

THE GRAPHIC ELEMENT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

THE older writers on what, for their time, constituted Biblical Introduction, draw particular attention to the *evidentia* of the style of the sacred writers. The expression, as understood by them, was not inappropriate to denote what Whately in his Rhetoric calls "energy" (the *Ἐνεργεῖα* of Aristotle), or the "vivacity" of Campbell; and is even more suggestive than these terms, from their common use, have now come to be. It corresponds, in fact, to the *τὸ πρὸ ὁμμάτων ποιεῖν* of the Greeks, or the *subjectio* of Latin writers, and is thus explained by Salomon Glass:¹—
"Per *evidentiam* literaturæ sive styli Scripturæ Sacræ hoc loco non intelligimus ejus claritatem et perspicuitatem . . . sed specialius *virtutem eam, quâ res quasi ante oculos spectandæ proponuntur.*" He goes on to say: "Et tali sermone animus non solùm movetur, sed res ipsæ etiam illustrantur, dum veluti coràm spectandæ proponuntur, ac ita quaedam *αὐτοψία* et *intuitiva* (ut in Scholis loquuntur) *notitia* efficitur;" quoting the maxim of Horace:—

"Segnius irritant animos de nissa per aures,
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus, et quæ
Ipse sibi tradit spectator."

To the same effect, and almost in the same words, Flacius² had expressed himself before; and Franzius³ puts the matter even more pithily: "Omnino enim tota

¹ *Philologia Sacra Libri Quinque*: Lib. I. Tract. iii. Sect. iv.

² *Clavis Scripturæ*: Altera Pars, Tract. v. Col. 473 sqq.

³ *Tractatus Theologicus*: Oraculum LVI.

Scriptura rem, quam propositura est, non tam eloquitur, quam certis adhibitis gestibus et affectibus agit, et quasi in *Comœdia viva* representat."

This graphic feature is, of course, common to all languages in a greater or less degree. Aristotle refers to Homer for examples of the τὸ πρὸ ὀμμάτων ποιεῖν, and the writers who have been named give illustrations of *evidentia* indiscriminately from all parts of Scripture. But in the Old Testament it is most strikingly exhibited, although our very familiarity with Bible language leads an ordinary reader often to overlook the vividness of the style which gives so much life to the sacred page; and a constant regard to its presence is necessary to prevent misconceptions that might arise as to the force of Scriptural language in general, and will enable the expositor in many cases to clear up passages that are otherwise obscure.

I. The whole tone of Hebrew thought inclines to actual presentation of the object rather than to notional representation of it, and this to such an extent as to have moulded the constructions of the language, and even controlled its lexical contents.

(1) The poverty of the language in adjectives has been remarked upon by all grammarians, and finds here its explanation. Accustomed to regard things in their concrete aspect, the writers of the Old Testament say, attributively, "walls of wood," and then, predicatively, "its walls are wood," so that one class of adjectives, that denoting *material*, has scarcely been formed at all, and others but sparingly, substantives being made to do duty instead. Even when compelled to abstract a quality, the Hebrew still regards it as a thing, and uses the abstract noun rather than the adjective; saying "words of truth" rather than "true words." And it is remarkable that, although there is no want of expressions to denote mental and spiritual qualities or acts, derived to a great extent, as in

all languages, from those which are physical and sensible; yet these expressions, whether nouns, adjectives, or verbs, retain with great firmness their primary significations, even though capable of being employed in secondary senses. Consequently the language is highly metaphorical, and even in formal comparisons it assumes a bold conciseness which is very striking, the feature of comparison being overlooked in the contemplation of the object to which it belongs; as "Who will give me wings like a dove?" "Thy eyes are doves," and so forth.

