

ignorant theology; but Pusey was a good man. So, if this movement is to be brought to naught, it will be when its opponents make it manifest that they have more knowledge and as much goodness.

JOSEPH THE DREAMER. BY ROBERT BIRD. (*Longmans. Crown 8vo, pp. xi, 387.*) Mr. Bird has now stepped out of hiding and

acknowledged the authorship of *Jesus the Carpenter of Nazareth*, and of *A Child's Religion*. Now, of these works the first has had a wide circulation, and its characteristics are well understood. This is like it. This has the same simple style, the same eye for colour, the same unreserve in its application. Joseph may not have been Mr. Bird's Joseph; but Mr. Bird's Joseph is very lifelike and real.

## Short Studies in the Psalter.

BY THE REV. W. E. BARNES, B.D., FELLOW OF PETERHOUSE, CAMBRIDGE.

### (A) PSALM cxix.

To many people Psalm cxix. is perhaps the least interesting of the Psalms. It contains, it is true, some well-known and striking texts, but many thoughts are repeated over and over again in it, and the whole psalm is very long. Yet, if we study it and think of the circumstances under which it was written, we shall find, I am sure, that it contains many a lesson for us, and that, like all things which really concern us, this psalm can be deeply interesting to us all.<sup>1</sup>

The children of Israel when they returned to their own land from the Babylonian captivity found their fields and gardens either lying waste and overgrown, or else occupied by intruding foreign neighbours, who came in as soon as the rightful owners had been dragged away. They also found Jerusalem lying in ruins with its great wall broken down in many places, so that they could neither live there nor find shelter there from the attacks of their enemies.

But these enemies might on conditions be appeased. If the Israelites would only consent to a compromise in matters of religion, then they might settle down among their heathen neighbours, intermarry with them, and share their prosperity. These neighbours did not say to Israel, 'Give up the worship of Jehovah'; they said only, 'Join

us occasionally in our worship. Cannot you worship our gods and your own too? Why must you worship one God only?'

Now to some Israelites this must have seemed a tempting compromise, in which little was given up in religion and much was gained in worldly advantage. They had only to combine some respect for their neighbours' gods with the worship of Jehovah, and then the heathen and semi-heathen would abstain from annoying and injuring them, and would even, to an extent, make room for them. 'Become a little like us,' said the heathen, 'and then share and share with us.'

But if Israel refused, what then? An unequal and bitter contest lay before them. You may have noticed that in this psalm the enemy is frequently called the 'proud' (ZĒDIM). Of course they were proud. All the advantage lay with them. They were in possession, and had been in possession for many years; they were the stronger for Israel's fall. Even on the religious side they seemed to have the advantage. Israel came back with the brand of punishment upon him; Israel's neighbours, on the contrary, were strong in self-righteousness because they had escaped Israel's fate. The conditions then were offered by the stronger to the weaker. Israel's answer is given in this psalm.

The Psalmist, though he says 'I' and 'me' and 'my,' not 'we' and 'us' and 'our,' speaks in the name of Israel. The 'I' of Psalm cxix., like the 'I' of the apostles' creed, is the 'I' of the Church, not of the individual. The congregation of Israel, as they sang this song, proclaimed their faith,

<sup>1</sup> The circumstances described in the following paragraphs lasted under various modifications for more than a century after the First Return (B.C. 536). I therefore do not attempt to *date* this psalm more definitely than by saying that it was probably written within two centuries after the First Return.

and gave an answer to the offer of their heathen neighbours.

The tone of the answer is full of humility and sadness. Israel sings as a *stranger* (GÊR, ver. 19) in his own land, a *child* (NA'AR, ver. 9), *small and despised* (ÇA'ÏR VNIBHZEH, ver. 141). There is a monotony in the psalm, as though it contained the thoughts of a prisoner or of a person shut up in a sickroom and getting few fresh thoughts—

The sad mechanic exercise,  
Like dull narcotics, numbing pain.

But though the song is pitched so low, aye rather because the writer realises so fully the low estate of his people, it is a hero's song. It is a stout refusal to buy peace and ease at the price of a wounded conscience. Israel, turning to God, protests: 'I esteem all Thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way' (ver. 128, R.V.). God had said: 'Thou shalt not bow down to other gods, nor worship them,' and Israel in obedience refuses to join in the worship of the heathen. The Psalmist will have no compromise; he teaches his people to sing: 'I hate them that are of a double mind' (SË<sup>a</sup>PHÏM, ver. 113, R.V.).

The question now arises, What was it which nerved Israel to choose the enmity of powerful neighbours and to refuse to share their prosperity? The refusal was made in the very spirit of the martyrs; Israel chose to suffer affliction for God. What was the moving cause?

