

ART. II.—EMPIRE-BUILDING : A LESSON FROM  
A PSALMIST.

WE do not know why Psalm cxxvii. is associated in the inscription with the name of Solomon, but its opening verse, *Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it : except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain*, expresses a conviction which is eminently characteristic of the wise King, and which often finds pointed utterance in the Proverbs collected under his name. "Trust in the Lord," they say, "with all thine heart, and lean not upon thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." "A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps." "The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord." "There is no wisdom, nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord." "The horse is prepared unto the day of battle, but victory is of the Lord." Some coincidences with the language of the Proverbs are noticed by commentators. But it is forcibly urged by Luther, whose great gift it was to penetrate to the heart of the portions of Scripture which he treated, that the association of the name of Solomon with the Psalm points to a deep connexion of thought. Solomon was before all things a wise ruler, a statesman, and a political teacher. "Give me," he prayed at the outset of his reign, "wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people ; for who can judge this Thy people, that is so great ?" It is, accordingly, for the practical wisdom of life that he is renowned, and it is in the treasures of this experience that the writings ascribed to him are so rich. "Through wisdom," he says, "is an house builded, and by understanding it is established," and this is the special wisdom with which he was endowed, much as he may have failed to act upon it in his later life. Bearing this in mind, the Psalm may well have been regarded, by those to whom the inscription is due, as embodying the sum and substance of the wise King's experience of life. He is represented in another book as despairing of all the labour that he had taken under the sun, exclaiming *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity*, but as content at last to leave all results in the hands of God, and pronouncing, as the conclusion of the whole matter, *Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man*. Prosperous and honoured as he had been, his experience of life is represented as having taught him, above all things, the shortness of human foresight and the weakness of human wisdom, and man's complete inability to command the course of events. He knew that his own wisdom and his

success were gifts from on high, and not the results of his own labour or ability; and the deepest conviction of his life might thus be regarded in finding an appropriate and pregnant expression in the words: *Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you that ye rise up early, and so late take rest, and eat the bread of toil; for so giveth He unto His beloved in sleep.*

It is remarkable that a feeling akin to this, though too rarely animated by a similar faith, is characteristic of men who have had a large experience of life, especially of great rulers or commanders. Men like Cæsar, Constantine, Marlborough, or even Napoleon, have been the most deeply impressed with the conviction that the issue of their momentous enterprises had depended on a power utterly beyond them and above them. Lord Bacon says in his *Essays* that "all wise men, to decline the envy of their own virtues, use to ascribe them to Providence and Fortune. So Cæsar said to the pilot in the tempest, 'Cæsarem portas et fortunam ejus.' So Sylla chose the name of Felix, the fortunate, and not Magnus, the great. And it has been noted," he adds, "that those who ascribe openly too much to their own wisdom and policy end unfortunate." Fortune was personified as a goddess in the wisest and most powerful State of ancient times, and her worship, as is observed by the elder Pliny, took a deep hold on Roman life. The Roman State itself, says Döllinger, raised from its petty beginnings to world-wide sovereignty, seemed the bosom child of the goddess. Some sentiment of this kind is, in fact, the verdict alike of the most general and of the deepest human experience. It may take the form of despair and cynicism, as in the bitterer moments of the Preacher in the Book of Ecclesiastes, or of a superstition, as in some of the cases just mentioned; but everywhere it emerges, so to speak, as the general result of the observation and experience of life. The conviction is the more striking as it seems to arise in spite of a strange illusion under which men too generally commence life, and to which they too long adhere. The mystery of life, its difficulties, its perplexities, its strange and baffling issues, seem hidden, as by a kindly hand, from youth and early manhood. Were it not so, men and women would hardly, perhaps, have the courage to face the ordeal before them; but the truth only grows upon them as their wills become firmer, and their principles settled enough to endure the strain. It is an observation of Paley that if our skins were transparent, and we could observe the infinitely delicate construction of our bodies, we should scarcely dare to move; and certainly if a man who was destined to play any important

part in public, or even in private affairs, were to have exhibited to him at the outset the main course of his life, with all that would depend upon it, and all the hazards he would run, for others as well as for himself, there are few who would not shrink back. But, as a matter of fact, men are ever starting afresh, full of confidence and enterprise, and the conviction we have been considering is forced upon them by the stern realities of life. It is like the unimpeachable testimony borne by an adverse witness.

