

ARTICLE III.

THE LATEST TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE.

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[The sudden death of Dr. Whitney, noticed in our last issue, brought the present essay to an untimely close. But we publish it just as he left it. The series to which this was to be the conclusion is one of inestimable value to all students of the English translations of the Bible. We are glad that the work which he contemplated was so nearly completed.—EDITOR.]

XI. CONCERNING IDIOM TRANSFERRED.

A DEPARTMENT of knowledge not yet fully appreciated by those who have made versions of the Bible in English is that of the transfer of idiom from tongue to tongue. For our present purposes it may be divided into manifest transfer from Hebrew through Greek into English and transfer from Greek to English where the connection with Hebrew is doubtful or unknown.

1. An excellent illustration of the former is in Rev. v. 6:—
 (Revs.) I saw in the midst of (margin) I saw between the
 the throne and of the four liv- throne, with the four living
 ing creatures, and in the midst creatures, and the elders, a
 of the elders, a Lamb. . . . Lamb. . . .

These are pretty far apart in the picture that they give, and which is right? The English Revision gives no sign that any one conceives of the possibility of an optional form. The "Twentieth Century," though often exceedingly perspicacious, made no discovery here. We have found in no version of the New Testament, except the American, any hint that the passage can have any but the old well-known sense,—or lack of sense.

Yet Professor William H. Green, in his "Chrestomathy," so early as 1863, had, by note upon Gen. i. 4, said that the key to the sense of the double use of μέσος in Rev. v. 6 is to be found in the Hebrew use of *bēn*. For instance, Gen. i. 4 reads, literally, "between the light and between the darkness"; i. 14 reads, "to divide between the day and between the night"; the English sense being "between light and darkness," "between day and night." Similar forms may be found in the original of Gen. i. 18; xxvi. 28 ("betwixt us and betwixt thee"); Ex. xi. 7; Josh. xxii. 25, and so on. In each of these cases the meaning is plain and necessary; in each of them the Septuagint has a form essentially the same as that which is found in the Greek of Rev. v. 6. The conclusion is irresistible that Rev. v. 6 is not to be translated literally, is not to be translated as it would have been if found in the works of Thucydides or Plato, but is to be interpreted by the Hebrew use of *bēn*.

Hence the marginal form in the American Revision is the right one. It shows a lack of perception, or else of courage, that the old mistranslation should have held its place in the main text to this day; it shows the usual halfway progress of perception, or of courage, that the correct rendering got into the margin, but only into the margin, in 1901. Perhaps in two hundred and ninety years more it will take its proper place in the text. The "creatures" were by the throne, the elders were opposite, and between stood the Lamb.

2. Similarly in John ii. 4:—

Woman, what have I to do with thee?

we need to go to Hebrew idiom to get a reliable clue to the sense. There has been an immense amount of speculation as to the spirit in which Jesus addressed his mother, and as to what he really meant, but this speculation has been almost

wholly *a priori*,—inference from the character of Jesus as otherwise known. We have not happened to find any commentator who, in print or in speech, raised the question whether the Hebrew language or the Septuagint had any form at all parallel to this, and, if so, whether that form could throw any light upon the sense of John ii. 4. And yet all the while a Hebrew correspondent form lay scattered through the Old Testament, waiting to be found and to throw its light. In Jdg. i. 14 is a halfway-form (*ma-l'ka*: "What [is] to thee?") and it is correctly rendered in our bibles, "What wouldest thou?" that is, "What do you want?" Full parallels to John ii. 4 are in Jdg. xi. 12; 2 Sam. xvi. 10; xix. 22, etc., and they are in each case rendered, "What have I to do with thee?" but evidently would be better brought into English by the words, "What do you want of me?" or, "What do you want me to do?" The forms of these in the Septuagint are exactly the same as in John ii. 4. These cases establish a strong presumption that in John ii. 4 Jesus simply asked his mother what she wanted him to do about the lack of wine. And this is no forced or cowardly reduction of the meaning to something that shall save our faith in the filial bearing of Jesus, but it is the natural and necessary inference from the fact that the writers of the New Testament, like the translators of the Hebrew Old Testament into the Septuagint, while using the language, or especially the vocabulary, of their Grecian teachers or of their Roman conquerors, thought in the conceptions, and expressed their thoughts in the idioms, of the Hebrew to which they were born.

