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The Historical Element in the New Testament.¹

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WHEN I speak of the historical character of the Scriptures, I beg to be understood as referring to the fact that the truth they convey is couched in history, comes clothed in concrete form, is exhibited, not in abstract and universal propositions, but in specific shape, adjusted to particular times, persons, places, and intended — at least primarily — for definite, contemporary needs and applications.

In making this sweeping statement I do not forget utterances, like the "Golden Rule," which hold good, just as they stand, for all circumstances, all beings, all ages; nor do I overlook the fact that many a particular Biblical direction is apposite as a general maxim. The apostolic statements, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin," "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind," are as wholesome dissuasives to-day from the temptation to disregard conscientious scruples, as they were when addressed to Roman Christians dubitating about observing Jewish feasts and fasts, or about eating flesh that had had some connection with idolatrous worship. Nay, the very circumstance that not a little of the Biblical language admits with facility diverse applications, emphasizes the importance of the exegete's noting narrowly and weighing carefully the specific conditions under which it was first spoken—so far as those can now be ascertained.

¹ The following paragraphs are taken from the President's Annual Address, delivered at the meeting of the Society in Hartford, June 13, 1895. This circumstance will explain alike their somewhat disjointed character, and their popular and unscientific style. After considering briefly the various senses in which the epithet "historic" is applied to the Christian revelation, the speaker proceeded as above.

That our sacred records have a strong national and local cast is as undeniable as that the Greek in which the New Testament is written is a species of that language current in the Levant during the first century. But both facts are easily forgotten. Language with which we have been familiar from childhood takes on a homelike sound. The full recognition of its foreign quality requires that the attention be concentrated for a moment on this particular aspect of it. For this purpose let us open the New Testament, almost at random, and read a considerable extract : —

Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ: for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, and in him ye are made full, who is the head of all principality and power: in whom ye were also circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ; having been buried with him in baptism, wherein ye were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, being dead through your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, you, *I say*, did he quicken together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses; having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us: and he hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to the cross; having put off from himself the principalities and the powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a feast day or a new moon or a sabbath day: which are a shadow of the things to come; but the body is Christ's. Let no man rob you of your prize by a voluntary humility and worshipping of the angels, dwelling in the things which he hath seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast the Head, from whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God.

If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances, Handle not, nor taste, nor touch (all which things are to perish with the using), after the precepts and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and severity to the body; *but are* not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh. — *Colossians* ii. 8-23.

Now it is difficult for an intelligent reader of these sixteen consecutive verses not to feel embarrassed by the air of historic remoteness which overhangs them. Over and above a misgiving which assails him here and there whether he quite understands the allusion on which the thought turns, the evident oriental and first-century air of the whole passage renders it almost ineligible for public reading, without comment, to a miscellaneous audience.

And what is true of this passage holds good of many others: for example, the extended discussions of the gift of tongues; of the relation of the sexes; of the dress and behavior of women in the Christian assemblies; the discipline of the incestuous church member; the collection for the needy believers at Jerusalem, — which make up so

large a part of the Epistles to the Corinthians ; the precepts relative to ecclesiastical administration, given in the Pastoral Epistles ; the elaborate vindication of the rejection of the Jewish nation, which occupies the 9th, 10th, and 11th chapters of the letter to the Romans ; nay, in one or two instances, the greater part of entire books, — as, for example, the contrast between Judaism and Christianity composing the bulk of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the mystic imagery, the dimly intelligible, and, according to modern taste, uncouth symbolism that fills so much space in the last book of the Canon.

Here perhaps I ought to thrust in a caveat. I am only saying that the New Testament is an antique, not an antiquated, book — ancient, not obsolete. I have no sympathy with those who think that because it is old-fashioned it is quite out of date. Just as, a generation or more ago, there were certain wiseacres who held that, because Christianity had superseded Judaism, the Old Testament ought to be discarded ; so we occasionally meet advanced spirits at the present day who would shelve the New Testament among the “Records of the Past.” I do not agree with them — as I hope will be evident before I close.

