

ARTICLE VII.

PROFESSOR BRIGGS ON THE REVISED VERSION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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IN THE *Presbyterian Review* for July there is an elaborate article by Dr. C. A. Briggs, of the Union Theological Seminary, upon the concluding portion of the Revised English Bible which appeared in May last. The paper displays a great deal of learning and ability, and a great deal of something else which perhaps it is as well not to define distinctly. The attack is upon the whole line, text, grammar, exegesis, translation, metrical division, higher criticism, and every thing else. And not only are supposed errors specified and emphasized, but their origin is sought in the motives of the revisers. The tone throughout is that of Omniscience criticising the efforts of a lot of schoolboys.

One serious misconception underlies all that Dr. Briggs says. He writes as if the authors of the revision had undertaken to make a new translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, whereas it is well known that the charge committed to them was simply to correct the authorized version, and in doing this "to introduce as few alterations as possible consistently with faithfulness." Had the Professor remembered this, he would have forborne not a few of the criticisms he has allowed himself to make. The writer can testify that again and again at the meetings of the revisers suggestions were made to which it was said in reply, "Yes, if we were making a new version we would agree; but we are not, and as the authorized has the ground, it is not worth while to adopt the proposed change." Now, it is quite possible that this course was

wrong, and that it would have been much better to make the version *de novo* throughout; at least, much may be said on that side of the question. But the revisers had no option. The terms under which they were appointed marked out their course, and it is unfair and unreasonable to compare the results thus attained with those of scholars who are left at complete liberty to choose whatever idioms, phrases, or words they may think best fitted to express the meaning of the Hebrew. It should be added, however, that a version conducted on the plan and in the methods proposed by Professor Briggs would have no prospect of success as a popular enterprise. It would, indeed, be welcomed by scholars and serve a useful purpose to intelligent students of Holy Writ, but the people at large could never be induced to accept it as a substitute for the common English Bible. The repeated experiments made during the last two centuries settle this point beyond controversy. The quarrel of Professor Briggs is not so much with the revisers as with the necessary limitations under which they acted.

I. The first ground of objection is the course pursued in regard to *the text*. The revision is based on the Massoretic recension with marginal readings containing "probable or important variations" taken from the ancient versions. The latter the American Company direct to be omitted. This excites the ire of Professor Briggs. He decries the Massoretic text in every possible way. He says that "the Ante-Nicene Church knew nothing" of it, which may or may not be true. All depends upon whether the Massorettes invented the pointing they gave the text, or only expressed in form the tradition they had received. For aught that any man can prove now, the Ante-Nicene Church had substantially the same text and pointing represented in the versions they used as the Massorettes had afterwards. But supposing the fact to be otherwise, how is their example to influence us, when we know that their course proceeded not from choice but necessity, since

none of ~~them~~ were Hebraists? The Professor also derides ~~the~~ notion that the Massorettes give us the Old Testament from the hands of them to whom were committed the oracles of God, and deems this a strange position for a Christian scholar to take. Let us see. Paul distinctly affirms that God gave the Hebrew Scriptures to the Jews, just as our Lord before him had said concerning the grossly corrupt church of his day, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat: all things, therefore, whatsoever they bid you, these do and observe," thus ratifying their possession of the documents recording the divine will. Now the Massorettes furnish us with the official copy of those Scriptures as transmitted from age to age by the constituted authorities of the Jewish nation—those who sat on Moses' seat. This is the uniform tradition of the Jews, against which there is nothing, while in favor of it is the extreme pains and care which the Jews are known to have taken in the preservation of their sacred records. It may suit Dr. Briggs to call the received text a recension of the Middle Ages, but all scholars not blinded by passion or prejudice admit that the Massorettes followed a tradition which came down to them through regular channels, and that this is true both of the text and the pointing they attached to it. The ancient versions were certainly made from codices earlier than any we now have, but this fact by no means justifies the inferences he draws from it. Yet even the Professor himself has not the hardihood to draw the full and legitimate inference; viz., that if the versions represent the older manuscripts and Christian tradition *vs.* Rabbinical, then they should be deliberately preferred all the way through.

In the first place, there is not in existence a good critical edition of any one of these versions. The codices differ widely, and have not yet been collated so as to furnish a trustworthy text. No doubt this will ultimately be done, but the revisers were summoned to act in the present, and could not wait for an indefinite period. The Pro-

fessor, however, is not so unreasonable as certain English critics, who, in an article in the *Expositor* for July, ask this amazing question: "Why, we ask here, did not some of the committee work out a scholarly recension of the LXX. with a full account of the state of each book?" In the next place, very little is certainly known as to the origin of these versions (excepting, of course, that of Jerome), the character of those who made them, or the degree of pains they took in selecting the recension which they translated. It is certain that they have grave defects. That one which is universally considered the best, and which is really invaluable for its aid in giving the key to the Hellenistic dialect of the New Testament, is deformed by many blunders, gross mistranslations, and often unintelligible combinations of words. It may, therefore, fairly be asked, Is it credible that men who proved thus ignorant or careless in rendering were models of caution and exactness in selecting the codex upon which they bestowed their labors? It will not do, then, for Dr. Briggs to claim superior or primary authority for the text of the versions, or that they represent any authority whatever. Made in an uncritical age and accepted by the early Christian fathers because this was the only way in which they could get access to the older Scriptures, they come to us simply as accessory helps and not at all as primal founts of knowledge. Nor are they a whit more entitled to credit as being "Christian" (pray, how is the Septuagint a Christian version?) as against the "Rabbinical" text. It has yet to be shown that the Jews in any degree tampered with the living oracles for any purposes of their own. The very face of their Scriptures furnishes a violent presumption against any such charge.

