

## “THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON.”

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THE *Wisdom of Solomon*<sup>1</sup> probably appeared not far from the first year of our era. It is written in almost classical Greek, is full of striking and poetic interpretations and spiritualisations of Jewish legends, and transfused with a piety at once warm and mystical. Solomon is summoned much in the way that the “Wandering Jew,” Ahasuerus, is called up in Shelley’s “Prometheus,” yet not quite allegorically, to testify concerning the Past, and concerning the mysteries of the invisible world. He has left behind his secularist Proverbs and his worldly wisdom; but though he now rises as a prophet of other worldliness, not a word is uttered inconsistent with his having been a saint from the beginning, albeit “chastised” and “proved.” In fact he gives his spiritual autobiography, which is that of a Son of God wise and “undefiled” from childhood. His burden is to warn the kings and judges of the world of the blessedness that awaits the righteous,—the misery that awaits the unrighteous,—beyond the grave.

The work impresses me as having been written by one who had long been an enthusiastic Solomonist, but who had been spiritually revolutionised by attaining the new belief of immortality. It does not appear as if the apparition of Solomon was to this writer a simple imagination. Solomon seems to be alive, or rather as if never dead. “For thou (God) hast power of life and death: thou leadest to the gates of hell, and bringest up again.” “The giving heed unto her (Wisdom’s) laws is the assurance of incorruption and incorruption maketh us near unto God: therefore the desire of Wisdom bringeth to a Kingdom.”

The Jewish people idealised Solomon’s reign long before they idealised the man himself; and indeed he had to reach his halo

<sup>1</sup> *Sophia Solomontos.*

under personified epithets derived from his fame,—as “Melchizedek,” and “Prince of Peace.” The nation sighed for the restoration of his splendid empire, but could not describe their Coming Man as a returning Solomon, because the priests and prophets,—a gentry little respected by the Wise Man,—steadily ascribed all the national misfortunes to the shrines built to other deities than Jahveh by the royal Citizen of the World. Thus grew such prophetic indirections as “the House of David,” “Jesse’s branch,” and finally “Son of David.”

But this idea of the returning hero does not appear to have been original with any Semitic people; it is first found among them in the Oriental book of Job, who longs to sleep in some cavern for ages, then reappear, and, even if his flesh were shrivelled, find that his good name was vindicated (xiv.). This idea of the Sleeping Hero (which is traced in many examples in my work on *The Wandering Jew*) appears to have gained its earliest expression in the legend of King Yima, in Persia,—the original of such sleepers as Barbarossa and King Arthur, as well as of the legendary Enoch, Moses, and Elias, who were to precede or attend the revived Son of David. Solomon, whose name probably gave Jerusalem the peaceful half of its name (*Salem*) would no doubt have been central among the “Undying Ones” had it not been for the Parliament of Religions he set up in that city. But he had to wait a thousand years for his honorable fame to awaken.

In the *Wisdom of Solomon* the Queen of Sheba is also recalled into life. She is, as Renan pointed out, transfigured in the personified Wisdom, and her gifts become mystical. “All good things together came to me with her, and Wisdom goeth before them: and I knew not that she was the mother of them.” She is amiable, beautiful, and gave him his knowledge :

“All such things as are secret or manifest, them I knew. For Wisdom, which is the worker of all things, taught me: for in her is an understanding spirit, holy, one only, manifold; subtle, lively, clear, undefiled, plain, not subject to hurt, loving the thing that is good, quick, which cannot be letted, ready to do good, kind to man, steadfast, sure, free from care, having all power, overseeing all things, and pervading all intellectual, pure, and most subtle spirits. For Wisdom is more moving than motion itself; she passeth and goeth through all things by reason of her pureness. For she is the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty: therefore can no impure thing fall into her. For she is the brightness of the everlasting

light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness. And alone, she can do all things; herself unchanged, she maketh all things new; and in all ages, entering into holy souls, she maketh them intimates of God, and prophets. For God loveth only him who dwelleth with Wisdom. She is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of stars; compared with the light she is found before it,—for after light cometh night, but evil shall not prevail against Wisdom.” (vii. 21–30.)

In *Sophia Solomontos* Solomon relates his espousal of Wisdom, who sat beside the throne of God (ix. 4). But there remains with God a detective Wisdom called the Holy Spirit. Wisdom and the Holy Spirit have different functions. “Thy counsel who hath known except thou give Wisdom, and send thy Holy Spirit from above?” This verse (ix. 17) is followed by two chapters (x., xi.) relating the work of Wisdom through past ages as a Saviour. But then comes an account of the severe chastening functions of the Holy Spirit. “For thine incorruptible Spirit is in all things (i. e., nothing is concealed from her), therefore chastenest thou them by little and little that offend,” etc. (xii. 1, 2.)

