

Chapter 1

Inspiration

"Whither shall I go from thy
spirit? or whither shall I flee from
thy presence?" (psalm 139:7. The Holy Bible. A. V. 669)

When History sometimes reawakens the past, we are wafted along into ancient Israel, into the palace of one great king, King David. We are told that the king used to hang a harp just above the place where he used to sit. Often, in the silence of a starry night, the cool zephyr disturbed the strings of the lyre thus producing a soft, magical tune which filled the air. Then, ". . . the poet-king was constrained to rise from his bed, and till the dawn flushed the eastern skies, he wedded words to the strain. The poetry of that tradition is condensed in the saying that the Book of Psalms contains the whole music of the heart of man, swept by the hand of the Maker."¹

All great poetry is inspired and so with the psalms. Inspiration is the very soul of their being. Impressed upon these

lyrics is the ever fresh and ever vivid picture of the moral growth and struggle of every man, his triumphs and defeat, his instinctive striving towards the good and the ideal and his heart-felt despair in the face of failure. In spite of a vicissitudinous life, the psalmist learnt never to break his bonds with Divinity. He continued to converse with the Holy on a very personal and one to one level. Though he was many times prey to sin and temptation, hope was always in his heart. This was a sign that he could not flee from the spirit of God.

"When a human being is 'moved' by the 'holy' he cries aloud. The cry grows into ecstatic song, . . ."² This was the case with the psalmists of the Old Testament. They were divinely inspired in their songs.

The aim here is not to analyze or define in exact terms, the concept of Inspiration, for much ink has been used by scriptural scholars and philosophers, in the clarification of this idea. What is inspiration in exegetical terms,³ may not be true for the psychologist or even a person from another religious order.

Therefore, a good way of explaining the idea of "inspiration", is, to see how it works.

In an October evening of 1816, John Keats and his friend, Cowden Clarke, sat up till very late into the night, discussing and reading, Chapman's translation of Homer. They parted company that night, with the assurance that each would write his response to the poem. The next morning, Cowden found at his breakfast table, Keats's written reaction to Chapman. It was the now familiar sonnet: On First Looking into Chapman's Homer⁴

Milton is another example. In moments of utter isolation and total blindness, he felt a strong prompting in his heart that bade him summon sometimes his daughter and at other times, his nephew Philip, to dictate to them, verbatim, ten lines or so, of

" . . . Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
of that forbidden tree . . . " (Milton, Paradise Lost
Book 1. lines 1-2.)

Milton's genius was fired by the story of the fall of Man and his ultimate redemption. His blindness led him to perceive more

clearly the vision of the inner world of the human soul. Shelley's evening walks at Leghorn with his wife, Mary, exposed him to the melodious "unpremeditated art" (Ode to a Skylark) of the skylark and it so inspired him that he too had to gush forth in a new song of his own.

Of a poem which Browning wrote, the story goes that one day a lady friend visited the poet and queried as to what the meaning of the poem was. Without hesitation, Browning replied that at the time when the poem was being written, two people knew what the poem was about - and that was God and himself. But now, he went on, only one person knew the meaning of the poem and that was God. This anecdote shows the nature of the creative process, a process triggered off by the force of Inspiration. In the world of Literature, Science, Music, History etc, we are confronted with proofs of how a Divine Energy sparks off a flame in the soul of man that he is pushed forward almost impulsively to reveal and to create. In The Discovery of Poetry, P. H. B. Lyon explains in a style simple and clear, the workings of Inspiration. "Breathing upon", he calls

it and he likens it to two processes - first, the receiving and passing of messages between the sensory and motor nerves in the brain and secondly, to the wireless receiver and transmitter. No one can describe what happens at the point of contact.⁵

The psalmist lived in a milieu which was conducive to his being personally in touch with the Divine. Like a true poet, he had a greater sensibility to feel, to suffer and to rejoice. The poet in psalm 39:2-3 says:

I was dumb with silence, I held
my peace, even from-good; and my
sorrow was stirred.

