

THE SOCIOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PSALMS, PROVERBS,
AND ECCLESIASTES

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
for the title of Rabbi and
for the Degree of Masters of Hebrew Letters

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INTRODUCTION

One of the principal beneficiaries of lay interest in the past two decades among Jews has been the organization of Jewish communal life; that is Jewish secular activities.

Many laymen have come to believe that their energies can be given greater expression in the eleemosynary field rather than in the synagogue.

They claim that Jewish institutional life offers more opportunities for a greater number of people to be recognized, for more individuals to give public service than in the synagogue, where the leadership of the laymen, except in economic matters, is secondary to that of its rabbi.

They are also of the opinion, probably due to the influence of Marxism on popular thinking, that religion in action no longer promotes social justice and that religious institutions (Viz.--the synagogue and the church.) are only another instrument to protect the vested interests of capitalism and to retain the "status quo."

They state that the synagogue receives gifts of money and leadership from those who are inherently opposed to the economic rise of the masses, and, there-

fore, the synagogue is placed in a state of perpetual obligation to the large contributor.

Add to this fact of social philosophy the fact that the philanthropies are now the setting, as well as a means of social expression, for Jews of East European extraction who have become economically successful.

These late-comers to the American shore are now seeking to carve a niche in Jewish communal life which was heretofore, and still is in many instances, dominated by the families of the early German Jewish settlers in this country.

This conflict has the community as its battlefield (Viz.--the Board of Trustees of the local Jewish hospital, the Jewish communal school, the Young Men and Women's Hebrew Association, the Jewish Social Service Bureau, the Old Folks Home, and other similar institutions.); fortunately, however, the synagogue has been able to avoid such community collisions in personalities and the sore of social philosophies.

Its internal struggle has Zionism as its source and it is generally rabbinically inspired so that prudent rabbinic leadership can keep it from reaching fever heat.

As a consequence, those who are trying for community recognition on the basis of personal aggrandisement and

find that the synagogue is closed to their aspirations, and those who believe that synagogal leadership is composed of personalities who represent another economic stratum and because there are numerous illustrations in history of the state utilizing religion as a tool, they conclude that religion and capitalism are now synonymous.

It is the purpose of this study to prove that religion is basically not an instrument of the strong and powerful, even though historically it has been abused and at times counselled by individuals who possess these potentialities.

It is the objective of this monograph to illustrate that it is religion which recognizes leadership and directs the successful man to his duties and that it is the religious conscience in man which is eternally operative, so that his abusive potentialities are continually restrained, and rarely become realities for any length of time.

The title of this study is "THE SOCIOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PSALMS, PROVERBS, AND ECCLESIASTES."

Within the realm of these Biblical sources and related material in the Pentateuch, it is the writer's purpose to correct both the historical and contemporary false impressions which have mushroomed around formal

religion and to reveal that religion is not on the side of the strong and the privileged, but on the side of the poor and the oppressed.

We begin our study by noticing the singularly honorific sense of the various words for poor --

עָנִי, אֲבִיָּה, אֶבְיָה, אֶבְיָה, אֶבְיָה, אֶבְיָה -- in the literature which we are surveying. "Poor" is again and again synonymous with "good", "righteous", "virtuous", "Divinely favored", "God centered" and the like.

Typical is a verse like Ps. 9:19 *יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ* *אֶבְיָה*. That note of Divine favoritism for the poor and the needy characterizes this literature extensively.

Thus, in Ps. 69:34, the expression, "His Prisoners", *אֶבְיָה* stands parallel to the word for "needy" *אֲבִיָּה*. That is to say, the needy are, in some singular sense, His. Of similar force is the possessive suffix in Ps. 72:2b, in the expression *אֶבְיָה*, "Thy poor". In some special sense, the poor belong to God.

That word, "Thy poor" in Ps. 72:2b stands parallel, moreover, to "Thy people" in Ps. 72:2a. Who are God's people? The poor.

Again the poor are identified with the innocent, as in Ps. 10:8 *יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶבְיָה* where the *אֶבְיָה* of 10:8a is parallel to the *אֶבְיָה* (the wretched one or helpless one) of 10:8b and to

the עני of 10:9a and 9b. Almost tantamount to this is the contrasting of the poor and the wicked in Ps. 37:14 where the עני and the אנשי חיל are manifestly the same as the אנשי צד of v. 11 and all of them the opposite of their oppressors, the אנשי רשע of vv. 10, 12 and the אנשי חיל of v. 14. Likewise in Ps. 82:4 אנשי חיל

אנשי צד the אנשי צד , the victims of the אנשי רשע , stand in antithesis to the אנשי רשע . Similarly does Prov. 19:1 אנשי צד

contrast the virtuous poor with the individual who is "perverse of lips" and a "fool". Prov. 19:22b אנשי צד rates the poor person אנשי צד as the moral superior of the liar. In Prov. 29:13, אנשי צד the poor is contrasted with the oppressor, the אנשי רשע .

Essentially the same as the אנשי צד , the poor, are the אנשי צד the humble whom Ps. 22:27 אנשי צד regards as seekers after God. They came to denote the "godly poor", the "suffering righteous", the persons who, whether "bowed down" or "needy" were God's servants. Later in Judaism the terms עני and אנשי צד , came to be synonymous in meaning, and they became two of the more prominent designations of a party in ancient Israel.

Prov. 28:3 seems to refer to the poor disparagingly: *אֵל תִּשְׁכַּח עַם רָשָׁעִים / אֶת פִּי אֵל / אֵל תִּשְׁכַּח עַם רָשָׁעִים* But scholars are generally agreed

that the text here is corrupt for *רָשָׁע*, as the LXX has it, or for *עָשִׂי*. The verse should read not "A poor man that oppresseth the weak", but "A wicked man (or a rich man) that oppresseth the weak".

