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OUR OWN FUTURE:
FORECAST AND A PROGRAMME¹

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THE subject to the consideration of which I would invite your attention has been dealt with by Kittel² and Sellin³ in Germany and earlier still by our own Professor Montgomery in a Presidential address delivered before this Society.⁴ If I venture to discuss the same subject, it is because I have carried the thoughts with me for some time and should like to express them in my own way. The German discussion was precipitated by Friedrich Delitzsch's '*Great Deception*' and Harnack's plea for the casting out of the Old Testament from the Protestant canon of Scriptures, followed by an agitation which proposed to eliminate or at least to reduce to modest proportions the teaching of Hebrew and the Old Testament Scriptures in the theological faculties. Germany, it would seem, is awaking to a situation which is new there; in this country we have had the malady in a chronic form and we have had ample leisure to think about it.

Years ago, a young professor in charge of New Testament Exegesis in a divinity school, showed me his copy of Tischendorf's edition of the New Testament closely packed with exegetical

¹ Presidential address, delivered at the annual meeting of the Society at the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City, December 27, 1923.

² *Die Zukunft der Alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft*. Address delivered in the Old Testament Division of the First German Orientalist Congress at Leipzig, September 29, 1921. Printed in *ZAW*, 39 (1921), 84—99.

³ *Das Alte Testament und die evangelische Kirche*. Leipzig, 1921.

⁴ *Present Tasks of American Biblical Scholarship*. Delivered December 26, 1918. Printed in this *JOURNAL*, 38 (1919), 1—14.

notes in the finest writing. I am certain that nothing was left untouched: the force of an aorist, the exact meaning of a particle, the reading supported by the best authorities, and the like. But, alas, in the new field of his activities none of the students knew or was required to know Greek. His duty was to interpret the Gospel or Epistle in the English translation, presumably the American Standard Edition. All the good notes were to no purpose; they simply could not be used. Just then a student turned up at the University who had been trained by an eminent scholar known for his studies in the Grammar of New Testament Greek; I advised him to take up the study of Syriac, which he found rather difficult. Since then Hellenists and Semitists have contested the possession of the New Testament domain; one such contest was witnessed at a previous meeting of our Society. One might think that now that Torrey has carried the discussion into Acts, and Burney and Montgomery into the Gospel of John, students would be crowding our lecture rooms during a course in Aramaic. It is no longer the Septuagint student alone who operates with 'translation Greek'. Behind the most uncommon Greek word or idiomatic turn of expression there lurks a Semitic equivalent which it is our business to get at by laborious and painstaking retroversion. The clue is found when the translator errs, when he misconceives, when he is abnormal; when he is normal, when he covers the original, he quite successfully covers it up. There is no reason on earth why a translator should not render one Hebrew or Aramaic word by a multitude of Greek synonyms and, conversely, unite in one Greek word a number of Semitic synonyms. Both phenomena may be witnessed in the English Bible. A glance at any Concordance will reveal how one and the same English word is used for sundry Hebrew and Greek synonyms; and as to foregoing uniformity of phrasing in the English, the Revisers of 1611 are quite explicit on this point: 'That we should express the same notion in the same particular words; as for example, if we translate the Hebrew or Greek word once by *purpose*, never to call it *intent*: if one where *journeying*, never *travelling*; if one where *think*, never *suppose*; if one where *pain*, never *ache*; if one where *joy*, never *gladness*, etc. thus to mince the

matter, we thought to savour more of curiosity than wisdom, and that rather it would breed scorn in the atheist than bring profit to the godly reader.' Just so, to bring profit to the godly reader, and not to facilitate retroversion for latter day students, was the aim of those good men of antiquity, whether it was the Hebrew law and the prophets and the other writings or the Aramaic narratives concerning the new dispensation that they wished to make accessible to those without, Jews or Gentiles. Naturally in the process of translation many an element of the original underwent modification; but this very angle of deflection can be measured only by the aid of the original extant or philologically reconstructed. It ought therefore be clear that to comprehend Torah or Gospel adequately we cannot rest content with substitutes in Greek or in any other language, but must have recourse to the wording in the original tongues, and that can be done only by industrious application to Hebrew and Aramaic and kindred languages.

