THE SONG OF SONGS

GRADUATION THESIS

BY

GEORGE SOLOMON

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

To say that the following pages represent no original work were but to make a gratuitous statement. In one sense, however, I am sure that originality will not be denied-- to be able to have any opinion at all, after consulting the many different writers on the subject, is in itself some title to originality.

The Song is perhaps the most obscure book, exegetically speaking, in the Bible. To quote from Delitzsch," Whatever principle of interpretation one may adopt, there always remains a num-

ber of inexplicable passages, and just such as, if we could only understand them, would help to solve the mystery. And yet the interpretation of a book presupposes, from the beginning, that the interpreter has mastered the idea of the whole. It has thus become an ungrateful task; for however successful the interpreter may be in the separate parts, yet he will be thanked for his work, only when the conception, as a whole, which he adopts is approved of."

When I think of Origen's twelve volume work on the subject, and the eighty-six sermons written by Bernhard of Clairvaux on the first two chapters (when an untimely death deprived us of any further enlightenment from him on the subject),

not to mention the good-sized library which has since issued from German, French and English scholars, all exclusively devoted to interpreting and making clear(?) this booklet with its eight chapters of 117 verses, I almost feel that my few pages had better been left unwritten and but for the inexorable law governing graduation theses I could never have been guilty of producing them.

But as the contemplation of this phase of the subject may lead us rather to a dissertation on the ingenuity of man in general and Biblical Exegetes in particular, we had better proceed rather to the Song itself, contenting ourselves with the remark that a thesis on " The Literature on Canticles" would be considerably more amusing and entertaining,

if not more instructive, than a treatise on the Song itself.

C H A P T E R I

CONTENTS OF THE SONG.

The Song of Songs is a love song--a Minne Lied, in the form of a dialogue. Thus far, at least, the critics are agreed.

Various are the views as to its form and meaning. Some, notably Herder, have regarded the book as a number of detached songs, or fragments having the common subject " Love ". This theory in itself has different aspects, some of its adherents seeing in the Song only detached fragments while others discover separate and distinct songs.

That the poem is a unity, however, is evident from the following incontrovertible facts:-

1) There is unity not only in the general tone of the language, and the repetition of certain words and phrases as refrains, but also in the order of the matter, as far as there exists any.

2) The same characters maintaining the same qualities continue throughout the entire poem,

3) The poem shows a development-- the sentiment expressed in II,7 is triumphantly repeated and emphasized in altered form in VIII,6-7.

Having decided that the poem is a unity we have now a larger task before us-- we must now settle who and what the characters represented are, and what form our poem is to assume. Accor-

ding to the traditional view there are but two main characters-- a Shulamite (or Shunamite) maiden of wonderful beauty and spotless purity, and King Solomon who is enamored of her. This does not preclude numerous minor and unimportant characters, but they need not be considered. Under this hypothesis the poem tells the story of how the maiden, because of her grace and beauty is taken from her rural home and brought to the palace by Solomon, who makes her his bride. The poem is then simply a declaration of mutual love on the part of Shulamith and Solomon.

The more modern view represented by Jacobi (1771), (though Ibn Ezra also distinguished the King from the lover) recognizes three dramatis personae-- The Shulamite, the King, and the Shepherd

lover. According to this view Solomon, while traveling in the north of Palestine sees the lovely Shulamite and takes her to his palace, endeavoring to win over her affections. She remains true to her shepherd lover, who somehow or other, gains entrance to the royal harem and she goes with him back to her rustic home. The cold, aesthetic blandishments and the artful compliments which the King showers upon the girl are here brought into marked contrast with the warm, glowing and passionate utterances of the enraptured lover, who breaks forth with all the ardor and spontaneity of one brought up in nature's school, free from the conventionalities and restrictions, the guile and mockery of city life. The poem closes with the lovers, in the quiet enjoyment of their country home,

happy and united, proclaiming the triumph of true love, VIII, 6-7.

Both of these views rest on the assumption that the poem is a drama. Of this we will treat at greater length in a subsequent chapter.

There is a third alternative presented to us in the view of Graetz and Reuss. Both agree in so far that the poem is to be put in the mouth of one person. Graetz makes the Shulamite the only speaker, while Reuss puts the poem in the mouth of the writer.

He says:-" We grant, or much rather, we assume from the fullest conviction that all parts of the book flow from one and the same pen. We see nothing of an Anthology (Blumenlese) of love-poems,

which a later hand tries to wreathe into one.

Just as little can we suppose that the poet wished to depict Love objectively by the aid of poetic personages, or by transforming some given outside matter. The lover is himself (the author); it is his own feelings to which he gives expression, and if certain detached verses do not seem to fit into this standpoint, it is because lyric poetry does not explain all its allusions, does not disclose all its secrets. But such passages are few." He then goes on to say that the poem is a collection of independent idyls, such as we find by the hundreds in modern literature, and especially among the Arabs. It is, as it were, the thoughts on the same subject as they occurred, at different times to the author.

This view does not antagonize the conclusions above reached (page 6) as to the unity of the poem. It were an impossible task to make of the Song as we now have it, a continuous and easily flowing presentation. We find parrallel cases in modern writings every day. It is quite possible for a man to-day to write an article on a subject, and while we could not but call it a unit, still there may be many breaks and jars. Much more can this be the case, if he puts down his thoughts as they appeared to him at different times, or just as he feels in the mood for writing.

Driver is of the opinion that much violence must be done in rendering some few passages, on the view of Graetz and Reuss. As noted in the

introduction, even Delitsch admits that whatever view we take some passages must remain obscure, so this argument can not have much weight. We certainly can not charge the interpreter with the blame if the work, as it came from the author, or as he finds it, contains inherent difficulties. But according to Reuss's view, it seems to me at least, that these very difficulties are expected and hence, in so far, cease to be difficulties.

While we thus adopt the view of Reuss in preference to that of Graetz, the latter must receive full credit in that his work preceded Reuss's book, and to his theory, as well as his able and conclusive refutation of the drama theory Reuss no doubt owes much in shaping his views, which, on the whole

seem to me to be clearer, more unbiased, and more worthy of consideration than any I have so far encountered. But of this more anon.

