

ECCLESIASTES OR THE SPHINX OF HEBREW LITERATURE.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE book of Koheleth, commonly called Ecclesiastes, has rightly been styled the sphinx of Hebrew literature. Though this book has only 222 verses, yet its literature is very rich, and it may confidently be stated that since the year 1850, at least as many pens as are verses in the book, have been busy in writing on that book. From the Septuagint the name *Ecclesiastes* comes to us, but this is not the only one given in explanation of the word "Koheleth." *Tot capita, tot sensus*, and thus has been suggested "compiler," "preacher," "debater," "gatherer or acquirer of wisdom," "eclectic," "accumulated wisdom," "the reunited, the gathered soul," "the penitent," "an assembly," "academy," "an old man," "an exclaiming voice," "philosopher or moralist," "the departed spirit of Solomon," etc. The latest is probably "prince of doctrinal ethics," if we may infer from the title of W. Garstang's book (which I have not seen): "My Heart's Fruit-garden, wherein are Divers Delectable Adages and Similes of the Prince of Doctrinal Ethics. A Translation out of the Ancient Biblical Hebrew of the Book of Koheleth, else 'Ecclesiastes,' or the Preacher." London, 1887.

The contents of the book were a great puzzle to the Jewish schoolmen, and for centuries the rabbis disputed about it, yea in the first Christian century it still belonged to the *Antilegomena*. Some heretics rejected it as teaching a false morality, and Theodore of Mopsuestia was accused of questioning its inspiration. Down to the time of Luther, both synagog and church believed in the Solomonic authorship of the book; but Luther was the first to question this authorship, and was followed by Grotius, who is the first

in the galaxy of writers who rejected the Solomonic authorship. Though Ginsburg wrote in 1861, "we could as easily believe that Chaucer is the author of 'Rasselas' as that Solomon wrote Koheleth," and Delitzsch, in 1875: "If the book of Koheleth be of old Solomonic origin, then there is no history of the Hebrew language"; yet in 1880, Dr. Johnston published his *Treatise on the Authorship of Ecclesiastes*, a book of 590 pages, endeavoring to vindicate the traditional view. Five years later, Dr. E. H. Plumptre wrote: "No one now dreams of ascribing it to Solomon."

The great majority of biblical students now reject the Solomonic authorship, and if names are of any authority we can mention besides Delitzsch, Hengstenberg, Zöckler, Hitzig, Knobel, Volck, Strack, Gesenius, Nowack, Ewald, Kleinert, Kautzsch, and others. In England we have Plumptre, Ginsburg, Davidson, Wright, Cheyne, etc.; in our own country, Moses Stuart. Others like Cowles, Young, Hyde and Tayler Lewis, who supplied the English translation of Zöckler's Commentary (in the Lange series) with notes, adhere to the traditional view.

As to the time of composition, the dates range over very nearly a thousand years, from B. C. 990 to B. C. 10. The last date is the one assigned by the Jewish historian, Graetz (without, however, being adopted by any one), who regards Ecclesiastes as a politico-religious satire leveled against King Herod, with the special object of correcting certain evil tendencies among the Jews of that age.

Different as the opinions concerning the date are, the opinions concerning the aim of the book are greater. Jerome read it with his disciple, Blæsilla, that he might persuade her to renounce the vanities of the world for the life of the convent at Bethlehem. Some saw in the book the confessions of the penitent and converted Solomon; Heine called it "the song of skepticism"; Voltaire dedicated his paraphrase of the book to Frederick II., as that of a book which was the King's favorite study. Graetz thinks that the book intends to teach a license like that of a St. Simonian "rehabilitation of the flesh." Graetz has found an admirer in Renan, although he goes his own way. The French writer published not only a commentary on Ecclesiastes in 1882, but also popularised the book in an essay published in the same year in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. In his *The Antichrist* he had already spoken of Ecclesiastes as the only charming book that has ever been written by a Jew, and in his commentary he says of the author of the book: he was "a worthy man, devoid of prejudices, good and generous at bottom, but discouraged by the baseness of the time and the sad con-

ditions of human life. . . . He would willingly be a hero, but, verily, God rewards heroism so little, that one asks one's self if it is not going against His intentions to take up things in that manner." Koheleth, according to Renan, was no atheist. He believed in the existence of a God who occasionally interposed in the affairs of the world. But the God of his creed was one who was too great to concern himself deeply with human actions in general.

