A Rhetorical Figure in the Old Testament.

JER. VII. 22 AND DEUT. V. 3.

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The much discussed passage Jer 7^{22} reads in R.V.: 'For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices: but this thing I commanded them, saying, Hearken unto My voice,' etc. In my *Ancient Hebrew Tradition* (p. 15 f.) I already gave expression to my conviction that we have here simply a rhetorical clothing of the idea, 'it was not *principally* (or not *only*) commands about sacrifice that I then gave you, but *rather* the moral command of obedience was the quintessence of the law.' I was unable at that time to offer direct proof of this by means of analogies from the O.T. or other literature of the Semites, in particular the most highly developed of these, the Arabic; but when one has been occupied for five and twenty years with the most diverse Semitic languages, he acquires a kind of instinctive feeling of what is an Oriental mode of expression, and what is not.

I have since then turned my attention especially to this point, and am now in the happy position of being able, in the first place, to adduce another O.T. passage containing the same rhetorical figure, and also to quote from the ancient Arabic literature several perfectly unquestionable parallels.

First of all, then, we have quite an analogous instance in Dt 5^{3}. We read in the verse immediately preceding: 'And Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the judgments which I speak in your ears this day [*i.e.* in Moab], that ye may learn them, and observe to do them. The Lord our God made a covenant with us [*i.e.* with our people, Moses included, for the greater part of those who stood at Horeb forty years before were already dead] in Horeb.' And now in spite of this comes the remarkable statement in v.^{3}: 'The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even with us who are all of us here alive this day,' to which v.^{4} further attaches itself: 'The Lord spake with you [while, strictly speaking, it was for the most part only with the fathers of those now alive] face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire, I standing between the Lord and you at that time,' etc. Driver, accordingly, in his commentary on *Deut., ad loc.*, proposes to understand the expression 'with our fathers' of the patriarchs. This is possible, indeed, as far as the form of expression goes, but the patriarchs would thus come in very abruptly, and Driver has even then to admit the strange fact that the above mentioned circumstance of the majority of those present at Horeb having passed away is quite left out of account (his words are 'is disregarded') by the narrator. Much more consistent from his own point of view is the judgment of Steuernagel: 'This passage, then, knows nothing of what is recorded in $2^{14\text{-}16}$, *i.e.* the communicating of the law, according to it, takes place at Horeb itself or immediately after the breaking up of the encampment there, say at Kadesh.' Every difficulty, however, is solved by discovering here the same rhetorical figure as in Jer 7^{22}. The meaning would then be: 'Jahweh gave the law to us, *i.e.* to me and your fathers, at Horeb, but the words were intended not only for our fathers, to whom He then spake, but (in opposition to the men who are now dead) likewise for us who are here alive this day. Jahweh had you in view as well, and therefore I now repeat the words solemnly to you.' In other words, Moses means to state emphatically that that law was intended not only for those who first listened to it but more especially for their posterity. Such is at all events the least forced interpretation, and the one that does most justice to the context, but which, to be sure, presupposes the possibility of the presence of a rhetorical figure of the kind just described ('not so and so but the following,' in the sense of 'not only . . . but rather').

That such a form of speech, however, was not strange to the Semites is clear from a number of extremely interesting Arabic parallels which I mean to set forth in order.

In A. F. Mehren's *Rhetorik der Araber* (Copenhagen and Vienna, 1853) there is a notice (p. 136) of a figure of speech bearing the name of 'a denying of the original sense of a word' (Arab. *an-nafyu li-l-mauḍûʿi*). Mehren draws from native

Arabic sources, principally from al-Kazwînî's (†1338 A.D.) *Talkhîṣ el-miftâḥ*. This figure consists, according to Mehren, in this, that, in order to heighten the effect of a word (or a sentence), its usual meaning is denied and another attributed to it. Of course actual citations of this employment of language are most instructive, for the mere formulating of rules by Arabic scholars of a later age is insufficient to satisfy us here; what we require are unambiguous ancient examples to establish the correctness of the rules. Now Mehren cites a verse which, translated, runs thus—

Not (only) he who has died and rests (in the grave) is dead, dead is rather (or, much more, lit. only) the dead among the living.