We will now endeavor, under this conception to state the contents of the Song.

The first thought or canto, or by whatever name we choose to call it, extends from I,1-II,7. The maiden seems to be at the royal court. She opens with an apostrophe to her absent lover (I,4) She then speaks of her being brought to court, but nevertheless, not at all blinded by the dazzling splendor which there bursts upon her untutored and child-like gaze she continues speaking in endearing terms of her humble betrothed. The brilliancy of the court then suggests the contrast between herself and

the beauties there-- the " Daughters of Jerusalem ". " I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem." Her dark hue, is due, however not to her birth but to exposure to the sun in the pursuit of her vocation of keeper of vineyard. Again she thinks of the absent one, and in answer to her he seems to speak praising her glorious charms. In this strain the dialogue continues, she finally turning to the " Daughters of Jerusalem" and exhorting them not to arouse love till it please -- not to tempt her with higher, and to her, unthought of spheres, but to leave her content with her humbler choice.

The second thought begins in II,8 and runs through the chapter. She again pictures

her beloved one who exhorts her to come away with him into the beautiful fields-- for lo the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers bloom, the birds sing, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard. The figs ripen on the vine, and give forth fragrance.

Here (III,1-5) in the ecstasy of her love she dreams of her dear one, whom she sought in her sleep.

In contrast to this the rest of Chapter III is taken up with a picture of the royal train as it passes in all the pomp and splendor befitting one of such high estate.

As if to comfort her in their lowly station and eradicate any feeling of envy or regret

after witnessing this grand spectacle, the lover now breaks out (IV,1-V,1) into a passionate encomium on her beauty,-- she is to him a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters. Love, love alone is his joy, his existence. Drink, O friends, be intoxicated with love.

Again she dreams (V,2-8), but so overcome is she by her ardent love, that it is now a horrid nightmare-- her beloved is gone and as she attempts to find him, the unsympathetic and heartless police greet her only with jeers and blows.

Recovering from her fright, she then thinks of her beloved in another strain and in V,9 to the end of the chapter she enumerates his various charms making, as it were, an inventory of

his manly beauty, ending with a plaintive sigh that he might be near at hand, rather than be forced to remain away feeding his flocks.

The poet then changes the strain, and as if in answer to the foregoing he breaks forth in praise of her beauty contrasting her virgin simplicity with the artificial and conventional life of the court ladies.

In a fragmentary way we are then told how she has wandered unawares among the royal retinue and was at once the object of universal attention. The lover calls her back, and indignantly cries out, " Why will ye look upon the Shulamite as upon the dance of Mahanaim " (VI,13). His indignation, giving way to his admiration of her beauty, which now

strikes him more than ever, in the following verses VII,1-9 he gives a catalogue of her voluptuous charms, until she stands before our imagination as a model, before which the most perfect work of a Phidias or Michelangelo pales into insignificance. Despite the pervading air of sensuality, approaching even to grossness, we can not but admire and wonder at the marvelous beauty of the imagery, and the felicitous and striking choice of expression.

From VII,10 to the end of the poem with but one interruption the maiden again gives expression to the fervency of her attachment, at the same time showing the most exquisite feeling of virgin modesty and virtue. " O that thou wert a brother "-then could I give unrestrained expression to

my love, and not be forced to suppress it in the presence of others.

Verses 8-14 in Chapter VIII must be explained a little more in detail. After proclaiming the inextinguishable nature of love and its triumph over riches, luxury and jealousy (VIII,6-7) Shulamith speaks of her little sister, picturing the perils that beset her and wondering whether she can avoid them as she herself had done. (VIII,8 and 9)

As if in emphasis of this thought of the ultimate triumph of chaste and true love over outside influences, she then (VIII,11and 12) mentions King Solomon's vineyard and wealth contrasting them with her own humbler vineyard (herself) and as a fitting ending to the whole (VIII,13 and 14) calls

to her shepherd lover to come in his lowly but honored capacity as a simple rustic swain and claim her as his own.

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On the drama-theory VII,1-9 is utterly unexplainable. The King cannot utter these words as flattering cajolery, as (if indeed he speaks at all) he says her eyes frighten him. Further, if it is the King who speaks (and she spurns his advances) we would expect her to answer quite otherwise than she does, in joyfully calling to her beloved. Those who want to hold consistently to the drama theory must utterly ignore this whole passage. Some claim it is an interpolation. As W.R.Smith says, "It is remarkable that the only passage which can hardly be freed from a charge of sensuality, hangs so entirely

loose from the proper action of the poem."

I see no justification of omitting it. Sensuous it is assuredly, but the whole poem is conceived in the same spirit. It is the mutual exchange of feeling between two pure souls who feel no need of restraint. This passage but typifies the whole poem. It is sensuous, even, if you will, to grossness, but there is a charming air of guilelessness and naive simplicity such that, to him who finds objections on this score we can only say " The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven."

I see no reason to try to explain or excuse the language of the poem. Once we attempt this, it no longer deserves our consideration at all.

Any such attempt degrades the book, placing it on a level with the modern French school of realistic novels or that English phase of the movement represented by Wilde and Beardsley. Let the book stand for itself. It needs no apology.

It is inconceivable how any one should deem such apologies necessary. In a poem of this nature where the chances are so manifold to descend to lower levels the beauty and exquisite delicacy of the whole leaves room for but one of two alternatives: either the author was too pure-minded to harbor any such thoughts, or he carefully and studiously repressed them.

Such is the Song of Songs-- a simple love song. The author revelling in the beauties of nature brings before us a most delightful panorama

of country life; the sweet fragrance of the flowers, breathing their perfume over a land smiling with contentment, with the birds chirping forth their songs from trees thick with varied foliage, and offering soothing rest and shadow under their spreading boughs; the goats resting on the hills and the gazelles leaping over the mountaind or feeding among the lilies.- all this is brought out with so fine a touch that we almost feel that we ourselves are the lover resting in the vineyard or beneath the spreading orchards. The balmy influence of the soft, vernal air, steals over us, and rude and jarring is the shock when we are aroused to find that "the day is cool and the shadows flee away".