It may well be considered, indeed, whether, even apart from this general illusion—an illusion, however, which, as will be seen in the sequel, may be but a mistaken form of a true conviction—there be not too generally prevalent, in spite of the experience thus described, the strangest degree of confidence in human power over the government of life in its various departments. From the days when Socrates so effectually cross-examined the brilliant young Athenian, who proposed to enter public life in the same spirit as that in which he entered for the races at Olympia, and extorted from him the confession of his utter incompetence for the task, there has certainly been a disposition in men to act as if the most momentous and difficult of all duties—those of the government of States and the organization of human life—were the most completely within their own power. At the present day in particular, men are as ready as ever to frame or remould constitutions, to urge ambitious policies, to lay down new laws for the organization of human relations, and to recast according to their own ideas the very elements of society and of the family. Yet this is the age in which science has rendered us more sensible than ever of the infinite complexity and subtlety of Nature, and in which men are learning every day how imperfect are their anticipations and their knowledge respecting the simplest of natural objects. But what is even the most complicated of the objects of Nature compared with man, with a human family, and still more with human society? That society now embraces, in an ever-increasing degree, all nations of men on the face of the whole earth. The truth announced by the Apostle, but so hardly learned, that God has made them all of one blood, grows upon us from day to day and from year to year. Europeans and Asiatics, white men and black, civilized men and savages, all are becoming united by the agencies of modern life into one vast organism, of which every part affects every other part. Our various religions, social habits, physical and moral qualities, no less than our political conduct, are acting and reacting one upon another; and the effect of a war or a revolution, or the silent modification of national character, of a moral decay or renovation in one corner of the world,

must needs sooner or later be felt at the Antipodes. History moreover, and literature bind the past with the present, and it is not merely all men who now live on the face of the globe, but all men who have ever lived upon it, who combine to form the vast, and even infinite, body of human society—nay, of our own Empire. If ordinary Nature has secrets which baffle the most prolonged and careful investigation; if a distinguished naturalist has to devote years of labour to the study of a crayfish, before he can explain its structure; if modern medicine, with all its resources, still stands baffled before the problems of our mere physical frame, who shall deem himself sufficient even to analyse human life, still less to put his hand to the momentous task of guiding, governing, and reorganizing it? Yet how often is the task undertaken, in its simplest as well as in its highest forms, from the duties of marriage and household government to those which influence public affairs, in a spirit too well described in our Marriage Service as “unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly”—if not to satisfy passion or ambition, yet without any adequate sense of the responsibility and difficulty incurred. Well may such enterprises, whether in the humbler sphere of the family or in the vaster sphere of the State, end, as they too often do, in disappointment and dismay, or at least in errors which have to be bitterly requited.

Thoughts like these have of late years been brought very closely home to Englishmen, and should be deeply impressed upon us in presence of the great facts which are so vividly exhibited in the great ceremonials of the Coronation. All thoughtful men, whatever their political opinions, must often be overwhelmed by the consideration of the momentous responsibilities involved in the present position of this country, and of the vast issues for weal or woe to the multitudes under our rule, and through them to the whole human race, which are dependent upon our conduct, and upon the acts of all who have a share, whether small or great, in determining the manner in which our power and influence shall be exerted. Did the issue, indeed, depend upon our own wisdom, and were we really responsible in our own strength for these vast multitudes and these stupendous consequences, we might well adopt the language of a ruler still greater than Solomon, and exclaim with Moses: “Wherefore have I not found favour in Thy sight, that Thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? have I brought them forth, that Thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father carrieth the sucking child, unto the land which Thou swarest unto their fathers? . . . I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for

me. And if Thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray Thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in Thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness." That is a cry too often wrung from really great souls, capable, like Moses, of appreciating the momentous importance and the immense difficulties of the task laid upon them. Even in private life, and in the management of the family, there are burdens and perplexities not less bitter; and the education of a child, or the discharge of true and loving duty to a husband or to a wife, too often extorts a similar cry from suffering lips. There is no remedy for these distressing anxieties and perplexities in any form of mere political or moral philosophy—certainly not in one which, like that which is now very prevalent, can only take into account the ultimate results of development, and leaves individuals and particular societies to be crushed out or left to ruin, with a mercilessness or an indifference far greater than that of the most predestinarian theology. If we would maintain courage and confidence amidst all the difficulties of life, if we would keep our sympathies and our hopes alive for every soul, however weak, for every race, however struggling, we must cling to the faith of the Jewish and Christian Church, and to the grand truth of that faith exemplified in this Psalm.

