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Excerpt  
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## INTRODUCTION.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE TITLE.

1. THE name *Ecclesiastes*, by which the book before us is commonly known, comes to us from the Greek version of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint (the version of the *Seventy* who were believed to have been the translators), as the nearest equivalent they could find to the Hebrew title *Koheleth*. Jerome, the translator to whom we owe the Latin version known as the Vulgate, thought that he could not do better than retain the word, instead of attempting to translate it, and it has been adopted (in the title though not in the text) in the English and many other modern versions<sup>1</sup>.

We are thrown back therefore upon the Hebrew word and we have, in the first instance, to ask what it meant, and why it was chosen by the author. In this enquiry we are met (1) by the fact that the word occurs nowhere else in the whole range of Old Testament literature, and the natural inference is that it was coined because the writer wanted a word more significant and adapted to his aim than any with which his native speech supplied him; possibly, indeed, because he wanted a word corresponding to one in a foreign language that was thus significant.

<sup>1</sup> Luther gives *Der Prediger Salomo*, which the English version reproduces in its alternative title.

Looking accordingly to the etymology of the Hebrew word we find that it is in form the feminine participle of an unused conjugation of a verb *Kāhal* and as such would have a meaning connected with the root-idea of the verb, that of “gathering” or “collecting.” The verb is always used in its other conjugations of gathering persons and not things (Exod. xxxv. 1; Num. i. 18, viii. 9, xvi. 19, *et al.*), and from it is formed the noun which in our English version appears as “congregation” (Lev. iv. 14; Num. x. 7; Deut. xxiii. 1 *et al.*), “assembly” (Num. xiv. 5; Deut. v. 22; Judges xx. 2 *et al.*) or “company” (Jer. xxxi. 8; Ezek. xvi. 40, xvii. 17 *et al.*), while in the LXX it appears almost uniformly as *Ecclesia*. It is accordingly an all but certain inference that the meaning of the new-coined word was either “one who calls an assembly” or, looking to the usual force of the unused conjugation from which it is formed<sup>1</sup>, “one who is a member of an assembly.” The choice of the feminine form may be connected with the thought that the writer wished to identify himself with Wisdom (a noun which was feminine in Hebrew as in other languages), who appears as teaching in the bold impersonation of Prov. i. 20, viii. 1–4. On the other hand the noun is always treated throughout the book (with, possibly, the solitary exception of chap. vii. 27, but see note there) as masculine, partly, perhaps, because the writer identified himself with the man Solomon as well as with the abstract wisdom, partly, it may be also, because usage had, as in the case of Sophereth (Neh. vii. 57), Pochereth (Ezra ii. 57), Alemeth and Azmaveth (1 Chron. viii. 36) sanctioned the employment of such feminine forms as the names of men.

It follows from this that the LXX translators were at least not far wrong when they chose *Ecclesiastes* as the nearest equivalent for the Hebrew title of the book, *Koheleth*. Our word “Preacher,” however, which has been adopted from Luther, is altogether misleading. Taken in connexion with the associa-

<sup>1</sup> The participle *Koheleth* is formed as if from the *Kal* conjugation, which commonly denotes intransitive state or action. No example of the verb *Kāhal* is found in this form. The two forms most in use are the transitive, “to gather,” and the passive “to be gathered.”

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tions which the very sound of *Ecclesia* in any of its compounds calls up, it suggests the idea of a teacher delivering a set discourse to a congregation of worshippers. That is, to say the least, an idea which it is hard to reconcile with the structure and contents of Koheleth. It may be added that it is just as foreign to the meaning of the Hebrew and Greek words. The verb *Kâhal* is never used in connexion with the idea of vocal utterance of any kind. The *Ecclesiastes* was not one who called the *Ecclesia* or assembly together, or addressed it in a tone of didactic authority, but much rather one who was an ordinary member of such an assembly (the political unit of every Greek State) and took part in its discussions. He is, as Aristotle says, not an *archon* or a ruler (*Pol.* III. 11), but a part of the great whole (*Ibid.*). So the *Ecclesiastusai* of Aristophanes are women who meet in an assembly to debate, and the word is used in the same sense by Plato (*Gorg.* p. 452, E). In the LXX, the word does not occur outside the book to which it serves as a title, and we have therefore no reason for thinking that they used it in any other than its ordinary sense. It follows from this that the more natural equivalent for it in English would be *Debater* rather than *Preacher*, and looking to the fact that the Hebrew writer apparently coined the word, it would be a natural inference that he did so, because he wanted a substantive which exactly expressed the idea of one who desired to present himself in that character and not as a teacher. He claimed only to be a member, one of many, of the great *Ecclesia* of those who think. If we could assume that he had any knowledge of Greek, it would be a legitimate inference that he formed the new word as an equivalent to the *Ecclesiastes* which had that significance. It is obvious that this is a meaning which fits in far more aptly with the nature of the book, its presentment of many views, more or less contrasted with each other, its apparent oscillation between the extremes of a desponding pessimism and a tranquil Epicureanism. To use the title of a modern book with which most readers are familiar, the writer speaks as one who takes his part in a meeting of *Friends in Council*.

