

*SOME THOUGHTS ON THE STRUCTURE OF
THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.*

At the present time, when attention is being called in many ways to the structure of the books of the Old Testament, and when startling suggestions are put forward concerning the kind of revision and editing to which these books were subjected to bring them into their present form, it will not perhaps be without advantage to ask whether any facts, and, if so, what, can be gathered from the books themselves calculated to throw light on this subject, which is of undoubted importance, and the discussion of which has been a fruitful source of disquiet to many earnest minds.

The Book of Proverbs seems to furnish some such material as is needed. That book forms part of the third section of the Bible, according to the Hebrew arrangement. The works contained in this third part were of somewhat less account than those in the other sections, which comprise the law, and the earlier and later prophets. They are merely classed as *Kethubim*, i.e. writings. The section commences with the Psalms, and it is thought that our Lord (Luke xxiv. 44) used the name "Psalms" as a title of the whole section, when He comprehends all Old Testament writings under the phrase, "the law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms."

The *Kethubim* were probably gathered into one collection at a later date than the other Scriptures, and the various parts of them kept open for the reception of additions during the years in which the Canon of the Old Testament was unsettled. The Book of Proverbs presents clear marks of its composite character, and that its various portions are not of the same date. It may be therefore, that a consideration of its form, and of the manner in which its contents appear to have been brought together, will give us

a clearer notion of what is likely to have taken place with regard to other books, at any rate to those included in the same section. It is no unwarrantable supposition that what befell in the case of one book befell also in the case of some others.

The title which stands at the head of the book, "the proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel," is a general one, and intended to apply to the whole collection of proverbs. But it was not the design of those who affixed this title to imply that the wise utterances contained in these first chapters were the words of King Solomon. This they make clear at the opening of chap. x., where "the proverbs of Solomon" is placed as a title in such a way as to show that in what follows we have the actual sayings of the wise king. The previous nine chapters may have been collected from the words of those sages with whom Solomon is compared in 1 Kings iv. 31: "He was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol." These men, and it may be others, had been of high repute before Solomon's time. Hence the comparison. Their wisdom, like his, had found expression in proverbial sayings. It was Salomonic, though not equal to the profounder teaching of the gifted king. Yet by reason of their precedence in time the words of these ancient worthies would seem fit to be gathered together, and placed first in the book which was to bear the name of Solomon.

The first instalment of the veritable sayings of David's son extends from x. 1 to xxii. 16. At this point, if we may judge from appearances, the collection stopped for a while: the chapters first gathered being doubtless the proverbs most current and in repute close to the age in which Solomon lived.

Two brief supplementary pieces are attached to this first body of Proverbs. The one, which commences at xxii. 17

and extends to xxiv. 22, is an anonymous contribution, and can only be called generally "the words of the wise." "Incline thine ear, and hear the words of the wise," is its opening exhortation. The second piece, contained in xxiv. 23-34, is also anonymous, but is furnished with somewhat more of a title. "These also are sayings of the wise." These two small contributions to the gnomic wisdom of Israel appear to have been placed after this first collection of Solomon's proverbs, that they might be preserved. It was known that all the wise words of Solomon had not yet been brought together, but the time perhaps appeared not ripe for further collection. But the two anonymous pieces were not to perish, and were stored up here by those who had the keeping of the literary treasures of Israel. Long years passed before the rest of Solomon's proverbs were gathered, and by that time the position of these two morsels had become secure, and they were left in their place, though they sever the two parts of the true Salomonic sayings.

At the opening of chap. xxv. we find the announcement, "These also are proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out." The part of the book so described embraces chaps. xxv.-xxix., and the superscription is full of interest. We learn from it that beside the proverbs which were first collected, and given forth under Solomon's name, there existed a considerable amount of floating proverbial sayings attributed to that king, but that this was not brought into the connected form which it has in chaps. xxv.-xxix. until more than two centuries after Solomon was dead. And the collectors of it were clearly an authoritative body. "The men of Hezekiah" were some sort of college of scribes, to whom the king gave in charge the arrangement of the national literature. And the time at which this body comes on the scene is very suggestive. It was in Hezekiah's reign that the ten tribes

were carried into captivity. The removal of so large a part of the nation would be sure to turn men's minds to the preservation of their history. Judah was only a little kingdom, but was heir to all the traditions of her captive sister. It was befitting therefore that the king of Judah should take measures for gathering and preserving the history of the whole people.

