

Questions and Answers. The editorial apologies for delay in answering questions has met with too ready a response from readers—for they have at the moment stopped asking any questions! May we say therefore that we shall be happy to receive some more at an early date.

The Revision of the Vulgate Bible. We print in this issue an article from the pen of Dom Adrian Weld-Blundell, O.S.B., on this subject which is perhaps not so well known in this country as it should be. Dom Adrian, who has now attained a very venerable age was one of the first collaborators in the work. He came to Rome in 1904 and began his task under the leadership of Abbot Gasquet, as he then was, at the Collegio Sant' Anselmo. In those days they were busy collating from the photographs of different manuscripts or revising others. During the world war of 1914-18 Dom Adrian served as chaplain in the Royal Navy and it was not till 1920 that he returned to his former work on the Revision. By this time Cardinal Gasquet had moved the work to the Palazzo San Callisto in Trastevere and Dom Adrian was notified that the Holy Father had appointed him a member of the Commission. Pius XI, who had of course long experience of manuscripts used to take a close interest in the work and not infrequently called members of the Commission to the Vatican to discuss details and give sound advice. On 26th June, 1926 the Commission were assembled to meet the Holy Father in the Vatican for the solemn presentation to him by Cardinal Gasquet of the first volume (Genesis) of the Revised text. A silver medal was struck to commemorate the event and distributed to the members of the Commission. In the autumn of 1927 Dom Adrian was sent to establish a monastery in Washington, U.S.A., and this officially ended his membership of the Commission although he did not cease to collaborate. He spent a short time in Rome again in 1936 after his leaving America, and on his return to Fort Augustus Abbey he continued to work on the collation of manuscripts until the "Blitz" made such work impossible in 1941. Some time ago he received a decoration from the Holy Father in recognition of his long and valuable services.

THE FUTURE LIFE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT¹

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I

General Summary. The beliefs of different nations about the lot of man after death arouse perennial interest in thinking persons and the interest is the greater in the case of the beliefs of those whose religion

¹A paper read at the meeting of the Catholic Biblical Association at St. Benedict's School, Ealing, on 1st Sept., 1946.

was a pedagogue unto Christ. The belief in the "four last things" is so fundamental in our own religious outlook that there has been in the past a disposition to imagine that this developed belief must always have been part of the spiritual armoury of the Saints of God whether of the New or of the Old Testament. There has been a tendency to take it for granted that, like ourselves, Abraham, Moses, David, and the other great men of God of the Old Testament looked forward to a judgment of their lives by God after death with a consequent apportionment of reward or punishment. But an attentive reading of the Old Testament shows that this is a mistaken notion and that for many centuries the religious life of the patriarchs and of the people of Israel was based exclusively on God's government of the world during the course of man's pilgrimage on this earth. Briefly put the position may be stated thus. From the beginning, right back to the time of the patriarchs, it was known that man survives death though there was only a very hazy idea what part of man does actually survive. Still they were clear on the essential point that what survived was the same person who had lived, though the body was placed and remained in the grave. What happened to this essential surviving element of man after death God Almighty had not revealed and did not reveal till towards the close of the Old Testament. Still they knew that God is the almighty and just ruler of the universe who is offended by wrong and pleased by right-doing. In the absence, then, of any revelation about the lot of man after death it could only be presumed that God punished the wicked and rewarded the good in this life. It is clear from various passages that the Israelites found it very difficult to square the experiences of life with this belief and, under divine providence, this discrepancy between belief and experience must have played an important part in developing the belief in rewards and punishments after death. This, however, was not the only element working towards a fuller and more adequate belief. Man's consciousness of his own love for God and intimate persuasion of God's love and care for him must also have been powerful motives leading on to the belief that the loving relations established between man and God during life would not be terminated by death, but would blossom out into an experience more glorious than that enjoyed in life. Such considerations under the guiding hand of God led the Israelites, at first so spiritually dull, to a belief in the efficacy of prayer for the departed, in the resurrection of the body, in rewards with God for the good and in punishment for the wicked. These developed beliefs we find, however, only in the last centuries before the beginning of the Christian era.

