

LITERATURE FROM THE ERA OF MOSES TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DAVIDIC MONARCHY

LITERATURE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.....(I)

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I

INTRODUCTION

It is said that the Old testament is a library of thirty-nine books under one cover. Historians, law givers, folk-tellers, poets, prophets and sages kept marvellous records of the life of the nations, set up important laws which are still remembered and quoted in our days, and composed many simple and beautiful poems, appealing to readers of the strong faith. In this respect, no other book has been written by so many different kinds of people than the Old Testament. And what is more, we are able to say that no other book has been read or studied for so many years by so many people than the Old Testament, either.

Each story in it possesses its special significance of its own time. Some of the stories lead us into a strong religious atmosphere, and move our spirits by showing and telling us through vivid description, the strength of people gained through their faith in God. Some of them, for example, Ruth of Esther, even though they have their own moral conviction, sound more secular than religious. They are literary.

Tracing the origin and development of each story in the Old Testament, and understanding how the people of the respective era and area had thought about life and religion, how the background culture had influenced them, and how those people had bore such a great literary fruit, we come to consider that the Old Testament is not only the records but also a great literature.

I am attempting to study and appreciate the literary value of the Old Testament by following the Syllabus prepared by Dr. E. Leslie, which shows the chronological development of the Old Testament literature. According to him, the Old Testament is divided into eight periods. In this thesis, however, I will set forth the literature

in the following two eras: 1) Era of Moses: (Before 1259 B. C.) 2) From the Israelites Invasion of Canaan to the Establishment of the Davidic Monarchy: (1250—1000 B. C.)

II

THE ERA OF MOSES

Many songs had been sung and stories told, through the mouths of the people from generation to generation, long before the people of Israel thought of writing the literature. Among the ancient poems which we can find in the books from Genesis to Samuel, there are lyrics, songs, didactic, prophetic and cultic poems.

The Song of Lamech (Gen. 4: 23-24) is considered as one of the oldest of them. It is an ancient war-song, uttering an arrogant boast of the possession of weapons and constant readiness for bloody revenge. The reckless soldier utters his boast to his wives,

Adah and Zillah, hear this voice of mine,
wives of Lamech, hearken to this speech of mine:
I slay a man for wounds of mind,
and a young man for bruises of mine.
If Cain takes vengeance sevenfold,
Lamech will truly seven and seventy fold!

Though the contents of this song are primitive and rather savage, the rhythm and the forms are perfect.

The Poem of Miriam is originated in Moses' time after the great deliverance at the Sea of Reeds (Ex. 15 : 21). It is one of the great poems of all literature. The place of the song is significant. It celebrates the new spirit of that war in Israel quite as much as the catastrophe which befell the Egyptians. Moses and his children in Israel sang it with music and dancing women, led by Miriam chanted,

Sing ye to Jehovah
For he hath triumphed gloriously,
The horse and his ride
Hath he thrown into the Sea.

It is like the Ark song and the Song of Well. The rhythm of movement is in the songs.

The little Song of Well

“Spring up, O well...Sing to it...” (Num. 21 : 17) is taken from the source, the

Bood of the Wars of Jehovah, in which the Exodus from the Egypt and the Conquest of Canaan appear to have been celebrating in poetry and songs. It is a song of the festal opening of a well in the desert which Jehovah gave water. When the leaders of Israel dug the well, the people gathered and sang this Song of Well.

There are some other interesting poems connected with this era. One of them is the brief couplet which tells Jehovah's eternal warfare against *Amalex*.

A hand of the banner of Jehovah.

Jehovah has war with Amelack forever. (Exd. 17 : 16)

This is the oldest literary witness to the immortal enmity between Israel and Amelack. The lifting up of the hand in making an oath is a very custom at that age.

The Song Satire of the Amorites (Num. 21 : 27-30), which belonged to the repertoire of the ballad singers at that time, is inserted in the narrative. Bashan extended north from the Jabbok to the Hermons, a rich plain. The Amorites dwelt east of the upper section of Jabbok, in the desert. The Israelites sent messenger to Sihon, asking permission to pass through his territory. Sihon answered by attacking the Israelites at Juboz, but he was completely defeated and the Israelites took all his cities, including Heshbon. Therefore the ballad singers say,

Come to Heshbon, let it be built,

Let the city of Sihon be established.

For fire went forth from Heshbon,

flame from the city of Sihon.