The true meaning of the title having thus been established, both on philological grounds and as being in harmony with the character of the work itself, it will be sufficient to note briefly the other meanings which have been assigned to it by different scholars. (a) It cannot mean, as Grotius thought, one who was a *συναθροιστής* (*synathroistes*) a *collector sententiarum* or “compiler,” one who does not maintain a theory or opinion of his own but brings together those of other thinkers; for this, though it agrees fairly with the nature of the contents of the book, is incompatible with the fact that the Hebrew verb is used, without exception, in the sense of collecting, or calling together, persons and not things. (b) More, perhaps, is to be said for Ginsburg’s view (*Kohleth*, *Introd.* p. 2) that the title expresses the act of bringing together those that have been scattered, assembling men, as the historical Solomon assembled them, to meet as in the Divine presence (1 Kings viii. 1–5), calling back those that have wandered in the bye-ways of doubt, “a gatherer of those far off to God.” The word thus taken expresses the thought which was uttered in the words of the true Son of David: “How often would I have gathered thy children together” (Matt. xxiii. 34; Luke xiii. 34). It is, however, against this view, that the writer forms the word *Kohleth* *ás* has been said above, from a conjugation not in use (*Kal*), which would naturally express being in a given state or position, and passes over the conjugation which was in use (*Hiphil*) and expressed the transitive act of bringing into such a position or state. To that latter form belongs, in this case, the meaning of “gathering together” into an assembly. It can scarcely be questioned that the writer’s motive in not using it, when it was ready to his hand, was that he deliberately sought to avoid the sense of “gathering an assembly,” and coined a word, which, as the LXX translators rightly felt, conveyed the sense of being a member of such an assembly and taking part in its proceedings. (c) Jerome’s view, followed as we have seen by Luther, that the word describes a *concionator* or “preacher” is that also of the *Midrash Rabba* (a Jewish commentary of uncertain date, but not earlier than the sixth, nor later than the twelfth century,

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Steinschneider, *Jewish Literature*, p. 53) which explains the name as given by Solomon, "because his discourses were delivered before the congregation" (Ginsburg, p. 3, *Wünsche, Midr. Koh.* p. 2), but this also, as shewn above, is both wrong etymologically and at variance with the character of the book. (*d*) The word cannot mean, as a few commentators have thought, "one who has been gathered," as describing the state of the repentant and converted Solomon, for this would involve a grammatical solecism in the opposite direction to that already examined, and would assign a passive meaning to a form essentially active, though not factitive, in its force. (*e*) Other more far-fetched interpretations, resting on hazardous Arabic etymologies, as that the word meant "penitent" or "the old man," or "the voice that cries," may be dismissed, as not calling for any serious discussion.

## CHAPTER II.

## AUTHORSHIP AND DATE.

I. It lies on the surface that the writer of the book, who, though he does not introduce the name of Solomon, identifies himself (ch. i. 12—16) with the historical son of David, was either actually the king of Israel whose name was famous for "wisdom and largeness of heart" or that, for some reason or other, he adopted the dramatic personation of his character as a form of authorship. On the former hypothesis, the question of date is settled together with that of authorship, and the book takes its place almost among the earliest treasures of Hebrew literature, side by side with the Psalms that actually came from David's pen and with the inner kernel of the Book of Proverbs. On the latter a wide region of conjecture lies open to us, from any date subsequent to that of Solomon to the time when we first get distinct traces of the existence of the book, and the problem, in the absence of external evidence, will have to be decided on