My heart was hot within me,
while I was musing the fire burned:
then spake I with my tongue,(Bible A.V. 617).

Between the keeping of silence ("I was dumb with silence") and the burning of the flame ("the fire burned"), something significant happens and thus the poet is compelled to speak "with my [his] tongue".

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"I waited patiently for the Lord; / he inclined to me, and heard my / cry." (Bible. RSV. 495), sings the poet in psalm 40 and through the silence of patient awaiting, the lyricist attunes his antenna to the voice of the Lord. In this searching silence, he is inspired to listen and to hear. He remembers that God has brought him out of a "horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my [his] feet upon a rock," (ps. 40:2.Bible A.V. 617), and he proclaims in thanksgiving and in acknowledgment that God has

. . . . put a new song in my mouth,
 a song of praise to our God.
 Many will see and fear,
 and put their trust in the Lord. (ps. 40:3 Bible.
 RSV. 495)

The psalmists were deeply and continually aware of God. The Lord was not just a distant or a vague concept formulated in the intellect of men. Their sentience drove them to listen to the voice of God because for them God was alive and "The voice of the Lord is [was] powerful," (ps.29:4Bible RSV. 487). This Divine voice

was heard, not once or twice, but again and again in Nature, in History and in Visions Mystical.

For these ancient Hebrew poets, Nature spoke with the voice of the Almighty:

The heavens declare the glory
of God; and the firmament
sheweth his handywork.

Day unto day uttereth speech,
and night unto night sheweth know-
ledge.

There is no speech nor language,
where their voice is not heard. (ps.19:1-3 Bible. AV.
606)

In psalm 29, there is another evidence:

The voice of the Lord is upon
the water: the God of glory thun-
dereth: the Lord is upon many waters.

The voice of the Lord is power-
ful; the voice of the Lord is full of
majesty.

The voice of the Lord breaketh
the cedars; yea, the Lord breaketh
the cedars of Lebanon. (ps. 29:3-5. Bible. AV.611)

The psalmist, brooding perhaps, on the vastness, depth and

Variety of nature, heard many a time the Lord speaking in the rush of the wind, in the patter of rain, in the rumble of thunder and the depths of his soul immersed into the harmony of the celestial music in Nature. The discovery of Nature as God's handiwork, is the beginning of prayer. To anyone who will pause awhile and listen to the sounds of Nature, will touch upon the Divine message. "We, too," says Leonard Griffith, "if we listened to the natural world about us, might hear its overtones speaking to the needs of our human situation. Sunset and dawn, winter and summer night will tell us that we live in an orderly dependable world and that behind it is a Creative Spirit ever intelligent and supremely loving. The receding waves on the seashore might tell us, as they told Job, that the God who sets boundaries for the ocean tides also sets boundaries for the destructive elements that beat on the shore of man's soul."⁶

Many times, the psalms become songs of the historical past when God actively intervened in the lives of men. The poets refer constantly to the events of history through which they felt convinced that God spoke to the present. This knowledge, that God has helped them

before and will therefore always protect them, inspired the songs of the psalmists, like psalm 66: 5-6, for example:

Come and see what God has done;
he is terrible in his deeds among
men.

He turned the sea into dry land;
men passed through the river on
foot. (Bible. RSV. 508).

The many and mighty acts of deliverance by which the Holy has vindicated his name in the past, gave the singers of these songs the confidence to encounter God. "God is confronted with former deeds in order to persuade him to do now, not what he is doing but what by contrast he had done earlier."⁷

In the momentous events of the past, witnessed by the forefathers from the time of Abraham, was founded Israel's arena of meeting with God. In the tides of historical motion, was seen the vital activity of the Divine, His fathomless love and sacredness. The revelation of God was first effected through His word. His word was accompanied by his actions in History:

- a) He established a testimony in Jacob,
and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded our fathers
to teach to their children; (ps. 78:5. Bible.RSV.
517)
- b) He divided the sea and let them pass
through it,
and made the waters stand like a
heap. (ps.78:13. Bible . RSV. 517)

In the memory of men, was recorded God's saving acts:

" One generation shall laud thy works
to another,
and shall declare thy mighty acts," (ps.145:4.
Bible . RSV. 555)

(Memory, [of the historical experience], as the source of poetic
Imagination, will be dealt in Chapter II).

