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# The Poetry of the Bible.

## The Book of Psalms as Literature.

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(The Poetry of the Bible.)

Although the number of baptized Christians in Japan totals fewer than 800,000, the number of Bibles and New Testaments sold each year is 600,000. The question therefore arises, who buys these Bibles?

A possible answer was given recently by replies to a survey of 100 leading Japanese business men, most of whom were not Christians, as reported by Ecumenical Press Service. According to the monthly journal, *Bungei Shunju*, the Bible was the second most frequently mentioned book when the question was asked, what Book would you take with you if you were making a three month space trip in a capsule and could take only one book?

The general secretary of the Japan Bible Society offered as a possible explanation for the choice, "In Japan the Scriptures are thought of as one of the most important cultural books."

The Bible as literature is inexhaustable. To do justice to this subject, even limiting one self to an introduction to each of the books of the Bible, would produce a library of books. For when we think of the Bible as English literature we are referring to a Bible translated from ancient languages. Therefore it would be necessary to examine carefully the literary style and rules of these languages in order to fully grasp the meaning. Also Bibles, such as the old German Bible of 1531 and The Staten Bible translated from the Hebrew and the Creek into classical Dutch, completed on the 29th of

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July, 1637, in The Hague The Netherlands, should be studied and comparison made with the English Bibles. For all are translations from the same ancient languages.

Christianity found two thoroughly established languages, Latin and Greek, ready to act as its instruments, and it was thanks to Christianity that these two languages survived and spread instead of being submerged by the incoming waves of foreign-speaking barbarians. The conqueror normally imposes his language upon those conquered. Why was the reverse true in the case of the Germanic invaders who overran the Roman empire? There is only one answer; as they came into the Empire, the Germanic invaders were converted to Christianity, and the language of western Christendom was Latin. Adoption of the religion carried with it adoption of the language indissolubly bound with that religion.

At a somewhat later period, however, christianity, having developed a mass appeal that had to be made in their own tongue to peoples living beyond the borders of the former Roman Empire, broke down the Classical system of aristocracy in language whereby only Greek and Latin were considered worthy of study.

The work of missionaries in reducing spoken languages to written forms, giving them dignity, culture, and a literature, began even before the Empire's fall and has continued uninterruptedly since. Many, if not most, of the modern languages of Europe have as their first written document a translation of the Bible made by missionaries. This is true of the first Germanic tongue to boast a literary form, Gothic, which the Bishop Ulfilas introduced to the world in the form of a fourth-century translation of the Bible; of Armenian and Georgian, which first appear in similar form in the fifth century; of Slavic, for which the Bishops Cyril and Methodius, missionaries from Constantinople to the Slavs, devised the Cyrillic alphabet in the ninth century; of Albanian, with its baptismal ritual of 1462; of Finnish, with its 1548 Bible; and of many others.

At the same time, established languages were assisted on the road to standardization and modernization by religious texts. Luther's translation of the Bible in 1531 laid the foundation for the modern German tongue; De Staten Bijbel of 1637 for the modern Dutch language; (of which I have an old copy) and the role played by the King James version in fixing the standards of modern literary English is too well-known to bear repetition. Today, it is thanks largely to the missionaries of the Christian religion that we are acquainted with countless tongues of Africa, Asia, North and South America, Australia and the Pacific.

Long before linguistic scientists and linguistic explorers arose, missionaries repeated the historical performance of their early predecessors. Arriving on the scene of their work, they at once proceeded to study the native tongues, devise for them written forms, translate into them the Bible for the use of the people.

Of all the thousands, and millions of books published in the past there are few of lasting value. "Of making many books there is no end," so we read in Ecclesiastes 12. Many books frequently called classics, are often classics only in their particular age and to those who are interested in a certain style of literary art, but as to their content or their form they frequently are laid aside. How many books there have been published and disappeared, no-one knows. But the Book of Books, the Bible still lives, notwithstanding frequent attempts made in the past to destroy this Book.

The Bible is always fresh, though it is an old Book, very old Book. The Bible is always new, though it was written years and years ago. It has a message for the individual as well as for groups, for nations, for all mankind as a literary source book and as a fountain for religious experiences. The Bible is always timely, though it seems to be timeless. And this is, ofcourse, because this Book was born of the Holy Spirit, planted in the souls of men, tried as by fire, lived for, died for by countless individuals.

As literature, the Bible is the greatest single piece that has ever come

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from the pen of men. Look at the biographies, the biographies of the Bible surpasses the biographies of any-one who has written biographies. They not only extol the virtues of the individuals, but they also tell us about their weaknesses and wanderings. The weaknesses of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as well as their staunch and strong faith in Jehovah God are told in vivid colors. The life story of Mozes from the bulrushes to the mountain top from which he had a look into the Promised Land, sheds light into the human soul as no psychiatrist or psychologist could ever do. We read about Peter, the big and strong fisherman, but also about Peter the very impulsive one. And David, Solomon, Paul and a host of others, the list is long and varied.

