

**THE MODERN READER'S  
BIBLE. WISDOM SERIES.  
ECCLESIASTICUS**

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The Modern Reader's Bible. Wisdom Series. Ecclesiasticus by Richard G. Moulton

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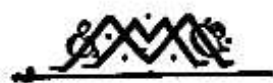
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**The Modern Reader's Bible**

Wisdom Series

*Ecclesiasticus*



*THE MODERN READER'S BIBLE*

A SERIES OF WORKS FROM THE SACRED SCRIPTURES PRESENTED  
IN MODERN LITERARY FORM

*Bible: Apocrypha — Ecclesiasticus.*  
*Eng., N. Y. (1896).*  
ECCLESIASTICUS

*EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES.*

BY

*Green*  
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## INTRODUCTION

THE series of books popularly known as the Apocrypha have been by an eminent scholar aptly styled *Zwischenschriften* or Intermediate Writings. To none of them does the term Intermediate apply with so much fulness as to that which is the subject of the present volume. Like the rest of the Apocrypha, *Ecclesiasticus* stands between the Old and New Testaments. Like the whole of the Books of Wisdom, it is intermediate between sacred and secular literature. In common with two other of these wisdom books it mediates between purely Jewish thought and the spirit of the external world by which this was gradually leavened; and in the case of *Ecclesiasticus* what there is of external influence is, on the explicit authority of the Preface, to be put down to that Alexandrian literary circle which was the great link between Oriental and Western, between Ancient and Modern. In a yet more important sense the word has application: so far as Biblical Philosophy can be presented as a thing of development, *Ecclesiasticus* holds in that development a middle place. The Book of Proverbs is a series of isolated obser-

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vations of life, universal wisdom being not analysed but adored. On the contrary *Ecclesiastes* and *Wisdom*, from however varied standpoints, agree in turning reflection on to the universe as a whole. Unlike these, the Book of *Ecclesiasticus* makes no attempt to investigate universal problems; its matter, apart from the hymns to Wisdom, is, like that of *Proverbs*, addressed to practical life; its Greek title makes it a Manual of Virtue or *Panaretos*, and a modern historian has described it as the sanctification of common sense. But, unlike *Proverbs*, its observations are not isolated, but digested into wider though still fragmentary surveys. The inquisitive spirit no longer satisfies; systematisation has not yet begun; between comes the arrangement of material under headings—like the ‘topics’ of the Aristotelian system—which is distinctly a middle stage in philosophic advance.

Here however a misunderstanding is to be avoided. To discuss the relation of this book to others as regards the development of the thought reflected in them is by no means the same thing as settling the chronological order in which the books were composed. The personal references in *Ecclesiasticus* are so distinct as to enable scholars, with practical unanimity, to fix the date of its composition as about 200 B.C. The decision of a date for *Ecclesiastes* is a *locus classicus* for disagreeing doctors; opinion on this topic has ranged over a thousand years, from the age of Solomon to the age of Herod the Great. But if the

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earliest date possible be taken for *Ecclesiastes*, this will not prevent its representing a later stage of philosophic thought than the other. The earlier stages of literary thought and form do not disappear when later stages take their rise; the two go on together side by side, each calling forth fresh representatives, just as the invaders of a country and the original inhabitants may settle down in it together. If *Ecclesiastes* be early and *Ecclesiasticus* late, this merely implies that the son of Sirach did not adopt the philosophic position of his predecessor, but remained in touch with the still earlier thought from which the Preacher had made his divergence.

The enlarged thought needs new forms for its expression; poetic forms had sufficed for *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiasticus* supplements these with a literature of prose. I desire to be the more explicit in my explanation at this point, because I have departed very widely from previous editions in the form which the book presents to the eye. Hebrew verse depends, not upon mechanical matters such as rhymes or the numbering of syllables, but upon the parallelism of clauses. But this parallelism of clauses is, in universal literature, a feature of rhetoric. If then a language bases its verse system upon something which also belongs to prose, it is inevitable that in that language we should find an overlapping of verse and prose. The extreme of poetry and the extreme of prose will be as far apart in Hebrew as in other languages. But there