

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

pulpit is not yet gone by, but what is wanted is to make the pulpit equal to its day. The weakness of the modern pulpit will be transfigured into strength directly its special sermons are so multiplied as to become co-ordinate with the special requirements of the modern age.

What is needed, above all things besides, to strengthen the modern pulpit's weakness and enlarge the modern pulpit's power is more hopeful faith and more living prayer. The current of the hour is setting against prayer; but if the modern preacher is borne away by this current, his preaching will drift into mere brilliant show—the show of self, with an absence of spiritual power. Of course, prayer of itself will achieve nothing without work. Indeed, prayer without work is not truly prayer. He who most earnestly prays over his sermons must also most earnestly work at their preparation, else his prayers will be little else than idle hypocrisy. It is one of the many beautiful sayings of St. Augustine: “*Sit orator antequam dictor*”—Let a man first pray, then preach. And the saying is just as true to-day as it was fourteen centuries ago. None but those who live within the veil can go forth with lips anointed from the altar of God. The primary, and most pre-eminent, requirement of the modern pulpit is a greater plenitude of effectual prayer—prayer both by clergy and people. Without incessant prayer its ashes will never be converted into beauty or its weakness into power. Let congregations and preachers combine together in prayer, and the one will speak, and the other will hear, with a quite new and resistless grace. And in praying, their first plea should be for a self-renouncing simplicity, because in every age, whether primitive or modern, the simplicity of the preacher has proved to be the power of God.

JOHN WILLIAM DIGGLE.



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

STUDIES IN THE “MIDRASH TEHILLIM.”—No. III.

ONE very serious difficulty which confronts the Christian reader in his attempt to become acquainted with the literature of Israel lies in the highly technical character of the phraseology which is adopted in it. He needs an acquaintance, not only with the two or three languages employed, and with their respective grammars and dictionaries, but also with some of the peculiarities of Jewish thought and life. This

requirement is abundantly illustrated in the "Midrash." One story of Rabbi Akiva will sufficiently exhibit it. His son had married a wife; and the night of his marriage he sat up all night to study the Law of Moses. He begs his bride to give him her assistance, which she accordingly does until the morning came. In the morning Rabbi Akiva wanted to know his son's opinion whether he had reason to be satisfied with his choice of a wife or not. But he makes the inquiry in this strange and technical way: "Is it 'findeth' or 'found'?" What could the ordinary English reader make of such a question if he did not know something of the usage of the speaker? In point of fact, Rabbi Akiva was simply making an allusion to two texts of Scripture: "Whoso findeth a wife, findeth a good thing" (Prov. xviii. 22); and "I find the woman to be more bitter than death" (Eccles. vii. 26); and he asked his son under which head, the good wife or the bitter one, his one case was to be placed.

Though the "Midrash" is not much occupied with Lexical considerations, yet it sometimes throws indirectly a certain light even upon these.

In approaching the "Midrash" on Ps. ciii., the first point to which a reader would perhaps direct his attention is to see what help it gives upon the vexed question of the Lexicons in the clause, "Who filleth thy mouth with good things." Did the Hebrews of old time understand the word to be *mouth*, as the English Bible? or *adornment*, as Mendelssohn understands it? or *time*, as Gesenius? or which of the various conflicting senses that have been suggested? There is no distinct pronunciation upon the subject in the "Midrash," though from one of its tales about R. Johanan wearing his phylacteries every day, and from a technical reference of the entire clause to the supernatural girding of the Israelites at Sinai with weapons inscribed with the incommunicable name of Jehovah, it may be gathered that the leaning was to take the word, as Mendelssohn does, in the sense of adornment.

This part of the "Midrash," however, affords us a glimpse into the curiosities of Rabbinic physiology. The Psalm begins, "Bless the Lord, O my soul." The mention of the soul at once makes an opening for the introduction of the subject. This part of the book is full of curious physiological ideas. It will be enough to cite one passage as a specimen of the whole.

R. Abdimi said in (the name of) R. Nechunja, "Some things are bad for the liver and good for the throat; and some things are bad for the throat and good for the liver. There are ten things in man: the windpipe, for voice; the gullet, for food; the liver, for anger; the lung, for drinking; the gall, for jealousy; the maw, for hatred; the intestine, for digestion; the

spleen, for laughter; the veins give counsel; the heart concludes."

