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Famous Quotations from the Psalms.

By J. EWING.

THERE is something in the Psalms, it has often been said, to suit everybody—something which, at one time or another, comes home to each and all of us. Young and old, high and low, have quoted them; in grief and in triumph, in prosperity and adversity, in life and in death, generally in all seriousness, sometimes in mockery, for even the cynic has on occasions found a stone for his sling in such a dictum, for instance, as that one which always seems as if it must have had Solomon for its author: “So long as thou doest well unto thyself men will speak good of thee.”

It has occurred to me that readers of *THE CHURCHMAN* might find some interest in a few desultory reminiscences of how the Psalms have been quoted on various more or less remarkable occasions. These citations will carry us from land to land and from one camp to another; we shall find, for example, Charles I., his little dying daughter, his destroyer, and his great minister (alas! that we must add his great victim), all drawing weapons from the same vast armoury.

In 1641, the year before the outbreak of the Civil War, sorrow, but a gentle sorrow compared to what was in store, had broken in upon the happiness which the unlucky King had always found in his immediate family. His third daughter, the little Princess Anne, was taken away from the evil to come before she was quite five years old. Being reminded by one of her ladies to pray, because it was near the end with her, the child made answer: “I am too weary to say my long prayer” (the “Our Father”), “but I will say my short one.” It was a verse from Psalm xiii.: “Lighten mine eyes, O Lord, that I sleep not in death.” And when she had repeated it, says Fuller, “the little lamb gave up the ghost.”

In a far different spirit did the great Earl Strafford make his

last quotation from the Psalms—almost his last recorded utterance. When the news was brought to him that he was abandoned by the master whom he had so faithfully served—obeying him often against his judgment, often, it is to be feared, against his conscience, but always with selfless devotion—the shock of the announcement drew from him the sole reproach he was to utter (we know not if it ever reached Charles's ears): "Put not your trust in princes," he exclaimed, "nor in any child of man, for there is no help in them."

Love lends strength, and love betrays to weakness. In terror for his Queen, whom the mob was already threatening, Charles had sacrificed the one man who might have saved him, the one man whom we can fancy meeting Cromwell on equal terms. Never was an act of selfishness and ingratitude more signally punished. He was now, indeed, though he knew it not, naked to his enemies.

It was rather ominous that in Strafford's honour a title had been revived, that of Lord Lieutenant, which had been borne by the only other English Governor of Ireland who perished on the scaffold, the gallant Essex. "Lord Deputy" had been the style up to his day, and "Lord Deputy" it again became after he had disappeared from the scene.

His death may be held to have been prophesied to him in a remarkable quotation from Psalm lv., made by Burleigh, who, when he laboured for peace in the Council, found himself hotly opposed by Essex. The young Earl, "having been bred to the sword and gained some Reputation by it," stood out so stiffly for war with Spain that "the Treasurer was provok'd to say 'that he seemed intent on nothing but blood and slaughter.'" On Essex still persisting, the aged minister, soon to go to his grave full of years and honours, took out his Prayer-Book and silently pointed to the passage: "The bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days."

Strangely enough, it chimed in with a warning Essex had received from his father, who bade him beware of his thirty-sixth year, at which age he himself died. His son perished a

little before reaching it. If we take the Psalmist's computation of human life—threescore years and ten—Burleigh's prophecy would seem to have been fulfilled to the letter.

Poor Essex, the hot-headed, impetuous man, who had ever "carried his passions in his forehead," made an edifying and even touching end, reciting the Creed on the scaffold, and having just before written to his friend Southampton: "I had many calls, and answered some of them slowly, thinking a soft pace fast enough to come to Christ, and myself forward enough when I saw the end of my journey, though I arrived not at it, and therefore I have been by God's Providence violently pull'd, hal'd, and dragg'd to the Marriage Feast, as the world hath seen."

But to return to Charles I. On one occasion, at the "giving out" of a Psalm in a Church at Newcastle, he showed resourcefulness as well as a ready knowledge of the Prayer-Book. Upon his entering the city just after his surrender to the Scots army in 1646, he was, as a local chronicler expresses it, "caressed with bonfires and ringing of bells." A Scotch minister, perhaps to check this apparent reaction in his favour, "preached very bold stuff before the King . . . and after sermon called for Psalm lii., beginning thus:

"Why dost thou, Tyrant, boast thyself
Thy wicked works to praise?"

His Majesty stood up, and without any reflection on the insolence of the man, with great presence of mind called for Psalm lvi., which begins:

"Have mercy, Lord, on me I pray,
For Men would me devour."

And the congregation were so well pleased with the happy Turn that they wav'd the preacher's psalm, and fell in with that which the King called for."

Ready wit, indeed, may make almost sure of appreciation, and there is not, I think, any irreverence in supposing that our Lord Himself was not insensible to it. To me it always seems that it was not only the perseverance of the Syrophœnician

woman which appealed to Him, but also the "happy turn" which she gave to His saying concerning the children's bread and the unfitness of casting it to dogs.

