

HOMMEL'S "ANCIENT HEBREW TRADITION."

THE announcement that a book was to appear from the pen of Prof. Fritz Hommel on the subject indicated by the above title would be quite sufficient to ensure it eager anticipation and respectful hearing. The writer of these lines read the author's alluring work, *Die Semiten*, soon after it appeared, fifteen years ago. The graphic chapters in the earlier part of that volume on the Semites in Egypt, based mainly on Lepsius' *Denkmäler*, and the skilful attempt to trace the ancient migrations of the Phœnicians, followed by the vivid description of the early culture, language, and religion of Babylonia, from that time forth invested the beginnings of human civilization on the Nile and in Western Asia with an interest that gave a fresh impetus to all subsequent studies in this fascinating region. Prof. Hommel shares with Prof. Georg Ebers the faculty—somewhat rare among German savants—of investing his delineations with charm. His history of Babylonia and Assyria, which deserves to be better known, is replete with information on every page. Yet he never wearies the reader. His pages are never encumbered with such a crowded maze of details that no definite impression emerges from the weltering chaos—the *débris* and shavings of the German workshop in the form of footnotes, quotations, and parenthetical references to learned *Zeitschriften*, expressed in cipher, that make the life of an English student a burden. Prof. Hommel is endowed with literary and artistic sense. He carries the heavy weight of his great knowledge as an Orientalist—for he is eminent as an Arabist as well as a cuneiform scholar—with the ease, lightness, and grace of a youthful warrior.

During the last six years the attention of Prof. Hommel has been largely occupied with other studies than cuneiform. In the early days when he wrote *Die Namen der Säugetiere*, and exhibited the firstfruits of his studies in Sumerology, Dr. Hommel was chiefly known in England as a rising Assyriologist. But during the closing decade of this century a new field of exploration has been opened up in South Arabia by the indefatigable researches of Dr. Glaser, who has paid several visits to that region, and has brought back with him a rich store of epigraphic material which is now slowly disclosing its secrets. It should be observed that previous to Glaser's researches came those of Julius Euting, 1883-1884, whose name is chiefly connected with the Nabataean inscriptions. Euting discovered in North Arabia many fragments in Himyaritic, *i.e.* South Arabian character. That Sabæan, and indeed Minæan inscriptions should be found in Northern Arabia was a fact of striking importance in the history of discovery.

These studies have added immense impulse to the work of Oriental scholars in this direction, among whom the names Halévy, Mordtmann, Müller, as well as Hommel himself, may be mentioned. Not very long ago it was generally supposed that Arabic possessed no records or civilization of any importance till the Mohammedan era. Thus we read in Bleek's *Einleitung*, 2nd edition (1865): "In the time of Solomon the Arabians appear to have been already celebrated for their wisdom, especially in proverbs, and yet nothing has been preserved to us from their literature in this and the following periods; the earliest we have being only a little anterior to Mahomet." And this is pretty much all that was at that date known, except among a very few scholars, as Rödiger. The history of the great Arabian branch of the Semitic race was then a vast and dim blank.

Yet even as early as 1834 Arabia was beginning to yield up its secrets, and it is interesting to know that it was the

travels of Lieutenant Wellsted, of the Indian Navy, a few years before our Queen's accession, which first drew attention to this important field. In the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. iii. (1834) may be found an account of the "inscriptions in Abyssinian character" discovered by him at Hassan Ghorab, near Aden. These discoveries were shortly followed up by others, conducted by Assistant-Surgeon Hutton and Lieutenant T. Smith, in 1835, and by Charles J. Cruttenden in 1838. As in so many other fields of Oriental discovery, Englishmen have been among the pioneers, but unfortunately—perhaps owing to some inherent defect of our race—"scharfsinnig aber nicht tief," as a German philosophical historian characterizes us,—we do not build up the edifice of discovery by unwearied linguistic labour.

Through the researches of Gesenius and Rödiger in 1841, and of Fresnel in 1845, who utilized the inscriptions obtained by the bold French traveller Arnaud, a beginning was made in the identification of the alphabetical signs. These have been continued in later times by Osiander, Halévy, Prætorius, and Mordtmann. But during recent years we have been chiefly indebted to Dr. Glaser and to Dr. Fritz Hommel for an extended acquaintance with the language of the inscriptions. As for the alphabet, the key to its decipherment was its close resemblance to the earlier forms of the Ethiopic character, stripped, of course, of its secondary elements or vowel signs. It likewise bears a marked family likeness in many of its signs to the ancient Moabitic-Canaanite, but, like the modern Arabic as compared with the Hebrew alphabet, it is fuller, *i.e.* possesses distinct signs for the two varieties of ן and ף, as well as the distinctions in the sibilants ש, שׁ, and שׂ.

