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From Pietism to Totemism: William Robertson Smith and Tübingen

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A paper discussing the relationship of William Robertson Smith with Tübingen may suitably take as its starting-point the unsigned article 'Tübingen' in vol. 23 of the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:[1]

> TÜBINGEN, the university town of Würtemberg, is picturesquely situated on the hilly and well-wooded banks of the Neckar, at the junction of the Ammer and Steinlach, 18 miles south of Stuttgart, and on the S.E. border of the Black Forest. The older town is irregularly built and unattractive, but the newer suburbs, the chief of which is the Wilhelmsstrasse, are handsome. [. . .] Tübingen's chief claim to attention lies in its famous university, founded in 1477 by Duke Eberhard. The university adopted the Reformed faith in 1534, and in 1536 a Protestant theological seminary – the so-called Stift – was incorporated with it. In 1817 a Roman Catholic theological faculty (the "Convict") and a faculty of politics and economics were added, and in 1863 a faculty of science. The leading faculty has long been that of theology, and an advanced school of theological criticism, the founder and chief light of which was F. C. BAUR (*q.v.*), is known as the Tübingen school. [. . .]

While it cannot be ruled out that this article was written by Smith himself, a more likely candidate for its authorship would seem to be his close friend and biographer John Sutherland Black (1846–1923), who had actually been a student at the University of Tübingen in the summer of 1868 and by the 1880s had come to be assistant editor of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.[2] Be that as it may, the Tübingen School of Theology had certainly been discussed (and dismissed) by Smith some thirteen years earlier in his famous article 'Bible':[3]

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[1] Anon., 'Tübingen', in: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Ninth Edition, vol. 23 (Edinburgh 1888), 602–3.

[2] See the anonymous obituary of J. S. Black in *The Times*, 21 February 1923.

[3] W. R. Smith, 'Bible', in: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Ninth Edition, vol. 3 (Edinburgh 1875),

> Can we say of all the New Testament books that they are either directly apostolic, or at least stand in immediate dependence on genuine apostolic teaching which they honestly represent? or must we hold, with an influential school of modern critics, that a large proportion of the books are direct forgeries, written in the interest of theological tendencies, to which they sacrifice without hesitation the genuine history and teaching of Christ and his apostles? [. . .] The theory has two bases, one philosophical or dogmatical, the other historical; and it cannot be pretended that the latter basis is adequate if the former is struck away.

However, the name of Tübingen is associated not only with the Tübingen School of Theology, but just as much or even more with what is in some respects its very opposite – Pietism. To this day, the name to conjure with in this context is that of Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752), author of the widely disseminated and highly influential New Testament commentary *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* and eponymous hero of the student hall of residence known as the *Albrecht-Bengel-Haus*.

One of the most influential representatives of South German Pietism, Bengel is commonly associated with Philipp Jakob Spener, August Hermann Francke and Nicolaus Graf von Zinzendorf who are regarded as the founding fathers of the Pietistic movement. In many ways, they may also be taken to have been precursors of English and Welsh Evangelicalism, a movement usually associated with Howell Harris, Daniel Rowland, George Whitfield and the brothers John and Charles Wesley. These men, in turn, were of pivotal importance for the rise of Scottish Evangelicalism as propagated by theologians such as John Witherspoon, John Erskine, Thomas Chalmers and Robert Smith Candlish. The son of a Free Church minister, Smith may be taken to have grown up with a form of Christianity which in many ways was characteristic of German Pietism as much as of British Evangelicalism. This becomes obvious when we take a closer look at what D. W. Bebbington has defined as the four most salient features of Evangelicalism: conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism.[4] As we shall see, these features were ubiquitous in Smith's background and upbringing. For this reason, they need to be given careful consideration if we wish to fully understand Smith's later career.

634–48 (quotation at 643–4).

[4] See D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain. A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*, London 1989, esp. 1–17.

'Conversions', maintained Bebbington, 'were the goal of personal effort, the collective aim of churches, the theme of Evangelical literature. [. . .] Since conversion was the one gateway to vital Christianity, parents looked anxiously for signs in it in their growing children'.[5] The Smiths were certainly no exception to this rule, as we know from Pirie Smith's account of his famous son's childhood and adolescence:[6]

> Before he was twelve years old, he had several attacks of illness so severe that once and again his life was despaired of, but also in the course of these years we had the consolation of learning that a work of grace was wrought upon him and in such a form that he was at length delivered from the fear of death and made partaker of a hope full of immortality. That the change wrought upon him was real, we had many satisfactory evidences – not the less satisfactory that there was no parade of piety, no sanctimoniousness, but a cheerful performance of daily duty, truthfulness in word and deed, and a conscientiousness which we could not help thinking was sometimes almost morbid.

The passage is interesting in several respects, not least for its implicit affirmation that conversion might be gradual ('in the course of these years') rather than sudden, a question hotly disputed and frequently discussed by Evangelicals. Equally interesting is Pirie Smith's implicit reluctance to make conversion (and religious convictions in general) the subject of prying investigations:[7]

> To say the truth I do not now and I never did approve of the practice, at one time, and perhaps still, very usual, of asking young people, or for that matter old people too, such questions as Have you been converted? Are you a child of God? and the like. And I have not in all my experience found reason to put much confidence in the answer given to such questions, but rather the reverse. It seems to me that children so trained are more likely than otherwise to learn hypocrisy – and I have some reason in my experience for this opinion. So the custom was not in use in our family; and we have no cause for regret on that account.

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[5] Bebbington (as above, n. 4), 5–7.

[6] Memoir by William Pirie Smith, composed in 1883 (Aberdeen, Queen Mother Library, Special Collections, AU MS 3674), 2.

[7] Memoir by William Pirie Smith (as above, n. 6), 29.

As far as we can tell, Smith kept this reticence inculcated at the parental manse to the end of his days. He was, as his father claimed rather approvingly in a letter dated 11 June 1877, 'not a man fond of making professions or parading his belief'.[8] 'I confess I never understood his inmost views on religion', admitted J. G. Frazer with characteristic candour in a letter dated 15 December 1897. 'On this subject he maintained a certain reserve which neither I nor (so far as I know) any of his intimates cared to break through'.[9]

As regards activism, the second conspicuous characteristic of Evangelicalism according to Bebbington, the reader may be referred to the childhood recollections of Smith's younger sister Alice. Writing in her old age for the benefit of her children and grandchildren, she gave a vivid and detailed description of her father's extensive extra-ministerial activities:[10]

> He set up evening classes for young men, teaching them and lecturing to them. We had an electric generator and a magic lantern with astronomical charts at home, which father had bought for these classes, and viewing them occasionally in winter in our children's room would always give us enormous pleasure. [. . .] When the brothers grew up, father taught them himself until they entered University and passed the entrance examination connected with this. [. . .] But every boy from the whole area who was keen to learn knew that he only had to approach father and point out his wishes and plans. When he was convinced that there was a determination to learn, he had the candidate come and see him every morning and taught him in the study side by side with his own sons. [. . .] All his spare hours, which became more numerous as he grew older, he divided up between reading and mathematics.

