

thought for every day of the year. But sometimes two or three thoughts are linked together, so that if we really read one every day we must remember our reading. Here are two of the thoughts:

'Sept. 16.—The way to heaven is through heaven; no man can enter heaven who has not the heavenly nature awakened within him; and no man could have the heavenly nature awakened within him if it were not already there.'

'July 12.—"The secret of the Lord" is the faculty of spiritual discernment which enables us to know that all visible things are a sacrament of the Presence of God, that every incident of the commonest daily life thinly veils a great divine purpose for us, that we are surrounded and enfolded by the care of God, that the Almightiness and love of our Father is perpetually appealing to us; that He may develop our characters, cultivate our higher propensities, and lead us (without forcing us) to seek the things which belong to our peace.'

The Rev. J. G. Greenhough, M.A., has gathered together some of his recent sermons—'sermons,' he says, 'preached in the closing years of a long ministry,' and has published them under the title of *Sunset Thoughts: or Aftermath* (Stockwell; 3s. net). It is not every long ministry that can afford to do it, so apt are the closing years of even a great preacher to be a repetition of a few familiar truths. Mr. Greenhough has kept his preaching fresh and varied. There is simplicity in these sermons, certainly. But it is the simplicity, not of the poverty but of the riches of Christ. What could be simpler or more homely than the text, 'This poor man cried and the Lord heard him and delivered him out of all his trouble' (Ps 34⁶)? The sermon is as simple and homely as the text. Yet out of that text Mr. Greenhough brings the cry of humanity and the philosophy of prayer. Its promise comes home to every hearer, and it is a promise that has power with God and prevails.

The Psalter and the Present Distress.

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THE LESSONS OF HISTORY.

THE next point we shall consider is the great place given in the Psalter, and indeed throughout the Bible, to history, the story of the national past. God had no doubt spoken through His servants the prophets; but to those who had ears to hear He had spoken, just as really, and far more loudly, through the facts. Many of the longer Psalms are just a recapitulation, in song, of the nation's story, told not, of course, to stimulate national pride, but to warn, to instruct and inspire the people, to reveal to them the gracious purpose that ran through their history like a line of light—that purpose with which it had been their high privilege to co-operate, but to which in the past they and their fathers had so often proved recreant. Sometimes, as in the one hundred and fifth Psalm, the past is regarded as an inspiration; sometimes, as in the seventy-eighth or the one hundred and sixth, it is a warning: an inspiration, when one

contemplates the goodness of God which at every point shines through—for at every point, as the one hundred and thirty-sixth Psalm reminds us, there are flashes of that mercy which endureth for ever; and a warning, on the other hand, if we contemplate the pitiful response, and too often the stubbornness and defiance with which men had met that goodness. The national past is thus fitted to kindle both hope and remorse. The heart of one singer fills with hope as he sings:

I think of the days of old,
Call to mind the ancient years (77⁵);

and the heart of another sinks as he thinks of the poor response to the divine love of which the nation's history had been so full:

We, like our fathers, have sinned,
We have done perversely and wickedly,
All heedless of Thy wonders,
And unmindful of Thy great kindness (106^{8f.}).

That God is love and that the nation provoked Him—in these two words is summed up the story of the past. Like Deuteronomy, the historical Psalms are a ringing and reiterated call to the nation to *remember*. But it is so easy to forget, and especially easy, in the exaltation of a great deliverance, to forget the obligation of gratitude and of a moral response to the God by whose hands it was wrought, and there is many a word in the Psalter which we would do well to lay to heart to-day.

The waters covered their foes,
Not a man of them was left.
So then they believed in His words,
And began to sing His praise.
But soon they forgot His doings.
Full lusty they grew in the desert.
He gave them the thing they had asked for,
But sent wasting disease among them (106¹¹⁻¹⁵).

The study of the past is fitted to save the men of to-day not only from despair, but from stupidity. From despair: for the past—so teach alike the poets of the Old Testament, its historians, and its prophets—the past, despite its tangle, reveals the thread of a divine purpose which runs through national and international history. But the study of it ought also to save us from stupidity: for the shadow that falls across the national history is thrown by the obstinacy and the irresponsiveness of the nation to the divine voice, by its refusal to cleanse its life of the vices that degrade it; and it is for us not to repeat the folly of the past:

O that to-day ye would hear His voice:
'Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah,
Or at Massah, that day in the desert,
When your fathers tempted and tried me,
Notwithstanding the works they had seen' (95⁷⁻⁹).