Besides Nature and History, another powerful instrument of the
voice of the Holy, was the innate soul of the psalmist himself. This
made it possible for the singer-poet to commune with the Greater
Poet, in contemplation and mystical visions. Claus Westermann, says
in, The Living Psalms, that the psalms are, " unlike a modern poem,"

in that, they have not arisen from "the mind of an individual human being but from what has happened between this human being and God. The form of the psalm is rooted in this exchange between God and Man. The author of the psalm has not 'thought up' what he says in it."⁸ The whole poetic utterance is a creation which pours forth from a "certain spiritual excitement caused by a vision in the soul of which it is eager to deliver itself. The vision may be anything in Nature or God or man or the life of creatures or the life of things;..."⁹

The essential thing is that the soul of the poet saw into the deeper realities hidden from life's exterior. The poets of the Old Testament were "mystics of the desert"¹⁰. Father George A. Maloney, S. J., who has used this term, explains the concept of "mysticism" thus:

. . . . being in touch with the 'really real.' Reality abides not in the changing, in the temporal, but in the unfathomable abyss where God speaks within the heart of man in silence. . . .¹¹

With this unquenchable yearning to be one with Reality, the psalmists

cried out to "Yahweh", the God who was potently ever present in the affairs of men.

The psalmists were basically nomadic shepherds and they found constant recourse to a pastoral environment. Nature was all around them: wide open deserts, the great expansive sky, the rocky hills punctuated by cedars and palms and olives: the age-old trees. In such salubrious surroundings, they were of necessity, very well attuned to listen and to re-act to that celestial resonance that made them burst forth in joy or sorrow or fear or praise. Their hearts knew not the mundane: deep within, their own celestial fire lay dormant to be kindled into a burning flame whenever the breath of Poetry rushed by:

A man cannot say 'I will compose poetry.' The greatest poet even cannot say it; for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness.¹²

This very same idea is contained in, The Discovery of Poetry

where P. H. B. Lyon says that "The wind blows from without, but there must be an answering glow."¹³

The psalms were songs of such men with a profound inner vision and David was perhaps the greatest of them. The Holy Bible records in II Samuel, Chapter 23:2, the very words of David himself:

"The Spirit of the Lord spake
by me, and his word was in my
tongue."

This is one great psalmist's acknowledgement of Divine Inspiration. Through the incantation of the sacred verses, the poets strove to rise higher into that spiritual plane which was the ideal merging ground with the Omnipresent. The incantations not only express a fact, Nor do these chantings drug us to sleep. The refrains and repetitions transact and reactivate a certain magical power which enriches the human soul. It is like the chanting of the Vedas, the saying of the Rosary, which releases such power that the person can rise above the trivial, to look into the greater and nobler significance of being.

Many times, the writers of the psalms talk of waiting patiently for God in silence. This silence is not only the silence of the contemplative world. It is also the silence after a storm, after an upheaval which sometimes breaks down even the strong and upright. In this silence, the individual found his God, the rejuvenating power that stirred him to action. We are reminded here, of Wordsworth:

" And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; . . ." (Wordsworth, Tintern Abbey, lines 93-95.).

