

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php



ARTICLE II.

THE EARLY RELIGION OF THE HEBREWS.

BY THE REV. ARTHUR E. WHATHAM.

It is my intention in this article to show, that, whereas the religion of the so-called Hebrews has been assumed by certain writers to have been from the first one of high monotheistic conception,¹ and great morality,² it was, on the contrary, little, if any, removed from the religion of those people by whom the Hebrews were at this time surrounded. Before, however, I can directly enter upon this undertaking, it is necessary to ascertain as definitely as possible who these Hebrew people were, since it appears to me that this question has not received that attention so necessary on the part of those who seek to determine the true character of the religion of the early Hebrews.

In Gen. xiv. 13, we find the first use of the term "Hebrew," where it appears as a cognomen for Abram. In Gen. xl. 15, we find it for the first time in its plural form; while from the language in Ex. iii. 18, it appears that those writers are somewhat justified who have affirmed that this term was subsequently extended from Abraham to his descendants exclusively through Isaac and Jacob.³ In Ex. v. 3, Moses is recorded as saying that the God of the Hebrews had met with the Israelites; while in chap. iii. 6, the Deity is there represented as peculiarly the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; from which it might be inferred that the

¹ Cf. Hommel, *Ancient Hebrew Tradition*, p. 309.

² Cf. Higgens, *Hebrew Idolatry and Superstition*, p. 75.

³ See Haydn's *Bible Dictionary*.

Hebrews were the *immediate* descendants of Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob. There is reason, however, to believe that this term must be extended not merely to include *all* the descendants of Abraham,¹ but the entire members of a dynasty ruling in Ur of the Chaldees at the time Abraham was born.²

Now if the extension of this term as indicated above, is, as there is every reason for believing, a necessary undertaking in view of modern research, then, in discussing the religion of the early Hebrews, we cannot limit ourselves to the religion assumed to have been adopted by Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob, but we must, in conjunction with this, consider the religion of those other branches of the Hebrew people who came into existence both prior and subsequently to Abraham. According to the opinion of the writer of the article "Hebrew" in Smith's Dictionary of the Bible, this term was "originally a Cis-Euphratian word applied to Trans-Euphratian immigrants, and accepted by these immigrants in their external relations."

It would seem that not only is the above conjecture the true one, but that it has been adopted and enlarged with peculiar significance by Hommel, quoting from a recent article (1897) by Glaser. It appears that the term *Ebir nari*, signifying the further or western bank of a river, i.e. the river Euphrates, must have been applied to that locality long before the time of Abraham. Eber, or Ebir, is an abbreviated form of Eber hanahar, or Ebir nari, and stands for the land of Eber. Ibri, another form of Eber, stands for an inhabitant of the land of Eber, being employed as the race name. It further appears that the official name for Palestine adopted by the Babylonians who at the time of Abraham ruled Canaan as a dependency, was Ebir Nari,

¹ See Hommel, *L.c.*, p. 260.

² See Sayce, *Patriarchal Palestine*, p. viii, preface.

and an interesting question to settle is, When, and for what cause, Canaan came to be thus designated by the Babylonians?

Hommel produces sufficient evidence for his assertion, that, even at the commencement of the second millennium before Christ, Palestine had fallen under the influence of Babylonian civilization. About 2000 B.C. an Arabian people established themselves in Northern Babylonia, and one hundred years later commenced a struggle with Eri-Aku, king of South Babylonia. In this struggle they were successful. It was about this time (1900 B.C., according to Hommel) that Abraham migrated from Ur to Canaan. It appears that he belonged to the same race that had at this period conquered Southern Babylonia. Dr. Davidson suggested,¹ that the true cause of his departure from his home was, that, upon his defeat as a leader of a horde worsted in some encounter, he had emigrated at the head of his adherents in quest of better fortune. Now it seems that, although this statement is not quite accurate, it yet contains more truth than at first appears. Abraham's people having made themselves masters of Babylonia, what more natural than that they should next seek to bring under their rule those outlying provinces which had been subject to the preceding rulers of Babylon. Abraham may have entered Canaan as a hostile conqueror, while he may equally have entered peacefully, being graciously received as the representative of a victorious people, which attitude accords more with the existing tradition. It further appears that when he did enter he experienced no difficulty in entering directly into conversation with the people of the country. Now how was this? Simply because the language of Abraham's people and the language of the Canaanites were kindred dialects of the same parent tongue. Professor Sayce informs us, that "the language of Canaan was practi-

¹ Ency. Brit., "Abraham."

cally that which we call Hebrew." There were, he adds, differences, but differences that were hardly appreciable.¹ But how, it may be asked, came this similarity of speech? Because, suggests Professor Cheyne,² "the Israelites, the Canaanites, and Phoenicians, all appear to have migrated successively from a Babylonian center."

