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*THE REVISED VERSION OF THE OLD
TESTAMENT.*

THE BOOK OF PSALMS.—I.

THE effect of the Revision of the poetical books must be judged of by different canons from that of the historical. One has to consider partly sound and partly sense. From the point of view of sound, one is naturally more exacting in the case of poems than of narratives; from that of sense, one attaches greater importance to the connexion of thought and to the manifestation of artistic unity. In the following pages, it is the latter point of view which will be adopted. The revisers of the Psalter deserve but little credit unless, in accordance with the principles of King James's translators, they have thrown their chief strength into the development of the sense. Dr. Scrivener has spoken in trenchant language of the "prosaic tone" of the Bible Version of the Psalms, which, "however exact and elaborate, is so spiritless as to be willingly used by but few that are familiar with the version in the Book of Common Prayer; a recension which, though derived immediately from the Great Bible, is in substance the work of that consummate master of rhythmical prose, Bishop Miles Coverdale."¹ It is possible that a musical editor might allow some little mitigation of this judgment with regard to the Bible Version in its revised form; to such an one I may remit the case. But I am sure that fair students will agree that sense has been cared for by the Revisers, not perhaps adequately—for poetry surely cannot be well translated by a company—but still in a praiseworthy degree. To translate the Psalter is a severe test of the grammatical insight of the translator. "There," as Sir W. Martin says, "the narration of facts gives place to an expression of the varying feelings of each

¹ *The "Authorized Edition" of the Bible* (Cambridge, 1884), p. 139.

psalmist as he looks before and after; oftentimes shifting his view suddenly, and passing through rapid changes and contrasts of thought and feeling.”¹ Readers of Dr. Driver’s *Hebrew Tenses* will know the importance of a thorough and consistent revision of the time-distinctions in the Authorized Version of the Psalms; with this book in his hand the reader will be able to test the revision far better in such points than I can attempt within my present limits. Suffice it to say, that the minute alterations of the Revisers in this and other respects will often commend themselves as much to the purely literary critic as to the Hebraist. By restoring colour and connexion they seem in many cases to invest the psalms with a fresh significance.

In the following paper I shall briefly justify some of the more significant alterations in the first sixty psalms. I had intended to take the first two books, but found a detailed examination was in danger of carrying me too far. In the second I will endeavour to group corrected renderings, and indicate, if I cannot set forth in detail, their value.

ii. 1. *Why do the nations rage?* In the period of Judaism proper a marked distinction arose between those who were within and those who were without the covenant, in short, between Jews and Gentiles or heathen. To render גוֹיִם, “heathen” (so A.V. here, but not everywhere, e.g. at cxvii. 1, it has, “all ye nations”), prejudices the question as to the date of the psalm. The margin on “rage” is excellent. The ideas of “crowd” and “noise” are as closely connected in רגש as in רומה. In Prov. i. 21, the rendering, *in the chief place of concourse*, is justified in R.V. by the marg., ‘Heb., *at the head of the noisy streets.*’ So here, “throng together” is the true meaning; “make an uproar” might have been given for a margin.

ii. 12. *Kiss the son.* Both here and in v. 7 we find

¹ *Inquiries respecting the Structure of the Semitic Languages*, Part ii. (London, 1878), p. vi.

“son” and not “Son,” because the latter prejudges the great question, whether an historical king of Israel is, or is not, intended by the psalmist. The margin shows the reader how difficult the expression in *v.* 12 was felt to be in ancient times. בר in the sense of בן “son,” is Aramaic, and is only found elsewhere in Prov. xxxi. 2, a post-exile passage. It so happens that the words, “kiss the son,” disturb the sequence of thought. It is not certain that the Septuagint translator had בר נשקו בר in his copy; δράξασθε παιδείας may be, not a translation of those words, but a gloss upon “be instructed,” which afterwards intruded itself into the text. If בר נשקו בר means “kiss the son,” it seems to me almost certain that either these words alone, or the entire psalm, is of post-exile origin. I am conservative enough to assume that בר נשקו בר alone is a post-exile addition, and that the psalm as a whole belongs to the regal period. The words are not quoted in the New Testament.

iii. 4. *I cry.* Not “I cried” (A.V.); nothing binds us to the past. *Vv.* 4, 5 describe the attributes of God in relation to the psalmist; He protects him (*v.* 4), and constantly answers his prayers (*v.* 5). Comp. *v.* 3, “in [the morning *dost* Thou hear my prayer.”

