

## ARTICLE VI.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF OLD TESTAMENT WORK  
IN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARIES.

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IT is not needful to pause to prove the necessity that is upon the seminaries, of developing courses in the Old Testament department; that must be evident to all. It is also unnecessary to say and prove that the seminaries are actually feeling the importance of such development, and are providing for it. There is activity in the department in most of the seminaries, and others wait only for more adequate equipment before inaugurating new courses. There is doubtless no room for differences of opinion as to the importance of additional opportunities for research in connection with the Old Testament. There is however room for question as to the line in which advance should be made; and the best way to secure the adoption of proper methods is to exchange views, or at least gain definiteness of thought by formulation and expression.

The function of the theological seminary as at present constituted in this country, is to fit men for the ministry. This purpose must be the test by which to judge of the claims of every applicant for admission into the seminary curriculum; from this aim we must start out as we try to devise means to render our seminaries more efficient. Whatever might be the value of a school of theological science that should have no immediate duty to the churches, that should investigate sacred truth for its own sake, for the love of the truth, and with the purpose of diffusing knowledge of the

Bible and biblical topics simply because they are worthy of study, and not in order to induce men to repent and be saved, and to "grow in grace and the knowledge of the truth," the seminary is not such a school. It is not a faculty in a university, its professors appointed by royal decree, or by any power at variance with the churches. It is an institution of the church,—one channel through which the benevolence of the church accomplishes its great work. It may fairly be regarded as one of the charitable institutions of the church, owing its existence and maintenance to it, and morally responsible to it for results. Our seminaries are founded by the liberality of supporters of the churches, who hope to serve them in this way. Tuition is, and can be remitted, because professorships are endowed by Christian men. Through the various boards of the churches, financial aid is given needy students to relieve them of concern about money matters. From a mere financial point of view, then, which is confessedly a low one, but nevertheless one which cannot be ignored and ought not to be, the seminaries are bound to seek the welfare of the churches first and foremost; always supposing that the church is God's chosen means for spreading abroad the good news of salvation.

Another phase of the question is brought out by regarding the seminaries as training-schools established by the church in which to place its future servants in order that the service to be rendered may be better done. Candidates for the ministry no longer read divinity with some minister of local renown as a broad scholar and successful pastor, but are massed under specialists in the various departments. The aim, however, is bound to be the same; the seminaries are to do better just what was done well by individual pastors in decades past, namely, fit men for the pastorate. Without this aim constantly and intelligently in mind, a seminary is unfaithful to the trust imposed upon it, however high the standard of its scholarship, or however brilliant the

record of its graduates in literary or scholastic pursuits. The fidelity or infidelity of an institution is not a matter of adherence to denominational symbols simply or chiefly; before that violent departure from its duty, a seminary may pass through various stages of unfaithfulness to its appointed tasks. The question whether the seminaries feel the pulse of the churches is an important one; but more important perhaps, at least oftener important, is the query, whether the churches feel the throb of seminary life, pulsing with force and health.

It is not intended in using the figures above, as expressive of an intimate relationship between the seminary and the church, to take sides in the mooted question of direct control of seminaries by ecclesiastical bodies; control there should be, but not such as to hamper; control, but not so that ignorance and prejudice, though pious, can exercise authority over learning and fairness, equally pious and consecrated. In the most democratic of denominations even, there is a classification actual though not statutory, by virtue of which certain leading spirits, in positions to understand the needs of the churches, are called upon to fix policies and mould sentiment, sometimes to dictate with authority—the authority of recognized ability and integrity. To such men, or rather to such worth, people delight to yield confidence; and under such control, operating within certain statutory limitations which form a factor of safety, the seminaries exist and develop. Universal recognition of a defect or a lack is but a step removed from the remedy or the supply. Long before that stage is reached, trusted leaders have felt the defect and have taken means to remedy it. One way to accomplish this in the case of the churches is through the seminaries educating young men for the ministry. If, for example, it be discovered that ministers are not reaching as they should the poorer classes in their parishes, effort should be made by the seminaries to impart instruction in methods

of such work by means of mission work in cities under competent oversight. If it is found that ministers are ignorant of music, so ignorant as to be at the mercy of the chorister who has been controlling and perhaps killing the attempts at singing in the congregation for a score of years, then instruction in music should be provided and a generation of ministers sent out who should each understand the needs of his church in this direction, and should be *able* to direct and dictate the music of his services. In the end ability would win the day over habit, and the way be paved for religious, devotional, appropriate music, and God would be worshipped in song, rather than his cause and people disgraced by it.