Now both Hommel and Sayce speak of the Hebrews as though, before they came into contact with the Canaanites, they spoke a different language. Hommel refers to the period when "they adopted the Canaanitish tongue in place of their original language" (p. 120); while Sayce says, "How the Israelites came to adopt the language of Canaan is a question into which we cannot here enter" (p. 246). But it is questionable whether there ever was such a difference between the speech of the Hebrews, before they came into Canaan, and that of the Canaanites, as the words of Sayce and Hommel imply. Even Sayce informs us, that the original tongue of the Israelites was as closely related to Hebrew "as French or Spanish is to Italian," and we must remember that he previously asserted that the language of Canaan and that which we call Hebrew were practically the same (p. 246). Thus Sayce further admits that the original language of the Hebrews before they adopted the language of Canaan was very closely related to the latter, in fact, to quote from Professor Cheyne, between the Phoenicians, Canaanites, and Israelites there existed a community of language. Perhaps were we to call all three dialects of the same parent language, we should be very near the true explanation of the matter. Hommel thinks that the Israelites originally spoke an Arabic idiom, which is questioned by Gray;³ while W. R. Smith, though admitting that Arabic is in many respects the elder brother of Hebrew, yet affirmed it is not its parent.

It should be observed that neither Sayce nor Hommel

¹*L.c.* p. 246. ²*Ency. Brit.*, "Canaanites." ³*Expositor*, Oct. 1897, p. 218.

is the real champion for the traditional school which each apparently assumes to be, since many of their conclusions are of an extremely higher critical character. But while both seem agreed in the attack upon the higher critics, they are not always agreed in their own conclusions. For instance, Sayce informs us that "the Tel-el-Amarna tablets have told us something about the language of Canaan as it was spoken before the days when the Israelites entered the land" (p. 246). Hommel, however, informs us, that "the Canaanisms which occur with comparative frequency in the Tel-el-Amarna letters, written from Syria and Palestine, prove conclusively that in 1400 B.C. Canaanite was a language almost identical with Hebrew" (p. 217). But if the language of Canaan was practically identical with that which we call Hebrew, that is to say, with the language spoken by the Israelites after they entered Canaan,¹ which even Sayce as well as Hommel allows, how can the Tel-el-Amarna tablets tell us something of a language existing in Canaan before the arrival of the Israelites? Hommel informs us that in 1400 B.C. Canaanite and Hebrew were almost identical. If this was so, then the Tel-el-Amarna tablets can have little to tell us beyond the fact that the language of Canaan in 1400 B.C. was practically the same as so-called Hebrew, that is to say, the language spoken by the Israelites after their entry into Canaan. But this evidently will not suit the inference to be drawn from Sayce's statement, especially in view of his previous statement touching the adoption by the Israelites of the language of Canaan. He evidently means to insinuate, that, before the arrival of the Israelites, the language of Canaan was not the same as it subsequently became when adopted by the Israelites; whereas Hommel says it was "almost identical."

Notwithstanding what I have said, however, the differ-

¹ Sayce, *L.c.*, p. 246; W. R. Smith, *Ency. Brit.*, Vol. xi. p. 595.

ence between Sayce and Hommel in the instance quoted may be more apparent than real, since Sayce admits that the differences between the language of Canaan and that which we call Hebrew "were hardly appreciable." Yet this only seems to prove the accuracy of my contention, since, if these differences were hardly appreciable, then the Tel-el-Amarna tablets have little to tell us of any difference in the language of Canaan before the entry of the Israelites, and as it was subsequently spoken by these people. Of course there was *some slight* difference, though evidently not even that existing between two dialects of the same tongue, a difference hardly appreciable, as even Sayce admits. Thus, even if there is no actual difference in the point in question between Sayce and Hommel, I still claim that the statement of Sayce, viz., "the language of Canaan as it was spoken before the days when the Israelites entered the land," is ill-chosen, since it naturally infers a greater difference than actually existed between dialects whose differences were so inappreciable that they were alluded to as "identical."

I have now shown that the Israelites in all probability spoke a language differing from that of Canaan merely as two dialects of the same tongue differ from each other. I have also shown that the supposed father of Israel, Abraham, derived his cognomen of "Hebrew" from the land he had emigrated from. I have further shown that scholars are of opinion that Abraham's people were ruling in Babylonia when he set out from thence to come to Canaan. Again, that Palestine was named Ebir nari by the Babylonian contemporaries of Abraham.

From all this, it would seem that to describe the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as merely "nomadic aliens in the land of Canaan," is scarcely correct. They actually belonged to the same race of people to whom the Canaanites were related; while between themselves and

the Canaanites there was scarcely more difference than exists between the inhabitants of a motherland and her colonies, in blood, speech, and religion. To take any other view is to make certain statements in Genesis altogether inexplicable. In the first case, we have Abraham, when at Bethel, telling Lot, that, as the whole land was before him, there need be no disputing between his own herdsmen and those of Lot. This follows the statement that the land was not able to bear the substance belonging both to Abraham and Lot because it was *so great*. Then follows the choice by Lot of all the plain of Jordan. Now if we are to be guided by, or to place any reliance on, the language of the Old Testament, such a colloquy as this is scarcely the tone which two *aliens* would give to their conversation touching the occupation of land which belonged to neither of them. Indeed, it assumes greater proprietary right than could possibly be looked for on the part of two aliens (Gen. xiii.).

