

“SMITH O’ AIBERDEEN”

“A feckless crew, no worth a preen,
As bad as Smith o’ Aiberdeen.”

R. L. STEVENSON.

“And whan we chastened him therefore,
Thou kens how he bred sic a splore
As set the warld in a roar
O’ laughing at us ;
Curse thou his basket and his store,
Kail and potatoes !”

BURNS.

THE greatest British scholar—“the cleverest man in Great Britain”, according to Wellhausen—and greatest Scotsman of his generation died in 1894. Eighteen years elapsed before his biographers could complete their task. The delay, as they observe, had the advantage of enabling them to present their subject in an historical perspective that would not have been possible while the emotions and animosities with which Robertson Smith’s name had been associated in his lifetime were still active and painful. That is true in the sense that old passions have long since burned out, but it is still impossible for any Scottish writer to approach the subject without a degree of feeling that his pen—if a truthful one—must betray. For, from the Scottish point of view, Robertson Smith remains and will remain

an extremely discomforting memory, calling up more humiliating reflections than are consistent with moderation and decency of language. If Smith had simply been scandalously and wickedly served by his fellow-churchmen, it would neither be so bad nor so difficult to explain. His penitent fellow-churchmen would have the perennial comfort of sackcloth and ashes, and all would be well. Sins do not worry the sinner overmuch. A grown man, if he be in good health, will break every Commandment (except possibly the Sixth) and sleep and eat none the worse. What poisons his soul at bed and board, and even drives him to suicide, is humiliation—the memory ever nagging at him of some imbecile act which no repentance can wipe out, no impulse excuse. So with Robertson Smith and the Free Church of Scotland. He was not burned at the stake: he was not cast out of the synagogues: he was merely obliged to leave a chair in which his gifts were wasted and to exchange Aberdeen for Cambridge. Few heretics have fared better. But the Free Church got no comfort from a moderation that put it in a false and ridiculous position in the eyes of the whole world. It made a half-hearted sacrifice of Smith to pacify a vindictive minority. It maintained no principle. It proclaimed nothing but its own pusillanimity, laid down nothing but its own dignity. In retrospect the course of action that seemed at the time so prudent and statesmanlike appeared

in its true character of a piece of unredeemed silliness for which repentance was vain and atonement impossible. No wonder, then, that Scotsmen still feel a certain nausea of spirit when the Robertson Smith case is recalled. Even the Established Church, which was not directly concerned, does not care for the subject, for there is the awkward fact that certain fathers and brethren of the Establishment, animated by a Christian zeal to discredit the rival institution, exploited the "heresies" of the Free Church professor for all they were worth.

The Robertson Smith case was the last, the most dramatic and the most impressive of the three great battles between traditional and modernist theology, the others being the *Essays and Reviews* controversy and the proceedings against Bishop Colenso. In the earlier engagements the heretics had reconnoitred the ground well before offering battle, and the big battalions of orthodoxy, chagrined and discomfited, left the field to the jeering strains of Psalm cxxiv., chanted by the rebels from the security of a Privy Council judgment. It was with exultation, therefore, that the orthodox throughout the United Kingdom learned that the next battle was to be fought in Scotland. "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills," they cried, "whence cometh my safety." For in Scotland there was no Privy Council to shield heretics from the wrath of the righteous, and the Scots, above all

people, could be depended upon to deal faithfully with anyone who laid an unhallowed hand on the Ark of God. In order to see exactly what ground orthodoxy had for its confidence, it is necessary to understand something of the constitution and history of the Church to which Robertson Smith belonged and its temper and situation in the ’seventies.

I

Scottish Presbyterianism, unlike English non-conformity, dates from the Reformation, and no less than the Church of England, though on different grounds, affirms its continuity with the historic Church catholic. But whereas in England the breach with Rome was first and foremost a political act—the consummation of the policy of reducing all jurisdictions into the possession of the Crown—in Scotland it was an extension of the Continental Reformation to which the Crown was bitterly hostile. The Kirk thus began its career in an attitude of antagonism to the State, which later events served only to intensify and render permanent. The curious result followed that a Church which rejected with peculiar violence the faith and obedience of Rome was obliged in self-defence to retain Rome’s ecclesiastical philosophy and to reaffirm it with ever-increasing vehemence. The doctrines of Hildebrand were adopted without scruple and, embodied in such resounding catchwords as “non-intrusion”,

“spiritual independence” and “the Crown Rights of the Redeemer”, were enjoined to be believed on peril of perdition.

On such a view, of course, a Church Establishment was possible only on the basis of a concordat, and a concordat was at last reached in the Revolution Settlement of 1690. It did not fulfil the Scottish ideal of a Church and State bargain, which was that the Church should get all the benefit while the State shouldered all the burden ; but it was a much better bargain than any Protestant church had a right to expect. The fact that an intransigent minority refused to be included in it was all in its favour, and if it had been left well alone the problem of the Scottish church would have been solved for ever. Unfortunately, soon after the Union, the united Parliament of Great Britain re-introduced lay patronage in Scotland. Friction ensued, and before long there were two serious secessions from the Establishment. But the Establishment, now basking in the serene light of the eighteenth century, was unperturbed and presently was able to observe with amusement the spectacle of the zeal of the dissenting brethren expending itself in internal quarrels and mutual excommunications. The nineteenth century brought this placid temper to an end. “Moderatism” fell into a decline, the Evangelical party gained control of the General Assembly, and the claims of the ecclesiastical power were revived in the

most extreme form. In 1838 a bold attempt was made to abolish lay patronage by the legislative authority of the Church, but was frustrated by an appeal to the civil courts on the part of the aggrieved patrons. A long and embittered struggle followed, in which the Kirk did not improve its position by unfrocking those ministers who chose to obey the law as laid down by the civil courts. The Government was hotly pressed to redress the “grievances” of the Kirk, but Peel was not the man to yield to ecclesiastical arrogance, and said plainly that he was not going to ask Parliament to grant the Church of Scotland an authority that it had denied to the Pope of Rome. There being no help for it, the Kirk as a whole was disposed to accept the situation and hope for better things. But the “non-intrusion” party, numbering about a third of the ministry and a like proportion of the laity, was irreconcilable. It seceded from the Establishment, proclaimed itself the “Church of Scotland Free” and proceeded to duplicate the organisation of the Established Church in every parish. This was the Disruption of 1843, which has been so praised and magnified that in many Scottish minds it ranks as the most important event in the history of Christianity since the Day of Pentecost. The only comment that need be made here is that the leaders of the Disruption were men of courage, energy and parts, but were neither as wise as serpents nor as harmless as doves.

In spite of its apparent unity the Disruption was far from being a homogeneous movement. It contained a diversity of motive, temper and direction that later embarrassed the policy of the Free Church. Head and shoulders above all the other Disruptionists was Thomas Chalmers, a man of teeming brain, furious energy and imperious moody temper. To a capacity for organisation that amounted to genius he added the dangerous gift of an eloquence that in an age of eloquence was regarded as incomparable. He was admittedly the most brilliant figure in the Church of Scotland. He had played an active but by no means dominant part in the 'Ten Years' Conflict, and his sudden appearance on the eve of the final crisis as leader of the non-intrusion party has always been something of a mystery. He was far too able and politic a man to go into the wilderness for the sake of an abstraction. He was not deeply religious, if indeed he was religious at all. By nature a sceptic, he found the passion of his life in natural science and economics. While still a young man he had made his name as a bold and original economic thinker, and he had had the vision to foresee the economic and social dangers of the industrial revolution. It may be said without injustice, therefore, that Chalmers cared little about the freedom of the Kirk *per se*, but cared a great deal about having an organisation that he could direct according to his own will and make the instrument of his

ambitious projects for dealing with the problems of industrial poverty. He duly fashioned the instrument but died before he could use it. His social programme died with him. One good thing he did achieve that was maintained—the raising of the standard of professional education for the ministry. This had important results.

Chalmers’ lieutenants were more or less inspired by his ideals, but there was a darker element in the enthusiasm of the Disruption that could not be disregarded—an element of blind and malignant reaction. There were men like John Kennedy of Dingwall and James Begg, who left the Establishment quivering with passion at the State’s recalcitrance and animated by nothing but the hope of a Canossa. They looked forward sincerely and confidently to a new Establishment in which the civil power would be the obedient servant of the Church for the enforcement of the most rigorous Calvinism; and anything that threatened the realisation of their ideal had their bitterest opposition. These men were not loved, but they were heartily feared, and at any crisis they could always rally timid and conventional orthodoxy to their side.

But the most difficult problem of the Disruption leaders was the heterogeneous character of their general following. There was no parish in Scotland in which the Free Church failed to find recruits, but its particular strength was drawn from the industrial areas and the High-

lands. The former were of prime importance, in fact it was their support that made the Disruption practical politics. With all respect for the ministers who "came out" in 1843 it is permissible to suggest that their exodus has been painted in colours unduly heroic. Certain initial sacrifices were inevitable. Some temporary inconvenience and even risk of privation had to be reckoned with ; but on the whole it cannot be said that the seceding ministers suffered much financial loss or ever supposed that they would. Chalmers, an adept financier, had carefully examined his resources beforehand, and he was satisfied that he could carry with him the bulk of the new industrial and mercantile plutocracy and could dip his hand deep enough into their bulging pockets to make good the loss of teinds (tithes) and endowments. The result was that within a surprisingly short time the Free Church ministers found themselves installed in churches and manses not much inferior to those they had surrendered and drawing equally good stipends. Naturally, the givers of these good gifts had to be considered. To keep them in humour, to flatter their pride and conciliate their prejudices, was accepted, therefore, as the first rule of sound Free Church economy. For when the golden calf really has brought you out of the land of Egypt it is decent (as well as prudent) to give it worship.

