
The Wisdom Literature of the Bible.

Alice Elzinga

Professor Bastiaan Kruithof of Hope College wrote recently in "The Banner," "Literature is here to stay. Voices speak to us from stones, clay tablets, papyrus rolls, and endless miles of paper roaring from the presses. Not everything that is written is important, but much of it is. Books of lasting significance are our heritage."

We do well to ponder what Milton wrote; "A good book is the precious lifeblood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life."

In this article I wish to draw your attention to The Wisdom Literature of the Bible, and in particular to that book which is called, Proverbs.

The term "Wisdom Literature" is applied to a class of Israelitish writings, of which the most notable are; in the Old Testament the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes; in the New Testament the book of James, and in the Apocrypha the books of Ecclesiasticus and of Wisdom. Some of the Psalms, also, belong to the literature of this class, and some of its characteristics appear in the Song of Solomon.

The reader who is entirely dependent on the English Versions only is at a disadvantage compared with the one who can read the Hebrew of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. The disadvantage is greater in the case of the Wisdom writings than in most other cases. According to scholars, this is particularly true for the following three points; First, our translations are in part revisions from earlier

translations, which were to some extent dependent on Latin versions, and the Latin has no article; so that the distinction of definite and indefinite has become greatly confused in the translations. This is important in itself, and particular important as obliterating a mark of poetic diction. Second, the tenses of the Hebrew verb distinguish between an action thought of as complete, and one thought of as incomplete; and this distinction, neglected even in the grammars till within a few years, is not consistently maintained in our English versions. Third, the Wisdom Literature has its vocabulary of technical words; wisdom, knowledge, correction, understanding, discretion, scorners, froward, and the like. Most of these words are significant by their derivation, and they are sharply distinct in their use; while our English versions perpetually interchange them in translating, and are not careful to render by words that are equivalent in derivation and use.

In spite of these infelicities, however, the accessible English versions give a good enough idea of the Wisdom Literature to make the study of it worthwhile. Not knowing the Hebrew and Greek languages I am mainly dependent on the Dutch and English Versions.

Introduction.

The finest anthology of proverbial lore is found in the Bible under the title; The Book of Proverbs. This is a collection of the sayings of the wise men of Israel. The material covers a wide range of subjects that have to do with life, character, and conduct. All types of the literary proverbs are found here, from the couplet to the continuous discourse. Some of these truths are expressed in common, everyday language and others are 'embellished' with beautiful figures of speech. All of them follow the parallelism of Hebrew poetry.

The typical proverb, *māshāl*, is a poetic couplet, occasionally a triplet. The second line is complimentary of the first, sometimes by

likeness of grammatical structure, sometimes in other ways. The following consecutive proverbs illustrate several of these varieties of structure.

“The good sense of those who have it is a well of life,
While instruction by fools is folly.

“ A wise man’s heart gives his mouth good sense,
And gives added attainments upon his lips.

“Pleasant words are an honeycomb,
Sweet to the soul, and pleasant to the bone.

“There is a level way before a man,
And ways of death are the consequence of it.”

Proverbs 16; 22-25.

(translated from the Hebrew by Prof. W. Beecher, D. D., Auburn
Theological Seminary, New York.)

The proverb has its origin in the life of the common people. The word *Māshāl* from which the word Proverbs is derived denotes a simple, self-evident truth, expressed in a short, pointed sentence, designed to “arrest attention, awaken responsive thought, and remain fixed in memory.”

This type of expression was apparently early in use among ancient people. In Scripture we find in 1 Samuel 10:12, “Is Saul also among the prophets?” The incident out of which this expression grew is familiar to Bible Literature students---Saul, who was looking for his father’s asses, is in a company of prophets! There was a rather sudden change in Saul’s life. The farmers’ son became a member of a teaching-group. These early proverbs were perhaps not so much used as teaching devices or to convey or impress truth as they were to

express or connote one's feelings, such as ridicule, sarcasm, or scorn. In fact, one may infer that such was the motive behind the proverb regarding Saul.

The literary proverb, however, is something different from the popular proverb just referred to. Gradually, no doubt, the value of the Māshāl as a tool of instruction became recognized and in the time of Solomon with its expanding life and contacts with the outside world it was widely used as a type of didactic discourse.

