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believing, as we do, that the more these things are discussed and sifted in a right spirit, the nearer we shall come to the truth—into which may God guide us all!



The Historic Basis of the Twenty-second Psalm.

BY THE REV. H. A. BIRKS, M.A.

THE Twenty-second Psalm, whether we view it as interpreted by Christ Himself or by the writers of the New Testament, or by the Church which has appointed it for use upon Good Friday, is certainly the most precise in Messianic reference of all the Psalms of suffering.

But what were the circumstances of its composition, and who was its composer? That great scholar and critic and Hebraist Delitzsch strongly adheres to the Davidic authorship, although he fails to find a situation in David's life suggestive of the detailed troubles recorded in this psalm. Others have wandered down the ages as far as to the Maccabees in search of suitable occasion—I cannot say with any great success. Others interpret the psalm as voicing the collective sorrows of the nation, and not a mere personal grief; but surely if ever any psalm was individual and personal in the outpouring of heart-sadness, this psalm is personal. Thus we return again to David, and ask once more, "Was there really nothing in the known circumstances of his life that could have given birth to such an elegy?"

I seem to myself to have found the necessary groundwork—an adequate support against the charge of psychological impossibility—but whether I am right or not, seeing so many abler men have missed it, I cannot say.

Where in the Bible should we look for the cry of a forsaken soul? Two names suggest themselves: in the New Testament Judas, in the Old Testament Saul. Each was a suicide. Of Judas' fate we cannot read without a shudder. His character

in no sense wakens sympathy. We simply think of his two epitaphs, and we can get no further—that by St. Peter, “He by transgression fell, to go to his own place”; that by our Lord, “Good were it for that man if he had not been born.” With Saul it is quite different. In spite of all his faults there is a fascination in his character. We see in him a noble nature marred. He had in him the magnetism of impulsive chivalry, the power of engendering intense affection. His armour-bearer killed himself sooner than live without him. David was loyal to the last, and wrote perhaps the most pathetic of all human elegies on hearing he was dead. Samuel, whom he had in some measure supplanted in his authority, and whose wise advice he often disregarded, yet did not cease to love him, and to mourn and pray for him until the day of his own death. Even Paul in the New Testament still speaks of him with pride, as of a fellow-tribesman by God exalted to the highest office, though afterwards removed in favour of his successor. Self-consciousness and envy spoiled him, and he became a victim to religious melancholy of the deepest gloom.

The early work of David was to play before him, and to exorcise his evil spirit. This was the very consecration of his gift of psalmody, the very inspiration of many of its deeper tones. He must have studied all his moods most narrowly; he must have known him as none other did. He must have entered the gloomiest recesses of his spirit by a vital sympathy. Estranged, at times nigh maddened by Saul’s sad aberrations and gusty fitful passion, like Samuel he never lost his love for him. He always spoke of him respectfully, of the ideal Saul. His conscience smote him even for a slight dishonour done to his person when he was in his power. At any sign of softening he was ready to relent. How touching their last interview at Hachilah! Saul made his frank confession of his folly, though David, knowing well his changefulness, could place no permanent reliance on it: and David made his bold appeal of injured innocence, reproaching not so much the King as his bad counsellors: and Saul concluded with acknowledging his

his clothes, and sent them round to their respective cities, possibly casting lots upon the several trophies, the sad reverse of David's former picture: "Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you with scarlet and other delights." They fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan, and in doing this they no doubt might pierce both his hands and his feet.

David was depicting the gloomy fears of Saul verified *after* his death. He did not know that he was picturing that which should happen to the living Christ with even more exactitude.

From ver. 19 and onwards—"But be not Thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength, haste Thee to help me"—David expresses rather his own present feelings. The kindness of the men of Jabesh-Gilead to Saul became to him a pledge that the bright promise of the opening of Saul's reign should yet be verified in him, his successor; that all the best traditions of the monarchy should still be carried to their completion. Of course, here, too, the psalm is indirectly Messianic, for the ideal of theocracy was never fully realized till Jesus came.

No doubt there are difficulties in this interpretation which sees in this psalm the last of the long ministries of David's harp to Saul. To some it may seem almost a profanation to suppose that the same human phrases could express the feelings of the self-slain Saul and the self-sacrificing Jesus. But human types are all of them imperfect; and sometimes to supply their separate defects they are presented to us in a double aspect. It is so with the sacrifice of Isaac, the lesson that follows Psalm xxii. in our Good Friday services. Isaac was the willing victim, and Abraham the type of One who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all. They wrought in harmony, they went together; but however we may multiply resemblances in lesser points, in one point the type fails. Isaac was not slain after all. He could have been no sacrifice and no propitiation, for he was only relatively, and not absolutely, innocent. His life was already a forfeited life before God called for it. The ram caught in the thicket by its horns was innocent, was slaughtered. The two together make the perfect type.

So, too, with Saul and David. Each was the Lord's anointed; each in a sense was typical of Israel's royalty oppressed beneath the enemy. In Saul we have the deepest traits of suffering, the darkest feeling of abandonment; but he was *not* innocent, his faith was *not* triumphant in this deepest gloom. Here David was his substitute; in him alone we have the true prefigurement of faith exultant through adversity. The two together picture Christ to us in all His depth of passion and height of calm serenity.

If this be so, it will account in some degree for the great fulness of description in the Scripture narrative of these last days of Saul, and throw some light upon the mystery of his strange, tragic end. The love of Samuel, the love of David, the hopes of other good men that had clung about him, were not all lost and wasted. They bore fruit for the good of others, it may be even for his own, if they resulted in Psalm xxii., which Christ Himself could use for comfort in His dying hours. It helps us to believe that somehow the perplexing lives that fail, and the warm love that seems so vainly squandered on them, may be wrought into the great scheme of God's wise Providence, and issue in some final good to men.



Literary Notes.

BEFORE his death Canon Overton had practically finished the main part of his volume on the "English Church in the Eighteenth Century," which forms the seventh volume of the series jointly edited by the late Dean Stephens and Dr. William Hunt. Canon Overton's manuscript was taken in hand and finally prepared for the press by the Rev. Frederick Relton. The period covered by the volume is from the accession of George I., in 1714, to 1800. Dr. Overton was, of course, recognised as the foremost English scholar in Church history of the eighteenth century, and by the inclusion of this latest work from his pen this particular history of the English Church is greatly strengthened. The eighty-six years covered by the book are divided into four well-defined periods, in which the subjects belonging to them are treated. As the average length of each period is less than a quarter of a century, it is hoped that the consecutive order, which a reader is entitled to expect in a history, will be sufficiently presented by such