

W. Robertson Smith

Answer
To the Form of Libel
now before the
Free Church Presbytery of
Aberdeen.

BX
9070
.S52
1878



BX 9070 .S52 1878
Smith, William Robertson, b.
1846.
Answer to the form of libel

PHOTOMOUNT
PAMPHLET BINDER
Manufactured by
GAYLORD BROS. Inc.
Syracuse, N. Y.
Stockton, Calif.

FOURTH EDITION.

ANSWER
TO THE FORM OF LIBEL

NOW BEFORE THE
FREE CHURCH PRESBYTERY OF
ABERDEEN

BY
W. ROBERTSON SMITH

EDINBURGH
DAVID DOUGLAS, 9 CASTLE STREET
1878

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

BW5546
.S653653

ANSWER TO THE FORM OF LIBEL

NOW BEFORE THE

FREE CHURCH PRESBYTERY

OF ABERDEEN

BY

W. ROBERTSON SMITH

EDINBURGH

DAVID DOUGLAS, 9 CASTLE STREET

1878

*Laid before the Free Church Presbytery of Aberdeen, on
12th February, 1878.*



ANSWER TO THE FORM OF LIBEL.

IN laying my defence before the Presbytery I might begin by animadverting on the form of the libel, and strictly examining its structure in comparison with the ordinary forms observed in such cases, and with the practice of criminal justice in lay courts, after which the ecclesiastical procedure appears to have been framed. Such an examination would probably bring out many features open to grave objection, and inconsistent with the obvious principle of justice, which requires that an indictment be free from all ambiguity of meaning, and that it lay every charge with such precision that the party accused can have no difficulty in making out the precise point of the accusation.

But I have no wish to embarrass a case already overloaded with technical difficulties. I desire to put my defence in such a shape as to meet directly the points which appear to constitute the real substance of the indictment; and I will, therefore, make no further remark on the form of the libel than is necessary to give clearness to my own line of defence.

Every ecclesiastical libel is a syllogism in which the major proposition states the offence against the laws of the Church, in terms which by mere comparison with these laws ought to be at once convincing; while the minor enumerates the facts which, by subsumption under these general laws, ought to prove the offence. In the present libel, however, there appear to be three steps. The major is in itself a syllogism, or at least involves a subsumption, for it contains a

general statement of the Confessional Doctrine of the inspiration, infallibility, and authority of Scripture, and at the same time an enumeration of special facts, viz., of detailed opinions, which are not in themselves in verbal opposition to the doctrine of the Confession, by maintaining which I am alleged to have contravened the general doctrine enunciated in the first part of the major.

Thus, in the first part of the major, I am charged with denying the infallibility and authority of Scripture; in the second part of the major, and under the first head, I am charged with holding a particular view of the institution of the Aaronic priesthood, which is said to infer denial of the infallibility of Scripture; and in the corresponding head of the minor, I find the citations from my writings which are supposed to prove that I hold the opinion in question. To follow this division through all the particulars of so complex a charge would render my defence extremely cumbrous, and bury the main points at issue under the mass of details. I shall, therefore, follow the ordinary precedent of first discussing the statement of the offences with which I am charged; and then taking together the allegations of fact in the major and the corresponding quotations in the minor. I shall thus follow the natural procedure known to all law, considering, *first*, whether I am charged with a real offence under the law of the Church; and, *then*, whether the facts alleged against me are sufficient to constitute that offence.

The offences charged against me are three in number—

- 1st—The publishing and promulgating of opinions which contradict, or are opposed to, doctrines set forth in the Scriptures and the Confession of Faith.
- 2nd—The publishing and promulgating of opinions which are in themselves of a dangerous and unsettling tendency in their bearing on doctrines set forth in Scripture and the Confession.
- 3rd—The publishing of writings concerning the books of Scripture which, by their neutrality of attitude in

relation to doctrines set forth in the Scriptures and the Confession, and by their rashness of statement in regard to the critical construction of the Scriptures, tend to disparage the Divine authority and inspired character of these books.

There can be no question as to the general relevancy of the first of these charges ; that is, I do not for a moment deny that I am liable to the censure of the Church if I have advanced opinions contradictory to the teaching of our Standards. And by this I do not mean that it is incumbent on the prosecution to shew that my statements are verbally contradictory to the doctrine of the Church. I admit that it is quite enough to infer Church censure that my statements should be proved to be logically inconsistent with what is taught in the Standards, by a chain of strict reasoning in which every link is complete.

With regard to the other charges in the major I stand in a different position, for I deny that these charges contain a competent ground to proceed against me by the law of the Church. I shall therefore, first of all, state the reasons for which I think the second and third charges irregular and incompetent. I shall then proceed to consider whether the statement of my opinions contained in the libel is sufficient to substantiate the graver charge of contradicting the confessional doctrine. To this end I must first examine the real meaning of the confessional doctrines under which I am accused ; for the words used in the major indicate these doctrines without defining them, and the indications are not free from ambiguity, especially as my accusers have not thought fit to cite the passages of the Confession on which their charges are based. Having exhibited the true confessional doctrine, I will then show in general terms how it bears on my critical position, and that it leaves room within the Church for the prosecution of the critical enquiries and the adoption of the critical conclusions for which I am challenged.

Finally, I shall go in detail through the particular

opinions enumerated as contained in my articles, examining whether the statements of the libel fairly represent my opinions, and if so, whether the opinions stated are really inconsistent with the confessional doctrine. I will not repeat this complete examination with reference to the less grave charges whose competency I entirely deny; but in dealing with the main offence I shall find occasion to point out from time to time that the minor charges (supposing them, for the sake of argument, to indicate real offences against the law of the Church) must yet fall to the ground along with the graver charge.

COMPETENCY OF THE SECOND CHARGE.

The position of this charge as an alternative to the graver charge of contradicting the doctrine of the Church shews that it only applies to opinions which are not inconsistent with the Standards. Before seeking to fix on any opinion drawn from my writings, the *alternative* charge of dangerous and unsettling tendency, instead of the graver charge of "contradicting, etc.," the prosecution must admit that there is nothing in the opinion which cannot be held in logical consistency with everything that is taught in the Confession.

Again, the charge is not one of undermining the confessional doctrines by dishonest statements, by insinuating in a disguised form opinions which, if I ventured to state them nakedly, would plainly contradict the Standards. There is no allegation that my opinions are not honestly held and honestly expressed, and there is express admission on the part of the prosecution, that so far as they fall under this alternative my views neither verbally nor logically contradict the Standards. This being so, I find it very difficult to understand what is meant by dangerous and unsettling tendency, and still more difficult to grasp the point of alleged criminality which the prosecution desires to convey by using the phrase.

It lies with the prosecutors both to explain what the charge means and to prove that it sets forth an offence under

the laws of the Church. Unless they do this the charge falls to the ground without any answer of mine; I will, however, do my best to state what I conjecture that it means or may mean, and to shew that it cannot mean anything which is a competent ground of Church censure.

The charge then appears to mean that the habit of thought which these opinions are likely to encourage will dispose men's minds to adopt views not easily harmonized with the views expressed in the Standards, or with the views commonly associated with the Standards in the popular mind, or with views which have been sometimes used to support or illustrate the doctrine of the Standards. In short, the opinions libelled under this alternative are held to increase the difficulty of believing, and on that account it is proposed to suppress them by an act of judicial censure, without enquiring whether they are true or false. The difference between such an exercise of Church power as is here contemplated and the usual action of Church Courts in a case of unsound doctrine is manifest. When an opinion is condemned as inconsistent with the teaching of the Confession it is not only condemned but refuted, not indeed from first principles, but on the premises of the Confession, which the Church has agreed to accept as the common basis of doctrinal argument. But before taking up this charge of tendency, the Court must find that my views cannot be refuted from the Confession. Nor is it proposed to refute them in any other way. They are simply to be censured and suppressed for fear that they may increase the difficulties of belief.

Such a use of Church censures is plainly inconsistent with the principle laid down in the Form of Process (cap. 1, § 4) that "*nothing ought to be admitted by any Church judicature as the ground of a process for censure, but what hath been declared censurable by the Word of God, or some act or universal custom of this National Church agreeable thereto.*"* On this

* In Sir Henry Moncreiff's "Practice of the Free Church," where the Form of Process is given in full, "act of universal custom" stands by a misprint instead of "act or, &c."

principle Church censures cannot be called into action by the simple will of a majority in order to put down opinions from which they apprehend some contingent danger to faith. An opinion is not to be censured for mere *possible* consequences or tendency, but only because in itself or in its *necessary* consequences it has been condemned and declared censurable by the Word of God, or by a legislative act of the Church, or by precedents establishing a universal custom of the Church. The charge cannot be sustained against me unless the prosecution bring it under this principle, by adducing a law of God, or a law of the Church, or valid precedents in the practice of the Church which rule the present case. No such law or practice is adduced in the libel, and the very fact that the criminality of my opinions is made to lie in their tendency appears to shew that the prosecution is not able to libel them as offences on any distinct and legal ground.

The explicit language of the Form of Process is quite sufficient to dispose of an assertion which has been made more than once in the previous stages of this case, to the effect that the Church, or, to speak precisely, the General Assembly, has power to define and punish new offences without any legislative act, and in the simple exercise of judicial functions. I need not waste words in confuting a supposed analogy drawn from a power which has sometimes been claimed by the Justiciary court of our country, but which in the very rare and now obsolete cases of its exercise, was always opposed by constitutional lawyers, and which the court itself no longer claims. The Assembly, unlike the Justiciary court, is a legislative as well as a judicial body. If it is necessary to protect the Church from a new kind of offence, the obvious constitutional course is to pass an Act defining the offence. If the Confession is not large enough to condemn all views which the Church proposes to exclude, an Act to add to it must be passed in regular form, and with those precautions against hasty legislation which the Barrier Act provides. It is clearly illegitimate to avoid compliance with these precautions by clothing an act essentially legis-

lative in the disguise of a judicial process. And it is also clear that no doctrine of an exceptional power belonging to the Assembly, as the supreme judicial court of the Church, can justify the Presbytery, as a subordinate court, in claiming for itself a prerogative to overrule the Form of Process.

The incompetency of the charge of tendency under the law of our Church, may be confirmed by observing that the offence is charged against me especially as a Professor of Divinity. Unless, therefore, the prosecution is prepared to aver that every Church member is bound to submit his opinions to the judgment of the Church upon their tendency, even in cases where they are not inconsistent with the Confession, it will be necessary to prove that the charge brought against me is valid under the special doctrinal obligations which I took upon myself on becoming a professor. These obligations are very precise. They bind me "firmly and constantly to adhere" to the doctrine of the Confession, and to "assert, maintain, and defend" it to the utmost of my power. But the only opinions which I am forbidden to hold are, "doctrines, tenets, and opinions *contrary to, and inconsistent with, the Confession of Faith.*" It is impossible to construe these expressions in a sense that will justify the charge of tendency.

But if the charge is inconsistent with the constitution of the Church, it is also utterly opposed to the ordinary principles of justice. It is a charge which no reasonable and equitable Church court could recognise, because it is too vague and indeterminate to be brought to a clear issue. It is a charge which can hardly be repelled, because different men will attach different meanings to it. It falls under the dangerous and invidious class of constructive offences which have been banished from the law of constitutional countries as necessarily involving grave injustice to the accused, and placing the definition of what forms matter for charge not in any clear and ascertained constitution, but in what may happen to be the opinion or feeling of those who are called at the time to be administrators of the law. Such a charge

is dangerous to justice in any court, but it is doubly dangerous in a court of popular constitution.

To admit before a popular court a charge which cannot be referred to fixed principles, which cannot be defined with precision, or made to mean the same thing to every one concerned, and which, therefore, must be ultimately measured by the feeling of the judges, is to obliterate the distinction between justice and the will of the majority, between unpopular opinions and offences. To allow such a charge to be brought before the Courts of the Church would offer direct encouragement to popular agitation as a means of controlling the course of justice, and place in the hands of any one who can gain the popular ear a ready instrument for repressing discussion, giving scope to injurious imputations, and practically working grave injustice. No Church which does not pretend to infallibility could venture to embarrass the administration of its judicial functions by admitting a charge which in principle nullifies every legal precaution against the miscarriage of justice, and makes it possible for a majority to inflict judicial censure on any fresh movement of Christian life in the Church.

