

Some words have faded from meaning

H. J. Low H. J.

NOTES ON PSALM 85

The outstanding peculiarity of this Psalm is its sudden transitions of feeling. Beginning with exuberant thanksgiving for restoration of the nation (vv1-3) it passing, without intermediate gradations, to complaints of God's continued wrath and entreaties for restoration (vv. 4-7), and then suddenly rises to joyous assurance of inward and outward blessings (vv. 8-13).

The condition of the exiles returned from Babylon best correspondings to such conflicting emotions. Nehemiah supplies precisely such a background as fits the Psalm.

A part of the nation had returned, but to a ruined city, a fallen Temple, and a mourning land, where they were surrounded by jealous and powerful enemies. Discouragement had laid hold on the feeble company; enthusiasm had ebbed away; the harsh realities of their enterprise had stripped off its imaginative charm; and the mass of the returned settlers had lost heart, as well as faith.

It falls into three parts, of increasing length, -- the first, of three verses (1-3), recounts God's acts of mercy already received; the second (vv4-7), is a plaintive prayer in view of still remaining national afflictions; and the third (vv8-13), a glad report by the psalmist of the Divine promises which his waiting ear had heard, and which might well quicken the most faint-hearted into triumphant hope.

Note the repeated use of the word, "turn." Vs. 1,3,4,8,) four times.

The prayer of Verse Compare with vs. 1, "turned" and now he is praying for God to "turn" us again. The restoration was incomplete -- both in regard to the bulk of the nation, who still remained in exile, and in regard to the depressed condition of the small part that had returned. The petitions of vs 5 look back to vs. 3.

The partial restoration of the people implied a diminution rather than a cessation of God's wrath, and he beseeches Him to complete that which He had begun. The prayers of vv 4-7 are founded upon the facts of vv 1-3, which constitute both grounds for the supplicant's hope of answer and pleas with God.

tube. In Vs 11, it is conceived as a human virtue. It "springs out of the earth", that is, it is produced among men. All human virtue is an echo of the Divine, and they who have received into their hearts the blessed result of God's Faithfulness will bring forth in their lives fruit like it in kind.

The same idea in vs 12. God gives that which is good, and thus fructified by bestowments from above, earth yields her increase. His gifts precede men's returns. Without sunshine and rain there are no harvests.

NOTE vs 13: A wedding between the divine and the human, between the heavenly and the earthly.

Righteousness, which in vs. 10 was regarded as exercised by men, and in v. 11 as looking down from heaven, is now represented both a preceding God's royal progress, and as following in His footsteps. "Righteousness will make His footsteps a way", that is, for men to walk in.

All God's workings among men, which are conceived as His way, have righteousness stamped upon them.

That absolute, inflexible Righteousness guides all Divine acts. But the same Righteousness which precedes, also follows Him, and points His footsteps as the way for us.

What a wonderful thought that is, that the union between heaven and earth is so close that God's path is our way.

(Alexander McLaren, *The Expositors Bible*.)

