

THE COLONIAL CHURCHMAN.

"BUILT UPON THE FOUNDATION OF THE APOSTLES AND PROPHETS, JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF BEING THE CHIEF CORNER STONE. Eph. 2 c. 20 v.

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For the Colonial Churchman.

THE PSALMS.—NO. I.

The psalms form so considerable a part of the daily services of the Church, that whatever may tend to elucidate their difficulties or promote a spiritual acquaintance with their contents, must be considered of importance by those who would worship with the spirit and with the understanding also. Those who are so happy as to possess the beautiful, eloquent and evangelical commentary upon the book of Psalms by Bishop Horne, cannot have a better interpreter of every difficult passage, nor a more efficient auxiliary in elevating their affections to Him by whose spirit it was indited. It is to be wished that in every family that excellent book had a place, as a daily manual of devotion. But such not being the case, it has occurred to the writer, that a few extracts from it might be useful, through the medium of the Colonial Churchman, in removing difficulties which sometimes occur with respect to the use of certain of these psalms in christian worship.—Such is the object of this and some future communications.

"The Psalms" says Bp. Horne, "are an epitome of the Bible, adapted to the purposes of devotion. They treat occasionally of the creation and formation of the world; the dispensations of Providence, and the economy of grace; the transactions of the patriarchs; the exodus of the children of Israel; their journey through the wilderness, and settlement in Canaan; their law, priesthood, and ritual, the exploits of their great men, wrought through faith; their sins and captivities; their repentances and restorations; the sufferings and victories of David; the peaceful and happy reign of Solomon; the advent of the Messiah, with its effects and consequences; his incarnation, birth, life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, kingdom, and priesthood; the effusion of the Spirit; the conversion of the nations; the rejection of the Jews; the establishment, increase, and perpetuity of the Christian church; the end of the world; the general judgment; the condemnation of the wicked, and the final triumph of the righteous with their Lord and King. These are the subjects here presented to our meditations. We are instructed how to conceive of them aright, and to express the different affections, which, when so conceived of, they must excite in our minds. They are, for this purpose, adorned with the figures, and set off with all the graces of poetry; and poetry itself is designed yet farther to be recommended by the charms of music, thus consecrated to the service of God; that so delight may prepare the way for improvement, and pleasure become the hand-maid of wisdom, while every turbulent passion is calmed by sacred melody, and the evil spirit is still dispossessed by the Harp of the Son of Jesse. This little volume, like the paradise of Eden, affords us in perfection, though in miniature, every thing that groweth elsewhere, "every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food;" and above all, what was there lost, but is here restored, THE TREE OF LIFE IN THE MIDST OF THE GARDEN.—And it appears to have been the Manual of the Son of God in the days of his flesh; who, at the conclusion of his last supper, is generally supposed, and that upon good grounds, to have sung a hymn taken from it; who pronounced on the cross the beginning of xxxiii Psalm; "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And expired with a part of the xxxist Psalm in his mouth; "Into my hands I commend my spirit." Thus He, who had not the spirit by measure, in whom were hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and who spake as never man spake, yet chose to conclude his life, to solace himself in his greatest agony, and at last to breathe out his soul, in the Psalmist's form of words, rather than his own. No tongue of man or angel, as Dr. Hammond justly observes, can convey a higher idea of any book, and of their felicity who use it aright."

The leading feature in this pious commentary is the spiritual adaptation of the Psalms to Jesus Christ, who is in almost all of them the principal and all glorious theme. Herein the Bishop treads in the path of the early fathers, and the first christian expositors of the Psalms, no less than of the inspired Apostles and our Lord himself, by whom many passages have been thus expressly applied. If this evangelical sense be kept in mind by the christian reader of these songs of Zion, many difficulties will be cleared up as he reads, and new beauties will shine forth in every line. With reference to this mystical sense, the spiritually minded Bishop observes—

"They are beautiful without, but all glorious within, like "apples of gold in pictures, or net-work cases, of silver," Prov. xxv. 11. The brightness of the casket attracts our attention, till, through it, upon a nearer approach, we discover its contents. Very delightful and profitable they are, in their literal and historical sense, which well repayeth all the pains taken to come at it. But that once obtained, a farther scene begins to open upon us, and all the blessings of the gospel present themselves to the eye of faith. So that the expositor is a traveller ascending an eminence neither unfruitful nor unpleasant; at the top of which when he is arrived, he beholds, like Moses from the summit of Mount Nebo, a more lovely and extensive prospect lying beyond it, and stretching away to the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills. He sees vallies covered over with corn, blooming gardens, and verdant meadows, with flocks and herds feeding by rivers of water; till ravished with the sight, he cries out, as St. Peter did, at the view of his Master's glory, "It is good to be here!"