Pirie Smith's eldest son obviously continued this habit of restless mental activity. 'He often spoke gratefully of his father's training in accuracy, and still more

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[8] Letter of W. P. Smith to W. G. Blaikie, dated 11 June 1877 (CUL Add. Mss. 7449 D 655).

[9] Letter of J. G. Frazer to J. F. White. See Robert Ackerman, *Selected Letters of Sir J. G. Frazer*, Oxford 2005, 102–10 (quotation at 109).

[10] Memoir of Alice Smith Thiele, composed around 1930 and now in family possession, 18–19. Mrs. Astrid Hess kindly supplied me with a copy of the German original which was translated and edited by herself and Gordon K. Booth as *Children of the Manse. Growing up in Victorian Aberdeenshire* (Edinburgh 2004). Here as elsewhere in this article, all translations of texts originally written in German are by myself (B. M.).

in rapidity, of work', recalled J. S. Black.[11] A vivid picture of Smith's working habits at Cambridge is given by the Master of Christ's College, as quoted by Smith's biographers:[12]

> At that time he was very busy preparing his Burnett Lectures, and I recollect that after a hard day's work in the Library he used to return to his rooms about five o'clock, having stopped after the Library closed to finish some piece of his official business, and immediately set to at his book and work hard till seven; and all this without luncheon – he always mistrusted luncheons. Soon after Hall he would be back at his work and write hard till long past midnight. I never could understand how he did it, but his marvellous nervous force carried him on – up to a certain point.

As Emily Wright told their common friend Michael Jan de Goeje during Smith's last and ultimately fatal illness:[13] 'He is cheerful, & excitable as usual & employs himself the entire day even though confined to a couch'.

Biblicism, needless to say, was another conspicuous feature of the Free Manse at Keig. '"Book"', recalled the mother of the future heresiarch with evident satisfaction, 'was one of the first words he could say & as an infant he *must* have a book to hold when he saw others with their Bibles at Worship'.[14] This was hardly surprising in a household where sessions of family worship would be held on a daily basis both mornings and evenings. As Smith's sister Alice recalled: 'First we sang [a psalm], then we read a chapter [from the Bible], Old Testament in the morning, New Testament in the evening. [. . .] At the conclusion everybody knelt down while Father prayed'.[15] The comprehensive and detailed knowledge of the Biblical text which Smith acquired in this way is illustrated by an anecdote transmitted by his mother:[16]

> It was a favourite occupation with the younger members of the family, when he came home over a Sabbath (which he often did when he lived in Abd[n]) to gather round him, each having a Bible in hand & try to

[11] J. S. Black, 'Smith, William Robertson', *Dictionary of National Biography* 53 (1898), 160–2 (quotation at 162).
[12] J. S. Black and G. W. Chrystal, *The Life of William Robertson Smith* (London 1912), 491.
[13] Letter dated 30 December 1892 (Leiden, University Library, BPL 2389).
[14] Memoir by Jane Smith, 2.
[15] Memoir by Alice Smith Thiele, 28.
[16] Memoir by Jane Smith, 8.

> puzzle him. They looked out a verse – not an outstanding passage, but one that perhaps there might be others very like it, & having read it, they expected him to tell the book, chapter & verse. Very rarely did he fail, even in telling the verse.

However, it is also worth while to recall the spirit in which the Bible was read in the paternal manse. As Pirie Smith remembered in his old age:[17]

> I drank in the ordinary traditional views with my mother's milk – and and all my early surroundings conspired to work these views into the very substance of my being. It may serve to illustrate what I mean, if I mention that during the earlier years of my life I would not have ventured to doubt that even the last chapter of Deuteronomy which relates to the death and burial of Moses was written by Moses himself! Even at a somewhat recent period it was with great difficulty, and not without grave scruples that I could be persuaded at family worship, to omit the singing of certain Psalms and portions of Psalms; and to pass over, in the orderly reading of the word, genealogical tables and certain chapters which need not now be specified. Nay, I still remember having, when a mere boy, made a not unnatural remark upon the orders which David, on his death-bed, gave to Solomon, respecting Ioab and Shimei; and that my conscience continued, for many years, to chide me on that account.

Perhaps the most telling illustration of the extent to which the Bible pervaded everybody's lives at the manse of Keig is provided by Pirie Smith's account of the end of his second son George, who died unexpectedly at the age of 18, exactly three weeks after graduating from Aberdeen University as the best student of his year:[18]

> During the final struggle he seemed to be entangled in deep water but just before all was over he cried out in rapture "Mamma, Mary Jane! I am safe through now." "And your feet on the rock?" said his mother. His answer was "Yes" and then all was over.

It does not take Smith's matchless knowledge of the Bible to suspect that the

[17] Reflections of W. P. Smith, Chapter First, 2.
[18] Memoir by William Pirie Smith, 25.

dying young man in his agony was re-living the anguish which is so graphically described in Psalm 69, 2. In the words of the Scottish Psalter:[19]

> Save me, O God, because the floods / do so environ me,
> That ev'n unto my very soul / come in the waters be.
> I downward in deep mire do sink, / where standing there is none:
> I am into deep waters come, / where floods have o'er me gone.

While there is good evidence that both Pirie Smith and his eldest son had a wide command of fictional literature, there can be little doubt that it was the Book of Books which supplied the model on which they interpreted their experience. When Pirie Smith looked back on his own remarkable career from wood-turner via school teacher and school director to Free Church minister, he fell back on words from the Book of Isaiah (42,16), claiming that he 'was led, like the blind, by a way that I knew not'.[20] In a similar spirit, his eldest son – as if to defy the critics who had accused him of rashness – adorned the portrait which his friend George Reid's had painted at an early stage of the heresy trial with another verse from the Book of Isaiah (28,16): וימאמה אל שיח, 'He that believeth shall not make haste',

But what about the fourth and last fixed point of the 'Bebbington quadrilateral', crucicentrism? In John Wesley's view, the doctrine of Atonement was 'properly the distinguishing point between Deism and Christianity'.[21] Consequently, Evangelicals usually set great store by the view that Christ died as a substitute for sinful mankind, an idea which can ultimately be traced back via Anselm of Canterbury to the writings of St. Paul. The Pauline letters were obviously familiar to Smith at an early age, as we may infer from the recollections of a visitor at the paternal manse:[22]

> On the occasion of my first visit, Dr. Smith was lecturing on the Epistle to the Romans, and, during the days when he was preparing his lectures, he would discuss with his sons the Greek text of St. Paul. Even then William – he was perhaps fifteen at the time – showed a wonderful knowledge of Biblical literature, and seemed to have the argument of that grand compendium of Pauline theology at his fingers' ends.