Of like tenor are the many utterances dilating up on the place which the poor hold in the affections of the Most High. The "poor" except in rare instances, are the exalted special care of the Lord. God remembers the poor (Ps. 9:19) *כִּי לֹא אֶפְשָׁה יְשׁוּעָה עֲבִילֵי יַקָּוֶה* and can be expected to remember them (Ps. 10:12) *קִוֵּי יְהוָה אֵל יִצְקֵם וְיִשְׁכַּח עֲוֹנֵיהֶם* as the supplication to that end implies. He pities the poor (Ps. 72:13) *יְהוָה אֵל צַדִּיק וְעֲבִילֵי וּפְשָׁעִים אֲבִילֵי יְהוָה* and harkens to them (Ps. 69:34) *כִּי שָׁמַע אֱלֹהֵי עֲבִילֵי יְהוָה*. He hears their call (Ps. 34:7) *כִּי עַתָּה קָרָא וַיַּשְׁמַע יְהוָה* and, as the invocation implies, He can be depended upon to hear their call (Ps. 40:18) *אֵל עֲבִילֵי אֲבִי יְהוָה עֲשֵׂה לִּי צְדָקָה וְשִׁפְטֵה אֱלֹהֵי אֵל* *תִּשְׁמָע*. He is confidently expected to heed the poor person's prayer (Ps. 102:11) *אֲפֹתִי צָרָה וְקָרָבִי כִּי נִשְׁאַתִּי וְתִשְׁמָעֵנִי*

and to turn to the poor (Ps. 25:16)
 and to incline His ear
 (Ps. 86:1) *אלהים יאזנה עניי ויענה להם*
 God favors the poor (Ps. 40:18, 68:11, 74:21). God
 grants them an inheritance (Ps. 37:10, 11, 14) God
 moreover, supplies the needs of the poor (Ps. 68:11)
 (Ps. 132:15). He sustains them in the law court, or, perhaps, on judge-
 ment day (Ps. 140:13) *יבצרני יי ויעזרני ביום הדין*
אלהים יאזנה עניי ויענה להם. In Ps. 12:6 *אין אדם יאמין*
 God is described as saying that he will place in safety the oppressed poor
 and the sighing needy. The psalmist is lauding God in
 Ps. 18:28 *אלהים יאזנה עניי ויענה להם* states that God will save
 the afflicted people. God, we are informed in Ps. 72:12,
 13 recognizes that the poor have no one to help them,
 so that the poor are given assurance by the Psalmist that
 their souls, that is their lives, will be saved. In Ps.
 35:10 *אלהים יאזנה עניי ויענה להם* the thought is expressed that God delivers
 the poor from those who are too strong for him and these
 that "spoil" or exploit them. God is supplicated in the
 assurance that His rescue will be forthcoming (Ps. 40:18,
 109:22). Ps. 70:6 relates that God is the helper and

deliverer of the poor and needy, and the afflicted re-
quest that God should come to their aid rapidly. God
saves the poor (Ps. 69:30) *אֱלֹהֵי עֲנִי וְאֶבְיָר יִשְׁעֶךָ*

אֱלֹהֵי עֲנִי וְאֶבְיָר יִשְׁעֶךָ. He snatches the poor from humiliation (Ps.

74:21) *אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעֶךָ (כִּי עֲנִי וְאֶבְיָר יִשְׁעֶךָ)* God rises

to the defense of the poor (Ps. 12:6) *מִשַׁבְּעֵי עֲנִיִּים*

מִשַׁבְּעֵי עֲנִיִּים. He raises them out of their affliction (Ps. 107:41) *מִשַׁבְּעֵי עֲנִיִּים*

מִשַׁבְּעֵי עֲנִיִּים and out of their abjectness

(Ps. 113:7) *מִשַׁבְּעֵי עֲנִיִּים*. This same thought is expressed in (Ps. 10:14, 18) *מִשַׁבְּעֵי עֲנִיִּים*

מִשַׁבְּעֵי עֲנִיִּים and Proverb 15:25 *מִשַׁבְּעֵי עֲנִיִּים*. However, this verse is understood only if we take into ac-

count the land background of the ancient Hebrews, namely the sanctity of the landmark and the border. Apparently, the widow and the orphan have become the prey of the land shark and the speculator so that the wise men make this reassuring statement.

Hardly different from the *עֲנִיִּים* are the *עֲנִיִּים*, the humble whom God supplies with food and drink (Ps. 22:27)

עֲנִיִּים and who are to inherit the land (Ps. 37:11) *עֲנִיִּים יִרְשׁוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ*

The Hebrew word for poor possesses a broader connotation than the English equivalent.¹ We can conclude from this honorific use of "poor" in the metaphorical sense, that respect for the literal poor must have existed first or else the literary use of the term would not have been employed by the Psalmist. Yet, were it not for an attitude of compassion toward the economically poor this sympathetic usage of the word "poor" even in a non-economic sense could hardly have arisen. "We may admit the contentions of those scholars who assert that

¹In addition to *עני*, *ענין*, *ענין*, and *ענין*, the term *ענין* is also employed. *ענין* refers to one who is humbled or "bowed down" by adverse circumstances. *ענין* means one who is humble in disposition and character, one who possesses humility. Thus *ענין*, unlike *ענין*, has from the beginning an essentially moral and religious connotation. Later in Judaism these two terms, *ענין* and *ענין*, came to be synonymous in meaning, and became two of the more prominent designations of a party in ancient Israel. "This party appears on the scene of history during the period of the later pre-exilic prophets. During the exile and subsequently it acquired a more marked and distinctive character. They formed an 'ecclesia' as opposed to the worldly and indifferent and often paganizing and persecuting majority. The Psalms, especially the 'Psalms of complaint,' abound with allusions to these two parties. The God-fearing party are described by many more or less synonymous designations, such as 'those that fear or love the Lord'; 'those that seek or wait for the Lord'; 'the servants of God.' These are the *ענין* or *ענין*. The party opposed to them are the 'wicked', the 'evildoers,' the 'proud,'" (Hastings, James (Editor) A Dictionary of the Bible Dealing with Its Language, Literature and Contents, Vol. IV, p. 20) Thus, semantically speaking, the "poor" in the Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes have a wide application.

