

THE SEVENTEENTH PSALM.

THE late Prof. Robertson Smith devoted a long article in the *EXPOSITOR* (1876, pp. 341-372) to the consideration of the sixteenth Psalm; it may not be inappropriate to offer the readers of the same magazine an attempt to remove the difficulties of the seventeenth. These difficulties have attracted less attention than those of the sixteenth Psalm; yet they are by no means slight, and the current explanations are not perhaps as satisfactory as could be wished. Following Prof. Robertson Smith's example, I will present my own solutions in the form of an exegetical study of the whole Psalm, and if the views of textual criticism which I presuppose are more "advanced" than those implied by Prof. Smith's article, I am saved from discouragement by the reflection that my own present textual criticism is the legitimate development of views which, as put forth in the translation of the Psalms now twenty-three years old, long ago obtained the approval of this loyal friend and admirable scholar.

The seventeenth Psalm, if I am not mistaken, is written in what may for convenience sake be called tetrameters, i.e. each line (or verse) in the Hebrew has four beats. It is a prayer of pious Israel, the Israel within Israel—the congregation of the pious "poor," which, according to some, is meant by that enigmatical phrase in the Second Isaiah—the "Servant of the Lord" (E.V.), or rather "Servant of Yahwè." The speaker bases his sure confidence that his prayer will be answered on his proved fidelity to Yahwè. An elaborate self-justification precedes his appeal for pro-

tection as the client of Yahwè, domiciled in His sanctuary. He is nevertheless not so much absorbed in the sense of mystic union with his God as not to perceive the imminent danger in which, humanly speaking, he stands, and being of sensitive nature (for Israel must be represented in colours borrowed from the Israelites), he breaks out into a vehement demand for a terrible retribution to his enemies. That his prayer will be granted he cannot doubt, for the Messianic age is at hand, when Israel will be admitted to a nearer and an altogether satisfying vision (see end of article) of the Divine countenance in the sanctuary, and this cannot be unless the land of Israel is relieved from the blighting presence of Israel's deadly foes. Who these foes are the traditional text does not tell us. But there is some probability that in the true text of verse 11 they are called the Geshurites. At any rate the parallelism between this Psalm and Psalms v., vii., x., xi., xvi., xviii., xxii., especially the four latter, leaves no doubt than the North Arabian tribes, who by their implacable hostility at and after the fall of Jerusalem earned such bitter hatred from Israel, are intended. We must not omit to add that Psalm xvi. and Psalm xvii. are also closely connected by their parallel ending, and that both are akin to the large group of Psalms expressing love of the temple, and especially to Psalms xxvii. and lxi., Psalms on which not a little fresh light may perhaps in the future be hoped for.

The Psalmist has often been accused of abruptness in his transitions. But this supposed abruptness is due to textual corruption. Criticism can, with high probability, remove this corruption; at the same time it reveals a want of literary originality in the Psalm. Some of the ideas and forms of expression which are most characteristically post-exilic are to be found here. The points of contact with the nine Psalms mentioned above are specially remarkable. In this connexion it may be noticed that the reading

חֲבֵלֵי מָוֶת, “the snares of Deathland,” in line 19, points to a date long enough after that of Psalm xviii, for the text of that Psalm (*v. 5a*) to have become corrupt. The interval between the two Psalms must not however be exaggerated; textual corruption evidently began very early. It is strange that Duhm—certainly the boldest of critics—should represent Psalm xvii. as the work of a Pharisee, as if assertions of legal righteousness began with the party called Pharisees, and should even emend the difficult word פְּרִיץ (A.V. the destroyer) in *v. 4* into פְּרוֹשׁ or פְּרִישׁ, “Pharisee”; “den Pfad der Strengen hielt fest mein Schritt” is his rendering. None of the Psalms, so far as I can find from the text-critical evidence, can safely be brought down to the age of the Pharisees, nor indeed is it judicious to regard any number of the group of Psalms to which Psalm xvii. belongs as the utterance of an individual.

We now proceed to the translation of a revised text; each stanza, it will be seen, consists of two lines or verses.

