

THE
COMMISSION OF ASSEMBLY;
AND
PROFESSOR ROBERTSON SMITH'S REPLY
TO
THE COMMITTEE'S REPORT.

BY THE
✓
REV. JAMES INNES, M.A.,
PANBRIDE.



Edinburgh:

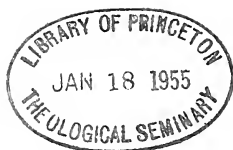
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CONTENTS.



	PAGE
CRITICISM OF THE OVERTURE,	5
HISTORY OF THE "SMITH" CASE DOWN TO THE ASSEMBLY OF 1880, .	11
Its Origination by Professor R. Smith,	11
Action on the part of the Courts of the Church,	13
Dr. Beith's Motion in the Assembly,	14
APPEARANCE OF PROFESSOR R. SMITH'S ARTICLE ON "HEBREW LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE,"	16
THE OCTOBER COMMISSION,	20
Conduct of the Committee,	20
THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE,	21
THE SPEECH OF PROFESSOR R. SMITH,	23
His Charge of "Insinuation" against the Committee,	24
His Culpable Failure to Prove his own Positions,	25
The Charge of " <i>Irreverence</i> ,"	26
The Chronicles : The Song of Songs,	27
The Book of Jashar, and its Relation to the Book of Joshua,	29
The Extent of Moses' Writings,	31
The "Original Context" in Exodus xxiv. 1, &c.,	32
Our Lord's Testimony,	33
The Statements of Deuteronomy,	34
The Solution of its Difficulties,	36
The Book of Ruth,	39
The Book of Jonah,	40
The Genealogies in Genesis,	41
THE EFFECTS OF THESE CRITICAL THEORIES IF ACCEPTED BY THE CHURCH,	42
As regards the trustworthiness of the Old Testament Writings,	42
As regards their bearing on the New Testament,	45
THE COMMISSION'S "INSTRUCTION" TO PROFESSOR R. SMITH,	46

THE greater part of what follows was delivered in moving the non-transmission of the subjoined Overture to the General Assembly, and will explain the style of address.

“Whereas it is of the greatest importance in the exercise of discipline to have strict regard to the constitutional rights and liberties of the office-bearers and members of the Church ; and whereas the action of the *in hunc effectum* meeting of the Commission in October last, in connection with the case of Professor Robertson Smith, is regarded by many as a departure, not only from the customs, but from the constitution of the Church : It is hereby humbly overtured to the General Assembly to take this matter into its consideration, and to take such action as may be necessary for confirming and securing office-bearers in the enjoyment of their constitutional rights.”

It is published at the request of friends.

J. I.

CRITICISM OF THE OVERTURE.

I RISE to move the non-transmission of this overture. I confess I was considerably vexed when, unable to be present at last meeting of Presbytery, I learned from the newspapers that notice of such an overture had been laid on the table. At one of our summer meetings following last General Assembly a respected member of this Presbytery, now no longer with us, indicated his wish that we as a Presbytery should, as several other Presbyteries were doing, call the attention of the August Commission to the lately-issued article of Professor Smith on "Hebrew Language and Literature." As it was evident, however, that such action would not be taken, if taken at all, without what was then unnecessary contention and division, he generously refrained from pressing his wish. I think it would have been well had the mover of this overture followed his example. Possibly, however, the preliminary private *reconnaissance* of his lieutenants in this campaign has been more skilfully conducted; and the result, for aught I know, may have assured them of their power to carry the position in this Presbytery by force of numbers. It may be so. It may be that enough are already committed to vote for the adoption of this overture to make it the finding of the Presbytery. I trust they will find themselves mistaken in the end; and that each of us, at least, will vote according to our own freely and fully formed convictions of what is right and true in the sight of God.

It is interesting and somewhat instructive to watch the history of these overtures as they have cropped up during the last few months in various Presbyteries of the Church. On their first appearance they bristled with an appalling and deadly array of artillery that was loaded with such heavy metal as "tyrannical," "unjust," "dangerous," "*ultra vires*," "unconstitutional," and

so forth, and to which the ensuing General Assembly was very plainly "instructed" to apply the match at once, and blow the October Commission and its report into fragments. Such was the form of the parent overtures that followed the October meeting of Commission; and it indicated the spirit of war and no quarter that many of those defeated there carried back to their homes. But it would not do. The deadly shot had to be withdrawn, even by the very hands that put them in, lest, instead of the balls reaching the Commission, their cannon would explode and damage only themselves. And so they tried quietly to draw out the heavy balls, and substituted what somebody recommended the Irish constabulary to use on the refractory peasantry, "buckshot," as warranted not to kill, but only to maim. They do not now, they say, want Dr. Wilson and Sir H. Moncrieff, to say nothing of smaller game, killed outright, but only incapacitated for further mischief. And what can be said of the overture on the table? It is but a feeble child of such a warlike parent. The weapon has not even been able to hold "buckshot"; but seems charged at the best with "sparrowhail." "*Parturiunt montes, nascetur,*" &c.

The overture itself, apart from the speeches that have been made in its support,—and we are not expected, I believe, to transmit the speeches,—seems a very diluted and innocent composition indeed. One only wonders what its original draft-form may have been; whether, for instance, it had all the foam and flatulency that characterised the primary product of the Aberdeen Presbytery; and if so, how, thereafter, it was subjected to the process of evisceration and dismemberment, till reduced to its present dimensions. These, however, I suppose, are mysteries we shall never know.

Its preamble runs: "*Whereas it is of the greatest importance in the exercise of discipline to have strict regard to the constitutional rights and liberties of the office-bearers and members of the Church.*" That is its major premise; and with the sentiment or statement it contains we are all at one. We are all office-bearers or members of the Church, and have all an equal interest, without the special reminder of an overture from particular individuals, to maintain intact our constitutional rights and liberties. The minor premise, however, which fol-

lows, tells us the special reason why we, as a Presbytery, are now asked to remind the next General Assembly of the grave truth contained in the major. It runs: "*And whereas the action of the in hunc effectum meeting of Commission in October last, in connection with the case of Professor Robertson Smith, is regarded by many as a departure not only from the customs, but from the constitution of the Church.*" That, of course, is the spirit and soul of the whole overture. It is "the action of the Commission in October last" that is here animadverted upon—its action "in connection with the case of Professor Robertson Smith." To these words I shall immediately return. Meanwhile, taking a general glance at the overture, we find that all that is urged against that "action" is, that "it is regarded by many as" so and so. That word "many" is a happy invention. I have no doubt it was felt to be so by the framers of this overture. It is, where it stands—what shall I call it?—a kind of arithmetical abstraction. It may mean very much or very little; and its elasticity probably constituted the charm and value of its place in the overture. But, I must say, it does not look to me a very manly or outspoken term. There is a painful want of transparency about it. Who are these "*many*"? and where are they? and when did they make known their wish to be adopted as clients of this Presbytery? Or is the term, as it stands in the overture, a mere numerical convenience, to create a haze of mystery? At all events, it is not, in present circumstances, a very frank or courageous way of overturing the General Assembly. For, let the Court mark it, the framers of this overture have taken care not to commit themselves personally or their supporters as belonging to the "*many*." They keep themselves free. They have indicated their sympathy in their speeches, and others will do so by their votes. But it is not their speeches or votes we are asked to send to the Assembly. These, I am sorry to say, will be unknown there. It is only this overture, with that indefinite numeral adjective, that will be read; and in it, I repeat, its supporters here have somewhat ingeniously excluded themselves individually, while wishing to involve the Presbytery as a whole in its transmission. They have not even said "many" of us, or "many" of this Presby-

tery. Surely such a style of overture, in a grave case of the kind before us, is not of the outspoken and straightforward character it should bear.

But what is it that the Presbytery is asked officially to certify as the opinion of "many"? It is, first of all, that "the action of the Commission, in connection with the case of Professor Robertson Smith, is a departure from the customs of the Church." We are asked to do this, as being in itself a reasonable ground of complaint against the Commission. "*A departure from the customs of the Church*"! And what, in the circumstances, though it were? Is not Professor Smith's own conduct in the whole of this unhappy business, from beginning to end, an unprecedented departure from the customs of the professors and ministers of the Free Church of Scotland? Has he not done what no professor or minister of this Church ever did before him? Did he not, *ex proprio motu*, cast the brand which has raised this four years' unparalleled conflagration and conflict within our Church? And when at last Assembly they seemed on the point of being allayed, had he not another firebrand, to the full as fiery as the first, ready to be thrown into the smouldering building? *Customs!* Casting firebrands looks as if it were to be the custom of Professor Smith. And there were those who, after the first impulse of astonishment and irritation, had the courage to exclaim, Let it lie: let it burn. And because the Commission would not let it lie, because they did the uncustomary thing of dealing as they could with an unprecedented act, we are gravely asked to carry to the Assembly the complaint of these "many," that the Commission has departed from the customs of the Church. I sincerely trust that this Presbytery will not so far depart from its own *customs* as to commit itself to any such unworthy course of action. I know that this alleged "departure from the customs of the Church" is put only as a subordinate clause of the minor premise. But there it is; and this Presbytery must send it up to the Assembly as in itself a legitimate and reasonable ground of complaint against the action of the Commission—that is, if this overture is carried by a majority of the Presbytery. But the main charge against the Commission, and that for which some perhaps will be prepared to swallow

whatever of mud there is in the mixture, is that its action, in October last, "is a departure from the constitution of the Church." Now it seems to me that "departure," which is applicable to customs, is slightly inaccurate, because somewhat difficult of application to constitutions. But perhaps the framers of this overture wished to indicate the least possible impairing of the constitution of the Church, or at least to leave it open to more hesitating minds to put the gentlest possible construction on its meaning, if only thereby they might be persuaded to vote for its adoption. They did not like to say "*violation*" of the constitution. Words like that were only in the parent overture. Now it is simply "departure," which may be much, as much as utter abandonment, or little, as little as hardly to be discernible. This latter consideration may dispose some half-committed members of Presbytery to swallow the whole, thinking that thus diluted it will hurt the Commission as little as themselves. But while I hold that an overture like this, so weakly, so vaguely, so timidly expressed, is utterly unworthy of this Presbytery, or of the grave interests in question, I ask brethren to remember that the main purpose intended, or at least the effect expected by the presentation of it and the like to the Assembly, is to impress the Assembly with the numerical strength of those who sympathise with Professor Smith's views as regards the Word of God, and who with him demand their toleration in the Free Church of Scotland. That is what lies covertly behind such an overture as this, whether in the conscious intentions of its supporters or not; and brethren need to be well assured of their own duty as regards this question which is vastly greater than that of the Commission's action, before they give their vote for the transmission of such an overture.

