

# TIMELY TOPICS.

POLITICAL, BIBLICAL, ETHICAL, PRACTICAL.

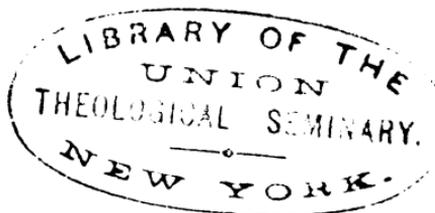
DISCUSSED

BY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS, PROFESSORS AND EMINENT  
WRITERS OF OUR TIME.

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NEW YORK:  
E. B. TREAT, 5 Cooper Union,  
1892.



## THE PROTESTANT CHURCH AND THE APOCRYPHA.

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**I**T is interesting evidence of the quickening influence of inspired Scripture that, even when the Jews were far below the standard set up for them by the Lord, through Moses and Joshua, they yet produced and valued books of history, ethics, proverbs and religious fiction so highly prized that when the Greek translation of the Old Testament was made they were also rendered into Greek, and placed beside the divine oracles.

The Septuagint having thus given the apocryphal books a place, they passed on into the Vulgate, and were retained where the Latin Bible was the standard, even by Protestant Churches—though with such explanatory notes, or inferior type, as indicated that they did not occupy the same plane with the inspired Word.

The controversy regarding the degree of authority to be given to these sections of religious literature, of course, early engaged the attention of Christian writers, and has its place in patristic discussions. With some inconsistency—in appearance, at least—Jerome, Eusebius and Origen denied their canonical authority, although making frequent references to them of a very respectful character—one other evidence to us Protestants that we must not mix up “the Fathers” with Apostles and prophets.

Before stating the attitude of the Churches, especially of the Protestant Churches, to these books, a sentence or two may be permitted as to their worth. They differ widely As a contribution to the history of the people of Israel in

the period—which Prideaux has named and written on with great learning—of the connexion between the Old and New Testaments, the books of Maccabees are of great interest and value. No one can read Ecclesiasticus without seeing what good use the writer had made of the Book of Proverbs, and of his own observation. So the author of the Book of Tobit had evidently been a diligent student of the Book of Job, and Hengstenberg valued his production so highly as a “didactic story” that, admitting geographical, chronological and historic mistakes, he would have it circulated with the canonical books. On the other hand, the Prayer of Manasses and the first and second Books of Esdras (Ezra) even the Church of Rome, in the Council of Trent, put in the doubtful place of an appendix to the Vulgate, while, curiously enough, the Church of England, in 1562 and 1571, puts I. Esdras as the “third book of Esdras,” making Ezra and Nehemiah the first and second. This book Josephus used to a large extent, notwithstanding the fact that it contains blunders so gross that DeWette and Hervey describe them as hopelessly irreconcilable with historic fact. In a word, we may examine the Apocrypha, associated with the Old Testament (we do not now refer to the corresponding claimants for a place in the New), as interesting exhibitions of the mental and moral development of a people grounded in the inspired Word, but influenced by outside thought and life, these developments being by fallible men, working as did Augustine, Tertullian, Josephus, and in later times, Bunyan, Baxter and Martin Farquhar Tupper.

As to the estimate formed of the Apocrypha by the Churches, it is curious and interesting that the Greek Church—notwithstanding corruptions that are deplorable—from the time of Origen down, held to the Old Testament canon, and sometimes forbade the reading of the Apocrypha. So the Greek Church declared against the Apocrypha at the

time of the Reformation, taking Protestant ground, although the need of some defence for certain views and usages akin to those of Rome has of late modified her attitude. Churches—when off the lines of loyalty to Christ—like politicians, welcome aid from any quarter, and shut their eyes to the moral disqualifications of their supporters.

The Church of Rome claims to have the unanimous approval of "the fathers" for her doctrines, a unanimity on most subjects—like the philosopher's stone—yet Jerome, Hilary, Rufinus, Cyril, and Gregory of Nazianzen took ground against the Apocrypha, and not only so, but great men from Gregory the Great in the sixth century, Venerable Bede in the seventh, and others down to Cardinal Ximenes and Caietan in the sixteenth century, held with Jerome and shut out the Apocrypha from the canonical literature.

For the first time in the history of Christendom the Council of Trent, after much discussion, received our canonical books and the Apocrypha "with an equal feeling of devotion and reverence." History repeats itself. When the Donatists quoted II. Maccabees (xiv., 17), Augustine replied by denying its authority; but he is alleged, in three African synods, to have sanctioned the ecclesiastical use of the Apocrypha. With a like uncertain position, when the Church of Rome found Luther and his followers pronounced against the Apocrypha, and at the same time that certain parts thereof supported its policy, it went against its most influential "fathers," and put the book alongside the inspired oracle. They are made to be, like the writings of David and Isaiah, "sacred and canonical." All sorts of casuistry, special pleadings and nominal distinctions (such as between canonical and deutero-canonical) have been resorted to, and no greater mass of confused and confusing self-contradictions can be found anywhere than in the oracular utterances of so-called Roman authorities on this matter.