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|----|---|---|
| 1 | Hear my wail, O Yahwè! attend unto my prayer; | 1 |
| | Hearken unto one that prays with lips that are
truthful. | |
| | Let my sentence proceed from thy presence [in] | 2 |
| | rightness; | |
| | Let thine eyes view [the pious] with exactness. | |
| | If thou triest my heart, if thou provest my reins, | 3 |
| | No deceit wilt thou find, in my heart is no wrong. | |
| | From the tracks of traitors, from the ways of | 4 |
| | rebels— | |
| | I have kept myself, O Lord! from the paths of
liars. | |
| | My steps follow close in thy tracks; | 5 |
| 10 | My feet waver not [in thy paths]. | |
| | O Lord! I call upon thee, thou wilt answer, O | 6 |
| | [my] God! | |
| | Bend down to me thine ear, hear my speech. | |
| | Separate thy loyal one in thy sanctuary, | 7 |
| | And keep him close in thy habitation; | |

- Preserve me, O Lord! | in the courts of thy house, 8
 With the shadow of thy wings | cover thou me.
 From the (angry) face of the wicked | deliver thou 9
 me,
 To the greed of mine enemies | [abandon me not].
 The snares of Deathland | encompass me, 10
 20 The floods of ocean | affright me;
 [For] there surround me | a troop of Geshurites (?), 11
 With pointed horns | they mangle me.
 They attack me as a lion | which longs for prey, 12
 [They encompass me] as a young lion | which lurks
 in coverts.
 Arise, O Yahwè! | and make him bow down; 13
 Rescue my soul | from the teeth of the young lions.
 Do thou, O Yahwè! rain | hot coals upon them; 14
 With a horrible blast | do thou fill their belly.
 As for me, by [thy] righteousness | I shall behold 15
 thy face;
 30 I shall be satisfied with thy lovingkindness | in thy
 habitation.

The exegetical notes which follow are limited to the most necessary ones. First of all, in line 2 we may observe the stress laid by the speaker on truthfulness. Truthfulness is a primary note of righteousness in the early Judaism—truthfulness towards men (v. 9, xv. 2, lii. 3; Isa. liii. 9, lix. 4) and also towards God (lxvi. 18). If Psalm xvii. were the prayer of an individual, we might be disposed to accuse the speaker of self-righteousness and pride. But it is the utterance of the pious community, and the Israel within Israel, with all its defects, is conscious of its high ideals, and that, through the indwelling Spirit (li. 11, Isa. xlii. 1, lxiii. 11), it is a polished shaft in God's quiver (Isa. xlix. 2). In line 5 the reader will notice that the revised text is without that troublesome word לילה, "by night," which led Duhm to suppose that Psalm xvii. was meant to be an evening Psalm; also, in lines 7 and 8, that we have got rid of the unseemly phrase "the word of thy lips." פִּי, in line 8, is

an interesting and much misunderstood word. It also occurs in Jeremiah vii. 11, Ezekiel xviii. 10, Daniel xi. 14, but not in the true text of Ezekiel vii. 22 (read ערצים with Cornill) and Isaiah xxxv. 9 (read חית הארץ). It means, not "violent," or "a violent one" (= robber), but "lying" or "a liar" = פָּרַץ and (partly) בָּגַד. The noun פָּרָץ occurs probably in Nahum iii. 1 (the usual reading פָּרַק is unsuitable) and in Jeremiah vi. 6 (read עֵיר הַפָּרָץ, cf. LXX.). The root is פָּרַץ, "to lie" = Assyrian *parûšu* (so Ruben for פָּרַץ in Nahum *l.c.*). פָּרַץ, "to act violently," is thought to occur in Hosea iv. 2, but the true reading is בָּאֲרָץ as in LXX.; so Ruben. "In thy habitation," lines 14 and 30, means "in thy temple." God is chiefly present in His temple, and therefore to be His guest or housemate is the pledge of security; cf. xxvii. 5. Line 15, as here given, deprives us of a parallelism with Deuteronomy xxxii. 10 f., Zechariah ii. 8. Certainly the received text (*v. 8a*) is plausible; Tylor has shown that the pupil of the eye is connected elsewhere in folklore with the soul (*Primitive Culture*, i. 389). But parallelism is opposed to the common text. Lines 19-28 (= *vv.* 10-14) are apparently, as subsequent notes will make clear, imitations of striking passages in Psalms xi., xviii., xxii., but the reader should be warned that in this remark I assume the correctness of my own revised text of the passages referred to. By "Geshurites" are meant the North Arabian oppressors of the Jews; there was a southern as well as a northern Geshur; see the article "Geshur" in the *Encyclopædia Biblica*, vol. ii. The rest of the present essay will be devoted to the explanation of various new readings which (as few will deny) add considerably—if correct—to the interest of the Psalm. I avoid controversy with those who stand where it was perfectly natural to stand at an earlier point of progress. When the scales have fallen from their eyes they will at once judge differently of the possibility and