The trouble, it would appear then, is with our students who are unwilling to study these very languages, and if this unwillingness continues we may anticipate the time when our own usefulness will come to an end. Not that we are thought of as of much use even now. Teaching faculties are at best a necessary evil; what matters is a governing board and a student body and possibly also a library! Jesus said, "Freely ye received, freely give". Or, as the rabbis make Moses to say, "As I was taught freely, so teach ye freely." The world sees to it that we teach for next to nothing and thereby expresses its estimate of our worth. A student in a theological institution once referred to the faculty as but misfit pastors. Students are quite keen on the subject of values; as someone observed, when the other professions are overcrowded, they flock to the schools of divinity, just as they desist when there is room in the other professions or when these pay better. As a matter of fact, our students are largely paid for attending. But, however the path of learning is made smooth for them, they will not go in for heavy work. As undergraduates in the colleges, they have been fed up on 'snap' courses, they have remained strangers to philology and the philological method. I am frequently amused by the notion that

grammar ought to be an elective course, since not all minds take to it. I am rather of the opinion that grammar should be made obligatory upon all of our students. Of course, grammar cannot be an end in itself; it is far more important that one should know Hebrew for example, the Hebrew language. But grammar is a means not only to the end of mastering a language; by its aid preeminently can that philological method be apprehended without which independent judgment is impossible in the higher branches of exegesis and criticism. It is on the subject of independent judgment that we and our students clash. They prefer to sit back while we do the work for them; they expect at our hands results which they may neatly take down in their notebooks, while we would fain convince them that all we have and hold for transmission is a bundle of questions and that for every problem which a new find disposes of there arise fifty new ones to solve. The student will say that it is not his business to become a specialist or expert; that he leaves to his teacher. But there is one specialty that the churches do or should expect of him, an understanding of the thing Religion and more specifically of a given, positive, revealed religion, which, whether committed into the keeping of the Church or embodied in the Scriptures, involves in one form or another the study of documents. But perhaps it is the case that certain denominations have cut themselves loose from their historical antecedents, that the Scriptures are just tolerated as venerable expressions of discarded notions, that the ancient texts when at all used as the foundation of discourses serve only as a peg upon which to hang the clap-trap that happens to be in vogue at the moment, and that the modern clergyman, a marvel of versatility and ubiquity, exhausts himself in multitudinous doing by which religion is secularized and piety externalized and conscience immersed into dead works away from the service of the living God. However, it is not our province to cast aspersions on the churches and the clergy, when the fault is perhaps largely our own.

Let us search our hearts collectively. It is unnecessary to recall flippancy and downright coarseness of expression, as when one pokes fun at the Jew God enjoying his roast veal in Abraham's tent and revealing himself to Moses *a posteriori*, or

when another describes Jahveh as an 'uncanny Titan', and a third speaks of him as immorally wicked. Often enough a growth in moral stature is noted, as he rouses himself from slumber in warfare with the Philistines and comes to differentiate himself through his conflicts with the Baals; imparticipative, jealous of his honor, exclusive, intolerant, sternly judicial, he nevertheless develops a strain of tenderness, for he is God and not man and he will not utterly destroy. This God of the Old Testament has his grip on the realities of life: when kingdoms are moved and nations are interlocked in deadly combat, in the hour of dire national distress, the cathedrals of Christendom resound with psalms and prayers which in times of peace are declared to be un-Christian. So at least according to our commentaries. To the Christian conscience the new dispensation is the fulfilment of the old, its flower and fruition; an un-Christian conscience will concede originality to the Gospel; but this originality will be enhanced by illuminating the background rather than by darkening it. We should have learned this lesson from the history of religions, that religious bodies cling to ancient Scriptures when certain details have been outgrown and when the bald literalism has been eclipsed by a spiritualizing interpretation. That progress had been consummated when the Gospel arrived. We do not underestimate the power of a great personality; it has been the besetting sin in our past treatment that personality was resolved into the mere factors of time and place. Much, however, was found prepared; the way had been paved along the lines of internal growth, we need not go far afield in the search for the roots, least of all to 'the prophet of Iran.' It is a one-sided historicism which, over the regress to beginnings, forgets to register the advance in meaning which just as surely came to be and forms a part of the historical process. According to the letter, the Old Testament held in veneration by latter-day Judaism had not changed in jot or tittle; but it was a transfigured body of Scriptures in which the heights dominated the depressions and the lofty expressions of undying hope and faith raised to their own level the notions and incidents of lower planes. A presentation of the Old Testament religion which winds up with the skepticism of Koheleth fails signally in insight.