This South-Arabian, or (as it is now called) Minæo-Sabæan language, has been recently made accessible to the Semitic student through Hommel's *Süd-arabische Chresto-*

mathie (1893), to which I am indebted for some of the above details. This language was spoken as far back as the third millennium B.C., and continued till the days of Mohammed. This South-Arabian tongue extended in early times northwards, as we can clearly see from the Minæan inscriptions of El Oela in North Arabia. But the centres from which it spread were the kingdoms of Ma'in (or Ma'an, *Heb.* Ma'on) and Saba' (Sheba), from which the name given to the language is derived.

Unfortunately, Prof. Hommel's *Süd-arabische Chrestomathie* is lithographed, and in many places his modern Arabic is not clearly reproduced, though the representation of the Minæan characters is fairly distinct. Nevertheless, this marvellously elaborate and learned work gives us a clear insight into the language spoken by the Midianites and other tribes that surrounded the early settlements of the Hebrew race. In the near future the results here achieved by this brilliant scholar, extended and corrected by the decipherment and interpretation of the large store of material which Glaser has not yet published, must have a very decisive effect on questions of Semitic (especially Hebrew) lexicography and philology (*e.g.* noun and verb structure), and it will throw much needed light on many subjects of great importance to the Old Testament scholar.

As to philology, the absence of vowel signs unfortunately leaves us in some respects in a worse position than we are in the presence of Assyrian. True, we are never perplexed by the questions as to ideograms or alternative phonetic equivalents, since we have before us a genuine alphabet; yet it is often, as Prof. Hommel says, not easy to decide whether a verbal form is *kaṭula*, *kaṭila*, or *kaṭala* without resorting to comparative philology. But in the language, as at present ascertained, there are many points of great interest to the Semitic student. Modern and classical Arabic with its *Istaf'al*, or 10th (reflexive) conjugation, shows that the

4th or causative conjugation on which it is based, which is now *Af'al*, was once *Saf'al*. The initial sibilant has been weakened to an aspirate (as in Heb.), and finally lost (as in Aramaic). We find similar phenomena in the parallel forms of Greek and Latin. Now the ancient character of the Minæan Arabic is shown by the fact that this oldest *Saf'al* causative here reappears just as it does in Babylonian and Assyrian (*Shaf'el*). Similarly in Minæan we have the three personal pronom. suffixes, -šū, fem. -ša (plur. -šumu, -šunā), just like -šu, etc., in Babylonian. The Sabæan, on the other hand, has the corresponding forms beginning with *h*, as in modern Arabic. I mention this because these facts simply prove that in this feature Minæan and its more distant Semitic collateral Assyro-Babylonian take us back to the primitive Semitic (Ursemitisch), from which all the Semitic languages spring (See Hommel's own sketch of the primitive Semitic verb—*Semiten*, p. 55). To ascribe this feature in Minæan to Babylonian influence, as Prof. Hommel suggests in *Ancient Hebrew Tradition*, p. 118, appears to me most unscientific.¹ (Comp. his *Aufsätze u. Abhandlungen*, p. 23 foll.)

To us the use and significance of this book lies not in its attempt to refute the "Higher Critics," which is a failure, but in the fact that we have here the somewhat crude firstfruits of what promises in the not distant future to be most important knowledge respecting the names of persons and places in the Old Testament derived from the *ascertained* results of the study of the Minæo-Sabæan inscriptions. Doubtless we shall learn much else.

Prof. Hommel is quite right when he says that "external evidence" must be the banner under which all students of Old Testament literature are to range themselves. But

¹ The reader, presumably a student of Hebrew, will also be interested in knowing that we have in this ancient Minæo-Sabæan language something closely akin to the Waw consec. idiom in the sequence of Perfect on Imperfect, and vice versa.—See *Süd. Arab. Chrestom.*, p. 27.

this must be under the two following provisos: (1) That *internal* evidence, *i. e.*, the evidence of the Old Testament itself, negative as well as positive in all its complex features, be not ignored; (2) That the so-called external evidence be evidence, and not a surmise or an interpretation of an obscure inscription which the next discovery may refute.

