

A
DISSERTATION
CONCERNING THE
ANTIQUITY
OF THE
HEBREW-LANGUAGE,
LETTERS,
VOWEL POINTS,
AND
ACCENTS.

By JOHN GILL, D.D.

Imo vero censeo, nullius mortalis, licet in Hebræis literis docte versati, tantum esse acumen, peritiam, perspicaciam, ut prophetæ nostro (Jesaiæ) longe pluribus locis reddere poterit genuinum suum sensum; nisi *lectio antiqua synagogica* per traditionem in scholis Hebræorum fuisset conservata, ut eam nunc *Masoretharum punctulis* expressam habemus: quorum proinde studium et laborem nemo pro merito deprædicet. Quod enim in hoc viridario deliciari possimus, ipsis debemus, viris perinde doctis et acri judicio præditis.

Vitringa, Præfat. ad Comment. in
Jesaiam, Vol. I. p. 5.

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M. DCC. LXVII.

T H E
P R E F A C E.

THE following Differtation has long lain by me; nor was it written at first with any design to publish it to the world; but was written at leifure-hours for my own amufement, and by way of effay to try how far back the antiquity of the things treated of in it could be carried. And what has prevailed upon me now to let it go into the world, and take its fate in it, are the confidence which fome late writers on the oppofite fide have expreffed, their contempt of others that differ from them, and the air of triumph they have afumed, as if victory was proclaimed on their fide, and the controverfy at

an end, which is far from being the case; and what seeming advantages are obtained, are chiefly owing to the indolence and sloth of men, who read only on one side of the question, and such who write one after another, and take things upon trust, without examining into them themselves, either through want of ability, or through unwillingness to be at any pains about it.

I CONFESS, it has given me offence to observe the *Jews* called by such opprobrious names, as villains, wilful corrupters of the *Hebrew* text, &c. It must be owned indeed, that they are very ignorant of divine things, and therefore the more to be pitied; and many of them are, no doubt, very immoral persons; but have we not such of both sorts among ourselves? yet, as bad as the *Jews* are, the worst among them, I believe, would sooner die, than wilfully corrupt any part of the *Hebrew* Bible. We should not bear
false

witness against our neighbours, let them be as bad as they may in other things. I have never, as yet, seen nor read any thing, that has convinced me that they have wilfully corrupted any one passage in the sacred text^a, no not that celebrated one in *Pf.* xxii. 16. Their copiers indeed may have made mistakes in transcribing, which are common to all writings; and the *Jews* meeting with a various reading, they may have preferred one to another, which made most for their own sentiments; nor is this to be wondered at, nor are they to be blamed for it. It lies upon us to rectify the mistake, and confirm the true reading.

It does not appear, that there ever was any period of time, in which the *Jews* would or could have corrupted the *Hebrew* text; not before the coming of Christ, for then they could have no disposition nor temptation to it; and to

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^a See a good Defence of the *Jews* by F. Simon against Leo Castrius, Morinus and Vossius in his *Disquisit. Critic.* c. ix. and x.

attempt it would have been to have risked the credit of the prophecies in it; nor could they be sure of any advantage by it: and after the coming of Christ, it was not in their power to do it without detection. There were the twelve apostles of Christ, who were with him from the beginning of his ministry, and the seventy disciples preachers of his gospel, besides many thousands of *Jews* in *Jerusalem*, who in a short time believed in him; and can it be supposed that all these were without an *Hebrew Bible*? and particularly that learned man, the apostle *Paul*, brought up at the feet of a learned *Rabbi, Gamaliel*; and who out of those writings convinced so many that Jesus was the Christ, and who speaks of the *Jews* as having the privilege of the oracles of God committed to them *Rom. iii. 1, 2.* nor does he charge them, nor does he give the least intimation of their being chargeable, with the corruption of them; nor does
Christ,