In connexion with this by no means improbable supposition concerning the establishment and duties of Hezekiah's college, it is interesting to notice that in the Book of Judges the only mark of chronology on which we can fix is this same deportation of Israel, and occurs in an allusion to that idolatry which was the cause of the national overthrow. We are told (Jud. xviii. 30) that Micah's Levite and his descendants were priests to the Danites *until the day of the captivity of the land*. These last words sound as though dictated by events in the not very remote past. There is abundance of ancient matter in the Book of Judges, but this sentence belongs to the framework of the narrative, and so to the age in which the book was brought into its present form. And, supposing this college of Hezekiah to have continued, there is no reason why the books of Ruth, Judges, and Samuel may not have been edited by the members of it, and the national literature thus far arranged by men acting under royal authority and supported by royal endowment.

The rest of the Book of Proverbs is comprised in two chapters, but these are made up of three independent compositions. Chap. xxx. is called "the words of Agur, the son of Jakeh," and chap. xxxi. 1-9 are "the words of king Lemuel." We find nothing to enlighten us as to who these persons were, but we may assume that they were sages of the Salomonic stamp, whose utterances appeared, at some later time, worthy of being appended to the words of the wise king of Israel. But this must have been done

at a late period, and these two pieces, with the one that follows them, look like the last gleanings in the field of proverbial philosophy.

In chap. xxx. 10-31 we have a separate poem, the beautiful description of the virtuous wife. Like some of the Psalms, it is marked by a pedantic peculiarity. Each of its verses begins with a different letter, and these follow each other in the order of the Hebrew alphabet. Such acrostics mark a late and fanciful stage of poetic composition. The little poem may be the work of Lemuel, whose name stands above the first verses of the chapter, but is an entirely distinct composition, though placed in conjunction with what precedes it without the slightest note, except the acrostic structure, of its separate character.

From this survey of the contents of the Book of Proverbs we may draw the following conclusions: (1) That the book was kept open till a somewhat late date for the reception of new matter of the same character. (2) That the name of Solomon was used in the title without any intention of implying that the whole contents of the book were Solomon's writing. (3) That small contributions of proverbs were added to the rest without any notice of whence they came. (4) That some portions of the book for which the material had been in existence for a long period were not brought into the form in which we have received them for some centuries after their first composition.

Further, it needs no long examination of the Book of Proverbs, where repetitions abound and where parallel passages are repeated even three times over, to see that little literary skill was exercised to avoid such repetitions. The materials were incorporated with probably very small modification of the form in which they had first been written down.

If we proceed to examine some of the other Old Testament books in the light thus derived from the contents of

one, we find that some of them present very similar phenomena, and we may not be indisposed to admit that what is shown to be true of a part need not necessarily be untrue of the rest, though it may not be capable of demonstration.

Take first "the Psalms." This is their simple title, but so many of them have the additional title לְדָוִד = "(ascribed) to David," that the whole collection has come to be regarded as David's work, an idea which is fostered by the frequent rendering of the separate title by "A Psalm of David." Yet it can easily be shown that the Hebrews did not intend by such a title to state that King David wrote the psalm which bears it. They meant only that the words were Davidic in character, and that it was appropriate that they should be included in the temple Psalter, which bore David's name, because he was one of the first and largest contributors to its contents.

This was fully understood by the Septuagint translators, and they were much more conversant with Hebrew thought and ideas than we can hope to be. They were living too much nearer to the age wherein the Psalms were written: an age when the conditions of authorship were much simpler than they now are, when proprietorship in a composition was not thought of as it is in these days of literary copyright. Hence to their Psalm cxxxvi. (Heb. cxxxvii.) they have prefixed the title τῷ Δαυὶδ (the exact literal representation of the Hebrew לְדָוִד) Ἱερεμίου, by which they assuredly meant to convey that the composition was in the style of David's writing, but that in their judgment, or according to the tradition which had come down to them, the writer was Jeremiah. And the matter of the Psalm ("*By the waters of Babylon*") shows that this is not improbable.

