

REASONS,

&c.

THE English Bible is authorized to be read in Churches. But the only standard of truth to the Church of England and to Protestants generally, is Divine Revelation, as exhibited in the inspired originals, "the Hebrew and Greek verity." It is, therefore, generally granted, that vernacular versions ought to be approximated, as much as possible, to those originals. Every student of the Hebrew or Greek Scriptures, perceives that in our English version, as well as other similar works, some passages could be improved. It is notorious that there is in America, a Society for the purpose of emending the authorized version. It is a fact, not so generally known, that there are three Societies in England engaged in the same work. It might be inferred, that an authorized revision by Royal commission would be better, or necessary, under present circumstances, to prevent confusion and quiet men's minds. And so the writer of these pages thought, when he

first heard of these various Societies, and before he had read what the advocates of revision had written.*

But having examined carefully some of the recent publications, he is led back to the conclusion which he published years ago, when Dr. Conquest's emended Bible first appeared, that we had better hold fast what we have. The question is not merely, whether we may effect some real emendations ; but whether by a revision we may not get a version infinitely worse than that which we possess, and, as a learned foreign Hebraist said, having ten worse faults for every one that we correct. Looking at the publications on the subject, there is great reason to fear the latter. Some of the advocates of revision are, as to learning, competent to execute what they propose—and as to purpose, honest. But the statements made by others of the recent writers, betray ignorance—incompetence—proneness to exaggeration—want of judgment and good taste—prejudice, and in some, even hostility to the vital truths of Christianity, as will be evidenced in the following pages.

* The proposal of a revision of the Bible, as a subject of consideration at the meetings of the Clergy at Sion College ; and a notice of motion to the same effect in Convocation, led the Author to careful study of the various proposals and reasons for revision. And, as some friends, who heard some of these remarks at Sion College, thought them worthy of publication, he now presents them, with additions, in this pamphlet.

The advocates of revision make objections against the present state of the authorized version, and sometimes state what they propose to substitute. It will be our duty to consider both.

I.—The first objection to our present English Bible is, the division into chapters and verses. The supposed mischief of this division is very tragically described in “The State of the English Bible.”* The Reviewer says, pp. 10, 11 :—

“These divisions, which have no existence in the original, have been made without any authority whatever. They were introduced for the purpose of liberating the theological student from the necessity of attaining a deep and accurate knowledge of the Scriptures, by placing in his hands a Concordance, which the sacred text had been notched and scored to tally with, and by which he may be readily assisted to the discovery of any passage he may chance to meet. About the middle of the thirteenth century, Cardinal Hugo de Santo Caro, projected a *Concordance* to the Latin Vulgate, and divided the Old and New Testament into chapters. Rabbi Nathan, in the fifteenth century, in preparing a *Concordance* of the Hebrew Scriptures, sub-divided the chapters into verses. Robert Stephens, in the sixteenth century, passed simultaneously through the press a New Testament and a *Concordance*; and—so at least his son Henry tells us—while travelling on horseback between Lyons and Paris, he cut the New Testament into verses for the sake of adapting it to his *Concordance*. The practice of breaking the text of Scripture into verses would, under any circumstances, prove most injurious to the right apprehension of its meaning. With whatever care the sacred text had been cut into such minute sections, those minute sections must necessarily

* By the Rev. William Harness. Reprinted from the “Edinburgh Review” of October, 1855.

have had a tendency to mislead. But they have not been carefully made. THE ONLY END contemplated in making them was, to fit the Bible to the Concordance.*

Now, first of all, it must be acknowledged that a Concordance, and the convenience of reference by means of chapters and verses, are substantial benefits conferred upon the great majority of Bible readers and Biblical students. The Edinburgh Reviewer may not require such helps; but if so, he stands almost, if not quite, alone. The general sense of students since the days of Cardinal Hugo, is that for the investigation of the meaning of words in Hebrew and the Greek, whether of the LXX. or the New Testament, a Concordance is a most serviceable auxiliary.

In the next place, this writer implies that it is injurious, if not unlawful, to divide the text into minute portions, not found in the original. But does he suppose that full stops, colons and semicolons, signs of interrogation and parenthesis, are found in the original? Does he not know that in some of the most authoritative Greek manuscripts, there is no division of words, but all the letters are

*The Westminster Reviewer, though not so violent against chapters and verses, has also this common story about their novelty. He says:—"Very few of our readers need to be reminded, that the existing division into chapters are not older than the middle of the thirteenth century; and that verse divisions and numberings only appeared in the beginning of the sixteenth."—*January, 1857*, pp. 161.

written together in a mass? Who, then, authorized the Reviewer to divide this mass into the "minute sections" marked by semi-colons and commas? He will doubtless reply, that this is done with regard to the sense, but the other was made *only for the sake of the Concordance*. But why does he not prove this? Why does he not show, by examples, the injury inflicted by the verses? Or rather, it may be asked, how is it possible that any man, competent to appear before the world as a Biblical critic, can receive and repeat such a statement? Let any one look at the song of Mary, Luke i. 46, and that of Zacharias, Luke i. 68—80, or Matthew v., and observe how the parallelisms are preserved and marked, (though, when the division of the verses was made, the theory of parallelism was unknown,) and say whether the division was made with regard to the sense, or to the Concordance; and whether it was not done, not only with great care, but with great judgment. It is really astonishing that any one accustomed to read his English Bible could believe in such an origin of the verses. Those acquainted, however imperfectly, with the Hebrew text, perceive the utter baselessness of the tale. Most Bible-readers know that Psalm cxix. is divided into twenty-two parts, according to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, with the Hebrew letter and its name prefixed to each part; and that every verse of these twenty-two parts