in many of these passages, the words "poor" and "needy" allude not to individuals but to the nation, Israel, or to some pious group within the nation. However, in many of these passages, those words undoubtedly do refer to individuals. Even where they designate not individuals but the nation or the group, the sentiment they convey presupposes an indetical sentiment toward individuals; otherwise the peculiar force of those words as applied to the nation or the group could hardly have prevailed. The same may be said of the view propounded by the scholars who hold that the word "poor" in the Bible does not always mean poor in the economic sense, but sometimes means poor in a psychological sense, that is, poor in spirit, humble, devout. The Bible is the only literature in the world in which the words "poor" and "needy" are not expressions of disdain but terms of encomium. In English whatever is "poor" is bad, is inferior.²

Nor are the poor lacking in qualities which are admirable from a purely human standpoint. Proverb 28:6

וְעַם יָשָׁר וְעַם יָשָׁר וְעַם יָשָׁר וְעַם יָשָׁר contrasts the upright poor with the perverted ~~poor~~ rich while Prov.

²Cronbach, Abraham, The Bible and Our Social Outlook, p. 23-24.

28:11 contrasts the alert minded poor person with a

conceited but slow witted rich person *ע"כ / חכמה רבה*

חכמה ודעת / חכמה רבה. Wisdom and intelligence, according to the Bible are not a monopoly of the affluent.

In another case a poor and wise child is contrasted

with a king so old and foolish as to be incapable of

learning. By sheer intelligence the poor child lifted

himself to royal status. (Ecc. 4:13) *לעצמו מלכות / חכמה רבה*

אדם דל / חכמה רבה. An

example of a poor man's ability is vividly described in

Ecc. 9:15. Here we are told that a certain city was be-

seized by a great and powerful king. This city had a

small population so that when the king built the bulwarks

against it the city was destined to defeat. The narrator

then relates that there was a man who lived in that city

who was poor, yet wise, and it was this man who delivered

the city because of his wisdom. ^{3a}

"Despite everything said at times in the Bible to^{3a}

the contrary, the poor ^{3a}Prov. 13:23 commends the poor

for efficiently unless with Frankenberg we emend *ע"כ*

into *חכמה* as we did in Prov. 25:3] are represented as cap-

able of wisdom, integrity, understanding, and efficiency."³

³Cronbach, Abraham, The Bible and Our Social Outlook, p. 23

The poor are also rated as endowed with superior wisdom
in Ecc. 6:8

כי זה יותר אדם מן הכסף זה אדם
ויצא אדם מן העולם ויהיה
החיים

A number of passages in the books which we are surveying show their compassion for the poor by expatiating upon poor people's hardships. Prov. 10:15
הוא עשיר
identifies poverty with ruination. It is deemed no exaggeration to assert that "all of the days of the poor are evil" (Prov. 15:15) The text observes that the poor are scorned by their neighbors (Prov. 14:20) לא יאמרו עמיתיו. Along the same vein of thought pulsating its way back to the heart of the problem is that another concomitant of poverty is friendlessness (Prov. 19:4) הוא יאבד רעים.

הוא יאבד רעים. לא יאבד רעים. לא יאבד רעים. הוא יאבד רעים. in Prov. 19:7 the author observes that even a poor man's relatives hold him in disdain. In their eyes he is unsuccessful and now they look upon him as a burden, an obligation. The writers painfully remark, לא יאבד רעים. Readily is the wisdom of a poor man forgotten, though it suffices to rescue a city.

אדם זה איש חכם אולם הוא איש חסיר (Ecc. 9:15) הכחשתו לא תציל את העם. Also that wisdom is likely to be ignored or disdained (Ecc. 9:16) ~~הוא יאבד רעים~~

לצבתי (האם) אדם נשחית. Poverty is also listed as a punishment.

It is a like, punishment for those who violate the poor and needy. In Ps. 109:10, 11, 16) the oppressor is informed that his punishment will be: "Let his children be vagabonds and beg -- let strangers make spoil of his labour -- because that he remembereth not to do kindness, but persecuteth the poor and the needy man."

Noted also is the fawning suppliant attitude to which the poor are reduced (Prov. 18:23) *התחנן ויפול*. This naturally comports with the poor's subordination to the rich (Prov. 22:1) *אדם עני יפול*. That poverty can lead to delinquency is another ~~evil~~ evil precipitate of which our literature takes cognizance (Prov. 30:9) *אדם עני יפול ויחטא*. *אדם עני יפול ויחטא*.

Nor does this compassion for the poor flag, as it would in our own land and age, when thoughts arise concerning factors of one's own personality that affect one's economic fortunes. Frequently, we hear in our modern society, successful men make the observation that other men are unsuccessful because they are either indolent or stupid. People who have lived through depression eras recognize that this is a fatuous statement. It is now a well known fact that large international^{AL} economic repercussions can affect any individual disaster-

ously and that we personally can do very little to stop this economic avalanche once its death-seeking rocks begin to fall.

The Book of Proverbs is convinced that one's diligence brings ones wealth (Prov. 10:4) *כאש עשר כל ימיה*
משביל חילוק אק אמת אכל (21:5) *ו' צ חללים קציר*
 that a person profits if he labors (Prov. 14:23) *כל ערב יהיה אק*
 will not suffer from lack of food (Prov. 12:11) *עבד*
 (27:18; 29:19) and that he will be admitted to the presence of the great *מלך* (Prov. 22:29)
איש מדיד במאמל אפני חכים יתעב כל יתעב אפני חכים
 Wealth is also viewed as a reward of righteousness (Ps. 112: 2, 3) *צדק באשר יהיה צדק צדק ישרים יבין חן*
 and of such graces as humility and reverence (Prov. 22 :4) *עקב ענוה יחיה עשר אקב*
 Wealth is likewise an up shot of wisdom. (Prov. 3:16) *אק ואם בימיה (חכמה) בשמאלה עשר אקב*
 21:20; 24:4). The Book of Proverbs also contains the contrary view that wealth can only be acquired through divine intercession. "The Blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich and toil addeth nothing thereto." Also, a wise slave can gain ascendancy over his owner's profligate son (Prov. 17:2) *עבד משכיל ימשל בן מדיד*.

