

not be limited to a half,' it is impossible to set aside the express testimony of Ex 38²⁶, that שֶׁקֶל denotes 'half a shekel' (cf. Gn 24²², the only other occurrence in O.T.), or, as the LXX translators render the passage, 'one drachm per head, the half of a shekel.'¹ The three inscribed beka's, therefore, are drachms, consequently each one half of the stater or shekel of the same standard as the Gezer market-weight. From this it follows that Mr. Macalister, like Dr. Driver, is mistaken in

¹ The shekel here is expressly defined as 'the shekel of the sanctuary,' i.e. the native Phœnician and old Hebrew shekel of 220-224 grs. (*D.B.* iii. 422), but the equation שֶׁקֶל = δραχμή remains.

identifying his beka 'standard (e) with 'the Hebrew shekel of 224 grs.' On the other hand, he is doubtless justified in assigning a number of the ordinary uninscribed Gezer weights, from half a drachm upwards, to the same standard as the beka' weights. One weight in particular, 'marked with five strokes' and weighing 64.47 g, is clearly five staters or shekels, 25 of which make up Sospater's half-mina. The Aeginetan standard, therefore, must henceforth find a place in any future presentation of the weights and weight-standards of Palestine in Old Testament times. (For another weight of this standard see sect. vii. to follow.)

(To be continued.)

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF THE PSALMS.

PSALM XXXI. 15.

My times are in thy hand.

It is an ancient opinion, that this Psalm was written by David immediately after an experience of special peril from Saul's enmity, and his deliverance therefrom. The men of Ziph had brought the vindictive but unhappy monarch down to their neighbourhood by information that David and his men 'hid themselves' near them, 'within strongholds in the woods.' He was in sufficient force to surround the son of Jesse, and 'search him out throughout all the thousands of Judah.' The peril was so imminent that we read: 'And Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them.' At this juncture, when, as we read in the Psalms, his life was spent with grief, and his years with sighing, his strength failed because of his trouble, and his bones were wasted; he was a reproach to his enemies, and a burden to his associates;—at this juncture, when there seemed an end of hope, and he felt that he would assuredly be caught in the snare laid for him, we read: 'But there came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land. Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philis-

tines.' Amid such scenes of terror, of rushing to and fro, and of deliverance, how sustaining the assurance: 'My times are in thy hand.'

Two distinct lines of thought are suggested by the words 'my times' and 'thy hand,' and we shall consider the text under the headings—

- I. The Times that make up our Life.
- II. The Hand that controls our Times.

I.

THE TIMES THAT MAKE UP OUR LIFE.

The Psalmist does not merely mean by 'times' the succession of moments, he wishes to emphasize the view that these are epochs, sections of 'time,' each with its definite characteristics and its special opportunities, unlike the rest that lie on either side of it. Each life is made up of a series, not merely of successive moments, but of well-marked epochs, each of which has its own character, its own responsibilities, its own opportunities, in each of which there is some special work to be done, some grace to be cultivated, some lesson to be learned, some sacrifice to be made; and if it is let slip it never comes back any more. 'It might have been once, and we missed it, lost it for ever.' The times pass over us, and every single portion has its own errand to us. Unless we are wide awake we let it slip, and are the poorer to all eternity for not having

had in our heads the eyes of the wise man which 'discern both time and judgment.'

1. *Our times of opportunity and service are in God's hand.*—Some of us have already chosen our vocation in life. But have we? One has chosen the factory. Has he? Did he prefer that to the poet-laureateship or the woolsack? Another has chosen teaching. Is he sure he has? Why did not his inclinations take him to engineering or stonebreaking? Here is a woman. She will never be Queen of England, or Empress of India, or Joan of Arc, or Elizabeth Fry, or Christina Rossetti, or anybody else for that matter. But why not? Because she would not, or because she cannot? Now what does it all mean but simply this: Someone has already chosen our lot for us; Someone has determined our appointed seasons and the bounds of our habitation; Someone who is higher and greater and wiser than we, and under whom, and through whom, and by whom we live, and move, and have our being?