We should grasp that truth very imperfectly if we regarded it as merely asserting the need of God's interposition or special assistance in order to prosper the work we have in hand, or to protect it from failure and to shield it from misfortune. That there are such special providences, as they are called, is, indeed, one of the deepest convictions of the Christian heart, and is daily confirmed by experience to the eye of a reasonable faith. But this is only a particular aspect of the great general truth which the Psalm embodies, and it is in the light of that general truth that it receives its main justification. The Psalm, in conformity with the general tenor of the Scriptures, represents the whole of human life as under the control and conduct of God, and places our labour and skill in a complete subordination to His direct personal action. It is not, as men are too apt to talk, man who builds the house and keeps the city, and the Lord who assists him; it is the Lord who builds the house, the Lord who keeps the city, and except so far as we are building with Him and for Him we labour and we watch in vain. He has His own great design for mankind. His kingdom is established, is being gradually developed, and is sure to come nearer and nearer; and every house that is builded, every family that is established, every city that is protected, and every state or empire that is prospered, is under His immediate governance, and is being

used by Him for His purposes. Human nature, in a word, is no less under His command and direction than all other Nature, and we can no more determine its course than we can control the motions of the stars or the currents of the ocean. The ebbs and flows of human affairs, the attractions and gravitations of human societies, have alike motives and objects, of which by nature we have but a dim apprehension, and they are vitally affected by spiritual realities and spiritual beings not open at present to our ken. None knows them but He who is their Creator, in the hollow of whose hand they lie, and who is moulding us all, individuals and societies alike, at once with the love of a Father and with the unsearchable counsels of a great Creator, to some glorious, but invisible, destiny. He has been pursuing this design throughout history. It has been revealed in its main features through holy men of old, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost; and there is no more amazing evidence of the truth of the Scriptures than the manner in which the course of the world and its condition at this day correspond to the predictions of Prophets and Apostles. That the Jewish revelation and a Jewish Messiah should be the central and supreme force of human life and of history—this, at the time it was first prophesied, was the most improbable to human eyes of all suppositions; but it is the most visible fact at the present day to all impartial observers. It is the Lord who has been building and watching through all the long centuries of human existence, and the builders of houses and keepers of cities have toiled successfully, or have watched in vain, in proportion as they have or have not co-operated with Him.

Moses, therefore, was in error in his complaint that the Lord had laid the burden of the whole people of Israel upon him, and that he was called upon to carry them in his arms as a nursing father carries a sucking child. It was the Lord Himself, as the prophet says, who was carrying them in His arms, and leading them through the wilderness. Moses was but His instrument, and his sole responsibility consisted in doing his duty to the best of his ability—an arduous task enough, no doubt, but one which is relieved of its greatest burden and dread when a man feels that he is not acting of himself, or in his own strength, but that he is the instrument of God Himself; that in proportion as he submits himself to God, and puts his trust in Him, he will be guided and supported, and that in any case, whether it be God's pleasure to grant him apparent success or failure, the ultimate result is safe in the Divine hands. We may relieve ourselves of the deepest of all anxieties by assuring ourselves that we and all we do are in God's hands, and that He is working out His own

purposes through us. Every work thus performed will contribute to His great design. It will serve His purposes here, it will contribute to His perfect kingdom hereafter, and it will be the means of helping our own souls forward in the way that leads to everlasting life.

The eminent French preacher, M. Bersier, has employed a fine image on this subject, which is in striking harmony with the language and the associations of this Psalm. "When I reflect," he says, "on the Divine plan which is pursued amidst the confusion of history, a familiar scene from the Old Testament is recalled to my mind. When Solomon built the temple of God on Mount Zion, we are told that all the materials which served for this immense work had to be prepared far from Jerusalem, in order that the sound of axe or hammer might not be heard in the Holy City. And thus, for a long time, in the valleys of Judæa or on the hills of Lebanon, workmen were felling cedars or cutting stones, whilst no one knew the plan of the great architect. But every one had received the order to complete his own task, until the day came when the temple at length arose in its majestic beauty. I have often thought," says M. Bersier, "that it was a striking image of the destinies of humanity. God, the Supreme Architect, is constructing, in the course of long centuries, a grand edifice, of which the plan is concealed from us, but which will be hereafter the living sanctuary in which we shall adore Him. It is being prepared far from heaven, far from the holy hill of Zion, far from the abode of peace and glory. It is here below, sometimes in the obscure valleys, sometimes on the mountain-tops of human life, that the materials are being fashioned; for the sound of suffering and toil cannot be permitted to penetrate into heaven. Every one of us has his own small part of the work committed to him, and it is enough for us to know that that work, if faithfully done, will be accepted by the Master Builder, and will find its place in His design. The day will come when all the materials, which now seem to us dispersed in a fatal confusion, will be united in a perfect order; when human sufferings, sacrifices, perplexities, will be seen to have all done their work in fashioning the stones of the great edifice; and all things, whether in our own lives or in the great scenes of history, will be seen to have been working together for the great purpose of God, and for the good of those who love Him."

