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The Amorites.

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THE earliest conquest of Israel was the northern half of Moab, which had been overrun and occupied by "Sihon, king of the Amorites." Like so much else in the Pentateuch, this notice of Sihon was an isolated fragment of contemporary history, difficult to explain because nothing else had come down to us which threw light upon it. Modern criticism, therefore, took refuge in its favourite and easy method of solving difficulties by denying that the notice was either contemporaneous or historical. The Amorites were merely the "hill-men" of Canaan, and Sihon was a figure of legend.

It is true that in the earlier history of Canaan, as recorded in the Old Testament, the Amorites are frequently mentioned where we should have expected to find the name of the Canaanites. It was the Amorites whom the children of Israel were enjoined to extirpate (Deut. xx. 17), and it was the Amorites, again, whose "iniquity," it was said, "was not yet full" (Gen. xv. 17). In the Books of Kings the Amorite rather than the Canaanite is held up as an example of wickedness; "Ahab did very abominably, as did the Amorites" (1 Kings xxi. 26), and Manasseh acted "wickedly above all that the Amorites did" (2 Kings xxi. 11). In the days of Samuel "there was peace between Israel and the Amorites" (1 Sam. vii. 14), and at an earlier date a prophet had declared that the Lord had said unto His people, "Fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell" (Judg. vi. 10). In accordance with these passages, the Amorites of the Old Testament seem ubiquitous in Palestine: there were Amorites in Hazezon-Tamar on the Dead Sea (Gen. xiv. 7), in Hebron, in Shechem (Gen. xlviii. 42), and in Bashan (Deut. iii. 8), while in 2 Sam. xxi. 2 the Gibeonites are stated to have been "of the remnant of the Amorites," and in Josh. x. 5, 6, the inhabitants of what was afterwards Judah are collectively called by the

same name. On the other hand, a distinction is drawn between the Amorites and the Canaanites in Num. xiii. 29, where we read: "The Amalekites (or Beduin) dwell in the land of the south; and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea and by the coast of Jordan." So, too, Ezekiel (xvi. 3) describes Jerusalem as born of an Amorite father and a Hittite mother in "the land of Canaan." There was thus some excuse for the bewilderment of literary criticism and its inability to find a way out of the Amorite labyrinth.

At first the discoveries of Oriental archæology rather increased than diminished the confusion. The Amorites were named and pictured on the Egyptian monuments, but as a race with fair complexions, blue eyes and light hair, who lived, not in Palestine, but immediately to the north of it. Their physical characteristics marked them out as separate from the Canaanites and the other nations of Palestine, and it became more difficult than ever to understand how they could have been the people the Israelites were commanded to destroy, and whose language belonged to the Semitic family of speech.

And yet the difficulty has been removed. The cuneiform texts have at last cleared up the Amorite mystery, and shown that the Old Testament writers were correct in their statements, and that their use of the name "Amorite" was both ethnologically and chronologically exact. The reason why the critic did not understand it was because he did not know the history of the period to which the Old Testament narratives refer.

The name Amurru, or "Amorite," had been applied to the Semitic population of Syria and Palestine by the Babylonians at a very early date. Syria, and more particularly Canaan, was known to them as "the land of the Amorites," and Hadad or Rimmon, the supreme deity of these Western Semites, was called accordingly "the Amorite god." Throughout the period of Babylonian influence in Western Asia—that is to say, down to the epoch of the Tel-el-Amarna letters and Israelitish Exodus—the literary name of the Semitic inhabitants of Canaan was

Amorite. Distinct from the Amorites who had adopted the culture of Babylonia were the Sutu, or Beduin, the Sheth of Num. xxiv. 17, who, like their modern descendants, roamed through the desert uncivilized and independent. Mesopotamia, including the later Assyria, was known as Subartu or Subari, contracted into Suri, which extended westward to the borders of the Hittite regions in Eastern Asia Minor. In early days, however, Harran, on the great highroad between Babylonia and the Mediterranean, was a city, not of Subartu, but of "the land of the Amorites," and was, I believe, at one time the centre of their power.

