

Jacob's Blessing.

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IN studying commentaries on Hebrew prophets and poets I have often been astonished at the amount of effort expended in the attempt to determine which of two or more permissible renderings of an obscure or equivocal passage was the correct one. It has seemed to me that the obscurity of the greater number of these passages, and their peculiar constructions, — which are the despair of grammarians, — are due to the intention of the writer to play on words, either saying two things at once, or saying one thing and insinuating another. Such a playing on words is characteristic of Arabic poetry, and, however frivolous and unworthy it may seem to us, to orientals it appears sufficiently forcible and dignified to be used on the most solemn occasions. New Testament commentators have recognized a large number of such plays on words, but in the Old Testament, where they abound probably to a far greater extent, and especially in the prophets and poets, they have been, for the most part, disregarded. The first chapter of the prophet Micah is a curious and unmistakable instance of this playing upon words; but, on the whole, the best example of a sustained playing upon words which I have observed in the Old Testament is the so-called Blessing of Jacob, Gen. xlix. The object of this paper is to point out some of the word-plays in that poem, and to make a few suggestions regarding its date, as determined by its allusions to historical events. But, first, it is necessary to say that the very possibility of such playing on words as we have in the Old Testament is conditioned on an unpointed text. A pointed text must, of necessity, adopt one reading to the exclusion of the others. Such passages ought, therefore, to be studied with little or no regard for the Massoretic pointing, — a rule which I shall apply in the present instance.

3. ראובן בכרי | אתה כחי | וראשית אוני
 יתר שאת | ויתר עז :
4. פהז כמים אל תותר
 כי עלית | משכבי אביך
 אז הללת יצועי עלה :

3. Reuben — my first-born, thou art my strength, and firstling of my manly power ;
Superabundance of lifting up, and superabundance of force ;
4. Bubbling over like water, abound not ;
For thou ascendedst thy father's bed ;
Then defiledst thou : my couch he ascended.

This is the ordinary translation ; but the second line is quite capable of another rendering, and the force of the whole is lost unless this second meaning also be perceived. Pointing as **שאת** the word which the Massorettes have pointed **שאת**, we can translate lines 2 and 3 thus : —

Remnant of destruction, and remnant of violence ;
Bubbling over like water remain not.

This is an interpretation of the consonant text at least as admissible, in itself considered, as that of the Massorettes. **ראשית און** is a phrase for the description of the first-born, used in Deut. xxi. 17, and to him belong the rights of primogeniture (**משפט בכרה**). Those rights are there defined as being two shares (**פי שנים**), a double portion, of all his father's possessions. These two shares are represented in our passage by the repetition of **יתר** ; one share being **יתר שאת**, and the other **יתר ען**. To the first-born should belong a great blessing, in two portions. In reality, Reuben practically vanished from among the tribes of Israel. Accordingly, the words used have a double sense, as above pointed out. If we turn to the LXX. we find an evidence in the translation *σκληρὸς φέρεσθαι καὶ σκληρὸς αἰθίδης* that the Greek translators perceived in the words another sense than that of blessing. The Peshito renders : —

Remnant of lifting up, and remnant of might ;
Thou didst dissolve like water, thou abidest not.

This rendering brings out the force of the comparison with water, namely, that Reuben was dissolved like water, which has no cohesion. If now we turn to the history of Reuben, we find primogeniture everywhere ascribed to him, the word **בכר** being used over and over with reference to him. In the stories of Joseph, and of Dathan and Abiram, we find a recognition of, or reference to, this same primogeniture. . In the Song of Deborah (Jud. v. 15) Reuben is represented as in existence, but holding aloof from his brethren ; later, the tribe disappears from history. In the Mesha stone (850 B.C.)

we find Reuben's land largely, if not altogether, in the possession of Moab. The same conditions also existed at the time of Isaiah, if Isa. xv., xvi. reflect the conditions of the time of that prophet. If we turn to the Blessing of Moses (Deut. xxxiii. 6), we read :—

Let Reuben live and not die,
Nor be his men a few!