The second case is where Joseph tells Pharaoh's baker and butler that he was stolen out of the *land* of the *Hebrews* (Gen. xl. 15). Now had his father Jacob been merely an alien in Canaan, how could Joseph have thus described his Canaanite home to two Egyptians? But there seems to have been a complete understanding on their part as to the country indicated by Joseph's use of the term "land of the Hebrews." Dr. Dods is satisfied to look upon this expression as "probably a later addition." But I am not sure that this explanation is the right one. Palestine, so Hommel informs us, was a province of Babylon in the time of the Khammurabi dynasty, and he claims that the title by which it was officially known to the Babylonians who ruled there under the Khammurabi dynasty, was suggested in the first instance by the migration of Abraham (p. 260). Now whether this explanation is correct or not, it throws considerable light upon the two cases I have just

mentioned, and is in complete harmony with the language there used.

Again, consider the people ruled over by Esau. The four hundred men with whom he came to meet Jacob show that his followers must have been very numerous. Jacob's followers also must have presented a considerable company, judged by the present of five hundred and eighty head of cattle in five droves which he made to Esau. Nor must we leave out the descendants of Ishmael, and those of Lot must also be reckoned. Indeed when all the descendants of Abraham, and those of his three hundred and ten servants and men-at-arms belonging to his household, are considered, Joseph's claim to Southern Palestine as "the land of the Hebrews" becomes easily intelligible.

Thus with all these indications of vast wealth, and many descendant households, each numbering a considerable array of followers; with the indications I have given of their proprietorship of the land they were then in, to look upon the three patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the light of three nomadic aliens in the land of Canaan, as Hommel does (p. 215), is to my thinking to miss the true history of the occupation of Canaan by the Hebrew people. Of course I am aware that this is how it appears from one point of view of the Old Testament, but this I contend is only *one* view, while the view I have given is also as plainly indicated. The existence of these two views seems to be due to the attempt on the part of the chronicler, or chroniclers, to narrate as strictly family records, giving certain details as happening within a given time, legends concerning the movements of peoples which occurred during the lapse of many generations. Dillmann himself concedes that "all these stories regarding the three patriarchs belong to the realm of legend, not to that of strict history."¹ At the same time he admits that in the name of Abraham there

¹ Genesis, ed. 1897, Vol. ii. p. 1.

may be preserved the name of some important personage who took part in the Hebrew migration, but he concedes that "there is, of course, no proof of this" (p. 3). Of the incidents in which he is represented as a nomad chief who, by occupation or purchase, acquires a few isolated spots in the country, and in religious matters goes his own way; who, as the head of his family, becomes the ancestor of new peoples; a man highly favored of God, the beginner of a new life among men,—of all these details, Dillmann says, "The legend had already tended to take this direction in the popular mouth. But the ideal elaboration of the picture and the collection and arrangement of those materials in the legend which had reference to Abraham, can be due only to those who committed it to writing" (p. 5).

It appears, then, that Abraham was the leader of the first division of one people (the second division being led by Jacob) which migrated into Canaan, whose inhabitants had themselves come from the same center as Abraham, who, moreover, were of the same stock, and who spoke a kindred tongue, in fact, a tongue which differed but slightly from that of Abraham. There is little wonder, then, that they were received so readily and peacefully by the earlier immigrants in a land where evidently at that time there was room both for the earlier and later arrivals; nor need we wonder, when taking this view, that these later arrivals were permitted to choose their own pasturing without coming into conflict with the people of the country, since with these they were, to all intents and purposes, one and the same people. If it is said, that we hear of them purchasing portions of the land, it may be answered, that these incidents show the artificial elaboration of a picture which is far truer to what actually happened when left to the reader to paint from the general drift of the narrative, which is out of harmony with this *special* elaboration.

This leads us to consider the religion brought by these

later arrivals into Canaan, which I shall endeavor to show differed as little from that of the so-called Canaanites as did their language. Hommel imagines that Abraham was a monotheist (p. 309), but in this he is grossly mistaken, since Abraham was a *henotheist*. Even the language of Sayce in his "Higher Criticism" indicates this (p. 187), while Dillmann acknowledges that the record suggests that the god of Melchizedek is *not* quite identical with the god of Abraham (vol. ii. p. 52). Thus it appears that Abraham, while owning a special deity, was nothing loath to pay homage to the deity of some one else.

Viewing Abraham as an individual, it is extremely difficult to say *what* his religious opinions actually were, since it is only natural that the subsequent chronicler of the assumed father of the race should paint him as nearly as possible according to his *own* conception of what they *should* have been. From an indirect source, however, we may arrive at the information we seek. When Gideon defeated the Ishmaelites they were despoiled of their amulets, which were little moon images (Judges viii. 21). Now at the time Abraham set out from Ur, this city was one of the chief seats of the worship of the moon-god. Abraham may or may not have had any leaning to this cult, but evidently his immediate descendants had, as is indicated by the amulets taken from the Ishmaelites. Jacob may or may not have paid deference to household gods, but his people did; and when Jacob buried these idols, owing to the presence of the God of his fathers Abraham and Isaac, he merely placed them beneath a sacred oak, showing that he was just as superstitious in their use as his wives or attendants (Gen. xxxi. 30; xxxv. 4).

Again, in Gen. xxxviii. 21, where is depicted the story of Judah and Tamar, we see the readiness with which the former took advantage of the licentiousness of the heathen temple-worship. But this surely is an indication that

Jacob's descendants were not averse to the heathen cult. When in Egypt we are told that they there followed heathen practices, told in language which indicates the licentiousness to which they gave themselves (Ezek. xxiii. 19). In Judges ii. 17, we have no new picture of degradation, but merely a similar one to that in Ex. xxxii. 25. Now just as their fathers had done in the land of Eber (Josh. xxiv. 4, 14), in Canaan and in Egypt, so they were doing when back again in Canaan.