The Song is the first of the five

"Megilloths" and is assigned to be read on the eighth day of the Passover feast.[1] The traditional explanation of this is that, according to the Targum interpretation, it begins with the departure from Egypt.

Ruth on Shebuoth; Lamentations on 9th of Ab; Koheleth on Succoth; Esther on Purim.

C H A P T E R II

C H A R A C T E R S .

It may seem peculiar first to give the contents of a book and then settle who and what the characters are. I have done this, however, advisedly. I felt that in discussing the book the first thing to be done is to state the problem. This I deemed could be best done, by giving first, as far as possible, an idea of the book before us. Thus the problem becomes to the reader, should there ever be one, something vital-- he can see from the book itself what the problem is and then he sees the

need to solve it-- and it is not as in the other case first given the problem to solve and then find out that there is a book which gives rise to this problem.

We touched somewhat on this point of characters in the first chapter but only in outline. Those which could be inferred from the direct language of the book itself are 1) Shulamith, 2) Her Lover, 3) King Solomon, 4) The "Daughters of Jerusalem" 5) Her brother and 6) her younger sister.

As to what the commentators make out of these and how they arrahge them we will more fully in Chapter IV. We are concerned now simply to establish who are the active characters. As for the younger sister and the brother, they can hardly be said to be characters at all,-- the former is merely

mentioned once (VIII,8) and that too at the very end of the poem ; the brothers are alluded to but once in I,6 and in a casual way at that. She does not even speak of them as brothers, but merely as "sons of my mother."

Similarly I can not see how King Solomon can be called a"character" in any way. We find the King mentioned impersonally in I,4 and again in I,12; in III,6-11 we find mention of King Solomon but only in a descriptive way; finally we have him mentioned again in VII,11. The slightest consideration of these passages must tell us that, without the aid of a lively imagination or a very decidedly biased judgment, King Solomon is assigned no active part. He is simply referred to and that

in no very complimentary way. There is absolutely not the slightest hint that he speaks at any time or is intended as a speaker.

With the doing away with the King's personality the "Daughters of Jerusalem" as a chorus or group of court ladies are also settled. If the King does not appear then the court has no place in our consideration. The whole court scene, King, chorus etc. is but a figure-- a picture which unfortunately the rays of an ever brilliant imagination have indelibly photographed on the minds of many of the commentators.

There remain then only the Shulamite and her shepherd lover. These are in fact the characters of the poem-- not in the sense, however

of speakers in a dialogue or play, but as we endeavored to show in the first chapter, simply as representatives of the poet's feelings-- he himself being the lover. The transitions are too abrupt for a dialogue, and while in the main we might adopt Graetz's view that it is the Shulamite who speaks throughout, there are several passages (notably VII,1-9) which are inconsistent with her modest and retiring maidenhood. It is therefore the poet who speaks throughout, his thoughts flowing according to his mood.

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C H A P T E R III

AUTHOR AND PLACE OF COMPOSITION.

Here again we meet with difficulty. It is true that the book is entitled the " Song of Songs which is of Solomon "*, but unfortunately in this age where tradition, of itself, has lost its weight, we need some stronger evidence than this. In the absence of Solomon's own autograph, and as there are no witnesses to testify to the genuineness of the title we must fall back on our general knowledge and reason. On these grounds alone we are abundantly

* שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לִשְׁלֹמֹה

justified in stating at the outset that Solomon was certainly not the author.

As we learn from other sources-- Koheleth, Proverbs etc. Solomon, was in Jewish literature a sort of stock character. His name being synonymous with wisdom and greatness, all that was misunderstood or strikingly peculiar was ascribed to him. The legends extant concerning him and the tales reported of him in the Bible, were oftеh the sole grounds of ascribing to him the authorship of a book.

Internal evidehce makes against his authorship in this case. It is scarcely likely that as the author he would have represented himself in such a light. As Reuss humorously remarks,

Solomon is supposed to be at once both author and first tenor etc. Delitsch discusses the heading in a very learned and scholarly manner, showing that it means " The Song of Songs composed by Solomon" He then continues that"the dramatized story, or the fable of the melodrama and its dress, altogether correspond with the traits of character, the favorite turns, the sphere of vision, and the otherwise well known style of authorship peculiar to Solomon.

The modesty with which he here styles himself simply 'Solomon' and not as in Proverbs and Eccliastes"Son of David, King of Israel", also make for his being the author. We give these arguments for what they are worth-- no criticism is necessary. Delitsch admits however that the peculiarity of construction in the

use of the שׁ for אשר is an objection to this conclusion.

The conclusions of modern Biblical criticism would settle in no uncertain terms the inadmissibility of accounting the authorship to Solomon. Some of the more conservative critics unable to cut loose entirely from the bonds of tradition, while forced to reject the Salomonic authorship, as a compromise between their faith and their reason ascribe the book to " a friend of Solomon living in northern Palestine ". That Solomon was not the author we are certain, but who he really was is one of those questions which we are doomed perhaps never to know. We can only conjecture where and when he wrote.

The language and scenery described,

since we have no historical facts related, must be our only guides in determining the probable place of composition. The general consensus of opinion on the subject is that the peculiar dialect, the freshness and beauty of the language and the scenes described point to northern Palestine.

Granting all this we have by no means settled the question as to the author. It is quite possible that even as a native of Jerusalem or for that matter of Egypt, he could still have written a poem the scane of which is laid in Northern Palestine.

The allusion by the author to different localities, (e.g. Kedar, En-Gedi, the valley of Sharon, Bether*, Lebanon, the Hills of Gilead, the Armory# of David in Jerusalem, Amma, Senir, Hermon, Tirzah,

* Not certain that this is a proper name

Just what this means is a matter of conjecture The figure (IV. 4) is very obscure

Mahanaim, Heshbon, the 'Tower of Lebanon looking toward Damascus' , Carmel, Baal-Hamon) in a way which suggests familiar knowledge of them, seems to me to prove little regarding his residence in that locality.

