

1918

# The problem of reward and retribution in the Jewish wisdom literature

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THE PROBLEM OF REWARD AND RETRIBUTION  
in the  
JEWISH WISDOM LITERATURE.

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by  
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1918

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## INTRODUCTION.

Five books comprise the Jewish wisdom literature. The sages who wrote them, although anonymous, mark as distinct a tendency in religious thought as did the preceding prophets and law givers. They disclaimed inspiration and all authority save that of conscience and reason. They were lay students and critics of life, gleaning, as one of them said, "after the grape gatherers". In the second century they instituted schools, where instruction in law and the general conduct of life was given. The social unification produced by the conquests of Alexander brought some of them into intimate relations with Greek thought; and it is probable, from Ecclus. 39:1-11, that it was customary for them, like the scholars of the middle ages, to travel and study abroad.

Hebrew wisdom has been defined as "the capacity so to order life as to get out of it the greatest possible good". At once it will appear that the sages were not as much interested in theory as in practice. They were interested in the application of the religion of their ancestors to daily life. Obviously, then, they would be intent upon the problems of reward and retri-

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bution. What makes righteousness worth while? is the question they are trying to solve. If righteousness is the course to pursue, why is it that the pursuit often ends in poverty, sickness or disaster, whereas the opposite course is crowned with all the desirable goods of this life?

In their discussion (or rather search) they all presuppose the existence of a great creating and overruling God, upon whom men are immediately dependent for their existence. But with the exception of this one presupposition, unthinkable of omission from the Hebrew mind, they seek to reason from the observed facts of human existence. Their scientific attitude, crude though it may seem, immediately links them with the mind and heart of our own age.

Their respective findings may none of them be complete or adequate; but they are honest and therefore convincing. They were in advance of their times, which are not marked by their influence as one might expect; but we may be very sure the material they left was taken up and utilized by later systems.

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"PROVERBS"

One or two misconceptions that have grown up in the religious consciousness about the book of Proverbs ought to be set aside, before the book can delight the modern reader as its compiler intended it should. One is the popular feeling that Solomon wrote it. This and "Ecclesiastes" and the Apocryphal book termed "the Wisdom of Solomon" might, from their super-scriptures, all be attributed to the pen of the great Hebrew ruler and the faith of Israel would have a philosopher king to rival the Stoic Marcus Aurelius. But Biblical students have very clear evidence that neither of these three books was written by the king and, the minute we are willing to relinquish his authorship, the books themselves take on a new self-consistency and meaning.

In the case of "Proverbs" the three main reasons for an authorship other than Solomon's are, first, the background of national and individual hardship and suffering which marks the book. Solomon's era was the heyday of Israelitish glory. Second, monogamy is presupposed (14:1; 18:22) a standard ill in accord with the facts of Solomon's life (I Kings). Third, certain passages (Like 11:28; 15:16; 25:16), in which riches and

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power are belittled, are equally out of keeping as coming from that classic example of splendour loving royalty.

Instead of substituting another author for Solomon, the student can offer only a final compiler of the book, who lived, most probably, two centuries before Christ, i.e., between the years 300 and 250 B.C. The implications of this statement are that the Proverbs represent a long process of formulation beginning perhaps as early as Solomon's day, perhaps later. From time to time these short, easily remembered sayings were gathered from the homes and hearts of the people by some writer. Chapters 10 to 22:16, and 25 to 29 seem to come from an earlier period, for instance, than chs. 1 to 9. The growth of these compilations is comparable to that of a modern anthology of verse.

Why such a book, made up, as 1:6 says, of "the words of the wise", should be attributed to Solomon was not strange. As Apollo was the patron of the Greek song; Sappho, of the Lyric; as choruses still form Apollo clubs; and poets write Sapphics; as David was the patron saint of the Hebrew lyric; so Solomon whose prayer for wisdom and an understanding heart is still repeated verbatim by Christians, was the patron

of didactic literature, particularly that of the wisdom writers. In a certain section of Ecclesiastes the author speaks in the character of the great king, just as Plato speaks in the character of his great teacher, Socrates. In other cases the words "proverbs of Solomon" represent a definite kind of unit proverb, a metrical form as distinct as that which modern writers use under the term, Shakespearian sonnet. But in general the books which the early church called "libri Solomon" are his by right of dedication only.

In comparing the compilation of Proverbs to a modern anthology of verse the second current misconception about the book has been suggested, namely the attempt to read three hundred and seventy five brief literary compositions, wholly unconnected, as if they formed a single essay. One could not and would not read through a disconnected series of lyric poems at a sitting, but here a poem and there a poem as mood and subject dictate.

The book of Proverbs is Hebrew poetry, for, as has been suggested, the wise men were both philosophers and poets. It is not rhymed poetry; but is distinguished by what we call parallelism in the thought of the two line units. This parallelism may be of var-

ious kinds. The second line may repeat the thought of the first so that the two are really synonymous.

"The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters;  
The wellspring of wisdom is as a flowing brook."

Or the second line may be in contrast to the thought of the first.

"A merry heart is a good medicine;  
But a broken spirit drieth up the bones."

Again the second line may complete the thought of the first.

"He that giveth answer before he heareth,  
It is a folly and a shame unto him."

Sometimes the poems are set in longer molds, as in the section ch. 1 to 9 on Wisdom, a kind of Hebrew sonnet form; but always parallelism is the basic structure.

As the thought of the book is in isolated observations, the attempt to read it en bloc, or with reference to its arbitrary divisions into chapters must always be unsatisfactory.

Although the book is made up of at least eight separate compilations \*, differing in many details of

\* Analysis of Proverbs (H.B.D.)

1. Chs. 1-9, Introduction (one author).
2. " 10:1-22:16, Proverbs of Solomon (kernel of book).
3. " 22:17-24, Words of the Wise.
4. " 24:22-34 Appendix to 3.
5. " 25-29, Hezekiah collection (not unlike 2) (pithy, rich in imagery)
6. " 30, Words of Agur (enigmatical numerical proverbs).
7. " ~~31:1-9, Mother's exhortation to Lemuel, king of Massa).~~
8. " 31:10-31, Alphabetical poem (panegyric of the virtuous housewife).

style and manner, when we approach the main religious problem of the work, we find but one point of view reflected.