The force of these general arguments against a charge of "dangerous and unsettling tendency" may easily be strengthened by a consideration of the special meaning of the charge in the present case. It is proposed to suppress certain opinions on critical subjects without meeting them on the merits, and without referring them to a fixed confessional standard, if it shall appear to the majority of the Presbytery or the Assembly that they tend to increase the difficulty of believing. Now, the Church has always been aware of the existence of real difficulties of belief, which can neither be denied nor suppressed. It has hitherto been held that these difficulties depend on the limitations of our nature, and are permitted in the wisdom of God for purposes of discipline and for the trial of faith. And the argument of the Church has always been that though the difficulties cannot be removed, they do not amount to what is actually inconsistent

with sound doctrine, and that the true way of dealing with them is simply to shew that the doctrine on which they seem to bear has an evidence of its own sufficient to establish its truth to the believer, on grounds which a mere appearance of paradox is not sufficient to invalidate. For example, it has always been suggested as a difficulty in the doctrine of the Trinity that it has a tendency to unsettle belief in the Unity of God; to which the Church replies that it has never been proved that Trinity of persons is logically inconsistent with Unity, and that the mere difficulty of the doctrine is therefore not sufficient to shake the positive evidence of revelation for its truth. Precisely similar objections are brought against the most cherished and distinctive doctrines of our own Church. It is averred by Arminians and others that the doctrine of unconditional election and prevenient irresistible grace tends to subvert men's belief in their moral responsibility. How does our Church meet the charge? Not by denying the existence of a real difficulty, but by denying the logical inconsistency of the two beliefs which it holds each on its own evidence. Is it not the wisdom of the Church to apply the same line of argument to the difficulties of belief which may arise from historical and literary criticism of the books of Scripture? Let us refute the critics if we can, but do not let us say that it is impossible for us to believe or to tolerate propositions which we have not refuted by argument, and of which we cannot assert that they are actually inconsistent with anything that we know to be true. To argue that an opinion is false, because a real difficulty of belief is connected with its acceptance, is only possible to a rationalist who goes on the assumption that supernatural revelation must contain nothing which our limited reason is unable fully to comprehend. This is the assumption which rationalism has invariably used to undermine the system of positive Christian doctrine, and it seems very shortsighted on the part of the prosecution that it has not hesitated to borrow this weapon of scepticism, and place it in the hand of the Church.

The charge of tendency is bad in law and dangerous to the Church, even if it is certain that critical opinions do add to the difficulties of belief. But it must be remembered that Churches are like other bodies of men, very apt to overrate the difficulties of opinions which are not familiar. There was a time when the greatest difficulty was felt in admitting the imperfection of Robert Stephen's text of the New Testament, when the Newtonian astronomy appeared to tend to atheism, and the science of geology to subvert all revelation. In any one of these cases a libel for tendency might have been quite sufficient to place the Church in open antagonism to sound scholarship and legitimate science; just as in point of fact an argument of tendency once led the Swiss Church to add to its Confession a statement as to the age of the Hebrew vowel-points, which every one now knows to be absolutely false. Great divines, like Owen and Turretin, were misled by the argument of tendency then. Are the members of our Church courts less liable to be misled now, if they allow the prosecution to demand their vote as to the tendency of opinions which scarcely any laymen, and only a small proportion of ministers, have studied on the merits?

For my own part, I am firmly convinced that a cautious and reverent use of criticism, combined with a right view of the Reformation doctrine of Scripture, is so far from adding to the difficulties of belief that no other way of dealing with the Bible can effectually meet the difficulties of the present age. The first duty of every scholar is his duty to truth, and no consideration can justify the student of Scripture in ignoring those difficulties which appear to careful study, though they may be overlooked by the ordinary reader. But while criticism honestly takes note of these difficulties, it has opened a way to their solution which, bold as it may at first appear, is really far safer to faith, because truer to the actual history of God's Revelation, than the isolated and arbitrary attempts at reconciliation of contradictory passages which were once current. No one will

rejoice more than myself if farther study shall offer a better solution to the difficulties that are found in the Old Testament, and set in a still clearer light the truth and harmony of the supernatural Revelation which distinguished Israel from all other nations, and makes the Old Testament still speak to us with Divine authority. But no progress can be made in this direction by the mere use of authority to suppress the statement of difficulties, and to forbid scholarship from applying its legitimate methods to the study of facts.

Before passing from the charge of tendency, I would observe, in conclusion, that the attempt to suppress opinions, not because they have been proved to be untrue, but because they may be supposed to offer difficulties to belief, is in principle neither more nor less than an attempt to introduce into our Protestant Church the Romish notion about "pious opinions." The Church of Rome has long been accustomed to recommend certain opinions to the faith of her adherents, not because they have been defined as articles of faith, or because their rejection involves the denial of articles of faith; but simply because their acceptance forecloses troublesome questions and facilitates that indolent acquiescence in the received doctrines of the Church, which in that communion passes for an act of piety. Almost every corruption of the Romish Church passed current as a pious opinion before it was accepted as a necessary dogma; and history records a long and fatal list of errors, ending with the doctrines of the immaculate conception of the Virgin and the infallibility of the Pope, which could never have been defined as articles of faith unless adherents had been won by the semblance of piety, and opponents silenced by the reproach of unsettling belief.

COMPETENCY OF THE THIRD CHARGE.

The general objections already stated against a libel for tendency apply to this charge, for it is not averred that my writings actually disparage, or were meant to disparage

doctrines of the Church, but only that they tend to do so. And here the necessary badness and unfairness of such a charge is aggravated by the insufficiency and vagueness of the two marks on which the allegation of tendency is made to depend.

I. My writings are said to disparage certain doctrines by the neutrality of their attitude towards them. It does not appear on the face of the libel whether this neutrality is exhibited in stating opinions as my own, or in reporting opinions of others, for which I do not accept personal responsibility. But it seems likely that the former is what is mainly meant, since the charge is made to rest on the same passages as are cited to prove that my published opinions are unsound and dangerous.*

But this third alternative charge does not come before the court until the other alternatives are rejected; that is, until it appears that my opinions are not inconsistent with sound views. In other words, the doctrine of the inspiration and authority of Scripture cannot, on the hypothesis of this alternative, be used to decide whether my opinions are true or false. Surely, then, I was at liberty to state my views, and to indicate the grounds on which I hold them, without digressing into a doctrine which, *ex hypothesi*, could not help the argument. So far as this goes, my writings are neutral to the doctrine of inspiration only in the innocent sense in which a Hebrew Grammar is so. The doctrine is not mentioned because it does not bear on the subject before me.

Or, on the other hand, is it meant that some of the opinions which I report, without either condemning or approving them, ought to have been condemned as inconsistent with the doctrine of the Church? If this is the meaning, the charge should have been so specified, with enumeration

* The resumption at page 3 H of the libel: "The writings containing these opinions do exhibit neutrality, &c." makes the proof of neutrality lie wholly in the opinions stated, *i.e.* in the opinions which a few lines before were declared to be not neutral but opposed to sound doctrine. But I do not press this point, as it seems due to a slip in drawing the libel.

of the opinions referred to; for it is plain that the question, whether one is bound to refute a false opinion upon occasion of having to mention it, must be answered with reference to the special circumstances of each case—which, for the purposes of the present charge, include the consideration that a contributor to an Encyclopædia writes under strict limitations of space and plan, that he cannot develop his own views or those of his Church at the length which would often be needed to give any value to an expression of opinion on a controverted point, and that his main object is not to state his own views at all, but simply to give a *resumé* of the present condition of learning and scientific opinion.

Perhaps, however, the charge of neutrality means only that I have stated critical opinions, without adequately indicating how I hold them to be consistent with belief in the authority and inspiration of Scripture, and by so doing, have given offence to the faith of persons who have been accustomed to associate criticism with unbelief, and whose scruples I was bound to treat with consideration. I am sincerely sorry if through fault of mine my articles have given offence to belief or encouragement to doubt, and I am ready to receive, not only with respect but with gratitude, any warning on this head which their superior experience in dealing with various classes of men enables the brethren of the Presbytery to suggest. While I cannot surrender the right to speak what I believe to be true, and to speak it within the Church so long as it does not contradict the doctrine of the Church, I would always desire to speak without giving unnecessary offence to scruples which I am bound to respect. In writing the article "Bible" I took it for granted that my position as an office-bearer in the Free Church, pledged to support our evangelical doctrine, my previous published utterances on the Supreme and Divine authority of Scripture, and, at least in Aberdeen, the known character of my public teaching, would obviate the suspicion of indifference to doctrines which I had no opportunity of asserting, when, by the plan of the Encyclopædia Britannica and the arrangements formed by the editor

I was limited to a survey of literary and historical questions. It did not appear to me that I was precluded from handling these questions because it had been determined that such account of the doctrine of Scripture as fell to be given in a work which excludes direct dogmatic teaching should come under a separate heading. I wrote the article not because it gave opportunity to say everything about Scripture that I could wish to say, but because it was planned to cover a field of legitimate scientific enquiry, which the Church cannot forbid to her members and office-bearers without surrendering it to unbelievers. I ought, perhaps, to have foreseen that this aspect of the case would not spontaneously suggest itself to the large section of the public which has never been accustomed to look at Scripture from the literary and historical point of view. Had I to write the article now I should be better aware of this source of misunderstanding; and while I still could not hesitate to occupy the same ground of scientific research, which I believe to be safe ground, and ground that the Church dare not give up to scepticism, I should endeavour, so far as is possible in an Encyclopædia, to make it plainer that my criticism does not imply indifference to the Bible as the Divine rule of faith and life. The Presbytery may still help me to make this clear, and to remove anxieties which are largely due to misapprehension and consequent misrepresentation; but I submit, with all deference, that they cannot reach this end by forcing a criminal complexion on what was at most a miscalculation of the state of public feeling and sentiment, and by sanctioning the principle that a Free Church Professor may not express opinions and record the present state of scientific enquiry in a Book of Reference which is on principle neutral in all questions of doctrine.

II. The second part of this charge is that my writings exhibit rashness of statement in regard to the critical construction of the Scriptures, and I presume, as there is no indication to the contrary, that this accusation applies to all the statements quoted in the minor. Now, rashness is

a thing which has various degrees, but what is here asserted is such rashness as the Church must suppress by judicial censures, a rashness which cannot be tolerated. How is this rashness to be brought to proof ?

Does the accusation mean that my statements are rash because they set forth opinions which the Church cannot admit to be possibly true ? If this is the meaning the charge is simply one of the two former alternatives in another guise. If the Courts of the Church are entitled to say under the third charge, " We forbid these statements as rash because the opinions they convey are dangerous and cannot be believed," they are equally entitled to drop the periphrasis and say at once under the second charge, " We forbid the opinions because they are dangerous."

On the other hand, if there is a real difference between the charge of rashness and the other alternatives, the proof of the accusation involves a very large and intricate question of fact. If the opinions stated are not in themselves censurable, the rashness of the statements must be measured by the grounds I had for making them, and it will be necessary to examine in detail, not only every statement, but the whole evidence on which each statement rests. This will carry the case far beyond the limits of the Encyclopædia articles, for an Encyclopædia never professes to give the evidence of its statements in full, and it will necessitate, on my part, a line of defence so extended that I need not attempt to include it in my written answer. But if the Presbytery find that the charge of rashness forms a relevant ground of prosecution, I must ask for an opportunity to discuss the whole matter at large.

If things take this course it may appear to the Presbytery, after a full examination of the evidence on which my statements rest, that I have been wrong in my judgment. But where is the law or precedent for finding that such an error in judgment is an offence to be visited with punishment ? If the two graver alternatives are dismissed, am I to be punished because the majority of the Presbytery do not agree

with my judgment as to the evidence of opinions which are not in themselves censurable ?

It is the same thing if the "rashness" means that I have spoken too soon, and have shocked the majority of the Church by my want of caution. Does the libel claim for the Church the right to determine, not only *what* a man is to speak, but *when* he shall be allowed to speak on things not contrary to her doctrine ; to limit the freedom of discussion among those who are loyal to her Standards, and to do this by directing her censures against any utterance which a majority in her Courts think it would be wiser to keep back ? To censure me on such grounds would be to affirm that opinions, which are not wrong in themselves, are unfit to be mentioned to the laity, and that enquiries, legitimate in an esoteric circle of scholars, must be kept back from the light of public discussion. I cannot believe that the Church will entertain a view of her functions which adopts the principle of the *Index Expurgatorius*. Even for the sake of unity in the Church, it is better that men should speak out what they think. If the views of scholars are contrary to the faith of the Church, let them be condemned ; if they are false, let them be refuted ; but unless they are openly discussed, we can neither condemn them justly nor refute them conclusively.