The cursory reader must be on his guard against supposing that this question is now raised for the first time. It was discussed long before Dr. Briggs existed. Again and again exaggerated claims were made for the versions, sometimes for one, at others for another, but in the end

the good sense of the church prevailed, and men went back to the old text as preserved by those to whom it was dearer than life. Dr. Briggs is indeed bold to assert that the unpointed text is the real text, a position which was held by some of the early American Hebraists (*e. g.*, the late Dr. James P. Wilson, of Philadelphia), as well as by some European scholars; but it would be hard to find a critical commentary of any kind issued within the last half-century which is not based upon the text pointed with vowels and accents. How could this be if the question is *in dubio*, and much more if the matter is as clear as the Professor makes it out to be? For centuries, indeed ever since the revival of letters, this matter has been contested and sometimes with no little warmth, and yet the consent of scholars is shown by the fact just referred to. The pointed text is always considered as presumptively right. The *prima facie* evidence is in its favor, and the contrary in any given case is to be made out by argument.

One of Dr. Briggs's strange conclusions about the revisers is in these words: "We observe that they sometimes follow the Qeri and sometimes the Kethibh, but in this they seem to be entirely capricious. We fail to see any sifting of the evidence." The only possible inference from this is that they have not agreed in opinion with their critic, which indeed is unfortunate, yet doubtless divine grace will enable them to bear the affliction. A choice of two readings being open to them, they sometimes took one, at others another, and it is to be presumed, from their being men of some knowledge, good sense, and piety, that they had reasons for the course they took. But since they made no record of those reasons, their censor feels at liberty to charge them with "caprice." Did it ever occur to him when he "fails to see" any thing, that the difficulty may be as much in the organ that sees as in the object that is seen?

Another of his remarkable observations is that "emendations of Rabbinical scholars" are not superior to those

of ancient Christian versions, or even modern biblical scholars. The difference is about as wide as one can well conceive. The nature of the case, the habits of the Jewish scribes, their reverence for the sacred text, and the uniform tenor of tradition,—all favor the view that when they adopted a different reading in any case, it was not pure conjecture but upon manuscript authority. But in the emendations of even the best modern scholars there is nothing but conjecture. And if there is any thing settled in textual criticism, whether sacred or classical, it is that the poorest manuscript is better than the cleverest guess.

Yet another of the Professor's hallucinations is that "Christian scholars who use the Hebrew Bible through the veil of the Massoretic accents and vowel-points see it with the eyes of the Jew and not with the eyes of a Christian." And this is fortified by a gross perversion of the text in Second Corinthians (iv. 15) about "the veil upon the heart" of Israel. There is not a tittle of evidence that this veil ever rendered the Jew unfaithful to the purity of his sacred books. The evidence all points the other way. Had the early copyists or any of their successors wished to pervert the traditional text of the Scripture to minister to their own pride or fancied interest, the way was open in numberless directions, but they never entered it. Everybody knows the perverse and often trifling interpretations of the Rabbins, but nobody can prove that this ever controlled their manipulation of the Scripture itself. And it is a poor, a very unworthy, return for their sleepless vigilance under all circumstances of peril or trial to insinuate that they have tampered with the integrity of the precious heirloom committed to them.

The Professor furnishes a specimen of the way in which he would improve Scripture by disregarding the Massoretic pointing, that is, as he calls it, "the interpretation of the mediæval Rabbins." This is found in Job xxxviii. 41, where the revision reads:

Who provideth for the raven his food,
When his young ones cry unto God,
And wander for lack of meat?

Here, by a change in the pointing, the words in the first line, "for the raven," can be altered so as to read "in the evening," which the Professor thinks is a great gain to the harmony and the beauty of the strophe. But it is a loss. The words as they stand in the received text have an exact analogy in Ps. cxlvii. 9, where it is said,

He giveth to the beast his food,
And to the young ravens which cry.

In the Psalter the raven is associated with the beast in dependence upon God: in Job the association is with the wild beast; and I submit that the one is as natural as the other, and there is not the least reason for the proposed change of text. And yet Dr. Briggs has such an overweening confidence in the correctness of his own intuitions that he says, "I cannot conceive that any one should hesitate to accept this reading, unless he has such a reverence for the Massoretic vowels as to deem them well-nigh infallible"!!

In the well-known verse of the twenty-second Psalm, where the revisers have left in the text "they pierced my hands and my feet," and put in the margin the Massoretic reading "like a lion," he charges this departure from their principle to "dogma, the desire to retain a particular Messianic reference." An older or more charitable man would have rather said that they retained the reading of the versions, either because it was in the authorized, or because of the difficulty of making a congruous sense out of the other reading. But the Professor not only knows all that can be known about Hebrew, but also can read men's minds and discern their motives. In Job xxxix. 21 he finds another instance of "the inconsistency and perversity" of the American revisers. There the Massoretic text reads "They paw," but the English revisers put "He paweth" in the text and "They paw" in the margin. And "we do

not find any protest from the American revisers." *Mirabile dictu!* It did not occur to the learned Professor that perhaps the reason was an unwillingness to disturb the authorized version, or possibly that this was one of the not rare cases in which ease and fluency of translation requires a change of number. Yet we can assure him that one or both of these reasons influenced the American company, and no one ever dreamed of a change of the original text.

