

the Hebrew, Samaritan, and Septuagint Versions, at which we have hinted, that indicate substantial agreement upon the facts; the distinct statement that Noah (one of his name and race) was 600 years old when he entered the ark; the apparent gradual diminution in the ages of the postdiluvian races till the days of Abraham—till Moses, according to Josephus; these and other difficulties, that take their rise chiefly in preconceived opinion, may form the subject of another chapter in *postdiluvian* chronology. Meanwhile let us not forget the words of Coleridge, “A theory—*θεωρία*—only helps *investigation*; it cannot invent or discover.”

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WIND AND FIRE MINISTERS OF GOD.

PSALM CIV. 4; HEBREWS I. 7.

IN the Epistle to the Hebrews we read, “And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.”

The Greek is: *καὶ πρὸς μὲν τοὺς ἀγγέλους λέγει, Ὁ ποιῶν τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ πνεύματα καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ πῦρ φλόγα.*

This agrees exactly with the Septuagint Version of Psalm civ. 4, from which the quotation is taken, except in the substitution of *πῦρ φλόγα* for *πῦρ φλέγον*, a substitution which in no way affects the sense. The English Version, however, is clearly wrong in translating *πνεύματα* by “spirits,” for such a rendering entirely destroys the parallelism. It is plain that the words ought to be translated, “Who maketh his angels winds, his ministers a flame of fire.” The two clauses are thus in strict parallelism. But the question

still remains, What is meant by such an expression? The text from the Psalm is quoted as a proof text, as one of those which support the writer's main argument in this section of his Epistle, viz., that the Christ as Son of God has a dignity higher than that of the angels. He places in sharp contrast those passages of the Old Testament in which God speaks of the Messiah as his Son, and those in which He speaks of the angels; arguing, that however great the angels may be in majesty and power, they yet hold a subordinate place in the administration of the world. The angels of God are called upon to do homage to his Son (Verse 6); they are servants employed by Him in his natural government of the universe (Verse 7), and in his special providence as exercised towards his children (Verse 14).

There can be no doubt of course as to the rendering of the Greek: the object and the predicate are clearly distinguished. The only question is as to the sense in which God *makes* his angels winds, his ministers a flaming fire.

Some expositors have explained this as meaning that God's angels are the secret agents by whom all the various phenomena of the world exist; that they are not merely employed on special missions and for particular purposes; that what we see working around us are not blind forces of nature, but beings to whom natural objects are a veil concealing their operations. In the words of a devout and eloquent writer: "Every breath of air, and ray of light and heat, every beautiful prospect, is, as it were, the skirts of their garments, the waving of the robes of those whose faces see God in heaven." This view in fact assumes that the whole mechanism of the universe is ordinarily

carried on by the administration of angels. Such a view, however, implies a scheme of the universe which it is not very pleasant to contemplate; and it goes beyond anything to be found in Scripture. We read no doubt much of angelic mediation. We are told that the Law was given by the interposition of angels; that the Most High came to Sinai accompanied by "holy myriads" of these shining ones. Angels, according to the theology of the Book of Daniel, play a part in the political convulsions of empires. The little ones of Christ's kingdom, according to our Lord's own words, are under the tutelary guardianship of these blessed spirits. In the passage immediately following that on which I am commenting, we read that they are sent forth for purposes of ministry (*εἰς διακονίαν ἀποστελλόμενα*), that in this world of sorrow and trial they "come to succour us, that succour want." In the imagery of the Apocalypse they are represented, not only as executing God's judgments upon earth, but as having the control of the elements. There are four angels who hold the four winds:¹ there is an angel that has power over the fire,² and an angel of the waters,³ and an angel "standing in the sun."⁴ But without urging that the language of the Apocalyptic vision is symbolical, and not intended to be taken as a description of literal matter of fact, the offices here ascribed to angels have evident reference to their agency on special missions and extraordinary occasions. The same may be said of the singular addition to the narrative of the miraculous cure of the paralytic in the fifth Chapter of St. John's Gospel, where the healing virtue of the water of the pool of Bethesda is ascribed to the influence of an angel. The interpolation in that

¹ Rev. vii. 1.² Ibid. xiv. 18.³ Ibid. xvi. 5.⁴ Ibid. xix. 17.

passage shews that a doctrine of angelic agency was early prevalent in the Church, closely akin to that of which I am speaking; and the interpolation itself may be due, as Tholuck suggests, to a Palestinian reader who held the belief that the powers of nature were under the immediate control and disposition of angels.

The traditional Jewish view, without going so far as this, gives a more literal sense to the verb "maketh." "God," say the Rabbis, "is called the God of Sabaoth (or hosts), because He doeth with his angels whatsoever He will. When He willeth He maketh them sit (Judg. vi. 11), at other times He maketh them stand (Isa. vi. 2); sometimes He maketh them like women (Zech. v. 9), sometimes like men (Gen. xviii. 2). At one time He maketh them winds, at another fire (Psa. civ. 4); *i.e.*, He makes them *assume the form* of winds or of fire."¹ This differs from the first interpretation in assigning special forms with special functions to the angels at the will of God, instead of regarding them as the ordinary instruments by whom the visible creation is sustained in its order.

