

only broken-winged Peris at the best ; and the F. F.'s do not consort with anything but Peris who can fly straight. So they cut themselves off a pleasant association—in the first days the young exclusive turns her back on the pretty exile—and she only repents when it is too late. Perhaps they relent in favour of the clergyman who sits near them. The cloth is respectable, the man is prepossessing, the circumstance safe. But if they thaw toward him, they keep a "stiff upper lip" to his married brother in the Church—women being, to the lady F. F.'s, inadmissible, where good looking single men may be countenanced. And so the thing goes ; and the philosopher can only stand by with a smile, that means substantially a sigh, as he sees how men and women wreck themselves on the sands for nothing, and how love and humanity get lost in the foolish waves of pride and exclusiveness which beat upon the lines of social ordering, and reduce what might be such a fine and fertile shore to barrenness and desert loneliness.

RELIGIOUS THOUGHT IN SCOTLAND.

III.—THE FREE CHURCH: PROF. ROBERTSON SMITH.

Much more important has been the liberal movement in the Free Church of Scotland, as shewn in the case of Professor Robertson Smith of Aberdeen. This *cause célèbre* arose out of certain contributions by Professor Smith to the new edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* in course of publication, especially an article on the *Bible* in the third volume of that work. And notwithstanding the decision of the last General Assembly in favour of Professor Smith, it seems as far as ever from any satisfactory solution. With the appearance of the last volume of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* containing his article on "Hebrew Language and Literature" the whole case has been reopened, and the last word in connection with it is still a long way off.

What precisely is Professor Smith's position ; what are the real issues between him and his church ?

A critic's attitude towards sacred literature is determined by that which he assumes towards the religion of which it is the literary expression. The point of view, therefore, from which Professor Smith regards the Hebrew Bible is conditioned by the conception he has formed of the religious ideas and system it embodies. Hence he begins his famous Bible article with a sketch of the rise and development of Old Testament religion, indicating the main stages in its growth, and the various streams of influence by which its course was modified. Old Testament religion, according to Professor Smith, divides itself into two periods—an era of ever increasing productivity, from Moses to Ezra ; followed by a period of spiritual stagnation and conservative tradition, onwards to its close. The productive period was one of constant struggle between the "spiritual principles of the religion of revelation" and a popular polytheistic nature worship, combined with an unspiritual conception of Jehovah as a merely tribal God. Old Testament religion was not a revelation given once for all. It represented the gradual growth of higher and more spiritual ideas in the face of a degraded faith and worship. Its chief ministers were the prophets, who worked out the spiritual problems of the national faith with ever increasing clearness. They have been falsely regarded only as inspired teachers of old truths and predictors of events, and not as the leaders of a "great development in which the religious ordinances and beliefs of the old covenant grew from a relatively crude to a mature form." Falsely ; because there is no such finality in the doctrine and ritual of the Old Testament. The spiritual religion of the prophets was not a finished but a growing system, not finally embodied "in authoritative documents, but propagated mainly by direct personal efforts." With the fall of the northern kingdom, however, the era of productivity in spiritual religion ceased. Ezra came not like the older prophets, with living words of truth, fresh and glowing with the fire of prophetic inspiration. He appealed to the "Book of the law of Moses," the public recognition of which as the rule of the theocracy, was a declaration that religious ordinances had ceased to develop, and the substitution of a canon of scripture for the living guidance of the prophetic voice.

The Old Testament, therefore, necessarily arose when prophecy ceased to be a living power in the national life. In its present form, however, according to Professor Smith, it belongs to a comparatively late period of Jewish history. The historical portion of the Old Testament—the Pentateuch and Earlier Prophets—is not a narrative continued from age to age by successive writers, each taking up the story where his predecessor left it. It is impossible to construct a theory of authorship on the principle of division into books ; the whole represents a fusion of several independent narratives by a single editor. Modern criticism, moreover, according to Professor Smith, has accomplished the task of disentangling some of these component parts. The three streams of influence observable in the development of Old Testament religion—the Priestly, the Prophetic, and the Popular—find their counterparts in the historical records. The use of two different names of God—Elohim and Jehovah—indicating a difference of whole mental attitude, affords a criterion by which two separate, independent documents can be disentangled, the one priestly, the other prophetic, in tendency and authorship ; and, from the genius, style, and

sympathies of another well marked literary individuality, an author from the northern kingdom has been postulated for a third document.