The Bible as a Book of oratory! There are those chapters which stand out as some of the greatest orations or sermons ever spoken by men. Read for example, Acts 2; Acts 17; Act 26, or turn to 1 Kings 3 beginning with the 22nd verse. Marvelous and beautiful.

The Bible as a Book of drama! Take the story of The Rich Fool, it just throbs. The story of the Prodigal Son, nothing surpasses it. And turn to Solomon's wise judgement in 1 Kings 3, beginning with the 16th verse. Or turn to the book of Esther. Has ever greater drama been written than the drama given to us on the pages of the Bible?

And as to Poetry and Song, the poetry of The Bible cannot be matched any place. And songs! The songs of the nativity and the songs of Miriam are the most beautiful songs ever written. Sometimes they express the sobbing of a child and sometimes the joy of victory of a pilgrim as he sings: "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace."

The Bible is not only the greatest literary Book, the finest literature in itself, but it is also the source book of inspiration of some of the finest literature written by men. From the library of literary classics we only need to mention Shakespear who liberally borrowed from the Bible.

In a short article one cannot do justice to this great subject, The Bible as Literature. I will concentrate only one aspect, The Book of Psalms— in other words, concentrate on the poetry of the Bible.

The Psalms rightly hold the center place of the Bible. The continual freshness and enduring quality of The Psalms is primarily due to their spiritual intensity. Whatever their mood, motive or variety of circumstances, the psalmists are at one in worshipping Jehovah God. Each of the hymns of praise and prayers is a facet or echo of a vividly personal relationship with Him. In these poems a dynamic quality of life has been embodied. Behind the words lies a profound experience, and beyond the experience is found a manifestation of God. Thus every Psalm has come from the very fountain of life.

Therefore, it need not surprize us that the truly great writers have drawn liberally from the Bible as a whole and from the Psalms in particular. Wordsworth wrote; "The Book of Psalms is a spiri tual epitome of all history."

A. The Title to the Book of Psalms.

The general title to the Book of Psalms in Hebrew is TEHILLIM or more fully. SEPHER TEHILLIM, Book of Psalms. The word TEHILLIM is derived from HALAL, to praise, as in the word Hallelujah, praise Jehovah. The name is given to the general collection, because praise, more than any one thing else is the characteristic of the book, and because the collection seems to have been designed to be used in the public praise or worship of Jehovah God.

The word PSALMS, as applied to the collection, has been derived from the Creek translation, the word PSALMS. plural form, PSALMOI. This word comes from the Creek PSALLO, to touch or to pluck a string, and to twang, that is, to cause to vibrate by touching something with

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the fingers. Hence the word is applied to instruments of music employed in praise and then to acts of praise in general. We are thinking here especially of the harp, an instrument used by David.

The verb, PSALLO, is also used in the New Testament of the Bible as denoting praise, as for instance in Romans 15 : 9, "I will confess--- and sing unto Thy name, "and in I Corinthians 14 : 15, "I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with understanding." Also reference is made in the New Testament to the Book of Psalms as a collection of songs and praise, Luke 20 : 42, "David himself saith in the Book of Psalms----. "and in Luke 24 : 44. "All things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets and in The Psalms concerning me,"----

#### B. The Authors of the Psalms

The Psalms collected into a book are by no means the production of one poet or of one age. They stretch through a long period of Jewish history, certainly from the time of Moses to the time of the return from the captivity of Babylon, and probably later. Many of them, however, are the composition of David, that it is customary to speak of, "The Psalms of David" though it is probable that not much more than half of the Psalms in the collection were written by David. Of the one hundred and fifty comprising the collection, according to the enumeration in the Hebrew manuscripts, not quite half are usually ascribed to David. Still so many are known to have been composed by him, and he was so eminent a poet, as to justify the language which is frequently employed when they are called familiarly, "The Psalms of David."

The following persons are mentioned in the titles as authors:

1. Moses: One Psalm, Ps. 90, is ascribed to Moses. No other Psalm in the collection is recognized as written by Moses, though not a few specimens of his poetry are preserved in the Pentateuch,

the first five books of The Bible.

2. David: David occupies a prominent position as the author of many of the Psalms in the collection, but, as has been mentioned before, critics are divided in opinion as to the exact number that should be ascribed to him. In the Hebrew inscriptions of The Psalms, sixty-eight are attributed to him. However, the Critical and Expository Bible Cyclopaedia by A. Fausset, page 591, gives eighty Psalms as composed by David. In Helps for Bible Study, by W. Stuart, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, fifty-six are given as definite Davidic Psalms. The differences between the numbers arises from the variations in the manuscripts in respect to the inscriptions and the different value attached to these inscriptions by various critics. It is impossible now to determine with exact precision how many Psalms are to be credited to Davids' name; though the number is undoubtedly so great that he is to be regarded as the principal author of the collection.
3. Asaph. Psalm 50 and from Psalm 73 to Psalm 83 are ascribed to Asaph. Asaph was a Levite. He was eminent as a musician, Nehemiah 12: 46 and 1 Chronicles 16: 7, and was appointed by "the chief of the Levites" at the command of David, with two other, Heman and Ethan, to preside over a part of the sacred choral services of worship.
4. The Sons of Korah. Eleven Psalms, 42, 44 to 49, and 84, 85, 87 and 88 are either composed for The Sons of Korah, or by The Sons of Korah. The Sons of Korah, this means that it was a company of musicians to whom the direction of the temple music was entrusted. It is obvious, that if the meaning is that they were composed by The Sons of Korah, this furnishes no information as to the individual authorship of these eleven Psalms.