probability of many of the corrections to which they are now unable, but not, I am sure, unwilling to do justice. The general position which I myself take up has been already set forth in the EXPOSITOR in a study on the text of Psalm xxxix.

In *v.* 1 the Septuagint presupposes 'י צדקי, i.e. "O Yahwè, who art (the source of) my righteousness." However plausible this may be, it is wrong. The whole verse is in disorder and needs rearrangement with due regard to the division into tetrameters. צדק is quite right, but it belongs to *v.* 2 (=line 3), where it is the necessary parallel to מישרים; see ix. 9, xcvi. 9. Next, we find בלא שפתי מרמה attached to תפלתי, as if it were "a shortened relative clause" (Duhm). But evidently we have here a confusion of the scribe. תפלתי is doubly significant. (1) It is parallel to רנתי (lxi. 1); (2) it represents an omitted מתפלל. We should therefore read the two first tetrameters thus:

שמעה י רנתי | הקשיבה תפלתי
האזינה מתפלל | בלא שפתי מרמה

In line 3 צדק should be restored from *v.* 1; cf. Jeremiah xi. 20, "that judgest [in] rightness (שפט צדק), that triest the reins and the heart" (see *l.* 6). Both metre and sense suggest the insertion of חסיד, which would easily fall out after [ת]חזינה. In line 5, for בהנת and פקדת we should read תבחן and תצרף; confusions like those here supposed are among the easiest; the imperfect is more natural than the perfect. צרפתי is an expansion of צרפת; suffixes appear to have been often inserted by the later editors of the text. צרפת is a variant to פקדת, and is more correct. Cf. Job vii. 18, where we should undoubtedly read תצרפני for תפקדני. We have already referred to the inconvenient word לילה. This is not the only occasion on which לילה has arisen by textual corruption (see xvi. 7, Job. xxxv. 10). A writer in an almost forgotten English periodical (*Journal of Sacred Literature*, new series, iv. 340) proposes פליות

(לב||). But this is not enough; read כְּלִיֹּתַי (Grätz). This was originally written 'כליות', with the mark of abbreviation. In line 6 (end of v. 3) the much disputed זמתי (זמתי? זמתי?) is obviously wrong. Probably there have been both transposition and corruption of letters. Read מְרַמָּה; ז and ר and ת and מ are regularly confounded. So too בל־יעבר פי is impossible. עבר, "to transgress," is not Biblical (see *Origin of the Psalter*, p. 466). The whole phrase must be corrupt. פי will be accounted for presently. For בל־יעבר read בְּלִבִּי אֵין. After אֵין supply אָן, which very easily dropped out. און and מרמה are naturally parallel; see xxxvi. 4.

