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*PROFESSOR W. ROBERTSON SMITH'S DOCTRINE  
OF SCRIPTURE.*

I HAVE been asked to describe what I believe to be the late Prof. Robertson Smith's doctrine of Holy Scripture as distinguished from the common Broad Church doctrine on the one hand, and from what may be called the Princeton view on the other. The materials for this statement are to be found in his various defences made before the Presbytery of Aberdeen and before the General Assembly in his famous trial, and in his opening lecture, *What History Teaches us to Seek in the Bible*, and I shall try to give it in Prof. Smith's own words. Prof. Robertson Smith invariably based his doctrine of Scripture on what he held to be the fundamental difference between the reformation idea of Scripture and that maintained in the mediæval Church, and in order to get at his point of view, it is necessary to see in what that difference consisted. For Prof. Robertson Smith declared over and over again that he stood on the same ground and maintained the same doctrine of Scripture which was held by Calvin and by all the leading reformers, and which is contained in all the principal confessions of the Reformation period.

It is too often forgotten that the mediæval Church did not, as a rule, warn its people against reading the Bible; that translations of the Vulgate were repeatedly made into the languages of Europe for the benefit of the common people; that mediæval theologians unanimously declared that their theology was based upon Scripture; and that at the beginning of the Reformation controversy Luther and

his friends never for a moment believed that their appeal to the Scriptures as the ultimate judge in controversies about religious topics would be refused. Indeed, so confident were the Lutherans in the matter that the earlier Lutheran symbols do not contain any statements of the supreme authority of Scripture as a distinctive article of the Protestant creed.

It is interesting to note that Luther makes his appeal to Scripture with the same unconscious serenity that no one can gainsay him, as he had when he set the believer's spiritual experience of the fact that he (the believer) was saved from sin by the merits of Christ against the proposal to sell God's pardon for money. Nor did his opponents gainsay him. They believed that they were able to meet Scripture with Scripture. They were content to abide by his challenge, and were sure that Scripture would decide against the Reformer.

It soon became apparent, however, that Luther had a much firmer grasp of Scripture than they had, and this meant much more than that he had a better memory for texts than his opponents. It meant that he had, somehow or other, an idea of Scripture which they had not. Their appeal to Scripture was "a balancing of texts or interpretation of texts, in which everything seemed in an uncertain flux unless backed by the authority of the Fathers or of the Church."<sup>1</sup> Luther had an idea of the *unity* of Scripture which they had not, and they soon felt that if they were to meet him on equal terms, they must also put a unity into Scripture in a manner previously unknown in the mediæval Church. Hence the famous decree of the Council of Trent, which, nominally, placed *traditiones sine scripto* on the same level with canonical Scripture, but which, really, gave an artificial unity to Scripture by means of a uniform ecclesiastical tradition, and for the first time stated ex-

<sup>1</sup> *What History Teaches us to Seek in the Bible*, p. 6.

plicity what had been perhaps unconsciously held all down mediæval history.

This leads me to ask what the mediæval doctrine of Scripture was, and why it required to be supplemented in this fashion. Mediæval theology always regarded the Bible as a book full of divine information or infallible truths about doctrines and morals. This idea carries with it the great difficulty that such a description does not seem to apply to a great part of Scripture. The Bible contains long lists of genealogies, chapters containing little else than descriptions of temple furniture, details of simple family life and of national history. The mediæval theologian had therefore either to cut out all this irrelevant matter, or to change these inventories and simple histories into doctrinal propositions or moral rules. He chose the latter alternative, and declared that the Bible had other meanings than the ordinary sense of the words disclosed. It had a fourfold sense, and these various senses were used to deduce theological doctrine from the genealogies of Abraham and David, and rules of conduct from descriptions of the high priest's robes or from the narrative of our Lord's journey from Capernaum to Nain.

It is sometimes difficult to know what is the precise meaning of certain passages of the Bible, even where the reader thinks only of the plain historical meaning; but the difficulty must be greatly enhanced if each passage may have four senses; and while mediæval theology made it almost hopeless, by its theory of a fourfold sense, to know precisely what the Bible did teach, their doctrine of faith made it imperative that every Christian should have this exact information. The mediæval theologian declared that saving faith was assent to correct propositions about God, the universe, and the soul of man contained in the Bible. He was therefore compelled to have recourse to a *regula fidei* or to a *traditio apostolica et ecclesiastica* which was

outside Scripture, and which would guide him safely in striving to puzzle out the meaning of its statements. The incurable vice of the mediæval doctrine of Scripture may therefore be briefly stated to be: It started with the theory that the Bible is nothing but a compendium of *fragmentary* intellectual truths about doctrines and morals, and that saving faith is the assent to these truths; it had to invent the idea of a fourfold sense in Scripture to make its theory fit the facts of the case; and, having thus destroyed the inherent and historical unity of the Bible in favour of a vicious intellectualism, it was compelled to manufacture a fictitious and external unity of Scripture by means of a theory of an ecclesiastical tradition or uniform traditional method of interpreting the meaning of texts.

