

## KIRJATH-SEPHER.

SURELY we ought not to let this place go unexplored, after the suggestion made by Professor Sayce in the August number of the "Contemporary Review." The recent discovery of cuneiform tablets at Tel el-Amarni, in Egypt—consisting of despatches to Amenophis IV and his predecessor (18th dynasty), from their agents in Palestine—proves that there was active literary intercourse from one end of the civilised East to the other, in the century before the Exodus, and that the medium of literary correspondence was the Babylonian language and script. There were libraries in Canaan in those days, and some of the books were in cuneiform characters. They were of clay, which would not perish like papyrus, and they could be read if they were discovered. Professor Sayce would be hopeful of finding such records at Tyre and at Kirjath-Sepher.

Kirjath-Sepher is translated as Book-town. In the Euphrates valley there was a city of corresponding name—Sippara—and it has justified its designation by yielding (within the present decade) many ancient records.

Sippara was a seat of sun-worship, and its temple contained hundreds of apartments. The legend said that Khasis-adra, the Chaldean Noah, here buried the records of the ante-diluvian world; and at any rate a great library was founded here as early as the remote days of Sargon I, of Assyria (B.C. 3750).

Some people from Sippara were transported to Samaria when the ten tribes were carried away captive, and the city is mentioned in the Bible under the name of Sepharvaim. This is a Hebrew dual form, signifying the "two Sipparas," and, accordingly, the ruins are found on both sides of the stream—at Abu Hubba and at Agadé. I find reason to think that the duality was symbolical, and was important in the astro-religious system, the two sites standing for the two equinoxes. We may compare with these twin temples, or towers, the mound of *Birs Nimroud* and the *Babil* mound on the opposite side of the stream; we may compare again the two "brother" peaks of Delphi, of the like significance, perhaps, in the Greek mythos, which was, at bottom, the same as the Chaldean.

The temple at Sippara was called Beth-el (House of God)—House of the *Sun-god*, apparently, since the expression "Shamash of Sepharvaim" occurs in the cuneiform texts.<sup>1</sup> We might have expected to find Nebo rather—the god of writing—especially as the temple at Borsippa was sacred to him. The first and principal records preserved in the temple would be astronomical records—called "tablets of destiny," because the fixed laws of the heavens governed the fate of men—such records being of prime importance in an astro-religious system. Accordingly, we find

<sup>1</sup> In 2 Kings, xvii, the men of Sepharvaim made images of Ana-melech and Adra-melech, and burnt their children in the fire.

that the treasures of the library of Sargon included a great work on astronomy and astrology in seventy-two books (72, it may be remarked, is an oft-recurring number in mythic writings, because  $5 \times 72 = 360$ , the number of degrees in the circle of the heavens, and of days in the ancient year). The priestly guardians of these writings, however, being the scribes of the people, would by-and-by be entrusted with the care of the contracts, &c., which they drew up; and so Mr. Rassam discovered, at this site, thousands of tablets relating to fiscal, legal, and commercial transactions.

These, then, are the kinds of records which we may hope to find at Kirjath-Sepher in Judea. The place was very likely the site of a temple of Nebo, or some equivalent god of writing, and the records preserved would be, first of all, astro-religious, and then commercial.

Kirjath-Sepher is otherwise called Kirjath-Sannah, and also Debir. It was one of the Canaanitish towns taken by Joshua, and the worship would relate to that early time; the tablets would belong to the pre-Israelitish inhabitants. In "Fresh Light from the Monuments," Professor Sayce gives the name *Debir* as meaning sanctuary, and compares it with Kadesh, "the holy city." In the "Survey Memoirs" (iii, 402) we are told that "the name has the meaning 'back,' due to its position on the ridge." I have always supposed that the later name, Debir, had the same meaning as the earlier name, Sepher. Dabar, from the same root, signifies a word, speech, saying, command, law, oracle, &c.; and Furst, under the word Debir, allows that it may mean Book-town, the same as Kirjath-Sepher. It comes from *Dabar* (דָּבַר) to speak. Apparently, the root-meaning of Sepher and Sauneh is connected with the idea of piercing and being pointed, like thorns or like crags, and may have had reference to the conical hills on which Nebo temples are built, or to the stylus used in writing. The west or hinder part of the temple was called Debir, and in that connection the word is said to mean hinder; but if the sacred books were kept on that side, the name may perhaps have reference to the writings.

Kirjath-Sepher is represented now by the village of *edh Dhábertyeh*, south-west of Hebron (see Memoirs iii, 402, and Armstrong's "Names and Places," O. T.). The description of it is not unpromising for the investigator—"ancient materials," "an old tower," "a sacred place," and "houses over caves."

GEORGE ST. CLAIR.

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## MEETING OF THE GENERAL COMMITTEE.

THE Annual Meeting of the General Committee was held at the offices of the Fund, 1, Adam Street, Adelphi, on July 3rd. Chairman, Mr. James Glaisher.

After the Honorary Secretary had read letters from various gentlemen