As to this composite character of the narrative, there is, according to Professor Smith, tolerable agreement among critics. The Levitical or Elohist document, however, he remarks, is the subject of violent controversy in regard to the chronological relations between Deuteronomy and the Levitical code. Professor Smith does not pronounce dogmatically upon the points at issue, although the side to which he leans is evident. In regard to Deuteronomy, he holds that it is difficult to suppose the legislative part of it as old as Moses. Indeed, he says, "it may fairly be made a question whether Moses left in writing any other laws than the commandments on the tables of stone." Deuteronomy, he thinks, cannot be placed at the beginning of the theocratic development "without making the whole history unintelligible." It is therefore, he concludes, certainly a *prophetic* legislative programme, the author, whoever he was, not being guilty of a pious fraud in ascribing it to Moses, since his purpose was to develop the old Mosaic principles in relation to new times and circumstances.

The fusion of the various narratives by a single editor was easily accomplished, since the Semitic genius tended to stratification rather than organic structure. The process was facilitated by the prevailing habit of anonymous writing, and the want of any idea of copyright. The copyist worked according to his own sweet will among the documents at his disposal, extracting here and there at pleasure, and harmonising them "by such addition or modification as he felt necessary." Little harmony was sought in matters of internal detail. It was enough if the compilation bore the semblance of outward unity. "Thus the minor narratives were fused one after another and at length in exile a final redactor completed the great work."

The whole of the Old Testament is regarded by Professor Smith from a similar point of view. The Hebrew character being intensely subjective, its poetry is lyrical. Hence the Psalmody, of which the greater number of the Psalms comprising it are anonymous, the traditions as to authorship indicated in their titles being unreliable. The 51st, or Penitential Psalm, so confidently ascribed to David by tradition, was "obviously composed during the desolation of the temple." The Song of Solomon embodies in dramatic form the pure love of the Shulamite for her betrothed as victorious over the seductions of Solomon and his harem. Difficulties as to Jonah and the whale disappear before the magic wand of criticism. Like *Esther* and *Job*, the book of *Jonah* is more than probably, according to Professor Smith, a "poetical invention of incidents attached for didactic purposes to a name apparently derived from old tradition." On the same authority we learn that the remains of prophetic literature, dating partly from the 8th and 7th centuries B.C., were edited so late as the 2nd century. By this time many had been lost ; some were only fragmentary ; others were anonymous. The whole, however, was then arranged into the modern form of four different books. It is not safe, therefore, to assume that every *anonymous* prophecy is by the author of the immediately preceding *titled* prophecy. Nor is it, according to Professor Smith, a valid answer to reply that internal evidence of date is altogether inapplicable since the prophets looked supernaturally into the future. The prophets all start from present sin, present needs, and historical situations. There is no reason to think a prophet ever "received a revelation not spoken directly and pointedly to his own time." The predictive element in prophecy consists not in minute descriptions of future events, but in its "laying hold of the ideal elements of the theocratic conception and depicting the way in which it would be realised in a Messianic age."

The standpoint of Professor Smith is the modern scientific one. His presentation of the rise and development of Old Testament religion is substantially similar to that of the religions of the East, for example, at the hands of oriental scholars. He no doubt claims for the Hebrew prophets, at least, that they were inspired men. But in what sense inspired ? He speaks of them as having a "faculty of spiritual intuition not gained by human reason, but coming as a word from God, wherein they apprehended religious truth in a new light as bearing in a way not manifest to other men on the practical necessities, the burning questions of the present." He refers to the fact that in spite of the crass and unspiritual character of the masses of the Israelites, the noblest traditions of their national life were intertwined with religious convictions, and, he adds, "the way in which Amos, *e.g.*, could arise, untrained, from the herdmen of the wilderness of Judah, shows how deep and pure a spiritual faith flowed among the thoughtful laity." This may indicate inspiration, but it is not of the objective, supernatural kind, hitherto claimed by orthodoxy for the writers of the Old Testament. His whole treatment of the Old Testament is precisely similar to that applied by literary critics to the Homeric Poems of Greece, the Vedic Hymns of India, and the sacred literatures of other nations ; and it is attended by similar results.

So much for Professor Smith's position : how is it related to the Church's creed ? If the Westminster Confession is so far dogmatically silent on the point, Professor Smith's attitude towards Old Testament religion is at least foreign to its spirit. Considering the mental structure of the time, such a standpoint as he occupies was impossible to the framers of the Confession.