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5. The Ezrahites. Two Psalms, 88 and 89 are ascribed to persons called, The Ezrahites. Psalm 88 reads, "for The Sons of Korah--- Heman the Ezrahite," and Psalm 89, "Ethan the Ezrahite." In 1 Kings 4 : 31, we take note of the fact that Ethan and Heman were among others as remarkable for their wisdom, and in 1 Chronicles 2 : 6 they are mentioned as Sons of Zerah. In 1 Chronicles 15 . 19 we read: "So the singers, Heman, Asaph and Ethan were appointed to sound with cymbals of brass." From this we may gather that the Ezrahites belonged to the same sacred choral group and music ensemble as Asaph the Levite.
  6. Solomon. Two of the Psalms, 72 and 127 are ascribed to king Solomon. But here again there is no certainty. It cannot be positively determined whether those Psalms are his composition or whether they were composed with reference to him or for him.
  7. Songs of Degrees. Fifteen of the Psalms, 120 to 134, are entitled, Songs of Degrees. These Psalms seem to be special occasion Psalms. There is no certainty about the authors, however some have very definite the Davidic style.
  8. The orphan Psalms. There remains a number of the collection the names of whose authors are not mentioned. Stuart in his Helps for Bible Study, calls these Psalms, The Orphan psalms. These Psalms are irregularly scattered through the book, though they are for the most part near its close.

C. The arrangement of The Book of Psalms

The Psalms form one book, so the Lord Jesus Christ referred to it in Luke 20 : 42, and so His disciples in Acts 1 : 20. The early church-fathers, Ambrose and Jerome spoke of one book, but added, "The Psalms in reference to the arrangement is five books in one volume." And Wors-



worth said:" The Hebrew history set to music an oratorio in five parts, with Messiah for its subject."

In the Hebrew the Book of Psalms is divided into five books or five collections.

Book 1: Psalms 1- 41, the Divine name JEHOVAH, the God of Grace, is generally used, signifying the attributes of God such as His love, grace, mercy, longsuffering. These are often called the most central attributes of God, however it is doubtful whether they should be regarded as more central than the other perfections of God. In book one, JEHOVAH the HELPER of His people, is the theme.

Book 2: Psalms 42- 72. In this second book the Divine name ELOHIM God is used principally in the original language. The name JEHOVAH or YAHWEH refers to God as the unchangeable One in His love and grace, as it appears in Exodus 3: 14, 15. The name ELOHIM indicates that God is strong and mighty. This name points to the exalted nature of God as the Most High, the object of reverence and worship. Another name belonging to this class is ADONAI, usually translated as LORD, the Possessor and Ruler of all men. Another name for God is SHADDAI or EL-SHADDAI which stresses the Divine greatness, but as a source of comfort and blessing for His people. Book two has the theme: the power of God for and in and through His people.

Book 3: Psalms 73- 89. The main thought is a call to worship God under all circumstances, in distress or in joy; in sorrow or in gladness; in times of deep consciousness of sin and in times of the joy of salvation

Help us O God of our salvation,

For the glory of Thy name;

And deliver,

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and purge away our sins,

For Thy name's sake. Psalm 79 ; 9

The most prominent Divine name is ELOHIM, the God of might, the All-powerful.

Book 4: Psalms 90- 106. The name JEHOVAH GOD predominates. The worship of JEHOVAH, the God of grace as rendered by all His people. And a call for adoration for the government of JEHOVAH over all the earth.

O give thanks unto the Lord, Jehovah,

Call upon His name;

Make known among the peoples His doings,

Sing unto Him,

Sing praise unto Him,

Talk ye of all His marvelous works.

Glory ye in His Holy name;

Let the heart of them rejoice that seek Jehovah-----

Remember His marvelous works that He hath done,

His wonders, and the judgements of His mouth.

Psalm 105: 1- 5.

Book 5: Here we have the Psalms of Praise and Ascent sung by the pilgrims as they journeyed to Jeruzalem. Psalms 107- 150. The absence of the author's names from most the Psalms in the fourth and fifth books implies that none of them have an individual and personal character, as the Davidic Psalms have. In all such the psalmist represents the community. Even in the Psalms of Davids' singers, the authors, except for Asaph and the two Ezrahites, who were immediately associated with David, do not give their individual names. But all psalmists seem to echo the poetry of David, with the exception of Moses.