Unfortunately, the name of the poet is not given, so that one is unaware whether the verse belongs to the period before Mohammed or to that of the Omayyades, or is even from a later poet, perhaps of the Abasside period. Poems belonging to this last class are already by the Arabs themselves regarded as post-classical. Happily, however, the above verse is cited frequently also by the Arab lexicographers, and that under the name of its author, the poet ʿAdî ibn ar-Raʿlâ, the Ghassânide, and, as the result of further research, I have been able to establish the fact that it is the fifth verse of a poem in the famous collection *al-Mufaḍḍalîyât* (or rather in the Appendix to this, the so-called *al-Asmaʿîyât*), which contains none of the above author's works, except just this one poem. Moreover, this ʿAdî ibn ar-Raʿlâ actually belongs to the period before Mohammed, the so-called *Jâhilîya* period (*i.e.* 'time of ignorance'). For the sake of showing the context, I give now a translation of the whole poem—

How many a stroke followed with polished sword at Buṣrâ (בָּצְרָא), and how many a far-fetched spear thrust,

A penetrating one, before which the hand of the surgeon goes astray (*i.e.* has no success), and where the physician's appliances fail.

They (the enemy) lifted up the standards of battle, and brought them forward, without (thereby) driving off those who talked together in the evening at Malḥâ.

Then fixed we our souls on thrusting (with the spear) until the horses swam before us in blood.

(So now) not (only) he who has died and rests (in the grave) is dead, but dead is rather the dead among the living;

Only he is dead (*i.e.* he rather is dead) who lives on melancholy [variant, 'unfortunate'], whose existence is colourless, who has little hope [variant, 'relief'].

So are there now people who obtain little water to drink, and (on the other hand) people whose throats are in the midst of water.

In the above we have mention first of the enemy whom the poet's tribe had slain, the literally dead. But not only these who are already in their graves are said to be dead, but in a metaphorical sense all may rightly be called dead who through this victory have been brought to ruin, who may have lost their relations or their goods, or even come into captivity.

Two other examples are cited by Mehren (p. 190). The first of these is taken from an Arabic didactic poem of Suyûti on the figures of rhetoric. Both examples belong to what is, next to the Korân, the oldest prose of the Arabs, namely, the so-called 'Tradition' (*el-ḥadîth*), *i.e.* the orally transmitted sayings of Mohammed. The first example may be translated thus: 'The strong is not (only) he who strikes down his foe, but the strong is (rather also) he who rules himself'; the second runs: 'Not (only) is he (of whom I have spoken) the childless, but the childless is (rather also) he who has sent none of his children before him (into the other world).' Here again a meaning, and that the meaning which the particular term generally bears, is apparently denied point blank, in order to give the greater emphasis to the other meaning which has more of a metaphorical usage.

Two other examples, which are almost more instructive still, occur in a panegyric by the Omayyade poet el-Farazdaḳ upon the Khalif al-Walîd ibn Yazîd (742–743 A.D.). Seeing that el-Farazdaḳ died in the year 110 of the Flight (=728 A.D.), the poem sings the praises of Walîd as crown-prince, probably while his father Yazîd (719–723) was still reigning, or during the reign of his uncle, Hishâm ibn ʿAbd el-Melik (723–742). It is found in the still unpublished part of the *Divan* of el-Farazdaḳ, which my pupil, Mr. Joseph Hell, is to edit shortly, from its only MS., that of the *Hagia Sophia* mosque at Constantinople. It was Mr. Hell, moreover, who, after I spoke to him of my explanation of Jer 7^{22} and Dt 5^{3}, drew my attention to both the passages of Farazdaḳ's poem (No. 394, verses 12 and 16), neither of which he had understood rightly at first. My reference to these Scripture passages and to Mehren's Arabic citations was what immediately brought the Farzadaḳ verses to his recollection and first gave him the key to the understanding of them, and to their only possible explanation. Now that the egg of Columbus has been set up on the table by Mr. Hell and myself, the whole matter

becomes so simple and generally intelligible that any layman, when I submit a literal translation to him, can follow the argument without difficulty.

