

**ECCLESIASTES: A  
CONTRIBUTION TO  
ITS INTERPRETATION**

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Ecclesiastes: A Contribution to Its Interpretation by Thomas Tyler

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**THOMAS TYLER**

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# ECCLESIASTES;

A CONTRIBUTION

TO ITS

INTERPRETATION :

CONTAINING

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK; AN EXEGETICAL  
ANALYSIS; AND A TRANSLATION, WITH NOTES.

BY

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להבין משל זמליצת דברי הכמים הדודתם

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## PREFACE.

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**D**ESVŒUX, in the preface to his book on Ecclesiastes, tells us that about thirty years had elapsed since he had first planned the work, and nearly five-and-twenty since he had published a sketch of his plan ; that the work had cost him a hundredfold the time and study which he had at first imagined would be necessary ; and that he had been obliged again and again to remould the work, casting it into a form different from that which he had before intended.

I might, with reference to the work now submitted to the public, repeat, to a considerable extent, what was said by Desvœux. I cannot, it is true, say that thirty years have passed since I planned my work ; but still, not only is it a very long time since I attained some of the conclusions concerning the interpretation of particular passages in Ecclesiastes, which I still hold, and which I have now for the first time printed ; but a good many years have elapsed

since I prepared for a society, with which I was at the time connected, a paper on Ecclesiastes containing and expressing those conclusions. Afterwards I rewrote and enlarged this paper, with a view to its being published. Other work and other engagements, however, demanded attention; and my paper in its improved form was laid aside. Subsequently, my attention being for a time less occupied with other pursuits, I took up the work anew, and again enlarging it, it assumed that tripartite form which it now presents; the paper above mentioned becoming, to a considerable extent, the basis of the Exegetical Analysis.

When the work was now, as it seemed to me, just ready for the press, I began to perceive the peculiar relation of Ecclesiastes to the post-Aristotelian philosophy. This being seen, I tried to adapt my work, by comparatively inconsiderable alteration; and I gave some account of the fact I had discovered in a pamphlet entitled *Some New Evidence as to the Date of Ecclesiastes*, London, 1872. I found, however, that the adaptation of my work which I had attempted was unsatisfactory. The relation of Ecclesiastes to the post-Aristotelian philosophy was too fundamental to be thus dealt with. Much of the work was accordingly written anew, and a good deal of illustrative matter introduced. The work has certainly cost me an expenditure of time and labour, such as I could not have at all anticipated when my attention was first directed to the subject. Apart from certain circumstances, it is likely that the work

would not now have been published : I might not unreasonably have hesitated before diverting from other pursuits so very considerable an amount of time and thought as was necessary even for the final preparation of the work for the press.

Of late, much has been said, and no doubt with justice, of the grave discouragements which attend upon original research in various departments of natural science. But—in England, at least—the discouragements connected with such research in the field of Biblical science are probably, on the whole, far more severe than those which must be encountered by the physicist or the physiologist. This result is caused, in part, by the generally low condition of Biblical and Oriental learning, and, in part, by various other causes, which I need not here particularly mention. I may be pardoned for alluding to this matter, on account of the probability that changes will be made, especially in relation to the Universities, which may, at least in the next generation, greatly facilitate original research in natural science. And I should certainly desire that this result may be attained. But there is some danger lest suitable provision should not be made for independent, faithful, and thorough Biblical investigation. I hope, however, that the necessity for such provision will be seen, since there are multitudinous problems in relation to the Biblical books which still await solution, and which will probably not be solved without prolonged labour on the part of many in-



investigators possessing not only adequate scholarship, but also suitable natural endowments. At present, it is probable, the energies of not a few who might have done good service in this department of intellectual labour, are diverted to other objects on account of the unfavourable circumstances attendant in England upon Biblical research. Some persons, indeed, may contend that, with regard to the Bible, little of importance remains to be discovered, its interpreters having been so acute and so erudite, and its literature being so vast and so voluminous. Probably, however, Dr. Westcott was, in relation to this matter, nearer the truth when he asserted that "we are at present only on the outskirts of the knowledge of Holy Scripture" (*Academy*, Oct. 1st, 1872).

I have mentioned above the pamphlet in which I gave an account of the conclusions I had attained concerning the relation of Ecclesiastes to the post-Aristotelian philosophy. Some reviews of this pamphlet, both in this country and abroad, may possibly have escaped my notice. Of those which I have seen, I do not know that there is any on which it is necessary that I should here offer a remark, if I except a notice by the distinguished Orientalist, Prof. Ewald, in the *Göttingische gelehrte Anzeigen* (Oct. 23rd, 1872). Though Prof. Ewald regards my paper as a proof of the advance which Biblical science is making in England, and considers that it contains matter "not unimportant even for more exact science," yet he calls in question my

conclusions as to the date of Ecclesiastes, and as to the connection of the Book with the actual Stoic and Epicurean schools. He professes, however, his willingness to abandon his position with respect to the composition of Ecclesiastes in the Persian period, when satisfactory proof of the later date shall have been furnished. I venture to hope, therefore, that my honoured critic will find such proof in the large amount of additional evidence contained in the following pages, and especially in §§ 4, 12 of the *Introduction*.

Of the three parts into which my work is divided, I have endeavoured to keep the second—the *Exegetical Analysis*—which gives a general view of the interpretation of Ecclesiastes, free from Hebrew quotations or such technicalities as would be unintelligible to readers not possessing a knowledge of the original languages of the Old Testament. The class possessing such knowledge, to any considerable extent, is, I should fear, even among professional interpreters of the Bible, a very small one. This part of the work has, perhaps on account of its origin, referred to above, a somewhat more popular and less scientific garb than it would otherwise have had. If this be a fault, it is one which I have not cared to correct.

The *Translation* differs in no small degree from the Authorised Version, on which, however, it is, to a considerable extent, based. I may observe, that I have not followed the Authorised Version with respect to the usage

of printing supplied words in italics. The practice is one which it is perhaps impossible to adopt with perfect and entire consistency. I venture to hope, however, that my translation will not, on the whole, be found wanting in closeness to the original. The notes appended to the translation will be, I trust, not without value to the student. They must be looked upon as, in some measure, supplementary to such illustrative matter as may be found in the Introduction and Exegetical Analysis.

The function which I have attempted to discharge in the following pages is that of the interpreter. Many expository works on Ecclesiastes have been written, but the present is not an addition to their number. My object is not to deduce moral or religious lessons from the Book, but to set forth its meaning. Simply to attain this object is, however, a task of no small difficulty. The interpreter can scarcely be indifferent with respect to those grave questions which Koheleth discusses. And thus a danger arises lest the interpreter's work should be marred by the intermingling of the subjective, and lest, by toning down, or dimly presenting, some of the conflicting sentiments contained in the Book, he should give an image incomplete and distorted. How far I have avoided these faults the candid and thoughtful reader may decide. Where there is so much which will probably appear new and strange, some things—possibly a good many things—may be deemed unacceptable. Still, it is perhaps not altogether