D. The General Character of the Book of Psalms revealed  
through the Peculiarities of Hebrew Poetry.

The Psalms are mostly lyrical poetry, that is, poetry adapted to the harp or lyre, to be used in connection with instrumental music; to be sung, not read. Such poetry was common among the ancient. Horace was eminent among the ancient as a lyric poet; and the numerous writers of songs, sacred and secular, among the moderns, can perhaps be classified as lyric poets. The phrase lyric poetry now, according to Webster, is frequently applied to that species of poetry which, "directly expresses the individual emotions of the poet." In Barnes Notes on the old Testament, page 19, book seven, we read: "Lyric poetry is, for the most part, an expression of deep feeling, and has its foundation in feeling or emotion. It is not so much the fruit of the understanding as of the heart; not so much the creation of the imagination as the utterance of deep personal emotion. It embraces in its design and nature all kinds of feeling, and may be joyous, pensive, desponding, triumphant, according to the feeling of the author, or to the occasion; for all these utterances may be sung, or may be set to music, the varying tones of music being adapted to express them all. Hence, in the Psalms, one hundred and fifty in number, and composed by a considerable variety of individuals, and on many occasions, we have a varied feelings of trouble, anguish, fear, hope, joy, trust and thankfulness, devotion to God, penitence for sin, and the exultation of forgiveness, --- the heart moved, and finding vent for its feelings in words adapted to the melody of the lyre or the musical tones of the voice. These feelings are expressed in a great variety of modes or forms, and the music was intended, doubtless, to be in accordance with these varied feelings." (Barnes Notes, Baker Book house, Grand Rapids, Michigan. U.S.A.)

However, to understand The general character of The Psalms we need to study the Peculiarities of the Hebrew lyrical poetry as distinguish-

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ed from the lyrical poetry of other ancient people, and from the lyrical poetry in more recent times. There is nothing that bears an exact resemblance to the Grecian or Roman or modern literature, The Psalms stands by itself--- a collection of poems, framed without reference to the Grecian rules of literary art. Again, in order to understand this collection of poetry, it is important to have a clear conception of the peculiarities of Hebrew poetry.

1. The New Bible Commentary, edited by professor Francis Davidson, emphasizes that there are two distinctive features of Biblical poetry, these distinctive features are: rhythm of thought and rhythm of sound. Not rhyme, but rhythm. The poetry of the Hebrews was never constituted by rhyme. The highest kind of poetry exists without rhyme. I will refer to this a little later.

Rhythm of sound we are familiar with in most European poetry, where it appears in a regular pattern of accented and un-accented syllables in the line or group of lines. Rhythm of sound in poetry is the gentle flow of sound usually depending upon the long and short syllables which make up the verses, and upon the kind of metrical feet used. In the poetry of Biblical Hebrew, rhythm of sound depends almost entirely on the regular patterns of accented syllables.

What is called rhythm of thought or sense is usually referred to as parallelism. It is this parallelism which makes Biblical Hebrew poetry so unique.

Hebrew parallelism takes various forms, which can best be explained by means of actual examples. We have first the complete parallelism where a line or 'distich' consists of two 'stichoi', each of which exactly balances the other. Such a 'distich' is,

Israel doth not know

My people doth not consider--- (Isaiah 1:3)

where Israel balances my people and doth not know balances doth not

consider. Because the two 'stichoi' are exactly synonymous with each other, each saying the same thing in different words, this form of parallelism is also known in Hebrew poetry as identical parallelism. The word 'distich' comes from 'distichos', meaning, row, verse or lines; 'sticho mythia'---speak a dialogue in alternate lines; 'stichoi' is the plural form.

Another form of complete parallelism is known as antithetic parallelism, because the one 'stichos' gives the obverse of the other. A good example is found in Proverbs 15: 20,

A wise son gladdens a father  
And a foolish man despises his mother.

Yet another kind of parallelism which is characteristic of Hebrew poetry is the emblematic parallelism where the one 'stichos' makes a statement in literal terms and the other repeats in figurative terms. This can be done in various ways; a good example is Psalm 103: 13,

As a father pities his children  
So Jehovah pities his fearers.

Also take note of the fact in these lines that each 'stichos' has three accented syllables. Accented here refers to rhythmically significant stress on the syllables of the verse.

Parallelism in Hebrew poetry may be more elaborate and take an introverted form. Psalm 30: 9- 10 is commonly cited as a good example of introverted parallelism,

1. To Thee Jehovah I cry  
And to the Lord I make supplication,
2. What profit is there in my blood  
When I go down to the pit?
3. Shall the dust praise Thee?  
Shall it declare Thy truth?
4. Hear, Jehovah, and show me grace,  
Jehovah, be a Helper to me.

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Here 'stichos' one is paralleled by 'stichos' four, and 'stichos' two by 'stichos' three.

