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ARTICLE V.

THE HEBREW TENSE.

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"THE whole of antiquity," said Jerome, "affirms that Hebrew, in which the Old Testament was written, was the beginning of human speech." This was a prevalent idea down to the seventeenth century. Occasionally, however, a writer was found bold enough to question this belief, and give the honor to some other tongue. For example, Goropius, who published a work at Antwerp, in the year 1580, endeavored to prove that *Dutch* was the language spoken in Paradise. André Kempre maintained that God spoke to Adam in *Swedish*, that Adam answered him in *Danish*, and that the serpent spoke to Eve in *French*. The Persians have a tradition that the serpent spoke in *Arabic*, Adam and Eve in *Persian*, and Gabriel in the *Turkish* language. In a work published at Madrid, as late as 1814, it was claimed that the *Basque* was the language spoken by Adam and Eve. The author of this volume did not speak without authority ; for a grave, deliberative assembly had decided that on this point no doubt could exist in their minds, and that " it was impossible to bring forward any serious or rational objection."

It was while these unscientific discussions were going on, during the latter part of the seventeenth century, that Leibnitz, the contemporary and rival of Newton, came upon the stage. He boldly attacked former opinions, and set himself to the task of collecting the materials necessary to a correct decision of the question. "The study of languages," said he, " must not be conducted according to any other principles than those of the exact sciences. Why begin with the unknown, instead of the known ? It stands to reason that we ought to begin with studying the modern languages which are within our reach, in order to compare them with

one another, to discover their differences and affinities, and
then to proceed to those which have preceded them in former
ages, in order to show their filiation and origin, and then to
ascend, step by step, to the most ancient tongues; the analysis
of which must lead us to the most trustworthy conclusions." [1]

Pursuing this method, his labors, together with those of
his successors, raised the study of comparative philology to
the rank of an important science, and demonstrated that we
have no more reason to suppose the Hebrew to have been
the original language of the race, than the Basque, the
Turkish, or the Dutch.[2]

Nevertheless, this extensive classification of languages,
living and dead, and the analysis of their grammatical forms,
have proved that the Hebrew is one of the oldest dialects in
existence; that it belongs to a family of which two other
branches are in existence — the Arabic and the Aramaic.

John Nicholson, the translator of Ewald's Hebrew Grammar,
says: " The Hebrew language belongs to the Semitic, or,
as it is more appropriately called, the Syro-Arabian family
of languages; and it occupies a central point amidst all
the branches of this family, as well with reference to the
geographical position of the country in which it prevailed,
as with reference to the degree of development to which it
attained. In point of antiquity, however, it is the oldest
form of human speech known to us, and, from the earliest
civilization, as well as from the religious advantages of the
Hebrews, has preserved to us the oldest and purest form of
the Syro-Arabian language." [3]

The student of Hebrew finds abundant evidence that the
language is ancient. Max Müller has shown that, in the
most ancient form of speech, the roots were *bi-literal*. The
first stage of progress from that point of departure would be
to a state in which the roots are mainly *tri-literal*. And
here we find the Hebrew. This is the law according to

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[1] Dissertation on the Origin of Nations.

[2] See " Science of Language." By Max Müller, chap. iv.

[3] Kitto's Cyclopaedia, Vol. i. p. 622.

which the language is framed, as also the cognate dialects — the Arabic and Aramean.

While this point was being reached, however, another process had been going on. Roots were combined by dropping one or more radical letters. A good example of this is seen in the paradigm of the verb, in which the secondary root — the pronominal — loses one or more of its radical letters, and the remainder is prefixed or suffixed to the verbal root. This work of condensation had not proceeded far, as the language shows, before it was arrested by reducing the language to writing. There seems to be internal evidence, then, that the language existed for a time as a spoken language, but not so long as from Adam to Moses — a period of twenty-five hundred years. Passing by the confusion of tongues, which there is reason to believe affected every dialect of the race, we shall find the Hebrew among the related dialects which sprung up as the tribes diverged from Babel.

To us, or to one speaking any of the Indo-European languages, no other feature of the Hebrew seems so unique as the method of denoting the time in which an action takes place. No other makes the Hebrew student more difficulty. It is of the first importance, then, that he have a true conception of the Hebrew Tense. But our view of this subject will be affected by the idea we have of time in the abstract.

Time, as Nordheimer has said, " consists of a constant flow or succession of moments, whose beginning and end are lost in eternity." Webster defines it as " a particular portion or part of duration, whether past, present, or future." In this latter definition, three distinctions of time are assumed, equally important, as it would appear, and the modifications of these three make up the frame-work of the tenses in Occidental languages.