Could we not on similar grounds suppose Homer, Virgil, Dante and Milton to have written both in Heaven-- and hell ?

The poem is much too short to warrant us, on such slight grounds as are enumerated by the critics to settle the question of authorship and place of composition in any satisfactory manner. The most we are warranted in saying is that it was written by some unknown poet, probably in northern Palestine.

CHAPTER IV

STYLE AND FORM

We have already generally characterized the style of the poem as light and graceful, beautiful in diction and rich in figure. The use of words is peculiar. First we note the continual and invariable use of the particle שׁ in place of the relative אשׁר. besides the frequent recurrence of words seldom or never found in other parts of the Bible. APPENDIX I Most of these words are common in Aramaic.

1. The heading שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים אֲשֶׁר לִ׳ is the only exception.

To these must be added the numerous plants and flowers mentioned, most of which are of rare occurrence, and some of which are very difficult to explain. Often the best we can do is to transcribe the Hebrew name into the vernacular.

The commentators are rife with conjectures as to the origin of these terms. They are traced to Aramaic, Phoenician, Canaanitish, Hindu, Persian, Arabic and Greek.

The foreign words are, according to Driver, such as might have been brought in through Solomon's connections with the East, and the fact of so many words uncommon to the Hebrew being readily explained by the Aramaic, combined with the general purity and brightness of the style, decides, in his

mind, that the poem is of the North-Israel dialect. W.R.Smith, Delitsch, modern critics generally, and certainly all the more conservative writers concur in this view.

There are however some objectios to to this view. If once we can discover Grecisms in the book, we have to say: either they are interpolations or else the book can not belong to thid dialect or age. That such can be found is reasonably sure.[Appendix 1a]

General knowledge of the style of the Old Testament will avail us little in considering that of the Song. The difference is very marked, and besides the Song is so short that we have scarcely enough to make a good working basis. Comparison

between its style and that of other books is virtually a game of hide-and-seek. In Psalm 45 and in Hosea, W.R.Smith sees some approach to the style of imagery of the Song. I was unable to discover any such similarity. So much for the Style.

It remains for us to discuss more fully the form of the book. This we will now do somewhat more in detail than was attempted in chapter I, where we were conceived to state only so much as was absolutely necessary to explain our position. Let us first enumerate the different possibilities and then discuss them in turn.

1) Fragment theory

a) Stray fragments found here and there.

b) Distinct and complete songs joined together.

2) Drama theory

a) Actual drama

b) Dramatic poem

3) Simple love poem theory.

In chapter I, I have touched on the fragment theory, sufficiently at length, and as its supporters were never many, and are now very few, I will not discuss it further here, as such treatment would involve mainly a list of names, which will be more in place in chapter VII.

The drama theory is the one most widely held, and in its defense could be marshalled a long line of critics forming so famous and imposing

a company that on the strength of their names alone we might be deterred from seeking further for any other than this explanation. While however, they agree that the book is a drama, their ideas as to what extent it is so, what the divisions are, who are the characters, and what the idea to be conveyed is, are so different and often so conflicting, that we might well say to begin with, the best argument against this theory is to read the views of the various advocated.

Before we run the risk of losing it, by entering this mazy labyrinth, let us first use our reason a little in the matter. What a charming and significant drama we can make out of 116 verses! I am afraid we would have to use the commas, periods,

and perhaps more than anything else, the spaces between the lines. If we made the time between the acts and the intermisssions long enough we might get along provided-- etc.

Aside from the absurdity of a drama which would be over before we had a chance to read t through the program and adjust our glasses, we must begin by having material for the plays. In vain we search for it in the song itself. His must be a wonderful genius that can construct out of a simple interchange of professions of love, a complete drama. The most that reason would allow would be a short dialogue forming but an episode in a scene.- Search how we may, and we will fail to find even the first essentials of a drama, much less the completed product.

In Chapter II we have shown that if we follow our reason and take the book as it stands before us, but two actual characters appear; still our friends of the drama theory are not contented with this, but in addition to making every name mentioned a character-- Solomon, the court ladies, the Shulamite's brothers, and her younger sister, they supply (whence I can not even imagine) a first, second and third citizen, a villager and what-not. After reading the poem itself it seems to me that the mere mention of these things shows their absurdity. So much for the testimony of the book itself.

If we revert to our historical knowledge we have even stronger grounds, if possible, for rejecting the drama theory. Curiously enough those

who maintain this view date the book as early as from 800-1000 B.C. Now in the first place I have been unable to discover that the drama finds any place in the genius of Hebrew literature, nor do I know of any drama from the period coeval with the Biblical books that has come down to us. But even laying aside this argument, did even the Greeks have any such thing in their literature as early as the eighth century B.C.? If Graetz were to claim the book as a drama he would be entitled to our respectful attention as he places it at a period (280 B.C.) when the Greek influence might have made such a thing as a Hebrew drama possible. His reason however would not allow of his so considering it.

Even to-day the Jewish genius does

not seem to run much in the dramatic line.as is testified by our numerous "Purim" and "Chanukah" plays. What possible sanction can be found in reason for regarding the Song as a drama, particularly by men presumably so well versed in Hebrew and Semitic literature is to me inconceivable.

In its practical working we meet again with new difficulties. In the poem itself we have no intimation of acts or scenes or who is speaking. This is left then for the ingenuity of the critics to decide. We might write a fair-sized book showing how ingenious they have shown themselves. Of course each one has the only right plan, but how little those plans agree! The acts, the scenes, and even the characters are differently designated.

Reuss gives a table representing in parallel columns the arrangements of Jacobi, Staendlin, Ewald, Boettcher, Hitzig and Renan. We need make no comment. When one reads the different commentators and notes their criticisms of one another's views, we are tempted to ask with Cicero " Ubinam gentium sumus?" Each one seems to delight in showing what big fools all the others were. We are tempted, in this at least, to declare that all were right.

