

male child got the title of *holy*? The thing is absurd.

Well, if the grammar allows, the sense demands the rendering which the Revisers offer. For surely it was not the Redeemer's Sonship that was secured by the miraculous conception. He was Son of God already. But if He is to be born of

man; if He is to come in the likeness of sinful flesh, is it not necessary that His sinlessness should be secured, and not only secured, but *pronounced* secure? His sinlessness or holiness is secured by the overshadowing power of the Most High; and He is pronounced holy by the words of the angel to Mary: it was the very message He was sent to declare to her.

The Theology of the Psalms.

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LIFE'S PROBLEMS.

SPIRITUAL fellowship with God, as a member of the chosen nation, formed the Psalmist's chief joy. But material considerations were by no means disregarded in his religion. For one thing, they could not be; the conditions of life were sometimes hard in the extreme, far beyond the conceptions of arm-chair saints or philosophers of happier days. Further, the religion of Israel traditionally associated piety and prosperity. Obey, and it shall be well with thee; disobey, and perish; is the language of law and prophets alike. The prayers and praises of the Psalms would neither be honest on the one hand, nor in accordance with the characteristic genius of Hebrew religion on the other, if they were not concerned with the joys and sorrows, successes and failures, prosperity and adversity, of concrete individual and national life. And, as every reader knows, this is their main concern. Lofty spirituality is not lacking, but it does not form the main web and fibre of the Psalms. The singers of these sacred lyrics brought their common life into their religion, and their religion into their common life. They lived in the spirit of St. James' words written long afterwards, 'Is any among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise.'

But no sooner is this done, than difficulties begin to arise. To move in the purely spiritual region is to fly in the air; to interweave religion with common life is to travel upon the earth, and to meet with obstacles and pitfalls innumerable. For the suffering to pray is easy; but suppose deliverance does not come? For the cheerful to sing praise is not difficult, but how if cheerfulness

abounds chiefly among those who do not sing praise, but pour out blasphemies? These questions may not occur to the mind of the saint; or if they do, may be so speedily stifled that it is as if they had not been. Where, however, they have once openly been asked, they must be answered, or be declared unanswerable. And an answer is likely to take one or other of the following forms:—(1) God will speedily intervene in answer to prayer. (2) Delay may take place, in which case chastisement is wholesome for the sufferer. (3) A better state of things may be expected in some later epoch of national or earthly life. (4) The balance will be redressed in a future state. There remain the possible alternatives: (5) No redress is to be certainly looked for, no explanation can be given of the problems of life. Yet God is good; this is the refuge of the baffled saint. Or (6) there is no God that judgeth in the earth; which is the resort of the despairing and sceptical sinner.

The writers of the Psalms seldom touch upon these world-old problems. They are in trouble, and they cry to God for help; or they are happy, and they praise His name; they hopefully anticipate deliverance, or earnestly expostulate with God, or patiently submit to the counsel of His will; their hopes and fears alternate very rapidly, like the sunshine and shadow, the 'chequer-work of light and shade' upon the hillside on a summer's day; but they seldom doubt or question, and hardly ever deny. A few psalms, like the 73rd and 77th, describe in full the mood of questioning and a succeeding mood of relief and enlightenment, but there are not many

psalms like these. Fear and unbelief are common enough, but the kind of fear and unbelief in which the naturally religious mind questions the reality of the foundations of its own faith is foreign to the Psalter. The religion of the child has its storms and earthquakes, but there are some things in it which are never questioned, and the religion of the Psalms is like the religion of childhood in this respect. Not that it is shallow, but it is simple, often *naïf*, free alike from self-consciousness and self-questioning. It is to the Book of Job, and later, to the Book of Ecclesiastes, that we must turn for a mirror of latter-day doubt, scepticism, and despair. This is a fact which must be faced by those who draw down the whole Psalter to post-Exilic days, and the greater part of it to the late Persian and Greek periods. The simplicity of faith which marks the Psalms as a whole would surely have shown more signs of disturbance had the writers been brought face to face with problems which had become familiar long before the second century before Christ. It may be said that such doubts and religious anxieties would not find a place in lyric poetry, and especially in temple songs; but we find almost all moods reflected in the Psalms, and the comparative rarity of this one, which has given rise to some of the finest and profoundest poems in all literature, is at least noteworthy.