In face of all this, to charge the Canaanites with being the cause of the Israelites' falling into the sin of idolatry, seems to be absolutely absurd. The Hebrew people had never given up idolatry. They were idolaters in the land of Eber, in Canaan, in Egypt, and again in Canaan, and so they continued down to the Exile. But notwithstanding all that I have said, amongst these same people was a strong tendency to henotheism, which eventually developed into pure monotheism. This tendency I shall now consider.

I have said that Abraham was not a monotheist, but a henotheist. We cannot, however, begin with Abraham, since in the land where he was born there was a strong tendency towards henotheism, if not indeed monotheism. Professor Sayce in his "Assyria: Its Princes, Priests, and People,"¹ informs us, that "in the pre-Semitic days of Chaldea, a monotheistic school had flourished, which resolved the various deities of the Accadian belief into manifestations of the one supreme god, Anu; and old hymns exist in which reference is made to the 'one god.'" He adds, however, that "this school never seems to have numbered many adherents, and it eventually died out. Its existence, however, reminds us of the fact that Abraham was born in Ur of the Chaldees" (pp. 58, 59).

¹ Religious Tract Society,

Hommel informs us, that "it would almost seem as though the Babylonians had possessed a deeper sense of religion than the Arabs" (p. 87), but from a further examination he concludes that the conception of the Deity entertained by the Arabs, "compared with that held by the Babylonians, . . . can only be described as a very advanced type of monotheism, not unworthy to rank with the religion of the patriarch Abraham as presented in the biblical narrative" (p. 88). But in a still previous concession, he admitted that, "notwithstanding, therefore, the countless greater and lesser deities in which Babylonian polytheism abounded, the names in general use seem to prove that it was only the moon, the sun, and the sky which conveyed an impression of deity to the Babylonian mind; and if we substitute the simple word 'God' (ilu) for the moon, the sun, or the sky, these names express no sentiment which is inconsistent with the highest and purest monotheism" (pp. 75, 76). I must not neglect to add that Hommel is speaking of a period "shortly before Abraham and during his time."

From these admissions several important conclusions may be drawn. In the first place, it appears that the conception of the Deity entertained by Abraham was shared equally by those members of his race who resided in Ur before and at the time of his birth. Now while this logical conclusion from Hommel's concession is very far from that entertained by the traditional school of theologians, it nevertheless fits in exactly with certain incidents in the Old Testament. Whitehouse, in the *Expositor* for October, 1897, suggests that as good a case may be made out for the Phoenician Baal as Hommel asserts for the Arabian ilu. Now I see no reason for objecting to this, nor for including with the Phoenicians the inhabitants of Moab, Ammon, and Edom, as monotheists in precisely the same sense as Israel was, to quote from Wellhausen's article

"Israel."¹ The only objection I have to make is against the word monotheists as applicable to any of these people. Excluding Israel, the religion they actually professed was a partial henotheism. That is to say, while recognizing one supreme deity as their national god, they nevertheless included in their worship many lesser deities. Israel's religion was pure henotheism, that is to say, that, while they recognized the existence of the gods of other people, they paid reverence to but one national deity, Jehovah. At least this is what the official religion of Israel called for, but the people as a whole never carried this out. On the contrary, in Canaan originally, in Egypt, and again when permanently settled in Canaan, they, like the Phoenicians, Moabites, and Ammonites, included in the worship of their national deity, the worship of other deities as well. As for the religion of the Babylonians shortly before and at the time of Abraham, to which Hommel calls attention on the ground that it was not inconsistent with the highest and purest monotheism despite its polytheism, its conception of deity was precisely on the same level as that of Egypt. Says Professor Flint, "The Egyptian religion was a polytheism which implied monism; it was not monotheism, which is exclusive of polytheism."²

A similar statement may be made touching the religion of Abraham as recorded in the Old Testament. It was not monotheism, as Hommel contends, as monotheism excludes henotheism. It was a henotheism which implied monotheism, and which, under the teaching of the prophets beginning with Amos, developed into pure monotheism. Of the truth of this there should be no doubt whatever, since, had Abraham been a monotheist pure and simple, he never would have recognized the god of Melchizedek, nor paid tithes to his priest.

¹ Ency. Brit.

² "Theism," Ency. Brit.

We must not, however, overlook the tendency to monotheism which the researches of Hommel show were unmistakably visible in the religion of the Babylonians prior to and at the time of Abraham. Nor must we forget Sayce's statement touching the existence of a monotheistic school in Chaldea in pre-Semitic days. Now it appears that what he has termed a monotheistic school, should really have been referred to as a henotheistic school. In this case it did not die out, as he intimates, nor were there few adherents attached to this religious conception. On the contrary, this conception, as we have seen, was shared by the entire people of Arabia, North, South, and West; while it was also exhibited in the religion of Egypt, since, if old hymns of pre-Semitic Chaldea exist in which reference is made to *one* god, there are also old Egyptian hymns which contain a similar reference.¹ Now all this is of great importance, since it shows that the religion of the patriarch Abraham as presented in the Bible narrative did *not* differ essentially from the religion of those people by whom he was surrounded, nor indeed from that of the still more ancient people to whom we have referred. The question is, Did it differ from these at all? But this is difficult to answer, as we have scarcely sufficient data upon which a definite judgment might be based. Personally he is represented as a henotheist of a high order, yet he is not an exclusive henotheist, as he was quite ready to acknowledge, and to pay tithes to, the priest of the god of the country he resided in for the time being. Moreover, Hommel concedes that the Israelites had allowed themselves to be deeply influenced by the religion of the Canaanites, in that they had compounded the names of their gods with those of their children, and he adds, "Even names compounded with Adoni=*my Lord*, such as Adoni-ram, betray

