

## PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

### THE HISTORICAL BASIS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

REPLY BY DR. ROBSON, ABERDEEN, TO MR. ROBERTSON SMITH.

The opening lecture of the Young Men's Christian Institute, Aberdeen, has this year been delivered by the Rev. Dr. Robson. At the outset of his address Dr. Robson remarked:—Though not ecclesiastically connected with the Church which has deprived Professor Robertson Smith of his chair, yet, realising the solidarity of Scotch Presbyterianism, I regret a decision which seems to restrict discussion on points left open in our Standards. What should have been met by argument has been met by repression. If I frankly discuss Mr. Smith's theories, it is in the same spirit as I would have done, and done with more pleasure, if he had been still a professor in the Free or United Presbyterian Church. But I believe I am at one with the great majority of those who defended Professor Smith's ecclesiastical position in disagreeing with his critical conclusions, and it is important that we should show that we have other reasons for doing so than mere tradition or Church authority. Mr. Robertson Smith has given a popular explanation of his position and reasons for holding it in his lectures on "The Old Testament in the Jewish Church." With much in that book I cordially concur, much I heartily admire. But on the question of the authorship of the laws of the Pentateuch, I decidedly join issue with him. His position, broadly stated, is that Ex. xxiv. is the original Mosaic code; that Deuteronomy, with its one sanctuary and Levitic priesthood, belongs to the close of the Jewish monarchy; and that the middle books of the Pentateuch, with their tabernacles and sharp distinctions between Aaronic priests and other Levites, while containing many old laws, yet belong to the exile or subsequent period. In opposition to this, I maintain the strictly biblical position that all in the Pentateuch which professes to be from Moses is substantially from him. The two points to which Dr. Robson mainly confined himself were—the one sanctuary and Levitic priesthood. He examined Mr. Robertson Smith's philological and historical arguments, traced the historical developments within the Pentateuch and after the time of Moses, and then proceeded Mosaism never triumphed in the kingdom of Israel over its more ancient rival, nor did it triumph completely in Judah till the reign of Josiah. His reforms are so directly associated with the finding of the book of the law in the Temple that the general view of the new school is that the book was written about the time it was found, and that it was the Book of Deuteronomy. Attempts have been made to fix its author, but each of these when tested fails. Mr. Robertson Smith does not attempt to assign the authorship to any one. He says—"It was of no consequence to Josiah—it is of equally little consequence to us—to know the exact date and authorship of the book. Its prophetic doctrine and the practical character of the scheme which it set forth were enough to commend it." We have no reason to suppose that Hilkiah and Josiah took it for anything else than the law of Moses. I have given reasons for believing that it was given by him. There are strong reasons against the latter date. The book contemplates a state of things that had wholly passed away in Manasseh's time. It looks to Northern Palestine rather than to Judah, and speaks of the renewal of the Covenant at Shechem. It is hard to conceive that a writer in Judah should have given this honour to the centre of the great schism; or that if, as some maintain, the book was written by an inhabitant of the northern kingdom, it should have found its way to the Temple at Jerusalem. It contains "prophetic doctrine," but doctrine without spirit is not likely to be of much avail. If we consider the discourses of Deuteronomy to have been uttered by Moses before his death, they have all the true ring of prophecy. But if we consider them the production of the seventh century, nothing could be more unlike the spirit of contemporary prophets. They spoke in the name of the Lord; the author of this book shelters himself under the name of Moses. They were ready to endure any amount of suffering and persecution as a testimony of their message; the author of this book strikes a blow in the dark, so that he can neither be recognized as the speaker nor called to account for