Like the Romantics, the Hebrew poets of Israel were constantly led by a vision. They were convinced that this vision had a Divine source and they prayed out of a total relationship with God. "With the Psalmist, prayer was not a neon-marked emergency exit to be taken only in time of calamity when all the other exits are blocked. Communion with God was the normal habit of his life."¹⁴ This idea is also discussed by Othmar Keel in his work, The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms. He compares the conceptual world of a biblical book with

that of the old Near Eastern iconography. In the Chapter entitled, "Attitudes of Prayer", Keel talks about Israel's constant encounters with God. In this context, he states, "Man's entire religious activity is ultimately directed towards no other end than seeing God again and ever again. (cf. ps. 27:13, ps. 63:2). The Sumerians of the early Dynastic Period II furnished their portrait effigies with over-sized eyes. These were emplaced before the images of the Gods so that no visible aspect of the divine splendour might elude them."¹⁵ He has an illustration of an image with wide-open eyes. These eyes project the idea of man's seeking for ^{the} appearance of God. Keeler [^] quotes psalm 63:2: as illustration of this visual image:

" So I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary, beholding thy power and glory". (p.308)

Thus so far on how the poetry of the psalms was inspired.

Now, we come to the second part of our discussion on Inspiration - the effect, in our lives, of these inspirational poems. Having

been inspired, they inspire. This is the relevance of the psalms today.

The psalms have been the fountain of consolation, refreshment and nourishment to every traveller who wearies with the burden of Life's travels. In them there are no limitations to a particular age, country or creed. They mirror the motions of every human soul, with the regular heights and depths of fortune, uttering in exquisite speech familiar experience and thought of men. But these experiences come with an intensity, a depth, an elevation and a beauty born of truth and simplicity. Survivors of the march of time," . . . in modes of thought, in habits of life, in forms of expression, the Psalms, as devotional exercises, have sunk into our hearts; as sublime poetry, have fired our minds and stored our memories."¹⁶ Poets, philosophers, scientists, leaders, religious thinkers, all have acknowledged the power and relevance of the psalms. Hymns have been composed, based on the treasures of the Psalter, not only in English but also in other languages. Even a modern pop group has made psalm 137, "By the Rivers of Babylon", come

alive to the rhythm of contemporary music. People of all nationalities and faith have been fascinated by the language, imagery and ideas contained in these poems. In missionary enterprises like the translations of the scriptures, the Book of Psalms is an unfailing choice. This book is well adapted to suit even the most pagan, mainly because Nature is projected in all its unity and wholeness, more than in its minute details. It is described as being glorious and magnificent not by itself but by the hand of God, the source of Life. Then again, the Psalter appeals very strongly to the basic, elemental but universal feelings of every man. This book replenishes in man that sense of awe before the Omnipresent. Prothero points out that the Gods in Homer's Olympus take just three steps and they have traversed the whole world.¹⁷ But a more sublime idea is expressed by the Hebrew poet, in psalm 139, for example. The individual is overawed by the fact that the Lord is Omnipresent. He cannot hide from his Maker for He is everywhere - in heaven, on earth, in man's innermost being, in all forms of creation. God knows His human child thoroughly and well.

It may be well at this point, to turn to the pages of history, to look at some great men whose lives were made richer by the influence of these songs of Israel.¹⁸ To begin with, there is the inspiring tale of St. Patrick of Ireland. In the distant past, the festival of Tara, on the plains of Breg, was held once in three years. All the kings of the land along with the commoners, gathered together around a huge pyre to be lit at a point of time. While thus waiting in the darkness of the night, the throng gathered there, suddenly witnessed a bright spark of fire in the horizon. King Laeghaire was furious as someone had disobeyed orders not to light any fire till the appointed time. The "sacrilegious wretch" was arrested and ordered to explain himself. Thus St. Patrick, the accused, stood before the royal and the common crowd to explain why he had lit a fire in the worship of God. Very gently but arrestingly, he spoke about God with such zeal and power that not only the people but Nature herself seemed still. He kept chanting psalm 20:7, "Some boast of chariots, and some horses; / but we boast of the name of the Lord our God.", and by the break of dawn, he had kindled in the heart of

everyone present there, a celestial fire.