¹"Theism," *Ency. Brit.*, and "The Dwellers on the Nile," Budge, R. T. S.

this influence" (p. 304). But Adoni was not an original Canaanite word; it was the title of a deity borrowed from the Semitic Babylonians, a name used to invoke the beautiful Tammuz, slain by the boar's tusk of winter.¹ Now this title Abraham applied to El Shaddai (Gen. xv. 2, 8; xviii. 3), a title emphasizing one phase of the sun, viz., its autumnal equinox. It must be remembered that the religion of the Semites was essentially solar. Besides the aspect mentioned, the Sun-god appeared to them as a kindly deity who gives light and life to all things, sometimes as the scorching sun of summer who demanded the sacrifice of the first-born to appease his wrath. Now Isaac may be viewed as Abraham's first-born, and the question naturally arises, whether we may not see in his attempted sacrifice the influence of this Semitic belief. Again, the very name by which God is recorded as revealing himself to Abraham, viz., El Shaddai (Gen. xvii. 1), is a compound of two Babylonian religious titles, El and shadu. Now, as well as the former, the latter term, which literally signifies mountain, possessed in Babylonian the religious meaning of god, so Hommel asserts (p. iii). But if this is so, then the term El Shaddai is merely equivalent to the term Adonai Jehovah (Gen. xvii 1; cf. xv. 1), or Jehovah Elohim (Gen. ii. 4). Be this as it may, however, it appears to me to be impossible to exclude the influence of the Semitic solar worship from the use by Abraham of the title Adonai, and also from his attempt to offer up his son Isaac in sacrifice to El Shaddai.

To the indications as to Abraham's religious belief which I have just given must be added the fact, to which I have already referred, that Ishmael's people were undoubtedly worshippers of the moon; while Jacob's people worshipped household gods. If all these circumstances are considered, I think the conclusion will necessarily follow

¹ Sayce, "Assyria: Its Princes, Priests, and People," p. 56.

that Abraham was not a monotheist in the pure sense in which Hommel desires to depict him.

It will be remembered that I previously contended that between the Canaanites and the Hebrews there existed scarcely more difference than exists between the inhabitants of a motherland and those of her colonies. Upon this I further contended, that it was impossible to view the three patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as merely nomadic aliens in the land of Canaan. As a further proof that I was correct in opposition to the statement by Hommel to that effect, I here append a passage from Sayce's "Patriarchal Palestine," which fully bears out my contention: "It was not, therefore, to a strange and unexplored country that Abraham had migrated. The laws and manners to which he had been accustomed, the writing and literature which he had learned in the schools of Ur, the religious beliefs among which he had lived in Chaldea and Haran, he found again in Canaan" (p. 168). Dr. Sayce adds, touching this conception as to the state of Canaan in the time of Abraham, that, "It is one of the many gains which the decipherment of the cuneiform inscriptions has brought to the student of the Old Testament, and it makes us understand the story of Abraham's migration in a way that was never possible before. He was no wild nomad wandering in unknown regions, among a people of alien habits and foreign civilization," which is only another way of saying that Abraham was not an *alien* in Canaan, my contention in opposition to Hommel. But Dr. Sayce continues, "Like the Englishman who migrates to a British colony, Abraham was in contact with the same culture in Canaan and Chaldea alike" (p. 169).

Before I had read either Sayce or Hommel, or independently touching the decipherment of the cuneiform inscriptions, I had come nearly to the conclusions which Professor Sayce attributes to the decipherment of those

inscriptions, and, consequently, I am in a position to contend that these conclusions may be obtained from a close and critical study of the narratives of the Old Testament as they stand. It has for some considerable time appeared to me, that, to a critical student of the records of the patriarchs contained in the Old Testament, the words of Dillmann present a self-evident truth, viz., "that all these stories regarding the patriarchs belong to the realm of legend, not to that of strict history." Now I contend that this conclusion may be arrived at merely by a close study of these stories as they stand in the Old Testament, and further, that the results with which Sayce credits the decipherment of the cuneiform inscriptions may mostly be derived from the same study, together with a reading between the lines of these records, and by noticing many statements made, as it were, by the way, which are quite out of harmony with the traditional view of the history of the patriarchs. At the same time, besides the corroboration of the results of the critical study of these narratives which the decipherment of the cuneiform inscriptions affords, they further add a definiteness to assumptions derived from this critical study, turning them into conclusions when otherwise they would have remained only assumptions. Thus, the student of the Old Testament still owes much to those scholars who make the aforesaid decipherment their special study.