If the Lowland towns were the Free Church's assets, the Highlands were its chief liability and

an exceedingly heavy one. In the Highlands the Disruption was embraced with the enthusiasm which the natives of that part of Scotland had never failed to show for anything that savoured of rebellion against State authority. A poverty-stricken and backward population dispersed over a wide area produced numerous and needy congregations that had to be supported out of Lowland abundance. The Highlanders accepted the bounty in the spirit of caterans levying blackmail. They considered that their piety—which manifested itself chiefly as bigotry and insolence—entitled them to extort all the money they could from the well-to-do who professed regard for pure religion. Although their adherence to the Presbyterian order was comparatively recent, and their whole outlook and religious temper were foreign to the historic Kirk, their zeal for orthodoxy was immense; and the grandsons of the men who, a century earlier, had marched in what every pious Presbyterian regarded as the legions of Antichrist, now had the effrontery to pose as the special guardians of the Ark of the Covenant. In the General Assembly, where their geographical distribution secured them a representation out of all proportion to their numbers, they were vocal and truculent. Any policy that did not accord with their views was met with threats of schism. As schism was a thing to be avoided at all costs, the second article in Free Church economy was to keep the Highlands quiet.

There were, then, three attitudes of mind represented in the Free Church. There was first the great mass of wealthy middle-class religion, which was mainly concerned that its pious fads should be consulted and was even prepared to be tolerant so long as it was not frightened. In the Assembly the representatives of these people formed a sort of "Government" party—that is, within limits they could be manipulated by the clerical junta that ruled the Church. The permanent opposition consisted of the "constitutional" or reactionary party, mainly Highland, but able to count on occasional and substantial assistance in the lobby from the more timid members of the Lowland majority. The third attitude of mind was the tradition of active theological scholarship established by Chalmers. It was embodied in no party, and its very existence as a separate influence was unsuspected until it suddenly emerged with disconcerting force in the early 'seventies.

At that time the constitutionalists were in great feather. For thirty years they had been an army in retreat, but they had stubbornly contested every inch of ground and lately they had won an important rearguard victory. Dr. R. S. Candlish, Chalmers' successor as leader of the Church, wished to bring about a union of all the dissident Presbyterian bodies. In addition to the Free Church there were three of these. By far the most important was the United Presbyterian Church, which represented the two secessions

from the Establishment during the eighteenth century. It drew its main support from the substantial *petite bourgeoisie*. It was a large and flourishing body, and, having no parasitic congregations, paid handsome stipends and always had money in hand. Most Free Church people had no fault to find with the U.P.’s except a smack of vulgarity—deplorable no doubt but not entailing damnation. But the constitutional faction, led by James Begg, detected something much worse—unsoundness of doctrine. Did not the U.P.’s repudiate all civil establishments of religion as unscriptural, and had they not begun to show an alarming weakness for hymns and instrumental music in the public worship of God? Congregations in remote Highland glens learned with horror and indignation that the Free Church was being invited to join itself with a body that actually tolerated an organ in one of its churches, though it had not yet fallen so low as to allow the abomination to be played.¹ From Assembly to Assembly the dust and din of battle filled the air, and ultimately Candlish had to acknowledge defeat. So far as the United Presbyterians were concerned his scheme of union was wrecked for a generation. All that was achieved was the absorption in the Free Church of two minor bodies to whom the constitutionalists took no

¹ The offending instrument had been erected in Claremont Church, Glasgow, as far back as 1856, but its use was interdicted by the U.P. Synod. “Howbeit the high places were not removed”, and after a silence of twenty years the organ was at last heard.

exception, because their tenets were as narrow as their own and they could be trusted to support the good cause.¹ The triumph was complete. The constitutionalists had waited on the Lord and the Lord had renewed their strength.

II

Such was the scene in the year 1876, when the Robertson Smith drama opened. Let us turn to the protagonists.

William Robertson Smith, Professor of Oriental Languages and Old Testament Exegesis at the Free Church College, Aberdeen, was a young man not yet thirty, but even so he had occupied his chair for six years. Theological professorships are the only permanent dignities to which the Scottish minister can aspire and are in consequence much coveted. They enjoy an almost episcopal prestige, and naturally they fall as a rule to men of mature age whose scholarship, or some part of it, has survived the ordeal of long years of pastoral work. Robertson Smith, therefore, was an exception,² and if the Free Church had possessed a tithe of the worldly wisdom which it afterwards so foolishly tried to assume,

¹ The Reformed Presbyterians (or Cameronians) and the Original Secessionists. The former represented the intransigents who refused to accept the Revolution Settlement. The latter were a remnant of the Secession Church who had not entered the United Presbyterian body. Small rumps of both bodies still exist.

² But not an isolated one. T. M. Lindsay (1843-1914), father of the present Master of Balliol, was appointed Professor of Church History at the Glasgow College in 1872. He was Robertson Smith's devoted friend and advocate.

it would never have elected a youth of twenty-three fresh from the schools. But to their credit the majority of the fathers and brethren were compelled by Smith’s extraordinary attainments. Extraordinary, indeed, is the mildest word one can use. It may be the loving exaggeration of a mother that has given “book” as the first word he articulated, but there is no doubt about his amazing precocity. He never went to school, but he had the best of tutors at home in his father, Dr. William Pirie Smith, Free Church minister of Keig, Aberdeenshire, who had been a schoolmaster before the Disruption. When fifteen years of age he went up to Aberdeen University, where he swept all before him. He was Ferguson Scholar in mathematics—a Ferguson Scholarship is the highest distinction the Scottish student can win—but nothing would induce him to go to Cambridge or shake his determination to enter the ministry. This was a disappointment to many of his friends, especially to Tait, who as one of the examiners for the Ferguson Scholarship, had seen in Smith a mathematician and physicist, not merely of distinction but of genius.

Smith later accepted Tait’s invitation to become his assistant at Edinburgh University, a position which he held for two years,¹ and which,

¹ Papers written by Smith while assistant to Tait include one on “Electrical Stream-lines” which Prof. Chrystal has described as a classic, and a brilliant scientific polemic entitled “Hegel and the Metaphysics of the Fluxional Calculus”, which provoked a heavy reply from Dr. Hutchison Stirling.

among other interests, made him acquainted with Robert Louis Stevenson as a pupil who regarded the physical laboratory as a suitable forum for theological discussion. But meanwhile he had begun his theological course at New College, and the mathematician was being eclipsed by the scholar in a manner that left his instructors dumb with astonishment. In 1867 he went to Bonn for the summer semester, dividing his time there between theology and mathematics. In 1867 he was at Göttingen, hearing Lotze and Ritschl and adding the latter, as he afterwards added Wellhausen and Lagarde, to the list of his admiring teachers. There was nothing that he undertook of which he did not immediately become a master. His mind seemed to be the most perfect intellectual machine ever designed by the Almighty for the equipment of a mortal. It absorbed, coordinated, generalised, transmuted and re-created knowledge with incredible swiftness, and every process was informed with the exactitude and candour of the mathematician. It was precisely this mingling in him of the mathematician with the scholar that made Robertson Smith so hard to deal with. The heart of the typical scholar is a nest of doubts. Smith's Edinburgh master in Oriental studies, A. B. Davidson, is a good example. He doubted everything, and then doubted his doubts. Not so the pupil, to whom knowledge was nothing if not dynamic and projective, and facts were interesting mainly as

material for inferences. To say that Robertson Smith had no love of knowledge for its own sake would not be true, but clearly he regarded a knowledge that exhausted itself in the act of knowing as hardly worthy of the name. This habit of looking at everything as an equation to be solved could not fail to create an impression of intellectual arrogance which he aggravated by his virtuoso displays of masterful dialectic and ready wit. His enemies, starting full of confidence—he was such a little fellow, so young and so frail-looking that easy victory seemed certain—presently found themselves, so to speak, reeling back to the ropes under a hail of dialectic blows. It was all very gallant and wonderful, and gained Smith hosts of admirers, but it was not always good policy. In a way his aggressive intellectualism overreached itself. His orthodox adversaries were not men to be easily daunted, and defeat only provoked them to renew the assault with intensified bitterness. They could not now attack him as an impostor, but they could say that he had sold himself to the Devil. They did not put it quite so crudely, of course, though once or twice they came very near it. What they said was that he was far too clever to be good, and everybody knows what a deadly charge that can be. Lest anyone should imagine that there was in it this substance, that Smith’s interests were primarily intellectual and that religion held a secondary place in his life, let it

be remembered that in order to undertake the ministry of the Church he had renounced a career in which his intellectual gifts would have found full satisfaction and certain success. He was in fact a profoundly religious man, and this not in any vague sense, but according to the evangelical faith which he never forsook. It is true that in Germany he had found it necessary to abandon the old standards and adopt those of Ritschl for the justification of his evangelicalism. But that was an intellectual affair, which he never would admit had anything to do with the substance of his religious belief. He was an evangelical; he had been brought up as an evangelical; he would remain an evangelical; and any suggestion, whether by enemy or friend, that he was anything else infuriated him. A curious instance of this occurred when the agitation against him was at its height. Principal Tulloch, an amiable and far-seeing man, wrote an appreciative article on Robertson Smith's work for the *Contemporary Review*. Smith took the first public occasion to make a singularly ungracious reply to the tune of *non tali auxilio*. Why? Because Dr. Tulloch belonged (a) to the Establishment and (b) to the Broad Church group thereof. No, Smith would row in the same galley with Wellhausen, Ritschl and Kuenen, but not with a "Moderate".

