
A
DISSERTATION
CONCERNING THE
HEBREW LANGUAGE,
LETTERS, VOWEL-POINTS, and ACCENTS.

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Of the Antiquity of the Hebrew Language.

ACCORDING to the *Targum* of *Onkelos*, on *Gen. ii. 7.* when GOD breathed into man the breath of life, that became in man רוח ממללא a *speaking spirit*, or soul; or, as *Jonathan* paraphrases it, the soul in the body of man became a *speaking spirit*; that is, man was endued with a natural faculty of speech; so that he may be defined as well *ab oratione*, a speaking animal, as *a ratione*,

a reasonable one ; for speech is proper and peculiar to men : when it is said, man is endued, as all men are, with a natural faculty of speaking, it is not to be understood, as if he was endued with a faculty of speaking some particular language ; but with a power and capacity of speaking any language he hears, or is taught ; I say hears, because unless a man has the sense of hearing, he cannot express any articulate sounds, or words : hence such persons as are totally deaf from their birth, are always dumb, and can never speak any language. *Adam* first heard the LORD GOD speaking, before he uttered a word himself, as it seems from the sacred history. The language *Adam* spake, and which, perhaps, he received not the whole instantaneously, but gradually ; in which he improved, as circumstances, and the necessity of things required, and which was continued in his posterity : this very probably is that which remained to the confusion of the tongues at *Babel*, and the dispersion of the people from thence. But of this more hereafter.

SOME have fancied, that if children, as soon as born, were brought up in a solitary place, where they could not hear any language spoken, that at the usual time children begin to speak, they would speak the first and primitive language that was spoken in the world. *Psammitichus*, king of *Egypt*, made trial of this by putting two children, newly born, under the care of a shepherd; charging him, that not a word should be uttered in their presence; and that they should be brought up in a cottage by themselves; and that goats should be had to them at proper times to suckle them; and commanded him to observe the first word spoken by them, when they left off their inarticulate sounds. Accordingly, at two years end, the shepherd opening the door of the cottage, both the children with their hands stretched out cried *bec, bec*. This he took no notice of at first, but it being frequently repeated, he told his lord of it, who ordered the children to be brought to him; and when *Psammitichus* heard them pronounce the word, he enquired what people used it, and upon enquiry found that the *Phrygians*

called bread by that name ; upon this it was allowed that the *Phrygians* were a more ancient people than the *Egyptians*, between whom there had been a long contest about antiquity. This is the account given by *Herodotus*^a ; but the *Scholiast* of *Aristophanes*^b says, that it was at three year's end the king ordered a man to go in silently to them, when he heard them pronounce the above word. And so *Suidas*^c relates, that at the same term of time, the king ordered one of his friends to go in silently, who heard and reported the same ; and all of them observe, that the story is differently related by others ; as that the children were delivered to a nurse or nurses, who had their tongues cut out, that they might not speak before them ; and so says *Tertullian*^d : yet they all agree in the word spoken by the children. But, as *Suidas* observes, if the former account is true, as it seems most probable, that they were nourished by goats, and not women ; it is no wonder, that often hearing the bleating of the goats, *be-ec, be-ec*, they should

^a Euterpe five, l. 2. c. 2, 3.
150.
l. 1. c. 8.

^c VOCE ΒΕΚΚΕΣΙΛΗΝΕ.

^b In Nubes, p.
^d Ad Nationes,

imitate the sound, and say after them *bec*, which in the *Phrygian* language signified *bread*; and so food is expressed in *Hebrew* by a word of a similar sound בֶּג *beg*, *Ezek.* xxv. 7. *Dan.* i. 8. and xi. 26. and might as well be urged in favour of the antiquity of that language; but this proves nothing.

It may seem needless to enquire what was the first language that was spoken, and indeed it must be so, if what some say is true, that it is not now in being, but was blended with other languages, and lost in the confusion at *Babel*; and also if the *Oriental* languages, the *Hebrew*, *Samaritan*, *Chaldee*, *Syriac*, *Arabic*, and *Ethiopic*, are but one language; which is more probable, as *Ravius* * thinks, and so may go under the general name of the *Eastern* language; and it must be acknowledged there is a very great similarity between them, as not only appears from *Ravius*, but from the *Pentaglot* Lexicon of *Schindler*, and especially from the *Harmonic Grammars and Lexicons* of *Hottinger* and *Castell*; and yet I cannot but be of opinion, that the *Hebrew* language stands di-

