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(p. 85)

Poetry of the Samaritans.

By **Stephen M. Vail, A. M.**

[We copy the following article from the Ladies' Repository, Cincinnati. In these "Songs" there are many thoughts and expressions of much grandeur and beauty. Those of our readers who are fond of the antique or sacred literature, will read it with interest, pleasure and profit.—ED.]

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

EVERY nation, having a literature, has its poetry. The Samaritans, though so inconsiderable as a nation, are not an exception. In their literature we have yet remaining their Pentateuch and their version of it written in the Samaritan dialect, the Samaritan chronicles, and the Samaritan songs. A short account of these songs we propose to give in the following paper, together with some extracts from them, showing their spirit and character. There are only twelve which have come down to us, and these are in part broken and fragmentary. We have a version of them in Arabic, which has assisted much in deciphering and translating them. In some instances we have preferred to adopt the Arabic instead of the Samaritan reading, as in Song I, verse 12.

POETRY, OR SONGS OF THE SAMARITANS.

These songs, of which we are about to speak, have never been translated into English; nor, indeed, have they ever been printed and published till a few years since. Gesenius, that veteran orientalist of the University of Halle, in Germany, having obtained manuscripts of these songs from the library of the British Museum at London, after the labor of four years, published them to the world with a good Latin translation. It is with the aid of this translation we have made a version of them in English.

"The external form of these songs or rhythm is different in different songs; yet follows the rhythmical laws of the Hebrews, Syrians, and Arabs. We say the rhythmical laws, not metrical, since the Samaritans, in the manner of the Hebrews, abstain from numbering and measuring their verses, and have adopted a certain rule of dividing them. These songs are mostly made up of hymns and psalms, composed for the use of the public

worship of the Samaritans. And they seem to have obtained almost the same place among them that the Psalms have obtained among the Jews and Christians. The poetry is, for the most part, light, and like the Syriac. And almost all the authors write in nearly the same circle of thoughts and images. Yet there are specimens of ingenuity, and of beauty, and elevation of sentiment.

THE DOCTRINAL USE OF THESE SONGS.

These songs are exceedingly useful and important for illustrating the doctrines of the Samaritans. From them we have a much more certain knowledge of the Samaritan doctrines, than from all other Samaritan monuments which, to this day, have been published. The Jewish Rabbis, on account of their national hatred toward the poor Samaritans, published about them all sorts of falsehoods, as, that they were idolaters; that they denied the existence of angels, and the doctrine of the resurrection, etc. The accounts of them by the ancient fathers are very uncertain. But the authors of these songs do not stop to indicate strictly their rites, ceremonies, and other external forms; but in the manner of the sacred poets, as by the way and undesignedly they unlock the hidden recesses of their faith.

The principal things of Samaritan theology, as far as they are contained in these songs, we will now briefly recapitulate, quoting those passages of the songs where they occur; and, first, they teach that there is one God, without any ally or partner, (Song II, verse 10,12;) without human weakness, (I, 4, 6;) without the form of a human body, (11,7;) known partly from reason and his works, (II, 5,13,) but mostly from the book (p. 86) divinely inspired—his nature not understood by mortals, (II, 10, 14.) The world they make of two parts—the one open to the senses, the other the spiritual seat of angels. They teach that the world was created from nothing, (I, 4; III, 13.) Man was made from the dust of Mount Safra, and in the image of angels, not of God, (XII, 18, 19.) Angels are the hidden powers of the world, and are called the divine hosts—present at the giving of the law, (III, 1; IV, 8,11)—Moses the prophet of all times, the *terminus* of revelation, the friend and familiar servant of God, the vertex of the world—the sun, the crown; and after his ascent into Heaven, he will dwell in the splendor of a god, (I, 11 *seq.*; XII, 25 *seq.*) The Samaritans reject all books as divine except the five books of Moses. Moses, therefore, was their only prophet; and hence they came to regard him with an extravagant veneration. The law they hold to be a part of the heavenly world, the first of all created things created on the six days—a spark of the divine garment, (I, 15; IV, 12 *seq.*) By the assiduous study, and careful observation of it, men attain to eternal life, (I, 12, 18.) The Sabbath they piously regard. They constantly admonish men to be pious worshippers of God; and they promise to his worshippers distinguished rewards, (I, 8, 9, 19;) and at last there will be a great day of judgment, the remission of sins, and the resurrection of the good. False prophets, with their worshippers, shall be excluded from the resurrection, and burnt up with fire, (VII, 9 *seq.*) In one passage the Messiah is referred to, (III, 22.)

THE AGE OF THESE SONGS.

