

ANTI-HIGHER CRITICISM

OR

TESTIMONY TO THE INFALLIBILITY

OF

THE BIBLE

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THE BOOK OF PSALMS.

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I.

THE NATURE OF THE PSALTER.

1. *Poetry.* A glance at the Book of Psalms shows that it is other than plain prose, although the way in which it is printed in the Authorized Version has concealed the fact from inobservant readers. It is a book of poetry. The peculiar nature of this kind of composition is a point that has been discussed from the days of Plato and Aristotle without reaching an harmonious conclusion. Indeed, it seems to be admitted that the essential *spirit* of poetry is undefinable, and even its concrete forms have not been characterized in a way which all will admit. Yet we can describe what we cannot define. What is truly called poetic must have thought, imagination, and passion, and these fused into tuneful expression, usually in the shape of rhythm; and thus it becomes the most vital form of human utterance. Poetical elements are often found in various kinds of prose, but poetry itself must always have the appropriate form, some kind of metrical composition or that which is a substitute for it.

Hebrew poetry is entirely destitute of meter. It has often been supposed by scholars that they had detected what could be called rhythm, but however ingenious their theories none ever won general support or even any considerable following. The lack of the vibratory move-

ment of syllables and feet in the several words is compensated by a corresponding arrangement of clauses, called parallelism. Each separate utterance, whether narrative, doctrinal, ethical, or devotional, is thrown into an antithetical form, and thus is made a couplet or a triplet or an integral verse consisting of four, five, or six lines. The second line is often only a repetition of the first in other terms, or an utterance of its contrast, or an illustrative supplement to it, or an exceptive caution. Thus everywhere the poem is built up of members which balance each other; and they do this, not because the logical development of thought requires it, but because this is the established form of poetical composition. The same peculiarity is found in the remains of Egyptian and Assyrian literature, but not so well defined nor so fully developed as among the Hebrews. This peculiarity, apparently so arbitrary, is an immense advantage to the translator into a different language. The musical rhythm of the classic poets cannot be adequately rendered into other tongues. The sense may be given, but the charm of melody and form evaporates. Not so with the Hebrewic muse. The forms into which it casts its passionate thought can be exactly reproduced even in languages at the furthest remove from kinship to what is oriental, such as our own. The parallelism has been needlessly disregarded in the Authorized Version, but is fairly exhibited in the Revised Version and in nearly all other modern translations. And it is worthy of careful attention, not only as a key to the meaning of what is ambiguous, but also as showing the salient points of a passage in their true relation, and often greatly enhancing the beauty and force of the thought. "The amplifications of a given point are like the echoes of a solemn melody, the repetitions of it like a landscape reflected in the stream." As Dean Stanley says (*Jewish Church*, ii, 165),

“The rapid stroke as of alternate wings, the heaving and sinking as of the troubled heart, which have been beautifully described (by Ewald in his *Dichter des A. B.*) as the essence of the parallel structure of Hebrew verses are exactly suited for the endless play of human feeling and for the understanding of every age and nation.”

Besides the parallelism there is sometimes an alphabetical arrangement of the verses, something of the same nature as the modern acrostic. The initial letters of the successive lines or couplets follow the order of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. There are eight of these alphabetical psalms, and in one, the longest in the collection, all the couplets of each stanza begin with the same letter—a peculiarity which cannot, without unnatural forcing, be reproduced in English. This device is reasonably attributed to a desire to aid the memory, most of the lyrics in which it occurs being detached thoughts on one subject. (These are ix, x, xxv, xxxiv, xxxviii, cxi, cxii, cxix, and cxlv.) Objection has often been made to the artificial character of these compositions, acrostic verse not being highly esteemed in modern literature; but the objection is met by consideration of the fact that in the East such forms of utterance have always been highly esteemed, and of the additional fact that in ancient times it was desirable that the learner should have every possible advantage in getting by heart the sacred oracles. Psalms cxi and cxii form a very interesting pair in form and in subject, both being acrostics and beginning with *Hallelujah*. The former celebrates the greatness and loving-kindness of Jehovah in the circle of “the upright,” and the latter the blessings thence resulting to “the upright” themselves. Taken together they set forth cause and effect, the blessed Jehovah and his blessed people.

2. *The Poems are Lyrics.* It is generally agreed by

sober scholars that there is no epic poetry in Scripture and no dramatic. Ewald, indeed, ventured to call Job a tragedy and Canticles a comedy, but without any reason, for the chief element of a drama, namely, action, is conspicuously absent from both. There is, indeed, dialogue, but this is quite devoid of incident, and occurs without change of place or of time. The Psalter is lyrical from end to end. Its Hebrew name is the Book of Praises, or Praise Songs, although many of the poems are rather prayers than praises. Most of the terms prefixed to the psalms have the same bearing, as *Shir*, something sung, and *Mizmör*, a song with a musical accompaniment. The same thing is confirmed by the frequent references to stringed, wind, and percussive instruments, such as the harp, psaltery, trumpet, and cymbals, and also by the fact that more than fifty of these inspired compositions bear the inscription, "To the Chief Musician."

They were not only regarded as lyrical, but also intended to be used in public worship, and that notwithstanding that they sprang from the domestic or personal relations of the writer and recited his subjective experience, or were simply gnomic utterances of theoretical or practical wisdom. No distinction seems to have been made among the psalms on any of these grounds. All were considered worthy vehicles of the vocal worship Israel was trained to offer to the God of their fathers—a fact which may well awaken doubt of the view now so prevalent that only objective hymns, or such as are direct ascriptions of praise and honor, are suited to the common service of the sanctuary. Human nature has not changed, and what was appropriate for worship ages ago may still be suited to express the sense of the godly when they draw near to the Most High. It is certain that many hymns which are nothing but recitals of individual experience have been and are widely acceptable

and useful among Christians of every name. Nor is it likely that such lyrics will pass out of use.

3. *The Poems are Distinctly Religious.* This is their chief and most remarkable characteristic. The Hebrews, it is well known, were a people who cultivated song, and with it celebrated all their occasions of joy and of sorrow. The reapers sang as they garnered the golden harvests, the vintagers as they trod the wine press, and the women as they toiled at the mill; there were love songs and marriage songs; there were the wail of the mourners who go about the streets and the dirge of the funeral train bearing the dead to their long home; the armies returning from victory were received by processions of singers, and often there were choruses which accompanied the troops to the battle and sang war songs to nerve them to the charge; their banquets were enlivened by songs and instruments of music. In short, there was no feature of their social and national life that was not mixed up with melodious vocal utterance. But notwithstanding this fact we find no intrusion of any mere secular bursts of song in the Psalter. There are, as there have been, those who maintain the contrary, but we are persuaded that they are mistaken. The compiler of the Psalter did not accept whatever came before him, but rigidly limited himself to sacred and religious lyrics.

There are no *patriotic* psalms. There are none which celebrate the glory of Palestine as the land of Israel. When Jerusalem or Zion is mentioned it is not as the capital of the land or the home of the monarch, but invariably as the dwelling place of Jehovah. Even the remarkable 137th Psalm is no exception. When the captives in Babylon were required to make mirth for their oppressors they hanged up their harps upon the willows, and the question that rose to their lips was, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

It was the sense of religious desecration that pierced their souls and brought forth their tears. The people no doubt loved their country, but it was as the land covenanted by Jehovah to their forefathers, and the place where

“ He showed his word unto Jacob,
His statutes and his judgments unto Israel.”

Nor are there any songs in *praise of national heroes*. There was no lack of such persons in their annals, as the illustrious roll call in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews abundantly shows. But not one of them has a psalm in his honor. The Book of Jasher (or The Upright), several times mentioned in the histories, is commonly supposed to be a record of those elders who had witness borne to them for their notable exploits, but none of these obtained admission into the Psalter. David's exquisite elegy over Saul and Jonathan and his shorter burst of sorrow over Abner were recorded in the annals of the nation, but neither found a place in the praise songs of Israel. We know not who made the collection as it has come down to us, but surely the compiler was divinely guided. The spirit of the whole is expressed in the opening words of Psalm cxv :

“ Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us,
But unto thy name give glory.”

If one desires to see a contrast he may find it in the odes of Pindar, or still more vividly in the several (xliv–xlix) chapters of the apocryphal Book of Ecclesiasticus where the writer gives a detailed list of Israel's great men from Enoch down to Nehemiah, celebrating the praises of each with no small rhetorical skill. “ The king ” is the subject of the Twentieth Psalm, but the theme is not what he has accomplished, but what God has been pleased to confer upon him. In all cases where it is

otherwise the royal personage is not any mere human occupant of David's throne, but that exalted Being of the increase of whose government and peace there was to be no end. This is demonstrated by the fact that deeds and excellencies are ascribed to him which cannot, even by the wildest oriental hyperbole, be considered as belonging to any mere son of man.

