

ART. II.—THE AUTHORSHIP OF PSALM CX.<sup>1</sup>

ALL who have travelled in the Hartz Mountains know how the spectre of the Brocken looms gigantic and alarming, while the top of the mountain is still far off. Yet, as the wayfarer draws nearer, it grows fainter, and by the time he has reached the spot where the spectre had seemed to stand, it has vanished entirely.

In a great degree, the same kind of result holds good of certain recent developments of the so-called "higher criticism." We do not speak, be it understood, of modern criticism generally, but of the extravagant lengths to which certain critics have gone. Doubtless most sober Christian scholars believe that Genesis is compacted by its editor of various earlier sets of documents; they are not, therefore, compelled to accept the view that we must put the final shaping and moulding of the Pentateuch as late as the time of Ezra. We may be willing to allow that our forefathers were wrong in believing that David was the author of the great mass of the Psalter; nay, we may even say sometimes that the ascription, "A Psalm of David," hardly seems borne out by the phenomena of the Psalm itself, and must be viewed with suspicion. It is a very different thing to say that David wrote hardly any of the Psalms, and that the great bulk of the Psalter is post-Exilic, or even Maccabæan.

Anyone who will take the trouble carefully to look into the arguments on which these theories rest, will be struck, I venture to say, at the outset, by finding that these arguments do not hinge (save in a very slight degree) on delicate points of Hebrew scholarship, but are matters which any clear-headed educated man, scholar or no, can fully appreciate. The linguistic argument enters in very slightly. Further, he will often find the arguments strangely subjective, often mere beggings of the question, and sometimes lacking, I cannot but feel, in argumentative fairness.

A very good example of my meaning may be found in Psalm cx. Are we to continue to believe that to be a Messianic Psalm from the pen of David? or shall we say that its author was the tyrant Alexander Jannæus? or shall we maintain that it is a composition of a court poet in honour of Simon Maccabæus—"a glorification of Simon," as it is called by a recent learned advocate of this view?

In Dr. Gifford's sermon and Dr. Sharpe's lectures we have

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Authorship of the 110th Psalm,' by E. H. Gifford, D.D., a sermon preached before the University of Oxford. 'Psalm cx., Three Lectures, with Notes,' by J. Sharpe, D.D.

what is, to all intents and purposes, a careful dissection of this last-named view. This is, perhaps, not *formally* true, for Dr. Gifford begins, without assuming anything, by examining the phenomena of the Psalm, and shows that no one has been suggested "upon whom the various lines of internal evidence converge as upon David." Dr. Sharpe, too, begins by careful exposition of the details of the Psalm, and then proceeds to discuss the objections to the Davidic authorship, and finally takes in hand the Maccabæan theory. Still, the essence of each book is the same—the Psalm is Davidic and not Maccabæan; and both books are characterized by the most studied fairness to the other side.

Let us ask, then, first, What grounds have we for calling the Psalm Davidic and Messianic? And first the heading may be noted, "A Psalm of<sup>1</sup> David," where it may be mentioned that the word "Psalm," here and elsewhere in the Psalter, is not expressed. It may be allowed to be true that the headings may at times be viewed with distrust, but this is when they do not sufficiently harmonize with the phenomena of the Psalm. A few suspicious cases may lead us to scrutinize other headings all the more keenly, but to cast all the headings aside contemptuously is only to show how closely scepticism and credulity are at times allied.

But not only does the Psalm itself profess to be Davidic, but we find the Saviour Himself expressly laying it down: "David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The LORD said to my Lord . . ." (Mark xii. 36; cf. Matt. xxii. 43, Luke xx. 42). The words are David's, and they are given by direct inspiration. Are we to be told that our Lord is merely speaking on the basis of the current belief of the day, without expressing any belief in it? But this, surely, is to play fast and loose with all laws of language. Sometimes, indeed, we are told that our Lord did think that David was the author, but that in this He but followed the erroneous belief of the time. This is not an occasion to enter into a discussion of the doctrine of the *kenosis*,<sup>2</sup> or voluntary self-limitation of Christ. I would, however, venture to say that, while we believe that His mind grew in wisdom as His body in stature, and therefore the mind, as being human, was finite; still, the Saviour, though *man*, was *perfect man*. We can, therefore, I think, readily

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<sup>1</sup> It is impossible within our limits to discuss other possible meanings of the Hebrew preposition. I think it fair to say that in all probability it means "of," and marks authorship. This is of course quite irrespective of the value we assign to the heading.