Nor would I seem to overlook the fact that there are whole stretches of the sacred text which are as fresh and apposite to the spiritual needs of the generality of men as though they were written yesterday. The twenty-five verses immediately following the extract just read from the Epistle to the Colossians furnish a capital example, making up, as they do, that effulgent third chapter, which begins : “If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is,” etc. With the exception of an incidental mention of “Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian and Scythian,” there is almost nothing in the entire chapter indicating when, where, or to whom it was written. The encomium on Love in the 13th of 1 Cor., the vindication of the resurrection in the 15th, the exhortation to bodily and spiritual consecration in the 12th of Romans, are other conspicuous specimens. But the very fact that they start at once to our thought, and linger so in our memory, is an indirect attestation of their exceptional character.

Nor, in calling fresh attention to the historical, i.e. the national and local, character of our New Testament Scriptures, would I be thought to be insensible to the added charm which a slight touch of archaism lends to certain passages — like the quaintness which enhances the beauty of some mediæval picture, or the occasional fascination of our vernacular on the tongue of a foreigner.

Still less would I be thought to lose sight of the accession of power which individualization lends, when it sets forth that which is or may be common to man. The personal then concentrates and localizes the universal. Thoughts and experiences gain incalculably in interest when they attach themselves to one whom though not having seen we love. When the apostle to the Gentiles recites his perils, or tells what things he counted to be loss for the sake of Christ, or gives that golden catalogue of experiences in which through evil report and good report he strove in everything to commend himself as God's minister, — no one needs a commentator to help him catch the heart-throbs. It is PAUL who is speaking: the intervening centuries are but his witnesses, catch up, corroborate, reverberate his words.

For still other passages the feeling of historical remoteness is neutralized by the modern or spiritual sense they have been *made to bear*. The current application, in their case, veils the primary intent. The ordinary Christian as he reads in the Prophets the descriptions of Israel's captivity and return, gives little thought to Israel after the flesh; to him they portray the coming triumph of the Israel of God. To such a reader many of the technical terms and phrases of Jewish speech would seem to have a kind of violence done to them if they were reproduced in their historical import. I allude of course to such terms as "the kingdom of heaven," "inherit the land," "see God," "the day of the Lord," "the wrath to come." So thoroughly transfigured have some of them become under the sublimating and spiritualizing influence of Christianity — which influence, by the way, pertains to its very genius and glory — that they are thought to refer solely to the *life beyond*; and certain persons in our day are winning a momentary distinction as great religious discoverers, because, forsooth, they have found out that the "Kingdom of Heaven" may begin to materialize here on earth!

Perhaps the most signal illustration in the New Testament of the power of the spiritual uses of Scripture to swallow up the primary and outward significance, is furnished by the Apocalypse. What cares the average Christian for your theories about its composite structure or historic reference! What matters it to him whether 666 stands for Nero, or Gladstone, or the Sultan! The edificatory use of the Book looks with scorn upon the uncertainties of the critic; yes, even triumphs at times over the natural force of language. At a funeral last winter, when the thermometer stood below zero, the clergyman read to a little shivering company of mourners gathered in a very humble dwelling the familiar words: "They shall hunger no

more, neither thirst any more ; neither shall the sun strike on them, nor any heat" — and hardly a person seemed conscious of any incongruity.

Let me not be supposed to take exception to this spiritualizing process. It was one great and ever-present aim of the Great Teacher. When he taught his Jewish followers to say "Thy kingdom come," he sought to defecate their mundane expectations by the appended petition, "Thy will be done, as in heaven so on earth." And they shew that they at length learned the lesson. With splendid distinctness does the apostle Paul insist that the true Jew is not the Jew by birth, that the genuine circumcision is of the heart, that the Gentiles become by faith the sons of Abraham, who is thus "the father of all them that believe." So thoroughly has the terrestrial in their thought been swallowed up by the heavenly, that a Peter and a James leave us in uncertainty whether, when they address the "Dispersion," they have in mind merely expatriated Jews, or all those who, having citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem, are while here on earth far away from home. A James can give commentators a pretext for doubting whether by law he means the Hebrew Torah or that eternal ordinance whose seat is in the bosom of God ; and with beautiful unconsciousness does the writer to the Hebrews, within the compass of a single section, use the term "rest" to signify the end of Israel's wanderings in Canaan, the rest promised in David's day, the divine completion of the creative works, and the everlasting sabbath-tide awaiting believers in heaven.