From these remarks on the general relevancy of the second and third charges, I pass on to examine, in connection with the first charge, the doctrines of our Church which I am accused of impugning. They are—I. The Doctrine of Scripture. II. The Doctrine of Prophecy. III. The Doctrine of Angels.

THE DOCTRINE OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

The points in the confessional doctrine of Holy Scripture, with regard to which my teaching is impugned, are three in number. The first is *immediate inspiration*. The libel seems to attach a special force to the phrase *immediate*, for it is repeated under *quinto*, where mention is made of "the

books which in the Confession of Faith are declared to have been immediately inspired of God.”* The Confession, however, does not use the expression to define the kind of inspiration which belongs to the books of Scripture; but only speaks of the immediate inspiration of the original text as distinguished from the versions (Cap. I. sec. 8). The word *immediate* cannot, therefore, be used to fix on the Confession any theory of the nature or degree of inspiration. On any conceivable theory it is clear that inspiration belongs primarily to the original text, and only mediately, or in a secondary sense to the versions. This distinction is employed in order to prove against the Church of Rome that the original Hebrew and Greek alone, and not any version is authentic—*i. e.*, is the authoritative document to which parties in any controversy of religion must make their appeal.

In the present case there is no question of the relative authority of the original text, and of translations made from it. It is the inspiration of Scripture, not of one or other edition or version of Scripture that is said to be assailed; and, accordingly, the expression immediate, as used in the Confession, has no application in the controversy.

When the Confession, Cap. I. sec. 2, says that all the books now contained under the name of Holy Scripture, or the Word of God written, are given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life, it closely follows the language of 2 Tim. iii. 16, adding no explanation of its own to the statement of that text. It is in accordance with the proof text, and with the force of the original word *θεόπνευστος*, that neither the Westminster Confession, nor any previous Confession of the Reformed Churches, so far as I am aware, speaks of the inspiration of the *writers* of Scripture. It is Scripture itself, according to the consensus of the Reformed Churches, that is inspired or “breathed of God”; and in all the Confessions the Bible is recognised as the inspired Word of God, not on the ground of any theory as to the influence of the Holy Spirit

* It is, however, noteworthy that the phrase is departed from in the third charge.

upon the writers *in actu scribendi*, but (1) because in the Scriptures the revelation of God and of His will first preached through the Spirit by the apostles and prophets is now reduced to writing; and (2) because the witness of the Spirit by and with the word in our hearts, assures us that in these Scriptures (as it is expressed in the Second Helvetic Confession) *God still speaks to us.**

These two arguments afford a sure ground of faith for receiving the Bible as the very Word of God, without any theory as to the way in which the Word was actually reduced to that written form in which we have it, and which is still accompanied by the testimony of the Spirit. Our Confession, therefore, simply states that it pleased the Lord, having revealed himself and declared his will to the Church, "afterwards to commit the same wholly unto writing." The same studious abstinence from all attempt to define the process by which the Bible came to be what it is, appears no less conspicuously in the Confessions of the Calvinistic Churches of the Continent. The ancient French Confession, Art. II., writes, "This God manifests himself as such to men, first by his works . . . ; secondly, and more clearly, by his word, which, originally revealed by oracle, was thereafter reduced to writing in the books which we call Holy Scriptures" (Niemeyer, p. 314; Schaff, vol. iii., p. 360). And the Dutch Confession, revised at the Synod of Dort, holds almost the same language. "Secondly, He manifests himself more clearly and perfectly in His holy and Divine Word, to wit, as far as is necessary for us in this life to His glory, and the salvation of His own. This Word of God was not sent or brought forth by man's will; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost . . . Thereafter,

* These are the two points taken up by Calvin in his commentary on 2 Tim. iii. 16. "This is the principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath *spoken* to us, and are assuredly persuaded that *the prophets spake* not of their own sense, but as they were organs of the Holy Spirit uttered only what was given to them from heaven . . . The same spirit which assured Moses and the prophets of their vocation, now also beareth witness in our hearts that he used their ministry *in order to teach us.*"

by a special care which He hath for us and our salvation, God commanded his servants, the Prophets and Apostles, to put his revealed Word in writing; and He Himself wrote, with his own finger, the two tables of the law. Therefore, we call such writings holy and Divine Scriptures" (Art. II. III, Schaff, vol. iii., p. 384).

This unanimous doctrine of the Reformed Churches is so constructed as to make the authority of the Bible altogether independent of questions that may be raised as to the human agencies by which the book came into its present form. According to the Confessional doctrine it is not matter of faith, when the books that record God's Word were written, or by whom they were written, or how often they were re-edited, changed, or added to, before the record of revelation was finally completed, or in what literary form they are cast, or what modes of literary handling they display, or what their literary merits and demerits may be judged to be. It is not even asserted by the Confessions that the persons who gathered and arranged the material of the Bible were under a special influence of God's Spirit, but only that under God's singular care, lest any age of His Church should be left without a full unmistakable declaration of His saving will, the record of His revealed Word has been so framed and preserved, that He still speaks in it as clearly as He spake by the Apostles and Prophets, and that we, by the witness of the Spirit, still recognise it as a word breathed forth by God Himself.

If I am asked why I receive Scripture as the Word of God, and as the only perfect rule of faith and life, I answer with all the fathers of the Protestant Church, "Because the Bible is the only record of the redeeming love of God, because in the Bible alone I find God drawing near to man in Christ Jesus, and declaring to us, in Him, His will for our salvation. And this record I know to be true by the witness of His Spirit in my heart, whereby I am assured that none other than God Himself is able to speak such words to my soul."

From this point we can at once pass on to enquire in what sense we are to understand the other predicates of Scripture adduced in the libel, viz., infallible truth and divine authority.

According to the Confession, infallible truth and divine authority go together. That which comes to us by the authority of God is necessarily and infallibly true, because God is truth itself (Cap. I., sec. 4). The two predicates are inseparable, the one does not extend beyond the other, and both are proved by one and the same evidence, viz., by the witness of the Holy Spirit (Sec. 5).

The nature of this evidence makes it clear that in the intention of the Confession the infallible truth and divine authority of Scripture are distinct, not only in degree, but in kind, from the general veracity of the Bible, as a credible account of the historical origins of our religion. The latter is to be proved by the ordinary methods of historical evidence, and is not matter of divine faith depending on a special action of the Spirit in our hearts, but may by a due use of natural means be reached by any candid thinker. But the Bible story contains something that rises above the analogy of ordinary history, and so cannot be gauged or tested by any historical evidence. In it we see God drawing near to man, revealing to us His redeeming love, choosing a people for Himself, and declaring to them His mind and will. To apprehend this supernatural reality, to grasp it as a thing real to us, which is to enter into our lives and change our whole natures, we need a new spiritual gift. No personal truth coming to us from without can be apprehended, except by a power *within*, putting us into communion with it; but fallen man has no natural power of communion with God; and so only the Spirit of God in the heart of the believer, enables him to realise that in very truth it is God and none else that is seen in the history, and speaks in the Word, revealing Himself, and declaring His will. This is the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit, as taught by Paul in 1 Cor. ii. 11, "What man knoweth the things of a man save

the spirit of man which is in him? *Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.*"

Within its proper sphere this witness, as the Confession indicates, is absolutely conclusive. The things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God. But conversely the testimony of the Spirit only applies to the things of God which "no man knoweth," or can know by the use of his natural powers. What these things are the Confession tells us in the paragraph on which its whole doctrine of Scripture rests. They are "the knowledge of God and of His will which is necessary to salvation." It is only to this knowledge that the witness of the Spirit extends, and therefore, the infallible truth and divine authority of Scripture, of which according to the Confession we have no other proof than the witness of the Spirit, means simply infallible truth and divine authority as a record of God's saving revelation of Himself and His will.

This conclusion is so important that I may be allowed to add some additional considerations in support of the foregoing argument:—

I. Every attentive reader of Chap. I. of our Confession must observe that nothing is said of the Scriptures, except in so far as they are the record of spiritual truths, of God's revelation of Himself and of His will. It is as the record in which this revelation is wholly committed to writing, and which God still acknowledges by the witness of the Spirit, that the Bible is called the Word of God. And so it is only in this relation that the Confession can fairly be held to declare the Bible to be of infallible truth and divine authority, and not in relation to any expression that may be found in Scripture, which touches neither faith nor life, and does not affect the record of God and His revelation.

II. The argument of the Confession and of Protestant theology in general runs thus:—

Because God is truth itself, His word is infallible; and because He is sovereign, it is authoritative.

But Scripture is the Word of God.

Therefore Scripture is of infallible truth and Divine authority.

Now, the sense to be put on this conclusion depends on the force of the word *is* in the proposition, "Scripture *is* the Word of God." One school of theologians presses the word as strictly as Lutherans and Romanists do in the famous controversy on the words "This is my body." And they press it with as little reason. For other orthodox Confessions of the Reformed Churches use a different expression, though all these Churches teach the same doctrine.

I have already pointed out that the French and Dutch Confessions distinguish between the Word of God, as it was first spoken by Revelation, and the Scriptures in which that word was afterwards recorded.

In accordance with this distinction, the fifth article of the French Confession speaks of the Word as *contained in* the Bible. So, too, Calvin in the Genevan Catechism (Opera viii. 24, Niemeyer, p. 159) defines God's Word as "spiritual doctrine, the gate, as it were, whereby we enter into His heavenly kingdom," and adds, that "this word is to be sought in the Holy Scriptures *wherein it is contained.*" Our own Shorter Catechism (Ques. 2) uses similar language. In a case like this, where a looser expression and one more precise are used side by side by the same author, or by Churches of the same Confession, we must, for purposes of exact argument, take the less ambiguous phrase. And so the conclusion that Scripture *is* of infallible truth and Divine authority, will be more correctly expressed by saying that Scripture records or conveys to us the infallible and authoritative Word of God.*

III. But now will it not be objected that this last expression is too little for faith to rest upon? that it leaves an

* I use the expression "Scripture records or conveys to us the Word of God," because some modern writers have twisted the old Calvinistic expression in a new sense. People now say that Scripture *contains* God's word, when they mean that part of the Bible is the Word of God, and another part is the word of man. That is not the doctrine of our Churches, which hold that the substance of *all* Scripture *is* God's Word. What is not part of the record of God's Word, is no part of Scripture. Only we must distinguish between the record and the Divine communication of God's heart and will which the record conveys.

opening for doubt whether the Scripture is a correct and adequate record? By no means, replies the theology of the Reformation, for the Holy Spirit accompanies the Word as it is brought to us in Scripture, with exactly the same testimony which he bare to the Word in the hearts of its first hearers, nay, even with the very same testimony whereby he assured the prophets and apostles that the word which they preached was God's Word, and not their own.* The witness of the Spirit does not attach itself to the outward characters of the record (1 Cor. ii. 1-5); but testifies directly to the infallible truth of the Divine Word, the spiritual doctrine, the revelation of God Himself, which is the substance of the record. Scripture is not the record of a word which was once infallible, but may have been corrupted in transmission. It is the record of a word which still speaks with infallible truth and personal authority to us, in accordance, as Calvin well observes, with the promise, Isa. lix. 21, "My Spirit that is upon thee, and My words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed's seed, saith the Lord, from henceforth and for ever."

