XIV.

A POEM ATTRIBUTED TO AL-SAMAU'AL.

BY D. S. MARGOLIOUTH.

IN the *Jewish Quarterly Review* for April, 1905, Dr. Hirschfeld published a poem discovered by him in the Cambridge Genizah Collection, attributed to Samau'al, and in Hebrew characters. This Samau'al is naturally identified by him with the Jewish hero of Taimā, whose name is commemorated in an Arabic proverb, and to whom certain poems preserved in the *Aṣma'iyyāt* and the *Ḥamāsah* are ascribed. An account of him was given by Nöldeke in his *Beiträge zur Kenntniss der Poesie der alten Araber*, 1864, pp. 57-64. Verses would naturally be ascribed to such a person, as it is the habit of the Arabs to attribute at least a few to almost every famous man; thus they can recite to us the ode in which Adam bewailed Abel. Samau'al being a person on the confines of myth and history, the supposition that any verses ascribed to him were really by him is extremely hazardous.

The noble poem in the *Ḥamāsah* beginning "If a man's honour be not stained, any garment he wears befits him," has other claimants besides Samau'al; Ibn Kutaibah, ed. de Goeje, p. 388, ascribes it to Dukain; the mention of "a secure fortress" in it is what has caused it to be attributed to Samau'al (Nöldeke, l.c., p. 64). Besides this there are eleven verses collected by Nöldeke, and seventeen published in Ahlwardt's *Aṣma'iyyāt*, rhyming in *itu* or *aitu*, of which, however, the first are in the *wafir* and the second in the *khafif* metre, while a line closely resembling the second of these poems is quoted by Jāḥiẓ (*Bayān*, ii, 86) in the *kāmil* metre. Two of the verses (with, as usual, some variants) are quoted in the *khafif* metre by the author of

Alif-Bā (i, 158) on the authority of Tha'lab, on whose authority the same two with a third are produced in the *Lisān al-'Arab*, ii, 381. Of neither poem is the genuineness particularly probable. The first is partly autobiographical, the author stating that he was faithful in the matter of the Kindite's cuirasses, whereas other people were apt to be unfaithful; and that 'Ādiyā, his father according to most authorities, or his grandfather according to Ibn Duraid, had built him a fortress, with a supply of water, and warned him not to destroy it. Anyone to whom the story of Samau'al was known could have composed the lines without difficulty; and the remainder, which are commonplaces about wine and women, are still cheaper.

The poem in the *Aṣma'īyyāt* is religious in character, and contains a confession of faith in the resurrection, with an account of the origin of man, similar to many passages of the Koran. It is of interest that the language contains some slight Judaisms, i.e. words which should end in *th* are made to rhyme with words ending in *t*; this is noticed in the *Nawādir* of Abū Zaid (p. 104) as a Judaism. The words in which it occurs are *مبعوثٌ* and *خبيثٌ*, rhyming with *دُعيتُ*, etc. Abū Zaid quotes them as Samau'al's. In L.A., ii, 332, the mispronunciation is said to be a sign of the dialect of Khaibar, and the author is called the Jew of *Khaibar*, and therefore a different person from Samau'al, who was an inhabitant of Taimā. However, on p. 333 two more verses are cited and ascribed to Samau'al, as usual. The chief importance of the poem to the Moslems lay in its throwing light on an obscure phrase in the Koran (iv, 87)—*mukẓit*. Ṭabarī (Comm., v, 111) cites the verse in which this word occurs as 'the Jew's'; Zamakhsharī as Samau'al's. Probably, then, the verses were originally ascribed to 'a Jew,' and afterwards this poet was identified with Samau'al.

Of the poem discovered by Dr. Hirschfeld there appears to be no trace in the Mohammedan records. That it was composed by a Jew is certain; but it contains no archaisms, nor indeed any peculiarity that would cause us to assign it

an early date. So far as it has any metre, it favours the *tawil* and *kāmil* rhythms about equally: some verses and half-verses belong to one or other of these 'seas' decidedly; in a few cases it is uncertain which is intended; and some cannot be got into either. One would imagine that the author was very imperfectly acquainted with the laws of Arabic versification. For there is little or no reason for supposing that the chief metrical irregularities are due to corruption of the text. That anyone should venture to write Arabic verses without knowledge of the metrical laws is surprising, but it would not be difficult to find parallels to such hardihood.

The genus of the poem is, as Hirschfeld rightly says, *fakhr* or *mufākharah*, 'boasting,' in reply to someone who had depreciated the Jewish race; we should gather that this person was a Mohammedan, since the reply is mainly based on statements of the Old Testament which are confirmed by the Koran; and the Koranic or Moslem titles for the Hebrew heroes are ostentatiously employed: *kalim* for Moses, *khalil* for Abraham, *dhabih* for Isaac. Koranic usage is also to be found in the word used for the dividing of the Red Sea (فرق, *Sūrah* ii, 47), and there is apparently a mis-reading of the Koran (*ibid.*), which states that we "drowned (الفرعون) Pharaoh's folk," for which the poet has (آل فرعون), as though آل were the article, which is not used with this proper name. The phraseology of *Sūrah* vii, 160, where the miracles of the wells according to the number of the tribes and the manna and quails are described, agrees closely with verses 19 and 20 of the ode. One or two details certainly are not confirmed by the Koran, but probably the poet felt he would satisfy his audience if the bulk of his statements were corroborated by that paramount authority.

