

TEACHING PROPHET  
THE LIFE AND CONTINUING INFLUENCE  
OF THEODORE HENRY ROBINSON

This essay is dedicated as a memoir to T. H. Robinson, the centenary of whose birth recently occurred, on 9th August 1981.

When students of the Old Testament speak of the "continuing influence" of a scholar of a previous generation, they cannot but recall the continuity of the prophetic function in Israel, even before there were writing prophets. Samuel is "father" to the sons of the prophets at Ramah. Elisha succeeds Elijah. As for the canonical prophets, one of the creative theories in modern Old Testament scholarship is that their preaching was preserved for posterity, and augmented for sure, by groups of prophetic disciples. The Isaianic corpus of writings perhaps supplies the greatest evidence and clearest example of this, from the time of Isaiah himself till after the return from exile.<sup>1</sup>

In this essay, we are dealing with a scholar who immersed himself in the prophets, and who moreover like them both entered into and furthered a living tradition - in his case, of Biblical scholarship. His influence - academic, personal and spiritual - has remained vital to his students, and in turn is reflected in their own teaching and ministry.

I. I would first like to sketch briefly the life and work of Theodore Henry Robinson. He was born on 9th August 1881, in the manse at Edenbridge to Rev. and Mrs W. Venis Robinson. He was the great-grandson of William Robinson, a missionary to India, Java and Sumatra in the early nineteenth century. Theodore had a rather strict Victorian upbringing, being schooled at home by his parents to the age of ten. His mother had a degree from London University and was an accomplished tutor and school mistress of a girls' school. His father taught him Latin and Greek. After finishing at Mill Hill School, he went up to St John's College, Cambridge (1901-1903) where he read classics and history.<sup>2</sup> Evidently, his classics teacher, T. R. Glover of St John's, was his mentor. What Cambridge meant to Robinson is evident from the way in which he was later to contrast it with his experience of theological college:

A student who, like the present writer, came from the freer life of Cambridge, inevitably missed the sense of comradeship and the atmosphere of fellowship in common things. The undergraduate had been at liberty to drop in on his Tutor for tea or a chat when he would...<sup>3</sup>

T. R. Glover was a prominent deacon in the St Andrew's Street Baptist Church, where Theodore was a member, where also he met the minister's daughter whom he eventually married, Marie Helen

Joseph. These were formative years for his future teaching career, as he revealed in his moving tribute to Glover, his teacher:

...he had the very rare gift, almost amounting to genius, of throwing himself into the personality of the writer ... He could not always translate accurately what he felt in a single word ... but he could explain, and his explanation invariably meant an illumination which no mere verbal rendering could supply. We may well regard this gift of historic sympathy as the highest of all qualifications for the appreciation and interpretation of an ancient literature and it is as rare as it is valuable.<sup>4</sup>

At this point in his life, Theodore must have regarded himself as primarily a scholar of classical languages and New Testament, and these are interests which he sustained throughout his career.<sup>5</sup> But from 1903-1905 he was at Regent's Park College, London, under Principal George Pearce Gould, the other great teaching model in his life, and the man who turned his career towards the Hebrew Old Testament. Life at Regent's Park was rather different from Cambridge:

(it) was rather like being back at school again. Indeed, as long as Dr Gould lived, one, at least, of his students always visited him with the feeling that he was once more a third-form boy who had been summoned to the Headmaster's study.<sup>6</sup>

But his very great admiration for Gould is revealed in the following comments:

...the preparation he made for his exegetical lectures on the text of the Old Testament would have been quite adequate for an ICC commentary... Thoroughness and a passion for accuracy were among the qualities which made Dr Gould the greatest teacher of the Hebrew in modern times.<sup>7</sup>

He describes a typical classroom experience:

Then the Principal would move back from the desk over which he had been leaning... and give us an inspired and inspiring exposition of the passage we had read. We were never allowed to feel that philology and criticism were ends in themselves; they were necessary and indispensable means to the fulfillment of a higher purpose. That purpose was the understanding and interpretation of the Word of God. [We]...could not fail to catch something of the passionate enthusiasm which our master had for the Book, and we realized that the drudgery of grammar and dictionary work was but the preliminary to the transmission of the eternal message enshrined in the language of Holy Scripture.<sup>8</sup>

Another important event in the formative years was the securing of a Dr Williams' Scholarship in 1904 to enable Theodore to spend a short time at Göttingen University. Theodore Robinson's

subsequent career in teaching and writing, and his work with the Society for Old Testament Study showed the pronounced influence on him of German Old Testament scholarship. His first teaching appointment was at Woodbrooke College for three years, during which time he taught not only Bible but Church History as well.