The objection is sometimes heard that there is much in these Psalms, which being literally applicable only to the Jews and to the times of David, must be out of place in the mouths of christians, under the Gospel—an objection which our author thus removes:—

"It may be said, Are we concerned with the affairs of David and of Israel? Have we any thing to do with the ark and the temple? They are no more. Are we to go up to Jerusalem, and to worship on Zion? They are desolated, and trodden under foot by the Turks. Are we to sacrifice young bullock, according to the law? The law is abolished, never to be observed again. Do we pray for victory over Moab, Edom, and Philistia; or for deliverance from Babylon? There are no such nations, no such places in the world. What then do we mean, when, taking such expressions in our mouths, we utter them in our own persons, as parts of our devotions, before God? Assuredly we must mean a spiritual Jerusalem and Zion; a spiritual ark and temple; a spiritual law; spiritual sacrifices; and spiritual victories; spiritual enemies; all described under the old names, which are still retained, though, "old things are passed away, and all things are become new." By substituting Messiah for David, the Gospel for the law, the church Christian for that of Israel, and the enemies of the one for those of the other, the Psalms are made our own. Nay, they are with more fullness and propriety applied now to the substance, than they were of old to the "shadow of good things then to come." And therefore, ever since the commencement of the Christian era, the church hath chosen to celebrate the gospel mysteries in the words of these ancient hymns, rather than to compose for that purpose new ones of her own. For let it not pass unobserved, that when, upon the first publication of the Gospel, the apostles had occasion to utter their transports of joy, on their being counted worthy to suffer for the name of their Lord and Master, which was then opposed by Jew and Gentile, they broke forth into an application of the second Psalm to the transactions then before their eyes. See Acts iv. 25. The primitive Christians constantly followed this method in their devotions: and, particularly when, delivered out of

VISITATION AND COMMUNION OF THE SICK.

Oh! Youth and Joy, your airy tread
Too lightly springs by Sorrow's bed,
Your keen eyeglances are too bright,
Too restless for a sick man's sight,
Farewell: for one short life we part:
I rather woo the soothing art,
Which only souls in sufferings tried,
Bear to their suffering brethren's side.

Where may we learn that gentle spell?
Mother of Martyrs, thou canst tell!
Thou who didst watch thy dying Spouse,
With piercing hands and bleeding brows,
Whose tears from age to age are shed
O'r sainted sons untimely dead,
If e'er we charm a soul in pain,
Thine is the key-note of our strain.

How sweet with thee to lift the latch
Where Faith has kept her midnight watch,
Smiling on woe: with thee to kneel
Where fix'd, as if one prayer could heal,
She listens, till her pale eye glow
With joy, wild health can never know,
And each calm feature, ere we read,
Speaks, silently, thy glorious creed.

Such have I seen: and while they pour'd
Their hearts in every contrite word,
How have I rather long'd to kneel
And ask of them sweet pardon's seal!
How bless'd the heavenly music brought
By thee to aid my faltering thought!
"Peace" ere we kneel, and when we cease
To pray, the farewell word is "Peace."

I came again: the place was bright
"With something of celestial light"—
A simple altar by the bed
For high communion neatly spread,
Chalice, and plate, and snowy vest.
We ate and drank: then calmly blest,
All mourners, one with dying breath,
We sate and talk'd of Jesus' death.

Once more I came: the silent room
Was veil'd in sadly-soothing gloom,
And ready for her last abode
The pale form like a lily show'd,
By virgin fingers duly spread,
And priz'd for love of summer fled.
The light from those soft smiling eyes
Had fled to its parent skies.

O soothe us, haunt us, night and day,
Ye gentle spirits far away,
With whom we shar'd the cup of grace,
Then parted: ye to Christ's embrace,
We to the lonesome world again,
Yet mindful of th' unearthly strain
Practis'd with you at Eden's door,
To be sung on, where angels soar,
With blended voices evermore.

Episcopacy.—"Nulla Ecclesia sine Episcopo," (no church without a bishop) "has been a fact as well as a maxim, since the time of Tertullian and Irenæus."—Gibbon.