The King himself was an able writer, a man of keen discernment, and a judicial mind. Much of his wit and sayings, his observations and judgements were cast into terse, pointed sentences which could be easily memorized and readily recalled by the people of his time in which the tools and materials of learning were rather rare. He himself is credited with having written three thousand or more proverbs. It was in this day of virile thought life that the old form of the Māshāl was chosen, consciously or unconsciously, as the medium through which the learning of that time could be brought to the common people. The most familiar and the best-known type of wisdom expressed in proverbs is found in the Book of Proverbs.

The earlier proverbs consisted of a single sentence, but with the development of literary art rose a new form of the Māshāl. Writers borrowed, and made use of the poetic couplet in which statements antithetically, synonymously, or synthetically are set against each other or in which the same thought is repeated in a different way. This mode of expression was cultivated and developed until it became a highly artistic form of literary composition.

The Hebrew term for "proverb" is māshāl, which, as Arabic seems to show, denotes properly a representation, i. e. a statement not relating solely to a single fact, but standing for or representing other similar facts. The statement constituting the māshāl may be one deduced

from a particular instance, but capable of application to other instances of similar kind, or it may be a generalisation from experience, such as in the nature of the case admits of constantly fresh application. The *māshāl* is by usage limited almost entirely to observations relative to human life and character, and is expressed commonly in a short, pointed form.

In brief, the Hebrew word for "proverb", *māshāl*, has a much more definite significance than the Latin proverbium. Its root meaning is that of comparison, the putting this and that together, noting likeness in things unlike.

The Five and Eight Distinct Parts;

Professor Stanford Calvin Yoder, in his book; *The poetry of the Bible*, discusses the Book of Proverbs as having five distinct divisions. They are;

1. A Master addressing His Pupils. Chapters 1--9
2. The Proverbs of Solomon set forth in distinct, Independent couplets. Chapters 10; 1-- 22; 16.
3. The Words of the Wise. Chapters 22; 17 -- 24:34.
4. The Proverbs of Solomon which the Men of Hezekiah, King of Judah, copied out. Chapters 25--29.
5. Appendices. Chapters 30, 31.
 - A. The Words of Agur, Chapter 30.
 - B. The Words of King Lemuel, the Prophecy his mother taught Him. Chapter 31: 1-9
 - C. A tribute to a Virtuous woman, Chapter 31: 10-31

Professor Julius A. Bewer of the Columbia University, and Professor Samuel R. Driver, professor of Hebrew at Oxford, prefer the Eight Divisions of the Book of Proverbs. They are;

1. The "Praise of Wisdom", the writer, speaking like a father

(repeatedly; "my son") to an imagined pupil or disciple, warns him against dangers and temptations to which he is most likely to be exposed, invites him affectionately to listen to his precepts and commends to him the claims of Wisdom to be his guide and friend. Chapters 1--9.

2. The Proverbs of Solomon. Chapters 10--22: 16.
3. Introduction to the Words of the Wise, and admonitions to follow the words of the wise. Chapters 22: 17--24: 22.
4. "These are also sayings of the wise." An appendix to No. 3. Chapter 24: 23--34.
5. "These also are proverbs of Solomon." An appendix to No. 2. Chapters 25--29.
6. "The Words of Agur, the son of Jakel, the oracle." Chapter 30.
7. "The words of Lemuel, a king; the oracle which his mother taught him." Chapter 31: 1--9.
8. The description of a virtuous woman, without any title given. Chapter 31: 10--31.

From these two sets of divisions, one immediately learns that the authorship of the Book of Proverbs cannot be ascribed to one writer. Therefor we need to take a closer look at the age and authorship of this Book of Proverbs.

Age and Authorship of the Book.

From the very different character of the various collections of which the Book is composed, it is apparent that the Book must have been formed gradually. According to the common opinion, the oldest collection is chapter 10 through chapter 22;16. At what date this collection was formed, cannot be determined with precision; but from the

general picture of society which the proverbs seem to reflect, and especially from the manner in which the king is uniformly alluded to, it is generally referred to the golden days of the monarchy.

It is, not, however, certain that this opinion is correct.