It devoured Ar of Moab,

the lords of the heights of the Arnon.

Woe to you, O Moab.

You are undone, O people of Chemos^h.

He has made his sons fugitives,

and his daughters captives,

to an Amorite king, Sihon.

So their posterity perished from

Heshbon, as far as Dibon,

and we laid waste until fire spread to Medeba.

A fragmentary poetic list of localities in Moab was inserted from the Book of the Wars of Jehovah into the itinerary of the Israelites' march on the borders of Moab.

The poem,

Waheb in Suphan,

and the valleys of the Arnons,

And the slope of the valleys

that extends to the seat of Ar,

and leans to the border of Moab. (Num. 21 : 14)
is of uncertain date, although hardly the time of Moses.

III

FROM THE ISRAELITE INVASION OF CANAAN TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DAVIDIC MONARCHY

95—127 B. C.

The Song of Deborah takes place next to the songs of the wars of Jehovah. This is considered to be the finest most elaborate and most characteristic of all early war songs, and also regarded as the most old one. Composed by great prophetess, Deborah, by herself. The portion which can certainly be understood fully justifies the opinion that this is genuine and splendid poetry.

“It begins with an imposing description of Jehovah’s march from Sinai to battle for his people.”⁽¹⁾

We are looking on a time when the people are severely oppressed, the road are deserted because no man was sure of his life till Deborah by inspiring speech and Barrak by courageous action, rouse their tribes a fight for freedom. It is still a time of confusion and disintegration.

Because the leaders took the lead in Israel,
Because the people freely volunteered,
Bless ye Jehovah !

Hear, O ye kings; ye princes give ear !
I will sing to Jehovah,
I will wing praise to Jehovah, the God of Israel.

Jehovah, when Thou wentest forth from Seir,
when Thou marchedst from Edom’s field,
The earth trembled, the heavens also wayed,
yes, the clouds poured water,
the mountains quaked at the presence of Jehovah,
God of Israel.

(1) Bewer: LOT, p. 6.

In the days of Shamgar the song of Anath,
caravans ceased,
and wayfaring men took roundabout ways.
The rural population had ceased,
in Israel they had ceased,
Until thou didst arise, Deborah,
didst arise a mother in Israel.

They chose new Gods,
then was war in the gates,
A shield or spear was not seen
among forty thousand in Israel.
My heart belongs to the rulers of Israel,
to those that freely volunteered among the people.

Bless ye Jehovah,
Ye that ride on tawny asses,
Ye that sit on rich carpets
and ye that walk by the way, sing!
Hark the huzzahing at the watering places!
there they rehearse the victories of Jehovah,
The victories of his country folk in Israel,
how at that time the people of Jehovah went down to the gates.

Rouse thee, rouse thee, Deborah;
rouse thee, rouse thee, utter a song:
arise, Barak, and lead forth thy captors, thou son of Abinoam.

Then marched down for him the nobles,
and the people of Jehovah marched down for him as heroes.
From Ephraim they came down to the valleys,
after them Benjamin with his hosts;
From Machir came down commanders,
and from Zebulun they that wield the marchal's stall.
And the princes of Issachar, were with Deborah;
as was Issachar, so was Barak,
into the valley they rushed forth at his heels.

Among the tribal divisions of Reuben
were great searching of heart.
Why didst thou sit still among the sheephold,
to hear the flute calls of the flocks?

Gilead remained beyond the Jordan:
and Dan sought the protection of ships!
Asher sat still on the shore of the sea,
and abode by his landings.
Zebulun is a people that jeoparded their lives to the death,
Naphtali also, upon the heights of the field.

The kings came and they fought;
then fought the kings of Canaan,
In Tannach by the waters of Megiddo:
they took no gain of money.
From heaven fought the stars,
from their courses they fought against Sisera.
The river Kishon swept them away,
that onrushing river, the river Kishon.
O my soul, much on with strength.
Then were battered the hoots of the horses
by the furious galloping of their chargers.

Curse ye Moroz, said the angel of Jehovah,
curse bitterly its inhabitants,
Because they came not to the help of Jehovah,
to Jehovah's help among the heroes.

Blessed above women be Jael,
blessed above women in the tent.
Water he asked, milk she gave;
she brought him curd in a lirdly bowl.
She put forth her hand to the tent pin,
and her right hand to the workman's hammer;
And with the hammer she battered Sisera, she crushed his head;
yea, she shattered and struck through his temple.
At her feet he sank down, he fell, he lay still,
where he sank down, there he lay slain.