Christ, nor do any of the apostles ever charge them with any thing of this kind. And besides, there were multitudes of the *Jews* in all parts of the world at this time, where the apostles met with them and converted many of them to Christ, who, they and their fathers, had lived in a state of dispersion many years; and can it be thought, they should be without copies of the *Hebrew Bible*, whatever use they may be supposed to have made of the *Greek* version? so that it does not seem credible, that the *Jews* should have it in their power, had they an inclination to it, to corrupt the text without detection. And here I cannot forbear transcribing a passage from *Jerom*^b, who observes, in answer to those who say the *Hebrew* books were corrupted by the *Jews*, what *Origin* said, “ that
 “ Christ and his apostles, who re-
 “ proved the *Jews* for other crimes,
 “ are quite silent about this, the
 a 3 “ great-

^b Comment. in Esaiam, c. 6. fol. 14. G.

“greatest of all.” *Jerom* adds “if
 “they should say, that they were cor-
 “rupted after the coming of the Lord,
 “the Saviour, and the preaching of
 “the apostles; I cannot forbear laugh-
 “ing, that the Saviour, the evange-
 “lists and apostles should so produce
 “testimonies that the *Jews* afterwards
 “should corrupt.” To all which may
 be added, that the *Jews* are a people
 always tenacious of their own writ-
 ings, and of preserving them pure and
 incorrupt: an instance of this we
 have in their *Targums* or paraphrases,
 which they had in their own hands
 hundreds of years, before it appears
 they were known by Christians; in
 which interval, it lay in their power to
 make what alterations in them they
 pleased; and had they been addicted
 to such practices, it is marvellous they
 did not; since they could not but ob-
 serve, there were many things in them,
 that Christians were capable of impro-
 ving against them, should they come
 into

into their hands, as in fact they have done; and yet they never dared to make any alterations in them: and had they done any thing of this kind, it is most reasonable to believe, they would have altered the passages relating to the Messiah; and yet those, and which are many, stand full against them. Indeed, according to *Origen*^c, as some think, the *Targums* were known very early, and improved against the *Jews* in favour of Jesus being the true Messiah, agreeable to the sense of the prophets; since he makes mention of a dispute between *Jason*, an *Hebrew-Christian*, supposed to be the same as in *Acts* xvii. 5. and *Papiscus*, a *Jew*; in which, he says, the Christian shewed from *Jewish* writings, that the prophecies concerning Christ agreed with Jesus; and what else, says Dr. *Allix*^d, could he mean by *Jewish* writings, but the *Targums*?

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though

^c Contra Celsum, l. 4. p. 199.
the ancient Jewish Church, &c. p. 376.

^d Judgment of

though it is possible the writings of the Old Testameant may be meant, by which the apostle *Paul* also proved that *Jesus* was the *Christ*. However, if the *Targums* are meant, they do not afterwards appear to have been known by christian writers for some hundreds of years.

IT may be said, perhaps, that the *Jews* are self-condemned, and that it may be proved out of their own mouths and writings, that they have in some places wilfully corrupted the *Hebrew* text; as the *thirteen* places they own they changed, on the account of *Ptolemy* king of *Egypt*; and also what they call *Tikkun Sopberim*, the ordination of the scribes, and *Ittur Sopberim*, the ablation of the scribes: as to the first of these, it is true, that they say^e, when *Ptolemy* king of *Egypt* desired to have their law, and seventy men sent to translate it, that
they

^e T. Hieros. Megillah, fol. 71. 4. T. Bab. Megillah, fol. 9. 1. Mafsechet Sopberim, c. 1. f. 8. fol. 8. 1.

they made alterations in the copy they sent ; but then it should be observed, that they do not say they made any alteration in their own copies, only in that they sent to him ; and which appears also to be a mere fable of the *Talmudists*, and that in fact no such alterations were made : but the story was invented, partly to bring into disgrace the *Greek* version of the *Seventy*, as if it was made after a corrupt copy ; and partly to make the minds of their own people easy, who disapproved of that work, and kept a fast on occasion of it^f. My reason for this is, because the *Greek* version does not correspond with the pretended alterations. There are but two places out of the thirteen, which agree with them ; the one is in *Gen. ii. 2.* which the *Seventy* translate, *and on the sixth day God ended his work* ; the other is in *Numb. xvi. 15.* which they render *I have not taken the desire of any one of them*, instead of *one*
as

