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978-1-107-69805-5 - The Song of Songs: Edited as a Dramatic Poem

With Introduction, Revised Translation and Excursuses by William Walter Cannon

Frontmatter

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BY

WILLIAM WALTER CANNON

Cambridge:
at the University Press

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107698055

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First published 1913

First paperback edition 2013

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-69805-5 Paperback

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PREFACE

SO much has been written about *The Song of Songs*, both in ancient and modern times, that any new writer may, not unreasonably, be asked to explain why he proposes to add to this large literature, and what he proposes to effect. My aim has been to write a little book for the use of those general readers who would like to have some knowledge of the subject, and who hardly know where to look for it. Some of the literature is not very easy of access, some is out of print, and some is not very attractive in form, or easy to use without close study. When I had spent some time on the study of this literature, it occurred to me that a short compilation from some of the best available sources might be of interest to many people who have not opportunity or leisure to quarry in libraries, or compare the contents of commentaries.

I have therefore written an *Introduction* in which I have endeavoured to give a concise account of such topics as are of interest to a student of the Song, and a discussion of those questions and theories on which there is difference of opinion, and the reasons which appear to me to justify my own views. Without a discussion of such questions it is impossible for a reader either to understand or appreciate the Song; and the consideration of them cannot be avoided. Where they appeared to be capable of general treatment I have inserted the discussion in the text, but where the question seemed to require a more technical treatment or an accumulation of details, I have thought it better to work it out in *Excursuses*, which I have put at the end of the book so that the reader need not be troubled with them unless he wishes.

I have added a *Revised Translation*, taking the Authorised Version as the basis. It seems almost sacrilege to lay hands on that lovely piece of English, and I have done my utmost not to spoil it. In this revision I have availed myself, as far

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as I could, of the fine poetical renderings of the late Prebendary Kingsbury in *The Speaker's Commentary*, which I have always admired, and which seem to me to be instinct with the spirit of the original.

Those readers who are already familiar with the subject will observe that I have not been able to adopt the modern views as to the interpretation of the poem propounded by Karl Budde and others. I trust that the careful examination of these views in my text will shew that they have not been rejected without due consideration, or without strong reasons being adduced why I cannot feel convinced by them. But the study of all alternative schemes has only strengthened my conviction, that the true interpretation is in the main that of Ewald, as modified by S. Oettli. Although I differ from the latter in some particulars, I consider his commentary, as a whole, by far the best of those I have consulted, and it has been of great use to me.

I am conscious that the aims which I set before myself when I planned this work were not easy to realise. I wish my readers not only to understand the Song, but to enjoy it. I have striven to bring out, as closely and yet as vividly as I could, its force and significance as a piece of ancient literature. That must be the primary aim of every editor. But I wish, even more, to impart to my readers some at least of the delight which I have felt in the study of this masterpiece of loveliness; some of the joy which caused its first editor to style it "the best Song of all." And I have also endeavoured to observe in my treatment of the subject the restraint and the reverence which ought to be the attitude of a writer who is treating, from any point of view, a portion of the Sacred Canon. If, notwithstanding the imperfections of the execution, I have to any extent achieved these aims, I may perhaps be justified in hoping that I have made a little contribution to Sacred Science. "In tabernaculo Dei offert unusquisque quod potest. Alii aurum, argentum, et lapides pretiosos, alii byssam, et purpuram, et coccum offerent, et hyacinthum. Nobiscum bene agetur si obtulerimus pelles et caprarum pilos" (Hieron. *Prologus Galeatus*).

I desire to express my most hearty thanks to Mr Norman McLean, M.A., Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, who has

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been good enough to read the whole of the proof-sheets, and (I need hardly add) has greatly improved the accuracy of the work. Those who are aware of the gigantic tasks in which Mr M^cLean is engaged will appreciate the extent of his kindness.

I desire equally to express my obligations to the Rev. Professor Sayce, Oxford, to whom, although personally unknown to him, I ventured to apply when I was in need of information. His prompt and courteous replies to my letters were of the greatest service to me, and I tender him my thanks.

I should be indeed ungrateful if I failed to express to the Governors of the John Rylands Library, Manchester, and to their Library Staff, my acknowledgments for the splendid hospitality they extend to students. Much of the preparation for this book has been made in that beautiful building, and I do not know how I could have accomplished it had I not had access to the valuable contents of its shelves. Only those who are able to use this Library know how valuable it is, and how courteous and helpful are those in charge of it.

Lastly, I should like to express my thanks to the Staff of the Cambridge University Press for the great care and pains spent on passing the sheets through the press.

W. W. CANNON

April 1913

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