I conclude on this point with the general remark that the difference between the American revisers and Dr. Briggs is that they consider the Massoretic recension as incomparably the best guide to the original text, and one therefore that is not to be departed from save in cases of absolute necessity, where there is no other escape from difficulties apparently insuperable. He, on the other hand, attributes to it no authority at all, or at least one greatly inferior to the ancient versions, while he subordinates both sources to the unpointed text, which every Hebrew scholar worth the name is not only at liberty but bound to furnish with vowels and accents according to his own independent judgment. If one may borrow the figure of Burke, what we would make the extreme medicine of the text he turns into its daily bread. He indeed claims that by allowing one departure from the received text in 1 Samuel (vi. 18) we have "opened the flood-gates to a critical revision of the entire Book of Samuel." Did ever mortal man make so wild an assertion? Because in one case, where the internal evidence of a corruption, or rather an accidental change of text, is overwhelming, and the early versions offer another reading which gives every evidence of being the original, it is adopted, therefore in all other cases where the ingenuity or the caprice of critical scholars calls for an emendation, with or without the support of the versions, we are bound to yield the primary authority of the existing Hebrew text and follow the clue thus given! No, our claim is that the

Massoretic text is in all cases presumptively right, that it is never to be departed from save where the internal evidence imperatively demands it, and that then and only then is the authority of the versions to be accepted. This is a very different thing from an habitual disparagement of that text as mediæval, rabbinical, and subsidiary, and an equally habitual exaltation of the text of the versions as ancient, Christian, and superior. Bishop Lowth, whom Dr. Briggs quotes, held his views, and carried them out in his work on Isaiah. What was the result? All the learning, acuteness, and elegant scholarship of the Bishop could not prevent his book from falling into desuetude. Nowhere is it accepted as authority. Scarcely ever is it quoted. It lies on the shelf of the libraries a perpetual monument of the folly of forsaking the traditional text and yielding to the vagaries of conjectural criticism.

II. The next point the Professor takes up, is the way in which the poetry of the Bible is treated.

The revisers' presentation of this subject Dr. Briggs declares to be "entirely incorrect." First, he finds fault with the inconsistency of giving the so-called poetical books in parallel lines, and yet declining to do this in the prophetic books and elsewhere. The only way in which he can explain it is "their failure to find a sufficient guide in the Massoretic accentuation." But in their preface the reason assigned is that the language of these books, "although frequently marked by parallelism, is, except in purely lyrical passages, rather of the nature of lofty and impassioned prose." The sufficiency of this reason will be admitted by any sober and candid judge.

But the chief charge brought against the revisers is that they mistake the proper division of the lines. This is founded upon the notion that Dr. Briggs has discovered the true principle of Hebrew poetry. In addition to the accepted views as to the parallelism, he insists that "the lines are measured by beats of the word accent, and divided into trimeters, tetrameters, pentameters, and hex-

ameters. The principle of parallelism extends to the strophe as well as to the line." His theory on this subject was fully set forth in his bright volume on *Biblical Study*, issued two or three years since; but we have yet to hear of one reputable scholar who accepts the theory. Upon it as a whole, it may be said that, even if it were admitted, it would and could have no effect upon the interpretation. That would remain the same upon any plan of interlinear division. Further, it is entirely arbitrary. The author rejects *in toto* the Massoretic interpretation and accentuation. He knows no more than any one else how the ancient Hebrews pronounced their language. Yet he says that there are so many beats of the accent, three, four, five, or six, as the case may be, and that these correctly stated prove themselves, especially to one familiar with the Hebrew. This they must do if the theory is to stand, for there is absolutely no other evidence in the case. Let us try one or two cases. In Ps. xlv. 3 the revision reads,

Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O mighty one.
Thy glory and thy majesty.

Dr. Briggs insists that this should be

Gird thy sword upon thy thigh,
O hero, thy glory and thy majesty.

One may well ask how the parallelism is improved by the change. The two lines are made more nearly equal in length, but that is all the gain. And surely it makes no difference to any English ear, however delicate, whether the phrase "O mighty one" is put at the end of the first line or the beginning of the second. In either case the sense and the melody are absolutely the same. So in the *Song at the Red Sea*, the revision reads,

The Lord is my strength and song,
And he is become my salvation :
This is my God, and I will praise him ;
My father's God and I will exalt him.
The Lord is a man of war :
The Lord is his name.

Here the Professor says that the revisers "entirely fail in the parallelism," which is a most astonishing assertion. He says the song is a tetrameter, each line having a caesura dividing it into two parts. (!) Accordingly he arranges it thus:

My strength | and song is Jah | and he has become | my salvation.
The same is my God | that I may glorify him | my father's God | that I may
exalt him.¹

Jehovah is | a warrior, | Jehovah is | his name.

I insist that this is an altogether arbitrary arrangement, and has in its support no reason whatever. It is not more rhythmical, more musical, or in any way more pleasing than the form adopted by the revisers. Yet so infatuated is the Professor with his theory that he says that the revisers by their method of division "are misled to a false construction of the entire poem," which is exquisitely absurd. The key to the movement, he says, is given in the refrain,

Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously :
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.

This the revisers recognize here but ignore elsewhere. But why? Because the parallelism requires this division here, and not elsewhere.

The same thing is seen in the Song of Deborah, which Dr. Briggs reproduces at length, correcting "in foot-notes the mistakes of the revisers." He says that "its lines are generally tetrameters, sometimes changed into trimeters, and occasionally into pentameters." Supposing this were true, what gain does it offer to the English reader? He sees no versification in it. It makes no other impression on him than that of the poetry of the thought and the ex-

¹ In respect to the change of rendering made here, one may well ask whether it is more natural for the singer to express the theological idea that God has become his God in order to call forth his praise, than it is for him to recite the fact that God is his God and his father's God, and that therefore he praises him. Or is the truth and poetry of the song to be sacrificed to an ideal conception of Hebrew tense-forms?

pression, without any, even the least, reference to metrical form. Nor do we believe that there is one cultivated reader in the world who would see more of the beauty and power of the poem in Dr. Briggs's division of the lines and strophes than he would in that of the revisers. Take one instance. In verse 23 the rendering of the authorized version is retained thus :

They fought from heaven,
The stars in their courses fought against Sisera,

The Professor says that this makes the first line too short and the second too long, and gives no proper parallelism. So he puts it,

From heaven fought the stars,
From their courses they fought with Sisera.

