

Office

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

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CHICAGO

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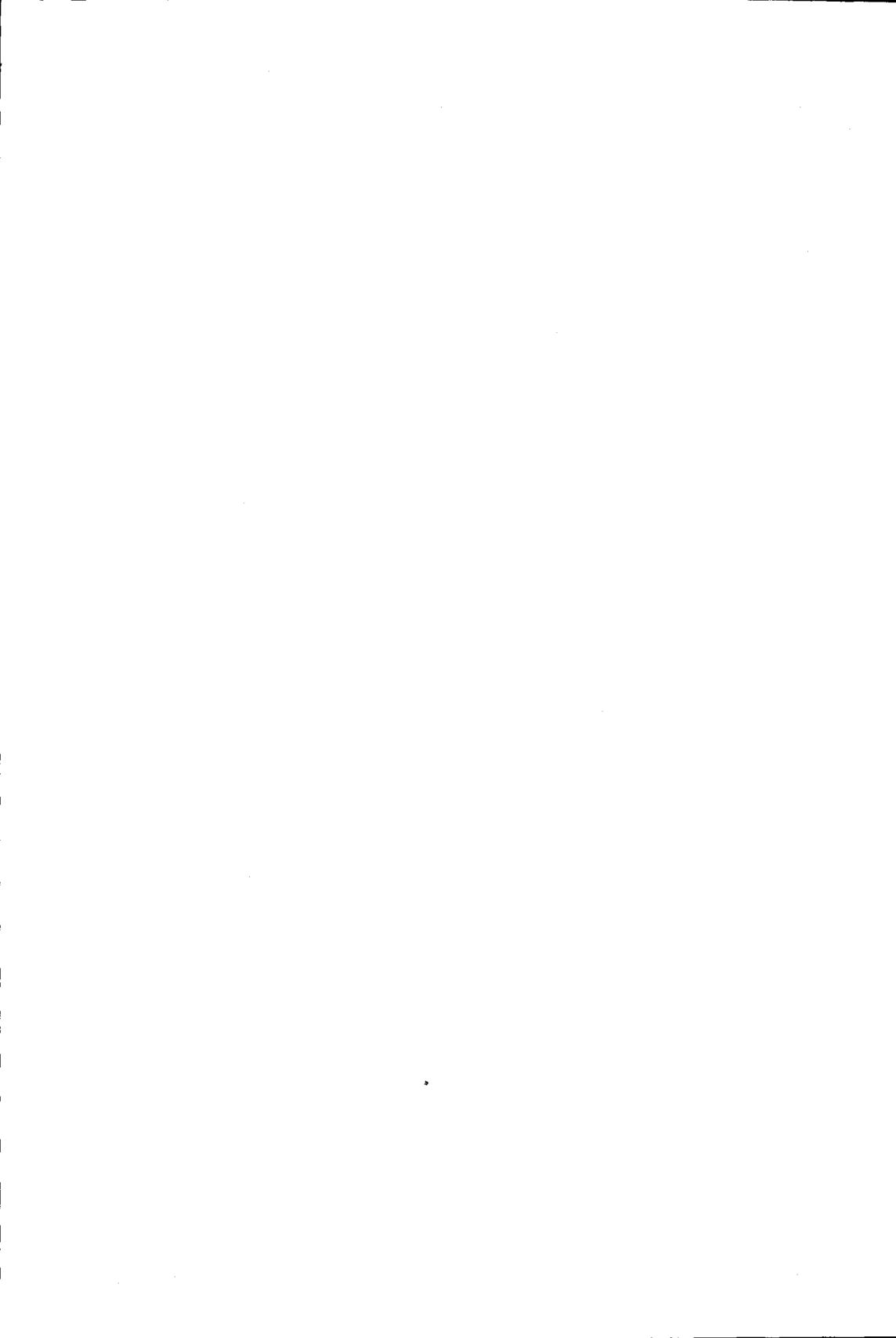
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RENÉ DESCARTES.

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THE PSALMS IN UNIVERSAL LITERATURE.¹

AN ADDRESS BY CARL HEINRICH CORNILL.

PSALMS and universal literature!² Two great and significant expressions! Two mighty and heart-stirring facts! We Germans especially cannot fail to feel pride and joy when we speak the phrase "universal literature," for the phrase and the idea originated on German soil, are the fruit of the German mind. The phrase, as is known, comes from Goethe, the most universal genius of Germany, and perhaps of mankind; but the idea we owe to Herder. Goethe himself frankly declared this in five fine stanzas composed in honor of Herder. I cannot forbear quoting them because they are among the less familiar of Goethe's compositions, and because they develop in a manner quite classic the idea of universal literature. In a masque for the 18th of December, 1818, the Ilm is represented as introducing the four literary princes of Weimar: Wieland, Herder, Goethe, and Schiller, and characterises Herder as follows:

A noble man, and eager to discover
How everywhere the human spirit grows,
Harks for the word or tone the wide world over
That in its songs from countless sources flows,
Through earlier and through later ages wending,
His ear to every region's voices lending.