During these years he married Marie Helen Joseph, and there was born to them their only child, a daughter, Dorothy Robinson (Spencer).<sup>9</sup> His wife's health was not strong (she was asthmatic), nevertheless they both felt a strong call to teach on the foreign mission field. When the choice with the Baptist Missionary Society narrowed down to China or India, Theodore's heritage from his great grandfather predisposed him to go out to Serampore, where from 1908-1914 he taught Hebrew, Old Testament, and Syriac. His inherent interest in languages and an incipient interest in comparative religion were thus materially aided. He participated in translating the New Testament into Bengali, and taught Syriac, ministering to Syrian Christians and the Syrian community, as had his great grandfather before him. He was a respected teacher, and his daughter has a letter of appreciation printed on silk by his Indian students thanking him for many things, and concluding: "it is your humility, true sympathy, and frankness of heart we have to thank you [for] most of all". Mrs Spencer added about his later career in a personal interview:

Theodore was determined to become primarily a teacher. He showed great patience with his students, continuing to teach them first year Hebrew. He gave individual attention to his students, praying for each daily, for as he said: 'People are more important than books'.

When he ended his mission service in 1914, Theodore had contracted an unknown fever, and was quite ill. He was given a year's furlough, and was never able to return because of World War I and his and his wife's health problems.

In this transitional period of his teaching ministry another great teacher came into his life as he went up for a time of study at Mansfield College, Oxford, with G. Buchanan Gray. This is the teacher who links the three greatest British Baptist Old Testament scholars of an era, H. Wheeler Robinson, who studied with him before the turn of the century, Theodore Robinson, and H. H. Rowley, who studied with him both before and after World War I. In a memoir to Wheeler Robinson, Theodore remarks:

It is a fortunate thing that his college training gave him the discipline of Hebrew, and that he studied under Buchanan Gray perhaps the greatest all round Old Testament scholar this country has ever produced.<sup>10</sup>

In 1915, Theodore Robinson applied for and was appointed to the post of lecturer in Semitics at the University College of South Wales and Monmouthshire at Cardiff, where "the impor-

tance of his work was recognized in 1927 by the creation of a chair in Semitic languages, which he occupied until his retirement in 1944".<sup>11</sup> Aubrey Johnson, his most famous student, assistant, and successor, writes of his service there:

Throughout the period his administrative gifts proved to be a valuable asset both to University College and to the University of Wales as a whole, notably through his activities as permanent dean of the college faculty of theology and as a member and some time dean of the university faculty of theology.<sup>12</sup>

In the Introduction to the festschrift volume presented to Theodore H. Robinson by the Society for Old Testament Study on his sixty-fifth birthday, the editor H. H. Rowley, after reviewing Theodore's work for the Society, his publications and career honours, adds: "It is safe to say that Professor Robinson himself considers his real life work to be, not in the things mentioned above, but in the classroom".<sup>13</sup> He comments on the great expansion of Theodore's department during his years at Cardiff, "This was in no small measure due to his power to make his subject live for his students, and to kindle their interest and enthusiasm".<sup>14</sup> Johnson in his obituary notice in *The Times*, remarks about Theodore's career:

Only those who lived through the 20s and 30s of this century can appreciate to the full what a creative period it was in this country and how profoundly he made his influence felt.<sup>15</sup>

In a more personal note, he adds: .

A tall, impressive figure with something of a military bearing, he was wont to command the awe of his students: but they also found in him a teacher of unusual distinction whose seeming austerity concealed a kindness of heart which placed him readily at their service in time of need.<sup>16</sup>

And of his churchmanship, he says:

Like his friend, T. R. Glover, and that other eminent Old Testament scholar, H. Wheeler Robinson, he was an uncompromising Baptist, and his reputation gave lustre to the denomination which in innumerable ways he was happy to serve.<sup>17</sup>

From the Baptist point of view, one of the important aspects of his teaching position at Cardiff was his tuition of students at the South Wales Baptist College. His annual reports on this activity from 1916-1927 reveal the growth of his teaching ministry, and the increasing importance of the connection between the Baptist College and the University.<sup>18</sup>

II. Theodore's teaching career at Cardiff coincides with two other phases of his work that developed simultaneously, as it were, with his teaching: his work with the nascent Society for Old Testament Study, which he helped found, and his writing for publication on technical Old Testament subjects.<sup>19</sup> Theodore himself wrote a history of the Society as an Appendix to *Record and Revelation*.<sup>20</sup> Anderson's Jubilee history of the Society notes:

... it was in the two decades before 1939 that the character and traditions of the Society were formed. During that early period of its life the Society owed an immense debt to the energy and enthusiasm of Theodore H. Robinson, who was sole Secretary until 1927, and to the service subsequently rendered by him and C. R. North as Co-Secretaries.<sup>21</sup>