But the present, though deriving importance from the fact that all events take place in it, can hardly with propriety be called a tense — " a portion or part of duration." It is only

the dividing line between the past and the future — the line where the two eternities meet. And this, like a mathematical line, in the last analysis must be regarded as without breadth. The future is constantly flowing into the past. We use its moments as they come, and while we are yet in the process they glide into the past. An acute writer has said : " Perhaps no angelic mind has quickness of thought enough to fix on a moment as present."

In comparison with the past and the future, then, the present, considered as " a part of duration," is worthy of no mention. So the Oriental mind seems to have conceived of it, and therefore discarded the present tense altogether from the grammar of its languages ; retaining only the twofold distinction, *past* and *future*.

It may be impossible for us, with our habits of thought, to feel satisfied with such an arrangement of tense ; but philosophically considered, it must be acknowledged to be correct. And, doubtless, if we could place ourselves at the stand-point of an Oriental, we should feel no want of definiteness in this method of indicating the time of an action.

But some of the best Hebrew grammarians reduce the existing tenses to a still greater simplicity, assuming that both are *preterites*. Herder seems to adopt this classification, when, in his " Spirit of Hebrew Poetry," he makes Alciphron say : " What kind of an action is that which has no distinction of time ? For the two tenses of the Hebrew are, after all, *essentially aorists*, that is, undefined tenses, that fluctuate between the past, the present, and the future ; and thus it has, in fact, but *one* tense."

In Rödiger's edition of Gesenius's Grammar the second tense is called an *imperfect*. " In moods and tenses," he says, " the Hebrew is very poor ; having only two tenses — *perfect* and *imperfect*."

Bush, Stuart, and Nordheimer, on the other hand, call the second tense *a future*. And this nomenclature seems much the more natural and philosophical for the following reasons:

1. It is according to the general analogy of language.

The human mind has a conception of future time scarcely less definite than of past. No language is without some form to express it, though several, as is the case with our own, denote it by Auxiliaries rather than by distinct verbal inflections, as do the Greek and Latin.

Marsh says, in his " Lectures on the English Language," " The Romance languages, as well as the Romaic, at one period of their history, all rejected the ancient inflected futures, and formed new compound or auxiliary ones, employing for that purpose the verbs *will* and *shall* or *have* in the sense of duty or necessity, though French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese have now agglutinated the infinitive and auxiliary into a simple future. .... The Saxon had but two tenses, the present or indefinite, used also as a future, and the past. .... And with the remarkable exception of the verb *beon, to be*, which is generally future, the Saxon had absolutely no method of expressing the future by any form or combination of verbs, so that the context alone determines the time. .... To our rude ancestors the future was too doubtful to justify the employment of words implying prediction or even hope, and they appropriated to it forms indicative of a present purpose, determination, or duty, not of prophecy or expectation."

Now, although the Saxon tense bears a strong resemblance to the Hebrew, the reasoning in this last paragraph can hardly apply to it. For whatever may have been true of the Hebrew originally, to Abraham and his descendants, through whom alone it has come down to us, the future was vastly more than the present or the past. It is hardly conceivable that a nation that lived as they did mainly upon promises of future good should have had no future tense in the paradigm of their verb.

2. The method in which the pronouns are used in the two verbal forms seems to indicate that these tenses are direct opposites in respect to time.

In the past tense the pronouns are suffixed. As for example : קָטַלְתִּי, קָטַלְתְּ, קָטַלְתָּ, קָטְלָה, קָטַל. In the second tense

they are prefixed: אֶקְטֹל, תִּקְטְלִי, תִּקְטֹל, יִקְטֹל. The reason of this seems to be, that in the former, the action being completed, comes naturally to mind before the actor: *killed he, killed she, killed thou, killed I.* The statement of the finished act suggests the doer. The verbal root comes first to mind, and then the pronominal root is suffixed, referring the act to its agent.

In the second tense the process is reversed. The action has as yet no existence. It can have no existence without an agent. Hence the agent comes first to mind, and then the act, which, it is affirmed, he is about to perform. *He, she, you, they will kill.*

This opposite use of the pronouns indicates that the two forms of the verb denote opposite times in which the action of the agent is performed. At least this affords a rational hypothesis in explanation of the peculiar use of the pronominal roots. The normal force of the one form is, a past completed act; of the other, a future action not yet commenced.

