

SOLOMONIC LITERATURE.

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KOHELETH (ECCLESIASTES).

IN THE *Atlantic Monthly* for February, 1897, a writer, in giving his personal reminiscences of Tennyson, relates an anecdote concerning the poet and the Rev. F. D. Maurice. Speaking of Ecclesiastes (Koheleth), Tennyson said it was the one book the admission of which into the canon he could not understand, it was so utterly pessimistic—of the earth, earthy. Maurice fired up. “Yes, if you leave out the last two verses. But the conclusion of the whole matter is, ‘Fear God and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.’ So long as you look only down upon earth, all is ‘vanity of vanities.’ But if you look up there is a God, the judge of good and evil.” Tennyson said he would think over the matter from that point of view.

This amusing incident must have caused a ripple of laughter in scholastic circles, now that it is generally suspected, and by many critics believed, that both of the verses cited by Maurice are spurious. They alone, he admitted, could save the book, and the charm of the incident is that the verses were placed there by ancient Maurices to induce ancient Tennysons to “think over the matter from that point of view.” The result was that the previously rejected book was admitted into the canon by precisely the same force which continued its work at Faringford, and continues it to this day. Only one must not suppose that Mr. Maurice was aware of the unguineness of the verses. He was an honest gentleman, but so ingeniously mystical that had the two verses not been there he could readily have found others of equally transcend-

ant and holy significance, without even resorting to other pious interpolations in the book.

Tennyson was curiously unconscious of his own pessimism. When any one questioned the belief in a future life in his presence his vehemence without argument betrayed his sub-conscious misgivings, while his indignation ran over all the conditional resentments of Job. I have heard that he said to Tyndall that if he knew there was no future life he would regard the creator of human beings as a demon, and shake his fist in His eternal face. This rage was based in a more profoundly pessimistic view of the present life than anything even in Ecclesiastes,—by which name may be happily distinguished the disordered, perverted, and mistranslated Koheleth.

It appears evident that the sentence which opens Koheleth,—in our Bibles “All is vanity, saith the Preacher; vanity of vanities, all is vanity,”—is as mere a supplied chapter-heading as that of our A. S. translators: “The Preacher showeth that all human courses are vain.” It is repeated as the second of the eight verses added at the end of the work. Koheleth does not label the whole of things vanity; in a majority of cases the things he calls vain are vain; and some things he finds not vanity,—youth, and wedded love, and work that is congenial.

Renan (*Histoire du Peuple d'Israël*, Tome 5, p. 158) has shown conclusively, as I think, that the signature on this book, QHLT, is a mere letter-play on the word “Solomon,” and the eagerness with which the letters were turned into Koheleth (which really means Preacheress), and to make out the wise King to be a preacher of the vanities of pleasure and wisdom of the fear of God, is thus naïvely indicated in the successive names of the book, “Koheleth” and “Ecclesiastes.” We are thus warned by the title to pick our way carefully where the Jahvist and the Ecclesiastic have been before us; remembering especially that though piety may induce men to forge things, this is never done lightly. As people now do not commit forgery for a shilling, so neither did those who placed spurious sentences or phrases in nearly every chapter of the Bible do so for anything they did not consider vital to morality or to salvation. In Ecclesiastes we must be especially suspicious of the very serious religious points. Fortunately the style of the book renders it particularly subject to the critical and literary touchstone.

Is it necessary to point out to any man of literary instinct the interpolation bracketed in the following verses? “Rejoice, O

young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart gladden thee in the flower of thy age, and walk in the paths of thy heart, and according to the vision of thine eyes [but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment], and banish discontent from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh; for youth and dawn are fleeting. Remember also thy fountain in the days of thy youth, or ever the evil days come or the years draw nigh in which thou shalt say I have no delight in them."

It is only by removing the bracketed clause that any consistency can be found in the lyric, which Professor Cheyne compares with the following song by the ancient Egyptian harper at the funeral feast of Neferhotap:

" Make a good day, O holy fathers!
 Let odors and oils stand before thy nostril;
 Wreaths and lotus are on the arms and bosom of thy sister
 Dwelling in thy heart, sitting beside thee.
 Let song and music be before thy face,
 And leave behind thee all evil dirges!
 Mind thee of joy, till cometh the day of pilgrimage,
 When we draw near the land that loveth silence."¹

There is no historical means of determining what writings of Solomon are preserved in the Bible and even in the apocryphal books. One may feel that Goethe recognised a brother spirit in that far epoch when he selected for his proverb:

"Apples of gold in chased work of silver,
 A word smoothly spoken."