Consulting Professor Davidson (in the *Encycl. Brit.*) strong reasons tending to show that the oldest proverbs are those preserved in chapters 25--29, especially chapters 25--27. Professor Davidson remarks that the highly finished, regular form of proverbs in Chapters 10--22 is not such as to suggest a great antiquity, but rather an advanced stage of literary culture, and long use of the arts of the proverbialist; the proverbs in chapters 25--27, on the other hand, while less regular in form, are more nearly what we should imagine the early popular proverb to be, as they are also in many instances more epigrammatic and forcible than those in chapters 10 through 22, and include those which have obtained currency among ourselves. Such as: chapter 25: 20, 22, 25, 26, 28,

“He who sings songs to a heavy heart
is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day,
and like vinegar on a wound. (20)

“For you will heap coals of fire on his head,
and the Lord will reward you. (22)

“Like cold water to a thirsty soul,
so is good news from a far country. (25)

“like a muddied spring or a polluted fountain
is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked. (26)

“A man without self-control is like a city broken into
and left without a wall.” (28)

And from chapter 27, the proverbs, 17, 19, and 22.

“Iron sharpens iron,
and one man sharpens another (17)

“As in water face answers to face,
so the mind of man reflects the man. (19)

“Crush the fool in a mortar with a pestle
along with crushed grain,
yet his folly will not depart from him.” (22)
(from, Revised Standard Version)

“These also are proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Juda copied,” (25: 1,) suggest that when chapters 25--29 was introduced in the book, it was preceded by another Solomonic collection, but not necessarily that such a collection existed when chapters 25--29 was first compiled by the “men of Hezekiah.”

Individual proverbs in chapters 10 through 22: 16 may be old, though the collection itself may be late, though not later than about 600 B. C. According to “notes upon the Date and Religious Value of the Proverbs” in the Jewish Quarterly, July 1890, the Book as a whole being completed in its present form about 350-300 B. C.

Who were the Authors, and what share in the Book may reasonably be assigned to Solomon?

Chapters 22: 17 through chapter 24, and chapters 30 and 31 are not, by their titles and otherwise, brought into any connection with Solomon. Chapter 30, “The words of Agur son of Jakeh of Massa. The man says to Ithiel, to Ithiel and Ucal;----” and chapter 31; 1-9, “The words of Lemuel, king of Massa, which his mother taught him;--” seem clear enough to authorship. The question therefor need only be considered with reference to chapters 1--9; 10--22:16; and chapters

25--29. The following is a long quotation from Professor S. R. Driver;

“Chapter 1: 1 is not the title to the book, but consists of the opening words of a sentence declaring the value of the “Proverbs of Solomon” and evidently pointed forwards to the collection which begins in chapter ten. Because as “proverbs” properly so called, are to be found only here and there in chapters 1--9. Even though The Book of Proverbs as we have it today begins with; “The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel,” it is not therefor stated to be Solomons from beginning to end; and, in fact, both its style and contents point to a date considerably later, as that at which it was composed, that is the chapters 1:2 through chapter9. Chapter 1:2 through verse 6 states the aim of the compilation of the book.

But even chapters 10 through chapter 22:16 leaves doubt, at least in it's entirety, to be Solomon's work. Not only is the same proverb, or part of a proverb, often repeated, and the same predicate applied to many different subjects, but there are also many other cases in which the same thought recurs, expressed in different words; it is not probable, however, that one and the same author would have adopted methods such as these for the formation of new proverbs, or have propounded a number of independent variations of the same theme. It is far more probable that in such cases we have before us the work of different wise men casting fresh generalisations into an old mould, or recording in slightly different phraseology the same observations of life and manners which another had made before them. Secondly, it is difficult not to feel that many of the proverbs are unsuitable to Solomon's character and position. The proverbs concerning the king seem rather to express the sentiments of the people than the reflections of a king about either him self or other kings. The proverbs which speak in depreciation of wealth, or which praise monogamy, do not fall naturally from Solomon's lips; consider for instance 13:1, 15:16, 18:22, 19:13,14, 21:31, 22:14, in the

light of Solomon's character, as depicted in 1 Kings."

"The most probable view is that chapter 10 ff. consists of a collection of proverbs by different "wise men" living under the monarchy, including a nucleus, though we cannot determine its limits or ascribe particular proverbs to it, actually the work of the wise king. The proverbs in chapter 10 ff. exhibit great uniformity of type; perhaps this type was set by Solomon, and was afterwards adopted naturally by others."
(from; An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament, page 407.)

Consider the following proverbs in the light of Solomon's character.

"A wise son hears his father's instruction,
but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke. (13:1)

"In the house of the righteous there is much treasure,
but trouble befalls the income of the wicked. (15:6)

"Better is a little with the fear of the Lord
Than great treasure and trouble with it. (15:16)

"He who finds a wife finds a good thing,
and obtains favor from the Lord. (18:22)

"A foolish son is ruin to his father,
and a wife's quarreling is a continual dripping of rain.