<sup>2</sup> See Philippians ii. 7, where *ἐκένωσεν* ("made Himself of no reputation," A.V.) is literally what we find in the bald rendering of the R.V., "emptied Himself."

allow that He *might* be ignorant (for example) of many human languages, knowledge of which was no part of His mission: He would not speak of anything that concerned His mission, with a foundation of mistake beneath His teaching. If this theory we are combating be true, what finality have we got? If His arguments are to be accepted only so far as we accept His premises, is the same to be said also of His denunciations and His promises?

Further evidence, too, is furnished from the New Testament as to the authorship and reference of the Psalm. St. Peter, speaking on the Day of Pentecost—when there is the directest Scriptural statement that the Apostles were filled with the Holy Ghost—asserts both that David composed the Psalm, and that, being a prophet, he spoke his words prophetically of the Christ to be. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews again sees plainly that the words “Sit thou on My right hand” must be spoken of someone higher than the angels, One who “serenely waits for a sure and absolute victory, while they are busied in ministerial offices” (Bishop Westcott, *in loc.*).

And now what of the Jews? Clearly those to whom our Lord spoke were at one with Him in His view of the authorship and reference of the Psalm. They raise no demur at the outset; they acquiesce in our Lord’s premises, and are silenced by His conclusions.

The same belief is frequently found in Jewish writings since our Lord’s time. We will take as one example a passage from the so-called “Midrash Tillim,” an exposition of the Psalms of uncertain dates, but all anterior to the eleventh century. Although it is often cited, it is worth giving it at length here, both as definitely bringing out the point at issue, and from its quaintness: “Rabbi Joden, in the name of Rabbi Chama, said: ‘In the time to come, the Holy One—blessed be He!—makes King Messiah to sit at His right hand (as it is said, The Oracle of Jehovah to My Lord, sit at My right hand) and Abraham at His left. And his (*i.e.*, Abraham’s) face turns pale, and he says, The Son of my son sits at the right hand, and I on the left. But the Holy One—blessed be He!—appeases him, and says, The Son of thy son is at My right hand, but I am at thy right hand,’” etc. (“Midrash Tillim” on Ps. xviii. 36). Other Jewish authorities, it is true, take other views, such as that Abraham or Hezekiah is the subject of the Psalm, which our space forbids us to discuss, but which we believe to have very little to recommend them. We shall, therefore, confine ourselves here to the question of David or not David; and if not David, what is to be said for a Maccabæan date.

We shall now try briefly to sketch the evidence on which it may be believed that the phenomena of the Psalm give the fullest support to the Davidic view; but before doing this, it may be well to meet a definite objection which has been brought forward. It is said here we have a Psalm occurring in the fifth and latest book of the Psalter among Psalms which are admittedly of much later day. The case is thus put by a recent advocate of the Maccabæan view: "By some strange accident, comparable to that by which the Moabite stone was only discovered twenty years ago, this Davidic poem waited (it would seem) for a public recognition till, probably, after the return from exile" (Cheyne's "Bampton Lectures," p. 20). We may, with Dr. Sharpe, begin by protesting against the exaggeration in the number of years involved—from David to the return measures roughly five hundred years, from the days when the Moabite stone was inscribed by the order of Mesha to its discovery was more than two thousand seven hundred years. Dr. Sharpe's remarks in continuation are exceedingly just.

He reminds us that there are no fewer than sixteen psalms in the fifth book inscribed "To David." Doubtless the compilation of the fifth book is much later than that of the first; yet this is in no sense conclusive of the date of individual Psalms. "Every new edition of a hymn-book, an anthology, a 'Golden Treasury,' contains writings omitted in earlier editions." The new conditions of life after the Exile "invested with new importance each utterance of a happier time."

Whatever special causes may have been at work in other cases, it seems to us that Dr. Sharpe's suggestion as to Psalm cx. is one of very high probability. The central figure of Psalm cx. (be he who he may) is spoken of as both king and priest. Now, after the disruption of the kingdom, we find Jeroboam assuming priestly functions, in spite of the Mosaic ordinance, by offering sacrifice (1 Kings xiv. 1). Thus, a Psalm like this might seem at first sight to justify this ideal of kingship. In the southern kingdom, too, we find Uzziah offering incense (2 Chron. xxvi. 16), as though it were part of his kingly prerogative, and visited with sudden judgment. We may perhaps, then, suppose that a Psalm which might seem to countenance this association of ideas would be at first misunderstood, and so remained unused. After the return from exile, Zachariah was inspired to prophesy of the Branch who should be both King and Priest (Zach. vi. 12, *sqq.*); and then the true inner meaning of the Psalm being understood, it was joyfully incorporated in the collection.

