NOTES AND STUDIES

Ecclesiasticus v 10.

Here the Greek and Syriac offer a text identical with the Hebrew. 'Let thy speech be one' can only be explained as meaning 'Be consistent in speech'. The connexion with vv. 11-13 suggests, however, that the thought of the writer is that, while mental apprehension should be swift and sure, speech should be considered and deliberate. The simple correction of רָשָׁא for רֵאָשׁ makes the couplet run—

'Be steadfast (i.e. well-assured) in thy understanding,
And afterward let thy speech be'.

The meaning is—'Do not speak till you are well-assured of what you have to say'.

C. F. BURNEY.

PSALM LXXXV 9.

The recent discussion in this JOURNAL of the Hebrew text of the passage above referred to has reminded me that about half a century ago I sent to the late Professor Weir, of Glasgow, a conjectural emendation of the last clause of the verse, and that in some extracts from that scholar's note-books, published in the Expositor a few years back, I had the surprise of finding my conjecture recorded, with my name and address appended.

My proposal was to read בָּלָה instead of בַּלָּה. This was of course suggested by the rendering of the LXX, καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἐπιστρέφοντας πρὸς αὐτὸν καρδίαν. It is evident that the Greek translator read בָּל; and if this reading be correct the acceptance of 'Selah' seems inevitable, in spite of the absence of διάφανα in the Greek; the LXX and the Masoretic text do not always agree with regard to the insertion of this word. It appears to me that one strong argument in favour of the originality of the reading בָּל is that in the older Hebrew alphabet there is very little resemblance between the letters ב and ב, which in the later square character are almost indistinguishable. As the MS which the Greek translator had before him was presumably written in the
ancient script, it is not likely that he can have misread a ב as a ג, while
the converse misreading on the part of a later scribe would be quite
natural.

On the other hand, the Greek translator appears to have read שמש as
the received Hebrew text does; and as it did not occur to him to
suppose that שמש had here a vocalization different from that which it has
in the two preceding clauses, he had to extract the most plausible sense
he could out of an ungrammatical passage. I am bound to confess
that the palaeographical consideration which I have adduced in support
of the reading שמש is a somewhat serious difficulty in the way of my pro­
posal to correct שמש into שמש; for although the ב and the ג are suffi­
ciently similar in the ancient Hebrew character, the ג and the ג are
about as unlike as any two letters could be.

Whether my suggestion has any value I must leave it to the judge­
gment of better Hebraists than myself to determine. I am quite aware
that it is not free from difficulty. I have already referred to the palaeo­
graphical objection; and it may perhaps be doubted whether so common
an expression as שמש שמש would be likely to be corrupted at all, even in
copying from a badly written MS. Then I have felt from the first that
the verse, as I proposed to read it, seems to conclude rather feebly and
unrhythmically; but I doubt whether any other conjecture that has been
offered is in this respect much better. The traditional text (in which
many eminent scholars have found no stumbling-block) gives excellent
sense and rhythm; but the sentence comes in rather abruptly, and
I find it difficult to persuade myself that שמש has not the same pronun­
ciation and meaning in the three successive clauses. The case for שמש,
too, appears to me to be strong. While I do not feel great confi­
dence in the correctness of my own conjecture, I cannot help thinking
that the received text requires emendation of some kind.

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