BOOKS OF PSALMS, PROVERBS, ECCLESIASTES

AND

THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

PSALMS.

Psalms xxiv.
9 Kings' daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir.
10 Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house;
11 So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.
12 And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift: even the rich among the people shall entreat thy favour.

13 The King's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold.
14 She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee.
15 With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the King's palace.

THIS book is supposed to have been written by David, the son of Jesse, called the sweet psalmist of Israel. He had a taste for the arts, a real genius for poetry and song. Many of the poems are beautiful in sentiment and celebrated as specimens of literature, as are some passages in Job; but the general tone is pessimistic. David's old age was full of repinings over the follies of his youth and of his middle age. The declining years of a well-spent life should be the most peaceful and happy. Then the lessons of experience are understood, and one knows how to bear its joys and sorrows with equal philosophy. Yet David in the twilight of his days seemed to dwell in the shadows of despair, in sackcloth and ashes, repenting for his own sins and bemoaning the evil tendency of men in general. There is a passing mention of the existence of women as imaginary beings in the Psalms, the Proverbs, and The
Song of Solomon, but not illustrated by any grand personalities or individual characters.

Psalms ii.
To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bath-sheba.
1 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving-kindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.

2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.
3 For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

David’s treatment of Uriah was the darkest passage in his life; and to those who love justice it is a satisfaction to know that his conscience troubled him for this act to the end of his days. We are not told whether Bath-sheba ever dropped a tear over the sad fate of Uriah, or suffered any upbraidings of conscience.

Proverbs.

ix., 13 A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing.

x., 16 A gracious woman retaineth honour: and strong men retain riches.

xiv. Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.

xvii., 25 A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her that bare him.

xix., 14 House and riches are the inheritance of fathers: and a prudent wife is from the Lord.

xxi., 9 It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.

xxi., 19 It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman.

xxvii., 15 A continual dripping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike.

xxx., 21 For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear:

22 For a servant when he reigneth; and a fool when he is filled with meat;

23 For an odious woman when she is married; and a handmaid that is heir to her mistress.

xxxii., 10 Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.

11 The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her.

12 She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

13 She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands.

16 She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.

20 She stretcheth out her hand to the poor.

21 She is not afraid of the snow; for all her household are clothed with scarlet.

22 She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.

23 Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.

24 She maketh fine linen, and selleth it.

26 She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.

28 Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.

29 Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.

30 Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, shall be praised.

With these pen pictures of the foolish, contentious wife contrasted
with the more gracious woman, surely every reader of common sense will try to follow the example of the latter. A complaining woman is worse than a leaky house, because with paint and putty you can stop the dropping; but how can one find the source of constant complaints?

Heretofore Biblical writers have given to us battles, laws, histories, songs; now we have in Solomon’s writings a new style in short, epigrammatic sentences. The proverb was the most ancient way of teaching among the Greeks. The seven wise men of Greece each had his own motto on which he made himself famous. These were engraved on stone in public places. Thus the gist of an argument or a long discussion may be thrown into a proverb, in which the whole point will be easily seen and remembered.

Solomon’s idea of a wise woman, a good mother, a prudent wife, a saving housekeeper and a successful merchant, will be found in the foregoing texts, which every woman who reads should have printed, framed and hung up at her family altar. As Solomon had a thousand women in his household, he had great opportunity for the study of the characteristics of the sex, though one would naturally suppose that wise women, even in his day, preferred a larger sphere of action than within his palace walls. Solomon’s opinion of the sex in general is plainly expressed in the foregoing texts.

Solomon is supposed to have written his Song when he was young, Proverbs in middle life, and Ecclesiastes when he was old. He gave admirable rules for wisdom and virtue to all classes, to men, to women and to children, but failed to practise the lessons which he taught.

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**Ecclesiastes.**

This book, written in Solomon’s old age, is by no means comforting or inspiring. Everything in life seems to have been disappointing to him. Wealth, position, learning, all earthly possessions
and acquirements he declares alike to be “vanity of vanities and vexation of spirit.” To one whose life has been useful to others and sweet to himself, it is quite impossible to accept these pessimistic pictures of human destiny.

**Eccles. vi.**

I said in mine heart, I will prove thee with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity.

4 I made me great works; I buldled me houses; I planted me vineyards:
5 I made me gardens and orchards.
7 I had great possessions above all that were in Jerusalem before me:
8 I gathered me also silver and gold and particular treasures: I gat me men singers and women singers, and musical instruments.

10 And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy.
13 Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.
14 The wise man’s eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all.

This constant depreciation of human dignity and power is very demoralizing in its influence on character. When we consider the struggles of the race from savagism to civilization, all the wonderful achievements, discoveries and inventions of man, we must feel more like bowing down to him as an incarnation of his Creator than deploring his follies like “a poor worm of the dust.” The Episcopal service is most demoralizing in this view. Whole congregations of educated men and women, day after day, year after year, confessing themselves “miserable sinners,” with no evident improvement from generation to generation. And this confession is made in a perfunctory manner, as if no disgrace attended that mental condition, and without hope or promise of a change from that unworthy attitude.

**Eccles. viii.**

26 And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.

28 One wise man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found.
29 Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

Solomon must have had a sad experience in his relations with women. Such an opinion is a grave reflection on his own mother, who was so devoted to his success in the world. But for her ambition he would never have been crowned King of Israel. The com-
mentators vouchsafe the opinion that there are more good women than men. It is very kind in some of the commentators to give us a word of praise now and then; but from the general tone of the learned fabulists, one would think that the Jezebels and the Jaels predominated. In fact, Solomon says that he has not found one wise woman in a thousand.

THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

The name of God does not appear in this Song, neither is the latter ever mentioned in the New Testament. This book has no special religious significance, being merely a love poem, an epithalamium, sung on nuptial occasions in praise of the bride and the groom. The proper place for this book is before either Proverbs or Ecclesiastes, as it was written in Solomon's youth, and is a more pardonable outburst for his early days than for his declining years. The Jewish doctors advised their young people not to read this book until they were thirty years old, when they were supposed to be more susceptible to spiritual beauties and virtues than to the mere attractions of face and of form.

The Church, as an excuse for retaining this book as a part of "Holy Scriptures," interprets the Song as expressive of Christ's love for the Church; but that is rather far-fetched, and unworthy the character of the ideal Jesus. The most rational view to take of the Song is, it was that of a luxurious king to the women of his seraglio.

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