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[19] *The Scottish Psalter 1929* (London 1929), 81.
[20] Autobiographical memoir of W. P. Smith (family possession), 17.
[21] Quoted by Bebbington, 14.
[22] Quoted in Black and Chrystal, 18.

Nevertheless, it has been remarked that Smith rejected the 'satisfaction' model of sacrifice, emphasising in its stead the communal character of sacrifice.[23] To understand why this should have been so, it is worth while to take a closer look at what John Rogerson has called 'The German Connection'.[24]

Smith started learning German in the winter of 1865–66, with a view to spending the following summer session in a German university. When his brother George died unexpectedly in April 1866, Smith put these plans aside for the time being, but took them up again some months later towards the close of his first year in Edinburgh.[25] The immediate reasons for this decision are given in a letter which Smith wrote on 6 February 1867 to his friend Archibald MacDonald:[26]

> I have settled to go to Tübingen during the summer. It is quite necessary to have a good knowledge of German if one is to do any good in the second Hebrew class. Indeed I have found it necessary to read a good deal of German this winter which of course is rather slow work as I cannot always dispense with the Dictionary.

Having been provided with a letter of introduction to Carl Schaarschmidt, at that time professor of Philosophy at the University of Bonn, Smith reached the Rhineland in the second half of April, only to find that his plans met with several objections. As his father recalled:[27]

> When he reached Bonn he called on Prof. Schaarschmidt to whom he had an introduction and, having learned from him, that the object which he had in view in visiting Germany might be attained at least equally well there as in Tübingen and that the place was in other respects more desirable as a residence, he resolved there to remain during the summer.

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[23] See especially Richard Allan Riesen, 'Criticism and Faith. William Robertson Smith on the Atonement', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37 (1984), 171–87, and Malcolm A. Kinnear, 'William Robertson Smith and the Death of Christ', in: William Johnstone (ed.), *William Robertson Smith. Essays in Reassessment* (Sheffield 1995), 95–100.

[24] John W. Rogerson, *The Bible and Criticism in Victorian Britain. Profiles of F. D. Maurice and William Robertson Smith* (Sheffield 1995), 74–93.

[25] Memoir of William Pirie Smith, 37–8; cf. Black and Chrystal, 60 and 63.

[26] CUL Add. Mss. 7446 C 64.

[27] Memoir of William Pirie Smith, 51.

Just why Bonn should have been judged to be 'more desirable as a residence' is by no means obvious, but as Smith's host was born and bred in Berlin, he may well have found Tübingen both devoid of urban amenities and impedimental to the acquisition of standard High German. At any rate, when six years later Henry Drummond spent the summer semester in Tübingen, he declared the local speech to be 'a fearful dialect, which Berliners cannot understand at all, at least when the peasants speak'.[28]

Smith planned his second stay in Germany together with J. S. Black in the spring of 1869.[29] Quoting from a letter which he had received from Carl Schaarschmidt, Smith told Black that he was inclined to follow his former host's recommendation and go to Göttingen rather than Berlin or Heidelberg, as there was the prospect of getting well acquainted with Albrecht Ritschl who had been teaching in Bonn from 1846–1864 and was a close friend of Schaarschmidt's. Born in 1822, Ritschl had studied Protestant Theology in Bonn, Halle, Heidelberg and Tübingen.[30] Having completed his second doctorate at Bonn (with a study on Marcion and the Gospel according to Luke), he had become Professor of New Testament and Early Church History at Bonn in 1852 and Professor of Dogmatics and Ethics at Göttingen in 1864. When Smith first met Ritschl in early May 1869, the latter had just embarked on what was soon to become the central piece of his theology, a three-volume study on the Christian doctrine of atonement. Having attended Ritschl's lectures for three weeks, Smith sent his father a glowing appreciation of his teaching which is well worth quoting in full:[31]

> Did I tell you about Ritschl? He was a pupil of Baur's but too acute to remain in the Tübingen School & was accordingly renounced by Baur both scientifically and personally. He now takes a very independent course, freely criticising the established positions; but cherishing much greater respect for the reformers than for the present dogmatic. In fact the old reformation Dogmatic seems to be what he values most highly.
>
> His course on Ethics is very interesting both historically and

[28] Quoted from George Adam Smith, *The Life of Henry Drummond* (London 1899), 49.

[29] Letter to J. S. Black dated 17 April 1869 (CUL Add. Mss. 7449 C 64).

[30] See the biography by Otto Ritschl, *Albrecht Ritschls Leben*, 2 vols., Freiburg 1892–1896, and the recent studies by M. Zelger, 'Modernisierte Gemeindetheologie. Albrecht Ritschl 1822–1889', in: Friedrich Wilhelm Graf (ed.), *Profile des neuzeitlichen Protestantismus* II,1, Gütersloh 1992, 148–188, and M. Neugebauer, *Lotze und Ritschl* (Frankfurt am Main 2002).

[31] Letter to William Pirie Smith, dated 24 May 1869 (CUL 7449 C 116).

> practically. He has been treating of Conversion of Good Works and is now on the subject of assurance of Grace on which he has given us the Lutheran & Reformed doctrine and is now proceeding to explain the nature of Pietism & Methodism as grounded on a desire to obtain Assurance by being able to assign a distinct point as the point of conversion. Ritschl of course objects to this, urging that conversion is almost never a sudden thing except in the case of very vicious men – that in men who have been under good influences the process of conversion is generally gradual. At the same time R. of course agrees with all protestants against Romanists in regarding Assurance as very necessary. He has not yet given his own positive views on the subject but seems to lean most to the Calvinistic doctrine.
>
> I have never heard anything so interesting on a theological subject as Ritschl's lectures. He has evidently such thorough clearness in his own views & such complete acquaintance with the views of others as make his lectures exceedingly instructive.

Being of a notoriously impetuous and energetic temperament, Smith must have found Ritschl's aversion to any kind of metaphysical speculation, his abhorrence of mysticism and his insistence on the ethical, active and practical side of Christianity eminently attractive. Moreover, he was evidently thrilled to find that some of Ritschl's views could be taken to confirm ideas held and advocated by his father. This is certainly true of Ritschl 'urging that conversion is almost never a sudden thing', which is precisely the point which Pirie Smith wished to make when he maintained that his son's conversion occurred 'in the course of these years'.[32] In another letter to his father, Smith explicitly pointed out this convergence of ideas:[33]

> Ritschl in fact holds, so far as I can see, a doctrine which I think you hold too, that where a child is faithfully brought up under Xtn influences we may feel a confidence that God will begin a work of grace in his heart even before his personal consciousness begins.

The extent of Ritschl's influence on Smith is difficult to gauge, as thirteen letters and one undated postcard from Ritschl to Smith is all that has survived

[32] See above, n. 6.