Dr. James P. Wilson, in his " Essay on Grammar," refers to this feature of the Hebrew verb in unequivocal language: " The various characteristic prefixes, suffixes, and changes adopted to designate the modes or manners of expressing action, affirmation, or being; and also the tenses or times when such events took place, are chiefly arbitrary. If in Greek and Latin the terminations have been supposed to have been formed from pronouns, not borrowed from the Scythians, they designated originally numbers and persons; but they also denote the mode and time. In Hebrew the numbers and persons are undeniably so constructed, and though the past and present tenses have been thought liable to be changed, in certain events, yet, perhaps always, the theme placed before the parts of the pronouns denoted the action to be past, with respect either to the time of speaking, or the time last referred to; and when placed after, it signified that the event was future, with respect to such time."

3. Another argument to support this view of the second tense is the derivation of the Imperative from it, which, in

every species, is made by dropping the pronominal prefix from the second person, singular and plural.

Since the Imperative form of a verb always designates an action which is yet to take place, the form which is chosen must have a future signification. There would be a felt impropriety in the endeavor to construct an Imperative, which relates to an act yet future, out of a Preterite. From the past tense we derive the Infinitive — the action abstractly considered divested of the considerations of person and number. But, before we can construct an Imperative, this abstract form must undergo a transformation, giving it a future signification. Then it becomes fitted for the utterance of a command that is to be executed in future time.

It may be objected to this argument for the derivation of the Imperative, that Gesenius derives it from the Infinitive. He does so, but at the same time says: "The inflections of the Imperative may certainly have been borrowed from the Imperfect"; or from what we have denominated the Future. But if the inflections are borrowed from this tense, why not assume that the whole form is derived from it? The philosophical reasons already given seem not only to justify but to demand this hypothesis. Nordheimer in his Hebrew Grammar does not hesitate to say: "The future is in fact the only form by which a command in the third person, a wish in the first, or a prohibition in any person can be expressed. But when a command is directly addressed to a second person it is usually done by a separate verbal form derived from the future, and called the Imperative."[1]

4. A fourth argument for regarding this as a Future rather than an Imperfect is to be drawn from its use.

In its simple form it stands over against the Preterite as its direct opposite. Gesenius, in specifying the uses of this tense, says: "It stands, I. *For the proper Future.*" This, then, is manifestly its normal signification. That it is sometimes used to denote a past act would not be conclusive evidence that it is properly a preterite, any more than the

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[1] Vol. ii. p. 193.

frequent use of the preterite to denote a future act would prove that it is properly a future. It is both more natural and more philosophical to regard the two tenses as normally opposites, and then to seek a rational explanation of the use of the preterite to denote a future act, and of a future to denote a past action, and of both to denote present time.

5. A final proof that the second tense is normally a future is found in its power over verbs connected with it by the copulative וֹ. It changes them into relative futures. This argument will come out as we proceed; it is only necessary to allude to it here.

The problem, then, is with two forms, a past and a future, to represent acts as having occurred at all periods in the past, as now passing, and as to take place in the near or remote future.

I. No difficulty will be found in understanding the normal use of these two tenses, since they correspond precisely with our absolute past and future. Thus in Gen. i. 1: " In the beginning God created בָּרָא," we have an instance of the preterite, and in chap. iii. 14, of the future : " Upon thy belly shalt thou go תֵּלֵךְ, and dust shalt thou eat תֹּאכַל."

These two forms are often used antithetically in the same sentence, as in Isa. xlvi. 4: " I have made עָשִׂיתִי, and I will bear אֶשָּׂא; even I will carry אֶסְבֹּל, and will deliver וַאֲמַלֵּט." Again, in the eleventh verse the same antithetic use of the tenses occurs : " I have spoken דִּבַּרְתִּי, lo, I will bring it to pass אֲבִיאֶנָּה; I have purposed יָצַרְתִּי (from יָצַר), lo, I will do it אֶעֱשֶׂנָּה." Isa. lii. 3 : " Ye have sold yourselves נִמְכַּרְתֶּם for nought, and ye shall be redeemed תִּגָּאֵלוּ without money." Isa. xlix. 8: " In an acceptable time have I heard thee עֲנִיתִיךָ, and in the day of salvation have I helped thee עֲזַרְתִּיךָ; and I will preserve thee אֶצָּרְךָ (from נָצַר), and give thee אֶתֶּנְךָ (from נָתַן) for a covenant," etc.