Introductory Considerations. Before attempting to establish the truth of this general presentation of Israel's beliefs it will be well first to pause to consider the general character of the Old Testament. The Old Testament, was, of course, God's preparation for the New. As leading up

to the New it was of its nature not only ephemeral but imperfect. And one essential difference between the two Testaments concerns the nature of the revelation accorded under each. The revelation of the New Testament is complete and final. It was closed with the death of the last of the Apostles. No new revelation is received by the Church, which, however, continues to grow in its understanding and appreciation of the revelation it has received once and for all. What was dimly understood becomes clear; what was implicit becomes explicit. Thus the body of doctrine continues to grow throughout the centuries but without receiving any addition from outside itself. Under the Old Testament it was not so. New revelations were made by God and the body of doctrine received real additions. This characteristic of the Old Testament is rooted in its ephemeral and imperfect nature. As a preparation for that which was to be eternal and perfect its revelation was in the nature of things incomplete and imperfect.

We must remember, moreover, the measure of spiritual capacity enjoyed by the people whom God chose to be His own special possession. St. Cyril of Alexandria reminds us that the people to whom God gave the Law on Sinai were not capable of the knowledge of incorporeal things and St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of them as uncultured and ignorant.¹ As in the New, so in the Old Testament, God chose the weak things of the world to confound the strong, (1 Cor. i, 27). Thus at an early stage of their career, engrossed as they were in material things, the Israelites would have been incapable of understanding spiritual things. But this does not explain their ignorance of future rewards and punishments as these were a fixed part of Egyptian belief from early times and the early Egyptians were also unspiritual and entertained gross ideas both of the nature of their gods and of the retribution which they looked for after death. In passing I might remark on the striking proof we have in this matter, of the slight religious influence exercised by the Egyptians on the Israelites during their long sojourn in the valley of the Nile. It is no exaggeration to say that Egyptian life was dominated by the thought of the after-life and of the manifold perils to be met with in the underworld, and yet the Israelites departed from Egypt with no conceptions concerning it that they had not brought with them at the beginning of their sojourn. These ideas were, substantially, those which Abraham and his family had brought from Mesopotamia. Strikingly dissimilar to the Egyptian conceptions the ideas of the Israelites about the underworld were in essence the same as those of the Assyrians and Babylonians, except, and it is a very important exception, for the polytheistic ideas of these latter. They peopled the world of the dead, as they did the sky, with deities of its own. The Hebrews knew that there is but one God whether in the heavens above or in the abode of the

¹ *Contra Julianum*, Lib. II (Migne, P. G. 76, 577, 612). St. Thomas *Summa Theologica* I, q. 68, art. 3 in corp.

dead below. When God chose out of all nations the stock of Abraham to be especially His own He found them, if one may so express it, with ideas of future existence derived from their common Semitic origin and with these He saw fit to leave them for the greater part of their history.

The Future Life in the Pentateuch. After this reference to the beliefs of the Egyptians on the one hand and of the Assyrians and Babylonians on the other it is time to pass to a more detailed examination of the beliefs of the Israelites themselves. The obvious place to begin with is the Pentateuch, the oldest writing in the Hebrew Bible. This is in substance the work of Moses, and therefore dates in the main from the fifteenth or the thirteenth century according as our chronology assigns the Exodus to the first or the second of those centuries. Now the Pentateuch from Genesis on presupposes the survival of man. Of that survival there was never any doubt. When Jacob heard of the supposed death of his son Joseph from the attack of some wild beast, his exclamation was "I shall go down mourning to my son to Sheol" (Gen. xxxvii, 35). Joseph, he thought, had already gone there and he would follow, for Sheol was considered the common bourne of all mankind. Sheol is mentioned also in the story of the rebellion of Core, Dathan, and Abiron: "If . . . the earth causes its mouth to gape and swallows them up with all that is theirs and they go down alive to Sheol, then you will know that these men have spurned Yahweh" (Num. xvi, 30). Taken alone by themselves these Pentateuchal references to Sheol might hardly suffice to prove conclusively that Sheol was the place where all men continued to exist after death; but the many later passages in the Bible where Sheol is spoken of and the similar Babylonian belief leave no room for doubt on the point.