But while this serious purpose or effect lies hid behind the overture, the prayer with which it concludes is as feeble and halting as the preamble with which it begins. "*It is hereby humbly overtured to the General Assembly to take this matter into its consideration, and to take such action as may be necessary for confirming and securing office-bearers and members in the enjoyment of their constitutional rights.*" "*This matter,*" I suppose, means the action of the Commission in

October last. If so, the object of this humble overture has fortunately been forestalled by the Commission itself, whose whole minutes must be examined and approved by the Assembly, and which has itself specially ordered the report of its action in the case of Professor Smith to be presented to the Assembly for consideration and judgment. Surely, if this is all the overture asks, it is a superfluous, and, therefore, an officious intrusion. And when, further, it requests the Assembly "to take such action as may be necessary," I consider such language not only superfluous, but somewhat offensive; as if the Assembly, with the report of the Commission before it, needed to be reminded by this Presbytery to do what was necessary; that is, I suppose, to do what the Assembly itself considered necessary. The request, to say the least of it, seems a little impertinent, as well as useless. All those who will constitute that Assembly are office-bearers of this Church as well as we, and if they will not do of themselves what they feel to be necessary to confirm and secure their own constitutional rights, I am afraid it is not this overture that will arouse them to their duty. And I say, again, that its very feebleness and flaccidity in expression, its want of any clearly formulated charge, and any well-defined request, show that there is behind it much more of a serious nature that is not expressed; and that this Presbytery would do well to consider the grave responsibility they will assume in giving it their approval.

There are, however, two main points in the overture, which, as yet, I have practically omitted. I mean "*the action of the in hunc effectum meeting of Commission in October last, in connection with the case of Professor Robertson Smith,*" and its violation of "*the constitution of the Church.*" I am glad that this portion of the overture is so expressed, and expressed so generally, as it gives us full liberty to enter into the whole subject of the Commission's action. Of that liberty I wish to avail myself. The occasion requires it. No such question as this, involving such solemn issues, has ever risen in the Church of our fathers; and the crisis to which it now seems to have come demands that we speak out fearlessly and fully what we feel, as in the sight of God.

HISTORY OF THE "SMITH" CASE DOWN TO THE ASSEMBLY
OF 1880.

I trust brethren will bear with me while I glance back, as briefly as possible, at the prior history of this case, because it is needful to do so, in order to explain and justify the action of the Commission in connection with the case of Professor Smith.

ITS ORIGINATION BY PROFESSOR R. SMITH.

Why was it, I ask, that these articles, the earliest in particular, were written at all, and written by one of the professors in our Theological Free Church Colleges, who are most certainly appointed for the purpose of wielding the influence wherewith they are thereby clothed, and moulding their teaching, on lines in genuine and substantial harmony with the generally accepted faith of the Church? Professor Smith is too clear-headed not to have known, when writing that article, that its general tenor and tendency could scarcely fail to send a thrill of astonishment, and arouse determined opposition, throughout the religious community of Scotland. Did the pressure of conscience compel him? And if so, did he, in a matter so new, and certain to excite agitation, previously submit his views and purpose to those in his own Church (Senatus, Presbytery, or College Committee), who were justly entitled to be consulted about it, or made aware of such a purpose? Or, did he, ultroneously accepting an outside engagement, make it the vehicle of conveying to the public such an analysis of the BIBLE, the Book of God, as certainly could never have been expected to issue from the pen of a Scottish theological professor? Did he venture on this bold cast to set his theories afloat, and then wait to see what the issue would be? whether they would pass unnoticed, and so obtain an unopposed footing, and a quiet currency within the Church, and make the new position ripe for further development from the professorial chair? Is it hard and uncharitable to suggest such questions as these? Well, if put in words here, they have been mentally asked by many in the Church before now, and the present emergency demands that they be plainly

and publicly put. Professor Smith says that he has never introduced these critical views into his class prelections, and his students say the same. Why did he not? Considering that the range of such questions, as summarised in these articles, is all but co-extensive with the whole of the Old Testament, it must have required considerable thought and skill to avoid trenching on the forbidden ground. But seeing it was so scrupulously avoided in the class, why was it so boldly traversed in printed publications? Did Professor Smith imagine, or does any one imagine, that his students would be careful to separate between his teaching in the class-room and his teaching in the Forum? They would be dull, indeed, if they could not, and did not, fill up the gaps in his professorial prelections by the pithy and pretty well pronounced opinions that had been published elsewhere.

At all events, whether designedly so or not, he took the unusual step of setting in the pages of a popular encyclopædia a critical analysis of the Bible that almost from first to last runs on the very lines which hitherto had been the exclusive monopoly of the Rationalistic school. He enunciated these views not to his own Church in the first place, but to the outside public; and that, not in the form of a merely ephemeral *brochure*, but as a well-weighed statement, designed to teach the present generation the latest discoveries and conclusions of theological science regarding the character and contents of the Bible. Professor Smith did this ultroneously; and, doing so, he challenged all alike to accept or gainsay his statement. Very specially did he challenge his own Church; and, had his challenge remained unanswered, the positions therein assumed would have been fairly held as the opinions that were henceforth to be tolerated and accepted within her pale. On him, therefore, rests the whole responsibility of the trouble and injury that have ensued. The Church did not wish to be challenged. She had no desire to be drawn into a vexing controversy, to define the limits of legitimate criticism, or be forced to a premature judicial decision on the questions it involved. She reposed confidence in the loyalty, the learning, and doctrinal soundness of her professors and ministers, and was slow to play the inquisitor into the use they made of their

opportunities and influence. It is Professor Smith that has startled and distressed and rent the Church by his uncalled-for publication of an article so entirely out of harmony with the living faith and cherished convictions of the Church.

ACTION ON THE PART OF THE CHURCH.

It was not long ere the Church everywhere was roused into a state of agitation and alarm : an agitation and alarm that found a too limited outlet in the report of the College Committee, and threatened in the immediately succeeding Assembly to precipitate a summary judicial decision. There were many then that went in for delay, in order that the case might be dealt with by the ordinary and regular forms of ecclesiastical discipline, who had no sympathy with the tenor and tendency of the article in question. Indeed, it may be safely said there were few, if any, who had a favourable opinion. The subject came up in due course before the Presbytery of Aberdeen ; and, after lengthened controversy, at the urgent demand of Professor Smith himself, took the shape of a libel. It is needless now to follow the subsequent course of procedure. The libel was at first a long and complicated document, containing three alternatives in the major premise, and many specific charges in the minor. These, through discussion and appeal to the superior courts, were gradually simplified and contracted, and the charge at length concentrated on what from the beginning was universally regarded as the core of the whole controversy—his attack on the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy, and relegation of its composition to the age of Hezekiah. The relevancy of that charge was judicially approved by the Assembly of 1878, and reaffirmed by the Assembly of 1879, which latter remodelled the libel in accordance with its own decision, and sent it down for probation to the Presbytery of Aberdeen. The majority of the Presbytery sustained the validity of certain objections that were urged as a bar in the way of proceeding to probation ; and the dissent and complaint of the minority, which was carried to the Synod and there dismissed, found its way in due course to last Assembly, where it was sustained by an overwhelming majority, and the libel again declared ripe for

probation. The Assembly, however, at the same time resolved to take the case into their own hands, in order to bring it to a speedy termination; and on the second day thereafter, after a protracted discussion, the well-known motion of Dr. Beith became, by a majority of *seven*, the finding of the Assembly.

DR. BEITH'S MOTION IN THE ASSEMBLY.

It is needful, in view of what followed, to look with some attention at some of the clauses of this generously conceived, but somewhat hazy and halting resolution. *In the first place*, the resolution bases its finding on the fact that the report of the College Committee "had not found any ground sufficient to justify a process for heresy against Professor Robertson Smith," but carefully omits the concluding statement of their opinion, that the article "is of a dangerous and unsettling tendency."

