Ethiopians and the Hebrews have the same word for many objects which the other Semites call by other names—for instance, “stone,” “tree,” “enemy,” “enter,” “go out”; and the same may be said of Hebrew as compared with Sabaean. But to build theories upon such facts would be unsafe, since the words cited are either found, though with some change of mean- ing, in at least one of the cognate languages, or actually occur, perhaps quite exceptionally and in archaic writings, with the same signification. The sedentary habits of the Ethiopians and the Sabaeans may possibly have rendered it easier for them to retain in their vocabulary certain words which were used by the civilized Semites of the north, but which became obsolete amongst the Arabian nomads. To the same cause we may attribute the fact that in religion the Sabaeans seem to resemble the northern Semites more closely than do the tribes of central Arabia; but these considerations prove nothing in favour of a nearer linguistic affinity.

One thing at least is certain, that Arabic (with Sabaean, Mabri and Socotri) and Ethiopie stand in a comparatively close relationship to one another, and compose a group by themselves, as contrasted with the other Semitic languages, Hebraeo-Phoenician, Aramaic and Assyrian. Only in these southern dialects do we find, and that under forms substantially identical, the important innovation known as the “ broken plurals,” consisting in the employment of certain forms, denoting abstracts, for the expression of plurals. They agree, moreover, in employing a peculiar development of the verbal root, formed by inserting an *ā* between the first and second radicals (*qātala, taqātala),* in using the vowel *a* before the third radical in all active perfects—for example, (*h)aqtala, qattαla,* instead of the *haqtil, qattil* of the northern dialects—and in many other grammatical phenomena. This is not at all con- tradicted by the fact that certain aspirated dentals of Arabic (*th, dh,* z) are replaced in Ethiopie, as in Hebrew and Assyrian, by pure sibilants—that is, *s* (Hebrew and Assyrian *sh*), *z, ṣ—* whereas in Aramaic they are replaced by simple dentals (*t*, *d, ṭ),* which seem to come closer to the Arabic sounds. Still, after the separation of the northern and the southern groups, we suppose, the Semitic languages possessed all these sounds, as the Arabic does, but afterwards simplified them, for the most part, in one direction or the other. Hence there resulted, as it were by chance, occasional similarities. Even in many modern Arabic dialects *th, dh* become *t, d.@@*1 Ethiopie, moreover, has kept *d,* the most peculiar of Arabic sounds, distinct from *s,* whereas Aramaic has confounded it with the guttural *'ain,* and Hebrew and Assyrian with *ṣ*. It is therefore evident that all these languages once possessed the consonant in question as a distinct one. One sound, *sīn,* appears only in Hebrew, in Phoenician, and in the older Aramaic. It must originally have been pronounced very like *sh,* since it is represented in writing by the same character; in later times it was changed into an ordinary *s.* Assyrian does not distinguish it from *sh.@@*2 The division of the Semitic languages into the northern group and the southern is therefore justified by facts. Even if we were to discover really important gram- matical phenomena in which one of the southern dialects agreed with the northern, or vice versa, and that in cases where such phenomena could not be regarded either as remnants of primitive Semitic usage or as instances of parallel but independent development, we ought to remember that the division of the two groups was not necessarily a sudden and instantaneous occurrence, that even after the separation intercourse may have been carried on between the various tribes who spoke kindred dialects and were therefore still able to understand one another, and that intermediate dialects may once have existed, perhaps such as were in use

amongst tribes who came into contact sometimes with the agri- cultural population of the north and sometimes with the nomads of the south (see below). All this is purely hypothetical, whereas the division between the northern and the southern Semitic languages is a recognized fact. It is perfectly certain, moreover, that Hebraeo-Phoenician and Aramaic are closely related with each other, and form a group of their own, distinct even from Assyrian. In fact, Assyrian seems to be so completely *sui generis* that we should be well advised to separate it from all the cognate languages, as an independent scion of proto-Semitic. We should classify these languages consequently in the following order: (1) Assyrian; (2) the remaining Semitic languages, viz.: *A.* Hebraeo-Phoenician and Aramaic, *B.* the southern Semitic tongues.