The opening of v. 4 cannot be right. "The word of thy lips" is not adequately defended by cxix. 13; indeed the whole clause is corrupt. In correcting it we must be guided by the parallel line. בדבר would easily come out of מדרכי; דבר and דרך are not unfrequently confounded (see e.g. xxxix. 2). For שפתֶיךָ, "thy lips," we want a plural noun such as פְּשָׁעִים; after פ and ש had been transposed, it was not difficult to misread the following letters. For the impossible אֲדָם לְפַעֲלוֹת דּוּחַ Duhm proposes אֲדָם לְפַעֲלֶתְךָ, "deinem Thun schweige ich." If a verb were wanted, we should rather expect a phrase like כְּלִיֹּתַי רְגִלִי (cxix. 101, Prov. i. 15). But how could the present text have arisen out of such an original? The corruption is deeply seated. But remembering how often בגדים is miswritten in our text, and that in lxxxii. 7 it has become corrupted into אֲדָם, and that it makes an excellent parallel to פְּשָׁעִים and פְּרִיץ, we shall do best to restore the word here. לֶפֶּ very possibly comes from מְמַעְגָּלוֹת; the second מ became ג; the first is represented by פי at the end of v. 3. ל is dittographic. Passing on, אני is an imperfectly written אֲנִי. It has produced the omission of נ in נשמרתי (so we should read with Wellhausen). Next read מְאָרְחוֹת (Baethgen, Grätz, and Wellhausen after the Syriac). פְּרִיץ may remain in the

sense of "liar(s)"; see above. In lines 9 and 10 the descriptive infinitive is not in place; read **תִּמְכֹּי** (cf. xxxv. 16). Insert **בִּדְרִכֶּיךָ** (metre and parallelism), with Bickell.

In line 11 the changes **אֶדְנִי** and **אֱלִי** are too simple to need defence. But in line 13 we have to use our methods boldly if we would not unduly disparage the capacities of the Psalmist. **חֲסִים** might conceivably come from **חֲסִיךָ** = **חֲסִי בְךָ** = **חֲסִיךָ**. So the old translator Street, whose clever work (now a hundred years old) is far too little known. The Septuagint has *τοὺς ἐπιζῶντας ἐπὶ σε* (similarly the Syriac). These are petty expedients. A perfect cure can only be effected by a remedy based on a wide experience of textual error. For **ח' מוֹשִׁיעַ** read **בְּמִקְדָּשֶׁיךָ**. Obviously **חֲסִיךָ** should be **חֲסִיךָ**. In line 14 "from those that rise up by thy right hand" cannot be right; no exegetical ingenuity can justify it. Parallelism requires a verb. The passage must be taken together with xvi. 11 (see below, on *l.* 30). **מִמִּים בִּים** is parallel to the false reading **נַעֲמֹת בִּים**, and both readings spring from **בְּמִשְׁכַּנְתֶּיךָ**; **מִמִּתְקוֹ** = **מִמִּתְקוֹ** (צ = ק; פ = מ; נו = מ). Cf. xxvii. 5. In line 15 **כְּאִישׁוֹן בְּתַעֲיוֹן** is too short, and is not favoured by parallelism. **עֵין** comes from **אֶדְנִי**, and belongs to the first half of the line; **כְּאִישׁוֹן** is a distortion of **בְּחִצְרַת בֵּיתְךָ**. In line 17 we can hardly tolerate **זוֹ שְׂדֵינִי**. Aramaisms are not as a rule probable, but here **שְׂדֵינִי** at once suggests itself. The next line should perhaps be **בְּנֶפֶשׁ אִיבֵי אֱלֹהֵתֵינִי**. Cf. xxvii. 12.

In line 19 we have to combine material from the end of *v.* 9 and the beginning of *v.* 10. Robertson Smith (*Rel. Sem.*, 2nd edition, p. 379) thought that a particular part of the *viscera* was meant (the Arabic *hilib*, "midriff"). But it is not probable that **חֵלֶב** in this sense would have been used side by side with **כֶּבֶד** ("liver") as the seat of the feelings. Duhm (after Dyserinck) would read **חֵלֶב לִבְמוֹ**, "their heart is become fat," continuing **סָגְרוּ פִימָה**; not satisfactory. **חֵלְבֵי** should certainly be **חֵלְבֵי מוֹת** (? **חֵלְבֵי**);

see xviii. 6, on which our passage is dependent. As line 20 we should certainly read, to match line 19, שְׁבִלֵי יַמִּים יִבְעֲתוּנִי; cf. xviii. 5, lxix. 3. The correction is justified by sound method. דָּבְרוּ probably comes from a dittographed fragment of שְׁבִלֵי יַמִּים. שְׁבִלֵי יַמִּים means "ocean," as in xxiv. 2.