From all the evidence I have produced, it must be clear to a candid reader, that, when the Israelites adopted the religion of the Canaanites, instead of adopting lower religious standards, they were merely accepting a cult, which, in a more or less altered form, was their own, a cult under which their fathers in the land of Eber had worshiped, to which they mainly adhered in Canaan, in Egypt, and again in Canaan.

But what, it may be asked, are we to make of the state-

ments so plainly recorded as to the faithful manner in which Abraham kept God's commandments, statutes, and laws (Gen. xxvi. 5)? I will let Dillmann answer this question, as he is a devout Christian who stands also at the head of nineteenth century Old Testament scholarship. "When," he says, "it is said that Abraham kept God's commandments, laws, and directions, the picture of the patriarchal period is obtained by transferring to it features and circumstances as they existed under the Mosaic law" (vol. ii. p. 203). The truth of this statement is forcibly seen in the expression in Gen. xxxiv. 7, "For he has done in Israel an act of folly." Here Dillmann correctly comments, "Rather naïvely the author applies the expression of a latter time to that of the patriarchs, when there was as yet no Israelitish people" (p. 296).

That Abraham was a historical personage, that he was a great leader and a good man, that he had a certain religious influence upon his descendants,—all of this I by no means doubt; but I also claim that the Old Testament itself shows that the character of Abraham's religion, and its effect upon his descendants, has been somewhat overdrawn by the later Hebrew chroniclers, who evidently heightened the tone of traditional pictures, already considerably overcolored. To show that I am not without warrant for this assertion I may add that Dillmann describes the Jehovistic document of the Hexateuch (which he calls C) as presenting us with "charmingly artistic pictures of events which are quite ideal" (vol. ii. p. 7). Now I may say that the Jehovistic document contains all the records of Abraham's call by God, and reception of a special covenant.

As for the name Jacob, Dillmann considers that it was the appellation of a tribe or locality centuries before the time of Moses. If, as it appears probable from the discovery made by Mr. Pinches, the full name was Jacob-el, it is improbable that Jacob represents an actual person. Con-

cerning the twelve tribes of Israel, Dillmann does not hesitate to say that their origin "is not to be explained by actual descent from twelve brethren" (vol. ii. p. 2). "As for names, such as those of Lot, Ishmael, Esau, and their sons," he adds, "it is sufficient to regard them as those of ideal persons taken from the names applicable to groups within the limits of the nation, or to the whole at various stages in its development" (p. 4). In his "Patriarchal Palestine," Professor Sayce informs us, that "the name Ammon was a derivative from that of the god Ammi or Ammo, who seems to have been regarded as the ancestor of the nation" (p. 22).

It is time now to turn our attention to Moses. Wellhausen maintains that "he gave no new idea of God to his people."¹ Now undoubtedly this is true; yet Moses was the first to impress an existing conception of deity so powerfully upon his followers, that, while it appears to have been inherently repugnant to them, they were never able to get rid of it, and subsequently it was developed into a higher conception by Israel's later teachers. I have said that Abraham was a henotheist, and that henotheism had existed from an early age both in Babylon and Egypt. The work of Moses was to make this henotheism an exclusive and an abiding conception. He did not teach that there was only *one* God, but that to Israel had been revealed the highest conception or manifestation of deity under the title of Jehovah, who had been known to the fathers of the race by the name of El Shaddai. Now it must be borne in mind that this appearance of God in Exodus iii. appears to have been the first direct knowledge that Moses possessed of the God of his fathers. Again, that the Israelites themselves had long neglected, even if they had not forgotten, the God of their fathers. Moses is represented as reintroducing the Israelites to a neglected or forgotten

¹"Israel," Ency. Brit.

deity. The God of your fathers, not the God whom from your fathers downwards ye have continued to worship, is the deity to whom they are introduced by Moses (Ex. iii. 15). That the Israelites had neglected the God of their fathers while they had been in Egypt is plain from the condemnation to this effect by the prophet Ezekiel. It is further proved by their ready return to idolatry when Moses tarried up the mount. It must be further noted that Moses was not directed to tell the Israelites that El Shaddai, the God whom they were then worshiping, the God of their fathers, had sent him unto them, but simply the God of their fathers under a name they had never heard. It was very natural then that at the first failure, a people, newly introduced to an old deity under a new name, should have refused to have any more to do with his assumed messengers (Ex. vi. 9). The chronicler says, "They hearkened not unto Moses for anguish of spirit, and cruel bondage"; but while this may be true, it was evidently but part of the truth. Unbelief in the mission of Moses, a lack of interest in the God he represented,—these formed the basis of their rejection of Moses. Once successful, however, Moses was looked to as their champion, the living representative of the God who had led their fathers. To enter into the details of this success is not the province of this article. All I desire here to show is the conception of God given by Moses to the Israelites. This I have said was no new conception, and the proof of this I have already given in this article. From an old, that is to say, from a henotheistic conception of God, Moses cleared away the polytheism which invariably accompanied this conception. Nay, he went further, and insisted upon the exclusiveness of this conception (Ex. xxxiv. 14), evidently on the understanding that the God of Israel was the greatest of all gods (Ex. xv. 2; xviii. 2). He did *not*, however, teach that there was *no* other god, rather the contrary (Num. xxxiii. 4).