The solution offered agrees with the solution of the prophets. With their enthusiasm for applied religion, the sages asked whether the righteousness in the fear of God which the law and the prophets enforced was also a workable principle for the guidance of life. Could the "truth of the work a-day and the truth of the Sabbath sanctuary" be identified? The answer of Proverbs is an emphatic "yes".

In the discouragement of the exile the Jews had propounded the question to Ezekiel, saying "The way of the Lord is not equal"; and he had answered them in that inimitable eighteenth chapter, and in the name of the Lord, "Hear, now, O house of Israel, is not my way equal? Are not your ways unequal? I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. The soul that sinneth, it shall die:" but as the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him, even so the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him". The compilers of the proverbs reaffirmed the moral justice of God's attitude toward the righteous and the wicked. In other words the man who can combine the

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fear of God with prudence (13:16; 24:27), discretion (11:22; 15:23), deliberation (15:22; 19:2), caution (14:6; 28:14), efficiency (14:1; 31:10ff), diligence (6:6-11; 12:24), contentment (14:30; 23:4f), reticence (12:23; 17:27f), cheerfulness (15:13; 17:22), affability (15:1; 16:24) may be called truly wise: and the corollary of this wisdom is the receipt of the rewards of life in wealth, comfort, honors, and length of days.

God's ways are equal because, in his universe, piety is always the advantageous course (2:7f., 11f., 20f.), and "the upright shall dwell in the land." God's ways are equal because virtue is never unrewarded (3:11f., 8-10, 16; 10:27ff.; 16:20).

"Honour the Lord with thy substance,  
And with the first fruits of all thy increase:  
So shall thy barns be filled with plenty  
And thy vats overflow with new wine."

God's ways are equal because, whereas consuming misfortune always comes upon the wicked, it comes if at all to the godly only as a chastening.

"Whom the Lord loveth he reproveth:  
Even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."  
(3:11f.)

Despite this kinship with the prophets, there is one point at which "Proverbs" notably diverges. In the passage quoted from Ezekiel, he was applying the demands of righteousness both to the house of Israel

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and to the individual soul that sinneth or repenteth. But of the earlier prophetic utterances it is true that they dealt largely in terms of the national life. They possessed a unique consciousness of God's relation to them as a social group, and of their resultant common obligations to Him. But in the Wisdom literature this note is lost. The sphere to which Wisdom is to be applied is that of individual and domestic life. The trampling hoofs of Oriental despotism have been driven so furiously over Jewish soil, that the cry of the nation to God is silent before the appeal of the individual. Not Israel and the other nations are here contrasted as standing in God's favour and disfavour; but the upright and the ungodly, the proud versus the humble, the understanding versus the foolish. Thus Semitic individualism had its birth in those times of political disintegration: and "Proverbs" and its kindred literature join forces across the centuries with the expressions of all individualistic philosophies from Stoicism to Puritanism.

In keeping with this absence of national emphasis, is the absence of hope in a messianic deliverance such as the prophets, like Deutero Isaiah, were anticipating for their people, with their reiterant cries of "salvation in Zion for Israel, my glory". Denied this

expectation of a future Utopia, it is all the more notable that the sages who wrote the proverbs could uphold uncompromisingly their theory of the temporal and individual reward of the righteous (10:3,24,29f; 11:3-8,31; 12:2f.,3,21; 13:6; 15:29).

Face to face with this uncompromising statement, the thinking man cannot fail to raise one of several questions. Perhaps the first is as to the possibility of drawing the line of demarcation between sinner and saint. Such a rigid classification is little short of blasphemous, in view of the statement that man is made in God's image. But, as one of the critics has pointed out, these compilations were intended for popular instruction and their sponsors did not want to cloud the issue by introducing exceptions to the rule. As every artist knows, who tries to share his thoughts and feelings with others in the guise of some form of art, he cannot transfer any but the outstanding colors, objects, ideas upon his horizon. In fact, his greatness may depend upon his ability to eliminate unessentials. There are then some reasons to account for the strikingly dogmatic character of these unit poems.

Another question that forces itself upon the honest thinker is a question as to the nature of the

rewards promised. Are they entirely of the bank-account variety, riches, honor, length of days, and ways of pleasantness? Whittier sang of a different type of happiness, "the joy of inward peace". Did these ancient thinkers attain to any such spiritualization of the doctrine of reward? Dostoevsky, speaking to a group of church dignitaries, says, "Fathers and teachers, I ponder what is hell? I maintain that it is the suffering of being unable to love". Did the authors of the proverbs share in any such spiritualization of the terms of retribution? There is a hint of it in chapter three, where, as a climax to the promises offered the righteous, we read, "and all her paths are peace". Again in 15:16 we find the words, "Better is little with fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith". A good name and loving favour are described in 22:1 as rather to be chosen than silver and gold. But these are only hints of the modern doctrine that holds that a spiritual heaven and hell are here and now. The main standpoint of the book is that goodness has its direct reward; wickedness, its punishment is this world, in such material forms as are popularly accounted desirable and undesirable. The possibility of another life after death is left untouched.

And the teaching of "Proverbs" is wholesome. Common sense, guided by a kind heart, tries to instill in the youth of each succeeding generation just such hopes and aspirations. One phase of bringing Christ's kingdom on earth is surely making possible such justice on earth as the sages preached. But in the meantime, while man's immaturity and wilfulness are alike interfering with the immediate reign of justice on earth, the mind draws large exceptions to the traditional solution of the problem of suffering as the prophets and lawmakers of Israel accepted it. Nor is the modern mind alone in these objections. The next book of the Wisdom group had its criticism of this solution to make.

### "JOB"

The book of wisdom most passionately concerned with the problem of suffering is the book of "Job". In "Proverbs" we found that various writers contributed solutions which were all cast in the traditional or prophetic mold. In the "Wisdom of Jesus, the son of Sirach" we shall see that one writer offered a solution in harmony with that of the traditional sages. In "Job" we have not only the work of more than one hand, but the

clashing points of view and philosophies of at least five different dramatic characters. This broader contribution to what is a universal problem, together with the beauty and grandeur of its literary form, are what makes this one of the most treasured of the scriptures.

