

*STUDIES IN THE CRITICISM OF THE PSALMS.*

I. PSALM XXXIX. (*continued*).

THE student will remember that in the present articles no veneration is accorded to the traditional or Massoretic text, which is far too defective to form the basis of critical translation and exegesis. Respect and veneration are two different things. Protestants highly respect the Pope as Pope, but reserve their veneration for the high moral standard and the maturity of moral experience which they believe or presume him to possess. So critical Protestants highly respect the Massoretic text as an extremely interesting historical document. They would have it edited with all the care and judgment that lifelong students of it can give. But they cannot base their translation and their exegesis upon it. To do so would not make the Massoretic text safer from destruction than it is. There is no fear that the old Hebrew Bible will disappear, nor is it difficult for the student to supply himself with a copy, and keep it open on his desk beside a critical edition of the particular book which he is studying. A critical exegesis, let it be stated once more, ought not to be based on a tenderly corrected Massoretic text. We must give up saying, "This or that correction is not necessary; let us stay by the Massoretic text." A tenderly corrected Massoretic text is an inconsistent medley, which has no right of existence, except as an exercise for an immature critic. The remarks in the Appendix on the Criticism of the Old Testament Text in Prof. H. P. Smith's new commentary on the Books of Samuel are opportune and sound. There is only one passage which, as it seems to me, falls short of preciseness. It is where the learned author says, "We cannot do without conjecture, but it should be our last resort, and it should not be put in the same class with emendation on the basis

of evidence, even the evidence of a version." Here there are several things to regret. (a) "It should be our last resort." This is in one sense perfectly true. The versions should be studied, next to the Massoretic text. But (1) the versions are not in the state in which they proceeded from the respective translators; (2) the translators were full of bias, partly traditional, partly personal, which drew them aside from accuracy; (3) partly out of an uncritical habit of mind, partly out of regard for the "congregation," they are prone to paraphrase; (4) like the redactors of the Hebrew text in all periods, they have sought to make sense where they could not find sense. (b) "It should not be put in the same class with emendation on the basis of evidence." But conjecture, as it has to be practised now, is not arbitrary guessing. It is the product of long study of the palæographical probabilities of corruption, and of the habits and dangers of scribes. This study is now becoming much more practised than was the case twenty years ago. But the remarks made in current commentaries and learned periodicals do occasionally show that the writers have not themselves got very far in the art of conjecture. This art must be slowly and painfully learned; a mere *πάρεργον*, a mere relief to more serious occupations, it cannot be. I am sure that if one half of the time spent on the versions had been devoted to the art of really critical conjecture, some of our best commentaries would deserve a more complete commendation. A large proportion of the corrections based on the "evidence" of versions are, in my opinion, undoubtedly wrong, and the quest of them may have hindered their authors from suggesting more probable corrections. The versions are valuable helps, but often dangerous guides.

I now turn to Psalm xxxix. 5 (Hebrew numeration). The little fragment of a Doubter's Psalm is at an end. Between v. 4 and v. 5 there is no connection whatever. To the reader who has followed me this is not strange, but to earlier

students it has been a difficulty. Riehm, the author of *Messianic Prophecy*, suggestively remarks: "With all its fervour the following prayer betrays nothing of the inward excitement so long repressed. We must therefore hold, with Herder, that the psalmist looks back on the expressions of complaint which had been forced from him, *without quoting them*. The psalm (*i.e.* the remainder of the psalm) is the prayer, which these (unquoted) expressions occasioned." It can hardly be said that this is a natural view; but it certainly does show the exegetical honesty of the writer. As the text stands, the plain man will naturally think that "Make me to know mine end," etc. (*v.* 5), are the words which the much-tried psalmist "spoke with his tongue" (*v.* 4). And yet the rest of the psalm is so inconsistent with the opening verses that Riehm is obliged to maintain that verses 5-13 are a quotation of a subsequent prayer which presents not a single trace of the dangerous excitement recorded in verses 2-4. The Revised Version renders *v.* 5 [4] thus:

LORD, make me to know mine end,  
And the measure of my days, what it is;  
Let me know how frail I am.

"Frail" is perhaps not the happiest word, but the older version gave it, and the Revisers retain it. A frail vessel may cross the sea many times if carefully managed; but if its materials contain the end of decay, it must soon perish. "Short-lived," "fleeting," are the alternative words which the context suggests, and yet the true word is different. For there is no word in Hebrew bearing either of these meanings, which could have been corrupted into חָדֵל *hādēl*. No such word as *hādēl* exists. Isaiah liii. 3 is the only other passage in which the received text presents the word: "He was despised and *rejected* (R.V. marg. *for-saken*) of men," is the rendering of our Bible. But corruption has been very properly suspected (see Haupt's

*Sacred Books of the Old Testament*, Hebrew edition). In the psalm before us parallelism decides against the current reading; what it prescribes for our acceptance is, "Let me know what my lifetime is."<sup>1</sup> The Prayer-Book version, by a happy guess, actually gives ". . . how long I have to live." The form of correction to be preferred is, מִדֵּ-חַלְדִּי אֲדַנִּי, "(Let me know) what my lifetime is, O Lord." It will now be seen how beautifully *v.* 6 joins on.

