

A FRESH EXPLANATION OF GENESIS VI. 3.

THE Hebrew phrase in Genesis vi. 3, which is represented in the Authorized Version, and also in the text of the Revised Version, by "for that he also is flesh," belongs to the not inconsiderable number of Biblical sentences on which a large amount of scholarly ingenuity appears so far to have been spent to but little purpose. All the ancient versions and early commentators agree in treating the word "bēshaggām" (בֶּשַׁגָּאִם) as a compound of the particles "bē," "sha(g)," and "gam"; and the absolutely literal equivalent of this combination is to be found in the words "for that . . . also" contained in the authorized rendering of the phrase. Against this view modern scholarship has rightly seen fit to revolt. There is first of all the fact that nowhere else in the Hexateuch does the form "sha" take the place of the usual relative particle "āšér" (אֲשֶׁר). Its occurrence¹ is, on the other hand, very frequent in Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon, and it is also found a certain number of times in several (presumably) later Psalms. There is, therefore, a pretty strong *prima facie* case against the solitary presence of the apparently late form "sha" in a document (J) which the critics assign to c. B.C. 750 at the latest.

Another very weighty objection to the traditional explanation of the word lies in the almost uniform² Masoretic pronunciation "bēshaggām," with a long syllable at the end; for the particle "gam" = "also" has a short *a*. We have, in fact, in the present case an instance of tradition being opposed to tradition. The traditional pronunciation of the word in question forces us to treat the termination

¹ For further details on this point, as also on the traditional pronunciation of בֶּשַׁגָּאִם, see Budde, *Die Biblische Urgeschichte*, p. 12 sqq.

² With this compare Mr. Ball's statement in his edition of Genesis (Haupt's Polychrome Bible), p. 52.

“ām” as a suffix of the third person plural; whilst the traditional rendering of the phrase presupposes a short syllable at the end as part of the word “gam” (also). And as the traditional translation is also opposed by the anomaly of the supposed presence of the form “sha,” modern scholars have rightly decided to follow the Masoretic pronunciation rather than the ancient rendering of the word.

The old view was, however, too well established to be easily discarded from the text of the Revised Version; and it is only in the margin that the alternate translation, “in their going astray they are flesh,” is to be found. In this the Revisers have shown the most excellent common sense. They rightly disliked the idea of exchanging an ancient doubtful translation for a modern equally doubtful one. The marginal rendering does justice to the termination “ām” of the word “bēshaggām”; but it in other respects substitutes new difficulties for the old ones. Hebrew scholars are aware that “shag,” in the sense of “going astray,”¹ can only be allowed a very precarious sort of existence, and it is, moreover, very difficult to extract a satisfactory meaning from this translation of the phrase. If one says that “in their going astray they are flesh,” one should also expect the converse to be true, that man is not flesh if he does not go astray; but in order to arrive at such a conclusion, a metaphysical train of reasoning is required which, I venture to say, is entirely foreign to the simple and crisp documents of which the book of Genesis is composed. An utterance like, “Pure and sinless man is not flesh, but spirit; it is only in his fall² that his fleshly nature appears,” would sound entirely different from all the rest of the Hexateuch; and the cramped expression of the same

¹ Also on this point see Budde, *loc. cit.*

² The sense is by no means improved, if the “going astray” refers to the fall of the angels; see *e.g.* Budde and Ball in the passages already mentioned.

idea by the phrase "in their going astray they are flesh" is worse still. The critic who has so far written most elaborately in defence of this view is Professor Budde in his *Biblische Urgeschichte*. But the same writer has, alas! brought down the whole argument to a veritable *reductio ad absurdum* by his categorical declaration that Genesis vi. 3 must be bodily lifted out of its present position and transplanted to its supposed original place after chapter iii. v. 21. According to Budde, we should, therefore, have to read: "Unto Abram also, and to his wife, did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them. And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man" (or, abide in man); "in their going astray they are flesh; let his days, therefore, be a hundred and twenty years." If literary criticism can accomplish feats of this kind, if it can, in a case like this, make it absolutely certain that a verse which now stands in one place of the Bible originally followed a different sequence altogether, no wonder that the archæologist, who may happen to have very little or no taste at all for a close literary analysis of the text, revolts against the whole method, and declares the "higher criticism" to be but the baseless fabric of the student's brain.