The wise men also note that sexual impropriety is one of the causes of poverty (Prov. 5:9,10) *ביתוך מלאה*

בביתך אלא תהיה אלא פתח ביתך בן גרן ואחרים האבן אלהן לאבד

(Prov. 6:26) *כי יבדד אשה צלה ער כבד אלה אשת א"ל נפש*

אנדה צללה אבד האל (Prov. 29:3) *יקרה תבדד*

This is an interesting thought since in our modern society we are of the opinion and we also possess the evidence that sexual impropriety is the consequence of poverty. *2 2*
poorly stated

Also reckoned as a cause of poverty is failure to heed advice. This is stated in Prov. 13:18 *כיש וקאל*

כרע נוסח and, allowing for the uncertainty of the text,

also perhaps in Prov. 13:8 *אנש לא שמע קצרה*. Among

the causes of poverty, Prov. 14:23 *צבד לשתים אק*

לחול mention loquacity.

The modern reader is often left to guess whether the Biblical author is thinking in societal terms or in theological terms. Does poverty follow naturally from unteachableness or from loquacity? Or is it a punishment superimposed from on high? There can be little doubt that the latter supposition prevails in Prov. 11:24 *לחול נשתר אק לחול* where poverty is viewed as a consequence of uncharitableness. ~~[The author of Prov. 11:24 could hardly have surmised that uncharitableness]~~ The author of Prov. 11:24 could hardly have sur-

mised that uncharitableness makes a person indigent because it makes him unpopular in the community.

Prov. 11:24 is more likely to have meant that uncharitableness will incur indigence by Divine intervention.

These reflections, however, do not impair the general attitude of sympathy for the necessitous. As stated in The Bible and Our Social Outlook, "Now, according to rigid logic, it would follow that, since poverty is the punishment for sin and wealth the reward of righteousness, the poor must be or must have been wrong-doers, and the rich must have been saints; poverty would be the sign of moral deficiency and wealth a sign of moral excellence. But the Bible departs from logic; compassion crowds out logic."⁴

One passage, Prov. 29:13, *עוֹלָם וְיָמֵינוּ יִשְׁלַח יְהוָה* seems to intimate that poor and rich are equal, at least in the same sense that the poor and the oppressor of the poor are equally dependent upon Divine favor. This same thought is expressed in Ps. 49:2 *אֵלֶּיךָ יִשְׁתָּחֲוּ כָּל־בָּשָׂר וְלֹא־יִשְׁלַח יְהוָה יָדוֹ וְיִשְׁתָּחֲוּ אֵלֶיךָ*.

Comporting with these viewpoints is the stressing of benevolence. In Ps. 112:9, *וְיִשְׁלַח יְהוָה יָדוֹ וְיִשְׁתָּחֲוּ אֵלֶיךָ* benevolence characterizes

⁴ Cronbach, Abraham, The Bible and Our Social Outlook, pg. 22.

the ideal man, and in Prov 31:20

כמה שכלי אדם

the ideal woman. When Ps. 112:9b says of such a person צדקה צדקה the passage means that this person's merits and prospects of reward are abiding. That צדקה can signify "merit" is shown by its translation, צדקה in the Targum and by the meaning of the word צדקה in Ezek. 18:20 צדקה הוציא עליה קריה. וינשאר הישע (קרי).

The Divine rewards awaiting the benevolent are impressive. God will repay the good deed (Prov. 19:17) מלאה יהיה חולן כל ודמיון ילם לו. "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed" (Prov. 22:9). Of the charitable, both Psalms and Proverbs use the word צדקה (Ps. 41:2) אשרי משהל אל כל ביום רעהי מלא יהיה (Prov. 14:21)

צדקה according to the commentators, means: assured of health, long life, and prosperity. Indeed the passage in Ps. 41:2-4 יהיה ישרהו ויחיהו אשר בארץ אלה ויחיהו בקרב אלהיהם ויהיה ישרהו ויחיהו אשר בארץ אלה ויחיהו בקרב אלהיהם elaborates upon the

term. It implies deliverance from trouble, longevity, rescue from enemies, mitigation of illness, and happiness in various forms. One's giving results not in the diminution of one's substance but its increase (Prov. 11:24,25) יש מפניו אולם צדקה חסד משהל אדם ויחיהו בקרב אלהיהם ויהיה ישרהו ויחיהו אשר בארץ אלה ויחיהו בקרב אלהיהם. Never does benevolence eventuate in

lack for the giver (Prov. 28:27a)

יְהִי אֵין מַחְסֵר

The charitable person will, in due course, acquire the wealth of which God will punitively deprive the poor person's oppressor (Prov. 28:8)

מַחְסֵר הָאֵין בְּיָמָיו

יְהִי אֵין מַחְסֵר. "Again, the compensation motive

is not entirely without merit. If people delayed with their benevolence until their motives were absolutely pure, the needy might in the meanwhile perish. We can hardly improve upon the standpoint of our Talmud which holds that, while unselfish giving is better than utilitarian giving, utilitarian giving is better than no giving at all."⁵

Benevolence is praised, rewarded, and legislated, but it is also necessary to take notice that benevolence possesses theological implications. The wise men drew the conclusion that any person who oppresses the poor is identified with that man who blasphemes God. However, any man who is gracious to the needy, honors God (Prov. 14:31)

יְהִי אֵין מַחְסֵר בְּיָמָיו

This same thought is expressed in economic language but in a theological theme when Prov. 19:17 avers that

יְהִי אֵין מַחְסֵר

יְהִי אֵין מַחְסֵר. God is actually made the benevolent man's debtor.

⁵ Cronbach, Abraham, The Bible and Our Social Outlook, pg. 50.