"House and wealth are inherited from fathers
but a prudent wife is from the Lord. (19:13,14)

"The horse is made ready for the day of battle,
but the victory belongs to the Lord. (21:31)

“The mouth of a loose woman is a deep pit;
he with whom the Lord is angry will fall into it.” (22:14)

(Revised Standard Version)

Contents and character of the Book of Proverbs.

The aim of the book is stated in chapter 1: 2-6. It offers increase of learning to the wise, to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion. It is a depository, as it were, of proverbial wisdom and a business manual for the young men. Much of it is addressed to them but its precepts are helpful to all classes of all time. The principles upheld are those that have their origin in the source from which the Ten Commandments spring---the mind of God.

“That men may know wisdom and instruction,
understanding words of insight,

“receive instruction in wise dealing,
righteousness, justice and equity;

“that prudence may be given to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the youth,

“the wise man also may hear and increase in learning,
and the man of understanding acquire skill,

“to understand a proverb and a figure,
the words of the wise and their riddles.”

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (ch. 1;2-7.)

(Revised Standard Version)

The first division, chapters 1:7--through chapter 9, is a most magnificent section on wisdom. In its style this part may be distinguished from the rest of the book. It may be a section taken from a teacher's day as he instructs his pupil. It is hortatory. The instructor, drawing in his store of wisdom, which he says has its beginning in the fear of the Lord, propounds sound principles of life and conduct by means of Proverbs. The whole section shows what can be done in the way of using accumulated wisdom of that early time by casting it in the literary mold of the Māshāl. The high points of this section are reached in chapters 7 and 8. In the former the young man is warned against the wiles and the devices of the infamous woman who lurks at the corners of the street to intrigue and beguile the innocent to her nest of vice and shame, which, he says, lead to the "chamber of death."

The scene is graphically described and the story effectively told.

Chapter eight is the most superb chapter of this section. It is a personification of wisdom and represents her as standing;

"In the top of high places by the way,
In the places of the paths.
She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city,
at the coming in at the doors." (2,3)

The climax of the wisdom truth of the chapter is reached in verses 22 to 31, the supremely elegant and highly poetic passage in which her relationship with God is described.

"The Lord created me at the beginning of His works,
the first of His acts of old.

"Ages ago, I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.

"When there were no depths I was brought forth,

when there were no springs abounding with water.

“Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth;

“Before He had made the earth with its fields,
or the first of the dust of the world.

“When He established the heaven, I was there,
when He drew a circle on the face of the deep,

“When He made firm the skies above,
when He established the fountains of the deep,

“When He assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress His command,
when He marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside him, like a master workman,
and I was daily His delight,
rejoicing before Him always,
rejoicing in His inhabited world
and delighting in the sons of men.” (Revised Standard Version)

The section fittingly closes with an appeal for obedience, verses
32, 33;

“And now my sons, listen to me:
happy are those who keep my ways.

“Hear instruction and be wise,
and do not neglect it.”

and a promise. verses 34, -36:

“Happy is the man who listens to me,
watching daily at my gates,
waiting beside my doors.

“For he who finds me finds life
and obtains favor from the Lord;

“but he who misses me injures himself;
and who hate me love death.” (Revised Standard Version)

In this first section, the form is throughout poetical, and the parallelism of members is, as a rule, carefully observed. The style is flowing, forming in this respect as strong a contrast as possible to that of the “proverbs” which follow: instead of a series of thoughts, each forcibly expressed, but disconnected with one another, a thought is here expressed and developed at length and presented from different points of view. A general uniformity of tone pervades the whole discourse, and the same idea is often repeated with but slight variations of expression.

Take note again of the fine personification of Wisdom in chapters 8 and 9, in part quoted above. The unity of thought and efficiency operative in the world is here abstracted from God, the actual operator, and presented as a personal agent, the first-born child of the Creator, standing beside Him and giving to His creative design, afterwards, in history, inspiring kings and princes with their best thoughts, delighting in the sons of men, and promising abundant reward to those who will commit themselves to her guidance. We find a living beauty in this personification of Wisdom.

In chapter 8, the reader can come close to the depth of the meaning of the word, “wisdom”, and also receive a touch of the real activities

of "wisdom" personified. Yet "wisdom" is greatly-diversified. It does not mean merely that there was, and still is great wisdom, but that wisdom was diversified and varied, and still is; like changing, variegated colours. It is like a landscape, or a panoramic view passing before the mind and lingering there, with a great variety of phases and aspects, all tending to excite admiration and a desire to possess.