IV. This argument is irrefragable, and a sure ground of faith to any one who keeps clearly in view the fundamental Reformation position that the Word of God is nothing else than the personal manifestation to us for salvation of God and His will. God's Word is the declaration of what is in God's heart with regard to us. And so its certainty lies in its substance, not in the way in which it comes to us. "The Word itself," says Calvin, "*however it be presented to us, is like a mirror in which faith beholds God*" (*Inst.*, Lib. iii., cap. 2, sec. 6). So long as we go to Scripture, only to find in it God and His redeeming love, mirrored before the eye of faith, we may rest assured that we shall find living, self-evidencing, infallible truth in every part of it, and that we shall find nothing else. But to the Reformers this was

* Calvin, *Inst.*, Lib. I., Ch. vii. Secs. 4, 5.; *Id.* on 2 Tim. iii: "To disciples as to teachers God is manifested as author by revelation of the same Spirit."

the whole use of Scripture. "The whole Scriptures," says the first Swiss Confession, "have no other end than to let mankind know the favour and goodwill of God, and that He has openly manifested and proved this goodwill, to all mankind, through Christ, His Son, but that it comes to us only by faith, is received by faith alone, and nourished and proved by love to our neighbour" (Art. V., Niemeyer, p. 106). Now, since Scripture has no other end than to convey to us a message, which, when accompanied by the inner witness of the Spirit, manifests itself as the infallible Word of God, we may for practical purposes say that Scripture *is* the infallible Word of God. Scripture *is*, essentially, what it is its business to convey. But we cannot invert the proposition and say that the infallibility, which belongs to the divine substance of the Word, extends to the outward form of the record, or that the self-evidencing power of the Word as a rule of faith and life extends to expressions in Scripture which are indifferent to faith and life.

V. That this is the true limit of the infallibility and authority of the Word, as taught in our Confession, appears farther from what is said in the latter at Ch. XIV., sec. 2, on the subject of saving faith, "By this faith a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God speaking therein; and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life and that which is to come. But the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace." Here we have the very same doctrine of the Word as in the extracts above given from Calvin and the Swiss Confession. The Word consists of God's commands, threatenings, and promises, addressed to our faith, and above all of the gospel offer of Christ to us. These and none other are the things which *faith* receives as infallibly true, and the Confession nowhere recognises an

infallibility which is apprehended otherwise than by faith. It is, therefore, wholly illegitimate to refer to the Confession as settling any question as to the human form of the Bible, or as to possible human imperfections in the Scriptures in matters that are not of faith.

The length at which I have drawn out these arguments will not, I trust, appear disproportionate to the gravity of the questions involved, and to their crucial importance in the present process. The whole case against me rests on the assumption that the doctrine of the infallibility and authority of Scripture has another sense and a wider range than that assigned to it in the preceding pages ; and that it is capable of being pressed to preclude enquiry, by ordinary exegetical and historical methods, into questions which have nothing to do with faith and life, and which are not inaccessible to man's natural powers of investigation. The questions which the libel desires to foreclose are literary questions as to the origin, history, literary form, and literary character of the Biblical books. They are questions on which the Confession could not give a direct utterance, because they had not emerged when it was composed ; but it is held that the language of our Standards is broad enough to cover these literary questions, and to exclude them from the sphere of ordinary literary discussion.

In articles in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* I have taken an opposite view, and while I heartily adhere to the doctrine of our Standards, in the sense and on the grounds which I have briefly stated in the foregoing pages, I have held myself at liberty to discuss all literary questions about the books of Scripture on the usual principles of literary evidence, and to adopt such conclusions as the evidence justifies, without practising any such "sacrifice of the intellect" as the Church of Rome demands from her theologians. These conclusions in no way conflict with the supernatural truths which Scripture presents for our faith on spiritual evidence ; but they do conflict with inferences which are sometimes drawn from the Confessional doctrine of Scripture, by

pressing the mere words of the Standards beyond the limits which the whole scope of the doctrine must fairly be held to prescribe. In other words my views—deduced not from theory but from the evidence of facts—are inconsistent with the ascription to certain Biblical books of a formal infallibility, extending to every word and letter, and some other supposed perfections, which have nothing to do with the Divine perfection of the Bible as a rule of faith and life, but are measured by an arbitrary and merely human standard.

If we extend the principle of the infallible truth of Scripture beyond the limits within which, as I have endeavoured to show, the whole Confessional doctrine moves, it is plain that we cannot stop short of the assertion that the Bible, as we now have it, contains no error or inaccuracy of even the most trivial kind. That this is not true of the present text of the Old and New Testaments is an undeniable fact, freely admitted by sound theologians from Luther and Calvin downwards. It is not necessary to multiply examples of what no theologian questions. I will therefore confine myself to citing one or two cases in the very words of Calvin.

Mat. xxvii. 9. "How the name of Jeremiah came in I confess that I do not know, and do not greatly care.

It is at least plain that the name of Jeremiah stands by mistake for Zechariah."

Acts vii. 16. "It is plain that there is an error in the name of Abraham."

Acts vii. 14. In this verse the number 75 is given according to the LXX. of Gen. xlv. 27, instead of 70. Recognising the number in Acts as due to an error in the Septuagint, Calvin remarks that "the matter was not so important as to oblige Luke to perplex the Gentiles who were accustomed to the Greek reading."

The origin of such errors is frequently assigned to copyists, and it is supposed—in the teeth of all textual evidence—that the mistakes did not occur in the originals. But this supposition, which is merely an hypothesis devised to support a certain theory of the inspiration of the writers, has no found-

ation in the doctrine of the Confession, which gives no theory about the writers of the Bible, and is only concerned to maintain the infallible truth of the Scriptures as we have them. It is of the Bible as it exists, and is in our hands, that the Confession throughout speaks. To affirm that former ages had a more perfect Bible than we possess, that our Bible is in the smallest point less truly the Word of God than when it was first written, is clearly to imperil a central interest of our faith on behalf of a mere speculative theory. The writers of the Confession were fully alive to this fact, and accordingly they assert the present purity of the Hebrew and Greek texts, the present authenticity of these texts as documents from which there is no appeal; and they assert this just as broadly, and with precisely the same generality, as they assert that Scripture is infallible and of Divine authority.

The Confession leaves room for only two views of Scripture. We may suppose that the infallible truth of the Bible extends to every letter and point of the present Greek and Hebrew texts. This is a view not inconsistent with the words of the Confession; but it is admittedly and notoriously inconsistent with facts. And this being so, we make the Confession self-contradictory if we declare it to be matter of faith, and indispensable to the character of the Bible as God's Word, that it was originally written without the slightest human imperfection, while we yet admit that the absence of errors from the Bible, as we have it, is not matter of faith, and not indispensable for the defence of its Divine character. If a Bible containing some errors and imperfections would not have been God's infallible Word when it came from the pen of inspiration, then the Bible which, as we read it, does contain errors, cannot be God's Word to us now.

We see then in this matter of verbal infallibility how dangerous it is to assume that in giving us a Bible perfect for his own Divine purpose, God must necessarily have bestowed on that Bible every other perfection which we with our little insight into the Divine wisdom, our fallible judgment, and our weak faith, may be disposed to think fitting.

God has not deemed it unworthy of His honour that in the Bible which we read His infallible and self-evidencing Word is presented to us in a vehicle which contains some marks of human imperfection, some verbal and historical errors. He has not withheld from this imperfect letter the witness of His Spirit in the heart of the believer, commending it as His own infallible declaration of redeeming love, as His own perfect rule of faith and life. Who are we that we should be wiser than God, and declare that we will not receive His Word upon His own witness to its truth, unless we are allowed to ascribe a number of arbitrary perfections of our own imagining to the letter which He acknowledges in its present admitted imperfection?

It is plain that the only honest and reverent way of dealing with the letter of Scripture is to allow it to speak for itself. We have it as a fact that in laying His Word before us as He does this day—for the Bible, as we have it, is a gift direct from God to us, and not a mere inheritance from the earlier Church—God has employed a series of human agencies, and in the use of these agencies has not excluded every human imperfection. If we are to have a trustworthy revelation at all, it is necessary that the one Record of revelation, which God has given us, be such that we can feel sure that it tells us all we need to know of God and His will, and that it tells us this with unvarying and infallible truth, not mingling God's message with doctrines of man. So much is witnessed in our hearts by God's own Spirit, and so much is necessarily assumed in our Confession. Everything more than this is a question of the letter, and not of the Spirit, a question of the human agency employed, and not of the Divine truth conveyed. We are all agreed that the agency was not merely mechanical, that the original organs of revelation, and the subsequent writers of the record were not mere machines, but exercised a certain human freedom and spontaneity. They wrote each his own style, they argued each after his own habit of thought, and so forth. How far

this freedom went, and what things in the Bible are to be explained by it, cannot be determined by *a priori* arguments, and by the irreverent and presumptuous cry that a Bible, which is not according to our ideas of the fitness of things, is not a Bible at all.

The Bible is a part of human literature as well as the record of divine revelation. As such God has given it to us, and so He has laid upon us the duty, and given us the right to examine it as literature, and to determine all its human and literary characteristics by the same methods of research as are applied to the analysis of other ancient books. Apart from objections of detail, which I shall take in a subsequent part of my answer, to the way in which the libel represents individual features of my teaching, I rest my general defence on the contention that what I have written as to the origin, composition, meaning, and transmission of the books of the Bible does not go beyond the limits of this legitimate and necessary research.

In support of this contention, I would ask the Presbytery to consider—

- (I.) That my opinions are not based on any principle inconsistent with the orthodox Protestant doctrine of Scripture.
- (II.) That the points to which the libel takes objection in the argument of my articles, are such as fall strictly within the scope of ordinary historical and literary investigation, and which must be so investigated, unless we are to make to unbelievers the fatal concession that our religion is not only above reason, but inconsistent with it.
- (III.) That the adoption of the critical conclusions in my papers, does not diminish the historical value of the Bible as the record of God's revelation of Himself to His people of old, but rather sets the history of revelation in a clearer and more consistent light.

(IV.) That these conclusions do not affect the perfection of the Bible as a rule of faith and life, and that they cannot be touched by arguments of faith, or reached by the witness of the Spirit.

(I.) My criticism does not assume as the basis of argument any principle inconsistent with the Protestant doctrine of Scripture. On the contrary, the article "Bible" starts from the position that the religion of the Bible is the religion of revelation; that it grew, not by the word of man, but by the Word of God given through His prophets; and that it found its evidence in the long providential history in which the reality of Jehovah's kingship over Israel, of His redeeming love, and of His moral government, were vindicated by the most indisputable proofs. It will be observed that in these statements I place in the forefront of my article two propositions which no rationalist can possibly admit, namely (1) That the Old Testament History exhibits a personal and supernatural manifestation of the redeeming God to his chosen people; and (2) That the Old Testament prophets were organs of revelation, who spake not by their own wisdom, but by the supernatural teaching of God. These statements amount to an explicit enunciation of the first of the two fundamental propositions on which the whole confessional doctrine of Scripture is based, viz., that the Bible records how God, at sundry times, and in divers manners, revealed Himself and declared to His Church His will necessary for salvation. It is true that my article does not enunciate the other fundamental proposition of the Confession—that by the witness of the Spirit the Word contained in the Scriptures is still brought home to our hearts as God's very message to us. But the reason of this is not that I had anything to say inconsistent with the Confessional doctrine; but simply that I had no occasion to use this principle in an article which, by the express limitation of its plan, was confined to the discussion of literary questions, which, lying outside of the region of spiritual evidence, can be exhausted by ordinary means of investiga-

tion, and do not affect the place of the Bible in the proof of the doctrine of the Church, or in the praxis of personal religion.

(II.) The details of my articles strictly correspond with this limitation of plan, and all the points to which the libel takes objection can be discussed by ordinary methods of literary research. Taken summarily, they reduce themselves to the following principal heads:—

(1.) I point out that at an early period in the history of the Hebrew text changes on what lay before them, rearrangements, and additions must have been introduced by copyists or editors. The proof of this lies in the text itself, and can be fully made out to any one who has the necessary scholarship. If the scientific proof is thrust aside as is done in the libel, by the simple assertion that such a view is disparaging to Scripture, what becomes of the reasonableness of our faith? The condition and history of every other ancient text are judged of by scholars on well-known principles which no one dreams of disputing; but to apply these principles to the text of the Old Testament is, according to the libel, an offence which, for the glory of God and the edification of the Church, must be visited with judicial sentence.

(2.) I endeavour to make out from the writings themselves to what class of literary composition each book is to be referred, and how the author meant it to be understood. Is the book of Job a literal history or a poem based on old tradition, in which the author has used the faculty of invention to illustrate the problems of God's providence, and man's probation? Is the Song of Solomon an allegory or a poem of natural love? These are questions of interpretation such as constantly occur in ordinary literary criticism, when no one hesitates to decide them by familiar criteria. Yet the libel forbids me to ask these questions about Biblical books, and declares it equally illegitimate to take Job otherwise than literally, and Canticles otherwise than allegorically, although the use of poetical invention has the sanction of

our Lord in His parables, and the allegorical interpretation of Canticles is the relic of a system of interpretation which, before the Reformation, was applied to every Bible narrative which seemed unedifying.