Correspondingly is the lack of charitableness re-
 proved. A curse awaits him "that hideth his eyes" (Prov.
 28:27) *וְהַמְכִּי עֵינָיו (אֶת הָאֵלֹהִים) בְּמָוֶל* and "whoso stop-
 peth his ears" shall himself cry and go unanswered (Prov.
 21:13) *אִם אָסַף אָזְנוֹ מִצִּדְקָה בֹּא אֵלָיו יָקָר וְאֵלֵי יֵשׁוּעַי*. An-
 ticipated here is the "manner for manner" so familiar
 in later Judaism. As the context indicates, the neigh-
 bor, the *רֵעַ* in Prov. 14:21 *כִּי אֶתְעַלֵּב רֵעִי מֵעֵינָיו* whom it is
 sinful to despise, is a neighbor who is poor. Sulz-
 berger is of the opinion that "the *רֵעַ* and the *עַבֵּד*
 were probably alternative expressions meaning the day
 laborer."⁶ We have already noted (page 15) how -- also
 with intimations of "manner for manner" -- uncharitable-
 ness can be punished by the visitation of want (Prov.
 11:24) *אִם אֶתְעַלֵּב רֵעִי מֵעֵינָיו אֶתְעַלֵּב עַל יָמָיו*. This identical principle
 is expressed in Ps. 109:10, 11, 16. *וְיִשְׁמַח יְהוָה בִּינְיָאֵן וְיִשְׁמַח יְהוָה בִּינְיָאֵן
 וְיִשְׁמַח יְהוָה בִּינְיָאֵן וְיִשְׁמַח יְהוָה בִּינְיָאֵן*.
וְיִשְׁמַח יְהוָה בִּינְיָאֵן וְיִשְׁמַח יְהוָה בִּינְיָאֵן.

It is interesting to note that this spirit of bene-
 volence is formulated into legal language by the Penta-
 teuch, and there are two institutions which are record-
 ed in the Pentateuch which convey a spirit of compassion.

⁶ Sulzberger, Mayer, The Status of Labor in Ancient Israel,
 Page 7.

They are the Sabbatical laws and the laws concerning the

Peah. In Ex. 23:10

ועל שנים תרצה את אדמתך למנוח
 קצרתה. והשביעו תשמישך וקצרתה ואלא אבולני עמך
 the Israelite farmer is in-

structed to sow his land and accumulate its produce,

but he is instructed to let his land lie fallow on the

seventh year. He is to do this so that the poor of his

people may eat as well as the beasts of the field. Lev.

19:9, 10 and 23:22 ובהקריבם את קציר ארצם לא תכלה סאת

שעך בקרבך ואלק קצירך לא תלקט לעני ואלד העני איתם
 describes the benevolent law which is iden-

tified as the Peah. In this law the Israelite farmer is

enjoined to leave a corner of his field so that the poor

might glean there and thereby sustain themselves. The

man who owns the field that he ploughs is further instruc-

ted that when he gleans his field, not to glean it thor-

oughly. He is compelled by law to leave some of the har-

vest on the field so that the poor might collect it.

Both the Pentateuch and the books of the Bible that are under consideration commend benevolence for the needy. The Pentateuch legislates it while the other books praise it and reward it.

At least two passages within our purview deprecate the charging of interest an act legally prohibited in

כח כח תלוי אחר עמי אחר עמי לא תהיה לו
 Ex. 22:24
 אל תקח מאתו Lev. 25:35, 36, 37 כשה לא תשאלו עליו נשך
 (אחיק) נשך וקרבות... כספק אחרת לא הנשך להחיות או
 אחרת אחרת נשך כח and Deut. 23:20.21 והן אסור
 אלא נשך כל צדק אשר ישך אכזריות לא תשך אחר
 והרבך יהיה אלהים כח שלח יצק על פאול אשר אתה כח שיהיה
 and prophetically condemned in Ezek.

הנשך לא יתן אחרות לא יקח... כל חיה חיה
 18:8. 13. 17
 נאם אפן יהיה. הנשך נשך אחרות לקח אחי. אחי חיה
 כספא לא נשך. לא יחול אחרות. חיה חיה
 Forebearing to lend on interest is, in Ps. 15:5,

listed among the qualifications for dwelling in
 the Lord's tabernacle; while, according to Prov. 28:8,
 one who, by charging interest, acquires wealth will soon be divested
 of that wealth. Such an exploiter is the antithesis of
 one whom the poor find gracious. This passage, like
 those in Exodus and Leviticus and like the juxtaposition
 of Ezek. 18:8 to Ezek. 18:7, shows that the interest referred to is not on investments in some industrial corporation but interest on puny sums lent to needy individuals to tide them over some acute stringency.

The subject of interest for money loaned off חיה, increase for victuals loaned was an important feature of labor conditions in the ancient world. The wages or other

developement of commerce. It favored and stimulated agricultural activity. Like all prohibitive measures, there were those who violated it. Apparently there were many who saw an opportunity to increase their wealth through the violation of this fundamental law. Thus, both the Psalmist and the Wise men were prompted by this violation to lift up their voices in protest. "He that putteth not out his money on interest, nor taketh a bribe against the innocent, He that doeth these things shall never be moved. (Ps. 15:5)" "He that augmenteth his substance by interest and increase, Gathereth it for him that is gracious to the poor. (Prov. 28:8)" In Psalms 37 and 112 we find the term "lendeth" which has the meaning of giving without interest. It is also possible that the term may even mean to give the principal without expecting its return. In other words, "Lendeth" ($\frac{1}{2}$) may signify community charity.

It is important to observe that if a man loaned money to a fellow Israelite, assuming that he loaned it to him without interest, and, if the money was not returned within seven years the creditor was to release the debtor from any obligation. Thus in addition to prohibiting the taking of interest, a man who loaned money without the interest stipulation, was in danger of losing

*On what basis
is the statement
made?*

his principal if the money was not returned within seven years. In this case, however, as in the case of interest taking, it was permissible to hold the stranger to his obligation to return the loan even if the time limit went beyond seven years. The 'וַיְשַׁבּוּ clause, thus made it possible to continue some semblance of economic life.