* A Discourse of the Oriental Tongues, p. 38, 39

tinguished by its simplicity and dignity. The celebrated *Albert Schultens*^f reckons the *Hebrew, Chaldee, Syriac, and Arabic* languages, as sister-dialects of the primæval language; which I am content they should be accounted, allowing the *Hebrew* to be the pure dialect, which the others are a deviation from, and not so pure: though I should rather chuse to call them daughters, than sisters of the *Hebrew* tongue; since, as *Jerom* says^g, the *Hebrew* tongue is the mother of all languages, at least of the oriental ones. And these daughters are very helpful and assisting to her their mother in her declining state, and now reduced as to purity to the narrow limits of the sacred scriptures; for I cannot prevail upon myself to agree that she should be stripped of her maternal title, dignity, and honour; since she has the best claim to be the primitive language, as will be seen hereafter. Dr. *Hunt*^h, though he is of the same mind with *Schultens*, that the above languages are sisters,

^f Præfat. ad Comment. in Job. & in Prov. & Orat. de Ling. Arab. Franeker. 1729. & altera Lugd. Batav. 1732.
^g Comment. in Soph. c. 3. fol. 100. A. ^h Orat. de Antiqu. &c. Ling. Arabic. p. 3. 49. 53. Oxon. 1738. & Orat. de usu Dialect. Orient. p. 2. Oxon. 1748.

having the same parent, the *Eastern* language, yet seems to allow the *Hebrew* to be the elder sister. And *Schultens*ⁱ himself asserts, that the primæval language, which was from the beginning of the world spoken by our first parents, and the antediluvian patriarchs, and after the flood to the dispersion, is the same which was afterwards called *Hebrew*, from *Heber*; from whom it passed through *Peleg* and *Abraham* to the nation of the *Hebrews*, and so the mother-language; but how it could be both mother and sister, is not easy to say.

THAT there was but one language spoken by men, from *Adam* to the flood in the times of *Noah*, and from thence to the confusion and dispersion at *Babel*, seems manifest from *Gen. xi. 1. and the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech*; and which is confirmed by the testimonies of several heathen writers, as by *Sibylla* in *Josephus*^k, by *Abydenus*^l, and others; and which continued in that interval without any, or little variation: the longevity of the

ⁱ Vid. Orationes supradictas, p. 6, 41.

l. 1. c. 4. §. 3.

l. 9. c. 14. p. 416.

^k Antiqu.

^l Apud Euseb. Evangel. Præpar.

patriarchs much contributed to this, for *Adam* himself lived to the 10th century, and the flood was in the 17th. *Metbuselah*, who died a little before the flood, lived upwards of two hundred years in the days of *Adam*, and 600 years cotemporary with *Noah*, and who doubtless spoke the same language that *Adam* did ; yea *Lamech*, the father of *Noah*, was born 50 years or more before the death of *Adam* ; so that the language of *Adam* to the days of *Noah* is easily accounted for as the same : if any variation, it must be in the offspring of those of the patriarchs who removed from them, and settled in different parts of the world, but of this there is no proof ; the separation of *Cain* and his posterity on account of religion, does not appear to have produced any alteration in language ; but the same language was spoken by one as another, as is evident by the names of persons in the line of *Cain*, and of places inhabited by them to the time of the flood ; when, no doubt, the same language was spoken by *Noah*, from whom his sons received it, and was continued unto the dispersion, which before that was but one ; and it is

the opinion of the *Persian* priests or *Magi*, that the time will come when the earth will be of one language again §; and if so, it is probable it will be the primitive one, but what that was, is the thing to be enquired into. The *Targums* of *Jonatban* and *Onkelos* on the place, add, by way of explanation, “and they spoke in the holy tongue, “ in which the world was created at the “ beginning,” meaning the *Hebrew* language, usually called the holy tongue; and this is the sense of *Jarchi*, *Aben Ezra*, and the Jewish writers in general, and of many Christians. But most nations have put in a claim for the superior antiquity of their nation and language, the *Europeans* not excepted. *Goropius Becanus* pleaded for the *Teutonic* language, or that which is spoken in lower *Germany* and *Brabant*, to be the original one, and attempted to derive the *Hebrew* from it; but it has been thought he was not serious in it, only did it to shew his *acumen*, and the luxuriancy of his fancy and imagination; the eastern nations have a much better pretext to antiquity, and most, if not all of them, have