(3.) I endeavour to ascertain the literary principles by which authors were guided. The libel seems to assume that there is only one way in which honest literary work can be gone about, namely, the way of modern Western literature. But every student of antiquity knows that ancient, and especially Eastern writers, have a different standard of literary merit and propriety from ours. For example, all ancient historians, whether in the East or in the West, were accustomed to insert in their narrative speeches of their own composition. This was so thoroughly a received part of the historian's art that no ancient reader would have thought it a merit to do otherwise. Nay, it was just in such speeches that an able historian displayed his power of illustrating an historical situation, and applied the lesson of the situation to his reader's mind.* But according to the libel nothing like this can occur in the Bible history. It is inconceivable, we are told, that the historians of the Old Testament can have incorporated appropriate reflections in their narrative, or used any literary freedom in expanding and developing the words of actors in the history, as was done by other historians without offence, and without misunderstanding on the part of their readers. Is it unfair to say that this is a matter that must be decided by the evidence in each case, that if there really is such a difference between the Bible and other ancient histories, it must appear on the face of the narrative in the absence of those marks

* Modern historians have sometimes found it advantageous to adopt the same literary figure. "I am far from wishing to introduce into history the practice of writing fictitious speeches as a mere variety upon the narrative, or an occasion for displaying the eloquence of the historian. But when the peculiar views of any party or time require to be represented, it seems to me better to do this dramatically, by making one of the characters of the story express them in the first person, than to state as a matter of fact that such and such views were entertained."—Arnold's *History of Rome*, II. p. 48, *Note*. See also Masson's *Life of Milton*, III. 177.

of the historian's own thought and expression, which literary criticism is admittedly competent to recognise in ordinary books.

(4.) Carrying out the right of enquiry into the literary construction and true meaning of Biblical books, I am constrained to admit that some of the Pentateuchal laws are not Mosaic, and the ascription of them to him cannot be taken literally. It is obvious on the face of it that the Pentateuch is a case of literary construction on principles which are extremely foreign to our habits of thought. To our minds a history and a statute book are very distinct things; but in the Pentateuch, which is the statute book of Israel, the laws are mixed up with the history, and sometimes so closely incorporated with the narrative, that it is difficult to distinguish between permanent ordinances and historical statements of what was done on a single occasion. But more than this, we find in different parts of the Pentateuch several laws on the same subject, which are not simply supplementary, one to the other, but differ in such a way that those who affirm that all are really of Mosaic date, and designed to be in operation at one and the same time, confess that it is often impossible to determine, otherwise than hypothetically, how the scattered details are to be reconciled, and what is the practice actually enjoined by the law. We have here a problem which can only be solved by recognising some peculiar principle in the composition of the Pentateuch. Laws are meant to be obeyed, and to be obeyed they must be understood. It was not enough for the people to *believe* the laws to be consistent, unless they could actually make them consistent, and find them unambiguous in practice. Either, then, we must suppose an oral tradition descending from Moses as the real authority by which the apparent contradictions in the laws were resolved in practice, or we must seek an historical explanation depending on the way in which the Pentateuch was put together. The former supposition places tradition above the written Word, and so the Biblical student is perforce thrown

back on the latter. We cannot give up the Pentateuch as a book which from its very origin was a hopeless riddle, and therefore we must call in critical enquiry to help us to understand why one law book contains precepts which not only appear inconsistent to us, but which in many cases must have been equally puzzling to the Hebrews themselves. Now the critical solution starts from the hint afforded by the peculiarity that Israel's statute book is also a history. Suppose the case that, after the original laws had long been current in historical form, it became necessary to introduce, under adequate prophetic authority, some new ordinance to meet the changing conditions of political, social, and religious life. It cannot be said that this is an impossible case, or that legislation by prophets later than Moses is inconsistent with the spirit of the Old Testament dispensation. But how could such a law be added to a statute book which had the peculiar shape of a history of Israel in the Wilderness? Apparently, says criticism, the only way to make the new law an integral part of the old legislation was to throw it into such a form as if it had been spoken by Moses, and so incorporate it with the other laws. Of course, if this plan was adopted the statute book ceased to be pure literal history. The ascription of a law to Moses could no longer be taken literally, but could only indicate that the law was as much to be observed as if it came from Moses, and that it was a legitimate addition to his legislation. Such a method of publishing laws would not be free from inconvenience; but the actual unquestioned inconveniences of the Pentateuch, when measured by our ideas of a law book, are so great that this cannot prove the thing impossible. On the other hand, there is no deceit implied in the use of an artificial literary form proceeding on a principle well understood, and so it is a pure question of literary and historical evidence whether the Hebrews did at one time recognise and use such a principle. There is one piece of direct historical evidence which seems to shew that they did, for in Ezra ix. 11, a law is quoted from Deut. vii., expressed in

words that throw it back into the Wilderness period, and yet the origin of this law is ascribed not to Moses but to the Prophets.

Criticism endeavours to prove that the Pentateuch was actually made up in some such way as I have indicated, and it does so on various lines of evidence—especially by shewing that different parts of the Pentateuch present consistent differences of style, excluding the idea of unity of authorship; by proving that some of the laws—such as the law of Deuteronomy forbidding sacrifice except in one central sanctuary—were never attended to even by prophets like Samuel and Elijah, and cannot be supposed to have been known to these holy men; and, finally, by shewing that irreconcilable contradictions arise if we suppose all the laws to be of the same date, and to have been in force at one time. If, for example, Numb. xviii. assigns the firstlings to the priests, and Deut. xii. bids the people eat them themselves, and if both laws are perfectly clear and unambiguous in the tenour of their words, it is vain to ask us to believe that both laws were given by Moses to be observed together.

Now, whether the critics are right or wrong in the conclusions which they draw from these and other similar lines of evidence, and whether or not they have found the true solution of the admitted difficulties of the Pentateuch, it ought to be plain that the line of enquiry on which they go does not exceed the limits of fair literary and historical investigation; and if they are wrong, they can and must be refuted by meeting their arguments, and not by relying on the mere assertion that they proceed on rationalistic grounds. If that is so, it must be proved by going over the steps of the argument, and pointing out where the rationalistic assumption comes in. I am convinced that in my criticism I have used no rationalistic assumptions, and that I have come to conclusions only on methods of which no one would dispute the legitimacy if the question were about another book than the Bible. If the authors of the libel have an opposite conviction, they ought to meet me in detail, and shew that

they have mastered the critical argument, and can lay their finger on its weak point.

(5.) Lastly, I have written on the assumption that it must be determined by observation of the facts, and not on *à priori* considerations, whether a Biblical author has sometimes made a slip in matters of fact—whether, for example, the Chronicler has misunderstood the phrase “ships of Tarshish,” which he found in the book of Kings, and whether he has sometimes taken it for granted, without evidence, that a usage of his own time applies to an earlier period. If such questions cannot be settled on the merits, there is no such thing as a science of history. And whichever way they are settled, they do not in the least affect the adequacy of the Bible as the perfect Divine rule of faith and life. It will however be noted that on all such points I carefully avoid hasty conclusions, and am unwilling to go beyond an admission that in some cases the evidence points to a possible, or at most a probable error.

I think that these five heads pretty nearly exhaust everything in my enquiries which has been objected to. I ask the court to consider that they correspond to competent lines of literary investigation, which are applicable to all ancient literature, and therefore cannot be inapplicable to the Bible on its literary side. And here I hope that the Presbytery will not allow me to be put to disadvantage by the circumstance that many of my judges cannot be supposed to be quite familiar with the way in which scientific method is applied by scholars to the study of ancient books. I hope that it will be remembered that, while every intelligent and thoughtful mind may appreciate such processes in a general way, it is scarcely possible to teach a man the full force and scope of a scientific or critical method except by exercising him in it, and showing him, not by one example but by many, how it is to be wielded. The criticism which I use, and the conclusions to which I arrive, are in their main outlines—and these it is which are challenged—common to me with almost every Hebrew scholar in Europe

who has directed his attention to the same questions. Under these circumstances it is not reasonable that any one who is not an expert should pronounce the method of enquiry incompetent, merely because he does not clearly see how scholars operate with it. When I say that I go to work only on recognised literary and scientific methods, I have the right to be believed unless it can be shown that I am mistaken. The burden of proof lies with the prosecution, and no man is entitled to condemn me simply because he does not understand how I can be right, unless he can go farther and say that he does understand how I am wrong.

But while the value of the critical method can be fully estimated only by scholars, every one should be able to see that my conclusions may be adopted without impairing the value and perspicuity of the Bible for the ends for which it is given to the Church. We go to the Bible partly because it is the source of historical information as to the origins of our religion and the history of God's revelation in past time, and partly because in it God still speaks to us, and lays down for our guidance an infallible rule of faith and life. My third and fourth points are that criticism does not interfere with this two-fold use of Scripture.

(III.) When we turn to the Bible to learn the history of God's Revelation, we do not find one continuous and systematic narrative, but a number of distinct documents or separate books, which present the story of God's dealings with His people, and the inspired messages which He sent to them at different times, in a somewhat broken and disjointed manner. To understand the history as a whole we must piece the several documents together, and use the one to elucidate the other. It is plain that in order to do this with success we must determine as far as possible at what point in the history each book comes in, and what purpose it was designed to serve. This is what criticism undertakes to do, and, therefore, every advance in criticism is an important step gained towards the understanding of the plan and progress of the Old Testament dispensation. We may

suppose that the critic starts at first on the assumption that all the traditional views about individual books are correct. But as he goes on piecing this and that together, he finds something that will not fit; he finds that on the old views some obvious incongruity arises. He started perhaps with the idea that all speeches are reported word for word, but at 1 Kings xiii. 32, he finds Samaria mentioned in a speech made long before that city was founded, and when the very word Samaria did not exist. What is his duty as a man anxious to understand the Bible history thoroughly? Not to slur over the difficulty, but to say frankly that it is plain from this example that we shall misread the history if we assume that speeches are given word for word as they were spoken. This is an example on a very small scale of what criticism has often to do on a large scale. When it is found that the old view about any part of Scripture leads to obvious incongruities or irreconcilable contradictions, the critic argues that these contradictions must lie not in the history but in his own standpoint. And if the difficulty cannot be overcome by a more correct exegesis, he prepares himself to ask whether there is not some mistake in what he has hitherto taken for granted as to the manner, the purpose, or the date of the book with which he is dealing. This way of dealing with Scripture is the very opposite of that of infidelity. The infidel delights in the difficulties and contradictions that arise on the traditional view of Scripture, and uses them to disparage the Bible history. The critic is sure that the history is consistent, and is only anxious to reach a standpoint from which the consistency shall become manifest.

But are there not critics who, under form of an attempt to get a consistent view of the Old Testament literature, and of the history which it records, eliminate God's revealing hand from the history altogether? No doubt there are; but they effect this, not by what lies in the critical method as I have hitherto described it, but by assuming an additional and wholly alien principle—by assuming that everything

supernatural is necessarily unhistorical. This assumption is so far from being part of my criticism, that I regard it as making true criticism impossible. Eliminate the supernatural hand of a revealing God from the Old Testament, and you destroy the whole consistency of the history; you destroy the very thing on which the possibility of a sound criticism rests.

Now I do not affirm that believing criticism can carry out its work without coming to the conclusion that an author, like the Chronicler, has sometimes made a mistake; that there are some inconsiderable interpolations in the present text of the historical books, and that some things, like genealogies, statistics, and laws, are thrown into a form which is misleading if taken literally. But my criticism reaches these conclusions, not at the expense of the historical truth of the Old Testament, but in the interests of the history, and on the evidence of the books themselves. And the result, even in the case of Deuteronomy and Chronicles, with regard to which I am most blamed, is not that these books are fraudulent and historically worthless, but that it is possible by fair enquiry to gain a view of their true method, and meaning, which disposes of the objections that have been brought against them, and enables us to draw from them fresh instruction. Such criticism is no assault upon the history of supernatural revelation; it is only an honest attempt to let the record speak for itself, and to use the light which one part of it reflects upon another.