The significance of this to the expositor is apparent. When a sacred writer uses a bold metaphor, it becomes the duty of the careful interpreter to consider what quality or qualities the writer was thinking of, and not to proceed to enumerate all the particulars in which the resemblance may hold. Much less, when the writer, preoccupied with one quality, straightway names the thing itself, must the expositor conclude that the thing itself is intended. Thus, to conclude from prophetic denunciations of sacrifices and feasts that these were neither appointed nor approved by God is false interpretation to begin with, and can only vitiate the process of historical criticism. On the other hand, the difficult passage in Psalm xlv. 7 (Heb.), which some render, "Thy throne is God" *i.e.*, *divine*, shews at least how cautiously the principle before us has to be handled.

(2) Of the nature of *evidentia* also is the extensive use of the definite article where other languages speak indefinitely. So strongly demonstrative is the language here that it not only regularly says "the snow," "the water," "the gold," "the ox," and so forth, when a whole class or a material is in question, but vividly singles out and particularizes an individual where we should use the class name. Thus Noah sends forth "the dove" and "the raven;" "the escaped one" comes to Abram and reports

the taking of Sodom; and "the lion and the bear" fall upon David's flock.

Perhaps it was from a similar impulse that a neuter gender was never developed. It is remarked by Whately that our language with its neuter gender, enables us to personify neuter things by speaking of them as masculine or feminine. On the other hand, the Shemitic languages, having no neuter at all, virtually personify all nouns, and are to that extent poetical throughout. It thus comes quite naturally to a writer to describe the mountains as skipping like rams; and to speak of the stones crying out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber answering it.

(3) The tense usages in Hebrew furnish a very clear illustration of the principle we are considering. Accustomed to direct objective presentation, the writers content themselves with a few forms to denote various spheres of time and relations of dependence; and we have to consider the context, or, in other words, to place ourselves side by side with the writer in each case, to occupy his precise point of view, in order to observe the relation in which the events stand to him. Prof. Driver in speaking of the Imperfect with strong *Waw*,¹ says: "That a series of past facts should ever have been regularly viewed in this light (a supposition without which the construction before us remains unaccountable), that in each term of such a series the salient feature seized upon by language should be not its character as past, but its character as nascent or ingressive, may indeed appear singular: but *the ultimate explanation of it must undoubtedly lie in the mode of thought peculiar to the people, and here reflected in their language.*" Now this mode of thought referred to in the words we have emphasized is just the striving after the *evidentia* of which we speak. To the Hebrew speaker or writer the character or quality of the act was the primary

¹ *Treatise on the use of the Tenses in Hebrew*, 2nd Edition, § 68.

thing, not its sphere of time. And in his endeavour to make that quality evident to the hearer or reader, he used such forms as would describe the event or state in its own character or its relation to other acts and states, moving on with the panorama that moved before his eyes, and expecting his listener to move with him. Without bearing this constantly in mind, we shall never be able to appreciate the peculiar usages and sudden transitions which are so characteristic of Hebrew diction.

(4) It was no doubt for the same reason that the Hebrew so tardily developed indirect speech, but takes the reader at once *in medias res*, and by dialogue, and sometimes by highly dramatic representation, exhibits what in our languages is generally conveyed by a summary or indirect statement.

Of the vividness imparted to poetical style by this mode of speech the second Psalm is a striking example, in which various actors are introduced, so to speak, abruptly on the stage, without any direct announcement of their appearance, the different scenes succeeding one another with picturesque brevity.¹ But even in the ordinary narrative style, it should be observed how, by means of dialogue, there is presented before us a great deal more than plain narrative could well convey. The voice, the gesture, the inward feelings of the interlocutors are conveyed or implied in their attitudes and words; and though the difficulty of the language with the *oratio obliqua* should warn us against taking the words in such conversations as meant to be the *ipsissima verba* that were spoken, we may be sure that they are always designed to convey some notice of the mind of the speaker, so that we have continually pictures between the lines, some of them most exquisite in the beauty of their details. Such a telling little picture is drawn, for example, in 1 Samuel ix. 11-13. The writer, who has been careful