iv. 8. *In solitude* (margin). A much finer and more appropriate meaning; comp. Num. xxiii. 9; Mic. vii. 14; Deut. xxxiii. 28; Jer. xlix. 31. “In solitude” and “in safety,” are to the psalmist parallel and synonymous phrases. A paradox of faith.

vii. 7. *And over them.* As if the Divine Judge went soaring up to His heavenly dwelling. A.V.’s “for their sakes” is not ungrammatical, but “return Thou on high” should be exchanged for “return to Thy high throne.” “On high” to an English reader is too suggestive of heaven.

viii. 5. *But little lower than God.* R.V. has done well in retaining A.V. (which agrees with Sept.) in margin. The new rendering is not above criticism. God (whom our

psalmist calls Jehovah) is directly addressed in this very clause. On the other hand, "than angels" (Ewald, in his latest book,¹ "than high angels"), limits the sense too much. To the Hebrew consciousness, there was no unseemliness in calling the heavenly beings "sons of Elohim," and even "Elohim" (comp. lxxxii. 1). Jehovah, and those who composed His court, belonged to the same class or family of superhuman beings (*elohim*).² Milton's rendering, "scarce to be less than gods," is still deserving of consideration; see Gen. i. 27 (comp. v. 26), "in the image of Elohim created he him"; Jud. ix. 13, "my wine which cheereth Elohim and men" ("man," as A.V. and R.V., is misleading in this connexion).

x. 14. *To take it into thy hand.* This is an evasion of a difficulty, no doubt; but evasions in a popular version seem unavoidable. The Hebrew simply has, "to give (or lay) it into (or, in) thy hand." The clause reads as if mutilated. A.V. (which the Amer. Revisers would retain) gives the required sense.

x. 18. *That man which is of the earth, etc.* For though Bishop Lightfoot's theory of translation was not that of the great English writers of the seventeenth century, yet the opposite theory is no justification for giving "oppress" as the equivalent of two very different Hebrew words in the same verse. In xv. 3, "neighbour" twice over is more excusable; "doeth evil to his friend" (R.V.) is not in accordance with Jewish ideas of friendship (see Prov. xvii. 17; xviii. 24).

xvi. 3. *As for the saints, etc., they are the excellent.* "Excellent" is such a weak word in modern English that one would have liked to see some change ("noble," with a margin, "or, illustrious"). The psalmist's meaning is, I imagine, fairly represented, but at the expense of Hebrew

¹ *Die Lehre der Bibel von Gott*, iii. 2, p. 100, n. 1.

² Comp. Davidson, *The Book of Job* (Cambridge Bible), note on Job i. 6.

syntax. I know of no perfect parallel to such an apodosis as R.V. assumes. The only tenable version of the Hebrew is, I venture to think, Hitzig's, "To the holy ones who are in the land let it belong, and to the noble ones, in whom is all my delight." Hitzig explains the psalmist to mean that a portion of those goods with which (*v.* 2 *b*) God has endowed him belongs to the priests (who in 1 Chron. xxiv. 5 are called "hallowed princes"). Few will accept this explanation; but Hitzig's grammatical insight few will dispute. What remains but to make an emendation, which this is not perhaps the place to describe? If however we reject all corrections of the text but such as have the authority of the ancient versions, there is no alternative but to turn the Septuagint version into Hebrew, *Τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς ἐν τῇ γῆ αὐτοῦ ἐθαυμάστωσε πάντα τὰ θελήματα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτοῖς* (comp. the Greek of 2 Thess. i. 10). But a comparison of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion suggests that the Septuagint translator has merely paraphrased a current view of the construction of the received text.

xvi. 10. *To Sheol*. "In hell" (A.V.) is partly wrong, partly misleading. Who doubts that the psalmist expresses confidence that God will not give him up to the greedy jaws of the Underworld?—*Thine Holy One*. The capital letters imply a violation of the principle of parallelism. The context shows that the speaker is a pious Israelite, and not the Saviour of the world. The Revisers satisfied their philological conscience by placing in the margin "godly, or, beloved." The word which A.V. and (unhappily) R.V. give for *חֲסִיד* (comp. lxxxvi. 2, A.V.) means simply "a pious one," "one who is bound to God by a bond of dutiful affection"