In the first place, then, v.[12] runs thus—

(The riding camels are collected) about the gate (=at the royal residence) of him whom alone of all (=to the exclusion of all others) we sought out in the east of the wide earth and not in the west.

Before Bagdad became the residence of the Khalifs, under the Abassides, there were already in 'Irâḳ, the ancient Babylonia, two flourishing places, Baṣra and Kûfa, one of which, even under the Omayyades, whose residence was Damascus, was the seat of a powerful governor. And when an Omayyade prince paid a lengthened visit to 'Irâḳ, it was natural that he should be his guest and fix his quarters with him. It is quite clear that by the east and the west el-Farazdaḳ can mean here only 'Irâḳ and Syria (Damascus), but it is less evident why he gives prominence to the east, the home of the poet, but appears directly to exclude the west, although the Omayyades resided there. But if we translate 'whom we visited (also) in the east of the wide earth, and not (only) in the west (where people ordinarily visited him),' the somewhat obscure statement becomes at once intelligible, and we have thus to do with the same rhetorical figure as we have met with in the above examples.

Still more clearly is this figure present in v.[16] of the same poem—

And never is one like him (the prince) met with by a fearing one, who approaches him, travelling by water, and not by land.

As a rule, those who came to the court of the Omayyades seeking help, came by land, on horses or camels, and even supposing that, at the time our poem was composed, the crown-prince was making his stay at Baṣra, most of his petitioners must have come there by land, and not in ships, *i.e.* from the Persian Gulf. But the writer, in his extravagant way, which is thoroughly in harmony with the character of Oriental eulogiums, means to say that Mussulman subjects came to the prince with their applications, not only from the usual localities, by land, from Arabia, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, 'Irâḳ, and Persia, but even by ship from distant Maghrib (N. Africa) and the recently conquered India. We have manifestly, then, to render 'travelling (even) by water, and not (only, as usually) by land.'

Seeing that in one and the same poem of el-Farazdaḳ this rhetorical form of expression is twice employed, a closer examination of the remaining some 500 fragments of his poems, the first half of which (260 poems) have been already published by Boucher, is pretty sure to furnish further examples. For our present purpose, however, which is to bring forward clear and unmistakable analogies to Jer 7^{22} and Dt 5^{3} from the Arabic literature, the passages cited are quite sufficient (one from the pre-Mohammedan poetry, two from the sayings of Mohammed, and two from a poem of the Omayyade period).

And now, in conclusion, to return to the two O.T. passages. Once more one may see clearly from what I have said, that the citation of sources *outside the Old Testament* helps to do justice to the Hebrew tradition. And this time it is not a matter of ancient inscriptions, but of that very Semitic literature, namely, the Arabic poetry, which hitherto has been used, even by such estimable scholars and distinguished Arabists as Robertson Smith and Wellhausen, in a one-sided fashion, and so much coloured by party feeling, to establish the alleged rude nomadism of the earliest Hebrews. I hope yet to devote much discussion to this subject, but even now I may remark that this copious source, although it springs from a period much later than the Babylonian and S. Arabian inscriptions, if rightly used, proves exactly the opposite of what it is supposed to do by the above-named scholars. When one considers, moreover, what an excellent philological discipline a thorough study of Arabic is for a Semitic student, it is to be wished that every young student of the O.T. should submit to this training. This will, to be sure, demand some years of the hardest study, but when these are past, and when he has devoted some years more to the ancient Oriental inscriptions, he will see many things in the O.T. through different spectacles from those in fashion at present.