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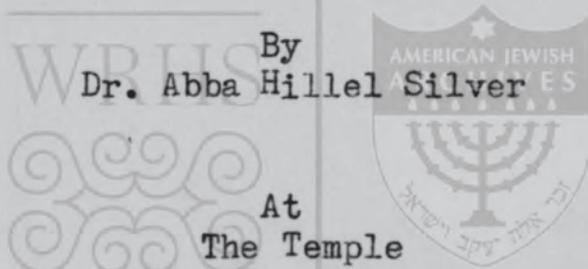
The immortal singer of songs - Judah Halevi, 1941.

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THE IMMORTAL SINGER OF SONGS -- JUDAH HALEVI
On the Occasion of His 800th Anniversary

By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple



On
Sunday morning, February 23, 1941

The 800th anniversary of Judah Halevi is being celebrated this year throughout the Jewish World. Halevi belonged to the Golden Age of Spain and to the band of immortals which that Golden Age produced. There have been five great ages in our history, five important centers of Jewish life since the beginning of our history -- Palestine; Babylonia, where the Talmud was completed; Spain, of which I shall speak in a moment; Eastern and Central Europe; Germany which produced so many Jews of the first water in every field of human thought and action.

The greatest of these ages, next to the one in Palestine was the Golden Age of Spain where Hebrew and Arabic culture enkindled each other. For five hundred years, from the tenth to the fourteenth century, Spain produced an amazing array of scholars, talmudists, grammarians, lexicographers, poets, philosophers, statesmen, scientists, world travellers, inventors. Finally, religious bigotry and intolerance excessive nationalism on the part of Christian Spain, in the 15th century, put an end to this amazing creative period. In 1492 the Jews were expelled, and all who remained behind went underground.

Judah Halevi belonged to this glorious period of Spanish Jewry. I wish to tell only briefly of his life this morning. The Rabbis say that the essential thing about a great man's life is not his biography, but what he did, what he created, what he achieved. Halevi was born in Toledo in 1085. In his early childhood he received the kind of education which cultured Jewish families at that time gave to children. He was thoroughly in Jewish studies, the Bible, the Talmud, Hebrew Grammar. He also received ^a fine secular education as the times afforded. He learned Arabic, Arabic science, philosophy. Professionally physician he prepared himself to become a ~~man~~ like so many Jews of his day. Medicine was almost a Jewish profession as it is today.

Halevi evidenced ^{poetic} genius very early. In fact when he was but a lad, a great Hebrew poet, a contemporary of Halevi, praised him in the highest terms. He had a capacity for friendships. He had a large circle of friends not only in Toledo but in many places. His fame spread rapidly and before many years Halevi

was unofficially crowned King of the Hebrew Poetry.

Halevi always longed to make a pilgrimage to Palestine. It wasn't until he was comparatively an old man that he finally did make that pilgrimage. It was a dangerous trip to make in those days. It was difficult to travel to Palestine. Palestine was already in the hands of the Crusades and the Jews of Palestine were terribly persecuted. Nevertheless his great love for Zion urged him on and he travelled across the Mediterranean to Egypt. Everywhere he was hailed as a conquering hero, in Tyre, Damascus. His friends tried to persuade him to remain, not to go on, but he insisted on going. We hear of him in Tyre, Damascus. Then we lose track of him. Whether he ever reached Jerusalem it is difficult to say. Tradition says that he did - that as he prostrated himself before the Holy City kissing its sacred soil, an Arab rider passed by and drove his spear through Halevi and Halevi died where he longed to die -- on the sacred soil of Palestine.

Halevi was not only a poet, but a philosopher. And it is about his philosophy that I should like to speak first because the major themes of his philosophic thought are the major themes of his poetry.

There were other philosophers in Spain and in other parts of the Diaspora at the time of Halevi and before his time. In fact there developed before him for two hundred years such men as Saadia, Isaac Israeli, Solomon ibn Gabirol, Babyn ibn Pakudah and many others who preceded him in Jewish philosophic speculation.