Secondly, and specially, the resolution makes the General Assembly "resolve to withdraw the libel against him," on the ground that, with regard to the remaining count—the one bearing on Deuteronomy, and already found relevant by the finding of three successive Assemblies—"the explanations offered by Professor Smith at various stages, and in particular his answer to the amended libel, afford satisfactory evidence that, in this aspect of the case also, there is not sufficient ground to support a process for heresy." Is it too much to say, that these "*explanations*," interpreted in a generous spirit, with an intense longing of heart after the recovery of unity and peace, were the really determining grounds with the majority of those who voted for the adoption of Dr. Beith's motion? Was it not because they believed, or tried to believe, that the "explanations" now and again given, the restrictions and limitations apparently set to the meaning and application of the theories broached in the article "Bible," indicated such a hopeful *rapprochement* of his own personal views to, or such a substantial harmony of his own personal convictions with, the living faith of the Church, that the interests of truth and peace would be fully conserved by admonition and warning? And if so, is it not a bounden duty on all such to be asking themselves now, what the value of

these explanations and limitations amounts to, as themselves explained and limited by the critical theories deliberately restated in the article on "Hebrew Language and Literature"? Would they have voted as they did had there been no prior explanations vouchsafed by Professor R. Smith? Would they have voted as they did had they not believed that Professor Smith in these explanations receded considerably from the advanced position taken up in the article "Bible"? Would they have felt as they did, had they known that during those months when they were trying to gather hopefulness out of these explanations, and were anxiously pushing their way to the determination to give him the benefit of their generous hopefulness, Professor R. Smith was labouring in secret at another article, which should restate with at least the same boldness and emphasis as before the very theories which had so painfully aroused their concern in the article "Bible"? Was it not dinned into the ears of outsiders from time to time by those apparently possessing the private confidence of Professor Smith, that he himself was already feeling that he had spoken rashly and unwarrantably? Was there not a widespread disposition throughout the Church, arising out of the strong desire to think the best of Professor Smith, and to be able conscientiously to retain his great talents within the Church, to believe all they heard, and to put the most favourable construction on every explanation he offered? And did not this friendly interpretation of his views seem to many to be amply justified when, in his answer to the amended libel, he let it be inferred that even in regard to Deuteronomy itself, his theory of a later origin applied only to the strictly legal enactments that were contained in several of the central chapters of the book? It is true that even then there were some who doubted the soundness of the prevailing inference, and who still ventured to infer for themselves, that the other portions of Deuteronomy were so excluded for the time, not as being untouchable by his theory, but as being unnecessary for, and rather in the way of getting his theory admitted, as comparatively harmless in its application to a limited portion. But these doubting few hardly dared before the last Assembly to breathe their suspicions; there were so many who felt their

previous hopes already verified, and only regretted that so gratifying an explanation had not made its appearance at an earlier period. And then, when Dr. Beith's motion in the Assembly expressly made these "explanations" the main ground of its proposed finding in regard to the count already found relevant, those who hoped before were enthusiastic in voting for its adoption. The motion became the resolution of the Assembly; and though the majority that carried it was small, yet the prevailing feeling on all sides of the House was one of relief that the case was ended, and of willingness also to hope that the hopefulness of the majority would be amply fulfilled in its subsequent results.

APPEARANCE OF PROFESSOR R. SMITH'S ARTICLE ON
"HEBREW LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE."

It was but a few days after the close of the Assembly that the Church was astounded with the report that another article, entitled "*Hebrew Language and Literature*," quite as pronounced, and still more comprehensive, than the previous one, had appeared in the newly-issued volume of the "Encyclopædia Britannica," from the pen of Professor Robertson Smith. The contents of this article, in the form of numerous excerpts and summaries, became speedily known over the length and breadth of the land, and everywhere at first, it may be safely asserted, excited unbounded surprise and indignation. By few, if any, it would seem, even of the innermost circle of Professor Smith's acquaintances, was its forthcoming appearance foreknown. It traversed almost all the books of the Old Testament canon, and in a cold, incisive, magisterial style, passed its judgment, or rather recorded what it had gathered out of the theories of Continental critics, as the only judgment worth presenting to the British public, on their character, age, and authorship. It was almost universally felt that this new production could not be let alone. Its author had stolen a march on the General Assembly. He had got a mild and generous verdict, expressly on the ground of

the "explanations," whereby to most others at least he was understood to have modified the startling theories laid down in his article "Bible." He had got this verdict from a House that was left in utter ignorance of the grave fact that there was a very important paper in the case, lying already printed on the publishers' shelves over the way—a paper that repeated and added to all that had given concern and offence in the first, but that contained none of the "explanations" which had proved so satisfactory to Dr. Beith and his friends; and which, fortunately or unfortunately, only came to the light a few days after the Assembly had committed itself to the adoption of Dr. Beith's motion. Professor Smith had a proof copy of that article, if not in his pocket, at least in his desk at home, when he stood at the bar of last Assembly, and he gave not the remotest hint of its existence. He let the Assembly make all it could or would of his "explanations," but he dropped not a whisper that a new manifesto of the higher criticism, advanced and *unexplained* as the other when it first appeared, was on the eve of publication. He knew all this when receiving the solemn admonition of the Moderator of the General Assembly. He knew it all when he made his touching reply; but he was too much moved at such a time to bespeak the forbearance of his Church when it came to know of that other article, as cold and critical as the first, which contained his own latest utterance on the subject of Biblical criticism. And yet he could not but know that it would startle and confound many, who had stretched a point to give him the benefit of their doubts. Possibly he himself was startled by the unexpectedly favourable character of the judgment arrived at; and his courage failed him to arrest its record till the whole of the truth were known. Perhaps the article was written in the conviction that the judgment of the Assembly would be adverse, and, being so, that he would thereafter be independent of its opinion. But whether such was the case or not, it scarcely seems in accordance with the highest notion of candour and honour that the full facts of the case should have been kept at such a critical moment from the knowledge of the Church.

Nor is this all. Granted even that the agitation of the

de late, and the personal emotions of Professor Smith, occasioned by its exciting close, could be accepted as an excuse for his omission of all reference to the forthcoming article, what shall be said of the graver and still more extraordinary fact, that Professor Smith, on leaving the previous Assembly of 1879, where the libel, already served on him and accepted, had been found relevant so far as regarded his published views on the Book of Deuteronomy, and the Presbytery of Aberdeen instructed to proceed to probation, went away to compose in private this other article, and to restate therein, in a still terser and more destructive form, especially as regards the Pentateuch, the theories he had previously enunciated and patronised in the article "Bible"? He was a party under arrest by his Church, and out at bail, in connection with what the General Assembly of that Church had already more than once declared to have all the *primâ facie* aspects of a grave offence, and he employs the liberty thus possessed, to repeat in all its fulness and flagrancy the very offence for which he was under trial. What would the lawyers, the judges, the masters of trade and commerce, so largely represented in the eldership and membership of the Free Church, think or say of such a proceeding were it to occur in departments of civil life that were under their own cognisance and authority? Would they not deal with it as a contempt of Court, or a flagrant breach of honour? Or would one section of them brand, with the odious names of tyranny and injustice, another section who felt themselves bound, in the interests of righteousness and truth, to take special notice of such an offence, and to deal, even summarily, with the offender for its commission? It is a strange commentary on the high principles of honour and justice, vaunted so loudly of late by the vehement supporters of Professor Smith, that they have said very little regarding this wanton breach of propriety and obedience; and that Professor Smith himself, in what doubtless he and some others considered his exhaustive reply to the Report on his last article adopted by the Commission in October, took care to make not the slightest reference to the concluding portion of that Report (page 8), where it says that the article on "Hebrew Language and Literature" "was prepared for publication, and finally revised at a time when the author had

accepted service of a libel containing a charge of holding and promulgating dangerous views on a cognate subject to those contained in this article. This course of conduct seems to require explanation as to how it can be reconciled with the ordinary principles of church order and discipline." " Explanations " by Professor Smith, which held so prominent a place in the discussions and resolution of the Assembly, were judiciously withheld on this subject. But the Church, whose authority and claims to respectful obedience had been deliberately defied and set at nought, could not be silent at such a juncture, when some, who seemed determined to have the new theories regarding the Word of God tolerated, at whatever cost, within the Church, were making Professor Smith's devoted attachment to her constitution one of the staple and popular arguments in his favour. Let only the time and circumstances of the composition of that last article, and its subsequent history, be weighed with such an argument, and honest-minded men will have little difficulty in seeing, how far this vaunted loyalty to the Church will be allowed to stand in the way of self-interest and self-will.

THE OCTOBER COMMISSION.

The action of the Commission of Assembly that met on the 27th day of October last in connection with the case of Professor Robertson Smith was the natural, the legitimate, and the necessary result of all that had thus preceded. The audacity and defiance implied in the appearance of that last publication, the feeling aroused in many, that they had been befooled in the past Assembly, speedily found expression in several Presbyteries of the Church; and the Commission of that Assembly, appointed to meet in August, was pressingly overtured to take up and deal, so far as it could, with the new aspect of the question, which had so unexpectedly emerged. The question was thereby legitimately forced on the attention of the Commission; just as that Commission was itself, from its very composition, the natural and proper place to give voice in the first instance to the feelings of the Church. It was to the preceding Assembly that disrespect had been shown, and injury done, by the subsequent publication of the article in question. And, by all the laws of common sense and equity, it was that same Assembly, sitting in Commission, that was primarily entitled to say what it thought of such a publication, and to provide, so far as it could, for the fresh crisis which had arisen. Its own corporate relation to the past Assembly, its very *raison d'être*, the pressing overtures of many Presbyteries, and its own responsibility to the next General Assembly, all united in demanding and justifying the action of the Commission.