(IV.) The value of the Bible as a collection of historical records, adequate when properly used to give a consistent view of the course of God's revelation to his ancient people, is not, however, that which is most immediately practical to the Christian. It may be left to scholars to vindicate by historical arguments the truth of the supernatural story of the Old Testament. To the ordinary believer the Bible is precious as the practical rule of faith and life in which God still speaks directly to his heart. No criticism can be otherwise than hurtful to faith if it shakes the confidence with which

the simple Christian turns to his Bible, assured that he can receive every message which it brings to his soul as a message from God Himself. And, on the other hand, no criticism is dangerous which leaves this use of Scripture secure.

Now my criticism undoubtedly implies that there are some things in Scripture which the unlearned reader is pretty sure to take in another sense from that in which they are actually meant. The ordinary reader never observes the difficulties that lie in the common view of the Pentateuchal legislation, and the critical theory that the Laws in Deuteronomy are put dramatically into Moses' mouth to show, as by a parable, that they are spoken by the same prophetic spirit as wrought through Moses, and are authoritative developments of his legislation, will probably appear to him very far fetched. But then, the value of the book for his faith does not depend on the question whether these things are spoken by Moses literally or in a parable. All that he needs to know is that they are God's teaching to his people of old; and that apart from the ceremonial and political precepts annulled in the change of dispensation, they are still spoken by God to him. This is the whole concern of faith. It is all that is covered by the witness of the Spirit. That witness can assure me that these words are spoken of God to me. But it cannot tell me to what generation of His Church, and by what prophetic agency God spoke them first. What is true in the case of Deuteronomy applies *à fortiori* to other less startling cases.

Criticism may change our views of the sequence and the forms of Old Testament Revelation; but its whole work lies with the "sundry times and divers manners" of God's declaration of His will, and it cannot touch the substance of that living Word which shines with the same Divine truth at all times and under every form of revelation.

Before passing from this doctrine, I wish to say a word on the supposed tendency of critical views. It seems to be thought that the habit of mind which rests with confidence on the Divine Word has no sympathy with critical method,

and that it is hardly possible to exercise one's judgment on critical problems without impairing the simplicity of faith. This is a notion which can be best tested by confronting it with facts. The leaders of the Reformation are the men who, above all others in the history of the Church, were filled with a deep sense of the Divine authority and infallible truth of Scripture, who triumphantly asserted this principle in battle with errors that had enslaved all Christendom, and who, under God's providence, were able to make their principle clear to whole nations, and teach the learned and the unlearned alike to turn from vain traditions and put their faith in the sure Word of God. How did these men, and especially Luther and Zwingli, who stood in the forefront of the battle for truth, deal with the Bible? Not in the spirit of timidity, which can admit nothing unfamiliar for fear of unseen consequences, but with a holy boldness, knowing the sure ground of their faith. Both these Reformers expressed themselves on critical questions with great freedom, and sometimes even with rashness.

Luther says that Job did not so speak as is written in his book, but that the author took his thoughts and put them into words as is done in a stage play, or in the Comedies of Terence. He says that the books of Kings are a hundred miles ahead of the Chronicles, and are more to be believed. He classes Esther with the Second Book of Maccabees, and wishes it did not exist, because it Judaizes too much and contains much heathen naughtiness. Zwingli finds an interpolation in the last chapter of Jeremiah, inserted by some one who wished to diminish the shame of the Jewish nation, by reducing the number of captives. All the leading reformers are at one in admitting the existence of verbal errors in the Biblical text, and supposing that the authors did not always write with scrupulous exactness, or observe in their narratives the order of events. Some of these opinions are quite as startling as anything I have said, and the list might easily be added to. Yet no men have had a simpler and firmer faith in the Divine Word, or are freer

from the suspicion of shaking the faith of others. Nay, the men who said these startling things are the very men who taught the Church to love and reverence the Bible as never had been done before. How then can it be affirmed that there is a repugnancy between critical tendencies and simple faith ?

THE DOCTRINE OF PROPHECY.

What is the Doctrine of Prophecy as set forth in the Confession of Faith ?

- (a.) From the use of the language of Heb. i. 1, it is clear that in Cap. I. sec. 1, the Confession has a special eye to prophecy when it says, that it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in divers manners to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will [*i.e.*, His will, the knowledge of which is necessary unto salvation] unto His Church.
- (b.) In Cap. VII. sec. 5, we read that the covenant of grace was administered under the law “ by promises, *prophecies*, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come, which were for that time sufficient and efficacious through the operation of the Spirit to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins and eternal salvation.”
- (c.) Cap. VIII. sec. 1. The Lord Jesus is the Prophet of His Church. This may be understood by the Larger Catechism, Q. 43: “ Christ executeth the office of a prophet in his revealing to the Church in all ages by His Spirit and Word, in divers ways of administration, the whole will of God in all things concerning their edification and salvation.”

The Confession, therefore, has two things to tell us about prophecy. In the first place, we learn from what is implied, though not expressly stated in Chapters i. and viii., that prophecy is God's revelation to the Church of His will for their edification and salvation. In the second place, we learn from Cap. VII. that inasmuch as the salvation of the Old Testament believers depended on the communication to them of the benefits of a *future* work of redemption (Comp. Cap. VIII. 6), prophecy under the old dispensation pointed to the future and foresignified Christ to come. This doctrine I heartily accept, and have always taught. I will not go back to an old Review article, written eight years ago, and published before I held office in this Church, but I ask the Presbytery to look at what I have said in the article "Bible," and observe how thoroughly it accords with the Confession. I say that prophecy is given by revelation:—"The characteristic of the prophet is a faculty of spiritual intuition, *not gained by human reason, but coming to him as a word from God Himself*" (p. 634b). And again, "The prophets generally spoke under the immediate influence of the Spirit or 'hand of Jehovah'" (p. 639b). I say that this word is given for the edification of the Church: The prophet "apprehends religious truth in a new light as bearing in a way not manifest to other men on the practical necessities, the burning questions of the present" (p. 634b). I ascribe to the prophets the whole growth of the religion of the old covenant (*Ibid*). I say that they reprov'd sin, exhorted to present duty, and gave "encouragement to the godly, and threatening to the wicked" (p. 640a). Again, I clearly indicate that the work of the Old Testament prophets, for the edification of their own dispensation, was based on their insight into the future purpose of God, and took the shape of prediction of the things to be fulfilled in Christ. I say in a passage, which the libel itself cites, that the encouragements which prophecy offers to the godly, and its threatening to the wicked, are based on the certainty of God's righteous purpose, and that "in this connection prophecy is pre-

dictive;" that "it lays hold of the ideal elements of the theocratic conception" [which include, as every one knows, the complete reconciliation of the people to God, the outpouring of His Spirit upon them, the writing of His law in their hearts, and the perfect realisation of His kingship over them], "and depicts the way in which, by God's grace, they shall be realized in a Messianic age." What does this passage mean? It means that prophecy includes prediction of the things fulfilled in Christ, in order that it may base its encouragements and threatenings directed to the Old Testament Church, on the certainty of the righteous purpose of God. The righteous purpose of God ought not to be an ambiguous term to any one who has studied the Bible. I use it here because it is under the aspect of righteousness that the Old Testament most constantly depicts the purpose of redemption. When, therefore, I teach that Hebrew prophecy predicted the things of Christ, the good things of the Messianic age, in order that the Divine Word to the Old Testament Church might rest on the certainty of God's righteous redemptive purpose, I teach the precise doctrine of the Confession, which says, that by prophecy the elect were instructed and built up in faith in a promised Messiah. Finally, lest it be said that in speaking of "a Messianic age" I do not sufficiently recognise a distinct foreshadowing of the personal Messiah, I point to a passage, at p. 642a, where I say that Jesus "read in the Psalms and Prophets, which so vainly exercised the unsympathetic exegesis of the Scribes, the direct and unmistakeable image of his own experience and work as the founder of the spiritual kingdom of God." The Presbytery will judge whether these statements could have been penned by one who was not in full accord with the doctrine of the Confession.

But when I turn to the libel I am told that I "disparage prophecy by representing its predictions as arising merely from so called spiritual insight, based on the certainty of God's righteous purpose." These are not

my expressions. I do not say that the predictions are based on the certainty of God's purpose, but that the encouragement and threatenings in connection wherewith prophecy takes a predictive shape are so based. Prediction is the link which connects the Prophet's exhortation to his own time with its basis in the certainty of a future work of redemption. And this, as I have shown, is the exact doctrine of the Confession, which teaches that prophecy was given on the ground of the righteous redemptive purpose of God, and in order to communicate its benefits to the Old Testament Church.

Again, the faculty by which the Prophet apprehends the word of Revelation is not by me called spiritual insight, much less “merely so-called spiritual insight.” But I do call it “spiritual intuition” (p. 634b), and I call it so—

- (1.) Because in the Old Testament the prophetic word as a whole, and not merely prophetic vision in the narrow sense, is called a “seeing” or intuition (*Chazôn*, Isa. i. 1; Nahum i. 1, etc.)
- (2.) Because this intuition, as its object is supernatural, is necessarily spiritual, 1 Cor. ii. 11, “The things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God.”

I am farther charged with excluding prediction in the sense of direct supernatural revelation of events long posterior to the prophet's own time. This charge is irrelevant, for the Confession makes no distinction between direct and indirect prediction, and does not speak of any predictions save those foreshadowing Christ, which I have amply acknowledged, as has been shewn above. And as a matter of fact, this charge has no foundation in my writings. The quotations brought from my exposition of Psalm xvi. are totally irrelevant; for in treating this passage as *indirectly* Messianic (in which I follow the best orthodox interpreters from Calvin to Delitzsch), I do not deny that other parts of the Old Testament contain direct prediction. And though I say that the prophets spoke directly to their own time, not to the future, I certainly hold that they spoke to their own

time about the future Messianic time, and have said as much in the article "Bible," as quoted in the libel.

I am unable to conjecture what objection is taken to the passages quoted from the "British Quarterly Review," unless the real difference between the authors of the libel and myself is that they think of prediction of future events as the characteristic mark and central function of prophecy; whereas I follow the Confession in thinking of prophecy as predictive in so far as was necessary for the instruction of the Old Testament Church in the will of God for their edification and salvation. In this connection, it is worthy of remark that the fulfilment of predictions is not even mentioned in Cap. I. sec. 5, of the Confession as one of the subordinate evidences that the Bible is the Word of God—an omission which makes it very clear that the Westminster divines were not of the school which values prophecy mainly for the evidence of fulfilled prediction.

THE DOCTRINE OF ANGELS.

The Confessional doctrine of angels contains the following points:—

Cap. III., sec. 3.—The predestination of angels.

Cap. V., sec. 4.—The relation of God's providence to the sins of angels.

Cap. VIII, sec. 4., and Cap. XXXIII., sec. 1.—The judgment of angels by Christ.

Cap. XXI., sec. 2.—Religious worship is not to be given to angels, saints, or any other creature.

The libel accuses me of holding that "belief in the superhuman reality of the angelic beings of the Bible is matter of assumption rather than of direct teaching." The passage on which this is based occurs in a sketch of the Old Testament teaching about angels. In this sketch I state that "a disposition to look away from the personality of the angels and concentrate attention on their ministry runs more or less

through the whole Old Testament angelology." And I illustrate this fact by saying that though it is certain that the Old Testament belief in angels is a "belief in the existence of superhuman beings standing in a peculiar relation of nearness to God" (p. 26b), the reality of such beings "is matter of assumption rather than of direct teaching." What I mean by saying that in the Old Testament the existence of angels is rather taken for granted than directly taught, appears in the next sentence. "Nowhere do we find a clear statement as to the creation of the angels." The libel, therefore, ought to have accused me of holding that *the Old Testament* rather takes the reality of angels for granted than makes it matter of direct teaching. In this form the charge is clearly irrelevant. My article gives a mere statement of facts, which are not my facts but those of the Old Testament. And the authors of the libel might have observed that in the Confession itself the creation and reality of angels are taken for granted, and do not form matter of direct teaching. Again I am blamed because, continuing my sketch of Old Testament angelology, I say: "That angels are endowed with special goodness and insight, analogous to human qualities, appears [viz., in the Old Testament,] as a popular assumption, not as a doctrine of revelation." This again is a mere statement of fact. The allusions to an analogy between the goodness and wisdom of men, and those qualities as displayed in a special way by angels, occur in speeches of Achish the Philistine, the woman of Tekoah, and Mephibosheth, not one of whom surely was a mouthpiece of revelation.

