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THE EXCELLENCE OF THE PSALMS.

AN ADDRESS,

BY

REV. DR. D. B. WILLSON,

Professor in Reformed Presbyterian Theological
Seminary, Allegheny, Pa.

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The Excellence of the Psalms.

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BY PROF. D. B. WILLSON.

Gentlemen of the Theological Class :

My subject this evening is The Excellence of the Psalms.

May we say of them as John Arnd, the first of the Pietists, said : "What the heart is in man, that the Psalter is in the Bible." It is part of the word of God, part of that Scripture which is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. It is a wonderful mosaic, whose pieces are of unequal age, the whole of matchless beauty. Of it, Delitzsch says : "This book has no equal in the expanse of time which it reflects, beginning with the wanderings in the wilderness, 1450 years before Christ, and reaching down to the building of the second temple, 800 years later." Bishop Wordsworth says of the fourth book of the Psalter (Psalms 90-106) : "This book has a very comprehensive character. It goes back to Moses, and it goes forward to the captivity and to the return from it. It reaches from Moses to Malachi." Perowne, another commentator on the Psalms, has written of them : "The history of the Psalms is the history of the church, and the history of every heart in which has burned the love of God. It is history not fully revealed in this world, but one which is written in heaven."* To the same purpose Tholuck has written : "What a record that would be, if one could write down all the spiritual experiences, the disclosures of the heart, the comforts and conflicts, which men in the course of ages have connected with the words of the Psalms ! What a history if we could discover the place this book has occupied in the inner life of the heroes of the kingdom of God !"† Perowne, already quoted, gives

* The Book of Psalms, Vol. 1, Chap. 2.

† Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Introduction, Sec. 1.

us the reason of this boundless use: "The nature of the volume accounts for this, for it is in itself to a very great extent, the converse of the soul with God. With its words, rather than with their own they (believers) have come before God. In these they have uttered their desires, their fears, their confessions, their aspirations, their sorrows, their joys, their thanksgivings. By these their devotion has been kindled and their hearts comforted. The Psalter has been, in the truest sense, the prayer book both of Jews and Christians." Even of one of the Psalms, the 51st, Dyer has said after giving many incidents: "Indeed the history of this Psalm is the history of the Christian soul, and in it the suffering and sinning of all ages have found the expression of their own unworthiness and the comfort that comes from a true confession."*

I shall gather what I have to say of The Excellence of the Psalms under two heads: I. The Use of the Psalms in the Past—how dear they have been to believers in all ages! II. The Contents of the Psalms—how full of the truth of God! I shall close by speaking of the Benefit of the Use of the Psalms—to ourselves and others.

1st, then, the Use of the Psalms in the Past—how dear they have been to believers in all ages! I repeat the words of Perowne: "The Psalter has been, in the truest sense, the prayer book both of Jews and Christians." We can do little more than confirm this by a few instances. At the close of the tenth century before Christ, Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa, began to reign over Judah. He was the godly son of a godly father. He did much to restore the true religion in his kingdom. In the latter part of his reign, Moab and Ammon came against him. Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast, and offered in the house of the Lord the earnest prayer recorded in II. Chronicles, the 20th chapter. He then equipped the army for battle, and the 21st verse tells us: "He appointed singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth forever." The strains of the 136th Psalm stirred their hearts, as they went out to a battle that was a full victory. "So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet; for his God gave him rest round about," verse 30. There came troubles again to Judah on account of sin. They were sent into captivity, and then graciously restored. In the second month of the second year of the return began Zerubbabel and Jeshua and the rest of the returned captives, and appointed the Levites to set forward the work of the house of the Lord. When the builders laid the foundation of the temple, they set the priests and Levites to work to praise the Lord, "and they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, for his mercy endureth forever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid," Ezra 3. The familiar Psalm that had been used by the Levites at the dedica-

* Psalm—Mosaics, page 237.

tion of the temple by Solomon stirred the hearts of this saved remnant, II. Chron. 5:13. Then Nehemiah came from Persia and cast in his lot with the people of Jerusalem, and became the governor. He wrought for reformation, for a revival of the true religion, for its purity. "The wall was built, and the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed," (Nehemiah 7:1), and the 12th chapter makes note: "In the days of David and Asaph of old there were chief of the singers and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God. And all Israel in the days of Zerubbabel, and in the days of Nehemiah gave the portion of the singers."

