

of the soul when good thoughts arise within us, when we long to be better than we are, when we feel well-nigh hopeless of the deliverance from that which is wrong and base and hard, for which we nevertheless sigh. We may put Him to the proof at any moment; and the moment we do go to Him, this elect and beloved Son of God will give us power to become the sons of God and to make his will our will amid all the changes and conflicts of time.

S. COX.

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THE VINDICTIVE PSALMS VINDICATED.

INTRODUCTORY.

IF I may hope that the defence of the 109th Psalm, which appeared in THE EXPOSITOR for November 1875, has commended itself to my readers, they will possibly be curious to learn whether any similar apology, or any apology at all, can be offered for the imprecations contained in other Psalms. They will probably be asking, "Can the fierce and vindictive expressions which disfigure other portions of the Psalter, in any case or cases, be identified as *quotations*—quotations by the Psalmists of the curses of their enemies?"

The answer to this question is, I had almost said unhappily, very simple. It is that, with the insignificant exceptions of Psa. xxii. 8 and Psa. xli. 8—in both of which instances, it will be observed, we have taunts or reproaches, rather than maledictions, and in both of which the reproachful words are distinguished as citations by our Authorized Version; and also with the exception of Psa. xli. 5, where the

citation, though not expressly acknowledged by the Authorized Version, is obvious,—there are no cases, except, of course, those which are stated to be reported speeches in the Original, where we can confidently say, “These are not the words of the Psalmist; they are the words of wicked men who hated him.”

There is one passage indeed, and that precisely the passage which after Psa. cix. is most distressing, which is *patient* of this interpretation, viz., Psa. lxi. 27, 28. I should scruple to say that these anathemas *must* be a quotation; but one need have little hesitation in saying that we may legitimately hold them to be such. The 26th verse runs: “For those whom *thou* hast smitten have they persecuted, and to the sorrow of thy wounded ones do they speak.” Then follow the imprecations: “Add iniquity unto their iniquity,” &c. Is it not possible that these are the very words which, as the Psalmist has just been telling us, “they spoke to the sorrow of God’s wounded ones”? I incline, on grounds which perhaps it would be wearisome to enumerate, to think that this is the most natural construction of the passage.

It is clear, then, that we cannot account for all, or indeed for many of the Imprecations, by pleading that they are citations. We must cast about, consequently, for other grounds on which to reconcile them with the moral sense and with the spirit of our just and beneficent religion. But, first, let us try to grasp the character and extent of the difficulty which we have to face.

The difficulty is this:—That in no less than

twenty-nine Psalms ;<sup>1</sup> in no less, that is to say, than twenty-nine Lyrics held by the Church of God to have been "given by inspiration of God," and allowed, even by those who would deny their inspiration, to be "full of all blessed conditions:" in so many of these, and frequently standing side by side with their most devout and gracious sentiments, are expressions which, by all the laws of language, we are bound to call *Imprecations*: that is to say expressions of the hope, the wish, the prayer, that some judgment, some punishment, some misfortune, may befall certain persons; while in more than fifty Psalms<sup>2</sup> we have, not *Imprecations* indeed, but *Comminations*;<sup>3</sup> that is to say, statements on the part of the writers of the Psalms of their belief that some judgment, some punishment, some misfortune, either has befallen or will befall certain persons, on account of their real or supposed misdeeds. The distinction between the two classes is obvious. The latter are declarations of what *will* happen in certain cases, and that whether the writer desires it or not: the former are petitions

<sup>1</sup> They are Psalms v. vii. x. xi. xii. xvii. xxviii. xxxi. xxxv. xl. xli. liv. lv. lvi. lviii. lix. lxxviii. lxxix. lxxxi. lxxxiv. lxxxix. cxxix. cxxxix. cxli. cxlii. cxliii. cxliv.

<sup>2</sup> Such are Psalms iii. v. xviii. xxi. xxxvi. xlvi. lii. liii. lv. lvi. lviii. lxiii. lxiv. lxviii. lxxv. ci. cx. cxlix.