There is here a slight variation in the historic development of the Spirit of God, and one so pregnant with results that it may be well to refer to some of the earlier Hebrew conceptions. The Spirit of God described in Genesis i. 2, as “brooding” over the waters was evidently meant to represent a detached agent of the Deity. The legend is obviously related to that of the dove going forth over the waters of the deluge. The dove probably acquired its symbolical character as a messenger between earth and heaven from the marvellous powers of the carrier pigeon—powers well known in ancient Egypt—it also appears that its cooing was believed to be an echo on earth of the voice of God.<sup>1</sup> We have already seen (viii.) that Wisdom, when first personified, was identified with this “brooding” spirit over the surface of the waters, and also that in a second (Jahvist) personification she is a severe and reproving agent. But in the second verse of Genesis there is a darkness on the abyss, and both darkness and abyss were personified. In the rigid development of monotheism all of these beings were necessarily regarded as agents of Jahveh—monopolist of all powers. We thus find such accounts as that in 1 Samuel 16, where the Spirit of Jahveh departed from Saul and an evil Spirit from Jahveh troubled him.

Although the Spirit of God was generally supposed to convey

<sup>1</sup>Bath Kol,—“daughter of a voice.”

miraculous knowledge, especially of future events, and superior skill, it is not, I believe, in any book earlier than *Sophia Solomontos* definitely ascribed the function of a detective. There is in Ecclesiastes (x. 20) a passage which suggests the carrier: "Curse not the King, no, not in thy thought; and curse not the rich even in thy bedchamber; for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter."<sup>1</sup> This was evidently in the mind of the writer of *Sophia Solomontos* in the following verses:

"Wisdom is a loving Spirit, and will not (cannot) acquit a blasphemer of his words: for God is a witness of his reins, and a true beholder of his heart, and a heaver of his tongue; for the Spirit of the Lord filleth the world, and that which containeth all things hath knowledge of the voice; therefore he that speaketh unrighteous things cannot be hid, neither shall vengeance when it punisheth, pass by him. For inquisition shall be made into the counsels of the ungodly: the sound of his words shall come unto the Lord for the disclosure of his wickedness, the ear of jealousy heareth all things, and the sound even of murmurings is not secret."

Here we have the origin of the "unpardonable sin." The Holy Spirit detects and informs, Jahveh avenges, and if the offence is blasphemy Wisdom, the Saviour, cannot acquit (as the "Loving Spirit" of God it is for her *ultra vires*). This detective holy spirit appears to be an evolution from both Wisdom and Satan the Accuser, in Job a son of God. By associating with Solomon on earth, Wisdom was without the severe holiness essential to Jahvist conceptions of divine government; in other words, personified Wisdom, whose "delight was with the sons of men" (Prov. viii. 31) was too humanised to fulfil the conditions necessary for upholding the temple at a time when penal sanctions were withdrawn from the priesthood. A celestial spy was needed, and also an uncomfortable *Sheol*, if the ancient ordinances and sacrifices were to be preserved at all under the rule of Roman liberty, and amid the cosmopolitan conditions prevailing at Jerusalem, and still more at Alexandria.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This may, however, have been flotsam from the Orient. Mahanshadha, a sort of Solomon in Buddhist tales, had a wonderful parrot, Charaka, which he employed as a spy. It revealed to him the plot to poison King Janaka, whose chief Minister he was. (*Tibetan Tales*, p. 168.)

<sup>2</sup> M. Didson (*Christian Iconography*, Bohn's ed., i., p. 464) mentions a picture of the thirteenth century in which the dove moving over the face of the waters (Gen. i.) is black, God not having yet created light. It may be, however, that the mediæval idea was that the Holy Ghost, as a heavenly spy, was supposed to assume the color of the night in order to detect the deeds

With regard to Wisdom herself, there is a sentence which requires notice, especially as no unweighed word is written in the work under notice. It is said, “In that she is conversant with God, she magnifieth her nobility; yea, the Lord of all things himself loved her.” (viii. 3.) This seems to be the germ of Philo’s idea of Wisdom as the Mother: “And she, receiving the seed of God, with beautiful birth-pangs brought forth this world, His visible Son, only and well-beloved.” The writer of *Sophia Solomontos* is very careful to be vague in speculations of this kind, while suggesting inferences with regard to them. Thus, alluding to Moses before Pharaoh, he says, “She (Wisdom) entered into the servant of the Lord, and withstood dreadful kings in wonders and signs” (x. 16), but leaves us to mere conjecture as to whether he (the writer) still had Wisdom in mind when writing (xvii. 13) of the failure of these enchantments and the descent of the Almighty Word, for the destruction of the first-born:

“For while all things are quiet silence, and that night was in the midst of her swift course, thine Almighty Word leaped down from Heaven out of thy Royal throne, as a fierce man of war into the midst of a land of destruction; and brought thine unfeigned commandment as a sharp sword, and standing up filled all things with death; and it touched the heaven, but it stood upon the earth.”<sup>1</sup>

The Word in this place (*ὁπαντοδύναμός σου λόγος*) is clearly reproduced in the Epistle to the Hebrews (i. 5). “The Word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword;” and the same military metaphor accompanies this “Word” into Revelation xix. 13. This continuity of metaphor has apparently been overlooked by Alford (*Greek Testament*, vol. iv., p. 226) who regards the use of the phrase “Word of God” (*ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ*) as linking Revelation to the author of the fourth Gospel, whereas in this Gospel Logos is never followed by “of God,” while it is so followed in Hebrews iv. 12.

This evolution of the “Word” is clear. In the “Wisdom of Solomon” Wisdom is the creative Word and the Saviour. The Word leaping down from the divine throne and bearing the sword of vengeance is more like the son of the celestial counterpart of

done in darkness without itself being seen. In later centuries this dark dove was shown at the ear of magicians and idols, the inspirer of prophets and saints being the white dove.

<sup>1</sup>Cf. Gospel of Peter: “They behold three men coming out of the tomb, and the two supporting the one, and the cross following them, and the heads of the two reached to the heavens, and that of him who was being led went above the heavens.”

Wisdom, namely, the detective Holy Spirit (called in i. 5 "the Holy Spirit of Discipline"). But in the era we are studying, all words by able writers were living things, and were two-edged swords, and long after they who wrote them were dead went on with active and sundering work undreamed of by those who first uttered them.

The Zoroastrian elements which we remarked in Jesus Ben Sira's "Wisdom" are even more pronounced in the "Wisdom of Solomon." The Persian worshippers are so mildly rebuked (xiii.) for not passing beyond fire and star to the "origin of beauty," that one may suppose the author, probably an Alexandrian, must have had friends among them. At any rate his conception of a resplendent God is Mazdean, his all-seeing Holy Spirit is the Parsê "Anahita," and his Wisdom is Armaîti, the "loving spirit" on earth, the saviour of men.<sup>1</sup> The opposing kingdoms of Ahuramazda and Angromainyu, and especially Zoroaster's original division of the universe into "the living and the not-living," are reflected in the "Wisdom of Solomon," i. 13-16:

"God made not death: neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living. He created all things that they might have their being; and the generations of the world were healthful; and there (was) no poison of destruction in them, nor (any) kingdom of death on the earth: (for righteousness is immortal): but ungodly men with their deeds and words evoked Death to them: when they thought to have it their friend they consumed to naught, and made a covenant with Death, being fit to take sides with it."

In the moral and religious evolution which we have been tracing it has been seen that the utter indifference of the Cosmos to human good and evil, right and wrong, was the theme of Job; that in Ecclesiastes the same was again declared, and the suggestion made that if God helped or afflicted men it must depend on some point of etiquette or observance unconnected with moral considerations, so that man need not omit pleasure but only be punctilious when in the temple; that in Jesus Ben Sira's contribution to his fathers' "Wisdom," the moral character of God was maintained, moral evil regarded as hostile to God, and imaginary sanctions in-

<sup>1</sup> Invoke, O Zoroaster, the powerful Spirit (Wind) formed by Mazda (Light) and Spenta Armaîti (earth-mother), the fair daughter of Ahuramazda. Invoke, O Zoroaster, my Fravashi (deathless past), who am Ahuramazda, greatest, fairest, most solid, most intelligent, best shapen, highest in purity, whose soul is the holy Word.

"Invoke Mithra (descending light), the lord of wide pastures, a god armed with beautiful weapons, with the most glorious of all weapons, with the most fiend-smiting of all weapons.

"Invoke the most holy glorious Word."—*Zendavesta*. (Vend. Farg. xix. 2.)

vented, accompanied by pleadings with God to indorse them by new signs and wonders. Such signs not appearing, and no rewards and punishments being manifested in human life, the next step was to assign them to a future existence, and this step was taken in the *Wisdom of Solomon*. There remained but one more necessity, namely, that there should be some actual evidence of that future existence. Agur's question had remained unanswered—

“Who has ascended into heaven and come down again?  
Such an one would I question about God.”

To this the reply was to be the resurrection from death claimed for the last of the spiritual race of Solomon.