This was the doctrine of Scripture which the Reformers were confronted with, and which from the beginning they opposed, guided at first perhaps by unconscious religious premonition rather than by clear dogmatic vision. At all events, the beginnings of the Reformation doctrine of Scripture spring from religious experience, and belong to the experimental rather than to the dogmatic side of Christian theology. For the Reformation doctrine of Scripture is just as much based on a fact of the religious experience of the Christian man as is its doctrine of justification by faith.

When Luther, Zwingli, or Calvin studied the Bible, they found in it what had been doubtless discovered by thousands of pious souls before their day, but what had never found its way into the dogmatic definitions of theologians—that in this Scripture they had fellowship and communion with God their Father. This was the experimental fact which lay at the basis of what afterwards grew to be the Reformation doctrine of Scripture, and it so changed the whole aspect of matters that it is scarcely too much to say that it meant that the Bible was discovered by the Reformers as Columbus discovered America. Of course, the Reformers

found in the Bible the doctrines of the Christian religion and rules to guide them in all holy living, but they found besides what was worth a hundredfold more—personal fellowship with a redeeming God.

The two thoughts of faith and Scripture correspond with each other. In mediæval theology they are both above all intellectual and propositional; to the Reformer they are both above all experimental and personal. To the mediæval theologian faith is primarily assent to propositions, it rests on propositions, it can hardly get beyond exact definitions of intellectual and ethical abstract truths, and the Bible contains these propositions; to the Reformer faith is primarily trust in a Person, it rests on a Person, it must have personal fellowship or its springs dry up, and the Bible gives it that blessed communion. These descriptions of faith and Scripture were no mere theological statements to the Reformers. They portrayed what they had experienced, the deepest facts in their religious life which made them live as Christian men; but they form the basis of their doctrine of Scripture, which can never be separated from their doctrine of saving faith. It was the sense of these experimental facts deeply rooted in their own hearts which gave the Reformers strength to use the Bible as it had never been used before.

It is interesting to notice that as the mediæval Church separated itself more and more from the idea that fellowship with a personal Saviour could be had in the Scriptures, pious Christians seemed forced to seek for it elsewhere. They had to get into personal touch with Jesus Christ somehow. They were taught that what they were to seek in the Bible was not the personal Jesus, but doctrines about Him, and they turned almost feverishly to find this fellowship in a contact with the corporeal presence in the Sacrament of the Altar. The eagerness with which such a doctrine as Transubstantiation was welcomed can only be explained on

the ground that it seemed to be the *only* way in which a believer could come into *actual contact* with the Saviour. For the deepest Christian life is the same in all ages—it must be one of fellowship with Jesus. Touching Christ is the test of genuine catholicity. The Reformers found this living fellowship in the Bible. They saw that the Word of God was a deeply personal thing, and that God Himself was behind every part of it—not an abstract Truth but a personal Father. “On the one side, on the divine, there is God pouring out His whole heart, revealing the inmost treasures of His righteousness and love in Christ the incarnate Word; on the other side, on the human, there is the believing soul looking straight through all works, and all symbols, and all words to Christ Himself, and united to Him by faith in the closest *personal* union.”<sup>1</sup> To the Reformers, therefore, the chief end of Revelation is to bring God near *me*—to unite two personalities in loving and adoring fellowship. Revelation is the direct message of God’s love to me; not doctrine, but promise; not display of God’s thoughts, but of Himself as my God and my Father. The Reformers found in Scripture a divine fellowship as close and as intimate as the mediæval Christian was supposed to get by his theory of Transubstantiation. The words of Scripture were the revelation of the heart of God, and words are the best means of such a revelation. Luther rings the changes on this. Works will reveal God; symbols may have their divine significance; but words excel all other means of communion. A brute, he says, can do works and show what is in it thereby; but a man speaks out what his heart thinks. We are therefore to go to the Bible feeling that we are having speech with God, and that the speech declares God’s heart. “Let no pious Christian, therefore,” says Luther, “stumble at the simple word and story that meet him so often in Scripture.” These can

<sup>1</sup> *What History Teaches us to Seek in the Bible*, p. 22.

never be mere dead histories of what has once happened and concern men no more, unless hidden meanings are put into them by an allegorical sense. They tell how God dealt with men long ago, and how He will deal with us now. No detail of individual or national life is useless. Everything helps to fill in the picture of fellowship between God and His people which was in the past, and which can come true in our own experience if we have the same faith which these holy men of old had.