Let us ask next how far the phenomena of the Psalm harmonize with the Davidic view—the view, that is, that the

Psalm is *by* David, not merely *about* David; "no mere glorification of David" by a "court-poet," but the words of the royal poet himself. Confining ourselves on this occasion to the case as between David and Simon, I trust it may appear that, apart from the *a priori* evidence of the heading, and apart from all external support to that view, the Psalm itself shows a far stronger—an infinitely stronger—case for David than for Simon.

We may now wisely follow the plan adopted by Dr. Gifford—that is, we may begin by simply letting the Psalm speak for itself, and then endeavour to see whither these phenomena lead us.

The writer, be he who he may, claims direct inspiration for what he says. This comes out more clearly when we translate the first clause more literally than is done in the E.V., "The oracle of Jehovah to my lord." The word here rendered "oracle" constantly occurs in the Bible in the sense of a solemn Divine utterance. It is very commonly found in the prophets, but, curiously enough, only occurs once again in the Psalms.<sup>1</sup> This oracle is addressed to "My lord"—to one whom the Psalmist accepts as his superior, one who "is invited by Jehovah to share the honour of His throne." The oracle uttered, the Psalmist proceeds to set forth the thought to him who is to be so honoured: Jehovah will be his help; his people will gladly devote themselves to his cause. And so in the day when their chieftain gathers his array, there shall be a multitude of willing followers, clad in "the beauties of holiness"—an army whose soldiers have had a priest-like consecration. But in verse 4, the Psalmist again appeals to the authority underlying his utterance in words as weighty and solemn as any words of Scripture can be, "Jehovah hath sworn"; and, as if to prevent even these words from being minimized, he adds, "and will not repent." And then follows a second promise: "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." Thus, whereas the first oracle was a promise of kingship, the second is that of an eternal priesthood to the same person. The three remaining verses of the Psalm regard the warrior, fighting, pursuing, with Jehovah, as the source of his strength, at his right hand. Complete victory is his, yet he knows the exhaustion that comes from the conflict, and is glad to seek the refreshment of "the brook in the way."

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm xxxvi. 1 (E.V.). Here the rather exceptional use of the word is to be explained by supposing Transgression to be personified as a quasi-divinity.

Dr. Gifford draws out very strikingly a parallel between this Psalm and the second, in both of which Zion is expressly pointed at. In both Psalms the Lord's anointed is newly made King in Zion; in both he is assailed by a combination of foes; in both God gives them utterly into his hands. All this points to a time when men believed fully in the reality of inspiration, and when the words of a prophet were held to convey God's will. How emphatically the speaker puts it we have already seen. The style, too, of the Hebrew, in its simple strength and beauty, may well be held to point to such an age as David's. And let it be remembered that this last statement is not one uttered merely by "unreasoning conservatives"; it is also the opinion of the most brilliant of the other school, one whom no one will accuse of lingering in the old paths. Ewald includes Psalm cx. among "Songs of David and of his time," though not assuming it to be by David himself. He speaks of the "genuine lyric brevity and compression of the Psalm"; it is "in the age of the greatest lyric poet of Israel, and as if after his example," we read of "a few grand briefly-sketched pictures," of the "very powerful beginning" ("Commentary on Psalms," i. 109, Eng. trans.). But we may go a step further, and argue that the Psalm is not merely one of David's age, and one which definitely refers to him, but that there are one or two touches which connect it with David personally. Thus the word "oracle," in verse 1, which, as we have said, only occurs in one other place in the Psalms, Davidic or otherwise, yet occurs twice in an undoubted Davidic hymn, "The last words of David," enshrined in 2 Sam. xxiii.

There is much force in a citation by Dr. Gifford from Dr. Driver, who does not accept the view of the Davidic authorship, and yet goes so far as to declare that we must believe the Psalm to have been written "by a prophet with reference to the theocratic king," and that it "depicts the glory of the theocratic king." Surely David's hopes were fixed on a "theocratic king"—one of his own seed, whose throne should be established for ever (2 Sam. vii. 12).

If it be asked whether there is any event in the life of David with which this Psalm can reasonably be connected, we may answer with some confidence that there are very fair grounds for connecting it with the time when the Ark of God was brought to its final resting-place on Mount Zion. That event happened, it will be remembered, shortly after David had won Jerusalem from the Jebusites, and had transferred his seat of government thither from Hebron. It was because the Philistines learnt that David was no longer a petty chieftain, ruling over a small part of the land, but was king of all

Israel, with a united people at his back, that they put forth effort after effort to overthrow him, to no purpose.