One more extract may be made from this part of the work, because it illustrates the practice to which our Lord resorted when He said, "I also will ask you one question"—the practice, that is to say, of meeting a difficult question by another still more difficult. The reference is to the mention of the human soul in "Bless the Lord, O my soul."

"As in the case of this soul, no man knows what its place is, or in what place it is put; so with respect to the Almighty, no creature knows what His place is; for even the holy living creatures on whom the Throne of Glory is supported do not know what is His place, or in what place He is put. For what do they say in Ezekiel (iii. 12), 'Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place.' It is related of a certain man that he said to Rabban Gamaliel, In what place is He set? But he replied, I do not know. He rejoined, Why, is this your prayer and your wisdom that ye pray before Him every day, yet do not know what His place is? He said to him, Thou hast asked a thing which is far beyond me by the space of five hundred years' journey. Behold! I will ask thee one thing, which is set by thy side day and night: tell me, then, in what place it is set. He said to him, What is it? He replied, It is the soul, which is set beside thee; tell me in what place it is set? He said to him, I do not know. He said to him, May your breath vanish.¹ What is that which hath been put beside thee? Thou knowest not its place, yet thou sayest to me a thing which is beyond me by the space of five hundred years' journey. He said to him, If so, they do well who worship the work of their own hands, for they look thereupon at all times. He said to him, The work of your hands—ye see them, but they do not see you; but the Almighty sees the works of His hands, but they do not see Him."

In Psalm civ. the student would at once desire to know the view of the "Midrash" upon the clause which has so troubled both the expositor and the translator: "He maketh His angels spirits." The Hebrew words both for "angels" and for "spirits" present an ambiguity. The one might with equal propriety be rendered either "messengers" or "angels," and the other, either "spirits" or "winds"; while the clause has been variously held to admit of all possible combinations of these senses. There is, moreover, the further question as to which of the two words is to have the position of predicate. Thus we are pushed into a multitude of questions—as to whether it means, "He maketh His messengers to be winds"—

¹ Lit. : "May that man's breath be breathed out."

that is, in swiftness—just as the subsequent figure of the flame of fire is meant to ascribe to them the attribute of irresistible strength; or whether it means, “He maketh winds to be His messengers”—*i.e.*, He useth the powers of Nature to execute His will. The “Midrash” is not the field to which we can go for the final solution of nice questions such as these; but, *pro tanto*, it may be of some service in narrowing the field of inquiry, if it shows us how the language has been understood when uninfluenced by any of our Western ideas. On the question of “spirits” or “winds” it is absolutely silent; but indirectly we can see that the doctors of Palestine in the early days of the Christian era understood the other word in the sense of “angels.” We can discern that from the fact that the “Midrash” here takes occasion to digress into one of those curious discussions about the place of the angels in the days of creation, which are so common in the earlier Hebrew literature.

WHO MAKETH HIS ANGELS SPIRITS. R. Johanan said, The angels were created on the second day.

In another part of “Midrash Tehillim” the same view is affirmed. At Psalm xxiv., upon the words, “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof,” the question is asked at once, “When were the angels created?” R. Johanan said, “On the second day”; as it is said (Ps. civ. 3), “Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters”; and it is written, “He maketh His angels spirits.”

The exposition of this Psalm in the “Midrash” is particularly rich in that class of application of Scripture, which in Christian theology has been called the Moral Interpretation. Its remarks under this head do not present anything of especial interest for us, but a few lines may be quoted as a sample of the method. The Christian theologian will be reminded of much that is to be met with in the work of Gregory the Great on the Book of Job; and the extract from the “Midrash” will serve to show how the same processes of thought have been at work during the ages of the past in schools so widely sundered as Judaism and Latin Christianity.

ANOTHER EXPOSITION, says the “Midrash.” “So is this great and wide sea also.” This speaks of the fourth kingdom, which was to rule over the earth.

“Wherein are things creeping innumerable.” The innumerable edicts which they write down against us.

“Both small and great beasts.” Generals, officers and captains.

“There go the ships.” These are the promissory notes—properly redemption notes: *sc.* notes issued by Roman authorities, which the Jews had to redeem; it was a way of

getting money out of them—which they form against Israel; which they write against them every day.

“That Leviathan whom thou hast made.” For whoever is associated with them will be made a laughing-stock with them in the world to come.