So far am I from objecting to this elasticity, this varied application of Biblical language, that I beg to call attention to it as to a characteristic which has received abundant recognition by the sacred writers themselves, and the oversight of which has hampered many a modern expositor. It is in the New Testament itself that we find, for instance, our Lord's prediction that he will rebuild the Temple, taken now outwardly, of the material structure, now typically of that body in which the Eternal Word became incarnate, now ideally of that habitation of God through the Spirit in which He will forever tabernacle with men. It is in the New Testament itself that the eucharistic meal is depicted now as a Passover, now as the fellowship of commensality, now as the physical incorporation of the believer and his Lord. And how neatly does the Fourth Evangelist give us the substance, yes, more than the substance, of many voluminous discussions about the manifold sense of Prophecy, when he finds, on the one hand, a fulfilment of the Redeemer's declaration, "Of those whom

thou hast given me I lost not one," in the exemption of the disciples from arrest in Gethsemane; and on the other hand — anticipating the irony of history — lifts the ignoble suggestion of the time-serving Caiaphas into a 'prophecy' that the death of Jesus was not for the good of the nation only, but of all the scattered children of God.

Paul, too, as I hardly need remind you, once and again breaks through the trammels of a rigorous historic interpretation when the needs of his didactic purpose so require. Let it suffice to recall his procedure in contrasting the Mosaic dispensation and the Christian. The veil which the earlier record represents Moses as putting on his face in order to abate the fear caused by its unearthly brightness, the apostle does not hesitate to say was put on in order that the children of Israel might not see distinctly the evanescence of the glory; and a moment after, he represents the same veil as lying on Israel's heart.

Nevertheless, such Biblical precedents for diversity of reference we shall all admit, I think, are over-pressed when they are made the warrant, for instance, for ascribing to the apostle the very maxims he combats: — the "Handle not, nor taste, nor touch," of the Colossian ascetics.

A far more common and more defensible procedure is that which allows one Biblical precept and another to lapse through desuetude. The historical limitations in such cases are recognized, and made the reason for the practical abrogation. In many of them Christianity itself has wrought the change which has nullified the precept. The number of particulars in which Biblical usage has become antiquated is larger, probably, than we are apt to suppose until we set out to reckon them up. Beginning with those early days when "not one of them that believed said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common," the mind runs along through precepts about the wearing of veils, the treatment of unmarried daughters, the prohibition of braided hair and gold and pearls and costly raiment, the injunctions relative to clerical monogamy, washing the saints' feet, the holy kiss, and I know not how many others.

This admission, that some of the Biblical precepts are at least obsolescent by reason of their historical form, is a scandal in the judgment of the Tolstois, "Joshua Davidsons," and all that ilk; but most of us — with the great body of Christian believers — remain tranquilly acquiescent until perhaps some obtrusive advocate of "Seventh Day" observance, or of immersion as the only valid mode of baptism, forces upon our attention the transientness of the historic form in

which the permanent spiritual truth is embodied. Even then our acknowledgment may restrict itself to the issue of the moment, and carry us no farther.

For example, one does not have to look far among the popular commentaries on the Fourth Gospel to find our Lord's words to Nathanael, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man," spoken of as referring to the scanty hints of angelic appearances at the transfiguration, in Gethsemane, at the ascension, or on some otherwise unrecorded occasion even. So completely do these interpreters stick in the bark. Stript of its national and local, its historic, costume, what is the saying but the declaration that in the Son of man free intercourse between heaven and earth has been re-established? That which of old was the exceptional privilege of him who strove with God and prevailed, is now the common and constant prerogative of all believers.

In reference to this whole subject of the agency of higher beings there still lingers, I suspect, not a little misapprehension, due to failure to discriminate between the Biblical thought and the language in which it is clothed. The thought has come to us in national costume, and we mistake that costume for the livery of heaven.

Few intelligent persons, indeed, nowadays would be disposed to maintain that "waterless places" are the favorite haunt of demons: the accompanying features, of the house put in inviting condition for a new tenant, and the symbolic 'seven,' compel even a dim perception in this instance to look through the imagery to the underlying thought. So, too, the 'fall of Satan, as lightning, from heaven' figures only in poetry and art. But, on the other hand, to call attention to the fact that the language; "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth," does not give express warrant for the talk about 'angels rejoicing over repentant sinners,' but is—as the whole tenor of the chapter (Luke xv.) shews—a beautifully reverent oriental way of picturing the joy of the Heavenly Father himself at the return of a single wayward child, would be generally thought to savor of exegetical officiousness. To question the statement that the Bible teaches that 'angels are sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation' would strike many minds as audacious unbelief—in spite of the endeavor of the Revision to guide a reader to the Biblical writer's thought. And to assert that what the Sacred Volume is reputed to teach about the "guardian angels" of 'little ones' rests merely upon a misapprehension of expressive oriental symbolism,