And thus he hears from nation sung to nation
What has touched each man in his native air,
And hears repeated in naïve relation
What grandsires gave to sires of good and fair,

¹ Separate Print from the *Jahrbuch für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur*. (Translated by W. H. Carruth, of the University of Kansas.)

² *Weltliteratur*. The translation is not quite adequate; but the German has the advantage of us with his beautiful words: *Weltgeschichte, Weltgericht, Weltliteratur*.

Amusement and instruction both revealing
As though 'twere all but one man's act and feeling.

Whate'er casts down the soul, whate'er upraises,
Quickly confused and carelessly combined,
One thought for each, a thousand words and phrases
From Eden to the present have defined.
Thus chants the bard. saga and song renew it,
We feel it all as though we had lived through it.

If the black cliffs and overclouded heaven
To pictures here of gloomy woe constrain,
The sun-kissed vault by jubilant songs is riven
Of rapt souls yonder on the open main ;
Their will was good, what everywhere should woo man
They too desired : the universal human.¹

Where'er concealed, his was the art that found it,
In serious guise, or masked for lightsome game,—
Humanity,² in loftiest sense to ground it
For future times be our eternal aim !
O would his spirit now might see them leave us,
Healed by humanity,—the plagues that grieve us !

Herder, you know, was an East Prussian, and since I have become acquainted with East Prussia through my own observation, I am inclined to regard it as not a mere matter of chance that it was an East Prussian mind that first developed the idea of universal literature. For East Prussia has peculiar ethnographic conditions such as are found nowhere else in Germany. Here, among and along with the Germans, dwell two other races of distinctly marked individuality and of great poetic endowment: the Poles and the Lithuanians. And Herder's native town, Mohrunge, is situated in close proximity to the wholly Polish province of Ermland, which in his day still belonged politically to the Kingdom of Poland. As a result of these early impressions, and of the similar conditions in Riga, where he spent the next five years after finishing his studies at Königsberg, his ear could not fail to become sensitive to the peculiarities of national tones, while his eye was opened to what was common in national characteristics: to the purely human.

Moreover, Herder had the gift of catching the utterances of nations in their most individual and at the same time most purely human manifestations, in the spontaneous expressions of their

¹ " Sie meinten's gut und fromm im Grund, sie wollten
Das Menschliche,—was alle wollen sollten,"

² *Menschlichkeit* assumes here, of course, much of the second sense of humanity, i. e., humaneness.

racial peculiarity. Herder has a marvellous eye and a unique sense for racial peculiarities; he is in truth the discoverer of the race-soul. Whether dealing with Esthonians or Persians, with Lithuanians or Spaniards, with Scots or Israelites, with equal insight Herder recognises and understands their innermost emotions, and finds in their popular literature their poetic echo and their artistic self-revelation. All humankind is to him a gigantic harp in the hand of God, each nation constituting a string and producing a distinct tone, and all together, when touched by the hand of one divine master, joining in a jubilant accord of everlasting harmonies; for the same God enabled them all to give utterance to their sorrows and their joys. This is all that they say, each in the tone given by God.

How Herder, through this way of looking at the matter, made an epoch in the appreciation of the sacred literature of Israel, I may assume to be generally known. While before it has been regarded solely as the supernaturally revealed word of God, the human factor wholly ignored, and while the father of the historical treatment of the Biblical books, the aged Johann Solomon Semler in Halle could see in the Old Testament nothing but the unedifying literature of an untutored people, Herder taught that it was the artistic product of the intellect of the Hebrew nation and at the same time a religious monument, and thus in a certain sense he re-discovered it for his contemporaries and for all succeeding generations and revealed its nobility. Whoever occupies himself to any extent with the sacred literature of Israel, and whoever loves it, owes to no one greater gratitude or sincerer admiration than to Johann Gottfried Herder.

A providential dispensation brought this seer and prophet into closest intimacy with Goethe at the most critical and important period for the latter, when the springtime of life was expanding within him, "and all the buds were swelling." As a matter of course, in the case of Goethe's far richer and far more comprehensive genius, such suggestions fell upon fruitful ground. He could not fail to see in the poetic activity of the various nations "a dance of spheres, harmonious amid tumult," as he expresses it in the poem entitled "Universal Literature." He found for the fact the expressive name "Universal Literature (*Weltliteratur*)." Whatever beautiful and permanent work a man or a nation has achieved has been wrought not solely for this man or that nation, but for humanity, for the whole world. Before the universal power of poetry and beauty all national barriers fall, the bounds of its influence

extend as far as poetry and beauty reach, that is to say, wherever human hearts beat.