The “Midrash” on Psalm cv. furnishes a specimen of a class of learning which properly belongs to the “Massorah.” The “Massorah,” it may be explained, has for its object the protection of the text of Scripture, both against loss and against the intrusion of extraneous matter. With this end in view, it systematically enumerates the observable peculiarities of the written text. How many times, for example, it happens that words begin and end with the same pair of letters; how many times each letter of the alphabet occurs.¹ For instance, that in the twenty-four books of Scripture the first letter of the alphabet occurs 42,377 times; that there are five words with the letter H (ה) in the middle in the textual reading, but without it in the margin; and so on.

The “Midrash” adduces an example of this kind of lore, which, from its character, might have been included in the columns of the “Massorah,” though it actually is not to be found there. It comments on the words, “Remember His marvellous works that He hath done, His wonders and the judgments of His mouth,”

“O ye seed of Abraham His servant: ye children of Jacob, His chosen.”

“He is the Lord our God; His judgments are in all the world.”

The point of its observation is that in the Hebrew text the word for “He” is prominent and associated with the name Jehovah.² And it says that in the Scripture this word for “He” is five times joined with a man’s name for good, and five times for evil; the five evil men being Nimrod, Esau, Dathan, Abaz and Ahasuerus; and the five good men being Abraham, Moses, Ezra, Hezekiah and David. R. Berechiah said in the name of our Rabbies, “The blessed God is (here) counted with the righteous; as it is said, ‘He is the Lord our God; His judgments are in all the world.’”

It may be observed that the personal pronoun certainly does

¹ Buxtorf (Comment. Masoret, Cap. 18) says that this was part of the Masoretic work, and that it is contained in the enigmatic Hebrew poem of Elia Raf Saadia Gaon, head of the Babylonish School of Sora about A.D. 927.

² Hoo (the Hebrew word for “he”) has been thought to be one of the names of God in some forms of religion. So in Ps. cii. 28, “Thou art the same.” The word, however, is not Hebrew for “the same.” It might be rendered, “Thou art Hoo, and Thy years shall not fail.”

so occur in the several passages cited by the "Midrash"; but there is no ready way of verifying the statement that there are no other similar occurrences of the word, because the pronoun is not given in the concordances of the Hebrew Bible. There is, however, only one circumstance which might reasonably cause any suspicion of it; and that is because we detect amongst the Hebrew expositors an especial fondness for developing the number five whenever it is possible, so as to point a mystic allusion to the five Books of the Law. Thus, there are five letters in the Hebrew alphabet which have a different form when they are at the end of a word; there are five Books in the Psalter corresponding to the five Books of the Law, as the "Midrash" says,¹ as justifying the phrase of the Greek Father² who said that the Psalter was "another Pentateuch": the letter H which God put in to change the name of "Abram" into "Abraham" stands in the Hebrew numeration for five, and many other such. But whatever we may think of the critical value of observations of this kind when taken one by one, there can be no doubt that such labours taken as a whole have exercised at least *some* influence upon the preservation of the text. There is probably no ancient book of wide circulation in the world which presents so few conflicting readings as the Hebrew Bible. Elias Levita, who wrote in Hebrew in the fifteenth century, contrasts the Bible with the state of the text in the "Chaldee Targum" of Onkelos, very much to the disadvantage of the latter; and he says³ that though a Massorah was made upon it, yet it has allowed so many variations and changes to slip into the text, because it did not follow the way of the Massorah on the Bible in numbering the words, the letters and the like. We, perhaps, can hardly avoid the reflection that, if only the Christians of antiquity had bestowed any similar care upon the New Testament, a vast number of those textual questions, which are now perhaps insoluble to us, might never have arisen: and when it is remembered that all this learning of the sages of the "Midrash" and "Massorah" was accumulated before the days of concordances, then, to do them justice, it must be admitted that it all represents a grasp of the whole body of the Sacred Text, and a prodigious acquaintance with its minutest features which we Christians may perhaps sometimes envy, but have scarcely tried to imitate.

In the exposition of the Psalm, it is satisfactory to find that some of the expressions which perplex the *modern* commentator were also a difficulty to the *ancient* authorities of Israel. The

¹ "Midrash" on Ps. i.

² Hippolytus, qu. Delitzsch, p. 11.