The chief interest which the book presents to us is a picture of an intellectual and moral position. The author was a man of the world, he was not a pious man or a theologian; perhaps he was some great-grandfather of Annas or of Caiaphas; of the aristocratic priests who with so light a heart condemned Jesus." What pleases Renan especially is the personality of the author, so that "one loves to picture him to one's self as an exquisite man, and one of polished manners, as an ancestor of some rich Jew of Paris gone astray in Judea in the time of Jesus and the Maccabees."

No less interesting, though written in a different spirit, is the ideal biography of Koheleth given by Professor Plumptre in his Commentary on Ecclesiastes. According to this biography Koheleth lived in Judea, about B. C. 220, not far from Jerusalem. By and by the young man travelled, and finally settled at Alexandria. Here he became acquainted with one whom he could call a true friend, "one among a thousand," but also with a woman for whom he imbibed a passionate affection. Discovering her utter baseness, he barely had time to escape from her net; hence his strong denunciation of the female sex in the pages of his work. At Alexandria Koheleth became also acquainted with the philosophical systems of the Epicureans and Stoics, and the natural science of physiology of the former especially attracted our student. In chaps. xi. and xii. of his book, Koheleth exhibits more than ordinary acquaintance with the anatomy and construction of the human frame. In consequence of his dissipation, Koheleth gets sick and, after a long illness, he has time to reflect on the past, and becomes a firm believer in God and immortality. Such is a short outline of the interesting novel written by the Dean of Wells.

In accordance with his theory, Dr. Plumptre brings many parallels to show Koheleth's acquaintance with the systems he became acquainted with in Alexandria; but this seeming Stoicism and Epicureanism is denied by Cheyne in his *Job and Solomon* (1887), according to whom Koheleth is a native Hebrew philosopher. With Cheyne agrees also Delitzsch and Renan. Some, as Zirkel (1792)

attempted to discover Grecisms in the Book of Ecclesiastes; but this theory has little or no support.

Some philosophical writers pretended to have found the doctrine of Pessimism in our book. Thus especially A. Taubert (the name under which Ed. von Hartmann's first wife wrote in defense of her husband's philosophy, the author of *Philosophie des Unbewussten*) in her work, *Pessimismus und seine Gegner* (Berlin, 1873), terms chaps. i-iii. and iv., 1-4 of our book "a catechism of Pessimism"; but the contents of these chapters show the essential difference existing between Koheleth's pessimism and our modern pessimists.

Passing over a number of other works on Ecclesiastes, we must mention the latest, that by C. Siegfried of Jena, published in 1898, and forming part of the Hand-Commentary on the Old Testament edited by W. Nowack of Strassburg. Siegfried endeavors to prove that it is impossible to accept the book as one whole. He admits that at the beginning there existed a unitary document of the whole, but the work as it is transmitted passed through many hands, hence the many radical contradictions. Thus according to iii. 1-8 everything in the world takes place in a certain change of opposites, from which one cannot win a sensible sense and over against which everything appears purposeless (v. 9). But according to iii. 11 this system of the world has been very excellently ordered by God, although man cannot fully grasp it; in iii. 12 Koheleth has again lost this knowledge, for he recommends to man to enjoy himself as much as possible, as the only thing left to him.—According to iii. 16, iv. 1 every mark of a moral system of the world is denied; but according to iii. 17, v. 7, viii. 11 it cannot be doubted that there is a highest judge who has only delayed his judgment.—According to iii. 18-21 there is no difference between man and beast; both are subject to the same law of nature, animated by the same breath of life. What takes place with the latter after death, we cannot know. But according to xii. 7 the body of man only returns to the earth, the spirit to God, who gave it, and we are assured immediately v. 9 that upon the whole everything is humbug, thus no doubt also what he had just said.—According to vii. 15, viii. 10, 12a, 14 it is a vain conceit to believe that the pious will be rewarded by God and the wicked will be judged. On the other hand, vii. 17, viii. 5, 12b, 13 we are assured that the wicked are taken away by a premature death; the pious and keepers of the law, however, are preserved from all misfortune.—In vii. 2 man is admonished to devote himself to the contempla-

