

one to another." To this the LXX. append: "And those who dwell in the cities (*μητροπόλεσι*) keep also the fifteenth day of Adar, a day of gladness, a good day, sending portions to their neighbours." The fact seems to be that the festival lasted and still lasts two days, whether in town or country.¹

NOTE ON PSALM XXXV. 13.

NOTHING is more singular in the history of Biblical criticism than the waste of ingenuity in discovering recondite meanings and allusions under words and phrases which are all the while as plain and straightforward as they can be. No doubt this is partly due to the preaching of sermons. A commentator who has all his life been accustomed to connect certain lines of teaching with certain texts is likely enough to be blind to the obvious intention of the writer of them. But it must also be confessed that the ardour of interpretation is itself only too apt to lead the critic away from the obvious and natural meaning. Like a too eager hound, he runs past the scent.

The English reader, it is true, in the case of the verse before us, is not likely at first to read into the words a meaning at once intelligible and consistent with the context. The return of a petition into the bosom of the worshipper may mean either that the answer to the prayer comes home to himself, or that the desire falls back baffled and fruitless. Both of these interpretations have found supporters. The second is in some degree sustained by the analogy of Matthew x. 13; Luke x. 6. But neither of them is in the remotest way deducible from the context, in which the Psalmist is purposely contrasting his pious and charitable demeanour towards his adversaries with their contemptuous usage of himself, and, producing in evidence, the fervour and earnestness of his prayers on their behalf. Dean Perowne's plan which turns the statement of the verse into a petition, "May my prayer return into my own bosom," is open to the same objection. It robs the whole passage of its point to make the Psalmist think of himself at all as the object of this most formal and arranged course of devotion. The parallelism in Proverbs xxi. 14 (comp. xvii. 23)

¹ See Dr. Ginsburg's article *Purim*, in Kitto's Cyclopædia.

would certainly suggest *silent prayer* as the meaning of the petition uttered or rather returned to the bosom, but the rigour of the context excludes this equally with the interpretations indicated above. As to the interpretation which sees a literal reference to the attitude of the worshipper,—the words being muttered into the folds of the robe as the head is bent on the bosom,—the great names of Ewald and Delitzsch cannot redeem it from the charge of being painfully prosaic.

Grätz, according to his custom, has recourse to emendation. He joins the verb with the next verse and changes to “my prayer for their recovery;” a plan which has nothing against it except, that there is not the slightest authority for treating the text as corrupt.

Nor is there the slightest necessity for such a course. A very simple and natural way of explaining the phrase has been curiously overlooked by all the commentators one after the other. In all languages words meaning *to turn* naturally connect with their use the idea of repetition. In the Hebrew verb שׁוּב we should especially look for such a connexion because it is actually employed with other verbs in the place of an adverb of repetition (See 2 Kings i. 11–13; xx. 5; Gen. xxx. 31). And, in point of fact, though the *kal* conjugation affords no example of such a frequentative sense, the *hiphil* was so employed.¹ Now the meaning, “My prayer came again and again to my bosom” is exactly the sense the context seems to require. In spite of all the ingratitude and discouragement received, the Psalmist persists in his charitable purpose of intercession, and not only assumes all the marks of fervent devotion, but repeats many times the same petition.

As to the preposition עַל, the meaning here suggested is supported by the phrase common in Jeremiah, עָלָה עַל לֵב, *came into the heart or mind*. Not only did the Psalmist pay scrupulous attention to all the outward forms of grief, but his solicitude for these ungrateful sufferers keeps recurring again and again to his mind with a persistence that will not let his devotions come to an end.

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¹ Gesenius says, “*To return* is sometimes used in the same sense as *to bring again and again, to render, as tribute*, 2 Kings iii. 4; xvii. 3; 2 Chron. xxvii. 5; Ps. lxxii. 10; a sacrifice, Num. xviii. 9. So in Lat. *sacra referre*, Virg. Georg. i. 339; Æn. v. 598–603.