[33] Letter dated 7 July 1869 (CUL Add. Mss. 7449 C 118).

of their correspondence.[34] These letters cover the period from July 1870 to December 1881, with a major gap between October 1873 and February 1877. Smith's letters to Ritschl appear to have been lost, although some if not all of them must have been still extant when Otto Ritschl wrote his father's biography, quoting from a letter dated 9 February 1877 and mentioning two others, dated 26 April and 24 October 1871 respectively.[35] Yet despite the sparseness of the evidence, there can be no doubt that Ritschl was a major influence on the budding Scottish theologian, as may be seen from Smith's retrospective acknowledgement of it in response to a question about 'books which had influenced him' which was put to the erstwhile professor of Old Testament Exegesis in 1891:[36]

> "Your request about theologians," he wrote to his correspondent, "is rather puzzling. A. B. Davidson, Rothe (*Zur Dogmatik*), Ewald, Ritschl come into my mind at once as leading influences, and I think I should add Dr. John Bruce. Then, of men of past ages, Luther certainly; Calvin, I suppose, had an influence, but I can't *place* it very well in my present resulting state of thought. I don't think any of the Fathers ever did much for me; the influence of Augustine was chiefly negative. I don't think I can count any of the Systematic Theologians – not even Ames, though I admired his clear dialectic. No Anglican writer comes into my list. I begin to think I never can have been a theologian. *Ecce Homo* impressed me at the time; I don't know that it left any permanent result, – not so much as *Christmas Eve* and *Easter Day*. For the Middle Ages, Dante."

A first point to be noted about this remarkable passage is the absence of the name with which that of Smith is most closely associated in the modern history of Old Testament Studies, Julius Wellhausen.[37] In 1899, John Forbes White quoted Wellhausen as having informed him by letter that he 'came to know Robertson Smith in 1871, when in our conversation he opposed my views with vigour. Afterwards we had much correspondence'.[38] However, '1871' is

[34] CUL Add. Mss. 7449 D 596 – D 609 and F 55.

[35] See Albrecht Ritschl, vol. I, 101 and 314.

[36] Black and Chrystal, 534 – 5.

[37] On him, see most recently Rudolf Smend, *Julius Wellhausen. Ein Bahnbrecher in drei Disziplinen* (München 2006).

[38] John Forbes White, 'William Robertson Smith', in: *Aurora Borealis Academica. Aberdeen University Appreciations 1860 – 1889* (Aberdeen 1899), 189 – 204 (at 203).

most probably a mistake (or misprint) for '1872', this being the year of their first acquaintance given in E. G. Browne's obituary of Smith (which, it should be noted, is stated to be based on personal information from J. S. Black who had accompanied Smith to Göttingen in 1869 and thus would have known if Smith and Wellhausen had met at that time).[39] This is confirmed by J. S. Black's account of Smith for the *Dictionary of National Biography* (which explicitly dates their first acquaintance to 1872) and squares nicely with Wellhausen telling Smith in May 1889 that Felix Klein, whom he had not seen for 17 years, had just visited the University of Marburg.[40] Yet despite their comparatively early acquaintance, Smith's and Wellhausen's voluminous correspondence does not appear to have started before the autumn of 1878, and until his detailed review of *Geschichte Israels I*, published on 17 May 1879, Smith appears to have mentioned Wellhausen's work only rarely and rather cautiously in his publications, commenting on 'that clearness and somewhat rude force which mark all Wellhausen's work', and concluding that 'his investigation, even in its present imperfect state, points to inferences of great interest for the history of the Old Testament'.[41] The conclusion seems inevitable that until 1878/79, Smith and Wellhausen were not on familiar terms and that it was only in the wake of Wellhausen's involvement in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and Smith's increasing absorption in Arabic history and philology that they became close friends.

The case of Abraham Kuenen, whose name is also conspicuous by its absence from the passage quoted above, is similar and yet different. Like Wellhausen, Kuenen makes his appearance as a correspondent rather late, his first letter to Smith dating from June 1880.[42] Yet, despite the lateness of their correspondence, there can be little doubt that Kuenen's writings were a major influence on Smith from at least 1870 onwards.[43] Born at Haarlem in 1828,

[39] See Edward Granville Brown, 'Professor William Robertson Smith', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1894), 594–603 (at 597).

[40] Cf. Black (as above, n. 11), 160, and cf. and Wellhausen's letter to Smith written in May 1889 (CUL Add. Mss. 7449 D 814): 'Neulich war Felix Klein hier, ich hatte ihn seit 17 Jahren nicht gesehen.'

[41] See W. R. S. and J. R., 'German Periodicals', *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 25.96 (1876), 374–84 (at 380) and W. R. Smith, 'The Study of the Old Testament in 1876', *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 26.102 (October 1877), 779–805 (W. R. Smith, *Lectures and Essays*, edited by J. S, Black and G. W. Chrystal (London 1912), 367–99, at 382).

[42] See Pieter Cornelis Houtman, 'Abraham Kuenen and William Robertson Smith: their correspondence', *Nederlandsch archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 80 (2000), 221–40 (at 225), and the lengthy extract printed in Black and Chrystal (as above, n. 12), 366–7.

[43] See S. J. de Vries, *Bible and Theology in The Netherlands* (New York 1989), 58–88, and P. B. Dirksen and A. van der Kooij (eds.), *Abraham Kuenen (1828–1891)* (Leiden 1993).

Kuenen had become full professor in the theological faculty of the University of Leiden at the early age of 27. In 1861–1865 he published a three-volume introduction to the Old Testament, *Historisch-Kritisch Onderzoek naar het ontstaan en de verzameling van de boeken des Ouden Verbonds*, in which he still adhered to the view that at the origin of the Pentateuch was a 'Book of Origins' (*Grundschrift*) which contained elements dating back to the time of Moses and which had reached its present form by the beginning of the exile. However, following further researches by Karl Heinrich Graf and John W. Colenso, Kuenen was subsequently converted to the view that both the historical parts and the laws of the alleged *Grundschrift* were in fact the latest strata of the Hexateuch, forming a 'Priestly Code' (P) dating to the time of Ezra or even later. This is the view propounded in his two-volume monograph *De Godsdienst van Israël tot den Ondergang van den Joodschen Staat* (1869–1870), which was published in an English translation as *The Religion of Israel to the Fall of the Jewish State* (1874–1875). In this book, Kuenen propagated a completely naturalistic view of Israel's religious history, rejecting the notion of a special revelation and taking the preaching of Amos and Hosea as the start of ethical monotheism.

In an 1870 essay on prophecy, for which he had used the first volume of *De Godsdienst van Israël*, Smith declared himself to be 'impressed by [Kuenen's] cold pellucidity of thought which lays bare to himself and others the real principles and unavoidable problems of a purely naturalistic criticism', contrasting the view of the prophets held by Ewald with those of Kuenen who 'would have everything explained by the psychology of ordinary life'.[44] While Smith in this article assumed the standpoint of an impartial observer who is content with weighing the historical evidence, he made no secret of his dislike for Kuenen's rejection of supernaturalism in his first review for the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review*, castigating in Kuenen's work his 'extremely rationalistic principles which separate it from our sympathy'.[45] As Smith put it in his review of the first volume of *Jahrbücher für Protestantische Theologie* published in 1875:[46]

> No doubt important results will accrue from the active investigation of religious history that is now going on, but one of the chief results,

[44] W. R. Smith, 'Prophecy in the Critical Schools of the Continent', *British Quarterly Review* 51.102 (April 1870), 313–43 (= W. R. Smith, *Lectures and Essays* [as above, n. 41], 163–203, at 163 and 169).