The other possibility—that we have here a pre-Koranic ode and one which may have been utilized by the Prophet—does not seem to commend itself. The epithets applied to the Hebrew heroes (quoted above) are Arabic words, in two out of the three cases derivatives of purely Arabic roots,

likely enough to have been invented in a Mohammedan community, but by no means likely to have originated in a Jewish community, which would employ either Hebrew words or Arabized forms of them. Moreover, the employment of the phrase *العاجل والآجل* for 'this world and the next' implies a more decided theological terminology than we should credit the 'people of the Ignorance' with possessing; the bulk of the Arabs would have known of no *'ajil*. Jews or Christians would have had their own words for it.

Pre-Koranic origin being excluded, it is difficult to offer any conjecture as to the date of the composition. Attacks on the Jews appear to have been common in all ages of Islam, and to the attacks naturally there were rejoinders. These rejoinders, if they were to be of any effect, had to be based on the Koran; and those members of tolerated sects who intended to enter the lists as controversialists, or indeed aspired to any considerable government employment, had to study the literature of the Mohammedans. Pious grammarians refused to teach unbelievers the grammar of Sibawaihi (and probably other works on the same subject), because it contained texts of the Koran; but the ordinary teacher, who lived by giving lessons, could not afford to be so particular.

The practice of composing speeches or verses and ascribing them to some ancient hero was so common in Mohammedan antiquity as scarcely to need illustration. The choice of Samau'al as the ideal apologist of the Jews in verse was both natural and felicitous. His name was held in high honour among Moslems, and verses containing a confession of faith closely agreeing with Islam were ascribed to him by the Moslem tradition. An apology put in his mouth, and couched in the language of the Koran, with special reference to the Biblical history recorded in that book, might well be received with favour and provoke little opposition. The author ruined his fair chance of success by forgetting to acquire a tolerable knowledge of Arabic metre, whence his

performance became ridiculous. Somewhat similarly those forgers of charters given to Jews and Christians by the Prophet ordinarily forgot to ascertain the death-dates and conversion-dates of the witnesses whose names they appended to the deeds, which in consequence were shown by simple inspection to be fabrications. Since no one would accuse the famous Samau'al of Taimā of inability to distinguish between the kāmīl and the ṭawīl metres, this apology never obtained the popularity which its author probably hoped, and hence it has only been preserved in a collection of waste-paper.

The following is the text (reprinted with Dr. Hirschfeld's permission) with translation¹:—

(1) *الا ايها الصف² الذى³ عاب سادتى*
اسمع جوابى لست عنك بغافل

*O thou party that hast found fault with my masters, I will
 make my reply be heard, I am not negligent of thee.*

The last phrase is Koranic.

(2) *واحصى مناقب قومة اختارهم* رحمانهم بشواهد ودلائل

*And I will recount the exploits of persons chosen by their
 Rahmān with evidences and proofs.*

This verse is both metrically and grammatically faulty. *قومة* seems intended for قوم. By omitting the initial و we should get a kāmīl verse, but the *elif* of *اختارهم* ought not to be fixed. مناقب is technical in this sense. احصى reads like a translation of *אחסף*.

(3) *اختارهم عقما عواقر⁴ للذي اختصهم ربى لصفو التناسل⁵*

*He chose them barren and sterile for the sake of the purity
 of strain wherewith my God had privileged them.*

¹ Hirschfeld's emendations are indicated by the letter H.

² MS. אלצפי.

³ MS. אלתי (H.).

⁴ MS. טואקר (H.).

⁵ MS. אלתלאסל.

The Samau'al of the Ḥamāsah answers the charge of paucity of numbers. The syntax of the second half-verse is faulty.

(4) من النار والقربان والمعن التي¹ لها استسلموا حب الاله الكامل

Of the fire and the sacrifice and the trials whereunto they surrendered themselves and of love for the Perfect God.

These words explain the 'exploits' of v. 2. The rhythm is ṭawīl, but the second half is defective. The epithet 'perfect' is probably due to metrical necessity.

(5) فهذا خليل صير النار حوله رياحين جنات الغصون الذواابل

This one was the Friend of God round whom He turned the fire into fragrant herbs as of gardens with quivering branches.

Baidāwī, on Sūrah xxi, 29, says Nimrod's furnace was turned into a روضة, 'garden.'

(6) وهذا ذبيح فداه بكبشة براه بديا لا نتاج الشياثل

And this was a victim, whom He redeemed by a ram whom He created anew, no dropping of the antelopes.

The verse is defective, and the form كبشة is doubtful. Baidāwī, on Sūrah xxxvii, 107: "Some say it was a ram from Paradise, others an antelope from Thabīr."

