A. Moody Stuart

The Fifty-First Psalm and the Encyclopaedia Britannica

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AND

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BY

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PRICE SIXPENCE.

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PSALM LI.

To the Chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the Prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bath-sheba.

1 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness; according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me.

4 Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest.

5 Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts; and in the hidden *part* thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

8 Make me to hear joy and gladness; *that* the bones *which* thou hast broken may rejoice.

9 Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.

11 Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me *with thy* free Spirit:

13 *Then* will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

14 Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation; *and* my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness.

15 O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.

16 For thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give *it;* thou delightest not in burnt-offering.

17 The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

18 Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem.

19. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offering, and whole burnt-offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.

THE FIFTY-FIRST PSALM

AND

THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA BRITANNICA.

THAT the title of the Fifty-first Psalm is genuine, and that the name of David is inscribed on the Psalm throughout, and written as legibly in its confessions and hopes as in its title, has been the undoubting faith of the Hebrew nation and the Christian Church for thousands of years. But the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, in its recent article on the Bible, assures us that the Psalm was not composed till four hundred years after David's death. The theory is not new, and its examination might have been reckoned unnecessary, except for the literary standing of the critic who adopts it, and of the work in which he writes, and for the painful shock it must therefore inflict on the devout reader of the Psalms.

After the Ten Commandments and the Fifty-third of Isaiah, there is, perhaps, no other portion of the Hebrew Scriptures that for these three thousand years has yielded richer fruit unto eternal life; and if it is now plucked by the roots from its historic ground, its leaf will be green no longer, and it will have lost for ever more than half its fruit. During all these ages the history of David has been shedding its light on every line of the Psalm, and has entered deeply and inseparably into the conviction, the comfort and the salvation it has ministered to myriads of the redeemed. By the words of the Psalm the historical essence of his repentance has been woven through the life of kindred spirits in every nation and tongue, and if the Church of the future is robbed of this priceless

treasure in its historic setting, the ages to come will be sadly impoverished as compared with the ages past.

In the following discussion, we must ask that our subject may not be understood in its narrowest sense, when we proceed to take up these points: The rejection of the titles of this and other psalms, the alleged unfitness of David to have written the Psalm, as of Moses to have written Deuteronomy, the proof from its contents of its only possible author, and the objections to this authorship.

I.—The rejected Titles of the Fifty-first and other Psalms.

It was the ancient belief of Jews and Christians that the titles are as old as the Psalms, either written by their authors, or, at least, not added at some later date; and this tradition is confirmed by the facts that some of the latest Psalms, as the song of the weepers by the rivers of Babylon, want the titles, and that the Hebrew musical notes in the titles are so old that, from a remote date, the clew to their meaning has been lost.

On the subject of these inscriptions, it is well remarked by Delitzsch, that "the custom which has gained ground since the last decade of the past century, of rejecting what has been historically handed down, has at present grown into a despicable habit of forming a decision too hastily, which, in any other department of literature, where the judgment is not so warped by the drift of the inquiry, would be regarded as folly."

The full and explicit title of the Fifty-first Psalm defines both its author and its occasion, and so long as the inscriptions were held in reverence, there was no room for dispute; but the writer in the *Encyclopædia* speaks of them in these terms: "There is no reason to believe that any title is as old as the Psalm to which it is prefixed, and some of the titles are certainly wrong; for example, the author of the elegy on Saul and Jonathan could not possibly have written Psalm lxxxvi., which is a mere cento of reminiscences from other poems." Some distinguished critics, like Bleek,