§ Plutarch. de Iside & Osir. p. 370.

put in their claim for it. There was a long contest between the *Egyptians* and *Phrygians* about this matter, as before observed. The *Armenians* have urged in their favour, that the ark rested on one of the mountains in their country, where *Noah* and his posterity continued some time, and left their language there. The *Arabs* pretend, that their language was spoken by *Adam* before his fall, and then changed into *Syriac*, and was restored upon his repentance, but again degenerated, and was in danger of being lost, but was preserved by the elder *Jorham*, who escaped with *Noah* in the ark, and propagated it among his posterity. The *Chinese* make great pretensions to the primitive language, and many things are urged in their favour, as the antiquity of their nation, their early acquaintance with arts and sciences, the singularity, simplicity, and modesty of their tongue^k. A countryman of ours, in the last century, published a treatise, called “An historical essay, endeavouring a probability that the language of *Cbina* is the primitive language, by *J. Webb*, Esq; *London*, 1669,

^k See the *Universal History*, Vol. 1. p. 346, 347.

8vo." But as when many candidates put up for a place, they are generally reduced to a few, and, if possible to two; the same method must be taken here; for the contest lies between the *Syriac* or *Chaldee*, and the *Hebrew*.

The *Chaldee* or *Syriac* language has its patrons for the antiquity of it; not only *Theodoret*, who was by birth a *Syrian*, and *Amyra* the *Maronite*, who are not to be wondered at, and others who have made it their favourite study; but even the *Arabic* writers, the more judicious of them, give it not only the preference to their own language in point of antiquity, but even make it as early as *Adam*. *Elmacinus* says¹, there are historians (*Arabic* ones) who affirm, that *Adam* and his posterity spoke the *Syriac* language until the confusion of tongues; and so *Abulpharagius* says^m, "of our doctors, *Basilius* and *Ephraim* assert, that unto *Eber* the language of men was one, and that that was *Syriac*, and in which God spoke to *Adam*;" and it must be allowed, that there are many things plausibly

¹ Apud Hottinger. Smegma l. 1. c. 8. p. 228. ^m Hist. Dynast. Dyn. 1. p. 16.

said in favour of this language being primitive: it must be owned that the *Chaldean* nation was a very antient one, *Jen.* v. 15. and that the *Syriac* language was spoken very early, as by *Laban*; but not earlier than the *Hebrew*, which was spoken at the same time by *Jacob*; the one called the heap of stones which was a witness between them *Jegar-sahadutha* in the *Syro-Chaldean* language, and the other *Galeed* in *Hebrew*, which both signify the same thing: what is commonly urged is as follows:

I. THAT the names of a man and woman are as much alike, if not more so, in the *Chaldee* or *Syriac* language, as in the *Hebrew*; a man is called *Gabra* and a woman *Gabretha*, which is equally as near as *Ish* and *Ishah* produced to prove the antiquity of the *Hebrew*, *Gen.* ii. 23. But neither in the *Chaldee* of *Onkelos*, nor in the *Syriac* version of that place, is it *Gabretha*, but *Ittetba* in the one, and *Antetba* in the other. *Theodoret*^a instances in the names *Adam*, *Cain*, *Abel*, *Noah*, as proper to the *Syriac* language; but the de-

^a In *Gen.* quæst. 59.

riuation of them from the *Hebrew* tongue is more clear and manifest.

2. THAT it is rather agreeable to truth, that the primæval and common language before the confusion should remain in the country where the tower was built and the confusion made, which was in *Chaldea*, and therefore the *Chaldee* language, must be that language^o; but rather the contrary seems more natural, that the language, confounded and corrupted, should continue in the place where the confusion was made, and that those possessed of the pure and primitive language should depart from thence, as in fact they afterwards did.

3. IT is observed^p, that both *Eber* and *Abraham* were originally *Chaldeans*, and were brought up in *Chaldea*, and so must speak the language of that country, which therefore must be prior to the *Hebrew*; but it should be considered, that not only *Eber* but *Abraham* lived before the confusion and dispersion; for if the confusion was in the latter end of *Peleg's* days^q, *A-*

^o Myricæi Præfat. ad Gram. Syro-Chald.

^p Ibid.

^q So R. Jose in Seder Olam Rabba c. 1. p. 1. Abarbinel in Pentateuch. fol. 51. 3. Juchasin, fol. 8. 1. Shalshalet Hakabala, fol. 1. 2.