There was, and is wisdom ever varying, ever beautiful. There was wisdom manifested when the plan for creation was formed; wisdom in the selection of the Redeemer; wisdom in the incarnation; wisdom in the atonement; wisdom in the means of renewing the heart, and sanctifying the soul; wisdom continuing to work as a fountain of life giving water, sanctifying, guiding. The wisdom thus shown is like the ever-varying beauty of changing clouds, when the sun is reflected on them at evening. Each aspect is full of beauty and tend to fill the mind with elevated adoration of God, the Creator.

In the second section, chapters 10:1 to 22:16, we find an entirely different type of composition, the authorship of which is ascribed to Solomon. This division of the Book is composed of proverbs, strictly so called. The proverbs exhibit great regularity in form; each verse contains a complete proverb; and each proverb consists of two members only, which is called a distich. For example;

"As vinegar to the teeth and as smoke to the eyes
so is the sluggard to them that send him (10;26)
A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance
but a sorrow of heart the spirit is broken. (15;13)
It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop
than with a contentious woman in a wide house" (21;9)

(King James Version)

There is one exception to the couplet, distich, style in this section.

Chapter 19:7, has the following four line poem, a tetrastich form of poetry;

“All a poor man’s brothers hate him;
how much more do his friends go far from him!
He pursues them with words,
but does not have them.”

(Revised Standard Version)

This second collection, composed of couplets, has the characteristics of parallelism in which the thought of the first line is amplified by, or contrasted with, the thought of the second line.

(In my booklet; “A General Approach to Bible Literature,” on pages 48--50, I discussed rather at length, the various forms of parallelism, as a peculiarity of Hebrew poetry.)

In this section, the proverbs are arranged in no particular order, though sometimes two or more dealing with the same subject (as 16:10, 12-15, on kings; 18:6 f. on fools), or containing the same more or less characteristic word (as 10:6 f. the righteous, verse 14 f. destruction (ruin), and 12:5-7; 15:8; 15:33--16:7, 9, 11, Lord, (Hebrew-Jehovah-Jaweh) occur in juxtaposition.

The two members stand usually, and in chapters 10--15 almost exclusively, in antithetic parallelism, the second confirming or enforcing the first by declaring some contrasted truth which forms, as it were, its counterpart. Instances of synonymous and “synthetic parallelism,” also occur.

Antithetic parallelism. Here the thought of the first line is emphasized, or confirmed, by a contrasted thought expressed in the second;

“A wise son maketh a glad father,
But a foolish son is the heaviness (sorrow) of his mother.”

Proverbs 10:1.

Synthetic or constructive parallelism. Here the second line contains neither a repetition nor a contrast to the thought of the first, but in different ways supplements or completes it.

“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is,
than a fatted ox and hatred with it.” Proverbs 15:17

“Answer not a fool according to his folly,
lest you be like him yourself.” 26:4.

“Like a bird that strays from its nest,
is a man who strays from his home.” 27:8.

(Revised Standard Version)

Where the contents are so miscellaneous, as in this section, it is difficult to indicate their characteristics, except in very general terms. But of the present collection it may be said that, as compared with subsequent collections, the proverbs are usually brighter and more cheerful in tone; if good and bad, rich and poor meet together (as they must meet in every society), nevertheless the happier aspects of life are predominant; prosperity seems to prevail and virtue is uniformly rewarded.

The collection includes some fine and elevated religious proverbs; but the generalizations are mostly drawn from secular life, and describe the fortune which may be expected to attend particular lines of conduct or types of character. The religious proverbs mainly emphasize Jehovah's sovereignty, or all-pervading omniscience;

“The eyes of Jehovah are in every place
Keeping watch upon the evil and the good.

“Better is little, with fear of Jehovah,
than great treasures and trouble therewith” 15; 3, 16.

“The plans of the heart belong to man;
But the answer of the tongue is from Jehovah.

“All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes;
But Jehovah weigheth the spirits.

“Commit thy works unto Jehovah,
And thy little purposes shall be established.” 16:1-3

(Revised Version)

Verses 17 to 21 of chapter 22 constitute a sort of introduction to the third section which contains those proverbs which are described as “Words of Wisdom” or, “Words of the Wise.”

“I have made known to thee this day, even to thee.
Have not I written to thee excellent things in
counsel and knowledge,
That I might make thee know the certainty of the
words of truth;
That thou mightest answer the words of truth to
them that send unto thee.” 22:19-21.