[45] W. R. S., 'Dutch Periodicals', *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 20.77 (July 1871), 579–84 (at 579).

[46] W. R. S. and J. R., 'German Periodicals', *The British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 24.92 (April 1875), 383–89 (at 388).

> we feel sure, will be to bring out more clearly than ever the absolute uniqueness of Christianity, and the impossibility of explaining its central conceptions and facts without calling in the aid of the supernatural.

In the famous or rather infamous 1876 *Edinburgh Courant* review of Smith's *EB* article 'Bible' (which had been published at about the same time), the anonymous author – later revealed to have been Professor A. H. Charteris – stated that[47]

> we had scarcely begun the article till we found that we were reading a reproduction of the well-known theories of Kuenen, the most "advanced" theologian in Holland. [. . .] We catch Kuenen's very words when we are told that Deuteronomy is a prophetic legislative "programme."

In view of Smith's repeated affirmation of supernaturalism, this allegation was obviously rather misleading, as Kuenen himself was not slow to point out in a public letter dated 16 January 1877:[48]

> It is true that several positions on points of Old Testament criticism which Professor Smith either fairly states or partially endorses are to be found also in my "Religion of Israel." But how could this be otherwise? [. . .] That it is out of the question to speak of slavish dependence or paraphrase is in the present case all the more clear, inasmuch as Professor Smith deals on the one hand with various matters on which I have expressed myself either not at all or only cursorily (text, version editions of the O. Testament), while, on the other hand he expressly adopts upon important points opinions differing from mine.

Yet if Kuenen was such a major influence on the development of Smith's critical views, why does his name not figure in the above-quoted list of 'books which had influenced him', although this list includes the names of Heinrich Ewald and Richard Rothe? The answer must be that, from a theological point of view, Smith regarded Ewald's and Rothe's influence as more significant

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[47] Anon., 'The New Encyclopaedia Britannica on Theology', *The Edinburgh Courant*, 15 April 1876, 4.

[48] 'Professor Kuenen on the charge of Plagiarism against Professor W. Robertson Smith', *The Scotsman*, 22 January 1877, 4.

than that of Kuenen. Presumably, Smith felt that finding the most convincing explanation for the composition of the Pentateuch and providing the most plausible picture of Israel's religious history so far might be fine achievements in themselves, but that these achievements were theologically of much less consequence than those of Ewald and Rothe. This, Smith repeatedly claimed, consisted in their distinction between revelation and Bible:[49]

> The Bible is not revelation but the record of divine revelation – the record of those historical facts in which God has revealed himself to man. That God really has so revealed Himself to man – not that we possess an inspired record of this revelation – is the point on which Christianity stands or falls.

This interpretation may also serve to explain why Smith regarded Ritschl as the 'Urvater (only begetter) of the Aberdeen heresy', a designation which Ritschl himself was unable to account for, as he could not recall having ever discussed the problems of Pentateuch criticism with Smith.[50] Obviously, Kuenen did not qualify for the epithet of heresiarch because Smith was fundamentally at odds with him theologically, affirming supernaturalism and regarding his adoption of Kuenen's historical conclusions as a mere corollary of taking Ewald's and Rothe's historical view of the Bible. Ewald and Rothe in their turn could hardly be blamed either, as Smith held their position – vastly different from the critical stance of Kuenen and Wellhausen – to be fully in line with that of Reformers such as Luther and Zwingli. In taking Ritschl to be 'the only begetter of the Aberdeen heresy', Smith did in fact acknowledge the latter's pivotal role in making him see his native Free Church from a historical perspective, pointing out to him the extent to which the traditional view of the Bible with which he had grown up was conditioned by post-Reformation ideas.

'The leading characteristic of Ritschl's teaching', we read in J. S. Black's and G. W. Chrystal's biography of Smith, 'was a sort of shrewd eclecticism which leaned decidedly to Calvinistic orthodoxy'.[51] The lack of quotation marks might lead us to suppose that this is a general verdict on the part of the authors, but in fact it appears to be merely the paraphrase of a statement made by Smith in a letter to his father, namely that Ritschl seemed 'to lean most to

[49] W. R. Smith, *Lectures and Essays* (as above, n. 41), 123. The text in question is stated to date from January 1869.

[50] See Otto Ritschl (as above, n. 30), Vol. I, 314.

[51] Black and Chrystal (as above, n. 12), 111.

the Calvinistic doctrine' in the specific question of the assurance of faith'.[52] In fact, Ritschl held rather strong reservations against Calvinism, as may be seen from a letter which he sent Smith on 24 January 1871, acknowledging the printed version of Smith's inaugural lecture and a sample translation of his book on the doctrine of atonement:[53]

> As I return the enclosed sheet, I am most grateful to you for your efforts on behalf of my book and give you credit for the high degree of pastoral wisdom which has guided you in the selection of the sample for your public. Well, it takes bacon to catch mice, as the proverb has it, and the passage does indeed sound as if I were a confirmed Calvinist. [. . .] Moreover I have to thank you specifically for your lecture which so skilfully uses Luther's original practical conception of the Word of God to establish the historical view of the biblical books. Melanchthon and Calvin invalidated this conclusion only too soon by their doctrinaire theoretical interpretation of the Word of God.

This theological difference between Luther and Zwingli on the one hand, and Melanchthon and Calvin on the other hand, is also mentioned in another letter of Ritschl dated 20 February 1878:[54]

> From the *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* (*Journal of Church History*) you may have seen that I have tackled a history of Pietism and that I am inclined to regard this continuation of the German Lutheran and Zwinglian Churches as a branch of foreign Calvinism. I have been busy pursuing the matter further ever since the New Year, with some interruptions due to lack of literature, and I have studied the writings of Gisbert Voetius, with admiration and yet not without astonishment at the consequences of Calvinism which are officially called praecisitas or Puritanism. To you this phenomenon will be less alien, but this legalism, which always draws on the example of the primitive Church, is bound up with that theological legalism – hostile towards you – which regards the view of the Old Testament which prevailed in the primitive Church and in St. Paul as eternally binding, just because it prevailed in the primitive Church. By basing yourself on the precedent of Luther and Zwingli

[52] See above, n. 31.
[53] CUL Add. Mss. 7449.
[54] CUL Add. Mss. 7449.

> you are no longer Calvinist in that respect, and I am afraid you will be judged accordingly. Well, you won't be burnt, and as to the rest *Deus providebit* [God will take care].

