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(5) Repentance and obedience to the voice of God—by these means alone may judgment be averted.

(6) The Divine purposes of blessing will be realized in spite of human failure—those who thwart the Divine purpose will be removed in judgment, those who fall in with it will be carried along to blessing and peace.

Note God's appeals and what they are based upon—in ch. 2 *His grace*; in ch. 3 *their privileges*; in ch. 4 *His dealings in discipline*; in chs. 5 and 6 *His name*.

N. T. REFERENCES—Amos 3:7 in John 15:15.
 „ 5:25-27 in Acts 7:42, 43.
 „ 9:11 in Acts 15:15-17.

THE LITTLE PSALTER

A. NAISMITH, M.A.

This is the name frequently given to a succession of short melodies that are in the A.V. designated 'Songs of Degrees' and in the R.V. 'Songs of Ascents'. They are found in the Fifth Book of Psalms (Pss. 107—150) and number fifteen in all, the first of the series being Ps. 120 and the last Ps. 134. The 119th Psalm which precedes the 'Songs of Degrees', the longest of all the Psalms and the longest chapter in the Bible, eulogizes in acrostic form God's holy Law using a variety of terms to denote it. The 135th Psalm which immediately follows the series begins and ends with a 'Hallelujah' and, with the exception of four verses that affirm the impotence of the idols of the heathen, extols the majesty, goodness and might of Jehovah.

Wherever we turn in the five Books of Psalms, we find instruction and comfort, and—sometimes in the major and sometimes in the minor, key,—melodious music. Dr Joseph Parker has well said:

"The Psalmists were not content to lift up their voices in the worship of the Eternal God. Those voices in the estimation of

the Psalmists were too feeble for the occasion. They must be accompanied—accompanied by thunder and billows, by organs and trumpets, by harps and cymbals. It seems as if the Psalmists would never have accompaniment enough. They would call all nature to their aid. Whatsoever had a voice or could make a sound was to be impressed into the holy service’.

These ‘Songs of Ascents’, too, were songs of worship, written by kings of Judah—David, Solomon, and in all probability, Hezekiah, and sung by myriads in succeeding generations as they voiced their praise and worship of God. And they without doubt had the accompaniment of suitable musical instruments.

Hezekiah, good and great king of Judah, wrote a little poem during his almost fatal illness in anticipation of his recovery (Isa. 38:9), and concluded it with the stanza:

‘The Lord is ready to save me:

Therefore we will sing my songs to the stringed instruments
All the days of our life in the house of the Lord’. (Isa. 38:20 R.V.)

Now, the word translated in our A.V. ‘degrees’ in the title of each of these fifteen Psalms is the same word used of the ‘ten degrees’ the sun went back on the sundial of Ahaz as a sign that Hezekiah’s life would be prolonged for 15 years more (2 Kings 20:9-11; Isa. 38:8). Here, then, are the songs Hezekiah promised to sing to the accompaniment of stringed instruments in the house of the Lord. But he himself composed only ten of them, one for each of the ten degrees in the miraculous sign that God gave him: so each is a ‘Song of Degrees’. Then he incorporated four appropriate Psalms written by David and one written by Solomon, five in all, to make up the fifteen, one for each year added to his life in the goodness of the Lord. The Hebrew Hymnal, consisting of the five Books of Psalms, was composed and compiled over a period of 300 years, commencing with David to whom the authorship of 73 of the Psalms is definitely attributed, and ending with Hezekiah’s reign. That era has been called the ‘Great Song Period of Isarel’.

Dr John Lightfoot, about three centuries ago, has given us the result of his study of these Songs of Degrees in the following words:

'Hezekiah lived these fifteen years in safety and prosperity, having humbled himself before the Lord for his pride to the ambassador of Babel. The degrees of the sun's reversing, and the fifteen years of Hezekiah's life-prolonging, may call to our minds the fifteen Psalms of Degrees, viz., from Psalm 120 and forward. These were Hezekiah's songs that were sung to stringed instruments in the house of the Lord (Isa. 38:20); whether these were picked out by him for that purpose be it left to censure'.—Note that 'censure' then had the meaning of 'examination'.

Toward the end of last century (1882) a Jewish writer named Abraham Wolfson, and in the early twentieth century Dr J. W. Thirtle and Dr Bullinger (in Appendix 67 of the 'Companion Bible') have developed and elaborated the explanation of the 'Songs of Degrees' that was suggested by Dr John Lightfoot; and a more recent scholar, Dr W. Graham Scroggie, whose four volumes on 'The Psalms' are replete with reliable exposition and exegesis, follows the same line of interpretation. In his splendid epigrammatic way Dr Scroggie points out that Ps. 119 is one, divided into sixteen parts, whereas the Songs of Degrees are fifteen, made one by a common title.