In the third millennium B.C. Canaan was a province of the Babylonian Empire, and a portion of a cadastral survey exists which was drawn up about 2500 B.C., for Urimelech, the governor of "the land of the Amorites." A few centuries later Northern Babylonia was occupied by an "Amorite" or West-Semitic Dynasty, who made Babylon their capital. The most famous king of the dynasty was Khammu-rabi, or Ammurapi, the Amraphel of Genesis, who united all Babylonia under his sway, and whose authority was acknowledged from Susa in Elam to the frontiers of Egypt. But though to a later generation Khammu-rabi became the representative and ideal of Babylonian greatness, he himself never forgot his Amoritish ancestry, and in an inscription found near Diarbekir, north of Harran, and dedicated to the Canaanitish goddess Asherah, the only title he assumes is that of "king of the land of the Amorites." His dynasty was weakened or overthrown by an invasion of Babylonia by the Hittites, and a semi-barbarous tribe from the eastern mountains made themselves masters of the country and founded a dynasty which lasted for nearly six hundred years. The Babylonian Empire in the West was lost, and the Hittites and Egyptians took possession of Syria and Palestine. There, however, the old culture of Babylonia continued to survive, and the language and script of the educated classes throughout Western Asia continued to be those of Babylonia. And in this language and script Palestine was "the

land of the Amorites," and the people who inhabited it were "Amorites."

But a new order of things had meanwhile grown up in the political world. The Egyptians and Hittites were now disputing between them the possession of what had once been "the land of the Amorites," and in the long struggle the Hittites were eventually victorious. They planted themselves too firmly in Syria to be dislodged, while Egypt was finally driven out even of Canaan. When, therefore, Assyria not only succeeded in making itself independent of Babylonia, but aspired to the imperial position once occupied by the Babylonians, the dominant power in Syria and Palestine was no longer Amorite, but Hittite. For the Assyrians, accordingly, Syria and Palestine became "the land of the Hittites," and remained so as long as the Assyrian Empire lasted. In the Assyrian texts the princes of Syria and Canaan are all alike "Hittite"; even Ahab of Israel and the king of Ammon are transformed into "Hittite" kings, and Sargon calls Ashdod a "Hittite" town. With the introduction of the Phœnician script and the use of the native language among the educated classes of Palestine, the old literary employment of the Babylonian term "Amorite" would have disappeared there also, and we may therefore regard the substitution of "Canaanite" for "Amorite" as marking the period when the cuneiform characters of Babylonia were replaced in Palestine by the letters of the Phœnician alphabet.

But even among the Babylonians political causes had tended to restrict the geographical signification of the word "Amorite." The great work on astronomy and astrology, which was compiled in the age of Khammu-rabi, contains several references to "the king of the Amorites." We hear of his accession to the throne, of the oracles delivered to him, of his wars and defeat, of the length of his reign, and of the invasion of his country. Like the kings of Suri and Elam, his actions were a matter of considerable concern to the astrologers and politicians of Babylonia. There was, therefore, a "king of the Amorites," who governed the West as the king of Suri governed Mesopotamia, or the

king of Anzan governed Elam. And, like the kings of Suri and Elam, he was a vassal of Khammu-rabi and his successors, whose empire included "the land of the Amorites."

It thus becomes clear that in the Abrahamic age Syria and Palestine were under the rule of a "king of the Amorites," whose power extended to the Babylonian frontier and who acknowledged the supremacy of the Babylonian sovereign. The recent discoveries of Dr. Winckler at Boghaz Keui, the site of the capital of the Hittite Empire, enable us to trace the fortunes of this kingdom of the Amorites down to the Mosaic age. At Boghaz Keui Dr. Winckler has found two libraries of clay tablets inscribed with cuneiform characters; the greater number of them are in the undeciphered language of the Hittites, but most of those which relate to foreign countries and international affairs are fortunately in Assyrian, the language at that time of diplomacy and trade. In this way we have come to know a good deal about the Amorites and their kingdom, more especially as the Hittite records are supplemented by the Tel-el-Amarna letters, in which the Egyptian view of the questions at issue is given to us. For nearly two centuries—from about 1400 B.C. to about 1200 B.C.—the Hittites and the Egyptians were struggling for the possession of Syria and Palestine, and the Amorite kings found themselves, as it were, between the hammer and the anvil. They were accused of treachery, sometimes by the Egyptian, sometimes by the Hittite Government, and to clear themselves of the charge was a hard task, which needed more than the usual amount of Oriental duplicity and opportunism. As a matter of fact, Ebed-Asherah, the king of the Amorites, and his successor Aziru, shifted their allegiance from the one master to the other as best suited their convenience or safety, and while professing to be the faithful servants of the one, were in the secret pay of the other. Among the Tel-el-Amarna tablets is one in which the Amorite prince is soundly rated by the Egyptian Government and threatened with death if convicted of further intrigues with the Hittite enemy; the Hittite records, however, show that the scolding was to little

purpose; Egypt lacked the power to carry its threats into execution, and "the king of the Amorites" eventually found it most to his interest to transfer his allegiance to his more powerful and dangerous Hittite neighbour. From this time onwards the Hittite kings treated the Amorite rulers as vassals whom they could crown and uncrown at will.