Recognizing some of these difficulties the more recent commentators say the book is a dramatic poem-- it never was intended for the stage. To begin with we must repeat that the History of Hebrew Literature militates very decidedly against the view of a Hebrew drama. Aside from this however,

the poem itself must be patched and smoothed considerably to satisfy this view. The transitions are too abrupt and frequent, and the logical sequence is hardly strict enough for such a poem.

Finally we come to the last view-- that the Song is nothing more than a simple love song. We can only repeat here the view already advanced-- the author is practically thinking on paper. As he felt in the mood he put down his thoughts and having either no time or no inclination, or perhaps never intending it for "publication" he never revised thework. There is but one other logical assumption we can make-- the poem is a fragment-- but in another sense than that intended by Herder and his followers-- it is all that is left of what once per-

haps was a larger work.

Taking, however, the view as set down by Reuss, and which I have thought the best to adopt, we have the fewest difficulties to overcome. We need not rack our brains concerning who or how many are the characters, or where the acts and scenes begin in order to reconcile the workings of our imagination that the poem is a drama, nor on the other hand, in order to find the separate songs of which it is made up need we discover interpolations here, and omissions there. The interpolation theory is always a dangerous one. Only where it is patent to all and readily perceived ought we resort to it. After all it depends a great deal, if not entirely, on our preconceived point of view, whether a passage is an interpolation

or not. It is not always advisable to make things too smooth. There are, of course, exceptions but in the main, the more difficult the passage is of explanation, the more probable is it that it is genuine. Let us then take the Song as we find it, and if, despite all the difficulties encountered, we still can draw a reasonable, if not entirely satisfactory, meaning from it, we should be content. The idea is, or should be, to understand and explain the Song itself, not to test our ingenuity by attempting to see how much we can get out of it or read into it. The simplest and straightest way is the best. Most of the difficulty is manufactured. We try to make something great and imposing out of something very plain and

simple, and naturally enough, the attempt fails.

CHAPTER V

DATE OF COMPOSITION

It seems to be an unwritten law among the commentators, that it is a crime t o write on a book of the Bible and not give a decided answer on every point. It sometimes happens that facts stubbornly refuse to give the required conclusion and then the opinions of the critics, delivered with all certainty and assurance, are only a collection of guesses. So it is in this case. Here however we are remarkably fortunate. Almost all tastes

can be suited since the variety is almost unlimited. We can place the date anywhere between 1000-204, and we need not be afraid that everyone will laugh at us-- whatever guess we make we will be sure to find some one who concurs in our opinion.

Being but a novice, I will seize the opportunity of doing now, what perhaps in later years I may not dare-- admit that I do not know. The most I can do is to join the others and make a guess. Before doing so let us look around a little, and survey the field in order to see just how much such a conjecture is worth.

To simplify matters, we can arrange the possibilities under three or four headings and examine each. We have scarcely the time to consi-

der the varieties. First, of course, comes the view of those, who adopting the Solomonic authorship, place the date about 1000. We need not dwell on this point as from what has preceded, we can be reasonably sure that this view is untenable.

Others again, discarding the view that Solomon was the author, place the date between 1000-850. Different reasons are assigned by the various authors who take this standpoint. The arguments above mentioned in chapter III, used to prove that the poem was written in Northern Palestine, are also made use of to establish the date at somewhere between 1000-850.

Some see in this poem an intention to decry the over-luxurious extravagance of the court,

emphasizing on the other hand, the pure simplicity of country life.

Others see in the poem reference to the break in the Kingdom between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. If such tendencies can be shown, we could certainly, on this ground take this date. We fail, however, to see any such allusions.

The theory that the Song was a collection of the songs of Solomon arranged and edited later by the " Men of Hezekiah " based upon the Talmudic statement to that effect, is deserving of little attention. This is only one of many another similar statement-- purely mythical. The evidence derived from the Midrash and the apocryphal books is equally undeserving of any serious thought; it

is purely traditional and based on no historic ground.

The other extreme, represented by the views of Graetz, and, more recently, by Dr. Wise,* places the book at 280 and 221-204 respectively. Most critics object to Graetz's view as too late, and of course the same criticism holds with greater force in reference to the opinion advanced by Dr. Wise. Many who hold this objection pronounce the book " late " but not quite so far down as Graetz. His main argument bases on the fact that he find Grecisms in the book. In one case at least, this view seems to be correct. Appendix a

The argument as to the date of the composition of the book is to be fought out mainly on the line of the language. The other arguments

* Dr. Wise mentions this as an alternative, Either this date or 1000.

avail little except in a cumulative way. This is not the kind of argument possible here, as the number of facts that can be marshalled in all departments is not great.

The authorities differ widely as to the origin of much of the language, but against the standpoint of those who contend for the earlier composition, I think we are justified in remarking that the influence of tradition has no small part to play in the making of their view. Feeling that Graetz has succeeded in finding Grecisms, I am rather more inclined to lean to the later view. I would however rather find the date somewhat earlier, for reasons which will appear more fitly in the following chapter.(105) The most plausible conjecture then, that I

can make, since certainty is out of the question, is that the book was written sometime during the period of the contact between the Hebrews and the Greeks; perhaps at the beginning of this period.

CHAPTER VI

CANONICITY

The word canon, and the exact idea connoted by the term, is very uncertain. Much has been written on the subject, but the conclusions reached are by no means beyond the pale of doubt. Therefore before deciding anything about the canonicity of the Song we must first try to get as clear a conception as possible, as to just what we understand by " Canon ".

The word seems first to have had the meaning of " rule " or " regulating principle " and then of a list of books carrying out this rule or embodying this principle. To Ezra is accredited the first formation of the Canon, and he is supposed to have done little more than edit the Pentateuch.

The second Canon is attributed to Nehemiah, and includes the work of Ezra plus the prophetic writings, thus completing the Torah and "Nevyim." It is not until the sedond century that we have a definite allusion to the second Canon. Ben Sirach presupposes its completion. The second canon appears to have been partly gradual in its formation.

The third canon seems to have been

settled during a period of a century and a half. We have mentionemade of it in Ben Sirach, but the allusion is very vague. Neither Philo nor the New Testament gives us any exact information, the latter in fact making no mention whatever of Canticles, Esther, and Ecclesiastes.

