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## ANOTHER FOLK SONG

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**I**N the *Journal* of this Society for 1885 and again in the *Journal* of 1915 I called attention to a curious song in a sort of jingle rhyme embedded in the book of Isaiah (3 18 ff.), apparently a street song satirizing female vanity in dress, used by the prophet as a text for his denunciation of the sinful folly behind such vanities. This folk song seemed to be unique in extant Hebrew literature, but recently in restudying the Psalms of the singular little "Davidic" collection, 138—144, I became aware of a similar piece embedded in one of the Psalms of that collection.

This group of Psalms, it will be remembered, is differentiated from all other Psalms and groups of Psalms in the last two books of the Psalter in that it is provided with musical headings and liturgical notes, like the Psalms of the first three books; moreover, each Psalm is ascribed to David, and one of them is provided with an "historical" note of occasion. In this they resemble the great "Davidic" collection of the first book, and the "Prayers of David son of Jesse" of the second book. In content, they constitute what, for lack of a better term, I may call a collection of "snare songs", liturgies against secret enemies who have laid wiles and snares to entrap and bring evil upon the righteous, poor and needy suppliant. Typical is Psalm 139, which is divided into four equal stanzas, 1-6, 7-12, 13-18, 19-24, as shown by the sense, each stanza being provided also with a sort of summing up clause. This Psalm commences, after a method common in old Sumerian as in Hebrew psalmody, with

a half verse, and, as is common also in Sumerian psalmody, the suppliant is a poor, righteous one. The purpose of this Psalm is set forth in the last stanza. It is a sort of incantation against the wicked, through whose secret wiles evil has come or may come on the righteous follower of Yahaweh. To secure Yahaweh's help to overcome these foes and their wiles the worshiper must give evidence of his knowledge of Yahaweh through which knowledge his prayer will exercise as it were a compelling power on Yahaweh to secure His intervention. In which, also, we find a conception similar to that found in old Sumerian as in other ancient incantations. Hence the suppliant displays his knowledge of Yahaweh's ways, in stanza 1, in relation to all His acts and the very thoughts of His heart, which is yet a knowledge too high and great for the understanding of man. In stanza 2 he displays his knowledge of the omnipresence of Yahaweh in heaven and hell, in east and west, in darkness and light, so that darkness and light are one to Him. In stanza 3 he displays his knowledge of Yahaweh's creative power, in his own dependence on Him for his wonderful and mysterious creation in his mother's womb, and before that in the womb of earth, and in the record of the creation (we are evidently in the book age here). Having thus established his claim to Yahaweh's help, we have in stanza 4 the invocation of Yahaweh against his foes, the enemies of God and right, and a final protestation of his own purity and righteousness.

The text of this group of Psalms is in an unusually disordered state, and there is a considerable number of Aramaisms and neo-Hebraisms. The suggestion is of a special text history, as though it had existed as a group by itself, and outside of the control of official scribes or Temple psalmists, for a considerable period, and then been taken over by the latter and added to the official Psalm collections. I would suggest that it was a collection of liturgies or incantations against secret foes and their wiles which had been in unofficial use and so handed down for a considerable period before it finally won its way into the official book of Psalms.

As is the case in a number of collections in the Psalter the closing Psalms of this group are somewhat different from the

preceding. Both 143 and 144 make use of the historical motive, referring to the great deeds of the past, and neither of them is so manifestly a "snare" song as the other Psalms of this group. The latter of these is one of the most singular Psalms in the Psalter, and it is to certain of its singularities that I wish to call attention.

Psalms 143 and 144 are divided into two clear cut parts, the first closing with v. 11. This first part is again divided into two stanzas, ending with partly identical refrains, 5-8, 9-11, and a preface, consisting of vv. 1-4, this whole portion, 1-11, being a mosaic of half quotations, chiefly from Psalm 18, except the identical parts of the two refrains, vv. 8 and 11 *i. e.*, which alone, by the way, constitute this Psalm a "snare" song.