(β) But it is quite possible to take the verse in a somewhat more extended signification, and one that does not pledge us to so definite a scheme of angelic ministration. It need mean nothing more than this, that God clothes His angels with the might, the swiftness, the all-pervading subtilty of wind and fire. Or, in other words, "God makes the angels as winds, his ministers as flaming fire." This is an interpretation unobjectionable in itself, and not out of harmony with the general scope of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, whose object here is to exalt the glory and

¹ *Shemoth Rabbah*, § 25, fol. 23.

power of the angels, only to show how far greater He is in glory and power who "hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."

But the next question we have to consider is, Do the LXX. give an accurate rendering of the original Hebrew? In my work on the Psalms I have hitherto felt myself bound to concede the substantial accuracy of their rendering on what appeared to me to be the grammatical requirements of the passage. But it was "only the irresistible compulsion of a grammatical necessity," to use Bishop Thirlwall's words, that drove me to adopt it; because, "however satisfactory in itself, it is quite foreign to the context. The Psalmist is evidently speaking of God's doings in the visible creation, not of the secret agency by which He accomplishes his ends." God has his palace in heaven, He makes the clouds his chariot, &c. (Verse 3. "It was therefore very much to the purpose to say that wind and fire are his servants and do his pleasure; but not at all to say that He has unseen servants who act as wind and fire." In the way, however, of this natural and obvious sense, there appeared to be two serious difficulties: first, the use of the plural predicate in the second member of the verse; and next, the inversion of order of object and predicate in both members of the verse. Let us examine these separately.

1. It seems awkward to say, "He maketh the flaming fire his ministers." We ought to have either "flames of fire his ministers," or, "the flaming fire his minister;" both plural, or both singular. This difficulty, however, was partly obviated by Hupfeld's remark that the plural predicate here is an accommodation to the plural predicate "messengers" in the first member; partly

also, as I think, by the consideration that as by the flaming fire the lightnings are meant, the subject itself is conceived of as plural. But further, there is an instance of an exactly parallel construction in Proverbs xvi. 14—"The wrath of the king is messengers of death"—though this is obscured in the English Version by the introduction of the particle of comparison, "The wrath of the king is *as* messengers of death."

2. But the other, and much more serious difficulty, is the inversion of order of the object and predicate after the verb in both members of the verse. This appeared so serious a difficulty to so profound and critical a scholar as the late Bishop Thirlwall that, whilst he felt that the context seemed to require the sense which such an inversion implied, he yet thought it "incredible that the language should have been left in such a state as to make it immaterial as to the sense whether you wrote, 'Who maketh the clouds his chariot,' or, 'Who maketh the chariot his clouds;' and that the reader should have to infer the author's meaning, not from the order of his words, but from extrinsic considerations. I cannot help thinking," he adds, "that more attention should have been paid to this question, and that it should have taken the precedence of every other." This question had, it is true, engaged the attention of Delitzsch, but the passages which he quoted in proof of the possibility of such an inversion of order were not to the point. I am, however, now able to establish by indisputable parallels that the rules of Hebrew syntax were in this respect not the same as those of most other languages. I can adduce two passages from the Prophet Isaiah (and a more careful and extended search would doubtless increase the number) as evidence that

what seemed "incredible" to Bishop Thirlwall, was, nevertheless, admissible, and that it was really indifferent to a Hebrew writer which order he employed. Thus, in Isaiah xxxvii. 26—"That thou shouldest be to lay waste defenced cities (into) ruinous heaps"—in the Hebrew order the predicate, "ruinous heaps," comes first after the verb, and the object, "defenced cities," last. Again, in Isaiah lx. 18—"Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise"—the Hebrew order is, "Thou shalt call Salvation thy walls, and thy gates Praise," it being evident that it was a matter of perfect indifference to the writer whether he placed the object or the predicate first. In the former of these examples it might of course be said that the verb "to lay waste" attracted into closer proximity to itself the predicate "ruinous heaps." But the latter is quite conclusive as to the condition of Hebrew syntax, and is strictly parallel to the construction in Psalm civ. There can no longer, therefore, be any doubt that the rendering which is most in accordance with the context is also perfectly justifiable on grammatical grounds, and we ought to render :

Who maketh the winds his messengers,
The flaming fire his ministers.

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THE PHARISAIC MODE OF WASHING BEFORE MEAT.

A BIBLICAL NOTE.

ST. MARK VII. 3.—"The Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands *oft*, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders." The word here translated *oft* (πυγμαῖ) is one of the crosses of the critics, and has