Where is the gain? Is the parallelism at all clearer? Is the sentiment any stronger? And if the revisers had made such a change, would they not have been severely censured for such a needless departure from the simplicity of the common version?

In Ps. xix. the Professor commends the putting of verses 7-10 in long lines, but asks why the remaining verses were not similarly treated, as he insists they should have been. Simply because there was no occasion for it. The parallelism, the force, the beauty, is just as well represented in the short lines as in the longer. It is the merest delusion to suppose that to say,

Moreover thy servant is warned by them : in keeping them there is great reward.

is in any respect better than to say,

Moreover by them is thy servant warned :
In keeping of them there is great reward.

The Professor sums up his criticisms on this point by saying that by following the guidance of the Massoretic points "the revisers have made so many mistakes that it is doubtful whether they have not done more harm than good in their attempt to give English readers an idea of Hebrew poetry." This harsh judgment rests entirely

upon the correctness of Professor Briggs's theory of lines and strophes, a theory peculiar to himself and remarkable for nothing but the confidence with which it is proclaimed as the final and conclusive settlement of a question which has been agitated for centuries. The only marked peculiarity of Hebrew poetry as distinguished from other poetry is its series of balanced clauses in which the sentiment expressed once is reiterated or expanded or contrasted so as to make a constant succession of parallels. There is no rhyme, nor rhythm, nor any of the long feet and short feet found in Greek and Latin poetry and in modern verse. The attempt has often been made to find the classic metres in the utterances of the Hebrew muse, but it has always failed. So far as form is concerned, the parallelism is not merely the chief characteristic. It is the only one. And the version which brings this out neatly and clearly, gives the English reader all that it concerns him to know. He may be told that one poem is composed of trimeters and another of tetrameters, etc., and he may read much about monostichs and distichs and tripstichs, etc., but after he has pondered the whole matter he finds that these ingenious suggestions have not aided him one whit, either in getting at the sense of the divine word, or in appreciating the poetical form in which it is conveyed. They add nothing whatever in the way of emphasis or impressiveness, but rather by their artificial character derogate from the simplicity of the sacred text and weaken its intrinsic weight. And so in regard to the strophes. This term, unless used in the widest and most general sense, is sure to mislead. Just as it has induced Professor Briggs to say in regard to the Song of Deborah, "It seems probable that each strophe was accompanied by the same refrain which we find at the close of the poem, thus: *So let all thine enemies perish*, etc." This so-called probable suggestion¹ would never have occurred to any one who

¹ The suggestion gives us some notion of the result that would be reached, were the Professor to carry out his views in regard to conjectural emendations.

did not have a cut and dried *schema* to apply to the matter in hand. The divisions of Hebrew poetry, just like those of Hebrew prose, are to be determined by the sense and the connection, as may be seen in the 107th Psalm, where the different portions vary so much in length as to defy any artificial measurement, yet are distinctly and certainly defined by the course of the thought. And no one who was untrammelled by a theory would ever think of splitting the eighth Psalm in two, and making a needless and injurious break in this short and beautiful lyric, as Professor Briggs does, in his passion for strophes.

One very singular blunder is made by him in the refrain of the Song of Solomon. The revision gives it (ii. 7) thus:

I adjure you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem,
By the roses and the hinds of the field,
That ye stir not up nor awaken love,
Until it please.

The American appendix renders the last two lines,

That ye stir not up nor awaken *my* love
Until he please.

And the reasons for this are given in the "Companion to the Revision," which Dr. Briggs quotes, but says "are without force," which he has a perfect right to say. But then he adds, "The English revisers have rightly adhered to King James's Version here," which is utterly wrong, for that version reads, "nor awake *my* love till he please." This is a bad enough misrepresentation, but what accompanies it is worse. He charges the American company with "not hesitating to interpolate in order to avoid an interpretation which is against their *a priori* theory." This is a very serious charge: where is the evidence of it? There is absolutely none whatever. There is nothing that even looks like an interpolation. He also asserts that "the American revisers would foist an erroneous interpretation into the drama," and this because of their "hostility to the realistic view" of its meaning. The audacity of this statement is marvellous. I am one of the American company,

and mingled in the discussions on the rendering of Canticles, and yet I cannot say of more than two of my colleagues whether they hold the realistic sense or not; but Dr. Briggs, who never heard a word of what was said, is able to pronounce *ex cathedra* the thoughts and intents of their hearts! Further, I deny the basis on which his allegation rests. In common with the great body of the Christian church in all ages, I hold the spiritual sense or application of the drama, but I hold with equal certitude the reality of the outside framework, and am ready to interpret that as rigidly in point of syntax and grammar as if it were nothing but a story of earthly love. This, indeed, must be the case with any sensible interpreter, and it is therefore the more inexcusable in Professor Briggs to charge a respectable body of his fellow-men with being biased by dogmatic considerations in their translation of a disputed and difficult passage. The Song on its face is a dramatic dialogue between a lover and his beloved, with suitable choruses; but whether its ultimate meaning be that only, or something more, it is a question which need not and ought not to have any influence upon the version of its words. And yet so sure is the Professor, that he repeats the charge of sinister influence. In his translation of ii. 4 he invents an optative perfect, and renders "Oh that he had brought me," etc., which he tries to justify in a note, and then adds this *naïve* remark: "One can easily see that it was the desire to retain the allegorical interpretation of the Song that influenced the revisers to this and other incorrect renderings of this wondrously beautiful drama." Was there ever greater fatuity?

III. The Grammar of the Revisers. On this part of the subject the reviewer speaks with the same confidence as on all others. He regards the revisers as having utterly failed in fidelity to the principles of the Hebrew language. Although the English company had among them such eminent grammarians as Professors Driver and A. B. Davidson, yet these were unable to lift the company "as

a body to their higher knowledge of Hebrew syntax." The consequence is that "the errors of tense mount up to thousands in the revision." And the same charge, in effect, is made in regard to all other grammatical forms.

