CHAPTER I

THE EARLIEST POETRY

THE English reader who knows how the language of Chaucer differs from that of Shakespeare will naturally expect the earliest poetry of the Hebrews to be clearly marked by archaisms. It is well therefore to state at once that this is not the case. Of course there are archaic forms, but fragments of Songs and popular poetry which have been preserved in the Hexateuch have come down to us in the language of the Prophetic Writers of the 8th century B.C. Thus, the Song of Lamech (Gen. iv. 23 f.), reads as follows:

"Áda and Tzíllah, | Héar my voíce;
Wíves of Lámech | heárken to my spéech:
For a mán I have sláin to my woúnd;
A yoúth to my húrt.
If sévenfold véngeance be Cáin's
Then Lámech's be séventy-séven."

If these words had been the actual words of Lamech they would have been not merely archaic but probably not even Semitic. In point of fact they

are pure Hebrew written in the *Ḳinah* or elegiac measure of which we shall have occasion hereafter to speak. It is quite probable that the Song was founded upon some Kenite (Cain) tradition connected with the discovery of metal weapons (cf. *v.* 22); for the Kenites were the smiths of the ancient world. But the Song in *its present form* is due to the Jehovist, i.e. to a prophetic writer of the 8th century B.C. whose object is to trace the downward course of the race of Cain to this Lamech, the *seventh* from Adam shewing the fruits of murder augmented from "seven-fold" to "seventy times seven."

It is interesting to note that in Gen. v. 29 (which is also assigned to a Jehovistic writer) we read of the other Lamech, of the race of Seth, "...and he called his name *Noaḥ*, saying, This one shall *comfort* (√NḤM) us for our works and for the toil of our hands from the ground which Jahve hath cursed."

The Hebrew words for "*vengeance*" (NḲM) and "*comfort*" (NḤM) are practically identical in sound. The good Lamech of the line of Seth inherits "*comfort*," the bad Lamech of the line of Cain inherits "*vengeance*."

If we omit the two last lines Lamech's song is a complete elegy (*Ḳinah*). I suggest that a Prophetic Writer (the J^s of the critics) found this poem in some collection of Kenite folk-songs, and, caring little for poetry, but much for edification, added the

two last prosaic lines to make out his allusion to Gen. iv. 15.

Another instance of ancient poetry which appears to have degenerated into prose is the quotation from the Book of Jashar in Josh. x. 12 f.:

> "Sun stand thou still upon Gibeon;
> And thou moon in the valley of Ajalon."

It is difficult to believe that a poet would have written, *Shémesh b'Gibyṓn dṓm*, with two accented syllables in painful juxtaposition, when, by changing the order of the words, he might have written the musical line, *Shémesh dṓm b'Gibyṓn*. As to the words which follow, "*So the sun stood still and the moon stayed*," &c., they appear to be simply prose.

The amount of secular poetry in Israel must, at one time, have been very great: thus of Solomon alone it is said, "And he spake three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall,..." [1 Kings v. 12 f. (iv. 32 f.)]

Poetry is older than prose; and, in ancient Israel, every impassioned thought expressed itself in song. "It was indispensable to the sports of peace, it was a necessity for the rest from the battle, it cheered the feast and the marriage (Is. v. 12; Amos vi. 5; Judg. xiv.), it lamented in the hopeless dirge for the dead (2 Sam. iii. 33), it united the masses, it blessed

the individual, and was everywhere the lever of culture. Young men and maidens vied with one another in learning beautiful songs, and cheered with them the festival gatherings of the villages, and the still higher assemblies at the sanctuary of the tribes. The maidens at Shilo went yearly with songs and dances into the vineyards (Judg. xxi. 19), and those of Gilead repeated the sad story of Jephtha's daughter (Judg. xi. 40); the boys learned David's lament over Jonathan (2 Sam. i. 18); shepherds and hunters at their evening rests by the springs of the wilderness sang songs to the accompaniment of the flute (Judg. v. 11). The discovery of a fountain was the occasion of joy and song (Num. xxi. 17). The smith boasted defiantly of the products of his labour (Gen. iv. 23). Riddles and witty sayings enlivened the social meal (Judg. xiv. 12; 1 Kings x.). Even into the lowest spheres the spirit of poetry wandered and ministered to the most ignoble pursuits (Is. xxiii. 15 ff.)[1]."