(King James Version)

The third division of the Book is less a collection of individual proverbs (as No. 2) than a body of maxims, in which proverbs are interwoven, addressed with a practical aim to an individual (to whom the expression My son is applied, 23:15, 19, 26; 24:13, 21), and worked up usually into a more or less consecutive argument. In the first section, “My son” is frequently used; in No. 2, only once, 19:17.

From the terms of 22:19, it would almost seem to have been addressed originally to a particular individual. Notice especially the emphatic

thou and thy in the King James Version and also in the Revised Version of 23:19,

“Hear thou, my son, and be wise,
And guide thy heart in the way.”

The Revised Standard Version weakens the tone of this hortatory couplet;

“Hear, my son, and be wise,
and direct your mind in the way.”

The following section, 24: 23-34, opens with the single line;

“These also are saying of the wise.” An appendix to No. 3, displaying similar variety of form:

1. a hexastich, 23b-25, (six lines)

“To have respect of persons in judgement is not good.
He that saith unto the wicked,
Thou art righteous,
Peoples shall curse him, nations shall abhor him;
But to them that rebuke him shall be delight,
And a good blessing shall come upon them.

2. a distich, 26, (two lines)

“He kisseth the lips
Who giveth a right answer.”

3. a tristich, 27, (three lines)

“Prepare thy work without
And make it ready for thee in the field;
And afterward build thy house.”

4. a tetrastich, 28, f (four lines)

“Be not a witness against thy neighbor without cause;
And deceive not with thy lips
Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me;
I will render to the man according to his work.”

5. a décastich, 30-34, (ten lines)

“I went by the field of the sluggard,
And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns,
The face thereof was covered with nettles,
And the stone wall thereof was broken down.
Then I beheld, and considered well;
I saw and received instruction:
Yet a little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to sleep;
So shall thy poverty come as a robber,
And thy want as an armed man.”

(Revised Version)

In the decastich, the famous description of the slothful man, (who has more than once been satirized in No. 2) is made the subject of a short apologue, drawn professedly from the writer's experience.

(chapter 7; 6--23)

“These also are Proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Juda copied out”, is the title of chapter 25--29.

According to its title it is a compilation. In structure the proverbs of this collection are predominantly of the couplet form, although there are several longer ones, and at the end of chapter 27, verses 23-27, is found the exquisite little poem of the field and flock which is the delight of readers everywhere.

“Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks,
And look well to thy herds:
For riches are not forever;
And doth the crown endure unto all generations?
The hay is carried, and the tender grass showeth itself,
And the herbs of the mountains are gathered in.
The lambs are for the clothing,

And the goats are the price of the field,
And there will be goats' milk
Enough for thy food,
For the food of thy household,
And maintainance for thy maiden."

(Revised Version)

In No 2, (chapters 10--22:16), the predominant type of proverb is the antithetic, this is common here only in chapters 28-29, while in chapters 25-27 the comparative type prevails. In this type of proverb, (which occurs but twice in No.2) an object is illustrated by some figure derived from nature or human life,, the comparison being sometimes expressed distinctly, sometimes left to the reader to be inferred from the mere juxtaposition of two ideas.

1. comparison expressed distinctly;

"As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest;
So honour is not seemly for a fool." 26:1.

2. comparison from mere juxtaposition of two ideas;

"Cold water to a fainting soul,
And good news from a far country." 25:25.

There is another peculiarity which we need to notice in chapters 25--27. The proverbs appear often to be grouped by catchwords, such as the particles, as--so. And sometimes so only.

1. as--so; "As an ear-ring of gold and an ornament of fine gold
So is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear.

"As the cold of snow in the time of harvest,
So is the faithful messenger to them that send him; --"
etc. 25:12 ff.

"As the door turneth upon its hinges
So doth a sluggard upon his bed." 26:14

“As in water face answereth to face,
So the heart of man to man.” 27:19.

2. so, only; “The north wind bringeth forth rain;
So doth a backbiting tongue on an angry countenance.”
25:23

“The legs of the lame hang loose,
So is a parable in the mouth of fools.” 26:27.

“Iron sharpeneth iron;
So a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.”
27:17.

(Revised Version).

The proverbs in this collection differ often in character from those in No. 2, though not so widely as is the case in Nos. 3 and 4. The proverbs in chapter 28-29 bear the greatest general resemblance to those in No. 2; but, on the whole, the proverbs in chapters 25-29 appear to spring out of a changed state of society. For one thing, the king is not presented in the same attractive or amiable light.

