

take his or her place in the civil life of the country, or endeavor to discharge all the duties of that place by the help of God, and for the glory of God and the present and future good of the nation.

It is the presence of God and of true-hearted Christian men in public life today that saves the Christian nations from humiliation, demoralization, and destruction. There may not be a formal recognition of God in the national constitutions, but there is none the less a positive recognition of God in the conduct of the government. Men of acknowledged religious life and of exalted Christian character are among the leaders. They have shaped the political policies of the government and have executed the laws that they have helped to enact. Occasionally men have risen to prominent place who have not been regarded as examples of Christian faith and practice, but for the most part those who have exercised authority in the national councils have been men who have had the fear of God before their eyes. For this we should be devoutly thankful.

One thing needs to be said. Christian lands to-day is a great increase in the number of those who steadfastly believe that righteousness exalteth a nation, are devoted to the loftiest ideals of national life, and are ready to live so as to realize these ideals and to induce others to do so. We need the contagion of noble example and of worthy life. The fountain of the nation's life is in the homes of the land, and it is there that the character is formed which is to shape the destiny of the people. A loose rein and an evil life at the centre mean calamity for the coming generations. But high ideals of virtue and honor, and the inculcation of right ideas of civic righteousness, and the development of a patriotism that finds expression in worthy acts of everyday life for the nation's good—these will have an influence upon the life of the country in the generations to come that cannot be estimated.

In a certain and very important sense, then, the destiny of the nation is in the hands of the men and women of strong character, and of high and noble impulse. God is on the side of the righteous, and while it may seem sometimes that their cause is falling, or at least that the enemies of the right are prevailing, yet God is keeping watch above His own. It needs only that those who are really His own shall be faithful in their allegiance to Him, and be ready by character and deed to accomplish His holy will, whether it relates to the home or to the nation. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord," we read, but this condition exists only when God is the Lord of the people, who, as individuals, compose the nation.

It is the duty of all Christians to have a part in the affairs of the state. Not everyone can enter public life, but everyone can do a full share toward the purifying of the political life of the nation, and toward the raising and dignifying of public officers. Neglect in the discharge of public duty may lead to serious consequences. If wicked and selfishly ambitious men get control of the machinery of government the nation will be plunged in all manner of trouble, from which it will take the best efforts of the best citizens years to extricate it.

The forces of evil are constantly at work, and for the same reason the forces of good should never sleep. The civil forces seek to undermine and destroy, so the forces of good should seek ever to protect and to build up the life of the nation.

Consider the many opportunities that are before the young people of the Christian Churches in all lands for the exercising of interest in the public life of the countries in which they live. They should be urged everywhere to take ad-

vantage of these opportunities and to do all in their power to raise the standards of public morality and of civic righteousness in the constant and conscientious exercise of the rights, privileges, and duties of their citizenship.

Masterpieces of Hebrew Literature

VI.—The Greatness of God

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TOPIC FOR WEEK OF OCTOBER 20.

Psalm 104.

THIS selection, along with that set for next month's literary study (Psalm 107), returns to the more elaborate Hebrew songs or *odes* of which the Old Testament Scriptures, and particularly the Book of Psalms, furnish us a variety of very notable examples. The Hebrew ode is somewhat difficult to define. Prof. R. G. Moulton describes rather than defines it when he says in his book "The Literary Study of the Bible" that it is Hebrew poetry at its furthest remove from the ordinary speech and when nearest to pure music. According to him the ode is "the song that can soar highest and remain longest on the wing." The sustained beauty and flow of the rhythm and the exalted thought of our psalm make it answer well to this vague definition. Professor Moulton is of the opinion that the psalm does not stand alone but is really a companion psalm to the 103rd; the first of the two setting forth the testimony "of the world within" (i.e., of personal human experience to the glory and goodness of God, while our psalm itself expresses the witness of "the world without" or of external nature when viewed from the viewpoint of its testimony to the glory of God as creator and sustainer. In this view the two psalms form one *grand ode* to *Jehovah* as the God of the individual and of nature.

An examination of the two psalms makes the view by no means an unlikely one, for it brings out the general similarity of their structure—for instance, the fact that each of them opens and closes with the refrain, "Bless the Lord, O my soul."

Our Leagues will make no mistake if as one part of the October literary meeting they arrange for the reading of the two psalms under the title "Prof. Moulton gives them, viz., "The World Within and the World Without."

The 104th psalm, however, is interesting enough in itself to occupy all the space available for this article.

Let us first glance at its structure. It illustrates in particular two principles of Hebrew poetry:

I. *The Mixed Stanza.* That is, its stanzas are not of one uniform type, but change in harmony with a corresponding change in the thought. The first section of the psalm is a long one, consisting of five consecutive stanzas of five couplets each, in which the psalmist sets forth the greatness of God as seen in nature. The first stanza will serve as an illustration:

"Bless the Lord, O my soul.
O Lord, my God, thou art very great;
Thou art clothed with Honor and majesty;
Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment;
Who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain;
Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters;
Who maketh the clouds his chariot;
Who walketh upon the wings of the wind;
Who maketh winds his messengers,
His ministers a flaming fire."

But at verse 24, where the thought passes to the consideration of the dependence of all created things upon God—where, in other words, the thought is not so "high" as in the previous stanzas—the form changes to a stanza of four strains (i.e., four couplets with one or other of their lines strengthened in each case by the addition of a weak third line).

The italicised lines in the following are the added "weak" lines which augment the couplets:

"O Lord, how manifold are thy works!
In wisdom hast thou made them all:

The earth is full of thy riches.

Yonder is the sea, great and wide,
Wherein are things creeping innumerable,

Both small and great beasts.

There go the ships;

There is Leviathan,

Whom thou hast formed to make his pasture therein.

These wait all upon thee

That thou mayest give them their meat
In due season:

That thou givest unto them their gather."

When again the thought reverts to the glory of God in the "bur" of praise at verse 31 the five couplet stanza is resumed, and with this the psalm proper closes, the final, "Bless the Lord, O my soul," being really outside the rhythm in the same way that the "Amen" is usually outside the metre of our modern hymns.

II. The second principle of Hebrew poetry illustrated by this psalm is that to which Prof. Moulton gives the name of "The Envelope Figure or Structure." This was referred to in a former article of this series, but it happens to be very noticeable both in this psalm and in its companion psalm (103rd). The term "Envelope Figure" as here applied simply refers to the fact that the psalm opens and closes with the same form of words, "Bless the Lord, O my soul,"—these opening and closing cries being regarded as enclosing the rest of the psalm as a letter is enclosed between the front and back of its envelope. This structure is really a further development of the spirit of parallelism which is the outstanding feature of Hebrew poetry; or, to be more correct, it is parallelism applied not to the verse lines nor yet to the stanzas, but to the poem as a whole. A further illustration of this envelope structure (apart from that given in the 103rd psalm) will be found in psalm eight. The structure is not peculiar to Hebrew poetry; it is one that is likely to suggest itself occasionally to poets of any nation, and it is not unknown in our English verse. Indeed, we have several illustrations of it in our Methodist Hymn Book, as, for instance, in Isaac Watts' hymn founded upon verse 33 of this psalm (hymn 62).

"I'll praise my Father while I've breath."