At the second meeting of the Society in Manchester in July 1919, G. Buchanan Gray read a paper entitled, "The Possibility of Issuing a New Translation of the Old Testament" which eventuated in practical discussions of the idea for the next few years. It is an interesting historical note that the discussions may have been the seed-bed for the New English Bible, of which Theodore Robinson became the first Convener of the Old Testament Panel in 1946.<sup>22</sup> In the note taken by Theodore of a committee meeting with SCM Press on a new translation of the Old Testament, there was a proposal for the preparation of a sample illustrated history of the Religion of Israel and an arrangement of the Book of Amos in oracular sections, both undertaken by Theodore Robinson. It is easy to see the idea for two of his future publications in this assignment. The first only came to fruition in *Hebrew Religion: Its Origin and Development*, 1930, with W. O. E. Oesterly.<sup>23</sup> The second came sooner to publication in *The Book of Amos: Hebrew Text with Critical and Grammatical Notes*, 1923.<sup>24</sup> Discussions held by Theodore with the Adult School Movement were more immediately fruitful in a suggestion of a series of Old Testament books in modern colloquial English. When this suggestion was made to the Society, Theodore already had a draft copy in manuscript of his translation of Amos, with the result that the Society moved to co-operate in the issue of such a series, and T. H. Robinson was appointed to act as co-editor. So in his bibliography, the first book on the Old Testament published by Theodore is *The Book of Amos* in "Books of the Old Testament in Colloquial Speech".<sup>25</sup>

The 1923 Minutes note a request from Clarendon Press for text books for schools on the Old Testament. This proposal resulted in the Clarendon Bible assignments to members of the Society under the editorship of Canon G. H. Box, in which Theodore wrote *The Decline and Fall of the Hebrew Kingdoms*.<sup>26</sup>

Theodore's own publishing in the early twenties had focussed on the prophets, especially one of his best-known textbooks, *Prophecy and the Prophets in Ancient Israel*.<sup>27</sup>

Rowley comments in his Introduction to *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy*, the festschrift already mentioned, in explaining the title:

While his publications have covered many aspects of Old Testament study, it is to the study of the prophets and of the prophetic books of the Old Testament, including questions of literary structure and poetic forms, that Professor Robinson's most important and most original work has been devoted...<sup>28</sup>

To be sure, Theodore had been influenced in his study of the prophets by the German scholarship, particularly G. Hölscher.<sup>29</sup>

In fact, one of his "crusades" and that of SOTS as well, was the re-establishment of contact with the German scholars after the war. He describes the incident that focussed this concern in his Memoir to Wheeler Robinson:

On the close of the first world war, Christian scholars of all branches made determined efforts to get into touch with their colleagues in Germany, and do what they could to repair the moral damage wrought by the conflict... A real opportunity came in 1923 with the news that the world famous Old Testament periodical, *Die Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* was in serious danger owing to lack of support. Proposals were at once made from the British side [through SOTS] which were aimed at rendering the journal even more completely international than it had been before the war. The Editor intimated that he would be glad to have a contribution in English, and the British choice fell on Wheeler Robinson.<sup>30</sup>

Theodore himself was contributing through German publications<sup>31</sup> and most importantly, "Die Zwölf Kleinen Propheten - Hosea bis Micha".<sup>32</sup>

This interest in international scholarship is just one indication of Theodore's broad ecumenicity of spirit. What he describes in his history of SOTS truly reflects his own thinking:

The Society has a broad basis of membership, the only necessary qualification being evidence of ability to appreciate the Old Testament in Hebrew. Every shade of religious opinion, Jewish and Christian is represented, and it has been found in practice that all can meet in happy cooperation on the basis of their common interest. Differences of opinion on technical matters are freely recognized, and the Society has no standard of orthodoxy, theological or critical.<sup>33</sup>

The breadth of his own approach to the study of religion is indicated in his *An Outline Introduction to the History of Religions*,<sup>34</sup> and his approach to the Old Testament may well be described as falling within the "religio-historical school".

The work of SOTS at this time reflected Theodore's international interests by a resolution passed in 1926 for an international gathering held at Keble College, Oxford in September 1927. At this first international gathering:

Six nationalities were represented, while papers were read and discussion carried on in English, French, and German. The links thus formed have been maintained and strengthened, not only by the election of distinguished foreigners to the honorary membership of the society, but also by the presence on a number of occasions of foreign scholars at meetings of the Society.<sup>35</sup>

Theodore presided at the next meeting for his first term as President in 1928, and read his Presidential Address: "Some Remarks on Hebrew Grammar".

The next year's Minutes contains a proposal which led Theodore to the writing of *A History of Israel, I, The Exodus to the Fall of Jerusalem*.<sup>36</sup> When the Committee to draw up the 1933 Book List of SOTS was appointed,<sup>37</sup> it must have seemed natural that Theodore should be the "convener". He continued the editorship of this Book List through the rest of the 1930s, and about this time (1934-1940), Theodore began seven years of production of the "Recent Foreign Theology" column for the *Expository Times*.<sup>38</sup>

Honours had by this time begun to accumulate to Theodore. He was the Schweich Lecturer for 1926, and was invited to give the Murtle Lecture at the University of Aberdeen in 1929, from whom he received the honorary D.D. He was invited to be visiting Professor at the University of Chicago in the Summer of 1929, which appointment helped him materially in the concentrated time and research facility needed to write his *History of Israel*, and to be visiting professor at Halle-Wittenberg in 1931<sup>39</sup> from whom he received the honorary Th.D. in recognition of his work for SOTS.