We shall see, later, that there was reason, avowed reason, for this human addition to the divine "law and testimony."

Now as to the Protestant Churches—in Luther's Bible the "Apocrypha" had a place as appendix, under this name with the explanation "books that are not held as equal to the Holy Scriptures, and yet are good and useful to read." While Luther's occasional lack of clear discrimination appeared here, and his course had great influence in the Lutheran Church, the Form of Concord, fifty years after the Augsburg Confession, set up the Scriptures as the only rule of faith.

The Reformed Churches took more decided ground. Westcott compliments the Calvinists for setting up the Old and New Testaments as "the outward test and spring of all truth." The French Bible (1535), while giving the Apocrypha, gives it no higher place than as found in the Vulgate. The Confession of Basle, the Helvetic Confessions, and the Belgian Confessions only recognize our Scriptures, and the French Reformed Church, in 1561, guarded itself against any appearance of evil in this matter.

The Synod of Dort (1620) characterized the Apocrypha in the severest language and raised the point, should it be translated and bound up with the Scriptures; which was decided, to put it colloquially, "It is not Scripture; but let it go with it," only marked off from it by a wide fence; or, they might have said, "drain," with different paging and type, and with notes pointing out the blunders. It ended by putting it at the end of the New Testament.

The Anglican Church—the Church of England that is—occupied unique ground on this matter since 1562, the "other books," *i. e.*, than the canonical, being read for "example of life and instruction of manners," though not for the support of doctrines. Against this plan strong protests were often made; yet the Apocrypha had place in authorized English versions until 1629. In 1643 Bishop Lightfoot

described the Apocrypha to the House of Commons as "wretched," a "patchery of human invention," and without formal legislation the authorized version continued to go forth without this appendix.

The controversy was revived in our century by the craving for Bibles with the Apocrypha, from communities on the continent needing aid from the British and Foreign Bible Society. Scotland revolted against this concession, and in 1819 Edinburgh took such ground that the society severed its connection with the Apocrypha in 1822, making some little compromises to the effect that any continental people who wanted it with their Bibles must pay for it themselves. But even this the Edinburgh people would not stand; and in 1827 it was decided that the society would not help anybody who put the Apocrypha with his Bible, and to prevent trickery it would only circulate "bound Bibles." The Scottish friends had such a firm hold of the Westminster decision of 1643, that "the books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon of Scripture; and, therefore, are of no authority in the Church of God, or to be otherwise approved of or made use of than other human writings." This part of the Confession will not, we hope, be changed by revision.

Any one anxious to study the details of this little international war, as it affected Germany, Switzerland and Great Britain, will find the details in Dr. Edwin C. Bissell's Introduction to the Apocrypha, in Lange's Commentary, of which I have made much use in this paper.

The Church of England, in her sixth article, states that the Scriptures only are to be appealed to for doctrine, but gives a list of the Apocryphal books—as of the Old Testament with this prefatory note—I quote from the English Prayer Book—"and the other books (as Hierome saith) the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth not apply them to establish any doc-

trine." Accordingly the books are set down in her Calendar for "Sundays and other Holydays" throughout the year, and the same in her Calendar with the table of Lessons, in which Baruch, Tobit, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Judith, Bel and the Dragon stand along with Isaiah, Paul, Matthew and John.

I may add that the Book of Tobit is used twice in the Communion service in the same way as Scripture, and that in the Book of Homilies, Tobit and Wisdom are quoted as Scripture, and Baruch is called a prophet. (The American Prayer Book.)

To any policy of this kind there appear to be the following objections:

(1) The authority of the inspired Word is lowered by its being put on the same plane with the confessedly uninspired.

(2) The Apocrypha countenances, and is used to sustain, usages and views contradictory to inspired Scripture. For example, Tobit xii., 12, 15, sanctions the doctrine of the intercession of angels: there is but one mediator. Raphael is not a second. II. Macc., xv., 14, and Baruch iii., 4, put the intercession of saints in the same category, against Christ's sole priesthood.

The inherent merit of good works is taught in Tobit iv., 7-11, and Ecclesiasticus iii., 30, "alms make atonement for sin." Purgatory and the propriety of prayers for the dead are rested on II. Macc., xii., 42 and onward.

(3) And finally, there appears to be a solemn threat in the closing chapter of the inspired Apocalypse against adding to the Scriptures—whether it be that one book or the whole volume, and it is the Church's duty to avoid even "the appearance of evil," and especially when, as expressed by Tanner, the Council of Trent treated the Apocrypha as canonical because "the Church found its own spirit in these books." The Bible makes the Church, and not the Church the Bible.