

THE DRAMAS OF THE BIBLE

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THE STATEMENT that there are dramas in the Bible will probably surprise many of my readers. This surprise is due to various reasons. First of these is the widely prevailing idea that the drama originated in Greece, and that no other nation of antiquity cultivated it; hence, of course, the Hebrews could boast of no such art. We hear on the other hand, the assertion repeatedly made that the Semites especially had no dramatic genius.¹ Now, the drama was by no means confined to the Greeks. We find it among the Hindus, where Vishnu is the hero of many old plays.² We find it also among the Chinese, where the Dragon-god is made the chief character of a drama in which he is represented as driving out the evil spirits from the dwellings of the godly.³ And the Japanese, too, have a drama, telling of the valiant achievements of their Sun-god.⁴

We thus see that the drama was not confined to the Greek; on the other hand, not only do we encounter it among the semi-civilized peoples, but also among barbarians and savages, who, as soon as they attain to a religious consciousness, have their ceremonies incorporated into dramatic performances.⁵ The Indian war-dances, the snake- and other animal-dances, are known to all; but these are really nothing more than dramatic presentations of religious ceremonies.⁶

The Australians had a drama long before the whites discovered them.⁷ They perform an historical drama to appease the gods for a murder committed in the neighborhood when the killer is unknown.

¹ Rev. S. B. Driver in the *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*.

² A. A. Macdonnell, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 347. Also A. Weber, *History of Indian Literature*, Vol. V.

³ H. A. Giles, *History of Chinese Literature*, p. 257.

⁴ Felix Rigany, *Japan in Art*. B. H. Chamberlain, *Cornhill Magazine*, 1895.

⁵ E. B. Tylor, *Anthropology*.

⁶ D. G. Brinton, *Essays of an Americanist*.

⁷ Spencer and Gillen, *The Tribes of Central Australia*.

Under such conditions, a party of six men is sent out to find the mysterious murderer. Five of these men are painted elaborately with various designs. They carry with them all kinds of arms. A place is prepared for them away from the village, but where many spectators can come out to see the performance. When these men reach the appointed place, they start a certain war dance. After exhausting himself by dancing, each lies down on the ground in a place as small as possible, which was prepared for him. Each covers himself with his shield. After a little while an old man suddenly appears from nowhere, armed only with a club. He wanders along for some time cautiously as though he were looking for the tracks of some people or animals. When his back is turned the five men, who have by this time risen from the ground, steal up behind him cautiously. Abruptly he turns and catches sight of the men who are about to kill him; a mock fight ensues, in which the old man kills all the others. This is repeated several times until finally the dead bodies of the five men are heaped in front of him, while he waves a club in the air. The people then leave the place with bowed heads. (This play is based upon an actual occurrence which took place in the long past when a noted warrior, who was thought to have killed a man, was tracked on a hunting expedition by four relatives of the murdered person. With his greater strength he turned and killed the revenging relatives.) The purpose of this drama is to convince the gods that the relatives are willing to revenge the dead but are unable to do so.

The Aztec religious worship too had a dramatic performance in which a human being, a captive usually, was annually sacrificed to the god Huitziotl.⁸ Moreover, this captive actually stood for the god to the people, who, whenever he appeared, bowed in token of reverence and honor. On the final day before the sacrifice, when he was conducted to the temple by the priests, his every act was regulated by them, in order that everything he did might appear to be the symbol of a godly action. Thus, even human sacrifices were only dramatic representations of their divine protagonist's self-sacrifice for humanity.

A curious modern instance of a dramatic performance among savages is the custom of the Aleutian Islanders, who, when game

⁸ W. H. Prescott, *Conquest of Mexico*, Vol. I. See also H. H. Bancroft, *Native Races of the Pacific States*, Vol. II.

is scarce, are wont to enact a performance in which some of them dress up to represent the animals they would kill, while the remainder shoot dull arrows at them until all the make-believe animals are supposedly slain. When this feat is accomplished, they are sure of the success of their hunting expedition.⁹

The Japanese people also had a drama for many centuries. One of these depicts the Sun Goddess who, in a fit of temper, declined to give forth her light to the world. The drama begins by the statement that the Sun Goddess was offended by some act of her children and had withdrawn to a cave taking her light from the world. The stage appears dark and desolate; cries are heard from the darkness. However, this was also inconvenient for the gods. They assembled on the dry bed of the river of heaven. After many attempts to lure the sun out of her cave, they decided to give a dance — the dancing to be on inverted empty tubs which would echo when the dancers stamped on them. When this dance was performed the Sun Goddess, as was expected, became curious and came out from the cave to see what this noise was all about. The gods were ready for her and they soon succeeded in persuading her to go back to heaven and again illumine the world.