"The development of Old Testament work in the seminaries" becomes, in view of the foregoing definition or introduction, "The development of the Old Testament department, in order best to promote the interests of the church."

The first and most elementary work of the department is philological; shall this be emphasized or slighted? Can it be omitted? The Old Testament is written in Hebrew, and Hebrew ought to be learned by every one who is to be an expounder of the Scriptures. Every teacher should know his text-book. To be sure there are excellent translations and a mass of excellent commentaries, but Hebrew is desirable to enable one to understand the commentaries; the minister should be to some extent independent of his commentaries; and above all, he can never comprehend the Old Testament until he knows the Hebrew language, its limitations and possibilities, its Semitic cast and character. If, from stress of circumstances, a theological student is unable to acquire the language, while still it seems advisable for him to enter the ministry, it is unfortunate for him and his people, but he should be bidden God-speed; God has a work for him from which he should not be deterred.

The teaching of Hebrew Grammar, is, however, no

proper part of the Old Testament department of the seminary. Unfortunately the colleges have not reckoned it within their province. Perhaps this, due in part to the old-time exaggeration of the classical languages as a means of discipline, is due also to the fact that the text-book of biblical Hebrew is of necessity the Bible. Whatever the cause, the fact is, that the seminaries have had, and have yet, Hebrew Grammar on their hands. Every Hebrew teacher in a seminary must feel an inward protest at being obliged to consume so large a part of the time that can be spent by him and his pupils in the class-room, and so large a part of the time and strength of his pupils that is available for study, with the elements of Hebrew. The protest is being more and more loudly expressed; short cuts to the knowledge (?) of the language abound; there are inductive methods, summer schools, extra pressure in the seminary class. An emphatic demand is being made that the colleges afford opportunities for those who are to take a theological course to study Hebrew as an elective or as an optional. When this is done, as it undoubtedly will be, the seminary classes can begin at once with Exegesis, with perhaps a rapid class in grammar to meet special cases. In echoing this demand, which we do with all our heart, we are at the same time asking for a more thorough drill for our graduates of seminaries. Hebrew begun in the seminary must always remain a compromise between a faithful scientific drill in the *language*, and an obnoxious, burdensome introduction to the study of the Old Testament. Adequate time cannot be taken from the course to secure a knowledge of the language that will be of great profit in after years. Let Hebrew take its place as an elective in college: it is as fitting to form a part of general college training as are, for example, the higher branches of mathematics. There is as much propriety in learning Hebrew for the sake of its literature as in studying Greek and Latin for years so as to read their classics.

Moreover, aside from its value in a general course, might it not be introduced as a part of a technical training? Students of the professions are nowadays allowed to make their college Senior year count as one year in their professional course.

Could this claim be made consistently and persistently, it would very shortly be brought about. One tendency, however, now noticeable in the development of Old Testament work, seems largely to neutralize the effect of whatever demand is made. Is it not an anomaly, that, when the seminaries are trying to rid themselves of elementary Hebrew instruction, they should voluntarily take up the extra, unnecessary burden of the Cognates? If there is time and strength for these, the presumption seems a fair one that there is time and strength for Hebrew. This brings us to the question of just how much value the Cognates are to the theological student. As one of the original languages of the Bible, Aramaic of course falls out of account.