Nor should we be surprised that this was so. In every age it has been true that, when a nation, a group, or an individual, using but a single language, has had occasion to learn another, and especially one exceedingly different from

their own, they have wrestled but ineffectively with the idioms of the superadded or substituted speech, and have largely carried over into it the idioms of the speech to which they were born; and not only so, but they have transmitted these idioms to their posterity, and even to some extent have taught them to their neighbors who were born to the other tongue. This tendency is greater in proportion to the humbleness of the intellectual development of the speaker.

Hence in Louisiana a porch is very commonly called a "gallery"; in Pennsylvania one can hear not only from descendants of the German immigration, but from people of purely English descent, such expressions as "What for a man was he?" The German of to-day, on coming to America, may be able soon to keep from saying "Thank you" as equivalent to declining an offer, but he will be much longer in unlearning the German relation of the tenses and of *shall* and *will*. The Frenchman would naturally think that the Latinic affluence of *the* was good, or good enough, English, and he would have no inward protest if he heard a neighbor say that a certain window "gives upon" a street. The Highlander has long enlivened English novels with his strange substitution of the future for the present tense, and with his terminal "whatever."

As we write, there is before us an advertisement (1869) of an "obbadeaker" [apotheker] in "Sued" Bethlehem, Pa., with such a medley as this: "GOOK YUSHT AMOHL DOH! [Guck just einmal doch] Monsleit un Weibslleit!! Buwa un Maed—Yungy un olty, Attention!! Mer hen aw [auch] an neier article dos gor net [gar nicht] gebutta konn waerra. . . .mer hen olles uf hond was mer denka korn in unser line of bisness. . . .Now is de tseit; macht eich bei, un judg'd for eich selwer; . . .un bringt eier greenbacks mit."

In this hotch-potch, doubtless humorously meant, but serious too, and carefully composed, is a picture, in little, of the field of linguistic change: there is gross dialectal corruption of words, with incidental spelling-reform; there is the result of fortuitous abandonments and preservations between the vocabularies of two languages; and there is the unconscious transfer of idiom, as in "uf hond,"—an English idiom, Germanized and set in a run of corrupted German words,—and in the abrupt ending with "mit,"—a German idiom closing a run of nominally English words. Most of these matters are not connected with our present theme: they are obvious to the most careless observer of the contact of races; Chaucer and Shakespeare find in them literary material, and the newspaper of the day enlivens its columns with examples. The tenacity of idiom, the persistence of old casts of thought under changed conditions,—these are not so often noticed: they are our present theme, and, as we have said, they are signally illustrated in New Testament Greek, and they make a difference when translation of the New Testament is on.

3. To return to our examples: An equally striking case is in John i. 3: (A. V.) All things were made *by* him,—— (A. R.) *through* him. It was said, when the English Revision appeared, that the doctrine of the divinity of Christ had been, on the whole, strengthened, rather than weakened, by the changes made. In this case the reverse was true. The preposition is *διὰ*, which in classic Greek means "through." But again the question is not how Pericles or Isocrates regarded that preposition, but, more immediately, how it was handled in Old Testament Greek (the Septuagint), and, ultimately, what was the sense of the Hebrew word that it stood for. For example, in Gen. iv. 1 Eve says [LXX]: "I have gotten a man[-child] [*διὰ*] God," the Hebrew preposition being

'eth, which means either *by* or *through*. Therefore *διὰ* in John i. 3 may mean either *by* or *through*, the former sense making "the Word" the sole creator, and the latter making him, as Milton and many others have believed, the agent of God the Father. So the American Revision is not correct in excluding the possibility that the writer meant that "all things were created *by* him," and the doctrinal bearing of the passage is put back nearer to where it was before. However, the dogmatic value of particular words does not loom up before the student of transferred idiom as impressively as it did when he first read Gaussen on verbal inspiration or gazed with Hodge through many pages at the preposition *ἐφ'*.