This shows that even the lowest savages had some form of religious drama, which they improved as they ascended the ladder of civilization, by adding to it music, dialogue, and songs, thus creating a true dramatic art. Only the Semites, according to the detractors of the Semitic genius, were an exception. Only they are relegated to a category lower than all these primitive peoples. In explanation of this stand, we are confronted with the argument that we have never met with any drama among the inhabitants of Western Asia, neither do we find any approach to it in all the discoveries made in the recent excavations in ancient Semitic territories. This argument, based on the fact that a Semitic drama is not known to us, seems to be rather flimsy. It is always precarious to come to a conclusion when the hypothesis is grounded on ignorance. Some years ago we still felt justified in denying the Egyptians dramatic genius for the same reason.¹⁰ Yet recently Egyptologists have discovered on the walls of the temple at Abydos a reference

⁹ Encycl. Brit., *Drama*. Also G. W. Gills, *The Aleutian Islands*.

¹⁰ Driver, *Authority and Archaeology*.

to a drama there enacted.¹¹ From this reference we learn that the worship of Osiris, the god of that temple, had in it a ceremony presenting in dramatic form, the life, death, and resurrection of that god. Of course, this discovery forced the learned world to change its opinion regarding the Egyptian genius, and to admit that the people of the Nile country were not lacking in dramatic talent.

In a like manner until lately, the Semites were not credited with any aptitude for epic poetry or any artistic talent, on the ground that nothing was known of such poetry or art among them. Then recent excavations in Babylon and Assyria brought to light a wealth of artistic and poetic treasures which had lain hidden in the mounds for thousands of years.¹² And since these finds compelled modern scholars to give over their preconceived idea of the dwellers of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, would it be so unreasonable to suppose that, sooner or later, there will be unearthed in the excavations now under way, a reference to a drama in the temples of Assyria and Babylon; and that we shall once more be called upon to amend our notion of the genius of the ancient inhabitants of these countries?

But even in the dim light of our present knowledge, we may safely infer that the Semites had a drama; not merely because all other peoples who passed through the same stages of civilization had one, but for other more cogent reasons. These reasons will soon become convincing when we remember that the origin of the drama in Greece is traced to the worship of Dionysus, the god of vegetation.¹³ and that, by uniting the plot and music of this god with the chorus of Apollo, the drama was perfected. This Dionysus, however, is no other than Adonis, a Semitic god, known also as Tammuz.¹⁴ Is it not more than probable, therefore, that the Semitic worshippers of Adonis had the same kind of ritual attached to his cult as their successors, the Greeks, had after them? This probability becomes almost a certainty when we recall that the religion of the Phœnician and Babylonian god Adonis-Tammuz was modelled on that of the Egyptian Osiris,¹⁵ — all these being gods of

¹¹ J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, Vol. I. Also Prof. Heinrich Schaefer, *Die Mysterien des Osiris in Abydos*.

¹² S. B. Driver, *Authority and Archaeology*.

¹³ R. G. Moulton, *The Origin of the Drama*. Aristotle, *Poetics*.

¹⁴ Sir James G. Frazer, *Golden Bough*, Vol. IV., Adonis-Tammuz. W. R. Smith, *Religion of the Semites*.

¹⁵ They were under Egyptian influence for many centuries. See Breasted, *History of Egypt*. Also Frazer, *Golden Bough*, Vol. II.

vegetation. As was stated before, the worship of the latter contained a dramatic presentation of his life, death, and resurrection; hence the Adonis-worship, which had the same traditions, must have had the same ceremonial. Since a similar dramatic performance belonged to the Greek Dionysus cult, the assumption would seem justified that among the Semites the same god, under the name of Adonis, had the same kind of ritual attached to his worship as previously in Egypt and later in Greece.¹⁶ This inference, again, would lead to the conclusion that the Semites had a drama.