Tantaene animis!

So much for the controversial aspects of Robertson Smith. For the rest, he was, as has

been said, a tiny little chap, dark-haired and dark-eyed, of swarthy, almost Oriental complexion, lively and merry as a grig, and a famous judge of wine and tobacco.

Although the reactionaries were for the most part Highlanders, their acknowledged leader was a pure-bred Lowlander of “Cameronian” extraction. James Begg, minister of Newington Free Church, commonly styled “Doctor” in virtue of a degree conferred by the Lafayette College, Penn., in recognition of his adamantine orthodoxy, was born near Airdrie in the bleak uplands of Lanarkshire. The region that extends twenty miles to the east and south of Glasgow is now covered by the West of Scotland coalfield, and its population has been changed by industrial immigration, but Begg belonged to the old native stock, the surliest, coarsest and most fanatical in Scotland. He was typical of the breed, a man of mean intellect and little culture. Some good qualities he had—courage, tenacity, a shrewd business head and a rough clownish humour that enabled his sorely tried obituary writers to describe him as “genial withal”. He also had some pulpit gifts, and was a forceful, though not acute, debater. But he was a truculent and vindictive bully whose influence in the councils of the Church was won and maintained by a system of terrorism and coarse intrigue. His callous contempt for the ordinary decencies was shocking even to those who shared his bigotry.

He had been Moderator in 1865, when he achieved the distinction of being rebuked by the Assembly for profanity in his address from the chair.¹ As a pushful, money-making Lanarkshire farmer Begg would have done well and might have passed for a useful member of society ; but as an ecclesiastic it does not appear that he ever in all his ministry of fifty-odd years devised or did anything but mischief. In the Assembly he had two zealous lieutenants — Dr. John Kennedy of Dingwall, a pulpit saint of great repute in the Highlands, and Dr. Horatius Bonar, whose celebrated hymns breathe a meekness and Christian forbearance that are less noticeable in the reports of his Assembly speeches.

The “leader” of the Church was Robert Rainy, Principal of New College, where he also held the chair of Church History. His lectures, it is said, were apt to be perfunctory ; but no man can attend to everything, and Rainy, who enjoyed that serene indolence of temper that so often marks the statesman, did not bother himself much in trying. He must have known that in any case his students could learn far more

¹ On the motion of Lord Dalhousie (Fox Maule) it was ordered that the offensive passage should be excised from the printed version of the address. But Begg's bigotry did not prevent him from marrying into an Anglican family. His first wife was Maria, daughter of the Rev. Ferdinand Faithfull, rector of Epsom, and sister of Emily Faithfull. Their son, Ferdinand Faithfull Begg (died 1926), was for many years a prominent member of the London Stock Exchange and was Unionist M.P. for the St. Rollox Division of Glasgow, 1895-1900.

ecclesiastical history from his example than from his or anybody else’s precepts. For nobody ever both played and looked the part of the ecclesiastical statesman to greater perfection than Rainy did. He had a noble head with exquisitely clear-cut features that in old age acquired an almost angelic beauty. His demeanour was composed and charming in a degree that is not often found in Scotsmen. Nothing, whether good or evil, ever perturbed him, and no occasion of severity—and he could be severe—ever betrayed him into a trace of passion, though, when necessary, he could always suggest that he felt deeply on the matter in question but preferred to leave it at that. His mind for affairs was like a garden spider’s web, both capacious and subtle, and on the whole justified the claim of his admirers that, man for man, there was little to choose between Rainy and his far cousin Gladstone.¹ The comparison is just, not only on the credit but also on the debit side. Thus Robertson Smith, who had occasion to study Rainy’s manœuvres with painful interest, came to hate him as Parnell in similar circumstances hated Gladstone. He called him a “Jesuit”, which was not fair either to the Society of Jesus or the leader of the Free Church.

¹ To be precise, Rainy was the son of Gladstone’s fourth cousin, Dr. Harry Rainy, Professor of Medical Jurisprudence at Glasgow University. Their common ancestor was a seventeenth-century Highland laird, Gilbert Robertson of Kindeace. Rainy and Gladstone were both of mixed Highland and Lowland descent, but in Rainy the Highlander predominated.

“Casuist” would have been the more appropriate term, for Rainy was Gladstone’s equal in the art of making fine verbal distinctions to which he attached extraordinary, sometimes comic, importance. “Then we omit that?” said somebody once at a committee meeting, referring to a controversial clause in a draft document. “No,” replied the old man, “we shall simply not include it.” There was much truth in the sneer of the hostile newspaper which spoke of “the curious mind of Principal Rainy worming like a corkscrew through material soft enough to be perforated by a chisel thrust”. It is easy to censure his tortuousness, and it was only natural that its occasional victims should be bitter about it, but if he had not been tortuous he would have been unfit for the task imposed upon him, which was to preserve the Free Church in being until the sense of corporate unity should supersede the spirit of controversy in which it took its origin. From the ecclesiastic’s point of view the situation in the ’seventies was extremely anxious. A fatal schism had only been averted by the abandonment of Candlish’s union policy, with the result that the authority of the “direction” of the Church had been badly damaged. It was the first duty of the new leader *cunctando restituere rem*. When the attack on Robertson Smith began Rainy knew little and cared less about the merits of his young Aberdeen colleague’s case: what he did care about was that he should not be

manœuvred into a general engagement with Begg and his dervishes. Dominated by that consideration he failed at the outset to see that Robertson Smith had introduced an entirely new element into the situation, and when he did appreciate the true state of affairs, it was too late. He was already committed to a policy that was bound to end in ineptitude and discredit.

Only two more personal references need be made. According to Free Church practice the leader’s chief of staff was always a Glasgow minister charged with the special duty of keeping Glasgow and the industrial West in order. In 1876 this position was held by Dr. John Adam, minister of Wellpark Free Church, Glasgow, a capable but somewhat domineering man. Lastly, there was the Rev. Sir Henry Wellwood Moncreiff of Tullibole, tenth baronet, Principal Clerk of Assembly. This highly respectable personage enjoyed a great prestige for various reasons. He was one of the small band of the old nobility and gentry that the Free Church had managed to detach from the Establishment. He belonged to a family that had produced a whole dynasty of Scots judges and was himself a perfect master of Scottish ecclesiastical law and procedure. In virtue of his official position he was an influential member of the “direction” of the Church, which was a great source of comfort to the reactionaries, whose principles he shared, however much he might dislike their tactics. Generally he might

be described as a typical "squarson" of the best sort—a narrow-minded, level-headed, honourable man, with a marked antipathy to poachers and heretics.

One of the remarkable things about the outcry against Robertson Smith is that it was not raised sooner. In his inaugural lecture in 1870, "What History teaches us to seek for in the Bible", he had made it plain that he had adopted and intended to teach the results of the German Higher Critics. At that time Scotland was in the grip of the most rigid Protestant scholasticism, of which the literal inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture was the cardinal doctrine. German theology was known only by hearsay as an abomination—*non nominandum inter Christianos*, much less to be examined at first hand. One would have expected, therefore, that the proposal of a Free Church professor actually to teach the accursed thing to candidates for the ministry would have raised a storm at once. But nothing happened. Robertson Smith taught peacefully for more than six years, during which time his reputation as a scholar grew rapidly. He was invited to take part in the two most notable works of combined scholarship then going forward—the Revised Version of the Old Testament and the great ninth edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. The editor of the latter—Professor Baynes of St. Andrews—offered him the assistant editorship, which Smith eagerly accepted. He wrote the

article “Angel” for vol. ii., and for vol. iii. the article “Bible”. As neither contained anything that he had not taught for six years as a professor, he had no reason to suppose that the expression of his views in a work of reference would make any difference, any more than he had reason to suppose that Principal Brown of Aberdeen, who knew all about his lectures and had seen his articles in proof, would afterwards be one of his most active accusers. “Angel” passed unnoticed, and for some months it seemed as if “Bible” would do the same. But by an evil chance the *Edinburgh Courant* sent its review copy of vol. iii. to Dr. A. H. Charteris, Professor of Biblical Criticism at Edinburgh University, who at once turned to the article “Bible”. Charteris was one of the younger divines of the Established Church, but he was the very embodiment of orthodox pietism, and “Bible”, with its implied acceptance of the Graf-Wellhausen theory of the Pentateuch, shocked him exceedingly. It was some months before he could master his indignation sufficiently to be able to write, but at last, in the *Courant* of April 16, 1876, his review appeared. It told the whole horrid story, and lest it should not be horrid enough, eked it out with a couple of subtle misquotations from the article and asked what the Free Church proposed to do about it.

The answer the Free Church cabal would fain have given was the right one, “Nothing. Mind

your own business." But there was always Begg. That champion of Christendom was already bellowing a "Fee, fi, fo, fum" that froze the official marrow. Charteris's wretched review having appeared on the eve of the General Assembly, Begg at once let it be known that he would invite the Venerable Court to consider what manner of man it had appointed to the chair of Hebrew at Aberdeen. Agonised deprecations followed. It was represented that there was a standing committee of Assembly charged with the duty of watching the life and doctrine of the professors, and that constitutionally no action could be taken until that body had made full inquiry and issued its findings. As this was undoubtedly the case, Begg graciously consented to hold his peace for a season on the understanding that the College Committee would proceed with all dispatch. A respite indeed, but one of that miserable sort that the blackmailer gives, well knowing how he can exploit it.

