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ART. I.—THE OLDEST COMMENTARY ON THE PSALMS.

STUDIES IN THE "MIDRASH TEHILLIM."—No. I.

THE word *Midrash*, it may be as well to explain, means what we call a commentary. The word itself occurs twice over in the Bible—in 2 Chron. xiii. 22: "And the rest of the acts of Abijah and his ways and his sayings are written in the story [marg., commentary] of the prophet Iddo;" and in 2 Chron. xxiv. 27: "Now concerning his sons and the greatness of the burdens laid upon him, and the repairing of the house of God, behold, they are written in the story [marg., commentary] of the book of the kings"—such commentaries as Cæsar wrote, says Gesenius in his great "Thesaurus" of the sacred language.

Whatever may have been the particular complexion of these Midrashim mentioned in Holy Scripture, no modern European writer would like to make himself responsible for the contents of these "commentaries" on Scripture that are outside the sacred volume itself. The present writer accordingly asks to be regarded as the exponent, and not as the apologist, of the "Midrash." If, like many of the ideas and expressions of Oriental religious thought—if to our conceptions the "Midrash" contains a preponderance of what we can only call the fanciful or extravagant, then it is at least something for us to know that it *is* extravagant, and it is something further for the intelligent world to know of what precise complexion the extravagance is. Still, when the worst has been said under this head, there remains a permanent value that must always attach to writers who, whatever be their own date, hand down to us interpretations that have been current in their nation

from time immemorial. And to us that value lies in the support which from time to time is indirectly given to Christian exegesis. Ideas which are current in Christian traditional interpretation are often seen here, at least, in germ. They often seem to point backward to a time when there was an agreement between the accepted, or at least the possible, interpretation of Israel and the subsequent interpretation of Christendom far more intimate than is generally supposed.

The "Midrash Tebillim" exhibits, probably, the most ancient specimens in the world of an attempt to expound the Book of Psalms. It is known only to a very limited circle of Christian scholars, and that for reasons which it is not difficult to discover. In the first place, it is not a remunerative study in the way of additions to our thought and knowledge; moreover, the difficulties presented by its style and language are great, and in many cases are insuperable to those whose knowledge of Hebrew does not extend much beyond the Hebrew of the Bible; and, thirdly, the work itself was extremely inaccessible until it was reprinted some few years ago in Poland. Hence, the literature upon the subject is extremely scanty. No one of the languages of Europe, ancient or modern, yields the student of "Midrash Tehillim" any material help. Unlike many of the monuments of Rabbinic literature, "Midrash Tehillim" has never been translated even into Latin.[1] There are a few passages from it, indeed, quoted and translated into Latin in Raymund Martin's famous work, the "Pugio Fidei"; and many of the same passages are translated into English in the notes of Bishop Pearson's great work, "On the Creed." Bishop Pearson's notes and a few lines in cyclopædias represent (so far as is known) all that exists in the English language upon the subject. French yields nothing. Italian yields nothing, and even in German the help is but slight. Zunz in his "Vorträge" has a notice of "Midrash Tehillim," short but profound, and thorough in its acquaintance with the book; and the latest attempt in this department of study—the work of Dr. Wünsche, of Berlin, upon the Midrashim—has not yet reached the "Midrash Tehillim." But perhaps no evidence of the unfamiliarity of the work amongst Christians is so conclusive as the surprising mistake into which that prince of Christian Hebraists—the older Buxtorf—has fallen in mentioning the very title of the work. In his alphabetical list of works in Hebrew literature he says[2] that "Midrash

[1] The present writer knows of one Englishman, an old Cambridge prize-man, who has written out the whole work translated into English. But it is not published, as it would not pay.

[2] "Bibliotheca Rabbinica," p. 189. Editio novissima, Herbornæ Nassaviæ. Sumptibus J. N. Andreæ, 1708.

Tehillim" is called, from its opening words, the "Midrash *Munus bonum*"—the good gift. He has, in fact, mistaken one Hebrew letter for another, making *shochar*, "a diligent seeker," into *shochad*, "a gift"; and he is obviously unaware that the opening words of "Midrash Tehillim" are a citation from Scripture itself: "He that diligently seeketh good procureth favour" (Prov. xi. 27).