CONDUCT OF THE COMMITTEE.

The Commission, consisting of the very same ministers and elders who had formed the previous Assembly, met in August, and after a prolonged discussion resolved, by a majority of *seventy* in a crowded house, in opposition to a motion counselling non-interference, to refer Professor Smith's new article to a Committee, which was enjoined to report thereon to this

misbehaving *in hunc effectum* meeting of Commission, to be held on 27th October.

Much has been said and written of an adverse kind about the composition and conduct of this Committee—much, I believe, which those, who have done so, already begin to feel had been better left unsaid and unwritten. But it is not with that Committee we have now to do. Had the Commission in October disowned its conduct and rejected its report, all alike would have left it undisturbed to its melancholy fate. But though the Committee came to no such ignoble ending, but died honourably and victoriously on the floor of the Commission, yet it did die, and its works have been assumed and adopted by the Commission itself. What, then, is the use of rating at the Committee? unless it be found a convenient way of having a fling at some of the individual ministers or elders of whom it was composed. It is not the Committee we have to do with now, but wholly and solely with the October Commission, which endorsed its actions and approved of its report.

THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE.

That Report was given in, at the appointed time, to a crowded house. It was much regretted at the time that it was not in the hands of members some reasonable period before the meeting of Commission. But there it was, and the Commission was at liberty to deal with it in the circumstances as it pleased. A fuller prior consideration of it might probably have led to a more protracted debate, but there is little likelihood that it would have materially altered the ultimate finding. And more than that, while members of the Commission outside the Committee had no knowledge of the exact form and contents of the Report, till put into their hands at the door of the Assembly Hall, yet most of them doubtless were more or less exercised during the intervening months, in discussing the contents of Professor Smith's article, and gathering their own

impressions of its character and tendency; while Professor Smith himself, besides his own necessary familiarity with the subject under review, was not left in such ignorance of the purport and scope of the coming Report as to have no sufficient clue to guide his own line of defence.

It is to some of the salient points in that Report, and to the Reply made to them by Professor Smith, that I would respectfully crave the attention of the Presbytery.

The first action of the Commission was to approve generally of the Report. That Report deals with Professor Smith's article on "Hebrew Language and Literature," and certain others specially named, and begins by calling attention to the fact, that the questions raised therein are quite new in the history of the Church of Scotland, inasmuch as they are questions that directly affect the authority of the Scriptures themselves, the supreme Standard of the Church, as that authority is asserted in, and assumed throughout the Confession of Faith; and it declares that "the statements made by him in many particulars are such as are fitted, and can hardly fail, to produce upon the minds of readers the impression that Scripture does not present a reliable statement of truth, and that God is not the Author of it." It then proceeds to cite the particulars referred to under four heads: Passages in which the books of Scripture are spoken of (1) In an irreverent manner, (2) In such a way as to render it very difficult for readers to regard God as the Author of them, (3) So as naturally to suggest that Scripture does not give an authentic narrative of facts or actual occurrences, and (4) Passages which discredit prophecy in its predictive aspect. Thereafter the Report declares that, "The whole tendency of the writings examined by the Committee is fitted to throw the Old Testament history into confusion, and at least to weaken if not to destroy the very foundation on which New Testament doctrine is built.

"Moreover, the general method on which he proceeds conveys the impression that the Bible may be accounted for by the same laws which have determined the growth of any other literature, inasmuch as there is no adequate recognition of the Divine element in the production of the book."

In conclusion, the Report refers to Professor Smith's letter to the Clerk of the Aberdeen Presbytery, specially noting the position of Professor Smith when the writings under consideration were prepared for publication, and also what it regards as his misrepresentation of what was expressed and implied in the judgment of last General Assembly.

THE SPEECH OF PROFESSOR R. SMITH.

Of this Report, Dr. Wilson, in his motion as a member of the Court, asked the Commission to give a general approval; but before it was spoken to, an opportunity was given to Professor Smith to address the Commission, both on the Report and on the motion. He did so, and found fault at the outset with that which is the standing formula of every Court of the Church when a committee's report is favourably received,—its general approval. As no one else, so far as I know, has ever repeated or revived the objections he then raised, it may be assumed that such approval was the natural and usual form in which the Commission could express its concurrence with the main scope and purport of the Report, without committing members to an unqualified acceptance of its every detail. Getting beyond this, as manifestly a mere preliminary skirmish, Professor Smith, in his long and ingenious speech, attempted quietly to assume possession of what would have proved a strong ground of attack against the whole action of the Commission, namely, that he had been finally and fully acquitted by last General Assembly of every charge that had been brought against his writings. The claim was met in the House by an instant and emphatic denial. And I frankly confess that I think the members of Commission were perfectly right in so meeting it. Had the claim been then passed over in silence, it would certainly have been wielded with still greater effect at another time. And if so, the members met it as a question of *order* is usually met, in the most effective way, by an instant and a determined negative.

CHARGE OF INSINUATION AGAINST THE COMMITTEE.

Professor Smith proceeded to throw odium on the term "impression," as made use of in regard to his writings in the Committee's Report, as if it were a synonym with "insinuations," or with "slandorous statements;" and he coolly classed in the same category the whole of the charges that had appeared in earlier speeches and pamphlets throughout the Church. There is nothing that can match the coolness of some men. Professor Smith has learned to speak, as if all intelligence and conclusive reasoning were bound up in himself, and, by persisting in doing so, he has got many of his worshippers to believe it. The fact is, that he has given us very little reasoning of any kind. He has stated many well-known difficulties occurring in the Old Testament Scriptures; he has imported into the pages of a popular Scottish Encyclopædia the leading hypotheses and inferences of the Continental school of critics, who generally reject the Divine authority of Scripture; he has, more or less, explicitly indicated his own approval of these deductions, while ignoring those of a contrary kind; and then, not there, but elsewhere, he has asserted and reiterated his own continued adherence to the doctrine of Scripture as expressed or assumed in the Confession of Faith. But nowhere has he hitherto united the former of these positions with the last by a satisfactory or sustained chain of reasoning. He has forged a few detached links, in a dubious way, in regard to certain selected difficulties in the Book of Deuteronomy and elsewhere. They are, however, at the best, but scattered fragments, that will hardly piece together; and certainly, join them as you may, will not stretch all the way between these hypotheses, on the one hand, and the Divine inspiration and authority of Scripture, or the united testimony of our Saviour, of His evangelists and apostles, on the other. "The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it, and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it." The one may be long enough, and the other broad enough, for Professor Smith himself and his own conscience, and I don't doubt that he honestly believes them to be so. But surely it is not by Professor's Smith's assertions of his own individual convictions, or the de-

clared inward satisfaction of his own conscience, that the convictions and conscience of the Church at large are to be regulated. The Church has a conscience as well as Professor Smith, and the harmony which his conscience has elaborated for itself between these new theories and the generally accepted doctrine of Scripture must resound in the conscience of the Church at large, ere she can be justified before God in tolerating the conclusions he has reached.

Professor Smith has certainly not demonstrated any such harmony. He has only succeeded in producing a discord that has set men's teeth on edge, broken up the old coherence and unity of the Church, and separated between very friends. And having of his own accord introduced the bone of contention, he was *bound*—BOUND, on every ground of brotherhood, of loyalty, and duty—to demonstrate from first to last, clearly and unreservedly, to the satisfaction of every earnest, honest, and intelligent mind, the full consistency and accordance of every theory he has broached with a genuine belief of the Divine inspiration and infallibility of the Holy Scriptures. And *not* having done so, it is sheer impertinence on his part to speak of the unfavourable "impressions" declared by the Committee or others to be produced by his writings, as if they were unworthy "insinuations," or "slandorous statements." He does so on the assumed ground, that he was fully acquitted at last General Assembly of every charge that had been brought against him. Certainly, a very cool and gratuitous assumption! considering that the successful motion which, carried by a majority of *seven*, sentenced him only to admonition on account of the generous meaning they attached to his "explanations," and was itself passed on the second day after another, which, by a majority of 200, absolutely condemned his views on Deuteronomy. Professor Smith, when asserting that there was no midway between condemnation and acquittal, might have even remembered that there is another verdict besides that of condemnation or acquittal, the verdict of "*not proven*," which is not generally looked upon as a very satisfactory way of being set at liberty. And is it not a fact that many, if not most or all, of the various charges that stood in the original libel were withdrawn, not through acquittal on the merits of the subjects

involved, but for the sake of condensation and convenience at the time in dealing with the leading charge in the libel? So much for Professor Smith's allegations.

THE CHARGE OF "IRREVERENCE,"

The commission by its action approved generally of the four headings of the Committee's Report. It was comparatively easy for one of Professor Smith's dexterity seemingly to cut in pieces and cause to disappear from the view of his admiring hearers the primary charge of *irreverence*. He laid hands upon the expressions and words here and there in the particulars quoted, he turned them up, he looked and asked you to look to this point and that, he went into verbal definitions and etymologies, he appealed to the Scotch habit of calling a spade a spade, and then he defied you to lay your hand upon any particular spot or expression, and call it *irreverence*. It was an apt illustration of intellectual *legerdemain*. You were carried along with him while he spoke; but when the operation was over, and you recurred to the particulars themselves under the various heads, you felt again as strongly as ever that the irreverence was there. The subject was not handled as one that, whatever its merely literary character, was at one and the same time the lively oracles of God. It was dealt with as surgeons deal, when they are dissecting a dead subject, not when they are operating on a living, sentient patient. Most people will acknowledge that there may be a manifest irreverence pervading the general style and tone of an article, even when it cannot be pinned down and fastened on any particular expression, just as there may be a nauseous flavour pervading an apartment, that fails of detection in any particular article it contains. Not that these are wanting in the writings of Professor Smith.