Out of the window leaned Sisera's mother
and looked through the lattice,
"why is his chariot so long in coming?
why tarry the hoof-beats of his horses?"
The wisest of his princesses answered her,
yea, 'tis she that made reply to her,
"Surely they are finding, dividing the spoil,

a damsel or two foreach man;
Booty of dyed garments for Sisera,
a dyed garment, two pieces of embroidered stuff for the neck of...”

.....
So let all Thine enemies perish, O Jehovah,
but let them that love Thee be as the sun when he rises in his might.

(Jud. 5)

We can well feel the genuine inspiration of the poet as well as his burning passion and religion.

“Its significance for our knowledge of the history of Israel greatly increase its value. In the threatening crisis of powerful offensiv of Canaanite city, kings against the Israelites invaders who had conslidated their gains in the mountains south and north of the Great plain, the tribes Issachr, Zebulum, Maphtali together with Ephrain, Benjamin, and Mochar, were rallied by Deborah to the standard of Jehovah ”⁽²⁾

It is remarkable that the unifying element is the religion of Jehovah. Oracles of Balaam also belong to the early poem period, only in them a famous non-Israelites seer of antiquity utters those rhythmic verses that have the power to bring about all the glory proclaimed therein. The prophecy a poem of seven couplets, states how Balaam was sermoned from Aram by Balak to curse and defy Israel; how this was an impossibility; how now he could see Israel as a people that dwelth alone, in safety (Dt. 33 : 28) not reckoned among the other nations, being of special divine choice; and how they were countless in number, Balaam concluded with a prayer that he might die the death of the righteousness, and that his last end be like this. The righteousness are the true Israelites so called because of their divine calling.

In his second prophecy, a poem of eleven couplets, received in the same manner as the first, Balaam declared the truthfulness and the immutability of God, (15 : 29) and reiterated that the divine compulsion was upon him to bless. A third time the seven-fold sacrifices were performed, but Ballam seeing that he could only bless Israel, turned His face to the wilderness, the plain where Israel camped, instead of going to the bare height to perform the customary auryey. Contrary to the two precious times, when Jehovah put a word in his mouth this time the Spirit of God came upon him, he fell into a trace.

The prophecy is a poem of nine couplets and two triplets, Balaam begun with an oracle at introduction of himself as a seer who heard the word of God and saw the

(2) Bewer, LOT.

Vision of Almighty. Balak was enraged by Balaam's third prophecy, and buntly drove the seer away, ironically claiming that Jehovah had kept him from great honor, Balaam only reminded him of the answer he had given Balak's messengers that no reward could alter the divine compulsion. The last utterance consisting of seven couplets and a triplet, is prefaced by the safe description of the seer as the third prophecy, with the addition of the words and known as the knowledge of the most high. The seer envisioned, not the present, but the distant future of Israel. These oracles are not real predictions, but poetic description of the time of the time of David, during which they were composed.

The ancient cultic formulae with which *the ark* was addressed, when it was taken into battle and when it returned are most probably from the time of Exodus or of the Conquest. In ancient times, Ark was taken into the battle especially at the critical situation, for symbolizing the constant presence of Jehovah.

“Rise up, Lord,
and let thine enemies be scattered; and
let them that hat thee flee before thee.

These words were spoken when the ark was set out at the head of the army. And when it came back from victory,

Return, O Lord, with the many thousands of Israel.

They are an expression of upmost confidence in and recieve upon Jehovah. The great antiquity of these verses are clearly seen from the manner in which the holy ark is spoken of as a pledge. For Jehovah was the God of battle, worth many thousands of Israel. He brought victory for his people and rest. When *the Ark* started, people in Israel broke camp, when it stopped, Israel did too. Every stages of the march was thus begun and ended with such prayers.

Among the longer didactic poems of this period, there is one remarkable poem. That is *Jotham's Fable* of the trees' choice of kings. This teaches us the leaver people have nothing to do with monarchy. Only worthless people are willing to become kings.

