EVERY MAN'S BIBLE

AN ANTHOLOGY ARRANGED
WITH AN INTRODUCTION
BY

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INTRODUCTION

The object of this Anthology is to help those who wish to use the Bible as their chief devotional book. For many generations the regular reading of the sacred volume, chapter by chapter, without explanation and without commentary, brought comfort and edification to many pious souls. This practice has now so far declined that many Christians have almost ceased to read their Bibles at all. This is a grievous loss to our national Christianity, which was distinguished by a deep reverence for the Scriptures and a minute knowledge of their contents. The Bible has set its mark upon our character, our habits, and our language. Some of our best writers, such as Bunyan, Carlyle and Ruskin, and some of our best orators, such as Abraham Lincoln (if we may claim him for this purpose) and John Bright, were steeped in the English Bible, and acknowledged their debt to it. The Church of England, in its venerable formularies, makes the Scriptures the final court of appeal; and the widespread knowledge of this inspired literature has had a very healthy and stabilising influence upon the religious life of our country.

And yet we cannot go back to the old-fashioned, undiscriminating manner of studying the Bible. We know now not only that we must not regard the Old Testament as a text-book on biology and pre-history, but that even in morals and religion it is not all of the same value, nor any of it of equal value to the New. As St Augustine says, 'We do wrong to the New Testament if we put the Old Testament on the same level with it'. We need, in short, a more critical temper than that of the early Protestants, who tried to find in the infallible Book a substitute for the infallible Church. And yet in our devotional reading we wish to put our critical faculty to sleep. At such times, when we desire to 'hearken what the Lord God will say

concerning us', we are on holy ground, and we cannot read the Bible 'like any other book'. We read it because for us it is not like any other book.

The method of selecting passages and arranging them under subjects, with very brief introductions, and a few explanatory notes when these seem to be necessary to make the meaning plain, may I hope satisfy the needs of some. I have tried to make the selections fairly long, sometimes as long as a whole chapter, and even two or more chapters, since a collection of texts would not answer the purpose. The literary beauty of many passages can be appreciated only when they are given entire, and the thought of the author may often be misunderstood if single verses are quoted apart from their context. Too much reliance has often been placed on detached 'texts', especially when they are used in controversy. At the same time, the juxtaposition of passages from different books, and from the Old and the New Testament, will serve to illustrate the fact that the revelation in the Bible was given 'at sundry times and in divers manners', so that we may sometimes contrast the higher and more spiritual teaching of the New Testament and the later books of the Old with the primitive theories of the Divine action which we find in the earlier books. The stages in the education of mankind before the full revelation of the will and character of God in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ are an important part of what we may learn from the Bible. They will help us to understand in what sense Christ 'made all things new', and to what extent He was content to build upon the foundation of the Law and the Prophets.

It is my hope that this Anthology may help some readers to rediscover for themselves the inexhaustible treasures which are hidden in the most widely read and incomparably the most important collection of writings in the literature of the world.*

* The Bible Society in its latest Report records that the output of the Society last year was 11,888,226 copies.

It is quite possible, as I have said, and as has been proved in countless instances, to gain religious edification by an entirely uncritical study of the Bible; and since this book is intended for devotional reading, I have confined my notes to the bare minimum required to make the text intelligible. But something more may be added in the Introduction, for the benefit of those who are not learned scholars, but who may wish to place the books in their historical setting, and to know how, in the opinion of the best authorities, they came into being, and to what periods they should be assigned.

It is a pity that some prejudice still hangs about the word 'criticism', as if it were necessarily destructive and disintegrating. Criticism only means *judging*, and without judgment there can be no appreciation. We do not think that our pleasure in Shakespeare has been spoilt by the labours of scholars who have tried to give us a pure text—the words which Shakespeare actually wrote; to explain difficult passages, archaisms and historical allusions; to ascertain the date of each play and the materials which the poet had to work upon. We are not indignant even when the authenticity of a few plays or parts of plays is called in question. Such labours are even more necessary on ancient books which were handed down in manuscript, at a time also when literary conventions were very different from what they are now. There was then no law of copyright, and no conscious dishonesty in incorporating long passages from earlier writers. Literary forgeries (the word is too severe) were very common; it was not thought unpardonable to borrow a famous name to give credit to a new treatise. The boundary between legend and history was ill-defined. The work of impartial sifting had to be done; and though some of the results, mainly in the Old Testament, have undoubtedly been displeasing to old-fashioned believers, the gain has far outweighed the loss, since innumerable stumbling-blocks to faith have been removed without any real loss to spiritual religion. It is

no small thing to have placed (for instance) the comparatively early date of the Synoptic Gospels and the authenticity of most of St Paul's Epistles on an unassailable basis.

