

CHAPTER IV.

THE INCOMMUNICABLE NAME.

As it might appear premature, at the outset of this chapter, to spell out that Divine Name which some regard as not only incommunicable but unpronounceable, it will be considerate to begin the present investigations by the aid of circumlocution and abbreviation, especially as no inconvenience will be occasioned thereby. The *Tetragrammaton*, or name of four letters (in allusion to the four letters Y H W H), is a technical term frequently employed by scholars, and will here, for a little, serve a useful purpose. Besides employing this term, we can reverently speak of "The Name," or can set down the first letter only, "Y," in the same way as critics are wont to use the Hebrew letter *yod* as the initial of the Divine Name intended. This understood, we can intelligibly proceed. Our very first sub-division will indicate the serious turn which this inquiry necessarily takes.

I.—THE NAME SUPPRESSED.

A. *The Fact.*

It is willingly admitted that the suppression has not been absolute ; at least so far as Hebrew and English are concerned. The Name, in its four essential letters, was reverently transcribed by the Hebrew copyist, and therefore was necessarily placed before the eye of the Hebrew reader. The latter, however, was instructed *not to pronounce it*, but to utter instead a less sacred name—ADONAY or ELOHIM. In this way The Name was not suffered to reach the ear of the listener. To that degree it was suppressed. The Septuagint, or ancient Greek version, made the concealment complete by regularly substituting *Kurios*; as the Vulgate, in like manner, employed *Dominus*; both *Kurios* and *Dominus* having at the same time their own proper service to render as correctly answering to the Hebrew *Adonay*, confessedly meaning "Lord." The English versions do nearly the same thing, in rendering The Name as LORD, and occasionally GOD; these terms also having their own rightful office to fill as fitly representing the Hebrew titles *Adonay* and *Elohim* and *El*. So that the *Tetragrammaton* is nearly hidden in our public English versions. Not quite. To those who can note the difference between "LORD" and "Lord" and between "GOD" and "God," and can remember that the former (printed with SMALL CAPITALS) *do* while the latter *do not* stand for The Name—to such an intimation of the difference is conveyed. But although the READER who looks carefully at his book can *see* the distinction, yet the mere HEARER remains completely in the dark respecting it, inasmuch as there is no difference whatever in sound between "LORD" and "Lord" or "GOD" and "God." It hence follows that in nearly all the occurrences of The Name (some 7,000 throughout the Old Testament) the especial Name of God is absolutely withheld from all who simply hear the Bible read. "Nearly all," for there are about half a dozen instances in the A.V., and a few more in the R.V., in which this concealment does not take place. In other words there are these very few places in which the *Tetragrammaton* appears as "Jehovah"; and although it may be asked, "What are they among so many?" still their presence has an argumentative value.

If it was wrong to unveil the *Tetragrammaton* at all, then why do it in these instances? If, on the other hand, it was right to let it be seen in these cases, then why not in all? With the exceptions explained, however, it remains true to say, that in our public versions the one especial Name of God is suppressed, wholly concealed from the listening ear, almost as completely hidden from the hastening or uncritical eye.

B. The Immediate Consequences of the Suppression.

These are—

(i.) Partly *literary*, though more than that. Reference is here made to the confusion into which many things are thrown through this abnormal state of things. “Baal” is “lord” and so is “Adon” (Adonay)—that is unfortunate; but why add to the embarrassment by rendering Y H W H (and Y H, the shorter form) also as “Lord”? Worst of all is the confusion when “Y” and Adonay occur together, as they do many times in the Book of Ezekiel. Inasmuch as to say, “Lord LORD” for “Adonay Y,” was too grotesque and misleading (positively false to the ear), the new device had to be resorted to of rendering this combination by “Lord GOD”—“GOD” in this case, and not “Lord” at all, standing for The Name. Even Y H (the shorter form) and Y H W H (the full form) of the *Tetragrammaton*, coming together,^a caused a dilemma; though in these instances, the acuteness of the trouble compelled the adoption of a partial remedy, and “the LORD JEHOVAH” is the result. “Confusion,” then, is a term not a whit too strong to apply to these varying devices. No wonder that even intelligent and educated people are continually forgetting what they have heard or read concerning so involved a matter.