No; the Psalter is through and through a religious book. It abounds in prayers and praises, but these are always addressed to God. His name, his perfections, his word, his works, are celebrated in every variety of form. There are descriptions of character, but it is always in reference to man's relation to God. There are poetical recapitulations of the national history, but the chief feature is what the Most High has done for his people, not what they have done for him.

4. *The Oldest Division.* While the Psalms form one book and are so referred to by our Lord (Luke xx, 42) and his apostles (Acts i, 20), yet from a very early period they were divided into five distinctive collects, each of which is closed by a doxology, and in the case of the first three by a double Amen. The principle which underlies this division is not certainly known. The ancient rabbins saw in the five books of the Psalter an image of the five books of the Pentateuch. Delitzsch called the Psalter "The congregation's fivefold word to the Lord, even as the *Thorah* (law) is the Lord's fivefold word to the congregation." The arrangement, overlooked in the Authorized Version, is introduced into the Revised Version. Book I comprises Psalms i to xli; Book II comprises Psalms xlii to lxxii; Book III comprises Psalms lxxiii to lxxxix; Book IV comprises Psalms xc to cvi; Book V comprises Psalms cvii to cl. It has been conjectured, with considerable show of reason, that these several books were collections made at different times and by

different persons, and afterward brought together into one and furnished with a common title. As a general rule the oldest psalms stand first, the latest last; yet there are many exceptions. The curious note added to Psalm lxxii, "The prayers of David are ended," indicates simply what is true of the foregoing collection, and by no means casts doubts upon the authenticity of subsequent lyrics ascribed to the son of Jesse. The contents of the Psalter are certainly not arranged chronologically, save in the general way already mentioned, but rather in groups distinguished by some common character; that is, the Pilgrim Psalms, the Hallelujah Psalms, etc.

Of late much attention has been given to the variant use of the divine names, God (Elohim) and Jehovah (LORD). The facts are these: In Book I Jehovah occurs 278 times and Elohim only 48 times. In Book II the proportion is reversed, Elohim occurring 198 times and Jehovah 33 times. In Book III there are psalms in which Elohim predominates and others in which Jehovah predominates, the former being used 60 times, the latter 43. In the last two books the name Jehovah is almost exclusively used, the proportion being 379 for it, against 45 for Elohim. The reason of this difference of usage is very hard to see. That there must have been some reason appears from the fact that in several verses of Psalm xiv (3, 4, 6, 7) the name Jehovah occurs, yet in Psalm liii, which is a repetition of it, in all these places Elohim is substituted. The same thing is seen in Psalm lxx when compared with the closing verses of Psalm xl. A partial help in understanding this usage is gotten by bearing in mind that Elohim is the general name for deity, and is applied by accommodation to angels, magistrates, and the gods of the heathen, while Jehovah is the peculiar name of the Most High as the covenant God of Israel, and is absolutely incommuni-

cable. One can see very well why the fool's utterance in his heart is, "There is no *God*," which is atheism pure and simple, whereas to say "*There is no Jehovah*" is simply to deny the existence of Israel's God. But this does not help one to understand why a whole book should contain mainly Elohim psalms. Some have contended that the usage is a matter of time, *Jehovah* being a sign of an early date, while *Elohim* indicates a later period. But this cannot be. Psalm lxxviii, 7, 8, is almost a literal copy of Judg. v, 4, 5; yet in the latter, which is beyond question earlier, *Jehovah* is used, while in the former it is replaced by *Elohim*. The complete solution of the question as to the cause of the variant usage seems unattainable. Yet this fact does not create any embarrassment in the use of the Psalter. Many ingenious theories have been devised to account for the division into five books and for certain differences between the several books; but none of these are needed to aid either the critical interpreter or the devotional reader of these sacred songs. Each book contains lyrics of every class, early or late, joyful, mournful, or gnomic, objective or subjective, individual or general; and the instruction is the same whatever the place of the composition or its date. Perowne, in his Commentary (i, 79), makes a remark which every faithful and unprejudiced student will acknowledge to be just: "To give a reason for the place of each psalm is as impossible as to give a reason for the order of the different suras (chapters) in the Koran, though there we see a general principle adhered to, the larger suras coming first and the smaller afterward, without any regard to chronological sequence."

Leaving aside all questions as to date, place, and authorship, I propose to mention and characterize some groupings of these lyrics, either such as have been made in the past or such as suggest themselves to a careful

reader, simply with a view to gain an insight into the ample and varied riches of the Psalter. These are not to be taken strictly or exclusively, since the same psalm may for one reason be assigned to one group, and yet for another reason be viewed as belonging to a different class. Thus the 130th is a song of ascents and at the same time is one of the Penitential Psalms.

(I.) *The Pilgrim Psalms.* The first class to be mentioned is one that stands out on the face of the book, there being fifteen (cxx-cxxxiv), each of which bears the title "A Song of Degrees," or, as it is more correctly given in the Revised Version, "A Song of Ascents." It was formerly thought that this name arose from the custom of the Levites to chant these psalms while standing on an ascent of fifteen steps between the court of the women and the court of Israel; but this is now generally given up. Others have referred the name to a peculiarity of structure, a phrase of one sentence being repeated in the next with some addition, so as to form a progression or gradation of thought and language. But although this is quite conspicuous in some of these little songs (cxxi, cxxiv) it does not characterize the whole, and therefore is inadequate. The popular view of the negative critics is that they were sung by the exiles on their return from Babylon; even as the Lord had promised that his ransomed should "return and come with singing unto Zion" (Isa. xxxv, 10). But it is far more likely that the title denotes the use of these songs by the people at their "goings up" to Jerusalem year by year, at the annual festivals. Hence they have come to be called Pilgrim Psalms. Doubtless they were used by the returning exiles, but that use was only the resumption of an earlier custom. They are for the most part expressions of hope and trust blended with confessions and thanksgivings. The whole world has no sweeter ballads. Where

is there such a setting forth of brotherly love as in the song (cxxxiii),

“ Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brethren to dwell together in unity ? ”

or such an expression of the joy and unlooked-for deliverance as (cxxvi),

“ When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion,
We were like unto them that dream ? ”

or such blending of faith and obedience as in the 123d Psalm :

“ Unto thee do I lift up mine eyes,
O thou that sittest in the heavens.
Behold, as the eyes of servants *look* unto the hand of their master,
As the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress,
So our eyes *look* unto Jehovah, our God,
Until he have mercy upon us ? ”

(2.) *The Penitential Psalms.* These are not clustered together in the Psalter, nor do they bear any distinguishing title ; yet from the time of Origen these seven lyrics (vi, xxxii, xxxviii, li, cii, cxxx, cxliii) have been regarded as belonging to one class and have borne a common nature, and with great propriety. They set forth in an experimental way the nature, character, and effects of true repentance with a precision not surpassed in the New Testament. In the well-known fifty-first the royal penitent strikes the keynote of scriptural penitence. He goes beyond his outward transgressions, gross as they were, and acknowledges the depraved heart from which all sins proceed, and which, so far from excusing them, only increases their enormity. The expressions of grief and pain are very strong, yet in every age have found believers able sincerely to adopt them as just and appropriate. Moreover, these Old Testament singers, even when crying out of the depths in which they were over-

whelmed, have an apprehension of the divine mercy which is never felt by the victim of mere remorse.

Nor is the compassion which they seek and expect only the forbearance that springs from indifference or insensibility to the evil of sin, but one based upon a far profounder view of things. Even as on assures himself,

“ But there is forgiveness with thee,
That thou mayest be feared ” (cxxx, 4),

David, in the classic song on the subject, entreats for a new heart and a right spirit, and, these being granted, promises,

“ Then will I teach transgressors thy ways,
And sinners shall be converted unto thee.”

This combination of grief and hope and a new life is wholly unique in all ancient literature. The penitential hymns of other races mingle violations of ritual with moral offenses, and even when they state the latter fail to go down to the *fons malorum*, the depraved nature, which is the primal cause of all departures from truth and duty. It is only in the Hebrew lyrics that we find an adequate view of man's fallen condition and a satisfactory statement of the means and method of recovery. There is no softening down of the evil of sin, but along with a penetrating view of its deplorable extent and character a devout and joyful recognition of the remedy.