Thus far I have quoted examples of complete parallelism, where each unit of thought in one 'stichos' has its counterpart in the other 'stichos', and the parallel 'stichoi' have the same number of accented syllables. But we have also to reckon with incomplete parallelism, where, for example, one of the units of thought in the former 'stichos' has no counterpart in the latter 'stichos'. Take, for example Psalm 1: 5,

Therefor, the ungodly shall not stand in the judgement,  
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.

The verb, 'shall not stand' in the former 'stichos' has no counterpart in the second 'stichos'. This is the incomplete parallelism in Hebrew poetry. Another of this incomplete parallelism is found in Psalm 27: 6,

But now my head shall be lifted up  
Above my enemies round about me.

and from Psalm 27: 1,

Jehovah is my light and my salvation  
Whom shall I fear?  
Jehovah is the strength of my life  
Of whom shall I be afraid?

One other form of parallelism is the step parallelism, or also called the climatic parallelism. In Barnes Notes, step parallelism is called rhythm of gradation. It denotes coming to a climatic conclusion. T. H. Robinson in his, *The Poetry of the Old Testament*, page 23, says: "This style is found where one member or part of a member in one line is repeated in the second, and made the starting point for a fresh step". A good example is Psalm 29,

Give unto Jehovah, O ye mighty,  
Give unto Jehovah glory and strength,  
Give unto Jehovah the glory due unto His name;

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

Another good example is provide by Psalm 92: 9,

For lo Thine enemies, Jehovah,  
For lo Thine enemies shall perish,  
All workers of iniquity shall be scattered-----.

And Psalm 24: 7-10,

Lift up your heads, O ye gates;  
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors;  
And the King of glory shall come in;  
Who is this King of glory?  
The Lord strong and mighty,  
The Lord mighty in battle.  
Lift up yours heads, O ye gates;  
Even lift them up, ye everlasting doors;  
And the King of glory shall come in.  
Who is this King of glory?  
The Lord of hosts,  
He is the King of glory.

We have seen that the first grand peculiarity of the Hebrew poetry is parallelism. The above examples can be many times multiplied, but that is for the classroom. An article such as this one, is to provide some guidelines.

The poetry of Biblical Hebrew is not constituted by rhyme. Rhyme, or the occurrence of similar sounds at the close of the lines, is an artifice of modern origin, and of doubtful advantage. It does not occur in Homer or Virgil; in *The Paradise Lost* or in *The Task*. The highest kind of poetry exists without rhyme. It is certain that rhyme does not constitute the peculiarities of Hebrew poetry, for in the few cases where it seems to occur in the Hebrew Scriptures, it seems to have been the result of accident rather than design.

And the poetry of the Hebrews is not constituted by rhythm. Even

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though, the New Bible Commentary edited by Francis Davidson, professor of Hebrew language and literature, mentions that, "The two distinctive features of Biblical poetry are rhythm of thought and rhythm of sound", this is explained as the rhythm of sound which commonly appears in a regular pattern of accented and un-accented syllables in the line or group of lines, and the rhythm of thought which is known as parallelism, already briefly discussed. Therefore, rhythm, as we generally know it to be understood, does not constitute the poetry of the Hebrews. It was a settled rule among the Greeks and the Romans that poetry was known by its rhythm, by its accurate and careful admeasurement of numbers, and its harmonious and graceful flow of measure. But this was not a leading object in the poetry of the Hebrew. It should be remembered that the Hebrew poetry is the oldest in existence; that it was composed long before the artificial rules known in Greece and Rome saw the light of day; that it was designed to express the sentiments of the earliest period of the human race. The Hebrew poetry is great art indeed, and this greatness is found in the alphabetical poems and in the carefully constructed parallelism, not in rhythm or metre.

Is the greatness of Hebrew poetry limited to its various forms of parallelism? Is this what embraces the characteristics of Hebrew poetry? A very definite, no. We have only begun to touch upon the unique characteristics of Hebrew poetry. How then can we describe these unique characteristics further? I take the beginning of an answer from Barnes Notes, book five, page 31.

- (1) "It consists in the nature of the subjects which are treated; in the ornate and elevated character of the style; in the sententious manner of expression; and in certain peculiarities in the structure of sentences and the choice of words which are found only in poetry".
- (2) "It is the language of nature and human experience in the early period of the world, expressing itself in the form of surprise, astonishment,



exultation, triumph, --- the outpouring of the mind raised by excitement above its ordinary tone of feeling. The poet is animated. His mind is excited. Every faculty of the soul is brought into exercise. His heart is full; his imagination glows; his associations are rapid; the soul pours forth its emotions in language figurative, concise, abrupt. The boldest metaphors are sought; the terms expressing deepest intensity of feelings suggest themselves to the mind; or language most beautiful, tender, and soothing, expresses the emotions of sorrow or of love. It is in the Hebrew poetry more strikingly than anywhere else that we perceive the evidence of the intensity with which objects struck the imagination in the early periods of the world; and nowhere do we find such examples of sublimity and power as there."