Among the Cognates, Assyrian is of the most importance, and may fairly be taken as a sample. There is an extensive literature in the language, some of which, though but a small portion as compared with the whole range, is of the utmost importance to the student as illustrating Old Testament times; but this part of the literature is translated already, in a fashion much superior to work that it is possible for any to do, save those who make the subject a life specialty. So far as concerns the linguistic value of Assyrian to the student, it is true that there are many roots common to the two languages; but it is also true that comparatively few are clearer of meaning in Assyrian than in Hebrew. To an exhaustive scientific study of Hebrew, the Cognates are indispensable, but it is doubtful whether many students ever get beyond the position of a certain reviewer of a recent Hebrew Grammar, who says in effect that Hebrew is much better understood now than formerly, thanks

to new and improved editions of Gesenius! Few men think it necessary, or find it possible to go behind their lexicon and grammar and improve upon their statements. It does not seem just that our seminaries, for the sake of the few who have "a taste for the languages," or even in the case, rarer still, of those who really expect to make Semitics their life work, should load their professors down with classes in those languages, or that the professors should themselves undertake the extra work. Yet this is being done; it is a requisite universally sought in a candidate for the Hebrew chair in the seminaries, that he should be able to give instruction in the Cognates. He is otherwise supposed not to be abreast with the times, or to be likely to develop his work properly. The value of Assyrian is not overestimated; Hebrew scholars welcome every new decipherer of inscriptions, every new "find," and every new translation. It is the glory of the United States that we are furnishing instruction in the language, and training men to decipher, perhaps the equal of any furnished and trained in the European universities. But we contend that this work lies beyond the proper limits of the seminaries. At most it may be said that some one or more seminaries, fully endowed with a view to Semitic work, and so situated as to be likely to receive in numbers men anxious to learn the languages, may with propriety offer such courses after other more important subjects have been provided. For every seminary through the land to strain after the Cognates, while poorly equipped it may be in every department, and while students asking for the courses, come one by one, perhaps some years none, is needless outlay and unprofitable, and is a mistaken effort to build up the department.

The proper lines along which to develop the Old Testament work are in the direction of Introduction, Theology, and History. Exegesis is doubtless offered extensively enough under the pressure of topics that already exists.

Professor Strack complains, "Students do not think it necessary to continue in attendance upon an Exegetical course to the end of it." This state of things has a shadow of justification. After all, Exegetical *method* is the thing to be gained from the course; that once mastered and the language,—for it must be borne in mind that half the work in a course in Exegesis is spent upon the language,—the student is equipped for independent work.

Old Testament Introduction should be taught in every seminary in the land. Always and in itself important, it is doubly so in these days of revived thought about the Bible. The study is not necessarily a handmaid of "higher criticism;" the fact that it is usually taught in its interest does not characterize it as belonging in that quarter exclusively, but does indicate what kind of weapons conservatism must use in the battle. Probably the United States will never be able to forbid other nations to build new and improved war vessels, but we can build ships ourselves that will do what in case of war is wanted of them. The watchword of the age is progress; or rather, the watchword of truth in every age is progress, and the way to avoid disaster from false and dangerous methods is to busy ourselves and our pupils with work equal in originality and scholarship, on true and safe methods. Doubtless nine-tenths of the questions properly treated in Old Testament Introduction are strictly neutral ones, and independent of critical position. Moreover these very critical problems are being so generally discussed, that they should be understood by all theological students of whatever school. It is the more advisable to take it up consecutively, because the range of the Old Testament is so great that it is impossible to cover all the books in an Exegetical course, and the opportunity is therefore lacking to enter upon the discussion of special Introduction in connection with any other course.

Enough attention is doubtless paid to "higher criti-



cism." It seems unwise to discuss its problems without a well-laid foundation of a linguistic, historical, and theological training. To be sure, statements can be made pro and con, prejudice can be exhibited one way or another, but not until a student is familiar with the language can he comprehend any philological argument for Pentateuchal analysis, and no earlier should he be asked or be allowed to say, as his own opinion, that there is no such argument. Likewise the historical arguments and those from the prophets—how can a judgment of any kind be formed without some study of the historical and prophetic books? The Pentateuchal question is not an easy one; it is moreover, comparatively speaking, not an important one. Certainly a wrong impression is created or conserved, when it is projected far toward the beginning of the course, and made to crowd back or out other more vital matters.