When the Reformers regarded the Bible as the means of fellowship with a personal God, who down through the ages had spoken to His people, telling His salvation, and giving the promise of it, sometimes in direct words, sometimes in pictures of His dealing with a chosen people or a favoured individual, it is scarcely necessary to say that they were compelled to look at it as a history. Personality and personal fellowship move in the plane of history and rest in that of metaphysics. The other side of the thought that in and through the Bible we have fellowship with a personal God, and not merely fragmentary collections of abstract truths, is that Scripture is in the main historical, and admits of historical treatment. Or, as Prof. Robertson Smith put it, "Just as the principle of personal faith is the foundation of all the fresh life of the Reformation, so the principle of a historical treatment of Scripture is at bottom the principle of the whole Reformation theology."

But if it be said that the Scriptures are historical records and describe the historical origins of our religion, which admit of historical treatment, and are to be tested by the ordinary methods of historical evidence, this is only a half truth. "The Bible story contains something that rises above the analogy of ordinary history, and so cannot be gauged or tested by any historical evidence. In it we see God drawing near to man, revealing to us His redeeming love, choosing a people for Himself, and declaring to them



His mind and will. To apprehend this supernatural reality, to grasp it as a thing real to us, which is to enter into our lives and change our whole natures, we need a new spiritual gift. No personal truth coming to us from without can be apprehended, except by a power *within*, putting us into communion with it; but fallen man has no natural power of communion with God; and so only the Spirit of God in the heart of the believer enables him to realize that in very truth it is God, and none else, that is seen in the history, and speaks in the Word revealing Himself and declaring His will. This is the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit as taught by Paul in 1 Corinthians ii. 11: "What man knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him? *Even so the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God.*"<sup>1</sup>

There are then two sides to the Biblical records: on the one hand, they are historical documents, subject to the ordinary career of historical research; and on the other hand, they are the medium whereby the personal God reveals Himself to His people. On the one side there are a whole variety of elements which are common to the Bible with all other historical records, such as, when the various books were written, or by whom they were written, or how often they were changed, re-edited, or added to before the record of revelation was finally completed, or in what literary form they were cast, or what modes of literary handling they display, or what their literary merits and demerits may be judged to be—all of which are subject to ordinary historical treatment. These are to be treated by the ordinary methods of historical evidence, are but methods of Divine faith depending on the special action of the Spirit in our hearts; and conclusion regarding them may be come to by a due use of natural means on the part of any candid thinker. On the other hand, through these records and

<sup>1</sup> *Answer to the Form of Libel*, p. 22.

what they contain, believers have a personal fellowship with God, and reach that knowledge of God and of His will which is necessary to salvation—and this knowledge cannot submit to any ordinary test or standard of human knowledge, but is witnessed to by the Spirit of God.

Before trying to show how Professor Robertson Smith, following carefully in the footsteps of the Reformers, combined these two sides into one whole of doctrine of Scripture, let me say that all the Reformers, because they held firmly by the doctrine of the witness of the Spirit, could treat the record of Scripture with what to many would now seem inexcusable boldness. No special theories of inspiration, no preconceived notions of what authoritativeness and infallibility *must* imply, stayed Calvin's critical labours. He confessed, without attempting to explain, or without thinking it necessary to explain, the presence of discrepancies, and even errors, in a guarded sense of that word, in the record of Scripture.

Thus, in his commentary on Matthew xxvii. 9, he says: "*Quo modo Hieremiæ nomen obrepserit, me nescire fateor, nec anxie laboro, certe Hieremiæ nomen errore positum esse pro Zacharia, res ipsa ostendit.*" And on Acts vii. 16, he declares that Luke may have got the fact that the other patriarchs, as well as Joseph, were taken to Palestine to be buried from an old tradition current among the Jews; he says, "*in nomine Abrahæ erratum palam esse*"; and he adds without a word of explanation, "*Quare hic locus corrigendus est.*"

It is needless to multiply instances. It is plain enough that Calvin would have fared badly at the presbytery of Cincinnati or before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America.