The Hebrew word for "usury" is *שֶׁבַע* which literally means "a bite". It probably derives this name from its painfulness to the debtor. Lending on usury is classed by Ezekiel as among the worst sins. The ideal man is one who "putteth not out his money on interest, nor taketh a bribe against the innocent."

The Book of Proverbs also contains admonitions against the removing of landmarks⁸ Prov. 22:28 *לֹא יִשְׁבֹּת עַל הַבְּרִית*

וְעַל הַבְּרִית and 23:10 *לֹא יִשְׁבֹּת עַל הַבְּרִית*

The passage in Prov 23:10, "לֹא יִשְׁבֹּת עַל הַבְּרִית",

⁸Verinder, Frederick, My Neighbour's Landmark, pg. 40. "In arable land, the usual boundary line is a furrow of double width, with a stone set up at either end."

⁸According to Hastings, James (Editor) A Dictionary of the Bible Dealing with Its Language, Literature and Contents. Vol. LV, pg. 20, "a landmark was an object such as stone, a heap of stones, or a tree with a mark on its bark, intended to mark the limit of a field, a farm, or the property of an individual."

like the invective in Job. 24:2, *הבא את יסודו* shows that the removal of the landmark implies foreclosure--foreclosure of property belonging to the poor--a type of rigor which the Bible severely condemns. In Deuteronomy 19:14 *לא תסלק קברו רעך אשר קברו ראשית* and 27:17 *לא תזיח קברו* such liberties with landmarks were forbidden by law.

Thus the boundaries of the family allotments were carefully marked and the sanctity of the landmarks were protected by the public. A solemn denunciation of a curse was invoked against anyone who should dishonestly tamper with them. This curse against those who move the landmark is recorded in Deut. 27:17. It reads *אשר יזיח קברו*.

The landmark, therefore, was a means of recording a man's original possessions, and if a man lost his possession between Jubilees, the landmark was not to be moved, since at the next Jubilee it would indicate how much land was to be returned to him. Like the law in Ex. 23:6 *לא תזיח קברו* and like the exhortations in Isa. 10:1, 2 *היו החקקים חקקי און ומכרתים עמל בנה אבטור חצין בנים ואלהם משפט עני עמי אלהים אמתו שלום ואהבת ימים יבוא* 32:7 *אין בלון רעים הוא*

זמאח יעל אבהא עתים באמחי שקר ובזבז אבולן משפט
 בן לא צנו בן יתום ויכליהן המשפט אבולנים לא משפט
 Jer. 5:28 עלא משפט ולבקר אהבולן יעל מיז עשוק
 22: 3, 16 ואלם יתום אלאמני אל תנו אל תחמסן וצם לקי אל תשפאל במקל
 עכרי לבקר לקחו כפר באבולנים בשער השל
 Amos 5:12 אקרהתי אליהם למשפט... ובעשקי שטר אלאמני ויתלם
 Mal. 3:5 אל תעצל כל הלא הוא אל
 Prov. 22:22 אל תמטי ידך

vigorously admonishes justice to
 the poor in the law court. Default in this regard is
 branded as robbing the poor and crushing the needy.

Upon those by whom the poor are ill used, our Bib-
 lical books heap overwhelming censure. The oppressor
 of the poor, according to Prov. 14:31 עקב כל חיל
 and the mocker of the poor, ac-
 cording to Prov. 17:5 ואלם חיל עקב commit blasphemy
 against God while, according to Ps. 109:16 יתן אשר לא
 persecuting the poor
 is conduct befitting the most despicable villian. Prov.
 22:16 is interpreted by Baethgen⁹ to convey that the op-
 pressor will by Divine ruling, lose his wealth to his
 victim. Also ignonimy awaits him, according to Ps. 14:6

⁹The author is indebted to Dr. Abraham Cronbach for this
 reference.

על עני תבוא כ' יקרה מוסר if, with Baethgen we
 emend עני into עני and translate: "In their plans
 against the poor, they come to shame."

These thoughts are implemented by a variety of metaphors. There is the picture of the poor person who, according to Baethgen's explanation of יצאק in Ps. 10:2, בוער בלע יצאק עני יקשה במלואו על חסדו burns up with anguish because of the grievances which he has to suffer. In Ps. 10:9, אורב במסרך בארץ הסכר / אורב במסרך עני יחטוף עני במלואו בלעק / the impoverished victim of the oppressor resembles the prey bagged by the hunter or caught in a net by the trapper. The slaying of the widow, the stranger, and the fatherless¹⁰ (Ps. 94:6) חנה פקדו ויהרגו אורב ארץ יחטוף or the murder of the needy by the sword-wielding, bow-bending exploiter is another of our metaphors (Ps. 37:14 חנה פקדו ויהרגו).

¹⁰The widows and the fatherless are objects of sanctity. They are the revered subjects of God. If Israel was a holy congregation, its widows and orphans were holier than holy. It is interesting to note that a (one who is fatherless) is considered an orphan. Apparently a motherless child is not considered an orphan in the sociological sense, since the concept was developed on an economic basis. A child without a father was in an economic predicament. He has no provider. The widow was a victim of the same situation. As a consequence, it was necessary to protect the material interests of the widow and the orphan.

אברהם קרניאל ז"ל אביון אברהם ישרי צדיק
 אברהם קרניאל ז"ל אביון אברהם ישרי צדיק
 Prov. 30:14

combines the figures of a rending beast and of a heartless assassin. If, with the LXX, we read Prov. 28:3 ^β not ^β but ^β, that passage also applies to our present thought. The oppressor is here likened to a rainstorm so violent that its benefits are nil.

"The oppressions that are done under the sun" are among the happenings that imbue Ecc. 4:1 ^β with gloom and pessimism -- such oppressions leave the poor victims without hope of consolation, mitigation, or cure. On the other hand, Ecc. 5:7 ^β affirms the faith in a Divine justice that will call the oppressor to count. According to D. C. Siegfried¹¹, Ecc. 4:1 is the utterance of a pessimistic philosopher, while while Ecc. 5:7 is that of a devout Hasid.