The tree once went forth to anoint a king over them; and they said to the olive tree, 'Reign over us.' But olive tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my fatness, by which gods and men are honored, and go to sway over the fig tree? And the trees said to the fig tree, 'Come you, and reign over us! But the fig tree said to them, 'Shall I leave my sweetness and my good fruit, and go to sway over the trees?' Then all the trees said to the bramble, 'Come you, and reign over us.' And the bramble said to the trees, 'If in good faith you are anointing me

king over you, then come and take refuge in my shade; but if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedard of Lebanon. (Judge 9 : 8-15)

This sarcastic judgement of kingship is applied by the narrator to Ablimeleck. He is not a man who can command respect and confidence. If they want to get along with him, they have to show good faith, which they withheld from Jerubbaal, who was much more worthy of it. Whether this fable written by the author or taken from the people's fund of stories, we do not know. This moral is of great historical importance, even if it came from much later time than we assumed.

Not only in poems but also in proverbs, riddles the people of Israel delighted. Riddles were favorite pastime of Israel in all ages. We have here the early riddle which Samson proposed at his wedding. The wedding festivities are enlivened by various pleasantries and play of wit.

Out of the eater came forth meat,
and out of the strong came forth sweetness. (14 : 14)

To this riddle is attacked a warger and of which the guests gave their solution saying,

What is sweeter than honey?
and what is stronger than a lion? (14 : 18b)

To this Samson replied,

If you had not plowed with my heifer,
ye had not found out my riddle.

“Both riddles are older than the stories of which they now form a part, for they originally meant something together different, since the real answer to the second was Love. What the first one originally meant is not certain.”⁽³⁾

Samson's taunt which tell his boast

With the jaw of of an ass
I smashed them in mass,
With the jaw of an ass
I slew a thousand men (15 : 16)

was taken literary by the narrator, but originally the phrase “throwing the jawbone of ass” explain Samson's wonderful victory with a most miserable weapon.

Another type of early poems is the form of prediction, but this is only a literary form and explained the present by the powerful words of the ancestor's blessing. These blessings were composed in poetry for the inspiration of the vision of the future put the ancestors into an exalted mood in which speech assumes rhythmic form.

(3) Bewer, LOT., p. 9.

The Blessing of Noah (Gen., 9 : 25-27) is considered to be one of the earliest of them.

Cursed be Canaan:

A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren,

Blessed by the Lord, God of them;
and Canaan shall be his servant.

God shall enlarge Japheth,
and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem;
and Canaan shall be his servant.

The striking feature is the curse on Canaan, which is repeated in the blessings of Shem and Japheth.

“The historical allusion cannot be made out with certainty. But it seems quite probable that they refer to the time after David, when Canaan had been completely subdued and Israel and Philistain dwelt in the tents of Shem, when the recognition of each other's independence and territories integrity had been finally won in the great Philistine wars, which David had brought to a successful termination.”⁽⁴⁾

The proverb concerning Saul in I Sam. 10 : 12 is also written in this period after the monarchy under Saul and regards to the choosing and anointing of Saul to be the king by Samuel, who gave him the spirit of prophesizing after his anointing with oil.

As I mentioned before, people in Israel are delighted in proverbs, riddles and wise saying as well as in poems. As the oldest proverb in poetics which we can find was once quoted by David.

From the wicked comes forth wickedness,
but my hand shall not be upon thee. (I Sam., 24 : 13)

Even in his day it was a proverb of the ancients.

The legends of the past had been handed down from age to age, repeated by people through people. They were all at the beginning the simple stories but story-teller had collected and narrated them. So it was rather inevitable that by the time we come to literate records, that tales should have been more or less modified in the long oral process of tradition. About 850 B. C., an author gathered the many kinds of stories and grouped together in which he told from the beginning, the story of man's creation; how Jehovah had formed him from the dust of the ground, and breathed the breath of life into his image; and how Adam and Eve lived in the wonderful garden of Eden. Why didn't it last? Because of man's disobedience. The author who had told of man's first

(4) Bewer, LOT., p. 11.