But, however much we may regret the fact, the secular poetry of Israel has not survived, except only in those cases where it was taken over into the service of Religion.

At a very early date the poetry of Israel, which had lived from mouth to mouth, was collected in a written form. One of these collections was called

[1] Reuss, Art. "Heb. Poesie," Herzog. *Encykl.* quoted by Briggs.

The Book of the wars of Jahve, which is quoted in Num. xxi. 14—a very obscure passage. Two other Songs are given in the same context (Num. xxi. 17 f. and xxi. 27 ff.), one being the *Song of the Well* and the other a taunt-song recounting a defeat of the Moabites. This latter song is introduced by the words "*They that make taunt-songs say....*"

Kautzsch suggests that both these songs, and possibly the groundwork of the Songs of Moses and of Miriam (Ex. xv.), may have been preserved in this *Book of the wars of Jahve*. Some also have supposed that the words of Moses (Num. xi. 35 f.) on the journeying and resting of the Ark were found in the same source.

Another collection of similar date was *The Book Jashar*, literally *The Book of the Upright*, i.e. *of Israel* (?). This Book is quoted twice. First, as the origin of Joshua's prayer (Josh. x. 12):

> "Sún; stand thou still upon Gíbeon,
> And thou Móon in the válley of Ájalon";

and secondly, for David's lament over Saul and Jonathan, which must be considered later at length.

These are the only passages in which the *Book of Jashar* is mentioned in our present Hebrew text, but some have supposed, from the Septuagint text (1 Kings viii. 12 f., Greek 3 Kings viii. 53 f.), that the words of Solomon at the Dedication of the Temple

were also preserved in the Book of Jashar. These words might be rendered:

> Jahve thoúght to dwéll in thick-dárkness!
> I have buílt Thee a Hoúse of Exaltátion,
> A Hóme for Thy éndless Dwélling.

Solomon feels that the Temple is to mark a new stage in the ever-growing nearness of God. He, Who, in earlier times, dwelt in the "*thick-darkness*" (Ex. xx. 21; Deut. iv. 11, v. 22), would now dwell in the midst of His people.

The word I have translated "*Exaltation*" signifies "*high-dwelling.*" Similar names are given to many Babylonian temples, e.g. *E-Sagila*, "the lofty House," *E-Anna* "the House of Heaven," *E-Zida*, "the fixed House," &c.

THE SONG OF DEBORAH.

The history, date and text.

It was probably about the year 1200 B.C. when the Northern Tribes were reduced to servitude by a powerful king named Sisera, possibly a Hittite, who headed a federation of "the Kings of Canaan." The plain of Esdraelon gave great advantage to his numerous horsemen and "chariots of iron"; so "for twenty years he mightily oppressed the children of Israel" (Judg. iv. 3). The deliverance came through

Deborah, Israel's Joan of Arc, a woman of the Tribe of Issachar (Judg. v. 15), who first stirred up her fellow-tribesman, Barak, and through him the Tribes of Issachar, Ephraim, Benjamin, West Manasseh, Zebulun and Naphtali. Judah is not mentioned, and seems at this time to have been of little importance; Reuben, Gad, Dan and Asher refused the call. The six loyal Tribes met Sisera in the plain. The first of the many battles of Esdraelon, in the valley of Megiddo, resulted in a decisive victory which established not merely the security of Israel in the North but which also tended greatly to its religious unity.

The Song of Deborah which commemorates this victory, whether actually composed by her or not, is recognised by almost every critic as belonging to the age of the events which it records. It is undoubtedly far older than the prose version which is contained in Judg. iv. from which, indeed, it differs in some important points which need not now be discussed. The Song contains archaic forms, one of the most important being the verb in *v.* 7, which has given rise to the mistaken translation "Until that *I*, Deborah, *arose*." The text is, in parts, corrupt; indeed Kautzsch goes so far as to say that *vv.* 8—14 "are nothing but a heap of puzzling ruins[1]."

