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→CONTRIBUTED NOTES←

The Book of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus.—The Apocryphal Books of the Old Testament, in consequence of their rejection by Protestants as uninspired, have been neglected by scholars. They have been considered as mainly the vagaries of wild rabbinical fancy, and their value has been correspondingly depreciated. This treatment is far from what these books deserve, for while they do contain much that is frivolous and of little worth; yet much can be gained from their study to illustrate the New Testament, to show the development of doctrine among the Jews. And as literature, they form the connecting link between the Old and New Testaments, being the only Jewish works that have survived from the centuries between the cessation of Old Testament prophecy and the commencement of New Testament fulfillment.

The two works named in our title are the most important of the Apocrypha, and deserve careful attention for their character, style and general contents.

The Book of Wisdom, ascribed by tradition though incorrectly to Solomon, was designed, probably, to commend the Alexandrian philosophy to the Palestinian Jews, and contains much that is truly inspiring and uplifting. It comforts the godly who are in distress by pointing them to a future life, where the ungodly shall be punished and the godly receive the reward of their deeds.

Samuel Davidson says, "With the exception of some extravagant statements, the contents are of a pure, noble, and elevated character, such as few philosophers of the ancient world could have promulgated. The work is not filled with strong prejudices and prepossessions. The meritoriousness of sacrifices, lustrations, asceticism does not appear. The narrow views entertained by the Jewish nation on moral subjects—the particularism which led them to hate all other peoples—are not prominent, except in the latter part, where the old inhabitants of Egypt are spoken of. The writer knows only the pious and the godless in the world; so that he must have been a liberal and enlightened Jew who had risen above some of the littlenesses of his countrymen by the force of an enlarged philosophy. His portrait of a wise man is elevated. We need not, therefore, be surprised at the very favorable reception the book has met with. Its religious and moral tendency entitle it to pre-eminent distinction." In style, this book is very remarkable; it is written in the purest Alexandrian Greek, and contains many passages of great beauty and force of expression.

Here we find much that is fine in thought and apt in wording; for illustration, notice the "the delicate balancing of sentences" in the following extract. We use Deane's translation:

"Short is our life and full of pain,
And there is no healing for the death of man,
And none was ever known to have returned from the grave.
For we were born at all adventure,
And hereafter shall be as though we never had been;
For smoke is the breath in our nostrils,
And thought is a spark at the beat of our heart.

And when this is quenched the body shall turn to ashes,
 And the spirit shall be dispersed as empty air ;
 And our name shall be forgotten in time,
 And no man shall remember our works ;
 And our life shall pass away as track of cloud,
 And shall be scattered abroad as a mist,
 Chased away by the beams of the sun,
 And by his heat oppressed.
 For the passage of a shadow is our life,
 And there is no return of our death,
 For it is fast sealed, and no man cometh back."

"Many phrases, such as "Love or Charity," "Holy Spirit," "Only Begotten," "Manifold," "philanthropic," "Providence," "the Fatherhood of God," occur here in the Septuagint, some of them in the Greek language, for the first time; and do not appear again till we find them in the New Testament." The book well deserves the title bestowed upon it by some of the Ancient Fathers, *πανάρετος* treasury of virtue.

Ecclesiasticus.—This is the longest and in some respects the most important work in the whole Apocrypha. The original title of the book is "The Wisdom of Jesus, the Son of Sirach;" and it consists principally of proverbs inculcating moral duties, grouped together after the manner of Solomon's Proverbs, with little real order of thought. We have in this book an expression of the Palestinian theology and its warm commendation to the Alexandrian school; being the reverse of what is found in the Book of Wisdom. The book is poetic in form, and contains many passages of great elegance and beauty, at times attaining the highest flights of human eloquence. Such, for example, as the skilful comparison between the judgments of the toiling day laborers and the educated few (XXXVIII., 24-XXXIX., 11), or that grand Song of Praise recounting the mighty heroes of the Jewish nation through the eras from the earliest time even to the author's own day—a roll resembling much the catalogue of worthies found in Hebrews (XLIV. sq. 29).