That popular belief was apt to credit the departed in Sheol with knowledge beyond the normal ken of living man is clear from the prohibition of necromancy: "When thou enterest the land that Yahweh, thy God, is to give thee, thou shalt not learn to do according to the abominations of these peoples; there shall not be found in thee . . . one that enquireth of the dead" (Deut. xviii, 9-11). This prohibition incidentally reveals the belief of the Canaanites in the survival of man and in the superior knowledge of the dead. This similarity of belief is natural in view of the kinship of the Canaanites to the Babylonians and the Hebrews both in race and in language.

For the rest what the Pentateuch has to teach us on the subject is negative only, but not therefore less enlightening. There is no reference in the five books of Moses to retribution after death and this silence is a convincing proof that no such belief existed, for had the belief existed, it must have found expression in the Pentateuch. This statement is based, not on the length of the Pentateuch, though it is actually over one fifth of the whole Old Testament, but on the nature of its contents.

It contains all the essentials of the Mosaic religion and the legislation which safeguarded that religion. There are many promises of reward to the faithful and many threats of punishment against transgressors, but no one of these refers to the future life. Without exception the promises and the threats are of temporal blessings and of temporal calamities. Here is an example of promised blessing: "It shall come to pass in reward for your obeying these ordinances and keeping and doing them, that Yahweh, thy God, shall maintain towards thee the covenant and mercy that He swore to thy fathers; and He shall love thee and bless thee and multiply thee, and shall bless the fruit of thy womb and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, thy new wine and thy fresh oil, the young of thy cattle and the offspring of thy flock, on the land that He swore to thy fathers to give thee" (Deut. vii, 12f). The divine punishments threatened in case of infidelity are also purely temporal: "Yahweh will cause pestilence to cleave to thee till it consumes thee from off the face of the land which thou goest in to possess. . . . The heavens above thy head shall be brazen and the earth beneath thee shall be iron. Yahweh will give powder and dust as the rain of thy land: from heaven shall it descend upon thee until thou be exterminated" (Deut. xxviii, 21-4). The exclusively terrestrial nature of the retribution shows that the Israelites knew nothing of rewards and punishments beyond the grave.

The Pentateuch thus makes it plain how jejune was the knowledge of the patriarchs and of Moses himself concerning the future life. They knew that man survives death and that was practically all. The thought of what awaited man hereafter was neither an incentive to good living nor a deterrent to wickedness. Incentive and deterrent, however, were not lacking and it may well be doubted whether men who were not stimulated to fidelity to God's law by the hope of temporal prosperity and the fear of temporal calamity would have been more powerfully influenced by similar considerations regarding the unseen world.

Ecclesiasticus. If now we turn from the earliest book of the Bible to one of the latest, we find, surprising though it may be, that the outlook is still the same. Sheol is still the home of the dead (xlvi, 5). And the attitude of Ecclesiasticus to death is based merely on this-worldly considerations:

O death, how bitter is the thought of thee
 To the man who has peace in his possessions,
 To the untroubled man, who prospers in all his ways,
 And still has strength to take his pleasure!
 O death, thy sentence is welcome
 To the indigent man of failing strength,
 Decrepit with age and overwhelmed with cares,
 Without trust and bereft of patience. (xli, 1-4).

And when the Wise Man speaks of rewards and punishments it is only retribution during life that he has in mind.

Take not pleasure in what pleases the impious ;
 Remember that this side of Sheol they shall not be held innocent
 (ix, 17).

That is to say, as the Revised Version has it : " Remember they shall not go unpunished to the grave." There are passages, it is true, which could be understood of retribution after death, but in view of the general outlook of the writer there is no doubt that he is thinking of retribution this side of the grave :

It is an easy thing before God in the day of death

To make retribution to each one according to his ways.

The evil fortune of an hour brings oblivion of luxury ;

And by the end of a man are his works revealed (xi, 28f).

The thought appears to be that people must not be deceived by the apparent combination of wickedness and prosperity, for it is an easy thing for God to bring the wicked but prosperous man to an evil and calamitous end.