¹ THE EXPOSITOR. Second Series, vol. iii. pp. 13 ff.

to describe the personal appearance of Saul in the second verse of the chapter, tells us how the two young men determined to consult the seer as to the straying asses. When they came to the foot of the hill on which the town of Samuel stood, they found young maidens going out to draw water, and put to them the brief question, "Is the seer here?" The narrative proceeds: "And they answered them and said, He is; behold he is before you; make haste now, for he came to-day to the city; for there is a sacrifice to-day of the people in the high place; as soon as ye be come into the city ye shall straightway find him, before he go up to the high place to eat; for the people will not eat until he come, because he doth bless the sacrifice, and afterward they eat that be bidden. Now therefore get you up, for about this time ye shall find him." Now wherefore all this round-about gossiping answer? Is it that the young maidens, impressed with the handsome form of the "choice young man and goodly, from his shoulder and upward taller than any of the people," under cover of giving information, take as long time to stare at the youth as propriety will allow? It is certainly noticeable that the first part of the answer is directed to *one* of the young men, "he is before *thee*" (לְפָנֶיךָ); but, in any case, by the simple use of the direct dialogue, the writer paints in a few touches the whole scene at the well and the excitement in the town on the hill; so that we have not a bare report of what had been done to prepare for the sacrifice, but an exhibition of the various actors in the very act.¹

¹ This is a feature of narrative that is very strikingly preserved in the modern Oriental usage. The charm of Eastern story-telling lies just in this system of word painting or word acting. A narrator does not give a *résumé* of an affair, but repeats it word for word. Or if, as sometimes happens, he has occasion to repeat the same thing more than twice, he says, "the matter was thus, and thus, and thus," holding up his hand and putting a finger to the thumb for each detail. We have thus a visible representation of the transition which so many languages show from *count* to *recount*, *conter* to *raconter*, קָפַר to קָפַר, zählen to erzählen, and *tell* in its two senses. Does the Arabic حَدَّث here

II. The tendency to objective presentation, which thus shews itself as a general characteristic of Hebrew diction, manifests itself usually not only in an animated style, but also in an animated *delivery*. A speaker under such an impulse to exhibit the *very thing*, acts the thing by appropriate modulations of the voice and gestures of the body; himself absorbed in the scene described, he draws the hearer also into it, and gives him a *notitia intuitiva* of the matter in hand. To what extent this may be carried is seen in the symbolical acts of some of the prophets whereby, in a more striking way than by words, they intimated impending events or reproved prevailing sins. Thus Jeremiah wears a yoke on his neck, and breaks a potter's vessel in presence of the elders of the people. So Ezekiel lies on his side to intimate the siege of Jerusalem, and digs a hole in the wall to carry his furniture out of the city: and doubtless there are many such symbolical acts obscurely indicated in the prophetic writings.¹ Even in the historical writings we find frequently a speaking by signs and acts rather than words, as when Abraham is made to walk abroad and look at the stars, and when Saul hews the bullocks and sends to the tribes of Israel.

But, not to dwell upon this acted speech, there are the accompaniments of spoken speech, the looks and gestures of the speaker, which, of course usually disappear when language is written down, but which it would be exceedingly interesting to trace on the written page. The use of appropriate gestures in ordinary conversation, with which travel-

approach the word **أحد** *one* ? The student will have observed that in all the respects enumerated, the Hebrew is more distinctly objective than the sister tongues; for both the Syriac and Arabic have worked for themselves a greater degree of freedom or subjectivity. Compare, for example, the bold objective **הִנֵּה** *behold!* with its etymological equivalent **אֲנִי** which already hovers, like the Greek *ἐγώ* between direct and indirect speech. On the growth of the indirect speech in Hebrew, see Ewald, § 338 a.