(3.) *Praise to Jehovah as the God of Nature* (viii, xxix, civ). Modern poets are never tired of dwelling upon the beauties of nature in heaven and earth, on sea or land, in mountain and plain, amid pathless woods or along flowery streams. The Hebrew poet perceived these things and felt them, but he never speaks of them for their own sake. Nor does he ever show the meditative sympathy with nature's visible forms such as we are wont to see in Wordsworth, Tennyson, and our own

Bryant. He looks upon the fair variety of things only as illustrating the unsearchable riches of God. Scenes of grandeur or of loveliness have no intrinsic interest, and no charm for the imagination apart from the thought of their Creator. The first and deepest impression upon him is given in the words, "O, Jehovah, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" In the Twenty-ninth Psalm there is a powerful description of a storm sweeping over the land, crashing down on the forests, shaking the wilderness, and upheaving even Lebanon and Sirion, but every single startling result is ascribed directly to the Most High. "The God of glory thundereth;" and it is his voice that breaketh the cedars and heweth out flames of fire. The thrilling incidents are specified, not on their own account, but to show the glory of Him whose kingdom ruleth over all. So in the 104th Psalm the singer follows closely the order of creation given in the opening of Genesis, but, with a poet's touch, sets forth the successive steps of the process as they display the power, wisdom, or goodness of God. The clouds are his chariot, and he moves upon the wings of the wind; at his voice the mountains rise and the valleys sink down; he starts the springs that give drink to every beast of the field, and he causeth the grass to grow; his are the trees where the birds make their nests and sing among the branches; day and night come at his command; the earth is full of his riches, and so is the great and wide sea where go the ships; all things and all creatures are dependent upon him; and so the conclusion is,

" I will sing unto Jehovah as long as I live :
I will sing praise to my God while I have any being."

Certainly a very natural conclusion from such traces of order, of thought, and of adaptation, of wise and tender care, as constrained the exclamation,

“ O, Jehovah, how manifold are thy works!
In wisdom hast thou made them all.”

(4.) *The Historical Psalms.* A fourth class is that which recalls God's dealings of old. These are lxxviii, cv, cvii, cxiv. They recite the annals of the past with poetical enlargement, but never so as to feed national vanity or exalt any of the chosen leaders of the race. On the contrary, the sins and shortcomings of the people are recounted with unsparing fidelity, and are made conspicuous by contrast with the goodness and mercy of God. The plain object of the singer is to embalm the chief incidents of former times in such strains as will induce the people to seek the Lord, and

“ Remember his marvelous works that he hath done;
His wonders, and the judgments of his mouth.”

The covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the experience of Joseph, the deliverance from Egypt, and the preceding signs, the miracles of the desert, the crossing of the Jordan, the successive apostasies of the people, and the judgments following, and then God's interpositions, are all dwelt upon until the establishment of the sanctuary and kingdom upon Mount Zion, with the single purpose to utter the mighty acts of the Lord and to show forth all his praise.

Particularly noticeable in this relation are Psalms lxxvii and cxiv. In the former the singer begins in deep dejection. His eyes are held waking, his soul refuses to be comforted, he is so troubled that he cannot speak; but it occurs to him to remember the years of the Lord's right hand and to make mention of his doings. So he recalls the wondrous story of the exodus, and tells in poetic form what happened then:

“ The waters saw thee, O God;
The waters saw thee, they were afraid:
The depths also trembled,”

and in consequence God led forth the people like a flock. In the latter the poet celebrates in a very lively manner the power of God over nature in the migration of his people from Egypt, personifying the objects addressed. Hence, in reference to the divine appearance, he says :

‘ The sea saw it, and fled ;
 Jordan was driven back.
 The mountains skipped like rams,
 The little hills like young sheep.
 What aileth thee, O thou sea, that thou fleest ?
 Thou Jordan, that thou turnest back ?
 Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of Jehovah,
 At the presence of the God of Jacob.’

In this brief, sententious utterance the amazing miracles wrought at the Red Sea and at the crossing of the Jordan and the intervening wonders are poetically glanced at, but there is no mention of either Moses or Joshua, much less of any inferior believers. The entire reference is to the power and presence of the Most High, and the thought of all readers or singers is lifted at once from earth to heaven, from man to God. There is no elaborate description, and no need of any. The brief statement, the bold comparison, the vivid question, the closing admonition, bring up at once before the mind the whole series of miraculous interpositions, and give emphasis to the thought of God's hand as the one great ruling cause. This thought filled the mind of the poet, and when it is uttered he ceases, not abruptly, but on purpose to secure the unity and depth of the one impression. That being secured, all else that is needful will follow of itself.

(5.) *The Didactic.* Usually one does not find elsewhere gnomic poems counted among the lyrics, yet this is certainly the case in the Psalter, as in some cases the

inscription shows, and in others the general design of the entire collection.

(a) Sometimes the aim of these utterances is to set forth *the character and destiny of the righteous and the wicked*, of which the First Psalm is a conspicuous instance, fitting it to be a suitable preface to the whole body of lyrics, as it sums up in few and well-chosen words, negatively and positively, in figure and direct speech, all that is to be said on the subject. A similar example is found in Psalm xxxvii, "Fret not thyself because of evildoers," etc., where the phraseology approaches that of the Book of Proverbs, with this considerable difference, however, that many of the sententious apothegms of the Proverbs are simply prudential, and do not imply religious thought ; for example,

"It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer :
But when he is gone his way, then he boasteth ;"

whereas in the lyric the moral or religious reference is always either asserted or necessarily implied.

(b) A favorite theme is the *excellence of the divine law*. The notable examples of this are Psalms xix and cxix. The former begins by declaring with matchless simplicity and beauty the glory of God as it shines in the visible universe, and then by an abrupt transition passes to the better revelation whose merits it sets forth, and finally closes with appropriate prayers founded upon the perfection and blessedness of the law. The evident reference here to a written word teaches us much concerning David's advantages. The latter is a prolonged variation upon the one theme. It is divided into stanzas, each of which begins its eight couplets with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet, but the subject is the same throughout. Yet, artificial as the framework is, it is pervaded by a living spirit which

redeems it from monotony, and not unfrequently there are bursts of genuine passion, as,

“ Hot indignation hath taken hold upon me,
Because of the wicked that forsake thy law ” (53) ;

or such gracious utterances as,

“ Thy statutes have been my songs
In the house of my pilgrimage ” (54).

(c) The *vanity of human life* is another theme for didactic instruction. An instance is found in Psalm xxxix, where the few and evil days of man's life on earth are treated, not in a sentimental way, but strictly in a religious relation. If man's days are a handbreadth, if at his best estate he is a breath, a passing vapor, surely his hope should be alone in the Lord. Again, in Psalm xlix the affecting contrast between the righteous and the wicked as to the possession of wealth is alleviated, and its bitterness taken away, by the assurance that the rich prodigal can take none of his wealth with him, but must die with the beasts that perish, while the faithful man can say,

“ God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol :
For he shall receive me.”

Again, in the lofty and melancholy psalm ascribed to Moses (xc) human frailty is set forth in contrast with the eternal years of God, and its relation to sin, secret as well as open, is so presented as to give great point to the petition,

“ So teach us to number our days,
That we may get us an heart of wisdom.”

(6.) *Songs of Thanksgiving.* This element pervades the Psalter as a whole, but it is especially conspicuous in certain lyrics. One of these is a psalm of Asaph (lxxvi), usually supposed to have been first sung on occa-

sion of the overthrow of Sennacherib when the angel of the Lord smote his whole army :

“ At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob,
Both chariot and horse are cast into a dead sleep.
Thou, even thou, art to be feared :
And who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?”

A more complete specimen is found in Psalm ciii, where the singing, beginning with the summons, “ Bless the Lord, O my soul,” enlarges upon the goodness and mercy of the Lord in a graceful variety of phrase, and then, after calling upon the angels mighty in strength, and all Jehovah’s hosts, and all his works in all places of his dominion to join in the ascription, ends as he began, with a summons to himself, “ Bless the Lord, O my soul.” A more artistic and elaborate treatment of the same theme is given in Psalm cvii, where the poet, after the usual call to praise, takes up in succession wanderers in a wilderness ; people in captivity ; men drawn near the gates of death ; seamen in a storm, and sufferers in drought and famine ; and after describing their peril and their deliverance adds in each case the joyful refrain,

“ O that men would praise Jehovah for his goodness,
And for his wonderful works to the children of men.”

The several cases of trial and perplexity in each stanza are wrought out with exceeding power and beauty, but none with so much force as that referring to them that do business in great waters, which Mr. Addison said is the finest description of a storm at sea he had ever met with :

“ For he commandeth and raiseth the stormy wind,
Which lifteth up the waves thereof.
They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths,
Their soul melteth away because of trouble.
They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man,
And are at their wits’ end.
Then they cry unto Jehovah in their trouble,
And he bringeth them out of their distresses.”

(7.) *Imprecatory Psalms.* There are twenty-five in all, but the chief are xxxv, lii, lix, lxix, cix, cxxxvii.

