

AT THE SIGN OF THE BIBLE.

THERE are in the Psalter not a few pieces, whose wealth of meaning and practical suggestiveness are entirely missed, unless their purpose is distinctly apprehended. Read as mere pieces of devotional poetry, they prove stones of stumbling and rocks of offence. They reek of self-righteousness, and mantle with complacency, or bristle with truculence and arrogance. We pillory them as Vindictive Psalms, or deprecate their spirit as pharisaic legalism, and congratulate ourselves on our superior lowness and enlightenment, who have been taught by the Spirit of Jesus. This is certainly a short and easy method with the difficulty, but it is a question if it quite does justice by the psalms. In the case of many at least, if not of all, it is only needful to ascertain their origin, and determine their purpose, to discover their justification, and feel in them that touch of nature which makes the Old Testament kin with the New.

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The hundred-and-first psalm ranks among the richest for depth of philosophic thought, vividness of interest, and capacity of practical application. Yet it is perused with hesitation by the devotional reader, and for the most part gets the go-by in the pulpit. This fate befalls it, because it is forgotten that in the first instance the psalm is not of private interpretation. Thus the author appears as an unpleasantly virtuous and self-sufficient person. He will behave himself wisely in a perfect way; hates the work of them that turn aside; will destroy slanderers; cannot tolerate proud persons; and every morning will destroy all the wicked of the land. These are, of course, excellent principles. It is well to have such sentiments; but is it discreet, not to say modest, to proclaim them on the housetop? Certainly not, unless—and that makes all the difference—

one holds a public position, that at once demands and justifies the proclamation. Now the very phrases that are accused of truculence prove the piece to be the manifesto of a ruler or magistrate, most probably of a king. Ewald thinks of David; Graetz of Hezekiah; and the occasion is almost certainly on the monarch's accession to the throne. The psalm is a coronation ode, and in view of the temptations, powers, and responsibilities of an absolute prince, it is a masterpiece of enlightened statesmanship, wisdom, and piety. Now-a-days we have left in Christendom few unlimited monarchies; but autocratic rule still survives in the home, in the workshop, and to some extent in the Church.

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In the second verse there is an awkward phrase, that is usually rendered, "When wilt thou come unto me?" Delitzsch makes it an expression of David's desire to have the ark in Jerusalem. Perhaps it refers to the Divine intervention in human lives in the way of aid and guidance, or in the way of judgment. No meaning has yet been suggested that suits the parallelism, and probably the difficulty is due to a flaw in the text. The poem is generally said to lack logical structure, and to be destitute of definite progression of idea. It is not the way of poems to wear their skeleton of hard thought on the surface, nor to bind their movements in a strait waistcoat of argument. Subject to this reservation, and backed by the not unreasonable assumption that prosaic interpreters of the nineteenth century are more likely to underrate than to overrate the meaning of an Old Testament saint or poet, we venture to divine in the piece at least a probable drift of thought, and to find in it a pretty complete summary of the essential principles of all just and beneficent government.

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The poem consists of a prelude (*v.* 1), and of two stanzas, of which the first (*vv.* 2-4) lays down the principles of the prince's personal conduct, while the second (*vv.* 5-8) announces the lines of his public policy and administration. Passing for the present over the prelude, we perceive that the king's ideal of personal behaviour is threefold. Against the corruption, which is the besetting curse of a despot and his court, he is determined to preserve his personal and domestic purity, especially—the turn of the phrase seems to imply—in the matter of religion (*v.* 2). Despite the temptation of kings to count themselves above law, he will govern his conduct in strict conformity with the restraints of honour and honesty (*v.* 3). In the choice of his friends and companions, he will follow the instincts of an untainted mind, and ally himself only with worth and integrity (*v.* 4). Happy the society that possesses a ruler surrounded by the wise and good, who in his own life presents a pattern of law-abiding rectitude, and secures the sweetness of the springs of social life by the maintenance of a pure court and the example of personal virtue and piety!

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The principles proposed by the king for the regulation of his public action and administration are admirable. They meet precisely the peculiar perils of absolute rule vested in a single individual. He will maintain impartial, even-handed justice, and will refuse to decide any issue till both sides have been heard, and so abolish the base weapon slander, so prevalent and so potent (cf. Naboth) under despotic government (*v.* 5 a). The oppression of the weak, and despoilment of the poor by the rich and powerful he will resolutely resist (*v.* 5 b); and the need of such action at all times is clamant in the impassioned protests of the Old Testament prophets, and in the disorders and unrest of modern society. If a ruler is to keep touch with his sub-

jects, and to establish his throne on general content and well-being, he must have around him honest counsellors, and under him upright subordinates (v. 6). To surround himself with courtiers and flatterers were pleasant but perilous (cf. Rehoboam), and to tolerate in the public service corruption and extortion, ruinous (cf. Eli and Samuel); and the wise monarch of our psalm will none of it (v. 7). Finally, there shall be in his government no supineness or laxity, but law and order shall be firmly enforced, and vice and crime extirpated (v. 8). It is a noble charter of a good, wise, and righteous reign.

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Where has our king learned so lofty an ideal of royal right and duty? In the perception of the infinite faithfulness and everlasting justice that underlie the government of the world by God (v. 1). In that awful and majestic scheme he and his kingdom are a part. They have their predestined place and purpose; they have their rôle to play, their duty to perform, and their share in the grand *denouement*, whether they will or not. Life is not a matter of personal choice, of selfish caprice, of wayward passion. He is not a king in his own right, but by right Divine. His throne is not his own to selfishly enjoy, his sceptre not his to wield in arrogance or self-will. He too is bound, like God, to rule in faithfulness and righteousness; for he is, in very deed and truth, the minister of heaven on earth, and his kingdom is the kingdom of God.