There is something unique about Halevi, about his book, the Kuzari, its contents, the structure of this philosophic work. The Kuzari is in the form of dialogue between the King of the Chazars and a Jewish scholar. Halevi used an historical event which took place three or four hundred years before his time. It is about the conversion of the King of Chazars and many of his subjects of Turkish origin to Judaism. The story is that the King wanted to foresake paganism

and adopt another religion. He summoned to his court a representative of Christianity, Mohammedanism and Judaism and requested each representative to define his faith and to explain why the King of the Chazars should accept it. Both the Christian and the Mohammedan spokesmen appealed in their arguments to the truths of the Hebrew Bible to substantiate their statements. So the king concluded that if both appealed to the Hebrew Bible, therefore the Bible of the Hebrews was the true religion. He was therefore converted to Judaism -- he and many of his subjects. And we have a Jewish Kingdom in southern Russia for some two hundred years until it was destroyed by the Muscovites.

Halevi used this story for the structure of his book. In that discussion between the king and the Jewish scholar, he contrasts Judaism with other religions, defines its tenets, its history, etc.

Halevi did not attempt, as did so many other Jewish philosophers in his day to reconcile religion with philosophy or to defend Judaism by showing how to harmonize it with Greek philosophy, with neo-paganism or with the accredited philosophies of his day. Halevi did not believe that Judaism need be on the defensive. He was not impressed by the rationalistic trends of his day which under philosophic thought the influence of Hellenism had begun to invade/both Jewish and Arabic. Philosophy has its definite limits, he maintained. Reason and logic have their legitimate domain in the fields of the natural sciences. Data can be analyzed. That is the field of logic, reason. But beyond that boundary lies the domain of faith, intuition, prophecy and revelation. And faith, in its field is as autonomous as reason in its field. Faith does not require any credentials, any vises, any passports from philosophy. Judaism is a revealed religion, therefore independent of and superior to philosophy.

And the authorities of Judaism are not the metaphysicians, not the philosophers. The authorities of Judaism are the prophets who are higher than the philosophers, who, according to Halevi, belonged to a fifth kingdom of

existence which is as far removed from the ordinary human being as the ordinary human being is removed from the Animal Kingdom, and that in ~~the~~ turn from the Vegetable Kingdom.

And the authority for Judaism is not pure speculation which is subjective, but actual experience, In other words, the real authority in Judaism is revelation in History, the meaning of what happened in the creative world, the manifestation of God in the process of history. When Pharaoh of Egypt asked Moses, "Who sent you?", Moses did not reply, "The God of Heaven and Earth sent me." He replied, "The God of the Hebrew sent me". The Second Commandment given by God does not begin: I am the Lord who created Heaven and Earth, but "I am the Lord God brought who/you out of the Land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage." The authority of religion is the manifestation of God in the historical life of a nation and in the life of a nation's experience, tradition. And particularly the history of the people of Israel, which people, according to Halevi was the especial channel through which the supreme religious revelations came to the world -- their prophetic religion was carried down the ages by this people. The consecrated spiritual essence of the world descended in an unbroken chain through Abraham to his descendants

Other people have other creative powers. In Israel it is the divine afflatus which gives a special distinction. Israel in a sense is the repository of the prophetic religion. Now this does not bestow on Israel any special privileges, nor does this exclude any other righteous people from God's love and providence and their reward in the world to come. Nor is it a mandate to Israel to conquer and subjugate other peoples. This prophetic tradition of a race only burdens Israel with the mission of spiritual leadership, of loyally living up to teaching and defending its ideals. And this peculiar quality of Israel's existence makes of Israel, as Halevi says, the heart of the nation, Just as the heart is the most vital and sensitive of all, so Israel is at one and the

same time the most afflicted and at the same time the most healthy. And Israel is sensitive to all the wrongs of the world; therefore, Israel's trials and sufferings are greater than all other people's. Because they are greater, Israel is progressively purged of all that is dross and unworthy. It is purified so that it may more and more receive this divine word which is imparted through them to the world.

Halevi calls attention of the King of the Chazars to the suffering of the people of Israel which was voluntary, especially in his day. The Jews of Western and Eastern Europe with a word could have given up their faith and could have received all the privileges. But they refused to do it because they wished to carry on as the prophetic people of the world.

Just as Israel is the people most fit for revelation, so Zion is land most fit for Israel and for its prophetic mission. Halevi is a passionate, mystical nationalist who exalted not only his people but his people's historic land. Zion, too, was holy because the divine prophets dwelt there. It was holy because the soil was best suited to produce prophets. Just as certain soil is good for certain plants, so the soil of Palestine is good for producing people of prophecy. Certain soils are good for certain plants. So the book closes with the Hebrew scholar announcing his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Zion.

