

The Reconstruction of Psalm viii.

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ויהן במי שיר חדש תהלה לאלהינו Ps. 40⁴.

WHEN we read Ps. 8 we cannot fail to notice the abruptness with which the poet passes from v.^{2b} to v.³. The writer addresses Yahweh in v.² with words of unbounded admiration, praising the marvellous manifestations of his glory in the heavens by day and by night.¹ This admiration is expressed in general terms, and, therefore, we should naturally expect next a detailed elaboration of the thought in v.² as of the one in v.³. Instead of this the poem breaks off here, and we have in v.³ a reference to something entirely different. Verse⁴ also stands isolated, having no connection of thought with either v.², v.³, or vs.⁵⁻⁹. Verse⁴ is not the natural sequence of v.^{2b}, but it is the summing up of something which has fallen out between vs.² and ⁴. What then has become of the missing part?

It is a long recognized fact that we have in Ps. 19 two independent fragments of two songs. In the first portion of Ps. 19 we have in vs.²⁻⁷ the remnant of a poem which celebrates the glory of God in nature, while the second is written in honor of the Law. There is no connection whatsoever between vs.¹⁻⁷ and vs.⁸⁻⁹. A marked contrast, moreover, is presented by the different meters in which the two portions of that psalm are written.²

Just as Ps. 19 is composed of two fragmentary hymns, so we have in Ps. 8 a fragment of one, and I believe that we are to look for the remainder of this psalm in Ps. 19²⁻⁷. How the psalm ever came to be severed into these two pieces we can only conjecture, but such a tearing apart is not uncommon in Old Testament literature.³

It appears to me that Ps. 19²⁻⁷ belonged originally after Ps. 8². After the grand preamble in v.² of Ps. 8, the poet goes into detail

¹ Cf. critical notes to v.^{2b}.

² Cf. *ZAW*. 1882, pp. 39-44.

³ Cf. Ps. 1 and 2 of the M.T. with the LXX, also Ps. 9 and 10. See the writer's "Reconstruction and Interpretation of Ps. 18" in the *AJSL*, Jan. 1903.

and describes in glowing terms in what manner the different parts of the universe give expression to their adoration of the Deity, Ps. 19²⁻⁷. From the inanimate world the poet turns to the animate world, Ps. 8^{5-9, 3a}. After a look of admiration toward the heavens, his mind, filled with the magnitude of God's marvellous creations, thus taking into his soul a complete picture of God's greatness as manifested in the astral world, the writer turns his inquiring gaze toward his fellow-beings, and finds also among them the same attitude toward the Deity, — even babes and sucklings join in the grand chorus of God's praise. As in the first stanza (Ps. 8² + Ps. 19²⁻⁷) the sun, the mightiest of the luminaries, is the representative of the heavens, proclaiming wherever he goes God's glory; so in the second stanza man (Ps. 8⁵⁻⁹ + 3a), the representative of the animal world, proclaims by his mental superiority over the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, and the fish of the sea, the glory of the Creator, who alone is his peer. Thus man himself becomes a living praise of God's greatness. The poem closes, as it began, with an ascription of praise to Yahweh v.¹⁰ (Ps. 8).

This psalm, according to the M.T., is of Davidic origin.⁴ Cheyne⁵ sees in the words "to still the enemy and the revengeful" (v.³) an allusion to that time when Israel had put forward some assertion of superiority over its neighbors which they resented as injurious to themselves. "This claim as put forward by Israel," says Cheyne, "found its sharpest expression in the isolating policy of Ezra and Nehemiah." Against this see v.³ below.

There are no external evidences which might help us to establish the date of this poem. Internal evidences, however, will help us at least to find a date prior to which the poem cannot have been written. The almost complete absence of Aramaisms is a rather noteworthy fact, yet the one Aramaism הַיְהוָה for the very common Hebrew word הַיְהוָה is a strong argument against even an early date after the exile. The numerous allusions to Gen. 1, though the literary dependence is not very close, indicate that it was known to the poet in some form, cf. 19² הַיְהוָה with Gen. 1⁶, Ps. 8⁶ with Gen. 1²⁶⁻²⁸. This leads me to assign this psalm (8² + 19²⁻⁷ + 8^{4-9, 3a, 10}) to a period later than the composition of Gen. 1. Job 7¹⁷ employs Ps. 8³ with bitter irony in reference to the punitive visitation of Eloah. The psalm must therefore be older than that portion of the Book of Job.