THE TRAINING OF THE YOUNG.

Now if the past has this power to instruct, inspire, and restrain, it follows that the story of the nation ought to be familiar—the great struggles, the heroic sacrifice—and also the lives of the great and good men who won for us the freedom and the truth and all the precious things by which we live. In other words, the national story ought to be taught to the children—taught by those who not merely know the facts, but understand the drift and the inner meaning of it all—till it lives in their minds and in their hearts. Here we have unquestionably much to learn from the ancient Jew. The historical Psalms thrill with the sense

of the obligation of the fathers to the children to acquaint them with the story of the nation's past:

O God, we have heard with our ears,
Our fathers have told us the story
Of the work that Thou wroughtest in their day,
Thy wonders in days of old (44¹).

That patriotism is most stable and most deeply rooted which knows something of the events, the forces, the personalities of the days long gone, which helped to create for us the national type and polity which to-day we prize. It is well worth our while, in these modern days, to note how the poets, like the legislators, of the Old Testament, plead with the fathers to pass on to the children the glorious memories of the ancient days which they, in turn, had received from their fathers:

What we have heard and known,
And what our fathers have told us,
We will not hide from their children.
We will tell to the next generation
The praises and might of the Lord,
And the wonders that He hath done.
He set up a testimony in Jacob,
A law He appointed in Israel,
Which He commanded our fathers
To make known unto their children,
That the next generation should know it,
That the children yet to be born
Should arise and tell their children;
That in God they might put their confidence,
And not forget God's works (78³⁻⁷).

—and so on. Similarly, in the forty-eighth Psalm, written perhaps to celebrate some great deliverance:

Walk about Zion, go round her:
Count ye her towers,
Set ye your mind on her ramparts,
Consider her palaces;
That ye tell to the next generation
That such is Jehovah our God (48¹²⁻¹⁴).

The story of the past, when told by those who know the thrill of it, helps to open the meaning of the present; for the God who worked then is working still—'as we have heard, so have we seen' (48⁸)—and He will continue to work for ever, because He is a living God. It is this that links the ages each to each—*He* rather who links them; and one of the great lessons of the Psalter will remain unlearned, until the home, the school, and the Church, realize their obligation to write upon the hearts of the children the story of the national past so plainly that it will be a warning against sin and a stimulus to heroism and faith.

A NATION'S REAL LIFE.

We are now led to consider the elements that constitute the real life and prosperity of a nation. There are songs in the Psalter, as there are large tracts of the Old Testament, which move within the region of the material, and which measure national prosperity by an external standard; as in the prayer:

May our garner be bursting
 With produce of all kinds.
 In the fields may our sheep bear
 By thousands and ten thousands (144¹³).

But though this is good, it is not the best. The real worth and prosperity of a land can best be measured by the kind of men it breeds; and the exquisite words of the eighty-fifth Psalm, written in a time of deep national gloom, set forth with singular beauty the ideal of a land in which the citizens are all kind and loyal to one another, and angels look down upon the lovely sight from the windows of heaven with eyes of wonder and delight: a land where

Kindness and loyalty meet,
 Peace and righteousness kiss.
 Loyalty springs from the earth,
 Righteousness looks from the sky.
 Yea, the Lord shall give all that is good,
 Our land yielding her increase,
 Righteousness marching before Him,
 And peace on the track of His steps (vv. 10-13).

The only prosperity for which a true patriotism cares is the prosperity which goes hand in hand with a fair civic life. It will not despise rich crops and large flocks, it will rejoice when the land yields her increase; but before and above that, it will value growth of character; crops of 'kindness and loyalty' must also spring from the land. Then, and not till then, 'shall glory dwell in our land' (85⁹), when the citizens are just and gracious to one another, and when the moral life of the community is inspired and transfigured by religion: in the noble imagination of the Psalm, when the kindness and loyalty that spring up from the earth are watched by the eyes of the angel of peace that looks down from the heavens. The patriotism which needeth not to be ashamed is that which yearns, not so much for crops and commerce and gold, but for kindness and justice, for salvation and God.

