

SOMETHING BETTER THAN HUSKS.

AMONG the most satisfactory rewards of work on a Bible Encyclopædia is the removal of difficulties which have sometimes deterred students and caused perplexity to the public readers of Scripture. People may not think that much can be got out of the study of "husks." Most of us, it is true, are well aware that the "husks" which "the swine did eat" were not what we should call "husks." The Revised Version warns the reader of this: the "husks," it says in the margin, are "the pods of the carob tree"—a very nutritious though not luxurious food. Not only in Palestine, but in Cyprus, the carob tree grows in abundance, and its value for the feeding of cattle and horses, and especially for pigs, is fully appreciated. It has not hitherto been observed that the pods of the carob tree are referred to several times in the Old Testament. The arguments for a deeper textual criticism which I have pressed on the attention of the readers of the EXPOSITOR might be strengthened by numerous other instances; but no instance, perhaps, speaks more eloquently than, at any rate, the first of those which I shall quote. It would be easy for me to prefix an elaborate discussion of the learned opinions of writers who have endeavoured to explain the received text. Perhaps I lay myself open to some disparagement because I do not on this occasion adopt the time-honoured practice. But my time is limited, and I am sure that students will easily be able to find out for themselves what has been said on these passages in the most esteemed commentaries. This, then, is the rendering of 2 Kings vi. 25 in the Revised Version :

And there was a great famine in Samaria: and, behold, they besieged it, until an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver and the fourth part of a kab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver.

Surely this is hardly what we expect; the narrative is rather painfully interrupted by improbabilities. This is the rendering of what I venture to call the true, the original text:

Now there was a great famine in Samaria (behold, they were besieging it), until a homer of lentils (חֶמֶד עֲרִשִׁים) was sold for fifty shekels (see LXX.), and a quarter of a cor (כֶּר) of carob pods (חֲרִיבִים) for five shekels.

Thus pages of learned dissertation become obsolete. Never mind whether the Arabs give the name "sparrow's dung" to a species of *salsola* or soap plant, or not. Never mind whether the people were to be excused for eating ass's flesh or not, nor trouble yourself to explain the choice of the "head" in particular. "Head" is a slightly distorted form of עֶרֶשׂ, a part of עֲרִשִׁים, "lentils." But I need not, I think, pause to explain what any student of Hebrew will see at a glance.

The next passage I shall not quote; to be able to remove it from our Bibles is a real, if a slight, service to the community. It is 2 Kings xviii. 27 with which Isaiah xxxvi. 12 agrees. The true text—not quite so certainly so in all points as the corrected text of the preceding passage, but certainly so in the main point—is this:

But the Rab-shakeh said, etc., Has he not sent me to the men who sit on the wall, that they may eat their (חֲרִיבִים) carobs and drink their sour wine with you?

We see from the striking passage treated above that one of the commonest features of a siege was that the inhabitants were reduced to eat carob pods, like horses or pigs, in order to live. This at once suggests a necessary correction of a well-known passage in the noble exordium of the collection of Isaiah's prophecies. We see from the necessary correction which I shall offer that when the prophet spoke Jerusalem was not actually besieged (which, by the way,

throws great doubt on the correctness of the words in Isaiah i. 8 rendered "as a besieged city)." Isaiah i. 19, 20 runs thus in the English Version :

If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land ;
But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword,
For the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

Any one can see that the parallelism between lines 1 and 2 is not perfect. Of course, this can be defended. A poet or a prophet is not the slave of his poetical or rhetorical forms. He may break through them to produce a greater effect. But this is not all ; the Hebrew phrase **חָרַבְתֶּם תֹּאכְלוּ** is very difficult. The meaning is not clear. Others render, "Ye shall be made to eat the sword" ; while Duhm, altering two points, renders, "Ye shall eat the sword." None of these views are quite natural. The true text certainly is :

If ye be willing and obedient, the best (fruits) of the land shall ye eat ;
But if ye refuse and rebel, carob pods shall ye eat (**חָרַבִּים תֹּאכְלוּ**),
For Jahwè's mouth hath spoken it.

חָרַבִּים was probably written **חָרַב** ; the mark of abbreviation was no doubt very early employed by Jewish scribes. This last correction was suggested, we may almost say, by a Rabbi in the Midrash, but apparently as a play upon words, not quite as a correction of the text. That **חָרַיב** has hitherto only been known from New Hebrew and from Syriac is no objection to these corrections. It is not asserted, so far as I know, that the carob tree is of late importation into Palestine. Many such observations have occurred in the course of the work entailed on me by the *Encyclopædia Biblica*. I should not have referred to this, however, but for the special interest of these particular corrections. In mentioning them, it is natural to make the innocent avowal that the preparation of an article on

“HUSKS” led the present writer to these results. There is plenty of room for a re-examination of words seemingly as unimportant as “Dove’s Dung” and “Husks.”

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THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM.

It is not easy to speak to any one about those things which he knows best and loves most. They have, among his associations and affections, a setting which no one but himself can appreciate, and which even the most sympathetic words of another must in a measure alienate and disturb. The slightest, subtlest change of atmosphere or tone will react keenly upon the heart when habit and affection have made it sensitive and tender. No one can speak, so as quite to please us, about our own father or our chosen friend, or about our favourite garden or picture or song.

Nor is it easier to speak about things that are very simple and yet very perfect. Some things are, we know, too elementary to admit of analysis, and too obvious to need explanation; but that is not what we mean in this reference. There is another kind of simplicity still more difficult to touch with words—that simplicity, namely, to which men of creative genius, by an alchemy of their own, reduce the results of their intensest thought and their farthest research. The longest pains of the musician and poet and painter issue in what seems the spontaneous growth of an hour; and, at its best effort, all their rare power results in the production of some little thing of simple beauty. All that the men themselves have been and are, all that they have won and know, sooner or later is reduced to a final process, and seems naturally to realize itself in one supreme moment when they are at their best and yet their simplest. Day and night, summer and winter, storm and calm, soil