His favourite description of the Chronicles as a "colourless narrative," will much depend on the colour of the medium through which they are viewed. Some people are colour-blind; but those who have studied the last acts of David, and the events of the reigns of Asa, Jehoshaphat, and others, as these are recorded only in the Chronicles, will feel that, if there

is not much variety of colouring, there is a brightness and beauty of hue that arrest the eye, and refresh the heart of the attentive reader.

And what shall we say of the epithet which he chooses in cold blood to apply to the visions of Zechariah, as "fantastic, symbolic imagery"? Will any earnest-minded man, who loves his Bible, say that there is no irreverence there? Professor Smith would, in his speech, have passed it by unnoticed, as it is but very partially noticed in the newspaper report I have seen; but some of those who were present in the hall could see that his attention was specially called to it; and the etymological explanation he attempted of it certainly made many in the house open their eyes with wonder. No minister, I suppose, would account it a compliment, or a term of courtesy, to be told that his sermon was full of *fantastic* illustrations; but such the term became through Professor Smith's ingenious manipulation. I think his own warmest friends were rather ashamed of the effort, and felt that the less said about it the better. But there it stands as his deliberately expressed opinion about the inspired productions of the postexilian prophets, although he somewhat strangely acknowledged that he would have altered his language had he thought that it would be subjected to criticism. If words, applied to Scripture writings, cannot stand such criticism as this, it will be evident to others that their use in such a connection was both a mistake and an offence.

THE CHRONICLES : THE SONG OF SONGS.

The charge advanced under the *second* head of the Committee's Report, and so far covered by the general approval of the Commission, is founded on those "passages in which the books of Scripture are spoken of in such a way as to render it very difficult for readers to regard God as the Author of them." The impression thus made on the minds of the members of Committee was manifestly gathered from the way in which Professor Smith, in his articles under review, seems to speak of the inspired writers of certain books of Scripture, particularly those of the Chronicles, and of the Song of Songs.

In the particulars quoted he apparently charges them with ignorance, that gave rise to stupid blunders; with imperfect recollection, as if they were merely the inaccurate transcribers of an oral legend, and not the veritable authors of an inspired production; and with confusion of ideas, whereby they misunderstood documents, transposed passages, and perverted the meaning. Applying such terms to the composition of books of Scripture, which our Confession of Faith and the Church at large hold to have been given by inspiration of God, it is difficult to see how Professor Smith himself could refuse to acknowledge the warrantableness of the impression produced on the minds of the Committee. At the same time, a very important distinction has to be drawn between what is actually attributable to the sacred writers themselves, as they wrote under the immediate guidance of God, and what may fairly be chargeable on succeeding copyists or commentators, who laid claim to no personal inspiration, and whose own mistakes in transcription, or marginal notes, may have been afterwards incorporated with, or even have taken the place of the original text. It is indeed on these facts that Professor Smith chiefly based his defence in his speech before the Commission; and it would be well if he could only make it clear—which he certainly does not do in the articles examined by the Committee—that it is to the latter, and not to the original writers, that he attributes the ignorance, the forgetfulness, and the confusedness that gave rise to the mistakes, the interpolations, and the transpositions he finds in the books themselves. No one denies that the sacred writings of Old Testament and New alike have suffered more or less, since the date of their original composition, from the causes mentioned. It is only wonderful that they have suffered so little, and specially those of the Old Testament canon, which have come down from so much more remote a date than the others, and have passed in the course of their history through so many national and religious crises. The unhappy feature in the present case is that, in two of the particulars cited, the sacred writer is himself named as the author of these mistakes and transpositions in the text; and if that is so, then his argument drawn from the inaccuracies and variations of the New Testament text as at present re-

ceived is wholly beside the question, and only throws a blinding glamour over the real state of the question which it is pretended to explain.

THE BOOK OF JASHAR, AND ITS RELATION TO THE BOOK OF JOSHUA.

There was felt by many at the time of Professor Smith's delivery of his speech before the Commission, what is still apparent in its printed report, the same kind of mystifying and unsatisfactory treatment of those passages in his writings, which, in the Committee's Report, "naturally suggest that Scripture does not give an authentic narrative of facts or actual occurrences." In the first particular quoted from his writings he says: "The earliest products of Hebrew authorship seem to have been lyrics and laws, which would circulate, in the first instance, from mouth to mouth, without the use of written copies. We have notice of early written collections of lyrics prior to our present historical books,—the *Book of the Wars of Jehovah* (Num. xxi. 14), and the *Book of Jashar* (Josh. x.; 2 Sam. i.)." Does he mean, that, while these circulated orally, without the use of written copies, they had not an originating and preservative written basis, say, in the hands of the author? Does he further mean, that these merely oral lyrics and laws, which, according to his hypothesis, circulated thus widely through the nation, were themselves, in large measure at least, the elemental groundwork of the subsequent legal and historical books which we now possess? And if so, does he also mean, that, designed or fated to be the foundation of so sacred and exalted a structure, these oral lyrics and laws were themselves in their original form inspired by God? Professor Smith says nothing in answer to questions like these; but rather leaves it very much to be inferred by those who have nothing else to guide them, that these canonical writings were in great measure a collection of the wandering sayings and songs of a rude and illiterate people. I do not say that such is Professor Smith's actual or avowed belief; but I do say, that the curt and ambiguous language of the particular quoted is fitted of itself to leave such an impression on ordinary readers. It would surely require very indubitable proof to beget the belief that

any part of the Holy Scriptures was traceable to so ignoble an origin.

Equally unsatisfactory is the argument, on which the Committee's Report lays stress, drawn from the *Book of Jashar*. Professor Smith tells us that "we have notice of early written collections of lyrics prior to our present historical books—the *Book of the Wars of Jehovah*, and the *Book of Jashar*;" and he declares thereafter that "the *Book of Jashar* is not earlier than the time of Solomon:" "the natural inference being," as the report puts it, "that the present historical books of the Old Testament were not written till that age, or afterwards." Such an inference is not only natural, but necessary, from the Professor's language as quoted; and, probably enough, he intended such an inference to be drawn. But did it never strike him that the *Book of Jashar* was one that might have the latest additions put to it as late as the time of Solomon, while its primitive form may have existed as early as Joshua? A book of that kind may, as likely as not, have grown up from a remote infancy by successive additions from age to age; and, if so, the inference that speaks out from the use made of it by Professor Smith is utterly unwarranted. In this part of his speech he made use of an illustration that may, with more propriety, be turned against himself. He supposed the possibility that at some future time all the blue-books of the General Assembly might be destroyed by fire, but that we might have a history surviving, "which had been written, not at one time, but at various dates, in which the blue-books were occasionally referred to;" and then after a very unseemly questioning of the sense of justice entertained by the members of Committee, in not judging him as they would be judged before man and God, he told them that they should "have taken these words [of his] in their natural sense; and their natural sense was, that the *Book of the Wars of Jehovah* was earlier than the *Book of Numbers*, and that the *Book of Jashar* was earlier than the *Books of Joshua and Samuel*." But if that Church history was written, as he allows, at different dates, was it needful, or at all natural, to suppose that the *earliest* of its volumes was only issued after the latest of these blue-books had been published? And if the *Book of Jashar*,

or the Book of the Wars of Jehovah could be possibly conceived of as records that, like the blue-books of the Assembly, grew from year to year, then his implied inference is utterly baseless, and the Book of Joshua, while later than that of Jashar, *may* have been long prior to the time of Solomon. Such a "fantastic" style of argumentation on Professor Smith's part may throw dust in the eyes of a prejudiced or bewildered audience, but is certainly not very convincing as a line of defence.

THE EXTENT OF MOSES' WRITINGS.

The Report approved of by the Commission quotes the following statement hazarded by Professor Smith in his article on "Hebrew Language and Literature":—"It may fairly be made a question whether Moses left in writing any other laws than the Commandments on the tables of stone. Even Exod. xxiv. 4, and xxxiv. 27, may in the original context have referred to the ten words alone." I say, hazarded; for in the way in which it is put it is a useless, a gratuitous, and, in the special circumstances of his writing, a mischievous statement. He does not commit himself to its veracity; but in a very reckless way he wrote that down in private, while in public many were gathering the belief from his "explanations," that all he really meant to relegate to a later age were various legal enactments contained in the central chapters of Deuteronomy. Their fond belief—the belief that weighed with many in voting for Dr. Beith's motion—must be pretty well dissipated by such a statement. It is another firebrand, wantonly cast into the midst of the Church, to raise a new conflagration. As such, it is no departure from the customs of Professor Smith. It is only strange and sad that there can be others implicitly saying to the General Assembly by overtures like these, Touch it not. It can "fairly be made a question," only when it has been fully settled, as he apparently esteems it settled, that the whole of the Pentateuch besides belongs to the last days, or to a period still later than the last days, of the Jewish monarchy. But why does Professor Smith exempt from the same grave

question even the Ten Commandments? What special and indubitable reason has he for the certainty that *they* were written, or left in writing, by Moses? To say the least of it, the grounds for believing that they were written by Moses himself are less conclusive than any other accepted products of his pen. There is but one passage (Exod. xxxiv. 28) which apparently, but not decisively, refers their writing to Moses himself, while elsewhere, both in Exodus and in Deuteronomy, the writing is ascribed directly to the finger of God. But Professor Smith may have had a special meaning of his own in the expression "left in writing," although the references that follow seem to contradict the possibility of any such limitations.