It is an immeasurable comfort that our duties are not the accidents of any undirected flow of circumstances. We are clearly assured that if we acknowledge the Lord in all our ways, He will direct our paths. That is, if we keep eye and heart ever turned toward God, we never shall be left to grope after the path, for it will be made plain to us. We are authorized to pray that God would order our steps. What direction in duty could be more minute than this—'He that followeth me shall not walk in the darkness?' 'He that followeth me.' We must not run on ahead of Him, neither must we lag behind; in either case we shall find darkness, just as deep darkness in advance of our Guide, if we will not wait for Him; as behind Him, if we will not keep close up to Him.

When David Livingstone offered himself for the foreign mission field, his heart was set on China. He had studied its problems. He had been allured by the great names of the men who had already given up their lives to the evangelization of the Chinese. He was burning with a true zeal to enter into that noble succession. But no opportunity was open to him. The door was shut somewhat abruptly in his face. There came the call to Africa, with its rude savages, unexplored rivers, far-stretching, treeless plains, and unknown privations. He hesitated. But he looked again at Christ, and he accepted this somewhat unwelcome will of God and steadfastly fulfilled it. To his own amazed and grateful surprise, he found and he fulfilled the work God gave him to do. Never shall any man meekly and humbly take up some duty, occupy some lowly sphere, accept some

difficult lot in life, or go forward to his cross, but he shall find and fulfil the work of God.¹

2. *Our times of stress and adversity are in God's hand.*—Around the noblest brows there is usually found an aureole of sorrow. There are some lives on whose path light lies all the way. There are men whose touch turns everything to gold. There are some who seem to pass on to a higher prosperity at every decade. We all know the faces which are flushed with success. The shadows that fall upon them are few and transient, and never such as wither the sinew or break the life in two. But the noblest do not walk in unshadowed paths; some of the noblest spirits are dowered with sorrow by God.

Yet God's love for us is infinite, unchanging, and eternal. If we can but get this truth into our individual consciousness, it will sustain us in every trial. All the universe is under His personal sway, and He is our tenderest and dearest Friend, carrying each one of us close in His heart. The beautiful things we see are the pictures our Father has hung up in our chamber to give us pleasure. The good things we receive are the ever-fresh tokens of His thoughtful love for us. And the same is true of the evil and painful things. Our Father sent them. They seem to mean harm. But He loves us with a love deep, tender, and eternal. We cannot see how these things consist with love's plan, but we know that they must; and in this faith we may rest, not understanding, but yet undoubting, unquestioning, and unfearing.

When some charged Sister Dora with carrying the burdens of others too heavily, she wrote, 'I tried to put myself in the place of these poor men, to see with their eyes, and to feel their wants and their difficulties as they were my very own.' That is the sorrow of insight and sympathy. In later years, when loneliness and disappointment rose like a tide upon her, and doubt as to the wisdom of her life assailed her, and the most dreadful disease that human lips can name sapped her life before her years had reached their meridian, she was given that dower of sorrow which is of God. She writes, 'I can't pray. I can't think. I sadly feel I shall be lost. I can only trust.' So it always is with the children of the Father. All the noblest, and bravest, and wisest, all who walk in the garments which are always white in God's eyes, have around their brows, to their perfecting for service and in character, this aureole of sorrow.²

3. *The time of our release is in God's hand.*—Dying does not interrupt nor in any way interfere with our relations to Christ. It is only a phase

¹ W. M. Clow, *The Secret of the Lord*, 327.

² *Ibid.*, 265.

or experience of living. We are as really Christ's when we die and after we die as we are when we are living. We are not separated from Christ in death; the bond between us and Him is not broken. The Old Testament Scriptures represent death as a walk through the valley, the valley of the shadow of death, accompanied by the Shepherd, whose presence allays all fear and gives peace. In the New Testament what we call dying is a departure from earth, in the companionship of Christ. There is a mystery in it because it is away from all that we know or understand and all that we can see; but there is nothing in it to be dreaded, for it does not separate from Christ for an instant, and it takes the person to Christ to be with Him for ever.