have modestly expressed a doubt about the authorship of the Eighty-sixth Psalm, and if such had been the spirit of the present criticism, the rejection of its brief title might have been left without remark. But in all of us critical study ought surely not to be dissevered from modesty and reverence in judging the word of the great God. Men by living long become aware that in widely different circumstances, separated by a long interval of time, a difference of thought and style goes a very little way to prove that the man cannot possibly be the same; and they learn that while deep trials, like those in the Eighty-sixth Psalm, are often fruitful in fresh ideas, they also tend to throw the soul back either on its own former thoughts, or on the thoughts of others. Even He who spake as never man spake did not utter new words of His own in the darkest crisis of His sufferings, but betook Himself to the reminiscence of the well-known words of David. Yet the prayer in the eleventh verse, "Unite my heart to fear Thy name; I will praise Thee with all my heart," instead of being a repetition out of other poems, we had taken to be without a parallel in all the Hebrew Songs. "Knit my heart into one, that I may praise Thee with my whole heart," presents a thought of quite singular significance and beauty. This petition, in its rarity and in its intenseness, does most characteristically fit the lips of him who could say, "I love the Lord" with more depth of meaning than any other man; no man in Israel was so likely to have thought and uttered it as he who had so thoroughly sounded the depths of human affection, and had sung of it so exquisitely in his elegy. Learned critics and men of poetic taste, as well as the devout reader of the Psalm, have been irresistibly arrested by the exquisite beauty of the prayer, "Uni cor meum," and they would ask with no little interest out of what older poem a thought that had seemed to them so new has now been found to be a reminiscence.

There is no call, however, for any earnest contention about the origin of this Psalm, but the case is very different as regards both the Fifty-first and some other Psalms on whose Davidic author-

ship we find the following general statement: "The assertion that no Psalm is certainly David's is hypersceptical, and few remains of ancient literature have an authorship so well attested as the eighteenth, or even as the seventh Psalm. These, along with the indubitably Davidic poems in the Book of Samuel, give a sufficiently clear image of a very unique genius, and make the ascription of several other poems to David extremely probable."

The critic maintains that one Psalm was decidedly written by David, or even two, the eighteenth and the seventh, and that the ascription of several others to him is extremely probable. Then the sixteenth, which the title ascribes to David, was either not written, or, at least, was not certainly written by him. Yet the Apostle Peter, in interpreting the Psalm by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says that the same David whose sepulchre might still be seen at Jerusalem, spoke in that Psalm of Christ, concerning whom God had sworn to him that He would raise him up of the fruit of his loins. But if David did not write the Psalm, this entire statement is, not designedly, yet most directly, false; for in that case the writer of the Psalm never received any promise that the Messiah should be his son, and he was never entombed in David's sepulchre; and if these Pentecostal words are not to be believed, there can be no faith attached to the Apostle's statement that it was the risen Christ who poured out the Spirit on that day.

The Apostle Paul founds exactly the same argument on this Psalm in Acts xiii. 36; and if we deny its authorship by David, we must hold not only that both the great apostles to Jew and to Gentile were mistaken in the fact regarding David, but that in building the two walls of the Church on the crucified and risen Christ as the one stone laid in Zion, they both altogether erred in their selected scriptural proof of His resurrection.

In a case still stronger, the 110th Psalm, with its Davidic title, is regarded either as certainly not David's, or as not certainly his. Yet our Lord himself declares most explicitly that it was David, the ancestor of the Messiah, who spoke in that Psalm, and He

gives it out as a matter for earnest inquiry how the writer of the Psalm could have Christ at once for his son and for his Lord. No evasion can get rid of the conclusion that Christ knew the Psalm to be written by David, for He says, "David himself saith in the Book of Psalms, 'The Lord said unto my Lord. . . .' David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son?" It cannot be pleaded that Jesus speaks thus, merely to stop the mouths of his adversaries in their asking entangling questions, for it is Christ himself who selects and proposes the question. The supposition that David may not be the author of the Psalm involves the awful blasphemy that the whole statement may be untrue, and the whole argument a deception, because in that case the ancestor of Jesus could not be affirmed to have called him his Lord.

The denial or the doubt of the Davidic titles of these two Psalms is a much graver matter than setting aside the title of the Fifty-first, because, however undesignedly, it does most directly impugn the inspiration of the Apostles and the infallibility of our Lord; but it serves at the same time to show both how little value is to be attached to the rejection of other titles, and how headlong is the course of such criticism.

II.—The alleged unfitness of David to have written the Psalm, as of Moses to have written Deuteronomy.