Koheleth also appreciated this, and also (x. 12) uses almost literally Proverbs xii. 18, "*The tongue of the wise is gentleness.*" (Compare Shakespeare's words, "Let gentleness my strong enforcement be.") The lines previously cited, "Rejoice O young man, etc.," are also probably quoted, as they are given in poetical quatrains. There are many of these quatrains introduced into the book, from the prose of which they differ in style and sometimes in sense.

In none of these metrical quotations (as I believe them to be) is there any belief in God, the only instance in which the word "God" is mentioned being an ironical maxim about the danger coming from monarchs because of their oaths to their God, with

¹ *Job and Solomon, or the Wisdom of the Old Testament.* By T. K. Cheyne. (1887.) Those who wish to study the Solomonic literature should read this excellent work. It is very probable, although Professor Cheyne does not suggest this, that the Book of Job was imported by Solomon along with the gold of Ophir from some Oriental land.

whom they identify their own ways and wishes. Such seems to me the meaning of the lines (viii. 2, 4) which Dillon translates—

" The wise man hearkens to the king's command,
By reason of the oath to God.
Mighty is the word of the monarch :
Who dares ask him, ' What dost thou ? ' "

With this compare Proverbs xxi. 1, " The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord (Jahveh) as the watercourses ; he turneth it whithersoever he will." This proverb is evidently by a Jahvist, and Koheleth quotes another which signifies rather " Jahveh is in the king's caprice." But he adopts the neighboring proverb, " To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to Jahveh than sacrifice." Koheleth says (and this is not quoted,—" To draw near to (God) in order to learn, is better than the offering of sacrifices by fools."

Although the verses quoted by Maurice to Tennyson (xii. 13, 14) are not genuinely in Koheleth they correspond with sentences in the genuine text of very different import. Koheleth, though his quotations are godless, believes there is a God, and a formidable one. Sometimes he refers to him as Fate, sometimes as the unknowable, but as without moral quality. " To the just men that happeneth which should befall wrongdoers ; and that happeneth for criminals which should be the lot of the upright " (viii. 14), and " neither (God's) love nor hatred doth a man foresee " (ix. 1). God has set prosperity and adversity side by side for the express purpose of hiding Himself from human knowledge (vii. 14) ; not, alas, as the Yalkut Koheleth suggests, in order that one may help the other. God does benefit those who please him, and punish those who displease him ; this is ' good ' and ' evil ' to *Him* ; but it has no relation with the humanly good and evil. (viii. 11-14) As it is evident that God's favor is not secured by good works nor his disfavor incurred by evil works, a prudent man will consider that it may perhaps be a matter of etiquette, and will be punctilious, especially " in the house of God " ; he will not speak rashly and then hope to escape by saying " it was rashness." His words had better be few, and if he makes any vow (which may well be avoided) he should perform it. But as for practical life and conduct, God, or fate, is clearly indifferent to it, consequently let a man eat his bread and quaff his wine with joy, love his wife,—the best portion of his lot,—and whatever his hand findeth to do that do with vigor, remembering that " there is no work, nor thought, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the inevitable grave."

Such is the Koheleth conception of life, which, save so far as it is marred by a vague notion of Fate which is fatal to philanthropy, is not very different from the idea of many in our own time. "The All is a never-ceasing whirl" (i. 8), and Koheleth advises that each individual man try to make what little circle of happiness he can around him. "O my heart!" says Omar Khayyam, "thou wilt never penetrate the mysteries of the heavens; thou wilt never reach that culminating point of wisdom which the intrepid omniscients have attained. Resign thyself then to make what little paradise thou canst here below. As for that close-barred seraglio beyond thou shalt arrive there—or thou shalt not!"

It is, however, impossible for any church or priesthood to be maintained on any such principles. Where mankind believe with Koheleth that whatever God doeth is forever, that nothing can be superadded to it nor aught to be taken away; and that God hath so contrived that man must fear Him; they will have no use for any paraphernalia for softening the irrevocable decrees of a Judgment Day already past. But Koheleth's arrows, feathered with wit and eloquence, were logically shot from the Jahvist arquebus. It was Jahveh himself who proudly claimed that he created good and evil, and that if there were evil in a city it was his work. It was Jahveh's own prophet, Isaiah, who cried (lziii. 17), "O Lord, why dost Thou make us to err from Thy ways, and hardenest our heart from Thy fear?"

What then could Jahvism say when a time arrived when it must defend itself against a Jahveh-created world?

