

Balaam

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'Balaam also, the soothsayer, did the children of Israel slay with the sword.' Joshua xiii 22.

THE character of Balaam offers us an enigma which has always exercised a great fascination for those interested in the analysis of the religious life. The early Christians, following the tradition of the Jews, saw in him the type of the false teacher, greedy of gain, enticing to immorality; and when similar teachers appeared in the Christian Church they were denounced as 'following the way of Balaam *the son of Beor, who loved the hire of wrong-doing*' (2 P. ii 15), 'they ran riotously in the error of Balaam for hire' (Jude 11 cf. Rev. ii 14).

To Bishop Butler the character seemed to present the type of self-deceit, the case of a man who longs to die the death of the righteous and yet to live the life of the unrighteous: of one who refuses to listen to the first clear dictates of conscience that a thing is wrong, and tries to make a composition with the Almighty, and to persuade himself that what he knows to be wrong may after all be right, 'he wanted to do what he knew to be very wicked and contrary to the express command of God; he had inward checks and restraints which he could not entirely get over; he therefore casts about for ways to reconcile this wickedness with his duty' [Butler's *Sermons* vii].

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