

**INQUIRIES CONCERNING
THE STRUCTURE
OF THE SEMITIC
LANGUAGES, PART II**

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Inquiries Concerning the Structure of the Semitic Languages, Part II by Sir W. Martin

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SIR W. MARTIN

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PART II.

BY
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P R E F A C E .

To this second and concluding Part of these inquiries it appears to be necessary to prefix a few remarks, in order to make more clear the plan and object of the book.

1. In the former Part, the writer began by laying down certain propositions comprising (it is believed) the main principles by which the construction or Syntax of the Hebrew language is regulated, and by citing in support of each proposition a number of examples. Thence the inquiry proceeded through the whole series of the Historical Books, as they stand in the Hebrew Bible, up to and including the Books of Kings. In those Books various passages were noted to which the principles so laid down were applied. It appeared to the writer that the result was to bring out with greater distinctness and force the meaning of the text; and,

further, that no passage was found of which the structure was inconsistent with those principles.

So far, the inquiry was conducted with the advantage, in almost every case, of a clear context. There was little difficulty in verifying or justifying, by aid of that context, the effect which, according to the principles before laid down, was to be assigned to the Verbal Form in each case; so as to determine the proper historical time, past, present, or future, of each fact or event, and also its relation to other facts or events referred to in the narrative.

2. On entering on the Book of *Psalms* the case was changed. There, the narration of facts gives place to an expression of the varying feelings of each Psalmist as he looks before and after; oftentimes shifting his view suddenly, and passing through rapid changes and contrasts of thought and feeling. In this Book, then, was found a sufficient, even a severe, test of the rules laid down. And, those rules being (as is believed) strictly and faithfully applied to the *Psalms*, the rendering so attained is found to furnish a clear and connected sense. This result appears to establish the soundness of the principles themselves; and also to give reason to expect that a similar result will follow upon the

application of the same rules to the remaining poetical Books of Scripture.

If this is indeed within reach, if it is possible to determine the true rendering of the Hebrew Text by a fair and unforced application of grammatical rules, we may hope to be relieved from much that is arbitrary, and much that is conjectural, in the current criticism of the Old Testament.

3. It may be hoped also that some few persons will be moved to investigate for themselves these questions. It may reasonably be believed that the imperfection of our ordinary treatises on the Hebrew Speech was among the causes of the indifference to these studies which has long prevailed in England. The grammatical forms of words were fully explained in those treatises: not so, the forms of thought, and the devices by which the relations of thought to thought are expressed. The student was able to verify the English Version, word by word; but at that point he commonly stopped. Indeed, few persons will persevere in the reading of a book in a strange tongue, if they are unable to go further than that; if, after all, they feel themselves unable to determine, on some trustworthy grounds, the true and precise meaning of the author. It may then be

hoped that the ascertainment and verification of clear and definite rules of Syntax may tend to a renewed interest in studies which, to our great loss, have been so long neglected.

4. In all such investigations as these, of which the result is now before the reader, there is of course much room for error; partly from the intrinsic difficulty of the subject, and partly from the infirmity of the human mind. Men are disposed to love their own thoughts, as their own children; often, very unwisely. All that can be done is to leave the whole matter (as it is now left) to the judgment of competent and candid persons, and to time.

In this second Part, it is shown that the principles, before laid down as to the Forms of the Hebrew Verb, apply also to the Forms of the Arabic Verb. An attempt is also made to exhibit the mode in which the tri-consonantal Verbs (both Hebrew and Arabic) are built up from simple roots.

The object of the fourth Inquiry is to show that certain passages, which have been supposed to form exceptions to one of the main rules of the Hebrew

language, do not really involve any departure from that rule.

The remaining Inquiries relate to matters (less closely connected with the main subject) in respect of which there appears to be reason to doubt the accuracy of renderings, which have found, of late years, a certain degree of acceptance among Hebrew scholars.

In order to compare the several dialects, it has been found necessary to adopt, as far as practicable, one common mode of writing for all; seeing that many scholars, possessing a fair acquaintance with the Hebrew, are not familiar with the characters in which the other dialects are written.

The use of a European alphabet for writing the Semitic tongues has been recently recommended by high authority on more general grounds. At the Congress of Orientalists, held at London in 1874, the President (Dr. S. Birch, of the British Museum) expressed his conviction that, for most Oriental languages, the adoption of some one mode of transliteration would be of the highest importance; and that, not merely as superseding the necessity of an expensive and difficult process