Now the grave defect of this book is that neither of these conditions is adequately observed.

I. As to internal evidence, Hommel's assumption that "it was in the Northern Kingdom that the final revision of both the book of the Judges and the Jehovistic narrative was carried out" (p. 289) is a statement so monstrously at variance not only with external probability, but with the contents of the documents themselves, that when I first read over the passage I thought that I must have misread it, or that there was a mistranslation, until the tenor of the subsequent pages led me to conclude that this was the deliberate opinion of the writer. For surely it is an astonishing thing for a scholar to gravely assert that sections like Judg. ii. 1b-6; ii. 19; iii. 7-18; iv. 22-24; vi. 1, 2; viii. 33-35; x. 6-8; etc., were written by the priests of the Northern Kingdom, whose lax practices were rebuked by Hosea (iv. 12, 13; vi. 9, 10; vii. 9; viii. 5, 11-14; ix. 1; x. 5-8; xi. 2; xiv. 8), and who, as Dr. Hommel assures us, "had only too often good reasons for either modifying or entirely suppressing portions of the traditions which would otherwise have become a standing reproach to themselves." As to the Jehovist document, Kuenen, it is true, considered that it originated with the Northern Kingdom, but here he stands almost alone among recent scholars. Prof. Hommel deservedly treats the late veteran scholar Dillmann with much deference. Dillmann, however, holds that the internal evidence of the Jehovist document decisively points to Judah as the land of its authorship (*Commentary on Numbers*, etc., p. 626 foll., *Genesis*, 6th ed.,

p. xiii.). Surely in face of the evidence which he cites, something more than bare assertion is required. Lastly, how are we, upon Hommel's assumption, to account for the canonical incorporation of works such as these into the Jewish canon without further revision? The fact is that the Deuteronomic addenda were the redactorial insertions of the later Judaism, without which hypothesis we are unable to understand the complexities in the problems of Old Testament literature.

Again, the passages Hosea viii. 13, ix. 3, which Hommel cites as based on Deuteronomy xxxiii. 68, in which return to Egypt is spoken of, present by no means the close parallel that our author supposes. It is gratuitous to assume that there is any quotation from Deuteronomy by the prophet. Returning to Egypt in the days of Hosea is by no means as far-fetched and improbable as our author seems to think. Let us remember that Egypt was the staff on which King Hoshea leaned just as Hezekiah did twenty years later. The threat of Assyrian invasion, and, still more, the invasion itself, probably drove many thousands of Ephraimite exiles into the land of the Pharaohs. Similar events happened in the Southern Kingdom in the days of Jeremiah.

II. We now come to the *second* condition, which deals with external evidence. Respecting the evidence from proper names in their bearing upon Babylonian as well as South Arabian religious ideas, we have certainly a copious array of examples provided for us, but the inference derived therefrom is startling. "If we substitute the simple word God, *ilu*, for the moon, the sun, or the sky, these names express no sentiment that is inconsistent with the highest and purest monotheism." That there may have been a fundamental Henotheism in early Semitic religion, and that a certain ethical sentiment on a level with that which existed in early Hellenic religion may have attached to the ideas of deity that prevailed in ancient Arabia, might be

inferred from the proper names compounded with Ili on p. 83 or with Abi, Ammi, etc., on p. 85; but might not nearly as good a case be made for the Phœnician Baal as is here asserted of the Arabian *ilu*? The truth is that epigraphy is after all not literature. What we still want to know is the ideal content which lurked behind these names. If we had an ancient Arabic document of the same character and antiquity as the Egyptian Prisse papyrus, Prof. Hommel would undoubtedly have a much stronger case. As it is, even the verb *Şaduķa* attached to *Ammi* does not tell us much.