Yet we need not depend entirely on inference. We have a Babylonian story which appears to have been originally a drama, recounting the descent of Istar through seven gates into Hades;¹⁷ there she was detained for some time, until gods and men, thrown into consternation by her absence, importuned the great god Ea to send a messenger to bring her back. We are told here of her ascent through the same seven gates on her return to earth. Remembering the peculiar construction of the Babylonian temples, in the form of seven stairs,¹⁸ we begin to see the meaning of the seven gates Istar must needs descend and ascend. Undoubtedly the Istar story was originally a dramatic performance, and the seven gates were represented by the seven temple stairs on which the several scenes were enacted.

Thus, it is obvious that the Semites were not lacking in dramatic ability, any more than other semi-civilized peoples of antiquity. That no actual drama of the Semites has yet been discovered, is due to the peculiar attitude of the Semitic priests. As stated previously, the drama of every nation had its beginning in the temple ceremonies. Even in Greece it was a religious performance up to the last days of Athenian splendor.¹⁹ Aristotle says that Æschylus was accused of betraying the secrets of the gods by writing down the religious dramas.²⁰ In India, too, the drama was secularized through a betrayal of the holy ceremonies outside the temples.²¹ And that the same was true in China, is borne out by the following curious story.

¹⁶ *Herodotus*, Vol. I.

¹⁷ M. Jastrow, *Religion of Babylonia and Assyria*. See also R. W. Rogers, *History of Babylonia and Assyria*.

¹⁸ *Herodotus*, Vol. I.

¹⁹ Lewis Campbell, *Religion in Greek Literature*.

²⁰ Aristotle, *Poetics*.

²¹ Macdonell, *Sanskrit Literature*.

In the fifth century B. C., so we are told, a number of stable-boys were arrested for enacting in a stable a performance which they had seen a magician conduct in the houses of the rich for exorcising the demons.²² These instances prove that the secularization of the drama came about through the betrayal of the priestly secrets.

This, however, could not have happened among the Semites, for the following reason. With them, the priests were consecrated to the temple-service from childhood;²³ in fact, there were always special tribes dedicated to the worship of the gods.²⁴ The young priests were drilled orally in the performance of the ceremonies by their masters; hence there was never any need for writing down these ceremonies. From generation to generation the temple lore was retained in the midst of the few, and when the temples were destroyed and the priests massacred — as was often the case in those days — all the traditions connected with that particular fane were lost forever.²⁵ This consideration renders it very unlikely that we shall ever find a clear, positive drama in Semitic territory. Even in Egypt only a reference was discovered; the drama itself was lost.

A further reason assigned for the contention that the Semites could have written no dramas, is the assertion that the Semitic genius, being intensely subjective, could have produced no objective art; that, being very self-absorbed, the Semitic writers could not have put themselves in the place of the hero of the play. While this accusation is so irrational as to require almost no consideration, let us pause long enough to show its utter absurdity. In addition to the fact that the epic is also an objective form of literature — and we have found the Creation epic among the Babylonians, the Gilgamesh epic among the Assyrians, and numerous epics in the Bible of the Hebrews themselves — we have a wonderful piece of objective art in the Biblical story of Balaam — undoubtedly the product of a Hebrew pen. In this narrative Israel is in the background — “We can see him at a distance,”²⁶ reiterates Balak. The two most im-

²² Giles, *Chinese Literature*.

²³ W. R. Smith, *Religion of the Semites*. Also G. A. Barton, *A Sketch of Semitic Origins*.

²⁴ Exodus XXVIII:1-2. Numbers XVIII:1-20.

²⁵ As to destruction of the Tabernacles of Shiloh and Nob, see I Samuel XXII:16-19, and Jeremiah VII:12.