The transference of the Ark, therefore, was effected under circumstances of possible danger from Israel's foes, and we learn that on the first occasion, when the removal of the Ark was checked by the death of Uzzah, an escort was called together of not less than thirty thousand men. But on the second occasion, after the three months' sojourn in the house of Obed-edom, we are told that David gathered all Israel together, special mention being made of the priests and Levites—about nine hundred in number—who are present under their chiefs (1 Chron. xv. 3, *sqg.*). Such a scene as this—a king, newly seated on his throne, attacked by powerful and resolute foes, yet able to believe that his Lord should have them in derision: an army of warriors giving themselves as a free-will offering to their king, ready to be led forth against the foes of the Lord—all this surely is a close parallel to the Psalm. But David himself, we are told, executes priestly functions. He wears an ephod, he offers sacrifice, and at the last he utters the benediction.

Yet there is one point more. Granted, it may be said, that all of this is suggestive of an assumption of a certain priestly character, yet why of the order of Melchizedek? Clearly, we may say that there is implied a combination of kingly and priestly offices, and that a priesthood is brought before us different from, and therefore greater (seeing what the line of thought is) than, the Aaronic priesthood. Probably, also, the meaning of the name "king of righteousness" is not to be lost sight of. How far we may identify the Salem of Melchizedek with the seat of David's kingdom, it is, perhaps, impossible to say with certainty. Last of all, we may call attention to a possible curious parallel between Melchizedek and David. The former brought out bread and wine for Abraham; David, after the offerings to God, and after he had blessed the people, gives to each one "a cake of bread and a good piece" (R.V. "portion") "of flesh"—where it will be observed that in the English Bible the last two words are in italics, answering to nothing in the Hebrew. The word rendered "a good piece" only occurs in the account of this incident (2 Sam vi. 19; 1 Chron. xvi. 3), and its meaning must be considered very doubtful. Yet no less a Hebraist than Gesenius explains the word as meaning "a definite portion of wine or drink, a cup" ["certam *mensuram* vini potusve, *calicem*"]; and this view is embodied in the margin of the Revised Version, where we have "*of wine*" as an alternative for the "*of flesh*" of the text. If this interpretation be correct, then the parallelism becomes strikingly close; after the lapse of well-nigh a

thousand years again this solemn act is performed, both foreshadowing the day when the Saviour should give to His disciples the typical bread and wine.

The only other detail to which we shall refer is the expression in the last verse, "He shall drink of the brook by the way." The warrior, while pursuing a flying foe, faints from heat and weariness till refreshed from the brook which flows by his path. This brings strikingly before us the occasion in David's war with the Philistines, which Ewald cites by way of comparison, when he longed to drink of the well of Bethlehem, and three of his warriors, at their own imminent risk, brought it to him, though he would not drink it.

Thus, do we believe, David portrays his own conflicts and his triumphs in this poem; but, with "thoughts beyond his thoughts," he sees, too, the glory of the future King, his Son, in far-off days yet to be. It is well pointed out by Dr. Gifford that it was just at this juncture in David's life, when, the Philistines overthrown, the Ark brought safely to Mount Zion, the rites of sacrifice and benediction accomplished, the promise comes of the Son who should establish His kingdom for ever. It thus becomes clear that a very strong case exists for the traditional view, and this case is stated with admirable clearness in both the works now before us. It is surely not too much to ask that whatever view is offered to us in its stead should come with a strong array of evidence sufficient to establish it as a real substantial rival to the Davidic one, and not be one which its advocates seek to force upon their hearers by sweeping declarations scantily supported by evidence.

The newest theory, set forth with unhesitating confidence, is that Psalm cx. is "a glorification of Simon Maccabæus," who, though not a king, "lacked nothing of the dignity but the name. Syria claimed no authority over him." This is very strong language, and, if it could be justified, it would set the theory, not, indeed, on higher ground than the traditional view, but would give it a very reasonable degree of probability.