It cannot be denied that at first blush these seem inconsistent with the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount. Hence various endeavors to explain them away, as, for example, by saying that the verbs may be translated as futures and not imperatives, and therefore are not imprecations but predictions, or by insisting that they are to be spiritualized and considered only as expressing the necessary results of unbelief and impenitence. But these are mere evasions of the difficulty, and are now generally abandoned. There remain two methods of treating these imprecations. One is to view them as illustrating the elementary stage of ethical development peculiar to the Old Testament, and, as the late Bishop Brooks said, "as specimens which God had preserved for mankind's instruction of the horrible wickedness into which even a worshiper of God, a man who tried to be a servant of God, was liable to fall if he did not watch and pray against his besetting temptation." The other regards them as utterances of a mind in full sympathy with God's righteous government, and expressions of this rather than of personal malevolence.

Which of these two methods of explanation is to be preferred is a matter of equal importance and difficulty, and the more as there is a wide difference of opinion on the point among men of equal piety, ability, and learning. I defer the expression of my own view, as the question will require to be treated when we come to consider the authority of the Psalter. For the matter cannot be considered apart from the general character and claims of the Old Testament. The Psalter is such a conspicuous and exemplary portion of the Hebrew Scriptures, and the imprecations of evil upon notorious transgressors are so many and so deeply woven in the texture of these

divine lyrics, that the two can with difficulty, if at all, be separated. A definitive judgment on the case must have far-reaching consequences, and should not be rendered without long and careful deliberation.

(8.) *The Hallel.* This is a term applied, according to Jewish tradition, to the six psalms preceding the 119th (cxiii-cxviii), which the Jews were accustomed to sing at their celebrations of the great yearly feasts. It is generally, and I think reasonably, supposed that it was one of these that was sung by our Lord and his disciples, as recorded by Matthew (xxvi, 30), just before they left the paschal chamber to go out to the Mount of Olives. It would be pleasant if we were able to say just what member of the Hallel was chosen on this most interesting occasion. But it is manifest that if our Lord at the first institution of the great commemorative ordinance of the Christian Church sang one of the praise songs of Israel it is altogether becoming in his followers when, in obedience to his command, they celebrate the feast, in like manner to lift their voices in sacred song.

(9.) *Hallelujah Psalms.* The last five in the collection bear this name from the fact that they (in common with the 106th, 113th, 117th, and 135th) begin and end with the word *Hallelujah*, the anglicized form of the Hebrew phrase rendered "Praise ye the Lord." This term properly expresses the keynote of each composition. All these psalms vary in contents and circumstantials, but they agree in tone. They recite the reasons why men should magnify Jehovah's name. Thus they serve a most important purpose in giving emphasis to the work of praise. The tendency among many otherwise excellent and useful Christians is to undervalue the vocal utterance of Jehovah's perfection and grace. This is most unhappy. We are prone to imitate what we sincerely admire and magnify. To repeat on earth the hallelu-

jahs of heaven is appropriate and inspiring. It is well, therefore, that the Psalter should wind up with a series of examples of the most varied and earnest praise, and that its final utterance should be,

“Let everything that hath breath praise Jehovah.”

The man who once found fault with a minister's adoration in prayer, saying he spent too much time in telling God what he is, must bring the same objection against the psalmists of Israel.

(10.) *Messianic.* The last class to be mentioned, and in some respects the most important, is those which refer to the Messiah. Of late the question has been raised, and in some cases eagerly debated, whether there are such psalms. But to devout readers of the New Testament this is no question at all. Our blessed Lord, Luke tells us (xxiv, 44), said to his disciples that “all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me.” The Psalter then does refer to him. This it does in two ways.

(a) There is repeated reference to the establishment of God's kingdom on earth amid all nations. This is seen everywhere throughout the collection, but especially in a little fasciculus of lyrics preceding the 100th Psalm (xcvi-xcix). The Lord reigneth, and all the earth is summoned to rejoice in the fact. He cometh, he cometh, to judge the earth. All peoples are to see his glory, and all the ends of the earth his salvation. This worldwide sovereignty is evidently different from the lordship which God as God continually and inherently exercises. It means a visible divine administration recognized by men and made by them a theme of joyful praise. This conception of a widely extended kingdom of God upon the earth is found frequently in the Psalter as an incidental statement. For example, in the Eighty-seventh Psalm,

where, after the statement that glorious things are written of the city of God, the poet adds this divine utterance :

“I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon as among them that know me :
Behold Philistia and Tyre with Ethiopia ;
This one was born there.”

Here the incorporation of Israel's hereditary enemies with the covenant people is expressly foretold. Jehovah himself shall register the greatest of worldly empires as born in Zion, so that the holy hill becomes the spiritual birthplace of nations.

The reason for calling all lyrics of this class Messianic is contained in the fact that the only possible conception the Jews could form of this prospect as a blessed reality was in connection with another and more definite class of predictions pointing to a single personage through whom such results were to be gained.

(*b*) Of this person there are several very spirited utterances. In the Second Psalm the Israelites were taught to sing of him as the Son of God, anointed King upon Zion's holy hill, against whom the nations rage in vain, for he dashes them in pieces like a potter's vessel ; and therefore it is the interest of all, whatever their station or dignity, to make terms with him. In another psalm (the forty-fifth) the personal excellence as well as the victorious power of this king is celebrated. Grace is poured into his lips. He is fairer than the children of men. He loves righteousness and hates iniquity, and therefore is crowned with glory above his fellows. In yet another lyric (the seventy-second) he is set forth as a most gracious sovereign who comes down as rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth. He has dominion from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth. Kings fall down before him, and far-off tribes bring their presents. And this is to continue so long as the sun and moon endure. The series of psalms of this nature winds

up with a short song which represents him as at Jehovah's right hand, as going forth at the head of a willing host, numerous and fresh as the drops of the dew, and his enemies are made his footstool; and yet he is a priest upon his throne, a priest of a peculiar order, wholly different from the ordinary occupants of the office, who are mortal, and when death occurs give place to others, while this man, made after the power of an endless life, has no successors, but is a priest forever.

These psalms and others like them represent the Messiah in his exaltation, and speak in the most glowing terms of his personal dignity and boundless empire. They cannot possibly be explained of any mere human or earthly monarch. Oriental splendor of diction will account for much of the language of poets and prophets, but it fails to give a satisfactory reason for the ascription of such excellence, power, and glory as these psalms declare to belong to God's anointed.

Besides these there is another class of lyrics which correspond to the phrase of the apostle Peter (1 Peter i, 11) when he says that the Spirit of Christ which was in the prophets "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them." The Twenty-second Psalm sets forth a "sufferer whose wail is the very voice of desolation and despair, and who yet dares to believe that the tale of his sorrow will be a gospel for the world" (McLaren). The picture of pain and sadness is painted in the liveliest strokes. Desertion, dejection, bodily anguish, reproach, and mockery do their worst, yet at last the sufferer is rescued from the dog's power, the lion's mouth, the wild oxen's horns, and the deliverance is followed by the most striking results.

"All the ends of the earth remember and turn unto Jehovah,
And all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee."

The numerous and minute correspondences between this lyric and the gospel account of our Lord's crucifixion cannot be accounted for in any other way than by supposing that the singer was guided by the Spirit of Christ, so that, whatever the immediate purpose of his psalm, he did set forth a likeness of the suffering Messiah. Other psalms (xli, 9; lxix, 9, 20, 21) exhibit the treachery by which the Saviour should be betrayed, the ferocious taunts he should endure, the complete isolation in which he should be involved, but at the same time clearly indicate that all this should be followed by deliverance and triumph. In these latter lyrics there are circumstances, especially the confessions of sin, which have no sort of application to Him "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." Hence it is natural to conclude that in the first instance such expressions of moral infirmity applied only to the original human speaker, and that in the other specific portions he uttered what was not only true of his own experience, but also bore a typical reference to Him who was to come. They who deny or doubt the possibility of such a typical reference do not wisely consider the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Thus was set forth before the eyes of the ancient Church a prophetic outline of the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed, and that both in his states of humiliation and exaltation. That the voice of prophecy here and elsewhere fulfilled its purpose is plain from the whole history of Israel and from the popular expectation that prevailed in the time of our Lord's personal ministry. The Jews consulted by Herod, the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well, Martha of Bethany, and the general body of the people looked for the coming of Messiah. That they fixed attention more upon his glory than his suffer-

ings, that they rather expected a mighty conqueror than a wise teacher, is easily explained from the general tendency of our nature, and does not at all hinder our faith that the songs of Zion nurtured the blessed hope that survived all the sore trials of the ancient Church and held the people intact and unmixed till the fulfillment came.