It is very plain that the Professor here, as elsewhere, forgets the circumstances under which the revision was made. He writes and criticises just as if the revisers had an open field before them, and were at liberty in all cases to give whatever rendering seemed to them best to convey the mind of the Spirit in modern English. And he compares his own versions, made in absolute independence, with theirs, made under restrictions which they could not set aside. He should have kept in mind that what he was criticising was not a new version of the Old Testament, but the revision of an old one which was never to be departed from save where necessary. Dr. Briggs's forgetfulness of this fact characterizes his whole paper, and seriously diminishes its value as well as impairs confidence in his fitness for the office of critic, whose function is to judge a work by its conformity to its professed aim and not to some other standard. The question is not, did the revisers make the ideal version of the Old Testament, but did they, under the rules imposed, make the common version a much more accurate representation of the original? To state the matter in this way, which is the only just and fair way, is to rule out very many of the Professor's suggestions as having no pertinence to the case.

The first instance he quotes is from Canticles ii. 8, 9, where Dr. Briggs gives his translation as representing the participles of the original, which is more lively than the common version, but not so much so as to justify the revisers in making the change. (His alteration of *upon* to *over*, which presents the beloved as "leaping over mountains," is as grotesque as it is useless.) But there are some cases in which the gain secured by a participial rendering is

infinitesimal. For instance, Ps. xlii. 7 is put by the revisers, just as the authorized version,

“Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts.”

Dr. Briggs prefers “is calling” to “calleth,” yet certainly the ordinary reader would get no more vivid impression from the former than from the latter. Another instance of the Professor's sacred rage for grammatical niceties is seen in his treatment of the first strophe of the second Psalm. He alters “take counsel” into “do take counsel,” and before “cast away their cords” repeats the subject and the modal form “let us;” just as if these things were of any importance whatever in a popular version of the Psalm. To the mere English reader they rather weaken than strengthen the force of the utterance. So, again, in Num. x. 35, 36, the revisers render, “And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, O Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered,” etc. “And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord,” etc. The Professor objects that they have not expressed the frequentative force of the imperfect, and he gives us his rendering to show how it should be done. How, then, does he do it? Simply by changing the second *when* into *whenever*. How childish this is! Every reader understands at once that the action described in the verse is habitual or oft-repeated, and Dr. Briggs's change makes that fact no clearer. The same thing may be said of his change of “and let thine enemies be scattered” into “that thine enemies may be scattered.” One form expresses design and the other result, and I humbly submit that either conveys the general sense of the invocation to that class of readers for whom primarily the English Bible is intended.

This part of the article is full of instances of this kind, in which stress is laid on matters either insignificant or doubtful. We are told, for example, that the Hebrew has three moods of the imperfect, the indicative, jussive, and cohortative; but it cannot make these distinctions

throughout in form, as is the case in the Arabic language. Then comes the assertion, "But where they cannot be distinguished in form, they may yet be distinguished by syntactical construction and context." But what is this but interpretation? The revisers were to represent the Hebrew in English, giving the sense the words and forms convey, but carefully abstaining from exegesis, as not within their province. The application of the Professor's principle would have justly subjected them to severe censure. In Prov. xxxi. 10, "A virtuous (or, as the American appendix gives it, A worthy) woman, who can find?" Dr. Briggs, without any authority whatever, changes the question into an exclamation or wish, "A capable wife, O that one might find." This bold and needless alteration must, we suppose, be accepted, because its author "stands upon the heights of Hebrew scholarship." The same may be said of the Vav of the oath, which, after Ewald, he introduces in Amos ix. 5, and elsewhere, but the introduction of this Arabic usage into Hebrew is not yet sufficiently accredited to be admitted into a revision of the English Bible. Dr. Briggs doubtless supposes that the revisers never heard of it; but it may be well here to say that there are members of the Old Testament company who possess every Hebrew grammar that has ever been printed and are as familiar with their contents as he is, and yet this fact does not lead them to suppose that nobody else knows any thing. Upon this verse in Amos, Dr. Briggs observes that "Vav consecutives of the imperfect after a participle or imperfect can only express the immediate result of the previous action." Now admitting this, what follows? By no means what he says, that we cannot render "he toucheth the land and it melteth," but must say, "toucheth the earth so that it doth melt." The idea of result is conveyed as distinctly by the one form as by the other. Did any rational being ever read this line in Amos without getting at once the notion that it was Jehovah's touch that made the land melt? The truth is

that the learned Professor has gotten so deeply involved in grammatical minutiae that he has lost sight of the full force of our noble English tongue, and has sacrificed its vigorous idiom to a pedantic exactness of Hebrew grammar. So it may be asked in regard to his emendations of the passage in Job iii. 11-13, admitting that they are founded in truth and accurately express Hebrew syntax, in what respect do they aid the ordinary reader of the Bible, or how do they give him any clearer conception of the force of the original?