Abraham, according to the *Jewish* chronology, must be 48 years of age †, and consequently possessed of the pure and primitive language, be it what it may; and since it does not appear that either he or any of his posterity, as *Isaac* and *Jacob*, used the *Chaldee* language, but the *Hebrew* only, it seems to follow, that not the *Chaldee*, but the *Hebrew*, must be the language spoken by him, and so the primitive one.

4. It is said †, the *Hebrews* sprung from the *Chaldeans*, *Judith* v. 5. and so their language must be later than theirs; this is founded on *Abraham's* being of *Ur* of the *Chaldees*, from whence he came; but it does not follow, that because he was born and lived in that country before the confusion of *Babel*, that therefore he spoke the language used in that country afterwards, since he was soon called out of it; and it appears that he spoke not the *Chaldee* or *Syriac* language, but the *Hebrew*, as before observed.

5. It is urged †, as highly probable, that the language the second *Adam* spake, the

† Seder Olam, ib.

‡ Myricæus, ut supra.

§ Ibid.

first *Adam* did ; now *Christ* and his *Apostles*, and the people of the *Jews* in their times, spoke in the *Syriac* language, as appears from *Matt. xxvii. 46. Mark v. 41. and vii. 34.* but according to some learned men, as *Mafius*^t, and *Fabricius Boderianus*^u, this was not the ancient language of the *Syrians* and *Chaldeans*, but a new language, which had its first rise in the *Babylonish* captivity, and was a mixture of *Chaldee* and *Hebrew*; tho' rather the mixture began in the times of the *Seleucidæ*, the *Syrian* kings, who entered into and distressed *Judea*; and therefore no argument can be taken from it in favour of the *Syriac* being the primitive language. I proceed now to propose the arguments that are, or may be used in favour of the *Hebrew* language being the primitive one; and the

First, may be taken from the alphabet of the tongue itself, which appears to be the first alphabet of all the eastern languages. The *Chaldee* or *Syriac*, *Phœnician* or *Samaritan*, have their alphabets manifestly from it; the names, the number, and order of their letters, and even the form and ducts of

^t Præfat. ad Gram. Syr. ^u Præfat. ad Diction. Syro-Chald.

them seem to be taken from thence, and to be corrupt deviations from it; and the *Arabic* language, tho' the order of its alphabet is somewhat disturbed, yet the names of most of the letters are plainly from the *Hebrew*; and so indeed is the greater part of the names of letters in the *Greek* alphabet, from whence the *Romans* have taken theirs, and other *European* nations.^v *Hermannus Hugo* observes, that it is agreed among all, that from the names of the *Hebrew* characters, the letters of all nations have their names; now that language, whose alphabet appears to be the first, and to give rise to the alphabets of other tongues, bids fairest to be the first and primitive language: let it be observed that the *Hebrew* alphabet, as it now is, is exactly the same as it was in the days of *David* and *Solomon*, so early it can be traced; for it is to be seen in the 119th *Psalms*, and in others, and in the last chapter of the book of *Proverbs*, as well as in the book of *Lamentations*, written before or at the beginning of the *Babylonish* captivity.

^v De prima scribendi orig. c. 7. p. 65.

Secondly, Another argument for the antiquity of the *Hebrew* language, may be formed from the perfection and purity of it. *Abraham de Balmis* ^w says of it, that “ it is perfect in its letters and in its points. “ Our language, says he, is the most perfect language, and in its writing the most “ perfect of all writings of all languages ; “ there is nothing wanting, and there is “ nothing redundant in it, according to the “ laws and rules of things perfect and complete.” It consists of words which most fully and effectually express the nature of the things signified by ’em ; its roots, which are of a certain number, are, for the most part, of three letters only, and it has no exotic or strange words used in it. Whoever compares it with the *Syriac* or *Chaldee*, will easily perceive the difference as to the purity of ’em, and that the *Chaldee* is derived from the *Hebrew*, and is later than that ; for as *Scaliger* long ago observed ^x מלך *Melech* must be before מלכא *Malca*, the latter being derived from the former ; and the same may be observed in a multitude of other instances : now that

^w Mikneh Abraham, p. 39. lin. 13, 14, 15.
ad Thompson. Ep. 242.

^x Epist.

which is perfect, pure, and underived, must be before that which is imperfect, corrupt, and derived; or, as the philosopher^y expresses it, that which is vicious and corrupt must be later than that which is incorrupt.

