Testament a few of the neighbouring peoples are represented as being descended from Eber, the eponym of the Hebrews, that is, are re- garded as nearly related to the latter, it was natural to suppose that they likewise spoke Hebrew—a supposition which, at least in the case of the Moabites, has been fully confirmed by the discovery of the Mesha inscription (date, soon after 900 B.c.). The language of this inscription scarcely differs from that of the Old Testament; the only important distinction is the occurrence of a reflexive form (with *t* after the first radical), which appears also in Arabic and Assyrian. We may remark in passing that the style of this inscription is quite that of the Old Testament, and enables us to maintain with certainty that a similar historical literature existed amongst the Moabites. But it must be remembered that ancient Semitic inscriptions exhibit, in a sense, nothing but the skeleton of the language, since they do not express the vowels at all, or do so only in certain cases; still less do they indicate other phonetic modifications, such as the doubling of consonants, &c. It is therefore very possible that *to the ear* the language of Moab seemed to differ considerably from that of the Judaeans.

The Mesha inscription is the only non-Israelite source from which any knowledge of ancient Hebrew yan be obtained. Still several Hebrew words occur even in the Tellel-Amarna letters, discovered in Egypt, and written in the Babylonian language by princes of Palestine during the second millennium B.c.

They clearly snow that the “ Hebrew ” language existed in Palestine even before the migration of the Israelites into Canaan. Some fragments in the Old Testament belong to the last centuries of the second millennium before our era—particularly the song of Deborah (Judges v.), a document which, in spite of its many obscurities in matters of detail, throws much light on the condition of the Israelites at the time when the Canaanites were still contending with them for the possession of the country. The first rise of an historical literature may very probably date from before the establishment of the monarchy. Various portions of the Old Testament belong to the time of the earlier kings; but it was under the later kings that a great part of extant Hebrew literature came into shape. To this age also belong the Gezer and the Siloam inscriptions and a daily increasing number of seals and gems bearing the names of Israelites.

The Hebrew language is thus known to us from a very ancient period. But we are far from being acquainted with its real phonetic condition in the time of David or Isaiah. For, much as we owe to the labours of the later Jewish schools, which with infinite care fixed the pronunciation of the sacred- text by adding vowels and other signs, it is evident that even at the best they could only represent the pronunciation of the language in its latest stage, not that of very early ages. Besides, their object was not to exhibit Hebrew simply as it was, but to show how it should be read in the solemn chant of the synagogue. Accordingly, the pronunciation of the older period may have differed considerably from that represented by the punctuation. Such differences are now and then indicated by the customary spelling of the ancient texts,@@1 and sometimes the orthography is directly at variance with the punctuation.@@2 In a few rare cases we may derive help from the somewhat older tradition contained in the representation of Hebrew words and proper names by Greek letters, especially in the ancient Alexandrine translation of the Bible (the so-called Septuagint). It is of particular importance to remark that this older tradition still retains an original *a* in many cases where the punctuation has the later *i* or *e*. We have examined this point somewhat in detail, in order to contradict the false but ever-recurring notion that the ordinary text of the Bible represents without any essential modifica­tion the pronunciation of ancient Hebrew, whereas in reality it expresses (in a very instructive and careful manner, it is true) only its latest development, and that for the purpose of solemn public recitation. A clear trace of dialectal differences within Israel is found in Judges xii. 6, which shows that the ancient Ephraimitcs

pronounced *samek* instead of *shīn.*

The destruction of the Judaean kingdom dealt a heavy blow to the Hebrew language. But it is going too far to suppose that it was altogether banished from ordinary life at the time of the exile, and that Aramaic came into use among all the Jews. In the East even small communities, especially if they form a religious body, often cling persistently to theîr mother-tongue, though they may be surrounded by a population of alien speech; and such was probably the case with the Jews in Babylonia. See Hebrew Language. Even so late as the time of Ezra, Hebrew was in all probability the ordinary language of the new community. In Neh. xiii. 24 we find a complaint that the children of Jews by wives from Ashdod and other places spoke half in the “ Jewish ” language and half in the language of Ashdod, or whatever else may have been the tongue of their mothers. No one

can suppose that Nehemiah would have been particularly zealous that the children of Jews should speak an Aramaic dialect with correctness. He no doubt refers to Hebrew as it was then spoken— a stage in its development of which Nehemiah’s own work gives a very fair idea.