⁴ So Ew. Del.

⁵ *Orig. of the Psalter*, pp. 201 sqq.

The word הַגְּתִית occurs besides here in Ps. 81¹ and 84¹. The Targum explains it as עַל קְנֻרָה רֵאִיתִי מִנָּת, "upon the cither which was brought from Gath," LXX, B, Sym., render it ἐπὶ τῶν λαγῶν, = עַל הַגְּתִית, and so Vulg. *pro torcularibus* = "at the wine-vats." That vintage-songs were known in Israel is confirmed by such passages as Is. 16¹⁰, Jer. 25³⁰, and especially Jud. 9²⁷. Psalm 81 was to be sung at the feast of booths which followed upon the vintage. Psalm 84 is a pilgrimage song, as is seen by its contents. These pilgrimages to the sanctuary were principally undertaken at the three great festivals. The last was the most important, and was often called simply רֵחֵק, Zech. 14¹⁶⁻¹⁷. It is to this feast in particular that the superscription of Ps. 8 refers; I therefore propose to read עַל-רֵחֵק, "to be sung at the feast," viz. the autumn festival, when the harvest had been gathered into the barns, and human hearts were ready to sing praises to the Giver of all material possessions. The rendering of the versions is easily explained by the fact that the vintage was one of the principal harvests, and was an occasion for great rejoicing. In Am. 8¹⁰ their rendering is rather an interpretation than an exact translation, though it may be due to an early scribal error in the Hebrew text.

"Yahweh, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!
 Thou showest thy majesty in the heavens by day and by night.
 The heavens declare the glory of God,
 And the expanse declareth the work of his hands." (Ps. 8² + 19².)

These opening verses reveal at once what kind of a poem this psalm is. It is an antiphonal hymn. The priest chants the opening and closing verses while the congregation, or the chorus, sing the intervening ones. The priest, as the mediator between the Deity and the people, would naturally employ the covenant name Yahweh, while the people, speaking of his marvellous works, would very appropriately call him El, the Mighty One. The fact that this psalm is antiphonal accounts also for the change of person. The priest addresses the Deity in the second person because he stands in a closer relation to the Deity than the ordinary people, while the latter, in the response, Ps. 19²⁻⁷, glorifying Yahweh, speak of him in the third person. This change of person (of God) is not at all uncommon in the psalms, and it is the characteristic by which we can recognize those that are antiphonal. An excellent illustration of this is furnished by Ps. 145; see below.

I give here a list of psalms in which this change from the second

to the third person (of God), or *vice versa*, occurs. This change I explain according to the view expressed above.

