

the race, and here its peculiar features are best preserved. The Arab nature consists of paradoxes : for example, he has great sensual grossness combined with marvellous powers of reverence ; he has subtlety without originality ; his genius is subjective with a strong leaning to self interest ; he is capable of infinite resignation and absolute serenity, together with fits of ungoverned ferocity. The Arab is a sheep and cattle breeder : he is his own butcher, he lies down at night with his beasts around him. From this we may trace the ingrained coarseness of the race.

The desert is a school of abstinence ; long fasts purge its dweller from his grossness and lend him detachment from the things of sense ; but the desert is also a school of vigilance. In it there is no brooding repose like that of the sages further east, neither shall we find within it the sustained thought of the west. The leisure of the desert is vast, but it is that of the sentinel. The interest which the Hebrew takes in things is never speculative but practical. His magnificent concreteness and perspicuity never descend to the mysterious or the obscure. It may have been the clear atmosphere of the desert which caused the Semite to form sharp and well-defined ideas of all phenomena. Such a realistic habit of mind has its dangers, but a saving force with the Hebrew was his hot passion. All his best poems were written by actors in the scenes which they depict. Only so could the Semitic poet be really effective ; hero and poet are one in Hebrew poems.

The Semitic race has given three Monotheisms to the world, the Jewish, the Christian, and the Mohammedan. This is in spite of, or shall we rather say because of, two defects in its genius. It is almost without the power of creating a mythology and of realizing a future life. To the ancient Hebrew God was not a God of the

dead but of the living. One reason for this absence of interest in a future life is the fact that to the Semite God is the God of the tribe, not merely of the individual. Moses prays "Blot not this people, I pray Thee, out of the book of life for Thy great name's sake." The slowness of the desert home, its constance change of place, impressed the imagination with the transitoriness not the permanence of mankind. It was not until Abraham bought the Cave of Machpelah that the physical groundwork of a belief in immortality was laid. We must never forget that early Isreal was a Semitic, virtually an Arab race ; all early traditions point to the tribes coming up out of Arabia with scarcely a touch of Egyptian culture on them. The desert was always near them, their great heroes, David, Amos, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, were either brought up in the desert or lived on its borders, and this discipline of desert life influences all their poetry. The youth of the race, like the youth of their greatest prophets, was passed in prolonged fasts, which tempered the will, but prevented sustained thought, and touched the blood with rancour which comes out, for instance, in the imprecatory psalms. Much of the poetry of Isreal was written by the hungry sons of starved sires, possessed by a famine of God, and impelled by a hunger after righteousness.

So much for the character and training of the poet-seers of Israel. To come to the actual title of our lecture. By "Early Hebrew Poetry" we understand all that preceded the great prophets of the eighth century. Although in bulk this is very little, yet it is of great interest when taken in connection with the growth of the natural life and consciousness. The first fragment of song occurs in Gen. iv. 19 24. Lamech has two wives, Adah and Zillah,—light and shadow ; they bear Jabal and Jubal and Tubal-Cain. These names stand for the