The secular idea of death is a hooded figure, black, forbidding, who sits at the turn of the way, waiting for each one of us we know not when and where. Christ has altered its aspect altogether. He has changed the hooded horror into an angel of deliverance. He has changed the graveyard into a gateway, He has changed the departure into an arrival, He has changed the 'good-bye' into a 'good-morning.' One of our Scotch religious poets, Lauchlan Maclean Watt, has struck a responsive chord in the deepest consciousness of men in their relation to Jesus when he says :

Carry me over the long last mile,
Man of Nazareth, Christ for me!
Weary I wait by Death's dark stile,
In the wild and the waste, where the wind blows free,
And the shadows and sorrows come out of my past,
Look keen through my heart,
And will not depart,
Now that my poor world has come to its last!

Lord, is it long that my spirit must wait?
Man of Nazareth, Christ for me!
Deep is the stream, and the night is late,
And grief blinds my soul that I cannot see.
Speak to me out of the silences, Lord,
That my spirit may know,
As forward I go,
Thy pierc'd hands are lifting me over the ford.¹

When Landgrave William of Hesse was shown an astrologer's book, wherein his day of death was set down, he wrote on the margin with his own hand: 'Compare Ps 31¹⁵: My times are in the Lord's hands.'

II.

THE HAND THAT CONTROLS OUR TIMES.

I. God has hands. The figure is pre-eminently human, the hand being one of the evidences of our nobility, and that which gives us supremacy over nature and the lower creatures. It is the

¹ L. Maclean Watt.

symbol of power and of rule. Man keeps all things in subjection with his hand. Inspired writers were not afraid to humanize God inasmuch as man was above the creature, and to that extent bore a stronger resemblance to his God. God has hands—so this book tells us. Of course this is a figure to express a great truth; but let us not lose sight of the meaning of this figurative speech. What was the teaching of the Hebrew writers with regard to the hands of God? References to the 'hand' of God are frequent, especially in the Psalms, and the word is used to denote different qualities or powers. Sometimes it is the symbol of *creative force* (95^{4,5}), sometimes of *retributive justice* (44²). Again, it is used to denote *sustaining power* (63⁸ 119¹⁷⁸ 145¹⁶), and also *redemptive energy* (77¹⁵ 90¹). And when we come to the New Testament we have the figure of the hand repeated, especially in connexion with God's saving work. For instance in Jn 10^{28,29}, 'I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.' Here the word symbolizes sheltering, or *preserving care*. These are but a few representative passages; but they are enough to show how God's hands can gradually cease to be terrible in our sight.

'But if you had sons at sea,' I said, 'it would not be of much good to you to feel safe yourself so long as they were in danger.' 'Oh yes, it be, sir. What's the good of feeling safe yourself but it let you know other people be safe too? It's when you don't feel safe yourself that you feel other people be'n't safe.' 'But,' I said, '... some of your sons were drowned for all that you say about safety.' 'Well, sir,' she answered with a sigh, 'I trust they are none the less safe for that. It would be a strange thing for an old woman like me to suppose that safety lay in not being drowned. What is the bottom of the sea, sir? The hollow of His hand.'²

(1) The hands of God are the hands of *almighty power*.—Nothing is impossible or too hard for God to achieve. What grandeur and blessedness must there be in His sublime consciousness that power in its utmost possibilities is His, and is put forth everywhere without fatigue! As the possessor of almightiness, God giveth power; whatever strength there is in any of His living creatures is His gift. The immense powers which machinery brings into exercise, are through the operation of God's laws.