^f Schulchan Aruch, par. i. c. 580. f. 3.

afs from them ; neither of which seem to arife from a bad copy before them, but from fome other caufe. The firft of them is not peculiar to the *Septuagint*, it is the fame in the *Samaritan Pentateuch* ; and the latter plainly arifes from the fimilarity of the letters *Daletb* and *Refb*. There is a third, *Exod.* xii. 40. in which there is fome agreement, but not exact. Befides, neither *Philo* the *Jew*, nor *Josepbus*, though they wrote very particularly of this affair of *Ptolemy*, yet make not the leaft mention of thefe alterations, in the copy fent to him, nor in the tranflation of it. They obferve, there never was any change made in the facred writings, from the time of the writing of them to the age in which they lived. *Philo* fays*, the *Jews*,
 “ for the fpace of more than two
 “ thoufand years, never changed one
 “ word of what was written by *Mofes*,
 “ but would rather die a thoufand
 “ times,

* Apud Euseb. Præpar. Evangel. l. 8. c. 6. p. 357.

“ times, than receive any thing con-
 “ trary to his laws and customs.”
Josephus ^h observes, “ it is plain, in
 “ fact, what credit we give to our
 “ writings, for that so long a space of
 “ time has run out, yet no one ever
 “ dared, neither to add, nor to take
 “ away, nor to change any thing.”
 And *Walton* ⁱ himself, I observe, reck-
 ons this story about the alterations for
 the sake of King *Ptolemy*, to be a
Rabbinical fable; and, as such, *Je-*
rom ^k had got a hint of it from one of
 his *Rabbins*.

THE *Tikkun Sopherim*, or ordination
 of the scribes, is supposed to be the
 order of *Ezra*, as it is said in the *Ma-*
sorah on *Exod.* xxxiv. 11. and on
Numb. xii. 12. and of his colleagues;
 though some think ^l it is no other than
 the order or instruction of the inspired
 writers themselves. It respects eigh-
 teen passages in the Bible, so expres-
 fed,

^h *Contra Apion*, l. 1. c. 8. ⁱ *Prolegom. Polyglott.* 9.
 f. 16. ^k *Præfat. ad Quæst. Heb. Tom. 3. fol. 65. c.*
^l *Ruxtorf. Epist. Glassio in Philolog. Sacr. p. 40.*

fed, as that some smatterers in knowledge might gather from the context, that something else is intended than what is written; and so suspect a corruption in the text, and take upon them to alter it. Now this ordination of the scribes, as it is called, is so far from implying a corruption itself, and from encouraging an attempt to make an alteration in the text, that it is just the reverse; it is an ordination that the text should be read no otherwise than it is; and would have it remarked, that the words so read, and which are the words of the inspired writer, contain an *Euphemy* in them, what is decent and becoming the majesty of God; when, if they were read, as the context might be thought to require they should be read, they would express what is derogatory to the glory of the Divine Being. Thus, in the first of the places, this ordination respects, *Gen. xviii. 22. Abraham stood yet before the Lord; it*
might

might seem to come from the context, that the Lord descended to stand before *Abraham*; but as this might be thought derogatory to the glory of God, the inspired writer chose to express it as he has done,; and the design of what is called the ordination of the scribes, is to establish it, and to admonish that none should dare to alter it^m; and so it was to prevent an alteration, and not to make one; they made no change at all, far be it from them, as *Elias Levita* saysⁿ. As for the *Ittur Sopherim*, or ablation of the scribes, that is only the removal of a superfluous *Vau* in five places^o; not that it was in the text, and removed from it by them, but what the common people pronounced in reading, as if it was there; which reading the scribes forbid, to secure and preserve the integrity of the text; and which

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^m Halichot Olam, p. 47, 48. Præfat. Ben Chayim ad Bibl. Heb. Buxtorf. fol. 2. Buxtorf. Talmud. Lexic. Col. 2631. ⁿ In Tifbi, p. 270. ^o Baal Aruch, in voce װײ Præfat. Ben Chayim ut supra. Buxtorf. ut supra. Col. 1597, 1598.

prohibition of it to the common people, is called a taking it away; though in reality it never was in the text, only pronounced by the vulgar.