would give not a few persons positive pain. Yet the key to the true thought here, viz., the high dignity belonging to the humblest believer, is given in Scripture repeatedly — from the exclamation of the queen of Sheba, “Happy are these thy servants which stand continually before thee,” down to the angel of the annunciation, “I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God,” and the reiterated promise of the vision of God to be granted to the pure in heart and the redeemed. Indeed, one wonders at the persistency of such literalism among modern Christians, in the face of the acknowledged currency among Gentiles and Jews alike of a belief in attendant spirits, whether styled genii, or *δαίμονες*, or ‘angels.’ What do such readers make of the exclamation of the Christians at Jerusalem, who, after interceding with God for the liberation of Peter, were so surprised that their prayer should be answered, that, sooner than believe the literal truth when it was confidently affirmed by Rhoda, “they said, It is his angel”?

And speaking of Peter, what but inattention to the present and personal reference of the Biblical language has caused so many readers to stumble at the only natural interpretation of the Savior’s commendation of the ‘Man of Rock’? — corroborated as that interpretation is by the post of primacy assigned him in all four lists of the Twelve, by the special responsibility laid upon him with reference to his brethren after the ‘sifting,’ by the pastoral charge given him to ‘feed Christ’s sheep,’ by his prominence in the early history of the church as that is recorded in the opening chapters of the Acts.

The accompanying or kindred utterances about “the keys of the kingdom,” “the binding and loosing,” “the gates of Hades,” “the sitting on thrones,” are only so many additional exemplifications of the national and local, the historic, cast of Biblical speech.

The same characteristic of the Biblical language appears, if I mistake not, in passages which have been held to be of cardinal importance in reference to systems of theology. Take, as a specimen, the recognition by Paul of Adamic headship and the unity of the race. But for his rabbinical theological training, it is more than probable that we should have never had that effective contrast of type and anti-type, the man of earth and the man of heaven, the living soul and the life-giving spirit, which sets the radiant crown upon his portraiture of the resurrection in the 15th of Corinthians; or that long perspective of the ages past and the ages to come given us in the 5th of Romans, and which Schlegel is said to have called the grandest philosophy of history that had then entered the human mind. But

what doctrinal burdens, what basal significance, what overwrought systems alike of theology and of anthropology, have these two passing references by a single apostle to a contemporary Jewish tenet been made to bear!

We may find an illustration of the principle we are considering in another momentous topic: the Parousia of Christ. This is a topic, indeed, which stirs a hopeless feeling in many minds; a topic on which sober and reserved exegetes have now and then gone so far as to admit that the apostles are chargeable with inextricable confusion — an admission from which they have not allowed themselves to be deterred by the remorseless logic of Strauss, who says¹ (for substance), ‘The only trouble in the case is, that the event did not agree with the prophecy. Now, Jesus either made these predictions or he did not: if he did, he is thereby proved to have at times lost his mental balance, and hence must be taken with reserve as a teacher and religious guide; if he did not, his disciples, who put such things into his mouth, are not to be trusted in their reports of his teaching.’

A full exposition of this intricate subject of course cannot be attempted here and now. At the most I shall endeavor merely to suggest a few particulars tending to show that the key to it is found in the recognition of the historical, *i.e.* the local and national, cast of our Lord’s language.

But I cannot refrain from saying at once, that, as between man and man, the modern interpreter is quite as likely to be under a misapprehension as the original writer. For, not only was the record made by those (whoever they were) who stood so near the prime source as presumably to be tolerably correct in their statements, but those statements were put in circulation at a time when every reader could bring them to the actual test of history. Nevertheless, there they have been allowed to stand, in all their palpable and reiterated erroneousness — if many modern exegetes are right!