²⁶ Numbers XXIII:13.

portant characters are non-Jews, and the author gives eloquently and impartially the point of view of Balaam and Balak. Without any prejudice, he presents Balak as a patriot of his people, doing his best to save them from their enemies; and Balaam, as a true prophet of God, obeying every behest of YHVH. The writer seems to have experienced no difficulty in placing himself in the position of non-Jews and portraying them with perfect sympathy in all their sentiments. The Balaam story proves conclusively that the Semites *could* write objectively; hence this argument also falls to the ground.

If we may hold that the Semites had a drama, we may be convinced that the Hebrews, being a Semitic race, had it also. We know, indeed, that the Children of Israel adopted many customs from their neighbors.²⁷ We read in Ezekiel that they observed the worship of the Babylonian god Tammuz in the Temple which as stated before was a dramatic performance.²⁸ Again, Israel was dominated by the influence of Egypt; first, in pre-Biblical times, during its sojourn in Egypt; later when, by the marriage of King Solomon to a daughter of Pharaoh, it fell under Egyptian control;²⁹ and finally, by the influence of King Jeroboam.³⁰ Again, we find the Hebrew people adopting the language and custom of the Canaanites, the former occupants of Palestine. For a long time it was surmised, though not actually demonstrable, that the Biblical language was taken over by the Hebrews from the people of Canaan. Only quite lately, the Tel-el-Amarna letters have verified this surmise, inasmuch as they show that the writers who employed the Babylonian language in the fourteenth century B. C., now and then used a Hebrew word to elucidate an unknown Babylonian term. As the Hebrews were not in Palestine at the time, the writers could not have taken these expressions from the Children of Israel; hence they must have adopted them from the predecessors of the Hebrews, the Canaanites, whom the twelve Tribes later dispossessed. Yet those words are good Hebrew expressions. This would prove, therefore, that the Hebrew language was the speech of the Canaanites, the predecessors of Israel.³¹ If the Hebrews, then, adopted

²⁷ Judges II:11-14; Isaiah II:6; Jeremiah X:2-9.

²⁸ Ezekiel VIII:14.

²⁹ 1 Kings III:1.

³⁰ 1 Kings I:40; XII:20.

³¹ Zimmern, *Cuneiform Inscriptions and the Old Testament* (3rd. ed.), p. 652.

from their predecessors their language, it may be assumed that with it they took over the civilization, customs, and religion; and that with this last — if they did not already possess it — they must have taken the drama, long cultivated by the Canaanites in common with their neighbors, the Phoenicians and the Egyptians.

We know very little about those other neighbors of the Israelites, the Philistines. From the biblical account of their capture of Samson it would appear that they also had a drama, for we are told that, after Samson was seized and blinded by the Philistines, he was brought down to the temple "to play before them."³² While we cannot state positively that the word *play* here means *act*, nevertheless it is almost safe to infer that the Philistines also had a drama, first because they were originally Greeks;³³ secondly, because their god Dagan was the same as Adonis. If such was the case, the Israelites, who came in contact with the Philistines for a long period, who were under their power, and in turn held them subject, were bound to take from them this interesting ceremony as a help in their religious propaganda.

The most convincing evidence, however, that the Hebrews had a drama is to be found in the Bible itself and in the ceremonies of the Jewish religion. From days immemorial, the Children of Israel had all the elements that, everywhere else, developed into a national drama. Those who claim for Greece exclusively the invention and development of the drama trace it back to the religious dances, to the chorus employed in the temple of Apollo, and finally, to the festival procession of Dionysus. The combination of these three, according to the Greek historians, resulted in the drama.³⁴ But we have these three factors in ancient Israel as well. We see Miriam and her maidens dancing and singing songs in praise and honor of God after the Children of Israel had crossed the Red Sea.³⁵ We also find the women dancing and singing in chorus when David and Saul returned from overthrowing Goliath and the Philistines, exulting that "Saul smote his thousands, while David smote his ten thousands."³⁶ David himself did not scorn to take part in one of these

³² Judges XVI:25.

³³ J. H. Breasted, *History of Egypt*. Hastings, *Bibl. Encycl.* Philistines. Also *Quarterly Statement*, 1907, Philistines, by Prof. Myers.

³⁴ R. G. Moulton, *The Origin of the Drama*.

³⁵ Exodus XV:20-21.