The lot of the College Committee was not a happy one. The sinister shadow of Begg brooded over their deliberations. On every official occasion he asked with deepening menace in his tones what progress had been made, and received evasive replies. The committee consisted of men of all shades of opinion. Some sympathised with Robertson Smith, more did not. But all were agreed that a heresy hunt was to be avoided, if possible. For a heresy hunt is always a messy

business. If it succeeds, the heretic is apt to be regarded as a martyr, which is inconvenient; if it fails, those who have promoted it get nothing but bad eggs and dead cats, which is deplorable. The committee were very much alive to these considerations. On the other hand, if there was no heresy hunt what would Begg do, or rather what would he not do? He was more dangerous than he had ever been before, for it soon became apparent that he could muster not only the usual “Highland host” but most of the white-haired Disruption doctors, and as it was unlikely that the Lord would require the souls of all these robust old gentlemen in the immediate future, a mere policy of playing for time did not promise much. Rainy’s own mind was soon made up. Judicial action against Robertson Smith must be avoided, but the ground could be prepared for suitable administrative action.

In the carrying out of this policy the first person to whom Rainy turned for help was the culprit himself. In a friendly and informal way it was suggested to Robertson Smith that he might apologise—nothing abject, of course, just a civil reassuring letter to the College Committee. This was what is vulgarly called a “try-on”, a procedure which with ordinary men will frequently give the desired results. But Smith was not an ordinary man. Being both acute and courageous he uttered by way of reply the one

word that Rainy most dreaded—"Why?" The dilemma thus handed back was indeed perfect. Smith, having been invited to apologise, was entitled to know in precise terms what his offence was, but Rainy could not satisfy him without greatly increasing the risk of a heresy trial.

Had Smith rigidly maintained this initial attitude of "no charge, no answer", the College Committee would have had no option but to face up a rough house from Begg and Co. and report that no action should be taken. But just at this juncture Smith made his only blunder, and it was a bad one. A pamphlet entitled *Infidelity in the Aberdeen Free Church College* appeared. It was the work of a person of no importance who, with that shrinking from publicity that makes good deeds doubly meritorious, had not put his name to it. So paltry a production should have been beneath Smith's notice, but he, with the *Courant* review still rankling, got the idea that it was a new outrage on the part of Charteris. He dashed off for the press a long, brilliant, angry reply on that hurried assumption. He ought to have known that Charteris, though he had culpably misquoted Smith's words in his review, was incapable of anything so mean, spiteful and ignorant as the "Infidelity" pamphlet. It was a mistake that enabled his enemies to say that this eminent Higher Critic, when put to a simple test, showed himself a very poor judge of authorship. Smith sent a proof of his letter to Rainy,

with the naïve suggestion that it should be accepted *pro tanto* for the purposes of the College Committee’s inquiry! Rainy’s only comment was a despairing groan. The letter, with all its indiscretions, was published, and at once Edinburgh was in an uproar. The reactionaries howled for Smith’s blood. One of those social pests known as popular preachers saw a chance too good to be missed, and harangued crowded congregations on “Have we a Bible?” The College Committee would have to do something. Under pressure from Begg a sub-committee was appointed to examine the articles “Bible” and “Angel”. Not content with that, Begg made a scandalous attempt to intimidate the Committee by means of a carefully packed “public meeting”. Smith protested that a fair inquiry was impossible if such things were tolerated, and it was with some difficulty that he was pacified. However, he submitted a statement of his views on Biblical criticism, but in spite of all Rainy’s blandishments and artifices he refused to be drawn into any admission, apology or quasi-apology.¹ The upshot of the College Committee’s deliberations was a report to the effect that there was no ground for a heresy

¹ Rainy even wrote to Robertson Smith’s friend, Professor James Candlish, who was also a member of the College Committee, suggesting that he should get Smith to write to him (Candlish) a suitable letter of which he (Rainy) enclosed a draft! Rainy, like Becky Sharp, was apt to underestimate the intelligence of ordinary mortals. The letter would have deceived nobody.

process against Professor Robertson Smith, but that in the article "Bible", more especially in his treatment of Deuteronomy, he had, though not intentionally, used language "of a dangerous and unsettling tendency". Smith's rejoinder to this was the counter-check quarrelsome: he wrote to the editor of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* proposing to reiterate his views in detail in a separate article on "Deuteronomy".

The College Committee's report was received by the Commission of Assembly in March 1877, and on Rainy's motion it was referred to the Presbytery of Aberdeen to consider what was "the safe and right and reasonable thing to do". Now the Presbytery of Aberdeen liked Robertson Smith, partly because he was an extraordinarily likeable young man and partly because they were proud of him. He was in every sense one of themselves. Most of them had known him all his life. Whatever qualms some might feel at his Higher Critical notions, all appreciated that it was a great score for Aberdeen that the son of an Aberdonian manse should command the respect of European scholarship. He was *patre docto filius doctior*, and there was the impressive fact that Dr. Pirie Smith, whose orthodoxy was above suspicion and who had given up more than most men at the Disruption, was his son's loyal comrade and sagacious counsellor. Being bound, in the pedantic Scottish phrase, to "obtemper" the instruction of a superior court, the Presbytery

debated fitfully for two months. Nobody showed much enthusiasm except Principal Brown who, to atone for years of laches, evinced a sudden anxiety for sound doctrine and assumed the rôle of *advocatus diaboli*. The worthy man’s discretion was nil, but no Buzfuz could have excelled him in his zeal for the personal interests of his client. Professor Robertson Smith’s treatment of Deuteronomy was bad, he declared, but not so bad as his treatment of the Devil. Would fathers and brethren believe that the article “Angel” made not a single reference to the reality and personality of his client who, orthodoxy apart, was in common decency entitled at least to a cross-reference *vide SATAN?*

But the spirit of Gallio was upon the Presbytery of Aberdeen. Even the sorrows of Satan failed to move it, and when the General Assembly of 1877 met on May 24 there was nothing to report but progress. It seemed that the Venerable Court would not for the present be troubled with the Robertson Smith affair. But such comfortable expectations were not to last. They were dissipated in the very rudest manner by the appearance of Robertson Smith himself demanding to be tried for heresy.

III

It was a bold as well as a youthful move. Some say it was a bad one, and so it was in the

sense that it was "bad for the coo", the "coo" in this case being Rainy. All his diligent scheming to avoid the perilous scandal of a heresy trial had been set at naught. But it was not in his nature to admit defeat before the end of the game. Something could still be done. There was a maze of legal procedure to be gone through in the course of which it might be managed that the heresy hunters should lose their way. The difficulty was Sir Henry Moncreiff, who was determined that if he could help it they should not. The old lawyer had been restive under Rainy's temporising policy. Now that it had failed he felt free to take his own line, and that was to secure that the trial should end in a conviction. Robertson Smith's action, therefore, was doubly successful. It embarrassed his enemies by obliging them to formulate their charges; and by splitting the official clique and thus resolving the official party into its elements, it created for the time being an entirely new alignment of parties in the Assembly. The issue was no longer liable to be obscured by considerations of ecclesiastical policy. The way was cleared for a straight fight between liberalism and reaction. This was exactly what Smith wanted. Altogether the immediate consequences of his demand to be put on trial were highly gratifying except in one respect—it involved his suspension from teaching. Curiously enough he had not foreseen this, and it surprised and vexed him.

However, he was never downcast for long, and presently he was cheered by various assurances that if Scotland cast him out England would be glad to have him. One that amused Smith a good deal seems to have come from Jowett through a third party—a suggestion that if the worst came to the worst he could easily sign the Thirty-Nine Articles and get the next vacant Balliol living!

As it turned out Smith had need of all his leisure. He was his own lawyer, and in the nature of the case his defence required above all things technical skill. In those days Scottish ecclesiastical libels still followed the old Scottish form of criminal indictment, which was more logical, less simple and quite as verbose as the corresponding English document. The general scheme was a syllogism—the major proposition reciting the charge, first generally (abstract major) and then in detail (particular major), the minor proposition setting out particulars of justification corresponding to the particular major, and the conclusion alleging the guilt of the accused and demanding judgment. On being served with the libel the accused might put in an answer objecting to its “relevancy” in law, which had to be disposed of before issues of fact could be tried. In Smith’s case the only questions of fact were the authorship and publication of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* articles, which were of course admitted. In the English phrase, therefore, the case had to be fought on demurrer.

Smith had plenty of time to survey the ground before being called upon to put in his answer. The wretched Presbytery of Aberdeen who had already spent futile weeks arguing about him now had the vexation of preparing a heresy libel thrust upon them. At first Principal Brown and his group thought nothing could be easier. Smith had rejected the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy; to reject the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy was to say that the Scriptures were not always what they professed to be, and that was to deny their Divine inspiration. At the last step of the reasoning a doubt crept in. What precisely was "inspiration"? Nobody could say. The Westminster Confession, which was the standard by which Smith had to be judged, was exasperatingly vague on the subject. It only said that the Bible "contained" the word of God, and Smith, the slippery rogue, had never said it didn't. It is said that a Scottish ecclesiastic once outwitted the Devil by setting him to spin ropes out of sea sand. If so the Devil got his own back with interest by working off Michael Scott's trick on Dr. Brown and the Free Presbytery of Aberdeen. Poor Dr. Brown! Though a clumsy advocate, he was a conscientious one, and deserved better treatment from his client. The Presbytery met in June, and delayed consideration of the matter till August. After two months a draft libel was produced and sent to the Procurator of the Church for approval. The

“abstract major” charged Smith, *inter alia*, with “subverting” the doctrine of inspiration. The Procurator struck out “subverting” and substituted “contradicting”. The amendment nearly reduced Dr. Brown to tears. “Subvert”, he wailed, was a nice vague word with lots of prejudice in it, but “contradict”—why, it was making a present of the case to the accused. The anti-Smith party contemplated their creature with disgust. It was a vast document with a brave outfit of whereases and aforesaid, albeits and yet-true-it-is-and-of-a-verities, but in its bloated body there was no health.

