

VIEWS FROM THE WATCH TOWER.
THE "HIGHER CRITICISM" IN SCOTLAND.
SCATHING PRESS COMMENTS.

A SCOTTISH READER of *Zion's Watch Tower* writes: – The month of May annually witnesses the great ecclesiastical meetings known as the General Assemblies of the Presbyterian Churches in Scotland. This year the Assemblies of the Established Church and of the Free Church (the latter consisting of those who did not enter the union between the former Free Church and the former United Presbyterian Church, now called in union the United Free Church) met in Edinburgh, the historic capital of the country, while the Assembly of the United Free Church was held in Glasgow. To readers of *Dawn* the principal interest in the voluminous discussions, extending over some ten days, will be in respect to the question of the "Higher Criticism" in connection with which there was a great debate in the U.F. Assembly at Glasgow on Friday, 23rd May. The matter arose in this way: Certain memorialists had called attention to the teachings of Professor George Adam Smith (one of the Professors of the Church) in a volume of lectures recently published by him, in which, they contended, views are set forth wholly subversive of the divine authority and authenticity of the Scriptures. The memorial had been remitted to the College Committee for consideration, and this committee, after deliberating, resolved unanimously to recommend that the Assembly should not take any action against Professor Smith. When this recommendation came before the Assembly for disposal extraordinary interest was taken in the proceedings, and the large St. Andrew's Hall was crowded all day. Rev. Dr. Kidd, Glasgow, submitted the report. Principal Rainy moved that the Assembly adopt the recommendation of the report to the effect "that it was not the duty of the Church to institute any process against Professor Smith in connection with his lectures recently published; but at the same time

declared that they were not to be held as accepting or authorizing the critical theories therein set forth." The motion also called upon ministers and professors to take care that reverence for Holy Scripture should be conspicuously manifest in their writings.

In a long speech in support of the motion, Principal Rainy contended that the present was not a fitting time to enter into the large question that had been raised, and that a Committee of the Church could not satisfactorily deal with the matter. Neither he nor those associated with him had any desire to make things uncomfortable for Professor Smith. The Bible would live triumphantly through all facts established as facts, and all the consequences following from them. Professor Orr seconded. Dr. John Smith, Edinburgh, moved a long amendment, setting forth that the recommendation of the College Committee did not deal with the most serious matter raised by the memorialists, and that, in view of the manifest danger to the peace and prosperity of the **[R3041 : page 211]** Church arising directly from the intrusion of this critical controversy in its present form, the Assembly appoint a large and representative Committee to take account of the whole situation with a view to arriving at such conclusions as shall dispel anxiety and clear the testimony of the Church before the world. Dr. John McEwan, Edinburgh, seconded. Dr. Wells moved that the Assembly resolve to appoint a Committee to confer with Dr. George Adam Smith in the hope that the perplexities be removed. Lord Overtoun seconded. Considerable discussion followed. Professor George Adam Smith addressed the House, complaining that he had been misrepresented. Amid loud applause he declared – "From the bottom of my heart I believe in the Bible as the revelation of God to sinful man – a thing which found me long before I found it." On a division, Dr. Smith's amendment was defeated by that of Dr. Wells; and on a further division, the report of the College Committee was approved by 534 to 263 given for Dr. Wells' amendment. This decision, together **[R3041 : page 212]** with the whole attitude in which the Churches stand towards the Higher Criticism in view of their creeds and standards, such as the

"Confession of Faith," has been extensively commented upon by the press of the country. There have, of course, been various opinions expressed; but the following extracts will be found as instructive and suggestive of the real state of matters in Scotland as they are undoubtedly plain and incisive in terms. They are both from the *Edinburgh Evening News*, an ably edited and influential daily of the Scottish capital. The first extract, a leading article, deals with the general question: –

Some of the influential among the clergy are getting alarmed about the Higher Criticism. This feeling found expression yesterday in the Established Church Assembly. Speaking on the indifference of the masses, Dr. Mair attributed it largely to the Higher Criticism. His words are worth reproduction: "The lapsing class cared nothing at all about creeds, but they did care about their squabbling. They said, 'When you have made up your own minds then we may hear you.' The prime cause was the change in the way of regarding Scripture that had arisen largely from scientific naturalism and from the Higher Criticism acting upon an age which worshiped progress and seemed to think that the newest was always best. He condemned reckless unscientific criticism, which only and always did mischief, and it was remarkable that these things percolated down into the lowest classes even. Had the Churches changed in their way of regarding the Word of God?" Dr. Mair has hit the nail on the head. Why should the working classes attend church? In the days of orthodoxy, when the Bible was believed to be an authoritative revelation, preacher and hearer held definite relations to each other. Sheltered behind a "Thus saith the Lord," the preacher could unfold before his hearers, after the style of Jonathan Edwards, a scheme of Redemption, which in essence was a philosophy of history. Man's creation, his fall, the progressive upward movements under supernatural guidance, as exhibited in the call of Abraham, the selection of the children of Israel, the wilderness legislation, sacrificial and ritualistic, typical of the New Testament revelation – these things formed the staple of orthodox preaching, and gave to human life an organic unity. To the