tion of the certainty of his death; in v. 17, ix. 7-10 the same considerations (see v. 14 seq., ix. 5 seq.) are used as an invitation to spend the existence if possible with good eating and drinking.—In xi. 9^a the young man is advised to follow the inclinations of his desires; in v. 9^b, however, it is enjoined on him to consider that he must give an account of all before God's judgment.—The observation that the iron order of nature (i. 2-10) makes every human effort fruitless (ii. 17, 20, iii. 9) drives Koheleth flatly to despair. According to iii. 22, v. 18-19, on the other hand, human labor, which according to what has just been said is fruitless, yields many a success and real joys of life. This is not a skepsis which is coupled with the deepest fear of God. These are contradictions more trenchant than which cannot be thought of.—In other questions also these contradictions appear. According to i. 17, ii. 15, 16 the strife for wisdom is a feeding on wind. But according to ii. 13, 14 the excellence of wisdom is as great as that of light over darkness; it belongs to the greatest good, vii. 11-12, 19; viii. 16; ix. 13-18; x. 2, 12.

On this account it has always appeared a fruitless task to show a plan and an organic connection in the book of Koheleth. These efforts were the more fruitless since besides the contradictions we must not overlook the complete incoherency in considerable parts of our writing. Let one compare the gaping chasms between iv. 15 seq. and v. 17; v. 1; between v. 6, 7, 8, 9, between vii. 6, 7; v. 19 and 20; x. 3 and 4 and other. One can boldly assert that in the part iv.-xii. the passages in which a tolerable connection exists form the minority. It can therefore not be surprising that so many efforts were made to show a plan and connection in the book of Koheleth, but the examination of all these attempts has resulted, as Siegfried confesses, in the conclusion that "all is vanity."

How does the latter solve the difficulty? Starting from the fact that in the first three chapters only a few passages are found contradicting the general views of the speaker and that for the rest we have in them an entirely close connection of thoughts, he thinks that we have here the proper original of the book of Koheleth, of which only fragments are preserved in the later parts of the book. In it we meet with a pessimistic philosopher who like Job opposes the proof of facts to the teachings of the Jewish religion. His main thought: All is vanity, in i. 2, by which he questions all positions of Judaism, he exhibits, as the same is done in the Job poem, in parallel deductions.

The first deduction comprises i. 3-ii. 12, 14^b-24^c. The author

whom we call Koheleth states here that all which happens upon earth exhibits an iron law of the circuit of the single phenomena, i. 3-11, and that all efforts of human wisdom to find out a rational ground for this regulation, are fruitless, v. 12-18. His effort to banish the pessimistic disposition with regard to the earthly conditions by all kinds of enjoyment, by creations of strained activity, and thus to obtain an inner satisfaction, has been in vain, ii. 1-11. Even his strife for wisdom has been without any result, ii. 12, 14^b, 15-16, so that he finally gave himself completely to despair, v. 17-24^a.

The second deduction of the main thought of i. 2 comprises iii. 1-10, 12, 15, 16, 18-21. Here we find the opposites of all earthly events, which frustrate every toil of man. Birth is followed by death, planting by uprooting, keeping by casting away, etc., iii. 1-9. This order of nature, which forever destroys again what has been created, v. 10, 12, 15, proves at the same time the absence of every moral principle and of every justice in the order of the world, since in nature there cannot be a special adjustment for men. As their essence is the same as that of the beast, their destiny cannot be different, iii. 16, 18, 21.

In the third deduction, ch. iv., v., the insertions by another hand, the misplacing of portions, the gaps and corrections, increase to such a degree that it is no more possible to show a firm connection of thoughts. Yet the hand of Koheleth can be perceived in the following parts: iv. 1-4, 6-8, 13-16; v. 9, 10, 12-16, in the complaint over the irretrievable suffering of humanity, iv. 1-3, and in the complaint over the restless and at the same time resultless toiling of men, iv. 4, etc.