II. Now from the view which we have taken of these two tenses as bordering immediately on each other, and constituting by their confluence the present, it will be easy to see how each of them may be made to perform the office of a

present. If a writer or speaker is referring to an action or state of being that commenced in the past, continued to, and embraced the time of the narrative, he would very naturally employ a past tense. That state or act had special reference to the time then past, but included also the time then present. Isa. i. 11 affords a good illustration of this idiom. "I delight not לֹא חָפַצְתִּי " (*I delighted* not, nor do I now delight, is the implication) " in the blood of bullocks, of rams, and of he-goats." Hence, although the tense is past in form, it is present in signification, and appropriately rendered, as in our English version, by a present. It is an affection that has existed for a long time in the past, and yet exists, and therefore the use of the past to denote it is really much more appropriate than our present tense would be, for this would leave us in doubt respecting all the past.

Take as another instance Ps. i. 1: " Blessed is the man that walketh not לֹא הָלַךְ in the counsels of the ungodly"; that is, who has not been accustomed to do so in time past, nor does he do so now. This is the sense. It denotes that which is habitual, embracing, of course, his present state, and hence appropriately expressed by a preterite, but rendered into the present. This construction will be appropriate in stating general truths — what has always happened. Isa. i. 3 : " The ox knoweth his owner יָדַע, and the ass his master's crib ; but Israel doth not know לֹא יָדַע, my people doth not consider לֹא הִתְבּוֹנָן." • Prov. xiv. 19 : "The evil bow שַׁחוּ (from שָׁחָה) before the good." Isa. xl. 7 : " The grass drieth up יָבֵשׁ (from the same), the flower withereth נָבֵל (from the same), because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth נָשְׁבָה upon it."

But if, on the other hand, the mind of a writer or speaker, when alluding to a present state or action, turns towards the future, or conceives of passing events as standing in relation with the future, he will naturally use the second or future tense to describe it. Prov. xv. 1 : " A soft answer turneth away wrath יָשִׁיב " (Hiph. fut. from שׁוּב), *will cause wrath to subside.* The implication is that it is doing so now,

and will in the future. Hence, although the future form is used, it is appropriately rendered by our present. Prov. xv. 20 : " A wise son maketh a glad father." (יְשַׂמַּח, *will rejoice, and is rejoicing* the father). The twenty-third Psalm affords a good example of this use of the future for the present. In the first three verses all the verbs are in the future tense ; but they are all rendered in our version into the present, except the first, which ought also to have been translated in the same manner: " The Lord my shepherd, *I want not.* He maketh me," etc. The Psalmist was evidently alluding to present experience. And so confident was he that this experience would continue into the future, that he uses the future form : " The Lord is and will be my shepherd ; he leads and will lead me," etc.

This form is often used in making general propositions which will hold true in coming time. Consciously or unconsciously, the universality of the proposition leads the mind to forecast the future, and hence to use this form of the verb. Ps. v. 7 : " The Lord abhors יְחָעֵב the bloody and deceitful man." Ps. i. 2 : " In the law of the Lord is his delight ; and in his law doth he meditate יֶהְגֶּה, day and night."

This feature of the Hebrew gives it great power, especially in its poetry ; for to poetry all time is present. And to the Hebrews, as to all people in their fresh, early existence, all history was poetical. The ability of a language to use the past and the future tenses as present — to bring all duration, so to speak, into the moment of narration — gives great freshness and vividness to its poetry. Not unfrequently we meet with parallel clauses where the writer gives additional force to the proposition by viewing it in both aspects, first employing the past tense, and then changing to the future. Prov. xxviii. 1 : " The wicked flee נָסוּ when no one is pursuing ; but the righteous are bold יִבְטָח as a lion." Prov. xxi. 29 : " The wicked man hardeneth הֵעֵז (Hiph. pret. from עָזַז) his face ; but as for the upright, he directeth יָכִין (Hiph. fut. from כּוּן) his way."

Herder, referring to this feature of the language, says: "Have you never observed, in the style of the poets or the prophets, what beauty results from the change of tenses? How that which one hemistich declares in the past tense the other expresses in the future? As if the last rendered the presence of the object continuous and eternal, while the first has given to the discourse the certainty of the past, where everything is already finished and unchangeable."

In every language it is the verbs that give strength and vividness to discourse. The Chinese call their verbs "living words," and all the rest "dead." "With the Hebrew," as has been said, "the verb is almost the whole of the language. The nouns are derived from verbs, and are, as it were, living beings, extracted and moulded while their radical source itself was in a state of living energy."

Give now to the verbs of such a language, through all their forms, the power of using their two absolute tenses in the sense of a present, the one augmented at the beginning, the other at the end, and always so inflected as to dispense with auxiliaries, and to express in a single word the person, number, and shade of thought and feeling out of which the action springs, and you have a language that is intensely poetic, and strong and massive enough to be the bearer of God's messages to men.