In the days of the Jewish revolt against the Syrian kings, the army of Judas Maccabæus sang the Psalm already noted, the 136th, after they had discomfited Georgias and his host, I. Maccabees 4:24. So also in II. Maccabees 10:38, we read, after Gazara was taken: "When this was done, they praised the Lord with Psalms and thanksgivings, who had done so great things for them, and given them the victory." All these instances are of public occasions, the record of memorable scenes. These Psalms ministered as well to the family and personal religious life of Old Testament saints.

We make the transition to the New Testament by quoting Bishop William Alexander, of Derry: "Those strains of prayer or praise spring freely from the stock of David's life, and are colored in some degree by the soil in which their roots are plunged. Yet they are not exclusively the record of one life or of one spirit. We know the names of the shapes that move across the stage of the fevered life—Saul, Doeg, Ahithophel, Shimei, Joab, and the rest. Yet they are not mentioned. Something sealed his lips. Some restraining influence was at work as effectually as if a voice had said, 'These Psalms are to be sung in centuries inconceivably distant. They are to be used at funerals grander than Abner's, in temples vaster than your imagination has dreamed of. They are to set to music such as you have never heard, under skies upon which you have never looked. They are to be the heritage of man wherever there is sin or sorrow; wherever there is a sigh of penitence, or a voice of yearning offered up to God. Keep them free, therefore, from that which is merely local and personal.' The Psalms are fitted for the inner life of saints, first in a Jewish, then in a universal church. Believers under the Old Testament used them as Jonah did, not merely repeating them, but naturally interweaving phrase after phrase into the web of their own thought and language. To the Virgin-Mother the *Magnificat* proves that the Psalter was Bible, Prayer Book, Hymn Book all in one. And when we pass to the Catholic Church, the different moods of David and the other Psalmists answer to the heart of the saints."*

First of all we think of our Lord, of him whose coming had been foretold, of him of whom it is written: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; who in

* The Bampton Lectures.

the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared." * What a part the Psalms fill among the prophecies of Christ! Matthew 22:41-46 reads: "While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, what think ye of Christ? Whose Son is he? They say unto him, the Son of David. He saith unto them, how then doth David in the Spirit call him Lord, saying, the Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his Son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any questions." These Psalms, which thus convincingly testified of him, were in his heart. In their words, he voiced his praise of God. Wordsworth in his commentary on the 31st Psalm says what should make us pause and reflect: "The Psalter was the Hymn Book and Prayer Book of Christ." It satisfied him. Coleridge in his *Table-Talk*, refers to the use of the 22d Psalm by our Saviour on the cross, and then adds: "Whether Christ did audibly repeat the whole or not, it is certain, I think, that he did it mentally, and said aloud what was sufficient to enable his followers to do the same. Even at this day, to repeat in the same manner but the first line of a common hymn would be understood as a reference to the whole. Above all, I am thankful for the thought which suggested itself to my mind, while I was reading this beautiful Psalm, viz: that we should not exclusively think of Christ as the Logos united to human nature, but likewise as a perfect man united to the Logos. This distinction is most important in order to conceive, much more appropriately to feel, the conduct and exertion of Jesus."

Saul of Tarsus was a chosen vessel of Christ. To him Jesus said: "Rise and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee," Acts 26:16, 17. He was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. The Macedonian cry brought him to Philippi. He and Silas were arrested at the clamor of the people. They were beaten with many stripes. The jailer thrust them into the inner prison and made their feet fast in the stocks. How were their souls exercised? What could express the emotion of their hearts? The precious Psalms. "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them," Acts 16:25. Of this passage, Dr. Hackett says in his Commentary: "Their prayers and praises were not distinct acts (hence the form of the expression, *praying, they praised God*), but their worship consisted chiefly of thanksgiving, the language of which they would derive more or less from the Psalms." While Dean Howson writes: "What it was that they sang, we know not," he immediately adds: "But the

Psalms of David have ever been dear to those who suffer; they have instructed both Jew and Christian in the language of prayer and praise. And the Psalms abound in such sentences as these—"The Lord looketh down from his sanctuary; out of heaven the Lord beholdeth the earth: that he might hear the mournings of such as are in captivity, and deliver the children appointed unto death,"—"O let the sorrowful sighing of the prisoner come before thee: according to the greatness of thy power, preserve thou those that are appointed to die,"—"The Lord helpeth them to right that suffer wrong: the Lord helpeth them that are fallen: the Lord careth for the righteous." Such sounds as these were new in a Roman dungeon."* From the Apostolic Age on, the Psalms have voiced the emotion of the martyrs and confessors of Jesus. Think of what Athanasius endured for the truth's sake, what service he rendered to the church of Christ. This witness for the truth, referring to the 31st Psalm, recommended it to Marcellinus as most appropriate for the Christian who, for the name of his Master, is enduring the attacks of enemies or suffering from the coldness of friends.