³⁶ 1 Samuel XVIII: 6-7; XXIX: 5.

dances, participation in which was not held undignified for a king, when the Ark of God was brought into the City of David.³⁸ Again we have the responsive chorus in the early Psalms, which would indicate that the Hebrews had singing choruses. Psalm XXIV not only lends itself to responsive recitation, but in all likelihood was so used.

Leader: "Who will ascend the mountain of the Lord and who will stay in His Holy place?"

Chorus: "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart ;
He who hath not lifted up his soul vainly, and he who did not swear falsely."

Leader: "He shall then receive the blessing from Y^HVH and righteousness from the God of his Salvation."

Chorus: (Pointing to the people): "This is the generation of them that, like Jacob, seek thy face: Selah."

Leader: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, so that the King of Glory may enter."

Chorus: "Who is the King of Glory?"

Leader: "Y^HVH, strong and mighty."

Chorus: "Y^HVH is mighty in battle."

Leader: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and lift up the everlasting doors, that the King of Glory may enter."

Chorus: "Who is the King of Glory?"

Leader: "The Lord of Hosts, He is the King of Glory."

In Psalm CXVIII:29 we find the same antiphonal singing:

Leader: "Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good."

Chorus: "His kindness endureth forever;" etc.

Thus we find in ancient Israel the three sources from which the drama came into being in Greece. It would, therefore, seem only fair to concede that the same factors brought about the same result here as elsewhere.

³⁸ 1 Samuel VI:15; 2 Samuel VI:14.

The Prophets seem to have been aware of the power exerted by dramatic ceremony upon the multitude. They liked to take the character or personality of some individual or nation. Thus (a) Isaiah went barefoot and naked for days, to impersonate the Egyptians and Æthiopians, who were to be led into captivity barefoot and naked by the Assyrians.³⁹ (b) Hosea married an unfaithful wife, who was to personify Israel's unfaithfulness to God.⁴⁰ (c) Jeremiah wore a heavy yoke, as a sign that Israel was to bear the heavy yoke of King Nebuchadnezzar.⁴¹ (d) Ezekiel impersonated the King of Babylon as fighting against Jerusalem, by making a brick represent the Holy City, and a piece of iron the wall of separation between God and Israel.⁴²

In addition to these personifications, there were other attempts along dramatic lines by itinerant actors, who went from place to place, playing before different assemblies in various cities for the purpose of instructing the people in religion. Whether this practice was originated in opposition to, or in imitation of, the Canaanitish dervish practices or whether it was a national Israelitish institution, is of no consequence here. It is sufficient to note the fact that there was such an institution. The fact in point is referred to in the Bible, where we read that the *B'nai Hanbhiim*, or Sons of the Prophets, marched about in large crowds, *chebel*, playing musical instruments, dancing, and giving performances before the people.⁴³ They executed feats of leaping, falling, and dancing, and resorted to numerous other devices, perhaps for the purpose of attracting passersby. Many who came within their influence were moved to join them.⁴⁴ These men were also called *meshugah* — possessed,⁴⁵ and their office was doubtless that of the itinerant actors before alluded to, who performed whenever they had an opportunity.

We find in the Bible also a direct reference to a drama played in Jerusalem. There is in Ezekiel the statement mentioned above, to the effect that, in the very Temple, "the women were lamenting the

³⁹ Isaiah XX: 2-3.

⁴⁰ Hosea I: 2-7; II: 1-5.

⁴¹ Jeremiah XXVII:2; XXVIII:10.

⁴² Ezekiel IV:1-3.

⁴³ 1 Samuel X: 5-6; 10-13.

⁴⁴ 1 Samuel XIX:20-24.