But sometimes the Professor's impetuosity carries him altogether away. He lays down the law as to the use of the infinitive absolute with a finite verb with a positiveness which is wholly unwarranted. He says that when it is placed before the verb it gives intensity to its essential meaning, but when placed after it gives a temporal emphasis. But recent grammarians, such as Kautzsch, do not admit any such unqualified statement. They would admit it as a general usage, but one by no means exclusive. I shall not go into details, but simply recommend those interested in the subject to examine the recent leading authorities. Dr. Briggs seems to think that the revisers are unacquainted with the results of modern investigation in Hebrew etymology and syntax. Some of them are inclined to think that he has learned nothing since Ewald. For example, he announces the doctrine of the emphatic plural which he calls one of the finest features of the Hebrew language, and he cites seven instances, such as "tabernacle" in Ps. cxxxii. 5, which he says, because the Hebrew is plural, should be rendered "great tabernacle" or "sacred tabernacle." Now in five of these instances he is (as I am credibly informed) opposed by Cheyne, Davidson, Delitzsch, Derenbourg, Dillmann, Ginsburg, Grätz, Plumptre, Reuss, C. H. H. Wright, and Zöckler. Nowhere is there a general or unqualified assent to his theory. And yet he berates the revisers because they have not introduced into their work this crude and rash assumption,

which has no defenders as a general rule, and in its chief applications is stoutly denied by veteran critics. It may be "childish," as the reviewer declares, to render in the singular and give the simple plural in the margin, but there are some experienced scholars to give countenance to that course.

In the brilliant passage in the 63rd chapter of Isaiah, beginning, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?" the revisers altered the rendering of the common version, which puts the verbs in the fourth verse and the sixth in the future, thus confusing the sense and making the whole pericope almost unintelligible. The revisers reversed this feature, and thus give the whole as an orderly, vivid, striking account of Jehovah's overthrow of his enemies. Upon this the reviewer remarks that they "have either violated the laws of Hebrew syntax in a most outrageous manner, or they have changed the Massoretic points in defiance of their own principles." If, however, he be so happy as to possess a copy of Robinson's Gesenius, he will find in a note at the end of the article on the Vav conversive of the Future the statement that "in parallel passages simple Vav often stands for Vav conversive," and this passage and the corresponding one in Isa. xliii. 28 are cited as instances. But supposing that this were not so, and that Gesenius was mistaken in allowing this divergence from the ordinary rule, still there is no ground for the dilemma so ingeniously put. We do not hold the Massoretic interpunction as inspired or infallible, and therefore to be adhered to at all risks and costs. But we do hold it as a correct and authorized statement of the traditional reading of the text, and therefore not to be departed from capriciously or without reason. We can in perfect consistency with our own principles depart from it in this case, because the sense and the context imperatively demand such departure. But since Ewald allows that the usage here may be like that of the dropped augment in Greek,¹ we may adhere to our

¹ The eminent English authority, Driver, also admits this view.

rendering and yet claim Massoretic authority, for the case will then stand, Gesenius and Ewald on one side and Dr. Briggs on the other. And the advantage is slightly with the former, though we tremble to say it, for perhaps even they did not "stand on the heights of Hebrew grammar."

Upon the whole matter of grammatical forms, the Professor thinks that the revisers pursued "a mediating and hesitating policy." If so, it was not designed. They intended to make the version conform as far as possible to the ascertained laws of the Hebrew language. They did not favor novelties, nor did they seek new-fangled interpretations. They consulted all authorities, both new and old. The only limit in any case was the proprieties of a people's book, and also the desirableness of not departing from the authorized version unless the proposed gain were clear and reasonably certain. In all matters still *sub lite* they could not undertake to decide, and therefore adhered to what was already in possession. It is easy to censure this course as narrow and timid and compromising, but it was the only one that offered any prospect of success. Dr. Briggs and those who think with him could undoubtedly produce a brilliant version, and one that all scholars would prize, but as a substitute for King James's Bible it would be an absolute failure. This is apparent not only from the nature of the case but from the testimony of all past experience.

IV. Biblical Theology of the Revisers. Under this head the reviewer first takes up the divine names. He remarks upon Elohim that it is an emphatic plural, but wisely makes no attempt to express that emphasis. As to the incommunicable name, he rightly rejects the rendering LORD as wholly inadequate. It gives no conception of the wealth of meaning in this peculiar name. The authorized version in a few cases transliterated it, and read Jehovah. The revision increases somewhat the number of such passages, and the American appendix recommends that the usage be made universal. To this Dr.

Briggs objects violently. He says that Jehovah is an "impossible word," a singular charge to make against a term which has been in the language for centuries. He calls it "a linguistic monstrosity," which it is in Hebrew, but certainly is not in English. It is, as all Hebraists know, the radicals of one word pointed with the vowels of one or two others, in order that it might not be pronounced, Jewish superstition, or, as they call it, reverence, requiring this practice. But the English reader need not know this, or, if he does know it, need not be at all troubled by it. What he requires to be told is the significance of this divine name as given in the Scripture, the name of the ever-living God, who manifests himself not only in nature but in revelation, and who enters into covenant with his rational creatures. All this is conveyed in the word *Jehovah*, and it adds wondrously to the force of many a passage of Scripture. Instead of this, Dr. Briggs, following the pedantic fashion that prevails, would adopt the term *Jahveh*. But there is not the least conceivable gain in such a course. Not in point of correctness, for it is admitted that the original pronunciation of the Hebrew word is lost. All substitutes, therefore, must be guess-work. Nor is there any gain in euphony, the old word being sonorous and dignified, the new one cacophonous and perplexing. Nor is there any in plainness, for the new word requires to be explained, and this explanation can just as well be attached to the old one. We submit, therefore, that the introduction of the new word is not only needless but injurious. Every one must be taught to pronounce it, for the spelling is no guide; whereas *Jehovah* is understood by all even now as a title not shared by the God of the covenant with any other god. And such persons are prepared to hear and accept and enjoy the fuller statements of its meaning which they may receive. The American company, therefore, deserve commendation for their manly fidelity in insisting that a divine name so rich in associations and so pregnant with meaning

should be incorporated with the English version, and so become the common property of all English speaking people.