Ps.	3 ^d -4	2 ^d pers.,	5-7	3 ^d pers.,	8-9	2 ^d pers.
7 ²⁻¹⁰	2 ^d	"	10. 11. 18	3 ^d	"	
9 ²⁻⁷	2 ^d	"	8-10	3 ^d	" 11	2 ^d "
9 ¹⁸	3 ^d	"	15	2 ^d	" 17	3 ^d "
9 ^{20 eq.}	2 ^d	"				
12 ²	2 ^d	"	4	3 ^d	" 7	3 ^d "
12 ⁸	2 ^d	"				
16 ¹⁻⁵	2 ^d	"	6-9	3 ^d	" 10-11	2 ^d "
23 ¹⁻³	3 ^d	"	4-5	2 ^d	" 6	3 ^d "
25 ¹⁻⁷	2 ^d	"	8-10	3 ^d	" 11	2 ^d "
25 ¹²⁻¹³	3 ^d	"	16-22	2 ^d	"	
27 ^{1-6a}	3 ^d	"	6b-12	2 ^d	"	
28 ¹⁻⁴	2 ^d	"	5-8	3 ^d	" 9	2 ^d "
59 ¹⁻¹⁰	2 ^d	"	11	3 ^d	" 12-18a	2 ^d "
59 ^{18b}	3 ^d	"	(v. 18 ^b is perhaps not original; see v. 11).			
60 ²⁻⁷	2 ^d	"	8	3 ^d pers.,	12 eq.	2 ^d pers.
60 ¹⁴	3 ^d	"				
64 ²⁻³	2 ^d	"	8. 10 eq.	3 ^d	"	
68 ²⁻⁷	3 ^d	"	8. 10 eq.	2 ^d	" 12	3 ^d pers.
68 ¹⁹	2 ^d	"	20 eq.	3 ^d	" 25. 29 eq.	2 ^d "
69 ²⁻³⁰	2 ^d	"	31-37	3 ^d	"	
104 ¹⁻⁹	2 ^d	"	10-19	3 ^d	" 20-30	2 ^d "
104 ³¹⁻³⁵	3 ^d	"				
123 ¹	2 ^d	"	2	3 ^d	" 3	2 ^d "
130 ¹⁻⁴	2 ^d	"	5-8	3 ^d	"	
145 ¹⁻²	2 ^d	"	3	3 ^d	" 4-7	2 ^d "
145 ⁴⁻⁹	3 ^d	"	10-11	2 ^d	" 12	3 ^d "
145 ^{13a}	2 ^d	"	(v. 13 ^a , 2 ^d pers.; verse is not genuine).			
145 ¹⁴	3 ^d	"	15 eq.	2 ^d pers.,	17-21	3 ^d pers.

Five psalms, 20¹⁰ 33²² 62¹³ 82⁸ 106⁴⁷, though they refer to Yahweh in the third person throughout the psalm, address him in the last verse in the second person. The last verses were chanted by the priests. We must also bear in mind that this poem, Ps. 8 M.T. + Ps. 19²⁻⁷, is not intended to celebrate merely the national Deity of Israel, Yahweh, but rather the God of all mankind, though in the mind of the poet he may be identical with יהוה האל whose כבוד is manifested to all. Hence he says אל (19²); it is the אל הגדול known to all the world (Ps. 8⁷⁻⁷) by his works (Ps. 19²⁻³) whom he celebrates, the God of the world, not the exclusive Israelitish Deity, Yahweh.

Psalm 8^{2a} is more like a doxology; it returns again in v. 10^a, and

forms a fitting frame to this beautiful picture of nature in its majestic silence eloquently praising its Maker. The hand of the poet strikes full chords, and the great anthem of adoring nature, interpreted by a soul in touch with what is best and purest, rises heavenward.

The second half of v.² as it stands in the M.T. offers great difficulty. It has generally been thought to be hidden in the verb תנה.⁶ The line is obscure ; what the poet wanted to say is clear. His words are expressions of adoration of Yahweh's majesty and glory as revealed in nature. I therefore propose to read תראה הודך בשמים יומם וליילה, "thou showest thy majesty in the heavens by day and by night."

From this general conception the poet turns his attention to the several parts of the universe. In 8² he uses the general designations earth and heavens ; in the following verse (19²) השמים is used in a limited sense, as is seen by the reference to רקיע which is included in 8² ; cf. Gen. 1⁶. The marvellous beauty which meets his gazing eyes from the heavens is the language in which the latter speaks to his inquiring soul. They and the mighty רקיע which holds the vast heavenly sea, speak naturally of the one who created them.

The praise of God which is uttered by the heavens is taken up by the personified day, v.³ (Ps. 19³), "Day unto day pours forth speech." These words of adoration bubble forth like the limpid waters of a living spring. "And night unto night declares knowledge." She does not interrupt this song of praise, but takes it up in her turn, and thus an uninterrupted anthem fills the universe with its sweet strains. הביצ is the speech of ecstasy.