A current modern fad is, in the face of the clear and positive statements of our Lord and his apostles and the well-nigh unanimous opinion of the Christian Church from the beginning, to deny the Messianic character of the psalms referred to, and to hold that they were uttered in relation to some merely human monarch. Thus the magnificent 110th Psalm, oftener quoted in the New Testament than any other, and made the basis of a strong argument in the Epistle to the Hebrews, is said to have been fulfilled in one of the Maccabees; and the forty-fifth, with its wondrous delineation of Messiah's personal excellencies and the brilliant description of the Church, is represented as an epithalamium for one of the Egyptian Ptolemies. To mention these follies is to refute them. One wonders how any literary man with a spark of taste in his composition, and still more how any Christian man with any reverence in his soul, could for a moment consent to such a degradation of the oracles of God.

(11.) *Some Exceptional Psalms.* There are certain lyrics which refuse to be classed, since they have a peculiar and unapproachable excellence of their own. One of these is the Psalm of Faith, the twenty-third, called "the nightingale of the Psalter—small and of a homely feather, but filling the air of the whole world with a melodious joy." It is remarkable for simplicity and beauty of form united with a spirit of heavenly peace and confidence. It appeals with equal force to the most learned and the unlettered. "It is the pure utterance of personal trust in Jehovah, darkened by no fears or complaints, and so

perfectly at rest that it has nothing more to ask." The strains of Theocritus are considered the finest specimens of pastoral poetry in all the ancient world, but there is a beauty and grace in this utterance of the sweet singer of Israel which the Sicilian poet does not even approach, while the sentiment is as much above Theocritus as the heavens are above the earth.

Another, the 139th, has for its theme the exhaustive knowledge of God, which it first asserts in the strongest terms, and then illustrates on one hand by a poetic delineation of the presence of God in all parts of the universe, and on the other by his personal concern in the mysterious formation of the human frame in the earliest stages of its being. Before One endowed with such knowledge the singer bows in deep humility, and prays to be led by him in the way of peace. This psalm, considered as a mere literary composition, has won universal commendation. No such picture of the divine omnipresence has ever been drawn by any human hand :

" Whither shall I go from thy spirit ?
Or whither shall I flee from thy presence ?
If I ascend up unto heavcn, thou art there :
If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, thou art there.
If I take the wings of the dawn,
And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea ;
Even there shall thy hand lead me,
And thy right hand shall hold me."

But mark how the reach of thought and the flights of imagination are subordinated to a spiritual and practical end. None of these exquisite touches are inserted for their own sake, but to give point and precision to the closing prayer :

" Search me, O God, and know my heart :
Try me and know my thoughts :
And see if there be any way of wickedness in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting."

A third, the sixty-eighth, has generally been considered the highest in poetic merit in the whole collection. The text has apparently suffered in places, and there are portions of it which it is difficult to understand, but the general sense is so clear as to win for it universal favor. There is no space to give an analysis. It is remarkable for its energy and boldness, its wealth of historic allusion, its rapid movement, its brilliant imagery, its sustained elevation, its far-reaching outlook, its lofty devotion and triumphant faith. Yet here, as elsewhere, the lofty flight of poetical genius by no means interferes with the flow of pious feeling. The most glowing, the most spirited, the most powerful hymn in the entire Psalter is at the same time the one most alive with faith and consecration.

“ The father of orphans, and defender of widows,
Is God in his holy dwelling (verse 5).
Blessed be God, who daily beareth our burden,
The Mighty One who is our salvation (verse 19).
Blessed be God ” (verse 35).

Such, then, is the nature of the Psalter. It is a collection of one hundred and fifty poems, some long and others short, written at various times and by various authors, but all lyrical in form and all intensely religious in their tone. They cover a very wide field. Sometimes they recount the past, and others describe the present, or again foretell the future. Sometimes they are objective, dwelling on the manifestations of God in creation and providence; at others they are strictly subjective, unfolding with wondrous acuteness and accuracy the workings of the individual heart. Now we hear jubilant notes sounding like an angelic chorus; again there is a pathos of indescribable depth and tenderness. There are delineations of character and destiny which exhaust the possibilities of language. First set forth

ages ago by men who lived under a Syrian sky and were trained under oriental influences, they bear the earmarks of their origin, and yet are found to meet the wants of every age and race and country. They were the song book of the ancient Hebrews; they are equally the song book of the modern Christian. Men of æsthetic taste admire them for sublimity, pathos, beauty, or other literary excellence, but believers love them for their spiritual character, for their power to express the varying states of religious experience, for their revelations of God's nature, for the comfort, the stimulus, the refreshment which they provide. Nor does it make any difference as to the mental grasp or literary culture of the Christian. These divine-human compositions are suited to every grade of intellect or culture.

One of the greatest statesmen and orators of our country a number of years ago soothed his dying moments with the Twenty-third Psalm; and not long afterward a poor negro boy, when sinking into the grave, had it read in his hearing. When the verse

“ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for thou art with me:
Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me,”

was reached he at once cried out, “ How sweet! O, read that again!” It was read again and yet again, and in its spirit he folded his arms and went to his last earthly sleep.

We know nothing about these lyric poems save what their contents or titles may indicate. Beyond these points tradition is absolutely silent. But we need nothing more. The Psalms tell their own story and do their own work. Rendered into any language, among any people, they arrest attention, they engage interest, they respond to the deepest needs, the strongest feelings, of a soul awakened by divine grace. They are concerned with what is elementary and universal in human nature,

and therefore are commensurate with the wants of the race. For more than twice a thousand years they have been the companion and the solace of the devout heart, and such they will continue to be while the world stands.

THE BOOK OF PSALMS.

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II.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE PSALTER AND ITS USES.

1. *The Authority of the Psalter.* The authority of the Psalter depends upon the testimony of the New Testament. It is especially named by our Lord as a part of the Scriptures, and it is frequently quoted by him and his apostles as the word of God. At the conclusion of their last paschal meal they sang one of its psalms. When our Lord on the cross gave utterance to his sense of complete isolation and abandonment he used the words of David in the Twenty-second Psalm, and when at the end he yielded up his spirit it was in the words of the sweet singer as recorded in Psalm xxxi, 5.

How and when the collection of the one hundred and fifty lyrics into one volume was made we are not informed. The tradition universally accepted by Jews and Christians until recent times assigns this work to Ezra, "the priest, the scribe, even the scribe of the words of the commandments of Jehovah and his statutes to Israel" (Ezra vii, 11). Nor is there any reason to doubt the correctness of this tradition. The time, the place, the character of the man, and the needs of the people all concur in its support. It has been vehemently assailed of late on the ground of its inconsistency with the modern view of the date of the Pentateuch. If no part of the

five books of Moses assumed its present form until after the eighth century B. C., and the whole Pentateuch as it stands was of post-exilic origin, then of course the Psalter must be supposed to have originated within the same narrow limits. Hence we are told with great confidence that it was the hymn book of the second temple, that it was from time to time enlarged, and was not completed until the days of the Maccabees. But there is as much evidence that the Psalter was used at the dedication of the first temple (2 Chron. vii, 6) as there is that it was used at the dedication of the second (Ezra iii, 10, 11).

To me this whole theory of the late origin of the Psalter seems a baseless dream.

(1.) It is opposed to the voice of *tradition*—a tradition every way reasonable in itself, and accepted without demur for hundreds and thousands of years. After Malachi the voice of prophecy ceased. What more natural than that its preexisting utterances should be gathered together and be made accessible as the guide of life and the charter of hope? And who could have been better able to perform this work than one who is spoken of as “a ready scribe in the law of Moses” (Ezra vii, 6). Ezra had the requisite learning, ability, and conscientiousness for the work; nor is there anything in his recorded career which is at all inconsistent with his doing it. The collection cannot have been accidental. The perfection of its character, including all that was needed and excluding whatever was unsuited for public or private worship, forbids peremptorily any such opinion. Who but a divinely guided teacher could have done the work, and who so suitable for it as the learned scribe, Ezra?

(2.) It is opposed to the *superscriptions* of the Psalms. The great majority of the lyrics (116) have titles prefixed to them, only thirty-four being “orphans,” as the Jews

called them, that is, without a recognized paternity. Now, of those that are inscribed, seventy-three are given to David, two to Solomon, twelve to Asaph, eleven to the sons of Korah (but whether they were authors or only musicians is not clear), one to Heman the Ezrahite, and one to Ethan the Ezrahite. It is common in our day to discard all these titles as entirely destitute of authority. But I maintain the contrary for these reasons :

(a) The titles are found in all existing manuscripts of the Psalter. There is not a solitary exception to this rule.

(b) They are retained in the oldest versions, such as the Septuagint, and are recognized in the Chaldee Paraphrase.

(c) The instances of David (2 Sam. i, 17, 18), of Hezekiah (Isa. xxxviii, 9), and of Habakkuk (iii, 1) are sufficient to show that it was the custom for authors to prefix their names to their poems.

