

world. Appalled in a moment at the degradation with which his Pharisaic pride in Jewish privilege had overwhelmed him, he flung from him all Jewish prerogative, and grasped the universal equality of man. Snatched from his hopeless struggle with that slough of despond, the law as a source of righteousness, confounded with the revelation that in fighting for the law he had been rebelling against God, and flooded with the light that unveiled to him the person of Christ, he could preach a righteousness, not of weary works, but of lively faith in Him. Possessed with the surprising vision of Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified in weakness, the exalted in power, the almighty in love, he could know nothing among men but Christ and Him crucified, he could demand honour and glory for the Crucified, not in spite of, but because of the cross. Profoundly stirred by the Saviour's agony for his sake, he could henceforth count all things but loss that he might have fellowship with those sufferings, being made conformable unto that death. Christ came, Paul saw, Christ conquered; and the suddenness and completeness of the victory may help us to understand how, next to the resurrection of Christ, the most momentous event in the history of Christianity is the conversion of Paul.

JOHN MASSIE.

THE EIGHTY-SIXTH PSALM.

THE 86th Psalm forms a strong contrast to the four psalms—the 4th, the 8th, the 16th, and the 32nd—which we have already sought to study at once historically and devotionally. All these poems form part of the earliest collection of psalms, which the Jews called the first book of psalms, and which, from their freshness of style and, in some cases, from their supposed appropriateness to moments in the life of David,

were styled Davidic. But this poem, if poem it can be called, is not the work of an accomplished singer,¹ but a piece of literary mosaic, expressing the thoughts and aspirations of average members of the Church in phrases already familiar by liturgical use. It would not be difficult to go through the psalm, pointing out the probable sources from which almost every verse was drawn. So true it is, that even ordinary intellects may be so honoured by the Spirit's guidance as to produce something which the Church will never forget. And may I not illustrate this by some of our own hymns, which owe their well-deserved popularity less to any slight poetical merits than to their close following of the great lines of spiritual experience?

Our psalmist has no mere head-knowledge of that experience. He clings to those foundation-truths which are the only consolations in time of trouble. There is not much consecutiveness in his writing. He tells the Church for what it most needs to pray, and upon what grounds, not for God's sake, but for its own, it ought to base its petitions. He speaks, not in his private capacity, but as a Churchman. Even where, as in the words, "Give thy strength unto thy servant, and help the son of thine handmaid" (ver. 16), he may seem to refer to his own pious education, he is really thinking of his spiritual mother the Church, for the accompanying complaint and petition need a reference to the Church to justify them.

*"O God, the proud are risen up against me,
And a congregation² of violent men have sought after my
soul,*

And have not set thee before them.

Show me a token for good,

That they who hate me may see it and be ashamed."

¹ "Prayer of David" is a most unhappy title, suggested, no doubt, by the occurrence in the psalm of expressions taken from the earlier "Davidic" Psalter.

² Kay renders "faction."

Those were the happy times when "Church" and "nation" were synonymous terms. True, the awful sin of apostasy had already raised its head in Jehovah's inheritance. But those "proud" and "violent" men, who are again referred to in other psalms,¹ especially the 119th, were self-excluded from the Israelitish community. The psalmist could have said of them what St. John said of the early heretics: "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us."² And for some time past the faithful worshippers had been accustomed to use the solemn interrogatories of the 15th and the 24th psalms, describing the qualities which Jehovah required in those who would be guests in His pavilion, and rise up in His holy place.³ Indeed, in this very psalm the Churchman is taught to pray, not only, "Incline thine ear, for I am poor and needy" (ver. 1), but, "Preserve thou my soul; for I can trace in myself the chief note of the character which thou, O God, requirest" (ver. 2).

Let us pause a little on the second verse, to which I have referred. Both the Bible and the Prayer-Book version make the psalmist say, "*Preserve thou my soul, for I am holy*"; and St. Augustine unsuspectingly remarks, "Who can be the speaker of these words but the Sinless One, who took the form of a servant, and through whom, and through whom alone, the sanctified, that is, the baptized members of the Church, can dare to repeat them?" But, as we can see from the Revised Version, the ground of the psalmist's appeal is, not something which he has received, but something which he is. It may be true—it *is* true—that not even the least motion towards God can the soul make without a prior motion of God towards us. But the psalmist is not regarding himself from this high and heavenly point of view. He says, according to the Re-

¹ Cf. Pss. xix. 13; liv. 3; cxix. 21, etc.

² 1 John ii. 19.

