

**STUDIES IN LIFE
FROM
JEWISH PROVERBS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649715343

Studies in Life from Jewish Proverbs by W. A. L. Elmslie

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BY

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LONDON

JAMES CLARKE & CO., 13 & 14 FLEET STREET, E.C.

100-12-13-107

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To

MY WIFE

“Forsan et hæc olim meminisse juvabit”


FOLKLORE

PREFACE

A WRITER of many books once said to me that he regretted every preface he had written. Seeing that I have the highest respect for his talents, I am constrained to take to heart the moral, which (particularly in a book on proverbs) would seem to be "least said, soonest mended." But whatever else he may choose to leave unsaid, an author is expected to give away his secret in the preface, making known his intentions as discreetly as he can but still explicitly. That duty accomplished, he is at liberty to give thanks, and so conclude.

The greater part of this volume (Chapters V. to XII.) is occupied with a study of the teaching of "Wisdom" among the Jews in Palestine during the Hellenistic Age, so far as the subject is represented in the two great collections of Jewish sayings, the *Book of Proverbs* and *Ecclesiasticus*. It would be too much to claim that in these chapters the book breaks new ground, for the importance of the Hellenistic period is recognised by students of history, and there have been many commentaries on the *Book of Proverbs*, nor has *Ecclesiasticus* been without its expositors. But the historian devotes himself to the relation of events, and the commentator is busy with the thoughts of the several proverbs or with the textual difficulties they present, rather than with their precise historical setting. Here an endeavour has been made to bring the proverbs into

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close connection with the history, and it is hoped that not only do the proverbs thereby acquire fresh interest, but also that there emerges a picture of the men who made them and used them in the furtherance of morality and faith. Even to professed students of Jewish history the makers of the "Wisdom" proverbs are apt to remain distant and shadowy figures; but we cannot afford to neglect any of the makers of the Bible, and I venture to think that the method followed in this volume makes it possible to appreciate the outlook of these men, to realise their difficulties, and if not to sympathise wholly with their views, at least to feel that they were very human. Whether this brief sketch is successful in attaining its object or not, it is certain that the subject deserves more attention than it has hitherto received.

Besides the numerous maxims in *Proverbs* and *Ecclesiasticus*, there are some interesting popular proverbs in the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament. To these a part of Chapter IV. will be devoted. Occasional references will also be made, especially in the second half of the book, to proverbial sayings taken from the Rabbinical literature of the Jews. The titles of Chapters XIII. to XX. sufficiently indicate the nature of their contents, and require no further comment here.

In translating the proverbs the Revised Version has been used as a basis, but liberty has been exercised in making any alterations that seemed desirable on textual or literary grounds. Most of the changes thus introduced will readily explain themselves to those who are acquainted with the original texts or may care to consult modern commentaries, such as that of Professor Toy on *Proverbs* (International

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Critical Commentary) and of Dr. Oesterley on *Ecclesiasticus* (Cambridge Bible Series).

Any volume, such as this, that touches a wide range of subjects must have correspondingly many obligations. I welcome this opportunity of recording my gratitude to the authors whose writings are referred to in the following pages, and in particular I desire to acknowledge my indebtedness to the Right Rev. E. L. Bevan's illuminating work on the Hellenistic period, to the writings of Professor Toy and Dr. Oesterley mentioned above, and to Professor C. F. Kent's short study and analysis of *Proverbs* in his book *The Wise Men of Ancient Israel*.

W. A. L. E.

Christ's College, Cambridge.

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