

## 'HIMSELF HE CANNOT SAVE.'

(Ps. xxii 29 and Mark xv 31.)

THE last clause in Ps. xxii 29 ('נִפְשׁוּ לֹא חַיָּה') presents not a few difficulties as regards text, and context, and exegesis. I shall endeavour to bring forward new evidence that the clause is a gloss, to elucidate its context, to explain its meaning and *raison d'être*, and finally to shew the use which has been made of it in an important passage in the Gospels.

Most commentators, modern and other, retain the clause in the text and attach it to the preceding line as in the M.T., R.V., A.V., &c. Briggs, e.g. in the *International Critical Commentary* renders 'Then shall bow down all about to descend to the dust and he who doth not keep himself alive', and comments 'The versions and interpreters have many suggestions here, but none are so simple as the Hebrew which gives an explanatory complement to the previous clause'.

What seems to have escaped notice hitherto is the fact that what immediately precedes the clause as we have it now is a tretrameter quadruplet, each line of which ends with such markedly similar formation as to exclude the possibility of these further words having ever been part of the original stanza.

The stanza is in vv. 28-30 which in Kittel's edition is set forth as follows:—

8ג יוכרו וישבו אל-יהוה כל-אפסי ארץ

וישתחוו לפניך כל משפחות גויים

בגויים משל המלוכה יהוה כי כי

39 אכלו, וישתחוו כל-דרשניארץ לפניו יכרעו כל-יוורדי עפר ונפשו לא היה:

The key to the stanza lies in the four endings:—

כל אפסי ארץ

כל משפחות נois

כל רשמי הארץ

כל יורדי עפר

By the excision from the beginning of v. 28 of יְמִיכָרֶו which is actually marked off in the M. T. in a way which not infrequently indicates an addition to the original text; by the omission of v. 29, a tetrameter line

which has no mate; and by some slight minor alterations as suggested by Kittel, &c., the original stanza may readily be restored thus:—

ישבו אל־יהוה כל־אפסי ארץ  
ישתחוו לפניו כל־משפחות נום  
אך לו ישתחוו כל־דרשו ארץ  
לפניו יברעו כל־ירדי עבד

Let there return unto Jahveh all the ends of the earth  
Let there worship before Him all the kindreds of the nations  
Even Him let there worship all the fat ones of the earth  
Before Him let there bow all those who go down to the dust.

When the stanza is thus set out it is obvious that the clause וְנִפְשַׁת לְחֵיה can have had no place in it originally, and that it certainly did not constitute the closing words of the last line.

It is more difficult to rule out definitely the suggestion made by certain commentators (e.g. Cheyne and Kirkpatrick) that the clause under discussion should be attached as part of the text to what follows. Cheyne's rendering is 'And as for him that kept not his soul alive His seed shall be reckoned unto Jehovah'. Kirkpatrick's is very similar 'And as for him that kept not his soul alive His seed shall serve him'. All one can say is (1) that the Hebrew is extraordinarily awkward (if this is really the meaning it was originally intended to convey), and (2) that in these and similar renderings and arrangements any regular metrical form suggested for vv. 31 and 32 breaks down if this clause is inserted at the beginning as part of the text.

It may not be out of place here to venture to add yet one other to the many attempts at restoring these two verses to their original form. There are so many conjectures possible that one can only claim probability for this new one and point out that at least it has the merit of a consistent metre and parallelism. The M. T. runs as follows:—

31 זֶה גָּבֹעַ יְעַבְּרֵנִי יִסְפֶּר לְאָדָנִי לְדוֹר:  
32 יִבָּאוּ וְגִרְיוֹן צְדָקָתוֹ לְעַם נֹלָד בַּי עֲשָׂה:

The only major emendations required are the substitution of קָרְבָּן for קָרְבָּן, and the addition of הַיְהָ at the end, in agreement with the LXX. Minor alterations are in the main also supported by the LXX.

The passage now resolves itself into a tetrameter triplet as follows:—

זֶה גָּבֹעַ יְעַבְּרֵנִי יִסְפֶּר לְאָדָנִי  
דוֹר יִבָּאוּ וְגִרְיוֹן צְדָקָתוֹ  
עַם נֹלָד בַּי עֲשָׂה הַיְהָ

{ Let the seed of Jacob tell of the Lord  
{ Let (this) generation come and declare his righteousness  
{ (Let) a people yet unborn (declare) that Jahveh hath taken action.

Again it is obvious that there is no place for וְנִפְשׁוּ לֹא חִיה at the commencement of this stanza, either as a first line or as part of the first line of the triplet.