DETAILS UNDER THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE.

I have still to take up *seriatim* the details which the libel sets forth under six heads, to prove that I have uttered censurable opinions about the Scriptures.

Primo. I am charged with holding "that the Aaronic priesthood, and at least a great part of the laws and ordinances of the Levitical system, were not divinely instituted in the time of Moses, and that those large parts of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers which represent them as having been then instituted by God, were inserted in the inspired records long after the death of Moses."

There are here three distinct charges: (A) That certain ordinances are not Mosaic; (B) That the priesthood, &c., were not of Divine institution; (C) That large parts of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers are of post-Mosaic date.

Under (A) I first make a correction of fact. I do not doubt that Aaron was priest before the ark in the Wilderness, and that in the Wilderness the tribe of Levi was consecrated to its special vocation. All that I assert in the passage quoted in the libel is:

1st. That the law in Deuteronomy does not recognise the distinction which assigns all proper priestly functions to the House of Aaron, and confines other Levites to ministerial service under the priest.

2nd. That Ezekiel writes in a way shewing that at his time this distinction was not enforced by law, and that he does not seem to know of a previous law to the effect, because he enacts the distinction as a punishment for the Levites' sins.

These statements rest on exegetical evidence, which I am ready to produce if they are challenged. As results of exegesis, they must be refuted before they are condemned. What they amount to is that the *details* of the Levitical system were not fixed and invariable from the time of Moses downwards. They thus fall under the general position which I lay down in the second passage cited in the libel, viz., that under the Old Testament dispensation there was a development of ritual as well as of doctrine.

This explanation brings me at once to (B). While I assert that the ordinances of ritual were not immutable, my statements give no colour to the accusation that I deny them to be part of God's teaching to Israel. It will be observed how

closely I conjoin the development of ordinances with the development of doctrine, repeatedly emphasizing the fact that both took place through the ministry of the prophets. Does not this clearly imply that God, in whose name the prophets acted, taught the people by His ordinances as well as by His word?

As to (C), I grant that I take parts of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers to have been written after the time of Moses, but I fail to see that this view is inconsistent with our Standards, which state nothing as to the authorship and composition of the Pentateuch.

If, on the other hand, the language of the libel is meant to convey that I regard large parts of the Pentateuch as interpolations which have no right to stand where they do, I repudiate such a representation of my views. I believe that the Pentateuch is essentially, and in its plan, a composite work, made up of several histories and law books, combined together and probably supplemented by one or more editors. But I believe that the several elements of which it is composed agree in possessing the characteristics which entitle them to form part of the Old Testament Record. I apprehend that the real difficulty which the authors of the libel wished to bring out is somewhat different from that which their words express, and that the point of their accusation is concealed in the relative clause, which says that the Pentateuch represents certain ordinances as instituted in the time of Moses, whereas I am taken to hold that the ordinances (and not merely the books in which they are recorded) are of later date. That is, I am accused of holding a view of the Pentateuchal legislation at variance with the language of the Pentateuch itself. I shall deal with this charge under the next head, where it is brought out more explicitly. Under the first head it is out of place, inasmuch as I believe that the Aaronic priesthood was instituted in the Wilderness, and do not profess to decide the question whether some ordinances of the Middle Books of the Pentateuch are later than those of Deuteronomy.

Secundo. Under this head the libel does me an injustice, which is no doubt unintentional, and which I am sure that every member of Presbytery will be glad to correct, in interweaving with the statement of my opinion as to the book of Deuteronomy remarks and inferences that are not mine, but are designed to shew that my position is untenable. Thus I am made to say that "the book of inspired Scripture, called Deuteronomy, *which is professedly an historical record*, does not possess that character." Now, I expressly state in my article, and I have since repeated on various occasions, that there is no fraud in the book of Deuteronomy, or in other words that the author did not give his book out for anything but what it is. Accordingly the insertion of the clause, which I signalise by italics, exactly reverses my view. My contention is, not that a book professedly historical does not possess that character, but that a book, or rather part of a book (for my remarks are, strictly speaking, confined to the legislative part of Deuteronomy), which at first sight may seem to be strictly historical, appears on closer consideration not to be so, and not to have been so meant by the author. The injustice done by overlooking this element in my view runs through the whole statement under this head. So, in the next clause, I am accused of holding that the writer made his book to assume a character which it did not possess, and did this in the name of God. The supposition that Deuteronomy contains a fraud put forth in the name of God, is as abhorrent to me as it can possibly be to the authors of the libel. The whole character of the book excludes such a hypothesis. But, on the other hand, there are facts connected with the laws it contains which to me and many others seem to exclude the idea that it is simply the report of a speech by Moses, containing no ordinance that he did not give to the Israelites. The theory of Deuteronomy, which I have adopted, attempts to do justice to both these sides of the case. As a theory it is of course in a measure hypothetical. I am not tied to the details, and am ready to receive fresh light, or adopt a more perfect theory. But I can-

not in conscience overlook the clear internal evidence that all the laws of the Pentateuch were not given by one law-giver to be in force at one time, and that some of the laws of Deuteronomy were not known, even to prophets, till a much later date.

Critics generally distinguish between the "legislative kernel" of Deuteronomy, containing the speech of Moses, and the "setting" or framework which connects it with the rest of the Pentateuch on one side, and the book of Joshua on the other. It is not probable that the author of the speech is also the author of all the historical chapters. I have not expressed, nor am I prepared to express a definite view about the latter. But about the legislative part I hold—

1. That it is based upon the older law, especially on the Book of the Covenant to which Moses bound the people at Sinai (Exod. xxiv. 7). It is, therefore, essentially an expansion of Mosaic ideas.

2. At the same time the book contains ordinances which on the evidence of the history, and on comparison with other parts of the Pentateuch, must be confessed to be later than Moses.

3. The new matter is to be viewed as a development of the old legislation under prophetic authority to meet the new needs of a later age.

4. The laws, restated and developed in Deuteronomy, are thrown into the form of a speech delivered by Moses in the land of Moab. It is not improbable that in choosing this form the author was guided by an historical tradition that Moses did rehearse the law to the people before he went up to Pisgah. But at any rate he knew that the people could be better taught by picture and parable than by argument, and instead of reasoning in an abstract manner that certain new ordinances were the legitimate development of the teaching of Moses, necessary to adapt it to new needs, he taught this truth in a pictorial manner by putting in the *form* of words uttered by Moses, what was strictly an application of the *spirit* of Mosaic teaching.

5. This would be a fraud unworthy of Scripture if the author wished to conceal the fact that his book included new ordinances, and to lead his readers to think that the speech now laid before them had literally been delivered and written down by Moses himself. But if no attempt was made to conceal the fact that the book was new at the time when it was first published, centuries after the death of Moses, every one would understand that it could not be meant as a piece of literal history. It would be received for its own intrinsic worth and spiritual evidence, and on the authority of the prophetic circle from which it emanated. And everything that we know about the feeling of Eastern antiquity in literary matters forbids the idea that readers of that age would have taken offence at the parabolic form of the book, or seen in it anything unworthy of a prophet.

6. Critics of the school of Kuenen, with whom I have no theological sympathies, though I respect his eminent scholarship and acuteness, do regard the book as a fraud palmed off upon Josiah by the priests. But apart from the psychological violence of the hypothesis, that the author of a book like Deuteronomy could be party to a vulgar fraud, it appears to me that this view stands condemned on the critical evidence itself, as I hope to shew at length on a suitable occasion. For the present it is sufficient to observe that Kuenen's theory is radically different from that which I share with such critics as Ewald and Riehm. What is common to the critics is the admission that Deuteronomy is a prophetic legislation belonging to the period of prophetic activity in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C. The notion that the book was not really found by Hilkiah, and that the alleged finding was a fraudulent conspiracy, has nothing to do with the proper critical argument. I believe that the internal evidence goes to shew that the work is considerably older than Kuenen supposes, and really had been lost in the troubles under Manasseh. The judgment passed on my views must not, therefore, be prejudiced by referring, as has so often been done, to a view which I disclaim.

7. It is, however, said that no reasonable Bible reader

can doubt that the Book of Deuteronomy professes to be history, that it is nowhere hinted that there is anything figurative about it. I reply that this argument proves too much. It would prove that all the symbolical actions related in the Prophets were literally performed. It is well known that the most orthodox writers take them figuratively, and yet they are all related just as if they had actually happened. Again, the question is not how we naturally look at a thing, but how the matter was viewed when the book was written. Ancient writers habitually developed their ideas in the form of speeches by historical characters, and this custom was too well known to need explanation in each case. Unless, as I have already remarked, the book was expressly passed off as an old book, its readers would at once understand to take it as not strictly literal. But it will be said again that the author goes out of his way to say that Moses wrote the law, and gave it to the priests (Deut. xxxi. 9). Is that part of the parabolic form? Yes, a necessary part, for one of the most important of the new ordinances of the Deuteronomist is that the law be read publicly every seven years. And this law could not be combined with the rest except by this extension of the parabolic form. But does not Deut. i. 1, shew that the whole book claims to have been written on the East side of the Jordan, before the people entered Canaan? On the English translation, yes; but the translation is wrong, and the verse really says, "These are the words which Moses spake on *the other side* of Jordan." A final objection remains. Does not the present place of Deuteronomy, in the Pentateuch, claim for it a strictly historical sense? What right has parabolic teaching to be incorporated with an historical context? Well, I have already urged that on the face of it the Pentateuch is not a mere history. It is primarily a law book in historical shape, and this accounts for its tolerating the parabolical or figurative element which was inevitable, if all the laws of different ages were to be incorporated in one *corpus juris*. It is probable that the "kernel" of Deuteronomy was originally published alone.

It may never be possible for criticism to trace clearly the editorial process by which it became part of the larger work which we call the Pentateuch. And as this process is obscure, I will not deny that it is conceivable that the last editor, who can hardly be placed much before the time of Ezra, may already have lost the knowledge that the Deuteronomic law was not actually written by Moses. He perhaps regarded all the laws as literally from Moses, and traces of this opinion may appear in his editorial work. But even if this should prove to be the case, it cannot affect the substance of the books. It is at most an error in name and date, not touching any interest of faith; not touching the fact that the whole legislation, of whatever date it be, is the sum of God's teaching to His people through legal ordinances. In one word, the critical theory of Deuteronomy is an attempt to solve exegetical difficulties, and remove apparent contradictions which have proved insuperable on the ordinary view. No one who has studied the subject will make light of these difficulties, and I would ask the Presbytery whether they can safely condemn me till they have satisfied themselves by a course of study, not less careful than has been followed by critics, that the attempt is not necessary. And on the other hand to declare my view theologically illegitimate, it must be maintained that Revelation is tied to certain forms of literary expression, that nothing can occur in Scripture which, though intelligible when first written, might afterwards be misunderstood in a way not affecting faith, and that no criticism is admissible which will not undertake to deny that such a harmless misconception may possibly have been shared by the last editor of the Pentateuch.

Tertio. I am here accused of making a number of statements which lower the character of the inspired writings to the level of uninspired. The whole evidence of this charge is drawn from my article on Chronicles. It would have been fairer to limit the accusation accordingly, and not to charge me with an attack on the inspired writings in

general, on the ground of statements that apply to a single book.