I pass on to Reformation times. Of the Huguenots it is noted, when they assembled on Saturday night for family prayer, the head of the listening household used to read the 23d Psalm in cheerful tones. † Marot's version of the Psalms, so dear to the Protestant French, became popular even at court. He was with Calvin at Geneva for a time. The words of Luther to his friend Melancthon, in seasons of discouragement, are known to us all: "Come, Philip, let us sing the 46th Psalm." And of the 110th Psalm he said, that it is worthy to be set in a frame of gold and diamonds, so full it is of Christian thought and divine instruction, and of all the Psalms the very crown and chief. The fifth verse is like a rich, copious mine, from which flow Christian instruction and wisdom, faith, hope and confidence, the like to which no other scripture supplies. John Howie, of Lochgoin, tells us of John Knox: "It was his ordinary practice to read every day some chapters of the Old and New Testament; to which he added a certain number of the Psalms of David, the whole of which he perused regularly once a month." ‡ The same writer says in his account of the scholarly George Buchanan, confined in a monastery by popish inquisitors: "In this confinement he consoled himself with that unrivalled paraphrase of the Psalms of David, which placed him first among modern Latin poets, and will continue to be read with delight as long as the language in which they are written is understood." §

When the news of the scattering of the Spanish Armada, in 1588, reached Edinburgh, Robert Bruce took the 76th Psalm as his text, preaching in a running commentary on its words, as most fitting the event. Dr. Binnie, in his work, *The Psalms: Their History, Teach-*

*The Life and Epistles of Paul, chapter 9.

†A Song of Life or Death. Meditations on Psalm xxiii, by G. W. McCree, page 5.

‡Scots Worthies, pp. 186, 187.

§Scots Worthies, p. 201.

*Hebrews 5:7, 8.

ing, etc. (p. 91), says of it: "Times without number this Psalm has been sung, as furnishing the fittest expression of the thoughts and feelings of God's people in view of deliverances wrought for them." He adds what no Scotchman can forget: "When the Covenanters at Drumclog closed their ranks to meet the onset of Claverhouse and his dragoons, they sang the opening verses to the tune of Martyrs."

Without further detail of history, I close this part of this address with the words of W. E. Gladstone, in his *Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age*, (II., 526): "But most of all does the Book of Psalms refuse the challenge of philosophical or poetical composition. In that book for well nigh 3,000 years the piety of saints has found its most refined and choicest food—to such a degree, indeed, that the rank and quality of the religious frame may, in general, be tested at least negatively by the height of its relish for them. There is the whole music of the human heart, when touched by the hand of the Maker, in all its tones that whisper or that swell, for every hope and fear, for every joy and pang, for every form of strength and languor, of disquietude and rest. There are developed all the innermost relations of the human soul to God, built upon the platform of a covenant of love and sonship that had its foundation in the Messiah, while in this particular and privileged book it was permitted to anticipate his coming."

Thus dear has been the Psalter through the ages, to the people of God. Its thoughts have filled their hearts, and its words their mouths in praise to God.

I pass now to the II^d head, to speak of the Contents of the Psalms—how full are they of the truth of God!

This is the secret of their excellence, with their marvelous adaptation to the human soul.

Martin Luther called the Book of Psalms *Parva Biblia*—the little Bible. Paul Gerhard said: "The Psalms are a theater, where God allows us to behold both himself and his works; a most pleasant green field; a vast garden, where we see all manner of flowers; a paradise where we see the most delicious flowers and fruits; a great sea, in which are hid costly pearls; a heavenly school, in which we have God for our teacher; a compend of all Scripture; a mirror of divine grace, reflecting the love of our Heavenly Father, and the anatomy of our souls." Thirteen hundred years before Gerhard, Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, had said: "Although all divine Scripture breathes the grace of God, yet sweet beyond all others is the Book of Psalms. . . . History instructs, the law teaches, prophecy announces, rebuke chastens, morality persuades; in the Book of Psalms we have the fruit of all these, and a kind of medicine for the salvation of man. . . . What is more delightful than a Psalm? It is the benediction of the people, the praise of God, the thanksgiving of the multitude, the voice of the church, the harmonious confession of our faith."

