

**THE LILY AMONG THORNS:
A STUDY OF THE BIBLICAL
DRAMA ENTITLED, THE
SONG OF SONGS**

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The Lily among Thorns: A Study of the Biblical Drama Entitled, the Song of Songs by William Elliot Griffis

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WILLIAM ELLIOT GRIFFIS

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THE
LILY AMONG THORNS
A STUDY OF THE BIBLICAL DRAMA

ENTITLED
THE SONG OF SONGS

BY
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To
KATHARINE LYRA

MAIDEN BELOVED
WIFE CHERISHED
MOTHER HONORED

His Ruby

OF A FAIR PAGE IN OUR HEAVENLY FATHER'S BOOK,
COMPLETED IN JUNE, THE MONTH OF
VISION, RING, AND ALTAR
IS LOVINGLY DEDICATED

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PREFACE.

THE fruits of a century of critical study of Hebrew are now within reach of all. Three generations of reverent students of text, rather than of tradition, have revealed the Bible as literature. The remarkable agreement in theory and result reached, and the total wealth of old truths re-discovered, are equally causes of gratitude. The analogy in the natural world has been the collateral progress in geology and the location of earth's unused treasures in old and new lands. As the miner is first to profit by the studies of the geologist, so the first to utilize the researches of orientalists should be ministers who are pastors and teachers of the Word of God.

No book of the Bible has been so inaccessible to the ordinary reader, none so walled about, matted over, and hidden by tradition, as the Song of Songs. This Thornrose castle of the Hebrew world has stood for centuries like some battle-mented tower mantled with rank growths of ivy and all wild vines. Its external form has prompted to innumerable conjectures as to what was within.

The great Hebraists of our century, like the prince in Teutonic story, have not contented themselves with beholding the outside. Penetrating

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within, they have been charmed with a beauty before unsuspected. Instead of the garish prismatics shed by allegories, they have enjoyed in white light a loveliness that is ancient, intrinsic, and real. They read in the Song of Songs a stainlessly chaste love-poem, the epic of a woman's purity, a satire on polygamy, lofty ethical teachings, and a spiritual doctrine taught in dramatic form. They find the complement to the other writings of the Jehovah-religion, which needs no artificial and far-fetched system of interpretation; for good doctrine needs no allegory.

In the company of such explorers of Israel's history and Bible truth as Herder, Eichhorn, Umbreit, Ewald, Ginsburg, Godet, Cheyne, Farrar, Smith, Briggs, and Daland, and indeed the majority of modern scholars, no pastor of a Christian church need be ashamed to stand. Yet, until the appearance of the Revised Version of 1884, which decapitated the chapters in the English version of their impertinent headings, and showed the poetic and dramatic structure of the Song of Songs, the preacher who discarded allegory seemed audacious, if not heretical. The version of 1884 removes danger and direful novelty, and helps grandly the student, expositor, and ordinary reader.

The study of this book having been very helpful to my own soul, I herein endeavor to impart freely the blessing enjoyed. I have repressed most of the homiletical matter used in the two courses of sermons, preached in Schenectady (1884) and Bos-

ton (1889), and have been content to furnish what is, in the main, a literary study of this, probably, the most perfect poem in any language. The thronging illustrations which have come to me from biblical, far-oriental, and other literature have been but sparingly used, in order that the work might be as modest in size as it is slender in scholarship.

It is no work of learning or research which is here submitted to cold type, but only the studies of one who enjoys the Bible as literature as well as revelation. The key to this particular treasure-chamber of Holy Scripture has been furnished me by the great Hebraists. An earnest study of Delitzsch completed my emancipation from the allegorical theory. Fascinated by the riches before me, I cast away the commentaries, and gave the spare hours of my days and nights to the original text and the ancient versions. These, to the sympathetic student, outweigh in value the mountains of commentary built upon them.

It remains to speak gratefully of all those teachers, friends, and associates who have helped me to enjoy and appreciate the riches of the Old Testament. First in honor, I name my instructors at New Brunswick, N. J. : the venerable ex-President of Rutgers College, Rev. William H. Campbell, D. D., LL. D., from whom I learned the rudiments of critical biblical study ; and the Rev. John De Witt, D. D., professor of Hebrew at New Brunswick, N. J., whose " Praise Songs of Israel " is, in