disobedience now followed it with a story of the first murder which was originally told by a shepherd, for Cain the murderer was a tiler of the ground and his cereal offering was not acceptable to Jehovah. Cain slew Able a keeper of sheep and was punished with a fearful curse. As a protection against murder Jehovah gave him a sign by which he was recognized everywhere as a member of a tribe which was famous for its terrible blood-revenge. Civilization had advanced through Cain and his descendants, but so had murder and sin. These had been increased so that God determined to destroy them all. Only Noah was in favor of Jehovah then comes the story of Noah's Ark and his sons. After this, J document commenced the story of Abraham, the father of the chosen race. The life of Abraham tells us vividly the strength of his success and failure in his strong faith in Jehovah. At Hebron, where Abram settled, Jehovah gave him the promise of a son, but his wife Sarah was barren so the promise seemed unfulfillable. But when both got so old that they could not expect their children anymore, Jehovah promised them his own son as a reward for their hospitality on His visit with two angels at Abram's tent. And finally their son Isaac was born. When he grew up they sent someone to their homeland Syria for he might bring a wife among their kinsmen for Isaac. After the trip he came back with Rebekah, whom Isaac gladly took as his wife. Even though Rebekah was, like Sarah, barren, Jehovah granted to her children the twin brothers, Jacob and Esau, for the reward of Isaac's honest entreaty. While still in the womb, they struggled. The oracle of Jehovah interpreted this as prophetic of the strife of the two nations Jacob (Israel), and Esau (Edom). Esau was the first born and Jacob was the next, and the first should ordinarily be the heir. That is Esau was a skillful hunter and Jacob was a modest man. Esau sold the headship of the family for one meal, and Jacob obtained the headship of the family for one meal, and Jacob obtained the headship of the family by giving the meal. The author of the Hebrew explains as Esau,

Who for one morsel of meal sold his birthright.

Esau was a good natured realist, while Jacob a rather sunning idealist. (25 : 19-34) It is quite natural to evaluate that Esau should have been chosen but,

Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. (I Sam. 16 : 7)

So God sees the real insight of men. God saw no desire for seeking Him in Esau but Jacob was man who was constantly seeking.

Coming through early poetry; now we reached the time of David. One of the earliest poems of his time is the song of the women celebrating Saul's and especially *David's victory* over Philistines. (I Sam. 18 : 7)

Saul has stain his thousands,
but David his myriads.

This is very short, only consists of two lines. The women sang it in joy when they received the returning victors with music and dancing. They repeated it over again. Even through very simple but it is very expressive.

Even though David himself is celebrated in tradition as a poet, almost everything he composed is lost. One of the songs which still remains is the famous *Lamentation* over the death of Saul and Jonathan—doubtless an old song used for centuries at the death of Israel's great heroes. This shows sorrow and love of a great heart with the words of beauty and sincerity.

The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places;
how are the mighty fallen !

Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the philistines rejoice, lest the daughter of the uncircumcised triumph.

Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you, nor field of offerings: for there the shield of mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil.

From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty.

Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.

Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in midst of the battle ! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places.

I am distressed for thee, my brother my Jonathan: very pleasant and hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished. (II Sam. 1 : 19-27)

“This lamentation was taken from taken from the Book of Jehovah. The metre is not regular, but whether this was due to textual corruption or to the strong, passionate sorrow that would not be forced into the rhythmic regularity of the lamentation metre, we do not know.”⁽⁵⁾

The other one dirge over Abner, is briefer than the first one.

Died Abner as a fool dieth? (II Sam. 3 : 33)

This shows David's sincerity so plainly. You would not see any literary skill in this

(5) Bewer, LOT., p. 17.

lamentation or anything religious but with such deep sincere feeling this was written.

Best the beautiful *parable of Nathan* must be considered as a fragment from David's time. It is not in metric but technical form appears in such perfection as to lead to the conclusion that it had been long cultivated. His parable of the rich man with his great possession and the poor man who had but one little ewe lamb gave a picture of contrast between rich and poor seen often in the East. This is one of the finest poems in poor that is still remain. (II. Sam. 12 : 1-7)

Sheba's battle cry (II Sam. 20 : 1) is as almost brief as the song of lamentation over Saul and David but it pictures entirely different emotions.

We have no portion in David
Nor have we heritage in Jessison !
Every man to his tents, O Israel

It is the fierce war cry of a bold Benjamite, calling the various tribes to desert their loyalty to king David. Benjamin had lost the royal crown, Judah must not have it either.

Otto Eissfeldt proposed the theory of the L source in this period. It is the direct contrast to the Priestly Document, and parallel with J document from the Creation to the death of King David, which is covering Gen. 2 : 4b to I king, 1-2. Each section include : Gen. 2 : 4b-7, 4 : 17a, 18-24, 6 : 1-4, 9 : 21-27, 11 : 1-9, 12 : 1-4a, 6-8, 32 : 23b-32, and Exodus 4 : 24-26.

It is dated from 964 B. C. to 900 B. C. The stories in L (Lay) Source do not have a unified theme as J and E source have.

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