Herein have we set forth in strains of poetry the greatness of God, his glorious attributes, the folly of idolatry, the creative work of God, man's sin and fall, God's providential care, the Spirit's guidance, the

waywardness of the wicked, the judgments of God, the incarnation, the saving work of Christ, his three-fold office as the Redeemer of men, his suffering even to death, his resurrection, his glorious ascension.

I would speak more fully of Christ in the Psalms. I have already referred to the question of Jesus as to David's Son and Lord. The same 110th Psalm, whose first verse our Saviour thus employed, furnished to the writer of the Hebrews a text which occupies a most important section of that epistle: "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedec."* In the verse before, he had quoted the second Psalm, as previously in chapter 1st: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." The same first chapter has references also to the 89th, the 102d, the 104th and the 110th Psalms. On the day our Saviour rose from the dead, two discouraged disciples were making their way to Emmaus. Jesus joined himself to them, and first of all instructed them. Asking them, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?" he began at Moses and all the Prophets, and expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. When he had disclosed himself to them and had vanished from their sight, they returned to Jerusalem and joined the company of the disciples. Jesus himself appeared, and evidenced to them the reality of his resurrection, and then he said: "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets and in the Psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them: "Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day. And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, 'and ye are witnesses of these things.'† So the Apostle Peter in his Pentecostal sermon, after he had quoted the prophecy of Joel to explain the outpouring of the Spirit, and would press the claims of the risen Christ on the assembled multitude, used the 16th Psalm: "For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved; therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope; because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the way of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance." He then explained it. "Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither

* Heb. 5 : 6.

† Luke 24 : 44-48.

did his flesh see corruption." He passes from his resurrection to his exaltation, saying: "For David is not ascended into the heavens," that is the entombed body of David still rested in the sepulcher they all well knew. He then adds from the 110th Psalm: "But he saith himself, the Lord saith unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand until I make thy foes thy footstool." Peter then warns the people: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."* So, also, when Paul went forth with Barnabas to preach the gospel in the countries beyond, he thus spoke to his own people in Antioch of Pisidia: "We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David." This passage of Isaiah 55:3 is followed by this: "Whereupon he saith also in another Psalm, thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." For David, after he had served his generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers and saw corruption. But he whom God raised again saw no corruption."†

Oxenham has said of the Psalms: "Their inspired sympathy with every phase of the Redeemer's lifelong passion, with every sentiment of the heart, which gathered up and recapitulated in itself the collective heart of humanity, has made the songs of Israel the rightful heirloom and common ritual of Christendom."‡ As to David's relation to Christ, Dr. Robert Nevin says: "We may remind the reader here of a remark we had occasion to make when commenting on Ezekiel's prophecy of the dry bones, that the name David is in several places of ancient prediction directly given to the then future Messiah in a way that cannot be mistaken. See Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 34:23, 24; 37:24; Hosea 3:5. This is not merely or chiefly, if at all, because the son of Jesse was an eminent personal type of Christ, but because Christ has a prior, even the highest claim to the name, which signifies Beloved." What light this deeper view sheds on the Psalms, for example, the 21st, and the 89th!—We may well follow this by quoting from the paper presented by Dr. George Duffield for the Presbytery of Detroit, to the New School Assembly of 1856: "It is the thought itself, the grand and sublime, the tender and touching, the thrilling and affecting truth of redemption through Christ, and the coming glories of his coming kingdom, that give to the Book of Psalms its value and power when intelligently employed for purposes of religious praise. The person, work, character and affecting scenes and incidents in the life of Christ, the glorious Messiah, his sorrows and sufferings, his trials and conflicts and his atoning death, the wonders of his resurrection, ascension and exaltation to the

right hand of the Father Almighty, the progress and history, the distresses and persecutions, the triumph and glory of the church, the gracious retributive providence of Jesus Christ, his supremacy and Lordship over this lower creation, and the bright scenes of joy and blessedness at his coming in his kingdom which enliven the Book of Psalms are themes that can never prove stale and uninteresting to the Christian heart. The longer the sentiments of this Book have been studied and used for purposes of praise and supplication in the worship of God, the dearer does it become to the pious heart, and the contrast between it and other hymns becomes glaring in point of strength and richness, of grandeur and power to enlighten, confirm and invigorate the Christian faith and hope, and lift the heart up to the holy joy and conscious, dignified and triumphant communion with God.