After the same fashion the Septuagint Psalm cxxxvii. is set down as "A Psalm of (*i.e.* in the style of) David, by Haggai and Zechariah," to whom the Seventy also assign

the authorship of Psalms cxlv.-cxlviii. Hence "A Psalm of David," as we render the common title, was not a phrase by which David was claimed as the author. If we bear this usage of the Seventy in mind we shall feel less disturbed, when in other psalms bearing the Davidic title in the Hebrew we meet with language which appears to belong to a later age. Like the Book of Proverbs, the Psalter was doubtless kept open for a considerable time after the return from Babylon, and if any poems were produced worthy to take their place among the music of the sanctuary, the guardians of the sacred literature included them in their collection as Davidic poetry, but with no intention to deceive or to give the impression by the title that the works were of earlier date.

That psalms of late date did exist in the Psalter was noticed more than once by the translators of the Geneva Bible. Thus in a marginal note to Psalm lxxiv. they say, "The Church of God being oppressed by the tyranny either of the Babylonians, *or of Antiochus*, prayeth to God, by whose hand this yoke was laid upon them." It offered no difficulty to these biblical students, and they were men mighty in the Scriptures, to admit that some psalms were written, and included in the Psalter, in the troublous post-Exile times, even as late as Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.). So in the margin of Psalm xlv. the same translators give their judgment. "This psalm seemeth to have been made by some excellent prophet for the use of the people when the Church was in extreme misery, either at their return from Babylon, *or under Antiochus*, or in such-like affliction." They were not troubled to maintain that the Psalter was early closed, or that there could be in it no Maccabæan psalms.

If then any are disposed to see in the language of Psalm cxlviii. ("*Great is the Lord, and highly to be praised*") a pilgrim song written after the return from Babylon, in

which, after the celebration of past glory and deliverances, the poet intimates the motive of his verse, thus :

*“ Walk about Zion, and go round about her :
Tell the towers thereof :
Mark ye well her bulwarks
Consider her palaces ” :*

or if allusions to the Babylonish captivity are traced in the close of Psalm cvi., where a part of the recital of God's discipline is thus expressed :

*“ Therefore was the wrath of the Lord kindled against
His people,
And He abhorred His inheritance :
And He gave them into the hand of the nations ;
And they that hated them ruled over them ” :*

such exposition finds its warrant in other places of the Psalm-book, and may prove worthy of acceptance. For Psalm cxxxvii. makes it plain that such post-Exile reminiscences did find their way into the Psalter, and the words of Psalm lxxix. (*“ O God, the heathen are come into Thine inheritance ”*) are more applicable to the sorrowful days of the Maccabees than to any other period of Jewish history.

Again, a study of 1 Chronicles xvi. gives us an insight into the way in which the various portions of the Psalter could be dealt with before the temple-services became stereotyped. We have there an account of the observances when the ark was brought by King David into Zion ; and among other things the chronicler tells us how a certain psalm, for the religious part of the service, was delivered by the king into the hand of Asaph. But when we compare this “ psalm ” with the Psalter, as we now have it, we find that the composition in Chronicles is made up of (1) the first fifteen verses of Psalm cv., with only a small change in one verse ; (2) Psalm xcvi. though two or three half-verses

are omitted, and there is a slight transposition; then follows (3) a doxology of three verses, made up of words found in Psalm cvi. 1, 47, 48, the last two of which verses form the doxology to the fourth book of the Psalter. From this example there can be no doubt that the Book of Psalms was looked upon as a treasury of devotional poetry, from which appropriate words might be drawn for special occasions, and ranged in such order as was deemed most suitable. We can understand too how it came to pass that several psalms when inserted in the Psalter were supplied with a closing verse or two which rendered them more suited for the public worship. From this cause the closing verse was probably added as a doxology to Psalm xviii., and a like remark applies to xxvii. 14, xxxi. 23, 24, li. 18, 19, lv. 23, and some others, where a sudden change of subject is found in the final verse or verses.