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Hebraica, the American quarterly for Old Testament research, conducted with such spirit and ability by Professor Harper, contains in the volume just completed an unusual amount of fresh and valuable material. In the last issue a point of importance in fixing the pronunciation

of the Tetragrammaton is put very neatly by Professor C. R. Brown. יהוה in proper names is contracted and vowelled יהוי; e.g. עִירֵיהוּ, יִשְׁעֵיהוּ, etc. A similar contraction appears in the Lamed He verb יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה (Exod. xxxiv. 8, Josh. v. 14, etc.), which stands for יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה. Hence by analogy we should pronounce the uncontracted sacred name יְהוָה.

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In the same number there is a paper by Professor Sayce on the last prophecy of Balaam, which bristles with ingenious, not to say audacious, emendations. Among other clever suggestions a curious and interesting interpretation of the phrase בני שת is proposed. Comparing it with the alternative reading שאון in Jer. xlvi. 45, he holds שת to be the original and שאון a later explanation. From the parallel proverb preserved in Num. xxi. 28, which he takes to be the model of Balaam's oracle, he shows that בני שת must mean the Moabites who worshipped on the high places of the Arnon. And as Ben-Ammi stands for a worshipper of Ammon, it is reasonable to conclude that שת was a god worshipped in Moab.

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The reasoning is brilliant, but only inferential. A bit of positive evidence for the existence of the god were satisfactory. It is forthcoming. Sir Charles Warren found in Jerusalem a piece of pottery, on which was engraved, in Phœnician letters of the pre-exilic period, למלך-שת; that is, "belonging to Melech-Sheth." The meaning of this proper name can only be, "Moloch is Sheth." Thus we would seem to have proof of the reality of a deity, whose name probably signified the *phallus* (cf. 2 Sam. x. 4, Isa. xx. 4) = שנת, the Assyrian *sinatu* = urine.

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In the warning addressed to Cain (Gen. iv. 7) there is an enigmatical parallelism, which has about it the look of an ancient proverb, that has had its concrete directness rubbed down into abstract vagueness. The Assyrian saying concerning the god of plague, "Nerra lieth at the gate," suggests that in the phrase, "Sin lieth at the door," the word **הַשָּׂאָת** means rather the avenger or Nemesis of wrongdoing. In that case the corresponding word, in the parallel line of the couplet, **שָׂאָת**, rendered "elevation," ought to be the name of some supernatural being or spiritual power. Allowing for the assimilating influence of **הַשָּׂאָת**, what more likely than that there stood originally here also in place of **שָׂאָת** the name of this enigmatical deity **שֵׁת**?

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Text emendation is a fascinating pursuit. It is much more exciting than exegesis. The latter crawls along on all fours, while the former mounts up on wings like eagles. It does not always follow however that difficulties are removed by flying over them. Still it must be admitted, that there is enough in the text of the Old Testament to provoke, if not to justify, the most daring of emendators. The original may not be recovered in this fashion, but the attempt can do no harm. Text emendation is very far from being an exact science, but even astrology has had its uses.

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Three years ago Professor Otto Pfeleiderer delivered the Hibbert Lectures, and disclosed considerable modifications of the theory of the development of early Christianity contained in his celebrated *Paulinismus*. The ideas sketched in these lectures have been worked out, and published in an elaborate volume entitled *Das Urchristenthum*, which will certainly attract much attention for its trenchant style and

boldness of conception. More decidedly than ever he rejects Baur's attempt to account for the Church as the outcome of conflict and compromise between a Judaic and a Pauline Christianity. Equally does he condemn the theory of Harnack, which conceives the development of Christian theology as a lapse from the apostolic norm, produced by the infusion of Hellenism into the Church's life and thought. He asserts, that the Church is the product of the action and reaction on one another of two forces—the Pauline gospel and Hellenism. This *rationale* corresponds with the facts, and proves its correctness by the liberty it allows to do justice without bias to the individual and varying phenomena of the problem. "History," he says in words of wide applicability, "is the truth God has made, dogma the truth man makes: therefore it is a vital interest of intelligent Protestantism, that dogma should be ruled by history, and not history by dogma."

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Apart from all questions of actual fact, it is an interesting and important inquiry to determine how the author of the first chapter of Genesis conceived the framework of days in which his narrative is set. There is now a general agreement among exegetes of all schools, that the notion of protracted periods and the idea of literal days would have been equally repugnant to the mind of the inspired Hebrew seer, who drafted this magnificent piece of religious faith and thought concerning God in His relation to the world and man. This impression is derived from a more profound apprehension of the spirit of Old Testament theology, a study too much neglected in former days, but must depend for its demonstration on an accurate and sympathetic appreciation of the literary character and structure of the narrative. Rudolph Schmid, in the *Jahrbücher für Protestantische Theologie*, thinks that an unmistakable indica-

tion of the author's intention to have the days understood not as actual but as ideal days is to be found in the rubric—"and there was evening and there was morning." For, while in our day night intervenes between evening and morning, in Genesis i. morning follows immediately on evening, because there is no night with God (cf. Amos ix. 2-6, Ps. cxxxix.). Thus they are expressly presented as "days of God," and are not in any way measures of time either short or long. Dr. Schmid's conclusion will commend itself to the literary and religious instincts of most scholars, but we doubt whether night is omitted from the formula for the theosophic reason assigned. Looking at the rubrical character and purpose of the phrase, which surely is simply the pictorial expression of timeless completeness, why should it be inserted?

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