This seems to show that at the time of the composition of Deut. xxxiii. 6 Reuben had practically ceased to exist, in which that passage is in entire accord with Gen. xlix. 3, 4, as I understand the intention of those verses.¹

5. שמעון ולוי אחים
כלי חמס מכרתיהם :
6. בסדם אל תבא נפשי
בקהלם אל תחד כבדי
כי באפם הרגו איש
וברצונם עקרו שור :
7. ארור אפם כי עו
ועברתם כי קשתה
אחלקם ביעקב
ואפיצם בישראל :

5. Simeon and Levi — brethren ;
Instruments of oppression their swords.
6. Into their circle enter not, my soul,
With their congregation unite not, mine honor ;
For in their wrath they slew men,
And in their kindness hamstrung cattle.
7. Cursed be their anger, for it was violent,
And their fury, for it was harsh.
I divide them in Jacob,
And scatter them in Israel.

¹ With regard to the last two words of v. 4, יצועי עליה, I feel satisfied neither as to pointing or translation. According to the laws of parallelism, and according to Massoretic usage elsewhere, we should expect יצועי. It seems, also, as though we should have a noun following it. In this and the following passages I have not deemed it advisable to stop to discuss poetical structure, but have tried to arrange the lines so as best to bring out the various rhymes, both final and medial.

This translation of v. 5 is a tradition, as to the correctness of which there is much uncertainty; LXX. reads **בְּלִי** instead of **בְּלִי**, and connects **מִכְרַתֵּיהֶם** with **כַּרַת**, to cut, treating the **מ** as preposition prefixed. In this latter respect Peshito agrees with LXX. The whole passage seems to refer to the story of Dinah (Gen. xxxiv.), and a hostile animus towards Levi is manifest. In v. 6 the word **קָהֵל** appears to have been chosen with special and sarcastic reference to the functions of the tribe of Levi, and the Levitical use of the word **קָהֵל**. The latter half of that verse seems to point to the contrast between the murderous conduct of Levi in the story of Dinah, and the priestly function which he claimed among the tribes. Accordingly, **בְּרִצְנָם עִקְרוּ שׁוֹר** seems to me a satirical and bitter reference to the sacrificial functions peculiar to Levi. Their part was in gracious and peaceful worship to sacrifice unto Jehovah, but instead they slaughtered men in violence, and destroyed their possessions. Similarly, v. 7 gives a satirical and bitter explanation of the fact that Levi had no inheritance in Israel, connecting it with the bloody deed wrought at Shechem. Throughout these verses, it will be observed, Simeon is merely a lay-figure; the animosity is directed against Levi. These verses breathe strongly the spirit of the northern kingdom, or Samaria (cf. 1 Kings xii. 31; 2 Chron. xi. 13-15). It is interesting to compare with this the corresponding passage in the Blessing of Moses (Deut. xxxiii. 8-11). That is indeed a blessing. So far as allusions to the past are concerned, it is founded on the incidents recorded concerning Moses and Aaron at Massah and Meribah, and the action of the whole tribe against the worshippers of the golden calf (Ex. xxxii. 27, 29). With relation to the present, it refers to the Levites as the guardians of the covenant, the teachers of the law, and the sacrificers for the whole people. In its present form, Simeon is left out of the Blessing of Moses, but Heilprin, in his *Historical Poetry of the Ancient Hebrews*, following Graetz, who, in his turn, follows Rabbi Eliezer, "a Talmudical authority of the second century of the Christian era," proposes to substitute Simeon for Judah. This would place Simeon in his natural order immediately after Reuben. The verse (Deut. xxxiii. 7) would then contain an intelligible word-play on the name Simeon. At present, it reads:—

Hear, Jehovah, Judah's voice,
And bring him unto his people.

This does not seem applicable to Judah, but is applicable to Simeon. If this amendment be adopted, — and it certainly is an enticing one, — we shall have in both Blessings the same picture of Simeon's condition, namely, that he was a lost tribe. But this change, according to Heilprin, involves a second change in order that Judah be not omitted altogether. He would, accordingly, transpose the latter part of v. 7, placing it immediately before v. 11, thus depriving Levi's blessing of its incongruous military suffix. Judah's blessing would thus follow that of Levi, as in the Blessing of Jacob. Beginning with the word **יָדָיו**, as a play on the name of Judah, it would read: —

Judah, — with his hands he fought for himself;
 And an aid against his foes art thou.
 Bless, Jehovah, his might,
 And accept his handiwork.
 Crush the loins of his opponents,
 And his haters, that they rise not.