Chapter 30 opens with the announcement; “The word of Agur the son of Jakeh; the oracle.” Yoder refers to chapters 30 and 31 as “appendices.” The appendices consist of two poems, unless chapter 31 should be divided into two distinct parts, as professors Bewer and Driver seem to prefer.

The first poem consists of the words of Agur, the son of Jakeh. Who this person was is not known. In the opening of his discourse, he disclaims any credit for having wisdom, understanding, or knowledge, but he affirms a deep and profound respect for the Word of God.

“Surely I am more brutish
than any man,

And have not the understanding of a man.

I neither learned wisdom,
Nor have I knowledge of the holy.

Who hath ascended up into heaven,
or descended?

Who hath gathered the wind in his fists?

Who hath bound the waters in a garment?

Who hath established all the ends of the earth?

What is his name and what is his son's name?
if thou canst tell?

Every word of God is pure;

He is a shield unto them

That put their trust in Him.

Add thou not unto His words,

Lest He reprove thee,

And thou be found a liar." ch. 30; 2-6

(King James Version.)

The subjects discussed are commonplace but essential, and his conclusions are practical. He displays a fondness for the numerical proverb, which reminds one somewhat of the scribal sayings of a later period. This style, while somewhat artificial, is attractive and sets forth truth in a way that lends itself to memorization and recall.

We need to notice the difference between the Revised Version and the Revised Standard version of 30:1. The Revised Version reads; "The words of Agur, the son of Jakeh, the oracle." Then there is a footnote which says; "or, Jakeh of Massa, see Genesis 25:14." The Revised Standard Version reads; "The words of Agur son of Jakeh of Massa." Of Massa, or the Massaite, in which case Agur would be described as belonging to

the Ismaelite tribe of Massa, whose home was probably in the north of the Arabian Peninsula, south-east of Palestine. If the reading, "of Massa" is correct, chapter 30 contains specimens of foreign wisdom, which may account for its somewhat peculiar character and vocabulary.

"Two things have I required of thee;
Deny me them not before I die;

Remove far from me vanity and lies:
Give me neither poverty nor riches:
Feed me with food convenient for me:

Lest I be full, and deny thee,
And say: Who is the Lord?
or, lest I be poor,
and steal,
And take the name of my God in vain.

ch. 30; 7--9.

(King James Version)

Chapter 31:1-9 "The words of Lemuel, a king; the oracle which his mother taught him." A mother's plea to her son for a virtuous and worthy life, devoted to noble purposes and lived in accord with right principles.

In form this section is the simple parallistic structure of Hebrew poetry. It is not made up of independent couplets but consists entirely of a continuous discourse.

Israel did not have a king by the name of Lemuel. We should expect an addition of the country of "King Lemuel", or his people of which he was king. The Revised Standard Version and a footnote in the Revised Version supply the answer. As in chapter 30:1, here too we read in the Revised Standard Version, "The words of Lemuel, king of Massa."

This may explain some of the unusual expressions in this section. A "foreign" element seems to have entered in. This, of course, has not reduced its literary value, nor its message of exhortation; warning the king against sensuality and immoderate indulgence in wine, and defend the cause of the poor.

The remaining verses of chapter 31 are set up in acrostic form to correspond with the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The poem has a single theme-- The Praise of a Virtuous Woman. It has no title or heading unless it is part of the oracle addressed to King Lemuel in the opening of the chapter.

This final tribute to womanhood is a fitting close to this Book of Wisdom and indicates the exalted opinion of the writer for woman in a day when her position in general was not too highly esteemed.

"She looketh well to the ways of her household,
And eateth not the bread of idleness.

"Her children rise up and call her blessed;
Her husband also, and praiseth her, saying:

"Many daughters have done worthily,
But thou excelleth them all.

"Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain;
But a woman that feareth Jehovah, she shall be praised.

"Give her of the fruit of her hands;
And let her works praise her in the gates." 31:27--31.

(Revised Version)

The Book of Proverbs, unique in its contents and structure, is deserving of the place it occupies among the writings of the greatest sages

and other writers. Coleridge said; "The Book of Proverbs is the best statesman's manual ever written."

Summary;

The literary style of the Book of Proverbs has some peculiarities of its own. Not only, especially in the principal collection of chapters 10--22:16, (section No.2) are the individual Proverbs terse in statement and regular in form, but the vocabulary of the Book includes many words and expressions which are met with seldom in other parts of the Old Testament, here they recur with considerable frequency.