Now, these great themes of Halevi's philosophy are also the leading themes of his poetry: Religion, Israel, Zion. Halevi, of course, is a far greater poet than a philosopher. He climaxed a whole galaxy of Hebrew poets which included Samuel Hanagid, Ibn Gabirol, Moses ibn Ezra.

In his beautiful *Romancero*, Heine writes of King Alexander who has land of Arabella conquered the ~~xxxxxxxx~~ and has amassed all the wealth of that tremendous empire, he proceeded to distribute all that wealth to his friends. The only thing that he kept for himself was a little casket itself a gem of inestimable value. In that casket he locked the divine songs of the bard, Homer. This casket

stood by the couch of Alexander, and at night he would read the poems of the beloved bard. Heroes slipt forth from the casket and lived and wandered in his dreams. Heine said that he should like to lock therein the poem of Judah Halevi should he ever gain possession of the casket. Heine/wrote about Halevi and the casket containing his poems:

- "It should stand upon a table
By my bed, and when my friends
Came and marvelled at the splendour
Of the little chest beside me,
- "At the curious bas-reliefs
So diminutive, yet perfect
In their finish, at the inlay
Of the big and costly jewels,
- "I would smile and I would tell them: --
That is nothing but the shell
Which contains the nobler treasure
In this little casket lying.
- "There are diamonds that mirror,
With their light, the light of heaven;
There are rubies red as heart's blood,
There are turquoises unblemished.
- "Also emeralds of promise,
Yes, and pearls of purer beauty
Than those given to Atossa
By the rank imposter Smerdis;
- "For those pearls of world-wide glory
Are but pale, secreted mucus
Of a sick and wretched oyster
At the bottom of the sea;
- "While the pearls within this casket
Are the precious overflow
Of a lovely spirit, deeper
Than the deepest depths of ocean.
- "For these pearls, they are the tear-drops
Of Jehuda ben Halevy,
That he wept for the destruction
Of the town Jerusalem. --
- "Pearly tears that, strung together
On the golden thread of rhyme,
From the ~~met~~'s golden forge
Issued perfect, as a song."



The poetic style of Halevi is rich. Hallevi has a rare power of expression, deep passion and imagination which even the corrupt mold of rhyme which he adopted could not imprison. There is rich color in Halevi's poetry. He is a marvelous chiseler of the phrase and a molder of speech. He wrote both secular poems and sacred poems as did many others of that age. He wrote poems about love, youth, spring, wine, births marriage, elegies epitaphs. He wrote a great number of poems on friendship, panegyrics, riddles. He wrote some amazingly beautiful poems on the sea the like of which are to be found in English Literature. Some of these poems, the secular poems are full of fire, rich, sensuous, authentically spontaneous. Others are more or less synthetic following the conventional themes and conventional pattern of Arabic poetry, employing the same graceful artifices and poetic cliches, the same "jeux d'esprit."

But the enduring fame of Halevi as a poet rests upon the great religious poetry which he wrote, the poems which concern God, Israel and Zion. He wrote more than a thousand such poems. Some three hundred have found their way into our prayer books. To Halevi God is what God is to a mystic. Halevi sought God, the nearness of God. Nothing else matters. Everything else enslaves. This piety of the mystic is most profoundly defined in Sufism. To Halevi God was not merely a personal God but one whose service was the total meaning of human existence, whose nearness is supreme joy and estrangement and sorrow. One can quote endlessly from the poems of Halevi this passionate religiosity of the man.

"When I am far from Thee, I die while yet in life -- But if I cleave to Thee, in my very death, I am alive."

"And what have I in Time if not Thy good grace -- and if Thou art not my portion, what is my portion?"

"My inmost parts do yearn to be in communion with Thee?"

"Increase the pain -- I shall love Thee the more, for wonderful is Thy love to me."

Here is another brief passionate poem of Halevi:

"With all my heart, in truth, and with all my might
Have I loved Thee. In open and in secret
Thy name is with me: how shall I go alone?
(Yea, He is my beloved: how shall I sit solitary?
And He is my lamp: how shall my light be quenched?
And how shall I halt, since He is a staff in my hand?)
Men have held me in contempt, knowing not
That my shame for Thy name's glory is my glory. --
O Fount of my life! I will bless Thee while live,
And sing Thee my song while being is mine."