² George MacDonald.

which man applies to his purposes. The forces of steam and of the descent of a volume of water belong to God. The power of electricity is His, by the application of which words have wings given to them, wafting them faster than any bird, swiftly, indeed, as the lightning flash.

(2) The hands of God are hands of *infinite wisdom*. Divine power is directed by a knowledge that is never at fault, and by a wisdom that never mistakes. To these we are to attribute the ordering of the several laws of Nature; when and in what circumstances they shall act, and when they shall be quiet. Facts sufficiently prove that they are not always in the same form of action. The storms on the Atlantic are not uniform in violence, direction, or effects; nor are circumstances in connexion with them twice alike. Infinite knowledge and wisdom guide the exercise of power. They also direct Divine interposition in 'stilling the tumult of the people,' and in 'making the wrath of man to praise Him.' Because under Divine control the plans of 'bloody and deceitful men' who do not live out half their days, and which are the fruits of their own wickedness, are rendered subservient to some great and glorious purpose in God's plan in history; those plannings and mischiefs are permitted to work for a season; but in the long-run evil-doers, who wax worse and worse, come to destruction.

A Jewish legend says: Once upon a time the angel Gabriel requested the Almighty to allow him to rule the world for twelve months. The request was granted and all went well. But when the harvest of grain was gathered in and men began to eat of the new corn, a great cry went up from the earth to heaven. The bread tasted bitter, and there was a great epidemic, and thousands of people died. Then the Almighty called Gabriel and asked him the meaning of this. The angel was puzzled. He explained that he caused the rain to come in due time and the wind and all else as he thought necessary for the children of men. 'Hast thou caused a great storm on such and such a day?' said the Almighty. 'No,' replied Gabriel, 'I entirely forgot it.' 'This omission is responsible for the calamity,' explained the Almighty. Then Gabriel bowed in humility, and acknowledged that the world is safe only in the hands of God.¹

(3) The hands of God are hands of *infinite love*. God's goodness and compassion are as real and glorious as His power, knowledge, and wisdom. We are not to think of Him as mightily working with a cold skill that has no sentiment or emotion; we are not to think of Him as managing the world's affairs by a merely keen, shrewd, but unfeeling

¹ H. Cooper.

statesmanship. His administration is not judicial acuteness, cool, far-sighted, scheming—grand and wise, working without heart. No! God is love. He is just, holy, true, but He is also loving. In the putting of laws into motion; in the endless variety of interpositions in perfect harmony with those laws, though above them as their Master; in controlling all things, and making even the wrath of men to praise Him, while He restrains the remainder—and in the exercise of power and wisdom, throughout the scheme of salvation in itself, and in its influence on men—God's love is ever present.

Many people are not only nervous about God, they are angry with Him. They say God's hands are not hands, but fists. I wish that I could hold up God's hands to you to-night. They are the warm hands of love, the palms outstretched to suffering and sinning humanity, and there are spikes through them.²

There was once a hermit who felt the world to be so evil that he could live in it no more; so he went and dwelt in a cave in the side of a hill above his town. And there he used to sit wondering how God could have patience with a world so wicked; how He could go on day after day painting the wonderful sunset and sunrise, year after year making flower and fruit and harvest to come in their beauty and bounty; how He could pour out His mercies, and receive no thanks and no service in return. He thought God should destroy the world, and one day he made a vow: that until God destroyed the world for its wickedness, he would stand holding out his hand at full arm's stretch. So he stood, day after day, holding out his arm, and it was anger and hatred that gave him strength to hold it so still.

One day two little birds perched on his hand, not knowing he was alive. He held his hand very still, and he held his breath not to frighten them. And to his delight they built a nest in his hand, and soon the mother was brooding on her eggs, and soon there was the rustling of young birds, and their crying for food. As he watched, he forgot his anger at the world, in fondness for three little feathered folks whose lives were in his hand. And his hand, which he had held still and stretched out for anger, he now kept still and stretched out for love. He had a little world in his hand, and he loved it, and held it with patience and tenderness. Love gave him strength to be still.