Dr. Briggs objects to the rendering given by the revisers to the fifth verse of Ps. viii., "For thou hast made him but little lower than God." He says that the authorized version properly followed the LXX. and other ancient authorities in rendering, "For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels." He adds, "This is given by the New Testament in Heb. ii. 7, and is certainly correct." This is what one would expect. Professor Briggs is absolutely sure of every opinion he advances. It is right for us to insist with equal positiveness that the Septuagint is wrong. Nowhere else is *Elohim* translated angels, and the word does not admit of such a translation. The sanction of the Epistle to the Hebrews amounts to nothing, for the author of that Epistle quoted the verse as it stood in the Septuagint, because as it so stood it was sufficient for his argument, while correctly rendered it would have made that argument the stronger. But he had no need to go back of the Greek text. That Dr. Briggs should favor such a perverse translation only shows how far he is transported in his zeal against the Massoretic text.

The reviewer has a paragraph concerning three words expressive of divine grace, *hen*, *hesed*, and *rahamim*. He gives his view of their meaning and of the equivalents by which they should be rendered. His statement does not strike us as well founded, and his objection to *loving kindness* as being "a sentimental weakening of a strong and all-important word," is sadly misplaced. The revisers were hampered by the fear of disturbing sacred and very tender associations, but they have introduced considerable amendments, especially in making the echoes of Jehovah's description of himself in Ex. xxxiv. 6, as they occur in subsequent Scriptures, correspond with the original utterance. Objection is made to the change of "meat offering" into "meal offering," and the critic would pre-

fer "vegetable offering," which, however, is no more exact than the other, for bread and cakes are surely not vegetables. If he could not suggest an unobjectionable word, why not let the subject alone? He falls foul of the revisers for allowing "offering for sin" to stand in Isa. liii. 10, when the Hebrew is the word everywhere else rendered "trespass-offering," or, as the English company prefer, "guilt-offering." The reason of the retention, no doubt, was an unwillingness to tamper needlessly with a passage having so many sacred and tender associations. Nor is the matter of much consequence, for most readers studying the passage would of course examine the margin and learn what the original word means. The critic further objects in this pericope to the retention of the authorized version in lii. 15, "he shall sprinkle many nations," and lii. 12, "he made intercession for the transgressors." But in the former of these cases so much can be said on either side that it was simply wise to retain the traditional translation in the text and then add the alternative rendering in the margin. As to the latter, the substitute proposed seems to be a mere vagary of Dr. Briggs, like Melchisedek "without father and without mother," and unworthy of further mention.

On the general subject of the sacrificial terms of the Old Testament, the Professor announces with great nonchalance that as a body the revisers "have not mastered the subject." This is certainly true, if it means, as it must mean, that they have not reached the same conclusions as himself, who, having mastered this and all other points connected with Old Testament exegesis, is able to apportion impartial praise and blame to all his fellow-laborers in the same field. He insists that *zebah* always means the peace-offering. If so, why is there another specific name for that offering, and why do we read in Lev. xix. 5 of a *zebah* of peace-offerings? There is no gain in departing from the common view that the word denotes sacrifices or blood-offerings in general, and gets its closer definition

from the context in each place of its occurrence. Again, it is said that "the revisers might have found a proper English word for the abode of departed spirits." Why did not the Professor furnish it, if the thing is so easy? There is no precise equivalent. Even "under-world," which not a few prefer, would require explanation for most readers. It seems to us that the American company did the wise thing in transliterating the word throughout, for any intelligent person can by the aid of a concordance ascertain how and when *Sheól* is used, and then form his own conclusion as to its meaning from the usage. This is to put him as nearly on a level with a Hebrew expert as possible. As for its being strange to represent the same place by *Sheól* in one part of the Bible, and *Hades* in another, I submit that this is a discrepancy for which the revisers are not responsible. In the poverty of our language, or rather in the difference between the eastern and the western conception of what follows death, they have done the best possible to bring the reader face to face with the statements of Scripture.

The Professor concludes his paper with some singular and sweeping statements on the general subject. He insists that "all translations are interpretations of the original." Now it is true that a man will be influenced more or less by his dogmatic opinions or his literary principles, but if he be conscientious he will be constantly on his guard against such an error. And just such conscientiousness, I can affirm from personal knowledge, was habitual with the Old Testament company of the American committee. They may not always have succeeded, but in general they have. But Dr. Briggs's position extends beyond the revision. He ratifies the objection of Romanists that "the common version is a Protestant version," that is, represents Protestant views. This is a most needless and ill-advised concession. The claim of Luther and Tyndale was that they put the word of God into the languages of the people for whom they wrote, and that they

sought to do this without prejudice or bias. If now their versions favor Protestantism, as they undoubtedly do, this is not because of any extraneous matter added, but because the original Scriptures have just this trend. Evangelical believers, therefore, have a right to urge the acceptance and circulation of the English Bible as a faithful and impartial expression of the sense of the Hebrew and Greek. And this is confirmed by the well-known unwillingness of Romanists to consent to the distribution of any version that is not accompanied by notes. They are afraid to trust the Bible alone—no matter who translates it. The Protestantism of the Bible lies not in the notions of the translator but in the book itself. But Dr. Briggs carries his view so far as to say that “the Old Testament in King James is a Christian book and not a Jewish book.” This is certainly true so far as the headings of the chapters are concerned in many places, but it is not true as to the text. How can it be when that text, as the Professor elsewhere complains, disregards the Christian versions (Greek, Syriac, etc.), and confines itself to a faithful reproduction in English of what has come to us from the hands of the Massorettes? We have known devout Jews who adhered to their ancestral faith and yet were diligent readers of the common English Old Testament. And for many years the American Bible Society has kept on sale the Old Testament in two or more editions bound separately from the New, on purpose to meet the demand of Israelites. It is true that Rabbi Leeser some twenty or more years ago published a very good English version of the Hebrew Scriptures. But even this scholarly work did not succeed in displacing the common version.

