

"These from the Land of Sinim."

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LONG years ago—when Ping Wang (Prince of Peace) ruled over the several petty States comprising the Chow dynasty, in the Western part of what we now call China, at the very period when the shadowy traditions of her earlier story began to give place to historic records—a Jewish prophet gave utterance to the phrase which heads this paper, "These from the land of Sinim," or, as it literally reads, "These from the land of the Sinae" (or Sinites); and an interesting question is suggested as to the identity of these Sinae, whom the prophet seems to differentiate from the expected arrivals from the North and West, from the indefinite and nameless distance. "Lo! these shall come from far, and lo! these from the North and from the West." The apparent absence of correlation or systematic arrangement between these "four quarters" becomes the more remarkable when we compare the evidently parallel expression used by our Lord: "And they shall come from the East and West, and from the North and South" (Luke xiii. 29), and makes the problem all the more difficult.

Perhaps the best way of arriving at a solution is to inquire first of all who are these whose location seems to be more or less definite, and then, by a process of reduction, endeavour to identify the remaining figures in the tableau.

"These from the North and West," we may safely assume, represent those great peoples who were the nearest neighbours of the Hebrew nation in Isaiah's day. "The North," or, more literally, "The Dark," represents that region which in his prophecy, and more especially in that of Jeremiah and the later prophets, is regarded as the source of political danger and warlike menace—*e.g.*, Isa. xiv. 31: "There shall come from the North a smoke"; Jer. i. 14. "Out of the North an evil shall break forth," pointing most clearly to the great world-power of

Assyria, whose empire in those days extended to the mountains of Armenia, and dominated the whole region of the North. Here the war-clouds constantly lowered, and, when at last they burst, it was as if a “whirlwind” (Ezek. i. 4), or an “overflowing flood” (Jer. xlvii. 2) had been let loose upon the devoted land, leaving a trail of death and desolation in their wake. The “West” is, literally, the “Roaring,” and evidently refers to the Mediterranean Sea, and the nations dwelling upon its shores, or in “the Isles” (Isa. xlix. 1) which dotted its surface. In this connection the reference may be primarily to Egypt, the second of the great powers between which the land of Judah was in danger of being crushed, as corn between the upper and nether millstones; for in those days Egypt, by her alliance with the Philistines, was in command of the sea-coast of Palestine; and the conquests of Tirhakeh were said to extend as far as the Pillars of Hercules. The North and the West, therefore, represent the great nations on the frontiers of Judah in Isaiah’s own time, and including by implication the South, where Egypt was predominant, and the East, where Assyria held sway. The prophetic vision would also include, we may suppose, the long line of nations and races which occupied these regions in the years which followed and until the consummation of the ages. “These from far” are those peoples of whose existence the Hebrews had been long in ignorance, until, by their recent acquaintance with the world-powers, their field of vision was enlarged. Hitherto Chaldæa and Babylon had been regarded as “far countries” (2 Kings xx. 14), but now that these have been included in the circle of neighbouring States, the nations lying beyond that circle, and formerly regarded as being at “the ends of the earth,” are thus brought nearer, as it were, so as to occupy the middle distance, or outer circle; and the outermost circle being thus left vacant, the void is filled by a race hitherto unknown even by name—*i.e.*, the Sinim, or Sinae. Thus the four quarters, as we have called them, may represent Judah’s proximate (“these from far”) and immediate neighbours (“these from the North and from the West”) the latter being specially differentiated by

virtue of their paramount importance at the moment ; and those far-off peoples of whose existence little was known, and of whom the Sinae might well stand as the most distant and distinguished representatives. The omission of the interjection "lo," in this last instance, may furnish a possible hint of the tentative character of this representation, as if the prophet could hardly point, with any confidence, to a people of whose existence he possessed but the scantiest information ; so that whilst he is able to indicate with some precision those with whom he is more or less familiar, namely, his nearer and more distant neighbours, he cannot add the same note of definiteness when he speaks of those who are supposed to inhabit the "Ultima Thule"; hence he says, "*Lo*, these shall come from far, and *Lo*, these from the North and West, and these from the Land of Sinim!"