(d) The chief objection against them is really in their favor, to wit, the apparent difficulty of harmonizing them in some cases with the contents of the psalm to which they are prefixed. For if they had been invented by unauthorized persons would not these inventors have taken pains to give verisimilitude to their inventions by adapting them to the purport of the psalms ?

(e) What else than their traditionary origin can account for the seemingly capricious manner in which the titles are distributed through the book? If of editorial manufacture how are we to explain the fact that we fail to see them where they might be expected and find them where they are not looked for? Would not self-appointed revisers have treated the whole book alike? It is far more natural and reasonable to suppose that all the psalms were at first inscribed with the names of their authors, and that in the cases where the titles are miss-

ing that fact is due either to the carelessness of transcribers or to some mischance.

(f) In two cases these titles mention persons and events not recorded in Scripture. Psalm vii is said to have been sung by David "concerning the words of Cush a Benjamite," and Psalm lx, on the occasion "when he strove with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah, and Joab returned, and smote of Edom in the Valley of Salt twelve thousand." Is it likely that any devout Jew would invent an enemy of David and an expedition of Joab, and insert them in a book he was taught to hold sacred? Is it not far more reasonable to believe that the person and the event were both of them real, and belong to that large portion of Hebrew history which was not recorded?

(3.) The post-exilic origin of the Psalter is opposed to its *contents*. There are, as we have seen, historical psalms, but these all stop in their narrative at the accession of David. The only reason to be assigned for this fact is that the lyrics were composed at that period. Had they originated at a later period the remarkable interpositions of Jehovah in the time of Asa, or of Elijah and Elisha, or of Hezekiah, would have found a place. Undoubtedly there are psalms of the exile (cxxxvii, lxxiv, lxxix), but there seems not the least reason to relegate the entire collection to the post-exilic period, nor even to assign any to the age of the Maccabees, because the previous experience of the people will satisfy the terms of any of the lyrics which seem to be appropriate to what the people suffered under Antiochus Epiphanes. The Maccabean period was remarkable for the valor and the constancy of the Jews, but it does not appear that either literature or piety flourished in any unwonted degree, and in neither respect do the apocryphal books compare with what we have in the canon.

And one may well ask, If the Psalms as a whole or any of them are of late date, how comes it to pass that they differ so decidedly from the other productions of that period? The apocryphal books are disowned by all Protestants, not only because they never composed part of the Palestinian canon, but because their internal character is a fatal objection. They bear marks of human infirmity either in subject or treatment or ethical bearing. Now we require to know how the singers of that period came to escape this contagion. That they did escape it is certain. Not one piece in the entire Psalter deviates from the fixed standard of canonical Scripture. It seems then to be a reasonable conclusion that none of them originated in a period when the voice of prophecy had ceased, and men were left without inspiration alike in their speaking and their writing. Their exalted character requires that we should consider them as belonging to that age when "men spake from God, being borne along by the Holy Ghost."

The names of persons, places, and events, as found in the Psalter, are all in accordance with the traditional view of its origin, and not at all with the modern opinion so confidently repeated. Neither in the titles nor in the contents of the various psalms is there any reference which indicates a very late period save in the few lyrics which were composed after the capture of city and people by Nebuchadnezzar. Nor is the type of piety other in one portion of the Psalter than it is in another. The religious experience is the same as to joy and sorrow, as to confession and penitence, as to praise and hope. There are individual peculiarities in each lyric, but none which mark off any portion of the collection as showing a modified theology. A devout, earnest, spiritual tone runs through the entire Psalter from beginning to end. It contains the world's deepest, tenderest, and most artis-

tic poetry, but the poetry of men lifted above themselves by the divine Spirit.

(4.) Much of the criticism relied upon to establish the late date of the Psalter is *arbitrary and unreasonable*. Psalms, it is said, which belong together have been torn apart (xlii and xliii), and others which have no inward connection have been violently made into one. Thus the fine Nineteenth Psalm is said to be made up of two parts wholly different in theme, tone, and style; whereas a sober criticism maintains that the lyric as it stands is an exquisite, homogeneous, and self-consistent production, celebrating first the glory of God as it speaks out of the heavens to all the earth, then the more excellent revelation contained in the law, and finally uttering appropriate reflections and prayers in the case. Not to see and feel this as it lies on the face of the sacred song is to show lack of intellectual insight as well as of pious sensibility. The same is true of the common treatment of the Twenty-fourth Psalm, which is said to be made up of two entirely incongruous portions, one the account of the acceptable worshiper, the other a summons to the old sanctuary to admit the presence of its Lord, the King of glory. What has become of men's taste or imagination, that they devise so monstrous a theory as to affirm that these two parts are fragments which, after floating about a long time separately, were seized and welded together by some senseless poetaster? The usual explanation of the psalm is natural, reasonable, and edifying. David first describes what sort of a man shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and then bursts forth into an exuberant account of Jehovah's entrance into his house. The two parts, so far from being inconsistent or contradictory, beautifully complement each other and constitute a lyric which has no superior for beauty and sublimity either in or out of the Scripture. So in regard to the close correspondence in

theme and tone between Psalms xlii and xliii, it is insisted that these originally formed but one lyric, and were violently and needlessly sundered. But it is equally reasonable to suppose that Psalm xlii was first composed and set forth as a whole, to which afterward the author composed a pendant in the same-spirit but upon another occasion, and therefore set it forth independently. I maintain that as much can be said in favor of this hypothesis as of the other, and that it is far more respectful and reverent.

The attempt to override all tradition and determine the age of any particular lyric from its contents is necessarily arbitrary save in a very few well-marked cases, such as those which recite the destruction of the temple or the suffering of the exiles in Babylon. It lies in the very nature of a spiritual composition intended for devotional use that it should be independent of time and place. It seizes upon the broad outlines of the soul's experience, and recites them in such a way as to be fitted for the edification of others at all times and in all places. Accordingly, the testimony of eighteen centuries certifies us that the usefulness of a psalm does not depend in the smallest degree upon the ability of the reader or singer to determine when or by whom it was composed. This result, we believe, was contemplated from the beginning. Hence endeavors to settle dates are and must be mere conjectures, and often are injurious rather than helpful.

Nor can any reliance be based on linguistic differences. The style of the Psalter corresponds to the period of its alleged composers. No such differences of words or structure can be found in it as occur in, say, Ecclesiastes, and mark it almost necessarily as of late date. It is true that the 139th Psalm, which the title ascribes to David, has numerous Aramaic forms, yet it cannot with any propriety be said to be written in a *patois*. Its peculiarities

of verbal and pronominal forms may very reasonably be ascribed to the fashions of copyists, nor in any case is a linguistic difference of this kind a trustworthy index to the date of a composition. Western Aramaic is certainly, as everyone knows, a different dialect from Hebrew, but who can say how long its peculiarities may have existed side by side with the Hebrew and, at times, exerted considerable influence upon the classic writers of Palestine? The occurrence of Aramaic forms is anything but a decisive test of date or origin.

(5.) Modern criticism is especially to be deprecated in its treatment of the psalms ascribed to David. To such an extent has this tendency gone that some have denied to him the authorship of any lyric save a portion of the Eighteenth Psalm. This is inexcusable, because we know from unquestionable authority that David was both a poet and a musician. "The sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Sam. xxiii, 1) seems to have been raised up and trained to be an organ of lyric inspiration. His whole being was cultivated by a variety of functions. As Edward Irving tells us, "God brought him up in the sheep pastures that the groundwork of his character might be laid through simple and universal forms of feeling. He took him to the camp that he might be filled with nobleness of soul and ideas of glory. He placed him in the palace that he might be filled with ideas of majesty and sovereign might. He carried him to the wilderness and placed him in solitudes that his soul might dwell alone in the sublime conception of God and his mighty works. And he kept him there for long years that he might be well schooled to trust and depend upon the providence of God. And in none of these varied conditions did he take from him his Holy Spirit. His trials were but the tuning of the instrument with which the Spirit might express the various melodies which he de-

signed to utter by him for the consolation and edification of spiritual men." These are words of soberness and truth. And they show the fatuity of supposing that this fine instrument, so exquisitely and carefully fashioned for the purpose, was thrown aside and the songs of Israel left to be sung by men not one of whom had the tenth part of the natural and acquired gifts of the son of Jesse, or the hundredth part of his wide and varied experience. Far more reasonable every way is the common faith of the Church that David, the man after God's own heart, was molded by his temperament and training to set the example of devotional poetical composition and furnish the pattern to guide the other singers whom the Lord would raise up.