III. These two tenses — the absolute past and the future — are capable of being used with a still greater latitude of signification.

1. The past may be used to denote a future action or event, when that action or event is one that has been decided upon in the plans and purposes of God. What is future to us is already done to his mind, and hence in speaking of it the past tense is employed, though the event is yet to take place.

This use of the verb gives great positiveness to the language of prophecy. Take, as an illustration, Gen. xv. 18: "To thy seed will I give נָתַתִּי this land." Have I given, etc. It is as though God had said to Abraham, "The decree

has gone forth, in my plans the event has long had a place, though the generations that are to inherit the land are not yet born." We can easily understand that the use of the past, denoting a finished act on the part of God, was much better adapted to confirm the faith of the patriarch than the use of the future would have been. And the same was true of all the prophecies so expressed. Isa. ix. 2: "The people that walk in darkness have seen a great light רָאוּ." This prophecy had reference to the experiences of the nations at the advent of Christ. It was so applied by the evangelist, Matt. iv. 14–16. It had reference to wants yet to come, as the gospel shall be preached to the heathen. But being then already decided upon in the counsels of redemption, and virtually done to the mind of God, it could be described appropriately by the past tense, and might have been as appropriately rendered by the future, *shall see*, etc. The same construction occurs Isa. lii. 10: "All the ends of the earth shall see רָאוּ the salvation of our God."

When the past is so used, it is sometimes followed by a future in the same sentence to strengthen the affirmation. Jer. xxxi. 33: "I will put נָתַתִּי my law in their inward parts, and will write it אֶכְתֳּבֶנָּה on their hearts." The meaning is, "It is done in my counsels, I will secure its accomplishment in the times appointed." Another good illustration of this idiom may be found in Isa. li. 3: "For the Lord will comfort נִחַם Zion; he will comfort נִחַם all her waste places, and he will make וַיָּשֶׂם her wilderness like Eden, like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness shall be found יִמָּצֵא therein."

2. In like manner the absolute future form may be used to designate a past act under certain circumstances. Thus Moses, when enumerating the sins of the heathen, says, Deut. xii. 31: "Their sons and their daughters have they burned יִשְׂרְפוּ in the fire." The act contemplated is one they have been accustomed to; it is natural to expect they will do it in the future. The deplorable feature in the case was that they would certainly continue this inhuman work;

and hence, though he is referring to an item of history, he does it in the use of the future tense.

Again the future is often used in animated description (as we use the present) to bring up past actions, and make them live and move before our eye ; as when Balaam says, Num. xxiii. 7 : " Balak, the king of Moab, hath brought me יַנְחֵנִי from Aram." In like manner Isaiah (vi. 2) says of the seraphim which he saw : " With two of his wings he covers יְכַסֶּה his face, and with two he covers יְכַסֶּה his feet."

There is another common use of the absolute future. It follows a preterite to denote an action that transpired subsequently to that expressed by the preterite, though long since past at the time of the narration. The words of Job (iii. 25) afford a good illustration : " That which I was afraid of יָגֹרְתִּי (from יְגֹר) is come יָבֹא (from בּוֹא) unto me." The first verb in this clause is preterite, the second, future, though both events had long before occurred. But the dread he experienced preceded the event dreaded, and hence there was a philosophical propriety in the use of the two tenses, and in this order. Since the Hebrew had no present, the mind seems to have gone back to the first of a series of events, and adopted that as a present, in so far, that whatsoever followed it would be with reference to it future, was in fact in the future at the time it occurred.

These two forms are frequently connected by the conjunction וְ, and the particular time when the series of events occurred is sometimes indicated by adverbial particles or phrases.

IV. This last idiom borders upon, and prepares the way for the consideration of, two other forms more difficult to comprehend and interpret — the *wav consecutive* (or conversive) *preterite and future.* These, as they stand in relation with the absolute tenses, have been called relative tenses. They are formed by prefixing וְ to the preterite and future absolute. Grammarians differ as to the origin of this particle. Stuart says : " It is probably a fragment of the verb הָיָה *to be.* The Arabians constantly make their imperfect

by writing out in full the verb of existence. The Syrians make theirs by joining the present participle to the verb of existence."