(ii.) Partly *practical*. Is it too much to assume that The Name has about it something very grand or very gracious, or at least something very mysterious? Whichever conclusion is received, the question arises whether there is not something essentially presumptuous, however little intended, in substituting for it one of the commonest of titles, seeing that there are on earth “lords many,” and the master of the humblest slave is his “lord”? There is surely nothing very grand or gracious or mysterious in that! It is therefore the most natural presumption that the suppression of The Name has entailed on the reader, and especially upon the hearer, irreparable loss.

C. The Reason for the Suppression.

The motive was good—let that be assumed. It was to safeguard the Divine Majesty in the minds of men. It was to prevent the inconsiderate mention of Him before whom seraphs veil their faces—though even so it is very difficult to see how one name should occasion irreverence and another not. Why not, then, leave Him altogether unnamed? Why not fear to allude to Him by any title that could definitely refer to Him? The passages commonly cited as furnishing good reason for the suppression surely cannot mean what is thus attributed to them, since there is a wide distinction between not taking His Name in vain, and not taking His Name into our lips at all, even for prayer or praise. In a word, the motive is respected; but the reverence is regarded as misapplied—the reason given is seen to be invalid.

^a As in Is. xii. 2; and xxvi. 4.

II.—THE NAME RESTORED.

A. Why?

1. Because its suppression was a mistake. So grave a mistake cannot be corrected too soon. An unwarrantable liberty has been taken; the path of humility is to retrace our steps.

2. Because thereby serious evil may be averted. Men are saying to-day that "Y" was a mere tribal name, and are suggesting that "Y" Himself was but a local deity. As against this, only let The Name be boldly and uniformly printed, and the humblest Sunday School teacher will be able to show the groundlessness of the assertion.

3. Because solid advantage may be counted upon as certain to follow the restoration. Even if the meaning of The Name should not disclose itself, the word itself would gradually gather about it the fitting associations—and that would be a gain; and godly readers would be put on quest—and that would be a further gain; and if the true significance of the *Tetragrammaton* should be brought to light, there would be a trained constituency to whom appeal could be made—and that would be a yet greater gain.

A PLAUSIBLE OBJECTION ANSWERED.—A plausible argument in favour of leaving The Name veiled, as it is now, may be based upon its concealment by the Septuagint. The plea takes the following form. The Septuagint conceals the *Tetragrammaton* under the common title *Kurios*, "Lord." Jesus used that version as it stood, notably in citing Psalm cx. 1.^a Therefore what was good enough for Him should be good enough for us. *Answer First*: Jesus Christ was not a scribe or literary critic: His mission was much higher. *Answer Second*: Jesus had to plead his Messiahship at the bar of the Scriptures as then current; and any criticism by Him of the nation's Sacred Documents might have placed a needless obstacle in the people's path. We thus conclude that the objection may and should be set aside as inconclusive, and so fall back on the reasons given why the Divine Name should be suffered uniformly to appear.

B. In What Form?

1. Why not in the form "*Jehovah*"? Is that not euphonious? It is, without question. Is it not widely used? It is, and may still be freely employed to assist through a period of transition. But is it not hallowed and endeared by many a beautiful hymn and many a pious memory? Without doubt; and therefore it is with reluctance that it is here declined. But why is it not accepted? There it is—familiar, acceptable, ready for adoption. The reason is, that it is too heavily burdened with merited critical condemnation—as modern, as a compromise, as a "mongrel" word, "hybrid," "fantastic," "monstrous." The facts have only to be known to justify this verdict, and to vindicate the propriety of not employing it in a new and independent translation. What are the facts? And first as to age. "The pronunciation *Jehovah* was unknown until 1520, when it was introduced by Galatinus; but was contested by Le Mercier, J. Drusius, and L. Capellus, as against grammatical and historical propriety."^b Next, as to formation. "Erroneously written and pronounced *Jehovah*,

^a See Mat. xxii. 41–45.

^b "Oxford Gesenius," p. 218.

which is merely a combination of the sacred *Tetragrammaton* and the vowels in the Hebrew word for Lord, substituted by the Jews for JHVH, because they shrank from pronouncing The Name, owing to an old misconception of the two passages, Ex. xx. 7 and Lev. xxiv. 16. . . . To give the name JHVH the vowels of the word for Lord (Heb. Adonai) and pronounce it *Jehovah*, is about as hybrid a combination as it would be to spell the name *Germany* with the vowels in the name *Portugal*—viz., *Gormuna*. The monstrous combination *Jehovah* is not older than about 1520 A.D.”^a From this we may gather that the Jewish scribes are not responsible for the “hybrid” combination. They intentionally wrote alien vowels—not for combination with the sacred consonants, but for the purpose of cautioning the Jewish reader to enunciate a totally different word, viz., some other familiar name of the Most High.

2. The form “*Yahweh*” is here adopted as practically the best. The only competing form would be “*Yehweh*,” differing, it will be observed, only in a single vowel—“e” for “a” in the first syllable. But even this difference vanishes on examination. It is true that “*Yehweh*” is intended to suggest the derivation of the noun from the simple (*Kal*) conjugation of the verb, and that some scholars take “*Yahweh*” as indicating a formation from the causative (*Hiphil*) conjugation; but, since other scholars (presumably because of the aspirate *h*) regard “*Yahweh*” itself as consistent with a *Kal* formation, thereby leaving us free to accept the spelling “*Yahweh*” without prejudging the question of the precise line of derivation from the admitted root *háyáh*, we may very well accept the spelling now widely preferred by scholars, and write the name—“*Yahweh*.”

3. The exact *pronunciation* claims a word to itself. “The true pronunciation seems to have been *Yahwè* (or *Iahway*, the initial I=y, as in *Iachimo*). The final *e* should be pronounced like the French *ê*, or the English *e* in *there*, and the first *h* sounded as an aspirate. The accent should be on the final syllable.”^a This statement gives rise to a question of rhythm, which is sure sooner or later to make itself felt. We are so used to the three syllables of the form “*Jehovah*,” with its delightfully varied vowels, that we shrink back dismayed in anticipation of the disturbing effect on our Psalmody of the substitution of *Yahweh*’ for *Jehóvah*. Our apprehensions may be dismissed. The readjustment is mainly the business of our hymn-writers; and if it should prove literally true, that “new mercies” shall “new songs” demand, which shall enshrine a new accent in a new rhythm, then we may rest assured that sanctified genius and enthusiasm will prove equal to the occasion. The Translator of THE EMPHASISED BIBLE has in his own humble province recast a good many lines in his rendering of “The Psalms” in consideration of the modified rhythm now required. As for the rest, it may with confidence be counted upon that increasing familiarisation and the silent growth of hallowed memories will ultimately render thrice welcome what was at first so strange.

III.—THE NAME EXPLAINED.

1. It certainly appears to be explained in Exodus iii. 14. It does not follow that the statements there made are rightly understood; nor can any compelling reason be assigned why a translator should be ready to expound everything which he has to

^a Professor Paul Haupt, General Editor of “The Polychrome Bible,” in the Book of Psalms, pp. 163, 164.

represent in English. Nevertheless, the correct rendering of the above passage is so connected with the meaning of The Name, that, were it not for special reasons, the attempt now to be made might not have provoked the charge of presumption. As it is, the reproach of rashness cannot easily be escaped.

2. Confessedly it is very discouraging to find the editor of the Polychrome Bible declaring bluntly: "The meaning of JHVH is uncertain."^a That it is uncertain would appear to be the natural conclusion deducible from the varieties of meaning summed up in the Oxford Gesenius under the name "Yahweh."^b

3. As against this discouragement it may be considered whether the Old Testament does not strongly embolden us to hope that greater success and greater unanimity may yet be attained. Is not a hidden name almost a contradiction in terms? Does not "name" in the Bible very widely imply revelation? *Men's* names are throughout the Scriptures fraught with significance, enshrining historical incidents, biographical reminiscences, and so forth; and why should the Name of the Ever-Blessed be an exception to this rule? Does not the Almighty Himself employ this Name of His as though it had in it some self-evident force and fitness to reveal His nature and unfold His ways? His Name is continually adduced by Himself as His reason for what He does and what He commands: "For I am Yahweh." Israel and the nations are placed under discipline, says the Divine Speaker, "that they may know that I am Yahweh." Is it not probable, then, that His Name was intended to be understood? Thus encouraged, we proceed; only requesting that the exposition which follows may be regarded as—

4. An Individual Opinion respectfully submitted.

- (a) The conclusion formed may be thus expressed: The Name itself signifies, "He who becometh"; and the formula^c by which that significance is sustained and which is rendered in the Authorised Version "I am that I am," expresses the sense, "I will become whatsoever I please"; or, as more exactly indicating the idiom involved, "I will become whatsoever I may become." We amplify the "may," and more freely suggest the natural latitude which the idiom claims, by saying: "Whatsoever I will, may, or can become."
- (b) The reasons for this conclusion are two: FIRST, that it gives the simplest, most obvious, most direct force to the derivation of The Name itself, as generally admitted. *Yahweh* is almost always regarded as the third person, singular, masculine, imperfect tense, from the root *hawah*, an old form of the root *hayah*. The one meaning of *hawah* is "become."^d So that the force of *yahweh* thus derived, as a verb, would be "He will become"; or, as expressive of use and wont, "He becometh." Then, passing into use as a noun, it is—"He who becometh," "The Becoming One." That is precisely how any other Hebrew name would be formed and would yield up its inherent significance. Thus viewed, its human-like simplicity would be its great recommendation. If the Eternal would speak to man so as to be understood, we seem compelled to expect that He will speak after the manner of men. And if after the

^a P.B., Psalms, p. 164. For an encouraging contrast, see the explanation offered by Dr. A. B. Davidson, quoted, *post*, in the Note on Exo. iii. 14.

^b O.G., 218.

^c Exo. iii. 14.

^d O.G., 217.

manner of men He pleases to take and bear a Name, it would seem the very perfection of condescension that His Name should be formed after the manner of men's names. SECOND, the sense of the formula given above is very simply and idiomatically obtained. The formula itself is *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*, in which it should be noted that the verb *'ehyeh*, "I will become," runs forward into a reduplication of itself; for it is that which constitutes the idiom. As a mere repetition, the assertion would be unmeaning. To escape this we must resort to mystery or imagination or—idiom. How if the mystery itself is imaginary; and where is imagination to end? how is it to be reduced to any trusty significance? Would it not be more humble and childlike to be prepared to find that the All-wise and All-loving is simply addressing us in an idiom of our own? We have many such idiomatic formulæ even in English: "I will speak what I will speak," and the like. *Only*, after the manner of our tongue, we avoid the semblance of meaningless repetition by emphasising the auxiliary verb: "I will speak what I *will* speak"—my mind is made up; or "I will speak what I *can, may, must* speak"—according to need and opportunity. Now, in Hebrew, the future (imperfect, or incipient) tense (the one used here) is freely employed to express *mood*; in other words, to convey those nicer shades of thought which in English are conveyed by such helping words as "will," "can," "may," "could," "would," "might," "must." The only question is whether we can assure ourselves that we are not acting fancifully in resorting to that principle of interpretation in the important statement before us. Have we any examples of such an idiom finding place where, as in Exo. iii. 14, a word is folded back upon itself? As a matter of fact, we have in the Old Testament at least three examples in which the recognition of this simple idiom brings out an excellent sense, and in which the Authorised Version leads the way (followed by the Revised) in so expressing the sense.

EXAMPLE I.—1 Samuel xxiii. 13, A.V. and R.V.: "And they went whithersoever they could go." Heb.: "*wayyithhall'ku ba'asher yithhallaku*." Freely: "And they wandered wheresoever they could, would, or might wander." The repetition is there, and the idiom, and the clear sense of it.

EXAMPLE II.—2 Samuel xv. 20, A.V. and R.V.: "Seeing I go whither I may." Heb.: "*wa'ani hólélk 'al 'asher 'ani hólélk*." Lit.: "And (or seeing) I am going whither I am going." Again the repetition, again the idiom, again the fit sense thereby conveyed.

EXAMPLE III.—2 Kings viii. 1, A.V. and R.V.: "And sojourn wheresoever thou canst sojourn." Heb.: "*w'guri ba'asher thaguri*." In the first passage the auxiliary is "could"; in the second, "may"; in the third, "canst." Idiom is recognised in all, and through it the meaning is seized and well expressed.

We thus gain all needful countenance for the idiomatic explication of Exo. iii. 14:

I will become whatsoever I will—may—can—become.

The only difficulty is to suggest the suitable latitude, without multiplying words and without violating any known characteristic of the Speaker. Perhaps the best word on

this momentous occasion is: "what I please," since we know that the Divine resources are infinite, and that God will please to become to His people only what is wisest and best. Thus viewed, the formula becomes a most gracious promise; the Divine capacity of adaptation to any circumstances, any difficulties, any necessities that may arise, becomes a veritable bank of faith to such as love God and keep His commandments. The formula is a promise, the promise is concentrated in a Name. The Name is at once a revelation, a memorial, a pledge. To this Name, God will ever be faithful; of it He will never be ashamed; by it He may ever be truthfully proclaimed and gratefully praised.

||This|| is my name to times age-abiding,
And ||this|| my memorial to generation after generation.^a

Praise ye Yah,
For good' is Yahweh,
Sing praises to his name,
For it is sweet.^b

Praise Yahweh, all ye nations,
Laud him, all ye tribes of men;
For his lovingkindness hath prevailed over us,
And the faithfulness of Yahweh is to times age-abiding.
Praise ye Yah.^c

5. Whether the foregoing explanation is ever likely to be generally accepted or not, one thing appears to be more and more certain the more the evidence is considered, that the name Yahweh has some inherent meaning of great force and graciousness; at the very least a significance of sufficient peculiarity to make it more fitting to be employed on some occasions than on others. This conclusion, which on its own merits will scarcely be denied, invests the matter with a literary interest which it will be fair not to forget. It may deliver the most open-minded critic from a too ready resort to documentary hypotheses to account for the presence or absence of The Name in or from some verses, sections, and books. The use of previous documents may go some way to account for the appearance and disappearance of that Name; but internal fitness to be avoided or employed may be an equally feasible explanation. Leaving aside the interesting question whether the sudden appearance of the name Yahweh in combination with Elohim in Genesis ii. may not owe its presence to the tenour of the new section which commences at verse 4, in view of Man's coming upon the scene, there are some examples of the presence and absence of The Name to which any documentary hypothesis would appear to be altogether alien. For instance, is it not indicative of what we may call changed moral atmosphere that the prologue of the Book of Job (chapters i. and ii.) and the epilogue (chapters xxxviii.—xlii.) should be replete with the especially gracious proper name "Y," whereas throughout the whole of the doubting, questioning, arguing portion of the Book The Name should occur only once, chapter xii. 9, and then with uncertain attestation? It appears to be equally indicative of a most delicate sense of fitness, that, whereas The Name is employed on an average nearly once in each of the eight-versed sections of Psalm cxix.—a Psalm pervaded by the atmosphere of sustained communion with Yahweh—the one exception, in which a less sacred divine name is used is the single instance in which the Psalmist's

^a Exo. iii. 15.

Ps. cxxxv. 3.

^c Ps. cxvii. Cp. Jer. xxxii. 27.

mind comes into contact with the colder air of disloyalty to the Gracious Being whom he himself delighted to worship :—

“ Depart from me, ye evil-doers,—
That I may observe the commandments of my God.”^a

It is with a feeling of lively satisfaction that the materials for judgment concerning all such peculiarities of sacred usage are now clearly set forth in the pages of THE EMPHASISED BIBLE.

^a Ps. cxix. 115.

TABLE I.
TRANSLITERATION OF HEBREW CHARACTERS INTO ENGLISH.

No.	Name.	Form.	Sign.	Form.	Sign.		No.	Name.	Form.	Sign.	Form.	Sign.	
1	aleph	א	,	...	...		13	mem	מ	m	final ם	m	
2	beth	ב	b	soft ב	bh, v		14	nun	נ	n	final ן	n	
3	gimel	ג	g	soft ג	gh		15	samech	ס	s	...	...
4	daleth	ד	d	soft ד	dh	like <i>th</i> in “ <i>then</i> ”	16	ayin	ע	‘	...	...
5	he	ה	h	...	...		17	pe	פ	p	soft פ	ph	
6	waw	ו	w	...	u	when a vowel	18	zadhe	צ	z	...	...
7	zayin	ז	z	...	...		19	koph	כ	k	...	...
8	heth	ח	h	...	...		20	resh	ר	r	...	...
9	têt	ט	t	...	...		21	sin or shin	ש	s	...	...
10	yodh	י	y	...	i	when a vowel	22	tau	ת	t	soft ת	th	as <i>th</i> in “ <i>thin</i> ”
11	kaph	כ	k	soft כ	kh								
12	lamed	ל	l	...	...						

The above Table may be put to an interesting special use. It will enable the merely English reader to trace the similarity of certain Hebrew letters, as the well-known cause of errors of transcription. For example, he can perceive how minute is the difference in form between *daleth* and *resh*, and so how easily “silenced” might creep in where “uplifted” should have stood, or *vice versa*, in Psalm cxxxix. 2 (see note there); and similarly how readily *ken* should have ousted *ben* in Prov. xi. 19.

N.B.—The vowel *ê* may be pronounced as *a* in *father*; and *ê* as *e* in *there*.