But this phrase coined by Goethe is used in a double sense: both as the confirmation of a fact and as a critical judgment. It is true that all the imaginative productions of mankind together constitute universal literature, as the imaginative manifestation of the human mind. This imaginative manifestation is innate to it, is part of its very nature, blows whither it listeth, being restricted to neither nationality nor race. Yet only a small number of poetic geniuses, indeed, only certain of their works, may be said in a special sense to belong to universal literature.

And what do we mean when we pronounce such a judgment?

We mean that these works not only have a significance for their nation, but that they belong to the world. Of course these are only the most prominent productions of the individual literatures, the most immortal creations, in which poetic genius has, so to speak, excelled itself, just as in a mountain panorama to one standing at a distance the lower mountains combine and blend into a compact and formless mass, while plastic and individual effects are produced only by the highest peaks, which tower like monarchs and in solitary majesty into the bright blue of the ether, kissed by the very first breath of the dawn while night still spreads her dusky pinions over hill and valley, and flushed by the last rays of the setting sun while deep twilight has already settled upon the earth. That is what we mean when we speak of universal literature, when we ascribe to a poetic product a place in universal literature.

And what are the claims that support this position?

That such works must be finished works of art is so much a matter of course that it need scarcely be said; for in every art only the finished has any claim to permanence. The essential qualifications for a place in universal literature have been shown plainly and clearly by Goethe in the already quoted poem to Herder,—

—“what everywhere should woo man
They too desired,—the universal human.”

The content of such works must be universally human; they must arouse in us feelings which appertain to every human being as such, no matter in what zone or among what people he was born, they must be international in the pre-eminent sense of the word. But Goethe mentions a second essential requisite, in the words that they sing

“What has touched each man in his native air.”

Such works must also be national in the pre-eminent sense of the word, must be characteristic of the nation which gave them birth, and at the same time the highest and purest artistic self-revelation of its special individuality.

There is scarcely anything on earth more sacred and divine than the individuality of man or of nation ; it is the first and indispensable duty of either to live out and develop it. Just as, in Rückert's profound saying, the rose adorns the garden by adorning itself, even so with man : the individual and the individual nation become valuable members of humanity precisely in so far as they develop their own distinct peculiarities, which could be developed in just the same way by no other man and no other people.

Accordingly the intellectual products that belong to universal literature must be finished works of art, representing in a specifically and distinctly national form a purely and universal human content, so that such a work could be produced in this manner only by the very people from which it comes.

After thus surveying the ground let us approach the treatment of our theme. This will develop in two directions. We must ask : Do the Psalms belong to universal literature at all in the pre-eminent sense intended by us ? And if we answer this question affirmatively, then : What is the significance of the Psalms in universal literature ?

Pray do not consider it pedantry, or even quite superfluous, if I ask first : Do the Psalms belong to universal literature at all ? Wide distribution alone is no criterion. The Koran, for instance, can rival the Bible in the matter of wide distribution, for it is the bible of 200,000,000 human beings in Europe, Asia, and Africa ; yet for my part I would never include the Koran in universal literature. True, it is national in a pre-eminent sense, a most typical expression of the peculiar combination of dry, sober reason and luxuriant, sensually glowing imagination which constitutes the national character of the Arab. But the Koran never got beyond the national, and rises to the height neither of the purely human nor of the finished work of art. The hopelessly dull prose portions and the over-ornate poetic pieces are unedifying to any but an Arab, unless he is constrained by religious considerations to regard this book as a divine revelation.

But the case is different with the Psalms. True, the one hundred and fifty different songs of which the collection consists are not all of equal value and significance ; in the familiar expression of Horace, even Homer sometimes nods, and thus a weak verse or

a dull episode creeps into his work. But we judge and estimate a poet or a literature by its best, and no competent critic who knows the Psalms will deny that among them are a considerable number of the finest and noblest things in all lyric poetry.

Moreover, almost any one will admit that the Psalms are products of the specific Israelitish intellect, and characteristic for the people of Israel. In what other literature, indeed, have we anything like them? True, poems have recently been found in cuneiform literature which have an undeniable resemblance to the Psalms; they are constructed with that peculiar parallelism of members, that thought-rhythm, which we know in Israelitish poetry, and even in the phraseology there is much that involuntarily suggests the language of the Psalms. But any one who should even remotely match these Assyrian and Babylonian psalms with the Hebrew, or undertake a serious comparison of the two, would thereby testify to his own literary incompetence; the very similarity of form and superficial features make us doubly conscious of the entire difference in spirit and content, just as one becomes fully aware of the whole greatness, nobility and incomparableness of Goethe's "Hermann und Dorothea" only by a comparison with Voss's "Luise."