Psalm 19⁴ offers a good many difficulties. It is translated in various ways :

R.V. *et al.* :

"There is no speech nor language,
Their voice cannot be heard."

This statement is in direct contradiction with what is said in vs.³⁻⁵, where the personified heavens, the day and the night sky, are represented as speaking. Better is Baethgen's rendering :

⁶ Ges. *Thes.* considered it to be a *Qal* imperat. with cohort. ending; so Böttcher, II. 179, who adds that it has a permissive sense. *EW.*, § 87 a, *Ann.*, considered it a 3^d pers. sing. m. of תנה 'extend,' Hos. 8⁹. However, the text of Hos. 8⁹ is corrupt. König, *Lehrgeb.* I. 304, gives the word the Aramaic meaning, 'to relate repeatedly, praise.' He also holds that the relative pronoun is correct, II. 195, *Ann.*

⁷ ראה with the accus. of the thing, Is. 30³⁰.

"No message and no words
Whose sound could not be heard."

He regards the verse with Hitzig as a litotes, viz. "they proclaim aloud the honor of God in that their sound smites the ear of the spirit," and takes v.⁴ with the versions as a relative sentence. Though this rendering of v.⁴ does not contradict v.³, it does, however, sever v.⁵ from v.³, of which it is the immediate continuation. Besides, v.⁴ has only three tone beats to the line, while all the other verses have four tone beats to the line, yet the metre is not quite consistently carried out throughout the poem. I delete v.⁴ for these reasons, and also because it seems to be an explanatory gloss⁸ by a scholar to prevent the ordinary reader from taking vs.³⁻⁵ as literal truths.

"Their sound goes into the whole earth,
And to the end of the world their words." (Ps. 19⁶.)

For קוּם, 'their measuring line,' we must read with Rashi, Cappelus, *et al.*, קלם. The LXX's rendering ὁ φθόγγος αὐτῶν and that of the Vulg. *sonus eorum*, though they are not the ordinary translations for קוּל, which are generally φωνή and vox respectively, do support the idea conveyed in the word קוּל and not the meaning קוּם. The suffixes refer to the day and the night. The only limit to which the sound of the voices of the day and the night travel is the uttermost part of the world, *i.e.* their range is relatively limitless.

Verse⁸ introduces the sun as the representative of the heavens.⁹ The LXX begin v.⁶ with v.^{5c}, which arrangement is preferable to that of the M.T. :

"To the sun he has placed a tent in the sea,
And he is like a bridegroom who goes out of his chamber.
He rejoices like a hero to run his path."

The masoretic בָּהֶם, v.^{5c}, is generally referred to השמים (v.³), which, however, is a long distance off. In Jos. 1⁴ 23⁴ we have the following reference הַיָּם הַגָּדוֹל מִבּוֹא הַשָּׁמֶשׁ; this leads me to substitute for the ill-placed בָּהֶם, 'in them,' בָּיָם, 'in the sea.' The Mediterranean, so far as the ancient Jew was concerned, was the western limit of the world. Into it he saw, night after night, the sun descend and disappear. What thought could be nearer than that he has his home there? The Assyrian¹⁰ addressed the rising sun, "O Shamash !

⁸ So Olsh., Bick., Wellh., Duhm.

⁹ Baethgen, *in loc.*

¹⁰ Jastrow, *Assyr. und Babyl. Rel.* p. 301.

out of the horizon of heaven thou issuest forth." Every evening the sun-god entered the domain of Ea. This Babylonian myth was not unknown to the writer of this psalm, who uses it in his own way. The home of Ea is naturally to be sought in the west. Thus the Hebrew poet made out of Arabû **הים הגדול** or simply **ים**, 'the Mediterranean,' and this he made the dwelling-place of the sun for the night.

"From the end of the heavens is his going out,
And his circuit unto their ends,
And nothing is hidden from his heat." (Ps. 19⁷.)

With v.^{7a} compare v.^{6a}. The **קצה השמים** is the eastern end of the heavens or eastern horizon, the **ים** of v.⁶ is the western, for there the sun passes the night in the tent which the Deity has pitched for him.