The arguments against the authorship of the Fifty-first Psalm by David, and of Deuteronomy by Moses, derived from their contents, are far from being formidable in either case; and if there are difficulties, let them be reverently stated. But when we come to judgments on the fitness of inspired authors to write what the Spirit of God has given them, we are treading on very sacred ground, where no man could guide our steps without being himself inspired; and, without any reference to the present writer, it must be said, that hitherto the forwardness of critics to "meddle with things too high for us" has usually been in proportion as their

writings fail to give evidence of their fitness for such spiritual criticism. According to Kuenen, "The least elevated and least pure conception of David's religion approaches the nearest to the truth. His ideas of Jehovah are in harmony with the spirit of his still half-barbarous age; and it is only when the literature of the age of David has been relegated to later times, that the accounts relating to him become altogether comprehensible." He therefore "abandons the hopeless attempt of uniting into one person the poet of the Psalms with the David of history," and David is set aside as incapable of conceiving the high spiritual thoughts of the Psalms, which are all held to be the products of much later and more developed times. But Kuenen begins his *Religion of Israel* with denying a divine origin or authority for the Bible more than for the Koran, sets aside any inspiration except what flows from what he designates the "all-embracing activity of God's spirit in humanity," rejects all miracles, all supernatural prophecy, and ends his third volume with extolling "the most excellent individuality of Jesus," and "liberal Christianity with its openly avowed Unitarianism." All these views the writer in the *Encyclopædia* would strongly repudiate; and we earnestly wish we could add that he also rejects his theory of development, and his most irrational method of constructing history, not by inquiring what its facts are, but by imagining what they ought to have been.

The unfitness of David for writing the Fifty-first Psalm is stated in the *Encyclopædia* in very general terms:—"This current of productive psalmody runs apparently from David down to the Exile, losing in the course of centuries something of its original freshness and fire, but gaining a more chastened pathos and a wider range of spiritual sympathy. Psalm Fifty-one, obviously composed during the desolation of the Temple, marks, perhaps, the last phase of this development." According to this theory, it took more than four hundred years from David's time to develop the chastened pathos and the wide spiritual sympathy of the Fifty-first Psalm. But no pathos can surpass the lament over Absalom;

chastening of spirit has very rarely exceeded the words, "Let him curse on, for the Lord hath bidden him;" and there is no wider range of spiritual sympathy in the Fifty-first Psalm than in the words of the Sixteenth, "The excellent of the earth in whom is all my delight;" and of the Hundred and Tenth, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power."

But the critic's estimate of David, as unfit to have written the Fifty-first Psalm, will come out more distinctly by comparing it with his estimate of Moses, of whose unfitness to have written Deuteronomy he speaks most definitely, and with an alarming decision:—"The whole theological standpoint of the Book agrees exactly with the period of prophetic literature, and gives the highest and most spiritual view of the law to which our Lord himself directly attaches his teaching, and which cannot be placed at the beginning of the theocratic development without making the whole history unintelligible." As to the writer the whole history of Israel becomes unintelligible if Moses is supposed to be capable of the highly spiritual view of the law given in Deuteronomy, which he holds not to have been attained till the prophetic period, or about the eighth century before Christ;—so to Kuenen the life of Abraham is not true history, because its standpoint is as high and spiritual as that of the same period. "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," he says, "are not only servants of Jehovah, but are also not inferior to the prophets of the eighth century before Christ in pureness of religious insight and inward spiritual piety . . . . this representation is utterly without foundation in history." This rejection of the narrative of Abraham's life and character by Kuenen is founded on exactly the same ground as the rejection of Moses as the author of Deuteronomy by the writer in the *Encyclopædia*, because their reception would in both cases make them equal to the prophets of the eighth century; the patriarchal narrative is set aside because the "pureness of its religious insight and its inward spiritual piety" are so high, and the Deuteronomy of Moses is refused because it "gives the highest and most spiritual view of the law;" and beyond all

doubt, if we accept the *Encyclopædia's* view of Moses, we must still more accept Kuenen's view of Abraham. If Deuteronomy is too high a book for the prophet to have written, Abraham's is too high a history for the patriarch to have lived; and his spiritual elevation is according to this theory of development the more incredible of the two, because he lived in a still ruder age, and was removed from the highly developed prophetic period by no less than twelve hundred years.