But the Tel-el-Amarna tablets show that before this happened the Amorite kings had ceased to exercise effective sovereignty in Canaan. The Egyptian conquest of Canaan by the kings of the Eighteenth Dynasty had put a stop to this, and the southern limits of Amorite power or influence on the west side of the Jordan coincided approximately with what was afterwards the northern border of Naphtali. There is no reason to suppose, however, that the Amorites had relinquished their claim to sovereignty over the Palestinian portion of their old dominions or would neglect an opportunity of enforcing it. One of the rebels whom the Egyptian Government ordered the Amorite king Aziru to deliver up to him was a certain Yisyari, and Yisyari is shown by a letter discovered by Mr. Bliss in the ruins of Lachish to have intrigued against Egyptian authority in the extreme south of Palestine. But while the Nineteenth Dynasty lasted Egyptian power on the two sides of the Jordan, in what was afterwards the territory of Israel, was too solidly established to be shaken either by the Hittites themselves or by their subject-vassals, the Amorite kings.

We learn from the tablets of Boghaz Keui that the successors of Aziru were little more than the nominees of "the great king of the Hittites." It was he from whom they received the royal title, and who deposed them when their fidelity was suspected. One of the Amorite kings was carried into captivity into Cappadocia, where he made the acquaintance of the heir to the Hittite crown, who was also at the time a State prisoner. When the death of the reigning monarch placed the latter on the Hittite throne, his first act was to restore the Amorite captive to his former kingdom and conclude with him a treaty which bound the Amorite king, and therewith the whole of Syria, more

tightly than ever to his Hittite suzerain. To make assurance doubly certain, one of the sons of the Hittite monarch was subsequently married to an Amorite princess, and an agreement drawn up in which it was stipulated that the succession to the Amorite crown should henceforth be confined to the descendants of the royal pair.

This happened about the time of the Hebrew Exodus out of Egypt, and consequently hardly more than a generation before the conquest of Moab by Sihon, "king of the Amorites." Sihon was a successor of the "kings of the Amorites" whose names and history are now being so unexpectedly revealed to us by the cuneiform tablets, and the time was favourable for his attempt to recover the lands to the south which had once belonged to his forefathers. A wave of northern barbarians—the Dorians and Phrygians of Greek story—had swept over Asia Minor, and the Hittite Empire had fallen before them. The invaders poured southwards into the fertile lands of Syria, and threatened Egypt both by land and sea. The Nineteenth Dynasty—the Dynasty, that is to say, of Ramses II., the Pharaoh of the Oppression, and his son Meneptah, the Pharaoh of the Exodus—had passed away, and the Egyptian rule over Palestine had passed with it. There were no longer Egyptian garrisons in "Muab," as it is called by Ramses II., to resist the Amorite attack, and there was no longer a Hittite suzerain to whom "the king of the Amorites" was answerable for his deeds. As the Amorite chieftain Og had possessed himself of what had once been the Egyptian province of Bashan, so the Amorite king Sihon made himself master of the country still farther to the south.

About 1200 B.C. Egypt was saved from destruction by a double victory on land and water. The northern invaders had advanced through Syria, and their ships and troops regarded the wealthy cities of Egypt as already their prey. But their fleet was destroyed off the coast of Canaan, and their army almost annihilated in a decisive battle. The Egyptian conqueror, Ramses III., followed up his victory by marching into Syria,

and among the captives whom he brought back with him was "the king of the Amorites." The latter would seem to have been the immediate predecessor of Sihon, hardly Sihon himself.

The Israelitish occupation of Palestine, however, must have followed soon after the Syrian campaign of Ramses III. It was the last time for many centuries that an Egyptian Pharaoh attempted to restore the Asiatic Empire of his predecessors. Hebron was among the conquests of the Egyptians, who penetrated as far as the Jordan. But their conquests were soon lost again, and the way to Canaan was blocked by the Philistines, who drove the Egyptian garrisons from its frontier cities and established themselves in their place.