This gives a much more satisfactory sense, which does not, however, necessarily prove the correctness of the emendation.

8. יהודה אתה | יודוך אחיך
 ידך בערף איביך
 ישתחוו לך בני אביך:
9. גור אריה יהודה
 מטרף בני עלית
 כרע רבץ כאריה
 וכלביא מי יקימנו:
10. לא יסור שבט מיהודה
 ומחקק מבין רגליו
 עד כי יבא שלה
 ולו יקתה עמים:
11. אסרי לגפן עירה
 ולשרקה בני אתנו
 כבס ביינ לבשו
 וברם ענבים סותה:
12. חכלילי עינים מיין
 לא יינים מחלב:

8. Judah thou, praise thee thy brethren.
Thy hand is on the neck of thy foes ;
Do homage to thee the sons of thy father.
9. A lion's whelp is Judah ;
From the prey, my son, thou art gone up.
He bowed, he crouched like a lion,
Or a lioness ; who rousteth him ?
10. Departeth not a ^{tribe} sceptre from Judah,
Nor a staff from between his feet,
Until he come to Shiloh
To whom is the obedience of the peoples.
11. He bindeth to the vine his foal,
And to the choice-vine his she-ass ;
He hath washed in wine his raiment,
And in the blood of grapes his mantle.
12. Dark as to the eyes from wine,
And white as to the teeth from milk.

The first play on the name Judah in the word **יודוך** is the same as in Gen. xxix. 35. There is also a second play on the name in **ידיך**, which is the same as in Deut. xxxiii. 7. The reference to the lion in v. 9 gains force if one can suppose the lion to have been the emblem and standard of the tribe of Judah, and similarly, as will appear later, the references in the case of Ephraim gain force if we can suppose the bull to have been the emblem or standard of that tribe. Both of these, it will be observed, are cherubic emblems. In v. 10 the parallelism with **שבט** compels us to understand **מהקק** as a neuter, — staff, and not ruler. Similarly, in Num. xxi. 18, we find it used as a synonymous parallel to **משענת**. In the word **שבט** lurks the second sense “tribe.” As to the translation of the words **עד כי יבא שילה**, it cannot be denied that, grammatically, the rendering “until Shiloh come” is possible. To make this rendering intelligible, however, it appears to be necessary to regard Shiloh as a mystical name for Messiah, for which no argument outside of the passage itself can be produced. Furthermore, if this rendering be adopted, we then find the passage in direct conflict with the facts of history, for the sceptre departed from Judah long before He came whom we hold to be Messiah ; and the Jews believe Messiah is not yet come. Kalisch would render : “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, — even when they come to Shiloh, — and to him shall be submission of the nations.” His rendering of **עד כי** seems to me har-

ing of the historical allusion in שִׁילָה I believe to be correct. Dillmann understands the historical allusion in שִׁילָה to be to the transfer of the "central point of the congregation and of the Tabernacle from Gilgal to Shiloh." He would, then, make Judah the subject of יבֵּא, and also the noun referred to by the pronoun וְלוֹ. But Judah never possessed the sceptre until the time of David. Dillmann refers to the fact that Judah stood in the first line in battle, and that he went up first to battle against the Canaanites. Admitting these as historical facts, the man must be hard pushed to prove a foregone conclusion who will adduce them as sufficient evidence that Judah was the sceptre-bearer. It is the difficulty which they have found in explaining the allusion in שִׁילָה that has led Dillmann and others to do such violence to the plain facts of history. From before the conquest to the time of Saul, Ephraim, and not Judah, possessed or claimed a sort of hegemony, which was, during that period, the nearest approach to sceptre-bearing. After Moses' death, Joshua the Ephraimite became the leader of the people. Ephraim, his tribe, assumed the hegemony, and accordingly the central sanctuary was located at Shiloh, within the territory of that tribe. During the anarchical period of the Judges we find at least two distinct claims to hegemony on the part of Ephraim, once over against Gideon (Jud. viii. 1), and once over against Jephthah (Jud. xii. 1). Judah became the leading and ruling tribe only through the prowess of David. Its rule continued unbroken until the beginning of the reign of Rehoboam, when, at a great parliament held at Shechem, the majority of the tribes, under the leadership of Jeroboam, an Ephraimite, revolted, and set up a new kingdom. We should expect, in connection with a reference to the departure of the sceptre, or of tribes — for the double sense should be borne in mind — from Judah, an allusion to this parliament of Shechem. Does such an allusion lie in the words of the text? Heilprin, in his *Historical Poetry of the Ancient Hebrews*, calls attention to the fact that Samuel ben Meir, "a sagacious rabbinical commentator of the twelfth century," had remarked "that the name Shechem, in connection with Rehoboam, as elsewhere in connection with Joshua, stands exceptionally for Shiloh, which was but a few hours' walk south of it." Heilprin holds "that the place intended to be indicated, here and there, was a great national camping-ground between the two towns, generally called after Shiloh." Kalisch maintains substantially the same view.