In the following parts of the book the insertions by a strange hand surpass the rest. The following portions undoubtedly belong to Koheleth: vi. 1-7; vii. 1^b-4, 15, perhaps also v. 26-28; viii. 9, 10, 14, 16, 17; ix. 2, 3, 5, 6; x. 5-7.

What saved the book of the pessimistic philosopher was the fact that it had the name of Solomon at its head, otherwise it would certainly have been destroyed by the parties which afterwards became authoritative in Judaism. But instead of this it had the misfortune to be corrected, glossed by the other parties within the then Judaism, to be adapted to their standpoint. The next glossator was no radical opponent. He belonged to those Sadducaic circles which devoted themselves to Epicureanism, and this in another sense as is sometimes the case in Koheleth. When the latter exclaims in painful resignation, that under the present

circumstances there is nothing better for man than to eat and drink, ii. 24*a*, iii. 12, we know from ii. 3, 10, 17 seq. 20 that in his sense this is not nor can be a real enjoyment. The Epicurean glossator, on the other hand, whom we call K², is of the opinion that eating and drinking is indeed a very respectable pleasure, in which one has full reward for all the toil of man, v. 17, viii. 15; and he exhorts the reader, as far as possible to prepare for himself such and other like sensual joys, ix. 7-10, x. 19, xi. 7-9*a*, 10, ere the time of old age and death comes and the time for such enjoyments is past, ix. 12, xii. 1-7*a*, especially xi. 8. He clings to life and finds it beautiful. It is good to see the light of the sun, he says, xi. 7, whereas Koheleth is of opinion that the day of death is better than that of birth, vii. 1*b*. According to ix. 4 (K²), a living dog is better than a dead lion, whereas Koheleth praises the untimely birth happy, vi. 3, and thinks the dead more happy than the living, iv. 2. As in this respect, so K² differs from Koheleth with regard to labor, iii. 22, ix. 10, v. 18, 19, vii. 14. On other points too we see the Sadducaism of this glossator. Thus in vii. 16 he opposes the Pharisaically cultic exaggerations. On the whole belong to K²: iii. 22; v. 17-19; vii. 14, 16; viii. 15; iv. 4, 7-10, 12; x. 19; xi. 7, 8*a*, 9*a*, 10; xii. 1*b*-7*a*.

Another reader of Koheleth evidently belonged to the assembly of the sages. He felt himself called to defend wisdom over against Koheleth. We call him the glossing Chakam K³. He asserts the excellencies of wisdom. To him belong ii. 13, 14*a*; iv. 5; vi. 8, 9*a*; vii. 11, 12, 19; viii. 1; ix. 13-18; x. 1-3, 12-15. The advice of Koheleth to give up the fruitless strife, iv. 4, 6*b*, he answers by saying that only a fool can act thus, iv. 5.

More important was the opposition to those utterances of Koheleth, which were directed against the fundamental doctrines of Judaism concerning the divine system of the world and its justice. Since in the circles of the pious a book which bore Solomon's name could not so easily be hidden, an effort was made to make it as harmless as possible by corrections. We call the author of these corrections the glossing Chasid and mark him as K⁴. He opposes the assertion of Koheleth concerning the fruitlessness of every human effort. And as he opposes Koheleth, he likewise opposes K² (vii. 16) in vii. 17. On the whole we must assign to K⁴: ii. 24*b*-26*a*; iii. 11, 13, 14, 17; iv. 17; v. 1, 3-5, 6*b*, 7; vi. 10-12; vii. 13, 17, 23-25, 29; viii. 2-8, 11-13; ix. 1; xi. 5, 8*b*, 9*b*; xii. 1*a*, 7*b*.