Respecting Genesis xiv., I find myself mostly in agreement with Prof. Hommel, but surely he spoils his argument by his attempt at literary analysis. Here the writer seems himself to turn "Higher Critic," and, for what appear to me to be inadequate reasons, divides the narrative (vers. 17-23) into two distinct recensions, in which the King of Sodom and Melchizedek respectively play their parts.¹ Moreover, his attempt to equate Bela' with Malgû on the basis of an obscure though very interesting tablet quoted on p. 196 foll. is hardly satisfactory, and what are we to think of the scientific sobriety of the following:—

"I frankly admit that what I have just said in regard to Bela' and El Pa'rân is mere conjecture, though none the less probable conjecture. It is therefore all the more necessary to lay emphasis on the fact that the name form Amraphel for Khammurabi is in itself amply sufficient to permit—nay, more, compel—us to assume that Genesis xiv. is based on a cuneiform original of the Khammurabi period produced in Palestine."

¹ I fully admit the difficulty occasioned by the contradiction in verse 10. The explanation usually adopted that only the followers of the king of Sodom 'fell' in Siddim is surely gratuitous. But a more satisfactory solution than that proposed by Hommel may be reached by holding that in verse 17 סרם arose by a corruption of שרם, and that the same error was perpetuated in verses 21 and 22. For when the king of Sodom was once introduced into the drama he could not be left as a dumb personage. Verses 18-20 have been regarded by many as a later addition. Verse 20b certainly looks like a gloss.

As a matter of fact, there is no compulsion in the case. Schrader, in the days when Prof. Hommel persistently read Ḥammurabi as Ḥammuragaš, in an essay which first propounded the identification of Amraphel with Ḥammurabi, showed how easily the final ב in the Hebrew name arose through obliteration of a portion of the final ב in the early Canaanite script. This is a far more probable solution (*COT.*, ii. p. 330).

On matters of chronology I find it hard to follow Prof. Hommel. The whole problem turns on the question whether we are to believe with Hommel that the kings of the Uru-ku Dynasty (dynasty B) reigned contemporaneously with that of Ḥammurabi (dynasty A). If so, we bring the date of Ḥammurabi and by consequence that of Abraham about three centuries later than that usually assigned to them by Assyriologists as Winckler, Hilprecht, Delitzsch, Sayce, and others, viz., circ. 2250 B.C. The eleven names of Dynasty B stand on the reverse of the tablet on which the list of eleven kings of the Ḥammurabi Dynasty are recorded, and Dr. Hommel considers this list B, with its numbers, "open to grave suspicion, and that the whole constitution of this Uruku Dynasty gives the impression of an artificial scheme." The fact that we have eleven kings in both and that the sixth king in Dynasty B has a reign of fifty-five years, like the sixth king in list A, viz., Ḥammurabi, and that he moreover bears the somewhat artificial name, "Destroyer of the World," are certainly suspicious; and we have other curious points of coincidence in the numbers which shake our confidence in the validity of the reverse side of the tablet.

On the other hand, the date which Hommel assigns to the Exodus, 1280-1277 B.C., carries us so late that the veracity of the Book of Judges becomes seriously imperilled. The reign of Saul can hardly be assigned to a later date than 1037; and unless we adopt very largely the theory that

the judges of Israel were contemporary rulers, no adjustment of Biblical chronology is possible. This aspect of the question does not seem to have been considered by Prof. Hommel. In the light of the discovery recently made by Flinders Petrie (comp. p. 266 foll.), some scholars are asking themselves whether the Exodus did not take place at a much earlier date. If so, the Biblical scheme would postulate an earlier date for Abraham and his contemporary Hammurabi than that which Hommel assigns to them.

It would be impossible, within the compass of this paper, to refer to more than a very few of the numerous contributions made by this stimulating writer to our knowledge of Biblical names of persons and places. With reference to Genesis xiv., despite the questionable elements which have been introduced, we heartily rejoice in the fresh supports that have been given to the historical accuracy of what we have always regarded as substantially a very ancient narrative. In this respect the author stands where he did fifteen years ago, but in his attitude towards the main conclusions of the "Higher Criticism" his position, in our opinion, was sounder then than it is now (comp. *Semiten*, pp. 58, 74, 119). We have also to thank him for his very probable combination of the Hebrew Levi with the Arabian *lavi'a* (fem. *lavi'at*), i.e., the priest of the god Wadd, discovered by Euting upon inscriptions at El Oela (p. 278 foll.); the word *ḥat'at* for "sin-offering" (p. 322); also for the light thrown on the name Abîda' (Gen. xxv. 3) through Hommel's combination of the descendant of Midian with the Minæan King *Abi-yada'a* (pp. 238, 272), and even for the more problematical combination of Midian with Muts-rân. With the latter we tentatively connect *mât Muşri* of the cuneiform records, which, as Dr. Winckler has recently shown, must be entirely separated from the like name bestowed on Egypt. (*mât*) *Muşri*, appearing in the annals