THE "ORIGINAL CONTEXT" IN EXODUS XXIV. 4, &c.

The statement that "even Exodus xxiv. 4, and xxxiv. 27, may in the original context have referred to the ten words alone," is a very venturesome, as well as mysterious, hypothesis. What "original context" does he mean? Does he mean that which issued fresh and complete from the hand of the latest redactor, and which since has had the context tampered with by careless or daring transcribers? Or does he mean the "original context" that floated about orally, ere ever it was committed to black and white? Or does he mean the "original context," in its primitive meagreness, as it issued from the hand either of the Elohist or Jehovist, before their separate productions were merged into one? His statement is wholly ambiguous; and it is also officiously daring; for Professor Smith *ought to have been able to say much more*, than what he thus says with a kind of reckless timidity, before he ventured *to say anything at all* on such a subject. And yet more, granted that he got the authority he wishes, that Moses left in writing the Ten Commandments, what more has he got for that, or can he get, than simply the declarations of the Scripture record itself? And how does that record become more trustworthy when it testifies of these, than when it testifies also of other writings as proceeding from the hand of Moses? Is it not to be considered as strictly veracious, when it says at an

earlier period, and of an earlier event, than that of the giving of the Law : " And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in *the* book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua" (Exod. xvii. 14). Or shall we say, that Moses is there only commanded to write, but that he failed to obey the command? And what shall we make of "*the* book"? Had it only an imaginary existence in the mind of a later editor of Exodus? Or if it did exist, whose book was it? and who had been writing in it before? I have quoted from Exodus, because Professor Smith does the same. But must we avoid Deuteronomy, as forbidden ground, because of its doubtful age and authorship, and because Professor Smith says that his views on Deuteronomy have already been tolerated within the Church? Must we be silent regarding the many passages in which Moses is there commanded to write, or described as writing, not the Ten Commandments, but many other laws, as well as his prophetic song? Are these declarations of the Deuteronomist untrue? for untrue they must be, if, as Professor Smith says, " It may fairly be made a question whether Moses left in writing any other laws than the Commandments on the tables of stone."

OUR LORD'S TESTIMONY.

It is painful thus to speak of the books of Scripture. One is almost tempted to forget that they are the Word of God, the very truth most pure; and that it is declared by our Lord Himself that " the Scripture cannot be broken." Surely it is in vain for Professor Smith to insist that it is out of the question, that it is dangerous and irreverential to cite the words of our Lord as any valid testimony to the authenticity of the Old Testament writings. If I know my own feelings at all, I know that it is with reverence I venture to introduce His name. But I do feel, and I make bold to say, that our Lord has cited Himself, in many emphatic forms, in reference to the personal utterances of Moses. According to Professor Smith, " the majority of the Church has refused to be dragged into such a dangerous and, he would say, irreverent use of the words of our Lord." Dangerous indeed it is, but the danger is of Professor

Smith's creating. And why is it that the majority of the Church has thus refrained? Not for the reason that he insinuates, and not because they have failed to perceive the perilous bearing of these views on the authority and infallibility of our Saviour's words; but because in very reverence they would wait long and anxiously in the hope of seeing the threatened peril averted by such a reconciliation of Professor Smith's real meaning with what they themselves most surely believe, as would obviate the necessity of giving public utterance to their feelings on so sacred a subject. Few will be of the opinion that such a reconciliation has as yet appeared; and not a few are beginning to fear that it cannot be accomplished. It is to that opinion that the Report of the Committee gives warrantable utterance when it says that the statement of Professor Smith "appears irreconcilable with many express statements made in the Pentateuch, and with the words of our Lord Himself."

THE STATEMENTS OF DEUTERONOMY.

Certainly the Pentateuch, or at least that part of it called Deuteronomy, declares explicitly and frequently enough that much more of it was written, or left in writing, by Moses than the Commandments on the tables of stone. And if it were not so, if these declarations are inaccurate and misleading, what comes of the veracity of the historian? and what comes of his trustworthiness in regard to the other statements he makes? Or are we also here to be precluded, on the ground of danger and irreverence, from introducing the person of the writer, whoever he was, who, according to Professor Smith's avowed belief as well as ours, wrote as he did under the inspiration and guidance of God? Besides testifying to much that Moses *wrote*, even following the narrowest interpretation of his words, he testifies to much more that Moses *spoke*. And here again we are asked to believe that many of these recorded sayings of Moses were not, and could not have been uttered by Moses in person, but that they came into oral form and expression in subsequent

ages, or that they were first formulated and set down in writing some time about the reign of Manasseh. Is this credible? Will any Christian conscience accept it as a legitimate or possible mode of narration by one who spake or wrote "as he was moved by the Holy Ghost"? Professor Smith has elaborated a theory of reconciliation which satisfies his own conscience. But has it satisfied many besides? Does not the moral sense of the Christian community instinctively cry out against it? Conscience needs and is bound to seek enlightenment; but I question if conscience needs or can rightly submit to elaborate processes of reasoning in order to affect or alter her intuitive verdict on a question of right or wrong. If Professor Smith has satisfied his own conscience it is well for himself; but the Church at large has to satisfy hers also, for it is not by the pronounced state of Professor Smith's conscience, but by her own fully-formed convictions of truth and duty, and up to the measure which she herself has attained therein, that she is bound to decide on this important matter.

The theory thus advanced by Professor Smith has derived its cogency, we are told, from the many difficulties occurring, especially in the Book of Deuteronomy, which militate strongly against its Mosaic authorship. We acknowledge, and every one who knows anything of the subject will acknowledge, that there are in it many difficulties of a perplexing and, perhaps, insoluble character. But we are convinced also that Professor Smith has sought the solution of the gravest of these—those that deal with the declared *utterances* of Moses himself—in a wrong direction, in a direction (to use his own language) that is both dangerous and irreverent. We say, those that deal with the declared utterances of Moses himself; for it is there that lie the gist and core of the grave difference between the Church and Professor Smith. The historical nexus running throughout the book and expressed in the third person, the historical parentheses occurring in the book, and the historical addition at its close, are questions of altogether inferior moment as to their age and authorship, and may well be excluded from a controversy of this kind.

The crucial question here is not even what Moses wrote or did not write with his own hand; for if he used, like Paul, an

amanuensis for the purpose, the writings that bear his name will still be as truly his as the First Epistle to the Corinthians is the work of the apostle. And even the date of their committal to writing is, in this instance at least, of less moment than the certainty of the fact so frequently asserted, that what is so written are the very words of Moses himself: that is, if it could be accepted as at all credible or possible that the words of Moses could be handed down orally, without adulteration, from one generation to another. But it is not pretended here that such is the case. All that is claimed is, virtually, that these *would have been* the words of Moses had he lived, or lived again in the age of Manasseh, and been himself the final editor who put these words into his mouth. Unfortunately such was not the case; and the editor of this "prophetical programme" was obliged, according to the new theory, to put words into Moses' mouth, in order to gain them the greater acceptance, which Moses himself never uttered, and never could have uttered. The moral sense recoils from such a supposition.

THE SOLUTION OF ITS DIFFICULTIES.

The central question is, Are these addresses of Moses, reported in Deuteronomy, the very words of Moses himself? They are declared to be so again and again in the book itself. Several of them are quoted as such in the succeeding historical books (Josh. viii. 30-35; 2 Kings xiv. 6). They are appealed to as such in the Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and elsewhere. They have been accepted as such by the Jews themselves from first to last. And it is only in these recent times that the Christian Church has been seriously agitated with the voice of dissent. All these together are strong grounds, which it will require a *very* clear and convincing argument to persuade her to forego. And yet there are many difficulties in those recorded addresses which it is hard to explain. Professor Smith mentioned some of them at an earlier period of the controversy: such as *the law of the kingdom, the law of the central altar, and the laws relating to the priests and the Levites*. But if the law of the kingdom given in Deuteronomy,

and not referred to by Samuel at a later period, when the people were demanding a king, is a grave difficulty; is it a less difficulty to suppose, that the law of the kingdom was not formally committed to writing, in order to be officially authoritative among the people, till after the kingdom of the ten tribes was actually extinguished, and till the kingdom of Judah itself was on the very verge of dissolution? Is it, apart from the higher considerations involved, a feasible solution to suppose that this important law was not put into the place it now occupies till all the use it could serve would be that of a mere melancholy memorial of the past? And so it would be with those other laws, had they only become incorporated in the Deuteronomic code when they had virtually ceased to be applicable or operative as laws.

