

THREE NOTES ON PSALM XLVI.

(1)

He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth (v. 10 a [9 a E.V.]).

ALL modern commentators (so far as I am aware) agree with our English translators in finding in this Psalm a notable utterance on world-peace. JEHOVAH is about to put an end to war and to destroy all weapons of war. We must concede that this is a possible explanation of the words of the verse.

But the text thus explained does not agree well with the context. In v. 9 [8 E.V.] the Psalmist invites men to consider the 'desolations' or 'destructions' (שְׁמוֹת) which JEHOVAH has wrought in the earth. For 'desolations' we might substitute the rendering 'astonishing things', but it is still necessary to remember that the Hebrew root connotes desolation, desolation of the spirit, if not desolation of the outward face of the world. It is sufficient here to refer to Jer. v 30, 'Astonishment (שִׁמָּה) and horror is come to pass in the land' (R.V. marg.). Does the Psalmist indeed class the bringing-in of world-peace among 'the' astonishing things, the deeds of desolation' which he invites his people to contemplate? It is difficult to think so. Again the Psalm ends with the refrain 'JEHOVAH-Sébaoth is with us, the God of Jacob is our high tower'. This surely is a war-cry (cf. Isa. viii 8, 10), but should a war-cry follow so closely upon the announcement of universal peace? *Vv.* 9, 12 [8, 11 E.V.] announce rather victory over Israel's foes than the end of all war.

I suggest that v. 10 [9 E.V.] is simply the description of a complete victory by which Israel is delivered from present danger. The exegesis of the verse must be set forth in detail. (a) מִלְחָמוֹת 'wars, battles' is to be taken in a concrete sense. Like the English word 'battle' it bears the sense of 'forces drawn up for battle'; it could be used to translate Shakspeare's

'Their battles are at hand'.

(*Julius Caesar* v i.)

Cp. Ps. lxxvi 4 [3 E.V.] 'There brake he the arrows of the bow; the shield, and the sword, and the battle'. So 1 Kings xxii 35 'And the battle (the Israelite army) went up' (ותעלה המלחמה), i.e. it retired,

retreated) 'that day, but the king was stayed up in the chariot against the Syrians', i. e. Ahab was held up at his post in order to stay the flight of his army. So again Joel iv 9 [iii 9 E.V.], 'Prepare ('Sanctify' R.V. marg.) war' should rather be 'Sanctify the battle array' (קדשו מלחמה). It was the men of war themselves, the warriors in their array, who were 'sanctified' in preparation for an expedition.

The verb השבית which is used with מלחמות agrees well with the substantive thus interpreted. The ranks are not merely to be broken, for broken ranks may be restored by able commanders. The ranks are 'made to cease', they are dissolved, so that the warriors never appear again as 'formed bodies', to use a military phrase. The 'ordered line' which often struck terror with its close array of spears will be ex-terminated in the literal sense, it will be made to cease unto the end (*terminus*) of the land (perhaps 'the earth'). This is truly a deed of 'desolation' or 'astonishment' for the onlooker, be he friend or foe.

The other phrases lend themselves to similar explanation. The bows are broken in the course of the battle (cp. Ps. lxxvi 4 [3]; Hos. i 5), and not merely as a measure towards the inauguration of a Reign of Peace. Finally, the clause 'He burneth the chariots (עגלות) in the fire' is a vivid battle-touch, having nothing whatever to do with Peace-measures. The עגלות are (as B. Duhm reminds us) not 'chariots', but 'die Lastwagen der Bauern'. To burn them would surely be a strange way of preparing for universal Peace. Possibly the LXX yielded to this consideration when they adopted the precarious rendering *θυρεούς* 'large door-shaped shields'. (The word עגיל 'round shield' which occurs some four times in the Aramaic Targum seems to have no place in Hebrew.) The Greek rendering, however, need not detain us, for עגלה 'wagon' is a common Hebrew word and (*pace* F. Baethgen and others) well suited to the present context. V. 10 describes the progress of JEHOVAH's great battle against Israel's foes. It is (like many other passages of O.T.) couched in unflinchingly anthropomorphic language. First by His attack He breaks up the enemy phalanx; there is no rally, but only broken flight as far as the very *border of the land*. In the pursuit both bowmen and spearmen go down before Him with shattered weapons. Soon He arrives at the camp, the wagon-laager behind which the enemy makes his last stand. But the wagon-barrier soon goes up in flame, and the victory is completed. It is not War, but the organized war-might of 'Assyria' that JEHOVAH brings to an end.

A confirmation of this view comes from an unexpected source. In Western Asia the language of war was naturally that of the great military power Assyria. So we may believe that the phraseology of

v. 10 is ultimately borrowed from the annals of Assyrian kings. The first two clauses in any case find a striking parallel in the first 'despatch' of Esar-haddon in which he records his victory over the murderers of his father Sennacherib. He ascribes his success to his patron goddess:

'Ishtar (Ashtoreth) the lady of conflict and of battle (taḥâzi) came to my side, and brake their bow (kashat-su-nu tashbir = קשת ישבר in the Psalm); their ordered battle (ta-ḥa-za-shu-nu ra-ak-su) she dissolved' (K. J. B. ii 142).

It need hardly be pointed out that there is no suggestion of disarmament or the bringing-in of universal peace in these words of Esar-haddon. Must we not say the same of the parallel language of the Psalm?

(2)

There is a river, the streams (נהר פלגיו) whereof make glad the city of God (v. 5 a [4 a E.V.]).