But do the Psalms rise to the height of the purely human? Or must we not finally on the most important point judge them as we did the Koran? The Psalms are religious poems, the classical expression of the religion of Israel, and the question is finally reduced to the more important and vital one: Is the religion of Israel merely one conditioned and limited by its nationality, or has it a significance for the world, for mankind?

There are not a few, especially in our day, who unqualifiedly deny it this importance, and propose at the best to let it stand as a more or less interesting curiosity which belongs entirely to the field of history. And they offer reasons for this view. The sacred literature of Israel is said to contain unworthy conceptions of God. Certain it is that the Old Testament speaks of God in a very human fashion, when it tells how God walked at eventide in the Garden of Eden, how He closed the door of Noah's ark with His own hands, how He visited Abraham under the oaks of Mamre, and showed only His back to Moses, since the sight of His face is fatal to man: it attributes to God human form and human emotions, and in one passage of the Psalms we even read the unparalleled figure: "Then the Lord awakened like one out of sleep, like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine." (Psalms lxxviii. 65.)

But one who takes offence at such expressions and regards them as demeaning to God only proves thereby that he lacks appreciation for religion and poetry. What appears to our local prejudice a defect in the Old Testament is in truth its chief strength and its highest claim to fame; for this is only a consequence of the fact that the religion of Israel took seriously the fundamental requisite of all religion—the requisite of a personal God.

Religion is the most personal matter in the universe, the surrender of one's own self to a higher being, not in order to lose oneself, but to find oneself, in order to receive oneself again from this higher being in the transfigured and more perfect form which an inner voice tells us corresponds to the deepest and truest essence of our self. Such a reciprocal giving and receiving, such a mutual relationship, is possible only between persons; we can just as little enter into a personal relation with a mere abstraction, a pure idea, as the feeling of love in the highest sense, such as pervades a man with irresistible power, lends wings to his soul and lifts him out of himself, is conceivable toward a statue, be it ever so true to life, or even much more beautiful and noble than any earthly being of flesh and blood. The famous phrase of the poet:

"And full of bliss or full of sorrow,
Each heart needs a companion heart,"

applies not only to the relation of man to man, but also to that of man to God.

Religion requires a God with whom man can enter into a personal, loving relation of heart to heart, to whom he can pour out his heart, to whom he can pray. It is not merely accidental, but very significant, that David Friedrich Strauss, in his *Old and New Faith*, having once surrendered the personality of God, answers the second question, "Have we still a religion?" no longer unconditionally, but with "That depends on how you understand it." This centre and soul of all religion, the belief in a personal God, is the pillar of the religion of Israel. And it fathomed this truth with incomparable and triumphant energy, and expressed it with incomparable poetic power.

But how is one to describe a personality or speak of it otherwise than in the forms and according to the manner of the only personality known to us: the human? It is the wonderful secret of the Old Testament, that, speaking in such a human fashion of God, it simply brings Him nearer to us without detracting in the least from His divinity. One may apply here the words of the poet:

" 'Tis bliss in his demesne to dwell
 And every heart near him doth swell,
 But loftiness and dignity
 Forbid familiarity."

Yes, 'tis bliss in his demesne to dwell, and every heart swells; he appears to us as a dear saviour and helper, as a trusted friend and counsellor, but familiarity, all irreverent approach is excluded—for even in this dear and intimate form He remains God, enthroned above this earthly sphere, to whom its inhabitants are as grasshoppers, to whom the nations are esteemed as a drop in the bucket and as the fine dust of the balance. Thence it comes accordingly—for me one of the strongest proofs of the divinity of the religion of Israel—that all who have broken with the belief in a personal God honor the Old Testament with their especial dislike; for the God of Israel is not to be mocked; there is no treating and bargaining with this mighty personality; He cannot be dissolved in any philosophic *aqua fortis* or vaporised in any pantheistic reort; He is the great I Am, the same yesterday, to-day and forever, who speaks and it is done, who commands and it comes to pass, who made the heavens by his word and all the hosts thereof by the breath of His mouth, who looketh on the earth and it trembleth, who toucheth the hills and they smoke, who withdraweth his breath and they perish and return to the dust of which they were made.