¹ See Cheyne on Isaiah xxx. 8, 9.

lers are struck as soon as they pass beyond our own islands, is even more remarkable in the East than on the Continent. It is not that gesticulation is more animated, or declamation more demonstrative; for in this respect the Frenchman or Greek surpasses the Syrian or Egyptian. But with the latter there is more of the suiting of the action to the word, the gestures are more expressive; and this is carried so far that at times the spoken word is omitted and a significant gesture takes its place, and thus the conditions of the *comœdia viva* are literally fulfilled.¹ And, to come to the Old Testament writers, one point of difference is very observable: in putting down the words of a speaker they very often give us an indication of his gesture as he spoke. However animated a conversation between Europeans may be, when it is written down we generally have the words and nothing more; but so wholly is the Hebrew writer absorbed in his narrative, that he is continually telling us of the movements of the eyes and head and hand of the actors in the scene before him, and the style thus attains a graphic character which, from our familiarity, is apt to escape our remark. An acquaintance with such gestures as are more common or more characteristic, will therefore, it need scarcely be said, go far to make the written composition vivid or even intelligible; and if we may assume that this

¹ Archdeacon Farrar, in his *Chapters on Language* (chap. vi.), has given references to the use of the language of gesture in various countries, instancing (from Chardin), the Armenian merchants who can, without moving a muscle of the face, intimate to one another the modifications of their bargains, by movements of their hands under their cloaks. On the other hand I have often seen in Eastern bazaars an interchange of glances and shrugs and movements of the head amounting, without a word spoken, to this conversation: "Can I sell you anything to-day?" "No, thanks, I am merely looking about." "I am very sorry, but it cannot be helped." That all this was a well-known thing to the Hebrews is plain from Proverbs vi. 13. Language with gesture bears the same resemblance to simple speech that poetry does to prose, dancing to walking, or singing to reading; and we may observe in regard to the Orientals how poetical is their prose, how graceful their gait, and how their reading readily runs into a chant.

is one of the many unchanging features of the unchanging East, it is evident that a study of modern gestures and visible accompaniments of speech may throw not a little light on the pages of Scripture.

Now we are not left to assume that such gestures were common in Palestine in ancient times; and, in point of fact, the correspondence of such as are mentioned in Scripture with those that may be observed at the present day, is extraordinary. Such phrases, ever recurring, as "he lifted up his eyes and looked," "he opened his mouth and said," "he arose and went," or even "he lifted his feet and went," are not mere pleonasms; they are pictorial phrases, coming in the written language to supply the accompaniments of spoken speech. These, and many others which will occur to the reader of Scripture, have their counterparts more or less exact in the modern speech of Palestine, in which the narrator not only *acts* the thing, but says that he is doing so, or sometimes dispenses with the word altogether.¹

The observant traveller in the Holy Land—and the tour of Palestine should form part of the education of every minister—will very soon find many illustrations of Scripture beyond the topographical characteristics and physical features of the country. The habits of life of the people, and, still more, their habits of thought, in varied forms of expression, throw a flood of light on the written page and make it a spoken word. Dr. Thomson, the most observant of all writers, in his *Land and the Book*, gives many such way-side illustrations, two of which may be instanced. The "braying of a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle" (Prov. xxvii. 22), no doubt refers to such an operation as the pounding of meat and wheat to make the common dish

¹ In the fourth chapter of John's Gospel, the words of the Samaritan woman, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain," imply the gesture of pointing to the overhanging Gerizim; and the *thus* in the phrase, "He sat *thus* on the well," is employed *δεικτικῶς*, having its exact counterpart in the modern Arabic, as if the original narrator shewed how He sat.

called *kubbeh*; and the "continual dropping," to which a brawling woman is repeatedly compared, is not the dropping of rain out of doors, as we in our moist climate might suppose, but the proverbial nuisance of the East, the constant *tak, tak* of wet oozing into a room through the flat roof; an annoyance that becomes intolerable from its irritable monotony, its persistence long after the rain has ceased, and the fact that it cannot be escaped from.¹

But if an acquaintance with the modern accompaniments of speech is indispensable to a correct understanding of the text, it is equally evident that a misapprehension of them will be a drawback, or may even mislead; and further, if, as is quite possible, some ancient modes may have changed or disappeared, a good deal may be for the time lost that might have been helpful. In any case, the gestures are worthy of study.