(ECCLESIASTICUS) WISDOM.

It was necessary that Koheleth should be answered, but who was competent for this? A fable had been invented of a Solomonic serpent who had tempted man to taste the fruit of knowledge and brought a curse on the earth, but the canonical prophets do not appear to have heard of it, and at any rate it was too late in the day to meet fact with fable. Nor had Jahveh's whirlwind-answer to Job proved effectual. However, some sort of answer did come, and significantly enough it had to come from Koheleth's own quarter, the Wisdom school. Pure Jahvism had not brains enough for the task.

The apocryphal book "Ecclesiasticus" is the antidote to Ecclesiastes. (These are the Christian names given to the two books.) This book, bearing the simple title "Wisdom," compiled and

partly written by Jesus Ben Sira early in the second century B. C., is as a whole much more than an offset to Koheleth. It is a great though unintentional literary monument to Solomon, and it is the book of reconciliation, or so intended, between Solomonism and Jahvism,—or, as we should now say, between philosophy and theology.

The newly discovered original Hebrew of Ecclesiasticus xxxix. 15–xlix. 11, just published by the Clarendon Press (1897), enables us to read correctly for the first time the portraiture of Solomon in xlvi., with the assistance of Wace and other scholars :

12. After him [David] rose up a wise son, and for his [David's] sake he dwelt in quiet.

13. Solomon reigned in days of prosperity, and was honoured, and God gave rest to him round about that he might build an house in his name, and prepare his sanctuary for ever.

14. How wast thou wise in thy youth, and didst overflow with instruction like the Nile!

15. The earth (was covered by thy soul) and thou didst celebrate song in the height.

16. Thy name went far unto the islands, and for thy peace thou wast beloved.

17. The countries marvelled at thee for thy songs, and proverbs, and parables, and interpretations.

18. Thou wast called by the glorious name which is called over Israel.

18*a*. Thou didst gather gold as tin, and didst gather silver as lead.

19. But thou gavest thy loins unto women, and lettest them have dominion over thy body.

20. Thou didst stain thy honour and pollute thy seed; so that thou broughtest wrath upon thy children, that they should groan in their beds.

21. That the kingdom should be divided: and out of Ephraim ruled a rebel kingdom.

22. But the Lord will never leave off his mercy, neither shall any of his words perish, neither will he abolish the posterity of his elect, and the seed of him that loveth him he will not take away: wherefore he gave a remnant unto Jacob, and out of him a root unto David.

23. Thus rested Solomon with his fathers, and of his seed he left behind him Rehoboam [of the lineage of Ammon], ample in foolishness and lacking understanding, who by his counsel let loose the people.

In the last sentence I have inserted in crochets an alternative reading of Fritzsche for the three words that follow. (Rehoboam's Ammonite mother was Naamah.)

It will be noticed that early in the second century B. C. there remained no trace of the anathemas on Solomon for his foreign or his idolatrous wives. He is now simply accused of being too fond of women,—a charge not known to the canonical books.

The verse 18 attests the correctness of the view taken of the

forty-fifth Psalm in a former article, written before this Clarendon Press volume appeared. It thus becomes certain that the Psalm was recognised as written in Solomon's time, and that it was he who was there addressed as "God" ("the glorious name").

The mention of this fact in "Wisdom," and the enthusiasm pervading every sentence of the tribute to Solomon, despite his alleged sensuality, supply conclusive evidence that the cult of Solomon had for more than eight centuries been continuous, that it was at length prevailing, and that it had become necessary for a broad wing of Jahvism to include the Solomonic worldly wisdom and ethics.

Jesus Ben Sira states that he found a book written by his learned grandfather, whose name was also Jesus, who had studied many works of "our fathers," and added to them writings of his own. The anonymous preface states that Sira, son of the first Jesus, left it to his son, and that "this Jesus did imitate Solomon."

It is not said that Sira contributed anything to this composite work, yet there appear to be three minds in it. There is a fine and free philosophy which savors of the earliest traditions of the Solomonic School; there is an exceptionally morose Jahvism; and there is also mysticism, an attempt to rationalise and soften the Jahvism, and to solemnise the philosophy, so as to blend them in a kind of harmonious religion. I cannot help feeling that Sira or some friend of his must have inserted the hard Jahvism between the grandfather and the grandson.