1. a variety of subjects described as a fountain or tree of life;

"the mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life," 10:11.

"the teaching of the wise is a fountain of life," 13:14.

"the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life," 14:27.

"the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life," 11:30.

"Hope deferred makes the heart sick,
but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life." 13:12.

etcetera.

2. destruction (Revised Standard Versions--ruin);

"the mouth of the foolish is a present destruction." 10:14.

"The destruction of the poor is their poverty." 10:15

"The way of Jehovah is a stronghold to the upright;
but it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity." 10:29.

"A fool's mouth is his destruction," 18:7.

"It is a joy to the righteous to do justice;
but it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity." 21:15.

etcetera.

3. a son that causeth shame; (a son who brings shame)

"he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame." 10:5.

"A servant that dealth wisely shall have rule

over a son that causeth shame." 17:2.

"He that doeth violence to his father

and chaseth away his mother,

is a son that causeth shame and bringeth reproach." 19:26

etcetera.

4. hand to hand, a peculiar expression in the Hebrew. Translators seemed to have had difficulties with this expression.

Revised Standard version: "Be assured, an evil man will not go unpunished." 11:21.

Revised Version, "Though hand join in hand, the evil man shall not be unpunished."

The New Bible Commentary, says: "though hand join in (to) hand" represents the Hebrew hand to hand, an obscure expression which is probably a strong asseveration." (affirmation)

The same expression appears in 16:5, translated in the same manner as above.

5. from the fruit of a man's mouth, (Revised Standard Version, from the fruit of his words a man---)

"A man shall be satisfied with good by (from) the fruit of his mouth,"

12:14

"A man shall eat good from the fruit of his mouth,"

13:2

"From the fruit of his mouth a man is satisfied."

18:20.

etcetera.

6. wise guidance. (literally; steersmanship, from sea faring life.)

"Where no wise guidance is, the people falleth," 11:14

"by wise guidance make thou war."

20:18

etcetera.

There are many more expressions, such as; breathes forth lies; breathes forth faithfulness; stirreth up strife; talebearer, and so on, which are not repeatedly used throughout the Old Testament, but frequent-

ly used in the Book of Proverbs.

Correction, instruction, understanding, are words on almost every page of the Book. Correction and instruction, no less than thirty times. The idea of life being a discipline is fundamental throughout the Book.

Bibliography, The Book of Proverbs.

1. Holy Bible: English Versions;
 - a, King James Version, 1611
 - b, Revised Version, 1901
 - c, New Chain Reference Bible, 1934
 - d, Revised Standard Version, 1952
2. The Dutch Bible. (De Hollandsche Bijbel)
 - a, De Staten Generaal Der Vereenigde Nederlanden Bijbel, 1637
 - b, De Bijbel, Nieuwe Vertaling, 1952
3. Calvin's Commentary on the Book of Proverbs.
4. The Wisdom Literature,
W. J. Beecher, D. D.
Auburn Theological Seminary, New York, 1896
5. The Oratory and Poetry of the Bible,
Ferdinand S. Schenck, D. D. LL. D.
Theological Seminary, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1915
6. The New Bible Commentary,
Davidson, Stibbs and Kevan,
Wm. Eerdman's Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1956
7. Poetry of the Old Testament,
Stanford Calvin Yoder, S. T. D., D. D.
Herald Press, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, 1952
8. The Literature of the Old Testament,
Julius A. Brewer. LL. D.
Columbia University Press, New York, 1933
9. An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament,
Samuel R. Driver, LL. D.,
Meridian Library, New York, 1957

The Wisdom Literature of the Bible.

10. Life and Language in the Old Testament,
Mary Ellen Chase, LL. D.,
W. W. Norton and Company, Inc. New York, 1955
11. Barnes Notes on the Old Testament, Book 11,
T. C. Cook, Editor,
Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1964
12. Christelijke Encyclopaedie (Dutch), Book 5,
Spreuken van Salomo,
J. H. Kok,
Kampen, Nederland, 1925

Alice Elzinga

Wisdom Literature, The Book of Proverbs.

Table of Contents;

1. Introduction to Wisdom Literature,
2. Explanation of the Hebrew term, "māshāl."
3. The Five and Eight Distinct Parts,
4. Age and Authorship of the Book of Proverbs,
5. Contents and Character of the Book of Proverbs,
6. Summary.
7. Bibliography