If it is true, as it sometimes seems, that we are on the eve of as radical a departure in Systematic Theology, as in Old Testament criticism, it is true too that the new movement will purport to be based more intelligently upon the teachings of the Bible. On all hands then, scholars should be busy systematizing what they regard to be the biblical teaching. But independent of possible changes in our Systematic Theologies, the study of the teachings of the Bible topically, or topically under the several historical periods, should be permitted if not required of every student. The Presbyterian Church, though set firmly against "higher criticism," has had for years a committee to revise proof-texts for the Westminster Confession. That involves of course the study of the Theology of the Bible. It might be queried whether a report from such a committee stating what they could find, and what they could not find in the Bible, might not properly have preceded any attempt at revision of the Confession. Moreover the old method of searching out texts, taking a verse out of its setting to do duty in support

of a given doctrine, is coming into disfavor in many quarters. Not that the Bible is any the less revered, but it is thought that in order to get its true teaching, context as well as text must be used. The conclusion to which we are driven on all sides is, that Biblical Theology cannot properly be omitted from a seminary course. Does any one doubt that it is better to assign special topics for original investigation to students mature enough, than to have them learn Assyrian characters? Doubtless there is some such work already done in most of the seminaries, but it is not systematic enough, not extensive enough, not thorough enough.

Sabbath-school scholars are more or less familiar, if the International lessons have any value at all, with the history of the Jews down to say a century after the restoration, and with narratives of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles; but what does the average minister even, know about the interval between these dates? Whatever may be thought of the relation of the New Testament doctrines to current Jewish beliefs, it must be admitted that the political environment of Jesus is to be studied best in connection with the history of Palestine in the centuries immediately before his time. This would seem to be reason enough for offering our students some work upon the history of the period between the Canon of the Old and that of the New Testament. There is, however, additional reason in the fact that the question is actually being raised of late, whether the interval between the Testaments does not form a necessary connecting link between them, without which the genesis of the New is not fully to be understood. "The Books that Influenced Our Lord" is the significant title of a recent work on the extra-canonical books of Jewish literature. Whatever the prejudice or bias of teacher or pupil, whatever the policies of the seminaries, no one who enters the ministry can afford to be ignorant of the facts of the case. The question is of vastly

more importance than the relation of an Arabic root to the *ἄπαξ λεγόμενα* of the Old Testament. This period will amply repay study whether attention be paid to its history, literature, or theology.

History of the Old Testament times is passed over all too lightly. Either in connection with Exegesis of the historical books, or as a separate lecture course, this theme calls for the very best, most thorough work on the part of instructor and pupil. It should certainly precede, if possible, discussion of the problems of literary criticism.

The Septuagint, moreover, stands inviting work that will be of the utmost importance in the midst of the Textual problems of the Old Testament, and will be none the less remunerative to the student of New Testament Greek.

In all these departments there is work to be done, and it lies closer to the minister than to any other class of students, and is more profitable to him than to any others. The work demanded is not re-doing what some one else has done, but is new work, calling for the most thorough training, for the broadest scholarship, the acutest thought, the most devout study of Christianity and its holy books; and yet there is profit in the first stages of the work. If a student stops Assyrian after a year or two of study, he finds that it has not been very valuable; but after two years of study of Messianic Prophecy and its fulfilment, or of the Maccabean period of Jewish history, the minister who stops, finding his time otherwise occupied, has something that wonderfully lights up dark passages and obscure doctrines of the Bible.

It goes without saying that not all of the suggested courses can be required; but not one can afford to be omitted entirely from the schedule of lectures. There is moreover a glamour of theory about the suggestions, it is confessed. Doubtless it would be long before any seminary

could realize them entirely. But the purpose has been to offer the suggestions merely as so many directions in which our schools of theology can fittingly, and with most profit to the church, reflect and transmit the enthusiasm that exists for work in connection with the Old Testament department.