<sup>3</sup> The definitions are perhaps somewhat wide, and may possibly cover a few expressions which would not ordinarily be called either imprecatory or comminatory, but which must however be so designated, if the words are taken in their strict and literal significance. It seemed necessary to say this, in order to account for the large number of Psalms set down under each of these categories. It is not meant, of course, that nearly thirty Psalms are, in their general character, imprecatory (or that over fifty are comminatory), but that no less a number contain one or more imprecations.

addressed to God that some specific evil *may* happen to the writer's enemies, or to God's enemies, as the case may be. The moral difficulty presented by the former, consequently, is much greater than that which attaches to the latter. For while the Comminations are liable to the *suspicion* of vindictiveness; while they countenance the idea that the writer was "glad at calamities," and "rejoiced at the destruction of him that hated him," inasmuch as he viewed the impending evil, not merely without regret, but with positive approval, and sometimes with a sort of exultation; the Imprecations, without proof to the contrary, have every stamp and token of malevolence. In the former case the author may or may not have been solicitous for the calamity which he foretells: in the latter, he *must* have been solicitous for it, for he prays for it. But the difference between the two classes of expressions, and consequently the difficulties which they respectively present to us, will be best exhibited by a few examples, which perhaps are all the more necessary inasmuch as both Imprecations and Comminations differ considerably among themselves in their range and intensity. For a reason which will be obvious hereafter, I have selected such specimens of either class as have a certain correspondency and community of idea with examples of the other class. The translation is in every case that of Professor Perowne's Commentary.

## IMPRECATIONS.

"O God, break their teeth in their mouths; the jaw teeth of the young lions wrench out, O Jehovah."—Psa. Iviii. 6.

## COMMINATIONS.

"Thou hast smitten all mine enemies on the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly."—Psa. iii. 7.

IMPRECATIONS.

"Of thy loving kindness, cut off mine enemies and destroy all the adversaries of my soul."—Psa. cxliii. 12.

"O that thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God."—Psa. cxxxix. 19.

"Pour out thy fury on the heathen which know thee not; . . . and render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom."—Psa. lxxix. 6, 12.

"Let destruction come upon him at unawares, and let his net which he hath hidden catch himself: into that very destruction let him fall."—Psa. xxxv. 8.

COMMUNATIONS.

"Mine enemies also thou hast made to turn their backs before me, so that I destroyed them that hate me."—Psa. xviii. 40. (Cf. Psa. xlv. 5.)

"Evil shall slay the wicked."—Psa. xxxiv. 21.

"O daughter of Babylon . . . happy shall he be that layeth hold of thy little ones and dasheth them against the rock."—Psa. cxxxvii. 9.

"Thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days."—Psa. lv. 23. <sup>1</sup>

Now what shall we say to such expressions as these? For one thing is certain, that we must say something. They call for explanation, for justification. We cannot shut our eyes to them, or if *we* can, others cannot and will not. To many persons, and those not the least devout, the Imprecatory and Communatory Psalms have occasioned exquisite distress. They say they wish to believe them to be inspired, and yet they perceive in them a spirit manifestly alien to the spirit of Christ. They say they appear to them to be vindictive, malevolent, truculent. They say they cannot frame their lips to pronounce them. In fact, they scarcely know what to think of them, except to wish that the Bible "were well rid of them." But others, the chartered enemies of our religion, are at no loss what to make

<sup>1</sup> Compare also Psa. lvi. 7 with Psa. xxxvi. 12; Psa. lxix. 22-28 with Psa. xxxvii. 13, 20; Psa. lxxxiii. 11, 13 with Psa. cxlix. 6-8; Psa. cxl. 10 with Psa. cxx. 3, 4.

of them. They make a capital of unbelief out of them. They point to them as a sufficient reason for rejecting the Volume of which they form a part. They parade them before us, and ask, "Can this be the voice, or can this have the sanction, of the Supreme Goodness? Can the Eternal Love approve of such hatred, and venom, and rank uncharitableness, as some of these expressions display?" The Vindictive Psalms, then, there can unhappily be no doubt, are a real difficulty: they are a weapon in the hands of the infidel: they are a stumbling-block in the path of the Christian.<sup>1</sup> And as such, we are bound, if we can, to vindicate them. If a good account of them can be given,—of which many persons profess to despair,—it is a sacred duty to produce it. And this is what, in subsequent issues of THE EXPOSITOR, I shall hope to do.