What then was the doctrine of Scripture which enabled Calvin, on the one hand, to be contemptuous ("*nec anxie laboro*") about small discrepancies in the Biblical records,

and at the same time to say, "This is the principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath *spoken* to us, and are assuredly persuaded that the prophets spoke not their own sense, but as they were organs of the Holy Spirit, uttered only what was given them from heaven. . . . The same Spirit which assured Moses and the prophets of their vocation now also beareth witness in our hearts that He *used their ministry* in order to teach us,"<sup>1</sup> or which enabled Prof. Robertson Smith to say that "the memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah, the colourless narrative of the Chronicles, and even the Book of Esther, are singularly destitute of literary merit," or that "the brief revival of spoken prophecy after the exile lacks the old fire, and presents no notable literary feature except the use of somewhat fantastic symbolic imagery, the prototype of the later apocalyptic literature"; and to declare, "If I am asked why I receive Scripture as the Word of God, and as the only perfect rule of faith and life, I answer with all the fathers of the Protestant Church, *Because the Bible is the only record of the redeeming love of God, because in the Bible alone I find God drawing near to man in Jesus Christ, and declaring to us in Him His will for our salvation. And this record I know to be true by the witness of His Spirit in my heart, whereby I am assured that none other than God Himself is able to speak such words to my soul?*"<sup>2</sup>

The doctrine may be stated under four heads: 1. There is a distinction to be drawn between the Word of God and those Scriptures in which that Word was afterwards recorded, or, to put it otherwise, we must distinguish between the record and the divine communication of God's heart and will which the record conveys. This distinction is conspicuous in the reformed confessions. Thus the ancient French Confession says (Art. II.): "This God manifests

<sup>1</sup> *Comm. on 2 Tim.* iii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Answer to the Form of Libel*, p. 21; cf. also speech in Assembly of 1878.

Himself as such to men, first, by His works . . . ; secondly, and more clearly, by His word, which, originally revealed by oracle, was *thereafter* reduced to writing in the books which we call Holy Scriptures. The Dutch Confession, revised at the Synod of Dort (Artt. II., III.) says : “ Secondly, He manifested Himself more clearly and perfectly in His holy and Divine Word, to wit, as far as is necessary for us in this life to His glory, and the salvation of His own. This Word of God was not sent forth by man’s will, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. . . . *Thereafter*, by a special care which He hath for us and our salvation, God commanded His servants, the Prophets and Apostles, to put His revealed Word in writing.” The Westminster Confession (Ch. I.) makes the distinction even more emphatic—“ Therefore it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in divers manners to reveal Himself, and to declare that His will (*i.e.*, that knowledge of God and of His will which is necessary unto salvation) unto His Church ; and *afterwards* . . . to commit the same wholly unto writing, which maketh the Holy Scripture to be most necessary ; those former ways of God’s revealing His will unto His people being now ceased.” Calvin describes the Word of God, used in this sense, to be “ spiritual doctrine, the gate, as it were, whereby we enter into His heavenly kingdom ” ;<sup>1</sup> or, again, as “ a mirror in which faith beholds God.”<sup>2</sup> Professor Robertson Smith, condensing the statements of many Protestant confessions, declares that the Word of God “ consists of God’s commands, threatenings, and promises, addressed to our faith, and, above all, of the gospel offer of Christ to us ” ;<sup>3</sup> and in another passage,<sup>4</sup> he adds, “ the Word of God is nothing else than the personal manifestation to us for salvation of God and His will. God’s word

<sup>1</sup> Genevan Catechism.<sup>2</sup> *Nest. Lib.*, III., Ch. 2, Sec. 6.<sup>3</sup> *Answer to Form of Libel*, p. 26.<sup>4</sup> p. 25.

is the declaration of what is in God's heart with regard to us. The Scripture, therefore, in the strictest sense, is not this Word of God, but the record which conveys it to us.

But it must not be supposed that this word of God is a series of hortatory discourses only; that would be to fall back into the mediæval error. The declaration of God's will, recorded for us in the Scripture, took place in a historical process. God showed Himself to His ancient people in a long miraculous history, coming to its fullest and highest in the incarnation and historical work of Christ, and therefore the record of revelation was so framed as to include everything necessary to enable us to understand the declaration of God's will in its historical context and in its historical manifestation.<sup>1</sup> Abraham's history is precious to us, says Luther, "because it is filled so full of God's Word with which all that befell him is so adorned and made fair, and because God everywhere goes before him with His Word, promising, commanding, comforting, warning, that we may verily see that Abraham was God's special trusty friend. Let us mirror ourselves, then, on this holy father Abraham, who walks not in gold and velvet, but girded, crowned, and clothed with divine light, that is, with God's Word." The simplest Bible stories, and even geographical and architectural descriptions, may, and do, give us the side-lights necessary to complete the manifestation of God to His people.

2. We must be careful, however, not to use this true distinction between the Word of God, and Scripture which is its record, in a wrong sense, as has been frequently done. Mystical theologians, basing their ideas on the supreme value of the Word as opposed to the record, have spoken as if the record, were a thing of small moment, and as if God made the declaration of His mind and will to us for our salvation apart from, and independently of, the record of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Speech in Assembly of 1878. *Proceedings*, p. 127.