Perhaps I cannot better arrange the proof of the identity of the

place of assembly referred to as Shiloh with that referred to as Shechem, than by quoting Heilprin once more. "We read in the book of Joshua (xviii. 1) that, on the conquest of Canaan, 'the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there'; that their camp remained 'at Shiloh' (xviii. 9); that Joshua, dividing the conquered land between the tribes, 'cast lots for them at Shiloh, before Jehovah' (xviii. 10); that when the report came that the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh had built an altar east of the Jordan, 'the whole congregation assembled at Shechem to go to war against them' (xxii. 10-12); and, after all this, that 'Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem,' and that there their elders, chiefs, judges, and officers 'presented themselves before God' (xxiv. 1); that 'Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance at Shechem,' and to commemorate the covenant, 'took a great stone and set it up there, under an oak that was by Jehovah's sanctuary' (xxiv. 25, 26). In all this latter narrative Shechem evidently stands for Shiloh, for at Shiloh was 'Jehovah's sanctuary' under Joshua." The proof here presented seems to me absolute, unless a man wish to assume two sanctuaries of Jehovah, one at Shechem, the other at Shiloh. Of the history of Shiloh during the period of the Judges, it is scarcely necessary to remind any one, excepting, perhaps, that the camp was there on occasion of the Benjamite war (Jud. xxi. 12). It is interesting to note that Abijah the prophet, who was in a sense the cause of Jeroboam's revolt, came from Shiloh, and that Jeroboam "built" Shechem as his capital. The proximity of Shechem, thus raised to new importance, while the old sanctuary of Shiloh was but a name of the past, naturally, in course of time, led to the use of the name of Shechem as the designation of the national camping-ground instead of Shiloh, which latter designation lingered only in a few instances.¹ To me, accordingly, the passage (Gen. xlix. 10) **לֹא יִסּוּר . . . עַמִּים** seems to refer to the revolt against Judæan supremacy successfully conducted by Jeroboam. Jeroboam is, then, in thought the subject of **יִבֵּן**. With

¹ It is worth while to call attention in this connection to the story of Abimelech, and the existence near Shechem of "an oak" (Jud. ix. 6), such as that alluded to in Josh. xxiv. 25, 26, and also, in or by Shechem, of a sanctuary of an El (Jud. ix. 46) or Baal (Jud. ix. 4) of the Covenant. The relation established between Shiloh and Shechem may help to explain these references in the story of Abimelech.

v. 11 the reference to Judah is resumed, and the remaining two verses describe the luxuriance and abundance in which Judah and Jerusalem revelled.

13. זבולן לחוף ימים ישכן
 והוא לחוף אנית
 וירכתו על צידן:

13. Zebulun — at the coast of the sea he dwelleth,
 And he is a coast for ships,
 And his side is toward Zidon.

Here there is a play on the root-meaning of זבול (זבול, inner-chamber), to dwell. The same play occurs in Gen. xxx. 20, and, in addition, a play on the similarity of sound between זבול and זבד. In the Blessing of Moses (Deut. xxxiii. 19, 20) there seems to be a play on the similarity of sound between זבול and זבח. Our verse gives Zebulun a seacoast (Jud. v. 17 uses the same words of Asher), contrary to Josh. xix. 10-16, and the reference to Zidon seems to show that it was on the Mediterranean. On the other hand, the Blessing of Moses (Deut. xxxiii. 18, 19), where Issachar and Zebulun are mentioned together as enjoying the treasures of the sea, as also the reference to the deportation by Tiglath-pileser in Isa. viii. 23 and 2 Kings xv. 29, seems to show that Zebulun bordered on the sea of Galilee. It is noticeable that both here and in Deut. xxxiii. the order of Gen. xxx. has been reversed, and Zebulun placed before Issachar.