As to the date of the book, it was probably written before the compilation of "Proverbs". But, however that may be, it deserves its present order of consideration because it represents a development in thought beyond "Proverbs". Such apparent inconsistencies between time relations and ideational ones are frequent: for the prophetic souls are always enunciating truths and orienting problems with which the mediocre but not therefore insignificant minds will not deal for a century.

The scene of the plot as shown in the prose narrative in chapters 1 and 42 is laid in patriarchal times. "Job is represented as a patriarch, surrounded by his dependants, rich in pastures and flocks, offering sacrifice as the head of his family, and attaining patriarchal longevity". But the indications in the succeeding chapters of an advanced state of society, unlike the nomadic, of the author's wide range of observation, and of disorder and distress born not mere-

ly of personal but of social suffering make it unquestionable that the writer was building, not a drama of contemporary life, but of previous history. The very formulation of the problems of the book would have been impossible in an earlier era.\* For such formulation presupposes an age of reflection, perhaps enforced by misfortune. About 350 B.C. seems a reasonable date; but the authorities disagree as to whether it should be exilic or post-exilic.†

One word about the form of the book, it is consummate poetry. Parallelism is present as in "Proverbs", but the thought is not limited and circumscribed

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\* The first instance of a questioning spirit had come as late as Jeremiah. Jer. 12:1, "Righteous art thou, O Jehovah, when I contend with thee; yet would I reason the cause with thee: wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they at ease that deal very treacherously?"

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‡ In favour of exilic date:-

1. Background of personal and social suffering (see above). 2. A fitting occasion for the discussion of a great moral problem, Job's experience typifying Israel's. 3. Parallels of language and thought between "Job" and "II Isaiah" favor inference that both were surrounded by the same atmosphere of thought. Job 9:8, Is. 44:24. Job 26:12f, Is. 51:9. Job 13:28, Is. 50:9.

In favour of post-exilic date:-

1. If Job typifies Israel, consciousness of national self-righteousness points to time after the reforms of Ezra-Nehemiah (458-432). 2. Mention of Satan ch. 1f. (elsewhere named only in post-exilic times). 3. Angelology, which has its closest parallel in "Daniel" 137-135 B.C. 4. Conditions of social and political disturbance (7:1. 12:17-25. 14:1f.). 5. The conception of the inwardness of morality, late. (20:12ff.; 31:1ff.).

by the two-line units, but goes steadily on to climax after climax of imagery, emotion, and power. Chapters 1, 2 and 42 are the prose frame-work and probably embody a simple folk tale, such as had grown up around the name of one of the nation's great men, Job. In "Ezekiel" 14:14 Job is referred to as a hero, the memory of whose righteousness, Ezekiel warns his listeners, will not suffice to save them if they persist in iniquity.

This folk tale recites the riches and good fortunes of the hero; then, transferring the scene to God's heavenly court, introduces Satan, not as God's opponent in the more modern sense, but as one of the members of that court, a kind of prosecuting attorney, whose function is the testing of human beings. He suggests that Job has served God for reward. If he be allowed to deprive him of all his possessions, Job's real loyalty or disloyalty will be shown. Job stands the test, and then Satan suggests that he be tried further by disease. So he is smitten with boils, the severe and loathsome form of leprosy known as Elephantiasis. But his piety still stands fast, despite his wife's misanthropic advice to renounce God and die. Three friends come at last to express their sympathy in his suffering.

Upon this prose introduction as a groundwork the author built up the main section of the drama, the colloquies in poetry between Job and his three friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. (Ch. 3 - 31)

Ch. 3- - - - Job's outburst of grief.

" 4-14 - - First cycle of speeches.

" 15-21 - - Second " " "

" 22-28 - - Third " " "

(27:7 - 28:28 is credited to Job but it is inconsistent not only with his earlier, but also his subsequent words. It may have been originally a third speech of Zophar's.)

(Ch. 28 is undoubtedly a later addition by an author who wanted to emphasize the traditional solution.)

" 29-31 - - Further discourses of Job.

( " 32-37 - - The Elihu speeches, by a newly arrived fourth friend. This section adds little to the thought and is of inferior literary quality; probably by a later hand.)

" 38:1-42:6 The speeches of Yahweh and Job's submission.

" 42:7-17 - The prose epilogue.

As the problem of the suffering of the righteous is the crux of the whole poem, it follows that the folk tale itself presents one solution, that the cycles

fellow another purpose, and the sections that may be from later hands present still divergent conclusions. After all it is not so much the solutions reached as the breadth of assurance with which the problem is stated that makes the value of the book. The teaching of the prose original is simple and dogmatic. After Job's testing he is restored to prosperity far in excess of that previous: "sheep and camels, oxen and she-asses, and sons and daughters and length of days". The teaching has been stated as follows:- "While men should not serve God and practice virtue for the sake of personal advantage, the good may, except when God for some wise reason ordains otherwise, expect to enjoy a richer portion of the things that make for happiness, than the bad in the present life." A solution so clearly drawn even the sages of the proverbs would have questioned.

But, ignoring for the moment the epilogue which probably antedates the remainder of the book, what point of view did Job's friends take? Eliphaz, the first speaker, the oldest and most courteous of the men, speaks like the earlier prophets. (4:6,7,8f.; 5:3,25,26). He attempts to reconcile Job to his fate and to accepting punishment for the sin that must be the necessary forerunner of his misfortune, by the assurance that no mere

linking with that a hope of future happiness. By his second speech he leaves the possibility of reinstatement out of the question and describes the abbreviated happiness of the wicked. The implications of his position are neither friendly nor constructively helpful.

In the first cycle of speeches these three speakers have traveled God's side of the question. That is they have upheld the present order of "things as they are", as an expression of his will. In the second cycle they emphasize man's side of the question. If the present order is unfavourable to the individual, and the God who instituted it is a righteous God, then the difficulty is with the individual. In the third cycle there is no new theory to be introduced: all they can do is to grow more bitter and sinister in their aspersions of their one-time friend, and in their emphasis on the fate of the ungodly.