Nothing can be determined with certainty in regard to the age of these songs. In this question the fifth song is of the greatest moment, which shows that the Samaritans were agitated and oppressed by their enemies when these songs were written. Probably it was during the persecution under Justinian—it may have been under the Saracens, or

Mohammedans. The latter opinion derives support from the names of the authors, which, for the most part, are of Arabic origin, as Abulpbatach Ben Tusuf, Saphi al Merdschan, etc. Other marks seem to indicate an earlier origin, as the ancient dialect, which, after the empire of the Saracens, seems to have died away.

These songs we have endeavored to translate *literally*, and as far as possible, to preserve the Samaritan form and expression. The lines and verses, almost without exception, stand exactly as they do in the Samaritan order. The first four songs are translated entire, with only an occasional omission. That which is omitted in the subsequent songs is indicated in the proper places.

SONG I.

This song was sung, according to the Arabic inscription, early on each Sabbath morning, and celebrates the dignity and sanctity of that holy day. It is also a hymn of praise to the Creator, especially on account of the work of creation and the giving of the law.

- 1 There is no God but one—
The Creator of the world.
Who can tell thy greatness?
Magnificently didst thou make it,
In the space of six days.
- 2 In thy law of majesty and truth.
We read, and by it become wise.
By the work of each of these days
Thou art rendered glorious.
- 3 Thy great and matchless wisdom
Announces thy excellence.
And reveals thy divine authority,
That thou mightest be still more glorious.
- 4 Without weariness thou didst make
All thy excellent works:
Thou didst bring them forth from nothing,
In the space of six days.
- 5 Thou didst make them perfect:
In them was no defect:
Thou madest thy perfection visible;
For thou art the Lord of perfection.
- 6 Without fatigue thou didst rest
On the seventh day:
To the six days
Thou madest it the crown.*
- 7 Thou didst make it holy;
Thou didst make it the head—
The time of holy convocation,
And the source of all sanctity.

* The Sabbath is called the crown of the six days, because it is their honor, ornament, and end.

- 8 Thou didst make it a covenant
 Between thee and thy worshippers:
 Thou didst teach the observance of it,
 And that thou wouldst keep him that kept it.
- (p. 87)
- 9 They are blessed who keep the Sabbath;
 For they are worthy of his [God's] blessing.
 He makes them to feel his sacred presence.
 While released from worldly care and weariness.
- 10 With his precious gifts
 Our Lord hath honored us;
 He hath given to us the Sabbath day.
 That we might rest in quiet.
- 11 All the magnificence of them, [i. e., God's gifts,]
 Hast thou revealed and delivered to Moses;
 Especially thy holy book
 Thou didst deliver to *thy friend*.
- 12 The tables of the law
 Thou didst give to the [*Arab.*, servant] of thy house.
 That [the living] might be blessed of the Lord—
 The living in every [state of] life.
- 13 He, giving life to his creatures,
 From whom is whatsoever fills the world-
 He has spoken out of the fire, [saying.]
 "Thou shall have no other gods before me."♦
- 14 Prophecy, ∇ as a crown, was placed upon him,
 From the days of the creation:
 The illumination of Moses
 Fell upon him who was worthy of it.
- 15 The aliment of our lire
 Is the tables of the law—
 An aliment never failing
 For ever and for ever.
- 16 Where is there a god
 Like the God of our fathers?
 Where is there a true prophet
 Like the friend of God?
- 17 With the son [*Arab.*, servant] of his house
 God hath spoken mouth to mouth;
 His wonders to him be hath revealed,
 Which he hath disclosed to none other.
- 18 The Creator, who has created the world.
 And whatsoever there is therein.

♦ Exodus xx, 3.

∇ The sense of the poet is, that prophecy was created during the six days of the creation, and afterward it was communicated to this man, who, by his divine gilt, was distinguished before other mortals.

- By his law by Moses,
Has given life [spiritual] to the living.
- 19 The reader who reads
"Thou shalt have no other gods before me,"
Also reads, " Keep the Sabbath,
To sanctify it~" &
- 20 Sublime and great is He,
All of whose glory
Magnifies the son of his house
Before all the human race.
- 21 Glory unto glory
Hath Jehovah added:
Jehovah is the God of ages,
And Moses is the prophet of all generations.

SONG II.

This second song is a hymn of praise to God, showing forth his power, especially in creation, as effected by himself alone; and his mercy, munificence, eternity, and wisdom are praised.