Obviously, Ritschl was convinced that it was the pietistic legacy of the Free Church which was at the root of Smith's persecution. In yet another letter dated 22 April 1879, he made no secret of his disgust at what he took to be the result of his historical research:[55]

> In the Netherlands, Pietism is a modification of Calvinism which was brought about by the fact that the majority of the Dutch people resisted Calvinism, when they received it as an import from the French provinces in the south in the wake of their liberation from Spanish rule. In order to enforce Calvinism in spite of the Lutheran and Zwinglian inclinations of the German section of the population, the strict representatives of Calvinism gather in conventicles and adopt a type of piety which is actually Catholic, namely intercourse with the Lord Jesus as bridegroom of the soul. [. . .] I trust you won't take it amiss if I confess that my affection for Calvinism as a system has not been enhanced by these researches, particularly since I have to say that Pietism – which is really Calvinism impregnated with Catholic devotion – has also poured into the Lutheran Church and produced all that obscurity which has spread over the state of our Church the for the past 60 years.

At this point of his argument, Ritschl felt free to point out the bearing of all this on Smith's own case:

> You, too, suffer because of that which is un-Protestant in Calvinism. For the combination of Lutheranism and certain disciplinary and constitutional standards of the Primitive Church (which is what Calvinism consists of) curiously attracts other most relative elements of the Primitive Church: For just because the scribal learning of a man like Paul was Jewish, this phenomenon of the Primitive Church is likewise regarded as eternally obligatory in Calvinism, and this is why you are barred from understanding the Pentateuch in any way which is different

[55] Ibid.

> from that in which it appeared to Paul. But the Primitive Church is the ideal of reform at the level of Catholicism, and it is the advantage of Luther over Calvin that he overruled that standard.

As Smith's letters to Ritschl appear to be no longer extant, we do not know his immediate reaction to these assertions. However, this loss is compensated for to some extent by Smith's letters to Ludwig Diestel. Born in 1825, Diestel had studied theology in his native Königsberg as well as in Berlin and Bonn. In 1851 he had gained a second doctorate from the University of Bonn, where Albrecht Ritschl had become a close friend. Having been appointed Professor at Bonn in 1858, he moved to Greifswald in 1862 and to Jena in 1867, meeting Smith in the summer of 1872, shortly before moving to what was to become the final stage of his career, Tübingen. Being a close friend of Ritschl and a staunch defender of critical freedom, Diestel had no problem in gaining Smith's affection and was consequently supplied with offprints of the latter's academic writing. The following letter written by Diestel in the autumn of 1874 is characteristic of the amicable tone of their correspondence:[56]

> Dear Colleague!
>
> I was most delighted at your sending me your lecture on "The place of theology in the work and growth of the Church". I thank you for it not only as a token of your friendly disposition towards your German colleagues, but especially because of its most excellent contents. [. . .] I do hope you, too, will soon come and see our beautiful Tübingen! You will be most welcome to all of us.

To this cordial acknowledgement, coupled with the offer to publish a German version of his paper, Smith replied almost instantly and in kind:[57]

> My Dear Professor Diestel
>
> Your very cordial letter was most gratifying to me, both as a proof of your friendship which I highly esteem, and from the satisfaction it gave me to have your approbation of the line of thought which I set before our students in my address. [. . .]
>
> I was greatly delighted to hear that your life & work at Tuebingen

[56] Ibid.

[57] Tübingen, University Library (Md 842–136).

quite come up to your hopes. I should like much to visit you there & perhaps may effect this when I next go abroad. I saw our friend Ritschl in the summer. His book was then rather pressing on his mind. He seemed to fear that it would not find the right reception. I am very glad that you have a better account to give. With us he already enjoys a great name, tho' here too Dilettanti find his writings too hard to read.

Are you as little a traveller as Ritschl? Shall we not hope to see you here? Aberdeen would in many ways repay a visit. It is the gate to the most striking part of the Highlands and has many other points of interest. And you would be warmly welcomed both here and elsewhere.

I ought to close with telling something of my own work. I have not many students but I have always a fair number of men of really good quality & I think that scientific theology is making way among us.

With kindest regards
Believe me Ever yours
Wm Robertson Smith

As was to be expected, Smith also kept Diestel informed of the ups and downs in his fight for critical freedom:[58]

My Dear Professor Diestel

I have from time to time sent you newspapers containing some details of the attacks to which I have recently been subjected in our Church courts. I fear they are not wholly intelligible to one who is a stranger to our Church law but you will at least have gathered that a very fierce storm has been raging & that the reactionary party have at all events gained a temporary victory. It is true that their victory is not really so significant as it appears to be at first sight. [. . .] All the rising men of the Church & especially all the younger theological professors were on my side; so one has friends strong enough to give good hopes of the ultimate issue. [. . .]

In his response, Diestel sympathized with Smith in his plight, expressing his conviction that things would be even worse in Germany: 'I think three out of four of our professors would have to go if they had to face a German synod in the same way as you have to'.[59] Smith, however, remained characteristically

[58] Letter dated 12 July 1877.

[59] Letter dated 4 July 1877 (CUL Add. Mss. 7449 D 187).

undaunted, and in January 1878 enlisted his colleague's help for the next strategic move in his campaign:[60]

> Dear Professor Diestel
>
> The process against me has at length after innumerable delays almost taken shape & I shall have to give in my answer to the libel in a few days. One of my arguments must be that the Reformers, who established the supreme authority of the Scriptures in the Protestant Churches, were themselves not concerned to deny the possibility of Errors in the Bible.
>
> Now I find in your Geschichte des A.T. p. 234 the statement that according to Zwingli "historische Irrthümer in d. Schrift sind v. Gott gewollt in pädag. Weisheit" [historical errors in the Scripture are willed by God in his pedagogical wisdom].
>
> You do not cite the relevant passages & I have not been able to find them. Nor have I access to the work of your "Gewährsmann" [source] Spörri. It would be a great favour if you could send me as quickly as possible (for my answer must be in print within a fortnight) the relevant references. [. . .]
>
> I have some hope of carrying through to victory my battle for Protestant freedom; but every engine has been used to prejudice the minds & excite the passions of the ignorant in the Church & especially of ministers & laymen from the Highlands who in our Church are a quite peculiar & wholly conservative or retrogressive body.
>
> Yours very truly
>
> W Robertson Smith

As usual, Diestel wrote back immediately and supplied the references which Smith had sought. To further the cause of his friend, he even offered to publish an article in the *Protestantische Kirchenzeitung*, and to facilitate this task Smith wrote what is probably the longest of his letters which are still extant, giving a detailed and astonishingly dispassionate account of his case extending over some 15 pages.[61] In it, he started from the assumption that 'such a question as that which is now under discussion affects ~~almost~~ all Scotch Presbyterians; & practically a victory for critical freedom in the Free Church will prevent the same battle from being fought over again in

[60] Letter dated 16 January 1878 (Tübingen, University Library, Md 842–136.