Josephus*, toward the end of the first century, mentions what appear to be our present books though he makes the number twenty-two rather than twenty-four.

With the first and second canon we are not much concerned here. We have only to deal with the third. Its history, as far as known, is very uncertain. That it did not possess the same sacredness as the other parts of the Bible is seen

* Contra Appion, I, 8.

from the fact that so many efforts were made to drop some of the books. Indeed several books, the Song being one, were relegated to the class גנוזים or " Hidden Books "

At one time, when the Shamai faction were in the majority, they absolutely excluded Kohelet. This action was later rescinded by the followers of Hillel who declared that both it and the Song " pollute the hands ". Appendix

The Alexandrian arrangement differed from the Palestinian, and in the Septuagint appear some portions not adopted in the Palestinian canon. So loose and uncertain was the third canon that Zunz* relates that about the fourth century even Ben Sirach was included in the Hagiographa. A further proof

* Gottesdienstliche Vorträge p.

of this uncertainty is instanced by the fact that in the Vatican manuscript we find the Apocryphal books inserted between the later canonical ones.

We see then how uncertain is the determination of what constituted the reasons for adopting the book into the canon. Regarding the first two divisions of it we can confidently assert that their deep religious import stamped them as sacred.

With the loss of nationality, the Hebrew literature seems also to have declined, and we might find much to justify us in the belief that the books comprising the third canon the "Kethubim" owe their sacred character to the fact that they were the last remnants surviving from the glory of former days. If there was any more extant, the severe and

constant persecution of the later Roman rule, during which so much of the literature was destroyed, must have annihilated it. This discussionm may be deemed unnecessary, but it is of importance in determining our view of the Song.

So doubtful are the reasons for its appearance in the canon, that Reuss in his introduction to his commentary, says that he hesitated at first to treat the book at all. This was the sentiment even among the Rabbis as can be seen from the discussions concerning it in the Talmud. Though the disputes end in declaring that the Song "pollutes the hands " (and is therefore sacred) and Rabbi Akiba asserts " No day in the whole history of the world is worth so much as that on which the Song was writ-

ten, for all the Kethubim were holy but the Song of S Songs most holy," much room was left for doubt. The very vehemence of the assertions make us suspicious that the opposition was great. The conservative critics like Delitsch and Zoeckler appeal to these sayings in favor of the unimpeachable sanctity of the book. If however such was the case, what reason was there to be so vehement in stating it ? We are not ordinarily so emphatic in stating what is generally admitted.

Knowing how loose was the fixing of the Kethubim we infer that it was canonized very late. Its claim to canonicity can rest on but one of two reasons: either the Kethubim generally were canonized simply because they were all that remained of the n

national literature, and therefore appealed in a pathetic way to the people's consciousness, and so the Song was taken up; or its reception was due to a misunderstanding: The book had existed for some time and the author being either unknown or long forgotten, it was, because of the beauty of the style and the intimate knowledge displayed of all three of nature's realms, ascribed to Solomon.

The general desire to preserve the work then gave rise to the attempts to find all manner of ethical and moral precepts in the book and so it was canonized. It was in order to make allowance for this misconception, and to give ample time for the author and original meaning to have been completely forgotten that I rejected Graetz's date

and placed the book rather earlier in the Greek period.

We can, at best, but speculate on the question. One thing we are sure of (and that is about all we can be certain of) : the book is in the Canon. Why and how it got there should not influence our opinion concerning it. Our business is simply to understand the book as it lies before us. But facts are too prosy for most people, and they prefer a generous sprinkling of the imagination. Were this not the case, we might have been spared the necessity of writing the next chapter.

CHAPTER VII

SKETCH OF EXEGESIS

I must once more quote from Delitsch. He complains in his introduction that when his first monograph on the Song appeared, some monster of a critic in Colani's Revue de Theologie remarked " Ce n'est pas la première revue de ce genre sur le livre en question; plût à Dieu que ce fût la dernière." He ends the introduction (after stating that his commentary presents " various new contributions to the

history of the interpolation of this book") by saying: " No other book of the Scriptures has been so much abused by an unscientific spiritual and an over-scientific unspiritual treatment as this has... .... To inventory the 'maculatur' of these absurdities is a repulsive undertaking, and in the main a useless labor."

Fully endorsing this thought we will proceed to give in a very general way a sketch of the Exegesis of the Song.

The allegorical interpretation, still so powerful, finds its origin in tradition. The fourth book of Ezra was the first to advance this theory, identifying Shulamit with Israel as the spouse of God. That this idea met with much opposition is

seen from the facts narrated in the last chapter, and Rabbi 'Akiba's exaggerated expression that the Song is most holy, can be regarded as a victory of the allegory theory. This idea was elaborated and the Shulamite is Israel; her royal love, King Solomon, is God; the whole poem being a sketch of Israel's history from the Exodus to the Messianic time. So is the view set down in Targum and followed by Rashi, David Kimchi and slightly modified by Ibn Ezra. The latter finds in Chapter I the history represented from Abraham to Moses. He explains II,8 " who comes leaping over mountains and hills " as the thunder of Jehovah by which Sinai was shaken, and II,9 " He looks in at the windows, he peeps through the lattice " as God looking down upon his people op-

pressed in Egypt. Maimonides follows the Midrashic method and explains 1,2 " Let him kiss me etc" as a mystical designation of the union of the creator with the creature, and traces the phrase that Moses, Aaron and Miriam died in the 'kiss of God' to this as its origin. Moses Ibn Tibbon, Immanuel ben Solomon (of Rome) and others of the Middle Age cabalistic and philosophic period explain the Song taking Solomon as a symbol of the highest spiritual will (intelectus agens), Shulamit as symbol of the lover, merely sensuous and receptive understanding (intelectus materialis) and the whole as a representation of the union of both, effecting the purification of the latter.