Besides those already mentioned, other glossators have also made additions to our book, whom it is impossible to distinguish

individually and whom we therefore call K⁵. To them undoubtedly belong: iv. 9-12; v. 2, 6 (the close excepted), 8, 11; vii. 1a, 5, 6a, 7-10, 18, 20-22; ix. 11; x. 4, 8-11, 16-18, 20; xi. 1-4, 6. The entire poem i. 2-xii. 7 was put together in the confusion in which it was extant by a redactor R¹, who supplied it with the title i. 1 and a concluding formula xii. 8.—Besides three special epilogues were added, of which the first xii. 9, 10 tries to instruct the reader with regard to the person of Koheleth. To this author can not possibly belong the second epilogue xii. 11, 12, since he betrays the most hostile disposition towards this entire literature. The closing words xii. 13, 14 betray a Pharisee who believes in a final judgment, which the Chasid K⁴ iii. 17; xi. 9b knows not yet. We call this Epilogist R².

Against this interpolation-hypothesis it cannot be asserted that so few linguistic differences are to be found among the individual glossators, since they all belong to the same short period from 200-100.

In this manner Professor Siegfried tries to solve the difficulties connected with this book. Whether this theory will be accepted by all is another question. We have, however, not adopted it in our translation, but introduced such emendations of the text—distinguished by []—as he recommends. It was not our purpose to write a commentary. But we have given such notes under the text as will help the understanding. From the ancient classics as well as from Shakespeare we have quoted such passages which could be adduced as parallels. The extracts in the notes are from more recent and less known works. We refer especially to Bradley's *Lectures on Ecclesiastes* and Momerie's work on *Agnosticism*.

We cannot close this introduction without calling attention to the fact that Ecclesiastes or Koheleth was not without influence upon the book commonly called Ecclesiasticus or the Book of Jesus the Son of Sirach. There are not a few of the aphorisms found in Ecclesiasticus which sufficiently show that the latter in many passages imitated Koheleth. But of greater interest is the fact that Ecclesiastes found an opponent in the author of the Book of Wisdom, who took exception to certain statements in the Book of Koheleth, and the work of this Anti-Ecclesiastes deserves more than a passing mention.

Of the deutero-canonical books none is more interesting than the Book of Wisdom, commonly called the Wisdom of Solomon, and which, as J. E. Ch. Schmidt (*Salomo's Prediger*, 1794), Kelle (*Die Salomonischen Schriften*, 1815), and others assert, is to be re-

garded as a refutation of Ecclesiastes or Koheleth. Because the book is called Wisdom of Solomon, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, and Tertullian believed in its Solomonic authorship. Origen, Eusebius, and Augustine denied this authorship, but believed in its divine inspiration. Jewish scholars, like de Rossi and Wessely, not to mention a number of Christian writers, also held that the book was written by Solomon, and the Solomonic authorship is still believed by the Roman Catholic writer Schmid, the author of *Das Buch der Weisheit* (Vienna, 1858). But Solomon is neither the author of Ecclesiastes nor of Wisdom. J. M. Faber's hypothesis that Wisdom was written by Zerubbabel is as much a curiosity as Grotius's claim that Ecclesiastes was written by that worthy. The suggestion of Noack (*Ursprung des Christenthums*, I., p. 222, Leipzig, 1837) that Wisdom was written by Apollos, was ably defended by Dean Plumptre ("The Writings of Apollos," in the *Expositor*, 1878), but with this difference, that the former claims that Apollos wrote the book after his conversion to Christianity, and the latter that it was written before his conversion, hence the many phrases of Wisdom which reappear in the Epistle to the Hebrews. According to Noack the famous passage in Wisdom ii. 12-20 is a mark of Christian origin; the description is a reflection of the impression which the fate of Jesus made upon his faithful followers, since in the Acts of the Apostles, vii. 52, the enemies of Jesus are charged with having become the betrayers and murderers of the "Just One." The passage in Wisdom runs thus:

"Therefore let us lie in wait for the righteous; because he is not for our turn, and he is clean contrary to our doings; he upbraideth us with our offending the law, and objecteth to our infamy the transgressings of our education. He professeth to have the knowledge of God, and he calleth himself the child of the Lord. He was made to reprove our thoughts. He is grievous unto us even to behold; for his life is not like other men's, his ways are of another fashion. We are esteemed of him as counterfeits; he abstaineth from our ways as from filthiness; he pronounceth the end of the just to be blessed, and maketh his boast that God is his father. Let us see if his words be true, and let us prove what shall happen in the end of him. For if the just man be the son of God, he will help him and deliver him from the hand of his enemies. Let us examine him with despitefulness and torture, that we may know his meekness, and prove his patience. Let us condemn him with a shameful death; for by his own saying he shall be respected."

