



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## RECENT INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PSALMS

It is with keen relish that one takes up a new work by Professor Smith. It is sure to be scholarly, sane, and illuminating. Even when we are pursuing a well beaten path, new vistas are opened out. There is always, too, the breath of pure air from the hills.

The present book on the Psalms<sup>1</sup> is neither technical nor devotional in the strict sense of the term. "The effort is rather to present the meaning of the Psalms as it lay in the minds of their authors and earliest readers." But one cannot follow the train of their feeling, under the lead of so sure and sympathetic a guide as Professor Smith, without having one's own spiritual nature warmed and quickened.

The Psalter is the hymn book of the Second Temple. As such it cannot stand on the poetic heights of Job or the greatest of the prophets. Still less may it be expected to blaze out bold new tracks of thought. The wonder is, "not that there is some poor poetry in it, but that there is so little of that kind," and that it expresses so successfully "those sentiments and attitudes of soul that are fundamental in worship."

There are Psalms like the 13th, 16th, 18th, etc., that are clearly communal. But "as the Psalms were composed by individuals, they must almost necessarily be to a large extent the reflection of individual experience." A Psalm like the 116th, for example, can hardly be understood in any other way. Even so, "the interests of the pious individual in Judaism were so closely and inextricably bound up with the interests of the community as a whole that in many cases it is practically impossible to distinguish between personal and community songs."

On the question of authorship Professor Smith occupies just as sound a position. He does not deny the possibility of Davidic elements in the Psalter. But he sees that the general tone of the book lifts it quite beyond the moral and religious world in which David lived. If there are Davidic elements, these have been so completely overlaid and transmuted in the process of revision that it is "little more than a waste of time" to attempt to discover them. "The really important question, after all, is not, Who wrote the Psalms? but, What are the meaning and value of the Psalms themselves?"

Like all great products of poetic art, the Psalms are mainly born in suffering. Of the 150 Psalms which compose the book, "about 90 con-

<sup>1</sup> *The Religion of the Psalms*. By J. M. Powis Smith. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922. ix+170 pages. \$1.75.

cern themselves more or less directly with some aspect of this problem." Professor Smith discusses with fine insight the various reactions upon suffering that are reflected in the Psalter—among others the fierce wrath of the Imprecatory Psalms—and justly celebrates the splendor of the faith that could endure so long the sickness of hope deferred. Two ways of escape offered themselves, messianism and personal immortality. The former hope Professor Smith finds on every page bursting forth "in one form or another . . . like a fountain of pure water from the well-spring of life." The latter he restricts to Ps. 73:22-26, though we think a good case can be made at least for 49:5-20. "However that may be, the fact remains that there is practically no thought of life after death in the Psalter as a whole." But this is a matter of relative unimportance, for the Psalmists counted their present fellowship with God as the supreme good. "With God at his side, the Hebrew was able to face all his foes, material and spiritual, and to triumph in the realm of the spirit even when routed on the field of battle."

In the last chapter Professor Smith treats of the idea of God in the Psalms. When we remember that the ideas of the Psalter are "those held by the plain man," we need not expect to find here the most exalted speculative conceptions of God. But again "the wonder is that the thought of God in the Psalter is as noble and lofty as it is." And the wonder grows when we set the Psalter against the background of religious worship opened up to us by the Assouan papyri. From the Psalter "practically every trace of polytheistic thought has disappeared," and there rises in clear relief the image of the just and holy, good and gracious God, whom Jew and Christian alike can reverence as the Lord and Father of their spirits. Hence the universal popularity of the Psalter. "It has helped us to keep alive in our souls the sense of our divine kinship. It has brought the God of the universe down into the simple homes and loyal hearts of the plain people."

ALEX. R. GORDON

PRESBYTERIAN COLLEGE OF MONTREAL

Duhm's Commentary on the Psalms first appeared in 1899. This second edition<sup>1</sup> differs from its predecessor chiefly in its mechanical make-up. It is printed in larger and clearer type and the translation is taken out of the midst of the comments and printed continuously at the top of the successive pages, with the interpretative matter below.

<sup>1</sup> *Die Psalmen erklärt* [Kurzer Hand-Kommentar zum Alten Testament], 2d edition. By B. Duhm. Tübingen: Mohr, 1922. Pp. xxxvi+496. M. 120.

The Introduction is reprinted with practically no change, except that the Bibliography is brought up to date. Here it is noticeable that the work of the last twenty-three years in England and America is ignored. The view that the Psalter is largely Maccabaeian and post-Maccabaeian, many of the Psalms being placed under the Hasmonaeian Kings, is retained and in some cases carried further in its application. But the Commentary, like the Introduction, is identical with the first edition to a surprising degree. There are no important changes. Here and there a detail is modified. In Ps. 1, for instance, vs. 6*a* is now transposed to follow vs. 3. This is done solely in the interests of strophic structure, which in and of itself is not a safe guide. Nor is there in the nature of things sufficient reason for changing "in his law" of vs. 3 to "therein," the repetition involved in the present text not being offensive. Similarly, for the sake of the needs of strophic structure only, 2:7*a* is transposed to follow 2:5, as was first proposed by Bickell. Such propositions as these, of which there are many, are too subjective to command general assent. The general position of the commentary as set forth in the first edition is well-known to scholars and has been adequately discussed in the literature of the last two decades. It receives no material reinforcement here.

Dr. Peters' book on the Psalms<sup>1</sup> marks the close of a long and active career. In addition to his official duties as rector of St. Michael's church in New York, he found time to keep up an active interest in biblical and Semitic studies. His early work at Nippur and his report of his excavations there made him well known and honored among workers in cuneiform literature; and his *Religion of the Hebrews* had already entitled him to the respect of Old Testament scholars. Dr. Peters has long sought to associate certain Psalms with certain local shrines and published occasional articles in support of this interest. In this book he undertakes to treat the Book of Psalms as a liturgical manual throughout.