In reading especially the first and second cycles, one is conscious of admiration and often of agreement. They echo the voices of the major prophets. Their words ring true; because the solution they offer, like that of "Proverbs" has often proved sufficient. The research, for instance, of medical science is constantly reaffirming the fiat that law of sin is death.

But the trouble with the solution of the three friends was their obstinate insistence on its universal application, and this despite the suffering before their very eyes of a man whose integrity they had long recognized. In our well-loved modern phrase they had come here upon "real life"; and the tenacity with which they clung to their dehumanized theory made them as heartless, blind and obstinate.

The prophetic solution holds good in the realm of disease, but only up to a certain point, when we come face to face with unearned tragedies of suffering. The prophetic solution may hold good in the realm of happiness, if we spiritualize our conception of it. But if we measure it by material possessions, how valid could this solution stand in the America of 1918? Even with a spiritual interpretation of happiness, we are conscious of superimposed disasters for which we can in no way hold the individual responsible. We are conscious that innocence often suffers with and for the guilty.

But in the survey of the drama the three friends do not have the final word. It is Job's personal problem and his solution must be the final one. In his earlier speeches Job voices his hopelessness. As a result of his trials he is torn between absolute des-

hair (3:25f.), the desire for death (3:2ff.; 7:15) and the fear of further misfortunes (9:28; 10:14). As the dialogue progresses he is more and more haunted by the query, why disaster has come upon him (3:11,12,20; 10:2ff.; 13:23ff.; 23:3ff.), and more and more disconsolate at the disloyalty of his household and his friends (19:15f.; 12:4), and the harshness of his critics (6:4ff.; 12:2-4; 13:2; 16:2ff.; 19:2-5).

In 7:9,20,21 it is clear that the first solution that might present itself to the Christian, i.e., of recompense in another life is incomprehensible to him: Sheol is a place of annihilation, where "thou shalt seek me diligently, but I shall not be."

From the very beginning he discounts the solution of his friends, for he feels himself innocent of any conscious departure from rectitude. To be sure he seems to appreciate the relativity of man's righteousness as compared with God's (14:4). But by human standards he feels his past life to be justified. God's dealings with him therefore take on the character of incomprehensibility.

But when Zophar has ended his first speech, Job has one positive contribution to offer. The previous speakers have been all too much like the rising

lawyer who must make his case regardless of the moral issues involved. So they have been making out a case for the present order of things as of necessity representing God's sense of justice.

"Here now, my reasoning", returns Job,  
 "And hearken to the pleadings of my lips.  
 Will ye speak unrighteously for God,  
 And talk deceitfully for him?  
 Will ye respect his person?  
 Will ye contend for God?"

In order to uphold the justice of his ways, God does not want a man to perjure his own soul. The God Job claims is not afraid of the limelight of truth. Defending God's morality by accusing Job without foundation is like the raffle that buys the new pulpit chairs. A good cause needs no evil means. Job here attests the supermundane righteousness of God and at the same time clings to his own innocence (13:15), preferring an apparently insoluble paradox to untruth or self-deception.

Before the discussion makes its fresh start with Eliphaz' second speech, Job ventures forth for further solution into the vast unknown,

"If a man die, shall he live again?  
 All the days of my warfare would I wait  
 Till my release should come."

The possibility of immortality occurs to him. Perhaps

Greek traditions nudged the author's elbow. At any rate Job relinquishes the thought immediately.

"Thou prevailest forever against him and he passeth" (14:20).

As the callous and aloof attitude of his old companions becomes more pronounced, Job is thrust back upon the friendship of God although he cannot understand his ways. In the midst of his lament over his own misfortunes and the miserable comfort of his friends, he cries out,

"Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven,  
And he that voucheth for me is on high  
My friends scorn me:  
But mine eye poureth out tears unto God;  
That he would maintain the right of a man with God,  
And of a son of man with his neighbor."

Bildad responds to this hotly, but Job is driven on by the pitch of his emotion to still further assurance of God's just relation to his world. (19:25-27,29).

Job is far removed from the typically narrow self-righteousness; but he reiterates, as his friends grow more critical, his integrity. (23:10-14; 27:5-6). Chapter 31 represents his detailed self-defence, a chapter, says Ruhl, "which marks the climax of Old Testament ethics, surpassing in this respect, not only anything that the original story had to offer, but the Decalogue and the prophets." Job's standards have included the following virtues of the active life, - honesty in word

and deed, respect for other's rights and possessions, loyalty in the marital relation, consideration for servants, charity to the unfortunate, scorn of injustice, freedom from avarice, devotion to God, superiority to resentment, generosity towards dependents and strangers and courage backed by a good conscience.

At last God's answer comes: and the curious feature about the speeches attributed to Yahweh is that they deal almost wholly with the marvels of nature as indicative of God's omnipotence, instead of solving Job's particular problem. The lines which bear most directly on the situation are (20:8) "Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be justified?" Is Job willing to cling less tenaciously to his pride in his own righteousness than to his pride in the hidden wisdom of the Almighty, which interpenetrates and controls the life of nature? The genuineness of Job's acquiescence before this searching question is shown by comparing ch. 23, which describes his ineffectual search for a God who has before utterly eluded him, with his closing words,

"I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear;  
But now mine eye seeth thee."

The real answer from Yahweh is Job's ability to see the wisdom and majesty of God himself. As Toy has pointed out, Yahweh's words are but the echo of those

of Job and of his friends· but it is God himself who now utters them. Job is in immediate nearness to the majesty of heaven, wise, unfathomable, ironical over the littleness of man, and he is abased. God himself effects what neither the man's own thoughts of God nor the presentations of his friends could accomplish, though by the same means.