Jerome reports that Origen used the

allegory to symbolize the love of Christ for the Church or the believing soul, rather than that of God for Israel; and Cocceius, no doubt influenced by the Targum, found in the poem a complete account of the Church history. Luther understood the book as a portrayal of the political connection of Solomon and his people; some find in it expression of Solomon's love for Wisdom (Rosenmuller in the present century). Alchemists find in it Solomon's researches in their art, and Puffendorf, by the aid of Egyptian hieroglyphics, referred the whole to the grave of Christ!!!

That the Rabbis also considered the literal interpretation is proved by the fact that it was a current saying that noone should read the Song

till he was thirty years old. To me this can have but one meaning-- believing it to be a purely sensual love song they must have thought it unfit for young men to read.

Theodorus of Mopsuestia thought the poem was an answer by Solomon to the complaints about his Egyptian marriage. For this opinion, among other things, he was condemned for heresy after his death, at the second council of Constantinople. It was over a thousand years after, before another attempt was made in this direction, when in 1544 Chateillon lost his regency at Geneva, for wishing to expel the book from the Bible as impure. In 1758 J.D.Michaelis in his notes on Lowth's lectures proposed to drop the allegory and base the canonicity

of the book on the moral picture it presents as a picture of the enduring happiness of wedded love. In 1771 Jacobi distinguished Solomon from the true lover, and representing the former as a baffled tempter, prepared the way for the modern view. Herder in 1778, followed by Goethe and some few critics, in his "Solomon's Song of Love, the Oldest and Sweetest of the East" brought in the fragment theory. Hengstenberg (1853) says that "the heavenly Solomon must be distinguished from Solomon, and this like the forty-fifth Psalm (which is a sort of "compendium of the Song of Solomon") must be explained allegorically of the Messiah and his Church in the Old and New Testament. The details of his commentary contain much of a trifling, not to say silly, nature. Hug (1815)

represents Shulamit as the Kingdom of the ten tribes; Solomon, as the groom, is Hezekiah, King of Judah; the brothers of Shulamit, are a party in the house of Judah. The whole is a representation clothed in an idyllic form of the longing felt by the Kingdom of the ten tribes for reunion with Judah, but which the " brothers " opposed.

Besides Goethe, Eichhorn, Doepke (1839), Magnus (1842), Noyes (1846), Rebenstein (1834) and Sanders (1866), De Wette and Diestrel follow Herder's view.

Following the suggestion of Jacobi we have the modern commentaries of Umbreit(1820) Ewald (1826 and 1867), Staendlin (1867), Boettcher (1850), Hitzig (1855), Ginsburg (1857) and Renan(1860)

Ewald assumed a very simple structure and did not claim that the piece was ever acted. His followers are less cautious, and Boettcher tries to bring into it the complexities and stage effects of a modern operetta. The view of Delitsch and Zoeckler has already been mentioned. They adhered to the Solomonic authorship and adopt the typical rather than the allegorical view. They did not suppose that the poem was ever acted. Dr.Kohler in 1878 published a small pamphlet on the Song but it contains little that is new. Davidson in 1862 adopted the shepherd hypothesis and regards it as a purely amatory poem, having neither an allegorical nor a typical sense, written by a citizen of the northern court twenty-five or thirty years after Solomon's death.

Graetz (1871) regards it simply as a love sang in which Shulamit speaks throughout, and written about 280. Dr.Wise in his Pronaos of Holy Writ (1891) regards the poem as follows: " The poet, while glorifying the daughter of Israel well represents the struggles between two civilizations (Greeks and Hebrews). Shulamit, the daughter of Sinai.....well represents the congregation of Israel, who in the whole poem is spoken of by Shulamit, but never appears personally on the stage of the poem; he is the invisible God whom no idols can represent. The highest ideals of the Grecian mind,- philosophy and the King, could best be represented by the philosophical King Solomon, and he is the absent lover's mighty rival. But he is rejected and the wisest of Kings is vanquished

by the unshaken faith of the plain shepherdess; the Grecian ideals cannot captivate the congregation of Israel; she remains faithful to her beloved, to Sinai, to the God of Israel. Here is the anagogue without mysticism. It is an allegory."

W.R. Smith, and Driver (Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament, 1891) agree that Ewald's view is the best so far proposed. They regard the book as a dramatic poem of the tenth century written in northern Palestine. (Ewald thinks the literal sense supplies the requisite ethical justification, and combining with this the typical explanation we have the heroine's true love represented by God, and Solomon represents the blandishments of the world unable to divert the heart of his true servants

from him.) So Driver writes.

Reuss in his book (1893) remarks, "Theological exegesis has sown weeds enough in the fields of Hebrew literature, it is time at length to come back to the natural meaning.....We can discover in this booklet no hidden meaning. The author simply loves and says so; that is all; he speaks and sings for himself and his beloved, and does not bother himself about the outside world." The aberrations of the many commentators are a source of endless enjoyment to him and he indulges in many graceful and keen sarcasm at their expense. He is the only critic, who was able so far to overcome his pride and prejudice, as to say in reference to any point- "I don't know". His book is well worthy of transla-

tion.

CHAPTER VIII

TENDENCY

From the preceding sketch we see that the suppositions, concerning the meaning intended to be conveyed by the Song, are manifold. We may well conclude from the diversity of opinion that these explanations reflect the writers' own minds, and not at all the idea of the Song. The peculiar ideas so long prevalent concerning the sacred and inviolable

character of the Bible as a whole and every part thereof, was the cause of seeking for some hidden, higher meaning. From this standpoint the Song could not speak of earthly love-- it must only picture a divine, spiritual love. The whole structure based on the allegorical and typical view crumbles before the breath of rational examination and criticism.

One would scarcely write an allegory and not give us a hint that it was intended as such. An allegory is written to impress some truth, and if people can not see that it is an allegory the object is lost. It must be a very skillful writer indeed, who composes an allegory purporting to convey spiritual ideas without using a single spiritual word or phrase. It has been called, and rightly so, a false

art, for an allegorist to hide his thoughts on sacred matters behind a screen of sensuous and erotic imagery so complete, so beautiful and so enchantingly voluptuous in itself, as to give not the slightest clue or intimation that it is only the vehicle of a deeper sense. There is absolutely no reason for allegorizing poetry so full of meaning, so appropriate in sentiment, and so beautiful and captivating in its imagery as the Song. We are entitled to look for allegory only when the natural sense is somewhat lacking. In the Song the sense is complete.