Contrasted with such nefarious actions, we have in Ps. 72:2, ^β the supplication

¹¹The author is indebted to Dr. Abraham Cronbach for this reference.

that the ruler may judge the poor with justice and in Prov. 31:9, *הַיָּסֵד עַל הַלֵּוֹי וְעַל הָאֵלֶּיךָ* the counsel delivered to King Lemuel by his mother that he "Plead the cause of the poor and the needy". A similar admonition is addressed to the judges in Ps. 82: 3, 4, *עֲלֵם בָּל וְיִתֵּן עֵץ וְכֵן הִצְבִּיקוּ בִּשְׁלָל בָּל וְאֵלֶּיךָ רִשְׁעִים* where the poor are literally poor individuals in

the economic sense. In Ps. 109: 8, 16 the offender is denounced *יְהִי וְיִחַי מְרִיטִים פִּקְצֵתוֹ יִקַּח אֹהֶל וְעַץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִכְבֵּד עֲשָׂה חֹסֶד וִירְצָה אֵישׁ עֵץ וְאֵלֶּיךָ וְכֵן הִצְבִּיקוּ בִּשְׁלָל בָּל וְאֵלֶּיךָ רִשְׁעִים*.

Prov. 14:31 *אִישׁ חָנּוּן אֵלֶּיךָ* extols the man who, by treating the poor graciously, honors God.

There are two institutions, the Sabbatical law and the laws of the Jubilee, which are recorded in the Pentateuch which have a direct bearing upon our subject. Without an understanding of these two institutions the praiseworthy statements on behalf of the poor and the needy in Psalter, in the book of Proverbs and in the book of Ecclesiastes are merely empty aspirations and ambiguous utopian ideals. They must be analyzed in order to give our subject its full significance.

In Ex. 23:10, "we find the foundation laws of the Sabbatical Legal System." It reads:

שְׁשָׁנִית תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת תְּבִלְתָּהּ וְאֶת שְׁמֵרֶתָהּ וְאֶת שְׁמֵרֶתָהּ וְאֶת שְׁמֵרֶתָהּ It is

obvious that this law found in the book of Exodus pos-

sesses an humanitarian tone and that the purpose for not reaping and harvesting the crop was to enable the poor and the beasts to eat the crops. The real meaning of Ps. 112:9 ^{אֵין} פֶּלֶא נָתַן אֱלֹהִים לְעֹבְדָיו זָכָר וְחַיִּים Prov. 11:24 ^{אֵין} וְיֵשׁ מִפֶּתַח אֲוֶרֶם חֵן וְחֶסֶד מִיֵּשׁ אֶת אֲוֶרֶם לְחַיִּים and Ps. 140:13 ^{אֵין} יִצְחָק בִּי יֵשׁ, יִבְרַח בִּן עֲרֵי מִשְׁפַּח אֱלֹהִים is fully attained only when we read this law recorded in the book of Exodus. In other words, that man who opens his field, his vineyard, and his oliveyard to the poor on the seventh year will be exalted by God and in the "end of days" he will benefit materially. Also, to leave a field ^{better English} lie still is the right of the needy. This is no charity. It is a right.

In Lev. 25: 1-7 ^{אֵין} וְיֵשׁ מִפֶּתַח אֲוֶרֶם חֵן וְחֶסֶד מִיֵּשׁ אֶת אֲוֶרֶם לְחַיִּים ^{אֵין} וְיֵשׁ מִפֶּתַח אֲוֶרֶם חֵן וְחֶסֶד מִיֵּשׁ אֶת אֲוֶרֶם לְחַיִּים ^{אֵין} וְיֵשׁ מִפֶּתַח אֲוֶרֶם חֵן וְחֶסֶד מִיֵּשׁ אֶת אֲוֶרֶם לְחַיִּים, the law is modified. During the Sabbatical year it made common to all the spontaneous growth "that the poor of thy people may eat." It secured to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, the immemorial right of gleaning. It secured for the wayfarer the right to satisfy his hunger from the growing crops.

The law of the Jubilee made special provision that each generation should have equal right to the use of the earth. Hence, special provision was made to secure, once in each generation, a restoration of the original right of equal access to the natural opportunities of labor. In other words, if in the course of a generation a man lost his property, the property which was his family right, it would be restored to him. In Lev. 10:5 we learn

וקצקת את שני חמשים שנה וקצקתם
באר בארץ לא ישיב ולא יחזק קניה אדם ובעתם איש

לשנה. No man in God's eyes owned land.

The land of Canaan was held from God on lease, by the families of Israel. At the end of fifty years all the leases fell due simultaneously and God made a fresh grant of the land for another fifty years. Hence, the Hebrew who, voluntarily or through compensation, "sold his land" sold not the ownership of the land, but the "fag end" of the lease. Lev. 27:22-24

ואם את שבע מקלות אשר לא משכר
אמזתן יקצו איהם. ואם לא הכהן את חכמת הענין
הוא ונתן את הענין הלא קצו איהם בשנה הלא
והוא השבע אשר קנהו מאתו אשר לא אמזת הארץ.

Those, therefore, who speak of our Sacred Literature as being on the side of the successful are in grave error. The facts which we have presented are a proof of this judgement.

Finally, within the social field, the respective books of Psalms, Proverb, and Ecclesiastes offer material relating to war and peace.

The Book of Psalms contains matter of a highly mili-
taristic and imperialistic tenor. An outstanding example
is Ps. 18:33, 35, 40, 43 יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

הבאר היחאזני חיל... מאחז יבו Ps. 18:33, 35, 40, 43
 אלהמה וחתה קלת נחלי צלתי... לקאזני חיל אלהמה
 תביע קח יחתי... ואשחקם בעשר זל פני נוח כטי

אֱלֹהִים צַדִּיק. Similar is the passage in Ps. 60:8 חֶלְסָא אֱלֹהִים צַדִּיק.
repeated in Ps. 108:9 אֱלֹהִים צַדִּיק יְהוָה יִשְׁמַח בְּעַמּוֹתָיו.