Now since the Arabic and Syriac are dialects cognate to the Hebrew, this explanation of the force of ו conversive seems rational. Nordheimer adopts it; but Gesenius says of it: " The opinion of earlier grammarians that וַיִּקְטֹל is a contraction of הָיָה יִקְטֹל is in every respect erroneous, and is now antiquated. The ו is always an emphatic *and*." Its conjunctive force no one can deny. But this would not forbid the derivation above alluded to, if we accept the view of Nordheimer, who derives the ו conjunctive from the same source, as also the definite article הַ. If we consider it simply as a conjunction, we cannot look to it as giving any peculiar force to the verb with which it is conjoined. We must explain the use of the relative tenses by reference entirely to the influence of the verbs with which they are connected, or of certain particles which affect their signification. This is perhaps as simple a method as any of explaining the form and force of the relative tenses.

1. *The Relative Past Tense.* — This is formed by prefixing ו to the future absolute וַיִּקְטֹל. It is used to denote an action which is dependent upon a previous action, expressed or implied. That previous action may be a past, a present, or a future. Whichsoever it is, the relative past tense depending upon it will always denote posteriority in the order of time. If it follow and depend upon an absolute past tense, it will denote an action past at the time of the narration, but that occurred subsequently to the action denoted by the preterite.

Dr. Wilson says of this idiom : " The future after a perfect often, perhaps generally, signified not a time to come after the speaking or writing of him who uses it; but a time future with respect to that of which the party is writing or speaking. Hence, it must necessarily follow that if a succession of past actions is to be described, the first must be in the perfect tense, and all the other actions, being

future with respect to that, must be put in the future tense. But when a translation is made of such successive actions from the Hebrew into Greek, Latin, English, or any other language, where no such future exists, the verbs which follow, whether with or without the conjunctive ו, would be necessarily rendered by past tenses ; hence the ו has been termed conversive." [1]

In the first chapter of Genesis, Moses, in giving a detailed account of the creation, commences with the absolute past, בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא, but continues the narrative with the relative past, whenever the sentences commence with a verb. " And God said וַיֹּאמֶר, Let there be light." " And God divided וַיַּבְדֵּל the light from the darkness." " And God called וַיִּקְרָא the light day." " And there was וַיְהִי evening, and there was וַיְהִי morning." In all these instances the relative past tense is used, or the absolute future with the ו conjunctive. They all depend on the בָּרָא with which the narrative commences. With reference to the time of narration, they were all past events, but not all equally remote. With reference to the first, the subsequent were all future. The revelations of science indicate that they were separated by long ages. The narrator, by introducing the series with a preterite, has thrown the mind back of all the events except the one denoted by that preterite. Considered from that stand-point, all the rest are future, and therefore appropriately indicated by the future tense. But the mind of the narrator, as also of the reader, occupies a twofold position in reference to the series, — one at the point of time when the narration is made, from which all the series of events would be past; and the other at the point indicated by the first verb, בָּרָא, from which all the succeeding would be future. The tenses of those intervening verbs should in some manner indicate all these facts.

It is a rule in English, and other Occidental languages, that conjunctions connect similar constructions — similar moods, tenses, or cases. In Hebrew the connection of

[1] Essay on Language, p. 221.

these futures with an absolute past seems to impart to them
a past signification, while in virtue of their form they denote
futurity, as compared with the first verb on which they
depend.

We saw, under the former head, that the absolute future
is sometimes used in the same manner, without the inter-
vention of the ו conjunctive. This influence of one verb
over another, or over others that depend upon it, is that
which gives rise to the idiom we are considering. It is per-
ceptible also in another idiom not uncommon in the Hebrew,
viz. a future tense connected with and dependent upon an
imperative has the sense of an imperative. Isa. xxxiv. 1:
" Draw near, קִרְבוּ, nations, to hear ; and as for the people,
hearken ye, הַקְשִׁיבוּ; let the earth hear, תִּשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ"; literally,
" the earth shall hear." Ps. lxix. 25 : " Pour out שְׁפָךְ thine
indignation upon them ; and let the fierce anger of thy
wrath overtake them יַשִּׂיגֵם." Ps. cix. 6 : " Set thou הַפְקֵד a
wicked man over him ; and let Satan stand יַעֲמֹד at his right
hand."

Professor Harkness, in his Latin Grammar, p. 224, has
illustrated the same general principle in the Latin tongue,
in his rule for the " Subjunctive by attraction." " The
subjunctive by attraction is often used in clauses dependent
upon the subjunctive: *vereor, ne, dum minuere velim labo-
rem, augeam ;* I fear I shall increase the labor, while I wish
to diminish it."

The time of the relative tenses is always derived from the
verbs on which they depend. If connected with a preterite
used in its normal sense (or to denote a past completed
action), they will in like manner denote an act also past,
but occurring subsequently to the one denoted by the pret-
erite. 1 Kings xiii. 1, 2 : " And behold there came בָּא a man
of God, and he cried וַיִּקְרָא against the altar, in the word
of the Lord, and said וַיֹּאמַר, O altar, altar."