We can also see how such Psalms as xcvi. and cxxxv. came into existence, in which nearly every verse has its parallel in some other psalm. Words appropriate for some special occasion of thanksgiving were culled from various places in the Psalter as it then existed, and the compilation finding favour was preserved to be used for any similar need. It was probably also the popularity of Psalm xiv. which caused it to be inserted in a slightly different version in the Psalter as Psalm liii. Thus we notice that some of the peculiarities observed in connexion with the Book of Proverbs exist also in the Psalter, especially that the book was kept open to a somewhat late period for the reception of new compositions; that to pass under David's name does not imply that a psalm was of his composition; and that a good deal of freedom was used in selecting and adapting some psalms for use, while the frequent repetitions which occur show that no great amount of regard was paid to the literary form of the book.

When we inquire from the prophetic books con-

cerning the way in which the Hebrews dealt with their literature, the evidence is naturally more scanty and of a different character. Here there is no book kept open for additions, but we constantly find the prophets using freely the writings of their predecessors, or any other existing literature. The oft-cited passage which exists alike in Isaiah ii. 2-4 and Micah iv. 1-3 will occur to everybody. Hosea viii. 14 is repeated with modifications many times over in Amos i. 4, 7, 10, 12, ii. 2, 5; and Hosea iv. 15 in Amos v. 5 and viii. 14. The utterances of Hosea ii. 19, 20 are taken up in Jeremiah xxxi. 31-34, while vers. 27, 28 of that chapter also draw upon Hosea ii. 23. The same chapter of Hosea has supplied many thoughts and figures which appear in Ezekiel xvi. The prophet Obadiah in vers. 1-9 and in ver. 16 quotes and adopts the words of Jeremiah in various parts of chap. xlix. while vers. 10-18 of Obadiah have much that is common to them and Joel i. 15 to iii. 19.

But perhaps the most interesting example is found in Isaiah, chaps. xv. and xvi. In the thirteenth verse of the latter chapter the prophet intimates that "the burden of Moab," which has just preceded, is taken from the lips of some previous prophet. "This is the word that the Lord spake concerning Moab in time past." As the land of Moab against which the prophecy was uttered was included between "the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain" (2 Kings xiv. 25), it has been suggested that the original prophecy may be "the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He spake by the hand of His servant Jonah," of which we have a notice in the passage of 2 Kings. But be this as it may, Isaiah is quoting from some one, and we know not whether with any adaptations. And this same prophetic word is taken up by Jeremiah (chap. xlviii.), and amplified either with language of his own, or with the addition of parts of the original which Isaiah had omitted. When we remember the large amount of prophetic litera-

ture which is mentioned in the Books of Chronicles, and which has not come down to us, we need not be surprised at resemblances in the language of those which are preserved, and we can form a judgment of the freedom with which each succeeding generation felt at liberty to adopt, or adapt, the words of those who had gone before them.

Concerning the very early books of the Old Testament, the evidence which deals with their composition is such as experts alone are fitted to examine, and hitherto among these the agreement is very partial. Yet from what we have seen in regard to the other books, we may be prepared to admit that for the books of the Pentateuch there existed in former times two or three, or it may be more, independent works, one containing more historic matter, another more of the legislation, while a third might treat of the priestly functions and of religion. Nor need we assume that the traditional title, "Books of Moses," was ever intended to signify more than that some part of the contents was of Mosaic origin.

We should suppose however that there never was any tendency to cancel or suppress, but that the several works were amalgamated somewhat unartificially, so that there may have survived from this method passages which at first sight appear conflicting.

It is very probable that the work of combination was not completed all at once, or even by the same persons, yet that whoever was employed thereon tried to preserve the material which they possessed as intact as possible. Hence it is that we meet with so many repetitions, here and there with double histories, and variations in the spelling of proper names, etc.