In reviewing the discussion, one must admit with Job's opponents that suffering often befalls the sinner in direct consequence of his sin. Again suffering may be merely a trial of faith as the prologue suggested. It may have a disciplinary value as Eliphaz (5:17ff.) and especially the interpolated Elihu speeches (33:15-20; 36:8-25) show. But for a satisfactory solution of moral perplexities a fuller and larger sense of God will alone suffice. As Driver points out, "the Hebrews were open to perplexity on this score because of their imperfect conception of general laws, whether in nature or in society. They were keenly sensible of his omnipresence, and pictured him as interposing actively in the course of the world; hence virtue overtaken by calamity, or vice flourishing unrebuked seemed to them to cast a direct slur upon the justice of God's government of the world. That the wisdom dramatist

was struggling to convey was an idea easier for our century, with its belief in a reign of law, to compass, i. e., the idea that, since the laws governing nature and the constitution of society are general ones, it may happen that in individual cases their operation does not redound to the advantage of virtue or the punishment of sin; the forces of nature may combine to overwhelm the innocent; men in virtue of the society in which they live being variously bound together, the innocent may suffer through the ill deeds of the guilty, or wickedness may elude detection, and triumph unchecked. Conceiving God as the author of so vast and infinitely complex a system it is unreasonable, the author of "Job" would have us feel, to conceive of oneself as isolated from his care or to infer that his sufferings have no place in God's purpose.

In his summing up of the argument Toy shows how the friends might have appreciated that the authority of conscience is that behind which it is impossible to go; and Job might have realized that there is such sinfulness in every human life as to account for the severest punishment from heaven. The author, however, chose to teach his truth by allowing his performers to push their false principles to their extreme. And

there is nothing, he adds, "about which men are usually so sure as the character of God. They are ever ready to take him in their own hand, to interpret his providence in their own sense, to say what things are consistent or not with his character and word, and beat down the opposing consciences of other men by his so-called authority, which is nothing but their own. The friends of Job were religious Orientals; men to whom God was a being in immediate contact with the world and life, to whom the idea of second causes was unknown, on whom science had not yet begun to dawn, nor the conception of a divine scheme pursuing a distant end by complicated means, in which the individuals interest may suffer for the larger good.

#### "ECCLESIASTICUS"

The title "Ecclesiasticus", by which the first of the apocryphal wisdom writings is known, is as inappropriate as it is forbidding to the modern ear. It was not the author's title but was applied later by Greeks and Romans who used the word, in default of a better, merely to indicate that the book was to be used in connection with church services. The prologue states that it is a Greek translation of a Hebrew work of Jesus,

the son of Sirach, and so it is more aptly called the "Wisdom of Jesus" or merely "Sirach".

The book itself has had an eventful history. Unlike "Proverbs" it appears to be a unity, the work of one author. The translator states that he came into Egypt in the thirtieth year of Ptolemy VIII, the king (i.e., Ptolemy VII) (ca. 132 B.C.) and that he made his translation of his grandfather's (or ancestor's) book some time after his settlement there. For the original Hebrew composition, therefore, the date is not later than 150 B.C. There are two good reasons for giving it a pre-Maccabean date, (1) the absence of any reference to the Maccabean struggles, (2) its eulogy of the house of Zadok, which came into disrepute during these wars. The reader fancies he finds in Sirach references to the earlier books of "Job" and "Proverbs"; and as the translator speaks of his grandfather as a great reader, it is extremely probable that he was acquainted with them.

Unfortunately the copies of this manuscript some in Greek, some in Latin, some in Syriac were very badly preserved during the early days of the Christian era. St. Augustine read and used the book almost like a catechism and embodied much of its thought in his "Speculum". St. Bernard's Jubilee Rhythm ("Hymns Ancient

and Modern" p 178,177) and the German Te Deum (370) were based upon it. But the text was in such imperfect condition that Luther, in attempting to translate the Greek, wrote "There have come so many 'Klüglinge' over this book, that it would be no wonder if it were totally disfigured, not to be understood, without any use. Like a torn, trampled and scattered letter, we have gathered it, wiped off the dust, and brought it as far as can be seen."

Then as recently as 1896 what are generally considered to be the original Hebrew texts were discovered.<sup>#</sup> This manuscript in turn is not perfect. The introductory chapters to 3:7 and chapters 26:26 to 30:11 are missing. But since the discovery the attempt has been made to compare the various translations and, by a process of elimination, arrive at a fairer and truer version. How radical the changes necessitated are may be illustrated by a verse (7:23) which now advises us, instead of "bowing down the neck of our children from their youth" to "marry them early". The recurring thought and emphasis of the book, however, remains much the same as when Augustine and Benard and Luther delighted in it.

Like the book of Proverbs, Sirach is based on the Hebrew couplet form called parallelism. But in

<sup>#</sup> (Note) A few scholars consider these to be only a retranslation of the Greek.

many respects it is much more readable; for instead of the two line unit proverb the book may be divided into short essays on distinct topics, like friendship, death, table manners, music, physicians, freewill, the apparent prosperity of the wicked, etc., etc. The sentences are still pithy and epigrammatic; but those dealing with a given subject are grouped together, an arrangement the present day reader much appreciates.

The book is written in the Hebrew verse form; yet after reading "Psalms" or "Job", one hesitates to call it poetry. Here and there one comes upon a beautiful passage full of imagery, i.e., poetic in thought as well as form. But the book as a whole is so utilitarian in character that one doubts if its original author, were he interrogated, would claim a place for it among the poets.

In its simple and practical dealing with the issues of every day life we can feel that it is particularly allied to our own day when physicians write of "what men live by", when "a voice from the crowd" admonishes preachers, the biologists discuss the religious training of the child and in many ways religion and the secular are being welded together.

Because of his plain speech the attitude that

Ben Sirach adopted toward the riddle of prosperity and adversity is particularly significant. His outlook was narrower than Job's. Therefore he was more dogmatic about his answer. On the other hand his outlook was broader than that of the men who composed the proverbs. He holds to the orthodox Jewish prophetic position; but it is plain that he has had to meet objections to this position. One can feel sure from his words that the verdict of his fellow citizens on the mooted problem was far from unanimous in favour of the reward of the righteous. Ben Sirach strengthened the defences of the orthodox because he had already found out, from the opposition where the arrows of the enemy, would lodge.

The clear statements of the earthly reward of the deserving are numerous. (7:16; 9:11,12; 27:25,26; 39:26-31)

"One that casteth a stone on high casteth it on his own head; - - - - .  
He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it;  
And he that setteth a snare shall be taken therein."

