

**THE SONG OF SONGS, BEING A  
COLLECTION OF LOVE LYRICS OF  
ANCIENT PALESTINE, A NEW  
TRANSLATION BASED ON A REVISED TEXT,  
TOGETHER WITH THE ORIGIN, GROWTH  
AND INTERPRETATION OF THE SONGS**

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The Song of Songs, being a collection of love lyrics of ancient Palestine, a new translation based on a revised text, together with the origin, growth and interpretation of the songs by Morris Jastrow

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**MORRIS JASTROW**

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Let us get up early to the vineyards,  
Let us see whether the vine has budded;  
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*Song xix, Love in The Fields*

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# The Song of Songs

BEING

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J.B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

1921

TO  
H. B. J.

TO WHOM MY FIRST BOOK WAS DEDICATED

I INSCRIBE ALSO THIS ONE

BECAUSE ITS THEME RECALLS TO ME HER LOVING COMPANIONSHIP

WHICH HAS BEEN THE JOY OF MY LIFE

AND THE INSPIRATION TO MY CAREER



When, on June 21, my husband laid down his facile pen forever, the manuscript of the Song of Songs was practically in the shape in which it now appears. He had planned to round out the sixth chapter by giving several examples of Ancient Egyptian and Modern Palestinian Love Songs. Of these he had translated—from the Arabic—only a few extracts of the modern ditties, which are still sung by the peasants of Palestine. In order to give the reader some idea of how closely they resemble the Biblical love songs, I have added them at the end of the book. It is my hope that the comparison of these extracts with my husband's translation of the Song of Songs will tend to confirm his interpretation of the Biblical book—as a collection of *secular* love songs.

A seventh chapter on "The Song of Songs as Literature" was included in the original plan of the work. It seems more fitting that this chapter be omitted than that it be written by another.

It is a great satisfaction to me to feel that the Trilogy to which my husband had devoted so many years of ardent and joyful study, should have been so nearly completed,—in his own words—"Job, the most philosophical, Ecclesiastes, the most fascinating, and the Song of Songs the most charming book of the Old Testament."

Rev. Dr. Royden Keith Yerkes has been good enough to read a proof, as well as to verify the many references, and Dr. Chas. J. Mendelsohn has also read a proof. To both these friends I am deeply grateful.

HELEN B. JASTROW

OCTOBER, 1921

## FOREWORD



THE Song of Songs is one of the smallest books of the Old Testament. It consists in the conventional subdivision of the text of eight chapters with a total of only 117 verses. And yet this little book has been the subject of more controversy than perhaps any other production of similar size. There are almost as many theories about its origin and its nature as there have been commentators who have attempted to explain it, from the Rabbis in the Talmud on the one hand and from Origen in the third century of our era on the other, down through the Middle Ages to our own days. There has generally been a sharp cleavage between Jewish exegetes and Christian theologians in the interpretation of the book, though occasionally in each camp a scholar arose who freed himself from the besetting sin of Biblical exegesis at all times to read *into* the text instead of to read *out* of it. If we look a little closer, we will find that a number of assumptions in connection with the book have proved to be stumbling blocks in the way of a correct interpretation, such as the supposed Solomonic authorship of the book, the assumption that it is a literary unit, the supposition that Solomon enters into the book as a participant, the belief that there is a hidden meaning running throughout it, or that from

## FOREWORD

the literary point of view it falls within the category of the drama, and the equally persistent preconception that the book, because it has found a place in a sacred canon, must be the vehicle of some higher teachings. It will be my aim to show that in the course of the discussion all of these suppositions must be set aside—in order to clear the way for a correct view of the book.

The Solomonic authorship is a pure tradition, that arose at a time when the Hebrews fell under the influence of the Greek view of individual authorship for literary compositions and entered upon a hunt for authors for productions that were the outcome of the ancient oriental mode of literary production which was essentially collective and anonymous.<sup>1</sup>

The association of Solomon with the Song of Songs, as though he were a participant in the situation unfolded in the book, rests upon the incidental mention of Solomon in the last chapter (8, 11-12) and upon the identification of the king, mentioned a number of times in the book (1, 4 and 12) with Solomon as the king *par excellence*. This identification led to adding the name Solomon after "king" in two other places (3, 9 and 11). But as will be shown, "king" is the designation still given in parts of modern Syria to the "bride-groom" as the central figure in the wedding festivities. The real Solomon plays no part whatsoever in the book.

Once, however, the name of Solomon having become attached to the book by a fanciful association,

<sup>1</sup>See the further exposition of this view in the author's *A Gentle Cynic*, pp. 31-61, and in his *Book of Job*, pp. 49-51, and 64-66.