And then it flashed into his mind that this was just what God was doing. He, too, was holding a world in His hand, and the reason He did not dash it down was because He loved it. He sees all the sin and the weakness, and the heedless foolishness of this world and its folk, and He holds it in His hand with patience and tenderness because 'God is Love.'

So, to the angry hermit's hand the sparrows, which Jesus once used as parables of our Father's providence and watchful care, were the evangelists of God's mercy, and taught him that God spares the world, not because He doesn't care, but

² Bishop William A. Quayle.

because He cares so very much. He holds the world in His hands, and rather than crush it, He has suffered it to pierce His hands: for these hands which hold it are the hands of Love.¹

2. We must commit ourselves to God's hand. 'Providence,' says Dr. Dykes, 'may seem contrary to our welfare because it is contrary to our wishes.' Happily for us, God has and will have the last word about all things, and it ought not to be difficult for us to trust Him. Then our wishes will come under control, and once they are in due place we shall be satisfied.

(1) God's hand was enough for Christ. No shadowy form of a dark destiny stands before Him at the end of His career; although He must die on the cross, the countenance of His Father shines before Him. He does not behold His life melting away into the gloomy floods of mortality. He commends it into the hands of His Father. It is not alone in the general spirit of humanity that He will continue to live. He will live on in the definite personality of His own spirit, embraced by the special protection and faithfulness of His Father. Thus He does not surrender His life despondingly to death for destruction, but with triumphant consciousness to the Father for resurrection. It was the very centre of His testament; assurance of life; surrender of His life into the hand of a living Father.

(2) God's hand is Christ's hand and that is enough for us. Christ is able to keep our lives. He became Master of all the world. He met

¹ S. Robertson, *The Rope of Hair*, 227.

every power and conquered it. He faced all evil and overcame it. We never can find ourselves in the hands of any enemy who is too strong for Him. One of the most beautiful ascriptions in the Bible is that which says: 'Now unto him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of his glory without blemish in exceeding joy . . . be glory.' In all this world's dangers, He can guard our lives from harm, and He can present us at last without blemish.

Sir Frederick Treves, the famous surgeon, was passing through a hospital ward and saw a small child just recovering from a severe operation about the head. It was sitting up in bed with eyes bandaged, so that it could see nothing. It only knew that it had been plunged into a terrifying sleep, and was now awake in pain and in the dark. Too frightened and too weak to cry out, it could only grope in the air with its hands. What was it searching for? It was searching for a human hand. When the nurse took hold of the terrified fingers, the child sank back on the pillows and slept. To every weary soul the Lord Jesus holds out a comforting hand.²

If Christ hold my hand,
I can take my stand
With Him on the wildest sea.
Though the surging wave,
And the fierce winds rave,
No danger can come to me.

Oh! sweet is the peace,
When the storm shall cease,
At His own almighty call.
But sweeter to know,
While the tempests blow,
We are safe in the midst of all.

² J. Duff, *Illuminative Flashes*, 24.

Recent Foreign Theology.

Germanica.

EVERY ONE remembers the joy with which he devoured Grimm in his youth. What raptures do the very titles of the tales themselves recall—'Hansel and Grethel,' 'The White Snake,' 'The King of the Golden Mountain,' and a score of others! And still over persons who have come to years of discretion the tales retain their ancient power to delight and please. *Märchen* are the perfect flower of romance, as the Brothers Grimm knew well; and if they had a scientific

purpose in collecting and publishing these old-world tales, they had an eye first of all to the sheer delight which they would cause to future generations. And though the scientific study of folk-tales has proceeded apace of late years, even the most scientific student can yet be thrilled by the matter and manner of the tales themselves. It is no crime to treat Folk-tales scientifically. Even Sir Walter, that 'great romantic,' could say that 'a work of great interest might be compiled upon the origin of popular fiction, and the transmission of similar tales from age to age, and