Surely it was the knowledge of words of God given in the Pentateuch which braced the people up to this great deed. The discourses of the Book of Deuteronomy probably supplied the fuel which kept burning the steady fire of Israel's faithfulness. It is a faithfulness to the spirit and not to the letter only. God's words appear to Israel in a twofold aspect, as *commands* guiding man in the path of right, as *promises* revealing the marvellous loving-kindness of God. 'I will keep Thy statutes,' the Psalmist cries (ver. 8); and again (ver. 166), 'I have hoped for thy salvation.' God's words, be they command, or be they promise, are in themselves a delight to him. They are dearer to him than worldly prosperity, for his spiritual senses are keen, his spiritual affections are stirred. On sacrifices and Levitical ordinances he bestows hardly a thought (vers. 62, 108, 164). The divine words are his wonders and treasures. He meditates on

them and finds them sweet, he examines them and finds them endless in significance ('exceeding broad,' ver. 96). Finally, when these words forbid him to make the compromise with the heathen which would ensure quiet and perhaps prosperity, he resolutely makes his choice: 'The law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver' (ver. 72). He chooses to be poor and weak for God's sake (vers. 14, 36).

The enemy had a cruel retort in his power. He could say to Israel, 'Your God, whose commandments you choose and prize, has done you evil and not good, for He allowed you to be carried away from your own land into captivity in a far country.'

The writer of the psalm is provided with an answer. His grievous affliction was, he says, for good: 'Before I was troubled I went wrong, but now have I kept Thy word' (ver. 67, *Prayer-Book Version*); 'I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me' (ver. 75). In these words Israel confesses the justice of his punishment, and claims that the punishment wrought amendment.

It will be noticed that all through the psalm Israel's answer to the offer of his heathen neighbours is addressed not to them, but to God. The temptation to be unfaithful to Jehovah calls forth an earnest protest of devotion to Him. But the Psalmist is too wise to content himself with protestations. He remembers, as some of God's saints have not remembered, that the flesh is weak; and so all through the psalm we find most touching petitions that God would uphold Israel, in whose name the Psalmist speaks, that they might keep His law: 'Let my heart be sound in Thy statutes, that I be not ashamed [by a fall at the last]' (ver. 80).

There is one dark spot on the picture of heroism which the psalm presents. Some Israelites did fall and accept their neighbours' compromise between idols and Jehovah, falsehood and truth. 'Hot indignation (ZAL'ÂPHÂH) hath taken hold upon me,' cries the Psalmist, 'because of the wicked that forsake Thy law' (ver. 53); 'I hate them that are of a double mind' (ver. 113); 'Thou hast rebuked the proud (*or* presumptuous), [and made them] accursed,<sup>1</sup> even them that wander from Thy commandments.' This is a psalm pre-eminently of love; but love of good must bring with it hatred of evil. Indignation at apostasy is inseparable

<sup>1</sup> So I translate a difficult verse.

from such devotion, as Israel declares in this psalm.

The sight of apostasy has a further effect on the Psalmist. The psalm is full of expressions of patience and faith. Poverty can be borne, so can the oppression of the enemy. But the desertion of friends moves Israel to one cry of impatience: 'It is time for Jehovah to work, for they have made void thy law.' Certainly the severest trial of faith is that caused by the desertion of God's cause by those who once upheld it, and our admiration for the faith breathed in Psalm cxix. is but little dimmed by the single cry to God which it contains to hasten His work.

(B) PSALM CXXXVII.

Perhaps no book of the Bible varies more in the character of its contents than the Book of Psalms. There is, however, one distinction above all others which ought to be taken account of in the Christian Church, namely, the distinction between *personal* Psalms and *impersonal*. The character of the Psalter is in part impersonal; *i.e.* prayers and praises are to be found in it which suit all persons and all times. Every religious man can join in them, and feel that they express some of his highest feelings and aspirations. Who was the author of such prayers and praises matters as little to us as the authorship of a favourite hymn or paraphrase. Whosoever was the hand which wrote them, the thoughts which they utter are those of the Church of all time. Thus may we speak of the Psalms I have called *impersonal*.

But there are also *personal* Psalms, Psalms in which the question, Who was the author? or at least, What were his circumstances? becomes all-important. Such a psalm is often rather a revelation of the spiritual struggles of an individual than a hymn of the universal Church. The experiences which are half unconsciously revealed in it may furnish us either with warning or with encouragement. In either case it is 'for our learning.' If it be not a hymn to stir our devotion, it may be a poetic monologue, a fragment of the history of a soul, written to instruct other souls which may pass through the same experiences.

Such a monologue telling unconsciously *the story of a soul sorely tried, and for the time defeated*, is Psalm cxxxvii. The author's name we shall never know, but his person and his circumstances rise up vividly before us, while he bares his inmost

soul as if unconscious of bystanders like ourselves. The story he tells is that of his own downfall, love for his country and a mistaken zeal for his God ending in a hell of vengeful passions.