- 1 Thou art one,
Whose is the divine glory:
Thou hast created magnificently,
And all things were made by thy hand.
- 2 To the joy of thy creatures.
Thou art known to be eternal:
Thou makest it known to all
That there is no other God besides thee,
- 3 Thou showest forth thy power;
It is altogether without bounds;
Thy works reveal
That thou art alone in thy greatness.
- 4 Thou, who dost endue thy creatures
With the gifts of thy wisdom,
Thou dost this in marvelous ways,
And thou makest thy praise acknowledged.
- 5 Thou, without any voice, dost announce
That thou art the cause [of all things]
Like an autograph which is God's own,
And clear to every one beholding.
- 6 These things [i.e, the visible world] with might have been made;
They show forth only a part of thine excellence;
And more than that which thou hast revealed
To the eyes, is that which thou hast hidden.

& The sense is, the law of observing the Sabbath is, by Divine command, not less sacred than that of avoiding idolatry. The Jews and Samaritans compared the highest crimes to idolatry.

- 7 Without words thou didst call,
 And the world appeared;
 Thy creatures hasten around.
 And they submit themselves to thy words.
- 8 Thou art the first,
 Whose beginning no one knows:
 Thou art the last.
 To whom there is neither end nor bound.
- 9 God holds the world,
 So great is its fear of him:
 God holds the world,
 And yet his hand touches it not.
- 10 Thou art alone; with thee is no companion;
 With thee is none other—no ally;
 Thou art the powerful, the eternal, the tremendous,
 The mighty one, the conqueror, the terrible.
- 11 Whatever may be like to thee.
 Thou art not like to it in the least;
 And whatsoever may be explored,
 Beyond its extent thou [dost exist.]
- 12 With no ally didst thou bring forth the world—
 With no other didst thou create it;
 Thou alone didst bring it forth,
 And on account of thy greatness thou art praised
- 13 By reason we have known thee;
 [And] from thy works;
 From thy book
 We have known both THEE and thy works.[≡]

(p. 88)

- 14 We praise thee for thy benefits,
 According to the measure of our strength;
 We have searched thee as thou art,
 Not according as we are, [i. e., we have searched
 thee, conscious of our own weakness, rightly
 to know thee, the true God.]
- 15 We have desired thy grace;
 We have waited for thy benefits;
 We would not turn our face from thee.
 But unto thee would we ever look.
- 16 We stand as wayfaring men
 At the gate of thy mercy;
 Let it be far from thee, that thou shouldst deny
 Any thing necessary to a wayfaring man.

[≡] How much like this is the beautiful remark of Lord Bacon: "Thy creatures have been my books, but thy Scriptures much more. I have sought thee in the fields and gardens; but I have found thee in thy temples!"

- 17 Stretching forth our hands.
 We earnestly supplicate [thy] gifts.
 And stretching forth the hands of thy grace,
 O, refresh thou our weariness.
- 18 The soul stands in need of refreshing;
 We stand in need of thy grace:
 Give thy gifts [not] according to thy justice
 But according to thy grace give.
- 19 Thou art inclined to mercy—
 Thou art slow to wrath;
 When the sinner forsakes his sin,
 Thou art ready to show thy mercy.
- 20 O Thou who art most merciful.
 To whom there is no one like,
 Give unto us what no giver
 Gives only thou thyself.
- 21 O Thou, who hearest the cries [of thy children,]
 Who art abundant in grace,
 O hear thou our humble
 And our needy prayers.

SONG III.

The first three verses of this song are an inscription of praise to God. The next verse is remarkable for the view of faith it presents. The following verses are ascriptions of praise to the Creator, on account of his wonderful works. The last verse is remarkable for the doctrine of the Messiah which it presents. He is called the Renovator, and is represented as quickly coming.

- 1 Eternal God,
 Who lives for ever—
 God above all power,
 Who remaineth the same for ever,
- 2 We confide in thy great strength;
 For thou art our Lord:
 By thy divine power thou didst bring forth
 The world at the beginning.
- 3 The noblest of all creatures
 Art but sparks of thy garment:
 The chiefs of all nations
 Thou hast chosen to be thy worshippers.
- 4 Where is faith.
 Holy faith, unless in thee?
 Faith in thee preserves life
 To him who is deserving.
- 5 Thy holy hosts[∪]

[∪] *Thy holy hosts*, i. e., the angels by whom God was surrounded on Mount Sinai, and by whose ministrations, the law was given, as stated by New Testament writers in Acts vii, 53; Gal. iii, 19 ; Heb. ii, 3.