Time moved on. The power of the psalms was felt in a wider gamut of life - in literature, in science, in secular and ecclesiastical events. It is said that the great Emperor Charlemagne, lived his life in accordance with the values taught by the divine poems. His favourite psalm was psalm 68 and he loved to be called "David" by his comrades. When he died at Aix-la-Chapelle, it was with the words of psalm 31:5 on his lips, "Into thine hand I commit my / spirit:".

Thomas A. Becket of Canterbury, prayed the same lines before he fell dead on the steps near the chapel of St. Benedict. In 1172, torn apart by guilt and grief, King Henry II went through a period of penance. He visited the cathedral where Becket was murdered and at the spot where he had fallen, he knelt down to unburden his load by reciting psalm 6 in the presence of a large gathering of monks:

O Lord, rebuke me not in thine
 anger, neither chasten me in
 thy hot displeasure.

Have mercy upon me, O Lord;
 for I am weak: O Lord, heal me;
 for my bones are vexed: but
 thou, O Lord, how long? (ps.6:1-3.Bible .AV. 600).

In Literature, we are inclined to think first of Chaucer who makes his Prioress begin her tale with a rendering of psalm 8:

'O Lord, our Lord, how marvellous Thy name,
 Spread through the reaches of the earth!' said she;
 'Nor only are Thy precious praise and fame
 Found in the mouths of men of dignity,
 For in the mouths of children, such may be
 As suck the breast, the bounty of Thy ways
 Can be declared in worship and in praise.

('The Prioress's Prologue'.The Canterbury Tales
 lines 1-7)

William Langland also used the language of the psalms in The Vision of Piers Plowman. The poet writes: "The tools wherewith I labour and earn my bread are Paternosta, and my primer Placebo and Dirige, and sometimes my Psalter and my Seven Psalms."¹⁹

Francis Bacon studied and quoted these sacred poems. He was also a versifier of the psalms, (Certain Psalms Written in Sickness), and so were Thomas Wyatt, Spenser, Sidney, Queen Elizabeth I, James I, Fletcher and the great Shakespeare himself. In As You Like It, Adam makes a reference to psalm 147:9 when he says: "He that doth the ravens feed/ Yea, providently caters for the sparrow, / Be comfort to my age !". (Act 2 Scene 3). The King in Hamlet asks, "What if this cursed hand / Were thicker than itself with brother's blood, / Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens / To wash it white as snow ?" (3.3.), and we are reminded of psalm 51:7, "Purge me with hyssop, and I / shall be clean: wash me, and I shall / be whiter than snow." (Bible . AV. 623).

To the Puritans of the seventeenth century, the Psalter was an important book. Two finest products of this age, show ample proof of this in their writings. Milton is known to have translated into verse, psalms 104 and 126 at the tender age of fifteen. Later, in 1648 and in 1653, he translated psalms 80 to 88 and psalms 1 to 6. Paradise Lost contains certain points of reference to the Hebrew

verses. For instance,

" 'Open, ye everlasting gates,' they sung,
 'Open, ye heavens, your living doors; let in
 The Creator, from His work returned
 Magnificent, His six days' work, a world.'" (Paradise Lost.
 7.565-9).

These lines can be compared to psalm 24:7,9. (AV. 609):

Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
 and be ye lift up, ye everlasting
 doors; and the King of glory shall
 come in. (Verse 7)

.....
 Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
 even lift them up, ye everlasting
 doors; (Verse 9)

Oliver Cromwell, a towering figure during the Civil War, was fired by the spirit of these ancient songs. This was the force which propelled all his thoughts and actions especially during stormy times. He constantly turned to the poetry of these psalms in his private and public letters and in his addresses to the Parliament. A part of his letter to a cousin, Mrs. St. John, is quoted by Prothero:

"Truly, then, this I find, that He giveth springs in a dry, barren wilderness where no water is. I live, you know where - in Meshec, which they say signifies prolonging; in Kedar, which signifies blackness; yet the Lord forsaketh me not. Though He do prolong, yet He will, I trust, bring me to His tabernacle, to His resting-place"²⁰ This was based on psalm 120. All through his military career, Cromwell is believed to have found in the Psalter, a powerful and constant guide and protector. Before every move he made, especially during martial operations, he always equipped himself in single meditation on the scriptural poems. During the war with Ireland (1650), he replenished his army by summoning a brief respite to sing the lyrics of the shortest psalm, psalm 17.

