

country. But the most recent excavations have brought to light some indications that the people who lived in the Euphrates valley used a written language and reached a condition which might be called civilized, even before these results were attained by the Egyptians. However this may be, these two valleys—that of the Euphrates and that of the Nile—formed the first two distinct centres of civilization. Separated as they were by an intervening desert, the Egyptian and Babylonian peoples took the first steps in the direction of a more civilized life, each unaided by the other. For a long period of time they were isolated from each other. It was only when they had each broken through their early boundaries and extended their conquests along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea—that is, in Syria—that their civilizations met and were mingled together. The first to extend their conquests to this middle land of Syria were the Babylonians. Whether or not they were the first to emerge from barbarism, the Babylonians, or the peoples of the Tigris-Euphrates valley, were the first to extend their culture to lands beyond their own, and to obtain importance as a civilizing people.

The Tigris-Euphrates Valley.—The Tigris and Euphrates rivers, rising in the mountains of Armenia, flow southwards and pour their united waters into the Persian Gulf. The valley formed by these rivers may be divided into two parts—the southern or the lowlands, and the northern or the highlands. The southern part, which has received the name of Babylonia, has its chief historical centre at Bab'ylon on the Euphrates. Its most marked features are its soft climate and its rich alluvial soil. The northern part of the valley, called Assyria, had its chief centre first at Assur on the Tigris, and afterwards at Nin'evah on the same river. Its climate was more rugged than that of the south; and its land, though less fertile, furnished large supplies of minerals and precious stones.

It was the people who found their way into the southern part, or the lower valley, that first developed a civilized state. It is probable that this lower valley was in very ancient times settled by a very early non-Semitic race—usually