The character of the language in which the "Midrash" is written is necessarily an important factor amongst those conditions which might guide to any safe conclusions about the work. It is written, then, in the main in what might be described as classical Hebrew, but a Hebrew which betrays a very free contact with other languages. There is, first of all, as might have been expected, a very extensive use of Chaldee, many entire passages being written in that tongue; but what is perhaps most likely to arrest the attention of the student in these early Hebrew writings is the very large admixture of Greek words. The Biblical scholar will be at once reminded of the similar phenomenon in the famous passage of the Book of Daniel, where, in the course of a Chaldee passage, the Greek word *συμφωνία* is adopted to describe the "all kinds of music" which played in connection with Nebuchadnezzar's image of gold. The same infusion of Greek words is met with in these extra-Biblical Hebrew writings, but on a very much more extended scale. In the course of a few Psalms we find *ζύγον* (in connection with marriage), *κλέος*, *στρόβιλος* (for the pine-cone[1]), *τάξις*, *ἀρχή*, *βάσις*, *παιδαγωγὸς* (in St. Paul's sense, for an attendant tutor), *ἔπαρχος*, and others which it is unnecessary to particularize.

And yet further, the language of the "Midrash" has passed under the influence of Latin, so that written in Hebrew letters we have *patronus*, in the sense of a defender; *quæstionarius*, as an executioner; *Augusta*, for queen; and even *locotenentes* (not *locum tenentes*), for those invested with a delegated authority.

The leading peculiarities of the entire volume are amply exemplified in the small portion of it that is to be noticed here. It is the work of no one hand, but a compilation of what has from time to time been delivered upon the Psalms by authorities, sometimes of greater and sometimes of less eminence in Hebrew theology. Its results are often valueless to us, except as the curiosities of a buried literature. It is the

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[1] The seeds of the pine-cone are used for seasoning or spice. "After soup came a whole sheep stuffed with rice and seeds from the cone of the pine."—"The Land of Gilead," by Laurence Oliphant, p. 368, ed. 1880.

very reverse of that which is acceptable to ourselves; it knows nothing of those processes of scientific inquiry which depend upon comparative grammar and the lexicon; and its aim, pursued at times with an obstinacy that defies all obstacles—its aim is the glorification of Israel as the one segment of the human race which had any real value in the eyes of its Creator, and upon whose destinies God's administration of the universe depends.

Yet, when all allowance has been made for the infirmities of the "Midrash"—for the grotesque license of its fancy, for the puerilities of a style that belongs to less enlightened ages than our own, for the unsoundness of its processes—there is one feature of it which can never lose its value. It is a link in the long chain of tradition. It is a link in the chain of that tradition which brings to us the sense in which the language of the Scripture has from the first been understood. When the Hebrew lexicon is so often at fault as it is; when the meaning of words has to be inferred by the precarious method of observing their affinities in the kindred languages, then it is at least something to be able to see how the words have actually been used by the people of the past, who spoke the sacred language as their mother tongue. Dr. Liddon was right when in his "Bampton Lectures" he said that these writers "read the Old Testament with at least as much instinctive insight into the meaning of its archaic language and of its older forms of thought and meaning as an Englishman in this generation can command when he applies himself to the study of Shakespeare or of Milton."

And in the province of theology itself, while the "Midrash" is of course not designed to aid our contention that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah, yet the Christian reader of it will hardly fail to be struck with the enormous—it might be said the ubiquitous—prevalence of Messianic interpretation in its pages, everything seems made to belong to King Messiah; and when the Christian expositor is taunted with being too free in his application of the Psalms to the person of the Christ, it is at least some satisfaction to him to know that even the wide limits which he has permitted himself have been far overstepped by the ancient usage of the Hebrew, who would agree with him that the Psalms were, in fact, the Lyrics of the Christ, though he would not concede that the conditions of Christ's appearance were satisfied in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Upon the questions of who the compiler of the "Midrash Tehillim" was, or in what country he lived, or to what age he belonged, nothing definite can be said, as the language and style afford only untrustworthy indications; though one of the