But does not the Old Testament represent its God as too human? Does it not ascribe to Him unattractive human qualities? For among them wrath plays a part, and there has been a great deal said about the wrathful God of the Jews, and this meets one constantly where the purpose is to disparage and discredit the religion and the sacred literature of Israel. True, the Old Testament speaks much and often and not infrequently in very strong terms of the wrath of God. In one Psalm it is said:

"Then the earth shook and trembled, the foundations also of the mountains moved and were shaken because He was wroth. There went up a smoke out of His nostrils, and fire out of His mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it." (Psalms xviii. 7-8.)

This, to be sure, seems more like Moloch than Jehovah. But let us look more closely. There is nowhere such a multitude of errors as concerning the wrath of God. What is wrath anyway? We think we have an example of it when we see any one scolding and ranting, railing and tearing, but such a person is simply in a rage, and rage and wrath are two very different things. Genuine

righteous wrath is one of the divinest passions of which man is capable, for it is the primal revolt of the divinity in man against all that is low and mean, because in this it perceives the degradation and desecration of his true nature. It is well known that great and superior men never appear greater and more superior, that their greatness and superiority never come more directly in evidence than when they are wroth with this genuine righteous wrath; how the figure seems to tower, the eye flashes lightning to consume what is mean with atoning and purifying flames,—a spectacle as grand and impressive as that of a thunder-storm, in which man has always believed that he heard most directly the voice of God. Wrath, in fact, is one of the most essential qualities of the divine image after which man was fashioned, and can we expect it to be absent from the archetype? The wrath of God is nothing else than the reaction of the divine holiness against all that is unholy and ungodly. For, as a passage of the Psalms has it: "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; the evil man shall not sojourn with thee." (Psalms v. 4.) A God lacking in this trait would be like a man lacking in conscience. And to ascertain the true opinion of the Old Testament of the relation of this one trait to the complete conception of God, we need only to consider the verse of the Psalm (xxx. 5): "For his anger is but for a moment. His favor is for a lifetime; weeping may come in to lodge at even, but joy cometh in the morning."

Those that are so stirred up over the wrathful God of the Jews either do not know, or forget, that the divine wrath is not only a Jewish but also a Christian doctrine, so that all the stripes and kicks bestowed upon the Old Testament on this account fall equally upon the New Testament. And when those that fancy themselves to have a monopoly of Teutonic race consciousness, who hold up Siegfried and Wuotan against David and Jehovah, and, impelled by their Teutonic race conscience and sentiment, testify against the wrathful God of the Jews, we are really at a loss what to make of it. For the wrath of God especially is a genuine and distinctly Teutonic conception, for which the religion of the Teutonic races coined a special word, calling the wrath of the gods, "ásmôdr" (áss, a god, and môdr, wrath). The primitive Germans were far too keen and vigorous in their feeling, too genuine and noble children of nature not to conceive a militant and triumphant idea of moral and ethical power.

When we read in the Edda how Thor, in order to destroy the powers of darkness and give victory to the good,

“ When he saw the heavens with wickedness heavy,
Seldom he lingers when the like he looks on,”

now, as the Voluspa says, seizes his fearful hammer in godlike wrath (*ásmódi*) and bravely smites the terrible dragon, no one will deny that these are similar views to those in Isaiah, where we read: “And the Lord saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no judgment. And He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was none to interpose: therefore His own arm brought salvation unto Him, and His righteousness, it upheld Him. And He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon His head; and He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds accordingly He will repay, fury to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies. . . . So shall they fear the name of the Lord in the west and His glory from the rising of the sun.’ (Isaiah lix, 15-19.)

This too shows what a decided kinship there is between the feeling of the Teutonic soul and that of Israel, a fact that was first pointed out, so far as I know, by a man whose name is not to be mentioned any longer in certain quarters without danger of being stoned,—I mean Heinrich Heine, who, however, was right in this as in many other things. And if, in spite of all this, the enemies of the Old Testament should insist upon their case,—for with unreason and unfairness the gods themselves contend in vain,—and grow indignant still in their Teutonic race temper at the wrathful God of the Jews,—well, then I profess myself on this point frankly and unreservedly a Jew, and dwell in the serene confidence that I am no worse a German and no worse a Christian for all that.

II.

But the contemners of the Old Testament discover in Hebrew literature, and especially in the Psalms, not only theological defects but profound ethical faults. On the one hand, where Israel is concerned, an arrogant, impious self-righteousness which approaches the Lord and demands reward of him, on the other hand, where non-Israelites are concerned, an inhuman, bloodthirsty temper which knows only feelings of hatred and revenge, and expects and even implores of God for this portion of mankind only wrath and damnation.