Driver renders it thus, with the older and some of the newer critics :

Behold, thou hast made my days as handbreadths ;  
And my time is as nothing in Thy sight :  
Surely every man, (though) standing firm, is altogether vanity.

This agrees with the Revised Version, except that it adopts from R.V.'s margin as the rendering of the word נָצַב, "standing firm." Also with Hupfeld and Delitzsch, who render line 3 :

Yea, a mere breath is every man, however firm he may stand.

So too De Witt, the most unbending of conservatives in questions of text :

Yea, all men are only a breath, even when standing most firmly.

But when we look closely, we see several great difficulties. (1) In *v.* 12 the received text gives simply "Surely every man is vanity" ; "standing firm" and "altogether" have disappeared. (2) The Hebrew has literally, "Surely, all vanity all man standing" (LXX. has ζῶν). One of these "alls" is clearly superfluous, and Aquila, Symmachus, and

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Isa. xxxviii. 11b, where the English Bible gives, "I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world," but where R.V. marg. gives, "Or [when I am] among them that have ceased to be." The supposed Hebrew word is interpreted "cessation," *i.e.* "the place where being ceases" (Sheol). It is usual to read *hāléd*, and to render "the world." There is, however, a better view. Cf. also Ps. lxxxix. 48 [47], where Bâthgen renders, "Remember, O Lord (יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ), "what life is," but where חַלְדִּי, "my life," is entirely correct (not חַלְדֵּי). This passage and xxxix. 5c. are completely parallel.

many MSS. are without it. (3) The epithet "standing," or "standing firm," introduces a qualification of a statement which obviously will not stand any qualification. (4) The passage quoted by commentators in explanation of נִצַּב (Zech. xi. 6) is certainly not free from corruption; הַנִּצְצָה should obviously be הַנִּעְצָה. Bâthgen therefore deserves credit for his attempt to correct the text gently. He reads, "Every man stands as a mere breath." König, the eminent grammarian, also adopts this. It has no doubt the support of an ancient version, but surely it is as "subjective" as anything can be. The evidence of the text is before us; all we have to do is to scan it intelligently. "Selah" (סֻלָּה), as several times in the Psalms, is a part of the text; we are not to stop short at נִצַּב סֻלָּה. נִצַּב סֻלָּה is a corruption of בְּצַלְמֹת [אֱדָד], with which *v.* 7 begins. The words were written twice over in error; then the first-written words became corrupted. כֹּל before הַבֹּל is also wrong; כֹּ was dittographed (cf. Pesh.); then ל was inserted by assimilation to כֹּל-אָדָם. Render the second stanza thus:

Surely [like a few] handbreadths  
 Thou hast made my days;  
 My lifetime is as nothing before thee;  
 What mere vanity are all men!

Verse 6 appears thus in Kirkpatrick's *Psalms* (Cambridge School and College Bible):

Only as a phantom doth each walk to and fro;  
 Only for vanity do they turmoil;  
 One heapeth up, and he will not know who doth gather the hoard.

"Man," this scholar remarks, "is an unsubstantial phantom (or *shadow*, lit. *image*), lxxiii. 20 : *σκιάς ὄψαρ*, "a dream of shadow," as Pindar calls him (Pyth. viii. 95). With unreal aim and unenduring result do men disturb themselves." The truth is an important one, and I have long supposed it to be contained in the words. But the

text of Psalm lxxiii. 20 is unfortunately in sore need of correction. The only sure senses of צֶלֶם are "image, sketch, model"; nor is the idiom called *Beth essentialis* natural here. An anonymous writer in a now extinct theological magazine has already corrected the text. Read אִישׁ אֶדְבַּר בְּצִלְמוֹת הַלֵּל אִישׁ. This is confirmed by my independent correction of the text of v. 12. The right sense had already been given by Ibn Janāḥ. The "deep gloom" spoken of is that in which all thoughtful men "walk" until the veil which shrouds the future is in some way rent. Render the third and fourth stanzas thus:

Surely in deep gloom does man walk;  
His turmoil is for mere vanity;  
He piles up [silver], and cannot tell  
Who may make it his prize.

And now, Lord, what wait I for?  
In thee is my hope.  
From all my transgressions [absolve me,  
From my distresses] set me free.