In line 21 occurs one of the greatest textual problems of the Psalm. What can אֲשֶׁרְנוּ עִתָּה סִבְבוּנֵי mean? "At each of our steps"? But surely this is superfluous, nor does it suit סִבְבוּנֵי. If however we grant that the enemies referred to in the neighbouring Psalms are the North Arabian peoples, and that a name for one of these peoples was נִשׂוּר, which is often miswritten as אֲשׂוּר, we shall at once see that אֲשֶׁרְנוּ is probably a corruption of נִשְׂרִים. The LXX. has ἐκβάλλοντες or ἐκβαλόντες, i.e. perhaps [נִשְׂרוֹנֵי] עִתָּה is also suspicious. Transposing, let us read [בְּנֵי סִבְבוּנֵי] | עִרְתֵּי נִשְׂרִים, and compare xxii. 17. The alternative to נִשְׂרִים is רִשְׁעִים.

In line 22, as represented in the traditional text, there are more corruptions which Duhm has tried to heal, but by a false theory (Pharisees). Grätz, Nestle, and Wildeboer have also made imperfect emendations (see Stade's *Zeitschrift*, 1896, p. 323; 1897, p. 180). Probably there is another to Psalm xxii. (revised text), where the North Arabian oppressors are variously described (*vs.* 13, 17) as "lions," and as "wild oxen with pointed horns." Read בְּקִרְנֵי הַשֵּׁן כְּתֵרוּנֵי. For בארץ see the next note. Line 23 presents us with the extraordinary word דְּמִינוּ, on which see the dictionaries. The LXX. has ὑπέλαβόν με, i.e. דְּמוּנֵי. Clearly we should read יְקִדְמוּנֵי (cf. xviii. 6, 19); see below. ק is represented by the ץ in בארץ (see on line 22); באר is a fragment of כארי, "as a lion," written too soon. In line 24 for יִכְסוּף read יִכְסֹף, with Bickell, Grätz and Budde (on Job xiv. 15). לְמִרְפָּה should be לְמִרְפָּה (Grätz). Insert יְקִיפוּנֵי, which easily fell out before כִּכְפִיר. It was however replaced in the margin, and now appears in the text of *v.* 13,

corrupt and mutilated, as פניו ; קדמה, which precedes, represents יקדמוני (a corruption of רמינו). In line 25 read והכריעהו ; in line 27 for the impossible מְרַשֵׁעַ הַרְבֵּךְ read probably מְשַׁנֵּי כְפִירִים. מְשַׁנֵּי כְפִירִים is a word very liable to corruption ; in xxii. 21 כפיר has become חרב.

Now we meet with one of the greatest "Biblical difficulties." ממתים ירך must be corrupt. But only a weak critic would add "hopelessly." ירך, like ידי in lxxvii. 3, most probably comes from יהיה. Then comes the ditto-gram יהיה ממתים and the extraordinary combination of words, מחלר חלקם בחיים. The key to the latter exists in Job (see xx. 23). The true text runs, תִּמְתָּר עֲלֵיהֶם גְּחָלִים ; in Job *l.c.* בלחומו should certainly be גְּחָלִים. Errors frequently arise both through the transposition of letters and through the substitution of similar or kindred letters. Thus מחלר = עליהם, and גְּחָלִים = חלקם. Still stranger but only a little less certain examples of this follow. בהיים וצפינד (וצפונד) should most probably be וְרוּחַ פְּלִצִית (xi. 6, where זלעפות needs correction). Thus we get a parallel for גחלים. תמלא במנם is right (see Job xx. 23). ישבעו is superfluous both for sense and for metre. Most probably it comes from אשבעה, which was written too soon, through the scribe's eye glancing at what is here reckoned as line 30.