³ Massoreth Hammassoreth, ed. Ginsburg, p. 134.

Psalm speaks of God's deliverance of Israel in the early period of its history. In the midst of the reference to Joseph, we have this verse:

"Until the time that his word came, the word of the Lord tried him."

Whose word? God's word, or Joseph's, in the interpretation of the dreams in the prison? The ancient authorities, it seems, were no nearer agreement than the moderns:

"R. Chaya bar Abba and our Rabbies (declared): one said, "[This means] until the word of Joseph came." And another said, "[It means] until the word of the Almighty came."

In the same part of the Psalm, legend comes in to fill up the outlines of the Old Testament history of Joseph. Pharaoh's treatment of him is described in the Psalm in these terms:

"He made him lord of his house and ruler of all his substance."

"To bind his princes at his pleasure."¹

What was this binding of the princes of Pharaoh? There is nothing about it in the history in Genesis. The phrase has always been more or less troublesome to Christian expositors. The doctors of the "Midrash" find no trouble whatever with it. They have a legend which admits of the words being taken in their most literal sense.

"When Pharaoh sought to make Joseph king, his counsellors said to him, So then a slave is to be king! (But) he took them and bound them until Joseph's brethren came to show that he was of noble birth."

There is not a trace of such action on the part of Pharaoh in the authentic history of Joseph. The story represents, indeed, what is quite likely to have been the jealous policy of a party in the state on the occasion of Joseph's advancement; but there is not the slightest evidence that it is anything else than one of those legends which, in so many ages of the past, men have had a tendency to invent so as to fill up the outlines of some particular phrase.

There is one habit of the "Midrash" at large which is worthy of specific notice—the habit, that is to say, of leaving the particular verse of the Psalm which is before the reader and going off at a tangent to discourse upon some other text of Scripture which it happens to have cited. This habit is often a source of disappointment to the student; but it has incidentally this result, that in the comments of the "Midrash" upon these few Psalms we meet with specimens of the curious way

¹ There is a trace in the "Midrash" (and also in the Commentary of Rashi) of there having once been a different reading here. The "Midrash" says, The Chethib is "his prince," which refers to Potiphar. Our printed text presents no trace of such a reading.

in which the Hebrew nation has understood certain other features of the Scriptures. Thus, in reference to David's Psalm, "Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! many are they that rise up against me!" we have an example of that species of explanation which is called *Notarikon*, and which consists in taking each letter of a word as the initial of some fresh word, very much as in Greek Christian Theology the word *ΙΧθυς* became adopted as a name of Christ. The present instance arises thus: the insults of Shimei are enumerated by the "Midrash" amongst the prominent troubles that David had to undergo, and reference is made to the terms in which David spoke of his insults in his last charge to Solomon his son: "And behold, thou hast with thee Shimei, the son of Gera, a Benjamite of Bahurim, which cursed me with a grievous curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim" (1 Kings ii. 8). The Hebrew word for "grievous" is understood in the "Midrash" to be symbolic of the opprobrious names with which Shimei assailed David: its five letters are the initials of the Hebrew words for Adulterer, Moabite (in reference to David's descent from Ruth, the Moabitess), Wicked Man, Adversary, Abomination.

There is a further point in the account of Shimei in the "Midrash" which, perhaps, may command more sympathy from us. On the first introduction of Shimei upon the page of Scripture, he is described in these terms: "And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera" (2 Sam. xvi. 5). When upon a subsequent occasion he comes before the victorious king to implore pardon for his insults, the sacred historian still describes him in similar terms: "And Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite, which was of Bahurim, hastened and came down with the men of Judah to meet king David" (2 Sam. xix. 16). Those, however, are not the terms in which Shimei describes himself: "Thy servant," he says, "doth know that I have sinned: therefore, behold, I am come the first this day of all the house of Joseph to meet my lord the king" (*ibid.* 20). Why this intrusion of "the house of Joseph" at this critical moment when Shimei felt that his fate was hanging in the balance? Perhaps he felt it politic not to put forward any mention of the house of Saul; but, then, he might have been silent upon his extraction—perhaps, as Stanley suggested, it is an indication of "the close political alliance between Benjamin and Ephraim";¹ the obvious rejoinder is that the moment of an impending sentence of death is hardly the moment when he would have cared to insist

¹ Dic. Bib., s.v. Shimei.

upon that. The "Midrash" on the Psalms¹ sees in the phrase a delicate touch of rhetoric. It is an appeal to David by one of the most sacred memories of the nation: that as Joseph rewarded his brethren good for the evil which they had done him, so David of his clemency would act now. That, says R. Samuel to R. Jonathan, was the view of the schools in Babylon. "You say beautifully," said R. Jonathan when he heard it; and we, it will be thought, may not improperly say the same.