German writers upon this literature concludes that the first part of the work, including all that is to be noticed here, belongs to the last centuries of what is known as the Geonian[1] Epoch; *i.e.*, presumably about the tenth century of the Christian era; and from the special way in which Apulia and Sicily are mentioned he draws the further conclusion that the compiler belonged to the southern part of Italy. What is really certain about the "Midrash" on the Psalms is that it was so generally known as to be cited as a recognised authority in the latter part of the eleventh century. That fact, to a certain extent, militates against this extremely late date to which it has become the fashion to assign the compilation of the "Midrash Tehillim."[2] New books could not circulate very rapidly in those ages, and a period of about a century seems scarcely long enough for a new work compiled in Southern Italy to become so well known about Europe as to be quoted for an accepted authority. It is in that character that Rashi quotes it. He was born about A.D. 1040 and died in 1105; was French by birth, and taught chiefly on the Rhine; yet he quotes this so-called recent Italian work to reinforce his own opinion. "So-and-so," he says on Ps. xxiii. 2, "is the explanation of a word as (it is in) 'Midrash Tehillim.'" Such an appeal seems almost to demand an earlier date for the compilation of the "Midrash" in some form or other. Exactly in its present form no doubt it could not well be earlier than the date assigned. But what additions may have been made to it from time to time, by way of gloss or otherwise, we do not know. The text of the "Midrash" is not even yet settled. Even the last reprint[3] of that part of it which refers to Ps. iii. contains a clause which is not contained in the former edition printed by Bomberg at Venice in the early days of the art of printing. How far this process of interpolation reaches we cannot say; but if the opinion of Bartolocci is to be adopted, interpolation must be held responsible for a great deal. In his great work on Hebrew literature Bartolocci says that the author of the "Midrash Tehillim" is unknown, but the work is commonly believed to belong to the age of the Tanaim, an age which, according to Wolf,[4] terminated about the beginning of the third century after Christ. It is obvious that such an

[1] The Hebrew sages, after the composition of the Gemara, were called Geonim. Maimonides, Pref. in Yad Hachazakah (ap. Wolf). Wolf ("Biblioth. Hebr.," vol. ii., p. 916) fixes the Geonian age from A.D. 689 to A.D. 1038.

[2] By R. Nissim, R. Nathan, Rashi (on Ps. xxiii. 2), who died about 1105 A.D., and R. Samuel ben Meir, ap. Zunz.

[3] Ed. Warsaw, 1873, p. 12, about ten lines from foot.

[4] "Biblioth. Hebr.," vol. ii., p. 914.

opinion is only compatible with the view that the citations of the Babylonian Talmud, which itself belongs to about A.D. 500, were themselves interpolations in the "Midrash Tehillim" as originally compiled.

But whatever opinion be formed of the date of this compilation, the important point to be noticed is that the "Midrash" on the Psalms is very old in substance, even if it be not so in form. A large portion of its contents consists in the quotation of what has been said upon the several passages by Jewish divines of a bygone age. The favourite phrase with which its expositions are introduced is, "Rabbi So-and-So said in the name of Rabbi Someone-else." The phrase is perhaps a tribute to a literary integrity which would ascribe what was thought to be a good saying to its real author; but it also, no doubt, exhibits that regard for authority which was prevalent amongst them. And in that character it perhaps exemplifies more than one expression in the New Testament. Authority was always a prominent question with them. "On what authority doest Thou these things?" (St. Matt. xxi. 23) was the question asked by the Jewish doctors of our Lord at a critical moment of His life. And it may have been this familiar formula of their own speech which suggested the form of His rejoinder to the Jews: "I am come in My Father's name, and ye receive Me not" (St. John v. 43). Under this formula we have in the "Midrash Tehillim" observations of divines who belong to the very opening of the Christian era. Not to multiply names unnecessarily, there are frequent quotations of Rabban Gamaliel—probably the one at whose feet St. Paul had been brought up—and of another whom Lightfoot thinks[1] to be the John in the verse of the Acts: "And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem" (Acts iv. 6)—John, known in the "Midrash" as Rabban Johanan ben Zaccai, the priest, who was personally held in high regard[2] by the Emperor Titus, and whose eyes saw the flames of the Temple mounting upwards at the close of the Roman siege.