There was the more need to emphasize the necessity for these things, as there is proof enough

throughout the Psalter that the national life of Israel was menaced and disturbed as much by foes within as by foes without. The unity of spirit which ought to characterize a community of brethren who live within the same borders, and whose glory it should be to help the nation to contribute its quota to the common good of the world—this unity was ruined by the spirit of selfishness and by the antagonism of class to class. The background of the Psalter is one of civic strife and contention; for behind the figures of the Psalmists, with the light of faith upon their sorrowful faces, there are gathered together the cruel and the selfish, the immoral and the unbelieving swaggerers and traitors and liars—a motley crowd of knaves and fools, who care for nothing but themselves, who scoff at the obligation to contribute to the higher life of the community, who recognize no interest but their own, who 'boast of the multitude of their riches,' and who use the power which circumstances have given them to exploit the weaker members of the society to which they all belong. The Psalter sorrowfully recognizes the existence of two classes within the nation—not the employers and the employed, not the capitalists and the working men, but those who believe in moral distinctions and those who do not. It is true of the Psalter, as of the Old Testament generally, that the good were often the poor, and the wealthy the wicked: but the distinction is really far more than an economic one. It is a distinction between those who care deeply and those who care nothing for the things that matter to the well-being of a nation; between those who are prepared to sacrifice life itself in defence of the things for which Israel stood, and those to whom ease and pleasure and power and money are the only things that matter. It happens that the Hebrew words for 'the nations' or 'the heathen' and 'the proud' or 'arrogant' are written and sound very much alike; and there is good reason to believe that the text of Psalms which were originally written to lament the assaults of the proud upon the better life of Israel was sometimes modified in later days so as to apply to the heathen who sought to blot out the nation. There is surely something very suggestive in this: it carries the implication that a nation may suffer as much and be exposed to dangers as great from the selfishness of its own citizens as from the aggression and the cruelty of the foreigners who hate

it. The Psalmists felt that the most deadly enemy might sometimes be within the gates. They knew that a purifying judgment within the nation itself was as sorely needed as deliverance from external foes, and for such a judgment they had the courage to pray. The war is not won when the foreigner is repelled; a war no less terrible has still to be waged for the purification and the uplifting of the national life.

THE HOME.

Now in this fight for the betterment of the nation's life, the Psalter recognizes that two institutions are of supreme worth—the Home and the Church. There are few pictures in the Psalter more winsome than that in Ps 128 of the labouring man, with his wife, the glad mother of the many children who are gathered about the table, and all this gracious family life is rooted in the fear of the Lord:

Happy all that fear the Lord,
 Even they that walk in His ways.
 Thou shalt eat what thy hands have toiled for.
 Happy and prosperous thou!
 Like a fruitful vine shall thy wife be
 In the innermost room of thy house:
 Thy children, like slips of olive,
 Round about thy table.
 See! this is the blessing
 Of the man that feareth the Lord (vv. 1-4).

And in the preceding Psalm there is a hint that the glory, the strength, and the safety of a land lies in the number of the children in her homes.

See! sons are, a gift of the Lord,
 The fruit of the womb a reward.
 Like arrows, by warriors wielded,
 Even so are the sons of youth.
 Happy the man who has filled
 His quiver full of them.
 He shall not be ashamed when he speaks
 With enemies in the gate (127³⁻⁵).

It is obvious that the dearly bought gains of the past can be handed on to the future only by the children of to-day; and, other things being equal, the greater the population, the more certainly and securely will the life of the nation, and the type which it has developed, be carried forward to enrich the larger life of the world in the days to come. A year before war broke out, Pastor Dörries of Hanover, preaching from the lines last quoted, bitterly lamented the rapid decline in the number of births in the Protestant parts of Germany, and pointed out that if the present ratio

of the birth-rate in Protestant and Roman Catholic families were to be continued, in a few years Germany would cease to be a predominantly Protestant country, and the great work of Luther would be, to that extent, undone.¹ When the enemies come to speak in our gates—in other words, when the distinctive life of the nation is being menaced—the future may be faced without fear when the defenders of the national traditions are not only brave but numerous. It has been said that, had the population of France been as great as that of Germany, there might have been no war: the enemies might never have gone near the gates had they known that they would meet there a host as great as their own, both willing and able to speak a sufficiently loud and meaningful word.

But, as we have seen, the real strength and glory of the family is that in it is furnished the first opportunity to leave upon the mind and heart of the child a lasting impression of the place and the power and the meaning of religion. There his mind can and should receive a bias in favour of the things that matter to the lives of nations and of men. We have already seen how scrupulous the Hebrew father was to tell the story of the national past to his children (cf. Josh. 4^{6f.} 21^{f.}), that they might learn to appreciate the mission of the nation—the things for which she stood, and the Power by which she stood. The Hebrew, who knew how to put first things first, was unquestionably right in viewing the home as primarily a school of religion and of faith. Neither Kultur, whatever that may be, nor culture, whatever that may be, will furnish a child so completely for the service of his fellows as the fear of God, the sense of His supremacy over individual and national life, and of the responsibility of men to Him.