But if Deuteronomy is too high for Moses, what of Exodus? Is it not likewise too high? Most certainly. The subtle German criticism of the past generation went the length of maintaining, not only that many things in Exodus could not have been written by Moses; but that the "Ten Words" themselves could never have entered his mind, because some of the views, both of God and of man, both of divinity and morality, are the highest of which the human intellect is capable, and could not have been conceived in so barbarous an age. "I am Jehovah, thy God: thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image," in the opening of the Commandments, gives the highest, most abstract, and most spiritual view of God which the mind of man can conceive; and at their close, "Thou shalt not covet" gives the noblest and most refined view of morals. It has, therefore, been held that it makes history unintelligible to suppose thoughts so sublime to have originated in so early and rude an age; and on the principles of the *Encyclopædia*, this conclusion is unquestionably right. There is nothing loftier in Deuteronomy than these first and last words of the Ten Commandments. The apostle Paul, who loves to quote Deuteronomy, and to reason from its texts, had in his own personal history found nothing in its noble chapters, through which the Spirit disclosed to him so high and so spiritual a view of the law as the words in Exodus, "Thou shalt not covet;" and if Moses, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, is judged to have been incapable of writing Deuteronomy on account of the spirituality of its views, he may also be held to have been incapable of intelligently ministering the Ten

Commandments. And where is this to end? The critic's own faith has arrested the process for himself; but in its reasonable results, and practical tendency, it can have only one termination —the rejection of all that is supernatural in the Bible.[1]

III.—The Contents of the Psalm the proof of its only possible Author.

The assertion in the *Encyclopædia* that it was "obviously composed during the desolation of the Temple" is to be noted, because the expression serves to assure us that the writer does not profess to found his conclusion on a recondite scrutiny of the Hebrew words, but on features of the Psalm that lie on its surface, and are apparent to all. The school of theology, which appropriates to itself the name of scientific, which is distinguished by acuteness and by industry, and some of whose writers, like Ewald, have cast their speculations in an attractive form, is at the same time marked by this characteristic and most unscientific feature, that while they agree in rejecting, as contrary to science, whatever in the Bible is at first sight improbable, each writer sub-

[1] *Deuteronomy in the New Testament.* We may advert to the clearness with which the New Testament vouches for the authorship of this book, not only by the express testimonies of Peter and of Stephen to the person of its author; but by the testimony of Paul to its date, when, after taking his leading quotation from the Law out of the Book of Deuteronomy, and reasoning from its being so long subsequent to Abraham, he makes the interval not twelve hundred years, but four hundred and thirty. Still more important is our Lord's own testimony regarding the law of divorce, found only in Deuteronomy, of which He says expressly that it was "written" by Moses; and with the certainty of One who knew the inward thoughts of men, adds that the secret motive which induced Moses to write it was the hardness of Israel's heart; and still further, that its date was as high as, but not higher than, the time of Moses, and was therefore not at all so old as the original law of marriage: when his argument would have had tenfold weight with his hearers if He had told them, as we are now told, that this much abused precept could claim no authority at all so ancient and so unique in Israel as Moses; but had originated in the mind of an anonymous writer of an unknown date, seven or eight hundred years after his death, who had put thoughts into his lips that had never entered his heart.

stitutes some fanciful theory of his own, or oftener of some one else, without taking account of the tenfold greater improbabilities with which it is burdened. The writer in the *Encyclopædia* rejects the anti-supernatural views prevalent in this school, but he too nearly agrees with them in disregarding the old historic foundations; and with this Psalm he takes the least tenable of all positions, that it was written during the Exile.

Taking up the Psalm as if it bore no title, and as if we had no clew to its history, what we find is this: Its circumstances and sentiments are so peculiar and distinguishing, that they are not known to have been combined in the history and character of any man but one in the whole human race. They are such as probably never were combined in any other, and as certainly could not have been found in any Israelite during the desolation of the Temple. One deeply cut feature stamps the Psalm as widely different from every other, and places it quite alone in the Psalter. It is the startling fact that the Psalm is *The Confession of a Murderer.* To such a confession nothing elsewhere in the Psalms bears the least resemblance; and a guilt so appalling must form the burden of the prayer throughout, although it is late in the Psalm before the supplicant has the courage to name the dreadful act, just as in the opening sentence of his prayer he does not utter the word "transgressions" till he has most touchingly appealed to God for pity in every form, in His mercy, in His loving-kindness, in the multitude of His tender mercies. While he laments inward sin, and acknowledges not only one but many transgressions, the "sin that is ever before him" must be most of all the dark red stain of murder; from which at last expressly, and with intense earnestness, he implores to be redeemed, and which in his petition he seems purposely to brand with the strong Hebrew word for blood used for the death of Abel. It is not a prayer for the purifying of the heart, but a loud cry for deliverance, for rescue from guilt and condemnation: (Erue me de sanguinibus, Deus, Deus salutis meæ) "*Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation.*"