According to Plumptre, the writer had heard, it may be, of that Righteous One who appeared in Galilee and Jerusalem, and that marvellous history had stirred him into a glow of admiration for him whom as yet he knew not. Whether one believes in Apollos's authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews or not, certain it is

that Apollonius is not the author of the Book of Wisdom, which was undoubtedly written before Philo; and the resemblance in language in the Epistle to the Hebrews may be paralleled rather from Philo, as J. B. McCaul has done in his *Epistle to the Hebrews* (London, 1874).

What was the writer's purpose? It may be said that he intended to correct either the teaching of Ecclesiastes, or a current misinterpretation of the same. The most striking instance is in Wisdom ii. 6-10 when compared with Ecclesiastes ix. 7-9. Here Ecclesiastes, or Koheleth, gives the advice to make use of the innocent joys of life. The ungodly libertines of Alexandria, referring to the passage, interpreted, or misinterpreted, it in their own fashion as may be seen from the words put into their mouth by Anti-Ecclesiastes:

"Come, therefore, and let us enjoy the good things present, and let us eagerly make use of the world as long as we are young. Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments, and let no flower of the spring pass by us. Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they wither; let there be no meadow which our riot does not traverse. Let not one of us be without a share of our wantonness; everywhere let us leave behind us signs of our joyousness; for this is our portion, and this our lot."

The last words are the same used by Ecclesiastes several times (ii. 10; iii. 22; v. 18; ix. 9). The scoffers at Alexandria asserted in the words of Ecclesiastes that "one chance happens to the righteous and to the wicked" (ix. 2). To this Anti-Ecclesiastes rejoins that there is no such thing; on the contrary, the righteous are in the hand of God, they are in peace and live forever; whereas the wicked go to destruction (Wisdom iii. 2, 3; iv. 7; v. 14, 15). Does Ecclesiastes assert that in much wisdom is much grief (i. 18), his antagonist replies that to live with wisdom has no bitterness and no sorrow, but mirth and joy (viii. 16). Says Ecclesiastes that wisdom brings no bread to the wise, neither favor nor respect (ix. 11), Anti-Ecclesiastes asserts that she brings veneration and honor (viii. 10). Says Ecclesiastes that there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever (ii. 16), Anti-Ecclesiastes rejoins that by means of wisdom he shall obtain immortality and leave behind an everlasting memorial to them that come after him (viii. 13). Says Ecclesiastes that wisdom is to be sought in wine and revelry and delights (ii. 1-8), Anti-Ecclesiastes replies that wisdom shall not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body given to sin (i. 4). When Koheleth states that death is better than life, and it is to be desired as an everlasting sleep (vi.

4, 5), his antagonist says: "Seek not death in the error of your life, for God made no death" (i. 12, 13); "through envy of the Devil came death into the world, and they that do hold of his side do find it" (ii. 24). When Ecclesiastes states that God has made all beautiful in its time (iii. 11) and made man upright (iv. 29), Anti-Ecclesiastes rejoins that God created all things that they might have their being (i. 14), and man to be immortal (ii. 23).

Without going into further details, it must be admitted that although Ecclesiastes occupies a place in the canon, and Anti-Ecclesiastes in the Apocrypha, the latter occupies a higher standpoint than the former. And because certain doctrines are brought out fuller in the Book of Wisdom than by Ecclesiastes, it supplied an important gap in Jewish theology. The late Professor Delitzsch says very pertinently:

"In the Book of Ecclesiastes the old covenant digs its own grave. It is in so far also a schoolmaster unto Christ, since it awakens the desire for a better covenant than the first. The Book of Wisdom, however, is a harbinger of this better covenant "