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the ground of internal notes of time and place as seen in the language, thought, and structure of the book. A preliminary question meets us, however, which turns, not upon evidence either external or internal, but upon an *à priori* assumption. It has been urged that when a writer adopts a personated authorship he is guilty of a fraudulent imposture, that such an imposture is incompatible with any idea of inspiration, however loosely that inspiration may be defined, and that to assume a personated authorship is therefore to assert that the book has no right to the place it occupies in the Canon of the Old Testament<sup>1</sup>. On this view Ecclesiastes, if not written by Solomon, takes its place on the same level as Ireland's *Vortigern*, or Chatterton's *Rowley*, or Macpherson's *Ossian*. It may fairly be said, however, of this view that it ignores the fact that a dramatic personation of character has, at all times, been looked upon as a legitimate form of authorship, not necessarily involving any *animus decipiendi*. With some writers of the highest genius, as *e.g.*, with Robert Browning and Tennyson, a monologue or soliloquy of this character has been a favourite form of composition. The speeches in Herodotus and Thucydides, the *Apologies* written in the name of Socrates by Xenophon and Plato, the Dialogues of Plato throughout, are instances in which no one would dream of imputing fraud to the writers, though in all these cases we have, with scarcely the shadow of a doubt, the thoughts and words of the writers and not of the men whom they represent as speaking. The most decisive, and in that sense, crucial instance of such authorship is found, however, in the book which presents so striking a parallel to Ecclesiastes, the Apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon. There also, both in the title and the body of the book (Wisd. vii. 5, 7, ix. 7, 8) the writer identifies himself with the Son of David. It was quoted by early Greek and Latin fathers as by Solomon (Clem. Alex. *Strom.* vi. 11, 14, 15; Tertull. *Adv. Valent.* c. 2; *De Præscr. Hæret.* c. 7). From

<sup>1</sup> The argument may be found in most English Commentaries, but see especially an elaborate treatise on *The Authorship of Ecclesiastes*, pp. 1—12 (Macmillan and Co., 1880).

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the time of the Muratorian Fragment<sup>1</sup>, it has been commonly ascribed to Philo or some other writer of the Alexandrian school of Jewish thought<sup>2</sup>. No one now dreams of ascribing it to Solomon. No one has ever ventured to stigmatize it as a fraudulent imposture. It has been quoted reverentially even by Protestant writers, cited as Scripture by many of the Fathers, placed by the Church of Rome in the Canon of Scripture (*Conc. Trident. Sess. IV. de Can. Script.*), and recognized by Church of England critics as entitled to a high place of honour among the books which they receive as deuterocanonical (Art. VI.). In the face of these facts it can scarcely be said with any probability that we are debarred from a free enquiry into the evidence of the authorship of Ecclesiastes, other than the statement of ch. i. 12, or that we ought to resist or suppress the conclusion to which the evidence may point, should it tend to a belief that Solomon was not the author. If dramatic personation be, in all times and countries, a legitimate method of instruction, there is no *à priori* ground against the employment of that method by the manifold and "very varied wisdom" (the *πολυποίκιλος σοφία* of Eph. iii. 10) of the Eternal Spirit. It may be added that this is, at least, a natural interpretation of the structure of the Book of Job. It can hardly be supposed that that work is the report of an actual dialogue.

Returning to the enquiry accordingly, we may begin by admitting freely that the Solomonic authorship has in its favour the authority of both Jewish and Christian tradition. The *Midrash Koheleth* (= Commentary on Ecclesiastes, probably, as has been said above, between the sixth and twelfth centuries) represents the opinions of a large number of Rabbis, all of whom

<sup>1</sup> The words of the Fragment as they stand are "*Et sapientia ab amicis in honorem ipsius scripta*," but it has been conjectured that this was a blundering translation of the Greek *ὑπὸ Φιλωνος* ("by Philo"), which the writer mistook for *ὑπὸ φίλων* ("by friends"), Tregelles, *Canon Murator.* p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> So Jerome (*Præf. in lib. Salom.*); Luther (*Pref. to Wisd. Sol.*) and many others (Grimm's *Weisheit, Einleit.* p. 22). The present writer has shewn what appear to him strong reasons for ascribing it to Apollon (*Expositor*, vol. I. "The Writings of Apollon").

base their interpretations on the assumption that Solomon was the writer. The *Targum* or Paraphrase of the book (assigned by Ginsburg (*Koheleth*, p. 36) to the sixth century after Christ) follows in the same track. A line of Jewish Commentators from Rashi (Rabbi Solomon Yitzchaki) in the eleventh century to Moses Mendelssohn in the eighteenth, and some yet later authors (Ginsburg, *Introduction*, pp. 38—80) wrote on the same assumption. The testimony of Patristic literature is as uniform as that of Rabbinic. The book was paraphrased by Gregory Thaumaturgus (d. A.D. 270), commented on by Gregory of Nyssa (d. A.D. 396), referred to and in part explained by Augustine (d. A.D. 430), and accepted by their mediæval successors, Hugo of St Victor (d. A.D. 1140), Richard of St Victor (d. A.D. 1173), Bonaventura (d. A.D. 1274), and Nicholas de Lyra (d. A.D. 1340), whose testimony, as having been born a Jew, comes with a two-fold weight, as the work of the historic Solomon.