Springing out of this radical distinction, there is the entire and very marked absence of a class of pleas for pity taken from the side of the suppliant that are common in the other penitential Psalms. There is the acknowledged transgression, the broken heart, the closed lips; but the penitent presents no plea on the ground of the hatred of his enemies, or of his own sincerity, or even from his calling, or trusting, or waiting on the Lord.[1]

The confession brings to light a very remarkable history, one far out of the common current of daily events, and quite contrary to the long downward course of an ungodly man ending in violence and bloodshed, and followed by dark remorse. The life of the suppliant has been a course of the highest spiritual experience of which man is capable, in the sense of God's presence, in the light of his face, in the indwelling of his Spirit, and in the joy of his salvation. This heavenward walk has been succeeded by a terrible fall, by inward foolishness, by the losing of a clean heart, by deviation from the truth, finally and fearfully by staining his

[1] *Blood-guiltiness.*—It has been attempted to attach a vaguer meaning to the term "blood," and to take it for guilt and punishment. But Hengstenberg says that the only passage on which stress has been laid is Isaiah, ch. iv. 4; and that its literal meaning is clear from ch. i. 15-21. A more plausible idea would be to attach to the expression the sense of natural pollution from Ezek. ch. xvi. 6, 9. But it would be quite inadmissible to attach to so common an expression a sense so rare and peculiar unless the context made it clear, as in Ezekiel; and the petition itself plainly disproves such a meaning, because it is not, as in the prophet, "washing" from blood that is referred to by the Psalmist, but he asks to be "delivered," to be "snatched or plucked from danger" (Gesen.), as being under condemnation; Sept. Ῥῦσαί με ἐξ αἱμάτων; Vulg., Libera me a sanguinibus; Pagnin., Erue me de sanguinibus; Cler., Libera me a caedis crimine.

Neither could the apostle Paul's use of the term, in the words "I am pure from the blood of all men," however helpful in a secondary sense to all who have charge over the souls of others, be its primary meaning here, without the connection making it unmistakably clear; and the confession is evidently not of mere neglect, but of the gravest actual transgression.

As a prayer for more general use, the nearly literal confession of blood-guiltiness, along with prayer for the divine righteousness, would come home to thousands of Jews at Pentecost; it will yet be offered by the children of those who cried, "His blood be on us and on our children;" and is now very intelligible to the man who is looking on Him whom he has pierced by sin and by unbelief.

hands with innocent blood. His sin against man is of a rarely parallelled guilt, yet he speaks of it as committed against God alone, and says that he will accept of His judgment as just if He shall condemn him, indicating that there is no man above him in the commonwealth to call him to account for his crime. To God he makes his deeply ashamed and most humbly penitent confession, yet not with the remorse of unbelieving guilt, but with the faith and hope of a child craving restoration to a Father's favour, and with intense desire for the omnipotent creation within him of truth, of wisdom, and of holiness; for there is a constant and beautiful mingling through the Psalm of prayer for pardon and for purity. Along with his confession he would present a sacrifice in the sanctuary, but the Holy One desires it not at his hands, or, as it has been translated, would not accept it; and no priest dare offer a sacrifice for the sin of murder. This present exclusion from the altar shuts him up to two distinct sacrifices of another kind. One is the spiritual sacrifice of his own broken heart; the other is the atoning cleansing of his conscience, as if with the hyssop dipped in blood ordained for the cleansing of the leper, and the prayer, "Wash me throughly," may refer to the sevenfold sprinkling of the leper with blood; but the cleansing he asks is not by human hands, but by a directly divine washing that will make him whiter than snow.

