited views which many of the best of the Israelites entertained even down to our Lord's time. They could not conceive of trouble as intended to deepen and purify their love to God; and so, when trouble came, they at once leaped to the conclusion that God was angry with them. I call it pathetic, because being such earnest, devout men, it seems as though they ought to have been taught better. But who was there to teach them? One can blame the Roman missionary in the Northumbrian kingdom for letting the noble Edwin

form such an imperfect conception of the Gospel as this—that it would necessarily lead those who embraced it to earthly prosperity: a mistake fatally avenged on the field of Hatfield Chace. But whom are we to blame for the mistakes of the psalmists and prophets? How many were there competent to teach them better?

So then the sign which this pious Israelite, and those who suffered like him, desired was the restoration of earthly prosperity; and a merciful God granted it. There *are* such things as answers to prayer, whatever sceptical men of science may think; and though prayers for spiritual are safer than those for temporal blessings, yet even these latter are for wise and gracious reasons very often heard. It was so in the case of the penitent sinner who wrote this psalm. God dealt tenderly with His servant, and would not shake his new-born faith by leaving him in his distress.

But will any of *us* try to bargain with God, and offer to believe in the forgiveness of our sins, if God will also take away all the impediments to our earthly happiness? Surely not. That were to doubt God's love, and to set up our wisdom against His; that were to compare two classes of good things which are by their nature wholly incommensurable. The sign of a spiritual blessing must itself be spiritual. Need I say what the true sign is? Listen to St. Paul. "*There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death*" (Rom. viii. 1, 2, R.V.). That is, if you have been forgiven through Christ Jesus, you have also received the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. There is no arbitrary connexion in this case between the sign and that of which it is the evidence. Because Christ died, not merely to obtain our forgiveness, and restore us to infant

innocence, but to mould us into His own likeness, qualify us to be fellow workers with Himself in God's kingdom. Neither is any mistake about this sign possible. A young Christian may stumble very often, but no one who observes him closely can mistake the direction in which he is walking. In private, he will be seen to court solitude, to read his Bible, and to pray; in public, to avoid those sins to which, before he made his baptismal vows a reality, he was specially prone, and to cultivate those Christian graces the most which are least congenial to his temperament. There will be a growing earnestness in his manner, a growing conscientiousness in his work, and a growing spirituality in his use of forms, especially of the most sacred and best beloved of all forms, which will mark him off at once from those who have missed the happiness of coming to Jesus for what He alone can give.

But note the beautiful inconsistency of the psalmist. He believes that even in this life the good are always rewarded, and the bad punished. "*Great plagues*," he says, "*remain for the ungodly, but whoso trusteth in Jehovah, lovingkindness embraceth him on every side.*" But he also quotes one of the loveliest promises in the Old Testament —I say, he quotes it, because beyond doubt it was in a special sense a revelation to him.

"*I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way thou art to go;*

I will give thee counsel, (keeping) mine eye upon thee."

So that, you see, the psalmist was not merely anxious for temporal deliverance; he longed for trustworthy moral guidance, and the sense of God's constant protection. Perhaps indeed one may say that though, in deference to the orthodoxy of his time, he gives the chief prominence to an earthly sign of forgiveness, yet in reality, in his heart of hearts, he longs most for the spiritual sign of intimate communion with God.

Last of all, observe the psalmist's grateful comment in verse 6:

"*For this let every one that is godly pray unto thee in time of distress,*

When the flood of the great waters is heard;

Unto such an one they shall not reach."[1]

What does *this* mean? Well, the psalmists delight in picture-speech, and "great waters" are the symbol of a great trouble.

"Save me, O God, for the waters are come in even unto the life."

And again, "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me."

Now does the writer mean that in really great personal sorrows the only true comfort is in prayer? I do not think he meant only this. If you look at the passages in which this figurative language is used, you will find that the troubles chiefly referred to as "deep waters" are, not personal and domestic ones, but those great calamities in which all the members of a nation participate. Doubtless the psalmists *had* personal joys and sorrows—they laughed at weddings, and they wept at funerals; but they did not make these the theme of song. How widely different in this respect are Christian hymns! Do I blame their writers? Not at all; the psalmists had such an absorbing interest in God's kingdom that it perhaps stunted other elements in their character not less worthy of being cultivated. I think that a nature like William Cowper's was richer, though far feebler, than that of any of the psalmists; and if poor Cowper's faith now and then gave way, it was due to nothing else but grave physical disease. I scarcely know two more touching verses, considering who

[1] I did not feel able to expound this passage without adopting a correction of the Hebrew text (see notes in my commentary on the book of Psalms).

wrote them, than these (the 2nd verse is unfortunately omitted in our hymn-books),—

> "God of my life, to Thee I call;
> Afflicted at Thy feet I fall;
> When the great waterfloods prevail,
> Leave not my trembling heart to fail.
>
> Amidst the roaring of the sea
> My soul still hangs its hopes on Thee;
> Thy constant love, Thy faithful care,
> Alone can save me from despair."

Still there is a bracing quality in the old Israelitish Psalms, which contrasts happily with the softer, subjective element so conspicuous in Christian hymn-books; and this arises from the constant reference of the psalms to the temporal and spiritual prospects of the Jewish Church and nation. If then we desire to taste the full sweetness of the psalms, we must first of all learn what the writers meant, and then apply this not merely to our own personal circumstances (which the words will not always fit), but to those of the universal Church and the English nation. The dangers we think of will be sometimes material, sometimes purely spiritual; for it may be said of bodies of men as well as of individuals, that their wrestling is not against flesh and blood. Is it not so? Do not the forces of evil sometimes almost seem to have a personal life, and to be fighting passionately against us? Then it is that the heart finds its way to its chosen psalms, "as the warrior's hand to the hilt of his sword." Luther was right in calling this and the companion-psalms the best. For him they were the best. And the missionaries of our own Church are right in going to the psalms for comfort in the moral wastes of Central Africa. "But for the psalms of David and of Asaph," said one of them in Uganda last year, "I could not bear to see this all-but-omnipotent reign of evil!" But we need not go to

Central Africa; evil is all too potent in our very midst. Let us fight against the evil in ourselves, and we shall have need enough of the psalms of David and of Asaph. We shall find out our own special psalms, as Luther found out his. Only there is one verse which we shall *never* have occasion to use, "*Save me, O God, for the waters are come in even to the life.*" For our "life is hid with Christ in God."

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THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON

(A HOMILETIC STUDY).

II.

THE PENITENT'S RETURN AND RECEPTION.

WE find the account of the recovery, like that of the fall, of the prodigal marked by clear and striking gradation. The steps are these: first *Reflection*, "when he came to himself, he said"; then *Resolution*, "I will arise"; then *Return*, "He arose and came"; afterward follows the father's *Reception* of him—the son's *Confession*; to crown all, his *Restoration* and the *Rejoicing*.

1. REFLECTION. "*And when he came to himself.*" For plainly, he had been beside himself,—not only an exile from home and alien from his father, but madly doing violence to his own nature. So is our state of sin, madness and folly; not such as to unfit us for the common business of life, not such as to free us from responsibility, yet such that we are out of our true and proper mind as to our highest and truest interest. The first step towards salvation is when we come to ourselves, and Reflection is the first mark of this return.[1]

[1] Trench notes that *Resipiscentia* or "becoming wise again," is one of the