I say in *subsequent* issues, for the remainder of this article must be devoted to a consideration of certain solutions of the difficulty which have been proposed by various divines, some of which, even at the present day, are very generally received as sufficient, but which I cannot but regard as untenable or inadequate. I am not at liberty to pass them by, because one or other of them almost invariably finds acceptance with students of Scripture, and because to leave them unchallenged would be to cut the ground from under my own feet. I shall notice three such, the Futuristic, the Prophetical, and the Condemnatory hypotheses. With

<sup>1</sup> See Dr. Hessey's "Boyle Lectures," 2nd Series, pp. 13-23, where testimonies to this effect are cited from Thomas Fuller, Dr. Chalmers, and others.

regard to the two first mentioned, it is true, my task will be almost one of slaying the slain; for they have been dealt with already by several writers, though not, it has seemed to me, as summarily and conclusively as they have deserved. Be that as it may, they still survive in popular estimation. The third, however, has been but recently propounded, and, so far as I know, has not yet received any reply.

By the *Futuristic* interpretation I intend, of course, the solution suggested, or advocated, by such writers as Bishops Horne and Horsley and Dr. Henry Hammond. This was for a long time the favourite explanation of the imprecations—of the comminations it takes no account; and it still has its advocates. It proceeds on the supposition that the imprecations have no necessary existence in the Original, and only appear in our English Bibles through the inadvertence of our translators, who have rendered certain Hebrew verbs as imperatives, or optatives, when they might with equal, if not greater, propriety have presented them to us as futures indicative. For example, where in Psa. lxix. 22, we read, "Let their table become a snare, . . . let their eyes be darkened," &c., Dr. Hammond would render, "Their table *shall be* for a snare," "their eyes *shall be* darkened." So in Psa. cix. 13, "Let his posterity be cut off," Bishop Horsley would translate, "His posterity *shall be* cut off." Now this system of translation, if it could be admitted, might do something to *reduce* the difficulty. It would at any rate convert a large number of imprecations into comminations, *i.e.*, it would transform

prayers into predictions, and so acquit the authors of these Psalms of having desired and implored God to inflict the punishments which they specify. But this translation is *not* admissible. Hebrew grammar absolutely forbids it. For though in Hebrew the optative is formed out of the future, yet it is a special and distinct form thereof, an apocopated form, known to grammarians as the jussive future, and frequently, though not always, easily distinguishable, orthographically, from the ordinary future.<sup>1</sup> It is so in the instances just mentioned.<sup>2</sup> But, secondly, even if this translation were legitimate, there would still remain a large number of imprecations in which it would afford us no relief whatever; all those imprecations, namely, in which the Hebrew imperative proper is used. Such a passage is Psa. lxi. 24, "Pour out thine indignation upon them," where the verb (שָׁפַךְ) is a strict imperative, and cannot possibly be manipulated into a future. Another such passage is Psa. lviii. 6, "Break their teeth," &c.; and these two are but examples of many more. And, finally, even if we were justified in turning all these optatives or imperatives into futures, all these imprecations, *i.e.*, into comminations, what shall we say of some of the comminations

<sup>1</sup> See Gesenius's Grammar, ed. Rödiger, pp. 75, 189.

<sup>2</sup> It is not meant to be denied here that there are some cases where the imperative of the Authorized Version might be more correctly rendered as a future indicative (as, *e.g.*, Psa. vi. 10), or even as a past (*e.g.*, Psa. cix. 17, 18). But, on the other hand, there are passages where our translators have employed indicatives, but where the optative or imperative is plainly demanded by the Original. I may mention as examples Psa. xi. 6, "Upon the wicked *may he rain*" (יִמְטֵר); Psa. xii. 3, "*May the Lord cut off*" (יִכְרֹת); Psa. cxxxix. 19, "O that thou *wouldst slay*" (אִם-יִהְיֶה-טֵל), &c.



themselves, as, *e.g.*, Psa. lviii. 10, or Psa. cxxxvii. 9? The Futurition hypothesis, consequently, must be for ever abandoned as both untenable and inadequate.