Pss. xv. 1; xxiv. 3.

vised Version, "Preserve thou my soul, for I am godly"; or, since no single word will express the meaning, "Preserve thou my soul, for to thy covenant-love I respond with a feeble but still sincere covenant-love of my own." You see, it is not the state of holiness to which the psalmist lays claim, but the overmastering affection of moral love, the same in kind as that of which he is conscious towards his brother Israelites, and in some degree towards his brother men. To a good Israelite there is no boastfulness implied in such a claim as the psalmist's. Whom should he love but Jehovah, who has granted Israel a "covenant ordered in all things and sure," a covenant based on the presupposition that those who desire its benefits are bound by practical love to each other, and, both as individuals and as a community, by worshipping and obedient love to Jehovah? Israel's proudest title is that he is one that loves, not vaguely and at random, but supported by the profound consciousness of duty. "Thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength."¹ This is the duty; and here is the reward:

"Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him:

*I will set him on high, because he hath known my name."*²

Observe, it is not, Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore I also will love him. By nature, Israel was not worthy to be loved; and if, in spite of this, Jehovah loved him, it was for the sake of the fathers,³ especially Abraham the "friend of God." But now, after the lapse of ages, a regenerate Israel is learning to love God; the title "Jehovah's friend," so gloriously borne by Abraham, can be given by a psalmist to faithful Israelites. "O friends of Jehovah," he says, "hate the evil thing."⁴ And this is really

¹ Deut. vi. 5.

² Ps. xci. 14.

³ Exod. ix. 6; Deut. iv. 37, x. 15; cf. Rom. xi. 28.

⁴ Ps. xciv. 10.

implied in the title assumed by the typical Churchman in the 86th Psalm, "Preserve thou my soul, for I am one that loves." For Jehovah too is "one that loves."

*"Righteous is Jehovah in all his ways,
And loving (or kind) in all his works."*¹

Consequently the relation between Jehovah and the true Israel—the Israel which is not stiff-necked, but yields to the soft guidance of Jehovah's eye²—is a sublimation of human friendship. Yes; just as God leads the child through the happy experience of human fatherhood to the enrapturing conception and experience of a Divine Father, so through the pearl of human friendship He would have us form some dim but truthful idea of that pearl of great price, the Divine friendship.

To me this verse seems transfigured, when understood as an appeal from one friend to another. I do not forget the more awful aspects of the Divine nature; there are times when it is natural and right to dwell upon them. But for a happy Christian life we need to dwell predominantly on the softer picture of our God presented to us by and in Christ. God is our friend. He knows our wants (our real wants) better than we do ourselves, and He has the will and the power to relieve them. We will not say to Him, "Preserve thou my soul; for, through Christ, I am holy and acceptable unto thee," but rather, as that noble 16th Psalm says, "Preserve thou me, for I have no good beyond thee," or, as our psalm, when rightly understood, expresses it, "Preserve me, for I am one of thy circle of friends."³ There is nothing arrogant in this. God in the olden time offered this friendship to every true Israelite; and in these happy Christian days He offers it to every child of man.

¹ Ps. cxlv. 17.

² Ps. xxxii. 8, 9.

³ Ps. xxv. 14 may be rendered, "The intimacy of Jehovah is for them that fear him."

‘I say to thee, do thou repeat
 To the first man thou mayest meet
 In lane, highway, or open street,
 That he and we and all men move
 Under a canopy of love,
 As broad as the blue sky above”:

or, in the words of our psalmist :

“(That) *thou, O Lord, art good and ready to forgive,
 And rich in lovingkindness unto all them that call upon
 thee.*”

You will see that I have had to amend one word even in the Revised Version of this passage; following the American Revisers, I have changed “mercy” into “lovingkindness.” Both are gentle words, and fill the air with benediction. But the psalmists draw a deeply felt distinction between them, and to obliterate it is to spoil many psalms, and especially the 86th, the keynote of which is lovingkindness. Do but observe how ever and anon this sweet word or its adjective drops from the writer’s pen. “Preserve thou my soul, for I am one that loves.” “Thou, Jehovah, art rich in lovingkindness.” “Great is thy lovingkindness towards me.” “Thou, O Lord, art a God rich in lovingkindness and truth.” I have pointed out how the first of these passages is marred by an imperfect rendering. But the three other verses from which I have quoted have suffered equally. And even Jeremy Taylor, great alike as a saint and as a prose-poet, has in some respects marred two of his gorgeous sermons, nominally based on ver. 5 of this psalm, by not seeing that this is one of the group of psalms of lovingkindness. All that he can find in this text is “miracles of the Divine *mercy.*” Listen to his solemn word-music.

“Man having destroyed that which God delighted in, that is, the beauty of his soul, fell into an evil portion, and being seized upon by the Divine Justice grew miserable, and condemned to an incurable sorrow. . . . God’s eye watched him; His Omniscience was man’s

accuser, His Severity was the Judge, His Justice the Executioner. . . . In the midst of these sadnesses, God remembered His own creature, and pitied it, and by His Mercy rescued him from the hand of His Power, and the Sword of His Justice, and the guilt of his punishment, and the disorder of his sin. . . . It was Mercy that preserved the noblest of God's creatures here below; he who stood condemned and undone under all the other attributes of God, was only saved and rescued by His Mercy; that it may be evident that God's Mercy is above all His works, and above all ours, greater than the Creation, and greater than our sins. . . . And God's Justice bowed down to His Mercy, and all His Power passed into Mercy, and his Omniscience converted into care and watchfulness, into Providence and observation for man's avail; and heaven gave its influence for man, and rained showers for our food and drink; and the attributes and acts of God sat at the feet of Mercy, and all that mercy descended upon the head of man."¹