Although we cannot deny that there may formerly have existed Semitic languages quite distinct from those with which we are acquainted, yet that such was actually the case cannot be proved. Nor is there any reason to think that the domain of the Semitic languages ever extended very far beyond its present limits. Some time ago many scholars believed that they were once spoken in Asia Minor and even in Europe, but, except in the Phoenician colonies, this notion rested upon no solid proof. It cannot be argued with any great degree of plausibility that even the Cilicians, who from a very early period held constant intercourse with the Syrians and the Phoenicians, spoke a Semitic language.

Assyrian.

Long before there existed any other Semitic culture, there flourished on the Lower Euphrates a sister language which has been preserved to us in the cuneiform inscriptions. It is usually called the Assyrian, after the name of the country where the first and most important excavations were made; but the term “Babylonian” would be more correct, as Babylon was the birthplace of this language and of the civilization to which it belonged. Certain Babylonian inscriptions go back to the fourth millennium before our era; but the great mass of these cuneiform inscriptions date from between 1000 and 500 B.C.

Assyrian differs in many respects from all the cognate languages. The ancient perfect has wholly disappeared, or left but few traces, and the gutturals, with the exception of the hard *kh,* have been smoothed down to a degree which is only paralleled in modern Aramaic dialects. So at least it would appear from the writing, or rather from the manner in which Assyriologists transcribe it. The Babylonian form *bēl* (occurring in Isa. xlvi. 1 ; Jer. 1. 2 and li. 44—passages all belonging to the 6th century B.c., and in many other ancient monuments), the name of the god who was originally called *ba't,* is a confirmation of this; but, on the other hand, the name of the country where Babylon was situated, viz. Shin'ar, and that of a Babylonian god, 'Anammelek (2 Kings xvii. 31), as well as those of the tribes Shō'a and Qō'a (Ezek. xxiii. 23) who inhabited the Assyrio-Babylonian territory, seem to militate against this theory, as they are spelt in the Old Testament with *'ain*. So, too, is the biblico-Aramaic word *te'em, ta'am,* “ order,” “ decree,” which is derived from the Assyrian; and we may also compare some Babylonian local names, *e.g. 'Anat. H* is found in the name of the town *Hīt,* and in the name of a man, written in Aramaic characters but formed quite in the Babylonian manner, *Hadadnadinakh.* Thus the Babylonians may have pronounced some gutturals, though they did not write them, precisely as the Persian cuneiform in- scriptions omit many *h's,* which, no doubt, were audible. The Assyrian system of writing is so complicated, and, in spite of its vast apparatus, is so imperfect an instrument for the accurate representation of sounds, that we are hardly yet bound to regard the transcriptions of contemporary Assyriologists as being in all points of detail the final dictum of science. However this may be, the present writer does not feel able to speak at greater length upon Assyrian. Attention may, however, be called to the fact, that, as might have been expected from the important rôle played by the Babylonians and Assyrians in the history of civilization and of peoples, many words passed over from their language into Hebrew and, more especially, into Aramaic, some of which attained a still wider vogue.@@3 (Compare the article Cuneiform.)

Hebrew.

Hebrew and Phoenician are but dialects of one and the same language. It is only as the language of the people of Israel that Hebrew can be known with any precision. Since in the Old

@@@1 In words borrowed from the literary language, *s*, *z*, habitually appear in place of *th, dh.*

@@@2 It is not quite certain whether all the Semitic languages originally had the hardest of the gutturals *gh* and *kh* in exactly the same places that they occupy in Arabic. In the case of *kh* we may assume so; since not only Arabic here agrees with Ethiopic, but Assyrian, also, has a particular guttural in roots which in Arabic have *kh.* But it would appear that in Hebrew and Aramaic the distinction between *gh* and '*ayin,* between *kh* and *ḥ* was often different from what it is in Arabic.

@@@3 So the Assyrian *mashkenü* was adopted into Hebrew and Aramaic as *miskēn;* from the Aramaic it was borrowed by Arabic and Ethiopie *(miskēn),* and from Arabic it found its way into the Romance languages *(mesquinho, mezquino, meschino, mesquin).*