

A note like this in which the Massoretic Text is, I believe, completely misunderstood, could only have been written under the confusion caused by the cross-light thrown by the LXX.

(1) In the first place, there is no 'comparison within a comparison.' David identifies himself with the *single flea*, and contrasts himself with the partridge. 'Hunt the partridge on the mountains with hosts of beaters, if you will,' he says; 'but do not make such elaborate efforts to catch me, the single flea unworthy of so much trouble spent.' The contrast between the 'one flea' and 'the partridge' is all the more clear since, as Dr. Driver rightly says, the article ('the partridge') is generic, and points to a *class* not to an *individual*. David compares himself to the solitary flea and distinguishes himself from the true game, the partridges.

Dr. Driver's second objection to the M.T. shows (shall I say?) a lack of humour. Surely, 'To seek a flea' is practically equivalent to seeking the *death* of the flea, so that this second clause of the verse does appropriately follow the first, 'Let not my blood fall to the earth.'

The M.T. then of this passage, far from being absurd, offers a simple and forcible meaning, but the antecedent objections to it being removed, we still have to weigh it with the reading of the LXX. Is, then, 'one flea' or 'my soul' more probably the original reading? To answer this question we must first answer two others, viz. (1) Which reading explains the origin of the other? (2) Which reading, after careful consideration, is the more vigorous, the more worthy of the author who wrote the story of David's exile?

Now, if we assume that the reading of the M.T. 'to seek *one flea*' is the true reading, we can readily explain the origin of the LXX. reading as an explanation of it. It was the business of the LXX. as translators to turn the Hebrew into Greek which could be easily understood. They must explain who or what the *one flea* was, and so acting within the limits of their business they gave the paraphrase, 'To seek *my life*.'

If, however, 'my life' be the original reading, it is not easy to see *why* a copyist should substitute 'one flea' for it. It is true, as Dr. Driver points out, that David applies the term 'one flea' to himself in the parallel passage, 1 Sam. xxiv. 14, 'After whom is the king of Israel come forth? After whom art thou pursuing? After a dead dog,

after one flea.' It is possible again, as Dr. Driver points out, that the expression 'one flea' may have been introduced into our passage from the earlier passage. But we may ask, What was there to tempt a scribe so to introduce it? The reading of the LXX. is simple and smooth, a reading of the kind not often changed or mistaken by scribes.

Lastly, if the 'one flea' was introduced from 1 Sam. xxiv. 14, why was the 'dead dog' left out? In short, the reading of the M.T. does explain the origin of that of the LXX. as a secondary reading giving a paraphrase which some found necessary; but, on the contrary, the LXX. reading does not throw any light on the origin of that of the Massorets. Surely, then, the M.T. is original, at least, as compared with the LXX.

Little remains to be said on the comparative vigour of the two readings. The contrast between the flea-hunt and the partridge-hunt, so forcible and so Oriental, which is found in the Hebrew is missing in the Greek. The natural explanation is that the half-western Alexandrine translator has toned down the original Hebrew text.

M.T. and LXX. have now been weighed together; and from what we know of the habits of scribes and of translators, and from our knowledge of the style of the author, the former commends itself as original, and the latter as a secondary reading.

I have discussed this instance at some length, because the opposite view has the support, undeserved I think, of so good a scholar as Canon Driver. It may be noticed also that Canon Kirkpatrick (Camb. Bible, *in loco*), writing in 1881, gave, in a passing note, a qualified support to the reading of the LXX.

(B) EZEKIEL i. 13.

As another instance of the disturbing influence of the LXX. on the work of able scholars, a passage from Ezekiel's vision of the chariot may be quoted. The prophet's attention is first arrested by the coming of the whirlwind from the north, and then he describes what he sees as point by point it becomes clear to him. The whirlwind brings with it a cloud, the cloud a 'continually flashing' fire, the fire sheds a brightness all around the cloud. Next he discerns, like brightness within brightness, the glow of 'amber' ('*electrum*,' R.V. marg.) in the very midst of the

fire. The amber glow soon resolves itself into four living creatures, whose feet, hands, wings, and faces are described as in succession they become clear to him.

At this point the commentators (including Dr. A. B. Davidson) tell us that the description of the living creatures themselves is finished, but a glance at the rival texts will show that M.T. and LXX. are at strife on this point, and that the commentators follow the LXX.—perhaps not well.

We find the following :—

M.T.

‘And as for the things which resembled living creatures, *their appearance was as coals of fire burning, like the appearance of torches. It (the fire) walked among the living creatures, and the fire had brightness.*’

LXX. (cf. R. V. marg.).

‘And *in the midst* of the living creatures *was an appearance as of coals of fire burning, as the appearance of torches turning about in the midst of the living creatures, and the fire had brightness.*’

Here the two texts, though but slightly different in wording, are very different in meaning. The M.T. continues to describe the living creatures, the LXX. introduces a fresh subject, viz. a mysterious fire which walked or turned about among the living creatures. It is the general opinion of commentators that the received Hebrew text must be wrong, and that the LXX. reading is clearly superior. May it not, however, be the case that here, too, the delusive smoothness of the Greek has thrown a false cross-light on the meaning of the original, and that the Hebrew text has not been fairly examined?

Before we can compare the M.T. with the LXX., we must first examine the M.T. and find out, if it may be, its exact meaning. The LXX., on the contrary, is clear enough, and needs no such examination.

Now it is not the case that the M.T. of ver. 13 adds, as commentators seem to suppose, a trait which does not suit the description of the creatures as given down to ver. 12. The *parts* of the living creatures have been described in detail, and their

general appearance was described in ver. 5 as human, but the description still lacks one most important detail. Are these creatures of the earth, or is there some trait which forbids the thought, and makes them fit inhabitants of an environment of whirlwind and fiery cloud? The words of the M.T., at which the commentators stumble, supply the answer to this question; the reading of the LXX., which they prefer, sends the questioner empty away. The Hebrew text tells us that these living creatures burnt on the sight like fire, with a steady ascending flame like torches. Every limb might have been of the earth, if the dazzling glory of the whole creature had not revealed a denizen of heaven.

But the Hebrew text has the further advantage of *not* excluding the trait to which the LXX. devotes the whole of ver. 13, viz. the mysterious fire which moves among the living creatures. The only difference in this respect between the two texts is, that the Hebrew text prepares us for the fire by describing its effect on the creatures in making them appear to be made of fire, whereas the LXX. introduces the fire merely as walking among the creatures, but does not mention its effect on them.

The Hebrew text seems to me, in short, to be consistent to the end in describing point after point of the vision as the prophet realised it. First the glowing ‘amber,’ next the creatures, next the limbs of the creatures, next the discovery that the creatures themselves were glowing, a brightness within a brightness; and last of all, the discovery of that which within all cast forth a brightness to be reflected by all, the mysterious fire moving among the creatures, the symbol of God Himself.

Since (1) the M.T. is the more difficult reading, and (2) its difficulties far from being insuperable are seen to contain traits which add to the force of the passage as a whole, may we not conclude that it is to be preferred to the LXX. reading?