The captive "king of the Amorites" whom Ramses III. led into Egypt and Sihon, against whom the Israelites fought, are the last "kings of the Amorites" of whom we hear. Henceforward, where the Amorite had ruled, we have only the Aramæan or Syrian. The name disappeared from use, and was found only in literature that was composed under Babylonian influence or contained records that went back to the older Babylonian period. Assyria had now superseded Babylonia in the life and politics of Western Asia, and for Assyria, as we have seen, Western Asia was Hittite rather than Amorite. "Amorite," in the wider sense of the term, was already passing away in the age of the Israelitish Exodus. The last echo of it is to be found in the history of Samuel.

And before the Israelitish occupation of Canaan was completed, the name had also passed away in the narrower sense. A kingdom of the Amorites, such as still existed when the cuneiform tablets of Tel-el-Amarna and Boghaz Keui were written, disappeared from history. It is unknown alike to the Hebrew writers and the Assyrian records. It vanished along with the old kingdom of Mitanni—the Aram-Naharaim of Scripture—which had once played a prominent part in the politics of Western Asia, and had intrigued with the Canaanite princes against their liege lord of Egypt. Instead of the "king of the Amorites," we hear of the Syrians of Hamath and

Damascus, and the Syrian state of Zobah takes the place of Mitanni on the banks of the Euphrates.

Sihon's conquest of Moab seems to have been an expiring effort of Amorite power. A century earlier, as we learn from the tablets of Boghaz Keui, the frontier of the Amorite kingdom touched upon Northern Babylonia, and its king on one occasion was summoned to Cappadocia to answer the charge brought before the Hittite monarch by the Babylonian ambassador, that "the king of the Amorites," who was a Hittite vassal, had made a raid upon Babylonian territory. But times were now changed: the Hittite and the Egyptian had alike ceased to interfere in the affairs of Syria and Palestine, and the native Aramæan was founding independent sovereignties. It was into these latter that the old Amorite kingdom was absorbed.

The overthrow of Sihon may have been facilitated by the fact that this kingdom was already struggling to maintain itself against the Syrian states which had risen up in the North. Moab, indeed, had fallen before the Amorite forces, but they were no match for the hardy Israelitish invaders from the desert. The Amorites were themselves strangers and conquerors in Moab, and therefore could not count upon the support of its inhabitants. They were but an armed garrison in a hostile country, and without help from home were little likely to make head against their Israelitish foes. And that help, we may gather from the Old Testament, was not forthcoming.

How recent their conquest of Northern Moab had been is indicated by the Amorite song of triumph quoted in Num. xxi. 27-29. "Woe unto thee," we read, "O Moab; thou art undone, O people of Chemosh! (Chemosh) hath given thy sons who escaped (the battle) and thy daughters into captivity to Sihon, king of the Amorites." The song seems to have been composed just after the capture of Heshbon; the flame that consumed Heshbon, it is said, shall spread southward through Moab, while Heshbon itself is rebuilt and made the capital of the conqueror: "Come to Heshbon, that the city of Sihon may be rebuilt and restored. For the fire spread from Heshbon, the flame from the

capital of Sihon, devouring Ar of Moab (or reading *'ad* with the Sept. instead of *'ar*, as far as Moab) and swallowing up (so Sept. reading *bâla'h*) the high places of Arnon."

It is hardly necessary to point out how closely the Biblical notices of the Amorites and their kingdom agree with the results of archæological discovery. Once more, where the archæological test can be applied, it is the Pentateuch that turns out to be right, not the subjective speculations of modern writers, miscalled criticism. The general sense attached to the name "Amorite" is that which it ought to bear if the Pentateuchal narrative goes back to the age to which it professes to belong, and Sihon and his kingdom have not only been proved to be historical, but the mention of them is an indication of the Mosaic date of the story in which it occurs. At a later period all remembrance of the kingdom had passed away, and in place of a king of the Amorites we should have had a king of Midian, a king of Edom, a king of Ammon, a king of Zobah, or a king of the Arabians. In the Mosaic age, however, the king of the Amorites was still a power, and only upon the supposition that the story of the conquest of Northern Moab is a contemporary record can we upon either scientific or common-sense grounds explain its presence in the Book of Numbers. Like the quotation from the Amorite poem, it presupposes, not deceptive oral legend, much less deliberate fiction, but a trustworthy historical source.

The Problem of Home Reunion.

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THE problem is an exceedingly difficult one; the signs of encouragement are many; the solution, when it arrives, will in all probability be unexpectedly simple—that is, in effect, what I want to say, with the addition of a few practical suggestions as to what it may be best for us to do, and not to do, in the immediate future.