The book contains a long introduction discussing the usual questions, but drawing in much material from Babylonian and Egyptian rituals for illustrative purposes. Dr. Peters makes the Psalms of Korah to have belonged to an early collection of psalms in use at the temple of Dan; and, in like manner, the Psalms of Asaph are said to have originated in the liturgy of the temple of Bethel. The first three books of the Psalter arose before the Exile and all of Pss. 1-134 were written by

<sup>1</sup> *The Psalms as Liturgies*. By J. P. Peters. (Being the Paddock Lectures for 1920.) New York: Macmillan, 1922. Pp. 494. \$4.00.

300 B.C., while the Psalter was complete before 180 B.C. This rules out of the question the existence of Maccabean psalms in the Psalter. The introduction is followed by a commentary, in which each psalm appears both in the rendering of the Authorized Version and in Dr. Peters' own translation. The notes are very brief and chiefly concerned with the liturgical character of the psalms.

The main proposition of the book to the effect that the Psalms arose in close association with and as a part of the ritual is certainly correct.<sup>1</sup> This fact has been insufficiently stressed thus far in the history of interpretation. But Dr. Peters, carried away by the enthusiasm of a new idea, has gone beyond the bounds of fact and has indulged too largely in the play of his fancy. To make Ps. 3 a morning hymn because of the words, "I laid me down and slept, I awaked," etc., and Ps. 4 an evening hymn because the Psalmist says, "I lay me down in peace to sleep," is to turn poesy into prose and deny the poet any figurative language. To assign vss. 3<sup>b</sup> and 5 of Ps. 6 to the priest is purely imaginative. Similarly it is a purely subjective procedure to make Ps. 14 (= 53) a "Siege Psalm" on the basis of "God has scattered the bones of their besieger"; and it is but slightly less so to call Ps. 24 an "Ark Song" descriptive of the bringing up of the Ark into Jerusalem; here again poetry is turned into prose.

A new translation is always to be welcomed. To put familiar thoughts in a new dress is always worth while. A translation of the Psalms should combine accuracy and poetic style. Dr. Peters has made many improvements in both respects, for which we shall all be grateful. But the rendering is very uneven; and there are many things to mend. It is a little disturbing to find "thy club" instead of "thy rod" in Ps. 23; "many steers" for "many bulls" in Ps. 22:12; "this is the ilk of his seekers" for "this is the generation of them that seek him" in Ps. 24:6; and "He learneth sinners" for "teach" in Ps. 25:8, 12. There is no sufficient ground in Ps. 8:5 for changing "God" to "gods". In Ps. 18:35 the rendering "thy humility" reproduces the Hebrew text but can hardly represent the Psalmist's thought. It would have been well to amend the text here, as Dr. Peters has done frequently elsewhere. It is apt to lead the unwary to wrong conclusions to find "Christ" taking the place of "anointed" or "Messiah." The interpretation of Ps. 82 fails to recognize the fact that the "gods" there are deified kings whom the Psalmist derides.

<sup>1</sup> See my article on this subject in the January (1922) issue of this *Journal*, pp. 58-69.

The book shows a lack of careful and exact scholarship;<sup>1</sup> but its main contention is sound and it will stir thought upon many matters of detail. This is justification enough for any book.

J. M. POWIS SMITH

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

### ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE<sup>2</sup>

A tender interest attaches to the review of this book, one of the two last works of Dr. Peters. In an easy, intimate, but informing way the author talks to us of the "Ancestry of the Hebrews," "Cosmogony and Folk Lore," "History and Prophecy," "Hebrew Psalmody," all in the light of his own travels in Bible lands and the excavations in recent times. He then sketches for us a history of exploration in Palestine and closes with archaeological illustrations of New Testament times, with special reference to the Oxyrhyncus papyri. The book does not aim to be an exhaustive or precisely methodical discussion of the subject with which it deals, though it provides a good archaeological background for the study of the Bible. But its chief interest and charm is the autobiographical and reminiscent note that sounds all the way through the lectures. He tells us, himself, in his chapter on "Cosmogony and Folk-Lore," that he is not attempting to give an exhaustive account of all the myths and stories in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. "I am more particularly noting those things which I have myself found or observed, or which have become especially my own through study and observation" (p. 73). This sentence might be taken as the text for the book as a whole, and it is the point of view implied in it which not only lends to the book its special charm, but also gives it its special value. Dr. Peters stood somewhat outside the beaten paths of the critical study of the Bible. But he was a close observer, a man of imagination and of inde-

<sup>1</sup> The following errors in proofreading have been noted: Page 55, line 7 from top, read "two" for "three"; p. 68 in note, read "Lammenazzeah"; p. 94, l. 5 from below, read "sacrificial"; p. 95, l. 16, read "4" for "3"; p. 131, delete last word "wall"; p. 143, l. 14 from below, read "outburst"; p. 250, vss. 2 and 4 of Ps. 68 are in disorder; p. 307, read "salvation" in vs. 12; p. 360, in vs. 7b insert "in"; p. 416, in vs. 1 transpose "of" to follow "servants"; p. 456, vs. 2 of Ps. 130 is in disorder; Ps. 31, vs. 10, on p. 172 is badly disarranged; it should read:

For my life is consumed by grief,  
And my years by groaning;  
By my guilt my strength is brought low,  
And my bones are wasted.

<sup>2</sup> *Bible and Spade* (the Bross Lectures). By John P. Peters. New York: Scribner's, 1922. xii+239 pages. \$1.75.