If the preterite is used in the sense of the present, the
relative past, depending upon it, will also denote a present
action, but one occurring subsequently to the former. Take

as an illustration, Ps. 1. 17: "Thou hatest שֹׂנֵאתָ instruction, and castest וַתַּשְׁלֵךְ my words behind thee." This opposition to instruction was an habitual state of mind, it had existed in the past, it then existed. Hence the propriety of employing the past tense in the sense of a present to express it. The "casting of God's words behind them" was also a past act, denoting, as well as the former, a state of heart that existed of old and embraced the present. It was, moreover, logically subsequent to the act of hatred referred to, for it was hatred of instruction that caused them to cast God's words behind them. Hence it was appropriately expressed by a future form, but, because depending upon a verb used as a present, it is appropriately translated in the present tense.

We have seen also that the absolute past may be used with a future signification, as in prophecy, where events are regarded as though already accomplished. If now, the relative past follow a verb with this signification it will take its shade of meaning from it, and denote an action in the more remote future. Isa. ix. 5 will afford an illustration of this idiom: "Unto us a child is born יֻלַּד (Pual pret. of יָלַד), and the government shall be וַתְּהִי upon his shoulders, and his name shall be called וַיִּקְרָא," etc. In the purpose of God the child was already born; hence the first verb of the series is a preterite. But as it is a prophecy of an event which was to be actualized in after ages, it has a future signification — "shall be born." Subsequently, both in the order of nature and time, he would receive the government, and be called "wonderful," etc. Hence the latter verbs are futures, denoting events subsequent to the one on which they depend.

We saw, under a previous head, that the absolute future form is often used in the sense of a present, when the attention of the writer is turned towards the continuance of the action. If, now, a relative past depends upon a future so used, it will follow the same law as when depending on a preterite used as a present. Job iv. 5: "But now it comes to thee תָּבֹא (fut. absolute used as a present), and thou faint-

est יַחֲלָא" (rel. part. from לְאָח). xiv. 10 : " Man dieth יָמִית,
and wasteth away וַיֶּחֱלָשׁ."

We have seen, too, that the future absolute is frequently
employed as a past tense, or to denote an action past at the
time of narration. If, when so used, it is followed by a rel-
ative past, this latter will denote a past action, but less
remote. Deut. xiv. 2, 3 : " A man or woman that hath
wrought יַעֲשֶׂה wickedness, and hath gone and worshipped
וַיֵּלֶךְ יַעֲבֹד." This idiom also is more generally used when
a customary action is referred to ; though sometimes it refers
to a past and complete historic event, as in 1 Kings iii. 16 :
" Then came תָּבֹאנָה two harlots to the king, and stood,
וַתַּעֲמֹדְנָה before him."

2. *The Relative Future Tense.* — This is formed by pre-
fixing ו conjunctive to the absolute past, וְקָטַל. We are not
to suppose that the change of meaning from the past to a
future signification is effected by the particle ו. This we are
to regard, as in the case of the relative past tense, as a simple
connective. As there, a future form, when connected with
a past, derived from it a past signification, so here, we have
a past depending upon a future, partaking of its future sig-
nification. Verb influencing verb by attraction ; this is the
explanation of this peculiar idiom. Gen. ii. 24 : " Therefore
shall a man leave יַעֲזָב his father and his mother, and cleave
וְדָבַק unto his wife." Sometimes two absolute futures occur
which are then followed by relative futures. Isa. lii. 13 :
" Behold my servant shall deal prudently יַשְׂכִּיל, he shall be
exalted יָרוּם and extolled וְנִשָּׂא, and be very high וְגָבַהּ."

The mind of the speaker or writer is directed to a future
event on which another and subsequent event hangs. The
first is put in the future tense, and the verb that depends
upon it, deriving its characteristic in respect to time from it,
takes the relative future. If it be asked, why a preterite is
used in such instances, and not rather another future, it may
be said, that the futurition of the series of events described
by the verbs is made so determinate by the first one or two
that it is necessary to add only the simpler form, the preterite.

We have a similar idiom in English: "I shall go to the city, make my purchases, and return." The latter verbs are so dependent upon the former for their time that the characteristic auxiliaries of the future tense may be omitted, and there is no obscurity in consequence.