Dean Stanley writes thus of this book, "Its general tone is worthy of that first contact between the two great civilizations of the ancient world, and breathes a spirit which an Isaiah would not have condemned, nor a Sophocles or a Theophrastus have despised. There is not a word in it to countenance the minute casuistries of the later Rabbis, or the metaphysical subtleties of the later Alexandrians. It pours out its whole strength in discussing the conduct of human life, or the direction of the soul to noble aims. . . . Here is a tender compassion which reaches far into the future religion of mankind: 'Let it not grieve thee to bow down thine ear to the poor and give him a friendly answer with gentleness. Be as a father to the fatherless, and instead of a husband to the widow; so shalt thou be as the son of the Most High and He shall love thee more than thy mother doth' (IV., 8, 10)."

On the other hand, it sometimes descends into minute particulars in regard to social duties, which verge on the ridiculous. Thus, "Eat as a man, what is set before thee, and chew not with smacking, lest thou be hated. Leave off first for manner's sake, and be not insatiable, lest thou offend. And if thou sittest among many, reach not thine hand out before them. . . . Sound sleep cometh of moderate eating; he riseth early, and his wits are with him. . . . Show not valiantness in wine, for wine has destroyed many. . . . Wine is as life to men, if it be drunk in its measure; What kind of a life is that which is without wine? And it was

made to make men glad. Wine drunk measurably and in season is gladness of heart, and joy of soul; wine drunken to excess is bitterness of soul, with excitement and quarrelsomeness." (XXXI., 16-18, 20, 21, 25 sq).

The morality, that is urged is extolled because of the recompense to be received in this life; nothing is said of the spiritual motives prompting to right action, the resurrection is unknown, and states of future reward and punishment are not mentioned.

Careful study expended on these works will be well repaid; and the student will find in them much that is attractive and pleasing.

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1 Samuel II., 35.—"But I will raise up to me a faithful priest who will do according to that which is in my heart and in my soul; and I will build for him a sure house, and he will walk before my anointed all the days."

Prophecy can be interpreted only in the light of history. That we may understand this prediction made by the "man of God" it will be necessary to glance backward at the preceding history of the priesthood and forward at the future of Eli's family.

Verse 28 speaks of the house of Eli's father. This plainly refers to Aaron. To him God promised the priest's office for a perpetual statute (Exod. xxix., 9); this covenant of an everlasting priesthood was confirmed to his grandson Phinehas, the son of Eleazar (Num. xxv., 13). For many generations the high priests had come from this branch of the family. But now we find as high-priest Eli, who was a descendant not of Eleazar, but of Aaron's younger son, Ithamar. Eli conferred the priest's office upon his sons Hophni and Phinehas, who "trampled upon the sacrifices" and dishonored God by their immoral lives. The man of God was sent to Eli to announce the death of his sons and the downfall of his house. This denunciation was repeated through Samuel (1 Sam. iii., 12-14). In the battle with the Philistines Eli's sons were slain and he himself died on learning the issue of the battle. The Ark of God remained away from Shiloh, and for a long time the priesthood seemed to be utterly abandoned. Samuel performed the office of judge and stood between the people and God. However, in the early years of Saul's reign, Eli's great-grandson, Ahiah, was high-priest, and afterward Abiathar, also a descendant of Eli. The latter was thrust from his position by Solomon, and the priesthood was given to Zadok, a descendant not of Eli, nor of Eli's ancestor Ithamar, but of Eleazar. In this branch of the family it continued.

We are now prepared for a study of the passage itself. To whom does the "faithful priest" refer? Four answers have been proposed referring it (1) to Christ, (2) to Samuel, (3) to Zadok, (4) to a line of priests which included Samuel and Zadok, and culminated in Christ.

The first view limiting its application to Christ hardly needs refutation. To introduce such an explicit prediction concerning a *personal* Messiah runs counter to the idea of the historic development of prophecy. Further, such an interpretation is utterly incongruous; the whole passage relates to the downfall of Eli's house and the appointment of its successor. Again, in this view, to whom can "my anointed" refer?

In reference to the second view which applies the prophecy to Samuel exclusively, it has been well remarked that Samuel is never styled a priest, nor does he,