Thirdly, The *Paronomasia* which *Adam* used when he called his wife *woman*, may be thought to be a good proof of the antiquity of the *Hebrew* language; since it will agree with that language only, *she shall be called Ishah, woman, because she was taken, meish, out of man, Gen. ii. 23.* which *paronomasia* does not appear neither in the *Syriac* version, nor in the *Chaldee* paraphrases of *Onkelos* and *Jonathan*, in which tho' *Gabra* is used of a man, yet never *Gabretha* of a woman, not even in places where men and women are spoken of together; see the *Syriac* version and *Chaldee* paraphrase of *Exod. xxxv. 22. Deut. ii. 34.* and many other places; and the reason for it is plain, the word is expressive of power and might, and so not so proper to be used of the weaker sex. The *Syriac* or *Chaldee* language will not admit of such an allusion

^y Aristot. de Republica, l. 3. c. 1.

as is in the text ; for on the one hand, as *Gabra* is used for a man, and not *Gabretha* for a woman, so on the other hand, *Itta*, *Ittetha*, and *Intetha* or *Antetha*, are used for a woman, but never *Itt* for a man. Now as we prove that the additions to the book of *Daniel* were written in *Greek*, from the *paronomasia* in ch. xiii. 55. 59. so this seems to prove that the language *Adam* spoke in to his wife must be the *Hebrew* language, and consequently is the primitive one.^z

Fourthly, The names of persons and places before the confusion at *Babel*, are in the *Hebrew* language, and are plainly derived from words in it; as *Adam* from אָדָם *Adamah*, earth, out of which he was formed, as is generally thought. *Eve*, from הַיָּה *Chayah*, to live, because the mother of all living ; *Cain* from קָיָה to get, obtain, possess, being gotten from the Lord ; *Abel*, from הֶבֶל *Hebel*, vanity, as his life was ; and *Seth*, from שֵׁת *Seth*, put, appointed, because put, set, or appointed another seed in the room of *Abel*^a : and so all the names of the *Antediluvian* patri-

^z Vid. Bereshit Rabba f. 18. fol. 15. 2.
 spher Cosri, par. 1. c. 68.

^a Vid. Se-

archs down to *Noah* and his sons, and their names also, with all those before the confusion and dispersion at *Babel*; and likewise the names of places, as of the garden of *Eden*, from נֶגַד delight, pleasure, it being a very pleasant place; and the land of *Nod* from נָדַד to wander about; *Cain* being an exile and wanderer in it: now these being the names of persons and places before the confusion of tongues, clearly shew what language was spoken before that time, namely the *Hebrew*, which therefore seems to be the primitive one.

Fifthly, It is notorious that the law and the prophets, or the books of the old testament, were written in the *Hebrew* tongue. The law was written in it on two tables of stone by the finger of God himself, and the sacred books were written in the same language, under divine inspiration. Now it is reasonable to conclude, that the same language God wrote and inspired the prophets to write in, he himself spoke in to *Adam*, and inspired him with it, or however gave him a faculty of speaking it, and which he did speak, and therefore may be concluded to be the first and primitive tongue.

IT now remains only to be enquired into, why this language is called *Hebrew*. It is supposed by some to have its name from *Eber*, the father of *Peleg*, in whose days the earth was divided, and from whom the *Hebrews* sprung and have their name^b; and which opinion has been most generally received. Others think it has its name from אבר *Abar*, to pass over, from *Abraham's* passing over the river *Euphrates* into the land of *Canaan*; this notion *Aben Ezra* makes mention of on *Exod.* xxi. 2. and has been espoused by *Theodoret*^c among the ancients, and indeed according to *Origen*† the word *Hebrew* signifies *passer over*, and so *Jerom*; and by *Scaliger*^d and *Arias Montanus*^e among the moderns, in which they have been followed by many. The matter is not of very great consequence, but I must confess I am most inclined to the former; for as *Austin*^f observes, before the confusion language was one, and common to all, and needed no name to distinguish it; it was enough to call it the speech of man, or the human language; but when there

^b Suidas in voce Εβραϊοι.

^c Theodoret. in Gen.

Qu. 60. † Comment. in Matth. p. 239. Ed. Huet. et in Num. Homil. fol. 19. 129. E. Reuchlin. de verbo mirific. l. 3. c. 13.

^d Epist. ad Thompson. et ad Ubertum.

^e Canaan c. 9. 10.