The vague rendering 'There is a river' is hardly defensible in the light of the use of נהר 'river' in O.T. That word, whether used with the article or not, is wisely rendered in different books in R.V. by 'the River', with capital R. Such is the case e.g. with Gen. xxxi 21; 2 Sam. viii 3; Isa. vii 20 (anarthrous), viii 7; Ps. lxxii 8 (anar.), lxxx 12 [11 E.V.] (anar.). The River is the Euphrates (Gen. xv 18), a symbol of the power which held the Euphrates valley, just as 'Orontes' stands for the Syrian people in Juvenal's well-known saying,

'In Tiberim defluxit Orontes.'

'The Lord', Isaiah says, 'bringeth up upon them the waters of the River... even the king of Assyria' (Isa. viii 7). The reference in the word 'River' to the Assyrians is to be asserted for the Psalm also. Whether it was written in the age of Hezekiah or not, it is but natural that, when Jerusalem was seriously threatened by an enemy, the Psalmist should recall the striking deliverance of the city from Sennacherib.

Further, the formula 'There is' is to be rejected on the ground that the 'River' needs no introduction, for its activity has already been depicted in the preceding verse. Certainly the pronominal suffix in 'His waters' does not refer back to the 'seas' (pl.) of v. 4 [3].

קדש in the second half of the verse is probably to be read as a verb; (so LXX, ἡγιάσεν); 'he (i. e. the River) hath hallowed the dwellings of the most High.' The Assyrian invader has been compelled to respect the sanctity of the Holy City; cp. Ps. lxxvi 11 [10 E.V.] 'the wrath of man shall be compelled to praise thee'.

(3)

*JEHOVAH-Sabaoth is with us ;
The God of Jacob is our high tower.*

(*vs.* 8, 12 [7, 11 E.V.])

This third note is offered tentatively. Evidence on the point raised is meagre, but the subject is interesting and possibly fresh information may shortly be forthcoming.

The Divine title 'God of Jacob' stands as a parallel to the title 'JEHOVAH-Sabaoth'. Is it possible that the parallel is closer than that which the English rendering presents?

The name 'Jacob' seems to be interpreted in Gen. xxvii 36 [E.V.] as meaning 'The Supplanter'. The connotation of such a name in English ears is only bad. But it must not be forgotten that Esau speaks not as a philologist, but as an angry man playing with his brother's name. That name is probably *mediae significationis*. Its essential meaning seems to be one who gets the better of his opponent, 'Victor' or 'Conqueror'. The particular means employed by Jacob against his brother and against Laban were dishonourable, but the name עקב contains no reference to those means. Even if there be a connexion with עקב 'heel', yet 'to take by the heel' simply suggests the completeness of the victory, not the means by which it is obtained. Cf. Hos. xii 4 [3 E.V.],

'In the womb he conquered (עקב) his brother ;
And in his manhood he had power with God.'

It appears then that עקב means 'he conquers' or (as a proper name) 'Conqueror'. On this basis we gain a satisfactory meaning for the otherwise strange name 'Jacob-el' found in a list of Palestinian names on an inscription of Thothmes III of Egypt (Driver, 'Jacob', Hastings's *DB.* ii p. 526). עקבאל would mean 'El (God) is conqueror', and עקב 'Conqueror' might become a characteristic epithet of God.¹ The M.T. of Ps. xxiv 6 actually yields an instance of this :

'Such is the generation of them that seek him,
That seek thy face, O Conqueror' (עקב).

It is true that LXX has for the second member ζητούντων τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ θεοῦ Ἰακώβ, but the reading is fatally easy, brought in probably from some parallel passage. The shorter form of the second member offered by M.T. keeps the general balance of the verse much better, and the epithet 'Conqueror' is peculiarly appropriate in the context.

¹ Cp. *al-Muqtadir* 'the Prevailer', the 69th of the ninety-nine Excellent Names of God in Islam.

On the other hand if M.T. of Ps. xxiv 6 be accepted, it does not follow that M.T. of Ps. xlv 8, 12 is to be corrected into agreement with it. We may render **אלהי יעקב** 'Conqueror God' or 'God the Conqueror' just as we render **מלאכי רעים** (Ps. lxxviii 49) by 'evil angels', or **פרא אדם** (Gen. xvi 12) by 'a human wild ass'. In each case the word in construction is qualified by the word with which it is in construction.

A translation of the Psalm is appended in illustration of these notes.

2, 3 [1, 2 E.V.] CONFIDENCE IN GOD BASED ON PAST EXPERIENCE.

God (JEHOVAH) is for us a refuge and strength ;

He is found indeed a help in troubles.

Therefore will we not fear though the earth be changed,

And though mountains be moved into the heart of the seas.

4-7 [3-6 E.V.] THE ASSAULT OF THE ENEMY TURNED TO THE ADVANTAGE OF GOD'S CITY.

The Enemy is represented under the figure of the mighty River, the Euphrates (Isa. viii 7 f).

His waters roar and swell ;

Mountains quake at his pride ;

Yet shall the River with his streams make glad the city of God,

He hath hallowed the dwellings of the most High.

God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved ;

God shall help her at the coming of the morning.

Nations have roared, kingdoms have been moved ;

He hath uttered his voice ; earth shall melt away.

8-12 [7-11 E.V.] JEHOVAH'S HELP.

JEHOVAH-Sabaoth is with us ;

God the Conqueror is our high tower.

Come, behold the works of JEHOVAH,

Who hath dealt destruction in the land.

He dissolveth their ranks in all our land ;

He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder ;

He burneth the camp wagons in the fire.

Forbear and acknowledge that I am God ;

I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.

JEHOVAH-Sabaoth is with us ;

God the Conqueror is our high tower.