Of course we can read any amount of ethical ideas and lofty moral ideals into the poem, but in the first place it is not necessary, as we have abundant and more proper opportunities to base such

thoughts on Scripture, and in the second place, they are not there. If a man is so thoroughly raised above things terrestrial, and he soars in his thoughts aloft in the etherial realms of divine inspiration, he will scarcely make use of the sensuous language of impassioned mortals. Such flights of the ethical muse are scarcely to be hampered by details concerning each separate part of the human anatomy, nor will one in thinking of heaven and rising above the clouds make it a specialpoint to give minute and graphic descriptions of the earth. Added to this we search the book in vain for a single mention of the name of God.

We might, it is true, derive the lesson of true and pure love and that it triumphs over all obstacles-- for "love is stronger than death, and

jealousy hard as the grave; many waters cannot quench love, nor the floods drown it." We may derive other lessons also, but I am sure that the inculcation of t these lessons was not the intention of the author. He loves and says so, that is all. His story happens to embody and express these lofty views, but that does not worry him one way or the other. His theme is love, and the language of the poem shows how intense was his passion. It is ridiculous, to say the least to find in the poem any expression of political situations or traces of ~~Church~~ history-- Church or otherwise. These and similar theories are simply due to overheated imaginations, the vapors from which becloud and darken the reason. So intensely earthly is the song that it was used as a drinking song. Thus we

see that either the author was so skillful in hiding the thoughts he was so anxious to express that men f failed to recognize them, or else these thoughts were the outcome of later minds and are not at all in the poem.

Were the Song to be turned into English or any other modern verse, and givenus to read, I am sure we could have but one verdict: It would be called beautiful and enchanting but no one would ever seek any hidden meaning-- we would be more than satisfied that the poet should have so charmingly expressed such a sentiment as love. Now that the Song is a part of the Bible I see no reason why we should act otherwise. Love,- common, every-day, earthly love is a theme lofty enough for any bard. In so far as

there is any tendency it is simply this:

The Song is nothing more than a love song-- as Herder aptly terms it," the Oldest and Sweetest of the East."

C O N C L U S I O N

It was the custom of the Old English writers to end their books with an apology and an explanation. That I might well follow their example I am painfully conscious.

I know, however, that in estimating this attempt, due allowance will be made for the difficulties besetting the path of the graduate, who in six months is expected to write a thesis, and at the same time perform his other duties, which just at

this period are more onerous than at any time in his college life.

Feeling that my preparation and knowledge were hopelessly inadequate, I have carefully refrained from being dogmatic or settled in the standpoints chosen. The greatest and most celebrated Hebrew scholars have made a woeful mess of this book, and even did I feel justified by my knowledge, I could scarcely be decided on a book which offers so little ground for certainty.

I have derived much benefit from the work done in this direction, and if it were only for the amusement which the various views of the different commentators and their criticisms of, and quarrels with each other afforded, I would feel that I had

not wasted time.

Finally I can only say that with all its shortcomings and imperfections, many of which I am conscious of even now, I present this thesis in the hope, that at no very distant day it may form the basis for a larger and completer work which a wider knowledge and more thorough study will enable me to make.

F I N I S

Appendix I

נטר I, 6. VIII 11. 12 probably for נצר (נטר means to retain wrath)

אכה where I, 7 cf 2 Kings 6, 13. שַׁלְמָה (?שְׁלֹמֹה) I, 7

(perhaps = Aramaic די למה) ברות for ברוש I, 17.

קפץ III, 8 · חרכים II, 9. כתל II, 9. סתר III, 11

סמרר II, 13. 15; VII, 13. פג II, 13 · של III, 7; I, 6; VIII, 12.

רסיס V, 2. טנף V, 3. הרהב VI, 5 - (frighten).

אמן VII, 2. מזג (for מסך) and סוגה VII, 3; סנסנים VII, 9

שעיה I, 7; קוצות V, 2. 11; גפה VI, 11, גליל V, 14; שש V, 15

A

אפרין III, 9 - Delitzsch traces it through
פרן to פרה, and W. R. Smith to the Sanskrit
paryañka whence Hindu palki - a palanquin
Grätz in ascribing it to φορεῖν is certainly
much nearer the truth.

לתלפיות Grätz derives from τήλοπις

כפר probably = κύπρος; פרדס = παράδεισος

Appendix 2

"To pollute the hands" was a phrase used in Rabbinical writings, meaning that the object thus spoken of (the phrase was used only of books) was sacred. To touch any thing unclean, would pollute the hands; and to provide for cases in which vermin or other unclean things had come in contact with the holy books, thus making them unclean & of course also him who touched them, the Rabbis decided that the Sacred Book pollute the hands.

Appendix 3

Plants.

אהלות, קנמון, כרכם and פרס are probably of Indian origin, as is also נֵרְדְּ אֱגוֹז (a nut) is Persian; אֶרֶז cedar; חִטִּים wheat; חֲבַצֶּלֶת lily, כֹּפֶר cyprus; לְבוֹנָה frankincense; מֹר myrrh; רִמּוֹן pomegranate; שׁוֹשַׁן lily; גֶּפֶן vine; תְּאֵנָה fig; תַּפּוּחַ apple; בְּרוֹת cypress? דּוּדָאִים mandrakes; קָנֶה calamus; and

Animals

אֲפִר הָאַיָּלִים young hart; עַזִּים; עֹרֵב; סוּסָה; נְמֵרִים; אַיֶּלֶת הַשַּׁחַר hind; שְׁעָלִים; תּוֹר turtle-dove וְתֹלִים and יַעֲבִי; יוֹנִים; גְּדִיוֹת; אֲדָרִיוֹת;

Minerals

שֵׁשׁ marble; תַּרְשִׁישׁ torquois; סַפִּיר sapphire of also שֵׁן ivory