Scripture. They have imagined such an opposition between Word and record as to teach that, while the record is of value to young, untaught and unformed believers, the trained and educated Christian, by means of what they have sometimes called the Inner Light, can either dispense with the record altogether, or use it to convey such meanings as this inward illumination, which they say they possess, reads into the record. This was not the doctrine of the Reformers, nor is it the idea of Prof. Robertson Smith. The witness of the Spirit witnesses to the truth of God for our salvation in, by and through the record of Scripture. The distinction between the Word of God and its record in Scripture is not explained by the common mystical illustration of kernel and husk, which husk (the record) can be thrown away when the kernel (the Word) has once been reached and laid hold of.

Nor can we rightly use the distinction between Word and record to mean that one part of the Bible is the Word of God and another part of it is the word of man. This is a common Broad Church view to which we must refer later on, and which seems based on the old mediæval conception of Scripture; but it is not the doctrine of Reformation and Protestant creeds, which uniformly teach that the substance of *all* Scripture is God's Word, and that what is not part of the record of God's Word is no part of Scripture. Some of Prof. Robertson Smith's opponents accused him of holding this Broad Church view, and no accusation was more indignantly denied by him.<sup>1</sup> He declared frequently that no one could accuse him of holding this opinion, who did not consciously or unconsciously accept the mediæval and discard the Reformation conception of the Bible.

The distinction between the Word of God, and Scripture its record, however real and true, must not prevent our being able to say that Scripture is the word of God. That

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Speech in Assembly, 1878. *Proceedings*, p. 127.

is a common expression, and, indeed, is used in the usual argument for the infallibility and authoritativeness of Scripture. The argument of our Westminster Confession, and of all Protestant theology, is:—

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

But Scripture is the Word of God.

Therefore Scripture is infallible and authoritative.

But while this is the common argument, men have used it and understood the conclusion in different senses, and it is evident that the sense put upon the conclusion depends on the force of the word *is* in the proposition “ Scripture *is* the word of God.” It is here that the difference arises between Professor Robertson Smith and what may be called the Princeton School, and for this reason I shall have to refer to it later on. Meanwhile, it is sufficient to say that many seventeenth century theologians, departing from the spirit of Reformation theology, used the copula *is* to denote logical identity. They pressed the word as strictly as Lutherans and Romanists do in the famous controversy on the words “ This *is* my body.” But this was not the view of the Reformation divines, nor is it the idea conveyed in the great Reformed Confessions. The copula *is* does not mean logical identity. The word of God and Scripture may be put together in the phrase, The Scripture is the Word of God, and yet *is* may not mean exact logical equivalence. To show the oneness and the difference, many orthodox confessions used the term *contained in* or *contains* instead of *is*. The fifth article of the French Confession speaks of the Word as *contained in* the Bible. Calvin says the “ Word is to be sought for in the Holy Scriptures *wherein it is contained*,” and speaks of the Word of God as *presented* in Scripture. The standards of our Church have both expressions. The Westminster Confession says, “ Holy Scripture is the Word of God written,” which is equivalent to

“Scripture is the Word of God,” and the Shorter Catechism says, “The Word of God which *is contained* in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.” All this goes to prove that while it is correct to say that Scripture *is* the Word of God, and that what may be said of the one may also be said generally of the other, the copula *is* cannot be held to express logical identity, but some such relation as can be more exactly rendered by *contains* or *presents*. Prof. Robertson Smith, with that cautious conservatism which characterized him when dealing with dogmatic questions, hesitated to use these time-honoured phrases, and to avoid the Broad Church inference, selected the expression “Scripture *records* or *conveys* the Word of God.” The main thing to observe, however, is that while we must carefully insist on the real distinction between the Word of God and Scripture, we are not to make such a use of that distinction as to infer that we cannot predicate of the substance of Scripture those attributes of infallibility and authoritative-ness which belong to the Word of God. We can rightly say the Scripture is of infallible truth and divine authority, but when we say so, we must remember that the more precise statement will be, Scripture records or conveys to us the infallible and authoritative Word of God.

