

The Books of the Apocrypha
W.O.E. Oesterley
The Princeton Theological Review 14:135-138. [1916]

By previous labors in the field of extra-canonical research Dr. Oesterley was well qualified for writing this introduction to the Books of the Apocrypha. He is one of the co-laborers of Dr. Charles in preparing *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English*, issued in 1913 by the Oxford University Press, and also a warden of the "International Society for the Promoting of the Study of the Apocrypha" founded by the Rev. Herbert Pentin, which publishes a quarterly *The International Journal of Apocrypha*. The revived interest in this line of study to which said publications and the formation of the society named bear witness cannot but be highly welcome to all biblical students, especially to students of the New Testament. The movement is all the more commendable since on the whole it helps to keep itself free from an exaggerated valuation of the importance of the literature in question at the expense either of the Old or of the New Testament. This is not saying that we should not like to see the line between inspired Scripture and Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical literature more sharply drawn than the authors of this school are inclined to do. Dr. Charles in his *Eschatology* does not hesitate to place the later uncanonical development in point of value above the Old Testament teaching, and that not merely in view of its advanced stage in the line of doctrinal progress, but also in regard to its intrinsic religious spirit and content. And Dr. Oesterley places all the wisdom-literature, outside and inside the canon, on an equal footing as "members of one family." That Ecclesiastes forms part of the Word of God and Sapiientia Salomonis belongs to a different category is nowhere emphasized, and that in the polemic which the author of Sapiientia is supposed to wage against the views of Ecclesiastes the former was in the wrong the author does not say, although in the words quoted from Plumptre (p. 456), who already suggested such a polemic reference of the later to the earlier document, it is at least indicated, that the author of Sapiientia may have misunderstood what he considered the erroneous teaching of Ecclesiastes.

The present volume was originally intended as a contribution to "The Library of Historic Theology". In the end it was not included in this, but issued separately on account of the size exceeding that set for the volumes in said series. It may be questioned, whether the bulk of the book ought not to have been reduced, irrespective of the desire to bring it within the limits of the serial publication. Of the 522 pages of the work only 277, that is a little more than half, are devoted to the discussion of the Apocrypha themselves. The preceding 245 are made up of Prolegomena and this rubric is conceived wide enough to subsume under it the whole movement of Jewish religious history beginning with the Hellenistic period. In addition to the various phases of Hellenism, the whole Apocalyptic movement, the Scribes, the Pharisees and Sadducees, the Origin of the Old Testament Canon, the Uncanonical Books come in for extended discussion. It is quite true, of course, as the author remarks, that the Apocrypha cannot be understood without knowledge of the milieu in which they originated and to such knowledge the treatment of all the topics named undoubtedly contributes materially. At the same time interest in the environment ought not to overshadow that in the organism itself, as we fear has been the case in the present instance. Not that the mass of material brought together under the Prolegomena is of secondary value in itself. There is much in it that is highly valuable and interesting. E.g., in the painstaking discussion of the intricate subject of the Jewish term *ganax* and the analogous Greek term *apokryphos* the author has rendered all non-experts a great service. It would have been better however to publish all this material in its present extended form separately, and give

by way of Prolegomena to the Apocryphal Books a mere extract from it, such as is furnished by the author in the summaries appended to most of the chapters of the first section of the work. As it is, the interest of the reader may become to such an extent absorbed by the preliminary investigation as to have no strength and zest left for the part that relates to the Apocrypha themselves.

The author ascribes considerable influence to the Hellenistic factor in the religious development of Judaism for the period in question. Once and again he expresses agreement with Friedländer, as e.g. where the hypostasizing of Wisdom is explained from Greek influence. On p. 94 it is stated that the Pharisees developed out of the Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul their definite belief in the resurrection of the body. Much is made of the contrast between the Sadducees and the Pharisees, and this contrast, at least in the form of two opposed tendencies, is traced back to the pre-Maccabean period, and utilized as a means for determining the religious attitude of the several writers. Thus Ben Sirach is classified with the precursors of the Sadducees. Unfortunately this has to be qualified in so many directions, that the help obtained from it for understanding the ideas of Ecclesiasticus is much reduced. In regard to Enoch the contention of Leszynski, according to whom the portions originally composing it, are of Sadducaic provenience is recognized as correct in the case of Chaps. 72-83, because the astronomical views here developed seem to be connected with the Sadducaic doctrine of the sacred calendar, but is rejected in the case of the other sections. On the other hand Charles' view, who discovers in Enoch a Pharisaic physiognomy, is found warranted only in so far as the pre-Maccabean portions originated in the circles of the Chassidim, who were the ancestors of the Pharisees, but likewise gave birth to the Apocalyptists. The whole question of the preformation of the later parties in the earlier period seems to remain involved in considerable obscurity, and especially as concerns the Apocalyptic movement we cannot say that the author's careful presentation of the case, as he sees it, sheds much light on the historical antecedents of this movement either indigenous or extraneous to the sphere of Judaism.

The author is not quite consistent in doubting on the one hand the correctness of the statement of Acts 23:8 to the effect that the Sadducees deny the existence of angels and spirits (p. 148), and on the other hand counting the absence of all mention of angels and demons in Ecclesiasticus a mark of the Sadducaic complexion of this book (p. 340).

We note that in regard to Wisdom the author evidently finished his writing before being able to take note of Focke's *Die Entstehung der Weisheit Salomo's*, published in 1913. Oesterley falls in line with the recent revival of the belief in the composite nature of Sapiientia but divides, as against Focke, in the customary way between Chaps. 2-11.1 and 11.2-19. One of the arguments which Focke appeals to in favor of Palestinian origin of what he considers the older portion (chap. 1-5) and of its connection with the struggles between Pharisees and Sadducees, viz., that the enemies and persecutors of the pious are charged with having rejected the law of God, and therefore must be sought in Jewish circles, seems to lose its force through an observation of Dr. Oesterley's. He calls attention to the belief emerging in several places of the apocryphal literature, that the law was originally offered by God to the pagan world, and only after being rejected of them, domiciled in Israel. On the basis of such a view the writer of Wisdom could charge the Alexandrian persecutors of the Jews with rejection of the law.

It is an omission that among the literature given the book of Couard *Die religiösen und sittlichen*

Anschauungen der alttestamentlichen Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen, 1907 is not named. On the whole the bibliography, while not professing to be complete, is discriminating and adequate.

Of errata we notice that on page 236 Prov. 22:24 ought to be 17:24 and on page 249 Job 38:12-28 28:12-28.