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M I S C E L L A N I E S

I. INVERTED CONSTRUCTION OF MODERN ARMENIAN.

BY REV. ELIAS RIGGS, D.D.

Presented to the Society May 20, 1857.

ONE of the most note-worthy phenomena of language which have come under my observation is the inverted construction of sentences in the Modern Armenian language. Essentially the same prevails in Turkish. What is specially worthy of notice in Armenian is, that the construction of the ancient language is almost the reverse of that of the modern; and that, notwithstanding the fact that the ancient dialect has been, up to the present century, the exclusive language of books, and continues still to be preferred by many Armenian scholars as the language of scientific works and of epistolary correspondence.

A striking illustration of the feature to which I allude is furnished by many passages in the Old Testament, where the order of words in the Ancient Armenian version is precisely the same with that of the Hebrew original, while the translation into the present spoken Armenian can be written directly under the Hebrew sentence, commencing at the left under its last word, following word for word the inverted order of the original, and ending at the right under the first word of the Hebrew sentence.

This inversion is not, like that of classical Greek and Latin, a matter of emphasis or euphony, but enters into the structure of the language, and is an essential feature of its syntax. I will endeavor to illustrate it in a few particulars.

1. All the words which correspond with our prepositions (excepting one or two, occasionally borrowed from Ancient Armenian) are postpositions. Thus, instead of 'concerning it,' the Modern Armenian says 'it concerning;' instead of 'in the house,' 'the house in;' and that, not merely in the case of syllables suffixed to form the oblique cases of nouns, but also in the case of separate words.

2. The particle which corresponds to our definite article is a suffixed letter. In this the Armenian agrees with some other dialects, both ancient and modern, as the Danish and Albanian in Europe, and the Chaldee and Syriac in Asia. Thus *doon* is 'house,' *doónü* 'the house;' genitive *dan*, emphatic form *dánü*; *dánü vrayov*, 'concerning the house.'

3. The noun or pronoun expressing the object of an action precedes the verb by which it is governed: e. g., 'They him rejected;' 'God the earth created.'

4. In like manner, the noun or adjective which forms the predicate of a simple proposition is placed between the subject and the verb: e. g., 'He kind was;' 'I a man am.'

5. Most remarkable of all is that the circumstances of time, place, order, and frequently also of manner, means, and instrument, are placed at the beginning of a sentence. Thus, instead of saying, as in English, "A Greek, in consequence of a quarrel originating in the use of wine, killed an Egyptian yesterday with a pistol in one of the streets of this city," an Armenian would say, "Yesterday—of this city—of the streets—one—in—of wine—the use—in—originating—of a quarrel—in consequence—with a pistol—a Greek—an Egyptian—killed;" or, "a Greek, with a pistol, an Egyptian killed."

To sum up the above particulars—a complex sentence in Modern Armenian generally gathers up first all the circumstances of an action, as time, place, and order, frequently also of manner, means, and instrument (although these admit of more latitude in their collocation); then follows the subject, with its attributes; then the object with its attributes; and last of all the verb. The last verse of the Book of Leviticus in English reads thus: "These are the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel in Mount Sinai." In Modern Armenian, the first word of this sentence is 'Sinai,' the second 'mount,' the third 'in,' the fourth 'of Israel,' the fifth 'the children,' and the sixth 'for,' being exactly the reverse of the order in English. The rest reads 'of the Lord—to Moses—the commanded commandments—these are.' In the Ancient Armenian version, the order of the words of this sentence is precisely the same as in English.

This remarkable change in the structure of sentences in Armenian is unquestionably to be attributed to the influence of the prevailing language of the country—the Turkish, in which the inverted order seems to be idiomatic and natural. The dialect spoken by the Armenians in Persia and India approaches much more nearly to the style and idiom of their ancient tongue.

II. ON DR. S. W. WILLIAMS'S CHINESE DICTIONARY.

BY REV. WILLIAM A. MACY.

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A number of copies of the *Tonic Dictionary of the Chinese Language in the Canton Dialect*, by Dr. S. Wells Williams, are for sale at the rooms of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, at 33 Pemberton Square, Boston; and as the work will be unknown to most of the scholars and literary institutions of the United States, a brief account of its character and merits may not be out of place among your literary notices.