A section of chapter 39 is perhaps as naive a statement of the matter as can be found:-

"The chief of all things necessary for the life of man  
Are water and fire and iron and salt,  
And flour of wheat and honey and milk,  
The blood of the grape and oil and clothing.  
These things are for good to the godly;  
So to sinners they shall be turned to evil.

There be winds that are created for vengeance,  
 And in their fury lay o the scourges heavily;  
 In the time of consummation they pour out their strength,  
 And shall appease the wrath of him that made them.  
 Fire and hail and famine and death,  
 All these are created for vengeance;  
 Teeth of wild beasts and scorpions and adders,  
 And a sword punishing the ungodly unto destruction.  
 They shall rejoice in his commandment,  
 And shall be made ready upon earth, when need is;  
 And in their seasons they shall not transgress his word."  
 (39:26-31).

In the last section of the book, in praise of famous men, the author draws upon history to illustrate his point, showing(45:18ff.) how the opponents of Aaron were destroyed, and how the division of the kingdom (47:19-21) was due to Solomon's sin. He applies the same principle in fact to national life, declaring (10:8) that

"Sovereignty is transferred from nation to nation,  
 Because of iniquities, and deeds of violence, and  
 greed of money".

On the other hand Ben Sirach recognized the inequalities and miseries of life (13:11f.; 40:1-11). There is one, he writes, "that toileth, and laboreth, and maketh haste  
 And is so much the more behind."

In Chapter 40 he describes how

"A heavy yoke is upon the sons of Adam - - -  
 From him that weareth purple and a crown,  
 Even unto him that is clothed with a hempen frock" - -

But, he goes on to add,

"Upon sinners seven fold more  
 Death and bloodshed, and strife, and sword,  
 Calamities, famine, tribulation, and the scourge:  
 All these things were created for the wicked,  
 And because of them came the flood."

More than once the mystery as well as the immediate demonstrable justice of God's ways is affirmed as in chapter 33:10-13, where the analogy of men and their fortunes to the clay in the potter's hands is used. Again it is suggested that God's ways are hidden among men (11:4b: 43:32).

In other words, while Ben Sirach harks to the views of Job's three friends, he is not as self-assured as to the nature of God's dealing. They like Richard Feverel, Senior, felt themselves capable of playing the role of the Omnipotent. Ben Sirach was not cursed with their fatal sense of competence. His position was further modified by his conception of the mercy and forgiveness of God. It is this that makes us feel his kinship with the New Testament concept of the fatherhood of God (cf. 18:13-14).

The character of the rewards which the honest man anticipates is somewhat different from that of those listed in "Proverbs". In the first place great stress is laid upon disciplinary suffering, as preceding reward. (4:17-19; 6:23-31; 18:13).

"For at the first she (Wisdom) will walk with him in crooked ways,  
 And will bring fear and dread upon him,  
 And torment him with her discipline,  
 Until she may trust his soul and try him by her judgments:  
 Then will she return again the straight way unto him,  
 And will gladden him, and reveal to him her secrets."  
 (4:17-18).

Unlike "Job" recompense or retribution in immortality is not ever suggested. And one is left with the impression that the score is apt to be left unsettled until the last of life "for which the first was made". Ch. 11:11-28 and 40:13,14 are perhaps the best examples of this.

"For it is an easy thing in the sight of the Lord  
 swiftly on the sudden to make the poor man rich.  
 The blessing of the Lord is in the reward of the godly;  
 And in an hour that cometh swiftly he maketh his blessing to flourish.  
 Say not, "What use is there of me?  
 And what from henceforth shall my good things be?  
 Say no, I have sufficient,  
 And from henceforth what harm shall happen to me?  
 In the day of good things there is a forgetfulness of evil things:  
 And in the day of evil things a man will not remember things that are good.  
 For it is an easy thing in the sight of the Lord  
 To reward a man in the day of death according to his ways.  
 The affliction of an hour causeth forgetfulness of delight;  
 And in the last end of a man is a revelation of his deeds.  
 Call no man blessed before his death:  
 And a man shall be known in his children?" (11:21b-28).

The last line suggests another aspect of the author's argument i.e., that a man's reward or punishment is in his children. This is much more emphasized than in "Proverbs". 30:4-6 and 41:5-13 are the clear-

est statements of this belief which was associated naturally with the reward of a good name.

"A good life", says the author, "has its number of days; And a good name continueth forever."

Again the thought of individual reputation is merged gradually into the thought of national prestige as in

37:25-26

"The life of man is numbered by days;  
And the days of Israel are innumerable.  
The wise man shall inherit confidence among his people,  
And his name shall live forever."

The wicked, on the other hand, "have no memorial" and "are perished as they had not been."

This gradual shifting of recompense from the lifetime proper to a man's death bed and thence to posterity and the continuance of his memory does not represent the full position of Ben Sirach. He appropriates the immediate goods of life, labor with contentment, music, good health, the temperate use of wine, riches, loyal friends, a congenial wife, honor among men, the possession of wisdom in the fear of the Lord (40:18-27). All these or some of these are the usual concomitants of honest dealing. But the logic of the exceptional circumstances pushes the author on as we have seen to those more enduring satisfactions which have been typical of the stoic solution in all ages.

## "ECCLESIASTES"

The shortest work of the wisdom writers is the one that has occasioned the most controversy. The Provogue calls it the "words of the Preacher". The Hebrew original, Qoheleth, however, is of uncertain meaning: it may be related to the word for assembly, i. e., qahal. Genung seems to have hit upon as apt and as innocuous a title as any, when he calls this book "the words of the counsellor"

It is commonly agreed that the book represents a late date. The most casual reading leaves an impression of social and political dependence and oppression. Injustice is rife (3:16; 4:1f.; 5:8f.; 8:9), reversals of fortune due to despotism are common (10:5ff.). Political upheaval (10:7) and the employment of spies (10:20) characterize the era.