[61] Letter dated 17 June 1878.

either of the other denominations'. Offering an historical interpretation of the situation, Smith cheerfully admitted that the Free Church of Scotland had 'generally been regarded as dogmatically the most conservative body in Scotland', maintaining, however, that it was

> far less absolutely a reproduction of the Church of the 17th century than its authors supposed. The reaction against moderatism wh. in a way highly characteristic of our country formulated itself as a conservative reaction was in reality largely influenced by so-called English Evangelicalism – i.e. by English Pietism of a somewhat modern type. [. . .] At first I had only friends who thought it right to leave room for opinions they did not hold. Now I have partisans for my views & in particular there is a widespread feeling that the Church must take a new departure by going back, on the whole doctrine of the Word of God, from 17th cent. dogmatism & 18th cent. pietistic supernaturalism to the Reformation position.

No doubt Ritschl would have agreed wholeheartedly. Diestel's article, which was mainly based on Smith's account, duly appeared in the *Protestantische Literaturzeitung* the following month.[62] Its author, however, did not live to see the outcome of the struggle, passing away on 15 May 1879, almost exactly one year before Smith practically won his case by being merely admonished, and almost exactly two years before he was finally deprived of his chair. For Smith, this turn of events rather widened the gulf which since his student days in Germany had opened between his own understanding of Christianity and that of the more conservative and pietistically-minded ranks of his Church. However, it also appears to have loosened the bond between Smith and the only begetter of the Aberdeen heresy, for although Ritschl died as late as 1889, there appear to be no letters from him to Smith after December 1881, when he declined Smith's offer to contribute an article on Lutheranism to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.[63] In a way, it might be argued that just as Ritschl's interpretation of Pietism as an aberration had estranged Smith from his own Church with its strong Pietistic background, so Ritschl's insistence on theology being possible only in connection with a church (as distinct from a sect) ultimately led to a parting of the ways with Smith.

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[62] Anon., 'Die kirchliche Bewegung in Schottland', in: *Protestantische Kirchenzeitung für das evangelische Deutschland* 29 (20 July 1878), 606–12.

[63] Letter dated 21 December 1881 (CUL Add. Mss. 7449 D 609).

Fortunately, Smith's withdrawal from theology pure and simple did not end his link with Tübingen, as his growing interest in oriental studies and work as joint editor of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* led to extensive contacts with the Arabic scholar Albert Socin (1844–1887) and the oriental historian Alfred von Gutschmid (1831–1887), who had both been appointed professors at the University of Tübingen in 1876 and 1877 respectively. This oriental link became even more significant, when in the autumn of 1882 Smith was told that he might apply for the Lord Almoner's Professorship in Arabic which had become vacant on the death of Edward Henry Palmer. A letter from William Wright, who knew Smith from his work on the Old Testament Revision Committee, appears to contain the earliest reference to this exciting possibility:[64]

> Palmer is, I fear, gone. Today's "Times" leaves little doubt on that point. God rest his soul. Poor little man, it was an awful death.
>
> Of course some time will elapse before his place can be filled. I don't suppose that will be done before the New Year. It wd. give me the greatest satisfaction if I cd. see you and Keith Falconer established beside me as Professor and Lecturer. Bensly is a thoroughly sound man in Syriac–his Arabic is not much–but he is horribly slow & unpunctual.
>
> But how can we set about the matter? I think I must really talk the thing over confidentially with Aldis Wright.
>
> You see, the Lord Almoner's Chair is not in the gift of the University, but of the Lord Almoner for the time being. Even the Commissioners have not dared to touch this piece of private (Royal) patronage. Therefore, as the University has no control over the appointment, they did not grant any increase of stipend, etc. The endowments of the Chair stand: £ 40–certain dues (nearly £ 10, I believe) + fees, if any.
>
> Now, the late Lord Alm. having been gathered by Providence to his fathers, a new man has just been appointed, viz. the Rev. Lord Alwyn Compton, Dean of Worcester. He may give it, I believe, to my cat Toodles, if he pleases. How is he to be influenced or got at?

Sensible man that he was, Wright mustered his friends and colleagues to provide testimonials, only to be informed that his old friend Theodor Nöldeke had already been approached by another competitor, Stanley Lane-Poole. Wright made no secret of his annoyance, telling Nöldeke by mid-November:[65]

[64] Letter dated 28 October 1882 (CUL Add. Mss. 7449 D 857).

[65] Letter dated 15 November 1882 (Tübingen, University Library, Md 782 A 5).

> My dear Noeldeke,
>
> I cannot understand Poole's restless anxiety to get Palmer's chair, unless it be merely for the sake of calling himself Professor. [. . .] I wd like to have Robertson Smith appointed, and he would like to get it, but I hardly know how to draw near the Rev. Lord. If you say anything for Poole at all, say it very mildly, else you may sadly interfere with whatever small chance Smith may have.

Convinced of Smith's superior merits and eager to please his old friend Wright, Nöldeke lost no time in asking Smith about his intentions:[66]

> My Dear Friend!
>
> Mr. Stanley Lane Poole has approached me in order to possibly receive a recommendation of his achievements in Arabic, with a view to obtaining the professorship of the late Palmer. I have asked Wright for his opinion, and he tells me that he would be much more pleased if you obtained the professorship, which – after the deduction of all dues – is worth only 30 £, but does not entail any duties at all. [Wright says] your chances were but small, as the Lord Almoner who bestows it is High Church. Still, I would not like do to the least that would reduce your chances. For this reason I would like to ask you 1) whether you apply or intend to apply at all (in which case you would of course obtain from me every recommendation, should it be sought), 2) if it is all right by you if I tell St. L.-P. that I would recommend him only in case you are not a competitor, as you were closer to me personally. Or is he perhaps not to know that you apply if you do? Please do respond a.s.a.p.!
>
> Kind regards, Th Nöldeke

While the response to this request is no longer extant, the glowing testimonial which Nöldeke supplied shortly afterwards leaves no doubt about the resolution and seriousness with which Smith sought support for his application. Wright's relief is manifest in a letter which he sent Nöldeke before the end of the month:[67]

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[66] Letter from Nöldeke to Smith, dated 17 November 1882 (CUL Add. Mss. 7449 D 509).

[67] Letter dated 26 November 1882 (Tübingen, University Library, Md 782 A 5).

> My dear Noeldeke,
>
> Thanks for your kind letter on behalf of R. S. I shall do with it the best I can; but I fear without result, as I am not likely to be consulted by the Lord Almoner. He is a strictly orthodox Highchurchman, the very antipode in every way of R. S. For the rest, the thing is as I told you: the said chair has no duties, and a salary of only £ 40 per an. Palmer's predecessor, Preston, lived, and still lives, in Madeira; and for the last two years of his life Palmer himself resided in London & never came near us. My only hope is that Poole may not get it, as he is personally a very conceited, unamiable individual.

