

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 עבר *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

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^b Suidas in voce Εβραϊστί. ^c Theodoret. in Gen. Qu. 60. † Comment. in Matth. p. 239. Ed. Haer. et in Num. Homil. fol. 10. 119. 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
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^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, * 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 *Chedariaomer*, a descendant of his, who attempted the rescue of it from the *Canaanites*, who had usurped a power over it, at least over
some

* See Dr. Lightfoot, vol. ii. p. 327.

some part of it; and it is easy to observe^r that in the prophecy of *Balaam*, *Numb.* xxiv. 24. as the *Affyrians* are called *Asbur*, 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 τω περατη the transitor or passer over; tho'

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

ⁱ Seder Olam Rabbah

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 language

^k Satyr. i. 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 *Hebrews*, 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 which

^m Vid Glos in T. Bab. Menachot, fol. 109. 2 & Abarbini. in *Is.* 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 *Eberhanaan*, 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*,

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* 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*: *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
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* Vid. Buxtorf. de Ling. Heb. Conservat. f. 22. 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 עִבְרִי 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.

C H A P. II.

Concerning the Antiquity of the Hebrew Letters.

IT has been a controversy among learned men, for a century or two past, whether the modern letters used by the *Jews*, and in which their sacred books are now extant, are the same in which the law and the prophets were originally written. This is denied by some, and it has been affirmed, that the original letters of the *Hebrews*, and in which the books of the Old Testament before the times of *Ezra* were written, were what are called *Samaritan*; and that *Ezra*, after the return of the *Jews* from the captivity in *Babylon*, changed these letters for the *Merubbab*, or square ones since in use; and in them wrote all the sacred books then in being, and gave the ancient letters to the *Samaritans*; and this notion has been embraced upon the testimonies of *Eusebius* and *Jerom*; the foundation of which appears to be a tradition of the *Jews*, and that far from being generally received by them. The former of these in his
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chronicle at A. M. 4740, writes, that “ it
 “ is affirmed, that *Ezra*, by the strength
 “ of his memory, compiled or put together
 “ the divine scriptures, and that they (the
 “ *Jews*) might not be mixed with the *Sa-*
 “ *maritans*, changed the *Jewish* letters:”
 now this passage of *Eusebius*, as *Marckius*^r
 observes, is not to be found in *Scaliger*’s
 editions of his chronicle, neither in the
 original *Greek*, nor in the *Latin* version;
 and the illustrious *Spanheim*^r has fully pro-
 ved, that it is spurious, and added to the
 text by some modern hand; and admitting
 it to be genuine, it smells rank of a *Jewish*
 tale, particularly that *Ezra* compiled the
 scriptures *memoriter*; and it is no difficult
 thing to account for it, from whence *Eu-*
sebius had it, if he had it at all; for since
 he was bishop of *Cæsarea*, where both *Jews*
 and *Samaritans* lived, he might receive this
 notion from the one or from the other;
 from the *Samaritans*, as *Buxtorff*^c con-
 jectures, who were continually boasting of
 their language and letters, in which, they
 say, the law was given, a copy of which
 they pretend to have, written by *Phinebas*
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^r Exercitat. in Matt. v. 18. f. 6. p. 67.
 Carpzov. Critic. par. 1. p. 240.
 f. 61.

^s Apud
^t De Literis Heb.

the son of *Eleazar* ; or rather he might have this account from the *Jews* that resided there. *Jerom*, who lived a little after *Eusebius*, and who might take what he writes from him, or rather from some of the *Jewish Rabbins* he had for his preceptors and instructors, for he had four of them at different times, is more confident, and says", "*certumque est, &c.* it is certain " that *Ezra* the scribe, and teacher of the " law, after *Jerusalem* was taken and the " temple rebuilt under *Zerubbabel*, found " other letters, which we now use, when to " that time the characters of the *Samari-* " *tans* and *Hebrews* were the same;" but how could *Jerom* be certain of this, who lived near a thousand years after the supposed fact? do *Ezra* or *Nebemias* give the least hint of such a change of letters, tho' they relate things of much less consequence than this? or do any of the other prophets suggest any thing of this kind? not the least syllable. Do *Josephus* or *Philo* the *Jew* say any thing about it? not one word, but the reverse, as will be seen hereafter: from whence and from whom then could *Jerom* be assured of it? from

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" Præfat. in lib. Reg. Tom. 3. fol. 5. L.

no other than his *Jews* and their traditions; from whom it is certain he received many things, as his treatise called *Quæstiones seu Traditiones Hebraicæ*, on various parts of scripture shew; which are all or most of them to be found in the *Talmud*, and other writings of the *Jews*, and particularly this. The *Jerusalem Talmud* was printed about the year 230, long enough before *Jerom*, for him to have knowledge of it at least from his instructors. The *Babylonian Talmud* was compiling in his time, tho' not finished before the year 500; but the traditions it consists of were well known before, being handed down from one to another, and with which *Jerom's Jews* could furnish him, and did. But what puts this matter out of all question, is a fragment of *Origen's*, published by *Montfaucon*^w, who also speaks of letters used by *Ezra* after the captivity, different from the more antient ones, and plainly declares from whom he had it, and opens to us the true source of this notion: “ in some accurate copies, “ he says, it (the word *Jehovah*) is written “ ten in antient *Hebrew* letters, but not “ in those now in use, *φασι γαρ*, for they say, D “ (that

^w Præliminar. in *Hexapla Origen.* p. 86.

