

about the time that Mesa was superintending the carving of the Moabite stone.

No doubt it was the same then as now; an inland people cut off from the sea would desire an ocean outlet, and that Moab could not reach except through the country of the Israelites. These circumstances, and probably the incestuous origin of Moab, and the idolatry of the Moabites, intensified the bitterness of the family quarrels between them and the Hebrews. David, who was a mighty warrior, and able to hold his own against Egypt, Assyria or Babylon, subdued the Moabites. On the division of the Jewish Kingdom, in B.C. 975, into Judah and Israel, the Moabites seem to have passed to Israel, to which crown they were subject in the reign of Ahab. On the defeat and death of that king at the hands of the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead, B.C. 897, the Moabites rebelled, as stated in the first verse of the first chapter of Second Kings, under the reign of Ahaziah, son of Ahab. It has indeed been suggested, as by Ragozin in his "Assyria," that the Moabite stone refers to the third chapter of Second Kings, in the 27th verse of which it is related that "the Israelites departed from an invasion of Moab, and returned to their own land."

It seems, however, clear that the reference is to the rebellion under Ahaziah. The Moabite stone is a block of black basalt nearly four feet by two, thus in appearance closely resembling Hammurabi's column near to which it is preserved in the Louvre, at Paris. It is inscribed in the Hebrew-Phœnician character, and is the oldest Semitic inscription that is known, and has been said to be the most ancient specimen extant of alphabetic writing. The date assigned to it is B.C. 850. The inscription, as far as preserved, runs as follows:

"I am Mesha, the son of Khemosh-gad the Dibonite. My father reigned

over Moab thirty years, and I reigned after my father, and erected this sanctuary to Khemosh in Karkha. . . . because he assisted me against all my foes, and let me feast my eyes on all my haters. Omri, the King of Israel, oppressed Moab many days, for Khemosh was wroth with this land. And his son followed him, and he also spake: I will oppress Moab. In my days he spoke thus, and I feasted my heart on him and his house. And Omri had taken possession of the land of Medeba and dwelt in it. . . . the days of his son, forty years. And Khemosh restored it in my days. And the men of Gad had dwelt in the land A. . . . from of old. And the King of Israel had built Oltarot for himself. And I fought against the city, and took it and slew all. . . . to repulse the eyes of Khemosh and Moab. . . . And Khemosh spoke to me: Go take Nebo from Israel. And I went at night, and fought against it from the rising of the morning dawn until midnight, and I took it and slew all, 7,000. . . . women. . . . and maidens I consecrated to Khemosh's Ashtoreth (or to "Khemosh, Ashtoreth?") and I took thence the vessels of Yahveh and dragged before Khemosh.

"And I built Karkha. . . . I built its gates and its towers. And I built the royal palace. . . . And there was not a cistern inside the city in Karkha. . . . Then I spoke to all the people: "Make each a cistern in your houses."

Then follow some mutilated sentences. The last intelligible fragment is: "Khemosh spoke to me: "Go down against Khoronah." The inscription breaks off at the thirty-fourth line.

The Omri mentioned in the inscription was the father of Ahab. The royal seat of the kings of Moab seems to have been at Dibon, still called Diban, some score of miles East of the Dead Sea. The God Khe-