(1) Many of the gestures mentioned in Scripture either correspond with gestures with which we are familiar or are evidently explained by the context. Thus we have the bowing of the head, and the lifting up of the head; falling on the face, lying on the face, holding up, or lifting up the face, and turning away of the face; the various expressions of the eyes, as the opening of the eyes on one in severity (Job xiv. 3; Zech. xii. 4; Jer. xxxii. 19), and the stronger expression "sharpening the eyes" (Job xvi. 9), having the eyes on one in Providential regard (Job xxxiv.

¹ All this was particularly impressed on my mind when, after a residence of a few years in Beyrout, I commenced a Bible Class in the native language to a number of intelligent boys. I found that the stock material for teaching such a class at home was taken from one. Not only were the flat housetops, the burning suns and parched lands, and all the features of an Eastern landscape, before the eyes of the pupils daily, but the mode of dialogue and turn of phrase were simple repetitions of familiar forms of speech. From a literary point of view there was little left to explain; and I was led to the conclusion that of all the peoples of the world who now read God's word in their own tongue, the inhabitants of Bible lands are the most highly favoured, in having it brought down to the level of their daily experience in the incomparable Arabic version of Drs. Eli Smith and Van Dyck, now circulated by the Bible Societies.

21 ; Psalm xi. 4, etc.), the eye as the symbol of desire (Gen. xxxix. 7 ; Eccles. ii. 10, etc.), winking with the eyes (Prov. vi. 13) ; laughing to scorn, and many others. We have not always, indeed, among ourselves their exact counterparts. The Oriental, for example, winks with both eyes ; so the shaking of the hand as a gesture of threatening or defiance (Isa. x. 32, xi. 15 ; Zech. ii. 13 Heb.), is not a movement of the closed hand (for the " fist " proper is very rarely mentioned), but such a gesture with the open hand as the boys in some parts of Germany employ freely when they threaten one another with the police. But they are all intelligible from the context and are all faithfully retained in the East. And here may be mentioned the expression in Malachi i. 13, to " snuff at " a thing, which is a stronger form of our *pooh-pooh*, and is given in the Arabic version " to say *uph* " to it.

(2) Some, however, are expressed in language which conveys to us, with our Western habits, a different idea from the one intended. Thus to " shake the head " does not, either in Scripture or modern usage, indicate dissent or refusal, the proper gesture for which in modern times is a slight backward toss of the head, sometimes accompanied with a click of the tongue, and a closing of the eyes. In Scripture we find the shaking of the head apparently as a sign of defiance or derision (2 Kings xix. 21 ; Job xvi. 4 ; Psalm xxii. 7 Heb., cix. 25 ; comp. Matt. xxvii. 39). In modern usage it is often employed to express supreme contempt, or deep sorrow at the contemplation of a misfortune, the uniting idea being perhaps the thought of the utter powerlessness of some person or thing before a great calamity. It occurs, along with two gestures of similar import, in Lamentations ii. 15. " All that pass by clap their hands at thee ; they hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth ? " The verb שרק " to hiss " is here explained by Isaaki (the so-called

Rashi, whose remarks on these gestures are particularly valuable) as corresponding to the Latin *sibilare* "as people do on seeing something fine that has gone to utter ruin," a long drawn *whew* in fact. So in Ezekiel xxi. 14 (ver. 19 in Heb.) and 17 (ver. 22 in Heb.) the phrase "Smite palm to palm" is explained by him "after the manner of mourners." The truth is that both the gestures mentioned, which are both common in the East,¹ seem to indicate, as he says, the feeling of a person on seeing something fine that has gone to ruin; but, according as the beholder views the catastrophe with complacency or the reverse, they will denote either joy or sorrow. Thus the clapping of the hands is indeed a gesture of grief, but it is also an expression of scorn or ridicule (as in Ezek. xxv. 6); and the "hissing" or "whistling" (for it is the nearest approach to whistling that an Oriental makes) may indicate either exultation over a fallen foe, or sorrow over a humbled friend.