Let us briefly examine this theory. It is of the essence of it that Simon was practically, though not formally, a king. Now, be it remembered, the words of the Psalm are very strong—the subject of it is bidden by God to sit at His right hand, and, therefore, his kingship is directly and distinctly due to God. Simon, we learn, on the death of his brother Jonathan, was chosen by the Jews their leader (*ἡγούμενος*, 1 Macc. xiii. 8), and thereupon he sends to Demetrius, King of Syria, presents of a golden crown and scarlet robe, begging that he would give the land "immunity," that is, of course, from tribute. The presents are graciously received, and the request granted.

but the wording of the permission is most suggestive: "As for any oversight or fault committed unto this day, we forgive it, and the crown tax also, which ye owe us: and if there were any other tribute paid in Jerusalem it shall no more be paid" (verse 39). Demetrius, it is clear, was glad of the alliance of stout warriors like Simon and his men, and so makes these concessions, but no words could show more clearly that the relation between the two was that of suzerain and vassal. Or, again, take another point, on which much stress has been laid—the fact, namely, that Simon coined money with his "own stamp." Antiochus Sidetes, the successor of Demetrius, writes to Simon: "I give thee leave also to coin money for thy country with thine own stamp" (1 Macc. xv. 6). This is hardly the language which would be addressed to one who "lacked nothing of the dignity [of king] but the name." Obviously he was a vassal, though a powerful one, and one whose alliance was valuable; but, none the less, it is impossible to view him as one who wielded a God-given sceptre.

But the same kind of results are got if we consider the nature of the priesthood. The reference to the priesthood of the subject of the Psalm is even more emphatic than that to his kingship—"The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent." Surely the force of language will hardly go further. The priesthood, too, is dissociated from the Levitical priesthood—something new, something specially sacred, is brought forward. But what of the high-priesthood of Simon? The first allusion to it is in the letter of King Demetrius, in which he calls him "the high priest, and friend of kings" (1 Macc. xiii. 36); and whether or no Simon owed the high-priesthood to Demetrius, anyhow the appointment was confirmed by him (xiv. 38). Nay, if we notice what happened in the case of the high-priesthood of Jonathan, the brother of Simon, to whom King Alexander could say (x. 20): "Now this day we ordain thee to be the high priest of thy nation," it seems by no means improbable that Demetrius had not merely confirmed, but actually bestowed, the dignity on Simon.

Surely the parallel somewhat breaks down. The Psalm brings before us a priest appointed to an exceptional priesthood in terms of special solemnity; the history shows us Simon probably appointed by a heathen king, and certainly accepting confirmation at his hands. Surely, unless the Psalm is an absolute mockery of language, the idea of such a parallel must be driven out of court.

Another point remains. The Jews and priests were pleased, we are told, that Simon should be "their governor and high priest for ever, *until there should arise a faithful prophet.*" To say nothing further of the source whence he derived his

authority, that authority was, in a certain sense, temporary ; a higher authority might in due time arise, and then this inferior authority was to come to an end. Thus, viewing the matter, as we have done, in a broad general way, it becomes plain that in no point will the recorded history of Simon satisfy the conditions laid down in the Psalm.

The Simonian theory is discussed with great fulness and clearness by Dr. Sharpe in his second lecture. To enter into full details is impossible here, but we may conclude with one striking point: The subject of the Psalm, priest and king, is distinctly and essentially a warrior, fighting and pursuing. But Simon's period of rule was one of peace, when "every man sat under his vine and his fig tree, and there was none to fray them." This is rather an awkward contradiction. A recent work, to which we have already referred, remarks on it: "It appears to be certain, from many prophetic passages, that inspiration was not incompatible with harmless illusion." A good many of us will have our opinion as to the good taste of such a remark in such a connection ; but, after all, the question is simply one of fact. The Psalm, we are told, refers to Simon ; but part of the Psalm is absolutely incapable of being so explained. An ordinary plain man would say, Then the theory has broken down. By no means, say our critics ; the theory is all right, the Psalm itself is in fault. This is almost as illogical as the case of the Roman priest, who, on being told some passage in the Vulgate was certainly incorrect, because it could in no way be reconciled with the Hebrew, cheerfully answered : "So much the worse for the Hebrew."

Has any case, then, been shown why—so far, at any rate, as this Psalm is concerned—we should cut loose from the old moorings ? Surely no. And be it once again remarked, that the present phase of criticism is having less and less to do with critical scholarship. In an increasing degree, the arguments contained in books of destructive criticism can in the main be comprehended by any educated person. It is not so much scholarship as keen logical common-sense that is wanted, which shall rigorously refuse to treat assertion and demonstration as the same ; which will demand, when the treasures assailed are so priceless, that no outpost, even the tiniest, be given up, unless and until it is shown to be untenable. Of absolute truth, whatever it be, we have, and need have no fear ; of theories put forward with loud assertion, and sometimes with reckless treating of the evidence, we may have much fear, yet often they are but shadowy and unsubstantial after all.

R. SINKER.