We cannot doubt that the language of the time, or times, in which the amalgamation of the various documents took place left its mark on them; and that, when the square character was adopted instead of the earlier Phœnician

letter, much uniformity of grammar was a certain consequence; that the later Hebrew language has altered forms and expressions; and that words and phrases belonging rather to the age of Jeremiah than of Joshua may for this reason be found in the early books: but for all this, that the subject matter has been preserved to us very substantially as it appeared at the earliest date when it was reduced to writing.

If this were not so, if the thoughts and hopes of the later times of the Hebrew nation had been allowed to intrude themselves and to modify the primitive records, they would most surely have left their impress, and we should have seen a very different literature in the Pentateuch. For in the days of the prophets and psalmists problems were exercising men's minds such as had never been stirred in the more ancient times. In Deuteronomy temporal blessing is God's reward to His faithful ones. "Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the Lord God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey," is (Deut. vi. 3) the language of the covenant. But when we have reached the times of Jeremiah, we find that men's faith has been sorely tried. "Wherefore," he asks (xii. 1), "doth the way of the wicked prosper? wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously?" And the like questions concerning retribution, and the suffering of the innocent, are discussed in many a place in the Psalms.

Again, the attitude of God towards other nations than Israel is differently conceived in the prophets and in the Pentateuch. It may be that the Lord (Num. xiv. 21) swears, "As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord"; but this glorification of God in the sight of the heathen has nothing in it which points to their admission into the kingdom of God. How widely

different is that other Divine oath (Isa. xlv. 22, 23)! "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. I have sworn by Myself, the word is gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." In this spirit was the hundredth Psalm written, and with such thoughts Zechariah can write (xiv. 9) of a coming time when "the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and His name one."

Once more, the Messianic hope, of which there are a few faint traces in the Pentateuch, is so developed in the Psalms and in the Prophets, that these latter writings are full of the Messiah, His person, His works, His nature, and almost every note of His character. Along with this development there rises the vision of immortality and a future life. Now these subjects are so far from finding any mention in the Pentateuch, that their absence was long ago made the foundation of an argument in the *Divine Legation of Moses*.

Further, we meet in the prophetic writings with many warnings concerning the coming of "the day of the Lord," and amid these some hardly doubtful premonitions of a future judgment: subjects which are out of the horizon of those to whom we are indebted for the originals of the Pentateuch.

Whatever therefore we may admit concerning the combination, or even the re-shaping, of the ancient Jewish documents, or concerning the modification of phrases and expressions by the diction of a later time, it is inconceivable that these books of the Pentateuch should any of them be, in any true sense, the composition of writers who lived at a time when the solemn topics, whose absence from the books of Moses is so conspicuous, were before the minds and on the tongues of all the men among whom, as we are

told, their author or authors must have flourished. Had these books been the product of the times of Jeremiah and Ezra and Nehemiah, some trace, yes, abundant traces, must have been introduced into them of truths which had grown by that day to be the very life of the religious in Israel.

J. RAWSON LUMBY.

THE LATE PROFESSOR DELITZSCH.¹

THE following article, written nearly a year ago, was read by the master who has since gone from us. On May 22nd, 1889, he wrote to me with reference to it: "You may consider it as a poem written in my honour, while I shall look upon it as a mirror, held up before me by a friendly hand. These twelve pages of yours are not merely a reflection of my image, but of your own—in describing me you have described yourself. I set great value on what you have written; to me it is like the fair sunset of our old friendship; I shall read it once and again, and while conscious of my own deficiencies, shall be conscious also of the unwearied affection which has drawn such a panegyric from you. When I am dead, then you of all others shall have the right to characterize me." And on July 6th he wrote: "I cannot see my way to alter my original decision, that such an article as this should not be published till after my death."

I now place the manuscript in the printer's hands, without improving upon it, or changing it to an obituary notice. It remains as Delitzsch read it, a picture of my master in his lifetime. I wish for this once to preserve it as it is. Later on, and in another place, I may be able to tell what he was and what he was to me.

MARBURG,
12th March, 1890.

HE who wishes to know the true character of the extraordinary man who, in his position, not only as a teacher of students, both of

¹ Translated from the *Theologische Literaturzeitung*.