14. יששכר חמר גרם
 רבץ בין המשפתים:
 15. וירא מנחה כי טוב
 ואת הארץ כי נעמה
 ויט שכמו לסבל
 ויהי למס עבד:

14. Issachar — a bony ass,
 Crouching among the pens.

15. For he saw ^{rest,} that it was good,
^{tribute,}
 And the land, that it was pleasant;
 And he bowed his shoulder to burdens,
 And became one paying tribute

There is, as concerns the name, possibly a recognition of the same play on words as in Gen. xxx. 16-18, but this is very doubtful. The same reproach which in Jud. v. 16 is directed against Reuben is here directed against Issachar, and the same singular word, **משפתים**, is used in both places. In v. 15 there is the second sense, **מנחה** "tribute," as indicated.

16. : **דן ידין עמו | כאחד שבטי ישראל:**
 17. **יהי דן נחש עלי דרך | שפיפן עלי ארץ**
 הנשך עקבי סוס | ויפל רכבו אחור:

16. Dan judges his people like one of the tribes of Israel.
 17. Be Dan a serpent on the road, a viper on the path,
 Striking the horse's heels, that his rider falleth backward.

18. **(לי שועתך קויתי יהוה:)**

For thy salvation have I waited, Jehovah.)

The play on the name is the same as in Gen. xxx. 6. So far as historical allusions are concerned, our verse seems to point to a period when Dan was quite insignificant in point of strength and numbers, and to a time when it lay on the road by which invasions threatened Israel. In other words, it points to a time after the removal to Laish, and before the first Assyrian deportation, or even before the Syrian conquests of the time of Jehu. Jud. v. 17, on the other hand, belongs to a period when Dan still dwelt on the Philistine seacoast. Deut. xxxiii. 22 agrees with our passage as to the dwelling-place of the tribe. It reads: "and of Dan he said: Dan is a lion's whelp; he springeth from Bashan." I have placed v. 18 in brackets because it does not seem to me to belong to the original poem, but to be rather a pious ejaculation or prayer added or inserted later. For a somewhat similar case, compare Isa. ii. 22.

19. **גד גרוד יגורנו**
 והוא יגר עקבם:

19. Gad—a squad invadeth him,
 And he cutteth their heel.

The sound certainly dominates the sense in this verse, and I doubt whether we should look for any political or historical allusions, excepting only a general reference to the

graphical position of the tribe peculiarly exposed it. The play on words in Gen. xxx. 11 is different, and not very intelligible. The blessing in Deut. xxxiii. 20, 21 is of an entirely different character. It is largely based, apparently, on the story of the conquest, or else, as Heilprin thinks, a reference to the conquest has been attached to the original blessing. In Jud. v. 17 Gad is rebuked for taking no part in Barak's uprising.

20. אֲשֶׁר שִׁמְנָה לְחֶמְוֹ
וְהוּא יִתֵּן מֵעֲדָנֵי מֶלֶךְ :

20. Asher — fat his food,¹
For he yieldeth royal dainties.

The play upon the name in Gen. xxx. 13 thinks of אֲשֶׁר as having the root-meaning "bless." Both here and in Deut. xxxiii. 24 the same signification of the tribal name is in the mind of the writer, and is applied to the richness of the land and its products. We know almost nothing of the history of this tribe; only we learn from Jud. i. 31, 32 that, so far from conquering the land where it dwelt, it simply went in and dwelt among the Canaanites; and from Jud. v. 17 that it took no part in Barak's uprising.