THE CHURCH.

The other great factor in the maintenance of the national life upon a worthy level is the Church. There the religious discipline which is begun in the home is continued and confirmed. Surely the pure joy of worship has never been expressed with such simplicity and power as in those sweet Psalms which voice the yearning for the courts of the Lord (84²) and which tell of the delight of the pilgrims:

I was glad when they said unto me,
 'We will go to the house of the Lord' (122¹).

¹ *Evangelische Freiheit*, Nov. 1913, pp. 416-424.

They were glad because of the memories that crowded upon them of the tribes that throughout the centuries had made their pilgrimage thither; glad because there they met with their brethren and companions from afar; glad because, after the long and weary way through many a valley of tears, they were rewarded at the last with the vision of God in Zion. But there were deeper reasons for their joy than those. For to such men worship was not merely a gorgeous ceremony fitted to titillate the senses and to recall memories of the ancient days; it was also a stimulus to the moral life. Some of those who took part in that worship had to spend their lives among what the writer of the eighty-fourth Psalm calls 'the tents of wickedness' (v. 10)—a reference, no doubt, to the foreign lands where so many Jews had their home, lands where degrading religions were practised and too often a degrading morality prevailed. But the worship in Jerusalem, and still more, no doubt, in the synagogues, would recall the sterner demands and temper of the religion of the fathers. There the moral nature would be braced again, and they would return to the struggle in the tents of wickedness with fresh hope and courage. And so it is to-day. The world would be a very different world if the Church, with her high and holy claims, held the place which she deserves in the affections and in the life of men and nations.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem :
They shall prosper that love thee (122^d).

The peace and prosperity of humanity would be guaranteed if all cared deeply for Jerusalem and for the gracious memories that gather round our hearts when we name the name of Zion.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF MEN.

But this leads us to remember in conclusion that to the noblest of the Psalmists, as to the greatest of the Prophets, the ideal is a brotherhood of nations, bound together in the bonds of a common salvation to Him who is the God and Father of them all. They call us to the contemplation of a Kingdom which covers all the world and stretches down the length of all the centuries (145). Though in the roar of the cannons we hear it to-day but very faintly, the call is to 'all people that on earth do dwell' to 'sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.'

Bless us, O God, with Thy favour,
Let the light of Thy face fall upon us ;
That the world may know Thy way,
And all nations Thy power to save.
Let the peoples praise Thee, O God,
Let the peoples—all of them—praise Thee (67¹⁻³).

We live in the faith that this fair dream may some day—and we pray God soon—be translated into fact. This dream has found no expression so winsome or so brilliant as in that too little known Psalm, the eighty-seventh, which, but for the names of the strange peoples that crowd it, would be one of the most familiar, as it is surely one of the noblest, songs in all the world. It sets before us Jehovah writing in the book of life the names of the citizens of Zion, and among them are numbered men from Egypt and Babylon, from Philistia, Tyre, and Ethiopia—men from cruel and distant lands who in ancient or more modern days had been the troublers of Israel. Here comes a dark-faced man from Ethiopia: down goes his name in the book of the citizens of Zion. And here is a man from Philistia, which in the old days of Samson and Samuel had harassed Israel so sorely; and here is another from Phœnicia, whose princess had once sat as queen upon the throne of Israel and used her power to slay the prophets of Jehovah with the sword; and here is another from Egypt, the memory of whose oppression persisted in Israel for a thousand years; and another from Babylon, whom an earlier Psalmist had cursed as the great Despoiler. Now their names lie together on the registry of Zion, written by the finger of Jehovah Himself, and Zion is acknowledged as the Mother of them all. The streets of the city of Zion are exceeding broad: on them there is room for the reconciliation of ancient enmities. 'Glorious things are spoken of thee, thou city of God.'

Here is a vision of the happy time when the nations shall no more dash themselves and one another in pieces; but, worshipping their common God as children of Mother Zion, 'thus'—in the words of the Psalm—

Thus shall they sing, as they dance,
Saying, 'All my springs are in Thee.'

What better can we do in the present distress than, as we believe in God Himself, so also to believe in the certainty of this brilliant and blessed future, and comfort our hearts with these 'glorious things'?