Surely, one would think that such language as, “*from this time forward ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven*” (Matt. xxvi. 64), or this, “*For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds. Verily I say unto you, There be some of them that stand here, which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom*” (Matt. xvi. 27, 28), must have

¹ *Der alte und der neue Glaube.* Sechste Aufl., p. 80.

seemed to the readers of the first century rather an extravagant description of anything their eyes witnessed. For notice: we have in this last passage an explicit announcement of (*a*) his coming; (*b*) his coming as king — in divine glory and with angelic attendants; (*c*) his coming to universal judgment and requital — (“every man according to his deeds”); (*d*) yet some of those on whose ears the words first fell should live to see their fulfilment. What room for faith in him as a prophet after that! Why did not the early Christians stumble at language which strikes us as extravagant to the verge of bombast?

Because they accepted it in the symbolic significance which current Jewish usage largely gave it. The prevalent Messianic expectations in our Lord's day were in the main confused, earthly, out of harmony with the spiritual kingdom which he aimed to establish. The task which confronted him was, how to lift his hearers from that which was secular to that which was spiritual, — from thoughts about *locality* to aspirations after *quality*; how to transform a kingdom of this world into the kingdom of God. And it was achieved, as his entire work was achieved, by first stooping to their level; by using their language; by adjusting his teaching so far as he truthfully could to their conceptions; by lodging the power of an endless life in local and temporary forms, and trusting to its expansive and transforming energy for the triumphant result.

The Bible is its own interpreter in this matter. An apocalyptic appearance on the clouds was one of the distinctive notes of the Messianic advent, as the Book of Daniel shews. Christ's appropriation of that description was merely an unequivocal avowal of Messiahship.

Readers slow to accept guidance in this matter from the Old Testament's employment of sublime and appalling natural phenomena to typify judgments upon Egypt, Babylon, Edom, and the rest, — judgments that had then passed into history, — may at least listen to the official interpretation of our Lord's eschatological discourses as that interpretation is given by the apostle Peter in his comment on the phenomena at Pentecost (Acts ii. 16): “This is that which hath been spoken by the prophet Joel (*τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ εἰρημένον*). . . .

And I will shew wonders in the heavens above,
 And signs on the earth beneath;
 Blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:
 The sun shall be turned into darkness,
 And the moon into blood,

Before the day of the Lord come,
That great and notable *day* :
And it shall be, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord
shall be saved."

Rather a grandiloquent description, *we* should say, of the Pentecostal occurrences! But surely Peter and his contemporaries are competent witnesses as to how such language was used and understood at that time.

As warrantably might we cavil when all three Synoptists find the verification of Isaiah's lofty predictions in the preaching of John the Baptist: "This is he that was spoken of by the prophet :

Make ye ready the way of the Lord,
Make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
And every mountain and hill shall be brought low;
And the crooked shall become straight,
And the rough ways smooth;
And all flesh shall see the salvation of God."

The expositors talk to us about diverse "comings": the "eschatological," "historical," "spiritual," "dynamic," "individual," and the rest. But it may be doubted how far sharp lines of demarcation are warranted or helpful. The Biblical representations favor quite as much the conception of *a period and a process*, as of particular epochs and events; lay stress on moral and religious *laws*, rather than prognosticate *external occurrences*. Not that I would deny here or anywhere the indications of development embedded in the sacred record itself. The whole stretch from Judaism to consummate Christianity is measured for us in the twofold use of the term "Son of God" in the first chapter of John. But I question whether, for instance, the Apostle Paul would have been as much embarrassed as some of us are, when attention was called to his intimations in writing to the Thessalonians that the parousia was at hand, and on the other side to the assumption underlying his elaborate theodicy in Rom. ix.-xi., namely, that the consummation of the gospel's work lies in an indefinitely remote future. For the very same writers who put into Christ's mouth these predictions of his impending advent, represent him as also carrying his hearers' thoughts into the indefinite future: "while the bridegroom *tarried*, the foolish virgins slumbered and slept" (Matt. xxv. 5); it is because "My lord *delayeth* his coming" that the self-indulgent servant engages

in revelry (Luke xii. 45) ; "after a long time" the man who went into a far country returns and reckons with his servants (Matt. xxv. 19). In short, the New Testament on this subject exhibits the educative method, the divine reserve, which characterizes the procedure of Providence. And the apostle shews that he was not an inapt pupil under its schooling. The growing spirituality of his conceptions — or at least of his mode of presenting them — discloses itself in his later Epistles. Nay, this very letter to the Romans which assumes the kingdom to be a remote realization, also defines it to be peace and righteousness and joy in the Holy Ghost — the Christian's *present possession*. And if at one moment he speaks of the advent as an event which he and his living associates may expect to witness, some ten years later (Col. i. 13) he describes himself and his fellow-Christians as already "delivered out of the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of the Son of God's love." And in his last recorded utterances on the subject, he can charge Timothy by Christ's appearing and *kingdom* (2 Tim. iv. 1), and at the same time express his personal assurance that he himself will be "delivered from every evil work and brought safe into the *heavenly kingdom*" (2 Tim. iv. 18).