Another strange notion of the Professor is thus stated by him: “It is impossible for any body of men, however intelligent or pious, to do such work as this. The very act of voting and deciding by a majority pinches the spirit of the translation and makes the work prosaic and dull. There is too much of the mechanical, artificial, and pedantic in

the work of revision by votes." In this the author sets himself against the general, we think universal, judgment of the Christian world. The *Staaten Bybel* of Holland, and the recent revision of the Dutch New Testament, the revision of Osterwald's French Bible, that of Luther's version now in progress, and the revision in the three Scandinavian nations, were in each case the work of a company of scholars. No one appears to have dreamed of committing a matter of so great importance to a single person. Luther and Tyndale were extraordinary men, raised up at an extraordinary time, and they performed an extraordinary work. But it is not possible to reproduce the men or the circumstances under which they labored. And their course, therefore, furnishes no example to be followed now. Every man, however acute, learned, or godly, has idiosyncracies which need to be repressed or controlled by contact with other minds. He may produce a work which scholars will greatly value for certain merits, but not one of equal excellence in all its features or suited for popular use. Hence the need of a company to do the work, not simply, as the Professor seems to think, by a majority of votes, but by free, unrestrained, and repeated exchanges of views. Of course the final result is determined by vote, but this in all cases is preceded by a calm, careful discussion, in which every view presented is candidly canvassed. "In the multitude of counsellors there is safety," for the obvious reason that if a number of persons study the same subject it is reasonably certain that what one may omit another will supply, and thus every point belonging to the matter in hand will be brought forward. But while this is true and weighty at all times, it applies particularly to the case before us. The want which it is proposed to supply is that of a revision of the English Bible which will bring it up to the standard of modern scholarship, and make it to all believers a more exact and acceptable expression of the sacred originals. How is it possible that one man could

perform such a work? He would be sure to be suspected or attacked on the ground of his nationality, his denomination, or his associations. A world of prejudice would have to be conquered before he could even obtain a hearing. The only conceivable method of avoiding such difficulties is to have all the leading shades of religious opinion and all the countries of English-speaking peoples represented in the performance of the work. Then it can be justly and confidently claimed that there is no provincial or sectarian taint, and the book is left to stand upon its own merits. Recent experience furnishes an apt illustration. The venerable Dr. T. J. Conant has performed some excellent work in the way of Bible translation, and no scholar of Britain or America, who is familiar with his publications, ever mentions them without a tribute of grateful respect; yet none of them is known to any extent outside of his own denomination. Their currency is strictly local and limited. On the other hand, when the Canterbury revision of the New Testament was issued, more than a million of copies was put in circulation within a single week. This contrast exhibits the difference between the favor shown to one man's work and that shown to the work of a catholic company. It is, then, foolish in the extreme to decry the recent revision because it was "done by votes." It must be so done, if it is ever done at all. The twentieth century may produce a new revision, but if so, it will be one on the lines and in the general direction of the present one. If, on the contrary, it is to be made by a single scholar, however eminent; if it is to prefer versions to manuscripts as the authority for the text; if it is to catch up every new-fangled notion in grammar which any one chooses to put forth; if it is to shackle the free movement of the Hebrew muse with an arbitrary system of versification; and if it is to be so presented as to help forward an improved view of biblical theology, it requires no prophet's ken to foresee its utter and absolute failure.

To conclude: The appearance of the article we have

considered is greatly to be regretted for the sake both of its author and of the dignified quarterly in which it is printed. It is no credit to either. This does not mean that the revision is above criticism. On the contrary, it is to be examined with the utmost care and unreserve. Its demerits are to be exposed clearly and distinctly. Nothing in the work or in its authors offers any reason why it should not be weighed in the nicest critical balances. And the conclusions reached should be diffused as widely as possible. They will aid the public mind in coming to that decision which will be reached in five and twenty or thirty years, and which will be final. But this is a very different thing from criticisms written in hot haste, animated by a hostile spirit, and abounding in errors; criticisms in which a man in the course of a few weeks pronounces oracular judgments upon the fifteen years' work of more than a score of men, some of whom were reading Hebrew before the critic was born. The impetuous haste of Professor Briggs to come before the public with his attack on the revision is shown by the numerous mistakes in his article, pointed out by Professor Howard Osgood, of Rochester, in the *New York Independent* of August 13. Not one of these was intentional, but doubtless all proceeded from the rapidity with which Dr. Briggs conceived and formulated his objections to a book, the conservatism of whose authors offended his sense of propriety. The same thing appears from a comparison of page 489 of the review with page 533. On the former he argues that there are no sufficient reasons why a Christian people should be confined to any common version. "The history of common versions shows that they no sooner gain the confidence of the people, and exclusive claim to public use, than they become the rule of faith, lord it over the real Scriptures, and bar the way to the divine originals which must ever remain the fountain of inspiration and guidance." But on the latter page we have the buoyant anticipation of a time when the illapse of the Spirit will

raise up a new Tyndale and a new Luther to give us new translations of the Scriptures to suit the higher faith and life of the church. "In view of the prophecies of Scripture, it is not too much to hope that then the enmity of Roman Catholic and Protestant may depart, and that one Bible may satisfy the cravings of ~~all~~ devout souls." Hence it appears that what in the beginning of the article was deprec~~ed~~ as an evil, a hindrance, and a tyranny, comes in the end to be held ~~up~~ as an object of lofty hope, suggested by prophecy and grounded on the work of the Holy Spirit. A deliberate writer would hardly have allowed such a contradiction to stand. And for any man, whoever he may be, to treat a work of this kind without deliberation is an offence against good taste and Christian morals. Professor Briggs's article will not have a feather's weight in determining the final verdict of the churches as to the acceptance of the revision, but it will prejudice many who look up to him as an authority, and will divert more from giving attention to a book, which, whatever be its shortcomings, cannot fail to be of essential service to all who are not practical Hebraists.