Cromwell, as beseemed a Puritan, had the Scriptures constantly on his lips. But the best-remembered of his quotations is one from the Psalms which he made at Dunbar. Captain Hodgson, who was present at the battle, gives a vivid account of the straits to which the invading English were reduced: "A poor, shattered, hungry, discouraged army," with the Scots under Leslie posted on the heights of the Lammermuirs, right across their homeward road, "having got us in a pound, as they reckoned." Most imprudently, but it must be said, most unwillingly, Leslie yielded to the persuasion of the ministers in his camp, quitted his post of vantage, and descended to the attack, drawing from Cromwell the famous exclamation: "The Lord hath delivered them into our hands." Hodgson relates how the General came himself and altered the position of his (Hodgson's) regiment just as the battle began. "And the sun appearing upon the sea, I heard Nol say, 'Now let God arise, and his enemies shall be scattered.' A little later, and his cry was, 'They run! I profess, they run!'"

How many great men have died with a Psalm on their lips! The famous St. Dunstan, almost the earliest English example of the combination, so often to be repeated in after-years, of the ecclesiastic and the brilliant statesman, closed his long, crowded career in peace, in his metropolitan city, surrounded by his monks. His dying words, after he had received his viaticum, form part of Psalm cxi.: "The merciful and gracious Lord hath so done His marvellous works that they ought to be had in remembrance. He hath given meat unto them that fear Him."

And the lion-like Hildebrand on his death-bed at Salerno, whither Robert Guiscard had withdrawn him from his turbulent Roman flock, exclaimed with all the uncompromising, intrepid spirit that had ever distinguished him: "I have loved righteousness and hated iniquity, therefore I die in exile" (Psalm xlv. 8).

How often, on the scaffold, the last sound before the thud of

the axe has been some plaintive word from a Psalm! The gallant Egmont, magnanimous in death as in life, prayed for his merciless master, Philip II., repeating, as he passed through the lamenting crowd (for the very Spanish officers were unable to restrain their tears), Psalm lxi., containing the petition to "grant the King a long life," unmindful of the cutting short of his own days in their prime. The historian Motley is half-contemptuous of such almost superstitious loyalty, yet it shows the fine and rare temper of one whom no injuries could provoke to revilings.

No Psalm, we may suppose, has been more used devotionally than the Miserere dear as it has been to the lips of countless dying sinners. Yet it is specially intertwined with the memory of Henry V., that King who, notwithstanding the bloody and unjustifiable quarrel in which his laurels were chiefly won, still bears about him the glamour of his heroic temper, his piety, his personal beauty, and his early death. As he lay at Vincennes near his last agony, his chaplains beside him chanted the aspiration for the holy city with which the greatest of the penitential Psalms closes. The dying man, roused for the moment by the sound of the name, caught it up, exclaiming, "Hierusalem! Lord Thou knowest that my mind was ever to have re-edified the walls of Hierusalem." And with this characteristic regret, he passed away.

Even more touching is the incident related of the young conqueror's ill-fated but most guiltless son, the meek and devout Henry VI., "so innocent to others that he was hurtful to himself," who, a prisoner in the hands of his enemies, confined in the Tower, whose walls were to witness his murder, could yet, happier and better in his delusions than some of us in our sanity, with serene content apply to himself the words of Psalm xvi., and bless God that "the lines were fallen to him in pleasant places, that he had a goodly heritage."

A less innocent victim of a cruel age, though youth and folly made him almost as helpless, was Darnley, through his ill-omened marriage the shadow-King of Scotland for a few restless months. If we are to take Froude's lurid picture as historically

accurate, the young man, by a strange dispensation of the *sortes liturgicæ*, opening his Prayer-Book an hour or two before his murder, found and read Psalm lv., which chanced to be one of those appointed for the dawning day, the last that he was to see. The Psalm, *Exaudi, Deus*, contained an almost prophetic description of the fate which Froude, at least, has no doubt was his—betrayal to death by the wife who had just quitted him with soft words and kisses, but with the significant saying which “marred all his pleasure”: “It was just this time last year that Rizzio was slain.”

“Hear my prayer, O God,” the Psalm began, “and hide not Thyself from my petition . . .

“My heart is disquieted within me; and the fear of death is fallen upon me.

“Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me; and an horrible dread hath overwhelmed me. . . .

“It is not an open enemy that hath done me this dishonour; for then I could have borne it . . .

“But it was even thou my companion; my guide and mine own familiar friend.”

Time would fail to mention the many occasions on which the Psalms are known to have strengthened and consoled the victims of misfortune, men’s cruelty, or their own errors. Strafford and Mary Stuart spent their last moments in reciting them. Francis I. found the Psalm of the day bear with strange appositeness on his forlorn and captive state after the Battle of Pavia.

As to the myriads of lonely and humble hearts which have been lifted up by the music of the Psalms, they are uncounted and unrecorded upon earth. We can only guess at the number of them, only imagine the varied and multitudinous sorrows and dangers through which they were supported.