Let me read you this one:

"To meet the fountain of the life of truth I run,
For I weary of a life of vanity and emptiness.
To see the face of my King is mine only aim;
I will fear none but Him, nor set up any other
to be feared.
Would that it were mine to see Him in a dream!
I would sleep an everlasting sleep and never wake.
Would I might behold His face within my heart!
Mine eyes would never ask to look beyond."

And lastly, that famous quatrain:

"Servants of time -- the slaves of slaves are they;
The Lord's servant, he alone is free.
Therefore when each man seeketh his portion,
'The Lord is my portion,' saith my soul."

That was the first of the three great themes.

The second theme was Israel. Halevi loved his people. He saw their affliction. "Is there any spot on earth, East or West, where one can feel safe?". He found himself in the midst of war. He said: "A curse on Edom and on Kedar -- whichever conqueror is conquered, always more come to my people." And so in many of his poems you find first of all a note of protest, anger, indignation:

"How shall it be sweet to me to eat and drink while I behold Dogs tearing at thy lion's whelps? Or how can light of day be joyous to mine eyes while yet I see the bodies of they eagles in the beaks of the ravens?"

Yet Halevi understood that it is important for a great national poet to

build up the morale of the people, to strengthen them. Here, for example is that famous one of his poems:

"The sun and moon, these minister for ever;
The laws of day and night come never to an end.
Given as signs are they t Jacob's seed,
That they shall ever be a nation, that they
shall not be cut off.
If with the left hand He should thrust them
off, with the right hand doth He draw them nigh.
Let them not say, ' 'Tis desperate', at the
time of their ruin;
Let them only believe they are eternal, and
that
They shall not cease until day and night shall
cease."

Lastly, the third theme of Halevi was Zion -- Zion which drew him like a magnet. His songs of Zion are the most perfect in our literature.

Quote - from "The Jewish Anthology" by Edmond Fleg -- poem called "To Zion". - page 218

You can see, good friends what poems like these meant to the Jews of his day, tortured, persecuted, hounded, what comfort it brought them, what and fitting dignity, what a sense of destiny. Perhaps it is well/for each of us to have the little caskets and to place in those caskets/great poems of Halevi... Perhaps we too might find comfort and inspiration from them as did the men of his day.

Other phils. before him. - ^{200 yrs} Isaac Israeli - the great Sancha -
Solomon ibn Gabirol - Bahya ibn Paqudah - Abraham Ben
Hayyah and many others.

- Unique structure - content.

In form of Dialogue ^{1251?} Used an histor. event which took
place 3-4 centuries before his time - conversion of King
of Castile and many of his people ^{living in Volga} Turkish origin to
Judaism. An encounter, the conversion - according
to a letter - refus. of 3 creeds. Both Ch. & M. appealed
in their arguments to the truth, the Heb Bible - the King
concluded Jud. must be true -

Halevi used this story for structure of his book - Discussion
bet. King and > 20. - Opportunity to explain Jud. - etc.

Unique in approach.

He occupies unique place in J. philosophy

- He did not attempt to ^{reconcile rel. with philo;} defend Jud. by harmonizing it with the Aristotle or Plato or with accredited An. phil. of his day. - as did so many other J. philo.

- He did not believe that Jud. ^{was} is on the defensive.

- He was not impressed by the rationalistic trends of his day, which, under the influence of Aristotle had begun to invade phil. that - Jewish and Arabic.

- Phil. has its limits, he maintained. Reason and logic have their legit. domain - fields of the natural sciences - on data which can be sc. analyzed.

- Beyond that boundary - lies the domain of Faith, + intuitions, prophecy and revelations.

- Faith in this field is as autonomous as Reason is in the other. It does not require any other credentials.

- Judaism as a revealed religion is thus 'independent of and above philo.

- The authorities of Jud. are not the metaphysicians, but the prophets who are higher philo. who, in fact belong to a 5th Kingdom ^(different from) existence, as far removed and as distant as in essence from the Kingdom of Man, as that is from the Kingdom of Vegetables, and that is far from King. II.

- The authority for Jud. is not pure speculation, but actual experience - which is subjective History, revelations in History - the meaning of what happened in the created world - the

manifestation of God in the processes of history. ^{God who has created death: God, life -} Particularly in the History of Israel - which people

was the particular channel through which supreme rel. revelations came to the world. The prophetic trad.

was carried down the ages by this people ^{The divine afflatus} other people have other gifts, other essential attributes, ^{the commandment} other creature qualities which give them distinction.