anxious inquirer, with his "What must I do to be saved?" the old divines had a ready and intelligent answer. They could point him to the Cross upon which the Second Person in the Trinity died as an expiation for human guilt. If questioned as to the authority for all this, the orthodox divine could appeal to the Bible as an inspired and infallible record. He could show the organic unity between the Old and New Testaments, and without difficulty could prove from the wilderness legislation and prophetic predictions the transcendent greatness of Christ and the sacrificial nature of his death. What has the Higher Critic to say to the anxious inquirer with his cry, "What must I do to be saved?" The Higher Critic can no longer point to Christ, the Second Person in the Trinity, as the Saviour of sinners. According to the "Encyclopedia Biblica," there was nothing specially supernatural about Christ. The miraculous birth is explained away or ignored, the miracles are attributed to misunderstandings or exaggerations, the supernatural, in short, is reduced to a minimum. Then Professor George Adam Smith has torn to tatters the old Redemption drama, which charmed the heart of John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, John Knox, Luther, and our own Candlish and Cunningham. According to the Higher Critics, there was no fall, no call of Abraham, no special legislation in the wilderness, no sacrificial symbols of the great sacrifice on Calvary, no predictions of Christ. In a word, the Bible is a collection of mythical stories, from which a preacher may extract a few grains of ethical teaching just as a skillful moralist may extract a few grains of ethical teaching from "Aesop's Fables." The working classes are not fools. They will not attend church to listen to men who themselves are living in a mental fog, men who, if they were honest, would prefer breaking stones on the highway to saturating their souls with hypocrisy for the sake of the loaves and fishes.

[We are quoting the above not endorsing it all. The editor would be very interested in seeing Bible *proofs* about the "Trinity." He is sure that neither the thought, nor the word Trinity is Scriptural. It is

such careless use of the Bible that has given Higher Critics the foothold they have obtained.]

The second – also a leading article – appeared on the day following the decision in the Professor Smith case: –

There is no use mincing matters. The Protestant Church is an organized hypocrisy, and its leaders arrant humbugs. It is actually come to this that if the author of the "Age of Reason" were alive today he would not be spoken of derisively as Tom Paine, the infidel, but the Rev. Thomas Paine, D.D., Professor of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis, U.F. College, Glasgow. He would have no difficulty in preaching from a Protestant pulpit. That means that while professing to pin its faith on the Bible as an authoritative, supernatural revelation, the Protestant Church is now willing to tolerate in its pulpits and its professorial chairs men who hold the views of the famous Paine. What were the conclusions reached by Paine? Pretty much the conclusions reached by the Higher Critics who today fill the highest positions in Protestant Churches. In order to justify this assertion it will be necessary to examine the views of the Higher Critics in detail. Let us begin with the first book in the Bible, Genesis. What do the Higher Critics say about that book? For answer let us turn to the article on Genesis by Professor G. F. Moore in the second volume of the "Encyclopedia Biblica." According to Professor Moore, Genesis was written about the eighth century B.C. Consequently, Moses could not be the author. As to its historical value, the Professor shows what he thinks of it by talking of "the legends of Abraham, and especially of Isaac." In a similar strain writes Professor Adam Smith, whose case was before the U.F. Assembly yesterday. Paine in his book gives ground also for believing that Genesis could not be the work [R3041 : page 213] of Moses, and that it was a collection of traditions, stories and fables. Thus both the theological professors and Paine reach substantially the same conclusion. The close agreement between the Higher Critics of today and Paine is still further seen in the article on Historical

Literature, also by Professor Moore, who remarks that "the stories of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, Israel, and his sons, are told with a wealth of circumstance and a vividness of color which show that we have entered the realm of pure legend." Let us turn to the article "Elijah," and what do we find? At the opening of the article we find the author, the Rev. W. E. Addis, Manchester, writing as follows: "We shall be better able to appreciate his (Elijah's) position when we have examined the legendary narratives in which his history is enshrined." It is the same with Elisha. Mr. Addis here also complains of the difficulty of reaching historic fact on account of the legendary nature of the Biblical account. This is very much the position of Professor Smith. Here, too, is substantial agreement with Paine, who, instead of using the word "legendary," uses the word "romancing." Take a crucial instance, the famous prediction in Isaiah about the Messiah. Here is what Professor Smith says: "Isaiah meant no more than that some one should be born whose character and hopes should be proof that God was with his people. Whether the promised unborn was an individual or a future generation of Israel it is difficult to make out; but probably the latter is what Isaiah intends." Professor Smith further knocks the feet from the famous prediction by stating that the word "virgin" should be really translated "marriageable woman." That is rather a severe blow at the incarnation as detailed by Matthew. The notable feature is that this is precisely the theory of Paine, who, if alive today, instead of being persecuted as a base infidel, would be drawing a handsome salary as a professor of theology in the U.F. Church. Dr. Rainy justifies this kind of tomfoolery on the plea that the question about the authenticity of the Bible is under grave discussion, and that we had better wait for light. That is to say, the Church is no longer the witness of God upon earth, but a huge debating society, in which large salaries are paid to those who set themselves to destroy the creed to which they have subscribed. The proceedings of yesterday confirm us in our old opinion, that the Church has become a colossal sham, and the clergy a band of sleek-faced Jesuitical trimmers, whose moral obliquity is only equalled by their intellectual dishonesty.

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