

**THE POETRY OF THE
PSALMS, FOR READERS
OF THE ENGLISH BIBLE**

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The poetry of the Psalms, for readers of the English Bible by Henry Van Dyke

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HENRY VAN DYKE

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☾ THE POETRY OF THE PSALMS



THE POETRY OF
THE PSALMS
FOR READERS
OF THE ENGLISH
BIBLE

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D. B. Updike, The Merrymount Press, Boston

THE POETRY OF THE PSALMS BY HENRY VAN DYKE



HIS little book is intended as a brief and simple introduction to the study of the Psalms, in English, as poetry.

An Introduction

There are three ways in which we may study the Bible: as a revelation, as a document, and as literature.

Three Ways to Study the Bible

We may study it as the divinely inspired and perfect rule of faith and conduct. This is the point of view from which it appears most precious. For this is what we need most of all: the word of God to teach us what to believe and how to live.

We may study it as a collection of historical books, written under certain conditions, and reflecting, in their contents and in their language, the circumstances in which they were produced. This is the aspect in which criticism regards the Bible; and its intellectual interest, as well as its religious value, is greatly enhanced by a clear vision of the truth about it from this point of view.

We may study it also as literature. We may see in it a noble and impassioned interpretation of nature and life, uttered in language of beauty and sublimity, touched with the vivid colours of

Harmony of these three Ways human personality, and embodied in forms of enduring literary art.

None of these three ways of studying the Bible is hostile to the others. On the contrary, they are helpful to one another, because each of them gives us knowledge of a real factor in the marvellous influence of the Bible in the world.

True Love for the Bible is not Blind The true lover of the Bible has an interest in all the elements of its life as an immortal book.

He wishes to discern, and rightly to appreciate, the method of its history, the spirit of its philosophy, the significance of its fiction, the power of its eloquence, and the charm of its poetry. He wishes this all the more because he finds in it something which is not in any other book: a vision of God, a hope for man, and an inspiration to righteousness which are evidently divine. As the worshipper in the Temple would observe the art and structure of the carven beams of cedar and the lily-work on the tops of the pillars the more attentively because they beautified the house of his God, so the man who has a religious faith in the Bible will study more eagerly and carefully the literary forms of the book in which the Holy Spirit speaks forever.

The value of Poetry in the Psalms We shall do wisely to consider and appreciate the poetical element in the Psalms. The comfort, help, and guidance that they bring to our spiritual life will not be diminished, but increased, by a perception of their exquisite form

and finish. If a king sent a golden cup full of cheering cordial to a weary man, he might well admire the twofold bounty of the royal gift. The beauty of the vessel would make the draught more grateful and refreshing. And if the cup were inexhaustible, if it filled itself anew as often as it touched the lips, then the very shape and adornment of it would become significant and precious. It would be an inestimable possession, a singing goblet, a treasure of life.

John Milton, whose faith in religion was as exalted as his mastery of the art of poetry was perfect, has expressed in a single sentence the spirit in which I would approach the poetic study of the Book of Psalms: "Not in their divine arguments alone, but in the very critical art of composition, the Psalms may be easily made to appear over all kinds of lyric poetry incomparable."

John
Milton
on the
Psalms