- (3) "The Hebrew language of poetry is distinguished from its prose by the effort which is made to express the ideas, and by the form which that effort gives. Sometimes we have merely a glimpse of the thought or the object, which it is left for the imagination to fill up. Sometimes the thought is repeated, thrown into a new form, modified, or merely echoed from the first attempt to express it. The mind, full of the conception, labours to give utterance to it, and in the effort there may be repetition, or a slight variation in words, or an attempt to show its force by striking contrast. It is from this effort of the mind that there was originated the principal peculiarity of the Hebrew poetry, exhibited in the form of parallelism."
2. But the second and greatest grand peculiarity of the Biblical Hebrew poetry is its religion. The climax of the Hebrew lyrical poetry as distinguished from the lyrical poetry of any other ancient people, and from most of the lyrical poetry of modern times is its religion founded on and in Jehovah God.

The psalms according to their religious literary style, comprise compositions of the following classes;

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- (1) Hymns in which the praise of God is the principal leading object, as,
    - (a) in general, God is praised as the God of nature and all men.
    - (b) As the God of nature and the Hebrew people.
    - (c) As peculiarly the God of the Hebrew people.
    - (d) As the Deliverer and Helper of All Gods people.
  - (2) Temple psalms, or songs of Zion.
  - (3) Psalms pertaining to the Hebrew nation; to its history; to the Divine interposition in its behalf; and to its relation to Jehovah God.
  - (4) Psalms in relation to trials, calamity, distress, whether of individuals or of the nation.
  - (5) Moral emphasis.

From this classification we may notice that the Psalms emphasis is upon subjects pertaining mainly to religion, or to be employed in religious activities; as expressing religious feeling, and as designed to awaken and foster such feeling. It is intended to raise the heart and the affections towards Jehovah God; to lift up the thoughts of men from the earth and things earthly; to inspire confidence in Elohim God; to produce consolation as derived from God in times of trouble; to cheer and comfort man in his pilgrimage along a path of sorrow and disappointment to a better abode.

The Psalms are an expression no less remarkable for its beauty than its truthfulness, they are the 'Songs in the Night'; songs indicating the joy that may spring up in the soul of man in times of distress and sadness; songs that show that there is joy in the darkness of this world when one completely rests on the everlasting mercy of God; songs which illustrate the power and the value of religion, true, living religion; songs with which man cheer themselves and each other in their journey towards the grave; songs which even the guilty may pour forth from the hearts softened into penitence, and filled with thankfulness in the assurance of pardon.

It is most remarkable that this rich poetry should have sprung up in

Palestine, and that it should have been confined to that land and its people. True, other people now read and sing this poetry in their own language, however, its origin is Palestine and the Jewish people. It was not that the land was better adapted to this kind of lyric poetry than other lands. It was not that the events of their history had been such as peculiarly to suggest this kind of composition. It was not that the Hebrews had more poetic imagination than other people, for theirs did not, in this respect, surpass the Greek genius. Nor was it that their language was peculiarly favourable for this kind of poetry, it had no superiority certainly over the Arabians and the Persians.

We may well ask; what is the real source of this rich poetry? where is the answer to this apparent secret? The fact that the Hebrew poetry took this turn, this characteristic as it has; the fact that in all the lyric poetry known to us nothing surpasses The Psalms, can be traced only to the idea that the religion of Jehovah God prevailed there, and can best be explained on the supposition that the authors of The Psalms were inspired, not by human imagination and feeling, but by the Divine, The Holy Spirit, to prepare and transmit to future times that which, in all ages, would express the feelings of true devotion, and which might be permanently employed in the praises to the Living God. He will fail to explain the fact that such poetry is found in Palestine alone, and will fail to appreciate its true nature, and will fail to grasp its full meaning, who does not admit that these singers were inspired by the Divine, by the Holy Spirit of God, and possessed a firm and unwavering belief in the love, grace, mercy and forgiveness of God. These composers had a staunch faith in Gods plan of Salvation to be offered to all mankind in the person and Divine Son, the Messiah Jesus Christ, Who was to come.

As the hart panteth after the water brooks,  
So panteth my soul after Thee, O God.  
My soul thirsteth for God,

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For the living God:

Where shall I come and appear before God?

My tears have been my meat day and night,

While they continually say unto me,

Where is thy God----

Why art thou cast down, O my soul?

And why art thou disquieted in me?

Hope thou in God:

For I shall yet praise Him---

O my God, my soul is cast down within me----

Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts:

All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.

Yet the Lord will command His loving kindness in the daytime,

And in the night His song shall be with me,

And my prayer unto the God of my life---

As with a sword in my bones

Mine enemies reproach me;

While they say daily unto me,

Where is thy God?

Why art thou cast down, O my soul?

And why art thou disquieted within me?