חֶסֶד is generally rendered "lovingkindness"). In l. 5; cxlix. 5, A.V. and R.V. have most unfortunately rendered *חֲסִידִים* "saints," more correctly given in xvi. 3 as the equivalent to *קְרוֹשִׁים*

xvii. 14. *From men whose portion in life is of the world*

(margin). "In life" is taken to mean "in this lifetime." This view of the clause would be more plausible, could we render, with Hitzig, "whose portion is in a life without duration." God is the portion of the believer; what is that of the unbeliever? It is (1) the world and its good things (not merely "of the world,"=something that is of a worldly nature); (2) life, in the lower and purely human sense of the word (= "a life without duration"). The sole advantage of the marginal rendering is that it favours an early date for this psalm. The phrases "life" and "men of the world" in the received rendering remind us strongly of St. John's $\xi\omega\eta\ \alpha\iota\omega\nu\iota\omicron\varsigma$, and $\nu\iota\omicron\iota\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \alpha\iota\omega\nu\omicron\varsigma\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon$ in Luke xvi. 8.

xviii. 29. *I run.* But why are A.V.'s wrong tenses retained in vv. 33-45, and why in vv. 37, 38, does R.V. actually introduce misleading futures? No one with a sense of literature will think lightly of these and similar inconsistencies, which arise from the faulty arrangements made for the Revision Company.

xxii. 1. Some margin seemed expedient in view of the difficulty of the passage. The construction in the alternative version is that of the Septuagint, Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, two other Greek versions, St. Jerome, and the Targum. It may be objected to as irregular; but see cxix. 155, and as Alexander says, "Who can construe a sob?" "My help" is, on this view of the passage, best taken as a designation for Jehovah; "help"=helper.

xxii. 8. *Commit thyself unto the LORD.* This rendering of the pointed text is in accordance with xxxvii. 5; Prov. xvi. 3, where the form לֵךְ is evidently an imperative. And yet was there not a fit case here for deserting the interpretation represented by the points, and following that of the Septuagint, the Peshitto, and Jerome, all of which authorities read the perfect לָךְ ? Is the abrupt change of person which follows ("let him deliver him") tolerable?

xxii. 29. *Even he that cannot keep his soul alive.* A parallel phrase to "all they that go down to the dust." Most psalmists think of Sheól as the land where praise is silent, but this psalmist proffers as a *viaticum* to the dying the privilege of worship after death. Comp. Phil. ii. 10. A.V., by wrongly changing "not" into "none," introduces an idea foreign to the context.

xxiv. 6. *That seek thy face, O (God of) Jacob.* A good example of the conflict between tradition and critical scholarship within the Church. Tradition says, Adhere to the received text, cost what it may. Scholarship says, The received text is often inferior to the more ancient form of the text represented in the Septuagint, and the difficulties attendant on the ascertaining of this older form are no excuse for ignoring the results already attained. As a compromise, the Septuagint is in the main followed, but the rendering of the word which has dropped out in the Hebrew is italicized, as if it were simply due to a difference between the English and the Hebrew idiom. This has the authority, it is true, of A.V. margin (comp. A.V. lv. 21; 2 Sam. xiii. 39; Job xxxiii. 17), but cannot be defended upon grounds of principle. The margin, "even Jacob," is sometimes defended by lxxiii. 1; but this view of the meaning would require "Israel."

xxix. 1. *O ye sons of the mighty* (A.V., "O ye mighty"). An exegetical prejudice of the old translators is embalmed in the text, but scholarship comes to its rights in the margin. Need it be said that the psalmist is not addressing "potentates and rulers of the earth" (Poole), and that by "the beauty of holiness" (v. 2) and "his temple" (v. 9) he does not mean God's "holy and beautiful house" (Isa. lxiv. 11, compared by Poole)? Most scholars hold that בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים is a "double plural" from בְּנֵי-אֱלֹהִים, and render "sons of El" (see first marg., R.V.). If this be correct, "El" (*i.e.* Jehovah) is represented as the "father" or creator of the angels

(that these are really meant, is clear from *v.* 9). But if "sons of Elohim" in Job means "members of the class of supernatural beings called Elohim" (see Davidson's *Job*), then we may take אֱלֹהִים (Elim) in Ps. xxix. 1 as equivalent to "Elohim" in "sons of Elohim," and the second margin in R.V. is substantially right ("sons of the gods"). The only view which is untenable is to make "Elim" a synonym of "Elohim" in the sense of God. Jehovah is often called "Elohim," but never Elim; this word always means "gods" or "supernatural beings" (Exod. xv. 11; Dan. xi. 36). Comp. on viii. 5, above.

xxxii. 9. *Else they will not*, etc. The misinterpretation of A.V. destroys the sense of the figure. Jehovah contrasts the willing obedience which He expects from His people with the constraint which has to be put on horse and mule. Believers ought to delight in "coming near" to God; another psalmist says, "It is happiness for me to draw near unto God" (lxxiii. 28).

