

Notes.

On Zech. vi. 1-7.

BY PROF. E. C. BISSELL, D.D.

THIS passage presents a difficulty regarded by most, perhaps, as insuperable. It has existed and been acknowledged as a difficulty, if not from time immemorial, at least during most of the time memorial. The old versions appear to have struggled unsuccessfully with it,—the Peshito, by the use of the scalpel, even confessing itself worsted. Modern commentators and critics have not hesitated to grapple with the problem, but in no case with results that command a wide acceptance. The recent excellent revision of our English version still leaves the unintelligible parts of the text, as doubtless the revisers themselves would be quite ready to confess, nearly as unintelligible as ever.

The difficulty begins to be foreshadowed in vs. 3, where two epithets are applied to the horses attached to the fourth chariot. They are designated not only by their color (**ברדים**) like the others, but they are said to be strong (**אמצים**). The full force of it is felt in vss. 5-7, where the angel, in explaining the meaning of the vision, has nothing whatever to say of the first of the chariots to which the red horses are attached; while he *seems* sharply to distinguish between the **ברדים** and **אמצים** attached to the fourth chariot, though just before treating them as identical. He is supposed here to assign to them different chariots, and wholly different fields of operation. A more palpable exegetical puzzle than this in appearance it would be difficult to find in the Old Testament.

It would be interesting, and not unprofitable, to examine in detail the more important attempts at harmonizing the several statements with one another. It is unnecessary, however, as the theory I now propose is wholly independent, and modestly suggested from an entirely different point of view. I find, in short, the key to the problem in Zech. vi. 1-7, in Zech. i. 8. In the latter passage, likewise, four kinds of horses appear in a vision of this prophet. On the

first, the red, rides one who is described as the leader of the rest. He speaks of the other three as executing commissions in which he does not personally participate. Such commissions are similar to those given to the chariots in our passage. The horsemen are "to walk to and fro through the earth." They afterwards return and report to him.

This, accordingly, we take to be the relation of the first chariot mentioned in Zech. vi. to the other three; it is their leader. It sends them forth, and receives their report on their return (vs. 8). The prophet would not deem it needful to make this explanation a second time, the norm once being given in a similar previous vision. He might have expected that the form in which the vision in Zech. vi. appears would readily suggest its explanation with that of Zech. i. before us. Hence, there is nothing remarkable that in the statement of what the chariots *do*, in vss. 6, 7, nothing is said of the one having the red horses.

All the remaining confusion, moreover, disappears by simply closing vs. 6 with **יצא** instead of **התימן**; that is, removing *soph pasuk* two words further on. It would then read, with the beginning of vs. 7, as follows: "*The chariot* wherein are the black horses goeth forth towards the north country; and the white went after them; and the grisled went forth toward the south country; even the strong went forth. And they [that is, all three of the chariots. Note the fem. ending **תהלהלכנה**] sought to go that they might walk to and fro through the earth." The rendering of *vau* as expegetical "*even* the strong," is too common in such a connection to need justification (1 Sam. xxviii. 3; Ps. lxxviii. 10), and vss. 6 and 3 are thus harmonized. The epithet "strong" may have been given to the horses of the fourth chariot because they go forth alone into the south country, while two chariots are required for the north.

That this, now, is the true explanation of the relation of the four chariots to one another is strongly supported by vs. 8, where, as in Zech. i. 10, the leader, as representative of Jehovah, addresses the prophet: "Then cried he upon me and spoke unto me, saying, 'Behold they that go toward the north country have quieted my spirit (allayed my anger) in the north country.'" If the first chariot is not regarded as the divinely appointed leader of the rest, and its occupant as speaking in these words, we are unable to account for the singular abruptness with which this verse begins, "Then cried he upon me," etc.