21. נִפְתָּלִי אֵילָה שְׁלֹחָה
הִנָּתַן אִמְרֵי שִׁפְרָה :

In this verse there is no reference to the play on the name in Gen. xxx. 8. There is, moreover, no play here on the meaning of the name, but merely a species of alliteration in the repetition as the prominent letter of the two following words of the final letter, ל, of נִפְתָּלִי. Deut. xxxiii. 23 agrees with our verse only in representing Naphtali as highly blessed and prosperous,—a condition certainly not existing when the eighth chapter of Isaiah was written. As to the translation of our passage, according to the Massoretic pointing it must mean:—

Naphtali — a hind let loose,
That giveth goodly words.

What the allusion is in this case is not clear. LXX. seem to have read אֵילָה for אֵילָה, and אִמְרֵי for אִמְרֵי. Substituting this pointing, the verse would read:—

¹ I have assumed, with commentators in general, that the כ prefixed by the Massorettes to this verse properly forms the close of the preceding verse.

22. Fruitful (son of a tree) is Joseph,
 Fruitful, by a fountain,
 Branches (daughters) run over the wall.

In the play on the name Ephraim in Gen. xli. 52 it is connected with the root פרי, "fruit"; but in the book of Hosea we meet with a double play on the name Ephraim, as connected with the root פרי, or with the root פר, "bull." So in Hosea xiv. 2 we have, apparently, a double sense given for the word פרים, carrying out this double word-play. There is a similar double play on the name אפרים in the first three lines of our passage. In their second sense we may render those three lines as follows:—

A bullock (son of a cow) is Joseph.
 A bullock by a fountain;
 Daughters have marched in procession to a bull.

In confirmation of this second rendering, we may cite Deut. xxxiii. 17, where Ephraim is designated as Joseph's first-born "bull," with a play also on the word for first-born.

בכר שורו | הדר לו
 וקרני ראם קרניו
 בהם עמים יגח
 יהדיו אפסי ארץ :

His first-born bullock, — glory is his,
 The horns of a mountain ox his horns;
 With them he thrusts peoples,
 The ends of the earth likewise.

The part which the heifer or bullock plays, moreover, in Ephraim's religious history is well known, and of itself inclines us to suspect, in the playing upon words and historical allusions in which this Blessing of Jacob abounds, some allusion to the similarity of פר and אפרים, and some reference to Ephraimite worship. The doubling of the phrase בן פרת seems to be an allusion to the dual form of אפרים. The word עין, in line 2, than which the LXX. evidently read something else, may possibly be intended as a reference to that to which Amos and Hosea refer in בת-און, where they apparently play on the words און and און. In line 3, צעדה seems to be a feminine plural form, of the same formation as in Aramaic and Assyrian. The meaning of this word in the secondary translation is the regular

meaning, rather than that given in the primary translation. In the secondary translation, פרת is treated as another form of פרה, "cow," and שור is read as שור, "ox." The remainder of our passage is full of difficulties, but they do not appear to be caused by word-plays.

23. But they dealt harshly, and contended with him,
And persecuted him — the bowmen.
24. But his bow abideth ever,
And supple are the muscles of his hands,
Through the help of Jacob's strong-one
Through the protection of Israel's Rock (?);
25. Through the God of thy father, that helpeth thee,
And the Almighty, that blesseth thee,
With blessings of the heavens above,
Blessings of the deep spread out beneath,
Blessings of breasts and womb.
26. Thy father's blessings —
Which prevail above the bounties of the eternal mountains,
The pleasant things of the everlasting hills —
Come on Joseph's head,
On the crown of the head of his brethren's prince.

The reference in verse 23f. seems to be both to the story of Joseph, as told in Genesis, and also to the oppression of Ephraim under Solomon, which finally led to Jeroboam's revolt. The last verse claims the hegemony for Ephraim as over against Judah, agreeing therein with the story of Joseph. The whole passage is conceived from the standpoint of Ephraim, and argues a north Israelite origin. Manasseh is not directly alluded to in the passage, appearing to be subordinated to Ephraim under the name Joseph. In verse 23, רלבו of the Massorettes is a ἄπαξ λεγόμενον. Sam. and LXX. offer ויריבהו, which seems to suit the metre better, and does not involve the invention of a meaning. Line 9 does not seem to me possible in its present form. In order to leave no blank, I have translated what seems to me to be the general idea. Lines 12-19 find a valuable commentary in Deut. xxxiii. 13-16. In accordance with the external testimony of Deut. xxxiii. 15, as also of the internal testimony of the parallelism I have substituted in line 16, קורי for קורי, and connected עך with the preceding, instead of with the succeeding word.