In fine, a due recognition of the necessity of employing concrete imagery, material symbols, the current dramatic phraseology, to convey spiritual truth to the first generation of believers, and a parallel recognition of the evolutionary and educative method of the divine administration, will do much, I believe, to relieve of its difficulties a subject still regarded as one of the most perplexing in the domain of exegesis. And it is a subject not to be evaded. In its underlying principles it is central and cardinal, as I have endeavored to indicate. For it turns upon the question, 'What was the idea held by *Jesus himself* respecting the nature and destiny of his kingdom, and the mode of its establishment?' The answer to that question our earliest Christian records leave in no manner of uncertainty. The experience of the church through the ages affords that answer historic comment and elucidation. Very interesting and instructive is the process by which the Spirit of Christ in his church has little by little been liberating it from Jewish and secular trammels, and lifting it into the liberty of his "mind," and of the true sons of God. In the kingdom of grace, as in nature, "the nest is emptied by the hatching of its eggs"; and the process of incubation requires patience and time. Mingled fulfilment and deferment, verification and transformation, old hopes blossoming into new surprises, — these are some

of the steps in the procedure of Him who "moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform."

These random illustrations of the historical cast of the language of the New Testament might be indefinitely multiplied; and did time permit, it would be interesting to notice the service which the recognition of this truth can be made to render in the treatment of the wider questions, alike of Criticism and of Biblical Theology. The entire sacrificial conception of the work of Christ, for instance, finds elucidation in, and furnishes corroboration of, our principle;—a conception repudiated by many at the present day as factitious and obsolete, and which it must be confessed Christianity itself, by its 'one offering once for all,' has done much to render antiquated to the average modern mind.

But let me turn to one or two suggestions which this general characteristic of the volume starts.

1. It emphasizes the importance of studying the New Testament writings in their relations—literary, national, local. Much is said in these days about studying the Bible as literature. But what would be thought of the student of English who should assume that the matter of five hundred years or so (say from Chaucer to Lowell) is of small account in its effect on the language? Yet our college boys jump from Thucydides to the New Testament at a bound; and take it for granted that the language of the latter is as much easier to understand than that of the stately historian, as its structure is simpler.

Shakspeare, like the Bible, has a certain intrinsic isolation; constitutes by itself a body of literature unique and apart; may in large measure be understood, enjoyed, and profitably used, without preliminary training or attendant comment. But what would be thought of a man who aspired to be a *student* and *expositor* of Shakspeare while he remained contentedly in native ignorance of the Elizabethan drama, the growth and characteristics of 16th century English, the social usages of the period, the sources and history of the materials which this peerless master has appropriated and transfigured! Yet not more than one or two theological institutions in the land, so far as I know, offer to their students thorough courses of study in the extant literature—Jewish, Heathen, and Christian—immediately preceding and following that embodied in our sacred volume.

An intelligent treatment of many prominent topics is quite impossible to these future expounders of the Word without some share in the broad outlook here advocated, some first-hand acquaint-

ance with the contemporary life and thought in which our Biblical writings lie embedded. Witness the floundering which has been going on for a decade over the contents of the term "kingdom of heaven"; take up almost any book professedly treating of the Messianic notions current in our Lord's day and his relations to them. True, our present knowledge of these and similar important topics is fragmentary, meagre, conflicting. But what excuse is that for remaining ignorant of what *is* to be known? And how shall knowledge be increased except by study and research? True, again, this desiderated knowledge has but a collateral and incidental bearing on the homiletic and devotional uses of our sacred writings; which uses must and ought to remain paramount with the mass alike of ministers and of people. But I am speaking to *scholars*, or those who aspire to become such; and thus qualify themselves to bring out more and more the inherent truth and power of that volume which under God is the hope of the world.