(7) وهذا رئيس اصطفاه وخصه واسماه اسرائيل بكر الاوائل

And this was a Prince, whom He chose and on whom He bestowed privileges, and named Israel, first-born of the ancients.

The verse is defective.

(8) فالله شرفهم كما لم يولهم لمكبر في العاجل والاجل

And God made them honourable in this world and the next, even as He did not make them subject to any tyrant (?).

¹ MS. אֱלֹהִי (H.).

The verse is defective. *مكبر* appears to stand for *متكبر*. The employment of *آجل* and *عاجل* for the two worlds is probably post-Koranic; in the Koran *عاجلة* is found for 'the present world,' and *آجلة* is likely to have been invented to give it a jingling antithesis like *طالح* and *صالح*, *قدح* and *مدح*, etc.

(9) *الا لعقبهم¹ الذين هداهم وحباهم بفصائل ونوائل*

Did He not favour their posterity whom He guided, and bestow on them excellencies and gifts?

The first half is unmetrical and defective in sense.

(10) *انصت لفخر يترك القلب مولها²*

ويشب³ ناراً في الضلوع الدواخل

Listen to a boast that will leave the heart dazed and kindle fire in the inmost ribs.

(11) *ويلهم وسواساً ويلقح⁴ حيرة ويوقع في الاحشاء مثل البلال*

And inspire bewilderment and give birth to wonder, and throw as it were confusion in the entrails.

(12) *السنا بنى⁵ مصر المنكلة التي⁶ لنا ضربت مصراً بعشر مناكل*

Are we not children of Egypt the plagued, for whom Egypt was struck with ten plagues?

This seems to be the sense; it would, however, require *الذين لنا ضربت مصر*.

¹ MS. *لعهق بهم*.

² MS. *ملاه*.

³ MS. *وينشب*.

⁴ MS. *ويلقح*.

⁵ MS. *بنو* (H.).

⁶ MS. *الممصر الممنكلة*.

(13) السنا بنى¹ البحر المفرق والتي لنا غرق الفرعون يوم التحامل

Are we not the children of the split sea, and those for whom the Pharaoh was drowned on the day of the charge?

'Pharaoh' ought not to have the article. See above.

(14) واخرجه الباري الى الشعب كى يرى

اعاجيبه مع جوده² المتواصل

And the Creator brought him out to the nation that He might show His signs with His continuous goodness.

جودو is the vulgar pronunciation of جوده.

(15) وكىما يفوزوا بالغنيمه اهلها من الذهب فوق الحمائل

And that its people might secure the plunder, even the gold above the sword-belts.

The verse is defective. Perhaps الذهب الابرينز.

(16) السنا بنى³ القدس الذى نصبت لهم

غمامة تظل لهم طول المراحل

Are we not children of the Sanctuary for whom there was set up a cloud to give them shade throughout their journeys?

The verse is ungrammatical and unmetrical.

(17) من الشمس والامطار كانت صيانة

تجوير عساكرهم من الهوف العائل

It was a protection from sun and rains, keeping their hosts safe from the fierce hot wind.

(18) كشبه الضلالل

Most of the verse is lost. Probably the words are intended for كشبه الظلالل, meaning 'like arbours.'

¹ MS. بنى.

² MS. بنى.

³ MS. بنى (H.).

(19) السنا بنى¹ السلوي مع المن والذى لنا فجر² الصوان عذب المناهل
*Are we not the children of the quails and manna, and them
 for whom the rock poured forth sweet waters ?*

(20) على عدد الاسباط تجري عيونها فراتا زلالا طعمه غير حائل
*Whose fountains flowed according to the number of the tribes,
 sweet and limpid water whose taste changed not.*

(21) وقد مكثوا في البر عمرا مجددا يغذيهم الباري بخير المآكل
*And they abode in the desert a whole generation, being fed by
 their Creator with the best of foods.*

(22) فلم يبيل ثوب من لباس عليهمو ولم يحوجوا للنعل طرا النقائل
*Neither did any garment upon them wear out, nor did they
 require fresh patches for their shoes.*

(23) وانصب نورا كالعمود امامهم ينير الرجا كالصبح غير مزاييل
*And He set up a light like a pillar before them, flashing hope
 like dawn unceasing.*

(24) السنا بنى³ الطور المقدس والذى تدخدخ للجبّار يوم الزلازل
*Are we not sons of the Holy Mountain and of that which
 humiliated itself before God on the day of the earthquakes ?*
 جبّار is a Moslem name for God (Sūrah xix, 23).

(25) اليس تظا بالجليل تدلّلا فسرفه الباري على كل طائل
*Did it not bow down its head (?) humbly, and was it not
 exalted by the Creator over all that is high ?*

جليل sometimes means 'thatch.' Here it appears to stand
 for the 'roof,' or 'top' of a mountain.

(26) وناجا عليه عبده وكليمه
And thereon He spoke to His servant and Interlocutor.

¹ MS. بنو (H.).

² MS. فجر.

³ MS. بنو (H.).