Further supportive testimonials arrived in quick succession, but Smith remained pessimistic, telling his Tübingen colleague Albert Socin on Christmas Day 1882:[68]

> I have still to thank you for your kind testimonial. My testimonials have been very well received in Cambridge; but I fear they will have no effect on the Lord Almoner, who seems resolved not to consult the Cambridge men "vom Fach".

In a letter to Paul de Lagarde, written two days later, Smith expressed himself even more negatively:[69]

> I have not yet any formal answer to my application for the Cambridge [professorship] but am told by W. Wright that tho' the Cambridge philologists seem to be strong for me the Lord Almoner refuses to consult them & will certainly not have me.

Thus it must have been with some apprehension that Smith opened the following letter from the Lord Almoner which he received on New Year's day 1883:[70]

> Dear Mr. Robertson Smith,
>
> You are no doubt aware that the Professorship recently held by Mr. Palmer, and which it is now my duty to fill up has a very small stipend

[68] Letter dated 25 December 1882 (Tübingen, University Library).
[69] Letter dated 27 December 1882 (SUB Göttingen, Cod. Ms. Lagarde 150:1135).
[70] Letter dated 30 December 1883 (CUL Add. Mss. 7449 D 160).

> and no duties attached to it. [. . .] As regards the latter point, I cannot think it satisfactory that the Lord Almoner's Reader at Cambridge should be in a position to do – if he likes – nothing there: though of course he cannot be expected to do much for £ 50. I propose therefore to impose upon him, in the terms of his appointment, the duty of giving at least one public lecture every year within the University on some Arabic classical author: or on Arabic literature generally: or on some subject connected with it, such as the Arabic language, grammatically or philologically considered, the Geography, History or Natural History of Arabia. I trouble you with all these details, because I have determined after much consideration to offer you this post.

One of the very first letters of congratulation came from Theodor Nöldeke who was delighted at this result which Wright had represented to him as most unlikely.[71] On the same day, Wright chose to lift at least a corner of the veil which enshrouded the Lord Almoner's mysterious change of mind:[72]

> My dear Noeldeke,
>
> For Rob. Smith's apptment we may, I think, be as thankful to Dr Littledale as to anybody. This, however, is private information, and not to be made public.

But what prompted the Reverend Dr. Richard Frederick Littledale (1833–1890) to exercise his influence in the way he did? In fairness to him it should be stated that he was not only a notorious controversialist on behalf of the Oxford Movement, but also a man of considerable learning who contributed numerous articles to the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.[73] Moreover, despite all theological and ecclesiastical differences, he appears to have resembled Smith not only in his appreciation of beautiful pictures, but also because he – just like Smith – is said to have had 'a keen and intense sense of humour, a power of repartee, and amusing way of putting things'. Born in Dublin in 1833, Littledale was said to combine 'the very truest, largest-hearted charity' with 'genuine Hibernian wit'. We get a glimpse

[71] Letter dated 5 January 1883 (CUL Add. Mss. 7449 D 510).

[72] Letter dated 5 January 1883 (Tübingen, University Library, Md 782 A 5)..

[73] Namely, 'Jesuits', 'Liguori', 'Monachism', 'Neri', 'Pilgrimage', 'Trappists', 'Trent, Council of', 'Usher', 'Vatican Council' and 'Xavier'. For the following details and quotations, see Anon., *Memories of a Sister of S. Saviour's Priory*, London 1903, 188–206, based on personal recollections and two obituaries from the contemporary news press.

of what that means when we read in A. H. Sayce's memoirs that the man who famously translated one of the *Laudi spirituali* by Bianco da Siena into English as 'Come Down, O Love Divine' (later set to music by Sir Ralph Vaughan Williams) had lost his first curacy when during a celebration on the Eve of St. Lawrence's day he had stolen into the empty church and mischievously replaced a gloomy hymn which had been specially composed for the occasion by a ditty of his own, beginning '"Twas the night before Larry was stretched'.[74] Nevertheless, we would probably do Littledale an injustice if we attributed his intervention on behalf of Smith to what Sayce chose to call 'an Irishman's versatility and sense of humour'. As the Lord Almoner's decision was very much in line with the preferences of the specialists, Littledale may well have been motivated by his customarily pragmatic, no-nonsense approach to questions of scholarship. 'He had a great horror of stupidity', remarked one of those who knew him, 'and always said "stupidity made more mischief in the world than wickedness."' On top of that, however, we should not neglect the human factor either, for Littledale was at the same time – William Wright's brother-in-law. Just how much Smith came to know about what had been going on we shall never learn, but it is probably significant that Smith's affection for William Wright and his wife Emily, née Littledale, remained unswerving to the end. Some ten weeks after her husband had died on 22 May 1889, a grateful Emily Wright told Theodor Nöldeke,[75]

> You will not require to be told that in all our time of anxiety and sorrow Robertson Smith has been the kindest, truest most untiring friend to me & my sister. I do not know what we should have done without his aid.

Some two weeks after Smith himself had died on 31 March 1894, Emily Wright told their common friend M. J. de Goeje:[76]

> The University has had a grievous loss & we shall never cease to miss him. Ever since Willie died no good son c[d] have done more or been more affectionate to me & my sister.

On New Year's Day 1883, however, these events were still in the distant future,

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[74] See Archibald Henry Sayce, *Reminiscences*, London 1923, 37–8.

[75] Letter dated 4 August 1889 (Tübingen, University Library, Md 782 A 5).

[76] Letter dated 17 April 1894 (Leiden, University Library, BPL 2389).

and an overjoyed Smith lost no time in telling his old teacher of Arabic, Paul de Lagarde, the splendid news:[77]

> Dear Prof. Lagarde
>
> After all, I am to have the chair in Cambridge. The Lord Almoner offers me it today "after much consideration". Thanks once more for your share in this result both by your testimonial & by your constant help. And now as they say in Egypt
>
> بـيط تـنا و ةنسلالـك
>
> ملاسلاو
>
> W. R. Smith

In thus switching from English to Arabic, moving from Scotland to Cambridge, and swapping theology for social anthropology, Smith may be said to have completed the transition indicated by the title of this paper, 'From Pietism to Totemism'. We in turn may feel – to use the concluding words of Smith's opening lecture on *The Religion of the Semites* – 'that we have reached a point of rest at which both speaker and hearers will be glad to make a pause'.[78]

Universität Tübingen

[77] Postcard dated 1 January 1883 (as above, n. 69).

[78] I would like to thank Mrs. Astrid Hess; the Syndics of Cambridge University Library; University of Aberdeen, Library and Historic Collections; Universiteitsbibliotheek Leiden; Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen and Universitätsbibliothek Tübingen for their permission to quote from unpublished material in their possession. – For a full account of previous and subsequent events in the life of William Robertson Smith, I may be allowed to refer the reader to my forthcoming biography (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).