And here I find myself obliged to take exception to a statement by Wellhausen. While it is true, as he states, that Moses gave no new idea of God; I believe it is *not* true that he did not borrow his idea from the priestly caste of Egypt and their wisdom. On the contrary, I believe that he did. While Moses taught the existence, or rather acknowledged the existence, of other gods besides Jehovah, lesser gods, he also taught that there was none else, none else beside Him (Deut. iv. 35, 39). Now this is not a contradiction. Moses meant that as an embodiment of all Deity there was none else, that in this respect He was alone. But he did not mean that as a God he was alone, since he distinctly acknowledges the existence of the gods of the Egyptians, and the gods of the Canaanites (Ex. xii. 12; Deut. vi. 14).

Now when we come to study the conception of deity entertained by the Egyptians, we find it exactly similar to that expressed by Moses. They also declared that God is One, and there is none other with him. He is the primeval One, and without end, existing from the beginning, even when nothing existed. God is the Creator of the gods, of man, the heaven and earth, the deep, the water, and the mountains. It is he that protects the weak against the strong, since he is *compassionate* to those who fear him, and *hears* those who *cry* to him. Who knows those who know him. Who rewards those who serve him, and protects those who follow him. God knows the wicked; he smites the wicked even to blood. God is the Truth, he lives by Truth, he lives upon Truth, he is the King of Truth.¹

In his new edition of his Bampton Lectures on "Inspiration," Dr. Sanday adds a sermon which he preached before the University of Oxford on the 21st of October, 1894, and he added this sermon because it is an expansion of the

¹ Budge, *Dwellers on the Nile*, p. 130.

leading idea in the previous lectures. This idea is to be found in the text chosen by Dr. Sanday, and upon which he based his sermon referred to. The text runs, "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin: and will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. xxxiv. 6, 7, R. V.).

Dr. Sanday points out that the truth contained in this text is that God is "infinitely righteous" and "infinitely merciful." He, however, concedes that the adverb "infinitely" is not used, but he asserts that its meaning is there, since in the simple speech of those early days the words chosen mean that God is both infinitely merciful and infinitely righteous. After much beating round the bush, Dr. Sanday asks, Where did Israel get this knowledge? "How did Israel know that the Lord, the Lord he is a God full of compassion and gracious?" And he replies, "Shall we be wrong if we say that the writer of the book of Exodus, or of the document which we have incorporated in the book of Exodus, was inspired to write it? Shall we be wrong if we say that he wrote it in obedience to a prompting from the Spirit of God?"

The editor of the *Expository Times* considers this answer of Dr. Sanday of the *utmost* importance. At this point, he informs us, all the battles and bickerings of our day meet and concentrate; the point being, "Is the Bible a record of revelation? Were the men who wrote it inspired, moved, influenced, acted on, by the immediate presence of God in the Spirit? That is the question of our day. And Dr. Sanday answers, 'They were.'"¹

Now I have *no* intention of disputing either the conclusion of Dr. Sanday, or of the editor of the *Expository*

¹ *Expository Times*, April, 1896.

Times, since they do but emphasize my own conclusions; but these are not drawn from the data from which evidently these two scholars have drawn theirs. Dr. Sanday asked, "Where did Israel get this knowledge?" I reply, From Egypt, who knew it centuries before the existence of Israel. The knowledge that God is compassionate, who will not clear but punish the wicked, while he hears those who cry to him, is plainly written in the passage from the ancient Egyptian hymn from which I have quoted. Surely the inference of the simple speech of those early days of the Exodus may be extended to still earlier times when this hymn was written. If we are permitted to see in a Hebrew expression a thought not expressed but intended, why may we not see in a parallel statement by still earlier people a thought not expressed *but intended*? The conclusion of the whole matter seems to be this, viz., that so-called inspiration was not limited to the writings of the Hebrews, but is equally visible in the records of other people. The difference, for difference there was, seems to be solely in the fact, that, whereas the leaders of other people did not with a perpetual and unwearied effort seek to influence their kindred by these promptings from the Spirit of God, the teachers of Israel continued, in the face of a fierce and national opposition, to instruct their people according to these promptings.

The question which I have just closed necessitates an excursion into the difficult problem as to the advent of pure monotheism. This would require a separate article. I am therefore compelled to leave it in the uncompleted manner in which I have presented it above. Suffice it here to say, that neither the quotation from the Egyptian hymn, nor that of Dr. Sanday from the book of Exodus, supported as it might be by copious references to other passages in the Hexateuch, tends to prove the existence of the conception of pure monotheism when the various state-

ments were penned. Their comparison, however, shows the truth of the statement of Wellhausen, "that Moses gave no new idea of God to his people," but at the same time, in opposition to Wellhausen, I think they further show that Moses borrowed this conception or idea from the Egyptians. And here I am supported not merely by the ancient Egyptian hymn, which evidences as high a conception of God as that assumed to have been put forward by Moses, but by the candid concession of Hommel, that Moses "was not only influenced by Jethro, but . . . he also adopted many of the forms of Egyptian worship" (p. 281). Hommel concedes that the breast-ornament of the Jewish high-priest was borrowed from that of the Egyptian priests. Plumptre in Smith's Bible Dictionary admitted the same thing in his elaborate article on the "Urim and Thummim," a concession which up to the present time has not received the attention it called for.