However, one has to make the best of things. Something might be done with the alternative charges. In addition to (1) “contradicting” Smith was accused generally of (2) “tending to contradict” the doctrine of inspiration, and (3) “by neutrality of attitude and rashness of statement tending to disparage” the divine authority and inspired character of Scripture. In particular it was alleged that he had taught: *Primo*, that the Levitical system was not a Mosaic institution. *Secundo*, that Deuteronomy was not the historical record that it professed to be. *Tertio*, that the sacred writers were liable to error in question of fact and occasionally sacrificed accuracy to party spirit. *Quarto*, that some parts of Scripture had the character of fiction. *Quinto*, that the Song of Solomon was a love-poem and devoid of spiritual significance. *Sexto*, that New

Testament citations were not conclusive of the authorship of the Old Testament books. *Septimo*, that the prophets were merely men of spiritual insight and had no supernatural revelations of the future. *Octavo*, that the reality of angels was a matter of assumption rather than of direct teaching in the Scriptures. By his answer the pannel (defendant) pleaded that the first general charge was not borne out by the particular allegations, and he objected to the second and third general charges as constructive and embarrassing.

The hearing of the objections extended over six months, during which time Robertson Smith showed a capacity for advocacy that would have made his fortune at the Bar. His opponents looked on helplessly while the Presbytery under his adroit persuasions struck out clause after clause with monotonous regularity. By the end of February the first charge, having not one of its eight legs left to stand upon, had collapsed. In March Smith met with his first reverse, the Presbytery by one vote overruling his objection to the "tendency" charge. He appealed to the Synod of Aberdeen. When the Synod met in April it was evident that the Robertson Smith affair was entering a new and, from the orthodox point of view, very disquieting phase. The gallery was unusually well filled by the general public, who cheered the appellant when he got up and sat down, and whose enthusiasm was unrestrained when on a division there was again a

majority of one, but this time in Smith’s favour. Clearly the heretic had not only had the best of the argument so far, but had the mob at his back as well. A few days later the “neutrality” charge vanished, never to be heard of again. For the time being Smith’s victory was complete.

The reactionaries’ only hope now was that something in the way of salvage might be done in the General Assembly where, of course, Smith’s personal influence counted for less than it did in his own presbytery and synod, and where Sir Henry Moncreiff, unlike poor Dr. Brown, could be trusted not to bungle things. Still, the conditions were not so good as they might have been. Smith was already becoming a popular hero. His triumph in the inferior courts of the Church was bound to have a serious moral effect with the waverers and trimmers; and to make matters worse the great Begg was under a nasty cloud, having lately been discovered in a discreditable intrigue of which the object was the return of himself and party to the Established Church. As for Rainy he was inscrutable. He had made one or two public utterances of sibylline darkness, and there was a rumour that since last Assembly he had been “reading up the Scripture question”, but what his line would be could not even be guessed.

The Free Church General Assembly of 1878, departing from custom, met in Glasgow. A notorious reactionary, Horatius Bonar’s brother

Andrew, filled the Moderator's chair, but his party would much rather have had him on the floor of the House, for he was a very fair Hebraist of the old school and, though a lame and unpleasing speaker, possessed great personal influence. Less talented than his brother, he was, in popular esteem, even more of a "saint". (Children were named after him, including one who became Prime Minister, which shows what a good name can do.) But instead of fighting the good fight Dr. Andrew Bonar had the uncongenial task of seeing that everybody got fair play within the limits prescribed by Sir Henry Moncreiff. For according to Presbyterian practice the effective ruling of proceedings lies, not with the Moderator, who is more or less of a *roi fainéant*, but with the Principal Clerk; and as that functionary plays a deliberative as well as an official part and is at perfect liberty to take sides, the side to which he is opposed has a poor chance of succeeding on any point of order it may be foolish enough to raise.

Sir Henry was sensible of these advantages. Like many strictly honourable men he had a callous conscience where prejudice was concerned. As against a person like Robertson Smith procedure could be rigged without scruple. *Primo* and *secundo*, in obedience to his ruling, the Assembly took together. Parties having been heard *pro* and *contra*, the good Sir Henry, with a fine show of impartiality, moved that *primo* be

dismissed (for the very good reason that the particular averments did not support it), but that *secundo* be allowed subject to an amendment which introduced some new matter carefully calculated to prejudice the accused. The English reader may gasp, and say, “Can such things be? How can one alter an indictment after the accused has pleaded to it?” The answer is that Sir Henry Moncreiff dated from the eighteenth century and eighteenth-century Scots lawyers took no stock of such trivialities. It is significant, too, that the Assembly as a whole saw nothing monstrous in his proposal.

Rainy, however, protested in language of unwonted vehemence. To him it was doubly offensive. Not only was it profoundly shocking to his sense of justice—for, with all his subtleties, Rainy was in essence a just man—but it was a gross affront to his supposed leadership. Sir Henry had acted on his own initiative, without consultation or even warning, and evidently expected the Assembly to acquiesce in the outrage. For the first and only time in his life Rainy had to fight on ground not of his own choosing. There was no help for it. Defeat would be bad, but surrender would be ruinous. He moved that the appeal be dismissed *simpliciter*. The speech in which he did so was perfect in its kind. While freely granting the excellence of Short (*alias* Sir Henry) he exposed many subtle and compelling reasons for the Assembly to

conclude that Codlin (*alias* Rainy) was the friend. He used, in fact, every art and persuasion of the Parliamentary leader who seeks to win a majority that he cannot command. His smooth and studied words did not conceal the fact that he was straining every nerve to avoid defeat. Fathers and brethren were profoundly thrilled. They had assembled looking for lively times, but this ecclesiastical cock-fight surpassed the most sensational expectation. The excitement grew until the Puckish little figure who sat at the Bar was forgotten save as a symbol, the infuriating abstraction over which the conflict raged. The House divided. By a small majority the appeal on *secundo* was allowed. Rainy's bid for a vote of confidence in his ability to deal with the Robertson Smith case had failed. The defeated leader could not conceal his chagrin.

When the Assembly met in the evening to consider the remaining appeals the anti-Smith party were glowing with confidence. They reckoned quite justly that having won on *secundo* they could not possibly lose on *tertio*, to which the same considerations applied with even greater force. Besides, Rainy had had his quietus: he would not stand up to be knocked down again. The pannel would be left to fight his own battle with what help he could get from a few halfling minister lads and maybe a thrawn elder or two. In such hybristic temper did orthodoxy unloose all its rhetoric, winding up with a blood-curdling

speech in which Begg warned the Assembly that the eyes of all Scotland were upon them and that the righteous were trembling for the Ark of God. Robertson Smith replied. Save for a word he was seen to scribble on the back of an envelope while Begg was up, he spoke without a note. His vindication was complete. Long before he had finished the crashing salvos of applause that marked the close of one brilliant period after another told the reactionaries that they were beaten, and when Smith, turning passionately towards Begg, reminded the House that one man only is recorded as having trembled for the Ark of God—“Eli, an unworthy priest”—the defeat became a rout.¹ Fathers and brethren shivered with delight, like small boys who see the school bully getting his head punched. Presently they poured into the lobbies openly declaring their admiration of Smith’s prowess and their anger at the trickery by which they had been duped into voting against him at the morning session. The appeal on *tertio* was dismissed by a two to one majority. The remaining appeals were incontinently abandoned, for Smith had stampeded the Assembly and scattered the redoubtable Highland host like chaff.

Amid the general hubbub Rainy remained unmoved, surveying the scene of confused

¹ The contemporary newspaper reports give “Eli, a worldly ecclesiastic”, but there is ground for suspecting that the passage was toned down for publication. I have used one of the several versions that are current orally.

enthusiasm with a keen and calculating eye. Sir Henry's usurpation of the leadership had been a disastrous fiasco, and there was now a good chance for the rightful leader to regain some measure of control. He moved, therefore, that consideration of the "tendency" count be deferred to next Assembly, subject to an order for its amendment in a form prescribed by him. A wearied Assembly agreed without discussion. The hypothetical count was to charge Smith with the publication of writings which "by ill-considered and unguarded setting forth of speculations of a critical kind tend to awaken doubt, especially in the case of students, of the divine truth and inspiration of any of the books of Scripture". Obviously this was not a charge of heresy at all, but merely a complaint that Smith was not a suitable person to hold a chair, and none knew that better than Rainy. It was a pure device whereby the Assembly could be switched off the heresy track back to administrative action. Smith did not see that. In the flush of victory and the innocence of his young heart he imagined that Rainy and Moncreiff were now separated by an inexpiable hatred and that the former had no option but to march as the submissive ally of the triumphant liberals. The delusion was shared by his comrades, so much so that as the year wore on and the Assembly of 1879 drew near, James Candlish, mildest of men, felt bold enough to send Rainy a kind but firm ultimatum. He

represented that Rainy must, in view of his recorded dissent, agree that the matter of *secundo* should be reopened and the Assembly given an opportunity of quashing the whole libel. If, for lack of due guidance, the Assembly should fail to do so and should pass even an implied condemnation of the Higher Criticism, then the liberals, who were numerous and influential, would be in an untenable position and would be driven out of the Church. Whereat Rainy, in delicate mockery, asked what Candlish meant by addressing him. “In this matter”, he wrote, “I am emphatically not the leader of the Free Church. Sir Henry Moncreiff holds that position.” As to *secundo*, that was *res judicata*, however deplorable, and could not be reopened. But he was quite sensible how disastrous it would be if the Free Church, for want of guidance, should commit itself to a condemnation of liberal theology; that had been his view all along. Therefore it would be for the liberals to consider whether for the sake of the cause they had at heart and for the peace of the Church they should not consent to sacrifice Robertson Smith. True, the removal of Robertson Smith from his chair would not satisfy the extreme reactionaries, but it would deprive them of all power for mischief. Otherwise the heresy process, with all its risks, must take its course.