What may be called the ordinary moods of the psalmists require no comment. For the most part, as has been said, the writer of a psalm thanks God for mercies received, or he spreads his troubles before the Lord, simply and hopefully expecting deliverance. He may be too heavily bowed down by calamity to anticipate succour, though this is rare; but in such a case he moans out his sorrow into what he knows to be a sympathetic Ear, finds relief in the act, and goes his way. There is something touching and very significant in the variety of the airs played upon these few simple strings, but there is nothing which calls for explanation or comment. The righteous is sad, but God is good, He will help, the wicked shall perish, right will be done,—hope, trust, wait, pray! So do these saints of old breathe out their souls Godwards, and sound in the ears of succeeding generations the trumpet-note of patience, courage, and fidelity unto death, which has animated so many fainting soldiers of righteousness in their long and arduous war. But the moods are too familiar to need illustration. The first psalm, in its didactic fashion, lays it down

that in whatsoever the godly man doeth he shall prosper, but the way of the ungodly shall perish. Almost the last psalm declares that He will 'beautify the meek with victory,' whilst the saints, with the high praises of God in their mouths, shall execute upon the rebels against Him the judgment that is written. The psalmist of the earlier period is sure that when he cries unto God with his voice, God will hear him out of His holy hill. He never doubts that 'if a man turn not, God will whet His sword,' or that if a man makes a pit and digs it, he will fall into the ditch he himself has made. The psalmist of the later periods is equally certain that 'except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it,' and that 'blessed is every one that feareth the Lord,' it shall be well with him indeed. His wife shall be a fruitful vine, his children shall be strong, young olive plants, and round his table he shall see his children's children and the good of Jerusalem all the days of his life.

Nor is this to be explained away as the euphemism of poetry. The psalmists know what trouble is—none better. They do not glide gently over their calamities, or apply the deceitful balm of optimistic commonplace to their own or their neighbours' wounds. When they are hurt, they cry out: 'Jehovah, heal me; for my bones are vexed. My soul also is sore vexed, and Thou, Jehovah, how long? I am weary with my groaning, every night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears.' 'I am faint and sore bruised; I have roared by reason of the disquietude of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before Thee, my groaning is not hid from Thee.' But in the midst of all this sore complaint comes perhaps an acknowledgment that the trouble is deserved, it is the punishment of sin. 'I will declare my iniquity, I will be sorry for my sin' (xxxviii. 18). Or an assurance that though the Psalmist is alone and helpless, and the very 'foundations' seem to be destroyed, yet 'Jehovah is in His holy temple; Jehovah, His throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids try, the children of men.' All be well, the righteous Lord reigneth; 'upon the wicked He shall rain snares' (xi. 6), but 'the upright shall behold His face.' This confidence in a retribution to come, perhaps speedily, and certainly sooner or later upon the earth, is a keystone in the religion of the Psalms. It is, with a few exceptions, an unquestioned and unquestionable axiom, and

there follow from it certain conclusions which are familiar to all readers of the Psalms. Trust in God, the hearer and answerer of prayer; patience on the part of the godly till God's own time for intervention has come; unsparing denunciation of all evil-doers, and sometimes stern imprecation of punishment upon them; an assurance that God is upon the Psalmist's side so confident and complete that the sufferer in trouble enjoys continually a more than anticipated personal and national triumph.

Sometimes the note of the victorious warrior prevails and his tone towards his enemies is that of ancient warfare,—defiance vigorous, whole-hearted, and implacable. Sometimes the note of the patient and resigned sufferer rules the strain, but the confidence of ultimate deliverance is no less complete. One psalmist may burst out abruptly: 'Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, thou tyrant, thou mischievous and deceitful tongue? God shall destroy thee for ever; He shall take thee up and pluck thee out of thy tent, and root thee out of the land of the living' (Ps. lii.). Another may gently, almost plaintively, remonstrate with his neighbour or his own soul, not to 'fret' over the prosperity of the man who brings wicked devices to pass, but to 'be still before the Lord,' and 'roll his way upon the Lord,' since the meek shall inherit the land, and fretfulness 'tendeth only to evil-doing.' The different tone may indicate different circumstances or a different temperament; the former may proceed from a more virile and active spirit, the latter may indicate a feminine resignation which yet possesses a strength and tenacity all its own. Or it may be that evil of some kind raises in every breast a righteous indignation which makes strong words necessary, whereas hardship of circumstances and general lot or condition calls for mild and passive endurance. The point is, that the Psalmist's confidence in God as a righteous Judge, and in retribution ere long to appear upon the earth, is in either case unmoved and unmovable. It is the 'brutish man' that does not know, the 'fool' that does not understand this (Ps. xcii.). The wicked man in great power, 'spreading himself like a green tree in its native soil,' will soon pass away and be no more, and the whole course of history shall show triumphantly that 'my Rock is upright, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.'