But at this stage we have an important point to consider, viz., Did Moses give to Israel the full ritual we find in the Priestly Code? The evidence against such an assumption seems overwhelming. But this in no way affects the conclusion that much of this ritual was borrowed from Egypt. If Solomon could borrow heathen ritual from Tyre (e.g. the brazen-sea; the pillars of Boaz and Jachin, etc.), there is no reason why ritual from other cults may not also have been adopted. An examination of the evidence at hand seems to credit Moses with being the founder of the Torah, but a Torah at first very different from what it subsequently became in its altered and amplified form. Had Moses devised and given to Israel the elaborate ritual and system of laws which the Priestly Code depicts, the neglect of them throughout the period of the Judges is inexplicable. The great work of Moses was to unify the tribes of Israel on a religious basis exemplified in the statements, "Israel is the people of Yahweh; its enemies are his enemies; its

victories, his victories."¹ In this, Moses was successful, as the subsequent history of Israel shows, but the subsequent history also shows that Moses could have given to Israel no such elaborate religious system as the Priestly Code depicts; this was the work of a later age, an age in which Israel's law-makers may have borrowed ritual emblems and practices from Babylon and Egypt, as well as from Phoenicia.

Here I think I may bring this inquiry to a close. I am fully conscious that much more might have been said on the many points I have touched upon; yet I think I have said sufficient to show that the popular idea, that Israel was seduced into lower religious standards by the Canaanites, is utterly without warrant. When they settled in Canaan, they found a religion practiced there which was theirs, which had been their fathers' before them, and to which they in their hearts adhered more than to the purer henotheism upon which Moses had endeavored to found them as a nation. That they adopted in preference the religion of the Canaanites rather than the higher conception of Moses, was but natural; at the same time, their success achieved under the guidance of Moses was so complete that they never forgot his conception and representation of their national God, Jehovah. In the days of their prosperity he was neglected for their older and still dearly cherished belief; while in the days of their distress they invoked the aid of Him who had so successfully led them out of their Egyptian bondage. The solidarity of movements and executions which this unity of belief gave them, invariably brought success to their cause. To the average Israelite, that is to say to the unobservant, which must have formed the far larger part of their nation, the cause of this success was little comprehended. Not so, however, did these things strike the devout and thoughtful minds

¹ Moore, Judges, p. 134.

amongst them. These, ever prompted and encouraged by the Spirit of God, saw in these results the manifestations of God's ever-watchful and ready Providence. The bringing of these lessons home to the hearts of the people was the work of these devout souls, who are better known under the term of the Hebrew prophets. At this work they labored in spite of the continued opposition of the entire people. Laboring in the cause of God, they themselves gradually acquired higher and more accurate conceptions of him. In this way they were enabled to correct many of their own utterances which they had given in the name of God. This is how it came about, that, whereas in earlier days they declared that children would be held as morally guilty for the sins of their parents, in later days they declared that the soul which sinned, that soul only should die (Ex. xx. 5; Ps. lxxix. 8; cix. 14, R. V.; cf. Ezek. xviii. 1-4, 20). That the work of the Hebrew prophets evidences a greater inspiration by, and revelation from, God than the work of any other community of human teachers, must, I think, be evident to any candid reader of the Old Testament. But I believe, however, that the method and results of this inspiration have been wrongly conceived and judged by the traditional school of Old Testament critics. The conclusions of this school leave the Old Testament full of perplexities incapable of solution. The conclusions of the modern school of critics remove at once these perplexities, and, while they show a different method of inspiration in the Old Testament, they show an inspiration more rational than does the old method, more in harmony with the facts of modern research, and more in keeping with the love and grandeur of the one God we all adore.¹

¹Since the above article was written, two books have appeared which deal with two of its main contentions. In the first place, Professor Sayce, in his "Early History of the Hebrews," published at the close of

1897, maintains, as I have here done, that Canaan before the conquest by the Israelites "was," to use his own words, "inhabited by a Hebrew people" (p. 6). Again, referring to the term "Hebrews," he says, "It would seem, therefore, as if it were the name by which the people of Canaan, and more especially the Israelites, were known to the Egyptians" (p. 2). Other proofs are furnished by Professor Sayce to which I also have referred in my article, and, as I have said, since it was written before I had seen Dr. Sayce's book, it was no little gratification to me to find myself in agreement with so distinguished a scholar.

The second book is Mr. Andrew Lang's "The Making of Religion." To my regret this eminent anthropologist and archæologist accepts "the old degeneration theory" to explain Israel's repeated desertion of Jehovah, a contention opposed by the whole drift of my article. It is with considerable relief, therefore, that I notice a reviewer in *The Guardian* for June 29, 1898, opposes Mr. Lang in what the former calls, "the old degeneration theory." Again, this reviewer says, "It is equally unhistorical to credit the pre-Mosaic Israel with a rudimentary theism. Apart from the appearances of God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, our oldest document is Joshua xxiv., where it is plainly stated that the people and their fathers had served other gods in Egypt and beyond the river."

Now this statement more immediately bears out my contention in a MS. recently accepted by the *Biblical World*, and entitled, "Were the Israelites ever Polytheists?" but it supports as well my contention in the present article, viz., that Abraham and his immediate descendants were not monotheists, but, at the best, henotheists; while, apart from the three great patriarchs, it further strengthens my contention that their respective immediate descendants were even more polytheists than henotheists.