To Christians there are two deep mysteries in the Psalm, not in its words, as shone upon to us in the New Testament, but as they were breathed from the heart, and uttered by the lips of a Jew: the prayer just quoted, "Purge me with hyssop," and the corresponding purpose, "I will sing aloud of thy righteousness." In the heart sprinkled from an evil conscience by the blood of Christ, and in Christ made of God unto us righteousness, both expressions are clear and full to us; but what did they mean in the mind of the Jew whose prayer, given him by the Holy Spirit, fits us so much better than any we could frame for ourselves? Undoubtedly the two expressions are quite kindred in meaning: "I was shapen

in iniquity, purge me with hyssop and I shall be whiter than snow : I acknowledge my transgression, deliver me from blood-guiltiness, and I will sing aloud of thy righteousness." The acquittal of a murderer is mercy, not justice; but as it is elsewhere, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity," so it must be here, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth righteousness." The not imputing of his own iniquity, and the imputing of divine righteousness must here be the subject of his song; and it is emphatically righteousness without works, for it is righteousness counted to a self-condemned and broken-hearted murderer. Whatever we now find in the words that he could not discern, he seems to have seen with an eye almost clearer than ours that the divine sprinkling would make his crimson stain whiter than snow; and he knew not doubtfully, but assuredly, that God's righteousness freely made his own would so acquit him from the guilt of blood, that he would not merely celebrate his mercy, but extol his righteousness, and that with no faltering voice, but with his loudest song of praise.

In the closing petition of this deeply personal repentance, the suppliant seems to intimate that he holds a public and representative position, that his sin might therefore be expected to injure the community, and he appends an earnest prayer for the welfare of Israel. He also looks forward in faith to a season when Israel would offer abundant and acceptable sacrifices, from which he had himself been excluded for a time; and although he would not offer a personal sacrifice for a crime for which there was no expiation under the law, yet after that shall have been on other grounds forgiven he will join with Israel in their sacrifices, both of expiation and of thanksgiving. One of the most noteworthy features in the whole case remains to be added in the singular fact that this penitential song, containing a confession of the darkest crime of which man can be guilty, is publicly received, and embodied in the songs of the sanctuary.

All this agrees minutely with the history of David, of his high

place in the divine favour, of his deep fall, and of his Psalms holding the first rank in the service of God notwithstanding his great transgression. Such a history will fit no other known man that ever lived, and no unknown exile in Babylon. If the penitent's prayer for building the walls of Jerusalem (not, however, for rebuilding them) must be taken in the letter, and must on that account be held to prove him to be an exile, his prayer for cleansing with hyssop must likewise be interpreted literally, and when so taken it will prove, on the contrary, that he could not have been absent from the land of accepted sacrifice. But the writer of the Psalm was a murderer, and if he had been one of the exiles he would have forfeited his life by his crime; or if he had contrived to escape the just penalty of the law, he would have been fain to keep silence both about his former grace and his recent guilt. If, on the one hand, this private criminal had read his confession openly, it would have been nailed to the tree on which himself was hung. And if, on the other hand, while still a fugitive from justice, he had written an unsigned confession, full of professions of piety, is it conceivable that it would have been allotted a place in the holy songs of God's sanctuary? Most men who have once had to do with a murderer's religious utterances are apt to be careful how they confide in them a second time. Our trust, indeed, is secured by Scriptural authority in the case of the penitent thief; but his brief petition is very different from a whole Psalm, and it came not from the pen of a hidden fugitive, but from the lips of one who died in the sight of all men, with his name and his crime written over his cross. This example gives no warrant whatever for supposing that such a place in the Church as belongs to the writer of this Psalm either has been, or ever could be, allotted to an unknown criminal. It is accorded to David only for his singularly high position in Israel, in providence, in grace, and in prophetic inspiration. All his history, previous and subsequent, is thoroughly known to us; this divinely imparted knowledge is essential to secure our confidence in his penitential confession; and as the

fruit of it, all generations have had the fullest reliance on the truth of every line of his matchless prayer.

But, further, it is hard to see what meaning can be attached in the exile theory to the words, "else would I give it;" because when taken along with the last verse of the Psalm, their only natural meaning in the lips of an exile is that he can offer no acceptable sacrifice while the temple is in ruins. But if he has been guilty of bloodshed his words are hypocritical, because he knows that although the altar had stood, it would have rejected any sacrifice for his heinous crime.

IV.—Objections to the Davidic origin of the Psalm.