It was clear from this that Rainy was working for a reconstitution of the official front. His

proposal was indignantly rejected — he could hardly have expected anything else — but it dashed the enthusiasm of his young liberal friends to find that in trying to dictate to Rainy they had played into his hands as beautifully as he could desire.

None the less Robertson Smith faced the Assembly of 1879 in the highest spirits. He had just returned from a long joyous holiday in Egypt and Syria to find that in his absence his fellow-citizens of Aberdeen had elected him a member of the School Board by a majority that staggered Dr. Brown and the other “old gentlemen” who had moved heaven and earth to keep him out. - Even before he left the tide of popular feeling had been racing furiously in his favour. His appearance on any public platform was the signal for frantic cheering. Whenever the distracted Free Presbytery met to consider how to carry out the instructions of the General Assembly, the galleries of their hall were invaded by a mob of students and the general public who demonstrated noisily on every occasion, cheering the accused, hissing the accusers and deriding the pathetic appeals of the Moderator for order and seemliness — reprehensible behaviour, no doubt, but very heartening. A less intoxicating and more respectable satisfaction was afforded by the decisions which the Presbytery reached in these trying circumstances. The amended “tendency” charge was eviscerated just as the

“contradiction” had been by all the particular allegations being struck out. As to the wretched *secundo*, tossed to and fro like the grinning sailor in *Ingoldsby*, the Presbytery after hours of wrangling over Sir Henry’s precious addendum gave it up as a bad job and sent it back to the General Assembly with a polite request that the Venerable Court might please to be intelligible.

The position was now really farcical. Three years had elapsed since Robertson Smith had begun to vex certain of the Church. Two years had elapsed since he had invited them to indict him for heresy—two years spent in confused intrigue, miscellaneous backbiting and general bad temper, at the end of which the prospect of bringing the culprit to book was farther off than ever. The futility of it all was a powerful argument for the proposal which Rainy now submitted, that the Assembly should abandon the heresy proceedings and appoint a special committee to inquire into the whole matter. But “the old gentlemen”, as Smith with the blithe arrogance of youth called his enemies, were not yet in a mood to yield. After much manœuvring and consultation it was decided that the appeals on the “tendency” charge offered no hope to fainting orthodoxy. They must concentrate on *secundo* for what it was worth. In virtue of the faith by which mountains may be removed it might be possible to convince the Assembly that the Galilean Carpenter attached

great importance to the Mosaic authorship of the book of the Law discovered by Hilkiah. Andrew Bonar, the previous year's Moderator, was chosen as the most suitable vessel to convey this doctrine (Sir Henry Moncreiff being unwilling to expose himself personally to a second rebuff), and he was so far successful that in a House of over 600 members he carried his point by a single vote.

A result so even of course produced a crisis, but Rainy was not dismayed. Crises were his *métier*. With profound satisfaction he noted that the Moncreiff-Begg coalition was doomed. Poor Sir Henry had completely lost his head, was talking wildly and doing one stupid thing after another. Presently he would see how foolish he had been. Robertson Smith had already proved himself the better lawyer, and his ingenuity was by no means exhausted. He had the Presbytery of Aberdeen under his thumb. There would be a new sheaf of dilatory pleas and maddening technicalities got ready for the next Assembly, on realising which the prodigal Clerk would humbly return, and doubtless the slaughter of the fatted calf—Robertson Smith, to wit—could be arranged.

The subject of these calculations now began to realise the danger. So long as Rainy held his hand he was safe, but he knew that Rainy would not hold his hand for ever. It was only a question of the opportune moment for striking. In the

circumstances, Robertson Smith had to consider whether it was worth while continuing a struggle that was wearing out his health and could at most only postpone the inevitable end. He was fighting now not for his own position, but for the sake of his friends—Candlish, Davidson and Lindsay—who, it was well known, would be the next to suffer, but it was doubtful if he could serve them further. There was a great deal to be said for quitting the arena if any honourable occasion for doing so should arise. At this juncture the chair of mathematics at Glasgow University fell vacant. Smith after some hesitation became a candidate, but, not having the support of Kelvin, he was unsuccessful—on the whole to his relief. Thenceforward, though he had several tempting offers (including two from Harvard) he never wavered in his resolve not to go out until he was put out.

He spent the winter (1879–80) in the East, exchanging his black coat for a burnous, and forgetting Robertson Smith of Aberdeen in Abdullah Effendi of Jeddah. The Emir of the Hejaz was his good friend and enabled him to make a rather daring journey to Taif. From Arabia he went back to Egypt to join Richard Burton for an expedition to Fayum and the Nitrian Lakes. A droll couple they must have made—the gigantic swashbuckling soldier and the little minister from Aberdeen who, if the dragoon is to be believed, spoke the better Arabic.

The pleasant days in the desert came to an end. In the spring of 1880 Robertson Smith was once more under the bitter Scottish sky. During his absence Rainy's plans had matured. With the diligent Dr. Adam as his go-between he had come to an accommodation with Sir Henry Moncreiff. He put its basis very simply and cynically. "If we sacrifice the man", he said, "they must sacrifice the libel." The reverend baronet was sad but resigned, for he saw no help for it. The Presbytery of Aberdeen had again proved recalcitrant. The heresy trial looked like going on until Judgment Day. Rainy had been right after all; the only way to get rid of Robertson Smith was by administrative action. And so the deal was concluded. Moncreiff was to remain in titular charge of the case but he was to carry out Rainy's policy. If Begg would signify his agreement, the business was as good as done. If not, they could probably do without him, as the moral effect of the leaders' *rapprochement* would go far towards securing a comfortable majority in the Assembly. Against such a move Smith could do nothing but appeal to the public conscience. This he did and very effectively, as the fresh burst of pamphleteering proved—by means of an open letter in which he charged Rainy with meditating a violation of the law, civil as well as ecclesiastical. But Rainy did not care. From his own observation he was satisfied that Edinburgh would support him,

“SMITH O’ ABERDEEN”

and Dr. Adam had assured him that Glasgow was pretty safe. Therefore to Smith’s open letter he sent an exquisitely phrased private reply, full of courtesy and good feeling, that could not have been bettered by any most humane Mikado who had determined on something lingering with boiling oil in it.

When the Assembly of 1880 met the Rainy-Moncreiff accord was officially declared by the agenda. By way of saving Sir Henry’s face the Venerable Court was to be invited to find the libel against Professor Robertson Smith “ripe for probation”, but the ripe fruit, being of the Dead Sea variety, was not to be plucked. Instead of instructing the Presbytery of Aberdeen to proceed according to law, the Assembly was to summon Robertson Smith to the Bar and consider what was to be done with him. If that were carried—which it was, the Assembly being anxious to get to an issue—Sir Henry was to propose that the Rev. William Robertson Smith, having forfeited the confidence of the Church, be deprived of his office of Professor of Hebrew and Oriental Languages.

The stage was now set for what in the language of the evening press are called the “closing scenes”. There was every promise of an exciting finish. For one thing, it was known that Begg, *idem infensus*, had refused to follow Sir Henry and would insist upon the libel, the whole libel and nothing but the libel. For another, Robertson

Smith was showing signs of strain and had signalled the opening sessions of the Assembly by a savage onslaught on Sir Henry Moncreiff, who had borne it like the Christian gentleman he was, being aware that he richly deserved it, for had he not committed the gross impropriety of publishing a pamphlet entitled *The History of the Robertson Smith Case*,¹ the only purpose of which could be to prejudice the accused?

The motion for Smith's deprivation was set down for Thursday, May 27. Shortly after six that morning there was an unwonted activity in the thoroughfares leading from the New Town up the Mound to the Assembly Hall. Students, who in those days were little plagued by the razor, were early on the spot, yet found themselves anticipated by a sedate procession of four-wheelers bearing elders' wives and daughters, complete with summer princess frocks and Leghorn bonnets, who had gallantly sacrificed bed and breakfast to make sure of cheering Mr. Robertson Smith as their great-grandmothers had cheered the Young Chevalier, a little further down the same hill. Long before 10 o'clock, the Assembly Hall, floor and gallery, was densely crowded. The appearance of the pannel at the Bar was greeted with tumultuous cheering.

¹ Had it not been for the author's position Smith might safely have ignored the pamphlet, for it is so tedious and pedantic as to be wellnigh unintelligible. It displays great learning in ecclesiastical law, Anglican as well as Presbyterian precedents being discussed exhaustively, but no appreciable sense.

Begg, making his way to his usual seat on the “opposition” side, bore good-naturedly enough a chorus of laughter and facetious noises contributed by young gentlemen who were pursuing theological studies. When Rainy entered there were hisses.