The psalm opens with words of which the melancholy sweetness blinds us from seeing the evil tendencies which lie hid in them: 'By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down, and wept, when we remembered Zion.' Are the words so sweet? Is there not suppressed bitterness in them? What right had these exiles to *sit down and weep*, when it was God who had brought them to Babylon? What right had they to fold their hands and hang up their harps when God had told them, by his prophet Jeremiah, to build houses, and seek the peace of the city to which they were led captive? (Jer. xxix. 5-7).

God sends trouble to make men look forward, not backward. Living back in an irrevocable past is worse than mere waste of time; brooding brings danger with it. So it proved with the captives by the waters of Babylon. They thought upon the wrongs, but not upon the wrongful dealing, of Zion. Zedekiah's broken oath to the king of Babylon (Ezek. xvii. 16) and their own intrigues with the enemies of Nebuchadnezzar were forgotten; the destruction of Jerusalem and the joy of their neighbours on the day of destruction were remembered too well. In this brooding spirit Psalm cxxxvii. was written; we shall presently see to what it leads.

God's cure for sorrow is not reflexion, but work and hope. When grief overtakes us and seems all-important, God lifts the curtain of our self-engrossment and shows us the world outside, working, struggling, thinking, feeling, rejoicing. He calls us by this sight to return to the duties which lie nearest to us. Such return may seem hard, but it is possible when God commands it.

No doubt the exiles by the waters of Babylon thought God's message by Jeremiah a hard one to obey: 'Thus saith the Lord, Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands . . . And seek ye the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be led away captives, and *pray unto the Lord for it*: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.'

Here is God's remedy for sorrow, here His

revelation of duty to the captives by the waters of Babylon. They were to labour, to make their new land their home, to pray for their new home, and—I dare to say—to sing the Lord's song in a strange land as a testimony to the heathen. But the author of Psalm cxxxvii. would have none of this. He would nurse his sorrow, measuring in thought the long weary distance between the old land and the new. He would recall his last look at Zion, the savage slaughter in which not even infants were spared, and the eager malice of the neighbouring Edomites who shouted for the utter destruction of the walls of the city. On such thoughts the Psalmist chose to dwell. No little child growing up at his knee in a new home in a new land should turn him from thoughts like these. He turned away from the new life God had appointed, *and fell*.

What can brooding thoughts lead to but to a desire for revenge, or to impotent hatred of some one whom we rightly or wrongly connect with our

sorrow? The most repulsive wish or curse in the whole Psalter comes from the mouth of the man whose persistent grief we sometimes think to be so beautiful and touching. The psalm which begins with a grief which looks almost noble, ends with the devilish cry: 'Blessed shall he be, that taketh thy little ones and throweth them against the rock.'

Not without the providence of God has this strange passionate psalm been included in the Psalter. The warning it gives is clear. The savage cry with which it closes is no accident; it follows naturally from the brooding grief with which it opens. From beginning to end the psalm is written in one spirit, an evil spirit placarded before our eyes for our warning. The Psalmist's gaze is fixed on the past with vain regret; his attitude is the exact opposite of St. Paul's: 'Forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal' (Phil. iii. 13).

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## Entre Nous.

No one is likely to miss Professor Davidson's comment on Moore's *Judges* in this issue. Another volume of the series is nearly ready—Professor Gould's *St. Mark*; and a volume of the International Theological Library is also just at hand. It is Professor Fisher's *History of Doctrine*.

Professor Slater's article on Professor Loofs of Halle will be welcome to those who have followed the first lectures which Dr. Sanday has delivered in Oxford as Lady Margaret Professor. In newspaper phraseology, Dr. Sanday may almost claim to be the discoverer of Professor Loofs; for it is said that even in the distinguished audience he had before him there were not a few who had never heard the name.

Well, we also have made a discovery. And lest any one should snatch it, let us hasten to make

it known. We have discovered a great explorer, a devoted missionary, and a charming writer, and these three are one. His name is George Leslie Mackay. His book is *From Far Formosa*. It has just come in, and cannot be touched in the solemn review columns, for they are out of hand. But it is a delight to be able to catch a corner of this page, and hurriedly make known our discovery. For this is the missionary book we shall be reading and rejoicing in when the longest nights are on us. Its publishers are Messrs. Oliphant Anderson & Ferrier. Its price is 7s. 6d.; and this is a very moderate price for so richly illustrated, artistically bound, and altogether excellent a volume.

Dr. Salmond's *Christian Doctrine of Immortality* has had a reception that is perhaps unparalleled for so big a book and so knotty a subject. But men have felt that it was a big book that was