A second system of interpretation, the Allegorical or Prophetical, lands us in equal, if not greater, difficulties. By writers of this school—and nearly all the Fathers were of this school—the imprecations are justified as expressions which find their mark and fulfilment in the enemies of Christ, or in our own spiritual enemies.<sup>1</sup> For example, in Psa. lxix. 21, they find these words, “They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” They know from the New Testament (St. John xix. 28) that these words were somehow predictive or descriptive of the sufferings of the Redeemer. They know, too, that the whole Psalm is generally esteemed to be Messianic. Accordingly, when they find in the verses following the 21st a series of imprecations, they conclude that these imprecations apply to the enemies of Christ, to those who gave Him “gall for meat and vinegar to drink.” But how this interpretation solves the difficulty, I profess that I am unable to see. For, not to insist on the sheer absurdity of applying all the imprecations of all the Psalms—and *such* imprecations!—to the enemies of our blessed Lord, or to our own spiritual foes, we find ourselves suddenly confronted by this dilemma: Either the Psalmist, in this and other similar Psalms, describes his own bodily and mental sufferings, refers to real personal enemies, and contemplates men then living in his

<sup>1</sup> This latter was Dr. Arnold's view.

curses—these sufferings being typical of Christ's sufferings, these enemies of Christ's enemies, these contemporaries of Christ's crucifiers; or the Psalm is purely allegorical, purely and exclusively prophetic of the sufferings, enemies, words, &c., of our Lord. Plainly, if any Psalm, or any passage of Scripture whatsoever, is prophetic of Christ, it is prophetic of Him in one or other of these senses. Then, I submit that, in whichever sense you take this particular Psalm,—for we will try the theory by one instance chosen at haphazard,—the difficulty presented by these imprecations, whatever it may be, is not lessened, but is enormously increased. Do you say, for example, that the Psalmist primarily contemplates his own personal enemies in his curses and at the same time speaks prophetically of the crucifiers of JESUS? Then I reply that you have more than doubled the difficulty; for now you have not only to account for the Psalmist's real imprecations upon real enemies, which of course is the original problem, but you have also to encounter the superadded difficulty of his cursing, in the persons of these real enemies, the unborn enemies of our blessed Lord. Or, do you say, on the other hand, that the whole Psalm is a prophecy *pur et simple*; <sup>1</sup> that the writer, speaking by the Spirit of God, had from first to last the passion of Christ in view? In that case, not to speak of the absurdity of regarding a Psalm which is so manifestly autobiographical as this is, as an allegory; apart from the difficulty, too, of interpreting it throughout in a mys-

<sup>1</sup> See, *e.g.*, Phillips, "Introduction to Commentary on the Psalms," p. lxix.

tical and non-natural sense, you have now to face this tremendous problem: You have to account for these imprecations proceeding from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ! For if it be Christ, be it observed, who is speaking by the mouth of David in verse 21; if the words, "they gave me vinegar to drink," &c., be his, and only his, then it must be Christ who is speaking in verse 22, *seqq.*, for these verses are obviously a continuation of verse 21; they are parts of one speech by one and the same speaker. It is Christ, then, who says, "Let their table become a snare; . . . let their eyes be darkened; . . . make their loins continually to shake," &c. Yes, it is the Fount of all mercy and compassion, it is He who, "when he suffered, he threatened *not*," that, according to this theory, pronounced these maledictory words. Now, it may be difficult to justify such words in the mouth of David, or any of the Psalmists, but to suppose them—I will not say to justify them—in Christ's gentle lips is altogether impossible. It is impossible if for no other reason, yet for this, that we happen to know what his prayer was for his crucifiers, a prayer uttered too, it is believed, about the very time when they gave Him vinegar to drink; and it was—*not*, "Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them" (verse 24), much less, "Add iniquity unto their iniquity" (verse 27), but, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

We see, then, that the attempt to defend the imprecations on the ground that they are Messianic and prophetic utterly breaks down the moment it

is fairly tested. The other view, that they may be used as imprecations against our spiritual foes, apart from the fact that it leaves the original difficulty—the difficulty that the imprecations were primarily directed against palpable enemies, enemies of flesh and blood—untouched, strains the language of the Psalms to such a degree as to justify us in summarily dismissing it as fanciful and unworthy of serious consideration.