But far too little stress, I am convinced, as an aid to the solution of these difficulties, is laid upon the political and religious condition of Israel during the four or five centuries that elapsed between this second giving of the law by Moses in the land of Moab, and the accession of his *true theocratic successor, David*, to the throne of Israel. We know a good deal regarding that period from the Books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel; but there is, perhaps, far more that we do not know. We know that it was a period of chronic unsettlement, revolution, and disunion; that breathing spaces of peace were succeeded by long wars of subjugation, oppression, and deliverance; and that Israel's own loyalty to the worship of Jehovah was as intermittent as their seasons of tranquillity. Giving only due weight to such considerations, and remembering that these periodical convulsions and changes continued all the way down till David's ascension of the throne, and far on towards the close of his reign, even till he himself could declare (2 Sam. xxii. 1) that the Lord had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, are we not warranted in saying that the fulness of the rest and the inheritance promised by Moses before his death was not really attained by Israel till the days of David? David alone completed what Joshua had begun. And, if so, was it not also according to this Mosaic promise, that the selection of the place where Jehovah should cause His name to dwell, and whither His people were to bring

all their offerings, *should only follow on the full attainment of the rest?* And if this view is probable or possible, does it not also follow that much of the Deuteronomic law was of necessity in practical abeyance, through the sins of the people, down till the very period when David purposed in his heart to build a house unto the Lord his God? The fact would be farther in favour of this supposition, that the movable tabernacle of the wilderness life and wilderness worship was itself transported into the land of Canaan; as if it was foreseen and designed by God that the shifting character of wilderness life and worship should continue therein till the promised rest were really attained, and till the tabernacle itself should be lost to view and laid up for ever in the Temple. And if the law of Deuteronomy fell into enforced abeyance for so many generations through the disloyalty and disobedience of the people, may we not find therein some aid to the solution of the difficulties lying in the way of the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy? Compare Deuteronomy xii. 8-14. Moses there says of that future state of rest and of inheritance, when really attained: "Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes." And yet it is again and again certified afterwards of that succeeding period, just as if to indicate that the time for the application of these Deuteronomic promises and laws had not then arrived, that "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." That period of self-will and national religious disunion had its plausible or pretended excuses annihilated only by the erection and public inauguration, by the whole nation, of the Temple at Jerusalem. It is, therefore, in the religious and political confusion of those previous centuries that the only feasible solution of many of these Deuteronomic difficulties is to be sought and found; and the Book of Deuteronomy we hold, and Scripture testimony backs us in holding it, was not "a prophetic programme"—that is, a selection by some late unknown prophet out of the accumulated gatherings of preceding ages; but a *prophetic ideal*, held up by Moses at the outset of the national history, as the goal which they actually failed to reach, but which they were commanded and warned to strive to attain.

THE BOOK OF RUTH.

Professor Smith's remarks in defence of the position he assigns to the Book of Ruth were simple declamation and bravado, with an appeal, as his only argument, to his own toilsome study of the complicated details of Scripture. The Committee's Report, in the fifth particular, under the third head, quotes these words:—"With these (post-exile) psalms the graceful prose idyll of Ruth has a natural affinity." Professor Smith, as if to divert his audience from the real point in question, asked them why the Committee should complain of his characterising Ruth as a "graceful prose idyll"? Of course, the Committee made no such complaint, but it suited Professor Smith to make it appear so. The Committee's only point in the reference was, clearly enough to him as to others, his placing the Book of Ruth, as regards the date of its composition, side by side with "the post-exile psalms," and claiming for it "a natural affinity" with these. What the natural affinity between them is, save what he calls "the charm of genuine feeling and sweet utterance" common to both, he does not say. Some Aramaic grammatical forms, which, for all we know, may also have been popular archaisms in Israel, they have in common. But other affinities are difficult to find. The scene laid in Ruth is certainly not post-exile. The contents of the really post-exile psalms are in harmony with the condition of their date, but it is altogether different with the Book of Ruth. It has nothing internally, as regards its subject, its characters, its colouring, in common with, or, we might almost say, as possible of conception in, the post-exile period. It synchronises best, and almost exclusively, with the Davidic age, and therein tallies with the fact, stated in 1 Sam. xxii. 3, that David's father, the grandson of Ruth, the Moabitess, found a friendly refuge in the land of Moab during the period of his son's persecution by Saul. Its chief affinity with the post-exile period of Israel's history is, that it thereby harmonises best with Professor Smith's theory regarding the date of other historical books of Old Testament Scripture. And, for this reason, the Committee were sufficiently warranted in giving it a place among the particulars quoted.

THE BOOK OF JONAH.

Nor is Professor Smith's defence of the description he gives, in his article, of the Book of Jonah of a much more satisfactory character. He places it also among the later Jewish literature, and classes it with the Haggada, or in the mystic story-telling epoch, that began a considerable time after the return from Babylon, and ran down into the Christian era. He speaks of it as the period of "the formation of parables and tales attached to historical names, of which the Book of Jonah is generally taken as an early example." He thus, in his article, boldly associates it with the Haggada, and there leaves its own character to be inferred from the company it keeps. Who will not say, that the natural inference from all he there writes of the Book of Jonah—and it was solely with what he does say in his writings that the Committee had to do—is that the Book of Jonah is neither more nor less than a parable or tale attached to an historical name? He says, that it is "generally taken" as such; and, hinting no divergent opinion of his own, he tacitly allows it to be assumed that he includes himself in the number. It is true that, when put on his defence, and forced to face the fact of our Lord's unequivocal testimony to this historicity of Jonah, and of his preaching to the men of Nineveh, he went a step farther, and makes some concession. His words, as reported, were:—"He did not deny that Jonah was a prophet, and he would not deny that he went to Nineveh." That was all; and will any say that that was a very frank or manly form of concession? He admits as little as possible. He does not explicitly acknowledge that the men of Nineveh actually repented at Jonah's preaching, and still less the reality of the miracle that followed his first refusal. And if we take his partial admissions alongside of his written statement, we have some ground to doubt the meaning of his reserve. Who does not know that the record of the miracle formed the chief ground with rationalistic critics for doubting the historicity of the book? Our Lord, on the other hand, chose an historical event to be a palpable sign to the Jews, and He found it in the experience of Jonah; and the fact and form of that miracle are stated by

Him as the very points that He employs as an expressive sign of His own death and resurrection. Professor Smith rushes hurriedly away from the historical, and sets forth the parabolic at great length as the only valid or worthy meaning attachable to the Book of Jonah. We have no objection to the parabolic lesson, but we hold that it is altogether subordinate and secondary throughout to the plain historical facts.

THE GENEALOGIES IN GENESIS.

To Professor Smith's hypotheses and conclusions regarding the genealogies in Genesis it is difficult to affix a name. He has succeeded in startling the Church by his boldness, his rashness, his irreverence. Notwithstanding his confused explanations, the Committee is right in saying that he has thereby thrown "doubt on the genealogy of Abraham, and, therefore, on the genealogy of our Lord," as that is given expressly by name in Gen. xi., and given so plainly and emphatically by repetition of the names, and enumeration of the years between each successive birth and death, that the rejection of its reference to individuals looks little less than a rejection of "the certainty of Divine revelation" as there recorded. The genealogies of Scripture at least become utterly untrustworthy and useless if we cannot accept such a chapter as Gen. xi. as describing the very individuals who constituted the family pedigree of the house of Abraham. And why should we not? Simply, it seems, because some of these early fathers of the human race gave their names to, or derived their names from, certain districts or regions of the globe. The fact is, that Professor Smith unwarrantably mixes up the tenth chapter of Genesis with the eleventh—that is to say, the table of national genealogies with that of a particular family. He does so because they have both the same source, have one or two of the same names occurring in both, and have the same name described there and elsewhere as that of the son of different parents. It is thus with the name of Aram, who, in Gen. x. 22, is the son of Shem; in Gen. xxii. 21, is the grandson of Nahor; and in Ruth iv. 19, and in 1 Chron. ii. 9 (compare Matt. i. 3, 4; Luke iv. 33), is the great-grandson of Judah. It is quite possible

then, as now, that the same name may have been borne by different persons; and that the same name (though not the same man) may be found repeated in two or three genealogies as the son of different parents, without supposing either that the one man was the son of different fathers, or that the names in every case were ethnographical or geographical abstractions.

There are several other questionable points in Professor Smith's article, as quoted in the Committee's Report, which might fairly have been brought under review; but without entering farther into detailed consideration of that Report, which was approved by the Commission, enough has been said to satisfy thoughtful and unprejudiced minds that both were amply justified in animadverting upon the dangerous and unsettling character of Professor Smith's writings, and in sending on their Report for the special consideration and judgment of the ensuing General Assembly.

THE FUTURE EFFECT OF THESE CRITICAL THEORIES.

Meanwhile it would be well for the members of the Church, if these theories regarding the Old Testament Scriptures are in present circumstances to be adopted within her pale, to consider what the results are likely to be in the not distant future.