How then have I lowered the character of Chronicles? In the first place "by ignoring its divine authorship." Now the main argument of my article is to shew that the book is of real historical value, and that the author is not open to the charge which has often been brought against him of inventing history for special ends. I could not conduct this argument as to the disputed credibility of an historical work without seeming to beg the question if I took express account of the divine authorship. Does Keil or any other orthodox writer take account of the divine authorship in discussing the literary value of Chronicles? Or is it impious to give literary and historical questions an impartial discussion? And will my accusers tell me what feature in Chronicles has been overlooked or misunderstood by me through not taking account of the divine authorship? Again, I "represent the sacred writers as taking freedoms like other authors." The expression "freedoms" is perhaps liable to be misunderstood. I explain it, however, (as cited at p. 10H,) to mean the "freedom of literary form which was always allowed to ancient historians, and need not perplex any one who does not apply a false standard to the narrative." My position is, that we must not be surprised to find in a book of the Bible any literary peculiarity which was familiarly recognised in antiquity as legitimate. And the special application of the principle is that antiquity expected historians to bring in speeches of their own composing, and that the Chronicler does so, and had a right to do as he does. Again, I am said to charge the Chronicler with "committing errors." That the perfection of the Bible as the rule of faith and life, and the record of God's whole revealed will, does not rest on the absence of every error in things which are not matters of faith, has been argued above. Least of all, should an opposite view be strained to apply to a book like this, where, if an error occurs, we have the parallel history in the older books to check it. Thus Turretin admits that there may be errors

in the text of Scripture which are to be corrected by the collation of parallel passages (Loc. II. Qu. v. sec. 10), though he assumes that such errors are due to scribes. But I state no more than that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Chronicler did make some errors, either by misunderstanding the older books or by drawing mistaken inferences from their statements. I put the matter in this cautious way, and I do not think that those who have studied the facts will say that such language is too strong. The case of a probable error, which I cite, is one admitted by Keil, who in earlier writings had done his best to explain it away. I do not think that I need go in detail over the other charges in this head. I point out that some of the statements of the Chronicler are open to such serious difficulties that it is not safe to take it for granted that he has never made a mistake, and that other statements probably were not meant to be taken literally. I put all these points rather hypothetically than categorically; and with the object of shewing that, even if the possible errors exist, they are confined within limits which do not destroy the value of the book. Each statement which I make with reserve, and with limited reference to points admittedly difficult, the libel transforms into a broad general statement without any limitation, and represents as a general attack on the Scriptures. It ends by affirming that I make the Chronicler write "under the influence of party spirit, and for party purposes." This accusation goes against the whole tenour of my article; but I suppose it is based on a single expression when, after shewing that the author writes as a Levite, who takes special interest in Levitical matters, I add that he is "most partial to the functions of the singers." Of course this means only that he describes all that concerns these functions with peculiar interest and affection, which surely is not to his disparagement if he was a temple singer himself.

Quarto. In its present form this head is irrelevant, because no conclusion against me is drawn from it in the minor. The argument of the prosecution is that the opinions formu-

lated under the several heads are censurable (p. 3, F G), and that, nevertheless (as the minor argues), I have adopted and published them. But under *Quarto* I find no statement of an opinion held by me, but merely something about the presentation of opinions, which is not taken up in the minor at all. This confusion of form is due to the introduction of a clause which is in itself unintelligible, as may be best seen by separating it out, and completing the sentence from page 3. This gives the statement "That, the presentation of opinions which discredit Scripture . . . by stating discrediting opinions of others, without any indication of dissent therefrom, is an opinion which contradicts or is opposed to the doctrine," &c. The Presbytery need no argument of mine to lead them to reject from the libel what cannot be expressed in grammatical form.

I will, therefore, for the sake of argument, drop this clause, and amend the rest of the head by omitting the irrelevant words "*presentation of.*" It thus appears that I am charged with "discrediting the authenticity and canonical standing of books of Scripture by imputing to them a fictitious character, and attributing to them what is disparaging." Compared with the passages adduced in the minor, the first branch of this charge reduces itself to a narrow compass. I have stated that in the book of Job there is poetical invention of incident, and that it is not inconceivable that the same thing may occur in other books. Does the libel maintain that it is matter of faith that every word in Job is a literal record of what was said and done? If the use of poetical invention is discreditable, what becomes of the parables of our Lord?

The second part of the charge is that I attribute to books of Scripture what is disparaging. Under this, I take it, is included what I say as to the freedom used by readers and copyists in modifying and re-arranging texts.

To this I reply that I have simply stated a fact regarding the readers and copyists, who were in providence permitted to do some things which are contrary to our notions of an author's property in his literary work. If the vari-

ations between Psalm xiv. and Psalm liii. are not due to copyists, how do the authors of the libel account for them? Or again, is it denied that some one composed Psalm cviii. out of Psalms lvii. and lx.? These things do not interfere with the perfect adequacy of the Bible as a rule of faith and life, and we have no more right to stumble at them than at the errors of grammar, inconsecutive sentences, and other human imperfections which Scripture contains with all its divine perfection.

Under this head the libel seems also to object to me that I separate the book of Daniel from the prophetic writings. I explained in the answers formerly given in to the Presbytery, and had indicated not obscurely in the article "Bible," that in making this distinction I do not deny that there is true prophecy in Daniel. My remarks were not meant in a disparaging sense, but simply pointed out that the book is so far peculiar that the problems affecting it could not be discussed in a general sketch of the prophetic literature. In separating Daniel from the Prophets proper, I do no more than is done in the Hebrew Canon, where it is placed not among the Prophets, but in the Hagiographa. With this it agrees that Daniel is not called a Prophet in the Old Testament.

The last citation under this head is, I submit, irrelevant, as in that passage I neither attribute anything disparaging to books of the Bible, nor impute to them a fictitious character.

Quinto. The libel represents me as holding that the book of Canticles "only presents a high example of virtue in a betrothed maiden, without any recognition of the Divine law." This statement is not taken from my article, but follows a speech made against me at last Assembly, which, unfortunately, and no doubt unintentionally, misrepresented my view of the book. I do not regard the Shulamite as betrothed to the shepherd; but, on the contrary, agree with Ewald (*Dichter* II. i. p. 335) that such a view is excluded by the text. The clause "without any recognition of the Divine law," is a comment on my opinion which is intelligible

only in connection with the argument of the speech already referred to, depends on the assumption that the maiden was betrothed, and has no pertinency when this misapprehension is removed.

What remains as a charge against me is that on my view the Song "is devoid of any spiritual significance." This is the very argument which used to be employed before the Reformation in favour of the allegorical interpretation of the greater part of Scripture—a system of interpretation which did more than anything else to bolster up the Romish theory, that the Scripture could not be understood without the assistance of ecclesiastical tradition, and that it was useless, or even pernicious, to place in the hands of the laity a Bible which, when taken in its obvious literal sense, was not spiritually instructive, and in some parts (it was argued) was even positively immoral or frivolous. Protestantism rejects the whole theory; admitting that there are passages in Scripture which do not in themselves teach any spiritual truth, but which, nevertheless, are valuable to us—partly from the examples and warnings they contain, but still more because the Bible is no mere system of spiritual truths, but essentially a narrative of the gradual process of revelation and redemption, in which God's saving manifestation of Himself is throughout interwoven with the history of His chosen people. God has not chosen to teach us His will in bare abstract sentences. He teaches us to know it as it came home to the people of Israel and modified their life and history. And so the record of revelation contains many things about the Hebrews which, if taken by themselves, would not convey spiritual truth; but which we could ill afford to lack because they enable us better to understand the whole course of God's dealings with His people. Under this point of view, the Song of Solomon, literally interpreted, has a twofold value. It throws important light on the history of the kingdom of Solomon, and the estrangement of Northern Israel; and it shews how the spiritual morality of revelation had borne fruit in Israel, and given birth to a state of feeling clearly pointing towards Chris-

tian monogamy and the Christian conception of wedded love.*

Sexto. I am accused of "contradicting or ignoring the testimony given in the Old Testament, and also that of our Lord and his Apostles in the New Testament, to the authorship of Old Testament Scriptures." Such a charge is irrelevant, unless accompanied by express reference to the texts of Scripture, whose witness I am held to reject. No such texts are named by my accusers, or cited in the passages quoted from my writings. The charge, therefore, presents nothing that I can meet, for I am not conscious that any of my statements are opposed to the witness of Scripture. There are texts of the New Testament which some people take as deciding points of authorship; but in every case known to me, in which the supposed evidence would clash with my opinions, the legitimacy of the argument is doubted on exegetical grounds by men who have not accepted critical views inconsistent with the admission of the alleged testimony. Thus Dr. Rainy said at last Assembly that while he believed in the unity of Isaiah he could not take the references by Paul as conclusive against an opposite view. The reason of this is obvious. We are no more entitled to treat the citation of a book by its current name as a testimony to the real authorship of the book, than we are entitled to treat the Bible as a witness against the Copernican astronomy, because it speaks of the sun as daily moving through the heavens. Does any one but a pedant think it necessary, whenever he cites a book, to pause and point out that the name by which it is recognised

* As an illustration of the consequences that flow from the idea that everything in Scripture has a "spiritual significance," I subjoin an extract from Jerome's interpretation of the story of Abishag (1 Kings i.) :—*Nonne tibi videtur si occidentem sequaris literam vel figmentum esse de mimo vel Atellanarum ludicra? Frigidus senex obvolvitur vestimentis et nisi complexu adolescentulae non tepescit. . . . Quae est igitur ista Sunamitis uxor et virgo tam ferrens ut frigidum calefaceret tam suneta ut calentem ad libidinum non provocaret? Exponat sapientissimus Salomon patris sui delicias. . . . Posside sapientiam, posside intelligentiam. (Ad Nepotianum, Ep. lii.)* The analogy with arguments still advanced in connection with the Song of Solomon is obvious.

is merely conventional? I suppose, for example, that we all speak and write of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians, though we know that the name of Ephesus does not stand in the true text. It appears that the authors of the libel differ from Dr. Rainy and myself in the construction they put upon the use of language in the New Testament, or at least in certain texts, and that they regard our construction as an offence against sound doctrine. Beyond this everything is vague. I have nothing but conjecture to tell me which are the texts which I and my accusers interpret differently. I therefore respectfully ask the Presbytery either to delete this head or to amend the libel by making it specify the passages of Scripture to be brought against me.

These are the remarks which, at this stage, I judge it necessary to submit to the Presbytery in answer to the details of the libel. But I cannot close without turning for a moment to take a larger view of the question at issue. I rest my defence of the critical opinions embodied in my writings not merely on the technical ground that they do not transgress the limits of doctrine defined in our Standards, but on the higher ground that they are conceived in the spirit of true Protestantism, which, acknowledging with undivided loyalty the sovereign authority of the Word as the only rule of faith and life, allows no human authority to limit the freedom of hermeneutical research, or to determine beforehand what conclusions shall be drawn from study of the sacred text. The Bible is spoken to us in the language of men, and the key to its true meaning must be sought in no ecclesiastical tradition or *à priori* theory, but solely in those universal laws of interpretation, by which all the language of men is understood.

The clearness and certainty of the Bible as a message from God to us depends on its strict conformity with the laws of human speech, on our right to assume that the ordinary methods by which other ancient books are studied are not misleading when applied to Scripture, and do not require to

be controlled by an authoritative tradition of interpretation.

It is on this principle that I have felt constrained to depart from traditional views which appear to be inconsistent with the confirmed results of grammatical and historical exegesis. I have acted on the conviction that loyalty to the Bible, in a Protestant sense, is inseparable from loyalty to the approved laws of scholarly research; for if they are inapplicable to the language of Scripture, God no longer speak to us in words that we can understand. By these laws the results of criticism must be tried; and by these they must be refuted before they can be justly condemned.

I have never concealed the fact that many of the *constructive* theories of critics are merely tentative; and even those which have a probability approaching to moral certainty, may still require much revision from renewed study of the facts. But beneath all that is hypothetical and tentative lies a great mass of facts, which I cannot but judge to be wholly irreconcilable with the views which the libel proposes to enforce as normative in the Church. It is not possible to exhibit here the whole scholarly evidence for this judgment, and I cannot prejudice my case by merely adducing individual examples to illustrate an argument of cumulative force whose strength lies in its totality.

I do not, therefore, ask the Presbytery to approve my views, but only to recognise their claim to toleration until they are confirmed or refuted by scholarly arguments in the continual progress of Biblical study. I trust that I have made it clear that in granting this claim the Court will do no more than the constitution of our Church entitles me to ask, and the interests of sound doctrine enable them to concede. But if the Church by her Courts must needs give an authoritative decision on the merits of the controversy, the decision ought not to be given without full and public discussion of every problem involved, and my condemnation cannot be for the edification of the Church unless it proceed on the ground that all the arguments I can advance have been patiently heard and conclusively rebutted on the open ground of philological and historical research.

BW5546 .S65S653
Answer to the form of libel now before

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library



1 1012 00038 8845