27.

בנימין זאב יטרף
בבקר יאכל עך
יחלק שלל:

27. Benjamin — a wolf that raveneth;
 In the morning he eateth prey,
 And at evening divideth spoil.

If one might suppose the wolf to be the emblem of Benjamin, this passage would gain in force. The tribal characteristics here referred to are well exemplified in Jud. xix.—xxi., as also in the history of Saul. There is no allusion in this passage to the play on the name Benjamin in Gen. xxxv. 18. The tone of the passage is hostile; it is an unfriendly characterization of the history and attributes of the border tribe. In this it stands in marked contrast with Deut. xxxiii. 12, which is written from the standpoint of Jerusalem and the Temple. At the time of the latter, Benjamin has evidently become a mere adjunct of the stronger Judah, whose only distinction is that Jerusalem and the Temple are within his geographical limits.

A consideration of the historical and political allusions in the Blessing of Jacob seems to show that it is the composition of a poet of the northern kingdom at some time, probably, between the reigns of Jeroboam and Ahab. The Blessing of Moses belongs to a later period, when amicable relations existed between the two kingdoms, and is the work of a poet of the prophetic school in Judah, who believed in national union, and unity of worship at the Jerusalem temple. The standpoint of the author in time and opinion may be described as approximately that of the prophet Amos. It is not meant to assert, however, that these are necessarily the dates of composition of the various individual "blessings." The Blessing of Jacob especially is far from homogeneous in style or treatment. A comparison of the various "blessings" in Gen. xlix. and Deut. xxxiii. with corresponding passages in Jud. v. and Gen. xxx. seems to show that these tribal characterizations or "blessings" were of ancient origin. What was done by the authors of Gen. xlix. and Deut. xxxiii. was to work up such more ancient separate couplets into one complete poem, modifying and amplifying the same by those historical and political allusions which their time and standpoint suggested.

But, if the Blessing of Jacob be such as is here supposed, the question arises, how and when did it attain its present position in the sacred books of the Jews? Imbedded in the books of Kings is a long section, drawn from at least two literary works, which might be designated respectively as Tales of the Prophet Elijah, and Miracles of the Prophet Elisha. This section differs strikingly from the surrounding material, and was evidently drawn not from archives, but

from collections of popular tales. Moreover, those collections of tales were evidently compositions or compilations of poets or narrators of the northern kingdom. The book of Judges again is a prose epic, consisting of a number of stories of the heroes of various tribes. It will be noticed, however, that no heroes of the tribe of Judah are included among those whose exploits are told in the body of this book. On the other hand, the editor of the book as we have it, manifestly did belong to the tribe, or at least the kingdom of Judah. So also the books of Amos and Hosea are concerned with, and belong to, the northern kingdom, although Amos himself was a native of Judah. But both of these books, as we have them, were edited in Judah. In the case of Amos, this is proved by vi. 2, a prose insertion in a lyrical passage, containing historical allusions which fix its date at about 711 B.C. In the case of Hosea, a Judæan editing is shown by the method of insertion of the references to Judah and Jerusalem. For example: in v. 13, although the name of Judah is introduced, yet the context concerns only Ephraim or Israël. This is one of many instances which go to show that the references to Judah are not of the essence of the book, but belong rather to the editing. It has seemed to me not improbable that the book was edited by Hosea himself for Hezekiah's library. Solomon's Song is another example of the literary compositions of the northern kingdom. A considerable portion of the most interesting, and, from a literary point of view, most artistic of the patriarchal stories have a similar origin. Some of these stories, moreover, contain historical and political allusions kindred to those contained in the Blessing of Jacob. Indeed, for the preservation of ancient legends and folklore, we seem to be especially indebted to the poets and narrators of the northern kingdom.

Without entering into a discussion of the books of Samuel or of the Psalms, several of which latter, and notably those two to the tune of The Lilies (xlv., lxxx.), seem to me to belong to the northern kingdom, I think it evident that in the first half of the eighth century B.C. the northern kingdom rather than the southern was the seat of literary, intellectual, and prophetic activity. The intellectual life which had begun in the days of David and Solomon perished with the great rebellion, to be revived later in the northern kingdom, where the conditions of national life were more favorable to such a revival than at Jerusalem. The fall of Samaria acted upon Judah as the capture of Constantinople acted upon Italy. Israelites sought refuge in Judah, bringing with them literary treasures and intellectual activity.