According to several passages, military ventures,
being attended by Divine help, are certainly favored with
Divine commendation Ps. 21:13 *כי יצא יי אלהים לפני דוד ויאמר יי אל דוד ויאמר יי אל דוד*

Divine commendation Ps. 21:13 כִּי תְשַׁלְּחָה שָׂם בְּאֵזְרִיךָ
Ps. 47:4 וְעַבְדְּךָ תַּחֲתֶיךָ אֱלֹהִים תִּתֵּן נִגְלוֹת

60:12 הלא אתה אלהים צנחתי ואלה תעלה אלהים בעלה ארתי
Ps. 108:11 ואלהי יבאני ואלהי צדק עבדתי ואלהי צדק אבא Ps. 118:16

יְהוָה יִשְׁמַר יְהוָה יִשְׁמַר יְהוָה יִשְׁמַר. Divine assist-

ance is often deemed a more salient factor than human

exertion in the promotion of victory Ps. 20:7 עֲזָרָה יִצְלָחַי
Ps. 33:16, 17 הַיָּסֵד הַשָּׁמַיִם יִבְרָא וְהָאָרֶץ יִסְדּוּ וְהַיָּם יִסְדּוּ וְהַכִּנּוֹר יִסְדּוּ וְהַכִּנּוֹר יִסְדּוּ
Ps. 44:6, 7 הַיָּסֵד הַשָּׁמַיִם יִבְרָא וְהָאָרֶץ יִסְדּוּ וְהַיָּם יִסְדּוּ וְהַכִּנּוֹר יִסְדּוּ

בשמך נבוא קמילן. כי לא בקשתי אבא אהיה לא תשיצני

Ps. 46:1 אלהים אנו מחסר ועל עזרה ברחל נחלא מאב

Ps. 48:13 סבא צילן והקיסרה סבא נחציה

There is also sounded, however, the note of divergent purport. In Ps. 120:7 אנו אלה אבי אצבר המה אלהמה

the desire for peace is, at least professed. Like the modern propagandist Ps. 120:7

blames the war on the

enemy. Otherwise, encomiums on peace are unqualified

Ps. 147:10, 11 לא בגדלת המל יחל לא בשקלי האיל ילה

יהיה Ps. 29:11 בלצה יבא את יכאיו את החימה לחסב
ע. אלא יתן יהיה יבק את צמא בשום

There is no need for inferences when we consider the attitude of the Psalmist to peace, to peace whether it be personal, national, or international. The Psalmist is looking forward to an era when strife will disappear and peace will reign when he exhorts, (Ps. 46: 9, 10) אבן חל

מפאלת יהיה אשר שם שאל באר שבים מלחמה
ע. קרה האר קר יבא וקל חנה צלאל יש בא

The linkage between peace and righteousness, so notably propounded in Isa. 32:17 איה משה הצבקה אלה אצבצה הצבקה

reappears in Ps. 85:11 אמת מארץ תצא
אמת מארץ תצא

Not unrelated to the subject of world peace is the adjuration in Prov. 20:22 לֹא תִשָּׂא אִשָּׁה אֶת־קִלְבָּהּ בַּיָּד וְלֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־קִלְבָּהּ בַּיָּד

לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־קִלְבָּהּ בַּיָּד against returning evil for evil and in Prov. 24:17 לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת־קִלְבָּהּ בַּיָּד against rejoicing at the discomfiture of one's enemies. We assume, of course, that an individual's views on questions international will not remain uninfluenced by his ideals of personal relationships.

CONCLUSION

Before summarizing the conclusions of the various sub-titles it is necessary to consider the source material and other studies that have been made on the subject.

The material, the secondary sources, available on the subject selected by the author was exceedingly sparse. Most of the monographs written on the sociology of the Bible devote little space to the Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. They concentrate their energies on the book of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy where little interpretation is needed. In these books it is a process of sifting evidence to illustrate that the laws concerning the afflicted or affluent were evolu-

tionary. In the case of our study, the Sociological Background of the Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, the approach was necessarily different. There were no evolutionary developments. There was no citing of law. At best, these books found in the writings expressed violations of the law, appeals for mercy and justice, and the promise of rewards for those who were godly. Thus, it was necessary to take these isolated statements and rearrange them in an effort to correlate them to similar situations in our own society. Also, there was another problem that complicated this study. This was the problem of temperment. In the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy the material is legal and not personal. There is no room for personal expression. The law is cut and dry. In the books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes we meet moods, temperments and various backgrounds. In fact, within the Psalms themselves there are shades of despair, despondency and exaltation all blended together. These writings are the records of pietists. The book of Proverbs, on the other hand, as sayings of wise men and in many instances consecrated business men, a spiritual laity. The book of Ecclesiastes is a collection of realistic observations by one or more

unsatisfactory

old men, or men who were deep in their mature years. Yet, while all these observations, opinions, and exclamations stem from sanctified and well meaning souls, they were not the product of legalists such as the Pentateuchal books.

Under these consideration it was frequently necessary for the author to interpolate his own interpretation. In an effort to control these interpretations, wherever possible, he used the legal background of the Pentateuch to guide himself. With respect to the laborer, he employed the Sabbatical and Jubilee material of the Pentateuch. The same was almost true of every sub-title considered.

While an attempt was made to reach some type of conclusion under each heading, the following general conclusion has been studied thoroughly by many eminent scholars, on the side of the downtrodden and the oppressed, but the books of Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes enunciate the same principles with the fire of the heart. The authors of these books, like the prophets themselves, were social crusaders, but it is fair to say they were more realistic than the prophets. They were more definite in designating the abuses.

Scripture, then, by and large, is on the side of the poverty stricken and does not support the status quo as many people have endeavored to prove.

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