No modern reader would be likely to listen with patience to the kind of trifling which is sure to form the staple of any considerable extract from the "Midrash." With a view to conveying some adequate idea of the work, we have selected a few Psalms, and we have selected those in which the "Midrash" suggests points that have considerable interest for Christian readers. We begin with the second Psalm. In dealing with

[1] Hebr. and Talm., "Exercitations upon the Acts" *ad loc.*
[2] Wolf, ii. 844.

its opening words, "Why do the heathen rage?" the "Midrash" starts with a mistake. "*Why do the heathen rage?*" This is what the Scripture says in Isaiah: "The wicked are like the troubled sea." The "Midrash" is here misled by a supposed identity between the Hebrew word for "rage" and the word for "troubled." The words, indeed, are composed of the same letters, but placed in a different order. The one word is, in fact, RaGaSH; the other is GaRaSH. Once, however, launched upon this mistake, the line of thought suggested is pursued in more than one direction. "As this sea sprinkles all its refuse upon its surface (lit. upon its mouth), so all the refuse of wicked men comes upon their mouths." And, "Another exposition. What is this sea? Its wave mounts and is mighty, as though it would overwhelm the world; but as soon as it reaches the shore it falls before the sand. Thus the idolatrous nations: everyone who combines against Israel to rob them falls before them. Why? Because Israel is compared to the sand, in Hosea (i. 10). Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea." The "Midrash" then proceeds to specify examples of this futile rage of the heathen against Israel. The first example involves what to us looks like a blunder in chronology. It says, "as Nimrod and his allies fell before Abraham." It, in fact, identifies Nimrod with Amraphel, the first-named of the five kings against whom Abraham and his three hundred and eighteen servants divided themselves by night (Gen. xiv. 15). That is an identification which no English expositor would be likely to accept, though it may be said to be quite a current view in Hebrew literature; for it is put forward by Rashi in his commentary upon the passage in Genesis, and a full explanation of it is given in the Great Midrash upon the Pentateuch, where it is said that for certain assigned reasons Nimrod is called by three names—Cush, Nimrod and Amraphel.[1] It may, of course, be set aside as an instance of that tendency which is so commonly observed to distinguish the less enlightened atmospheres of religious thought—the tendency to accumulate incident round a few prominent names.

The subsequent examples alleged are not exposed to the same objection. Abimelech, the "Midrash Tehillim" continues, fell before Isaac; Esau before Jacob; Pharaoh and the Egyptians before Israel; and, similarly, many such instances are found in the Pentateuch. And, further, in the world to come Gog and Magog will fall before Israel. And David saw it and cried, "Why do the heathen rage?"

There are, perhaps, just two points in these strange expres-

[1] "Bereshis Rabba," sect. 41.

sions which might be supposed to possess any interest for ourselves. The one is the expression which is of continual recurrence in Hebrew literature, and which has become naturalized in Christian theology—"the world to come." It is clear from the passage which has been cited that Hebrew divinity did not understand the phrase, as perhaps most English hearers have learned to understand it, in the sense of the future life of the redeemed in heaven; but that it was taken in a kind of millennial sense, referring to a time when, owing to the presence of Messiah upon earth, the people of God would triumph over all their enemies.

The other point to which allusion was made was the placing the power of the oppressors of Israel in their mouths. It is a point which the reader of English commentaries upon the distresses of Israel in their captivities is very apt to miss. Yet the tradition that has come down with the Hebrew nation is quite uniform upon the subject, and it is quite a characteristic of their literature in describing it, that a great portion of the distress which they had to suffer at the hands of their successive oppressors was inflicted by the tongue. It was what was said, rather than what was done, against them that they most bitterly deplore. It was the calumny, the slander, the misrepresentation that they suffered in their exile, more than the actual banishment and the bonds, which seem to have rankled in the memories of the nation, and which have with them given to many a phrase in the Psalms—"sharp arrows of the mighty," "Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue"—a vividness of meaning which perhaps only those who have so suffered are at all likely to share.

It will be readily understood that allegorical expositors who engage in discoveries of this nature are not likely to render much direct service in the critical solution of a real difficulty. The slenderness of that service will be at once perceived from their treatment of a difficult passage which the second Psalm presents, and which has perplexed all expositors and translators, ancient and modern alike. The passage in question is the first clause of the famous verse which stands in the Authorised Version of the Bible as follows:

"Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and ye perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little."