And, worst of all, neither Jahveh nor his word seem to be able to live down their past. So we have passed on the word to the facile popularizers and through them to the reporters—sometimes we take down copy to them in person—that the Old Testament as seen in the light of today is decidedly not worth while. As to the New Testament, or at least certain parts thereof, we have the word of the Fundamentalist that it has been weighed in the balances of modernism and found wanting. If the Scriptures lack in worthwhileness, why then study them?

For, we must come to realize it, the students of the Scriptures will always be their friends, not those that are hostile to them or even indifferent. But we have profaned the holy, yielding to the unrest which has loosened what was bound and dishallowed what was hallowed. We have furthermore brought our own work into disrepute by indulging in pseudo-science. On the one hand we are beset by a traditionalism which sits tight on the lid, or else by deftly misinterpreting the evidences of archaeology would prop up untenable positions; and on the other hand by a criticism hardened into a tradition and woefully lacking in self-criticism. All scientific questions may be reopened, and the truer solution is not necessarily the straight-line account. Things, I believe, will right themselves. Neither the church nor the synagogue can long continue Scriptureless. After straying in the byways, the ancient paths will once more be trodden. Every age, from its new perspective and angle of vision, must re-interpret for itself the past. And so must every country. We here in America are determined to become self-sufficient in our Biblical studies. Not that we intend to shut ourselves off from contact with other minds. But we have a distinct outlook upon life, itself formed upon the Scriptures, the Old Testament no less than the New. The American conscience will brush away finespun quibblings and, purged from all insinuating motives of the present, apply itself to a renewed apprehension and appraisal of that which abides forever. If we pursue the quest of the historical Jesus or Isaiah, the American public will demand to know what we ourselves have to say. We shall vouch for our findings with all of our own labor and all of our scholarly reputation. If we must needs go abroad, Jerusalem and Bagdad

are quite near. In all gratitude to past stimuli from without, in all earnestness bent upon developing our own strength, 'with malice toward none, with charity for all', with unswerving fidelity to truth and with infinite love for the object of our studies, we shall dedicate ourselves anew to the task in which our fathers found a worthwhile occupation. An American Biblical science, the corporate contribution of American scholarship, mature, competent, veracious, reverent, this is the vision I see arising before my eyes, this the forecast by which I set out to banish our fear for our future, expressed somewhat apocalyptically — but the wise will understand.

But the fulfilment is conditioned by our own determination to mend our ways. The student of the Bible must fetch his raw material from many quarters, there are any number of auxiliary sciences which furnish him with data, geography, history, archaeology, and the like; they all have a bearing on that which is central in his work, but they cannot take its place. For a generation or so we have lost sight of our central occupation. Let us penitently return to it. Criticism has been overdone, the higher and the lower. Investigations as to date and composition may lie fallow for awhile. Nor shall we go on rewriting the ancient documents in such manner that their authors would exclaim, "Well done, but it is not what we wrote!" Rewriting is not at all our business. We may take it for granted that Isaiah knew his Hebrew quite well. Nor did he consult us as to the arrangement of his thoughts. Let us concentrate on exegesis. It is so easy to break up a text into atoms. It is far more difficult to discern relevancy, continuity, coherence. We should model ourselves upon the inimitable Ewald. What made him so eminently successful as a commentator was his sympathetic attitude: he took on for the time being the personality of the author. Personality is unique, elusive of grammar and lexicon, but revealing itself to intuitive absorption, to that love which 'vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own . . . but rejoiceth with the truth'. It is our privilege to interpret the greatest of all ages; their thoughts were of the deepest, and we must not be abashed to own ourselves vanquished by obscurity of expression or ob-

scurity of thought. We shall strive, of course, with all power to recreate the lost context, not the context of a paragraph or chapter, but the context of pulsating life in which these men stood and from which their hope and their faith emerged, touching that of their contemporaries at every point, and yet transcending it so as to focus itself upon eternity. All new finds must be welcome; yet the old material has unexplored mines awaiting the sturdy digger below the surface who is unafraid of the grime and the grind. Away with the multitude of our little publications in which we frequently repeat ourselves! Let us address ourselves to monumental works which will require the cooperation of a large number of us and provide useful occupation beyond the present generation. Need I single out such undertakings as a critical edition of the Masoretic Text (which neither Baer nor Ginsburg have provided), or the assembling of the complete material for a study of the ancient versions? And if we are to recover the Semitic original of Gospel word or Gospel phrase, must we not with infinite toil construct Greek-Semitic Indexes? Here is a programme which, though sketched in its merest outlines, is comprehensive enough: 'the people are many, neither is this a work for one day or two, for we have greatly transgressed in this matter.'