(3) But some expressions of this kind are descriptive of gestures peculiar to the East, or at least unknown among ourselves. And of this class some find an obvious explanation in manners and customs of which a general knowledge is possessed by the average reader of the Bible. Such are the rending of the clothes as a sign of grief, and the accompanying gestures or habits of putting ashes or dust upon the head, and tearing the hair. So again the girding up of the loins for speed, or girding the loins with strength, the laying of the hand on the mouth in token of keeping silence (Jud. xviii. 19) but more frequently in shame and humiliation, indicating that the person has not a word to say for himself (Job xxi. 5, xl. 4; Prov. xxx. 32; Micah vii. 16, etc.).

¹ In Lane's translation of the *Thousand and One Nights* (Chap. xx. vol. iii. p. 20) occurs this passage:—"He uttered a loud cry and said, Oh! my disappointment! There is no strength nor power but in God. We seek refuge in God from Satan the accursed! He repented, and *struck hand upon hand* and said, Oh! my grief!" upon which Lane has a note on the various uses of clapping the hands in the East.

Perhaps the covering of the lip enjoined on the leper, and elsewhere referred to, is only another form of the same thing. The phrase in Leviticus xiii. 45, rendered in A.V. "put a covering upon his upper lip," is exactly the same as is found in Ezekiel xxiv. 17, 22, and Micah iii. 7, in which places it is rendered simply "cover thy lips," and evidently denotes humiliation and mourning. The "smiting on the thigh," again (Jer. xxxi. 19; Ezek. xxi. 12, ver. 17 in Heb.), though made plain by the context, is a peculiar gesture, denoting regret, grief or disappointment. So it occurs in Homer:—

"Divine Achilles viewed the rising flames,
And smote his thigh, and thus aloud exclaims."

The "shaking of the raiment" is a gesture that very soon attracts the attention of a European in the East. It consists in taking the lappet of the coat or cloak daintily between the finger and thumb and shaking it outwards; and it indicates that the person holds himself clear of participation in a doubtful or improper business, and declines in any way to be responsible for consequences. This, it should be mentioned, is different from the "shaking out of the lap" in Nehemiah v. 13, which seems to come under the head of symbolical prophetic acts, and should not, as is done in the marginal references of our English Bibles, be reckoned with the shaking of the dust off the feet, or shaking of the raiment (Acts xiii. 51, xviii. 6). I cannot remember an instance in the Old Testament of the shaking of the raiment in the sense in which it has been described, although it is now exceedingly common. Another very common gesture is referred to in Nahum ii. 7 (Heb.), "Her maids shall moan [not "lead her" as in A.V.] as with the voice of doves, tabering upon their breasts;" where we have the well-known sound raised by mourning women, and the accompanying gesture of gathering the points of the fingers and

thumb into a compact mass and beating with them the bare breast.

Of others, however, the explanation is by no means so obvious; and it is quite probable that many references of this kind lie hidden away in obscure phrases and expressions, which a better acquaintance with the ancient habits and life of the people would clear up. It may be that commentators have perplexed themselves in vain endeavours 'to explain expressions which are simply the statement in words of a gesture which, in the spoken language, would have been an accompaniment or even a substitute of speech. There are, at all events, some phrases, in themselves obscure, which find a striking parallel in curious gestures prevailing at the present day; and the existence of a few prepares us for believing that there may be more. In particular, the Book of Job, whose Arab colouring is generally recognized;¹ and the Book of Proverbs, which is full of graphic little pictures of the old daily life, furnish notable examples.