^f De Civ. Dei, l. 16. c. 11.

was a confusion of tongues, and so more than one, it became necessary to distinguish them by names; and what name more proper for the first language than that of *Hebrew*, from *Eber*, the last man in whose days it was alone and common to all? for in his son's days the earth was divided into different nations, speaking different languages. Moreover, *Shem* is said to be *the Father of all the children of Eber*, Gen. iv. 21. or as *Jonathan* paraphrases it, of all the children of the *Hebrews*, or of *Hebrew* children: respect is had, as the learned *Rivet*^f observes, to the blessing of *Shem*, in opposition to the curse of *Ham*, Gen. ix. 25. 26. Now as *Canaan* sprung from *Ham*, and was the father of the *Canaanites*, so *Eber* sprung from *Shem* and was the father of the *Hebrews*; and as afterwards they were called the children of *Israel*, and *Israelites* from *Israel*, and the children of *Judah* and *Jews* from *Judah*; so the children of *Eber* or *Hebrews* from him, and with equal propriety the language they spoke may be called *Hebrew* from him; and their country likewise, as in Gen. xl. 15. for it does not seem probable that the

^f In Gen. Exercitat. 66. p. 319.

land of *Canaan* should be called the land of the *Hebrews*, as it is there, so early as in the youth of *Joseph*, from a single family being passengers, travellers, and strangers in it, which are characters not very respectful and honourable, nor distinguishing; but rather from *Eber*, who, and his immediate offspring, might inhabit it,^ε it being that part assigned and divided to 'em at the division of the earth, *Deut.* xxxii. 8. out of which they might be driven by the *Canaanites*, see *Gen.* xiii. 7. and xiv. 1, 4. therefore it was an act of justice to dispossess them and replace the children of *Eber* in it: and this may also serve to account for the names of places in pure *Hebrew* in old *Canaan*, by which they were called, when *Joshua* made a conquest of it, as well as in the time of *Abraham*, since it was the land of *Eber* before it was the land of *Canaan*; if *Melchizedeck* was *Shem*, as the *Jews* in general believe, he was king of a city in it, and *Eber* his first born had a right unto it, claim'd by *Chedarlomer*, a descendant of his, who attempted the rescue of it from the *Canaanites*, who had usurped a power over it, at least over

^ε See Dr. Lightfoot, vol. ii. p. 327.

some part of it; and it is easy to observe³ that in the prophecy of *Balaam*, *Numb.* xxiv. 24. as the *Affyrians* are called *Afbur*, from their original progenitor, so the *Hebrews* have the name of *Eber* from him; and so the word *Eber* there is rendered *Hebrews* by the *Septuagint* and other translators; and as they, so their language, may be called from him. As to what is objected^h, that *Eber* and *Abraham* were *Chaldeans*, and spoke the *Chaldee* language, this has been reply'd to already; and whereas it is observed, that from the time of *Eber* to *Abraham*, no one is ever called an *Hebrew* from him; it is not to be wondered at, since *Eber* lived to the time of *Abraham*, and even to the time of *Jacob*, according to both the Jewish and Scripture-chronology.

THE foundation of the other opinion, that the *Hebrews* and their language have their name from *Abraham's* passing over the *Euphrates* to the land of *Canaan*, is the *Septuagint* version of *Gen.* xiv. 13. which instead of *Abraham* the *Hebrew*, reads τῷ περατῇ the transitor or passer over;

^b Erpen. Orat. de Ling. Heb. c. 2. p. 4.

¹ Seder Olam Rabba.

tho' perhaps no more is meant by that version, than that he was, as *Juvenal*^k expresses it, *natus ad Euphratem*, born near the river *Perat*, for that is its name in *Hebrew*; but whatever may be said for *Abraham's* being called an *Hebrew* from such a circumstance, it can scarcely be thought that a whole nation should be denominated from such an action of a remote ancestor, when they themselves passed not over the same river; besides there were multitudes who passed over the *Euphrates* besides *Abraham*, who yet never were so called; as *Canaan* and his posterity must pass over it, when they removed from *Shinar* to the land afterwards called by their name; and indeed *Erpenius*^l is of opinion that the *Canaanites* were first called *Hebrews*, or passers over, by the *Chaldeans*, because they passed over the river *Jordan* into the country which lay between that and the *Mediterranean* sea, afterwards called from them the land of *Canaan*; and that *Abraham* had not his name from his passage into it, but from his dwelling there, and learning their language; hence his posterity were called *Hebrews*, and the *Hebrew* language the lan-

^k Satyr. 1. v. 104.