When for a time this confidence is disturbed, it is interesting to watch the ways in which the Psalmist finds relief and comfort. We may notice three. 1. Sometimes, as in the 77th Psalm, he falls back upon history. God has often of old heard the cry of His people, and will hear it again. He who led His people through the wilderness, who delivered them at the Red Sea, will not forsake them in later, perhaps lesser, troubles. 2. Sometimes, as in part of the 73rd Psalm, he recurs to the old solution, which in better moments reasserts its power. The wicked are in great power, and say, How doth God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High? But when in the sanctuary of God I considered their latter end, all became plain—

Surely Thou settest them in slippery places,
Thou castest them down to destruction.
As a dream when one awaketh,
So, O Lord, when Thou awakest, Thou shalt despise
their image.

But it will be seen that thus far there is no further light upon the problem itself. It is simply that as Tyndall confessed of himself, in his darker moments materialism got the upper hand with him, while in his saner and better moments he found a higher faith his own, though the intellectual conditions of the case had in no respect changed, so the Psalmist, with the same views of God and the world, sometimes loses, but shortly regains, his normal faith and hope. 3. In the latter part of the 73rd Psalm, and in some other instances, it seems as if the Psalmist found relief in another class of considerations. 'Better is a little that the righteous hath than the abundance of many wicked' (xxxvii. 16). 'Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than they have when their corn and their wine are increased' (iv. 7). 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire, with Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; God is the rock of my heart, and my portion for ever' (lxxiii. 25, 26). The next line, however, shows that the Psalmist did not rest entirely in abstract spiritual considerations: 'They that are far from Thee shall perish.' The most spiritually-minded Jew was far from the attitude of the Stoic, wrapping himself in the mantle of his religious philosophy, content to find in virtue its own reward. He who draws near to God (ver. 28), and makes Jehovah his refuge, desires to 'declare

all His works,' and expects that those works will make manifest the righteousness of God's cause and his own.

Do we find in the Psalter any assured expectation that the balance of justice, so far as in this life it hangs awry, will be redressed in a future life? This question has often been asked concerning the Old Testament as a whole, and some of the Psalms in particular, and it has received different answers. That the doctrine of a future life forms no part of the revelation of the old covenant, is tolerably clear; but many are of opinion that individual saints, especially in the later period of Old Testament history, rose above the spiritual level of their time, and obtained an insight into truths thereafter to be clearly revealed. Confining our attention to the Psalms alone, we must hold this to be exceedingly doubtful. Without desiring to minimise the significance of a few important exceptional passages, we should say broadly that the expectation of a life beyond the grave, in which the inequalities of the present life should be rectified, did not enter into the Psalmist's religion as an actual working element. Such 'obstinate questionings of sense and outward things,' such guesses, hopes, aspirations, as appear very occasionally in the Psalms, have another origin, another explanation. Life beyond the grave has little or no place in the theology of the Psalter.

The ordinary Old Testament view of the grave prevails for the most part, and may be illustrated by Pss. vi., xxxix., lxxxviii. The Psalmist prays for restoration from sickness: 'For in death there is no remembrance of Thee; in Sheol who shall give Thee thanks?' The end which is contemplated in the 39th Psalm, when man passes away from the earth, is the same: 'Look away from me, that I may brighten up, before I go hence, and be no more.' The language of the 88th Psalm is not the expression of an unusually gloomy mood, but a despairing appeal founded upon current beliefs—

Shall the Shades arise and praise Thee?
 Shall Thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave,
 Or Thy faithfulness in Destruction?
 Shall Thy wonders be known in the dark?
 And Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

This does not imply an absolute denial of a future state, for belief in some kind of continued existence after death was not uncommon among the Hebrews, and other nations around them. But

the Jew possessed no revelation on the subject, could not rely upon any certainty in regard to it, and the idea did not enter into his working creed. The future loomed before him as a dim, shadowy, unreal kind of existence, in comparison with the warm, real, solid earth. He did not people the cloudland of the future with fantastic images of his own creation, as did current mythologies, but concentrated his attention upon that concrete, visible kingdom of God in the earth, with regard to which clear light had been vouchsafed to him, and in which he had, as he was convinced, so important a part to play. The Psalter is in this respect, as in others, the mirror of the Law and the Prophets. What these declare objectively, it reflects subjectively. The Psalmist performed his part in the history of religion all the more effectively, and his words are now all the more instructive to us, because the horizon of his religious life was limited, and he diligently gave himself to that which came clearly within it.