This arrangement, it will be noticed, leaves half of v. 9 (8) unprovided for. In truth, the verse division is very often wrong. To alter it, however, would be rash until the text has been revised. It is such a revision which I have attempted; I am therefore justified in disregarding the traditional verse. A "verse" properly so called is what the ordinary reader would call a line. The stanzas being of two verses (lines) each, the last portion of v. 9 (8) necessarily falls into a different stanza from the first part.

The material we have at our disposal for the fifth stanza appears thus in Wellhausen and Furness's version:

Make me not the scorn of the reprobate.  
I am dumb, I open not my mouth;  
For it is thou who hast done it.

This agrees with Driver's version, except that Wellhausen relegates v. 10 (9) to the margin as an interpolation. To

justify this treatment of *v.* 10 he gives the following note in the Hebrew edition :

The tenor of *vv.* 11 ff. shows no difference in time and tone from that of *vv.* 5-9; *v.* 11 is a simple continuation of *v.* 9, and stands in the closest connection with it. Ver. 10, on the other hand, breaks the connection badly. Its origin cannot be ascertained.

Bäthgen, on the other hand, and all other critics, retain the passage. But the note of the former scholar should stimulate reflection. I condense it because it is not very clearly expressed :

As long as the Psalmist looked only at the wicked, his complaints were always liable to burst out afresh (*vv.* 3, 4). True peace of mind did not come to him till he looked up to God, the appointer of his sufferings.

Wellhausen's interpolation-theory is the natural development of Bäthgen's exposition. *נאלמת* in *v.* 10, if genuine, and all that belongs to it, must be an interpolation, influenced by *vv.* 3, 4. But Bäthgen and Wellhausen are too precipitate. They should have taken the structure of the poem into consideration, and also have scanned the material in *v.* 10 more closely. The psalm is not nearly as formless as these critics suppose, and here, as elsewhere in doubtful passages, we must consider the possibility that the editor may have been at work, making sense as well as he could out of partly effaced characters. The true reading is probably not unlike this: *הַאֲלֵמְנָה שְׁפָתַי שֶׁקֶר הַדְּבָרוֹת עֵשֶׂק* (cf. xxxi. 19, Isa. lix. 13). *א* and *פ* are both liable to be written for *ש*. An imperfect *ק* might be taken for a *ת*. *א* was inserted to make sense. The fifth stanza should run :

To the insulting of the impious [people]  
Do not thou expose me;  
Stricken dumb be the lying lips  
Which speak of oppression!

Now the difficulties are removed; there is parallelism both of form and of idea.

As-material for the sixth stanza we have words thus rendered by Driver:

Remove thy stroke from off me:  
By the hostility of thy hand I am consumed.

Wellhausen and Furness agree, but they put a (?) after "attack" (=Driver's "hostility"). The material is rather scanty, and there is one word which is not known elsewhere in Biblical Hebrew. In the Psalms, which are intended for the faithful community at large, and where the ideas and images are so often repeated, we are bound to look at *ἅπαξ λεγόμενα* with suspicion. There is no sufficient justification for the rendering "hostility." The LXX. has ἀπὸ τῆς ἰσχυος, which has suggested מַגְבִּירַת. But God's heroic strength (גְּבוּרָה) should not cause terror. מְתוֹכַחַת, "through the chastisement (of)," would be better. But metre suggests, בִּי הִנְחַתָּ [עָלַי] יָדְךָ. At the close, כְּלִיתִי should be נִבְהַלְתִּי (vi. 2, 3). נ dropped out after אֲנִי. The sense now obtained is excellent. In l. 1 I insert שִׁבְטְךָ and הִרְחַק. Words here and there have certainly dropped out of not a few of the Psalms.

Withdraw [thy rod] from me,  
[Remove far away] thy stroke;  
For thou hast laid thy hand [upon me],  
I am terror-stricken.

Verse 12 may be literally rendered thus:

With chastisements for guilt thou disciplinest a man,  
And makest to melt away, moth-like, his precious things.  
What mere vanity are all men!