There is a depth, a power, an unction, a reach, a grandeur, a comprehensiveness and sublimity in the Psalmody of the Bible which we look for in vain in Watt's imitation or any other imitation. This inestimable collection, made by the Spirit of God, possesses a worth and power far beyond anything to be found in Watt's imitation, or any other collection of sacred songs, the production of uninspired men. . . . Dr. Watts was himself greatly in error as to the views he took of the spirit and design of the Book of Psalms which led him to style many of them 'cursing Psalms,' and represent them to be unsuitable to the Christian spirit. The future tense indicates often mere prophetic character, and the imperative mood, judged by him as inappropriate to the Christian, when employed by the Saviour whom the literal David personated, possesses a deep significance and gives a point and power to the denunciation contained in many of the Psalms by no means inconsistent with, but corroborative of the faith and hopes and spirit of the evangelical worshipper. An intelligent use of the Book of Psalms for purposes of religious worship could not fail to guard congregations against the influx and influence of dangerous error and keep before the mind the glorious Saviour who apprised his disciples that 'all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Book of Psalms concerning him.' Luke 24:44. The Syriac version throughout, in its reference to the contents of the Psalms, bears witness to their relation to Christ. For example. To the 2d Psalm: "Concerning the call of the Gentiles, and prophetic allusions to the passion of the Messiah." To the 72nd Psalm, "A Psalm of David, when he made Solomon King; a prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah, and the calling of the Gentiles." Thus much for Christ in the Psalms. The fruits of his redemption are fully set forth. We need only recall the use the apostle Paul makes of the 32nd Psalm in his argument as to justification by grace; and the adoption and sanctification of believers come before us in the 89th and the 51st Psalms; while the writer of the Hebrews uses the 95th to impress the truth, that there remaineth a rest to the people of God, and the 16th Psalm furnishes, as we have seen, the prophecy of the resurrection of the body of our Lord, who

* Acts 2:25, 26. † Acts 13:32-37. ‡ Catholic Doctrine of the Atonement.

himself said 'Because I live, ye shall live also.' The 19th and 119th Psalms dwell upon the Law of God; while Bishop Alexander tells us: "The great sacramental ideas of the Gospel are also provided for in the Psalter. It has strains which imply and go forth to meet the conception of entrance into the new community by a new birth, and of the continued sustenance of the spiritual life by a eucharistic feast."* He brings as we would, the words of Christ to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again," into relation with Psalm 87th, "This man was born there": and how frequent are the festival Psalms.

The exercises of the soul in repentance, faith and prayer, as voiced in the Psalms, have already been sufficiently noted. I close this part of this address with quoting some testimonials to the wealth of certain Psalms, and a testimony to the whole from the German commentator, Delitzsch. The Syriac version has this for the 1st Psalm: "A summary of the instructions concerning the various Christian graces, which is contained in the canon of the nine beatitudes of Matthew." Adolph Monod has written of the 38th Psalm: "It is in the furnace, it is from the bosom of the furnace, that he (David) writes these lines, which are intended to be the encouragement of the church in all ages. O power of the love of Christ! O renunciation of self will! O grace of the true servant of God! O virtue of the Apostles, and virtue of the Prophets, virtue of Christ in them, and of the Holy Ghost! For never man (of himself) would be capable of such a power of will, of such a triumph over the flesh."† Dr. George Douglas, of Scotland, says: "To this hour the Christian Church has no missionary hymns equal for instance to Psalms 67 and 72."‡ Housmann says of the 68th Psalm: "It is no longer a hymn telling how God, in days of old, led the Jewish Church, as in a triumphal march, from Sinai to Zion, but how Christ, having founded his Kingdom upon earth, is preparing it now, by victory over the opposing power of sin and death, for the great consummation, when having put all enemies under his feet, he shall gather into one all the kingdoms of the earth, and as a mighty victor and triumphant leader, he shall be proclaimed by every tongue to be 'King of kings,' and 'Lord of Lords.'"§ Alexander Von Humboldt spoke thus of the 104th Psalm: "It might almost be said that one single Psalm represents the image of the whole Cosmos. We are astonished to find in a lyrical poem of such limited compass the whole universe—the heaven and the earth—sketched with a few bold touches. The contrast of the labor of man with the animal life of nature, and the image of omnipresent, invisible power, renewing the earth at will, or sweeping it of inhabitants, is a grand and solemn creation."|| Of the 119th Psalm it is said: "This Psalm drew to it the admiration of Pascal, who, as his sister, Madame Perier, says, often spoke with such feeling about it that he seemed transported. He used to say that, 'With the deep study of life it contained the sum of all the Christian virtues.'