There are, however, certain psalms which appear to be exceptions to this general rule. In the 16th, 17th, 49th, and 73rd Psalms it is said that there are clear anticipations of a future state. Clear these passages can hardly be called. Whilst Oehler, as representative of one section of interpreters, finds in them 'an elevation from the region of the dead to a higher life,' Schultz, as representative of another section, distinctly denies that any such hope is expressed in the psalms in question.¹ The phraseology in xvii. 15, for example, is at best ambiguous. The most natural interpretation to us of the phrase 'When I awake' certainly points to life after death, but it would be impossible to build a doctrine upon the passing use of a metaphor. The description of Sheol in Ps. xlix. corresponds with the picture elsewhere; but does the Psalmist, in ver. 15, anticipate for himself a life beyond and above that of the grave? 'God shall redeem me from the power of Sheol; for He shall take me.' Is this an allusion to the translation of Enoch, and does it imply a higher destiny for the righteous than for the man 'who is in honour and understandeth not, who is like the beasts that perish'? The same question must be asked concerning lxxiii. 24: 'Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me with glory.' And the answer surely is, The words

¹ Oehler, *Old Testament Theology*, ii. 467 (E. T.); Schultz, ii. 329 foll. (E. T.).

may bear this meaning, and to our minds such interpretation seems the most natural one; but there is nothing in these occasional phrases definite enough to build any doctrine upon, or to warrant us in saying more than that they give the merest glimpse of a passing hope.

The 16th Psalm appears to speak more definitely. It is quoted, moreover, in the New Testament, as containing a prophecy concerning the resurrection of Christ: 'Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol; nor suffer Thy beloved to see corruption,' especially when taken with its context, can hardly mean that God will not suffer His servant to die. Quite apart from the New Testament use of these words—which, as becomes the methods of biblical theology, we do not now take into consideration—the whole tenor of the psalm shows clearly what the other three psalms more obscurely hint at, that the intimate spiritual fellowship with God, to which some of the psalmists were admitted, was beginning to teach them that such communion could not be quenched in the grave, that they had already entered upon 'eternal' life, and were heirs of life immortal. This is the thought which the Lord Jesus Christ found in the often-repeated phrase, 'God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,' which the Sadducees could not under-

stand because they did not 'know the Scriptures,' as only spiritually-minded men could know them. The writer of the 16th Psalm, just because he was able to say 'Jehovah is the portion of mine inheritance,' could say also, 'My flesh shall dwell in safety'; Thou wilt not leave me in the grave. Where Thou art is life, joy, pleasure eternal; and in that I rest content. If this implies an expectation of a future life, then unquestionably such expectation is to be found here and there in the Psalter. A *doctrine* of a future state is not taught; a clear conception of such a state is not to be found anywhere in the Psalms; but an inward assurance for which there was no outward warrant in revelation, that the eternal God would not leave His saints to perish, some of the psalmists surely did possess, and the passages at which we have glanced are the mountain-peaks which catch the morning before the sun has risen.

But such hopes, however bright, were too transient and too alien to the prevailing spirit of Israelitish religion to enter effectively into its ordinary working. The hopes which did so enter into the very fibre and tissue of the Psalmist's religion, and which give to a large part of it not only colour but form, must be reserved for another article.

Requests and Replies.

During what months of the year would mission work, such as is described in the Gospels, be possible in Palestine? Would it be too hot in the summer months, too cold or wet in the winter ones for outdoor ministrations? and for how long?—S. C.

IN Palestine the question of heat and cold depends not merely on the climate, but on the elevation above the sea. From April to the end of October is, generally speaking, the best season for moving about. About the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, in the middle of October, the Jews have a prayer that the Lord should not regard the petitions of such as are about to go on a journey. They would want dry weather, but the land needs rain. Spring and autumn would be most suitable around Galilee and in the Jordan Valley; but higher up as around Jerusalem it is healthy and pleasant even in midsummer. In

times of heat, journeying is done in the morning and evening, and by night when there is moonlight.

Summer has also the advantage that vegetables and fruits are easily obtained, and one can sleep at night with little or no shelter.

G. M. MACKIE.

Beirut, Syria.

1. Do the elements of time, place, and manner possess any real value in determining true conversion, or is fruit the sole determining element?
2. Is it scriptural to speak of three types of conversion, natural, gradual, and sudden; and are the apostles rightly considered examples of the second?
3. Is there any book dealing with the subjectivity of Protestantism and its dangers?—J. G.

These questions would probably have been differently expressed if the evangelical distinction