

Lutheran Observer.

Unless with proofs of Holy Writ, or with manifest, clear and distinct principles and arguments, I am refuted and convinced, I can and will recant nothing.—Luther.

In Essentials, Unity; in Non-Essentials, Liberty; in all Things, Charity.

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Poetry.

A SOLITARY WAY.

There is a mystery in human hearts,
And though we be enriched by a host
Of those who love us well, and are beloved,
To every one of us from time to time
There comes a sense of utter loneliness,
Our dearest friend is stranger to our joy,
And can not realize our bitterness.
"There is not one who really understands,
Not one to enter into all I feel."
Such is the cry of each of us in turn;
We wander in a "solitary way."
No matter where or what our lot may be,
Each heart, mysterious even to itself,
Must live its inner life in solitude.

And would you know the reason why this is?
It is because the Lord desires our love.
In every heart he wishes to be first;
He therefore keeps the secret key himself
To open all its chambers, and to bless, with
Perfect sympathy and holy peace,
Each solitary soul which comes to him.
So when we feel this loneliness, it is
The voice of Jesus, saying, "Come to me;"
And every time we are "not understood,"
It is a call to us to come again;
For Christ alone can satisfy the soul;
And those who walk with him from day to day
Can never have a "solitary way."

And when beneath some heavy cross you faint,
And say, "I can not bear this load alone,"
You say the truth. Christ made it purposely
So heavy that you must return to him.
The bitter grief which "no one understands,"
Conveys a secret message from the King
Entreating you to come to him again.
The Man of Sorrows understands it well;
In all points tempted he can feel with you.
You can not come too often, or too near;
The Son of God is infinite in grace,
His presence satisfies the longing soul,
And those who walk with him from day to day
Can never have a "solitary way."

—Author Unknown.

Then my heart said, "Give o'er;
Question no more, no more!
The wind, the snowstorm, the wild hermit flower,
The illuminated air,
The pleasure after prayer,
Proclaim the unoriginated Power!
The mystery that hides Him here and there
Bears the sure witness He is everywhere."

—Alice Cary.

Thus thy life shall be
One record of His love and faithfulness to thee.
—Frances Havergal.

Content is wealth, the riches of the mind;
And happy he who can that treasure find.
—John Dryden.

Contributions.

THE NOURISHMENT OF THE PSALMS.

BY ROBERT E. SPEER.

In the summer of 1887 I attended the Conference for Christian workers at Northfield with a friend who had recently left Princeton Theological Seminary and was soon to go out to India as a missionary. We traveled together to Northfield. We lived together for the three weeks of the Conference and together we came away at its close. It was my first intimate and prolonged experience with such a real man of God, and it was an experience of priceless value and inspiration. The Conference was a great blessing. Professor Drummond was there, and Major Whittle and Dr. Gordon and Dr. William Henry Greene. But no influence was more blessed and powerful than that of my friend. It was all unconscious on his part. It flowed from the sincerity, the integrity, the vital strength of his own spiritual life and character.

I remember many of his ways, but none more distinctly than his morning and evening reading of the Psalms. He was making it a practice to read a page of the Psalms each morning and a page each evening. The idea had been suggested to him by Dr. Greene. "Rabbi," as the students at Princeton called him, was the greatest Hebrew scholar in the country, but beyond that he was a Christian of most tender reverence, child-like faith and loving humility. One of his favorite hymns in the Seminary Chapel was the hymn beginning "Enthroned on high Almighty Lord, the Holy Ghost send down," which contained the couplet which seemed best to express old "Rabbi's" heart:

"And bring us where no clouds conceal
The beauty of His face."

After that he would lead in prayer, stopped often by the depth of his devotion and pausing in the midst of his prayer in silence of love and penitence and longing. Dr. Greene had recommended once to his class the devotional reading of the Psalms, a page in the morning and a page in the evening. The suggestion was made in that way because a page was a convenient and practicable allowance within the possibility even of the busiest Christian. "Rabbi" said that he had long made it a rule to follow the practice. Those who knew him scarcely needed to be given this hint of the secret of his rich range of religious feeling and experience. He was evidently fed at this table. My friend had eagerly taken up the hint and morning and night was laying his soul down upon the soul of the Psalmist as Dr. Greene for long years had been wont to do.

Experience will have taught all who have tried it the value of this practice in the Christian life. Such practices with many are most valuable when they are alternated with others, but again and again we need to bring our lives back to the fountain from which pours forth the best longing and desire, the purest confession, the richest emotions, the most vital religious convictions of Israel.

One advantage of the Psalms for us is their detachableness. They are not a book as Romans is a book, needing to be mastered as a whole before the parts are fully known. The Psalms are brief and separable. A single cry or exclamation may be the whole and completed utterance of some man's soul, centuries ago, yet as truly may be the whole call of some soul to-day. No busy cares, no absorption in work or duty can prevent the Psalms from finding us, and finding us in the very needs of our modern lives.

