

A MEANS TOWARDS ARRIVING AT A MORE CORRECT HEBREW TEXT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

THE encouraging and stimulating article on the Septuagint in the last number of the *EXPOSITOR* leads me to hope that the time has now come for proposing seriously the following undertaking with reference to the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. I feel that I may venture to press my suggestion after the experience of sixteen years of constant work—on an average, I suppose, for four hours a day all the year round—on the text of the Septuagint and a comparison of it with the Hebrew. The great object in view has been to indicate the correspondence between the Greek and the Hebrew, and to show the Hebrew word corresponding to the Greek word wherever possible in the Oxford Concordance to the Septuagint. This laborious work has made me, as time has gone on, more and more anxious to see an unpointed edition of the Hebrew text printed, with notes showing the variations of the Massoretic text from that indicated by the versions where the reading or pointing of the two would be different. The work aimed at may be treated more fully under the following heads:—

(a) The unpointed Hebrew should naturally follow the best editions of the Hebrew Bible as now printed, such for instance as that of Baer. The Keri and C'thibh should also be given. Where it is quoted the Massoretic text should be that of Baer as a rule.

(b) Whenever there is any approach to certainty, the Hebrew, as read by the version, should be given. It might also be possible to indicate by a difference of type cases in which it was clear that the reading of the version was the better one. Wherever the version has additional matter no attempt should be made to represent this in Hebrew, but

the additions or omissions could be set forth in the margin. When a double or even a triple rendering occurs of the same passages, it might be well sometimes to notice these. The versions to be included should be any up to and including that of Jerome; and any further light which can be thrown on the text by quotations occurring in authors of an earlier date than Jerome should also be made use of. In cases where it is impossible to guess at the reading of the version the words of the version might be quoted. At the present moment there are scattered about in various commentaries and other works many indications of the readings which the versions had, but I do not know of any way in which it is possible without great labour to lay one's hand upon any suggestions that have been made as to what was the Hebrew text read by the version in any particular case when it differs from the present Hebrew text.¹ Wherever the version is paraphrastic of the present Hebrew text it should be passed by in silence.

It is not always easy to convince others of the impressions one has formed oneself and to persuade them of the truth of them. But these sixteen years of constant study of the Hebrew text have made me form an estimate of the Massoretic text, in particular as to its pointing, which is not a very high one. It seems to me sometimes to be inconsistent with itself, sometimes to make laboured differences between one passage and another which probably had no existence originally, and sometimes to create difficulties which need not exist without it. It might be difficult at the moment to give exactly chapter and verse for each of these conclusions, but they have gradually become settled opinions with me.

With such an Old Testament before us the ground would be cleared for a careful consideration of the relative value

¹ Schleusner's Lexicon helps us to a certain point in this respect; but many of his suggestions are very uncritical.

throughout of the variations from the present text and of the value which should in each case be attached to one reading or the other. To my mind this is of much more permanent and pressing interest than the question, how many redactions or how many hands we are to find in any particular book. There is the book, as we have it; let us be sure that we have the best reading of it.

In saying all this I am not at all asserting the inerrancy of the versions any more than I should be disposed to assert that of the Massoretic text. There are no doubt many places where, for instance, the LXX. is hopelessly astray; but I think that Professor Kirkpatrick has been unduly severe upon that version in giving as a specimen of it the passage from Isaiah (ix. 1-7). If we were to take account of the whole translation, I suppose there is no part which we should rank lower than that of most of Isaiah.

Should any such edition of the Old Testament become possible, it might well be that its publication should be undertaken by one of the learned Universities. I am quite aware that editions of the unpointed text of the Hebrew Bible are held to be a drug in the market, but the collection of such a body of information as might be incorporated with it would be of great value to the student of Old Testament literature.

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