⁴⁵ 2 Kings IX: 11.

death of Tammuz." ⁴⁶ Now this lament was part of the Drama of Tammuz-Adonis discussed above, strongly dramatic in content and form. Such are the stories of Jacob and Joseph; of God's appearing for the first time to Moses; and of the life of Saul. But perhaps nothing will indicate so clearly the existence and the progressive steps in the development of the drama in ancient Israel as the ceremonial observances of the Hebrews. The Purim festival, with its mystic story of Haman and Mordecai, with its quaint ceremonies as retained to this day, is a survival of an old masque and dramatic presentation in vogue in ancient Israel. Such, likewise, is the Hoshana Rabba procession with the *Lulov* and *Ethrag*, the knocking, and the crushing of the willow branches; ⁴⁷ not very different, indeed, is it from the Greek procession of Dionysus. ⁴⁸ Other survivals are the ceremonies of the Passover night — the Paschal Lamb, the puzzling questions and answers, and the cup of the Prophet Elijah. ⁴⁹ All of these show traces of having primarily been given in dramatic form before some shrine, or before an assembly of the people gathered to the great Temple of YHVH.

Dramatic traces are again to be found in the ceremony of the Sanctification of the Moon. ⁵⁰ In that ceremony there are remnants of a dialogue as well as a direct apostrophe to the Moon — a survival, undoubtedly, of Moon worship in ancient Israel. For the performance of this ceremony three men are needed. During the services one of them says to the others: "Peace unto you." And the others must respond: "Unto you be peace." Then the three leap heavenward and address the Moon in the following words:

"As I leap against thee, but cannot touch thee, so should mine enemies not be able to touch me with evil intentions." These words and the accompanying actions undoubtedly belonged to a Moon drama that was performed when Israel, in common with other Semites, worshipped the Queen of Night.

The ceremonies of the Day of Atonement, with the goats as sacrifice which were sent by lot, one to YHVH and the other to the Demons of the Wilderness, as described in Leviticus; ⁵¹ the fasting

⁴⁶ Ezekiel VIII:14.

⁴⁷ Prayerbook, Sohar. Mishnah, Sukkah, IV:2.

⁴⁸ *Plutarch* (1, c, 14, 62).

⁴⁹ Haggada. (Passover Night Service).

⁵⁰ *Daily Prayerbook* (Berlin Edition).

⁵¹ Leviticus XVI:7-10.

and blowing of the trumpet at the conclusion of the services, were in all likelihood originally part of a dramatic performance. It would be out of place here to attempt a discussion of the custom of the synagogue of reading the law with the necessary quorum of three persons standing near the Scroll.⁵² The Talmud asserts that this custom was instituted by Moses,⁵³ but this is only a makeshift explanation. Anthropology, which traces institutions to their source, cannot be satisfied with such a statement. The basis for this observance is doubtless to be found in its being an outgrowth and substitute for the original dramatic presentation in the Temple, where at least three persons were required by the structure of the play; and though the ceremony was changed, this latter custom was preserved in accordance with the law of the persistency of religious sanctity. From all this we gather that, like all other peoples, Israel had religious plays; that, like all other primitive peoples, when it reached a higher level of civilization, it crystallized these barbaric usages into ceremonies, to become symbols of a more refined cult, more adapted to changed conditions; and, like all peoples at that stage of civilization, they combined isolated ceremonies into one strong form of worship, which resulted in an artistic drama.

From the facts adduced thus far, we may assume that the Hebrews had a drama and employed it for religious purposes, like their neighbors, the Babylonians, the Phoenicians, and the Egyptians. Like the drama of their neighbors, that of the Children of Israel was in the hands of the priests, who preserved the plots orally among themselves. For very good reasons, as the Biblical student knows, the priests later in Jewish history allowed their traditions to be put into writing.⁵⁴ Among these traditions were also dramas and performances which were taken up by the Sons of the Prophets and others. Of these dramas, however, very few were preserved, because most of them had primitive ideas and even these were not taken into the Bible in their original form, but changed and recast so as not to be recognized as dramas in order to eliminate the pagan origin of these plays.

For this reason, these old dramas were turned into prose narratives by later Biblical editors. The reasons that prompted the

⁵² Talmud Megilah, 23a.

⁵³ Talmud Jerusalmi Megilah, Ch. III; *See also* Talmud Bab., Baba Kamah, 82a.