As in the case of Psalm 18 and as in the old Sumerian psalms, we have first a series of honorific names, adapted from, but with set purpose and considerable ingenuity never literally quoted from Psalm 18, and not always either from its opening verses. So v. 1 a צורי יהוה ברוך is 18 47 חיי יהוה וברוך צורי; v. 1 b מלמד ידי למלחמה is 18 35 מלמד ידי למלחמה; in v. 2 a חסדי seems to be a corruption, and should perhaps be corrected to חוקי from 18 2 or to סלעי from 18 3. The remaining appellatives in 2 a ומצודתי משגבי ומפלטי לי are different parts of 18 3 or rather 2 Sam. 22 2, for it follows the text of the latter; 2 b מגני ובו חסיתי is 18 3 אחסה בו מגני; and 2 c הרדד עמי תחתי is 18 48 (or rather 2 Sam. 22 4) ומריר עמי תחתי. Vv. 3 and 4 seemed to me at first to be a gloss from a later hand, suggested by the piling up of honorific names for God, which by magnifying His greatness caused the glossator to reflect on the insignificance of man in comparison with Him. But more careful consideration has led me to conclude that this reflection is a part of the original poem, or at least it is done in the same method of half quotations, v. 3 יהוה מה אדם ותדעוהו בן אנוש ותחשבהו being taken from Psalm 8 5 מה אנוש כי תזכרנו ובן אדם כי תפקדנו (the ותחשבהו with which 8 6 begins perhaps suggested the ותחשבהו with which the citation in our Psalm closes); and v. 4 אך כל הבל כל אדם להבל דמה ימיו כצל עובר from Ps. 39 6 b, 7 אדם נצב אך בצלם יתהלך איש אך הבל יהמיו יצבר (Apparently the concluding עובר of our Psalm is suggested by the יצבר of Ps. 39).

Similarly the body of the two stanzas which follow is a mosaic of citations, chiefly from Ps. 18, with the original words purposely transposed or substituted. So 5 a יהוה הט שמיך ותרד is 18 10 ויט שמים וירד; 5 b גע בהרים ויעשנו is Ps. 104 32 יגע בהרים; 6 ברוק ברוק ותפיצם שלח חציך ותהמם; ויעשנו שלח ידיך ממרום פצני והצילני ממים; 7 a b ויפיצם וברקים רב ויהמם; ישלח ממרום יקחני ימשני ממים רבים: יצילני; 7 c מיד בני נכר is Ps. 18 45, 46 בני נכר; 9 אלהים שיר חדש אשירה; 9 בנבל עשור זמרו לו is Ps. 33 2 b, 3, 2 לך בנבל עשור אומרה לך שירו לו שיר חדש אלהים, as though to accentuate the intention of the author wilfully to vary the original, a practice carried much farther in post-biblical literature, I believe, but not occurring elsewhere in Bible literature to the best of my knowledge and certainly never so clearly and consistently carried out through an entire passage of such length; 10 הנותן תשועה למלכים הפוצה את דוד עבדו מחרב רעה is Ps. 18 מגדל ישועות מלכו ועשה חסד למשיחו לדוד ולזרעו עד עולם. All the words of 11 a occur in Psalm 18, but not in any one single verse, as though the author would close his mosaic with the most extreme exposition of his method possible.

Verses 12-14, as they have come down to us, read:

אשר בנינו כנטעים מגדלים בנעוריהם  
 בנותינו כזוית מחטבות תבנית היכל:  
 מזוינו מלאים מפיקים מזן אל זן  
 צאוננו מאליפות מרבבות בהוצותינו:  
 אלופינו מסבלים אין פריץ ואין יוצאת  
 ואין צוהה ברחבתינו:

With a couple of most obvious corrections and adjustments of the text we have

בנינו כנטעים מגדלים בנעוריהם  
 בנותינו כזוית מחטבות בנותיהם

<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps noteworthy that the citations from these two later Psalms occur in the first verse of the two stanzas respectively. All the other citations are from early Psalms.

מזוינו מלאים מפיקים (מזן אל זן)  
 אין פרץ ואין יוצאת ואין צוחה  
 מאלפות מרבבות בחוצותינו<sup>2</sup>  
 אלופינו מסבלים . . . ברחבתינו.

The last two words in 12, **תבנית היכל** are obviously a corruption for something like **בנותינו**. The last three words of 13 are apparently a note of a glossator, "from here to here", something has been lost? Apparently this lost line has been inserted in v. 14. The whole would translate as follows:

Our sons like saplings grand in their youth(ful vigor);  
 Our daughters like columns comely (draped) in their domesticity.  
 Our garners full, overburdened ( from this  
 No breaching, no leaking, no tumult . . . to this.)  
 Our sheep fertile, multiplying in our fields;  
 Our cattle burdened, (heavy laden) in our streets.

The **אשר** with which v. 12 now commences may be a remnant of the verse of benediction with which Psalms frequently close, which originally closed the Psalm vv. 1-11, but, transposed to its present position after the addition of this jingle poem, or folk song, now appears as v. 15, thus

אשרי העם שבכה לו  
 אשרי העם שיהיה אלהיו.

which is itself a rhyme verse of curious construction. Possibly it was originally the close of the jingle, not of the Psalm, and the **אשר** of 12 may be a dittography from v. 11.

I should judge that verses 12-14 were originally a folk song which for some reason was written on the piece of papyrus or parchment on which the Psalm was written by the owner of the latter, or vice versa, and by that chance came to be combined with the Psalm, as we now have them. I should suppose the folk song to be older than the Psalm.

<sup>2</sup> According to the LXX all endings are in **הם** not **נו**.