

THE WISDOM OF THE DESERT

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The Wisdom of the desert by James O. Hannay

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JAMES O. HANNAY

**THE WISDOM
OF THE DESERT**

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BY JAMES O. HANNAY



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TO YOU
A. S. H.
MY FELLOW STUDENT

PREFACE

THIS little book is neither a critical examination of the early Egyptian monastic literature nor an historical account of the movement. It is nothing more than an attempt to appreciate the religious spirit of the first Christian monks. I do not know of any other similar attempt, though an exceedingly interesting study of the hermit life will be found in E. Lucius' *Das Mönchische Leben des vierten und fünften Jahrhunderts in der Beleuchtung seiner Vertreter und Gönner*.

The collection of stories and sayings which I have translated, sometimes very freely, must be regarded merely as an anthology culled from the "meadows" of the literature of the desert life. There is much more which is worthy of a place in our devotional literature, and which, I hope, may in the future be arranged and translated by men more fitted for the task than I am. I acknowledge gratefully the assistance I have received from two friends—Miss Bloxham and the Rev. C. S. Collins—whose sympathy with things that

are high and holy has been a constant help to me in my work.

I have further to acknowledge the very great kindness of Father Andrew, s.d.c., who designed the drawings which both adorn this volume and interpret the spirit of the hermits' teaching.

After the MS. of this book was in the publishers' hands I received, through the kindness of Professor Zöckler, of Greifswald, a copy of his recently published *Die Tugendlehre des Christentums*. The work is of great importance for anyone engaged in the study of the ethics of monasticism, but I have not felt myself obliged to modify anything I have written. Professor Zöckler's point of view and his object are entirely different from mine. He is scientific; I hope only to suggest devotional thought.

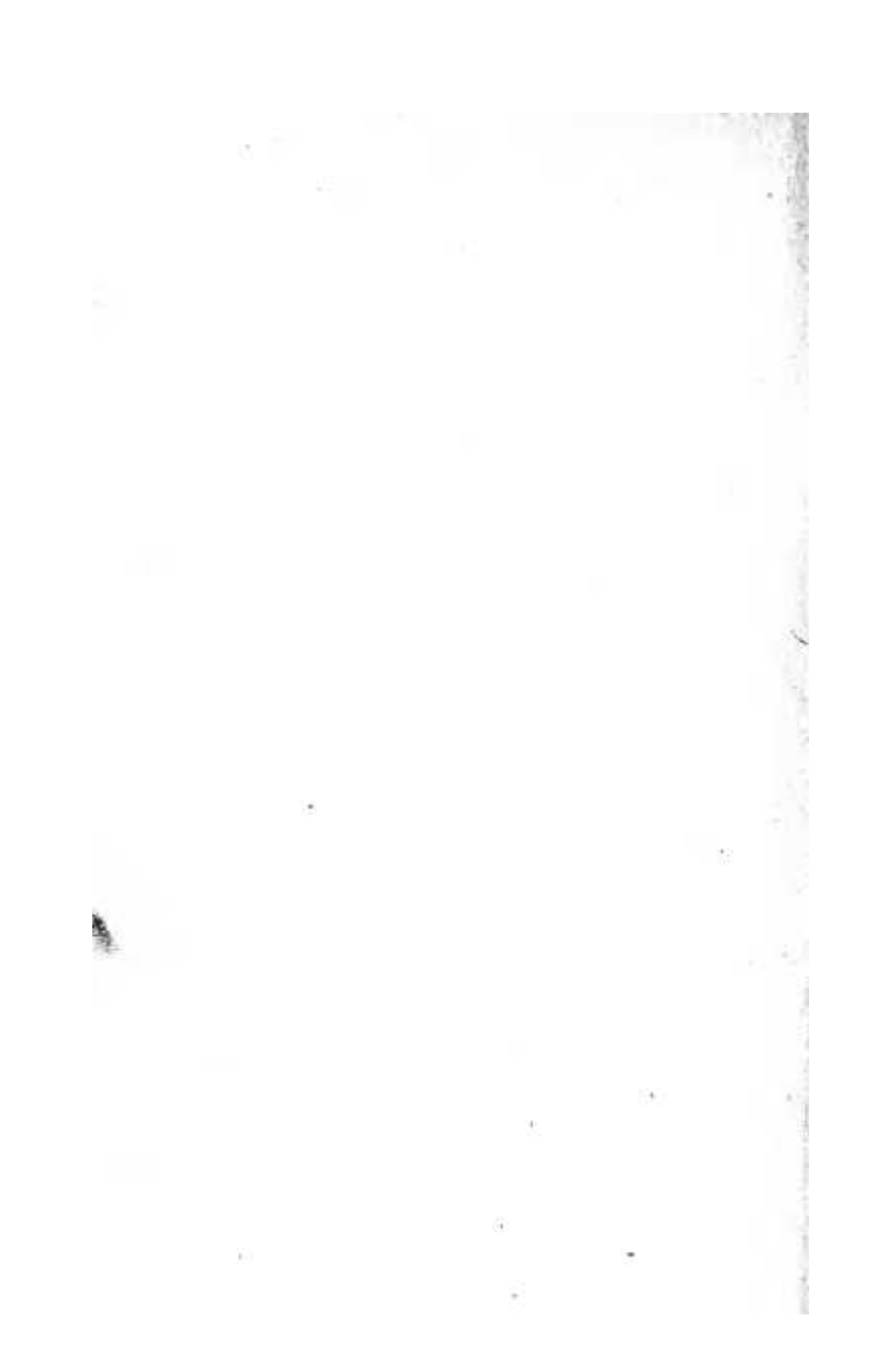
In the course of my Introduction I allude to the want of a critical study of the Apophthegmata. I am now informed by Dom E. C. Butler, o.s.b., that such a work is being prepared by Abbé Nau, and will soon be published in the *Patrologia Orientalis* by Firmin-Didot (Paris).

J. O. H.

Westport, Ireland, 1904.

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THE WISDOM OF THE DESERT

INTRODUCTION

I

EVERY kind of effort after good has found sympathy and help in Christianity. Nothing is more wonderful and nothing more suggestive of His divinity than the way in which the words and example of the Master have been found adaptable to the ideals which have possessed the souls of men in different ages and under various circumstances. There was a time when men were impelled to search for and express truth, the eternal truth of the nature and property of the Deity Himself. At that time the life of Christ presented itself primarily as a revelation. He set forth, under the conditions of time and space, the mysterious God whose seat is amid clouds and darkness, and yet who baffles human inquiry chiefly by the garment of impenetrable light in which He has decked Himself. In another age the religious spirit took a lower flight and allowed its activities to be dominated by a political conception. Whole generations spent themselves in the effort to realize upon earth a veritable kingdom of God. To these men Christ appeared