In reading the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, and the other historical books of the Old Testament (this Anthology contains very few extracts from this part of the Bible), we should be willing to accept the general verdict of scholars, and to find in them 'a compendium of the patriotic literature of a little people, obscure in origin, limited in outlook, often questionable in morals, but charged with a mission and a message to humanity at large, whose significance has deepened with the lapse of ages, and whose influence is still the profoundest and most far-reaching in the whole world'.* We are permitted to trace the growth of this revelation, conditioned, as it must have been, at every stage by the state of civilisation of Bedouin tribes invading lands of more settled culture, mixing with the inhabitants in war and peace, and doomed, after a brief gleam of prosperity, to suffer oppression from one after another of their more powerful neighbours.

We must picture to ourselves a small country, with a harbourless seaboard, mountainous and badly watered, except for the coastal plains which were the highway of invading armies. From the Mediterranean to the south of the Dead Sea is the wretched tract called the Negeb, more derelict now than before the Mohammedan conquests, but always poverty-stricken. The Philistines kept guard over their fertile plain; they were probably akin to the Cretan Minoans, about whom so much information has recently come to light. The Plain of Esdraelon, which to European eyes does not look large, was a coveted expanse of good soil, drenched with blood in many fierce battles. Galilee is the most favoured portion of the country, and for that very reason was despised by the

* Introduction to Peake's *Commentary*.

strict Jews as being overrun and populated by foreigners. It is a well-wooded hilly district, with a soil capable of cultivation, and of a smiling beauty, at any rate by contrast with Judaea. The central range was politically divided between Israel and Judah. The northern part incloses the luxuriant plain of Shechem, and the formidable fortress of Samaria. Farther south, as we approach Jerusalem, the landscape becomes indescribably grim and forbidding. The Holy City itself was an almost impregnable fortress, and could never have been selected as a capital for any other reason. One side of the Jewish character seems very much at home amid its precipices and gorges. The Jordan valley, the deepest rift on the earth's surface, 2600 feet below sea-level at the bottom of the Dead Sea, contains the now almost useless river Jordan, flowing, thick with mud, through a jungle infested with mosquitoes. Its bed is too low for much irrigation, and its banks in summer are almost too sultry for human habitation. On the east the land of Gilead consists of moors suitable for pasturage; it belonged to Palestine, and the inhabitants were patriotic Jews.

A tiny country, which the airman flies over in an hour or two. Not a land of milk and honey, except by contrast with the Arabian desert. The visitor to Greece will perhaps generalise from these two instances, and say that where nature has done little, man has done most. The cradles or spiritual homes of civilised humanity are lands of rugged rocks and narrow valleys.

Some acquaintance with the geography of the country is essential to an understanding of the historical books. In reading them, we must make allowance for the poetry of patriotism, of which we have many examples in the modern history of European nations, and we shall not be surprised to find that many corruptions infected for a time the worship of Jehovah or Jahweh, who was not at first conceived of as the God of the whole earth, but as the Lord of hosts of a warlike little people. But when we

have made all the concessions which are forced upon us by modern research and the modern historical spirit, we shall be able all the better to appreciate what is unique in the religious message of the Old Testament. What are the chief lessons which we may learn from it?

'The Lord your God is one Lord.' As against the gods many and lords many of the surrounding nations, Jehovah alone is the God whom men ought to worship, and there is none beside Him. This was indeed the centre of the religion of the Hebrews. When we consider the results of polytheism in other religions—the genealogies and the amours of gods and goddesses, their jealousies and divided jurisdictions, the imaginary crowd of intermediate beings between God and man, and the lowered reverence for the Divine which results from these beliefs—we can hardly exaggerate the value of the First Commandment, 'Thou shalt have no other gods but me'. And yet the Old Testament shows us that it was only by slow degrees that the doctrine emerged in its full sublimity. We can trace a gradual progress from monolatry (the worship of a single national God, the Lord of the hosts of Israel) to true monotheism, the belief that there is one God only, the Creator of heaven and earth, and the God of all nations alike. That the Jews never fully learnt this lesson —that they clung to their national exclusiveness to the last—is part of the tragedy of their history; for it prevented them from taking advantage of the glorious destiny which God had prepared for their race, that of seeing their national hopes transmuted and fulfilled on a grander scale than they ever dreamed of. There are gleams of this wider vision in some of the prophets; but when the nation became a Church, as it did after the return from the Captivity, the eyes of its religious leaders were blinded. Even so, though their stubborn refusal to read the signs of the times drew tears from our Lord, we cannot but admire the indomitable tenacity which refused to accept defeat. The Jews, oppressed and scattered, have yet stood

by the graves of all their persecutors in turn. There are no more Assyrians, Babylonians, imperial Persians, Macedonians and Romans; but the Jews we have always with us.