After the time of Alexander large bodies of the Jewish population were settled in Alexandria and other western cities, and were very rapidly Hellenized. Meanwhile the principal language of Syria and the neighbouring countries, Aramaic, which had already become the language of the older Jewish colonies in Egypt (see below), and the influence of which may be perceived even in some pre-exilic writings, began to spread more and more among the Jews of Palestine. Hebrew gradually ceased to be the language of the people and became that of religion and the schools. The book of Daniel, written in 167 or 166 B.c., begins in Hebrew, then suddenly passes into Aramaic, and ends again in Hebrew. Similarly the redactor of Ezra (or more correctly of the Chronicles, of which Ezra and Nehemiah form the conclusion) borrows large portions from an Aramaic work, in most cases without translating them into Hebrew. No reason can be assigned for the use of Aramaic in Jewish works intended primarily for Jerusalem, unless it were already the dominant speech, whilst, on the other hand, it was very natural for a pious Jew to write in the ancient “ holy ” language even after it had ceased to be spoken. Esther, Ecclesiastes, and a few Psalms, which belong to the 3rd and 2nd centuries before our era, are indeed written in Hebrew, but are so strongly tinctured by the Aramaic influence as to prove that the writers usually spoke Aramaic. It is certain, of course, that there were still many Jews capable both of writing and speaking Hebrew. So the Book of Sirach, composed shortly after 200 B.c., was written in an almost absolutely pure Hebrew, as is proved by the portions of the original, amounting to about two- thirds of the whole, which have come to light in our day. But we are not likely to be far wrong in saying that in the Maccabean age Hebrew had died out among the Jews as a current popular language, and there is nothing to show that it survived longer among any of the neighbouring peoples.

But in the last period of the history of Jerusalem, and still more after the destruction of the city by Titus, the Jewish schools played so important a part that the life of the Hebrew language was in a manner prolonged. The lectures and discussions of the learned were carried on in that tongue. We have very extensive specimens of this more modern Hebrew in the Mishnah and other works, and scattered pieces throughout both Talmuds. But, just as the “ classical ” Sanskrit, which has been spoken and written by the Brahmans during the last twenty-five centuries, differs considerably from the language which was once in use among the people, so this “ language of the learned ” diverges in many respects from the “ holy language ”; and this distinction is one of which the rabbis were perfectly conscious. The “ language of the learned ” borrows a great part of its vocabulary from Aramaic,@@3 and this exercises a strong influence upon the grammatical forms. The grammar is perceptibly modified by the peculiar style of these writings, which for the most part treat of legal and ritual questions in a strangely laconic and pointed manner. But, large as is the proportion of foreign words and artificial as this language is, it contains a considerable number of purely Hebrew elements which by chance do not appear in the Old Testament. Although we may generally assume, in the case of a word occurring in the Mishnah but not found in the Old Testament, that it is borrowed from Aramaic, there are several words of this class which, by their radical consonants, prove themselves to be genuine Hebrew. And even some grammatical phenomena of this language are to be regarded as a genuine de- velopment of Hebrew, though they are unknown to earlier Hebrew speech.

From the beginning of the middle ages down to our own times the Jews have produced an enormous mass of writings in Hebrew, sometimes closely following the language of the Bible, sometimes that of the Mishnah, sometimes introducing in a perfectly inorganic manner a great quantity of Aramaic forms, and occasionally imitating the Arabic style. The study of these variations has but little interest for the linguist, since they are nothing but a purely artificial imita­tion, dependent upon the greater or less skill of the individual. The language of the Mishnah stands in much closer connexion with real life, and has a definite *raison d'etre;* all later Hebrew is to be classed with medieval and modern Latin. The dream of some Zionists, that Hebrew—a would-be Hebrew, that is to say—will again become a living, popular language in Palestine, has still less prospect of realization than their vision of a restored Jewish empire in the Holy Land. Much Hebrew also was written in the middle ages by the hostile brethren of the Jews, the Samaritans; but for the student of language these productions have, at the most, the charm attaching to curiosities.

@@@1 For example, we may conclude with tolerable certainty, from the presence and absence of the vowel-letters *y* and *w,* that in older times the accented *e* and *o* were not pronounced long, and that, on the other hand, the diphthongs *au* and *ai* were used for the later *ó* and é.

@@@2 The very first word of the Bible contains an Aleph *(spiritus lenis),* which is required by etymology and was once audible, but which the pronunciation represented by the point-system ignores.

@@@3 It is a characteristic feature that “ my father” and “my mother ” are here expressed by purely Aramaic forms. Even the learned did not wish to call their "papas ” and “ mammas ” by any other names than those to which they had been accustomed in infancy.