The first incident was provided by Smith, who objected to the Assembly’s procedure as grossly irregular, refused to plead and walked out of the House. This was awkward, but there was no help for it. With a wry face Sir Henry Moncreiff moved that Mr. Robertson Smith be deprived of his professorship. Dr. Laidlaw, a member of the pro-Smith party, moved what amounted to a direct negative. The debate was in the doldrums until Begg got up. Begg was astonished. Begg was grieved. Begg was indignant. What, sentence a man without trying him! Words could not express the infamy of it. Would the Assembly of the Free Church betray the principles for which Hampden had died? Perish the thought. . . . And so on, and so on. Derisive bursts of applause from the divinity students in the gallery punctuated Begg’s impassioned appeal for justice—a shameless performance that made Rainy and Moncreiff thoroughly miserable, which was its main purpose. Lastly, there was a motion in the name of the doyen of the Assembly, Dr. Beith,¹ who proposed that the Assembly should admonish Professor

¹ Great-grandfather of Major Hay Beith (Ian Hay).

Robertson Smith to beware of publishing "un-guarded and incomplete statements" and let the matter rest there. Dr. Beith's great age, the esteem in which he was held by all, and the fact that having been identified at first with the orthodox party he had revised his opinions in no uncertain fashion, ensured that his motion would command a large measure of support, and the pro-Smith party decided to concentrate upon it. The old man was so infirm that he could not appear, but by leave of the House the speech he had prepared was read by his son, Mr. Gilbert Beith, M.P. It was a mild, grave speech, without a hard word in it, but as a condemnation of Rainy's doctrine of expediency and "the peace of the Church" it was unanswerable. Begg's vigorous, if dishonest, invective had made the official clique look ridiculous. Dr. Beith's censure exhibited them as paltry shufflers. It became clear that though the Rainy-Moncreiff motion might get votes it had no friends.

The debate dragged on all day and far into the night. Past midnight a wearied Moderator, whose lace ruffles had long since lost their morning freshness, rose to put the question. As there were four motions three divisions were necessary. Dr. Beith's motion was carried first against Dr. Begg's and then against Dr. Laidlaw's. Lastly, it was put against the official motion for Dr. Robertson Smith's deprivation, and the real struggle began.

The result, as it happened, was determined largely by the manner in which divisions are taken in the Scottish General Assemblies, which is the opposite of the Parliamentary method—that is, members are counted as they pass *out of* the House *into* the lobbies. Hence it often happens that cautious members hang back until they see how the division is going before deciding how they will vote or whether they will vote at all. It is a system admirably contrived to falsify the sense of the House and to suit the convenience of faction leaders. Dr. Begg took full advantage of it. Officially he and his party could take no part in the final division, as they were opposed on principle to both motions. But on one thing they were resolved—Robertson Smith must go, if not by their way then by Rainy’s way. So presently Begg left his seat and ascended the railed-in dais on which stood the Clerks’ table, whence he could take stock of the situation. From time to time he signalled to members of his party to go into the lobby for the official motion. At length he returned to his place. The pro-Smith party were all in the lobby, but the supporters of Rainy and Moncreiff were still crowding through their door. Begg and Kennedy chatted affably. The gallery in deep dejection watched the tellers checking their figures at the table and wondered what the majority would be. Suddenly, in full view of the scandalised Sir Henry Moncreiff, one

of the tellers for the Beith motion waved his hat. . . .

It was a strange gust of passion that swept over the Mound that summer night. Packed into the sombre low-roofed Assembly Hall were some two thousand of the staidest and most convention-ridden human beings it would have been possible to find in Victorian Britain, who had been listening for fourteen hours to a debate on the questioned historicity of Deuteronomy, and when they learned that Deuteronomy had been beaten they went mad. From the gallery came every kind of din of which frenzied men and women are capable—cheering, shrieking, even sobbing with delight. On the floor the fathers and brethren of the victorious faction literally danced for joy, wrung one another's hands and yelled themselves hoarse, while orthodoxy and expediency sat in tragic bewilderment.

When at length the figures were read out and it was found that Dr. Beith's motion had been carried by seven votes only, bewilderment gave place to rage, and if the unspoken thoughts of his friends could have killed, Begg would have been a dead man. What had happened was patent to all. Begg had been misled by the delay of the supporters of the Rainy-Moncreiff motion in getting into the lobby—a circumstance that was not due to superiority of numbers, as he supposed, but to the fact that they were older,

fatter and stiffer than the liberals—and he had been too niggardly in doling out his unofficial support. His clumsy attempt at hedging had resulted in a decision that did not in fact represent the sense of the House. On the other hand, the liberals were entitled to make the most of their victory. They could fairly claim that, though slightly in a minority in the Assembly, they represented a majority of the membership of the Church. Amid renewed plaudits Smith appeared at the Bar to receive the mild admonition prescribed by Dr. Beith’s motion. He accepted it gracefully, but not without a touch of irony in the contrition he expressed for “statements so incomplete that even at the end of three years the opinion of this House has been so divided upon them”.

IV

For the brief space of three weeks Robertson Smith enjoyed the perilous bliss of having seen his enemies brought to confusion. Rainy had been humbled to the dust. Sir Henry Moncreiff’s reputation as an ecclesiastical lawyer was in tatters. The terrible Begg had dwindled into a pig-headed old bungler. But the victor was not permitted to fall into the sin of *ὑβρις*. While he was still receiving congratulations from Wellhausen, Cheyne and others, there happened what Begg exultingly hailed as “a marvellous interposition of Providence”. A new volume of the

Encyclopædia Britannica appeared in which the familiar initials "W. R. S." were appended to an article on "Hebrew Language and Literature" that was even more "unguarded" in its statements than the article on "Bible". Had the volume appeared, as intended, in the early spring, all would probably have been well. The fury of the orthodox was then burning so fiercely that a little extra fuel could have made no material difference. But unfortunately Kelvin, who was writing the article on "Heat", was dilatory and publication had been held up. The result was that Robertson Smith was put in a very awkward position. He had accepted the Assembly's admonition and had given an undertaking to walk more delicately in future, yet, within a month, here he was offending in the eye of all the world more grossly than ever. It was now made possible to denounce him, not simply as a heretic but as a man without honour, and his enemies did not fail to exploit this unexpected advantage. On the motion of Sir Henry Moncreiff (who said he had not read the article and did not intend to read it, being well assured of its damnable quality) the Presbytery of Edinburgh decided to request the College Committee to take immediate action. Robertson Smith was in London at the time, attending a meeting of the Old Testament Revision Committee. Innocent as ever, he would hardly believe his friends when they wrote to him that the trouble had broken out afresh. He

protested that he had scrupulously observed his undertaking even to the extent of refusing to write the articles “Isaiah” and “Israel”—a sacrifice surely substantial enough to warrant his good faith. Was it not obvious that the article now complained of had been written many months before and was already through the press before the Assembly met? To this came the awkward rejoinder, why had he kept silence about it? Knowing the state of feeling in the Church, was it not his plain duty to disclose all the facts? Smith’s answer was that it simply had not occurred to him—which, like many an honest answer given in the witness-box, was not convincing.

The last phase of the Robertson Smith case was short and ugly. The allegation of broken faith, flimsy and false as it was to the knowledge of those who used it, served as a screen behind which every abomination of policy, cunning, malice and untruth could be, and were, wrought with impunity *ad majorem Dei gloriam*. Certain of the manifestations were peculiarly vile. One Macaulay, the “popular” preacher who had distinguished himself in the early stages of the controversy, tabled a mysterious demand that the Presbytery of Edinburgh should sit *in camera* to discuss a matter of grave import that was unfit for publication. This turned out to be a study of Semitic totemism, with special reference to the Old Testament, which Smith had contri-

buted to the *Journal of Philology* and which still ranks high in the literature of anthropology. Not being disposed to spoil a good case by making themselves ridiculous, the Presbytery did not warm to Mr. Macaulay's indignation, and the matter dropped; but the incident was typical of the temper in which the second attack on Robertson Smith was conducted. It was no longer a question of condemning a heresy and beating the bounds of orthodoxy. It was the strictly practical business of hewing Agag to pieces before the Lord and making as fine a minced collop of him as was humanly possible—that is to say, very fine indeed. Principle, honesty, common decency might go hang, provided Robertson Smith was turned out of his place. Even Begg was of opinion that the forms of law had become intolerable, and Kennedy of Dingwall preached lynch law without disguise or shame. Highland presbyteries, inflamed by propaganda directed and financed from Edinburgh, showered angry "overtures" upon the Commission of Assembly, demanding instant and drastic action. Prejudice was organised on the grandest scale. No insinuation however mean, no lie however flagrant, was deemed unworthy in the service of the good cause. "What God hath cleansed that call thou not common." The favourite device—which had been invented by the ingenious Macaulay at an early stage of the case—was to portray the offender as a worthless

fellow whose ruling passions were vanity and a hatred of the Christian religion, and whose pretended learning consisted of impudent plagiarisms from Kuenen. The fact that Kuenen himself had already made an indignant protest against the misuse of his name in no way abashed the defenders of the faith. The lie was simply repeated and amplified. It should have been the duty of the titular leader of the Church to censure these calumnies, but Rainy at this juncture heard nothing, saw nothing and said nothing. The Church had preferred faction to leadership. Well, let them have their fill of it. In God’s good time he would be called in to clear up the mess. Meanwhile matters must take their course. And so when the August Commission appointed a packed committee to examine and report upon Robertson Smith’s latest article, he merely raised his eyebrows, expressed a chilly doubt or two and set sail for America, where he had an urgent and opportune engagement. He was still in America when the October Commission received the committee’s report and took infatuated action.