^l Ut supra.

guage of *Canaan*, *Is.* xix. 18. and the same writer thinks, that if the *Hebrews* were only those of the family of *Jacob*, they would not have been so well known to the *Egyptians* in the time of *Joseph* as they were: but to all this it may be reply'd, that the *Canaanites* were ever called *Hebrews*, does not appear from any writers, sacred or prophane; nor is it probable that the pure and primitive language, that is the *Hebrew*, as has been shewn, should be left with and continued in the race of *Canaan*; and still more improbable, that *Abraham* should learn it of them, who was possessed of the first and primitive language before the confusion of tongues, as has been observed, and before he came into the land of *Canaan*; besides he seems to be called *Abraham* the *Hebrew*, *Gen.* xiv. 13. to distinguish him from *Mamre*, *Eshcol*, and *Aner*, who were *Canaanites*, confederates with him; nor is the *Hebrew* language called the language of *Canaan*, because first spoken by the *Canaanites*, but because the people of *Israel* spoke it, who for a long time had inhabited the land^m

^m Vid Glos in T. Bab. Menachot, fol. 109. 2. & Abarbanel. in li. xix. 18.

which bore that name; nor need it seem strange, that the name of *Hebrew* should be so well known in *Potiphar's* family, and to the *Egyptians* in *Joseph's* time, when he himself told them, no doubt, that he was an *Hebrew*, as he told the chief butler, *Gen.* xxxix. 17. and xli. 12. and especially if what has been before observed concerning the land of the *Hebrews*, can be established, *Gen.* xl. 15. as being inhabited by *Eber* and his sons, before the *Canaanites* possessed it.

THERE are other etymologies of the name of the *Hebrews* and their language, which scarce deserve any notice; as that they have their name from *Abraham*; so *Artapanus*ⁿ, an heathen writer, says the *Jews* are called *Hebrews* from *Abraham*, but there are but few that have embraced this notion; others say, they are so called from *Eberbanaar*, which signifies beyond or the *other side* of the river, that is, of the *Euphrates*, where *Abraham* and his father *Terah* dwelt, and from whence *Abraham* is said to be taken; but there were many besides them, even whole nations who dwelt beyond that river, who were never called *Hebrews*,

ⁿ Apud Euseb. Evangel. Præpar. l. 9. c. 18.

nor can any good reason be given, why these and their posterity and their language should be called *Hebrew* from thence, tho many, both *Jews* and *Christians*, have imbibed this notion^o: *Eusebius* †, tho' he thinks the *Hebrews* had their name from *Eber*, yet as the word signifies a passer over, not from one country to the other, but from the vanity of the things of this present world, to the study of divine things, and in which they rested not, but passed on in search of more recondite knowledge: perhaps, after all, the true original of the name may be taken from the place of *Abraham's* birth, who is first called *העברי* the *Hebrew*, or rather the *Ibrite*, *Gen.* xiv. 13. the place of his birth was *Ur* of the *Chaldees*, as *Aben Ezra*^p rightly judges, since it is expressly said to be the land of his brother *Haran's* nativity, and therefore most probably his also; now *Ur* of the *Chaldees* is called *עברא זעירא* *Ibra Zeira*^q and so *Abraham* might have this epithet from the place of his nativity, the *Ibrite*, to distinguish him, as before observed, from

^o Vid. Buxtorf. de Ling. Heb. Conservat. f. 32. 33.

† Evangel. Præpar. l. 9. c. 6. p. 520. ^p Comment. in Gen. xi 28. ^q T. Bab. Bava Bathra, fol. 91. 1. & Gloss. in Ib.

the *Amorites*, among whom he then dwelt, and whence his posterity frequently afterwards have the name of יְבֻרִי or *Ibrites*, *Gen.* xxxix. 14. 17. and xl. 15. and xliii. 32.

ONE thing more I would just observe, that whether the *Hebrews* and their language are so called either from *Eber*, the father of *Peleg*, or from *Abar*, to pass over, or from *Eber*, beyond, or the other side of the river, or from *Ibra* the native place of *Abraham*; tho' custom has prevailed to write the word with an aspiration, *Hebrew* and *Hebrews*, it should be written without one, *Ebrew* and *Ebrews*, as words beginning with *y* usually are, as *Amminadib*, *Immanuel*, &c.