According to Delitzsch, the psalmist "raises what has happened to himself into a universal fact of experience." Surely a very strange transition in such a fervent personal supplication! Still, if the Hebrew were good, and the sense clear, we might accept it. But the Hebrew is not good,



and the sense is not clear. "Chastisements for guilt" is unnatural; of course, the chastisements spoken of were "for guilt"; the context proves this. Then, in l. 2, where is the parallelism? And is the moth the destroying agent (so Delitzsch) or the thing destroyed (so Bâthgen)? Obviously there is corruption. The versions do not help us except in one particular in l. 2. So much is clear—that the personal complaint ought to be continued, and that *v.* 12 ought to contain two striking figures. Note also the Pask after עון, the occurrence of which, in this psalm, as often elsewhere, coincides with the appearance of textual corruption. Let us write the letters continuously as far as the Pask, and scan them closely, בתוכחותעלעון. Remembering what goes before and what follows after, can we hesitate to read this, בתוך צלמות עון however remains. Connect it with the next group of letters, so producing עוניסרת. Here a practised eye discerns at once מוששתי; מ became נ; ש passed into ס and ע; ר became י. איש is unaccounted for, but we can make use of it in the next line. Observe the parallelism which now emerges into view between *v.* 12, l. 1, and *v.* 7, l. 1 (rather, say, between line 5 and line 13 of Psalm lxxxix. *b*).

Next take כעש חמודי איש ותמס. This is too much for the second part of *v.* 12, l. 1 (rather, line 13). Part of it must belong to l. 14. תמס occurs once again in the Psalms, viz. in lviii. 9. Both passages are figurative, and in both תמס can only be explained as a slightly corrupted fragment of תנשמת, "screech-owls." In Isaiah lix. 10 the same word for "owls" (ת is *not*, as Tristram thought, the ibis) has become אשכנים, parallel to which is נשף, a fragment of ינשף. After making this correction, we see at once that איש must have arisen from נמשלתי ל. We have now only to explain חמודי. This is not quite long enough for l. 13a. The LXX. has ὡς ἀράχην = כעביש. In truth, עש is several times miswritten for עכביש, as the articles "Moth"

and "Spider" in Messrs. A. & C. Black's *Encyclopædia Biblica* will probably show. This puts us on the right track. Surely כַּעֵשׁ is the remnant of עֲבָרֵי עֲבָרֵי (see Isa. lix. 5; Hos. viii. 6, as Dr. Paul Ruben has corrected, after Quinta in Origen's Hexapla). חֲמוּדֵי should of course be חֲמוּדֵי. The result will not, I hope, be thought too specious to be correct. Some reward of toil may surely be looked for. Render therefore :

In the midst of deep gloom I grope,  
I am become like the owls;  
All that I have prized is as spiders' webs;  
What mere vanity are all men!

Only one correction remains; Hupfeld, Grätz and Bâthgen have already made it. For הִשְׁעָה, "besmear," read שְׁעָה (cf. Job vii. 19, xiv. 6, and especially x. 20, where שִׁית should be שְׁעָה). The last two stanzas may be rendered thus :

Hear my prayer, O Yahwè;  
Hearken to my cry;  
Hold not thy peace at my tears;  
\* \* \* \*  
For I am a sojourner beside thee,  
Without rights, like all my fathers.  
Avert thy frown that I may be cheerful again  
Before I go hence and cease to be.

The reader has now before him almost all that I have to say on the text-criticism of Psalm xxxix. To form a decided opinion of it is hardly possible for any one who has not had much training in the sort of textual criticism which I have described. But perhaps these two articles may serve to open some minds to a new conception of the meaning of text-criticism as applied to the poetical and prophetic books of the Old Testament. There are no doubt parts of the historical books which are not less deeply corrupt, and yet are capable of being corrected by similar methods (such a passage is 1 Kings xi. 14-20). But on the

whole the text of the narrative books is much better than that of the poetical and prophetic Scriptures. We must not, of course, dogmatize too much, such being the state of the case. But there is considerably more reason for a textual critic to be confident as regards the Psalms than as regards the prophets, because of the large amount of repetition natural to a church hymn book. There is much to be gained, and little to be lost, by the procedure here recommended and practised. All those strange, rough passages, which so startle an intelligent Englishman when he hears them sung in church, can be corrected. Let those who undertake the task of correcting them have a fair hearing, and let one of them be believed when he says that the Psalms are more coherent and intelligible, and therefore surely more beautiful, than our predecessors have supposed.

It is not my present object to expound the 39th Psalm. I would certainly much rather expound the text as here presented than that which, after all the efforts of scholars to smooth away its roughnesses, is still so difficult to comprehend. But I must ask leave to point out the remarkable parallelism between Psalm xxxix. 12 [11] as here presented and Isaiah lix. 10. I presume that Psalm xxxix.*b* and Isaiah lix. 1-15*a* were written about the same time. In my *Introduction to the Book of Isaiah*, pp. 328-334, I have discussed the chronological question, but I was not then aware of the interesting parallel to be found in the second part of Psalm xxxix. The parallel in Job x. 20 and Psalm xxxix. 14 has long been known. The post-Exilic origin of Psalm xxxix.*b* is therefore decided. And there is now reason to think that the special subject of the author's grief was the delay of the Messianic judgment. The religious character of Jewish patriotism is more and more wonderful the more we reflect upon it.

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