of Tiglath Pileser III., is situated near Edom,¹ and this is supported by an interesting confirmation from Glaser, who, as we learn from Winckler,² found on a Minæan inscription (Hal. 535), a place מוצר bordering on מנחש.³ This land Muṣr became confounded with Egypt. Thus Hagar was possibly—indeed probably—a native of this country, and not Egypt (comp. Gen. xvi. 1, xxi. 9). Winckler, indeed, rides this hobby to death. For, according to this revolutionary writer, who goes beyond Stade in this respect, Israel never dwelt in Egypt, but in this North Arabian region. Here we see the peril of one-sidedness produced by some new discovery. We look at everything, now through Babylonian, now through Minæo-Sabæan spectacles. Dr. Hommel is not free from this infirmity. In his farewell pages he invites us to quit Fried. Delitzsch's far more probable domicile for Paradise in Babylonia, and go to seek it among the uninviting wadis of North Arabia, for reasons which cannot be regarded as sufficient or satisfactory.⁴

Hommel, indeed, by his theory respecting Goshen, seems to build a most ingenious bridge in the direction of Winckler's contention, for he gives Goshen a wide lateral extension

¹ Winckler, *Altoriental. Forsch.*, i. p. 24 foll.

² *Altoriental. Forsch.*, iii. p. 289.

³ Respecting this inner plur. of a tribal name מנחש, and מוצר as abbreviation of מנחש, see Hommel's *Aufsätze u. Abhandlungen*, p. 8, footn. 1. Comp. also Glaser's *Mittheilungen*, p. 64, for examples of similar plural forms, frequent in the names of South Arabian tribes.—In an appendix to the *Aufs. u. Abh.* we have a useful reproduction and also a translation in full of this important inscription, Hal. 535. Comp. *Anc. Heb. Trad.*, p. 249.

⁴ The identification of Hiddekel with the Wady (Hadd) of Diklah (p. 315) is very far fetched. As for the identification of Hawilah, this has been fully and ably discussed by Glaser (*Skizze der Geschichte u. Geographie Arabiens*, II. Band, p. 323 foll.). But his ingenious attempt to reconcile the passages: Gen. ii. 11; x. 7, 29; xxv. 18; 1 Chron. i. 9, 23, under a common geographical expression fails to convince me. חוילה in 1 Sam. xv. 7 is given up by most commentators as a corruption, probably, as Glaser suggests, of חבילה (1 Sam. xxiii. 19; xxvi. 1, 3), in the wilderness of Zif, south of Hebron.

towards Edom (p. 227). He might have gone a step further, and placed the crossing of the Yam Sûph at the Elanitic gulf, which in fact bore this name (Num. xxi. 4). Probably M. Naville would object to this proceeding, since he identifies Succoth with Pithom = Patum. But the argument would not be absolutely fatal, as our knowledge of the locality of Succoth is necessarily vague, and the name suggests nomadic surroundings.

Prof. Hommel's theory, that the tribe of Asher had its seat in Edom, that Ashûr is an internal plural of the same word (cf. Gen. xxv. 3), and that Shûr is merely an abbreviation (Gen. xvi. 7-14; xx. 1; xxiv. 62; xxv. 11), is enforced with considerable ingenuity and fulness of illustration in chap. viii. Armed with this fresh identification, the author proceeds to apply it to Balaam's prophecy (Num. xxiv. 21-24), and certainly gives an entirely novel interpretation to a well-known oracle. But the writer also startles his readers by the assertion that the tribe of Asher entered Canaan about a century earlier than the rest of Israel. This is certainly a bold departure from Biblical tradition (Num. x. 26; xiii. 13, etc.), and will probably occasion some misgivings. The radical defect of the book is that the author seems utterly unable to draw any distinction between speculation and ascertained facts. Doubtless to our poor human perception the margin is a very shadowy one. Yet it is surely patent to every sober-minded scholar that a considerable portion of the matter contained in this book, that has been offered to the uninitiated English public with indiscriminating and enthusiastic confidence, should, in the interests of Biblical science, have been withheld. In our opinion the present work will not enhance the reputation of the distinguished author of *Aufsätze u. Abhandlungen*.

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