Joseph Addison wrote about the poems in the Spectator. He made paraphrases of psalms 23 and 29. These essays are perhaps as familiar to the reader as is Sir Roger de Coverley.

John Hargreaves in his book, A Guide to Psalms, recounts the touching story of how William Cowper found strength and courage in the psalms. As a shy and hesitating schoolboy, he was frequently

bullied by an older boy who made his [cowper's] life miserable. So the little, motherless boy shared his suffering with God in the words of psalm 118, " I called upon the Lord in dis - / tress: the Lord answered me, . . ." ²¹ and found sustenance in them. Later on, he wrote the hymn, " O for a closer walk with God." ²²

Lord Byron loved these lyrics and as a child he had memorised many of the psalms including psalm 1 and psalm 23. The influence of the Psalter can also be seen in Wordsworth, (The Excursion), Tennyson (Rizpah), and Arnold (Oberman Once More). Even the Brownings could not escape this magnetic power. In The Ring and the Book, Pompilia seems to make a refer^ence to psalm 11 in lines 991 - 996 and Elizabeth B. Browning writes in The Sleep:

Of all the thoughts of God that are
 Borne inward into souls afar,
 Along the Psalmist's music deep,
 Now tell me if that any is
 For gift or grace surpassing this:
 'He giveth His beloved - sleep? " (stanza I).

Ruskin and Carlyle were fascinated by the psalms. The former is said to have memorised many psalms and the latter always believed that the psalms were "the truest emblem ever given of a man's moral progress and warfare here below."²³

History reveals that even men of science could not let these religious poems go unnoticed. Alexander von Humboldt, (1769-1859), the German traveller and scientist, gave a physical description of the universe in the Kosmos, and said of psalm 104, ". . . we are astonished to see within the compass of a poem of such dimension, the universe, the heavens and the earth, thus drawn with a few grand strokes".²⁴ In an age of unprecedented scientific probing into the cosmic mysteries, the Divine message comes loud and clear that the whole, vast universe is energised by a Force, mighty and unfathomable. "The heavens are telling the glory/of God; / and the firmament ^{r0} ~~pro~~claim his/handiwork." (ps.19:1Bible . RSV. 481).

Though Science unfolds and explains many mysteries of the universe, the eternal question of whence, where and whither, are never satisfactorily answered and the fatigued mortal has sought

many times, solutions, in the yellowed pages of some ancient, treasured volume of the psalms.

We have, so far, peeked into the past to bring out instances to show the relevance of these inspirational lyrics. We turn our focus now, on the modern man, who seems more prone to fatigue and weariness, as there is no nourishment in "the waste land"²⁵. In the name of civilization, modern man has traversed too far away from home. He has forgotten that ". . . trailing clouds of glory do we come / From God, who is our home:" (Wordsworth Immortality ode. lines 64-65). Many a time his soul yearns to retreat to a world of rest and repose:

"O how I long to travel back
And tread again that ancient track!" (Vaughan. The
Retreat. lines 21-22)

The human mind is battered by ^{myriad} desires and ambitions and is beginning to sag from total exhaustion. Material excitement and

sensations fail to feed his impoverished spirit. He hungers, and in desperation he looks for satisfaction in illusions - drugs, alcohol and violence. Newspapers seem to see the seamier side of life: a government has fallen, countries are at war, an innocent person has been murdered, the environment is dying. There is enough to make one falter. When we begin to lose our bearings, we grope frantically for proper direction. It is then, that we should look for the road less taken, to lead us to the spiritual springs and quench our thirst with words such as of psalm 116:6:

"The Lord preserveth the simple:
I was brought low, and he helped
me." (Bible. AV. 658)

God is the "rock" and "salvation" (ps.62), for searching souls and only in Him can one find rest and strength. Drowning in the mire of sin, man can still hope for Holy intervention to pull him out. He only has to cry out for help, "Lord, hear my voice!" (ps.129. RSV. 549), knowing that God is merciful:

If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark
 iniquities,
 Lord, who could stand ?
 But there is forgiveness with thee,
 that thou mayst be feared. (ps.130:3.Bible .
 RSV. 549).