I now come to examine the third theory, the theory which, for want of a better name, I have ventured to call the Condemnatory. I refer to the ingenious and original defence of the Imprecatory Psalms recently put forth by Dr. (now Archdeacon) Hessey.<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to do full justice to this view in the limited space at my command; but, briefly stated, it amounts to this. That these imprecations are unjustifiable and reprehensible, not only when judged by the standard of the New Testament, but also when tested by that of the Old; that the instruction which the Psalmists had received, condemns what they said (p. 46), that the imprecations are “unrestrained expressions,” and improper expressions—“impatient, envious, and revengeful” are some of Dr. Hessey’s words—“of the feelings of their respective writers” (p. 45); that they are expressions which the writers themselves “in their more tranquil and dispassionate moments would be

<sup>1</sup> In the “Boyle Lectures” for 1872. It is perhaps only fair to Dr. Hessey to state that he appears to put forth this theory, not as unassailable, but only as being “liable to fewer objections than any of the other theories with which he is acquainted.” Preface, p. xii.

inclined to retract" (p. 60); that, either in the Imprecatory Psalm itself, or in contiguous Psalms, we have "unequivocal proofs of the Psalmists' resipiscence" (p. 76); that we are no more called upon to approve of all the *words* of the Psalmists than of all their *acts* (p. 54); that, though the Psalms are inspired, and though, in the comminatory passages, the Psalmist speaks in God's name, in the imprecatory passages his language is of himself and not of God (p. 61); that these imprecatory portions may nevertheless be said to be inspired in the sense that it was inspiration "led the writers to put their feelings on record just as they had arisen, that it quickened their memories to recall them and their conscientiousness to prevent their modifying the description of them" (p. 64): and, finally, that it is for the "spiritually disciplined mind of the peruser of their compositions" to decide "when the Psalmists were speaking of themselves and when not" (*ib.*).

Now, while fully recognizing the conspicuous ingenuousness of this interpretation and the great ability displayed in its support, I am nevertheless unable, for the following reasons, to accept it:

First, it appears to me—and I hope I write with all the deference due to Dr. Hessey's superior learning and high reputation—to be a desperate remedy; it makes, as I cannot but think, not only needless but inadvertently dangerous concessions. By embracing this theory we surrender to the enemy positions which are by no means untenable, and which they will not be slow to occupy and use against ourselves. For, of course, it will be said,

“If the Psalms, the most pious and spiritual portion of the Old Testament, the portion where, if anywhere, we might fairly look for the marks of Divine Inspiration,—if *these* are disfigured by passages charged with ‘envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness,’ what certainty can we have as to the rest of the Volume, what warrant that any part of it has come from God? Besides, where are we to draw the line? how are we to know *when* the Psalmist is speaking ‘of himself’ and when ‘in the name of God.’” “You tell us indeed,” it will be said, “that the comminations are the voice of God, the imprecations the voice of the Psalmist; but surely that distinction is hardly well founded, for we observe that many of the imprecations are clearly but the echoes of the comminations. The Psalms are not few in number where the writer both prays God to inflict some punishment and also predicts that He will inflict it. Who is to say that the prediction is right, and the prayer wrong?” Moreover, if the Psalms contain expressions and prayers penned by their inspired writers which are thoroughly unjustifiable, they lose to a large extent their value for us. They are of value to us principally, though of course by no means exclusively, as patterns of devotion, as models and as vehicles for prayer and praise. It was for this reason, I take it, because they are “prayer-songs” and “praise-songs,” not merely unexceptionable in character but also every way imitable, that they were collected into one volume under the title of the “Book of Praises.” But if they contain vindictive prayers, prayers which never can be

and never could be justifiable, it is plain that, apart from the difficulty of finding out where they are and where they are not, models of devotion, to some extent they cease to be models at all. And, futhermore, if we allow that certain parts of this Hymnal—and those not easily definable—are of no authority, can this admission fail to impair the authority of the other parts? The Book of Proverbs is a didactic book. It professes to teach morality. Suppose we discovered amongst its precepts some which inculcated dishonesty or immorality; what should we say of the book as a whole? Would not both its value and its authority be thereby greatly lessened? And if it be prayers which are immoral instead of precepts, is the case at all changed? I cannot but regard this concession, therefore, as fraught with the most perilous consequences.

But, quite apart from the question of consequences, I believe this concession to be perfectly needless and uncalled for. For I cannot allow for a moment that the Imprecatory Psalms, judged by a just standard, are indefensible. I am prepared to accept them, and I hope to vindicate them. I hope to prove that, so far from being “condemned by the instruction which the Psalmists had received,” they are the natural results and embodiments of that instruction; that, so far from being reprehensible, they are, when rightly understood, commendable and even in some sense imitable.