The result was a renaissance, and the age of Hezekiah became the golden age of Hebrew literature.

In Prov. xxv. 1 we are told that "the men of Hezekiah translated," or transcribed, or wrote down "proverbs of Solomon." Here is an effort to collect and preserve the literary treasures of the past. The account of the step-clock in 2 Kings xx. 11 serves to show that Assyrian culture and civilization had already begun to make themselves felt in Judah. The account of Ahaz' altar in 2 Kings xvi. 10 points in the same direction. It is not unnatural to suppose that the writing down of Solomon's proverbs was for the purposes of a library in Jerusalem such as the Assyrian kings had long since begun to collect at Nineveh. I have already pointed out that the book of Amos was edited somewhere about 711 B.C., apparently for this library. The first twelve chapters of Isaiah form a collection by themselves, quite separate from the rest of the book. Whereas chapters xiii.-xxxix. are a conglomerate, thrown together without order or arrangement, chapters i.-xii. form an orderly and complete compilation, comprising some six or seven independent sections or chapters, and yet, over against the following chapters, constituting both in arrangement and contents one book. Now these chapters contain only prophecies concerning Judah and Jerusalem, all of which were delivered, according to Cheyne, not later than about 711 B.C. That is to say, this book (Isa. i.-xii.) was edited about the same time as Amos. I suppose Hosea and Micah also to have been edited about this time and for the same purpose, namely, for Hezekiah's library. It was the formation of this library at just this time, and the desire, as shown in Prov. xxv. 1, to collect and preserve all the literary remains of the past, which led to the collection and preservation of so much of the literature of the northern kingdom but lately brought into Judah by the Israelite *émigrés*. No tales of the valor of heroes of Judah, no Judæan folklore antedating the time of David, has been handed down to us; this literature belonged to the northern kingdom. Literary and antiquarian zeal led to the collection and reception of these northern tales and poems into Hezekiah's library in spite of their occasional unfriendly allusions to Judah, and once received into that library, their use in historical works, owing to the awakened zeal for a knowledge of the past, was assured. So with the transference of intellectual activity from Samaria a new era begins in Judah, and soon the charming tales and poems of the north, preserved in the library of Hezekiah, begin to be woven into the more solid and ambitious works of the historians and lawyers of Jerusalem.

This literary awakening could not fail to act on the priests. They were the custodians of those ancient religious and legal traditions which, coming down from the age of Moses, had grown with, and been modified by, changing times and conditions. While some parts of the "law" were written, presumably the larger part of it was handed down mainly by word of mouth. Moreover, that which was written probably existed in various independent codes relating to different subjects. Some of these—such as a tariff of offerings, or tables of civil and criminal law, like those contained in the Book of the Covenant—may have been published, or set up at the Temple gates where they could be read by the worshippers. The greater part of the "law," however, seems to have been the exclusive, if not esoteric, possession of the priesthood of the Jerusalem temple. The literary activity of the renaissance made itself felt within the circle of the priests, leading them to begin to commit to writing their unwritten law as well as ancient traditions, customs, and ceremonies. Thus was commenced the work which has given us the middle books of the Pentateuch, as well as much of Genesis and Joshua.

But besides the merely literary activity of the period, a strong prophetic or religio-ethical movement also made itself felt. Centering about the Jerusalem temple, demanding unity of worship (2 Kings xviii. 3, 4) as one of the necessary conditions of the purity of the religion of Jehovah, and as a component part of the Mosaic revelation, this movement endeavored to impart to the people at large the semi-esoteric "law" of the priesthood. The result of this attempt to instruct the people in the law of Moses, especially on its ethical side,—as it affected their life, not as it affected the details of priestly ritual,—to apply it to their actual needs and conditions, to force it on their conscience and belief by exhortation, and by the story of its original promulgation, was the book of Deuteronomy, which, as it seems to me, was a product of the age of Hezekiah.

Such are the chief speculations suggested to my mind by a careful study and analysis of the Blessing of Jacob.