However this may be, it is evident that Jesus Ben Sira was too reverent to seriously alter anything in the volume before him, for the contrast is startling between the hard Jahvism and the philosophy of life. Their inclusion in one work is like the union of oil and vinegar. The Jahvism is hard and bald: fear Jahveh, keep his commandments, pay your tithes, say your prayers, be severe with your children (especially daughters), never play with them, guard your wife vigilantly, flog your servants. The philosophy is quite incongruous with this formalism and rigidity, most of the maxims being elaborated with care, and only proverbs in form. Some of them are almost Shakespearian in artistic expression:

"Pipe and harp make sweet the song, but a sincere tongue is above them both."

"Wisdom hid, and treasure hoarded, what value is in either?"

"The fool's heart is in his mouth, the wise man's mouth is in his heart."

"There is no riches above a sound body, and no joy above that of the heart."

"Whoso regardeth dreams is as one who grasps at his shadow."

"The evil man cursing Satan is but cursing himself."

"The bars of Wisdom shall be thy fortress, her chains thy robe of honour."

About the rendering of xli. 15 there is some doubt, and I give this conjecture :

Better the (ignorant) that hideth his folly, than the (learned) who hideth his wisdom.

In the Bible which belonged to the historian Gibbon, loaned by the late General Meredith Read to the Gibbon exhibition, I remarked a pencil mark around these sentences in "Wisdom" :

"He that buildeth his house with other men's money, is like one that gathereth stones for the tomb of his own burial."

"He that is not wise will not be taught, but there is a wisdom that multiplieth bitterness."

To Jesus Ben Sira we may, I believe, ascribe the following :

"Glorifying God, exalt him as far as your thought can reach, yet will you never attain to his height : praising him, put forth all your powers, be not weary, yet ever will they fall short. Who hath seen him that he can tell us ? Who can describe him as he is ? Let us still be rejoicing in him, for we shall not search him out : he is great beyond his works."

This has an interesting correspondence with the beautiful rapture of the Persian Sâdi :

"They who pretend to be informed are ignorant, for they who have known him have not recovered their senses. O thou who towerest above the heights of imagination, thought, or conjecture, surpassing all that has been related, and excelling all that we have heard or read, the banquet is ended, the congregation is dismissed, and life draws to a close, and we still rest in our first encomium of thee !"

To Jesus Ben Sira may be safely ascribed the passages that bear witness to the pressure of problems which, though old, appear in new forms under Hellenic influences. They grow urgent and threaten the foundations of Jahvism. It was no longer sufficient to say that Jahveh rewarded virtue and piety, and punished vice and impiety in this world. Job had demanded the evidence for this, and the centuries had brought none. Job was awarded his recompense in this world, but that happy experience did not attend other virtuous sufferers.

The doctrine of one writer in "Wisdom" is simply predestination, Paul's potter-and-clay similitude is anticipated, and the Parsê dualism curiously adapted to Jahvist monotheism : "Good is set against evil, life against death, the godly against the sinner and the sinner against the godly : look through all the works of the Most High and there are two and two, one against another."

But the liberal son of Sira is more optimist: "All things are double, one against another, but he hath made nothing imperfect: one thing establisheth the good of another." Freedom of the will is asserted: "Say not, he hath caused me to err, for he hath no need of the evildoer. He made man from the beginning and left him in the hand of his (own) counsel. . . . He hath set fire and water before thee, stretch forth thy hand to whichever thou wilt. Before man is the living and the not-living, and whichever he liketh shall be given him."

But the doctrine of human free agency is pregnant with polemics; has been such in Christian history, as proved by the Pelagian, Armenian, Jesuit, and Wesleyan movements. There are indications in Ben Sira's work that the foundations of Jahvism were threatened by a moral scepticism. His own celebration of the Fathers was enough to bring into dreary contrast the tragedies of his own time and glories of the Past, when "Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and fig-tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon." What shelter now in the divine fig-tree, which could bear nothing but legendary or predictive leaves? The curse on the barren tree was near at hand when Jesus Ben Sira uttered his pathetic complaint, veiled in prayer:

"Have mercy on us, O Lord God of all, and regard us! Send thy fear on all the nations that seek thee not; lift thy hand against them, let them see thy power! As thou wast (of old) sanctified in us before them, be thou (now) magnified among them before us; and let them know thee, as we have known thee,—that there is, O God, no God but thou alone! Show new signs, more strange wonders; glorify thy hand and thy right arm, that they may publish thy wondrous works! Raise up indignation, pour out wrath, remove the adversary, destroy the enemy: hasten! remember thy covenant, and let them witness thy wonderful works!"

The tables seem to be turned: instead of God looking down on the children of men to see if there is any that doeth good, man begins to search the heavens to see if there is any God that doeth good.