The Question of the Imprecations. There is, however, another matter touching the authority of the Psalter which has not sprung from modern criticism, but has long divided the opinions of the religious world. This is the morality of the imprecations. Many wise and good men insist that these are expressions of human infirmity, and as such to be unsparingly condemned. Thus Dr. McLaren says (i, 336) of these passages: "However restricted, they express a state of feeling far beneath the Christian, and the attempt to slur over the contrast is in danger of hiding the glory of midday for fear of not doing justice to the beauty of the morning twilight. It is true that the imprecations of the Psalter are not the offspring of passion, and that the psalmists speak as identifying their cause with God's; but when all such considerations are taken into account these prayers against enemies remain distinctly inferior to the code of Christian ethics. The more frankly the fact is recognized the better." To the same effect he says, in remarking on Psalm xxviii, 4: "The stern tone of this prayer marks it as belonging to the older type of religion,

and its dissimilarity to the New Testament teaching is not to be slurred over. No doubt the element of personal enmity is all but absent, but it is not the prayer which those who have heard 'Father, forgive them,' are to copy" (p. 271).

The great difficulty in the way of accepting such a view of these imprecations is the impossibility of accounting for their formal incorporation into the Songs of Israel, the service book of the Old Testament Church, the devotional manual of all believers. If they are expressions of personal hate, the offspring of unhallowed passion, why were they made a constituent part of the divine directory of worship? And why are they quoted in the New Testament equally with the others as of divine authority? John tells us (ii, 17) that when our Lord cleansed the temple his disciples drew an explanation of the fact from a verse in one of the strongest of these psalms (lxix), for they "remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house shall eat me up." The same psalm is quoted by the apostle Paul (Rom. xi, 9, 10) to set forth the desert and the doom of obstinate unbelievers :

" Let their table be made a snare, and a trap,
And a stumbling-block, and a recompense unto them :
Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see,
And bow thou down their back alway."

From another psalm of the same class the apostle Peter quotes passages (Acts i, 20) designed to justify the choice of a successor in place of Judas: "For it is written in the book of Psalms:

Let his habitation be made desolate,
And let no man dwell therein:
His office let another take."

Yet in no one of these cases is there any indication that exception is taken to these imprecatory lyrics as in any

way inconsistent with New Testament ethics, but the imprecations themselves, in two of the cases, are cited just as any portion of the Psalter. If these utterances are to be condemned as wrong the way is open to impeach the authority of the Hebrew Scriptures in other directions. Beyond a doubt the Old Testament believers, even the best of them, were imperfect men, and many of their doings and sayings are to be condemned; but the case is different with their words when under the guidance of the Spirit, as we read in Heb. iii, 8-11, a quotation from the Psalter, preceded by the authoritative statement, "even as the Holy Ghost saith." For our part we prefer not to sit in judgment upon the oracles of God, but rather to seek some way of reconciling their utterances in any one case with the general tenor of the whole. Is there such a way? We honestly think that there is. The imprecations are to be considered not as ebullitions of human anger excited by a sense of personal grievance, but as the expressions of a wholesome abhorrence of evil and a deep sense of its ill desert. The petitioner identifies himself with the holy Being whose law has been grossly violated, and speaks as in his name and under the guidance of his Spirit. The duty of the forgiveness of personal injuries was not unknown under the old economy, and illustrations of the fact are not wanting in the Psalter. For example, xxxv, 12, 13, and xxxviii, 12, 13:

They reward me evil for good,
 To the bereaving of my soul.
 But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth :
 I afflicted my soul with fasting.

They that seek my hurt speak mischievous things,
 And imagine deceits all the day long.
 But I, as a deaf man, hear not ;
 And I am as a dumb man that openeth not his mouth.

It seems necessary that the idea of retributive justice should be set forth in this concrete form, and, therefore, the imprecations are not to be regarded as blots upon the fair face of the Psalter, infirmities that are to be explained and apologized for, but should be considered a constituent part of its teaching, designed to guard us against underrating the evil of sin or being indifferent to its occurrence. This is confirmed by the fact that when confronted with some great outbreak of wickedness even eminent Christians have found that the imprecatory psalms met the circumstances and formed an appropriate expression of the feelings they felt compelled to cherish. A true man, an intelligent believer, may be perfectly ready to forgive an injury so far as his own interests or feelings are concerned, and yet at the same time may long for the vindication of outraged justice. An eminent missionary who had spent a long life in Syria told me that after living among Mohammedans so many years he had no difficulty in accounting for the imprecatory psalms. There seemed to be a call for them, and that call still exists. There is a species of rose-water philanthropy which sadly interferes with the maintenance of righteousness. It is sufficient for a man to be a convicted criminal to have his cell deluged with flowers, and the more aggravated his offense the greater the manifestations of sympathy. All this strikes at the stability of law and the foundations of society. Hence the need of a strong assertion of the claims of eternal justice. The Psalter, as we shall see, sets forth in the most striking way the riches of divine grace in the forgiveness of sin, but, lest these blessed offers and promises should be misunderstood and perverted, it also proclaims in thunder tones the wages of sin and the necessary doom of the impenitent.

There is a righteous anger which a right-minded man

ought to feel toward a gross transgressor, and which if he does not feel there is reason to think that he is indifferent to the claims of justice. Who can witness deeds of atrocious cruelty upon the helpless and unoffending without having his blood boil? In such a case there is no room for supposing personal malevolence. No injury is done to the righteously angry man. It is the outrage upon justice, decency, and propriety which he feels, and which the moral order of the universe requires to be fittingly punished. We are to cherish a sympathy with justice and right as well as with our fellowmen. It is a false humanitarianism that glosses over crime and apologizes for evildoers. It is an unsound civilization that tolerates wrongdoing. We have reason to beware of a philosophy which takes away the backbone of our moral sense and wears off the keen edge of that detestation of evil which is essential to righteousness. In the exquisite delineation of the Messiah as King (Psalm xlv) it is said:

“Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness:
Therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee.”

The hatred of iniquity is the counterpart of the love of righteousness, and the two go together. The love of righteousness includes righteous persons, and the hatred of wickedness includes wicked persons. It is one thing to smart under a sense of personal wrong and cherish a vindictive spirit, and quite another to desire retribution upon evildoers as a satisfaction of justice and a vindication of the rights of society. The psalmist was like the Messiah whom he praised when he said (Psalm cxxxix, 21, 22),

“Do not I hate them, that hate thee, Jehovah?
And am not I grieved with them that rise up against thee?
I hate them with a perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.”

He had no personal grudge against them, but because they were enemies of his Lord they were his enemies.

Besides, there will occur occasions when these very psalms will appear the most fitting form of words to be used. During the present year in the State of New Jersey certain legislation was proposed which to all Christian men seemed designed to "frame mischief by statute." Ministers and churches were aroused, and a large meeting of persons from different parts of the State was held at the capital to protest against the consummation of the nefarious purpose. Professor Duffield was called upon to open the exercises with prayer. He complied by reading with emphatic solemnity the Ninety-fourth Psalm, whose opening words are :

"O Jehovah, thou God to whom vengeance belongeth,
Thou God to whom vengeance belongeth, shine forth.
Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth :
Render to the proud their desert."

And I am told there was not a single person in the vast assemblage that did not think that this was the most appropriate prayer that could have been offered. Yet not one of them had any personal wrong which he wished to avenge. The only desire was to avert what they considered to be a grievous injury to society, to prevent legislation that would open the door to every kind of vice and crime. It was the good name of the State, the preservation of morality, the interests of individuals and families, that moved their souls. To see all these struck at, and that simply for the sordid gains of a few, made them feel that nothing less than the words of the indignant psalmist could adequately express their feelings; and more than one of them devoutly thanked God that he had been pleased to incorporate in the service book of the Elder Economy a psalm whose fiery energy seemed expressly made for the occasion.

It remains to answer the questions, Of what use are these imprecatory psalms to the ordinary reader of the Bible? Is he to imitate their authors and invoke anathemas upon the heads of those who are at once his enemies and the enemies of God? Surely not. The plain directions of the Saviour forbid. He is to remember that these men were under the direct influence of the Holy Ghost, and therefore in this way put on record their entire agreement with the retributive justice of God, shaping their utterances in accordance with the habits of their time. No modern believer would pray in regard to any enemy of God that his wife should be a widow and his children vagabonds, or pronounce a blessing upon the man who should dash his little ones against the rock. In this, as in some other features, the Psalter does not furnish a pattern for literal imitation. But the spirit which underlies these utterances, the sympathy with God's character and claims which they exhibit, is of great use and value. It strengthens the moral fiber of the soul and draws the line distinctly between forbearance and indifference.