But if I find myself at issue with this scheme in its conclusion, I am equally so with the arguments by which it is supported. One of these is

the statement (upon which apparently Dr. Hessey lays some stress) that the Psalmists were themselves conscious that in giving utterance to these imprecations they had been carried away by their own feelings, and that in their calmer moments they would have wished to retract their words, and would most probably have retracted them, had not the hand of Inspiration held them back; and that the same invisible Hand guided them, instead of wiping out what they had written, to supply a corrective, a "proof of resipiscence," either in the same Psalm or in contiguous Psalms. Now this assertion, I cannot but think, is wholly destitute of proof. We have, so far as I know, no evidence at all that the Psalmists had any misgivings, either at the time they penned their imprecations or subsequently, that they were overstepping the bounds of charity and religion. It seems never for a moment to have occurred to them that such imprecations were otherwise than lawful and right. By whatever other motives they may have been actuated, they appear to have been possessed with the firm belief that they were doing God service, or at least acting in perfect accord with the Divine will and purpose, in praying for judgment upon their enemies. I find the proof of this in the following facts: First, that in Psalm vii.—a Psalm which, by the way, is universally allowed to be Davidic—the writer utters the sternest anathemas *against himself*, anathemas precisely similar to those which he elsewhere employs against others, providing he has acted, or should act, as they have done. Secondly, that in Psa. cxxxix. 21, the author distinctly implies that he considers it a religious duty to hate those



who hate God, "to hate them with a perfect hatred" and "to count them his enemies." Thirdly, that the imprecations are, with few exceptions, prayers, appeals to God to wreak the vengeance which the writer desired; prayers, too, uttered in evident sincerity and in full confidence that they would be heard and answered: and, consequently, that if the Psalmist subsequently relented and regretted his prayer, his proper course would manifestly have been, not to content himself with an expression of resipiscence, but to cancel his prayer; for until cancelled it would remain in force; it would go on, so to speak, crying out for vengeance. And, lastly and chiefly, that everywhere, as I have already hinted, we find imprecations which are merely the echoes of preceding comminations, and comminations which afford a warrant for succeeding imprecations. It may not be amiss to take a few examples in addition to those which may be found on pp. 30, 31. In Psa. vii. 6 we read (Perowne's translation), "Arise, O Jehovah, in thine *anger*; lift up thyself against the wrath of mine adversaries," &c. Such is the prayer. In verses 11-13 we find its analogue, "God is a righteous judge, and a God who is *angry* every day. If a man will not turn, he whetteth his sword, he hath bent his bow and made it ready. Yea, for that man he hath made ready the weapons of death; his arrows he maketh fiery arrows." So that the Psalmist here predicts that God *will* do all that he has just before *prayed* Him to do. The imprecation, *i.e.*, marches *pari passu* with the commination. So also in Psa. lv. 15, "Let death come suddenly upon them, let them go down into the unseen world alive." This is the prayer. And here is the prediction (verse 23),

“ But thou, O God, shalt bring them down to the pit of destruction ; bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days.” Again, we ask, What material difference is there between the two ? The first is a prayer for the sudden death of his enemies ; the second, a declaration that their doom will be according to his prayer. A still more striking instance may be found in Psa. liv. 5, where, within the compass of one verse, we have a commination, “ He will requite the evil [of seeking to destroy the Psalmist] to mine adversaries,” and in the next clause its exact imprecatory equivalent, “ In thy truth destroy thou them.” The writer of this Psalm, again, must be acquitted of the charge of having been carried away by his feelings and of having penned what subsequent reflection would condemn ; for not only does the same verse which contains the imprecation assure us that its prayer *will* be granted, but the concluding verse of the Psalm assumes that it *has* been granted : “ And upon mine enemies hath mine eye seen [its desire].” Here, again, no one, I imagine, can seriously maintain that while the two comminations are right, the imprecation, spoken in the same breath, is wrong, or that the first half of verse 5 was inspired of God, while the second was the unrestrained and uninspired utterance of the man.<sup>1</sup> It is clear, therefore, that while we have no evidence to prove that the Psalmists ever corrected or disclaimed their imprecations, they have repeatedly, and that in the