3. From all this it follows that when we speak of the infallible and authoritative character of Scripture, the infallibility and authoritativeness belong primarily to the Word of God, and only secondarily to Scripture, and belong to Scripture because it is the record which contains, presents, or conveys the Word of God. And this Word of God is, as we have seen, nothing else than the personal manifestation to us for our salvation of God and His will, the declaration of what is in God’s heart with regard to us. It is this which, in the first and highest sense, is infallible and authoritative. No careful student of the confessional literature of the Reformed Church can help seeing that the



writers say nothing about Scripture, save in so far as it is a record of spiritual truths, of God's revelation of Himself and of His will. Holy Scripture, the Westminster Confession tells us, is Scripture because it gives us that knowledge of God and of His will which is necessary unto salvation. Scripture is Scripture because it records God's manifestation of Himself and of His will to His people. It is Scripture because we see in all its parts held forth to us the will of God for our salvation; because it presents to the eye of faith God Himself personally manifested in Christ. It is this presentation of God Himself and of His will for our salvation which is of infallible truth and divine authority, and the infallible truth and divine authority of Scripture mean simply its infallible truth and divine authority as a record of God's saving revelation of Himself and of His will; but this revelation of God Himself and of His will is a spiritual manifestation of a supernatural reality, and is to be apprehended by a spiritual faculty which, as the Westminster Confession teaches, is faith. "By this faith a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God speaketh therein; and acteth differently upon that which each particular passage thereof containeth; yielding obedience to the commands, trembling at the threatenings, and embracing the promises of God for this life and for that which is to come. But the principal acts of faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace."<sup>1</sup> The Word consists of God's commands, threatenings, promises, addressed to our faith, and above all of the Gospel offer of Christ to us, and these are conveyed to us in every part of Scripture. These and none other are the things which *faith* receives as infallibly true and authoritative, and the confessions of the Reformed Church do not

<sup>1</sup> Ch. xiv. § 2.

recognise an infallibility and authoritativeness which is apprehended otherwise than by faith. And what awakens faith, and enables it to see this infallibility and authoritativeness in what is conveyed in Scripture, is the witness of the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit accompanies the Word as it is brought to us in Scripture with exactly the same testimony whereby He assured the Prophets and Apostles that the Word which they preached was God's Word, and not their own. "The witness of the Spirit does not attach itself to the outward characters of the record (1 Cor. ii. 1-5); but testifies directly to the infallible truth of the Divine Word, the spiritual teaching, the revelation of God Himself, which is the substance of the record. . . . This argument is a sure ground of faith to any one who keeps clearly in view the fundamental Reformation position that the Word of God is nothing else than the personal manifestation to us for salvation of God and His will. God's Word is the declaration of what is in God's heart with regard to us. And so its certainty lies in its substance, not in the way in which it comes to us. "The Word itself," says Calvin, "*however it be presented to us, is like a mirror in which faith beholds God*" (*Inst.*, III. ii. 6). So long as we go to Scripture, only to find in it God and His redeeming love mirrored before the eye of faith, we may rest assured that we shall find living, self-evidencing, infallible truth in every part of it, and that we shall find nothing else. But to the Reformers this was the whole use of Scripture. . . . Now since Scripture has no other end than to convey to us a message which, when accompanied by the inner witness of the Spirit, manifests itself as the infallible Word of God, we may, for practical purposes, say that Scripture *is* the infallible Word of God. For Scripture *is*, essentially, what it is its business to convey."<sup>1</sup>

Prof. Robertson Smith, therefore, in common with the

<sup>1</sup> *Answer to Form of Libel*, pp. 25, 26.

Reformers and the most conspicuous Reformed confessions, holds that infallibility and authoritativeness belong to the sphere of faith and of the witness of the Spirit, and, therefore, belong to that personal manifestation of God and of His will toward us which is conveyed to us in every part of Scripture. But this manifestation is given in a course of events which are part of human history, in lives of men and peoples, in a record which in outward form is like other human writings. If every part of Scripture be the manifestation of God, every part of it is also human. The supernatural reality is encased in human realities. To apprehend the former it is necessary to use faith enlightened by the witness of the Holy Spirit; but with regard to the historical credibility of Scripture it is sufficient to use the ordinary methods of research. The unanimous doctrine of the Reformed Churches is so constructed as to make the authority of the Bible, which belongs to the region of faith, altogether independent of questions that may be raised as to the human agencies by which the book came into its present shape. It is not a matter of faith when the books that record God's Word were written, or by whom, or in what style, or how often they were edited and re-edited. It is not a matter of faith whether incidents happened in one century or another; whether Job be a literal history, or a poem based on old tradition in which the author has used the faculty of invention to illustrate the problems of God's providence and man's probation; whether genealogical tables give the names of individual men, or of countries and peoples. All these belong to the human side of the record. No special supernatural illumination is required to apprehend and understand them. They are matters for the ordinary faculties of man, and subjects for ordinary human investigation. The Bible is a part of human literature as well as the record of Divine revelation. As such God has given it to us, and so He has

laid upon us the duty, and given us the right, to examine it as literature, and to determine all its human and literary characteristics by the same methods of research as are applied to the analysis of other ancient books.