There are some beautiful illustrations of this in Mr. Morley's "Life of Gladstone." The Psalms again and again furnished the great statesman with the guidance or consolation or heartening of soul of which in some great crisis he stood in need:

"On most occasions of very sharp pressure or trial, some word of Scripture has come home to me as if borne on angels' wings. Many could I recollect. The Psalms are the great storehouse. Perhaps I should put some down now, for the continuance of memory is not to be trusted. 1. In the winter of 1837, Psalm 128. This came in a most singular manner, but it would be a long story to tell. 2. In the Oxford contest of 1847 (which was very harrowing) the verse, 'O Lord God, thou strength of my health, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.' 3. In the Gorham contest, after the judgment: 'And although all this be come upon us, yet do we not forget thee; nor behave ourselves frowardly in thy covenant. Our heart is not turned back; neither our steps gone out of thy way. No, not when thou hast smitten us into the place of dragons; and covered us with the shadow of death.' 4. On Monday, April 17, 1853 (his first budget speech), it was, 'O turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me: give thy strength unto thy servant, and help the son of thy handmaid.' Last Sunday (Crimean War budget) it was not from the Psalms for the day: 'Thou shalt prepare a table before me against them that trouble me; thou hast anointed my head with oil and my cup shall be full.'"

Probably, every Christian has had experiences like Mr. Gladstone's. Some could even write the story of their inner lives as they have moved from one stage to another of defeat or victory in expressions from the Psalms which embody great typical experiences, universal and enduring, familiar to men of all lands and all times because their hearts are as the hearts of Israel.

Doubtless, one hindrance to a fresh and fruitful use of the Psalms is the fact that they are grown mechanical to us. The phrases have become familiar and no longer puncture with vital suggestion the hardened familiarity of our thought and feeling. It is on this account that those who cannot read the Psalms in Hebrew, but can in German or French or Spanish do well to use such a translation, and by those who can do neither, the same end can be secured by using some new and improved English version like the Standard American Revised and substituting as often as possible even here the marginal readings. The fact that the reading is marginal shows that it is deemed inferior to the reading in the text, but its admission into the margin indicates that it is legitimate for us. And often it is these readings that make a passage otherwise meaningless, full of significance to us. There is a good illustration of this in Psalm xlv. 1, "My heart overfloweth with a goodly matter; I speak the things which I have made touching the King." The margin reads: "My heart overfloweth with a goodly matter, I speak; my work is for a king." What room for shame or concealment, for abashedness or hesitancy now! What ground for joy, elation, pride, contentment, and upright walk in the world! The Christian will be no cringer, no hider of his profession and his service, when his overflowing heart bursts forth in the joyous knowledge that his work is for a king.

The American Standard Revised Version makes the Psalms more vivid and meaningful in many places. Take for example Psalm xxxiv. 5, "They looked unto him and were lightened" becomes "They looked unto him and were radiant." We understand that. We have seen it. Now and then we have felt it, the glory of the radiant face which has looked unto God and been illumined.

And the Psalms need to be read with both a historical and with a practical imagination. When we remember the defenseless villages on the plains or in the valleys, and the place of safety in the rocks on the hills above to which in peril the villagers may flee, where often in dangerous times, some will habitually live, we realize the glad significance of the aged Psalmist's prayer: "Be thou to me a rock of habitation, whereunto I may continually resort." (Psalm lxxi. 3.) That is the Old Testament way of saying what Paul says in the terms of the Gospel: "Ye are dead and your lives are hid with Christ in God." And we need a practical spiritual imagination to make a quick application of the Psalms to ourselves, "Thou has visited me in the night. Thou has tried me and findest nothing." (Psalm xvii. 3.) That is a good evening verse. "Character," Mr. Moody used to quote in one of his favorite apothegms which his quick memory had caught and held, "Character is what a man is in the dark." A man with a good character is one who can use the Psalmist's words as his own. In the night no surprise can discover evil in him.

For all of us the Psalms have their rich purpose and use. It is a grievous thing if by neglect we are missing it. Those who feed here are nourished into reverence and power.

New York.

SWEETENING THE BITTER THINGS.

BY THEODORE L. CUYLER, D. D.

What a fine series of life lessons for the Christian is presented by the journeyings of the children of Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land! Almost every scene illustrates some practical truth or spiritual experience. For example, the Israelites, soon after leaving the Red Sea, and after a weary march over torrid sands, come upon a fountain in the desert. They rush forward eagerly for a refreshing draught. But alas! the first taste is a taste of disappointment; for the waters are so bitter that neither man nor beast can drink them! At once the murmuring multitude give to the unpalatable waters the name of "Marah," which signifies the water of bitterness. There is a still more terrible bitterness of disappointment in their hearts. They forget all about their deliverance from the land of bondage and the waves of the Red Sea, and think only of their present troubles. With a mixture of ingratitude and despair they crowd about their leader and cry out, "What shall we drink?"

Now, this exciting scene beside the fountain of Marah finds a parallel in many a chapter of our life experience; and we read of such in the lives of others. Abraham Lincoln was keenly disappointed because he did not win a certain office under President Taylor, and afterward that he was not elected to the United States Senate; but then he might have missed the most exalted station that any American has won in this century. Young Frederick W. Robertson was disappointed because he did not get a commission in the British army; but God had a better place for him in the army of Jesus Christ as the most brilliant preacher in the Church of England. In our own humble experiences we have had some tastes of the waters of Marah. We had set our hearts on some favorite plan or project. Perhaps we were going on a long-coveted