* Bampton Lectures, page 248.

† Adieux a ses amis.

‡ Lex Mosaica, page 77.

§ The Psalms.

|| Quoted by Perowne.

He singled out verse 59 as giving the turning point of man's character and destiny: 'I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.'** Of the 131st Psalm (of which Charles Spurgeon says, comparing all the Psalms to gems, we should liken this to a pearl) Augustine wrote: "This should be received, not as the voice of one man singing, but as the voice of all who are the body of Christ. This temple of God, the body of Christ, the congregation of the faithful, has one voice. It is as it were one man who chanted the Psalms."†

I now give the words of Delitzsch as a summary: "If (the Book of Psalms) is without equal in the richness of the form and feeling of its poetry, for freshness of spirit and outpouring of the deepest emotion, from still, soft prayer to the triumphant hymn of victory. To this we may add that it is without equal for the richness of its contents. It embraces nature and history, heaven and earth, the world around and the world within us, the experience of each and all from the darkest abyss of trial to the summit of celestial joy. It is unequaled in the depths of its secret soul experience, and the power of expressing it—not the palpable and superficial, but the root secrets of the inmost life, ideal and real, abstract and concrete, universal and individual—and so it possesses for the understanding of each reader, and for the inquiry of the commentator, a growing attraction towards something ever fresh and new." This depth and fulness are from the Spirit of God.

I come now to speak

III. Of the Benefit of the Use of the Psalms. This portion of the word of God, used by saints before and since the coming of Christ, so rich in the instruction of doctrine and experience, must needs be most fruitful. Isaac Walton says in his *Lives*: "The frequent repetition of the Psalms of David hath been noted to be a great part of the devotion of the primitive Christians; the Psalms having in them not only prayers and holy instructions, but such commemorations of God's mercies as may preserve, comfort and confirm our dependence on the power and providence and mercy of our Creator." Casaubon, one of the world's greatest scholars, says in his journal, in connection with an accident on the Seine with peril to himself and wife: "I could not but remember that place of Ambrose where he says: 'This is the peculiarity of the Psalter, that everyone can use the words, as if they were peculiarly and individually his own.'" Bishop Alexander says: "The soul, conscious of sin and yearning for pardon, the soul, lifted from the dust and 'liquifying unto God,' finds its history in the Psalter. The end of all the Psalms is '*ut anima conjungatur Deo;*' the Psalmists run with a rapid hand over the whole scale of the affections of the human spirit seeking after God. We may pass the hardest judgment upon David; yet the tenderest, purest, saintliest, most virgin souls—Augustine, St. Louis, Ken, Keble, Leighton—have found nothing more suitable in life or death than

* Dr. Alexander's Bampton Lectures.

† Quoted by Alexander.