The relative future is often found in hypothetical sentences, the protasis being put in the absolute future, the apodosis in the relative. Deut. xi. 13, 14: "If ye shall hearken תִּשְׁמְעוּ diligently, ... I will send וְנָתַתִּי rain." The following sentence affords a good illustration of each of the foregoing idioms. Deut. vii. 12: "Wherefore it shall come to pass if ye hearken תִּשְׁמְעוּן to these judgments, and keep and do them וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם וַעֲשִׂיתָם, that the Lord thy God shall keep וְשָׁמַר unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he sware unto thy fathers." The last three verbs are put in the relative future tense because depending on תִּשְׁמְעוּן, though the dependence of the last differs from that of the two that precede it, it being the apodosis of the sentence.

We have seen that an absolute future may be used to denote a past customary act. If when so used it takes a relative future after it, that verb will likewise indicate a customary action, but one occurring subsequently to the former, while both were past at the time of the narration. Thus Gen. ii. 6: "But there went up (or used to go up) יַעֲלֶה a mist, and it watered וְהִשְׁקָה" (Hiph. pret. used as a rel. fut.). The watering was subsequent to the ascent of the vapor, and the ability of a preterite to denote this futurition is derived from the future tense with which it is joined. But since the absolute future is used in the sense of a past, so also is the relative that depends upon it.

We saw likewise that an absolute past tense is often used by the prophets in predicting future events, because events future to us are fixed and determined — in a sense accomplished — to the mind of God. This form, too, may have a relative depending upon it, and deriving from it a future significance, and to be translated into the future. Thus of Ishmael God said to Abraham (Gen. xvii. 20): "I will bless

בֵּרַכְתּי him (I have done it in my counsels, it shall be accomplished in the order of time), and make him fruitful והפְרֵיתי, and multiply והִרְבֵּיתי him exceedingly." Here, then, we have three preterites ; the first used absolutely, though with a future signification ; the latter two depending upon it, and transformed by it into relative futures.

This idiom is perhaps the farthest remove of any we have considered from the normal use of the tenses, and yet perfectly intelligible. To one using the Hebrew as a spoken language, or to one familiar with it as a written language, it would occasion no doubt as to the time of the events referred to.

This tense is sometimes used in uttering commands that depend on events or statutes that are supposed to be known. Sometimes employed at the opening of verses, chapters, or books where there is an implied connection with something that has gone before, and that is in the mind of the hearer or reader. It is sometimes introduced by participles, infinitives, and imperatives, in which case it will take its time from those words, always looking forward, and never backward, from the point of time of the verb that introduces it.

It has not been our purpose to exhaust the subject by going into all the idiomatic forms of the language ; but simply to refer to those that give the Hebrew student the most difficulty, and that are best adapted to illustrate the point under consideration, viz. *that the second form of the Hebrew verb is normally a future, and not a preterite.* This assumption, it will be seen, harmonizes all the leading facts of the language, and brings them under a simple law of attraction— *the dependence of one verb upon another,* of the secondary upon the primary, the relative upon the absolute. What the translator has mainly to do then is to determine the signification in respect to time of the *absolute* or leading verbs. This being done the tense of the *relatives* will be derived from them, and make no special difficulty.

It may perhaps render more intelligible the points we have made, if we bring them together, and express them in

as brief terms as possible. We shall then see at a glance the fertility of the Hebrew language in its methods of indicating *the times* in which actions are performed and the relations they sustain to each other.

1. By their *preterite*, in its normal use, they denoted a past completed act more or less remote.

2. By their *future* normally used, an action yet to take place in the near or remote future. These tenses are often used antithetically in the same sentence.

3. Since the present is simply the point where the past and the future touch each other, each of these tenses was employed *as a present*. (*a*) If the act is conceived of as related to the past, the preterite would more naturally be employed. This form is often used in speaking of that which is *habitual* and in stating *general* truths. (*b*) If, on the other hand, the action under consideration is conceived of as standing in relation with *the future*, *this* tense will probably be used. Like the foregoing it may be employed to denote that which is not only occurring, or true now, but that which *will occur* and *be true* in the future.

4. The *preterite* is often used by the prophets when predicting the future, because the events predicted are finished in the plan of God.

5. The *future* is sometimes employed in narrating events long since past. This is true especially of *customary* acts. It is implied that they will be done in the future.

6. The *future* is used in describing a past act that followed some other past act or event which is expressed by a preterite. It was in the future when the former event occurred, though both alike were in the past at the time of the narration.

7. By their *relative past and future tenses*, the Hebrews could denote an act subsequent to another act, whether past, present, or future. The *time* of the relative tenses will, in every instance, be derived from the absolute on which they depend, and, like the march of time, they always look forward, never backward.