The poet pauses here for a moment reflectingly. What he has seen and heard in the natural world has impressed him deeply, especially the two great luminaries have stirred his soul mightily. Then he breaks out in the jubilant words :

"When I behold the sun, the work of thy fingers,
The moon and the stars which thou hast made." (Ps. 8⁴.)

These are words of grateful recognition that he, the poet, was permitted to see God's glory revealed in his works, and to understand the anthems which the heavens sing uninterruptedly to the glory of their maker.

As neither **ירח** nor **כוכבים** has a suffix, I omit this with the LXX in the first line. In connection with "moon" and "stars" one would rather expect **שמש**, the largest luminary, instead of **שמש**. The preceding verses in which **שמש** is the representative of the heavens demand the reading of **שמש** instead of **שמים** in this connection.¹¹

These grand manifestations of God's glory cause the poet to turn his attention to man, who is frail and subject to all the vicissitudes of this life,—hunger, thirst, illness, death. This great contrast, which he cannot fail to notice between his own kind and the eternal heavens, the sun, moon, and stars, causes him to reflect. If God creates such marvellous things as the heavens, and the luminaries which adorn them, and which sing his praises without interruption,

¹¹ I have subsequently learned that Smend also reads **שמש** instead of **שמש** in this verse.

and are apparently not subject to changes, why should God trouble himself about man who passes away like the grass of the field? To these thoughts the poet gives expression in Ps. 8⁵:

“What is man, that thou art mindful of him,
And the son of man that thou visitest him!”

True, as far as the external splendor is concerned, his cannot compare with the brilliancy of the heaven and its luminaries, hence the manner in which man praises his creator must differ from that of the inanimate world. His superiority over all the rest of the creation, and the superior grandeur of his praise, both of which he doubted for a moment, he finds now clearly established in man's inmost nature, and jubilantly, almost defiantly, cries out:

“But thou didst make him lack little of God,
And with honor and glory thou didst crown him.
Thou caustest him to rule over the works of thy hands,
Everything hast thou placed under his feet.” (Ps. 8⁶⁻⁷.)

Though man is but earth-born and does not live in the higher realms of the heavens, he is, nevertheless, the special object of God's care, as he lacks but little which would make him אֱלֹהִים.¹²

The poet is looking back upon Gen. 1, — man made in the image of God. In our passage the reference is not to the external appearance of man, as Duhm believes, for that is just what created the doubt in the poet's mind, whether man could, so to speak, in any way compete with the praise of those grand manifestations of God's power in the heavens; but it is man, the thinking and intelligent being, to whom the poet refers.¹³ By virtue of his mental superiority he stands far above all else, nearest to the Deity, and exercises a rule over the whole animate world (vs.⁸⁻⁹), and thereby reflects, in a far higher sense, the glory of him in whose image he was created.

The poet describes now in detail what he means by כָּל in v. 7.

“Sheep and cattle all of them;
And also the beasts of the field;
The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea;
What passes through the paths of the waters.” (Ps. 8⁸⁻⁹.)

¹² LXX, Syr., Targ., are wrong in rendering אֱלֹהִים with *παρ' ἀγγέλους*; Aq., Sym., Theod., and Vulg. render it correctly *παρὰ θεόν*.

¹³ The writer of Heb. 2⁶⁻⁸, and Paul in 1 Cor. 15²⁷, have also a mental and spiritual affinity with the Deity in mind.

צִנְה is used instead of צִנְחַן, and שָׁרִי for the ordinary form שָׁרָה. The word עֲבָר v.⁹ must be taken in the neuter sense, and does not refer to the sailors, which reference would fit ill here. For יָמִים read מִיָּמִים.¹⁴ This reading is to be preferred on account of the יִ in the first half of this verse.