<sup>1</sup> Compare also Psa. v., verse 10 with verses 5, 6 ; Psa. x., verses 15 and 16 ; Psa. cxxix., verse 4 with verse 5 ; Psa. cxl., verse 9 with verse 11.

most practical and striking manner, confirmed and justified them. And I may add here that, so far from finding in *contiguous* Psalms proofs of relenting, we not unseldom find in them comminations which ratify and confirm the imprecations complained of. In Psa. xxxv. 5, 6, *e.g.*, we read, "Let them be as the chaff before the wind, and the angel of Jehovah thrusting them. Let their way be darkness and exceeding slipperiness," &c. I find a comminatory parallel to the first clause of verse 5 in Psa. xxxvii. 20 (*cf.* also Psa. i. 4), to the first clause of verse 6 in Psa. lxxiii. 18, and Psa. ix. 3, and to the second clause of both verses in Psa. xlv. 5. Again in Psa. lviii. 10, we have an expression, which, though not an imprecation, sounds strangely vindictive: "The righteous shall rejoice that he hath beheld the vengeance, his footsteps will he wash in the blood of the wicked." But in Psa. lxxviii. 23, a very similar sentiment is found in the mouth of Almighty God Himself, "The Lord hath said . . . that thou mayest wash thy foot in blood, that the tongue of thy dogs may have its portion from the enemy." Now these parallels, which might be multiplied to an indefinite extent, prove, I think, conclusively, that the Psalmists did *not* pen their imprecations in moments of passion, and did *not* repent of them afterwards; they prove that they wrote them deliberately and advisedly, never doubting for a moment that what they wrote was just and right and acceptable to God. Whatever we may think of their words, then, there can hardly, one would think, be two opinions as to the terrible earnestness of those who penned them.

The next position of Dr. Hessey's which demands

notice is this. He says (p. 54), "They [the Psalmists] were men, David, for instance, who did many *acts* which our moral sense cannot approve. Is there any reason why we should be called upon to approve all their *words*?" I venture to think that there *is* a reason, and it is this: That an inspiration is claimed for their words, or at least for David's words, in Scripture, which is nowhere claimed for his acts. It is claimed by David for himself (2 Sam. xxiii. 2). It is claimed for him by our blessed Lord (Matt. xxii. 43); by St. Peter (Acts i. 16); and, by the whole band of the Apostles (Acts iv. 25). And, lastly—and this surely is conclusive not only on the point in question, but as against Dr. Hessey's theory generally,—an inspiration, or, what is the same for my purpose, a propriety, is claimed for him by St. Paul with respect even to some of his *imprecations*, the very imprecations indeed of Psa. lxix. 22, 23, to which reference has been so often made: "And David saith," we read in Rom. xi. 9, "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 down their back alway." Surely these scriptures, among others, prove that David's words, *his curses among the rest*, have received a Divine imprimatur such as is nowhere accorded to his deeds. And in the face of these testimonies should we not do well to pause before we speak of the sweet Psalmist's words as "proud and self-justifying," as "impatient, envious, and revengeful"?

I have but one remark more to make on this hypothesis. Dr. Hessey admits (p. 71) that so far

as we know "the Jews did not take offence at the imprecatory passages in the Psalms." But one cannot help feeling that, according to his theory, they ought to have done so, and *would* have done so. If these same passages violate the precepts of Judaism, if they are out of harmony with the spirit of the Old Testament (as Dr. Hessay maintains), is it not almost certain that the Jews would have remarked it and resented it? We know that the sharp-sighted Rabbis seized upon the apparent discrepancy between the statements of Ezekiel (chap. xviii. 4, 20) and that of the Decalogue (Exod. xx. 5), and long deliberated whether the former should not on this account be excluded from the canon. Can we think that the imprecations of a book, which more frequently perhaps than any other was in their hands and on their lips, if they were really in conflict with "the instruction which they had received," would have escaped their scrutiny? I find, then, in their acquiescence in them, and, above all, in the acquiescence in them of the Son of Man, a confirmation of the opinion (to which I am also led by a comparison of these passages with the denunciations of the prophets and with other portions of the Old Testament) that the Imprecatory Psalms are by no means unaccordant with the genius of the older Dispensation. And I see in this an additional and final reason for rejecting the hypothesis we have now been considering, a hypothesis the fundamental postulate of which is that the Vindictive Psalms stand condemned even by the very Revelation of which they form a part.

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