xxxv. 15, 16, 21. The tenses employed are out of harmony with those in *vv.* 11, 12, and the unity of the poem is destroyed. In the multitude of counsellors there is not always strength. See Driver, *Hebrew Tenses*, ed. 2, p. 17.

xxxvi. 1. Gratitude is due for the various reading which is as old as the Septuagint (*his heart for my heart*), and which, with the two marginal renderings, restores sense to a fine passage. What the "oracle" is may be divined from the context.

xl. 9. *I have proclaimed glad tidings of righteousness* (margin). We are reminded by this rendering of the great prophecy of Israel's restoration (Isa. xli. 27; li. 7). Bishop Lightfoot may have insisted too much on uniformity of translation; but in the case of this important word uniformity was called for. The marginal rendering also at once suggests the true meaning of righteousness (see the commentators on Isa. xl.-lxvi.).

xl. 9. *I will not refrain my lips.* Contrary to all sound views of Hebrew grammar. A.V. was better.

xlii. 4. *How I went.* A decided improvement. "For I had gone" (A.V.) suggests a single action. "Went" is not indeed altogether happy; we want something like "einherzog." And why did not the Revisers combine the textual and the marginal renderings of the next verb, giving us "led them in procession"? This would have defined the meaning of "went." A.V. is of course indefensible.

xlii. 5. *For the health of his countenance.* But the marginal reading, "who is the health of my countenance," etc., is undoubtedly right (see v. 11, and xliii. 5). We shall do well however to substitute "help" for "health." English is not as rich as Hebrew in words for "help."

xlv. 3. *O mighty one.* A.V.'s "O (most) mighty one," bears witness to the exegetical prejudice of the old translators, who explained this Psalm of One "who is not only a Man, but also *the mighty God*, as He is called, Isa. ix. 6" (Poole). Certainly the Messiah, as many with Ewald think, is referred to in Isaiah *l.c.* as *El gibbōr*, and the psalmist's king is here addressed as *gibbōr*. But nothing in the Hebrew *compels* us to interpret this psalm as an ecstatic anticipation of the Messiah's advent. How Delitzsch can say (*Die Psalmen*, ed. 4., p. 358) that "*El gibbor* as one of the names of the Messiah in Isa. ix. 5 points back to Ps. xlv.," is a mystery, for this keen expositor is very far from holding that the psalm is primarily Messianic; it refers, he says, to some contemporary king.

xlv. 6. *Thy throne is* (the throne of) *God for ever and ever* (margin). The dispute among expositors is whether "Elohim" is the subject or the predicate. The rendering in the text is by far the most natural one, but it is difficult to believe that a psalmist would in one verse address the king as "Elohim," and in the very next verse apply the same title to Jehovah. The marginal rendering was

intended to meet the difficulty. Dr. Driver has however (*Tenses*, ed. 2, pp. 285, 286) well shown its improbability from a grammatical point of view. No Hebrew reader would have understood the phrase thus. Is it not a case for critical conjecture? The context suggests the idea that the king's success is assured, because God has established his throne, and because he loves righteousness (see *v.* 7). Bickell therefore, improving upon Olshausen, reads :

"As for thy throne, [firm is its foundation,]
God [hath established it] for ever and ever."

xliv. 13. *The king's daughter within* (the palace) *is all glorious*. The A.V., as one knows but too well, is constantly misinterpreted. "Within" means not "inwardly," as opposed to "outwardly," as if the poet meant "her greatest charms are those which do not strike the eye" (so even Herder); but "in the inner part of the palace" (*i.e.* in the women's apartments), as the margin more clearly puts it.

xlix. 5, 14. I content myself with indicating the corrections which go far to restore sense to this fine but here and there obscure psalm.

lviii. 1. "As otherwise read" means "as otherwise pronounced." The letters of the text may be pronounced 'elim, as the marginal renderings imply that they should be (see on xxix. 1). It is well that two margins were accorded; for the first margin, though doubtless correct, much requires a commentary. The strange interpretation of the letters of the text embodied in the vowel points ('elem, *i.e.* in silence), was probably invented to avoid the rendering "ye gods," the key to which had been lost. Indeed, the word 'elem was itself probably a new coinage.

lviii. 9. *The green and the burning alike*. The insertion of "wood" in italics would have made this clearer, and would have counterbalanced the insertion of "flesh" in the marg. rendering.

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