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Rev. H. A. Henry Coll.

AN EXPOSÉ,

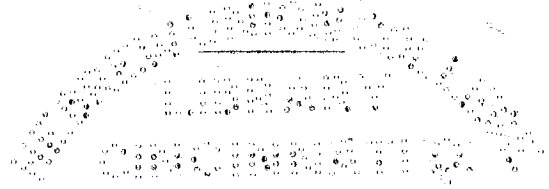
&c.

AN EXPOSÉ  
OF THE MANNER IN WHICH  
THE HEBREW LANGUAGE  
IS GENERALLY TAUGHT IN  
SCOTLAND.

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AN EXPOSÉ,

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It is to be regretted, that in an age like the present, when the knowledge of languages seems absolutely necessary to constitute a liberal education, that the Hebrew Language, "the first and sacred tongue," should not be prosecuted, *in this country*, with the same ardour and zeal that other languages are. Various attempts have been made to account for this. One of these wise conjectures is, "*That the Hebrew is one of the Dead Languages!*" So it is. So are the Latin and Greek. Yet this argument is not used against the latter languages; and for what reason? Because the teachers of those languages have a regular system, whilst the Hebrew teachers *here* (in nine cases out of ten) adhere to their rotten

system ; and what is worse, that, when convinced, they will not adopt the true and only one. This seems rather an extraordinary charge, but it is nevertheless true ; for, until this day, the majority of teachers in this country have been strenuous antipunctuists. And what has been the result ? The language, instead of being cultivated, has been allowed to sink into almost utter obscurity, whilst, in the sister countries and the continent, the language is cultivated with an almost idolatrous enthusiasm ; and a Hebrew scholar *there* is not the "*rara avis*" that he is *here*. The reason is obvious ; for there they adopt the very opposite mode of proceeding ; and, by the simple and beautiful arrangement of the points, the beauties of the language are laid open to the enterprising and persevering student.

I have been often asked the following question. " Why are the clergy in this country (in general) so strongly opposed to the system of the punctuist ?" On every such occasion, after the most mature reflection, I could come to no other conclusion than the following :—"*That either they*

*were conscious of their own inefficiency,*" or, in the words of my esteemed friend and instructor, Mr. Newman (author of many valuable works on Hebrew literature), "*that they wish to keep the knowledge of the Sacred Tongue, like the magic of Egypt, a secret with a few.*" The one or other of these must be. If not so, why is Scotland so far behind other countries in a knowledge of this interesting tongue ? That something is wanting must be apparent to every one. We often see those who are studying this divine language forsake the system of the antipunctuist for that of the punctuist ; yet those who have once studied Hebrew with the points, have never adopted the opposite view. These facts speak for themselves. Some antipunctuists go so far as to say, " that the Hebrew, as taught with the points, is a totally different language from that which was spoken by the Almighty to Moses !" This is another proof of their lamentable ignorance ; and to disprove their statement, I will trace the progress of the language, from the giving of the Law unto the compilation of the points.

Moses received the law from Mount Sinai ; then he delivered it to Joshua ; from Joshua it was given to the Elders ; from the Elders to the Prophets ; and from the Prophets to the men of the Great Synagogue ; and all by word of mouth ; so that the true pronunciation could not be mistaken : hence it is called the “ *Oral Law*.” It was not until the captivity of the people into Babylon, that the language began to be adulterated : the pure Hebrew was then no longer heard, but in its stead a mixture of it and the language of Babylon ; in proof of which we have the words of the prophet Nehemiah (xiii. 24) וּבְנֵיהֶם חָצִי מְדַבֵּר אֲשֶׁר־וּדִית וְאֵינָם מְבִינִים לְדַבֵּר יְהוּדִית “ *And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews’ language,*” &c. It was then that Ezra compiled the points which remain to this day, and which serve to shew every grammatical point connected with the language.

To shew the absolute necessity of the points in the present day, I will illustrate by a few examples. In Hebrew there are many words whose consonants are precisely alike ; and it is by the

vowels, alone, that we are enabled to obtain their true meaning : as—

he returned	שָׁב	between - -	בֵּין	there - - - -	שָׁמָּה
sit thou - - -	שֵׁב	understanding	בִּינָן	a name - - -	שֵׁם
				he placed - -	שָׂם

I could enumerate many more such examples.

Now, can the antipunctuist make the requisite distinction ? No : that remains for the punctuist only. Whilst the antipunctuist must be content with *guessing* at the meaning of any piece of Hebrew which may be laid before him, the punctuist has only to cast his eye on the points, and he is at once impressed with the true meaning of the sentence before him. If the system of the points is (as *THEY* say) so insignificant, why have we the works of such men as Buxtorf, Gesenius, Lyon, M. Josephs, Newman, and a host more, written with the points only ? Now, will any one, after this statement, be so presumptuous as to depreciate the value of the points ? If so, I would thank that person to answer the following question : “ Why were the points at all instituted ? ” By the points, the punctuist has a rule by which he can distinguish gender, number,

and every grammatical point which can occur in the language. *Very unlike* the course which the antipunctuist pursues, who adopts any sound he pleases. Is it thus that this Divine language is to be treated? Is it thus that the language of God is to be moulded, mouthed, and adapted to the inclination of every individual who is satisfied with as much Hebrew as will enable him to pass through the ordeal necessary for a clergyman? Forbid it, Religion! Forbid it, Literature! Yet, notwithstanding all this, there may be those who are so bigoted as still to ridicule the system of the points; but I warn them of their danger: it shall not be done with impunity; it shall not be done whilst there remains one spark of patriotism in the breast of a Jew, who is the sole inheritor of this Divine Language. I belong to a nation peaceable by nature, a nation quiet, inoffensive and unassuming in their deportment; but when their language, which is a portion of their nationality is invaded, they rise up *heart* and *soul* to defend it. It is true we are in "a strange land;" it is true we are degraded and despised; yet, though still suffering under all these calamities, we have still the spirit to defend

our only consolation (which is our language) from the attacks which (in this country *alone*) are levelled at it. In conclusion, I shall be most happy to convince any one whose scruples are not yet satisfied; and should a discussion be deemed necessary, I shall be proud to meet him or them, *where* and *when* it shall be found most convenient.

LEWIS ASHENHEIM.

*Edinburgh, October, 1836.*