A scholar's comments on an illustrious contemporary are always revealing. In his Memoir to H. Wheeler Robinson, Theodore describes the next international meeting in which SOTS participated at Göttingen in 1935:

At this last, representative scholars were invited to take part; one from each of the more important countries to read a longer paper and others to offer shorter contributions. There was only one possibility for the longer paper from a British scholar, and that again was Wheeler Robinson. When he finished reading it [i.e. his paper on "The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality", *Werden und Wesen des Alten Testaments*, ed. by P. Volz, F. Stummer and J. Hempel, B.Z.A.W., lxvi, Berlin Töpelmann, 1936, pp.49-62] the ablest of the German scholars [Eissfeldt] whispered to a British colleague [T. H. Robinson] 'We have no one in this country to compare with this man in his field'. We are

justified in believing that he held an unique position, standing head and shoulders above every other scholar of our time in his special branch of Old Testament Studies.<sup>40</sup>

Lest one suppose, from the excerpt quoted from Theodore's Memoir to Wheeler Robinson (1945), that his feelings toward his contemporary were unambiguous admiration, I must cite another passage immediately following the preceding:

Of course, he had his limitations, and, being human, was largely unconscious of them. This, unfortunately, led him to give time and trouble to branches of study with which he was less qualified to deal than with his own speciality. He knew little or nothing of archaeology and was not greatly interested in textual criticism. The value of history for him lay in the underlying philosophical issues, particularly that of time and eternity; he never visualized it as a biology of the organised human community. He was not, and never could have been, a higher critic, and, where critical work was necessary, he was content to accept the views of others, not always judiciously balanced... It is the more to be regretted that he did not concentrate wholly on one side of Old Testament studies and give us a systematised 'Theology of the Old Testament'. This is one of the big gaps in modern Biblical scholarship, and no man was ever better fitted to fill it... For Wheeler Robinson was by instinct and by interest a theologian, and his approach was inevitably psychological and philosophical.<sup>41</sup>

Now to complete what this assessment of Wheeler meant to Theodore, a passage that contrasts him with T. R. Glover, the formative influence in Theodore's life with whose teaching style he most closely identified.

A scholar may be either an artisan or an artist or, in rare instances, both. Wheeler Robinson's methods were essentially those of the artisan...[concordance work, etc.]. He had no patience with the worker who saw his way through a literature by sheer insight, and, while he was reading it, became for the time a sympathetic contemporary of the author. He offered the strongest contrast to the other great Baptist scholar of our time, Reavely Glover, and the two men tragically enough, never did or could have understood one another. The amazing thing about Wheeler Robinson's genius was that he constantly produced great works of art by the methods of the artisan.<sup>42</sup>

III. This leads me to mention the disappointments in Theodore Robinson's career. Perhaps the first of these was his enforced return from the mission field. The next disappointment had to do with the Professorship in the Chair of Semitic Languages and Literature at University College of North Wales, Bangor, for which he applied, but to which Edward Robertson was elected in 1921.



He was given his own professorship at Cardiff six years later. But perhaps the chief disappointment of his teaching career was his failure to obtain the appointment to S. A. Cook's chair at Cambridge, the Regius Professorship of Hebrew, for which he applied in 1938. He must have felt in his 56th year to be in the prime of his career. I have been told that he was most satisfied in his writing accomplishments by Old Testament textbooks he had produced together with W. O. E. Oesterley, not only the *Hebrew Religion* and *A History of Israel* already mentioned, but also *An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament*.<sup>43</sup> The revised and enlarged edition of *Hebrew Religion*<sup>44</sup> had just been published. There is a note of accomplishment not only for the Society in the concluding paragraph of Theodore's history of SOTS written for *Record and Revelation* this same year:

The Society for Old Testament Study, then can look back on a history of steady progress and of successful activity in many directions. It has done its work quietly, and without ostentation, but it has unremittingly pursued its object in the promotion of Old Testament studies. While the present volume of essays represents its general work and interests, and commemorates twenty-one years of development and achievement, it should serve also as an earnest of yet greater prosperity and usefulness for many years to come.<sup>45</sup>

He had seen his outstanding student, Aubrey Johnson, elected his Assistant at Cardiff. Another outstanding student, G. Henton Davies, was moving from a successful pastorate to become tutor at Bristol Baptist College. To reconstruct the climate of Old Testament Studies in the mid-thirties, one must remember that the burning issue was the patternism of the "myth and ritual" school associated with the name S. H. Hooke. Theodore had published the essay "Hebrew Myths" in *Myth and Ritual*, ed. by S. H. Hooke.<sup>46</sup> He co-authored books with W. O. E. Oesterley, another religio-historical scholar in the "myth and ritual" school. Those who knew Theodore best say he went to extremes in this myth and ritual approach,<sup>47</sup> as he had with the subjects of prophetic ecstasy and form-critical theories about the prophetic oracles and poetry. As Henton Davies, in his "Reminiscences..." about the Robinsons noted:

There were blind spots in both these great men. Theodore H. Robinson was so catholic in his sympathies that he sometimes failed in his judgments, and did not know where to draw the line. He consequently went to extremes in his points of view which exasperated his contemporaries and tried his friends. His over emphasis on prophetic ecstasy, and on literary units in prophecy are examples of this.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, D. Winton Thomas, aged 36, whom G. R. Driver in his Memoir to Thomas, called S. A. Cook's "obvious successor", got the position instead of Theodore.<sup>49</sup> Theodore was crushed by this decision.<sup>50</sup>

