

NOTE ON THE TABLE OF NATIONS (GENESIS X).

THE tenth chapter of the Book of Genesis consists of an enumeration of Nations, exhibited in the form of a genealogy of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the three sons of Noah. First we have the sons of Japheth: seven northern peoples, including the Greeks (Javan—Ionians), *vv.* 2-5. Next come the sons of Ham: the four main stocks are 'Cush' and 'Mišraim' (i. e. Egypt) and 'Put' and 'Canaan', *vv.* 6-20. Last come the sons of Shem, *vv.* 21-31.¹

The main purpose of the following Note is to point out a resemblance between certain parts of this Table of Nations and the newly discovered Sumerian Dynastic List. Before making the comparison, however, a few words about the composition of the Table itself are necessary. I am venturing to treat the Table as a single whole, but modern critics regard it as composite: *vv.* 8-19, 21, 24-30 are assigned to J, the 'Jahwist' compiler of ancient traditions, while the remainder (*vv.* 1-7; 20; 22, 23; 31, 32) are assigned to P, the writer of the 'Priestly Code'.² P belongs to the period of the Exile, while J is placed in the eighth century B. C., about the time of Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser.

If we divide up the Table between J and P two points seem to me to demand explanation: (1) if *ver.* 22 f³ belong to P, then P gave Shem's family tree twice over, for no one doubts that Gen. xi 10 ff⁴ is P's genealogy of Shem; and (2) if *vv.* 13 and 14 be assigned to J, as no doubt they should be, then as Prof. Francis Brown says 'P's list of the sons of Mišraim has not been preserved'—a highly improbable conclusion, seeing that geographical knowledge must have been much more extensive in the fifth century B. C. than in the eighth.

The question is really a little broader than the immediate scope of these details. If P's list of the peoples allied to the Egyptians is not extant, it is probable that it never had any existence. What interest

¹ Shem is always reckoned as the eldest, but the general method of this Table is to exhaust the side lines and come last to the main stock.

² So e. g. Driver *Introd. to Lit. of O.T.* pp. 12, 13; so also Prof. Francis Brown, whose Article on *Geography* in *Ency. Bibl.*, published in 1901, seems to me the best account of Genesis x that I have read.

³ 'The sons of Shem; Elam and Asshur and Arpachshad and Lud and Aram. . .'

⁴ 'These are the generations of Shem. Shem was an hundred years old, and begat Arpachshad two years after the flood, and Shem lived after he begat Arpachshad five hundred years, and begat sons and daughters', &c.

had the Priestly Writer in the tribes of the Gentiles? None whatever. He begins with the Creation of Heaven and Earth, but his object is to describe the successive covenants of God with Man, each successively more elaborate, but more restricted in scope, and his interest is with the direct ancestors of the Chosen People. J, on the other hand, though less scientific, is far more human and encyclopaedic. Almost anything he knows comes in handy. He does not shrink from loading his pages with a list of the thirteen races of the Joktanites,¹ i. e. the S. Arabian tribes, whose existence can never at any time have bulked very largely in Israelite life and polity. We seem in Gen. x 26-30 to be listening to a Jewish trader's tales of foreign parts, when he had come back from King Solomon's venture down the Red Sea.

For the same reason I doubt the propriety of assigning to P the list of the Sons of Japheth (*vv.* 2-5). I do not see what interest P would have in naming them. In fact, I do not see what P has to do with Genesis, chap. x. Possibly the final editor of the Pentateuch put 'These are the generations of' as a heading to the Table, but beyond that I do not see any necessity for analysis.² The word *mishpachōth*, 'clans' or 'families', which occurs in *vv.* 5, 18, 20, 31, 32, is a particular favourite of P, but it is found elsewhere than in his work, and indeed its use here is almost unavoidable.

But, of course, if the whole of ch. x be regarded as the work of one author it is necessary to shew that it has general cohesion. Minor contradictions are not excluded, for indeed they are not absent from modern works on Ethnology, but the general plan must be shewn to be reasonable. It is not my purpose to make a full commentary, but a few explanatory remarks will not be out of place.

To begin with, the Table is neither strictly geographical nor strictly historical. It is not strictly geographical, i. e. it does not give an accurate list of the Nations in the writer's own day, because it professes to represent the conditions of an earlier time, when for instance Israel had not entered Palestine. But, on the other hand, apart from Israel and some allied peoples it does give a Table of the Nations as they were in the writer's day, i. e. as they are assumed always to have been, so that it is mainly geographical. The method is quite clearly exhibited

¹ Joktān is otherwise unknown. The Arab genealogists identified the name with Kahtān, the mythical ancestor of the non-Ishmaelitic S. Arabian tribes. In other matters the Arabic forms of Bible names are worthless, but in this case is it not possible that the Biblical *Yoktān* was originally a traveller's mishearing of Kahtān? Gen. x 26-30 rests ultimately on good information, for it contains the name Hadramaut.