begins with the same letter of the alphabet. In like manner Psalms xxv., xxxiv., xxxvii., cxlv.; Proverbs xxxi. 10—31; Lamentations i., ii., iii., iv.; the verses are determined by the sequence of the letters of the alphabet. Psalms cxi. cxii. have the peculiarity that each verse begins with one letter—the middle of the verse with the next. Lamentations iii. begins three verses in succession with the same letter. Now, if the division into verses was made *only* to fit the Concordance, and not with respect to the mind of the Author, how is it that in the Hebrew Bible and modern versions, this alphabetic sequence is perfectly observed? And it is to be particularly noticed, that in some of these alphabetical portions, one letter has fallen away, or has been intentionally omitted by the Author. In the division of verses the deficiency has produced no disorder. The next verse begins with the letter following that omitted, so that there is undoubted proof not only of design, but of attention, care, and scrupulous regard to the mind of the Author.

But even in the portions not alphabetic, but which are called poetic, the end of a verse in the Hebrew, and in the English version, always marks the end of a parallelism. And, though these parallelisms sometimes consist of two, three or more members, it is scarcely ever unsuitably divided, but the whole parallelism, and nothing more or less, contained in the verse. So, in the

prose books, the end of the verse marks a logical division. It is impossible to read the wonderful narration of the creation without perceiving this. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," a separate verse. "And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters," a separate verse. So the end of each day's work is the end of a verse. In like manner in the account of the judgment on the Tempter and his victims, the change of speaker is marked by the beginning of a new verse: so in the prophecy of Jacob, Gen. xlix., the numbering of the tribes, Numb. i. 5, &c., the curses recorded, Deut. xxvii. 15—26; in fact, every chapter, if attentively considered, will satisfy even the English reader, that the division into verses manifests care, deep study of the text, a desire to mark the Author's sense, and a deliberate effort to present it intelligibly to the reader.

But there is no need of internal evidence. There is historic testimony to prove that the division into verses existed many hundred years before R. Nathan or his Concordance was thought of. In the first place, with the exception of the synagogue rolls, the verses are marked in all MSS and printed editions.* In the next place, there is undoubted

* That other common story, that Athias first printed the

proof that the verses into which our Hebrew Bibles are divided, were well known in the middle of the second century, and to make it probable that they existed before the time of our Lord. The Mishnah* commands that "He who reads publicly in the Law should not read less than three verses. But, to the interpreter, he should read only one at a time. In the prophets he may read three verses, except when each verse is a paragraph, (as in Isaiah lii. 3—5,) and then he must read one at a time." From these directions Prideaux infers, that the division into verses was introduced, when in the public reading, the custom arose of interpreting the Bible into Chaldee, that the people might understand: *i.e.*, before the time of our Lord; not very long after the return from Babylon, if not in the days of Ezra.† And, from a comparison of this passage in the Mishnah, and another (in the treatise Taanith, iv. 3) directing the mode of reading the first chapter of Genesis, that celebrated scholar, Hüpfeldt, infers, that the verses are the very same that we have now, confirming this conclusion by another passage in the Talmud, Megillah, fol. 21, 2. This latter passage directs the mode of reading the first fifteen verses of Numbers xxviii, from which it

Hebrew Bible, divided into verses, in the year 1661, is also a mere fable, negatived by looking into any older edition.

* Megillah iv. 4.

† Prideaux's Connexion, vol. i., p. 321

appears that the paragraph then contained the same number of verses that it does at present. In another treatise (Kiddushin, fol. 30, 1) the number of verses contained in the Law and other books is given, and is very nearly the same that we have at present.* The common statement about the verses is therefore altogether false, as regards the Old Testament. The verses were not made for a Concordance of the fifteenth century, but existed probably before the time of our Lord; and the division was made to help the people to understand. Thus this argument against our authorized version of course falls to the ground.

The reader, who sees how unfounded is the account of the origin of the verses, will be slow to believe the similar assertion about the chapters. The Old and New Testament, so far as we can judge from manuscripts, Hebrew, Samaritan, Greek, and Latin, or ancient testimony, have always been divided into short and manageable portions; and it matters little, whether we call them chapters or paragraphs. Who the author of the present chapters was, is by no means certain. Some ascribe them to Stephen Langton, who died 1227; † others, as we have seen, to Cardinal Hugo. Buxtorf ‡

* Hüpfeldt, "Ausführliche Hebraische Grammatik," pp. 104—112.

† Davidson, "Biblical Criticism," i., p. 60.

‡ Preface to Hebrew Concordance.

says, that the first who made a Concordance was Antony of Padua, who died 1231—the second, Cardinal Hugo; and he cites Sixtus Senensis as saying, that the work was not done by Hugo alone, but that he set to work 500 studious monks in various monasteries; and that by their joint labour it was accomplished. R. Gedaliah attributes it to Father Arloto, General of the Franciscans in 1290, and says that R. Nathan translated his work. But whoever was the author of the chapters, it is demonstrable, that they were not made hap-hazard for the convenience of reference, but with a view to the sense and the mind of the Author. In the first place, the whole book of Psalms is rightly divided. The chapters in Lamentations fixed by the order of the alphabet, already alluded to, are all right. All the ten chapters of Ezra, the four of Jonah, the first eleven chapters of 2nd of Samuel, the first eleven chapters of Nehemiah—nay, without reckoning the 150 Psalms—two hundred and eighty-four chapters, *i.e.*, more than one-third of all the chapters of the Old Testament are so rightly divided as to the sense in our authorized version, that the Editor of the Paragraph Bible has not altered them. Can this be accounted for by chance? Is it at all probable, that a mere Concordance-maker, cutting up the text at random, to make references to a Concordance, should so happily have hit upon the sense?