And once again, in the description of David's bodyguard as "the Cherethites and Pelethites," the "Midrash" furnishes² a glimpse of a view which more than one Hebrew expositor adopts,³ and which is admitted to be arguable by the moderns. Gesenius even adopts the view in question, which is that the names Cherethites and Pelethites are not geographical names at all, describing a nation or a tribe, but that they are official terms derived from the functions which the corps discharged. The names might be referred to two Hebrew words which mean respectively to *cut* and to *wonder*. And so we find in the "Midrash," "R. Ibbo says, They decided legal questions, and were the distinguished presidents of the courts of justice."

The leading characters in Scripture, too, sometimes assume a novel attitude in Hebrew tradition. Doeg, for example, is president of the Sanhedrim, because the Scripture describes him as "chiefest of the herdmen belonging to Saul"—"herdmen" being apparently understood in the sense of pastors, guides and leaders. And in the case of Ahithophel we are offered an explanation of one of those mysterious gaps which are retained even in our own copies of the Hebrew Scripture, where a word is ordered in the margin to be read, but its place has always been left vacant in the text. With reference to Ahithophel it is said, "And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired of the oracle of God" (2 Sam. xvi. 23). The word for "man" has never been written, but a space has been left for it in the text. The omission, says the "Midrash," was meant to imply that Ahithophel was not really a man, but an angel.

The tradition of Israel attempts to supply the detail of many a Scriptural picture of which the sacred narrative itself gives little more than an outline. Thus, in reference to the first days of man's life upon earth, the "Midrash" is rich in many a speculation upon points about which modern curiosity has not been altogether silent—the gates of the garden of Eden.

¹ "Midrash" on Ps. iii.

² On Ps. iii.

³ So Talmud Babli (Ber. 4a). See also Levy, s.v.

were close to Mount Moriah (on Ps. xcii.); the skins of which the Lord God made coats of skins unto Adam and his wife were skins which the serpent had shed (*ibid.*).

There is many a story preserved in the "Midrash" which probably has not survived elsewhere. As a specimen, one may be cited in reference to the Emperor Adrian, whose name is often mentioned in Hebrew literature. It occurs in the exposition of the words, "The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters." And it shows how the ancients were no strangers to that curiosity about the secrets of the deep which in our own day we have endeavoured to satisfy by the soundings and dredgings of scientific expeditions. It happened, says the "Midrash," to Adrian, that he sought to study what was at the bottom of the ocean; so he took cords and lowered them for three years, when he heard a mysterious echo, saying, Stop, Adrian! He sought again to know what the waters were saying in praise of the Creator, so he made chests of glass, and, having put men inside them, he lowered them into the ocean. And when they came up, they said, We heard the ocean uttering praise, and saying, "The Lord on high is mightier."

Occasionally we meet with some legend or usage in the "Midrash" which serves to elucidate an expression of the New Testament. For example, on the question of angelic ministration at the giving of the Law on Sinai, there is no direct statement of it in the narration of the scene in Exodus; there is a dim allusion to it in the last blessings of Moses at the end of Deuteronomy; but in the New Testament it is freely affirmed without apology or explanation: "If the word spoken by angels was stedfast" in the Epistle to the Hebrews; by St. Paul in the Galatians, "it was ordained by angels in the hand of a Mediator," and by St. Stephen "Who have received the Law by the disposition of angels and have not kept it." It is at least curious that in the "Midrash Tehillim" we have evidence of a tradition which is dated in the times of the Apostles themselves, and which shows that St. Paul and St. Stephen were but affirming a view which was common property in their day. It may be translated as follows:¹

"R. Johanan expounded the Sacred Text thus: On Sinai at the time when Samuel received the Law, there came down sixty myriads of ministering angels and put crowns on the heads of every Israelite. Rabbi Abba bar Cahana in the name of R. Johanan said, There came down one hundred and twenty myriads, and while one put a crown upon the head of each Israelite, another girt him with a weapon."