The next question to which our attention is diverted is, Who were these from the land of Sinim of whom Isaiah speaks? The word is evidently of plural number and masculine gender. It does not refer to a land called "Sinim," but to a country inhabited by people called the "Sinim," according to the Hebrew spelling—Anglicè, "Sinites," or "Sinese." Judging by the importance with which the prophet invests them, standing as a class by themselves, and occupying, as they seem to do, the most remote regions of the world, we are forced to conclude that they represent some great nation of whose existence Isaiah had but recently learned, and whom he thus selects as a concrete example of the nations situated at the "ends of the earth."

Looking at the history of the world in Isaiah's time, say from 759-710 B.C., we can find, outside the circle occupied by Egypt, in South and West, and Assyria, in North and East, and the wider circle which included the more distant peoples on their frontiers, no nation so deserving of a place amongst these various powers, and of the honour of representing the nations so much further removed, in point of distance as well as relationship, as the "Black-haired people," occupying the Western marches of what we now call "China," or more correctly "Chin" (the final

“a” being a Portuguese addition for the sake of euphony, but having no radical authority); in other words, the land which was already known by this name for some two centuries in India, as the Institutes of Manu witness, and which the Latins called by this identical title, “The land of the Sinae,” with which also the Arabic and Syriac names agree. When we further inquire into the origin of this name the explanation is a simple one; the Western frontier of the China of that day was occupied by an independent kingdom, which had severed its connection with the feudal States clustered round the banks of the Yellow River, and which, just about the date when Isaiah began his career, had arrogated to itself the prerogatives of the Imperial authority—*i.e.*, by building an altar and sacrificing to Heaven. This State embraced the districts now occupied by the provinces of Shensi and Kansu, and thus stood in the direct path of the trade-routes through Eastern Turkistan, by which, we have reason to believe, an active intercourse with the West was maintained even in those early days; and thus it may be said to have been the door of entrance to the great and ancient civilization represented by the “China” of that period. We must bear in mind that “China” was a nameless country at that time, as at the present; the ruling dynasty giving its name to the “empire,” and thus furnishing an ever-changing nomenclature; and it is an interesting confirmation of what has already been argued that the name of the State with which we are concerned—namely, that lying nearest to the Western kingdoms which formed the link between China and Judea at that time—was “Ts’in,” which, when reproduced in Hebrew letters, would naturally appear as “Sin” (pronounced “Seen”), the Hebrew language, like the English, being unable to reproduce the peculiar aspirate sound of the Chinese initial Ts’. Thus the people of Ts’in would be represented in Hebrew as the “Sinim”—“These from the land of the Sinim.”

There only remains the question as to what Isaiah could have known of the “Sinim,” and by what means that knowledge could have been communicated to him. The time during which Isaiah prophesied was remarkable as witnessing the rise of the

great powers of Assyria, Media, Scythia, and Ethiopia ; with the latter we need not concern ourselves at the moment, but with reference to the first of these, we may quote the opinion that this was the "Golden Age" of Assyrian history, the "Romans of Asia" as they have been well termed. Pul, or Tiglath-Pileser, as he is called in the Bible, was the Napoleon of the East, a "military adventurer who usurped the throne, and determined to found an empire in Western Asia which should embrace the whole of the civilized world" (Sayce), an ambition which marks a new event in human history ! The civilization of the Assyro-Babylonian Empire was carried eastwards far beyond the limits of the Empire in that direction, and commercial enterprises seem to have penetrated even further still through districts then traversable by caravans, but which have now been obliterated by the evaporation of the inland waters and the irresistible encroachment of the Mongolian desert, slow but pitiless, like the descent of a glacier. The finding of articles of white jade, amongst the ruins of Assyria and Babylon, is regarded by Colonel Conder as a proof of this position, since this is a product peculiar to the K'uenlun Mountains of Central Asia, and one which holds a high place amongst gems affected by the Chinese. The fact that porcelain vases, etc., bearing Chinese inscriptions have been discovered in ancient Egyptian tombs may also be mentioned in this connection.¹ Not only so, but as Assyrian trade proceeded eastward, so the victorious "Ts'ins," or "Sinim," penetrated westward, driving the barbarians on their frontier farther into the wilds. The distance between these two civilizations was thus further reduced, and it seems inevitable that that peculiar combination of commercial eagerness which the Assyrians derived from their Semitic ancestors, and the mechanical inventiveness with which their Babylonian subjects enriched them — inherited from the