Not less important than monotheism is a conception of history in which God is always the centre. 'In the beginning, God.' Nature in the Old Testament is always God's handiwork, the scene of His personal activity. No doubt in the earlier books we find ascribed to the unseen Ruler of the world some of the arbitrariness and caprice with which all Eastern races are familiar in their own kings or sultans; but all through, from Genesis to Malachi, there is heard a deeper note, an unquenchable faith that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, justice is done in the Divine ordering of the world. 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' This question, and the tentative answers to it, are perhaps the dominant theme of the whole collection of sacred books. Every possible solution is tried in turn. Is the nation the unit to whom justice is done, or the family, or the individual? When misfortune overtakes a man, is he punished for unknown sins committed by himself, or for the sins of his parents? Later the question was even raised whether some doctrine of reincarnation, like the Indian Karma, may supply the explanation. It is implied in one verse of Wisdom, and in St John the disciples ask Jesus whether the man born blind is punished for his own sins, obviously in a previous life, or for those of his parents. Only gradually were the nobler doctrines of salutary discipline, of sacrificial suffering for others and of the reward of the righteous in a better world, proclaimed to the Jewish people. That stubborn race was slow to learn that God's rewards and punishments are not distributed in the world's currency.

This indomitable faith, maintained in the teeth of bitter experience, made Judaism a religion of hope. The words of Loisy, that 'God is never encountered in history', are the antithesis of the Jewish belief. The long

series of public calamities which befell their nation only drove them to take the forward view. There would come a 'day of the Lord', when the cause of the righteous would triumph. Hopefulness, confidence in the future, was much stronger with the Jews than among other nations, such as the Greeks. St Paul found that the Pagans with whom he came in contact 'had no hope'.

The Jews were singularly slow in arriving at a clear faith in human immortality. This belief seems to have three roots—primitive animism, such as we find in most of the backward races; the wish to vindicate the justice of God by 'calling into existence a new world to redress the balance of the old'; and belief in a God in whom all live. *Quod Deo non perit, sibi non perit*, as St Augustine says very finely. This third alone is the source of truly religious faith in immortality. Now the religion of the Hebrews was comparatively little affected by animistic beliefs. Nor did they usually copy the Egyptians in their extraordinary devices to preserve the dead body from decay, and to provide it with the most costly habitation that pride could devise and the piety of the survivors afford. Jacob and Joseph were embalmed, but this was unusual. The Babylonians drew gloomy pictures of 'the Land of No Return', and these were akin to the Hebrew belief in Sheol, the shadowy abode of the dead, which was outside the jurisdiction of Jehovah. 'In death no man remembereth thee, and who will give thee thanks in Sheol?' This view of death as 'cutting a man off' from the presence of God is universal in the earlier books. There was no blessed outlook for the Old Testament saint after he was dead.

Beliefs about the next world are often the last to be influenced by worthier conceptions of God. Till quite a late period, it was supposed that if we knew all we should find that retributive justice is done in this life, to the individual, to the family, or to the nation. Jeremiah and Ezekiel are pioneers in teaching the value of the individual soul in the sight of God. The 'new covenant'

predicted by Jeremiah was a spiritual covenant directly between God and the individual. But even Ezekiel could not free himself from the accepted belief in Sheol as the unblessed abode of shadows, and from the theory of retribution here on earth which went with it. The Book of Job (about 400 B.C.) was an attack on this belief. Job certainly appeals for justice beyond the tomb. His 'Avenger' would appear above his grave, and '*without* my body I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold, and not another'.

But the only definite expressions of faith in a blessed future life are now believed to belong to the latest stratum in the Old Testament, at the time of the Maccabees, when the successors of the prophets, the apocalyptists, gave a new character to Judaism. Such very late passages are Isaiah 26, and Psalms 49 and 73. Except in one passage in Daniel, the resurrection is to be the privilege of the righteous only. In the chapter included in Isaiah the hope is still for a corporate survival of the elect nation. The belief in future reward and punishment grew stronger, and transformed Sheol into Hades. Persian influence may be traceable here, and in the Wisdom Books the Greek doctrine of the natural immortality of the soul has unquestionably modified the Jewish faith. But the Jews always clung to a personal immortality.