⁵⁴ 2 Kings XXII:8-10.

latter to this course were their desire to unify and make the Bible appear a connected, actual history of the Hebrew people. The material, as it came down from the past to the days of Ezra, consisted of various forms drawn from various sources. Some were the work of YHVH priests and the Prophets. Others again were the compositions of men known as the "false prophets"; that is, prophet-worshippers of other gods beside YHVH. From all this material the Judean editors naturally selected only those traditions that were favorable to the God of the Temple of Jerusalem. Everything else they threw out or destroyed;⁵⁵ and soon the works they chose to preserve had to undergo changes, emendations and revisions, for the religious ideas of pre-Exilic Israel did not agree with the teachings of Ezra and his school. The Hebrew writers of the early days, like their neighbors, had anthropomorphic and unethical ideas about the gods, whom they were wont to represent as involved in perpetual feud with one another; jealous, full of hatred, and struggling for preëminence. Nor was even YHVH an exception. As presented in the ancient dramas, he too, was far beneath the lofty conception of the later School of Ezra. Therefore the editors of the later age were very careful as to what matter should be incorporated into the Canon and what rejected, and in what form it should be preserved.

That the drama should be subject to the severest censorship, is obvious. Too eloquent a reminder of the heroic day of pagan Israel, it must either be entirely omitted or, being included, must be freed from all anthropomorphisms, and reconstructed into prose stories so as to appear true history. It is only due to the fact that some of the YHVH dramas had beautiful lessons to teach, that they were preserved in the Bible, though in mutilated form. It was also due to the conservative spirit of the editors that they retained in many instances expressions otherwise used only in the drama. These expressions help reveal the original status of the compositions and tell their true character.

As Biblical students today well know, there are in the Bible stories which were originally epic poems, but which were altered into prose accounts for the same reasons as were the dramas. The two stories of creation for instance, not only bear the marks of

⁵⁵ Baraita in Baba Bathra, 14b. Also, Tosafta, 15a. Also, Tosafta yad, ii, 13.

having been originally epics,⁵⁶ but their Babylonian cousins, which were lately discovered, are likewise in epic form, and shed light on the Biblical stories.⁵⁷ The same is true of the Flood epic, which has an echo in the Babylonian Gilgamesh poem. This makes it clear that the Biblical compilers had at their disposal a mass of heterogeneous material, that needed to be sifted and unified into a work of historical sequence and verisimilitude. All references to alien gods had to be expunged or endued with a new or allegorical meaning, and all the fictitious incidents in which they occurred, converted by a few changes into so-called historical events.

We must, therefore, remember that we cannot hope to find in the Bible a drama that would answer the exact Aristotelian definition of this art: first, because of the changes the Biblical drama underwent at the hands of the editors, changes in the process of which all its essentially dramatic form was eradicated; secondly, because Aristotle had in mind in his definition the Greek theater, and we may not judge a Semitic drama, by a Greek standard, any more than we may apply his standard to the best of our modern dramas — those of Shakespeare not excepted — most of which if the strict Aristotelian definition were brought to bear on them, would have to be removed from the stage. But taking the whole range of the world's dramatic literature and generalizing the Greek standard somewhat, the Hebrew drama will fall into its rightful place.

I should define the drama as an expression of an event in action. It must have characters, a plot, a conflict of passions. It must have unity of action — a definite beginning, a climax, and a catastrophe. In addition, it must be an expression of life as the writer and his audience see it around them. It requires poetic dialogue, uniting the qualities of the conversational story with the lofty diction of the epic poem. And finally, it must have spectacular scenery, rapid, exciting action, and a conflict of will against sentiment. Any story of the Bible that answers these requirements may be assumed to have originally been a drama.

If we take this broad definition of the drama, we find several stories in the Book which, even in their present prosaic version, have many of the earmarks of their earlier dramatic form. Judging by

⁵⁶ Moulton. *Poetry of the Bible*. See also Ewald, *History of Israel*.

⁵⁷ S. B. Driver, *Genesis*.

this standard, I find four stories which were undoubtedly dramas originally. These are: The Fall of Man, the Sacrifice of Isaac, and the Story of Job. In addition we may state that the story of Esther was in all likelihood a drama originally. By a careful analysis we shall see that these stories fulfil all the dramatic requisites; they have all the pathos, the poetic fancy, and the ethical grandeur of the highest dramatic art, and may, therefore, claim their rightful place in the best dramatic literature of the world.