

ANNOTATIONS TO TABLES XXII AND XXIII THE RISE AND FALL OF THE SEMITES IN EGYPT

The intermarriage of the Israelites with the kindred Semitic peoples in Egypt, and with the Egyptians, accounts for the vast number of the children of Israel at the Exodus, and for the statement in the Book of Exodus, that, besides the 600,000 men, apart from women and children, “*a mixed company also went up with them*” out of Egypt.

As Prof. Sayce points out in his “Higher Criticism and the Monuments,” when, after Joseph had interpreted Pharaoh’s dream, the people proclaimed him *abrikku*, a seer, the word here used in Genesis, is neither Hebrew nor Egyptian. It is an ancient Babylonian word that was employed in correspondence Tablets between Babylon and Egypt during the XVIIIth Dynasty, and not before that Dynasty. The people who proclaimed Joseph *abrikku*, could only have been a people from the banks of the Euphrates ; kindred Semitic peoples who had been led to Egypt as captives in conquest or as tribute during the reign of Tahutmes III.

Tahutmes III died 5 years after Joseph’s famine ended. The history of succeeding reigns presents us with a picture of peaceful penetration. Semites in increasing numbers attain to the highest official appointments in the Egyptian Empire. Intermarriage Semiticizes the Egyptian nobility, until, in the 3rd reign after Joseph’s pharaoh, the history of the reign—that of Amenhotep III—is the history of Semitic Supremacy in Egypt.

Thus Prof. Petrie states :—

“*The striking change in the physiognomy and ideal type of the upper classes in the latter part of the XVIIIth Dynasty points to a strong foreign infusion. In place of the bold, active faces of earlier times, there is a peculiar delicacy; a gentle smile, and a small, gracefully-curved nose are characteristic of the upper classes in the time of Amenhotep III*¹..... *Being of such a winning type, it is no wonder that they were taken into Egyptian families..... No wonder that, after a few generations, we find Semitic words, idioms, and thoughts transfused throughout Egyptian literature. No nation could be proof against such influenceIn language, as is well known, Egypt became Semiticised.*”

This was the state of affairs under Amenhotep III, less than a century after Jacob’s entry. How matters developed in the next reign forms one of the outstanding themes of discussion in Egyptological works. The new king, Amenhotep IV, himself partly Semitic on his mother’s side, made a drastic change in the official religion of Egypt. He overthrew the worship of Amen-ra, Osiris, and other Egyptian deities. The new religion set up in place of these was essentially monotheistic. It was Semitic in its origin and in all its ideas, forms and ceremonies. The One God was worshipped in the form of Aten or Aton. .possibly the Egyptian form of the Semitic name Adou, Lord. The symbol of His beneficent Presence and work was the Solar Disc without other form of visible attribute. We may view its formulation as a conception to be compared with the idea of God held by Abraham’s father, Terah, and by such other Semites as had not been influenced by the Revelation to Abraham. But then we know that the Israelites themselves between the time

of Joseph and until the Revelations to Moses, possessed a poor conception of God as compared with that revealed in the Books of the later Law.

Whilst, therefore, Aten worship may have been a debased form of the worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we must not forget the possibility of the visible attribute of the One God, as seen in His work, being held out to the Egyptians as something tangible, to their priest-ridden understanding, of what the One God could mean to them. As to this, let the matter be explained by the French Egyptologist, M. Moret. This great authority on Egyptian religion states concerning the new Semitic form of worship in Egypt under Amenhotep IV; or as he called himself, Khounaten (i.e., Akhen-aten) :—

“*The king’s desire,*” says M. Moret, “*seems to have been this: to direct the adoration of the Egyptians towards a god who would not be the artificial creator of a priest hood peculiar to one town, or exclusively national in character, but towards a god incarnating a force in nature, and therefore able to be universally understood and revered*”

“*It is, perhaps, the first time in the history of the world that we see a king calling to the strangers, Semites and Nubians, his newly conquered subjects, to come and worship, side by side, with his own people, Aton, the Father of All. For the first time, religion is regarded as a bond which binds together men of different race, language, and colour. The god Of Khounaton does not distinguish between Egyptians and Barbarians. All men are equally his sons and should be considered as brothers.*”

“*Khounaton made him god of the Egyptian Empire at a very opportune moment, when Egypt, extending her conquests beyond her frontiers, incorporates new subjects in Syria and Nubia.*” “*From this point of view, the attempt of Amenophis (Amenhotep) IV was something more than a politicalreaction against the encroaching ambition of the high-priests of Amon*”

“*.....In the hymn of El-Amarna, there is expressed with sublime elevation, a feeling of gratitude for a God who is a universal Providence, who extends His care not only to men of diverse races but to animals and plants, a feeling of fraternity with the humblest being in Nature, who, endowed with life, may join in giving forth praise to his Creator.*”

The reign of the pharaoh who established this Semitic form of worship marked the summit of Semitic supremacy in Egypt. His well-meant religious reform was the means of the downfall of Semitic power in Egypt. During the course of his reign of 16 years, the priestly intrigues of the followers of the powerful Egyptian cult of the god Amen-ra, formerly supreme, centred around the representative of a hitherto obscure family. This sinister figure in Egyptian politics was a certain Pa-Ramessu, who about 50 years later, as Ramessu I, the grandfather of Ramessu II, was associated as coregent with the last king of Dynasty XVIII. (Refer Plate LXI and Annotations.)

¹ The type here described by Petrie is the true Semitic type prior to the Roman Dispersion of the Jews. Sir Gardner Wilkinson (Anc. Egyptians, Vol. II, 197-198) draws attention to this fact. Holman Hunt, in his visit to Palestine for his type of Christ, observed that the descendents of Jews there, who had never left Palestine, were, during the 19th Century, of the same Semitic type described by Petrie and Wilkinson. Refer the prediction of the change in the Prophecies of Isaiah (III, 9 ; LXV, 15) and Jeremiah (XXIV, 9).