Ben Sirach, despite the reversals which had befallen his city in the years of foreign oppression still wrote with pride of his own people, of their past and future and their unique covenant relation to the omnipotent. There is no trace of national pride in Koheleth's words. His spirit is cosmopolitan. Oriental state-craft and Greek speculative thought have become

so naturalized in Jerusalem that the writer is apparently of a later generation than Ben Sirach. On the other hand, there is no reference to the Maccabean struggle and a certain spirit of strenuous and daring accomplishment, such as usually comes with war is notably lacking. Finally there are certain infallible evidences in the language and style that favour a late date, ca. 250-200 B.C.

As is suggested by the form of translation in the revised version, the book is essentially prose. The ancient parallelism of structure has broken down. Yet there are lines replete with poetic thought in such sections as ch. 12. Sirach was scarcely poetry, as we have seen, because of its intensely practical interest in maxims for the guidance of life, an interest which lead its author to include all sorts of cautions, like that against leaning on one's elbow at dinner. The Counsellor is also a man of practical affairs, prudent enough to be worldly wise and capable of giving genuine Machiavellian advice in such passages as 11:20 "Reville not the king, no, not in thy thought and revile not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the heavens shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter" But on the whole Ecclesiastes is distinguished by its interest in the speculative rather.

than the practical or imaginative.

As regards its contribution to the theory of retribution, it is generally considered to lack self-consistency. Therefore all manner of theories have been devised to account for it. Siegfried distinguishes the work of five original writers and at least two later editors. Genung, on the other hand, has written an interesting book, "The Words of Koheleth" to show that the work has unity within itself, the unity of the queries and solutions of the active mind of a single individual. To accept his point of view, however, a great deal of explanation has to be made at certain points. The most satisfactory interpretation would seem to be that "the glaring deviations or contradictions (notably 7:29; 11:9b; 12:14; 7:12, 18b, 19; 8:5; 7:6; 2:26; 8:12) are due to the attempts of one or more revisers to bring it into harmony with the ethical teaching prevalent in their day or at least in the class or party to which they belonged."

The words of Koheleth were not orthodox. They represent a complete breach with the long-standing Jewish conception of the demonstrable justice of God. They hold a strange position in our Christian Bible, for they might be regarded as a criticism of the entire Old

Testament. As it is good for the individual to have a drastic critic to whom to turn; so perhaps it is good for a religious system to submit itself to adverse comments. Possibly no words more clearly than those of Koheleth show the Old Testament's need of the new. As Davidson has said "One of the tasks of the old economy was to drill holes in itself, to begin making breaches along the whole circumference of the material world that bounded it --- by the law to die to the law. And none were busier agents in these operations than the wise."

Like Job, the author of "Ecclesiastes" was forced by his observation of human society to deny that men receive their just deserts on earth. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" is the constant refrain of his conclusions. "All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not; as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth as he that feareth an oath"(9:12).

The idea that the good man is remembered by posterity has no foundations, says Koheleth. "There is no remembrance of the former generations: neither shall there be any remembrance of the latter generations

that are to come, among those that shall come after" (1:11).

The idea of a progressive civilization to which each worthy man contributes his part, Koheleth scouts. Human society moves forward only to return upon itself in a vicious circle. (1:1-11) Progress is a myth.

As for a life after death Omar Khayyam himself could not scout the idea more completely. The Greek conception of immortality must have been known to the writer; for his philosophy of the cycles of history is assuredly of Greek importation. Genung suggests that in the form of its importation it was not on the highest ethical plane, that it appealed to Koheleth only as an aesthetic luxury of fortune telling and apocalypics; that, with its system of future glories, it made heavenly reward a motive, as Satan had claimed reward to be with Job. About this time the two sects of Pharisees and Sadducees were taking their birth. The latter sect included men like Ben Sirach and Koheleth and denied resurrection and spiritual existence. "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have any more a reward: for the memory of them is forgotten. As well their love as their hatred and their envy, is perished long ago: neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under

the sun." (9:5,6)

The possibility of satisfaction in this life is discussed. Complete immersion in pleasure is suggested (2:1f.) the amassing of great wealth and possessions (2:4f.) the pursuit of wisdom (2:14). But these are insufficient so long as threatened by death. Koheleth is a theist but an agnostic theist. God's ways are utterly hidden. "That which is, is far off and exceeding deep; who can find it out?" (7:24; 8:17).

This is the fundamental position of the major part of the book (the so-called grundschrift). On the problem in which we are interested it is frankly agnostic: it has no answer to make. It is scarcely fair, however, to leave it at this point without showing that its author does present some slender thread to which the reader may cling. Having given up all attempts to understand the reason of God's ways, there are left certain miniature "summsbona" which may be clung to from day to day. In reading "Ecclesiastes" in its Biblical setting, the teaching seems often far from wholesome and decidedly lacking in that courage which embraces risk and attempts the impossible. But read it after Omar Khayyam, and its worth is at once apparent; for it is infinitely more challenging and nobler in concep-

tion than the theory there inculcated.

It can offer as satisfactions, first, labor and contentment therein, enough to eat and drink, sound sleep, marital happiness (4:5; 5:12; 5:18-20; 9:9) friendship (4:8-12) the Greek sense of fitness and proportion, the satisfaction of a appropriate action, described in the chapter on times and seasons. Such passages reveal a self respect and a sense of duty in addition to sympathy with natural happiness such as Epicureanism is not of.

There is something moreover strangely modern about this philosophy. Previous to the great war one heard echoes of it on every hand. But one notes that the war has silenced it. The book of Ecclesiastes is too negative in spirit for the use of a heroic and twentieth century Europe and America is not willing to be agnostic about one thing, the ultimate triumph of that which is right in God's sight.

#### "WISDOM OF SOLOMON"

The last of the wisdom books, the apocryphal "Wisdom of Solomon, has been called "the most brilliant production of pre-Christian Hebrew philosophical thought, remarkable both in the elevation of its ideas and the

splendour of its diction". Unlike the other works of the series, the original manuscript was probably written in Greek, and by a Jew of Alexandria. Despite his Greek education, however, the writer was a loyal Jew at heart and true in every respect to "the law".