his words. Anything more antagonistic to the whole spirit of prophecy—to the spirit which animated such men as Jeremiah and Ezekiel—it would be impossible to imagine. It is contrary to all experience to suppose that a book so conceived and so produced should have had the effect which Deuteronomy had. It came as a resurrection of a word of the past, and it had its effect because it was what it professed to be. The reform under Josiah finally delivered Mosaism from Patriarchism, but it did not terminate the conflict between it and heathenism. The destruction of the first Temple and the captivity of Babylon were needful to deliver the Jews from this evil. When the return took place, and the worship of the second Temple was established under Ezra, it was freed from all trace of idolatry, and so continued. Mosaism finally and definitely triumphed. But it was already an anomaly. It was utterly unsuited for the nation in its new position, and that is sufficient to dispose of the hypothesis that the system was the outcome of this age. The latter chapters of Ezekiel are spoken of as the programme according to which Ezra worked in arranging the Levitical law. It is very evident that these chapters are a vision that was never meant to be realized, and that never possibly could have been realized. They are valuable as gathering out of the past the elements that were essential to true Mosaic worship, and presenting them in an idealized form. But when we pass from Ezekiel to the middle books of the Pentateuch, instead of further development, we find ourselves thrown centuries back, both in religious and national conditions. Mosaism had during its history developed especially in two crises. With the destruction of the sanctuary at Shiloh the tabernacle had disappeared; with the destruction of the first Temple at Jerusalem the ark had disappeared. Through the agony of these crises it had advanced to the more spiritual and direct worship of the second Temple. But in the Pentateuch we find ourselves back to the "beggary elements" from which it had been delivered—the ark and its sanctuary. Dr. Robson examined next the contention of the defenders of the new theory, that the present description of the tabernacle is an artistic adaptation of the Temple to the situation in the wilderness, obtained by the ready method of halving the dimensions of the Temple. Such a proposition, he remarked, is about as difficult to disprove as it is to prove our own existence. Yet, from the manner in which the dimensions are given, we can find evidence that the builder of the first Temple had seen or preserved the tradition of the tabernacle—that the tabernacle, and not the Temple, was the original conception. In concluding, the lecturer said:—I can conceive the use of legal fictions to establish laws which are practicable, not laws which are wholly impracticable. So, too, we find that the Mosaic system, taken as a whole, was entirely unsuited to the new state of things. The rule requiring all the males to appear before the Lord three times in the year could have been easily carried out in the wilderness, was practicable up to the close of the Jewish monarchy, but was quite impracticable, and never was put into practice, after the return from the captivity. We can conceive statesmen adhering as far as possible to laws that were old, which claimed reverence on this account, however ill adapted they were to the new circumstances; but we can hardly conceive sane men enacting laws which they knew the greater part of the nation could not conform to. These are considerations derived from human experience and human intelligence. If we bring in the question of revelation they will be greatly strengthened. If it be true, as Mr. Smith says (p. 238), that "the characteristic mark of each dispensation of revealed religion lies in the provision which it makes for the acceptable approach of the worshipper to his God," what are we to think of a theory which represents the Levitical dispensation as having been revealed, not in the wilderness, when it did make ample provision for all, nor while the nation lived in Palestine, when it could be adapted to all, but at the return from the exile, when it made provision for the acceptable worship of only the few who returned, and practically unchurched the whole of the greater Jewish nation throughout the world? I have thus brought before you a few of the outstanding features of the present discussion. No one can be more conscious than myself how imperfectly they have been presented, and what a vast number remain to be dealt with, but I trust I have said enough to show you that

if we reject the conclusions of the new criticism it is not from refusal to consider them, nor because we consider them incompatible with a belief in inspiration, but because we believe that broad considerations of ordinary evidence and common sense lead to the conclusion that the old view of the Old Testament history—that which rests on a literal acceptance of the books themselves—is the true one.

### TOTAL ABSTINENCE.

From what? From sin. To this Scripture exhorts us. "Abstain from all appearance of evil." But to abstain only from what appears to be evil cannot amount to radical or extensive reformation. In the Revised New Testament this passage is rendered: "Abstain from every form of evil." With this rendering Dean Alford agrees. In his critical comment upon this passage he says: "The Greek word never signifies 'appearance' in this sense. . . . The Greek word means the species as subordinated to the genus."—Abstain from every species (or form) of evil.

It is not enough to abstain from sin in the general; it must be avoided in the particulars; not in the genus only, but also in the species; not alone as a whole, but also as to all forms and kinds of evil. If a man should make a specialty of shunning one form or phase of sin, and yet at the same time he should practise others, his partial abstinence could not make nor prove him complete nor exemplary as a Christian. He must have respect to all God's commandments. If he keep all the law besides, and yet offends in one thing, his one offence makes him as really guilty as though he had broken every precept. The abstinence must be total. "Come out and be separate," is God's command. "Touch not the unclean thing," is the sole condition of full acceptance and recognition as God's sons.

Whatever is contrary to the principles and practice of Christianity is evil, and it must be avoided. Such contrariety is evil in two ways, viz., to the guilty delinquent himself and to those who observe his conduct. Christians are to "let their light so shine before men that they may see their good works, and glorify God." They are to "walk worthy of God as dear children," and the caution addressed to them is: "Let not your good be evil spoken of." Some of the more common forms of evil relate to the spirit and words and conduct of Christians. Anger and malice, envy and hatred, are sinful. They are contrary to the spirit of love and forgiveness taught in the Gospel. Their effect on the person indulging them is deadly: for hatred is murder, and envy is the rottenness of the bones; and wherever displayed, such unholy tempers are injurious upon observers. Idle, unchaste, slanderous, profane words are evil. Some professed Christians use one or all of them at times. Conversation should be chaste, sincere, grave, simple, truthful; in opposition to that which is lascivious, trifling, merely complimentary and intemperate. "Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay, for whatsoever is more than this cometh of evil."

Neglect of God's house and its ordinances is wrong. When it results from indifference or inattention it is culpable; but when from love of ease or of the world, or from aversion to God's service, it is far worse. Worldly conformity falls into this category; so, also, does want of strict honesty or probity. A Christian whose integrity is doubted by those who know him, is but a sorry specimen. Christianity does but little for a person if it does not make him strictly honest in all lines and in all relations.

The total abstinence from sin should result from intense hatred of it. It should shun all occasions. It should be induced by a close and spiritual walk with God, and by the prevalence of all Christian graces in the soul. It should consist with close sympathy and fellowship with all God's people; and pre-eminently, it should follow a careful attention to what God's word teaches of privilege and duty. This abstinence is commanded by the Lord. This covers all the ground. Our safety, our usefulness and our religious growth are seriously involved in making this abstinence total and perpetual.

### MORAL COURAGE.

How rare it is! And yet how important! It invests character with a charm which none can fail to admire. When Eudoxia, the Empress, threatened Chrysostom, he said—"Go, tell her I fear nothing but sin." When Valerius, the Arian Emperor, sent Basil