

# A GENTLE CYNIC,<sup>1/</sup> “Indulging in a General Fling at the Unceasing Production of Literature.”

At the close of the Book of Koheleth<sup>2/</sup> [or, The Book of Ecclesiastes] some reader or commentator has added the warning:

“Beware, my son, of the writing of many books without end,”<sup>3/</sup>

as though to caution us against taking too seriously the teachings of a book, which seemed dangerous from the point of view of conventional morality. The warning sounds a challenge to every writer to justify himself in adding another to the more than three million books that have been produced [up to A.D. 1919] since the literary impulse — Koheleth would call it “a sorry business”<sup>4/</sup> — first seized hold of man on this little planet of ours. Koheleth himself would, no doubt, echo the suggestion contained in the warning that books follow one another in endless succession, because it is a part of the ‘nature of the beast.’<sup>5/</sup> Man writes because he cannot help it. The point is not what man writes, but that he writes and that he goes on writing as naturally as he goes on living...

The written word must not be regarded as having the same value as the spoken one, for a man speaks when he has something to say, whereas a man may write because he is anxious to say something. There are so many books in the world, presenting the same subject from different points of view, that they surely cannot all be right;... [t]here is no final book — no last word. Why, then, add another to share the fate of gathering dust on the shelves of libraries or of being ground to pulp to form the material for some successor... only to be offered up as a sacrifice to bring into existence the next one, a process which gives to book making some of the aspects of cannibalism? The warning against the making of endless books comes with special force, if the book in question is to be a new translation of an ancient one... Are there not enough commentaries on this [same subject]?

Therefore — do not take books too seriously, and be careful before you decide to add another to the endless list.

## NOTES FOR *THE GENTLE CYNIC*

1. Jastrow, Morris, Jr., Ph.D., LL.D, Professor in the University of Pennsylvania, *A Gentle Cynic, Being a Translation of the Book of Koheleth, Commonly Known as Ecclesiastes, Stripped of Later Additions* (Philadelphia & London, J.B. Lippencott Company, 1919), pp. 27-28, 96-97, 241.
2. Koheleth has been alleged by some Bible historians to have been the author of Ecclesiastes, correcting the error that Solomon the King (considered to be the accepted writer by most Bible readers, students, and scholars) was the author. Jastrow, *Cynic*, Chapter 1.

3. See: Ecclesiastes 12:12, *The Holy Bible*, (King James Version), and other Biblical translations, which may satisfy equally as well. Read of them all.

4. Ecclesiastes 4:8; “a sore travail” (KJV); “a grievous vexation.” George M. Lamsa, *The Holy Bible from Ancient Manuscripts*; (1933,1968); “a sorry business,” James Moffett, *A New Translation of The Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments* (1922,1935).

5. Eccl. 3:18.