First let me make a general prefatory remark: that Israel also incurs the wrath of God and stands in constant expectation of it, is expressed in the Psalms themselves most clearly and most impres-

sively. And the judgments which the Psalmists hope and expect are aimed in very considerable measure not at the heathen, but at impious and apostate Israelites. As for the undeniable expressions of self-righteousness, if we are to judge justly we must not forget that they are balanced by at least an equal number of descriptions of the sinfulness and corruption of the people, painted in the very highest colors. So Israel did not flatter itself, nor try to delude itself as to its own condition; indeed, we cannot but admire its unsparing devotion to the truth in this respect. And in this matter of self-righteousness it should be observed further that such expressions are not intended in a personal and individual sense, but refer to Israel as a congregation, for the Psalms are the hymns of the congregation, and the "I" which speaks in them is the congregation. And was not Israel justified, when it considered the night and darkness of the heathenism round about it, in feeling a glad and grateful consciousness of the gift of grace which it had received in its revelation of God? Was it not actually justified, in view of the abominations of heathendom, in speaking of its righteousness and declaring that it had kept the commandments of the Lord? Even the Christian Church, in the so-called Apostles' Creed, characterises itself as the Communion of the Saints, and no Christian takes offence at this, although he knows that this communion by no means consists of saints alone, indeed that there is not in it a single one who could be regarded as a saint when measured by the standard of divine holiness.

Further there is absolutely no denying the expressions of unfriendliness toward others. For instance, the sixty-ninth Psalm, and still more the one hundred and ninth, contain a series of imprecations upon the enemy which are surely not exemplary, and which we cannot wish to be the expressions of the feelings of all men, and when at the close of the one hundred and thirty-seventh Psalm, which begins so nobly and very impressively, the wish is expressed that the enemy may seize the children of the Babylonians and dash them to pieces on the stones, we must see in this an animosity which no one will venture to defend or excuse; I would gladly have my right hand cut off if this one verse were not in the Psalter. Later prophetic literature, too, furnishes disagreeable things in this respect, and even the Jews themselves have justly taken serious exception to the Book of Esther.

But here too it is after all but a matter of isolated instances and tendencies which are offset by equally strong ones of the opposite sort. How many Psalms speak of the godless and the enemy

with solemn ethical earnestness, but without passion and animosity, wishing only that they may be confused and brought to a recognition of their wickedness! Indeed, can this unrighteous zeal for God be rebuked better and more pointedly than in the precious words of the thirty-seventh Psalm, which our glorious Felix Mendelssohn used in his *Elijah* in order to check the fiery zeal of *Elijah* by the mouth of an angel: "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; and He shall give thee the desires of thy heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him and He shall bring it to pass. Cease from anger and forsake wrath: fret not thyself, it tendeth only to evil-doing?" (Psalms xxxvii. 7, 4, 5, 8.) Indeed, even those undeniably offensive and painful expressions, examined in the right light, are only the defects of virtues, excesses and excrescences of qualities in which the strength of the religion of Israel consists. This staking of the whole person for the cause of God, this complete surrender to it, is the mighty power of the religious sentiment.

The Israelite sees his God persecuted, hated, oppressed, assailed, when he himself thus suffers, and sees in the success of the wicked the failure of the sacred cause of his God.

"Should not I hate them that hate Thee, O Lord? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them my enemies," the language of the one hundred and thirty-ninth Psalm, must be taken as the motto of all this sort of expressions: it is never a matter of personal hostility, but of the holy cause of God, in the feelings of these singers, and even the evils which they call down upon the enemy are only his own sins which God is asked to let fall back as misfortunes upon his head. Even where this judgment of God appears in the form of the victorious wars of Israel, it is never their own glory or their own honor which they seek: "Not unto us, Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy holy name give the glory." (Psalms cxv. 1.) "I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me; but Thou savest us from our adversaries and puttest to shame them that hate us." (Psalms xlv. 6, 7.) And what the singers have to suffer they are conscious of suffering for the sake of God and their faith: "For Thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter," laments the singer of the forty-fourth Psalm (v. 22), and in the much-quoted Psalm of vengeance, the sixty-ninth, we read: "O God, thou knowest my foolishness, and my sins are not hid from thee. Let not them that wait on thee be ashamed through me, O Lord God of hosts: let not those that seek Thee be brought to dishonor

through me, O God of Israel! Because for Thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face. For the zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproach Thee are fallen upon me." (v. 5-8.) Their cause is also God's cause, and their honor God's honor. Were the heathen, then, to be suffered to continually shout in mockery, "Where is then your God?" Often the singers express most touchingly how difficult it is to restrain themselves and keep still in the presence of this apparent defeat of the cause of God, and amid the arrogant sneers of the ungodly victors.