4. While the Bible is human literature, it is the record of Divine revelation, and it is part of the doctrine of Scripture held by Prof. Robertson Smith in common with the Reformers, that God has taken special care that the literature has been preserved in order to be a suitable record of the Divine Revelation. Accordingly the Westminster Confession declares that the record of God's revealed Word has been framed and preserved in a special way, and under "the singular care and providence of God," lest any age of His Church should be left without a full and unmistakable declaration of His saving will. As a result of this singular care and providence His Word has been so preserved that God still speaks to us as clearly as He spake by the apostles and prophets, and the Scripture is such a correct and adequate record that the Holy Spirit accompanies the Word as it is brought to us in the Scriptures, and assures us that in these Scriptures God still speaks to us. It is to be remembered also that the Reformed Confessions do not speak as if this singular care and providence of God were exercised for a certain time, say until the original written record was finished, and then ceased. It is still at work: for its purpose is, in the words of the Westminster Confession, to keep the record "pure *in all ages*, and therefore authentic."<sup>1</sup> Scripture is not the record of a Word which was once perfect for God's purpose, but which may have been corrupted in transmission. It is the record of a Word which still speaks with infallible truth and personal authority to us, and will do so to believers while the world lasts. The record of revelation was so framed and has been so preserved as

<sup>1</sup> Chap. i., § 8

to include everything necessary to enable us to understand the declaration of God's will in its historical context and historical manifestation, and the value of the whole Bible lies in the fact that directly or indirectly every part serves to convey to us an infallible declaration of the saving will of God. The perfect adaptation of the Bible to this end may be, and in matter of fact is, quite unaffected by the fact that the text as we now have it contains some marks of human imperfection, some verbal and historical errors.<sup>1</sup> God has not withheld from this imperfect letter the witness of His Spirit in the heart of the believer, commending it as His own infallible declaration of redeeming love, as His own perfect rule of faith and life, and we must be careful not to assume that because God has given us a Bible, perfect for His own divine purpose, the letter of Scripture must therefore have all such minor perfection as we in our frailty suppose needful. In all such matters "it is plain that the only honest and reverent way of dealing with the letter of Scripture is to allow it to speak for itself. We have it as a fact that in laying His Word before us as He does this day—for the Bible, as we have it, is a gift direct from God to us, and not a mere inheritance from the earlier Church—God has employed a series of human agencies, and in the use of these agencies has not excluded every human imperfection. If we are to have a trustworthy revelation at all, it is necessary that the one record of revelation which God has given us be such that we can feel sure that it tells us all we need to know of God and His will, and that it tells us this with unvarying and infallible truth, not mingling God's message with doctrines of man. So much is witnessed in our hearts by God's own Spirit. . . . Everything more than this is a question of the letter, and not of the Spirit, a question of

<sup>1</sup> It may be observed that I am not discussing the modern question of "inerrancy," an interesting enough subject of speculative enquiry, but which to my mind has no *practical* connection with the reformed doctrine of Scripture.

the human agency employed, and not of the Divine truth conveyed.”<sup>1</sup>

Such was the doctrine of Holy Scripture formulated and held by Prof. Robertson Smith, and which was in all essential parts that stated by Calvin and the other great leaders of the Reformation period. I have endeavoured to state it in his own words, and those who are familiar with his writings will recognise familiar words or phrases of his in almost every sentence.

It now remains to point out briefly how this doctrine of Scripture differs from the common Broad Church view, and from what has been called the doctrine of the Princeton School.

The Broad Church theologians, doubtless under the influence of the earlier evangelical school of the Church of England, a school eminent for its saintly piety, but not conspicuous for its acquaintance with theology and its history, took for granted that the use of Scripture was to give clear views of truth, rather than to give fellowship with a self-revealing God. For it is curious how the majority of the evangelicals, notwithstanding their sturdy abhorrence of popery, really held what was essentially the mediæval as opposed to the Reformation idea of Scripture. The Bible was for them a storehouse of infallible truths about God and His salvation, a revealer of doctrines and rules for conduct. They used typology in much the same way as the mediæval theologians employed the fourfold sense, to extract doctrinal truths from unlikely sources, such as the description of the temple and its furniture. The great Reformation thought of the witness of the Spirit was either ignored, or thrust into a very subordinate place. Their Broad Church successors, all trained in this school, feel the insuperable difficulties of the position. Starting from the idea that the essential function of Scripture was

<sup>1</sup> *Answer to the Form of Libel*, p. 30.