¹ On Ps. ciii. Ed. Warsaw, p. 148, foot.

The "Midrash" naturally acquaints the reader with many of the leading ideas in ancient Jewish cosmogony. Thus, God is declared to have created seven heavens. "I created seven heavens, but of them all I chose only the ethereal plains" (A.V., Ps. lxxviii. 4, heavens) "for the habitation of my dwelling," a conception possibly which lies at the base of our English phrase of "being in the seventh heaven." There is a void between the firmament and the waters that are below the firmament, and a similar void between the firmament and the waters that are above the firmament; the upper heavens are suspended in the air, and rain is caused by the descent of the upper waters (on Ps. xix.). The earth is supported in a manner which may remind us of the legend of the still more distant East, which says that the earth is poised upon an elephant, and the elephant upon a tortoise, though the account in the "Midrash" is philosophically far more complete, inasmuch as it traces the ultimate support to God Himself. "The earth," it says, "is supported on the pillars" (*i.e.*, the ones mentioned in the Scripture), "the pillars upon the waters, the waters upon the mountains, the mountains upon the winds, the wind upon the whirlwind, and the whirlwind depends upon the arm of the Almighty" (on Ps. cxxxvi.). The question is touched from which modern impatience is sometimes not altogether free: Why the things were created which seem to have no use or seem to exist only for the purpose of inflicting discomfort and annoyance; and the answer which the "Midrash" gives is that when His creatures sin God may look upon such useless members of His creation, and reason that if He preserves those for which there is no necessity, much more may He preserve those for whom there is a necessity (on Ps. xviii.).

And before closing the subject, there is one other feature of the New Testament which receives abundant illustration from the pages of the "Midrash," and that is the prevalence of parable. That description which the Gospel gives of our Lord's teaching is entirely true to the usual methods of these doctors of Israel, "Without a parable spake He not unto them." In the "Midrash" parable is everywhere. It must suffice to quote one specimen. It is attached to the text, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart since the time that their corn and wine and oil increased." The aim of it is to show how Israel in depression could be glad on seeing the prosperity of the nations of the world. R. Joshua, the son of Levi, said, It is a parable of a king who made a feast and invites the wayfarers, and sets them by the door of the palace, where they see the dogs going out with pheasants in their mouths and heads of fatlings and of calves, they begin to say, If the dogs have

such good things, how much better will the feast be which is prepared for us? Now, the idolatrous nations are compared to dogs, as it said in Isaiah (lvi. 11), "Yea, they are greedy dogs." They are in prosperity in this world: and will not Israel be much more in prosperity in the world to come? This is the meaning of the text, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart." One reflection will probably be suggested to the reader of the New Testament: that the parables of the "Midrash," of which that is a more than average specimen, are vastly inferior in dignity, in aptness, and in all the elements of literary merit, to the earlier parables with which our Lord has made us familiar.

From what has been said it will have been gathered that in this field of the older Hebrew literature, much ground has to be broken before anything of real value can be found. The explorer is indeed at times rewarded by the discovery of something which serves to illuminate some feature of the New Testament with not a little of the brilliancy which it naturally bore to the oriental eye of old time, but which it has almost lost to our changed perceptions and habits in the west. That perhaps, imparts to the literature of the "Midrash" a value which it will never lose; but, as students of Scripture, if we want a caution that we are not to be misled by its vagaries, its extravagances, its triviality, we have it in that Hebrew saying of these very Rabbies themselves—

הדרשה תדרוש אבל אין המקרא יוצא מדי פשוטו.

You may expound your "Midrash," almost as we should say, You may preach your sermon; but the Scripture does not leave its simple and literal sense.

H. T. ARMPFIELD, F.S.A.

ART. III.—FASTING.

FASTING was an institution of the Old Covenant, as it is of the New. Our Lord scarcely alludes to it: as St. Chrysostom hath it, His direct command is rather "eat" than "fast": His apparent recommendation of it as a source of spiritual strength is, like St. Paul's in 1 Cor. vii. 5, of dubious textual authority: yet His non-ascetic ministry was preceded by the great fast of forty days. It is an observance ordered in our English Church.

What is fasting? What is the final cause of fasting? Familiar as is the well-known word, it may be that since both