No, here too the root is not evil; we have here only the ferment of an unclarified vintage that has been pressed from noble grapes. We all know that even the sun has spots, and yet it is and always will be to us the symbol of brightness and purity. So we may admit that there are some dark spots in the Psalms, and yet we may justly hold to their predominantly sunny quality; they offer us relatively so much more that is purely and truly human that even from this standpoint we need not feel compelled to surrender their claim to a place in universal literature.

But what, then, is their significance in universal literature?

They are for the world what they were for Israel, the prayer-book and hymn-book. In fact we have in the Psalms the purest expression of the religious sentiment in the artistic form of the lyric, the crown of sacred poetry. Their wealth, like life, is inexhaustible; all the situations and events of life are viewed in the light of godly meditation and consecrated and ennobled by piety, so that they are transfigured into prayers and hymns. In them we hear every chord struck, and all with equal purity and strength: lamentation and mourning, confession and penitence, prayer and praise, thanksgiving and adoration. There is scarcely a situation or a mood imaginable which has not found its classic expression in the Psalter.

John Calvin, probably the greatest of all commentators upon the Psalms, calls the Psalter for this reason an anatomy of the soul, saying that the human soul knows no mood nor impulse that is not mirrored in the Psalms. And Martin Luther, spiritually the most closely akin to the Psalmist, says in his preface to the Psalter: "Thence too it comes that the Psalter is the book of all the saints, and that every one, whatever his business may be, finds in it psalms and sayings which are adapted to his affairs and fit him as if they had been composed expressly on his account, such that he himself could neither compose nor invent nor wish them bet-

ter." Shall we test this utterance of Luther? Certainly, for after having said so much about the Psalms, we surely shall wish to hear something from the Psalms themselves.

Let us begin with pleasant pictures. "O taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalms xxxiv. 8), thus the Psalmist himself invites us. "Oh how great is Thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which Thou hast wrought for them that put their trust in Thee before the sons of men!" (Psalms xxxi. 19) thus another cries in adoration. "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Psalms xvi. 6), we hear a third one sing.

"Thy loving kindness, O Lord, is in the heavens; Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the skies. Thy righteousness is like the mountains of God; Thy judgments are a great deep; Lord, Thou preservest man and beast. How precious is Thy loving kindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge under the shadow of Thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures. For with Thee is the fountain of life; in Thy light shall we see light. O continue Thy loving kindness unto them that know Thee, and Thy righteousness to the upright in heart." (Psalms xxxvi. 5-10.) And this feeling has found its classic expression in the universally known twenty-third Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want," and whenever the heart feels constrained to offer its gratitude to the giver of all these good gifts, how can it be done more briefly, more simply, and yet more expressively than in the words of the Psalm, "Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endureth forever?" (Psalms cxviii. 1.) And where is the sacred duty of thanksgiving brought home to the heart of every man more touchingly and more impressively than in the words of the Psalm: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits?" (Psalms ciii. 1-2.) And where is there a more forcible expression of the feeling of security in the strong hand of God and of His mighty protection, than in the words of the Psalm: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalms xxvii. 1.) "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Psalms xlvi. 7); "God grants that I praise His word; in God have I put my trust, I will not be afraid; what can flesh do unto me?" And the repose and the peace which then enter the heart are depicted in the saying: "My soul waiteth in silence for God; from Him

cometh my salvation. He is my rock and my salvation, He is my high tower; I shall not be greatly moved." (Psalms lxii. 1-2.) And the mighty "Nevertheless" of faith, which hopes even where it cannot see,—with what invincible power we hear it in the words: "Nevertheless¹ God is good to Israel, even to such as are pure in heart." For no one is disappointed who waits upon God, and the faithfulness of God is far above the faithfulness of the most faithful men: "My father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me up." (Psalms xxvii. 10.) The sense of communion with God overcomes all grief and sorrow; it outweighs a world, and nothing can deprive us of this highest of possessions. "If I have but Thee I care for neither heaven nor earth. Though my flesh and my heart fail, yet is God the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Psalms lxxiii. 25.) Where was ever the longing for God expressed more powerfully and more effectively than in the forty-second Psalm: "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come to appear before God?" (Psalms xlii. 1-2). And where shall we find expressed more concisely and more movingly the anxious waiting upon God and the longing watching for Him amid feelings of temporary desertion by Him, than in that sighing aspiration, only a breath as it were, of the sixth Psalm: "My soul is sore vexed. And Thou, O Lord, how long?" or in the question filled with mortal anguish, of the twenty-second Psalm: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" And just here I must not fail to point out a characteristic fact. It is well known that lamentation occupies much space in the Psalter. But with the single exception of the eighty-eighth Psalm not one of these hymns is all lamentation: they all overcome the sorrow and grief and wrestle their way out to hope and faith so that the lamentation finally ends with praise and thanks. We find the most touching and stirring example of this in the recurring verse of the forty-second Psalm, where we can still see in the confidently hopeful eye of the singer the gleam of the tear which his grief has forced from him: "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." (v. 5.) That is the manly and heroic trait in Israelitish piety, which is one of its most precious treasures and a model to the whole world, the "universal human, which everywhere should woo man."