The poet, leaving almost finished his song to the glory of God, strikes once more the chords of his lyre. With a last mighty bubbling up of the deep emotions of his soul, he gives vent to his unbounded admiration for the marvellous works of his God by saying that even the little ones, the most helpless of all, in all their feebleness proclaim the glory of their Maker, and do it in such a convincing manner that no eye can be blind to it nor ear deaf to it. This is a worthy closing of this touchingly beautiful hymn, flowing from the very heart of a man who, to speak with Bryant, "in the love of nature holds communion with her visible forms," and thus learns to interpret nature's song.

We have, then, a threefold hymn of praise addressed to the Deity, that of the heavens and their astral worlds, that of adult man, and last, though by no means least, the praise of those who have always been the type of innocence, hence most acceptable to the Deity.

Verse⁸ in the M.T. stands in no connection with what precedes or with what follows, but to declare it a gloss would be robbing this poem of one of its greatest charms. Verse¹⁰, which is the introit, is entirely too short if we compare it with Ps. 8²; something has dropped out; but what was it? It must have been a statement which formed a climax to the preceding, and this I believe I have found in v.^{3a}. As it stands in the M.T. v.³ is entirely inappropriate. "Out of the mouth of children and sucklings thou hast founded strength because of thy oppressors to still the enemy and the avenger." Why this clamor of war? Who are the enemy and the avenger? Is Yahweh the oppressed? Scarcely would a man who concedes a moral and spiritual affinity between mankind and the Deity fall back into such a coarse anthropomorphism. Nor is the poet one who revels in descriptions of bloodshed and horror. There is not a single word in the poem which suggests anything but serene peace and a worshipful attitude. Why then this blast of the war trumpet? The writer of this poem "has list to nature's teaching," to the still small voice which comes from "earth and her waters and the depths of air," and that voice knew naught but to reveal the

¹⁴ Vulg., Baethg.

glory of him who is the Maker of all and who is the God of peace. I therefore believe that the accepted rendering of v.³, beginning with לְמַעַן to the end, is due to an erroneous rendering of the preceding portion of that verse. The word עֹז, commonly rendered 'strength,' is also used in Ps. 29¹ 96⁷ 1 Chron. 16²⁸ (c. יְהוָה) Ps. 59¹⁷ (c. שִׁיר) Ps. 68³⁵ (c. נִתַּן) to denote 'praise.'¹⁵ This meaning it has here, and so it is rendered by LXX, Pesh. The use of עֹז in connection with עֹז is not necessarily in favor of the interpretation 'strength' or 'bulwark,' as Baethgen assumes, for עֹז has the general meaning 'to establish.' It is used of Yahweh's commandments Ps. 119¹³³, and of the founding of a tower or temple, in the *Qal* Ezr. 3¹², in *Piel* 1 Ki. 5²¹ Zech. 4⁹. In the sense used in this psalm we find it in 1 Chron. 9²² Esth. 1⁸, both late passages. A reader who understood עֹז in the sense of 'strength' felt obliged to give the reason why Yahweh founded strength out of the mouth of these weakest of the weak, and thus a thought foreign to the spirit of this hymn was introduced. It seems to me that perhaps a עֹז has fallen out before עֹז. The emphasis lies upon the word "even," as in Ex. 4⁹ Num. 22³². Then the last verse of the poem reads:

"Even out of the mouth of children and sucklings hast thou founded praise;
Yahweh, our Lord, how glorious is thy name in all the earth!"

Thus closes one of the few psalms which are free from imprecations, or, at least, a tinge of bitterness against those who dare think differently from the poet, and who do not share his often overbearing and repulsive national pride and religious prejudices. Throughout this poem peace breathes that knows no petty differences, or even great ones, which so often unduly disturb the minds of the Hebrew poets. Its sole theme is God's greatness as manifested by his works, beside which all else for a truly pious soul, such as our poet, sinks into insignificance. Who the poet was will always remain a secret, but as to his true character we can no longer be in doubt.¹⁶

¹⁵ Cf. Brown, Driver and Briggs, *Hebrew Lex.*

¹⁶ I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness for valuable suggestions in connection with this paper to my esteemed former teacher, Professor Francis Brown, D.D.