4. If our general position has commended itself to the reader thus far, he will be interested in considering its bearing upon the New Testament words rendered "eternal" or "forever." They are founded upon the *æon*, which, again, is a question, not of classic, but of Hellenistic, Greek. In 2 Sam. xii. 10 (LXX) we find: "Now a sword shall not depart out of thy house for an *æon*." The Hebrew back of this is '*adh-olam*, and '*olam* certainly means a very long time. It does not necessarily mean a literal eternity, although the word is used of the eternity of God; it is sometimes the duration of the person's life; the date of the terminus, if any, depends upon the nature of the subject. It is a necessary presumption that the *æons* of the New Testament are like the '*olam* of the Old.

5. In Luke ix. 59, if "suffer me first to go and bury my father" means "let me live at home with my aged father and take care of him until his death, which must be soon," the presumption is that, as this was not a Greek way of speaking but was very much like other Oriental locutions that we know, it was used by the speaker in Aramaic, was perfectly intelli-

gible to his hearers, and was transferred by the historian to the Greek without adaptation or explanation because he was without the thought that any future reader would be unfamiliar with that way of putting the matter.

6. In Micah i. 11-15 the "inhabitant" of each of five towns is feminine, although any inhabitant seems to be meant; there is no visible reason why by synecdoche the entire population, male and female, should not be meant. Hence the Revisers put "inhabitant" in the text with no suggestion of sex. The present writer, noticing the facts, wrote to Professor Charles M. Mead, who had been chiefly responsible for the details of the American Revision of the Old Testament, asking whether it could be said generally that in the Hebrew the feminine was the common or generic gender,—as the masculine is in English. This was in 1909. In answering, Professor Mead referred to Micah vii. 10, where the word rendered "enemy" is feminine in form, the pronouns following being therefore also feminine, although there seems to be no reason to suppose that the enemy or enemies were women, or towns personified as of the feminine gender. He referred also to Micah iv. 6, 7, where the King James text and the English Revision have "her that" five times, and to Zeph. iii. 19, where "her that" is given twice. The American Revisers, feeling the absurdity of the literal feminine, concluded to treat these feminines as substitutes for neuters, a thing found elsewhere in the Old Testament and not surprising to any one who has studied the history of the Romanic tongues in connection with the loss of the Latin neuter. Professor Mead, reviewing these various verses, evidently felt that they meant people, and people of both sexes, and admitted that "they seem to indicate that the feminine is sometimes used for the generic." In each of the cases the Septua-

gint has a feminine to match. Is there a persistence of this usage in the New Testament? In Jas. iv. 4 (A. R.) the strange feminine, "adulteresses," may be due to this cause, although in the margin it is explained in another way. The word certainly includes both sexes.

As to the use of the feminine for the neuter, there is an interesting case in Ps. cxviii. 22: "This is Jehovah's doing" Here "this" is feminine, with no reason for it but usage; the Septuagint follows blindly, with no concession to what would be classic Greek. The verse is quoted in Matt. xxi. 42 and Mark xii. 11, and thus, the Septuagint being followed exactly, this idiom of the Hebrew gets into the New Testament in a single case.

7. A distinctive idiom may be found in the original of 2 Sam. xi. 11: "By thy life and by the life of thy soul, [God do so to me and more also] if I shall do this thing." It is translated: "As thou livest and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing." Parallels to this are frequent in the Old Testament. One of them is carried over from Ps. xcv. 11 *via* the Septuagint, into the Greek of Heb. iv. 5, as an elliptical oath or imprecation. In the version of 1611 the matter is expressed by English idiom in Ps. xcv. 11: "They shall not enter into my rest," but by Hebrew idiom in Heb. iv. 5: "If they shall enter into my rest." This very peculiar idiom has moved into the margin in the American Revision, and the equivalent in English idiom has taken its place in the text.

If any one thinks that this method of expression is impossibly peculiar, he may well remember, on the one hand, that every language contains extremely peculiar idioms that do not seem strange to persons born to the use of them, and, on the other hand, that there are stranger things than this in Hebrew speech: for instance, in 2 Sam. xviii. 33 that pathetic

outcry of David's is, literally, "Who will give my death, I in thy place, Absalom, my son, my son?" We know just what this means: it was a conventional, though highly idiomatic, method of wishing: "Would I had died for thee, Absalom, my son, my son!"