Hope thou in God:

For I shall yet praise Him,

Who is the health of my countenance,

And my God.

(Psalms 42: 1-3, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11.)

E.

David, the Poet.

An article on The Book of Psalms cannot be concluded without some special reference to the most prominent composer, David. For

if we follow the titles of The Psalms and the common opinion, we must suppose the lyric poetry of the Hebrews, as well as the largest portion of the Psalms themselves, to be a production of David and His contemporaries. The few specimens of lyric composition which we find before David scarcely enter into consideration, compared with the fertility of his own period. After so few attempts in lyric poetry during the early days of Hebrew history, it is breath-taking to meet so accomplished and fruitful poet rise up, with several others in his company. So rapid a progress suggests some adequate occasion, some preparatory steps. Some writers claim that David was at the Samuel's school of the prophets. Prophets refers to, teachers in Religious Education. It is known that the composition of lyric poetry was cultivated at this seminary. David brought it into full daylight and to perfection. But David, before his unction had no connection with Samuel as far as is known. David tended his father's flock. It appears that Samuel knew not about David. At the time that God told Samuel to go to Bethlehem to the house of Jesse to anoint a new king for Israel, Samuel had no knowledge at all of the youngest son of Jesse. After meeting the seven sons of Jesse, all tall and strong in appearance, God says to Samuel, "None of these, for the Lord sees not as man sees, man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord at the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7.

Then Samuel said to Jesse: "Are all your sons here?", verse 11. And Jesse answered: "There remains yet the youngest, behold he is keeping the sheep." This youngest son was David. And already at that time David was known as a great musician; though Samuel did not know that he was the son of Jesse. We read in 1 Samuel 16: 18, ( a servant answering king Saul) "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skilful in playing---- and the Lord is with him." And in verse 19, "Therefor Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said: 'send me David your son, who is with the sheep."

From this we may learn that at a very tender age David was already

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a skilful minstrel and famed for his art. We are not obliged to trace the origin of the sweet and amiable poetry of Davids' psalms exclusively to Samuels' school of the Prophets.

We must also take note of the fact that David was known for his religious attitude, his true piety. The servant added in 1 Samuel 16: 18, "--- and the Lord is with him." In other words, at a very young age, David served His Jehovah God with all his heart, all his mind and all his being. He saw the sovereignty of God in nature around and about him as he guided his fathers' flock into the green pastures.

The heavens declare the Glory of God  
and the firmament sheweth His handywork.  
Day unto day uttereth speech,  
And night unto night sheweth knowledge, Psalm 19: 1, 2  
The earth is the Lord's,  
And the fullness thereof;  
The world,  
And they that dwell therein.  
For He hath founded it upon the seas,  
And established it upon the floods---. Psalm 24: 1,2.

Here we may find the secret to the greatness of David as a Poet. He sings: The Lord is my light and my salvation;

Whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the strength of my life;  
Of whom shall I be afraid?--- Psalm 27: 1.

That David served his father as a shepherd and thus understood very well the life and the experiences of a shepherd is cast into a deep spiritual experience in his twenty-third Psalm, which Psalm has perhaps become the most beloved of all.

The Lord is my Shepherd;  
I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:  
He leadeth me beside the still waters.  
He restoreth my soul:  
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness  
For His name' s sake.  
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil:  
For Thou art with me;  
Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.  
Thou preparest a table before me  
In the presence of my enemies:  
Thou anointest my head with oil;  
My cup runneth over.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days  
of my life:  
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Psalm 23.

There were other institutions which may have had an influence more important and decided than Samuel's school of the Prophets, in promoting the culture of lyric poetry, especially of the religious kind. I refer particularly to those institutions of music and choral art which, according to the account in 1 Chronicles 15 : 16 ff, were established by David in aid of public worship. Natural capacity, in connection with frequent practice, might produce the same degree of talent, to say the least, as an artificial system of instruction, like that which we may suppose to have prevailed in the School of the Prophets. From 1 Chronicles 15, we may learn that David opened a school for singers and musicians; Heman, Asaph and Ethan were appointed as "chiefs." And from 1 Chronicles 16 we learn that David appointed Asaph to sing a Psalm of thanksgiving at the occasion of the opening ceremony of the Place of Worship, a tent which

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David had erected in Jerusalem. The ark of the covenant was brought to this tent, and here the Psalm of thanksgiving was sung, perhaps by the Levites under the direction of Asaph upon the request of David.

Upon a careful study of this Psalm of thanksgiving we come to the conclusion that this Psalm was specially composed for the occasion. From 1 Chronicles 16: 7 it appears that David was the composer, and from the fifth verse of the same chapter, Asaph prepared the music. And Asaph was instructed to teach the Levites. There is no doubt about the fact that David had a well established school of music and choral art.

In this thanksgiving Psalm we must take note of the fact that the phrase: "because His mercy endureth for-ever," is re-echoed in the later poetry which we have in Psalm 136, where this phrase forms a regular refrain; also in Psalm 106, 107 and in 118.

