

**THE SIBYLLINE ORACLES:
TRANSLATED
FROM THE GREEK INTO
ENGLISH BLANK VERSE**

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BY

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PREFACE.

THE Sibylline Oracles are a collection of pseudepigraphal poems, venerable for their antiquity, and valuable for their exhibition of the spirit and thought of the early Christian centuries. In assuming to be the utterances of the most ancient Sibyls they are obviously spurious, but, like the Book of Enoch, the Assumption of Moses, and the Ascension of Isaiah, these Jewish-Christian poems possess a permanent value for the theologian and the student of history. They represent a notable phase of ancient religious life and sentiment, and their very imperfections as literary productions reveal to the critical reader tendencies in human civilization and intellectual activity which he can nowhere else so clearly trace.

These Sibylline books are quoted by Josephus, Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, Clement of Alexandria, Lactantius, and other Christian fathers, and are treated by some of them as if they were as authoritative as the Holy Scriptures. The relation, accordingly, of these and similar books to current discussions in the department of biblical criticism and canonicity is of a very noteworthy character. They have also acquired no little importance in the modern study of apocalypses. Lucke and Stuart give them much space and attention in their learned works on the Revelation of John, and a considerable literature has grown up around them, as will be seen in the following Introduction.

It seems very desirable that these oracles should be made accessible to English readers. The old version of Floyer has long been out of print, contains only the first eight

books, and is given to discussions which have become obsolete by the progress of scientific criticism. The present work is an attempt to put these famous Sibyllines into as readable English as is consistent with accuracy of translation. The form of heroic blank verse has been chosen as on the whole best representing to English readers the spirit of the Greek hexameters. It would not have been difficult in numerous passages to have made better poetry and better sense than can be found in the Greek original, but such a liberty would violate the obligations and proprieties of a work that assumes to be a faithful translation.

It must be remembered that the Greek text of these books has come down to us in a very corrupt state, mutilated in a number of places, and notable for its imperfect meters. Many of the geographical and historical allusions are obscure and uncertain, and the several books contain numerous repetitions. For the convenience of the critical reader the corresponding lines of the Greek text are indicated at the foot of each page of the translation, and in the notes references are furnished to the places in the writings of the Christian fathers and other ancient authors where the Sibyl is quoted, or where similar sentiments occur. It is hoped that our Introduction and foot-notes will also supply the information which readers in general will desire; but it should be observed that there are many passages which all the learning and ingenuity of scholars have hitherto failed to make clear.

I desire, in conclusion, to acknowledge my indebtedness to Professor Joseph R. Taylor, of the North-western University, for his very helpful co-operation in the preparation both of the translation and the notes; also to Professor Charles Horswell for assistance in the translation of the third book. My thanks are also due to Professors Baird and Bradley for valuable suggestions.

M. S. T.

EVANSTON, *September*, 1890.

TO
MY BELOVED COLLEAGUES

IN THE

FACULTY

OF

CARRETT BIBLICAL INSTITUTE,

M. RAYMOND, D.D., LL.D., C. W. BENNETT, D.D., LL.D.,
H. B. RIDGAWAY, D.D., LL.D., C. F. BRADLEY, D.D.,

THIS VOLUME

IS

Affectionately Inscribed.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Sibyls occupy a conspicuous place in the traditions and history of ancient Greece and Rome. Their fame was spread abroad long before the beginning of the Christian era. Heraclitus of Ephesus, some five centuries B. C., compared himself to the Sibyl "who, speaking with inspired mouth, without a smile, without ornament, and without perfume, penetrates through centuries by the power of the gods." Various oracles, purporting to have been uttered by the Sibyls, are found in the writings of Pausanias, Plutarch, Livy, and other ancient authors of less celebrity. From all which it appears that they were female prophets, believed to be gifted with a knowledge of the future, and inspired to make known the fate of individuals, cities, and kingdoms.

The most ancient and famous of the Sibyls was the one who dwelt in the cave at Cumæ, near Neapolis, on the coast of Italy. To her solemn and sacred place Æneas journeyed when he would learn the destinies of the future, and she opened to him the secrets of the lower world, and served as his guide therein, as Virgil has so finely described in the sixth book of the *Æneid*. The ancient story about this Cumæan Sibyl is that Apollo became enamored of her, and offered her whatever she might ask of him. She asked that she might be permitted to live as many years as she held grains of sand in her hand. The god at once granted her request, but she refused to reciprocate his love. He thereupon decreed that her long life should be to her a burden rather than a blessing, for she should be without freshness