It must be confessed, further, that the claims, alike respecting inspiration, and the formation of the Canon, which the Protestant theologians of the 16th century thought themselves forced to set up over against the arrogant pretensions to infallibility of the church with which they had broken, have somewhat fettered for many of their modern successors freedom of speculative thought, and enterprise in historic research.

Moreover, it is undeniable that the Christian literature is the product of the Christian religion; and that the Christian religion had its birth with the one solitary and transcendent personality whose name it bears. What *He* did and said, therefore, how *He* was understood and preached by his personal followers, is given us in the earliest extant Christian writings, and nowhere else. These writings make up our New Testament. Hence, it is sometimes argued, we have no need of anything further. Nothing is to be gained by recourse to outside literature, Jewish or Christian. The veil is upon the heart of the Jew even in reading Moses and the Prophets; the later Christian gets his illumination, if he have any, from the same central sun that gilds our sacred page.

But let us not confound the substance of the New Testament with the interpretation of the New Testament. Let no one think that it is proposed to supplement the sacred record from either the puerilities of the Rabbins or the dicta of the Fathers. But how are our Scriptures to be understood? is the question. And without conceding any the least claim to final expository authority to outside individual

or church, ancient or modern, the Christian student may eagerly welcome the help to the elucidation of language, customs, opinions, which comes from any quarter ; and that much may be expected, is shewn by the progress in the portraiture of Christ himself which the last generation has witnessed.

The visionary and mystical materials which these writers of the second and subsequent generations mingle with the Biblical do not nullify the evidence their works afford in attestation of our New Testament documents on the one hand, and in elucidation of them on the other.

2. Again : The recognition of the historical cast of our sacred records will lend new value to all geographical and archæological information relative to the country of their origin.

Thanks to the occasional generosity of a missionary or traveller, we have in this country here and there an embryonic museum of Biblical or Semitic antiquities. But such collections are in general but little appreciated and little studied.

Further : how many of the public teachers of religion have any definite knowledge of the mountains and plains, the rivers and high-ways, of that land which witnessed and shaped the characteristics and history of the ancient people of God, from the Father of the Faithful to the Crucifixion? The " Fifth Gospel " it has been styled ; rather might it be called the illustrator and expositor of all Four, yes, and of the entire Hebrew history.

Shortly after the outbreak of the Rebellion, it occurred to a pastor that he might turn to account the prevalent interest in military affairs by attempting with his people a detailed study of the Old Testament wars. He had at command the invaluable works of Robinson and Stanley and the standard encyclopædic equipment of the average minister's library. But after a few experiments he was forced to abandon his undertaking. The topographical knowledge requisite for an intelligent understanding of Israel's decisive battles was not accessible. Professor George A. Smith's recent work puts a student in a very different position. It is one of the happiest and most stimulating signs of the times for the friends of the Bible, that at length students whose primary interests at least are not religious are beginning to study and test its records from their own point of view. At a recent meeting of the Academy of Inscriptions — as the newspapers tell us — M. Dieulafoy (the well-known Persian traveller) read a paper in which he " reconstituted the principal phases of the battle between David and the Philistines in the Valley of Rephaim,

after a detailed study of the exact theatre of operations." He reaches the result that 'the plan of the battle is very clearly described in the Bible,' and David's complicated and bold strategy on the occasion gives evidence of the highest military capacity, being in striking analogy with the movement executed by "Frederick II. at the battles of Mollwitz and Rossbach, and by Napoleon at Austerlitz."

3. But I am impatient to reach a suggestion which I will frankly confess has with me for the moment vastly more interest and attraction than any other: Is it not high time that an *American School for Oriental Study and Research* should be established in Palestine?

This is no new idea. Others besides myself, no doubt, have been cherishing it as a secret hope for years. Indeed (as many of you know) an attempt was made some ten years ago to lay the foundation for something of the sort at Beirut. A scholarly and interesting article in advocacy of the enterprise, written by Professor Henry W. Hulbert, now of Lane Theological Seminary, was published in the "Presbyterian Review" for January, 1887. Whether because of the somewhat restricted organization and relations of the proposed establishment, or the limited constituency to which it primarily appealed, or other reasons, unknown to me, the project failed to attract the attention and secure the support which such an undertaking merits.