2. *The Uses of the Psalter.* Here we enter upon a theme as to which there is little difference of opinion among real believers. However men diverge in their views of the date, authorship, and structure of the Hebrew lyrics, they are at one as to their practical use and application. In every age the Psalter has been dear to the Church as a *vade mecum* of daily life, and justly, since its treasures of thought, sentiment, and feeling are so rich and varied. It is

(1.) *A Manual of Praise.* Praise is both comely and becoming. When sincere and whole-hearted it is perhaps the most acceptable form of worship. Cordially to praise what is praiseworthy insensibly brings the offerer nearer to the subject of the encomium. Now the Psal-

ter is a constant guide and stimulus in this work. It shows us by precept and example what and how to praise. The name, the perfections, the works, and the ways of God are set forth in a very distinct and attractive manner, each of them appealing to the devout soul and rousing its deepest interest. The diligent and careful reader of the Psalter can never go astray in this element of devotion. There are some bodies of Christians who confine themselves to the Psalms in public worship. That this is held to be an error appears very clearly from the practice of the great majority of evangelical Churches. Yet it may be said with the late Donald Fraser that it is a greater error and a deeper injury to supersede the Psalter entirely by hymn books, or to sing it only in diluted paraphrases. One thing is certain: This book is a pattern of public praise, and no theory on the subject, however ingenious or attractive, can stand which is opposed to the specimens given us in the Psalms. Here we find subjective as well as objective lyrics, the didactic as well as the emotional, the historical and descriptive as well as the imaginative. Nor is it a strained analogy to say that what was good for the ancient believer must equally answer the needs of our own day.

(2.) *A Manual of Prayer.* On this point the instruction is given incidentally yet very fully. The examples show us that the proper object of prayer is neither saints nor angels, but God alone; for him alone do the singers ever address. And the appeal is always made to his loving-kindness, or his faithfulness to his promise. The wide range of petitions in the book show us that we may come to God for every human interest, and that we should come to him not only for life and health, for food and raiment, for home and friends, but for pardon and grace to do what is right, for our foes, for our country and its rulers, for the prosperity of Zion, and the exten-

sion of its truth and privilege to the ends of the earth. Nor are the graces of persistency or importunity without exemplification in the petitionary psalms. Our Lord, we are told (Luke xviii, 1), "spake a parable unto his disciples to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint;" but they should not have required such an instruction, seeing that they had so many illustrious examples of importunity given in the Psalter in the case of persons in desperate extremity who felt that they had no other help or hope than in God, and therefore called on him day and night. Usually the prayers are answered. And there are many psalms which begin with sad complaints and outcries and yet end with notes of thanksgiving and triumph. There is only one exception (the eighty-eighth), which begins and ends in sorrow and trouble, and in this respect stands alone in the whole collection. The affecting appeal runs through the entire eighteen couplets, and perhaps was intended to show the propriety of continuing one's entreaty even though no sign of an answer was received. But the fact that this stands alone in the Psalter in its unalleviated gloom is an impressive testimony to the cheerful and buoyant character of the praise and prayer songs of Israel.

(3.) *An Exhibition of Experience.* The lyrics of the Psalter furnish a full account of the actual workings of the truth in heart and life. The major part of the book is a recital of religious experience. It sets forth the varied manifestations of sin in word and deed, the exercises of the soul in penitence and humiliation, its submission under trying dispensations, its joy in God when his face shines upon it. In short, it runs through the whole gamut of pious emotion, so that notwithstanding the book belongs to an early and imperfect dispensation it yet fully meets the wants of those who live under the full blaze of gospel light. One who passed through the

sad scenes of the Indian mutiny said, "There is not a day in which we do not find something in the Psalms that appears written specially for our unhappy circumstances, to meet the wants and feelings of the day." The same testimony has been borne by hundreds and thousands in former ages as well as in our own. This characteristic of the Psalter is greatly weakened by the tendency of modern critics (and particularly Dr. Cheyne) to deny the personal relation of many of the psalms, and make them utterances of the nation personified as an individual. Even the exquisite Twenty-third Psalm has been thus explained, to the great loss and damage of the reader. But Dr. McLaren well says: "I cannot persuade myself that the voice which comes so straight to the heart did not come from the heart of a brother speaking across the centuries his own personal emotions, which are universal just because they are individual" (*Psalms*, i, 226). The same may be said of many another psalm. There are national lyrics in which the whole people speak as one man, and there is no need of adopting this chilling reference in cases where the entire vitality and usefulness of the utterance depends upon its being the recital of an individual experience.

(4.) *It Illumines the Old Testament.* It is not uncommon for even good people, especially the young among them, to undervalue the older and larger portion of Scripture. They misconceive its place and value. They think only of its cumbrous ritual system, of its outward restrictions, its dim intimations of the life to come, its close alliance of the Church and the State; and they wonder if religion could maintain its vitality under such an oppressive burden of externalities. One glance at the Psalter dispels all such wonder. Here is seen the beating heart of a true believer; here is found the close intercourse of the soul with God; here is emancipation

from all forms and ceremonies. The temple, the sacrifice, the offering are not undervalued, much less denied, but it is clearly seen that religion is more than form and that all outward services apart from a spiritual mind are of no account. There is no appearance of a studied effort in this direction, but the result of even a superficial reading of the Psalter is a conviction that the religion of the ancient people of God was a most real thing, going down to the depths of their being and affecting their whole lives. With faint reference to a future life or a heavenly home these men felt that friendship with God and trust in his favor was alike their present duty and their highest good. When one singer can say, "I have no good beyond thee, O Lord" (xvi, 2), and another exclaims,

"Whom have I in heaven but thee?
And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.
My flesh and my heart faileth:
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever,"

we feel that here is a vigor of faith and hope, a deadness to the world and its prizes, which the most advanced Christian might well envy. The tree is known by its fruits, and if the Old Testament bore such blessed results in the hearts and lives of men it is utterly vain to denounce it as crude, immature, and barbarous. Preparatory as it was, it had in it all the life-giving elements of a genuine spirituality, and nourished saints whose soaring devotion may well be a stimulus and a pattern to us.

(5.) *It Maintains a High Standard of Integrity.* Take, for example, the Twenty-fourth Psalm, and hear the question,

"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?"

What is the answer? Is it, "The Israelite, the circumcised, the man who has paid all his tithes and offerings?" By no means. Moral and spiritual qualifications are alone

insisted upon. The writer answers his own question: "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart," and manifests this by corresponding speech and life, as the singer proceeds to set forth; and so throughout the collection. The emphasis is always laid upon integrity of purpose and uprightness of conduct, for which nothing else can be a substitute. Here the Psalter stands at an immeasurable distance above all other sacred books. These latter often have gleams of highness and of purity, and say many true and striking things; but these are associated with others of a very different character, so that the result is a piebald mixture of truth and error, destitute of power to satisfy the reason or awaken the conscience. But the singers of Israel have but one standard, and adhere to that with undeviating fidelity. As David said in the Fifty-first Psalm,

"Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts:
And in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom."

Sacrifice and offering are good things, but the best of all sacrifices is a broken and a contrite spirit.

There was a constant tendency among the Hebrews to make the observance of ritual the chief thing. But they were vigorously warned of the danger of such a course. Hence we find in the Fiftieth Psalm the indignant remonstrance:

"Will I eat the flesh of bulls,
Or drink the blood of goats?
If I were hungry, I would not tell thee;
For the world is mine, and the fullness thereof."

Such a passage is not a repeal of the Levitical dispensation or a denial of its authority and use, but an earnest warning against the insidious temptation to make sacrifice and offering a substitute for integrity of heart and life.

(6.) *It Teaches the Forgiveness of Sins.* How fully this is done appears not only by the repeated citations of

God's revelation of himself to Moses (Exod. xxxiv, 6), as "Jehovah, Jehovah, a God full of compassion and gracious," but also by such sweeping statements and comparisons as occur in the 103d Psalm:

" For as the heaven is high above the earth,
So great is his mercy toward them that fear him.
As far as the east is from the west,
So far hath he removed our transgressions from us."

This forgiveness was granted in view of the great propitiation on the cross, not then made known, but symbolized in the Mosaic ritual. Hence David said in the great outpouring of his heart in penitence, "Purge me with hyssop," in allusion to the bunch of hyssop at the end of the rod of cedar wood, by means of which the mingled blood and water was sprinkled upon the defiled, and they became ceremonially clean. The humbled king desires to have applied to his heart and conscience that which will take away the burden of guilt and the stain of sin. The true effect of pardon was also set forth in the Psalter, as we read in the 130th Psalm:

" But there is forgiveness with thee,
That thou mayest be feared."

The issue of pardon is not to render the forgiven indifferent and careless, but just the other way. He now is free to go on in a new course rejoicing; the intolerable burden has fallen from his back, and the restored relations of friendliness between him and his Maker give him a new and abiding impulse in the practice of holy living. Of course he cannot feel the tremendous motive that comes from the cross of our Lord, but he does feel a motive of the same kind when the sense of graciously pardoned sin binds his heart like a fetter to the spiritual service of his Lord.