It is interesting also to study these fifteen Psalms in light of the history of King Hezekiah, and to observe certain internal evidence of that king's authorship in the relation of not a few expressions to his own peculiar circumstances.

(1) The reference in Ps. 120:2-3 and in Ps. 123:3-4 is in all likelihood primarily to the scornful blasphemy of Rabshakeh, Sennacherib's General in chief.

(2) Hezekiah's earnestness in prayer as he spread the Assyrian's letter before the Lord in the temple is reflected in Ps. 120:1 and Ps. 130:1-2.

(3) The expression—'the Lord which made heaven and earth'—in Ps. 121:2; 124:8 and 134:3; is that used by Hezekiah in his prayer in the house of the Lord (2 Kings 19:15).

(4) The appeal to God to help His anointed king 'for thy

servant David's sake' was exactly the phrase used twice by Jehovah in His assurance of protection.

(5) The promise of help from Jehovah to Hezekiah through Isaiah the prophet is the basis of the confidence of the Psalmist in Ps. 121:2-5; 124:1-3; and 126:2-3.

(6) Hezekiah's zeal for the 'House of the Lord' finds expression in Ps. 122:1 and 134:1-2.

(7) The jubilant blessedness of the households where there are children, particularly in Ps. 127:3-5 and Ps. 128:3-6, voices the yearning hope of a monarch whose life had been prolonged at a time when he had no child and no heir to succeed him on the throne of Judah.

So far we have considered the probable origin of these fifteen Psalms and the significance of the title—'A Song of Degrees'—prefacing each. Now the question that arises is—On what occasions were they used? In this consideration the R.V. Translation—'A Song of Ascents'—has special significance. The Revised Version is the text which Dr J. W. Thirtle makes use of in his explanation of 'The Titles of the Psalms'. In the title index to the Hebrew translation each of the fifteen Psalms is called 'A Pilgrim's Song'. That too is the English translation of the Telugu title to each of these Psalms. The word translated 'ascents' means 'goings up'. To what conclusion can we come other than that these were the songs which pilgrims going up to Jerusalem to worship sang *en route*? Compiled by Hezekiah, these Psalms were doubtless chanted by pilgrims who came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and the other great feasts during the remaining years of Hezekiah's reign, and later in the days of the good King Josiah. The returning exiles who went up to Jerusalem after the edict of Cyrus with Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, would also express their trust in Jehovah and hymn his praise in the words of the Songs of Ascents, to the accompaniment of musical instruments. We are therefore not surprised to find in these Psalms not a few references to the pilgrim band, their destination—Jerusalem and the house of the Lord, and their experience of the 'good hand of their God' upon them by the way. These will be dealt with later in the second part of this study.

Before proceeding to a consideration of these, we shall find it interesting to examine the structure of this anthology of Pilgrim songs. We have seen that, of the fifteen 'Songs of Degrees' or 'Ascents', ten are anonymous and were probably written by Hezekiah, four are Psalms of David, and one of Solomon. The opening words of Ps. 127, the central Song of the series, which was written by Solomon, have reference to architecture and building: and Solomon, we know, spent many years of his life building the house of the Lord and his own house. Of the seven Psalms preceding Ps. 127 two are Psalms of David and the remaining five anonymous: and this is true also of the seven Psalms that follow. The subject matter, as well as the general structure, divides the fifteen songs into five triads, or groups of three, and in each triad the authorship of one of the Psalms is given; the other two being anonymous and, we have inferred, the composition of King Hezekiah. In continuing this theme, we shall see how these triads are appropriate to the various stages of the pilgrimage of God's people from the lands of their captivity to the place Jehovah had chosen to put His name there.

DIVINE PARADOXES

A paradox is defined to be a 'tenet or proposition contrary to received opinion, and seemingly absurd, but true in fact.'

The Gospel of Christ is full of paradoxes; for God's thoughts and ways are on a higher plane than human thoughts and ways, and therefore appear impossible and even absurd from the merely human standpoint, just as the statements and actions of an astronomer searching the heavens with a telescope would appear absurd to the wild savages in the heart of Africa. We give a few of these:

1. We see unseen things (2 Cor. 4:18).
2. We conquer by yielding (Matt. 5:5, with Rom. 12:20-21).
3. We rest under a yoke (Matt. 11:28-30).
4. We reign by serving (Mark 10:42-44).
5. We become great by becoming little (Matt. 18:4).
6. We are exalted by being humbled (Matt. 23:12).
7. We become wise by becoming 'foolish' (1 Cor. 1:20-21).

(Continued on page 97)