In the terms of logic, usage is the genus; distinctiveness is the differentia, marking idiom as the species; and in every language there are idioms whose differentia seems to people of other tongues exceedingly wide.

8. For another example, we may put in parallel columns the literal meaning and what we suppose to be the real sense of Lev. v. 1:—

(A. V.) If a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen [it] or known [of it], if he do not utter [it], then he shall bear his iniquity.	If any one sin by not disclosing the fact of his having heard words of cursing, being able to be a witness by having been present or by having only known of the cursing, he shall bear the responsibility of the sin.
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These two forms are pretty far apart, but, if one is familiar with the idioms, including the opening hendiadys, he is sure of the sense. It would be better in this case to have less of the original idiom and more of the original sense. The Septuagint, having no eyes of its own, is a blind guide here as elsewhere, and leaves us in the ditch.

9. In the New Testament are many places where things happened "that it might be fulfilled." A careful, open-minded study of all these places, and of the many other places where *ἵνα* or *ὅπως* introduces a clause, forces one to the conclusion that the sense is various, shading off from divine foreordination to mere human result. For example, in Luke xvi. 26 one does not like to think that the "great gulf" was "fixed" by the divine fiat, in order that passage between Hades and

the bosom of Abraham, either way, might be absolutely prevented; it is bad enough if the laws of character make the gulf that prevents any Lazarus and any Dives from visiting the other's abode: Lazarus must have been sorry not to be able to perform that kindly act. In Matt. ii. 23 it can hardly be that the purpose was, literally, to fulfil an Old Testament prediction that no commentator has yet been able to find.

Now, if we look for these connectives in the Old Testament Greek, and having found them, turn to the corresponding places in the Hebrew, we find that the original word is *l'ma'an*. Then, if we track *l'ma'an* through the Old Testament, we are led to the same conclusion in regard to it, namely, that, like the others, it may mean an absolute divine foreordination, or, in spite of its derivation (meaning "for the purpose"), it may shade away to a mere every-day human result. Gesenius denies this weakening, but his own quotations are against him; Edward Robinson, re-editing the Hebrew lexicon of Gesenius, says that the use of each of the three words for mere result is "frequent and undeniable." The three, by transfer of idiom, evidently have the same character, the two Greek words matching *l'ma'an* without reference to their sense in Attic Greek. It is a great relief to feel that in some of the harsher passages of the Bible the interrelation of these three words gives admission to a view that lets them count as figurative,—like so many other expressions that, literally taken, exhibit God as absorbing all purpose and all activity into himself.

10. The extraordinary number of genitives, in the New Testament, modifying a previous noun, is due to Hebrew idiom: in each Testament many of them puzzle the reader with the question whether they are merely attributive, taking the place of an adjective, or are something stronger. Some

are obviously attributive; others are as clearly objective and intensive; and between stand many that are doubtful. Many were turned into adjectives in the process of translation; many were transferred, as they stood, to the English text. There are a husband of blood, the steward of dishonesty, the root of fatness, the wine of the wrath, the stature of the fullness, the children of thy bereavement, the rock of ages, the waters of quietness ("still waters"), the blood of sprinkling, the flesh of sin, the vessel of election, the word of life, the tree of life, the battles of shaking, and the rest.

On the whole, one comes from the study of parallel cases in the Old Testament with a stronger disposition to treat the New Testament cases as pregnant, if they can be made to seem so, because the method seems to have been largely used in the Old Testament as a way of adding power. Hence "the rock of ages" is presumably the everlasting rock, and the "trees of life" (there are at least two of them in Rev. xxii. 2) are presumably not only living trees, but trees giving life.

11. And there are all those curious "sons," by which in Job an arrow is "the son of the bow," and in 2 Chron. xxiv. 7 "the sons of Athaliah" may be her kind of people, whether of her own flesh or not, and the "offspring of vipers" were more venomous than the vipers themselves, and a "son of perdition" was ruined beyond any hope. These "sons" were idioms, imposed by the Hebrew directly upon the Hellenistic Greek.

12. The abundance of ellipsis in the New Testament is due, of course, to transfer of idioms, since it is exceedingly common in the Old Testament but is far from common in classic Greek. We have illustrated this usage abundantly from each Testament in former papers, but a few more cases may freshen our sense of the matter: