The New England Puritans and the Name of God

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W<small>HEN</small> John Cotton wrote his *Singing of Psalmes A Gospel-Ordinance* (London, 1647), he noted an objection that certain liberties had been taken with the text of the psalms by earlier translators. 'The Meeter of the late Translators, though it come nearer to the Originall, then the former Meeters, yet not so neare as the Prose. They frame their words and sentences more to the Meeter, then the Prose. Yea they sometimes break the Attributes of God, and for the verse sake put *Jah* for *Jehovah*: which is a mangling of the word' (p. 60). Writing in anticipation of and perhaps smoothing the way for the Dunster and Lyon revision of the Bay Psalm Book, Cotton answers the specific example of 'mangling' with the observation that 'it is very rare when the Translators doe make any such change of *Jah* for *Jehovah*: and to prevent all stumbling, either of your selfe, or others at it, I suppose they will helpe it in the next edition of the Psalmes' (p. 61). Certainly he understates the case with regard to the Bay Psalm Book of 1640 which uses *Jah* only once in the entire text of the psalms. That is in psalm 68, verse 4:

> Sing to God, to his name sing prayse,
> extoll him that doth ride
> on skies, by his name IAH, before
> his face joyfull abide.

The objection to the use of *Jah* might better have been levelled at an earlier translator of the psalms, Henry Ainsworth, whose *The Booke of Psalmes: Englished both in Prose and Metre* was published in Amsterdam in 1612 and was brought to the new world by the Pilgrims who continued to use it in their worship until 1692, when Plymouth Colony merged with the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Concerning his translation of the name of God, Ainsworth says, '*Iehovah* (or *Iehovih*,) I keep in the prose alwayes, as I find it written … but in the verse, I am forced sometime to contract it into *Iah* (which is also the scripture name, Psal. 68,5.) sometime I turn it *LORD*, as the new Testament expresseth it: and somtime I₁ add the word *eternal*, as the French Version turneth it, and the Hebrue *Iehovah* implieth' (Sig. **2).

The contraction of Iehovah into Iah was not without scriptural warrant. The forms in question are יְהֹוָה (Yahweh) and a shortened form יָהּ (Yah) found principally in post-exilic scripture. *Iehovah* is the former word as it is incorrectly transliterated from the Masoretic text where it is pointed with the vowels of אֲדֹנָי (Adonai) as a direction to substitute *Adonai* for the inexpressible name יְהֹוָה . Whenever *Iah* and *Iehovah* appear in Ainsworth's prose version of the psalms, presumably they correspond to similar Hebrew forms in the text from which he is working. In the metrical version, however, he freely substitutes *Iah* for *Iehovah* when the meter demands it. In no case, however, does he expand *Iah* in the prose to *Iehovah* in the meter.

In all *Iah* occurs 115 times in Ainsworth's metrical psalter. In twenty-two of these instances the prose version likewise has the shorter form. In the other ninety-three occurrences the prose has either *Iehovah* or *Iehovih*. In the twenty-two instances where Ainsworth has *Iah* in both prose and meter, the *Bay Psalm Book* has *Lord* fifteen times, *God* twice, *Iehovah* twice, and *Iah* once. In the two remaining cases it has

Hallelujah corresponding to Ainsworth's prose *Halelu-Iah* and his metrical *Praise Iah or Praise th' eternal Iah.*

In those ninety-three cases where metrical demands cause Ainsworth to contract *Iehovah* to *Iah,* the translators of the *Bay Psalm Book* have other solutions. In thirty instances they are able to incorporate *Iehovah* into the meter. Where a monosyllable is required, *God* is employed seventeen times, *Lord* forty-four times. In one instance, psalm 104, verse 33, which in the Ainsworth psalter contains *Iah,* the verse is omitted entirely. In one other instance the problem is avoided by paraphrasing out the form *Iah.*

This latter instance is useful in illustrating the force of *Iah* or *Iehovah* as Ainsworth perceived it and in suggesting that although he and the translators of the Bay Psalms were working from a similar theory of translation, viz., that the translation be as literal as possible while retaining the force-fulness of the original, yet the Bay translators were, in fact, less precise than Ainsworth in their translation of the name of *Iehovah.* In this particular instance, psalm 48, verse 8, Ainsworth's prose reads, 'In the citie of Iehovah of hosts, the citie of our God.' However, in his metrical translation he expands this to

> in citie of our God,
> in citie of *the God* of hosts
> the everbeing-Iah . . .

'Iehovah of hosts' becomes *'the God* of hosts,' but in order to retain some of the force of *Iehovah,* Ainsworth adds an appositive, 'the everbeing-Iah.' The form הַ יֹּה is very likely a derivative of the verb הָיַה meaning *to be* or *to exist.* Ainsworth, in his annotations to psalm 68, verse 4, observes: '*Iah,* is the proper name of God in respect of *being* or *existence* . . . . It is the same in effect with *Iehovah;* but more seldom used; . . .' (p. 172). In his note on psalm 83, verse 19, he ex-

plains the significance of *Iehovah* according to its parts, '*Ie*,
being a signe of the time to come, *Ieheveh, he will be: ho*, of
the time present, *Hoveh, he that Is; and vah*, of the time past,
Havah, he was' (p. 221). For Ainsworth, then, the use of
Iah as a substitute for *Iehovah* is an attempt to preserve the
sense of the eternality of God in the translation, but those
less skilled in Hebrew and therefore unfamiliar with this
seldom used term saw it only as a 'mangling of the word.'