The General Assembly of 1880 had been pretty evenly divided in opinion. An accident had gained a small majority for Robertson Smith. The Commission of Assembly, which theoretically consisted of the same persons, was bitterly hostile and steadily registered large majorities for strict orthodoxy. The change of attitude is easily explained. The pro-Smith majority at the

Assembly had included a certain proportion of weaker brethren whose quaking legs had carried them with difficulty into the liberal lobby and who now were only too eager to show their penitence. Furthermore, the Begg party, realising the futility of tactics, were now pulling their full weight. Lastly, the attendance at a Commission of Assembly is for obvious reasons apt to be unrepresentative. Country members cannot afford the expense of time and money involved, with the result that the Commission rarely reflects anything but the opinion of Edinburgh. As Edinburgh had definitely aligned itself with the orthodox party, and as money was available to secure the aid of Highland presbyters who were zealous to defend the Ark of God provided their expenses were paid, the attitude of the Commission was a foregone conclusion. Robertson Smith was summarily suspended from teaching, and his case was reported to the next General Assembly for final judgment. It is interesting at this time of day to note the finding of the special committee upon which this interlocutory sentence was passed, to wit: "The general method on which the author proceeds conveys the impression that the Bible may be accounted for by the same laws which have determined the growth of any other literature". But the terms of the indictment were immaterial to a court that had already made up its mind. The Commission's competence to act as a court of first instance was more than

doubtful, but the warnings of the legal members were unheeded. Constitutional forms having so far favoured the accused were now ignored. The Free Church of Scotland reverted to the judicial standards of the sixteenth century. “Show me the man”, said a Scots judge of that date, “and I’ll show you the law,” and the maxim was unblushingly applied to Robertson Smith. The committee’s report, which was in effect an indictment, was concealed from him until he was summoned to the bar to plead to it. His plea of *autrefois acquit* was greeted with an angry uproar, and sentence of suspension was passed forthwith, pending final judgment by the next General Assembly.

Rainy returned from America to find the Free Church in pandemonium. Robertson Smith, though inhibited from teaching, was still free to preach, and he exploited his liberty to the full. There were plenty of pulpits at his disposal, and wherever he went he had crowded and excited congregations. He popularised the Higher Criticism to enthusiastic Glasgow audiences in a series of lectures on “The Old Testament in the Jewish Church”. A newspaper and pamphlet war was waged in which intemperance of language was not confined to one side. Throughout Scotland no presbytery could meet without a violent scene in which reverend gentlemen shook fists at one another and were barely restrained from blows. The pro-Smith party challenged the

legality of the Commission's action. The anti-Smith party wavered between apology and defiance. Sir Henry Moncreiff once more lost his head in a crisis and tried to argue that the Commission had not purported to perform a judicial act, whereby he evacuated a bad position to take up a worse. On the other hand Begg and Kennedy, who a few months before had been all for the strictest legality, were now shameless advocates of lynch-law: "In dealing with heretics", they said, "the Church must not allow itself to be hampered by red-tape". Talk of this kind produced its natural reaction. The laity took alarm, and, especially in the West, rallied to the cause of Robertson Smith in increasing numbers. Poor Dr. Adam, doing his pathetic best to maintain some show of an official front during Rainy's absence, found himself faced with a revolt of influential elders¹ and immediately flew into a passion, which only made matters worse. The elders, who were for the most part men who were not accustomed to take anybody's orders, told Dr. Adam that unless he wanted to provoke a first-class anti-clerical agitation, he had better keep a civil tongue in his head. Altogether the situation was about as ugly as it could be. The official element was thoroughly frightened. Even the Highlanders, for all their bluster, were uneasy. With every day that passed the feeling

¹ This movement was led by Dr. W. G. Blackie, head of the well-known publishing house.

grew that Rainy had better be asked to resume the leadership on his own terms. Overtures were made to which the great man listened with chilling courtesy. He was at one with the brethren, he said, that Robertson Smith should be turned out, and would loyally, though with the deepest regret, co-operate to that end, but he would much prefer that somebody else should lead in the matter. There is no reason to suppose that he was wholly insincere. He was cold, calculating and avid of power, but he was no hypocrite; for hypocrisy argues a vulgarity of mind of which Rainy was incapable. He knew that this time Robertson Smith’s doom was sealed, and he was not in love with the hangman’s job that was now being thrust upon him. At the same time the restoration of his primacy with an implied assurance that never again would it be questioned was the reward, and Rainy was not the man to make a grand refusal.

And so at the Assembly of 1881 the Robertson Smith case was brought to an abrupt and scandalous end. Rainy assured a humble, contrite and obsequious House that in passing the resolutions for Robertson Smith’s deprivation they need not be troubled by the question of legality, inasmuch as the Venerable Court possessed a *nobile officium* or prerogative jurisdiction in virtue of which a professor appointed *ad vitam aut culpam* could be dismissed without any finding of *culpa*. This monstrous doctrine was emphatically disowned

by the new Procurator of the Church, Mr. C. J. Guthrie,¹ who warned the Assembly that it was doing an illegal thing. The warning was treated with contempt—partly because Mr. Guthrie was notoriously an adherent of the Smith party, but more because the Assembly well knew that Robertson Smith would never take the Church to law. The illegal resolutions were carried by large majorities. There was one feature about them of a meanness that is almost comical. Though depriving Smith of his professorship they purported to continue his “emoluments”. This was neither justice nor generosity but a cautious device which it was conceived would protect the Church from a civil action for damages! The only appropriate answer was that which Simon Magus had, and it was given.

Nearly all the rest of Robertson Smith's life was spent at Cambridge, where he did his most solid and lasting work in pure scholarship. For some eighteen months after his deprivation he lived in Edinburgh carrying on his work for the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, of which he was now editor-in-chief, and continuing his active Church connection even to the extent of sitting in the General Assembly as a representative elder. But he was no longer happy in Scotland and when, largely through the good offices of Henry Sidgwick and Leslie Stephen, he was offered the Lord Almoner's Professorship of Arabic at Cambridge

¹ Afterwards Lord Guthrie, a judge of the Court of Session.

he gladly accepted. Trinity elected him a member of the High Table and gave him rooms, which he occupied until early in 1885, when he was elected a fellow of Christ’s. In the following year he was appointed University Librarian, a position for which he was rarely gifted and to which he devoted unremitting labour. In 1889 he was promoted to be Professor of Arabic in succession to William Wright. The same year saw the publication of *The Religion of the Semites*, designed as part of a greater work which he was never to complete. For in 1890 his health began to fail, and as time went on he was found to be suffering from a slow but fatal internal malady. He died at Cambridge on March 24, 1894, aged forty-seven.

One cannot contemplate the career of Robertson Smith without a mixture of feelings in which admiration for what he achieved contends with anger at the perverseness of his fellow-countrymen which prevented him from achieving more. Out of all his too short life five precious years were consumed in fighting the wild beasts of reaction, stupidity and expediency—years that by right should have been spent in the advancement of the studies to which he was devoted. “Why all this waste?” is the rueful question. Possibly the answer is that there was no waste. Had he been left in peace Smith might have added much more than he actually did to the volume of pure scholarship, but in his day liberal theology

had more need of champions than of devotees. Colenso and the authors of *Essays and Reviews* had won notable victories, but they had had to vindicate themselves by the law of the land, which the ecclesiastics had loudly complained was not playing fair. A battle had yet to be fought in the open, without recourse to law and with the public as ultimate judge. It was Robertson Smith's destiny to fight this battle single-handed, and to win. His expulsion from his chair, so far from being a defeat, signalled the completeness of his victory, for it was in terms an abandonment by his adversaries of their main objective, viz. the proscription of liberal theology in Presbyterian Scotland. It had no more value than any other act of vindictive *sabotage*. Of Rainy's part in it enough, perhaps, has been said. He, of course, was not in the least vindictive: his strongest feeling against Robertson Smith was impatience. The worst that can be said of him is that he sinned against the light, which according to good authority is as heavy a burden as any man can be called upon to bear. He certainly secured that Begg, Kennedy and Moncreiff should not disturb the peace of the Church during the very few years that remained to them, and when they were gone he was able to put down heresy hunting with a more or less firm hand. But the price of Rainy's peace-making was a loss of *moral* from which the Free Church never recovered. The more cultured

and thoughtful laymen, who had seen in Robertson Smith the first token of a Church of Scotland Free in a wider and nobler sense than that of the Disruption, never forgave the Church, and in their unforgiveness there was inevitably involved the leader who directed the Church’s policy. They did not secede—though some resigned their elderships—but they ceased to be interested, and their deeper allegiance was quietly withdrawn, with the result that the lay representation in the councils of the Church soon fell into less worthy hands. The new lay magnates were men of large purses and small minds, who had all been more or less infected with the new brand of religiosity that had been brought from America by Moody and Sankey, and whose avowed purpose was to convert the Free Church into a permanent evangelistic mission. To the liberal theologians they accorded a contemptuous toleration, for as practical men they refused to worry about what might be published in books that nobody could be supposed to read. As they had the same contempt for confessional standards, formularies, constitutions, traditions and indeed everything else, the account was squared. The professors, after a few abortive attacks, were left in peace,¹ and in fairness to the Free Church (and its successor the United Free Church) it must be

¹ The last attack—it was a demonstration rather than a genuine heresy hunt—made some twenty-five years ago, was directed against the present Principal of Aberdeen University, Sir George Adam Smith, then Professor of Hebrew at the Glasgow U.F. College.

admitted that it has been consistently liberal in its college appointments. To-day as a body the ministry of the United Free Church is probably the most scholarly in Great Britain, but as religious influence it is curiously inarticulate and impotent, and for that the blame must be attributed to Rainy's fatal decision in the Robertson Smith case. It had the effect, apparently irretrievable as it was unforeseen, of creating a divorce between scholarship and religion in the very life-blood of the Church.