To the view now given of the Psalm it is objected that its confession of sin as against God alone may mean that to God alone is every sinner finally responsible, and that by Him alone can his sin be forgiven. This sense we earnestly hold to be included; but that the Psalmist was likewise outwardly responsible to no man, we take to be the full and natural meaning. As regards God not desiring or accepting sacrifice, it is contended that the reference, as in the Fortieth Psalm, is to the inefficacy of the sacrificial blood of beasts; but it seems quite impossible to bring this interpretation into harmony with the concluding joyful commendation of prospective sacrifices, not of another, but of the very same kind; which is quite consistent with the view we have taken of the Psalmist's present exclusion from the altar. It is also pleaded that if he referred to such exclusion he would have written "sin-offering;" but "sacrifice" is a general term for an offering with blood, and may surely include the sin-offering. There seems, however, no cause for the royal penitent specifying either the sin or the trespass-offering, as if he could conceive that his offences might possibly, but did not really, come under the special provisions for such sacrifices. His double transgression of adultery and murder twice demanded, not the blood of beasts, but his own blood; the

murderer was to be dragged even from God's altar and slain; and as in presenting the sin-offering the priest was made cognisant of the nature of the offence, it was scarcely necessary to state that he would not accept it. But every sacrifice, and very markedly the burnt-offering which he names, made expiation for the sins of the offerer, who transferred them to the victim by laying his hand on its head, that it might make atonement for him. There had been no public declaration of David's guilt, and if without a confession before man the king had approached the altar like any other Israelite with a burnt-offering, the priest considering his position would certainly not have refused to present his sacrifice; and to God alone he would have acknowledged the sins for which he sought expiation. But David knew that in expiation for his double crime God would accept of no sacrifice that he could bring to the altar, and that nothing but a higher sprinkling could make atonement for him, although after his reconciliation he would be accepted in joining with Israel in their righteous offerings.

Some critics have objected that David had already received the divine pardon through the lips of the prophet Nathan, and had therefore no need to ask it, as is done in this Psalm. But that was only the formal assurance of forgiveness through a messenger, and could never have satisfied David's soul. He must receive the divine pardon directly from God himself, with the light of his countenance, and the inward seal and sense of reconciliation in his own heart.

The great central feature of the Psalm remains unassailable, and not open to dispute, the confession of murder. This acknowledgment can neither be set aside nor explained away; and the confession of a crime that inexorably demanded the life of the criminal has been proved to be quite incompatible with the publicly accepted Psalm of an exile.

As regards the public petitions in the last two verses, it was most natural for David in his prayer to think of Israel whom he had so dishonoured and so endangered by his crime. His own

death by the hand either of God or of an avenger of blood would have been a great calamity to the nation; and the sword threatened by Nathan the prophet against his house could not but involve serious evil to all Israel. He asks therefore that the Lord may do good to Zion, and that he will build the walls of Jerusalem. When, at a later period, the angel of the Lord threatens "to destroy Jerusalem," his intellect is not so material as to suggest the thought that the destruction of the city means the overthrow of its stone and lime; but he sees only his people's danger, and pleads for them, "These sheep, what have they done?" So here, if it were necessary, the second petition, "Build thou the walls of Jerusalem," might most naturally be taken as only another form of the first, "Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion."

At the same time, although it has sometimes been unaccountably overlooked, it is quite certain that the walls, both of Jerusalem and of Zion, were still unfinished at David's death, and the breaches in both at the date of his confession must often have engaged his earnest thoughts. As soon as David occupied Jerusalem he gave himself assiduously to the building of its walls; and Josephus assigns it as a chief reason of the vast strength of those walls, that "David and Solomon and the kings following were very zealous about this work." Selecting his own dwelling in the citadel of Zion, "he built round about from Millo and inward; he built the city round about, even from Millo round about," and under him "Joab repaired the rest of the city," 2 Sam. v. 9; 1 Chron. xi. 8. Millo is understood to have been part of the citadel of Zion, and to Zion also the site of the temple on Moriah was reckoned to belong. But none of these great works were completed till the reign of Solomon, who "closed the breaches of the city of David, built Millo, and the wall of Jerusalem round about," 1 Kings iii. 1; ix. 15; xi. 27. And with the still open breaches of Zion before his eyes, and the unfinished walls of Jerusalem, and his own accumulations of gold, silver, brass, iron, and marble for the temple, it was the most natural of all prayers on the lips of David, "Do

good in thy good pleasure unto Zion, build thou the walls of Jerusalem, then shalt thou be pleased with sacrifices of righteousness."