- In Israel, it is the "Divine Matter" ^{אמת / אמת}. The Jews are esp. prepared to attain to prophecy. They are the repository of prophecy.

- That does not bestow upon Israel special favors privileges. Nor does it exclude other righteous people from God's love & Providence & their reward in the world to come. Nor is it a mandate to be to conquer and subjugate other peoples.

- The proph. trad. of the race only burdens Is. with the mission of sp. leadership, of loyally living up to, proclaiming & defending its ideals Greater Responsibility

"only you have I loved out of all the peoples of the earth." ^{and I will bless you all & you will be blessed.} This makes Is. the "Heart, the Navel." - just as the heart - most vital & most sensitive of all organs, so Israel is, at one & the same time, the most afflicted bee. the most sensitive of all nations, and at same time the healthiest and most enduring.

- The heart must feel all the ailments, the body. Israel must suffer for all the sins & wrongs of humanity in the world.

- Is.'s trials - purge it of dross - more & more Divine will come to Is. & then Is. to world - and world will be impregnated & hot water to God.

- Is suffering is Voluntary - a word - state of agony - contentment
- Just as Is. is people - most fit for help - so is Zion ~~most~~
land most fit for Israel and its prop. role.

- Habari is a passionate, mystical nationalist who exalted
not only his people but his people's heritage land. It
too was Holy - Holy ^{Habari's Divine Purpose - meant to} see. Its soil was best suited to
produce the people of prophecy. Certain soils are
good for certain plants. Zion is good for as the
soil for fish, etc.

- 227 goes to Paal - as H. did. - kept himself.

Thus H. he talked his faith - doubtless - Dominant Faith
" his people - humbled - Crusades - Muslim
strengthened " " is hope - Portents - to Zion.
- Why so beloved to-day - Persecution - Zionism - Renaissance

"I was asked what I had to say in answer to the
arguments of philologists, rubricists and professors of
other religions against our own"

II These chief leading convictions, H. reflected in his poetry
 - Far greater poet > philosopher. - chimes of galaxy which
 included Samuel Hanagid, Don Juan, Uranus the God.
 - In his "Romances" - Heine - assimilationist and convert -
 King Alexander - distributed jewels - but kept the little
~~gilded~~ costly - itself a few of worthwhile value - for
 himself - and he locked therein the divine songs of Homer -
 the land he loved beyond all others - and by his combs
at night it stored - Hermes slipped forth from costly
and lived and wandered in his dreams.
 If he should ever gain possession, that costly.
 he should lose all to lock within it the poems of H.

(Juste 31-33)

- Style - Imagination - rare poems, expressions - Passion - even constructing world
 & Rhythm - could not imprison the world & speech - Genuis of the next
- 2- Secular - Religious. Pathos Edwards the next the next
- Secular - Love - YOUTH - Spring - Wine - Poems for birth - Marriage
 - elegies epitaphs poems on friendship - Paragynics - riddles
 - Sea poems - lament - English.
 - Some rich, sermons, full, fire - authentically
Maritanens - great poetry - themes constant.
 - Some synthetic - following conventional patterns &
An. poetry = employing same great artifices and
poetic cliches - same "jeux d'esprit".
Sambon
 - An Arabesque & interlaced Biblical texts -
contorted into playful poems - Midrashic
allusions for the reconcile of the conscience
 - Bulbous poetry - but not great poetry.
via tragedy

God Zion + Israel

3. Reproaches - This enduring fame. 1000. - 300 in liturgy.

A - Edom - Mystic - Sects God - Warriors of God - Nothing else matters. Everything else - obstacle of Even was fully defined to be in su ff er en ce - in an un der stand ing of It's day.
- Not only a personal God - but whose service is the total meaning of human existence and whose warms is suffering of God & life.

"When I am far from thee, I die while yet in life - But if I draw to thee - in my very death - I am alive"

Hebrew text: וְכִי אֶפְרָח אֶפְרָח וְכִי אֶשְׂמַח אֶשְׂמַח וְכִי אֶשְׂמַח אֶשְׂמַח וְכִי אֶשְׂמַח אֶשְׂמַח

"And what have I in Time if not Thy good grace - And if there art not my portion - What is my portion?"