But I have been unable to discover anything which should deter us from renewing the undertaking under better auspices. Indeed, so alluring are enterprises of this sort at present, so great their promise of usefulness alike to Biblical learning and missionary work, that — as you are aware — a French Catholic School of Biblical Studies has established itself already in Jerusalem, whose quarterly "Revue Biblique," printed in Paris, is in its fifth year and deserves the respectful attention of scholars; while the journals tell us of a projected "Church College" in the Holy City, and a School of Rabbinical Learning (with ample library) at Jaffa. As Dr. Smith pithily puts it, "We have run most of the questions to earth: it only remains to *dig them up*." Shall the countrymen of Robinson and Thomson, Lynch and Merrill, Eli Smith and Van Dyck, look on unconcerned? Shall a Society, organized for the express purpose of stimulating and diffusing a scholarly knowledge of the Sacred Word, remain seated with folded hands, taking no part or lot in the matter?

Let it not be supposed that we students, in our poverty, must wait upon the generosity of some liberal friend of sacred learning to fulfil our heart's desire, by blessing the enterprise I am urging with an ample endowment from the start. I will not deny that

it stirs one's wonder that somebody with wealth, and the ambition to use it in a way that shall ensure his own renown as well as large and lasting benefits alike to learning and religion, does not seize upon the waiting opportunity. To be sure, of the two classes of 'finds' which tempt to exploration — those, namely, of intrinsic value, like jewelry and statuary, and those of archæological and historical importance — it is mainly the latter which promise to reward oriental research. And yet (to say nothing of the Sidon sarcophagi), the Sendjirli inscription, the Mesha stone, the Temple tablet, the Siloam inscription, the Tel-el-Hesy cuneiform, and countless coins, would made a creditable return, as investments run, if rated in dollars and cents. But we, who cannot look upon the enterprise from this angle, are fortunately not debarred from seriously considering it. The plan I would venture to suggest is simple and modest, but not ineffectual. Can we not take a hint from the School at Athens? There are, if I am not mistaken, at least two score institutions of learning represented in the list of our "Active Members." Let but half that number, let but twenty or twenty-five of the leading theological seminaries in the land pledge their support to the enterprise for five years to the amount of \$100 a year, and the greatest obstacle is overcome. For two thousand or twenty-five hundred dollars, annually, it is believed that modest but adequate accommodations for the School can be secured, and a suitable Director. The general management of the School — which of course should be wholly free from denominational connection — might be lodged in the hands of a Committee chosen by the co-operating Institutions, which should further have the right to be annually represented at the School, in turn, by a resident Professor, while the \$500 or less which residence would cost a student, he himself would pay.

The achievements of Dr. Frederick J. Bliss shew how easily a competent Director can be found, while for explorations in the field the efficient co-operation of Americans long resident in the country as missionaries or teachers can often be secured at a merely nominal cost : men thoroughly acquainted with the language and habits of the people, as well as with the formalities of official etiquette, and whose presence would render exploration vastly less dangerous and expensive, as well as more promising, than it could be apart from such intelligent expert co-operation.

As I have alluded to Beirut, I may perhaps be permitted to say to those who may never have had the privilege of visiting the place, that in addition to its regular connection by steamers with Europe,

it possesses already an educational plant, if I may so style it, of exceptional value for our purpose, which — under proper safeguards — I have reason to believe could be rendered serviceable to the School: for example, *there* may be found what is held to be the finest collection in existence of the flora of the country, a respectable museum of local mineralogical and geological specimens, more than 1500 coins from the age of the Seleucidæ down, a library of more than 5000 volumes, including many of the most valuable works relating to Syria and Palestine. Moreover, there are resorts, to be reached in three hours, which are 3000 feet above the sea-level and where the average temperature during the hottest months does not exceed 72° Fahrenheit, thus permitting the results of winter exploration to be worked out comfortably during the warm season.

Whatever results the School may achieve, whether by way of study or of exploration, can at once be spread before the world, free of expense, in the pages of our JOURNAL.

But, dropping details, I beg to commend the project to your most serious consideration before this present meeting of the Society closes.

[NOTE. — It may be added, that the closing suggestion above received the consideration of a special Committee, with whose approval a Circular setting forth a plan for the establishment of the desired School was prepared. After receiving the endorsement of many leading scholars, it has been sent to the theological and other institutions of learning in the hope that some such school may be instituted without much delay.]