It is in the peculiar institution of prophetism that we find the most potent force for elevating and moralising the whole religion of the Jewish people. There were also, from an early period, priests, the guardians of the local shrines and their traditions; but these were not as a class moral reformers or inspired teachers. Yet we must not exaggerate the antagonism, which did not always exist, between prophet and priest. The most remarkable thing about their relations was that the utterances of the prophets, often very hostile in tone to ceremonial institutionalism, were accepted by the hierarchy as inspired, and read in the synagogues. Originally, we are told, the parts

of the prophet (*nabi*) and the seer were distinct, but from Samuel onwards they unite. The first prophets behaved like dervishes (1 Sam. 10^{10-13}); but in the fine story of Balaam we have a higher conception. In the great figures of Elijah and Elisha we find the prophet intensely patriotic, intensely jealous for the honour of the true God against the Baals, and the champion of private rights against the kings. Jeremiah was a courageous statesman as well as a religious teacher. Ezekiel, working among the exiles, had a profound influence upon the later development of the Jewish Church. The Second Isaiah, with his wide outlook, tender sympathy, and messages of hope, deserves the title of 'the Evangelical Prophet'.

The books of the Twelve Lesser Prophets are collections of various dates, arranged under twelve names. But it is generally agreed that Amos, Hosea, and parts of Micah were written before the exile.

In most of the prophets social and moral teachings are prominent. The prophets were the conscience of the nation. Not only idolatry, but oppression, luxury and immorality fall under their lash. The religion which they teach is spiritual and moral. In the famous passage of Micah beginning 'Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?', as in Psalms 50 and 51, there is a strong impatience with ceremonial religion. The only sacrifices which God will accept are a contrite heart and a pure, upright life.

It is important to know the approximate dates of the various books, so far as these can be determined, and to have a clear understanding of the political conditions under which they were written. Post-exilic Judaism has features which distinguish it sharply from the earlier periods. For a long time, the small community of Jews in Judaea was under the generally lax and tolerant control of the Persian Empire. But Jerusalem was the centre and rallying-point for the exiles and emigrants who were scattered all over the then known world. The Law was more strictly enforced, and the worship of Jehovah was

purified from what remained of morally unworthy admixtures. A certain harsh intolerance towards non-Jews seemed necessary in order to keep the nation, or rather the Church, together. But personal holiness was also more emphasised. The sacred books were now codified, and extreme reverence was paid both to the text of Scripture and to the traditional interpretation of it. Collections of moral aphorisms, like the Book of Proverbs, were much valued. These maxims are not always on the highest level; sometimes they preach little more than 'the religion of all sensible men'. But it was much that religion was now made to penetrate every corner of social life, and that homely precepts, the proverbial philosophy of simple folk, were taken under the protection of the Church and issued with its approbation.

This was also the time when personal piety inspired songs and hymns of devotion, in which we can still feel the heart-beats of the Jewish soul. The Psalter is the great treasure-house of this popular devotion. It is perhaps the greatest gift of the chosen people to humanity. It has become the prayer-book and hymn-book of the most progressive part of the human race. Many of the Psalms were written in times of bitter strife, and reflect the terrible hatreds as well as the adoring love of a passionate race. Some of these 'hymns of hate' are quite contrary to the spirit of Christianity, and it is a mistake to use them in our public worship. They are not now read in the synagogues. But the large majority of the Psalms still speak direct to the hearts of men. Penitents all use naturally the fifty-first Psalm. The qualities of the upright and God-fearing gentleman have been summed up for all time in the fifteenth. The power and goodness of God are displayed in nature. Where else shall we find this so nobly expressed as in Psalms 8, 19, 29 and 104? God knows the very secrets of the heart. We remember Psalm 139. He allows the righteous to be afflicted, but not to fall for ever. Such is the faith of Psalms 34 and 73.

Patriotism, splendid though sometimes fierce, sees in God the Protector of his people, and of the holy city which it idealises as 'a fair place, the joy of the whole earth'. How many dying Christians have commended their spirits to their heavenly Father, as Christ did, with the words of the Psalms on their lips? Those who were taught as children to learn the Psalter by heart have a treasure for life which will never fail them in joy or sorrow.