not to give fellowship with God, but to communicate truths about God and given by God, they saw that there was much in the Bible that could scarcely be so described. They accordingly laid hold on the genuine distinction between the Word of God and Scripture, or the Bible, the record of the Word, and making an illegitimate use of the old phrase that the Scriptures contained the Word of God, they purposed a sharp distinction between the Word of God and the Scriptures which contained it. This enabled them to say that those parts of Scripture which did not appear to them to give divine utterances, although in Scripture, were not the Word of God, and this led to the general conclusion that part of the Scripture was and part was not the Word of God. It was apparently thought easy to divide the various portions of the Bible into the two flocks of sheep and goats, and it was left very much to each reader to make the division for himself. The view is totally different from that held by Prof. Robertson Smith. Let me quote his own words: "Some modern writers have twisted the old Calvinist expression (*the Word of God is contained in the Bible*) in a new sense. People now say that Scripture *contains* God's Word when they mean that part of the Bible is the Word of God, and another part is the word of man. That is not the doctrine of our churches, which hold that the substance of *all* Scripture is God's Word. What is not part of the record of God's Word, is no part of Scripture."<sup>1</sup> Besides, this school has never grasped the idea of the witness of the Spirit, and the relation of this witness to the attributes of infallibility and authoritativeness.

The divergence of the views of what have been termed the Princeton School from the doctrine of Scripture, stated in this article, require much more careful exposition, and I fear that it is not possible to put the case very clearly in the brief space that remains to me.

<sup>1</sup> *Answer to the Form of Libel*, p. 24, note.

The divergence really begins, as I have already said, in the effect of the distinction drawn between the Word of God and the Bible, or Scripture, which is the record conveying that Word to us. Many of the later seventeenth century divines, both Lutheran and Calvinist, insisted on reading the copula *is* in the sentence: *the Scripture is the Word of God*, as if it expressed absolute identity of subject and predicate. They rejected all more precise expressions such as *contains*, or *presents*, or *conveys*. In their view there was no difference whatever between the Word of God and Scripture, except perhaps that the former was unwritten, while the latter was written. This idea completely obliterated the distinction between the substance of Scripture, or the Word of God, and the letter of Scripture, or the record which conveyed that word to us; and in so doing it transferred the attributes of infallibility from the substance to the letter. This transference of interest from the Word of God to the record of the word, perhaps unconsciously, but nevertheless really, diminished the religious element in the doctrine of Scripture. No space was left for the over-mastering spiritual self-manifestation of God drawing near to man in Scripture, and there is no need to dwell upon the thought that faith is required to grasp this great supernatural reality, and that faith itself must be enlightened by the witness of the Spirit, which at once reveals and guarantees the infallibility and authoritativeness of the manifestation. These attributes of the divine Word are transferred from the sphere of faith and of the witness of the Spirit to which they really belong, to the sphere of the letter or literary record of Scripture. Accordingly it was customary to prove the perfection, authoritativeness and infallibility of Scripture, not by reference to the witness of the Spirit, but by bringing forward a whole variety of minor perfections said to belong to the letter of Scripture, and all witnessing to its divine attributes. The doctrine of the



witness of the Spirit which is placed in the fore part of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture and which occupies such a large place in every confession of the Reformed Church, is either left out entirely or relegated to a very subordinate place. In more modern writers the transference referred to has had the curious result of almost banishing a doctrine of Scripture from many treatises on dogmatic, and substituting in its place a doctrine of inspiration, which becomes an explanation of how a literary record can in itself, and not because it conveys the Word of God, become perfect, infallible, and authoritative. But to trace and to explain the many divergences between the doctrine of the Reformers and of Prof. Robertson Smith, and what is commonly called the doctrine of the Princeton School, would require an article by itself. Perhaps what has been said may indicate the lines on which that article would run.

THOMAS M. LINDSAY.

#### ON THE MEANING OF ΠΡΟΣΗΛΥΤΟΣ IN THE SEPTUAGINT.

IT seems to be a generally received opinion that the Greek word *προσήλυτος* has a twofold signification. The lexicons are uniformly in agreement upon this point. Thus Thayer: "*προσήλυτος*. 1. A new-comer, a stranger, alien (Schol. ad Apoll. Rhod., i. 834; LXX. often for ἑβραῖος). 2. A proselyte"—and to the same effect Schleusner (who quotes in support of the first meaning *Lex Cyrilli*, MS. Bremen, *προσήλυτος*, ἑβραῖος, πάροικος, ξένος; and Hesychius, *προσήλυτος*, πάροικος, ἀλλοεθνής); Sophocles (who for the same meaning refers to some LXX. passages and to Philo. i. 160, 42; ii. 219, 27), the *Thesaurus Linguae Græcæ* ab Hene. Stephano Constructus (which refers to Hesychius,