¹ It was during this period also, as a study of Chinese history evidences, that Chaldean "astrology" and Persian "magic" were introduced into China, and Babylonian ideas of "cosmogony" were incorporated in Chinese historical records.

Akkadians, a Mongolian race, to which they owed their birth—should seek to establish an affinity with the hereditary traders and craftsmen who occupied the rich lands of the Farthest East, and who were thus connected with them, not only in sympathy, but also, to a certain extent, by ties of blood. The impact of Assyria upon Judea, of Media upon Assyria, of the Eastern barbarians upon Media, and of the Sinim upon the barbarians, would also have the effect of extending the knowledge of these distant people, and the prophetic vision, ranging over the larger panorama thus unfolded, foresaw not only the immediate prospect, the great world-movements of his own day, but also "that far-off divine event" which would prove an even greater attraction than the hope of extended Empire, or sordid plunder, or of a relaxing of the struggle for existence which now inspired these mighty developments; for what is the quest upon which these several nations are predicted as entering? It is the promise of Light and Salvation in the person of Jehovah's servant: "I will also give thee for a Light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be My Salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isa. xlix. 6).

How that promise was fulfilled in the case of the ancient nations it is not our present purpose to inquire, but it is an interesting fact that during the twenty-five centuries which have elapsed since the days of Ts'in, the solitary State which finally conquered the feudal kingdoms and gave its name to the first Empire—the Ts'in dynasty, or "China"—no other dynasty has been called by a name of similar pronunciation until the present or Manchu line of rulers, which in Chinese is known as the "Ts'ing" dynasty, a name very similar in sound, and identical in tone with the "Ts'in" from which Sinim is derived; so that the China of to-day, if represented in Hebrew characters, would be "the land of the Sinim" as it was in Isaiah's time. And if we can recognize the proximate fulfilment of the prophecy in the mission sent by the Emperor Ming-ti in A.D. 65 to make inquiry concerning a new doctrine, which was reported from the West, and which resulted in the adoption of the Buddhist faith, which

his intercepted messengers accepted in lieu of the Christianity which awaited them in the further West of India, may we not expect to see its ultimate fulfilment in the present "Awakening," when the Chinese will no longer be satisfied with any lesser light than that of the "True Light" of which the prophet spoke, and which alone can merit the title of Sun of Righteousness: the one great orb for the enlightenment of the world, bringing at the same time both light and salvation, rising, as the prophet Malachi says, "with healing in His wings"?



Whitsuntide.

COME from the four winds, Breath Divine! and sweep
 Through all Thy gardens, where the dense mists lie;
 Come, gracious rain! from clouds that bend and weep
 O'er parchèd land, o'er flowers that fade and die;
 Flame! Fire of God, and souls that Thou hast made
 In sunshine of that Love shall find their sheltering shade.

Of old Thy holy men inspired by Thee
 Spake word by word, and wrote each sacred page
 Wafted by Thy fair gale; now Victor! Free!
 Scatter the cavils of this later age.
 All things in heaven and earth through all the hours
 Wait not for human guess, but Thy Divinest powers.

Come, Lord! and let each sacred court again
 Tremble at Thy blest Presence and be still!
 Take of the things of Christ and make them plain,
 Uplift the valley, bow each vaunting hill!
 For not by might nor power but by Thyself alone,
 In heaven and earth the last high victory shall be won.

A. E. MOULE.

