

wild honey." In this guise he was recognized as claiming to be a prophet like Elijah, who is also described as "a man with a garment of hair and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins." (II. Kings, i., 8. R.V. margin.) With the prophets, who constituted a sort of volunteer clergy among the Jews, for whose support no provision was made by law, self-denial was perhaps more a matter of necessity than of choice, once they had consecrated themselves to the work. Their example, however, could not fail to make an impression on the minds of those who received their message and respected their office. So that, perhaps, after all, we do not need to go so far afield in order to find the explanation of the ascetic development of Jewish piety, which at no time extended beyond a comparatively limited number. The Essenes, in their palmiest days were never estimated as above 4,000 persons.

But, however that may have been, there is hardly anything more striking in the Old Testament than the almost entire absence of all ascetic teaching from both the law and the prophets. Provision was certainly made by Moses for self-denying vows, and once they were pledged the consistent Jew was bound to fulfil them. But these were usually for a limited period only, and were not regarded as constituting any claim to superior piety, unless their lives were otherwise exemplary. Samuel, as a life-long Nazarite, certainly receives the fullest appreciation, but Samson was equally so, and enjoyed only a doubtful reputation. The Rechabites are commended by Jeremiah for their abstinence from wine, even when tempted in the House of God, but it is more for their constancy than for their self-denial. The refusal by Daniel and his three companions to eat food provided for them from the King's table was not dictated by an ascetic motive, but from a desire to avoid ceremonial defilement. The important thing all through is not the practice of self-denial, but the uprightness, purity and integrity of the man. The ethical idea is never allowed to be obscured by any fictitious glamour of sainthood suggested by roughness of dress, lowness