Uniform, however, as this *consensus* is, amounting almost to the "*semper, ubique, et ab omnibus*" which Vincent of Lerins made the test of Catholicity, it can scarcely be regarded as decisive. The faculty of historical criticism, one might almost say, of intellectual discernment of the meaning and drift of a book or of individual passages in it, is, with rare exceptions, such as were Origen, Eusebius, Jerome, Dionysius of Alexandria, and Theodore of Mopsuestia, wanting in the long succession of the Christian Fathers, and no one can read the *Targum* or the Midrash on *Koheleth*, or the comments of not a few of their successors, without feeling that he is in the company of those who have eyes and see not, and who read between the lines, as patristic interpreters also do, meanings which could, by no conceivable possibility, have been present to the thoughts of the writer. It is true alike of all of them that they lived at too remote a date from that of the book of which they write for their opinion to have any weight as evidence, and that they had no materials for forming that opinion other than those which are in our hands at the present day.

The first voice that was heard to utter a conclusion adverse to this general *consensus* was, as in the case of so many other



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traditional beliefs, that of Luther. The same bold insight which led him to the conjecture, now accepted by many scholars as approximating to a certainty, that the Epistle to the Hebrews was the work not of St Paul but of Apollos (Alford, *Commentary on N. T., Int. to Ep. to Hebrews*) shewed itself also in regard to Ecclesiastes. In his short Commentary on that book, indeed, written in A.D. 1532 (*Opp.* IV. p. 230, ed. 1582), he treats it throughout as by Solomon, but in his *Table Talk* (*Tischreden*, LIX. 6, ed. Leipzig, 1846) he speaks more freely. "Solomon did not write the book, 'the Preacher,' himself, but it was composed by Sirach in the time of the Maccabees... It is, as it were, a Talmud put together out of many books, probably from the Library of Ptolemy Euergetes, king of Egypt." He goes on to point to the Book of Proverbs as having been composed in the same way, the maxims which came from the king's lips having been taken down and edited by others. It is probable, though we have no evidence of the fact, that Luther may have derived this opinion from some of the "*Humanists*," the more advanced scholars, of his time, or, possibly, from the Jewish students with whom his work as a translator of the Bible brought him into contact.

The line of free enquiry was followed up by Grotius (A.D. 1644) who, in his *Commentary on the Old Testament*, after discussing the meaning of the title (see above, p. 18) and the aim and plan of the book, gives his judgment as to authorship: "With good reason was it" (in spite of apparent difficulties) "received into the Canon. And yet I, for my part, do not hold it to be the work of Solomon, but to have been written later under the name of that king as one who was moved with repentance. What is to me the ground of this conclusion is that there are many words in it which are not found elsewhere than in Daniel, Esdras (Ezra) and the Chaldæan paraphrasts" (*Opp.* I. p. 258, ed. 1679). Elsewhere he assigns the authorship to Zerubbabel or one of his contemporaries. Luther and Grotius were, however, before their time, and although the suggestion of the latter received a favourable mention in a note of Gibbon's (*Decline and Fall*, c. XL.), Protestant and Roman Catholic

commentators went on following the received tradition till Döderlein in 1784, Jahn in 1793, J. E. C. Schmidt in 1794, revived the objections urged by Grotius and gave them currency among European scholars. From that time onward the stream of objections to the Solomonic authorship has flowed with an ever-increasing volume. Among them we find not only those who are conspicuous for a bold and destructive criticism but men whose position in German theology is that of orthodox Conservatism. Hengstenberg, Keil, Delitzsch, Vaihinger, are on this point at one with Ewald and with Hitzig. In America Noyes and Stuart, in England Davidson and Ginsburg and Cox (*Quest of the Chief Good, Introd.*), have followed in the same track.

The chief ground of agreement among writers representing such very different schools is mainly that given by Grotius. Delitzsch gives a list of about a hundred words or forms or meanings either peculiar to Ecclesiastes or found only in the post-exilic books of the Old Testament, or even not appearing till the time of the later Aramaic of the Mishna literature. It would be out of place to give this list fully here; some of them will be noticed as they occur. Delitzsch's summing up of the results of the induction is that "If the Book of Koheleth be of old Solomonic origin, then there is no history of the Hebrew language" (Delitzsch, *Introd.* p. 190). Ginsburg (p. 253) asserts, with equal emphasis, that "we could as easily believe that Chaucer is the author of *Rasselas* as that Solomon wrote Koheleth." Ewald's judgment is hardly less decisive when he says that "this work varies more widely than any other in the Old Testament from the old Hebrew speech, so that one might easily be tempted to believe that it was the latest of all the books now included in the Canon" (*Poet. Büch.* IV. p. 178). Ewald himself does not adopt that conclusion, holding that in the gradual admixture of the older and the newer forms of speech, it might easily happen that an earlier writer might use more of the newer forms than a later one, but he places the date of the Book as certainly not before the last century of the Persian Monarchy. The same conclusion