¹ I remember Dr. Van Dyck telling me that no part of the Old Testament was easier of translation into Arabic than the Book of Job. Where a terse, enigmatical, or ambiguous phrase occurred in the original, a counterpart or analogue offered itself in Arabic, so that a literal translation was an idiomatic version. The correspondence of phrases is at times very striking. And I cannot help thinking that one expression at least answers to an Arabic usage which is only found in sub-classical and modern speech. The Arabic phrase مَا صَدَّقَ as explained by Dozy, in his Supplement to the Arabic Dictionaries, and heard often at the present day, though properly meaning "he did not believe," has come to be used in the sense of "he was impatient till—" and then "scarcely had . . . when," the intermediate signification probably being "he believed not for joy." The corresponding phrase לֹא נִשְׂמַח בְּשִׂמְחָתוֹ occurs several times in the Book of Job in connexions where it seems to be undergoing the same transition. On the passage relating to the war horse (xxxix. 24) "Neither believeth he that it is the sound of the trumpet," the editors of the Queen's Printers' Bible justly remark "viz. for joy," and the idea of *impatience* is only a step removed. In regard to xxix. 24: "If I laughed on them they believed it not," the commentators render, "I laughed towards them when they despaired," which seems much more frigid than, "I smiled towards them—they were overjoyed," or even "they longed for my smile." These passages seem clear, and in other places it is worth while to bear this variation of meaning in mind (e.g. Job ix. 16; Lam. iv. 12; Hab. i. 5).

The expression, "skin for skin" in Job ii. 4, is most naturally explained as a proverbial phrase, originating in the gesture of raising the hand to ward off a blow, or stretching it out to soften a fall. As one puts up his hand to save his face, and would rather suffer the bruise of a limb than the injury of a vital part, so, Job's adversary insinuates, the patriarch would sacrifice one after another of his worldly possessions and bodily comforts to preserve his own life.

"I am escaped with the skin of my teeth" (Job xix. 20) has been a great puzzle. Talmage says, "Job's teeth have exercised the forceps of commentators from the earliest times," and we do not think that the crack American dentist has been more successful than his predecessors. No doubt the phrase was proverbial, and it certainly corresponds exactly to one of the most expressive gestures in use at the present day. When a speaker wishes to indicate absolute deprivation of *everything*, utter and entire poverty, he puts up his closed hand to his mouth, inserts his upper front teeth between the nail and the flesh of his thumb, brings the nail away with a sharp crack, extends the hand with the palm outwards, and ejaculates "ha!" as much as to say, "See! what can you take off there?" A modern Syrian, to express Job's thought, would say, "I am escaped with—see!" making the gesture just described; and all this put down in writing is simply, "I am escaped with the skin of my teeth," in other words, with absolutely nothing. "Cleanness of teeth" is made by Amos (iv. 6) parallel with "want of bread," and the firmness and whiteness of an Oriental's teeth make this passage in Job the more forcible.¹

"Wherefore do I take my flesh in my teeth and put

¹ Gnashing (or *creaking* rather) of teeth in anger is very common. It is as painful to the ear as the sharpening of a saw. The rendering "set on edge," in the E. V. of Jeremiah xxxi. 29, etc., should be "dulled" or "blunted."