1. AS REGARDS THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF OLD TESTAMENT WRITINGS.

In the first place, the main purpose of all these new hypotheses regarding the Old Testament canon is to get the date of its composition, in its present form, relegated to a period at or after the Babylonian captivity. Not a scrap of writing, save the Ten Commandments, of all the five books of Moses was extant at the death of the Hebrew law-giver, or for long after. Israel, the people and Church of God, have passed through a long and all-important period of their history, but, though the art of writing is well known, nothing is written of that history till at or after the

time of David. All that can be dimly discerned through those many centuries are a few legendary songs and elementary laws, (perhaps the broken echoes of the reputed sayings of a half mythical Moses, as we quote to-day the snatches attached to the name of Thomas the Rhymer), that are circulated from mouth to mouth, and constitute all the literature of what must have been an illiterate and semibarbarous people. It is only in the latter period that written literature really begins, and then only in disjointed fragments, historical episodes, heroic biographies, and sacred songs, down till the time of Hosea, when at last the day of written prophecy dawns, feebly at first, but, after a lengthened twilight, bursts into noonday brightness all around the lurid volcanic crater of the Babylonian captivity. It is only then, through diverse individual efforts, each of them fragmentary, and following each other at longer or shorter intervals, and all of them at last fused together, more or less artistically or clumsily, by a final editor, that the historical books of Scripture, from first to last, as we now possess them, were called into existence. The conclusion reached is, that, with the exception of one or two stepping-stones rising wierdly, out of the floating mists of a previously unbroken night, on the farther brink of the captivity chasm, the only sure foothold we have for contemplating at all, or judging with certainty of the whole previous history of man or of the Church of God, is from the hither side of the Babylonian exile. All beyond that is uncertain and obscure, so far as written records of these early times are concerned. We do not doubt that God might, had He so pleased, have revealed to His servants at that late period a full and infallible history of both from creation downwards, such as we have it in the Sacred Scriptures, just as He *could* have delayed making known the Gospels of Jesus Christ, as we now possess them, till the fourth or fifth century of the Christian era. But surely we have very inadequate reason to believe that God did either. And we are not asked to do so even by those in our own land who are beginning to be caught by the charms of this Graf-Wellhausen romance. They are content to say that these pre- or post-exile writers were guided in a certain way by the hand of God, but that they practically drew their material from the oral and legendary traditions of the nation,

and from the fragmentary writings that gradually emerged between the age of David and the captivity. And yet, along with this Divine superintendence, they were not exempt from mistake, or from misunderstanding the very documents from which they gathered their histories.

What, then, we are virtually asked to do according to this new theory, is to look back on antecedent Scripture history from a standpoint fixed on this side of the exile, just as we look back on prior Roman history from the age of Livy, the historian. We have no other nearer, clearer historical foothold than this for looking with certainty on the history of creation, of the flood, of Abraham and the other patriarchs, of Israel and Moses in Egypt and in the wilderness. And yet if these late historians were practically dependent for much of their history on national legends and similar sources, and if that history has much to do with the miraculous and the prophetic, how shall we be certain that, with their acknowledged liability to mistake, they knew infallibly how to separate the true from the false, the Divine original from the human accretions of successive ages, and to give us the miracle, if miracle it really was, as it really transpired? For some of the primeval history we must be dependent on Divine revelation, as there were no human eyes to witness or hands to record its successive stages. But it is different afterwards; and it is not according to our experience of the Divine procedure for God directly to reveal what man himself has natural and sufficient sources of knowing. And what, then, are we to say in regard to those early miracles with which Scripture history is so largely interspersed, and which could scarcely fail to gather many fanciful additions in the course of oral transmission from age to age; what can we say with satisfying assurance of the product—the result—to the unbelieving school of critics, who reject the miraculous and the prophetic as mere hoary legends of the unhistorical past, as we reject the fables of pagan mythology? Are we not asked, by these reckless theories of a pretentious but one-sided scholarship, to give up one of the great vantage-grounds of defence which the Church has hitherto inexpugnably occupied—namely this, that these narratives were written down within such a distance from the events recorded, and by such writers as had sufficient

means of knowing the truths whereof they affirmed, that God, who inspired them so to write, has given us human as well as Divine grounds for believing the thorough truthfulness of their record? If these new theories are accepted, it will become a very shaky and slippery ground on which we are left to stand in regard to the genuineness and authenticity of the Old Testament Scriptures. And if these are once acknowledged as tenable, it will be very difficult to meet the somewhat similar attacks that have been made and threatened on the age and authenticity of the New Testament Gospels. Even granting that there are not a few difficulties that cannot be solved, and not a few apparent contrarieties that cannot be reconciled, may not many of them arise from our mere ignorance of the other facts which God has not been pleased to reveal; and are they not a very slender and insufficient basis at the best whereon to build conclusions so momentous, and so far-reaching in their results? For besides what has been stated,

2. AS REGARDS THEIR BEARING ON THE NEW TESTAMENT.

In the second place, it has to be borne in mind that these views, once admitted, will have their bearing not only on the question of the New Testament canon, but on the central Gospel doctrine of the person of Christ. It is of no use that Professor Smith and some others cry out against any such application, and indignantly denounce those who indicate its possibility. It is a fact that such is the case already; and it is of necessity that every concession thus made to the validity of what till now were regarded as the arguments of the infidel and deistical school, will be hailed with triumph as an outpost gained, and made a new and more effective point of attack on the Christian stronghold. Professor Smith opposes the introduction of the words of our Lord as any valid testimony affecting the age and authorship of Old Testament writings. It may suit him to do so; and he may honestly believe that he is right in his opposition. But whether or not, they are and will be so introduced; and men *will* ask many serious and startling questions on the most sacred of all subjects, and they

will not cease asking with increasing boldness till they get more decided and convincing answers to their questions than any that have yet fallen from Professor Smith or his friends. Is it not the indubitable fact that most of those on the Continent, who have built up the positions in regard to Old Testament criticism since occupied by Professor Smith, professedly belong to the non-believing school; and has not their line of argument been carried farther by themselves or others, and applied to the canon of the New Testament Scriptures with the like result? And if so, is it not high time that we ourselves were looking well to our moorings as a believing Church, and holding fast that which we have, that no man take our crown? That crown entrusted to us is not merely the maintenance of Christ's sole supremacy in His Church, but it is adherence to Him in His whole Person as the absolute perfection of truth, the very fulness of the God-head bodily. We utterly shrink from charging any amongst us, who seem presently to be giving countenance to these recent speculations, of consciously or intentionally in the slightest degree tarnishing that crown; but we do seriously believe that, in regard to some of these views at least, they are treading on dangerous ground, paining the hearts of multitudes of God's people, shaking the faith of the ignorant, and giving joy and courage to the enemies of His Church. And we do say again, because we are convinced of it, that the support given to such overtures as these, whether consciously so regarded by the movers or not, will be looked upon, outside, as so much moral support given to those views whose enunciation has caused the present pain and turmoil in our beloved Church.

THE COMMISSION'S "INSTRUCTION" TO PROFESSOR R. SMITH.

And, in conclusion, why is it, even professedly, that brethren are so anxious to send up these overtures to the General Assembly? They wish to complain of the action of the Commission in October, in connection with the case of Professor

Smith. But the Commission has sent up the Report of all its own action for the consideration and judgment of the Assembly. Are brethren afraid that the members of that Assembly will not look with due deliberation and seriousness to that Report, without a special poke from themselves? The Commission itself has decided nothing, has judged nothing. One thing indeed it did. In view of what the Commission itself considered the grave nature of the charges contained in its Committee's Report, and which could not be adjudicated upon till next General Assembly, it "instructed Professor Smith to abstain from teaching his class during the ensuing session." There were some present in the Commission who would have greatly preferred the omission of that clause, believing that the special transmission of the whole case to the Assembly was sufficient to meet the emergency that had arisen. But if brethren would only look at the wording of that clause, and look at it in the light of existing circumstances, they could not regard it as in itself an adequate cause for all the outcry and wrath that have been aroused over it. The Committee have done less than any other precognosing or initiating court of the land would have done in similar circumstances. It did *not* try Professor Smith, it did *not* condemn him, it did *not* suspend him. But with that Report of the Committee before it, with the general tenor of its contents approved by a decided majority of its own membership—that is to say, by 270 ministers and elders of the Church—and with the knowledge that these charges would remain there till affirmed or rejected by the General Assembly, *was* it such a piece of tyranny and injustice, was it even unnatural or unbecoming that the Commission should ask him, should tell him, should instruct him "to abstain from teaching his class during the ensuing session," that is, till this new cause of trouble was removed or dealt with by the next Assembly? The trouble was there, whether he abstained or not. It was over the Church. And were it not for other causes of irritation that found a convenient and plausible vent in this special act of the Commission, there cannot be a doubt that it would have been universally looked upon as a natural, or at least a perfectly competent course of action. So much so, that even if the Commission had alto-

gether omitted it, it would have seemed to most people only a becoming and respectful step for Professor Smith to have taken of his own accord. But there had entered other elements of irritation that the case should have been re-opened at all,—irritation, not at Professor Smith for re-opening it by his strangely-timed article on Hebrew Language and Literature, but at the Church for not allowing such a new defiance to remain unchallenged. And this "instruction" to Professor Smith became a convenient stalking-horse for airing their irritation, without too openly disclosing its meaning. Professor Smith might, I suppose, have refused to abstain from teaching: and there was some hint even expressed in his subsequent letter that, but for certain specified reasons, he would have refused. Had he done so, the war-cry that has so loudly resounded, could not have been raised. Is it harsh to suppose that Professor Smith was well advised by his friends to yield obedience? At all events, his doing so has given breath for the vehement trumpet-blast of opposition, that seemed for a short time as if it would desolate the Church. Happily, it is dying away; or is warily softening its notes into the feeble tones of the overture on the table. The hand is now gloved; but the spirit and purpose cannot be hid. And though I do not court victory, for mere victory's sake, neither shall I be greatly discomposed by defeat; but I earnestly trust that members will remember only their own personal responsibility to God, and vote accordingly.

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