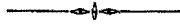
It is in the light of this truth that we may best comprehend our Lord's command, in the Sermon on the Mount, that we should seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all other things will be added unto us. It has sometimes

been made a ground of objection to the teaching of that discourse, and of the New Testament in general, that it takes too little account of the greater social and political interests of life, and that it concentrates attention unduly upon spiritual perfection and future salvation. The objection greatly exaggerates the characteristic which it notices; but so far as that characteristic exists, it depends upon the recognition of the great truth now in question. The Lord is known to be building the house and keeping the city, just as He arrays the grass with a glory greater than that of Solomon, and feeds the birds who neither sow nor reap. The temporal affairs of human life will develop under His guidance, and will pass, in ever-varying forms, from one condition to another. Few permanent rules can be laid down respecting them; for the conditions of national and social life will vary from age to age; nations assume different forms, and the nature of their relations is continually shifting. But certain great moral and spiritual realities remain permanent amidst the perpetual flux; and so far as we are faithful to them, shall we be sure to fulfil our part aright, in whatever position we may be placed. The permanent principles, on which the Lord is building the house, have been revealed to us in the Scriptures, and are embodied for us in the Christian Creed and the Christian standard of duty. Our part is to study those Scriptures; to imbue our minds with the revelations they contain of the will and purpose of God; to submit ourselves more and more, day by day, to the law of Christian life which they exhibit; to live as God's servants and children, in humble trust, in the faithful endeavour to do our duty in His sight, in the patient endurance of any difficulties or trials He may lay upon us; and doing this, to rest in the calm assurance that He will build the house, and will use us to carry out His great designs.

One and the same rule, in short, applies to national and imperial and to private affairs. As we review, at great turning-points in our lives, or in the history of our country, our discharge of our duties in the past, we must have occasion to feel, in the spirit ascribed to Moses in the ninetieth Psalm, the grievous imperfection of our labours. We may have reason to exclaim, like him, "Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance. For all our days are passed away in Thy wrath: we bring our years to an end as a tale that is told." Entering more and more into the momentous character of our responsibilities and anxieties, we may be appalled, like Moses, by the burden which weighs upon us. But in proportion as we can join in the faith expressed in his prayer, "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations," so far may we find rest in the thought that the



Lord is building the house and keeping the city ; and at the end of our meditations and confessions we may confidently add the words : " Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and Thy glory upon their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us : and establish Thou the work of our hands upon us ; yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it."



### ART. III.—OUR LORD'S TEACHING CONCERNING HIMSELF—II.

#### (2) *Jesus is the Son of God.*

1. **I**N considering the application of the title—" Son of God"—to Jesus, let us first glance at the usage in the Synoptical Gospels, and then in St. John's Gospel.

(1) In the former there is no passage in which Jesus explicitly calls Himself " Son of God." Nevertheless, He does so by implication, and He accepts the title when given to Him by others.

He names or addresses God as the Father in Matthew twenty-one times, in Mark thirteen, in Luke twelve. It is remarkable that in regard to His relation with God Jesus never classes Himself with other men. He says, " My Father" and " Your Father," but never " Our Father," except when He bade the disciples pray " Our Father." Nor is there a single instance in which Jesus includes man with Himself, as alike " Sons of God." Certainly, these things point to a uniqueness in the sonship of Our Lord.

In two parables—that of the Vineyard and of the Marriage Feast—Jesus represents Himself as the Son, and by implication the Son of God.

The title is applied to our Lord under very different circumstances, and doubtless with considerable variety of significance. Thus the demoniacs addressed Him as the Son of God, with some perverted sense of His power ; Satan challenged Him to prove Himself the Son of God ; the centurion, moved by what he saw at the cross, declared Him to be a Son of God, perhaps with his heathen conception of a hero or demi-god.

All the Synoptics relate the testimony of the Father, given at the Baptism and at the Transfiguration, in varying form—" Thou art my Beloved Son."

There were two notable occasions upon which Jesus accepted the title : First, when St. Peter made his first confession, " Thou art the Christ, the Son of God," and our Lord approved it as a truth divinely taught ; and, secondly, when, to the