This is what the great preacher means by "miracles of the Divine mercy," and supposes to be in the mind of the writer of the 86th Psalm. Well, "miracles" the psalmist, certainly does refer to. He says in ver. 10,

*"Thou art great, and doest wondrous things,
Thou art God alone";*

and in ver. 15, he refers to the Divine mercy,

*"Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion (i.e. merciful)
and gracious."*

But, as I have said, the Divine "mercy" is not foremost in the writer's mind; God's "miracles" are to him miracles of lovingkindness. Nor is Jeremy Taylor's idea of the Divine "mercy" the only admissible nor, for ordinary Christians, the most wholesome one. If you feed upon the view of truth presented in this fine passage till it colours your inmost nature, you will no doubt gain a grand, a simple, and a concentrated Christian character, but the moral tension in which you live will communicate to your bearing a certain hardness which will contrast unfavourably with the gentleness of the gracious Master. It is well sometimes to say and to feel the words:

¹ *Sermons* (1678), p. 383.

“Mercy, good Lord, mercy I ask;
 This is my humble prayer;
 For mercy, Lord, is all my suit,
 O let Thy mercy spare.”

For, as another psalmist says,

“*God is a righteous Judge,*

Yea, a God that hath indignation every day”;¹

and, looking at ourselves apart from Christ and His Spirit, we can have no hope of acquittal. But as soon as we admit into our mind the idea of the Divine covenant, the conceptions of “justice” and “mercy” become transfigured, and “shine with something of celestial light.” All that fine passage of Jeremy Taylor then becomes simply a description of what God and man would respectively be apart from that succession of covenants which both Old and New Testament writers trace in the very earliest age of history. There never was a time when God’s name was any other than Love; man might not know the covenant, or might know it but vaguely, and yet from the foundation of the world the relation of God to man was the same as it is now through the eternal Word. Nor can it be said that the first covenants were merely legal covenants. Oh no; there are germs of the gospel in the book of Genesis, and even if the eyes of the early men could but dimly see them, yet God seeth not as man seeth, and “with Him is no variableness.”

To realize this is the secret of an equable and serene Christian temper. God’s “righteousness” now becomes His consistent and undeviating adherence to His revealed purpose of salvation. “He is faithful and just” (or, righteous), as St. John says, “to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” “Spare us, good Lord,” may be paraphrased by another psalmist’s words, “Think upon the covenant.” And God’s “mercy” now becomes something very different from that clemency

¹ Ps. vii. 11 (Revised Version).

which, in consideration of human weakness, an omnipotent King may extend to His erring subjects. The word needs rather to be expanded into "*tender* mercy," so as to form a fit accompaniment to "*lovingkindness*,"¹ according to that sweet saying of the 103rd Psalm in the common version, "Who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies" (ver. 4). For it suggests, or ought to suggest, not the narrowness of our escape from a punishment too awful for words, but that yearning of a father over his child, the suppression of which would be, not only unmerciful, but a breach of an eternal covenant. There are some things which are beyond even God's omnipotence, and one of these is the withholding of love from any single child of man. Or rather, there is, according to biblical religion, no such thing as omnipotence; there is only a strong, righteous, wise, everlasting love²—a love which has bound itself to shrink from no effort in order to bring the beloved object into moral union with itself. Such love has an enthralling power; "the love of Christ constraineth us," or, as St. John says, according to the undoubtedly correct revised version, "We love (no need to say whom), because he first loved us." We cannot from the nature of the case return God's "mercy," except in deeds of mercy to those who are in greater need than ourselves. But we can return His love. Looking upon God in Christ, not as an awful King, far away and uninterested in our small concerns, but as a Friend, as close to us as our own soul is to our body, a Friend, who has made known His high purposes to us, and given us the inestimable privilege and power of forwarding them, how can we but love Him?

And shall we not even love these passages of the Psalms

¹ The A.V. of Ps. cxvii. 2, cxix. 76, produces the alternative "merciful kindness"; in Ps. cxix. 77, the Prayer-Book renders, for "mercies" or "compassions," "loving mercies." Both fine, but confusing the synonyms.

² Cf. Tennyson's beautiful line, "Strong Son of God, immortal Love."

which give us an insight into the loving heart of Jehovah, and supply a chaste and yet fervent expression for our own responsive feeling—love them with a love which will take some trouble to learn better why they are worth loving? Were this the time and the place, it would be pleasant to go through these passages, and set forth their beauties. But three out of the four psalms which we have studied already contain one or more of them, and from these three psalms let me in conclusion gather up some five words on lovingkindness.

“ See what surpassing lovingkindness Jehovah hath shown me ;

Jehovah heareth when I call unto him ” (iv. 8; cf. 1 John iii. 1).

“ For this let all men of love pray unto thee in time of distress,

When the flood of the great waters is heard ” (xxxii. 6).

“ Thou wilt not leave my soul to Hades,

Neither wilt thou suffer thy loving one to see the pit ” (xvi. 10).

“ Preserve thou my soul, for I am one that loves ” (lxxxvi. 2).

“ For thou, Lord, art good and forgiving,

And rich in lovingkindness unto all that call upon thee ” (lxxxvi. 3).

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