Praise ye the Lord,  
O give thanks unto the Lord;  
For He is good:  
For His mercy endureth forever.

Psalm 106:1.

O give thanks unto the Lord;  
For He is good:  
Because His mercy endureth forever.  
Let Israel now say,  
That His mercy endureth for ever.  
Let the house of Aaron now say,  
That His mercy endureth forever.  
Let them now that fear the Lord say,  
That His mercy endureth forever.

Psalm 118: 1-4

O give thanks unto the Lord;  
For He is good:



For His mercy endureth forever.  
O give thanks unto the God of gods:  
For His mercy endureth forever.  
O give thanks to the Lord of lords:  
For His mercy endureth forever.  
To Him Who alone doeth great wonders:  
For His mercy endureth forever.  
To Him that by wisdom made the heavens:  
For His mercy endureth forever.  
To Him that stretched out the earth above the waters:  
For His mercy endureth forever.  
To Him that made great lights:  
For His mercy endureth forever.  
The sun to rule by day:  
For His mercy endureth forever.  
The moon and stars to rule by night:  
For His mercy endureth forever. etc.

Psalm 136: 1-9.

But these Psalms belong to a much later style of poetry, and the authors are unknown. However, it does show that the Davidic style of poetry had made a lasting stamp upon the art of poetry.

In Barnes Notes, page 25, book seven, we read, "We may imagine that a master like David would not be without companions and assistants in the poetic art; and, in fact, several of David's contemporaries are named in the titles as composers of Psalms."

True piety was essential to compose rich poetry such as The Psalms. David, like all human creatures, constantly battling human weaknesses, possessed this quality of true piety. This was his power and his beauty.

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F.

Summary.

To be able to explain or translate the words used; to state the origin and the authorship of The Psalms, and the occasions on which the poems were composed; to investigate the genuineness and accuracy of the text, and to determine the value of the varied readings; to understand and explain Hebrew parallelism, the rhythm and the accents employed in the Psalms, this is but a drop in the bucket.

To comprehend and appreciate the poetry of The Psalms, one needs a knowledge and understanding of the human heart. One needs to know himself. The Psalms comprise, more than any other book in the Bible, more than any other book ever written, a record of the workings of the human heart. For indeed, the poetry of the Psalms is directed to the heart. Not addressed, as the Epistle to the Romans, to the powers of understanding; nor do The Psalms make such appeals to the imagination as the visions of Isaiah, or the visions of John on Patmos. It is the heart which, in The Psalms, is eminently the medium of communication between the Divine spirit and the soul. All that there is in the heart of man is there in one way or another illustrated, and in an almost endless variety of circumstances. Joy, sorrow, penitence, gratitude, praise, despondency, sadness; love--- love to God-- love to man; the feelings experienced in sickness, and on a recovery from sickness; the anguish of the soul, arising from the ingratitude of others; the peace which true, living religion gives in the prospect of death; the joy of prayer; the light which comes into the souls in answer to earnest supplication; the calmness which springs from devout meditation on the character of Jehovah God and His law; the light which beams upon the soul after long darkness. Yes, much more, as in Psalm 51, remembering guilt;

Have mercy on me, O God,  
According to Thy stedfast love

According to Thy abundant mercy,  
Blot out my transgressions,  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
And cleanse me from my sin.  
For I know my transgressions  
And my sin is ever before me,  
Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned,  
And done that which is evil in Thy sight,  
So that Thou art justified in Thy sentence,  
And blameless in Thy judgement,      Psalm 51.

And then there is the feeling of despair when Jehovah God seems to have forsaken; the feelings which spring up in the heart on the reception of injuries; all these and still more are among the many topics which are illustrated in The Book of Psalms in the personal experiences of the writers, and it is obvious that no-one is qualified to really comment and make explanatory remarks on these subjects unless he has himself a knowledge of the workings of the human heart.

The Psalms are so rich; so full of meaning; so adapted to the wants of the believers; they so meet the varied experiences of the people of Jehovah God, and are so replete with the illustrations of true devotion and of piety, that no commentary can do justice to it.

It need not surprize us therefore, that many none-Christian High-schools and Colleges, as well as Christian, throughout Europa, Canada and The United States of America offer study courses in The Bible as Literature, with special emphasis on The Poetry of The Bible.

Referring to the literary excellence of the Psalms, Luther and Athanasius exclaimed: "The Book of Psalms is an epitome of the Bible." And Milton writes: "Not in their Divine arguments alone, but in the very critical art of composition they may easily made to appear over all

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kinds of lyric poetry incomparable." And Sir Sandford writes: "In lyric flow and fire, in crushing force and majesty, the poetry of the ancient Scriptures is the most superb that ever burnt within the breast of man." And Muller states, "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 Book of Psalms, in literary excellency, ranks for purity of language, and for sublimity, beauty and freshness of the highest conception, in the highest class of lyric poetry.

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