¹ The English version has here "Surely."

And in the Psalter, too, as every one knows, we find the profoundest and most heart-stirring tones of sin and penitence, as well as the clearest and most uplifting language of mercy and forgiveness. "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Psalms cxxx. 3.) "Mine iniquities are more than the hairs of my head, and my heart hath failed me." (Psalms xl. 12.) "Who can discern his errors? cleanse Thou me from secret faults." (Psalms xix. 12.) And then: "He dealeth not with us after our sins nor rewardeth us after our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the East is from the West so far hath He removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him." (Psalms ciii. 10-13.) And lest in the light of the mercy of God the solemnity of His holiness be forgotten, we read in the one hundred and thirtieth Psalm the profound saying: "For there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared." (v. 4.)

And now, a few sayings of the Psalms for human relationships. Can peace and harmony be commended more simply and more urgently than in the language of the singer of the one hundred and thirty-third Psalm: "Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" And can domestic happiness and the blessings of family life be depicted more delightfully and in a way that goes more to our hearts than in the language of the singer of the one hundred and twenty-eighth Psalm: "Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord, that walketh in His ways. For thou shalt eat the labor of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine in the innermost parts of thy house, thy sons like olive plants around thy table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord."

And yet one more glance, this time at the nature poetry in the Psalter, which was admired and praised by no less a master than Alexander von Humboldt. The earth is the Lord's and all that is therein, the world and they that dwell thereon, and so the Israelite sees God everywhere in nature; he does not make nature God, but it is to him a revelation of God. "Nature," says Humboldt, "is not described as something existing independently and glorified by its own beauty; it always presents itself to the Hebrew singer as related to a higher, overruling spiritual power. Nature is to him a work of orderly creation, the living expression of the omnipresence of God in the elements of the world of sense."

I will only refer to the splendid Psalm of thanksgiving for harvest, the sixty-fifth: "Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness, and Thy paths drop fatness;" to the magnificent twenty-ninth Psalm, the storm Psalm, which depicts with sublime majesty the glory of God in the thunder-storm, and above all to the one hundred and fourth: "O Lord, how great and manifold are Thy works; in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy goodness"—a hymn which has not its equal in all literature. "One is disposed to say," as Humboldt puts it, "that the picture of the whole cosmos is presented in this one psalm, the one hundred and fourth. . . . We marvel at seeing the universe, heaven and earth, depicted in a lyric composition of such slight compass with a few great touches. Contrasted with the animated primal life of nature, we have here the noiseless, toilsome labors of man from the rising of the sun to the close of his day's work in the evening." And where else is man more profoundly comprehended and depicted as but a tiny atom in nature, and yet in accordance with his royal mastery in it, than in the eighth Psalm? Where is the whole creation as a thousand-voiced proclamation of the glory of its creator better depicted than in the nineteenth Psalm, in which the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork, the sun rises as a bridegroom cometh forth out of his chamber and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race!

And of still another sort of poetry, the didactic aphorism, do we find in the Psalter matchless jewels. A considerable number of the Psalms are like necklaces, where the most profound sentences, the most glorious thoughts are strung pearl on pearl. Wherever we turn our gaze, a rich canopy, star after star, an inexhaustible treasury!

Permit me in closing to mention a recent personal experience of mine, illustrating the manner in which the Psalms give us the fitting word for every situation in life. One who for days and weeks has watched in anguish over the life that is dearest to him on earth,—when he has already prepared to surrender it, there comes a turn for the better, and the angel of death who has already spread his dark wings over the victim, departs, and life returns,—who could express what overwhelms his deeply stirred heart in such a moment save in the words of the Psalm: "God is unto us a God of deliverances; and unto the Lord belongeth escape even from death." (Psalms lxxviii. 20.)

The Psalms are the prayer-book and hymn-book of Israel; and

as Israel is pre-eminently the religious race, they are the prayer-book and the hymn-book of the whole world, or at least deserve to be. Of all the precious things which Israel has given mankind they are perhaps the most precious. They resound, and will continue to resound, as long as there shall be men, created in the image of God, in whose hearts the sacred fire of religion shines and glows; for they are religion itself put into speech. To them applies what one of the noblest of them says of the revelation of God in nature: "That is neither speech nor language, the voice of which would be unintelligible. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." (Psalms xix. 4.)

Religion itself put into speech for all mankind,—that is the significance of the Psalms in universal literature.