are the record of individual experience. Personal religion is the same in all ages. The depths of humanity remain unruffled by the storms of ages which change the surface. This Psalm (he is speaking of the 51st), written three thousand years ago, might have been written yesterday; it describes the vicissitudes of spiritual life in an Englishman as truly as in a Jew. Not of an age, but for all time.* If then uniting distant times, they unite Christians of one age, met in one place, with one accord. The same writer elsewhere gives expression to thoughts which though new, to any, as of record, may yet be understood by all familiar with the Psalms, whether in reading or use in praise: "The value of the public reading of the Psalms is, that they express for us, indirectly, those deeper feelings which there would be a sense of indelicacy in expressing directly. . . . There are feelings of which we do not speak to each other; they are too sacred and too delicate. Such are most of our feelings to God. If we do speak of them, they lose their fragrance, become coarse; nay, there is a sense of indelicacy and exposure. Now, the Psalms afford precisely the right relief for this feeling; wrapped up in the forms of poetry (metaphor, etc.), that which might seem exaggerated is excused by those who do not feel it, while they who do, can read them, applying them without suspicion of uttering *their own* feelings. Hence their soothing power."† Perowne has this: "The pages of that book have often been blotted with the tears of those whom others deemed hard and cold, and whom they treated with suspicion and contempt. Those words have gone up to God, mingled with the sighs scarcely uttered in the heartbroken anguish of those whom Pharisees called sinners, of those whom Christians denounced as heretics or infidels, but who loved God and truth above everything else. Surely it is holy ground. We cannot pray the Psalms without realizing in a very special manner the communion of saints, the oneness of the church militant, and the church triumphant. We cannot pray the Psalms without having our hearts opened, our affections enlarged, our thoughts drawn heavenwards. He who can pray them best is nearer to God, knows most of the Spirit of Christ, is ripest for heaven."‡ This then is the closest fellowship, the truest union.

3. Growth in Christian activity. And this in every direction to the outermost bounds of the influence of this life; and in this day who can mark these bounds, with intelligence to and from every quarter, and with easy access?

John Donne said of the Psalms: "The Psalms are the manna of the church; as manna tasted to every man like that he liked best, so do the Psalms minister instruction and satisfaction to every man, in every emergency and occasion. David was not only a clear prophet of Christ himself, but of every particular Christian; he foretells what I, what any shall do, and suffer and say."§—What food have they been to the most laborious of the ministry of Christ! I need

not go far back. Look in these times at the work of Charles H. Spurgeon for nearly forty years in the great city of London. How clear the Psalms were to him. 'The Treasury of David' came from his pen because the Psalms were precious to his soul. They were to him heavenly manna, and strengthened by this food, he labored zealously for God. The great heroes, whose names I gave in the first part of this address, were sustained by these Psalms as they read them and sang them in praise of God.

The use of the Psalms promotes progress. The leaders in true progress have used this heavenly manna. See what Calvin did for the church, for civil and religious liberty. He says of the Psalms: "If the reading of my commentary on this book brings as much blessing to the church of God as I have got in the composition of it, I shall not repent of the work. Not without reason have I been accustomed to call this book the anatomy of all the parts of the mind, since there is no emotion of which anyone can be conscious, that is not imaged here as in a glass. All the sorrows, troubles, fears, doubts, hopes, pains, perplexities, stormy outbreaks, by which the hearts of men are tossed, have here been depicted by the Holy Spirit to the very life." Tholuck says of John Jacob Moser that he "was equally renowned as a statesman and experienced as a Christian. He had been engaged in severe struggles for the right of his country, and had been on that account unlawfully imprisoned by his sovereign for a period of two years." Here is what this Christian patriot says of the Psalms: "Oh, how precious and dear was the possession of the Psalms; how much comfort, light, and strength have they imparted to my fainting soul! I often not only missed the way, but lost the very trace of it. I sat me down as if I had become petrified. One word from the Psalms was a sunbeam to me. Like a lark I settled on the pinions of that eagle; carried by her, I scaled the rock, and beheld from that eminence the world, with *its* cares and *mine*, stretched out *beneath me*. I acquired to think, infer, mourn, pray, wait, hope, and speak in the spirit of David; I thank thee, O Lord, that thou has humbled me. I acquired to know and understand the rights of God. . . . I was enabled with tears to express my gratitude for mercies which formerly I counted not as blessings, but as my right and due." So he was nourished. Think of what William Wilberforce did for the cause of Christ, and the liberties of men. He wrote in his journal in 1803: "I am reading the Psalms just now. What wonderful compositions, what proof of the divine origin of the religion to which they belong! There is in the world nothing else like them."

What have the Psalms done, what must they do for national religion! What an exhibit do they give of the majesty and power, the rule and government of God; what exalted praise of his law; what a setting forth of the dignity and authority of Christ, of the grace and beneficence of his sway! "Ask of me and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for

* Sermons, Second Series, VII.
Book of Psalms, Vol. I., Chapter 2.

† Sermons, Second Series, IX.
‡ Sermons LXVI., Works, Vol. IX.