my life in my hand?" (Job xiii. 14) is another verse that is perplexing. The latter part corresponds to 1 Samuel xix. 5, xxviii. 21; Judges xii. 3, and other places; where the meaning clearly is to expose life to the greatest danger, whatever the origin of the expression may have been. In regard to the "taking the flesh in the teeth" there is in the margin of our English Bibles a reference to Chapter xviii. 4, "he teareth himself in his anger," which may be a stronger form of the expression, and may indicate the original nature of the gesture which I believe is referred to. When one wishes to indicate the repression of violent passion, to express regret at something that he has said, or to imply that he is tempted to say something he would not say, he presses his fist to his mouth, biting the fore finger, a much intensified form of our biting of the lip. And Rashi seems to have understood the verse as referring to such a gesture, for he explains, "to expose my life to death *from the pain of silence*" and this, it will be seen, agrees with the context: "Hold your peace, let me alone that I may speak, and let come on me what will. Wherefore should I take my flesh in my teeth and put my life in my hand?" In Lane's *Thousand and One Nights* (vol. ii. p. 61) occurs this passage: "So when the wolf heard the words of the fox, he bit his paw in repentance" [having been circumvented by him], and Lane in a note explains that the phrase "biting one's hand," is a common expression, and that the action denoted by it is still to be seen in Egypt. It is very common in Syria.

The expression, in Proverbs xxx. 20, "She eateth and wipeeth her mouth, and saith I have done no wickedness," came into my mind vividly as I listened once to a story (and curiously enough, a story of an intrigue) that my teacher was telling me. A man was relating to a friend some love adventure in which he had been engaged, and the woman concerned happened to be the wife of the

friend to whom he was speaking. She, listening behind the lattice, and fearing exposure, addressed an ejaculation to her child, the object of which was to put him on his guard. So he proceeded, "And just when we came to that point I awoke and . . . [wiping first one side of his mouth, and then the other] there was nothing more," passing the whole off as a dream.

The expression, "on my head," accompanied with a bow and the placing of the hand on the head, is a very common modern gesture, indicating submission to authority, or undertaking of service. To this there are frequent references in Scripture, and the expressions that occur, "binding on the heart," "binding about the neck," etc., though they may proximately refer to the phylacteries, yet probably point to something on which the custom of phylacteries itself was grafted, and corresponding to the modern form of salutation by touching the heart, the lips, and the head, in token of entire devotion. Thus, no doubt, is explained Job xxxi. 27, "If my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand" [or literally "my hand hath kissed my mouth"] as a symbol of reverence and worship. Also in Genesis xli. 40, Pharaoh says to Joseph, in the E.V., "According unto thy word shall all my people be ruled," but, in the original, "On thy mouth shall all my people kiss." As a kiss of homage from the people indiscriminately seems out of the question, we may understand the words to mean, "At thy word shall all my people kiss" [the hand] in token of acceptance of orders and submission to authority. An old friend of mine in the East used regularly to kiss his hand with an obeisance when anything was said that met with his approval. And I cannot help thinking that Proverbs xxiv. 26, is to be explained after some such reference: "Every man shall kiss his lips that giveth a right answer." The words are difficult in the original, and the A.V. is at least

doubtful. Delitzsch observes on Job xxxi. 27 that "the kiss which the mouth gives the hand is to a certain extent also a kiss which the hand gives the mouth," so that it may not be a forcing of the words to render: "People kiss lips [when] a man gives a right answer." At all events these words describe a thing that is often to be seen.

Similarly, without doubt, there are many expressions that might have light thrown upon them by lingering customs, and quaint phrases of old men and women, if one could lay hands upon them, and many a passage which to us is obscure, was to men in Bible times "familiar in their mouths as household words." Surely, for example, there is humour in Proverbs xxvii. 14, "He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him"; and if the commentators had had a little humour themselves, they would not have tried forcibly to get sense out of the verse by connecting it with the preceding. We have but to fancy a man scarcely out of bed assailed suddenly by a volley of salutation from his neighbour's garden or housetop. Such a blessing in a loud voice would be as execrable as a fine piece of music played out of time and out of tune.

The examples that have been given will suggest others that have been purposely omitted, and may stimulate the reader to look for pictures between the lines, or even *in* the lines, of Scripture. And, to come back to the general subject with which we started, the remark often made will bear repeating, that the Book which is for peoples of all tongues is pre-eminently characterized by an excellence in style that is least impaired by translation.

JAMES ROBERTSON.