In any case, Theodore taught for the remaining seven years of his career in Cardiff. In the official Society for Old Testament Study minutes memoir on his death, F. F. Bruce makes this observation:

He had an immense belief in whatever cause he laid to his heart. For him, there never was a batch of students to equal his own; there never was a better Hebrew Department than that at Cardiff. For him, the Old Testament was a study to cherish, and in this way our Society became his very life-blood.<sup>51</sup>

Another disappointment to Theodore was his enforced retirement because of his health in 1944 at the age of 62. His daughter remarks: "It was a very traumatic experience for him not to be able to go on living his working life to its end".<sup>52</sup> He was ill of Stokes Adams syndrome, with momentary blackouts from a shortage of blood to the brain. His daughter says the doctors were only giving him six months to live, when he and his wife who was a semi-invalid because of asthma came to Ealing to live with the Spencers.<sup>53</sup> Aubrey Johnson says:

On his retirement in 1944, he decided that his career was at an end, and he sought to disappear from the academic scene [i.e. gave his books away to friends and students] and to devote himself more and more to his hobby of philately.<sup>54</sup>

As far as I have been able to determine, when he retired, Theodore destroyed all his personal papers.

However, the story of his later life is not wholly one of disappointment. Recognition of Theodore Robinson's significance to Old Testament scholarship did come in a most appropriate way, from the Society for Old Testament Study, which elected him president for the second time in 1946, when the work of the Society resumed after World War II. Theodore indicated he wished to resign as Secretary after 29 years, and the SOTS passed a commendatory resolution for his devoted service to the Society. Then plans were made for a festschrift volume to be prepared by A. R. Johnson, C. R. North and H. H. Rowley (editor). This volume, *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy* presented to Theodore H. Robinson on his sixty-fifth birthday (August 9th, 1946), was publicly presented at a dinner in Dr Robinson's honour given by Professor Johnson in Cardiff at an international gathering of the Society.<sup>55</sup> A message of greeting was received from the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, United States of America.

But Theodore's retirement was short lived. As Aubrey Johnson noted in his obituary memoir:

In 1946 he found a new outlet for his energy and enthusiasm in the proposed *New English Bible* and for ten years he played a leading part in the development of the project by acting as convener of the Old Testament panel, happy to be working once again with his beloved Hebrew Bible.<sup>56</sup>

Other activities of his retirement years are noted by E. A. Payne:

During 1949-50 he paid weekly visits to Regent's Park College, Oxford, assisting with tuition in both Old and New Testaments, and for a time lectured at the Church of England Missionary training college at Haslemere... He continued active in the service of the Bible Society, the Dr Williams's Trust, the Institute of Christian Education... and also did a good deal of broadcasting, particularly to schools.<sup>57</sup>

He even became a tutor in Hebrew to a member of the congregation, a school teacher, in the Haven Green Baptist Church, Ealing, of which he was a member and deacon. One of the best evaluations of Theodore came to me from his Pastor during those years, and former student, the late J. Ithel Jones:

T. H. Robinson: During his time at University College, Cardiff, T. H. R. regarded it as his first duty to teach ministers in training to read their Bibles... He did, of course, produce noted Old Testament scholars, the best known among whom would be A. R. Johnson, and G. Henton Davies. But these were by-products of his academic enthusiasm rather than the aim of his teaching... The source of greatest satisfaction to Dr Robinson is the fact that he has helped so many ordinary ministers to read the Old Testament in the original tongue and that through his help they, in turn have been enabled to make its message live to ordinary people... He would not spare himself, body or mind, in seeking to bring the message of a prophet to his hearers. I have a reference to this in one of my books [*The Holy Spirit and Christian Preaching*, London: Epworth, 1967, p.45] - 'I am tempted at this point to recall my old teacher, the late T. H. Robinson, describing the Hebrew prophet in his ecstasy. Robinson's histrionic powers were not inconsiderable, judged even by Welsh students, some of whom were old enough to recall the end of the line of preachers who indulged in old Celtic *hwyl*. The technical expression for the onset of the prophetic ecstasy 'the breath of God rushed upon him' was almost onomatopoeically demonstrated before us!... Probably his book on the Prophets is the one that was most helpful to the rank and file of the ministry... It is very difficult for those who are indebted to him to know where that indebtedness begins and where it ends.<sup>58</sup>

Theodore continued to publish during his retirement years, including *The Poetry of the Old Testament*,<sup>59</sup> *Job and His Friends*,<sup>60</sup> and new editions of his *St Mark's Life of Jesus*,<sup>61</sup> *Paradigms and Exercises in Syriac Grammar*,<sup>62</sup> and *A Short Comparative History of Religions*.<sup>63</sup> For schools he published two brief works: *An Introduction to the Old Testament*,<sup>64</sup> and *The Old Testament: A Conspectus*.<sup>65</sup>