- Were drawn forth upon Mount Sinai:
The hosts of thy kingdom.
Who is able to number them.
- 6 Thy power was spent
In exalting Israel:
Happy is the house of Jacob,
And whosoever is obedient to the Lord.
- 7 The sea and its waves
Are subject to thy will;
Thy right hand overshadows
All thy works.
- 8 All things are obedient unto thee:
At thy command they come:
Every thing testifies
There is no God but one.
- 9 There is no divinity but thine.
In the heights or in the depths;
Besides to thy divinity
We trust to none.
- 10 My future home
Shall be thy dwelling-place:
The sea cannot contain thee, nor the deep,
Nor yet heaven itself.
- 11 Thou showest forth thy wisdom:
The world arose at thy command.
O thou most wise,
How excellent is thy name!
- 12 Thy divine wonders
Show forth thy power;
With excellent food
We are nourished, through thy mercy.
- 13 Thou hast created the world—
Thou hadst no helper—
Thou didst cause to go forth from the midst of it
Creatures where nothing was.
- 14 Thou didst open the dust,
And from the midst of it thou didst bring forth necessary things:
By thy right hand thou didst bring forth
Creatures from it where nothing was.
- 15 He who was formed from the dust,
All things for him were made:
Whatever things were necessary for man.
To him were they subject.
- 16 Upon thy divine name
We all do call:

Thou shalt live for ever:
Thou wast before all things.
17 Thou art the beginning of all,
And the end of every thing.
[God,] merciful and kind,
Has looked upon us, and will judge us.

(p. 89)

18 Thy name fills every thing with good:
Thou dost nourish every one who is worthy [with thy grace:]
We laud and magnify thy power:
There is no God besides thee.
19 To the penitent thou wilt give,
Yea, unto them thou wilt give the world.
Messiah, the renovator, be quickly comes,
And he will give according to thy mercy:
Thou art able.

SONG IV,

By the renowned Dr. Safi, of Merdschan, a Syriac town near Damascus. See Burckhardt's *Travels in Syria*. London: 1822—4, p. 119. This song is in celebration of the law, and the giving of the law. And this history of the law is presented, ornamented with myths and poetic images of the later Jews; whence it appears that the Samaritans, as is commonly believed, did by no means reject all the traditions of a later age.

1 O, thou eternal God,
Who wast before the world.
Thou didst begin the world*
And thou didst finish it!
2 In his lofty dwelling-place
God shall dwell for ever:
In his holy habitation
Is the place which he hath chosen.
3 Thy hidden power
Is above all [other] power.

6 Woe unto him who will not have faith
In God's great strength!
Woe unto him who will not believe
That God is only one!
7 When [God] declared his name, [i. e, in giving the
law,]
The earth trembled,[⚡]

[⚡] In Exodus *xix*, 16, the people who were in the camps are said to have trembled; but the poet, after the example of the later Jews, would exhibit the giving of the law in greater splendor. The giving of the law is ornamented with fables and poetic images, in both the Targum of Jerusalem and in that of Pseudojonathan.

When he proclaimed and said,
 "Thou shalt have no other gods before me."
 8 Angels and men
 Then gathered together:
 The great God, to whom no one is equal.
 There came down to reveal himself.
 9 Mount Sinai was crowned
 With clouds and lightnings:
 The mountain trembled greatly;
 For mighty was its fear.
 10 Great was the congregation,
 Such as never was seen before,
 When our holy law
 Went forth from the fire.
 11 All the hidden powers of the world
 Came forth to the light.
 When God proclaimed,
 "I am Jehovah, thy God!"
 12 Upon the two tables
 He wrote the ten commands;
 For food he gave them, [i. e. , his laws,]
 For life to future ages.
 13 God showed unto them
 The two tables,
 Perfect, and inscribed
 With the finger of burning fire.
 14 They were refulgent
 Like the chining of flame:
 He who is terrible wrote upon them
 With his own finger.[♦]
 15 A long time were they concealed
 In the midst of the fire—
 A long time did Moses pray
 Before he received them.
 16 Time gives a glorious life
 To him who drinks from hence:
 This time brings to him
 Eternal life.[⊙]
 17 A spark [only] of the unseen world
 Are these tables—
 A spark showing forth wisdom
 To all future ages.

♦ According to Pseudojonathan on Exodus xxxi, 18, these tables were made of sapphire, furnished and prepared of God, of forty pounds weight.

⊙ The sense of this verse is obscure. Probably it means the time one spends in reading the Mosiac law, as if drinking it, renders him a partaker of a glorious and eternal life.

20 There were they trembling,
The living and the dead,
When thou wouldst proclaim in order
The words ; which are written upon them.

The fifth song is attributed to the learned and celebrated Abulphatach, the son of the polished Joseph. This song contains five complaints against enemies of the Samaritans, with supplications for help. The poet complains of persecutions, of cruel and powerful enemies—of their lives being in danger, especially of their teachers and presidents, and particularly of one enemy, who was their (**p. 90**) king—and prays for their destruction. This song is more easy and flowing in its style than either of the preceding, and it contains some beautiful, pathetic, and elevated passages. But being much of the same nature with the preceding songs, we have thought it unnecessary to translate it.