The preceding quadruplet and this triplet, though they are probably not directly connected with one another, would both seem to be ascriptions of praise to Jahveh called forth by the thought expressed in v. 25—‘For he hath not despised, he hath not scorned the affliction of the afflicted one, Nor hath he hid his face from him, But when he cried unto him he heard.’ And this verse would seem to be the source or subject of almost all the sections which go to make up the second part (viz. vv. 23–32) of the Psalm.

The foregoing conclusions exclude the clause under discussion from a place in the original text. The question then arises as to its significance and *raison d'être* as a gloss. Such critics as do regard it as a gloss (e.g. Wellhausen and C. F. Kent), though without recognizing the reasons just set forth, take it to be a gloss on the preceding words. Wellhausen renders it ‘and he who hath not preserved his life’; Kent somewhat similarly ‘even he who doth not keep his soul alive’. But וְנִפְשׁוּ לֹא חִיה is not the natural way of saying either of these things. It is only the supposed necessity for making their sense fit the preceding context—a necessity which holds good only if the words are retained in the text—which compels the translator to give them some such meaning.

Apart from this necessity, apart that is from the immediate context, a perfectly simple and literal translation of the clause is this ‘And (or but) himself he did not save’. It is not necessary to point out that נִפְשׁ frequently, and in later Hebrew normally, means ‘self’. It is placed first in the clause for the sake of emphasis or contrast. חִיה in the Pi'el means ‘save alive’ or more simply ‘save’. It is rendered as σώζειν by the LXX, e.g. Ps. xxix 4 (M. T. xxx 4).

I would suggest then that the clause is a misplaced gloss, referring primarily not to its context, but in general to the original Psalm (vv. 1–21), to which all the rest is a later, though most valuable, addition.

It is in fact a comment on the fate of the Sufferer as there depicted, which becomes deeply interesting and significant, if one is right in conjecturing that it was made in the light of Isaiah liii, or at any rate that it arose out of the same circle of ideas.

The implication of the comment seems to have been as follows. In one sense it was true that Jahveh had triumphantly vindicated (צָקֵר) in v. 32 may possibly be a reference to this vindication) His suffering servant, as suggested implicitly and explicitly in vv. 23–32. The suffering of that servant might indeed, in some mysterious way, be

for the redemption of his fellows as suggested in Isaiah liii and even of the world (*vv.* 28–30). The sufferer, in his suffering, might have been God's instrument for the saving of others, *but* it was at the price of his own martyrdom, *himself he did not save*.

One is tempted to conjecture that the form of the Gloss originally ran thus אַחֲרִים תִּהְיֶה וְנִפְשֵׁל לֹא חִיה but that only the second half became incorporated in the text.

However that may be, it seems clear that it was at least the words נִפְשֵׁל לֹא חִיה (Himself he did not save) which the writer of the Crucifixion narrative (Mark xv 31 and Matt. xxvii 42) was echoing when he summed up the mocking comments of the chief priests in the words 'Others he saved, *himself he cannot save*' (ἀλλοις ἔσωσεν, ἑαυτὸν οὐ δύναται σῶσαι).

There can be no question but that that most sacred story of the Crucifixion was told in language closely reminiscent of Ps. xxii, the narrator directly borrowing or slightly adapting such clauses and sentences in the Psalm as were appropriate. We may now claim that this is another phrase which must be added to the list of those thus honoured.

It is to be noticed that the quotation is not from the LXX, which reads ἡ ψυχή μου αὐτῷ ζῆ (חַיְשֵׁל לוּ חַיָּה), but directly from the Hebrew (or from some version which almost literally followed the Hebrew which, however, no extant version does).

Perhaps it may be of interest to close the discussion of this phrase by quoting part of Kimchi's comment on it, or rather on the Christian usage of it, which shews clearly that the Christian commentators, whose work he knew, applied it to Christ in much the same way as was done by the Gospel writer, though it is not apparent that they equated the N.T. and O.T. phrases. Kimchi himself, curiously enough, on the other hand, unconsciously echoes the sentiments of the chief priests in the gospel narrative. His comment runs thus: 'And the Uncircumcised interpret this Psalm of Jesus. They say that he is a god "before whom bow down all who go down to the dust", though it was not his good pleasure to save himself (לחיות נפשו). But that specifically for this he came down to take flesh, that they might slay the flesh and that thereby "all who go down" to Gehenna might be saved. Wherefore it was not his good pleasure to save himself (לחיות את נפשו) but he delivered himself into the hand of his slayers . . . . They say that it was not his good pleasure to save himself (לחיות את נפשו) nor to rescue himself from the hand of his slayers. If so, why then did he cry עובתני גן' (אָלָי אלְ לִמְהַעֲבֹתִי גַּן), although it was not his good pleasure to be saved?'