Hebrew text: וְכִי אֶפְרָח אֶפְרָח וְכִי אֶשְׂמַח אֶשְׂמַח וְכִי אֶשְׂמַח אֶשְׂמַח וְכִי אֶשְׂמַח אֶשְׂמַח

"My in most parts do yearn - To be in communion with thee"

Hebrew text: וְכִי אֶפְרָח אֶפְרָח וְכִי אֶשְׂמַח אֶשְׂמַח וְכִי אֶשְׂמַח אֶשְׂמַח וְכִי אֶשְׂמַח אֶשְׂמַח

"Increase the pain - I shall love thee the more for wonderful is thy love"

Just p. 105 and 115 and 121

Hebrew text: וְכִי אֶפְרָח אֶפְרָח וְכִי אֶשְׂמַח אֶשְׂמַח וְכִי אֶשְׂמַח אֶשְׂמַח וְכִי אֶשְׂמַח אֶשְׂמַח

"A curse on Edom + on Kedar whichever conquers is conquered always we come to my people"

B: Israel. Loved his people. Saw their affliction - Protest "How shall it be sweet to me to eat and drink while I behold Dogs tearing at thy lion's whelps? Or how can light of day be joyous to mine eyes while yet I see the bodies, thy eyes in the breaks, the ravens".

Hope - Comfort - (126) - E. Lerner

(8)

C = Zion . Wider life 11.5 - 9th of Ab

The casket - a Guide to an dark day at age.

- Best beloved of all the people
- Heartened them - buoyed up their spirits - Filled them with pride - aroused their fighting spirit
- Knitted together for them in the Night -



p. 9a

Art thou not hungry for thy children, Zion, -
 Thy sons far-scattered through an alien world?
 From earth's four corners, over land and sea,
 The heavy-hearted remnant of thy flock
 Now send thee greeting: "Know that as the dew
 Falls daily on the ancient slopes of Hermon,
 So daily on the faces of thy children
 Tears of vain-longing fall." And as for me,
 When I remember thee, the Desolate,
 My voice is like the jackal's in the night,
 A wailing and a lamentation old;
 But when a dream of resurrection wakes -
 A momentary glory - then my voice
 Breaks like the harp's into a jubilant ringing.
 Thy names are on my lips, and in my heart
 Restless desire: Beth-El, Mach'nayim, P'niel -
 Assemblies once of the elect - on you
 The glory of His name was shed, for you
 The gates were flung open, and with a light
 Neither of sun, moon stars, your beauty shone.
 Where on the dearest of His chosen ones
 God poured His spirit, let me pour my heart.
 I will pass to Hebron, where the ancient graves
 Still wait for me, and wander in the dusk
 Of the forests of Carmel. I will go to Gilead
 And from Gilead pass to Habarim and Hor,
 And stand upon the summit of the mountains
 Where once the forgotten brothers stood
 And the light of them was seen throughout the world.
 There let me fall to earth and press my lips.
 Into the dust, and weep thy desolation
 Till I am blind, and, blind, still comfort thee.
 I would to God that I were turned to dust
 So that the wind could scatter me upon thee.
 What comfort is in life for me, since now
 Thine eagles have become the prey of vultures?
 What pleasure in the light of day, since now
 Thy lions, dead, are less than living dogs?
 Oh, can I weep no more: enough, the cup
 Of bitterness is full and overflows.
 O Zion, beauty and gladness of the world,
 Thine is all love and grace, and unto thee,
 In love and grace we are for ever chained.
 We who in thy happiness were happy
 Are broken in thy desolation. Each
 In the prison of his exile bows to earth,
 And turns him toward thy gates. Scattered and lost,
 We will remember till the end of time
 The cradle of our childhood, from a thousand seas
 Turn back and seek again thy hills and vales.
 Glory of Pathros, glory of Shinar,
 Compared to the light and truth that streamed from thee
 Are dust and vanity: and in all the world
 Whom shall I find to liken to thy seers,
 Thy princes, thy elect, thy anointed ones?
 The kingdoms of the heathen pass like shadows,

Thy glory and thy name eddure for ever.
God made His home in thee: well for the man
Who makes God's ~~choice~~ choice his own, with thee to dwell.
And happy, happy the man who vigil keeps
Until the day break over thee again,
Until thy chosen are returned to thee,
And thy first youth in glory is renewed.