The sixth song is not entire. The last eight verses are alphabetic. The subject is the giving of the law, but much more bold in its imagery than the fourth, which is mostly on the same subject . It exhibits traces of the artificial and allegorical interpretation of the sacred books. The nineteenth verse only will we quote:

Thunders, and lightning, and rain,
The voice of the trumpet, and clouds, and light.
Upon the mountain top await their Lord.

The seventh song treats of the praises of Moses, and of the later prophets, in the last judgment and resurrection. It is very important, on account of the doctrines of *eternal life*, and of the *resurrection*, because the preceding songs touch only lightly upon these doctrines. This song vindicates the Samaritans against the fathers of the Church, who represent them as only admitting the immortality of angels. Epiphan. Haeres, 9, 13; Leontius de Sectis, chap. 8; Gregory the Great in Job, chap. 15. Some of the more important verses we will translate.

Moses, the true prophet,
The friend of the divine house,
Who is there like him among men?
Who has ever attained to his dignity?
His mockers mock him saying,
" He is not equal to a soothsaying prophet."
But every one of them is shameless, and a liar,
And all their words are malicious;
And in the great day of the resurrection,
A great redemption shall be declared.
But to them there shall be no resurrection:
Only a fire shall burn in their heart;
And each one of them shall curse his works,

Pseudojonathan, on Exodus xx, 2, says, the first precept which came forth from the sacred mouth [of God,] was like to whirlwinds, lightnings, and flames of fire. Aflame of fire was upon his right hand and a flame of fire was upon his left hand. And it flew through the air of heaven, and returned and showed itself to the camp of Israel, and returned, and was engraved upon the tables of the covenant, which were put into the hands of Moses, and the tables were turned in them from side to side. Then he cried and said, 'O my people Israel, I am the Lord your God!'

And all of them shall stand
 Like blocks of stone.
 And the word shall come to them,
 "There is no release for you,
 Though now ye be turned to your God;
 Ye shall be burned in the fire.
 For this that ye have done.
 To my people, and to my chosen;
 For light was in their hand.
 And ye walked in darkness."
 A voice shall come to the shameless ones,
 From the bidden world it shall come,
 "Woe unto you! woe unto you!
 To you there is no release:
 Ye have profaned my prophet; ,
 Ye have transgressed the divine precepts;
 Ye have forgotten my house;
 Ye have overturned the holy sanctuary;
 Ye have destroyed my people, my first-born.
 Your feet have run to heresy;
 Ye have taught your own will;
 Ye have covered up the revelation [of God;]
 Therefore, there is no release for you,
 Neither solace, nor hope.
 But, my people, grace shall dwell upon it,
 And it shall dwell by the founts in the paradise [of God.]"
 Happy art thou, O Israel, among the nations
 In this world and in the next!
 Let Moses, thy prophet, be glorious,
 And pray for salvation upon him,
 And say, "The salvation of Jehovah be upon him!
 With the honor of a prophet,
 The salvation of Jehovah be upon him!
 To whom belongs eternal life:
 The salvation of Jehovah be upon him!
 Thus will we ever say."

Songs eight, nine, and ten are omitted by Gesenius. Of the eleventh we have only an extract on *the spiritual nature of God filling the world*.

There is nothing like God:
 He is neither *shadow* nor *substance*;
 No one knows who he is, only himself.
 There is no creator of him, neither any companion with him:
 He fills the whole world:
 He appears in every place;
 [And yet] no place comprehends him.
 He is hidden, and at the same time manifest;

He sees and knows every hidden thing;
There was nothing before him, there shall be nothing after him.
In another verse of this psalm, or song, man is represented as a *microcosm*.
Thou art a little world,
And on account of thee is the great world about thee.

The twelfth and last song is historical in its character, reaching from the creation to Moses. A few passages from it must suffice.

He [God] hath exalted the heaven of heavens.
And he hath made the stars and the sun.
And he hath hung out the earth upon nothing;
And upon these he hath made the herbage and the corn to grow.
Man was the crown of his works,
Who was made from the dust of Mount Safra.
God made him in the image and likeness of his children.
And placed him in the Garden of Eden,
That he might cultivate and keep it.

The song closes with a hymn in praise of Moses, as the great prophet of God, and the sun and light of the world. The Samaritans reject all other books as divine save the five books of Moses. Therefore, Moses is elevated above all other men in their theology.

End

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