In the closing couplet (= v. 15) read בצדקה, "in thy righteousness"; ד easily fell out after ק. Not so easily corrected is the final phrase תִּמְוֹנֶתְךָ. Conservatively minded readers will pardon me if, after a long and wide experience of critical methods, I presume to say that the textual reading is due to the unrestrained, uncritical subjectivity of an ancient editor. Various attempts have been made to explain it, and the present writer has taken his fair share of the trouble. Passing over earlier theories (for which reference may be made to the commentaries), I will only here refer to Beer (*Individual- und Gemeindepsalmen*, p. 18) and Wellhausen, who regard ת as the subject of

הקִיץ. The “awaking of God’s form” is thus taken to mean the revelation of the Divine glory at the judgment. Unfortunately no parallel can be adduced for such a phrase, and if this view of the construction were correct, it would be necessary to emend תמו into אמונתך, or rather (see the writer’s *Jewish Religious Life after the Exile*, p. 241) קנאתך. This however is not favoured by the parallelism. Some (e.g. Smend in Stade’s *Zt.*, 1888, p. 95) would render, “. . . with thy form at (thine) awaking,” i.e. at thine intervention in my behalf, while others (cf. *Origin of the Psalter*, p. 430) think that הקִיץ is used technically of God’s raising the dead. But let us put aside the current exaggerated belief in the Massoretic text, and apply a stricter critical method. Evidently בהקִיץ is not a proper parallel to בצדק, neither is תמונתך a proper object to אשבעה. One might be inclined to transfer בימינך from xvi. 11 (where it is metrically superfluous) to xvii. 15, supposing the scribe to have made an error (*lapsus oculi*). But the expression is too unnatural (“pleasant things in thy right hand”) to be correct. It is perfectly true that the theory of *lapsus oculi* will most easily account for the existence of these words (נעם’ בימ’) at the end of xvi. 11, but the further problem remains to discover the word, or the words, out of which the improbable phrase referred to may have arisen. A practised eye will at once see that תמונתך, which already exists in the text of xvii. 15, is a parallel false reading to נעם’ בימ’, so that we have to find a word, or words, out of which both תמונתך and בימינך can have developed. There is only one possible solution—במשפנתֶיך. בהקִיץ still remains. Beyond doubt, this has arisen out of חסדך. Parallel cases abound in the Psalter. The decisive proof however is that חסדך is the only word out of which the troublesome נצח at the end of xvi. 11 can have arisen.

What then is the satisfying vision of God’s countenance

to which the speaker of this Psalm looks forward? If we adhere to the traditional text, and take Psalm xvii. in connexion with Psalm xvi., and still more in connexion with Psalms xlix. and lxxiii. (according to the revised text), we are justified in supposing that the Psalmist expressed himself in such a way as to edify those who in the late Persian or early Greek period (?) accepted the new delightful hope of personal immortality. Prof. Charles is willing to abandon Psalms xvi. and xvii., if he may but retain the older view of Psalms xlix. and lxxiii. I do not think that a strict textual criticism will justify this position. It is only the remnant of a conservative prejudice which prevents us from seeing that in all these Psalms the speaker is pious Israel (i.e. the Israel within Israel, the true "servant of Yahwè"), and that the hope which animates him is, not (as the rationalists thought) deliverance from some one of the dangers which from time to time beset the community of Israel, but the crowning deliverance from a combined attack of Israel's foes, which will be immediately followed by the great golden age of "Messianic" felicity. Thus the truth, in this as in so many other problems, lies neither on this side nor on that, but apart from and yet near to both sides in the old controversy. It is pious Israel which, on moral grounds, so confidently hopes for lasting continuance, and out of this hope at a later time will develop the elevating and ennobling hope of personal immortality, the Divine covenant being seen to be not merely with Israel, but with each pious and devoted Israelite. If a few readers may be led by this to suspect that "advanced criticism" is only another name for "thorough criticism," and that sympathy with the religion of the Psalmists is not confined to scholars who from youth to age stand on the same spot and use the same critical instruments, the first of the objects which the writer of the present article has had before him will have been attained.

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