Ecclesiasticus contrasted with Wisdom and II Maccabees. The similarity of outlook between the earliest book of the Bible and the book of Ecclesiasticus, which dates from 200 to 300 B.C. provides a touchstone by which we may judge the meaning of ambiguous passages in the intervening literature. Such a tremendous and epoch-making thought as that of union with God hereafter or of retribution beyond the grave would not be introduced merely incidentally and in ambiguous language. Where such passages occur in earlier books it would be an anachronism to interpret them in the sense of later and more developed doctrine. We shall be right in understanding them in harmony with the meaning the words will readily bear and the general contemporary outlook. To put this matter in its right perspective mention should be made here of a problem presented by the undeveloped doctrine of Ecclesiasticus. The Book of Wisdom, which is not so much later in date, has a definite doctrine of future rewards and punishments. In this case the difference might be explained by the Palestinian origin of Ecclesiasticus and the Egyptian origin of Wisdom. The former was written in Hebrew and the latter in Greek. But, besides, the Second Book of Maccabees gives clear evidence of the beliefs current in Palestine itself in the first half of the second century B.C. There we find expression of faith in the efficacy of sacrifice for the dead (2 Macc. xii, 38-46), in the resurrection of the body (2 Macc. vii, 11, 14, 22), and in the reward after death of God's faithful servants (2 Macc. vii, 14). These truths are not denied in Ecclesiasticus, but neither do they find expression in that book. In fact they seem to be unknown. How are we to reconcile the existence of these two different standpoints ? The possible time-interval of about a century and a quarter does not seem to provide an adequate explanation. The explanation may lie in the fact that there was no prophet in Israel during these centuries to give the stamp of divine authority to the new

teachings, and that, consequently, they were not at once accepted positively in all circles. The fact is that the new doctrines were never accepted by all Jews even up to the time of Christ. This, of course, is plain from the New Testament, where it is recorded that the Sadducees not only did not accept, but positively rejected the doctrines of the existence of Angels or spirits and of the resurrection of the body (Matt. xxiii, 23, Acts xxiii, 8).

A Text of Daniel. In this connexion another text which will naturally occur to the mind is that of Daniel xii, 2 : " Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall arise, some to life everlasting, and some to reproaches, to everlasting abhorrence." How is it, it may be asked, that after such a pronouncement as this so many post-exilic writers seem to have no knowledge of the resurrection and of future rewards and punishments? An answer which readily suggests itself is that many modern Catholic writers attribute certain elements of the Book of Daniel to Maccabean times and that the advanced doctrine manifested in this text indicates its late origin. Such an answer would, clearly, solve the problem, but it is not necessary, I think, to have recourse to a late dating for the passage. Corporal resurrection had been used by earlier writers as a figure of national revival. Thus Isaias xxvi, 19 :

Thy dead shall live ; my corpses shall arise,
Awake and sing aloud, ye that dwell in the dust.

Long ago Polychronius, bishop of Apamea and one of the most illustrious exegetes of the school of Antioch, recognized that this text does not speak literally of the resurrection of the dead but metaphorically of revival from the death of captivity. He thus answered in advance the modern contention that the text cannot have been written by Isaias on the ground that the resurrection of the dead was a doctrine unknown in his time and long after. A better known example of the same metaphorical usage is that of Ezechiel's vision of the dry bones being clothed with flesh and sinews and returning to life (Chap. xxxvii). This vision, as St. Jerome says, was figurative of the restoration of the people of Israel, then, as it were, dead in the Babylonian captivity. The passage of Daniel may, then, well have been understood in the same figurative sense. This is not to say that the figurative sense necessarily exhausts the full meaning of the passage. Some texts by "compenetration" have a double meaning like the prophecy of Nathan : " I shall be to him a father and he shall be to me a son " (2 Sam. vii, 14), which refers both to the adoptive sonship of Solomon and the theocratic kings and also to the natural divine sonship of Christ, as St. Paul teaches (Heb. i, 5). And our Lord seems to allude to this passage of Daniel when He speaks of the resurrection of the dead : " The hour cometh when all who are in the sepulchres shall hear the voice (of the Son of God) and shall come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation " (John v, 28f).

(To be concluded).