“ (that is, the *Jews*) that *Ezra* used others
 “ after the captivity:” so that it clearly ap-
 pears to be a *Jewish* tradition; and it is
 not improbable, that *Jerom* had what he
 calls *certain*, from this passage of *Origen*,
 as well as from *Eusebius*, supposing the
 passage in him to be genuine; and in which
 he might be confirmed by his *Rabbins*; so
 that all that has been said about this mat-
 ter comes from the same fountain, a *Jewish*
 tradition. And the tradition respecting it
 in the *Jerusalem Talmud* * is as follows: “ it
 “ is a tradition; *R. Jose* says, *Ezra* was
 “ fit to have the law given by his hand,
 “ but that the age of *Moses* prevented it;
 “ yet tho’ it was not given by his hand,
 “ the writing and the language were;
 “ the writing was written in the *Syriac*
 “ tongue and interpreted in the *Syriac*
 “ tongue, *Ezra* iv. 7. and they could not
 “ read the writing, *Dan.* v. 8. from hence
 “ it is learnt, that it was given on the same
 “ day. *R. Nathan* says, the law was
 “ given in breaking, (in rude, rough, and
 “ broken letters, supposed to be meant of
 “ the *Samaritan*) and agrees with *R. Jose*;
 “ but *Rabbi* (i. e. *Judah Hakkodesh*) says
 “ the

* T. Hierof. Megillah, fol. 71. 2, 3.

“ the law was given in the *Affyrian* cha-
 “ racter (the square letter) and when they
 “ finned, it was turned into breaking,
 “ (into a rough, and broken character) and
 “ when they were worthy, in the days of
 “ *Ezra*, it was turned to them again in
 “ the *Affyrian* character, according to *Zach.*
 “ ix. 12. It is a Tradition; *R. Simeon ben*
 “ *Eleazer* says, on the account of *R. Ele-*
 “ *azer Ben Parta*, who also says, on the
 “ account of *Eliezer Hammodai*, the law
 “ was written in the *Affyrian* character.”
 As it stands in the *Babylonian Talmud* ^y, it
 is thus expressed: “ *Mar Zutra*, or as
 “ others *Mar Ukba*, says, at first the law
 “ was given to *Israel* in the writing beyond
 “ the river, (or the *Samaritan*) and the
 “ holy tongue; and again it was given to
 “ them, in the days of *Ezra*, in the *Affy-*
 “ *rian* writing, and *Syriac* tongue; they
 “ chose for the *Israelites* the *Affyrian* wri-
 “ ting and the holy tongue, and left to the
 “ *Ideots* the writing beyond the river, and
 “ the *Syriac* tongue. Who are the *Ideots*? *R.*
 “ *Chasda* says, the *Cutbites* (i. e. the *Sama-*
 “ *ritans*): what is the writing beyond the

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“ river ?

^y T. Bab. Sanhedrin, fol. 21. 2. and 22. 1. and Zeba-
 chim, fol. 62. 1. and Glos. in ib.

“ river ? *R. Chafda* says, the *Libonæan* writing ;” which the *Gloss* explains of great letters, such as are written in amulets and on door-posts. Now tho’ this account is far from being clear and plain, as to what is the sense of these *Rabbins* ; yet admit it to be the sense of *R. Jose*, and of *Mar Zutra* or *Ukba*, that the law was written in *Samaritan* characters ; to which if you add *R. Nathan*, as agreeing with them, there are but three on that side of the question ; whereas there are four who affirm it to be written in the *Assyrian*, or square character, namely, *R. Judah* the faint, *R. Simeon*, and the two *Eleazers* ; and as for *R. Judah*, he was of so much account with the *Jews*, as to weigh down all others ; the decision of any matter in debate was, for the most part, according to him ; and it is to the latter sentiment that the *Jews* now universally agree. There is but one, *R. Joseph Albo*, on the other side of the question, unless *Nachmanides* can be thought to be, which yet is doubtful^z. now this seems to be the whole and sole foundation of the above notion, which has prevailed so long among christian writers.

^z Vid. Buxtorf. de literis Heb. f. 20. 52, 53, 54.

ters. I cannot but remark the foible of some learned men, that if any thing against a received opinion is produced from the *Talmud*, and other *Jewish* writings, it is at once condemned as a *Jewish* dotage, dream and fable; but if it accords with a favourite hypothesis, how greedily is it caught at? how tenaciously is it held? It is amazing that so many learned men should give into the change of the *Jewish* letters by *Ezra*. It is not likely that the law should be given to the *Israelites*, and the sacred books be written in *Samaritan* letters, that is, in the old *Phœnician* characters, which belonged to the race of *Canaan*; and if they were, that the people of the *Jews* could be prevailed upon to part with them, in which their holy books were written; and if they were written in them, as then, besides the *Pentateuch*, the books of *Joshua*, *Judges*, *Samuel*, the *Psalms* of *David*, and books of *Solomon*, and the *Prophets* before the captivity, must be written in the same character; and if so, it is strange that not one copy of either of these should be heard of, seen, or known; nor is it probable that the books of the *Old Testament* should be written in two

different characters; those before the captivity in *Samaritan* letters, and those after it in the square letters, as they must be according to this hypothesis. It is not to be believed, that *Ezra* would attempt such a change of himself without an order from God, which no where appears, when such a charge against innovations stands in *Deut.* iv. 2. nor does it seem possible that he should be able effectually to do it; it could never be in his power to call in all the copies of the sacred books, which the *Israelites* had carried into the several parts of the world, thro' their captivities; nor is it probable that the *Samaritans*, if possessed of the square character, which is grand and majestic, should ever be prevailed upon to part with it, for a character so ugly, so ill shaped and deformed as the *Samaritan* is; nor was it in the power of *Ezra* to oblige them to it: to which may be added, that surely it can't be thought that those ugly and ill-shaped letters were formed by the finger of God, and the law written by him in them, the contrary to which is now universally affirmed by the *Jews*; and yet with what confidence has this been asserted, and those of a different sentiment treated with most