When one pursues such an active "retirement", the inevitable result is the necessity for another, later retirement. This was for Theodore, if anything, more painful than the first. Evidently he did not perceive how much his scholarly acuteness had begun to fail him in the mid-1950s. The rule of the translators of the New English Bible was that retirement at 75 years was mandatory. In 1956, at a general committee meeting, in the spring, the Bishop of Winchester, Dr Williams, the general chairman, asked Theodore to stay on another year as Convener of the Old Testament Panel, even though he would turn seventy-five that August 9th. But in connection with the SOTS meeting at Cardiff in July, the Old Testament panel itself felt compelled to request that he step aside in favour of Dr G. R. Driver. This was a bitter disappointment to Theodore, and he was hardly himself when he tried to present a paper on Ezekiel to the society the following day. Theodore's health was deteriorating. Calling his daughter from Cardiff after the decision was made known, he remarked: "I fainted twice this morning".<sup>66</sup>

By the following Spring, however, he was able to explain the method of the translation and the progress of the New English Bible Old Testament project to the British Baptist Union in these terms:

Our method is as follows. A draft is prepared by a single scholar, who need not be a member of the relevant panel. Old Testament drafts are first submitted to a scholar [i.e. G. R. Driver] who is, perhaps, the greatest Semitic philologist living, to whom I handed over the convenership of the panel at the beginning of this year. His suggestions often include meanings which are as yet to be found in no dictionary or lexicon. Then the panel as a whole discusses and modifies the draft, and it is sent to the literary advisers. Their recommendations are most valuable, and are always accepted, unless, in the judgment of the translating panel, they fail to give the real sense of the original. When agreement has been reached between the two panels, the result is presented to the Joint Committee in the form of a Pink Book, and filed till the whole work is completed when it will be subjected to final revision.<sup>67</sup>

The final tragedy in the life of Theodore came in the Summer of 1959. He was driving with his wife when he blacked out, and in the multiple crash that followed, she was fatally injured, dying four days later of pneumonia. He never stopped blaming himself for her death in the declining years till his death in June, 1964.

At his death, H. H. Rowley wrote of him in *ZAW*:<sup>68</sup>

A man of remarkable energy and enthusiasm, he never spared himself in the service of his students and was always generous in encouraging younger scholars. His services to British Old Testament scholarship were immense, and more than any other of his generation he kept open the channels between British and other scholars.

E. A. Payne wrote of his teaching career at Cardiff:

Students of many denominations and lands benefitted by his outstanding gifts as a teacher and caught something of his own enthusiasm for Hebrew language and literature.<sup>69</sup>

Aubrey Johnson wrote:

Professor Robinson's reputation extended far beyond the borders of Wales, for he speedily earned international recognition as an Old Testament scholar. On the whole his original contributions to scholarship were confined to the realm of Hebrew metrics and that of the prophetic literature; and it was primarily as the author of textbooks for students that he became widely known... His enthusiasm for his subject knew no bounds...<sup>70</sup>

F. F. Bruce wrote for SOTS:

Professor Theodore Robinson's death removes from our midst one of the most prominent and best loved of our Fathers. He was founder Member and twice President (1928 and 1946). He was the first Secretary, and ... he remained an Officer for 29 years. He always attended SOTS meetings, though latterly, when his advanced age restricted his movements, he mainly attended the London meetings... We miss, and shall miss for a very long time to come a most loyal member and friend of the Society.<sup>71</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Returning to that set of presuppositions about prophetic teaching and discipleship with which I started, and after studying the lives and teaching ministries of both Henry Wheeler Robinson and Theodore Henry Robinson, I conclude that what these men taught their students they also modelled, embodied, almost incarnated for them in living personality. To meet Wheeler Robinson was to be confronted by an Amos. To hear Theodore Robinson lecture on prophetic ecstasy was to observe it happening before your eyes. Great teachers live on in the lives of their students, and the next generation, their students' students. This is a peculiarly Old Testament kind of "immortality". Corporate personality, as interpreted by Wheeler Robinson, meant the continuity of the generations and the life of the individual devoted to and subsumed within the covenant community.<sup>72</sup> He lived and implemented this in his teaching ministry. Prophetic teaching for Theodore Robinson was the re-living by intuition and insightful inspiration the experience of the ancient prophets in interpreting their messages for today's prophets-in-training. His prophetic teaching ministry lives on in his students and their students' ministries. Instruction in the Hebrew prophets, teaching the Old Testament language, history, literature and religion to ministers who would teach others, who in turn would teach others, was worth the kind of devotion and scholarship which

the Robinsons of British Baptist twentieth century theological education poured into their teaching ministries. Publications are a continuing contribution, ideas live on, but lives that devotedly teach other lives to minister to yet other lives provide a living chain for tradition in the fellowship of believers. Henton Davies, who alone of my interviewees studied with both Robinsons, concludes his "Reminiscences" this way:

Theodore Robinson taught me an art of presentation, and an art of prayer together with some understanding of the delicate tracery of the human spirit in relationship. Wheeler Robinson taught me an art of study and an art of communion together with some understanding of the concentration of the spirit in ceremonial, conceived as moments, words and deeds of revelation. They were two great men, my masters both. Being dead they still speak, and their names will live on.<sup>73</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Isaiah 8.6, 50.4-5.
- 2 *Cambridge University Reporter*, 14th June 1902, p.1055; 20th June 1903, p.1050.
- 3 "Reminiscences of George Pearce Gould", *The Baptist Quarterly*, Vol.9, No.5, January 1939, p.311.
- 4 *Terrot Reavely Glover of Cambridge: Scholar and Christian*, No.12, Brief Biographies of Leading Laymen (London: The Carey Press, 1943) pp.6-7.
- 5 cf. His later publications of *St Mark's Life of Jesus* and *Moffatt Commentaries on Matthew*, and *Hebrews*.
- 6 "Reminiscences..." , *loc.cit.*
- 7 *Ibid.* p.312.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 Who has been gracious enough to share with me her memories of her early years in India and Cardiff.
- 10 "Wheeler Robinson: Old Testament Scholar", *The Baptist Quarterly*, Vol.II, Nos.14-15 (July-October 1945) p.377.
- 11 A. R. Johnson's obituary in *The Times*, (Monday, June 29th, 1964).
- 12 *Ibid.*
- 13 *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1950) p.viii.
- 14 *Ibid.* Mrs Spencer writes that in 1915 his department had six students, and over sixty when he retired in 1944.
- 15 *Op.cit.*

- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Kindly supplied to me by Principal Dafydd Davies. The reports from the years 1925, 1926 and 1927 are very favourable, especially in their assessments of Aubrey Johnson and Henton Davies.
- 19 My main sources for this double phase of his work are his own Minutes and circulars contained in the Minutes Books of SOTS, to which I was kindly given access by D. R. Ap-Thomas and the University of Wales, Bangor, and the Bibliography of Theodore's publications prepared by G. Henton Davies for the festschrift volume mentioned above, pp.201-206.
- 20 *Essays on the Old Testament by Members of the Society for Old Testament Study*, Ed. H. Wheeler Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1938) pp.499-502
- 21 G. W. Anderson, "The Society for Old Testament Study 1917-1967", *Vetus Testamentum*, xvii, 1, 1967, p.1.
- 22 A committee of S. A. Cook, R. H. Kennett, and Theodore Robinson was also appointed to discuss with the syndics of the Cambridge University Press about the possible establishment of a Journal of Old Testament Studies, an idea finally abandoned as not financially feasible.
- 23 London, S.P.C.K., 1930.
- 24 Texts for students, 30. London, S.P.C.K., 1923, which the SOTS minutes make clear was arranged through the Society, with a minimum sale of 1000 copies, and £20 guaranteed by the Society itself.
- 25 Ed. by G. C. Martin and T. H. Robinson (National Adult School Union, London: 1920).
- 26 Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926.
- 27 London: Duckworth, "Studies in Theology", 1923.
- 28 Op.cit., p.viii, cf. the Prefatory note to his *HAT* Commentary (1936) on *Hosea bis Micha*, "For the last thirty years the prophetic books of the Old Testament have formed my main interest and my principle subject of study". p.III.
- 29 *Die Propheten*, (Leipzig: 1914).
- 30 Op.cit., p.375. The article was entitled: "The Psychology and Metaphysic of 'Thus Saith Yahweh'", *ZAW*, 1923; cf. pp.501-502 of his own history of SOTS in *Record and Revelation*.
- 31 Eight items between 1924 and 1936 listed in Henton Davies' bibliography, pp.202-205.
- 32 *Handbuch zum A. T.*, ed, by O. Eissfeldt, (Mohr: Tübingen, 1936).
- 33 Op.cit., p.501.
- 34 Oxford: Humphrey Milford, 1926.

- 35 Op.cit., p.502; the first list of honorary members, of distinguished foreign scholars, according to the Society's resolutions at December 1926 meeting, was listed in December 1927 minutes as follows: Professor K. Budde, Professor B. D. Eerdmans, Professor H. Gunkel, Professor Joh. Hempel, Professor A. Lods, Professor J. Powis-Smith, Professor Paul Volz, (cf.1938, *Record and Revelation*), Professor Dr A. Bertholet, Professor A. Causse, Professor B. D. Eerdmans, Professor Dr Otto Eissfeldt, Professor Joh. Hempel, Professor A. Lods, Professor J. A. Montgomery, Professor J. Pedersen, Professor Dr F. Stummer, and Professor Paul Volz.
- 36 Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932, the whole work by Oesterley and Robinson dedicated to the Society for Old Testament Study.
- 37 Miss B. K. Rattley, Professor S. A. Cook, Mr G. R. Driver, Professor W. O. E. Oesterley, Principal H. Wheeler Robinson, Rev. H. H. Rowley, and Professor T. H. Robinson.
- 38 Henton Davies' bibliography, pp.204-205.
- 39 Where he taught his "history of Israel", and was in daily consultation with Otto Eissfeldt about the content.
- 40 Op.cit., p.376.
- 41 Ibid., pp.376-377.
- 42 Ibid., p.378.
- 43 London: S.P.C.K., 1934.
- 44 London: S.P.C.K., 1937.
- 45 Op.cit., p.502.
- 46 London: Oxford University Press, 1933.
- 47 e.g. in his reconstruction of a pre-exilic Israelite new year festival ritual, including a sacred marriage of Yahweh and Anath, and the death and resurrection of Yahweh! "Hebrew Myths" in S. H. Hooke, ed. *Myth and Ritual*, (London: Oxford, 1933), pp.188-189.
- 48 Wheeler Robinson Centenary Edition of *The Baptist Quarterly*, Vol.XXIV, No.6, April 1972, p.247.
- 49 "David Winton Thomas", *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol.LVII, pp.463-476.
- 50 Private interviews with Aubrey Johnson and Henton Davies.
- 51 SOTS Minutes, 7 January 1965, p.70.
- 52 Private Correspondence.
- 53 Private interview and correspondence.
- 54 Memoir in *The Times*, op.cit.