² Note that the construction of 'unto them were sons born' in x 1 is very similar to that of 'unto Shem . . . also were children born' in x 21, a verse universally assigned to J.

in the treatment of the sons of Canaan (*vv.* 15-19): I can best exhibit it by giving a modern paraphrase of these verses. The author says in effect:—

‘The peoples of Palestine (not counting the Philistine strangers referred to above, *ver.* 14) are the Phoenicians, whose oldest settlement was Sidon; the Hittites; the various clans that traditionally occupied the hill-country before we Israelites arrived; the people of Arca, of Siana (?),¹ of Aradus, of Simyra, along the northern Phoenician coast; and the people further inland about Hamath. Some of these stocks have developed considerably since their earliest settlements.² From Sidon to Gaza, and then across to the Dead Sea [all the land W. of the Jordan] is reckoned as Palestine.’

We have now to consider what meaning is to be given to the words Shem, Ham, and Japheth, as used in Genesis x, if we are to transfer them from the naive patriarchology of the Israelites to our way of speaking. I venture to think we may define these names thus: *Shem* includes all the peoples and tribes to which ‘we Israelites’ (as the writer might say) feel ourselves akin; *Japheth* includes all the peoples to the North and North-West, while *Ham* includes all the peoples to the South and East. ‘Japheth’ and ‘Ham’ are on this view essentially geographical rather than ethnological terms, while ‘Shem’ on the other hand does include the notion of racial kinship. Thus the Greeks and the Medians and the unknown peoples who lived in the direction of the Black Sea are all ‘Japheth’, while Egyptians and Babylonians are ‘Ham’.

Here we come to the heart of the matter. What has ‘Cush’, which means Ethiopia or Nubia, to do with ‘Cush’ who ‘begat Nimrod’? And if Abraham came from Ur of the Chaldees, how are the Babylonians to be reckoned as the children of Ham?

The first of these questions is an old difficulty, and of course it is quite impossible to get rid of all confusion, whatever view we take. The two Cushes cannot really be the same peoples; they have been confused by some one, and it does not make a very great difference whether we call him a ‘writer’ or a ‘reviser’. After all, the man who drew up this Table was a compiler, not himself an original source of information. He had not himself visited Phoenicia and Egypt and ‘Cush’ and ‘Put’, and found that the inhabitants of these countries were ethnically ‘Hamite’! No doubt he was working on previous Lists, or semi-historical accounts of foreign parts. He had no Atlas or

¹ Not clearly identified.

² I presume *ver.* 18 really means that many great towns, notably Tyre, had sprung up in later times, but that all the Phoenicians were to be regarded as originally Sidonians.

Map to help him. I imagine he simply confused Cush (= Ethiopia) with the 'Cush' that is really connected with the land of Shinar, with Babylonia.

Who was this Cush? The name has often been connected in recent years with the Kossites, an Elamitic people who invaded Babylonia at various times. But neither in myth nor in sober history did they have anything to do with the beginning of Babylonian civilization. It is here that the results of the American excavations at Nippur help us, particularly what is known as the Sumerian Dynastic List. This document, published by Dr Arno Poebel,¹ consists of lists of the earliest rulers of Babylonia, arranged according to the towns which successively held the hegemony in these early times. It has been admirably discussed by the late Dr Leonard King in his *Legends of Babylon and Egypt* (Schweich Lectures for 1916), published in 1918.² These early, though fragmentary lists of historical and semi-mythical rulers 'prove that Berossus and the later Babylonians depended on material of quite early origin in compiling their dynasties of semi-mythical kings. In them we obtain a glimpse of ages more remote than any on which excavation in Babylonia has yet thrown light, and for the first time we have recovered genuine native tradition of early date with regard to the cradle of Babylonian culture' (King, p. 22).

But fully as Dr King discussed the Sumerian Dynastic List he did not bring forward our Table to illustrate it, and it is just that which I wish here to do. Indeed it is all the more appropriate, as it seems probable that the List professes to be concerned with the Post-Diluvian period (King, p. 31).

I am not going into details, because even if I were competent to do so the names of individual Sumerian rulers would have as little interest for most of us as they would have had to the Jahwistic compiler. But the striking thing is that the first Sumerian Dynasty is the Kingdom of *Kish*, and when that comes to an end the Kingdom passes to *Erech*. I suggest that the source of Gen. x 8-12 is Babylonian information (whether written or oral) based on the Dynastic List literature.

Let us see whether this hint will not help us better to understand the Hebrew text. The Dynastic List suggests that *ver.* 10 does not refer to Nimrod but goes back to 'Cush' (or, as I shall henceforth vocalize it, 'Kish'); and in *ver.* 11 it will be best to take Asshur as the nominative.³ Nothing therefore is left to Nimrod but his hunting reputation.