On another account it was most fit that in asking the forgiveness of his sin he should also entreat that God would build His own house in Jerusalem; for he could not but reflect that if the blood of righteous war had before unfitted him for erecting an habitation for the God of peace, the dark stain of innocent blood had now made him much more unmeet for such an honour, and he would therefore the more earnestly ask that God would build a house for himself. And when from these closing verses the desolation of the Temple is so confidently assigned for the Psalm, it is to be noted that there was no time before the exile when prayer could have been offered for the building of the temple, except during the latter period of David's reign. Ten years earlier it had not been contemplated, but at the time of his great transgression the Temple, though not in ruins, might almost be said to be lying unbuilt. During the period of his unconfessed guilt the outward work might have either been interrupted, or else, for the quieting of his troubled conscience, might have been prosecuted with the greater diligence; but now, when the soul is returning to its God, his personal confession is sure to be followed by the springing up of a renewed and intense desire for the accomplishment of the great work which had long been the chief object of his life.

The writer in the *Encyclopædia*, with apparent reference to this portion of his article, speaks elsewhere of the "new results of scholarly criticism affecting the authorship of a favourite Psalm." But the subject requires the exercise of judgment rather than of scholarship, because the theory is very apt to present itself to the mind of any reader; and the results of the German criticism, even of one cast, scarcely appear to be so entirely in favour of his view as his remark may seem to imply. In our own country Davidson, and some others before him, take the exile theory of the Psalm, which will occur at first sight to all who are prepared to set aside

the title; not a few German critics are of the same mind; and Kuenen is not prepared to ascribe any of the Psalms to David. On the other hand, the accordance of the older commentators in ascribing the Psalm to David needs no proof. But it may be mentioned that Le Clerc takes, in substance, the view already given of the connection between the divine rejection of sacrifices in the sixteenth verse, and their acceptance in the nineteenth; on which he says that a careful study of the Psalm will lead to the conclusion that God, having sanctioned no legal expiation of any kind for the sins of adultery and murder, would utterly refuse a burnt-offering presented with that view, but that after he had, on quite other than legal grounds, granted a full pardon for those offences, he would then accept David along with Israel in bringing sacrifices both of atonement and of thank-offering. Amongst recent critics, Hengstenberg, Delitzsch, and Kiel maintain the truth of the historic title of the Psalm, and their orthodoxy is no good reason for setting aside their criticism. But Bleek, whose criticism is often destructive enough, has no hesitation whatever in assigning the Psalm to David, with the exception of the last two verses, which he supposes to have been added afterwards to render it more suitable for the sanctuary service; a needless supposition, and unsupported by any historical proof, but infinitely more probable than the ascription of the Psalm to a Babylonian captive. And (as cited by Hengstenberg) Ewald, for whom no theory is too bold, while not allowing the Psalm to be David's, holds that it was composed before the captivity, and must have been written by a king; and if so keen an eye fails to see its exile origin, it cannot be said to be "obvious." No supposed authorship of the Psalm agrees with its contents, except the old one founded on its historic title, and in harmony with every line throughout.

The Psalms of David have for many generations been loved and honoured in Scotland more than in any other land on earth, and it will be sad indeed if we shall rob him now of the brightest jewel in his crown; if we shall still attach credit to the darkest

passage in his history, but leave his memory stained with his sin by snatching from him the penitential song given him by his God in tenderest love to accompany and turn into richest fruit the story of his crime. Over against his bitter sorrow, in which he must often have wished that his right hand had forgot her cunning ere he wrote and sent by the hands of his faithful soldier the blackest letter in all history, "Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him that he may be smitten and die;" the God whom he loved so ardently put into his hand the pen of a ready writer to record this wondrous prayer as a song of saving health for all nations; and shall we degrade his open and sublime repentance into the anonymous, and therefore hollow, confession of a hidden criminal?

Let us turn from the crude imagination to the noblest spectacle ever seen among the ransomed sons of men, to the royal penitent laying aside his robes to humble himself in sackcloth before his people and his God, and delivering to the "Chief Musician" this song of a broken spirit reaching alike into the depths of sin in the heart of man, and the depth of mercy in the heart of God. Let us love and admire the man who, when his throne has become a pillory at which the arrows of envenomed scorn are shot from a thousand blaspheming tongues, rises above all his shame before men, in the grief of his shame before his beloved and dishonoured God, forgets every eye that looks on him, save One, and smiting on his breast, prays aloud, before all his people, "Hide Thy face from my sin."

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AT THE EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY PRESS.