The conquests of Alexander the Great brought the Persian Empire to an end, and transferred Palestine to the rule of the Ptolemies. This meant that the subtle influence of Greek thought began to penetrate the stubborn Semitic mind. But it was not till Seleucid Syria wrested Palestine from Egypt that the Jews had to suffer persecution for their faith. When Antiochus Epiphanes tried to Hellenise the people by force, they broke into fierce revolt, and for a time established national independence under a Levite family, the Maccabees. Jerusalem was then the capital city of a self-governing Priest-State, a type of which there were several other examples in the Near East.

But something must now be said of the Wisdom Literature, to which several among the sacred books belong. The 'wise men' had long been recognised by the side of the priests and prophets, and their influence grew after the exile. Three canonical books, Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, belong to this class, together with two apocryphal books, Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus. The beautiful Song of Solomon stands by itself; it is probably a collection of wedding songs, or, as used to be thought, it is a romance about a peasant girl who is true to her lover, even though she is coveted by the king. The 'Wisdom' of the Proverbs is a commonsense philosophy of life, governed by religion. But Job, a composite book which in its present form is strangely incoherent and in parts inconsistent, contains the sublimest poetry in the Old Testament. Parts of it must rank among the greatest poetry of the world. It solves none of the questions which it raises, but it shows

with splendid power that the old Hebrew theodicy does not fit the facts, and must be abandoned. In the Wisdom of Solomon the influence of Greek philosophy is very strong, though the interest of the author is practical rather than speculative. It is a great pity that this fine poem, which is used by St Paul, is not in our Canon; all Bible readers should study it.

The Wisdom Books are more universal and less Jewish than the other books of the Old Testament, and the reader may be puzzled by the poetical personification of Wisdom as a kind of Divine emanation or subordinate manifestation of the Deity. No orthodox Jew could go quite this length; but the idea of Wisdom is given so concrete an expression that it may be said to have prepared the way for the Johannine doctrine of the Logos, the Word or Reason of God. Modern scholars place the greater part of Job not later than 400 B.C., Proverbs in the Persian period, with possible incorporation of older sayings, Ecclesiastes about 200 B.C., Ecclesiasticus about the same date, and Wisdom perhaps shortly before 100 B.C. Daniel, which is proved by sufficient internal evidence to have been written in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, was shortly afterwards admitted to the Canon in the belief that it was written by an ancient worthy called Daniel. But by this time the roll of canonical prophets had been closed, and the Book of Daniel could not be admitted into it.

Archdeacon Charles has finally disposed of the old notion that there was a long 'period of silence' between the prophecy of Malachi and the mission of John the Baptist. Not only was there no period of silence, but the two centuries between 300 and 100 B.C. 'were in many respects centuries of greater spiritual progress than any that had preceded them in Israel'. It was in that period that the belief in immortality for the individual soul or spirit gained strength, that the jurisdiction of God was extended to the realm of the departed, and that some at

least of the nation were ready to accept the Gentiles as within the compass of the Divine mercy. The idea of the Messiah took a position in religious thought which it had never had before, and such moral precepts as the duty of forgiving injuries were more fully admitted. All these changes, which belong to the apocalyptic rather than to the prophetic age, were cherished mainly in Galilee, the home of a more liberal, generous and spiritual faith than prevailed in the capital.

There is an old prejudice in the Reformed Churches against the *Apocrypha*, from which I have not hesitated to make extracts. The Old Testament Canon was formed gradually, and was not finally fixed till after the time of our Lord. Esther, the Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes were in dispute till the end of the first century A.D., mainly no doubt on the ground that they can hardly be called religious books. The Septuagint, a translation of the Hebrew books into Greek, made at Alexandria at various dates later than 250 B.C., included our Apocrypha; but the Jewish authorities never accepted even the patriotic 1 Maccabees, nor Ecclesiasticus, which so closely resembles Proverbs. Wisdom was written in Greek, and was possibly objected to on this ground. In the Christian Church, Jerome, who had been taught by a Jewish Rabbi, tried to emphasise the distinction between the inspired books and the Apocrypha, while Augustine was in favour of the larger and more popular Bible. The Anglican Church in 1571 followed Jerome; the Roman Church at the Council of Trent formally abolished the distinction, and pronounced all the books of the Apocrypha canonical. The Greek Church has hesitated, but on the whole maintains the distinction as we do. A modern reader may prefer to judge on its merits the degree of help and edification which he can derive from each book. There is no obligation to declare Esther inspired and Wisdom uninspired.

The word 'apocrypha', which means 'hidden', was