I will not tire the reader with a discussion of the four or five more or less ingenious emendations that have been proposed as substitutes for the Masoretic reading "bēshaggām." Those who have time and inclination for it will find a full account of nearly all that has so far¹ been said on the subject in Prof. Budde's well-known work to which I have referred. But I will now proceed to state as briefly as I can what appears to me to be the right explanation of this difficult phrase. In order to do this effectively, I must ask the reader's indulgence, if I begin with a brief grammatical analysis² of the word "bēshaggām." The letter ג at the

¹ Mr. Ball (*op. cit.*) decides in favour of בְּעִינָם, "owing to their guilt."

² The analysis would indeed not be necessary, if the exact agreement between בְּשִׁגְגָם and בְּעִינָם had been laid stress on before.

beginning is no doubt a particle ; and it will be seen further on that, in conformity with the Authorized Version, it has in this instance the force of a conjunction. The word "shaggām" (שַׁגָּאָם) is exactly equal in form to "qawwām" (קַוָּוָם) in Ps. xix. 5. Now "qawwām" (their line) is compounded of "qāwē" or "qaw" (a line) and the suffix "ām" (their). Grammatically speaking, therefore, "shaggām" will have to be analysed in the same way, namely, into "shāgē" or "shag" and the suffix "ām." We thus arrive at the preliminary conclusion that we have here to deal with a substantive (not an infinitive) to which a pronominal possessive suffix is attached. The question which remains to be solved is what the meaning of the word "shāgē" or "shag" is. Here the Ethiopic, which is as closely related to Hebrew as Arabic, will help us out of our difficulty. In that language "shegā," which would be represented in Hebrew by "shāgē," means $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$,¹ body. Applying this sense to the Hebrew word before us, we obtain the entirely satisfactory translation, "Inasmuch as their body (or substance) is but flesh." "My Spirit," says Yahweh, "shall not strive with man (or, abide in man) for ever, considering that his substance is but flesh." The divine breath of Yahweh's supernal life is so far exalted above the weak and fleshly nature of man that it cannot be permitted to stay for ever in such a gross kind of earthly body, a body, moreover, which has by its fall sunk lower in the scale of being than it had been at first, and has also been the means of lowering the dignity of the "sons of God."

Of the Arabic,² Syriac, and also other Hebrew analogies of the word "shēgā" or "shāgē," I will not speak now. Suffice it to say that the root-meaning of the word is that of "growing" or "increasing," and that it thus admirably

¹ It also means $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\kappa\acute{\iota}$, flesh ; but it is largely used in the sense of $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$, body, the meaning required by the present passage.

² I must, however, mention that the Arabic word "sajiyya(tun)" means "indoles, natura hominis."

applies to the physical or animal substance of the human body. No surprise need be felt at finding a fresh "hapax legomenon" in the Hebrew of the old Testament, considering that many other such are known to exist in it; and the fact of their occurrence is sufficiently accounted for by the comparatively small number of documents that have come down to us from the times of the ancient Hebrews.

I will, in conclusion, point out that the ancient versions and early commentators, though apparently mistaken in their analysis of the word "bēshaggām," nevertheless gave the general sense of the phrase correctly enough. For it can be seen at once that the rendering "for that he also is flesh" practically amounts to the same as "inasmuch as his substance is but flesh." This is indeed one of the, perhaps, not inconsiderable number of cases in which tradition was guided by common sense to perpetuate the right meaning of a phrase, notwithstanding the obscurity which had settled down on some form or forms of which the collateral analogies of cognate languages had been either lost or forgotten.

G. MARGOLIOUTH.

*WERE MATTHEW AND ZACCHÆUS THE SAME
PERSON?*

THIS may seem a startling question, but the reader must judge of the evidence for himself. It has generally been assumed that Matthew and Levi are two names of one and the same person, but considerable doubt is thrown on this identification by the alternative reading "Lebbæus" for "Thaddæus" in S. Matthew x. 3, and S. Mark iii. 18. In their "Notes on Select Readings" Westcott and Hort, commenting on this reading, observe: "This name is apparently due to an early attempt to bring Levi (*Λευεῖς*) the publican (Luke v. 27) within the Twelve, it being assumed