- 55 The list of overseas visitors include Professor and Mrs Aage Bentzen, Dr and Mrs Ivan Engnell, Professor B. A. Alfrink, Professor W. Baumgartner, Dr. E. Brønno, Professor J. Coppens, Professor J. Newton Davies, Professor P. A. H. DeBoer, Professor B. D. Eerdmans, Professor E. Hammer-shaimb, Dr A. A. Kampman, Professor R. deLanghe, Professor A. Parrot, Professor J. van der Ploeg, Professor Th. C. Vriezen, Professor A. Gulecia. Dr S. A. Cook on behalf of the British Academy also presented to Dr Robinson the "Burkitt Medal for Biblical Studies". Reading papers at the meeting were Professor A. Parrot, Professor S. A. Cook, Professor N. W. Porteous, Professor W. Baumgartner, Professor Aage Bantzen, Professor G. R. Driver, Professor A. R. Johnson, Professor E. Robertson, Professor J. Coppens, Professor H. H. Rowley, Professor P. A. H. DeBoer, and for Professor Otto Eissfeldt, who could not be present, a paper was read by Professor C. R. North. The contributors to the festschrift were W. F. Albright, S. A. Cook, G. Henton Davies, who also prepared the Bibliography of Theodore Henry Robinson's writings, G. R. Driver, O. Eissfeldt, A. R. Johnson, A. Lods, C. R. North, Johs. Pedersen, N. W. Porteous, H. H. Rowley, R. B. Y. Scott, and N. H. Snaith.
- 56 Op.cit., *The Times*.
- 57           Memoir. "Memoirs of Ministers and Missionaries", *Baptist Union Handbook*, 1965, pp.362-363.
- 58 Private correspondence.
- 59 London: Duckworth "Studies in Theology", 1947.
- 60 London: 1954.
- 61 London: Wyvern Books, W29, 1962.
- 62 3rd ed. London: 1949.
- 63 2nd ed. "Studies in Theology Series" (London: Duckworth, 1951).
- 64 London: Merlin Books, 1948.
- 65 London: Colet Library, 11, 1953.
- 66 Private interview with Dorothy Spencer.
- 67 His speech continues: "We may now look at various kinds of problems which the translator has to face... In the first place we have to decide what we are to translate. It is not enough to have any one text before us; the writer's original words have been copied again and again, and it may safely be said that there are few cases... in which changes have not been made by accident or design.
- "Then begins the real work of translation. For this task I, personally, can claim only one qualification, though that is absolutely indispensable: I know that the task is impossible. This is true of every translation from one language into another... It is only rarely that a word in one language exactly covers a single word in another. There are nearly always overtones and undertones, delicate shades of meaning which cannot be rendered in any other language by a single word. We are dealing with

minds which do not think in our ways, with languages whose very structure is different from that of English, with writers whose political, social and moral background is often startlingly different from ours...

"Then again how are we to avoid one of the serious defects of the familiar versions and show how different are the styles of the various Biblical writers?... No one with any sense of style could possibly confuse the poetry of Ezekiel with that of Isaiah. Prose styles, too, vary considerably in both parts of the Bible... In the Old Testament we have simple stories such as might be told to small children, formal accounts of historical events, biography, legal codes, vivid and powerful rhetoric, even little (p.179) scientific and philosophical treatises. Any conscious and deliberate attempt to reproduce these styles would be fatal; it could result only in stiff and artificial English. The translator must be so steeped in the original that he unconsciously reproduces for his readers the kind of impression made on him by the Hebrew and Greek - if he can". Reported in *Baptist Times*, 16 and 23 May, 1957, volume ciii, 5326-5337, as cited in Geddes MacGregor, *The Bible in the Making* (London: John Murray, 1959), pp.177-179.

68 *ZAW*, Volume 76, No.3, (1964), p.244.

69 *Op cit.*

70 *Op.cit.*, and cf. "Some Principles of Hebrew Metrics", *ZAW*, xii (1936), pp.28-43.

71 *Op.cit.*

72 H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*, (Philadelphia: Facet Books, Fortress Press, 1964).

73 *Op.cit.*, p.247.

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