

## Our Contributors.

### The VIII. Psalm: A Meditation.

BY REV. PROF. JORDAN, B. A., D. D.

There are two great subjects in the world of thought, God and man. These are sometimes said to be two sides of the same subject, and in a deep sense that is true. In the highest form God reveals Himself as man, and man comes to know himself in the light of God's glory. Philosophy teaches man to know himself. Religion calls upon him to know and serve God. It may be that in the present life we cannot know either ourselves or God perfectly, but that should not hinder us from turning our faces towards the eternal light. Any earnest endeavor after truth will teach us the close connection between the life of God and the experience of man.

Sometimes this question "what is man?" is asked in a skeptical or despondent tone by those who think that the life of man is a contradiction or a failure. There is nothing of that tone in this Psalm. The writer is not printing his question in a magazine, or submitting it to a company of critics; he is uttering it at the throne of God. It is not so much a question as a devout exclamation, a thought that man is both small and great. Small in comparison with the infinite God; great because God is good to him. There is in our time much poetry of despair; men whine in elegant language over real or fancied wrongs and cry out madly against God or fate. It is refreshing to turn from this to a song which flows freely from a grateful heart, and the burden of which is "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth!"

This simple little song has exercised a cheering, helpful influence during many centuries. It is impossible to trace clearly through the ages the influence of any strong, noble work, but this has

#### Left Three Distinct Marks

on New Testament teaching; and these may both prove to us its living power and show us how to handle it in a broad, generous spirit.

To the scribes who were annoyed at the enthusiasm of little children, our Lord said, "Have ye never read, out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise." He saw in this Psalm a principle that the scribes had forgotten. They thought they showed their wisdom in cultivating a critical and suspicious spirit towards all new forms of life. But He showed them that there is a deeper wisdom, the wisdom of the child which manifests itself in spontaneous wonder and unrestrained praise.

Paul in that well known discourse on the Resurrection, 1 Cor. xv., shows us in the 27th verse that a sentence from this Psalm is echoing through his mind, "For He hath put all things under His feet." He knows that in a sense this is true, and yet he feels that it is a prophecy. Sin, sorrow and death have all to be put under the feet of Christ, and of redeemed humanity; and the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews uses our Psalm, "But one in a certain place testified, saying, 'what is man?'" etc., then he adds significantly, "But now we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffer-

ing of death, crowned with glory and honor that He, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man." In this way the writer shows us that he feels the difference between God's view of man and man's present condition, and also his belief that Jesus Christ is the perfect man who fulfils the vision of the poet.

The Psalm has many lessons for to-day, and liked all inspired poetry it has an ever-broadening meaning.

If we are to find a satisfactory solution of human life we must seek it in

#### The Spirit of Praise to God.

The beginning and end of the Psalm is the same, a joyful note of praise, "Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth." When this is the first and the last we are not surprised that the words which come between are words of hopeful gratitude. What is man and what is his life? When you come to that question you cannot conquer it by brute force or worldly cunning. The wicked man cannot answer it, his life is full of contradictions and disappointments. The careless man cannot deal with it until some rude shock awakes him; he has no interest in it. The sceptic cannot solve it; he confesses that he is in a fog and sees no path clearly before him. It is not every godly man who can handle it intelligently, though he may have found rest for himself. But this we know, that the man who is to shed light upon our path must see God above dwelling in righteousness and glory. He must say:

"God's in his heaven—  
All's right with the world."

He who wishes to have everything explained before he can praise God will find that he has begun at the wrong end. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" it is a beginning of things to know that the world is great and God is good.

This man is content to take his place beside the children. God's answer to the proud and scornful is the praise of little children. They have no reason for infidelity. The thought of a father's care is sweet to them. They have not learned the world's false and foolish ways. You would not have the audacity to tell them that the round earth sprang up of itself; that suns and stars made themselves or came into being by chance. You could not answer the child's question, "what is chance?" It is easy to tell a child about the great and good God. God has often shut the mouths of boastful men by the unconscious wisdom of a little child. Our Lord had

#### Looked Deep Into Human Life

when He exclaimed, "Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Thy sight." God could speak to us in the thunder, but He prefers to teach us through the simplicity of the child which clings to its mother, worships its father and finds in these the symbols of God.

The man who looks out upon life in this spirit is deeply impressed by the generosity of God. A few years ago, when the great discoveries of modern astronomy were startling the world, there were people who came forward to preach to Christians against presumption. They said, "When we consider the heavens what is man? When we think that this little earth is only a speck in the infinite uni-

verses, and that the great sun is only one of many such bodies, what is man but a tiny insect crawling in the dust? How absurd to think that God will take any notice of him or listen to his wondering cries and foolish prayers. Let him fret his little day and then go contentedly down to the dust." That seemed to come to be an utterance of wisdom and humility. It was answered by Chalmers and other men of brilliant intellect and child-like heart. It has gone, it does not trouble us now. But how different is this man's thought. When I consider the heavens, the sun filling all the day with his light, the moon, the queen of night, with her pale reflected beams, the innumerable hosts of stars sparkling in the infinite azure, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, what claims had he upon Thee that thou shouldst make him so great; with all his frailty thou hast made him a king, and almost a god? What he says is true now in a larger sense, that is, the enlarged life of the world enables us to see it more clearly. Man has the same weakness; he staggers under his burden of care; he chafes at the stern call of duty; he indulges in trifling gaiety; he passes through tragic hours; he has the same strength in fuller measure, he can conquer the beasts of the field, he can harness to his chariot the giant forces of nature. This great saying applies to humanity,

#### The Individual Passes Away

but we each share the common life, we can feel shame over its defeat and degradation, we can glory in its marvellous victories.

That which the poet here declares is now recognized as sober scientific fact, that man is the topmost round of nature's ladder, the crown of creation. God has made him a king and put the earth under his feet. He is linked to lower things, but in one sense he is above nature, he can use the forces of nature, he can do wonders through the powers of thought with which he is endowed. That is the fact. The sceptic and the man of faith, the man of science and the poet, stand here on common ground. However he came to this position, he stands proudly in it now. But the prophets go further. They say that this is so, because in a certain sense we are the sons of God. Luke speaks of the man as the son of Adam, which is the son of God. In the same spirit the Psalmist looks up and says, "O Lord, Thou hast treated man as Thy child; Thou hast dowered him with great gifts and sent him out into a wide world."

The thought here is not what is man in comparison with the unbounded heavens, what a mean thing he is, but what a wonder that the great God should share His greatness, His sovereignty with man. Man is great because God is generous. It is a small nature to want to monopolize greatness. A small, narrow-minded king wishes to have only puppets round him that he alone may appear great, but a truly great king desires

#### To Encourage Strength and Goodness

in others. God is too great to know any small rivalry or petty jealousy. He has breathed into man His own life and endowed us with some of His peculiar powers. How God is misjudged and slandered by us; we think of His service as it were a thing to belittle us. We talk as if God took pleasure in making little crawling creatures. It is not true; God calls