

NOTE ON MR. GRAY'S ARTICLE, "THE ALPHABETIC POEM IN NAHUM."

MR. GRAY'S carefully worked out article is not only an introduction to the newer mode of correcting the transcriptional errors of the Hebrew text, but a reply to the statement that the supposed traces of an acrostic in Nahum i. may be fortuitous, and an attempt to bring those English scholars who are as yet but moderately impressed by the critical discussions of Bickell and Gunkel into somewhat closer agreement with those scholars. Few tasks indeed are more urgent than to stir our scholars up to work in more union with their continental brethren in the correction of the Hebrew text. But it would be strange if only the three English scholars mentioned by Mr. Gray had referred to the subject. In 1891 (*Origin of the Psalter*, p. 228), I argued that the psalm which underlies Psalms ix. and x., being an acrostic, might be contemporary with the alphabetic poem which "perhaps" underlies Nahum i. 2-10; and in the *EXPOSITOR* (June, 1895, p. 437) I remarked that, "as the combined researches of Bickell and Gunkel have shown," Nahum i. 2-ii. 3 is "really an alphabetic psalm, describing Jehovah's speedy appearance for judgment on Israel's enemies, and is one of the numerous insertions of the post-exilic editors of the prophetic records" (see also the footnote). I think that Mr. Gray should have mentioned my adhesion first to Bickell, and then to Bickell and Gunkel, uncoupled as it was with any minimizing adjectives or adverbs (which are ungracious, take up space, and are not required by scholars), except that diplomatic "perhaps," which was necessary in self-defence, but exerted no influence on my argument. For if any one has suffered in this country for a frank adoption of German methods, both in higher and in lower criticism, it is surely the

present writer; and if Bickell has had any friend among English critics, he surely hails from an Oxford college.

I have also to make a suggestion, which seems to me all-important, to produce complete conviction of the correctness of Bickell's and Gunkel's theory. On that theory, line 11 of the poem or psalm in Nahum i. (*i.e.* Nah. i. 4*b*) ought to begin with ג. But the word found in our Hebrew text at the head of this line (אמלל) begins with א. Mr. Gray's argument in favour of דלל (in preference to the words favoured by Bickell and Gunkel) is thoroughly sound, but the statement דלל בשן וכרמל is lacking in definiteness; we expect דלל כבוד בשן, on the analogy of Isaiah xvii. 4, nor can Mr. Gray lay much stress on the specialized sense of הָרָל, "to thin grapes," in some Talmudic passages. This is one of the cases in which radical (not arbitrary) criticism is the best criticism. What the poet wrote was most probably this: דללו אֶלְגֵי בשן ואמללו פרדי (דלו or דללו). The initial אמלל in M. T. conceals the word אֶלְגֵי; מ frequently takes the place of נִי (or *vice versâ*) in corrupt passages, while erroneous transposition of letters is so common that it hardly needs to be mentioned. The final ל in אמלל is a vestige of a nearly effaced דלו or דללו. When the first two words had coalesced to form אמלל, it became easy to mistake an indistinctly written ואמלל for וכרמל (cf. Isa. xxxiii. 9, "Bashan and Carmel.") The final ו in ואמללו then became attached to פרדי, and to make sense אמללו was placed at the end of the hemistich. Later on, in some copies דללו and אמללו changed places, as Mr. Gray has virtually pointed out. The parallels for each critical step are numberless. All this I would rather have indicated in half the number of lines, but, like Mr. Gray, I am conscious of the novelty which such arguments must still present to some readers. Render, "The (strong) oaks of Bashan become weak, and the growths of Lebanon wither."

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