Some may not perceive of and comprehend the Divine too readily. To envisage and accept the Lord as the kind and caring shepherd (ps.23) may be a difficult proposition. They could well ask: "Is God a living God - a real live character in the drama of Life?" Sometimes when our personal life is in shambles, we are inclined to echo H. G. Wells who said of God that "He is an ever-absent help in time of trouble."²⁶ But perhaps the atheists and the nescient unknowingly know him in the depths of their hearts as Peace, Love, Happiness, "Shanti" ?

When we pray the psalms, we are stripped of all unrealities to stand naked before the Omnipresent. The ancient psalmist was in a way, a psychologist, for he knew of the cathartic effects of confessing our wrong-doings. In the psalms, we shout for mercy (ps. 57), we rave and rant against God in anger (ps. 58, 60), or we plead

from the deep pits of suffering, (ps. 116), or we ecstatically proclaim victory (ps. 18) over our problems. In short, we let loose all pent-up feelings and emotions. After the storm of forthright expression, we experience a calm that is the panacea for the frayed and rattled nerves. The psalms, being written with the ink of personal experience, find us in our human situation. They reveal to us the result of what happens when we bring the Holy to bear upon a particular event. The singers of Israel brought God into every experience of theirs: God and worship were integral to their living. This Sacred Energy, "Yahweh", gave them support, defence, consolation, encouragement. Hence the psalms were written as a response to man's experience of the activity of God and every man can identify himself with one of the old, Hebrew singer-poets.

In, The Psalms in Modern Life²⁷, Sister Cecilia discusses fifty-three psalms to show how they are helpful in coping with the pressures of modern life. Here are some of them with the rubrics given by the author:

Psalm 1 - "Where Happiness is Found in the World Today" (p 51)

Psalm 31 - "The Joy of God's Forgiving Grace" (p 106)

Psalm 61 - "No True Rest Save in God" (p 89)

Psalm 92 - "Only in God Can the Soul Today Stand Sure" (p
71)

Psalm 120- "Divine Insurance for Life's Pilgrimage" (p 65)

Psalm 123- "Without God Life Would be too Perilous" (p 68)

Psalm 132- "Living Together in Love" (p 98)

Total immersion in mundane, workaday affairs will not help one to meditate upon these sacred poems and thus reach spiritual heights. Nor will it help to look upon the psalms in "cold abstract study" (Cecilia, 13). These psalms have to be taken as prayer: a direct and personal communication with God which requires the shedding of all pretences born of pride and materialism. The mere mortal must realise that there is a need to anchor himself to the Eternal Energy, without which, he is nothing. "In our prayer life we are always learning, always open to the winds of the spirit, ready to explore new ways of approaching the un^papproachable and expressing the inexpressible . . . ".²⁸

From each and every page of the Psalter, the Spirit of the Holy comes blowing across to all those who venture to encounter the poetry of the psalms. "It seems to me appropriate, almost inevitable, that when the great Imagination which in the beginning, for its own delight and for the delight of men and angels and (in their proper mode) of beasts, had invented and formed the whole world of nature, submitted to express Itself in human speech, that should sometimes be poetry. For poetry too is a little incarnation, giving body to what had been before invisible and inaudible."²⁹ David, Moses, Solomon and the rest of the ancient Hebrew poets were channels through which the Divine Inspiration concretized Itself. Thus the significance of Inspiration in the psalms of the Old Testament.

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