‡ The

thy possession," Psalm 2:8. "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth," Psalm 72:6. Counsel is given, in view of his authority and power: "Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings; be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are they that put their trust in him," Psalm 2:9-12. What fruit there would be, if statesmen would come to say with Moser, in words already quoted: "I acquired to think, infer, mourn, pray, wait, hope, and speak in the spirit of David." For as Dr. John Eadie, in his English Bible, says: "The singer himself, in his various changes, is embodied in his Psalms, whether he sinks in deep contrition, or soars away in spiritual rapture; whether he extols mercy, or sinks into awe before judgment; or whether he lays his sword and scepter at the foot of the throne in offer of suit and service, or in acknowledgment that the kingdom and the victory are alike from God." To be in fellowship, therefore, with him is to serve the Lord in public and in private life.

These references to the history of the use of the Psalms, to their contents, to the benefit of their use, must close with pressing the study of them more and more. John Mueller, the historian, wrote: "David yields to me every day the most delightful hour. There is nothing Greek, nothing Roman, nothing in the West, nor in the land towards midnight, to equal David, whom the God of Israel chose to praise him higher than the gods of the nations. The utterances of his mind sink deep into the heart, and never in my life, never have I thus seen God." Bishop Horne says in the preface to his Commentary on the Psalms: "He who has once tasted their excellencies will desire to taste them again, and he who tastes them oftenest will relish them best. And now could the author flatter himself that any one would take half the pleasure in reading the following exposition which he hath taken in writing it, he would not fear the loss of his labor. The employment detached him from the bustle and hurry of life, the din of politics, and the noise of folly: vanity and vexation flew away for a season, care and inquietude came not near his dwelling. He arose, fresh as the morning, to his task; the silence of the night invited him to pursue it, and he can truly say that food and rest were not preferred before it. Every Psalm improved infinitely upon his acquaintance with it, and no one gave him uneasiness but the last, for then he grieved that his work was done. Happier hours than those which have been spent in these meditations on the Songs of Zion he never expects to see in this world. Very pleasantly did they pass, and moved smoothly and swiftly along, for when thus engaged he counted no time. They are gone, but have left a relish of a fragrance upon the mind, and the remembrance of them is sweet."

Lastly, then, the Psalms prepare for life's close. In the words of Alexander, who has been often quoted: "In it (the Psalter) you will find him whom it is best to know—Jesus, your Lord and your God. And as time goes on—when you bow down in penitence; when you seek for pardon: when your head is bent in sorrow; when you lie on a bed of sickness; when your lips turn white and quiver as you kneel before your dead; as the solemn hour comes, when your spirit must pass into God's presence, it has treasures which will never fail you." May I not instance here our Savior himself? Bishop Wordsworth, in his Commentary, dwelling on the 31st Psalm, the 5th verse, 'Into thy hands I commit my spirit,' says: "This Psalm is connected with the 22d Psalm. Both of these Psalms were used by Christ on the cross. From the 22d Psalm he derived those bitter words of anguish, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?' From the present Psalm he derived those last words of love and trust which he uttered just before his death." Time would fail me to tell of the names of those who have used these words since Christ and the early martyrs. History notes them as the last words of Polycarp, Basil the Great, Bernard, Jerome of Prague, Lady Jane Grey, Melancthon, George Herbert. John Huss often repeated them when at the stake. Ridley used them in the flames. Luther came over them frequently at Eisleben when in distress of body in approaching death. But I must close. The literature here is so great.

The Book of Psalms is the Church's Manual of Praise. The lowly Christian and the distinguished scholar alike may be satisfied. "We can appreciate the estimate of the Psalter ascribed to an old old Scotch woman. The 'Songs of Zion' had been her stay in times of trial, a means of spiritual refreshing, and an aid to her devotion for nearly a hundred years. A friend asked her whether she thought it wrong to sing hymns, and whether she would not like to unite in singing one. "Aye," was her reply, "I'm gaun to begin the hymns when I have feenished the Psalms."* Moser, whose words are quoted by Tholuck as already given, has further said: "If my soul would keep holy day, the Psalms become my temple and my altar. Next to the writings of the New Testament, they are now to me my dearest and most precious book—the golden mirror, the cyclopedia of the most blessed and fruitful knowledge and experience of my life; thoroughly to understand them will be the occupation of eternity, and our second life will form their commentary."

"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."—Psalm 17:15.

"It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."—I. John, 3:2.

* R. M. Sommerville's Tract on Psalmody.