Over the course of many years, Dr. Gelston has published an extensive series of articles on textual and theological problems in Isaiah 40–55. Some have been on matters of major importance, others on relatively minor issues. The present study falls firmly in the latter category, but it is offered on the understanding which Gelston has himself exemplified so well that sometimes scholarship advances by the accumulation of details.

By comparison with what may be called a traditional English version of the Old Testament such as the Revised Version, the New English Bible rendering of Isaiah 51:6 differs in several respects. The two translations are as follows, with the significant differences highlighted in italics:

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.

Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath: the heavens grow murky as smoke; the earth wears into tatters like a garment, and those who live on it die like maggots; but my deliverance is everlasting and my saving power shall never wane.

None of these differences is to be explained on the basis of text-critical judgements – the Masoretic Text is presupposed in both cases;¹ rather, the changes are due to supposed improvements in our understanding of the meaning of Classical Hebrew words.

¹ For the NEB, see the lack of any entry under this verse in L.H. Brockington,
As is well known, many such improvements were proposed during the middle decades of the present century, often on the basis of comparison with cognate Semitic languages. This procedure was subjected to a searching critical analysis by Barr, who of course did not reject the method in principle, but who urged caution and suggested guidelines for its proper application. On the whole, his structures have been accepted, and the appearance of *The Revised English Bible* (1989) reflects this changed atmosphere; its rendering may be appropriately compared:

Raise your eyes heavenwards;
look on the earth beneath:
though the heavens be dispersed as smoke
and the earth wear out like a garment
and its inhabitants die like flies,
my deliverance will be everlasting
and my saving power will remain unbroken.

This rendering accepts two of the changes which the *NEB* entered by comparison with the *RV* and rejects the other two. Concerning "saving power" as an equivalent in certain contexts for Hebrew הָשָׁם, this is a matter of semantics internal to the corpus of classical Hebrew, and would be widely accepted today. It is unnecessary to discuss it further here.

The translation of תַּמְנָה by 'wane' in the *NEB* goes back to a suggestion of G.R. Driver in 1935. He maintained that the usual explanation of the word as an imperfect qal of תְמַנֶּה, "was shattered, dismayed" (hence "be abolished" in *RV*, "be ended" in *RSV* and *NRSV*), "yields no satisfactory sense in the context" and proposed instead that the word should be analysed as an imperfect qal of תָּמָה,

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