[1] In a work like the present critical notes would be out of place. The Biblical students may be referred to the following books. Moore,

Analysis of the Song.

Though we cannot strictly divide the Song into strophe and antistrophe, yet there is a relation between the Parts which should be carefully studied.

Part I (*vv.* 2, 3). *Prelude*, addressed to "kings" and "princes" of a united Israel, bidding them to "Bless Jahve" for the "devotedness" of the loyal Tribes.

Part II (*vv.* 4, 5). A meditation on the victories of Jahve at the Exodus.

Part III (*vv.* 6—8). The low estate to which Israel had sunk in the times of the writer—A contrast!

Part IV (*vv.* 9, 10). A second *Prelude*, addressed to the Rulers and Judges, bidding them to "Bless Jahve" for the "noble-devotion" of the People—Compare Part I.

Part V (*v.* 11). The "victory of Jahve" which has just been won has freed Israel like a second Exodus—Compare Part II.

Part VI (*vv.* 12—15[a] and 18). The high estate to which Israel has now attained—Contrast Part III.

If the Song had ended with Part VI it would have

on Judges, *Critical Edition of the Hebrew Text*; G. A. Cooke, *The History and Song of Deborah*; Kautzsch, *Literature of the Old Testament*; Zapletal, *Das Deboralied* and various articles in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*.

had a certain completeness in itself. But the thought of the faithful Tribes who are praised in Part VI suggests, by way of contrast,

Part VII (*vv.* 15ᵇ—17). The taunt-song on the unfaithful Tribes.

Part VIII (*vv.* 19—22). A magnificent description of the Battle. The star-gods of Canaan fight in their orbits for Jahve. The Kishon river of Sisera's home rises in torrent to sweep him away ; and the scene ends (*v.* 22) in a marvellous piece of word-painting in which the Hebrew pictures the once terrible horses hammering their hoofs in headlong flight—"*da'ărôth da'ărôth abbîrâv.*" Zapletal well translates this verse

> "Da stampfen die Hüfe der Rosse ;
> Der Galopp, der Galopp der Renner!"

Part IX (*vv.* 23—27) records the events in the pursuit. The curse on Meroz for refusing aid and a blessing on the Kenite friend of Israel.

Part X (*vv.* 28—30). A taunt-song picturing the scene in Sisera's home. This, from its own point of view, is a masterpiece of irony. The text has suffered from a double reading in *v.* 30.

Metre.

The Ode is dithyrambic, and the metre irregular. For the most part it is 3 + 3 metre but at times it breaks into the more lively metre (2 + 2) + (2 + 2). In

the two Preludes the metre again varies. I have endeavoured to represent this in my translation.

PART I. *Prelude.*

2 For Ísrael's whóle self-abándonment—
For the Péople's devótedness
Bléss ye Jáhve!
3 Héar ye kings; | heárken ye prínces;
Í of Jáhve | Í would síng,
Would hýmn of Jáhve | Ísrael's Gód.

PART II. *The Victories of Jahve at the Exodus.*

4 Jáhve when Thou wéntest forth from Séir,
When Thou márchedst from the fiéld of Édom,
The éarth did sháke | the héavens drópped,
The véry cloúds | drópped wáter.
5 Moúntains mélted | at the présence of Jáhve,
At the présence of Jáhve | Ísrael's Gód.

PART III. *The low estate to which Israel is reduced!*

6 In the dáys of Shamgár ben-Ạ'náth
In (*Ísrael*?) róads were desérted.
They stóle along by býways, | twísting lánes.
7 Víllage-life (?) ceased, | In Ísrael they céased,
Till Déborah róse | as a Móther in Ísrael.
8 (*The first two lines are corrupt and the whole verse seems out of place.*)
. . . . . .
Was there shiéld or dárt to be séen
'Mid the fórty thoúsand of Ísrael?