As to the date of writing, the terminus a quo is the Greek translation of the Bible ca. 250 B.C.; the terminus ad quem, St. Paul's acquaintance with the book. Most recent critics agree on the latter part of the first century before Christ. The acceptance of this late date places the book in the familiar phrase "so near and yet so far" from the New Testament that its reading takes on an added zest.

The book falls naturally into two sections. Chapters 1 to 9 contrast (1-5) the righteous and the wicked, set forth (6-9) the glories of wisdom. Chapters 10-19 deal with the early fortunes of the Israelites as a righteous nation beloved by God. The same general theme the salvation and final prosperity of the righteous may be said to hold for both sections; and both presuppose God as the supreme moral governor. But the points of view differ to such an extent that a double authorship may be indicated. (1) The Greek coloring which marks the first section is absent in the second.

(2) One part is a treatise; the other, in the form of an address to God. (3) One refers to the Jewish people by name only once, and that incidentally in Solomon's prayer. The other is wholly devoted to Jewish national experiences. (4) One emphasizes justice. The other portrays a finer ethical conception of God as a father and saviour of all, a lover of souls, merciful to the wicked as well as to the good. (5) In the first the hope of immortality is prominent. In the second part it appears but once (15:3). The question whether these differences indicate a double authorship may be left undecided. For our present purposes section one is of the most importance and is nearer modes of present thinking than what seem to us the imaginative and highly improbable narrative proofs of the second part.

As has been mentioned, the author appears to have been familiar, as none of the earlier sages were, with Greek life and art and thought. Amorphous matter (11:17) central ideas (13:1) the pre-existence of the soul (8:19f.) the body as hindering the elevation of the divine (9:15) the four cardinal virtues (8:7) have been listed as conceptions borrowed directly from Platonism, while the all-pervading nature of Wisdom's power (7:22,24) is reminiscent of Stoicism. Greek art,

however, like St. Paul he repudiated, as related to  
 the idolatrous worship of the merel; human (14:15ff;  
 15:4ff.). Despite his intellectual borrowing, the writ-  
 er was a thoroughgoing Jew and his theme is a defence  
 of the traditional Jewish belief in the salvation of  
 the righteous. In particular he writes with the ex-  
 press purpose of refuting the remarks of the sceptic  
 author of "Ecclesiastes". "Thus reasoned they "he says,  
 concluding a long chapter on the carpe diem philosophy,  
 "and they were lead astray. For their wickedness blinded  
 them, and they knew not the mysteries of God, neither  
 hoped they for the wages of holiness, nor did they judge  
 that there is a prize for blameless souls" (2:21-22).

"A prize for blameless souls", this was the  
 burden of the teaching of "Proverbs" and "Ecclesiastics".  
 The "Book of Wisdom" has some new methods of expounding it.

In the first place Sheol, the realm of anni-  
 hilation, is replaced in the thought of the author by  
 the idea of immortality. Nowhere is this profoundly  
 revolutionizing teaching strictly defined. "The Book  
 of Wisdom" could not be substituted for a text book in  
 systematic theology. But the very fact that the teach-  
 ings were vague, that the mind of the writer passes more  
 easily than pedagogically from individual to national

immortality makes the book a very human document, and presents an appeal to the more or less unconscious groping of other bewildered souls that a stricter logic could not claim. As the bereaved world of 1917 does not insist on believing either in personal immortality for the good and for the wicked or in an immortality strictly dependent upon earthly memory and influence, but grasps all clues that appear rationally satisfying and commandeers them for the immediate necessity of living; so this forerunner of the Christian hope reveals to us his excursions into all fields for clues.

Ben Sirach believed that the end of a man's life was apt to divulge his reward or retribution. The later author, especially in the second section, emphasizes this same temporal revelation of merit. All his narratives of early Israel are in illustration of this. He even goes so far as to say that the form of earthly retribution corresponds with the sin committed (11:15; 15:18- 16:1) as in the case of the Egyptians plagued by the very reptiles and insects whose images they had sinfully made and adored. Again he denies that death, a short life and the lack of children represent misfortunes for the righteous (4:7-16). Over against them he places the possession of wisdom as a supreme good. And,

in contrast, the sinner he observes, is condemned in this life by "a witness within", is pressed hard by "conscience" (17:11).

But he is not satisfied with Ben Sirach's complete trust in a justice apparent before death. His observations have forced him to admit that often "The ungodly shall see a wise man's end";

"And shall not understand what the Lord purposed concerning him."

(4:17) His observations have pushed him through the closed portals in his search for justice. There he finds that after a man's death "in the memory of his virtue is immortality" (4:1f.).

"When it is present, men imitate it;  
And they long after it when it is departed;  
And throughout all time it marcheth crowned in triumph,  
Victorious in the strife for the prizes that are undefiled."

And again:

"For to be acquainted with thee is perfect righteousness,  
And to know thy dominion is the root of immortality."  
(15:3)

The reverse of this proposition is the contempt accorded the wrong doer by his posterity. The passage (4:5-6) on the insecure and broken fate of the "multiplying brood of the ungodly" could scarcely have been written more forcefully by LaMarck or his school.

This conception of the immortality of influence passes naturally into an idea of national immortality

end of a (messiahless) kingdom in which the righteous shall rule over the heathen (3:8; 5:16; 6:17-20).

But the writer did not stop here. The references are somewhat vague, but, taken in their entirety, it seems to me assuredly true that he accepted and began to spread (for it was an innovation) the belief in a personal immortality.

"They shall come, when their sins are reckoned up, with coward fear;  
And their lawless deeds shall convict them to their face" (4:20)

seems in its setting to contemplate judgment and some sort of continued existence for the sinner. While 2:23ff. is the clearest account of the expectations of the righteous and is a fitting conclusion to a survey, not only of this book but of all the wisdom series, because it points to a central teaching of the dispensation that was to come.

"Because God created man for incorruption,  
And made him an image of his own proper being;  
But by the envy of the devil death entered into the world,  
And they that are of his portion make trial thereof.  
But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,  
And no torment shall touch them.  
In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died;  
And their departure was accounted to be their hurt,  
And their journeying away from us to be their ruin;  
But they are in peace.  
For even if in the sight of men they be punished  
Their hope is full of immortality."

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