

book that happened to be making a stir just then in the world of letters. What a pity that Renan's criticism of the Mosaic annals had not been delayed a few months.

One of the cities where a library or libraries existed was Kirjath-sopher, or Book-town (the City of Letters), mentioned in Josh. xv. 16. It was also called Kirjath-Sannah, or City of Instruction, doubtless from the school which was attached to its library. The site is unfortunately lost; should it ever be recovered we may expect to find there literary treasures beyond all price. Why, indeed, should it be thought a thing incredible that some day we may find tablets containing the Ten Commandments, or some of the principal laws of the Hebrew nation in the handwriting of Moses himself. Would such a find be any more wonderful than that which has been found within the last few years?

In short, then, in the fifteenth century, B.C., the whole of the Oriental world was filled with schools and libraries, with readers and writers, with teachers and pupils. The books which were composed and studied were in the language and script of Babylonia; and the centre of all this literary activity was Canaan. Here the civilization of Egypt and Babylonia met and coalesced.

How far astray, then, are they who suppose that the Israelites came up into a land of ignorance. Joshua and his army settled in a land of cities and fortresses, wealthy and numerous. The people, especially on the sea-coast, were highly cultured as compared with the Israelites, and excelled as workers in gold and silver, as manufacturers of porcelain and vari-coloured glass, as weavers of richly-dyed linen, and their merchants traded with the most distant parts of the known world.

Yet it was a civilization which the original possessors were unable to carry further, and which, in their hands, was slowly degenerating. It needed the infusion of vigorous, simple elements such as nomadic Israel could give. The rapid advance from nomadism to the organized and brilliant empire of Solomon is largely to be explained by this prior Canaanitish civilization forming a framework of political and social elements which Israel inherited, and which did not need to be painfully and slowly brought out *de novo*.

Here is light on those passages in which reference is made to Melchizedek: "Two or three years ago it would have seemed a dream of the wildest enthusiasm

to suggest that light would be thrown by modern discovery on the history of Melchizedek. Whatever lingering scruples the critic might have felt about rejecting the historical character of the first half of the fourteenth chapter of Genesis, he felt none at all as to the second half of it. Melchizedek, 'King of Salem' and priest of the most high God, appeared to be altogether a creature of mythology. And yet among the surprises which the tablets of Tel-el-Amarna had in store for us was the discovery that after all Melchizedek might well have been an historical personage." So says Sayce in his "Higher Criticism and the Monuments."

In this bundle of old letters there are quite a number from Ebed-Tob, the king of Jerusalem. In almost every one of them he makes the claim that he is not an ordinary king such as the other kings of Palestine. He had been appointed to his office, not by the Pharaoh, but by the arm or oracle of "the mighty God," i.e., the supreme deity of his city. He also makes claim that he rules not by inheritance, that he is king not because his father was king before him. "Neither my father nor my mother have exalted me in this place, it was the oracle of the mighty God that gave it me," says he in many of his letters.

Appointed by the voice of the God he worshipped, he was thus a priest rather than a king. Melchizedek is called king of Salem instead of king of Jerusalem, because he was first priest of the most high God, and king only in virtue of his priestly office. It is now also clear why the father and mother of Melchizedek are not named. Like Ebed-Tob, his authority was not based on the right of inheritance, he had been called to exercise it by a divine voice. The state over which he presided was in reality a theocracy.

The letters of Ebed-Tob further show why it was that Melchizedek went forth to bless Abram in the name of his God, after the defeat of the Babylonian kings. His God was Salem, the Prince of Peace. Abram's victory had delivered Palestine from the invader and restored it again to peace; the sacred character of the priest-king of Jerusalem must have been acknowledged throughout the neighbouring district, and to him, accordingly, the victorious Hebrew paid the customary tithes. It is not difficult to believe that Isaiah, who was well acquainted with the older history of his birth-place, is referring to the ancient name and oracle of Jerusalem, when he bestows upon the