Amidst a number of conflicting renderings of the first clause "Kiss the Son," there are ways of justifying the choice of the English Bible. The first difficulty is presented by the word rendered "Son." It is pleaded that, while in Chaldee the word commonly means "Son," yet it has not generally that sense in Hebrew, and that in point of fact it has that sense in only one other Hebrew passage of the Bible—the passage at the

end of Proverbs (xxxi. 2) amongst the words of King Lemuel, "What, my Son? And what, the Son of my womb? And what, the Son of my vows?" And, moreover, that the presence of the disputed word there is in some measure explained by the company of other Chaldaisms in the passage. In Hebrew, it is added, the word might mean *pure, purity, purely,* or (2) it might mean *winnowed corn.* The first of these two senses is older than the Christian era, insomuch that the LXX. seem to have inclined to it in their paraphrase δράξασθε παιδείας "grasp discipline," the same sense being continued in the Vulgate *apprehendite disciplinam,* and in the later Chaldee Targum of the Psalms.

We have now to see what hints the "Midrash" gives upon the point, as to the conventional way in which the difficult clause has been understood in the Hebrew nation. As it usually does, the "Midrash" offers alternative expositions. First of all, the word which we have rendered "Son" is taken in its sense of winnowed corn, standing as a figure of the people of Israel, "Why is Israel compared to wheat?" It is as it is written in the Song of Solomon (vii. 2): "Thy belly is like an heap of wheat set about with lilies." And then follows an enlargement upon the points, generally more or less far-fetched, in which the race of Israel might properly be compared to wheat. R. Iddai said that the likeness lay in the superiority of wheat to all other grain, and the distinction of Israel amongst the races of the world. R. Simeon ben Lakish said that wheat is carefully measured both in going out to be sown and in coming in at harvest; so the Scripture is careful to particularize the number of Israel when they went down into Egypt as threescore and ten persons (Deut. x. 22), and when they came up as six hundred thousand on foot (Exod. xii. 37). R. Chanina said that when a householder comes to reckon with his steward the produce of his harvest, he cares nothing about the stubble, the straw, the chaff, but only about the quantity of the wheat. God is that householder, and so He—and here again comes in that monstrous idea which has poisoned the theology of Israel at its very source, and which stung mankind into centuries of reprisal upon the race—so God really cared for Israel alone amongst all the creations of His hand, designing them for a place in the storehouse of His grain, and all the nations of the world for the doom described by the prophet: "And the people shall be as the burnings of lime; as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire." (Isa. xxxiii. 12).

It would be fruitless to pursue these comparisons further. What is really to our purpose as Christian expositors is to notice that the "Midrash" shows that the sense of "son" was

also hanging about the word in dispute. Rav and Rav Acha are discussing the clause "when His wrath is kindled," and one says, "It is like a king who was angry with his subjects; they go and persuade the king's son that he may persuade the king. When he had been pacified by his son, the subjects go to thank the king; but he says to them, 'Do ye thank me? go and thank my son.'"

The application of the term "son" to the people of Israel does not concern us; but the story may be alleged as evidence that the disputed word was accepted in the sense of "son." And when we remember that the high Israelitish authority who is here called Rav is described by Wolf as the last of the sages of the Mishna, that he was teaching in the Jewish schools at the close of the second century after Christ, and that he actually died in the year 243, the fact that he could understand the controverted word in the sense of "son" at least may serve to relieve us from the taunt that such a meaning is foreign to the usage of the Hebrew language, and has, in fact, only been invented in order to meet the needs of Christian exegesis.

H. T. ARMFIELD.

(To be continued.)

ART. II.—DR. BOYD'S REMINISCENCES.

THE second volume of Dr. Boyd's Reminiscences will be eagerly read by many admirers. It abounds, like its predecessor, with anecdotes of distinguished persons, chiefly ecclesiastics, all told in A. K. H. B.'s kindly and genial manner. And opportunities enough had the author of "The Recreations of a Country Parson" of gathering together his interesting materials. He is constantly receiving distinguished visitors at St. Andrews, and constantly staying in delightful houses away from home. He is now at Selsdon Park, in Surrey, the guest of the "beloved prelate," Bishop Thorold; now at Glamis Castle with Canon Liddon; now at Windsor visiting Hugh Pearson, and walking round the cloister with Dean Wellesley; now at the Deanery of Wells with Dr. Plumptre; and now at Westminster, delighting in the companionship of Arthur Stanley.

"When a friend is made a bishop, you lose your friend," said someone to Dr. Boyd. But Dr. Boyd has not found it so. Fourteen times after Dr. Thorold became Bishop of Rochester did our writer visit him in his stately home at Selsdon. And no visits were more keenly enjoyed. The long walks in the