THERE is a passage in the *Talmud*^p, produced by some^q, as a proof that the *Jews* studiously corrupted the scriptures, and allowed of it, when an end was to be answered by it; which is this, “it is better that one letter be
 “rooted out of the law, than that the
 “name of God should be prophaned
 “openly;” but their sense is not that any letter should be taken, or that it was lawful to take any letter out of any word in the law, to alter the sense of it, in order to serve that, or any other purpose; but that a lesser command should give way to a greater: as for instance, that the law concerning not putting children to death for the sins of their parents, and of not suffering bodies hanged on a tree to remain

^p T. Bab. Yevamot, fol. 79. 1.
 de Sincer. Heb. 1, 1. Exercitat. 1. c. 2.

^q Vid. Morin.

remain so in the night, should give way to a greater command concerning sanctifying the name of God publicly ; as in the case of *Saul's* sons being given to the *Gibeonites* to be put to death, and whose bodies continued hanging a considerable time, which is the case under consideration in the *Talmudic* passage referred to ; and the sense is, that it was better that the law in *Deut.* xxiv. 16. should be violated, rather than the name of God should be prophaned ; which would have been the case, if the sons of *Saul* had not been given up to the *Gibeonites* to be put to death for their father's sins, because of the oath of *Joshua* and the princes of *Israel* to them. The falsifications charged upon the *Jews* by *Justin* and *Origen* respect not the *Hebrew* text, but the *Septuagint* version ; and even, with respect to that, *Trypho*, the *Jew*, rejects the charge brought by *Justin* as incredible ; whether,

ther, says he^r, they have detracted from the scripture, God knows; it seems incredible.

It has been very confidently affirmed, that there is no mention made of the *Hebrew* vowel-points and accents, neither in the *Misnab* nor in the *Talmud*: and this is said by some learned men, who, one would think, were capable of looking into those writings themselves, and not take things upon trust, and write after other authors, without seeing with their own eyes, and examining for themselves, whether these things be so or no; in this they are very culpable, and their mistakes are quite inexcusable. But to hear some men prate about the *Talmud*, a book, perhaps, which they never saw; and about the *Masorah* and *Masoretic* notes, one of which, as short as they be, they could never read, is quite intolerable. These men are like such the apostle speaks of, on
another

^r Justin. Dialog. cum Tryphone, p. 297. 299.

another account, who *understand, neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.* What is this *Masorab*? who are these *Masorettes*? and what have they done, that such an outrageous clamour is raised against them? to me, they seem to be an innocent sort of men; who, if they have done no good, have done no hurt. Did they invent the vowel-points, and add them to the text, against which there is so much wrath and fury vented? to assert this is the height of folly^t; for if they were the authors of the points, the inventors of the art of pointing, and reduced it to certain rules agreeable to the nature of the language, and were expert in that art, as, no doubt, they were, why did not they point the Bible regularly, and according to the art of pointing at once? why did they

b leave

* Plane divina res est Hebræorum Critica, quam ipsi Massoram vocant. If. Casaubon. Epist. ep. 390. Porthæsiø, p. 467. † Punctationem Hebraicam non esse Massora, neque dici, norunt qui nondum ære lavantur. Owen. Theologoumen. par. 4. Digress. 1. p. 293.

leave so many anomalies or irregular punctuations? and if, upon a survey of their work, they observed the irregularities they had committed, why did not they mend their work, by casting out the irregular points and putting regular ones in the text itself, and not point to them in the margin? or there direct to the true reading? is it usual for authors to animadvert on their own work in such a manner? if they make mistakes in their work at first, is it usual in an after edition, and following editions, to continue such mistakes in the body of the work, and put the corrections of them in the margin? The *Masorettes*, had they been the inventors of the vowel-points, would never have put them to a word in the text, to which they were not proper, but what better agree with a word placed by them in the margin; had they invented them, they would have put proper ones to the word in the text;
or