¹ A. Poebel *Historical Texts* (Univ. of Pennsylvania Museum Publ., Bab. Sect., vol. iv, no. 1, 1914).

² See esp. pp. 28-39, 144-146.

³ So *AV* and *RVms*. 'Asshur' is semi-personified, like 'Sidon' in *ver.* 15; 'went forth', of course, means 'was a later colony', as in *ver.* 14, not 'started on a journey'.

He owes his mention to the proverb here quoted. The only serious objection I can see to this is Micah v 6, where 'the land of Nimrod' is used as a poetic synonym for Assyria, but in such a context the difference between one part of Mesopotamia and another is unimportant. It is like using 'Columbia' for the United States, although Columbus never visited North America.

The view I am here putting forward is that the glimpse into the ancient history of Babylonia given in Gen. x 8-10 is ultimately derived from the Babylonian historical tradition, of which the newly discovered Sumerian Dynastic List is a surviving monument. Who are these people who founded Kish and Erech and the other ancient seats of civilization in lower Mesopotamia? They were what we call the Sumerians, that is to say a non-Semitic race. And therefore they are quite properly not included in the children of Shem, but among the Hamites, i.e. according to J's usage all the non-Semitic peoples to the South.

I imagine that J had a real difficulty in 'placing' the Babylonian civilization, to speak in modern terms. It was so obviously different from all the other Semitic national organizations in language, custom, and development, and the same source from whence he got his information about its early beginnings may have told him something corresponding to what we mean when we talk about 'the absorption of the earlier Sumerian culture by the Semitic Babylonians'. In these circumstances the identification of the *Kish* where Babylonian civilization had its first seat with *Kūsh* the son of Ham must have seemed like a ray of light in the darkness.

When he comes to the sons of Shem in *ver.* 22 we find among them Asshur and Arpachshad as well as Elam and Aram. The fact of Asshur coming here is of course not quite consistent with *ver.* 11, if Asshur there be taken as nominative and meaning the nation, not the land. But it may be noted that it is not said in so many words that Asshur is a son of Cush or Kish; what is noted, as in the case of the Philistines, is that the Assyrian power is not immemorial, but its beginnings only date after the general settlement of the older nations.¹

Finally, if a further conjecture be added to what in the nature of

¹ The rendering which makes Asshur in *ver.* 11 a nominative, meaning 'the Assyrians', is that of the Targums, and it seems to me most in accord with Hebrew syntax generally and with the construction of the clause in *ver.* 14 about the Philistines in particular. For 'to Assyria' J writes אֲשׁוּרָה (Gen. xxv 18). In *ver.* 10 'Babel' seems to be an anachronism, natural enough in a foreign writer, for the city of Babylon was founded later than Kish and Erech. What is wanted, of course, is 'The beginnings of the Babylonian civilization were in Kish and Erech and Accad . . .'

things must be so tentative, may we not see in the story of the confusion of tongues at the building of the Tower of Babylon a far-off echo of the rise of that monstrous jargon, the 'Semitic' Babylonian language, neither a definitely alien tongue, nor a genuine Semitic manner of speech? It seemed to the Jews of Isaiah's time and Jeremiah's like the talk of a drunken man (Isa. xxviii 11), you could not understand what they say (Jer. v 15). Neither the Bible, nor as yet the cuneiform literature, gives any intelligible picture of the penetration of the Sumerian civilization by what we call the Semitic Babylonians: in Biblical phraseology we simply do not know how Arpachshad became the heir of Kish (= 'Cush'). According to J the ancestors of Abraham and Terah were Arpachshad and Eber. Arpachshad seems to be connected with the Kashdim or Chaldaeans, and to be used as the ethnic name for the Sumerianized Chaldaeans. Eber, on the other hand, seems to denote the tribes that did not settle down and so escaped Sumerian influence. After Eber's day the Sumerianized Chaldaeans and the Semites who escaped Sumerian influence part company. The land is divided, as we read in Gen. x 25; what that means appears to be that in a few generations the ancestors of the Israelites leave 'Ur of the Chaldees' altogether, and go West.

It is time now to drop fancy and come back to the main points here brought forward, which are: (1) There is no reason to think that the Table of Nations in Genesis x is not the work of a single compiler; the minor contradictions found in it are best explained as inevitable, in view of the real difficulty of equating foreign names and of a reasonable grouping of foreign nations. (2) The passage about early Babylonia is founded ultimately upon native Babylonian historical tradition, of which a fragment has now reached us in the Sumerian Dynastic List. (3) The 'Cush' of Gen. x 8 owes its pronunciation to a confusion with Cush (= Ethiopia); it does not signify the invading Kossites, but really means Kish, the town which Babylonian tradition regarded as the first seat of government, earlier than Erech. (4) The assignment of the earliest Babylonian civilization to a son of Ham implies a true knowledge that this earliest civilization was not Semitic.

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