

he urges the conversation which passed between *Abraham's* servant and *Nabor's* family, when he was sent thither to take a wife for *Isaac*, and what passed between the men of *Haran*, *Nabor's* city, and *Jacob*, and between him and *Rebel* and *Laban*, in which there appear'd to be no difficulty of understanding one another. All which is true, and yet the language might not be exactly the same; the *Chaldee* being a dialect of the *Hebrew*, might be understood by the *Hebrews*, especially in those earlier and purer times; when the deviation from the *Hebrew* might not be so great as afterwards; and yet it is certain that *Jacob* and *Laban* used a different language, at the time of their covenanting together, and gave different names to the heap which was the witness between them, tho' to the same sense. This learned writer indeed thinks that the *Chaldean* name of it was given by anticipation, and that it was called so by *Laban's* sons afterwards, which being known to *Moses*, he inserted it: but be it so, that will prove the difference of that language in the times of *Moses* at least, and which, in the times of *Hezekiah*, appears to be still more different from the *Hebrew*,

since the common people among the *Jews* understood it not, *2 Kings* xviii. 26. and in the times of the captivity, some of the *Hebrews*, carried captive, were taught the *Chaldean* tongue, *Dan.* i. 4. and the difference between that and the *Hebrew* may be seen in the books of *Daniel* and *Exra*, yea, it is called a language not known nor understood by the *Jews*, *Jer.* v. 15. now from the sameness of language, as this writer supposes, he proceeds to argue the sameness of character, which however probable it may be thought to be, it is not conclusive. The *Syriac* and *Chaldee* are nearer to each other, than either to the *Hebrew*, and yet their characters are very different, at least as we now have them. But what this learned writer seems chiefly to depend upon, and what he thinks to be greatly to his purpose is, the instance of *Cyrus* being able to read the prophecies in *Isaiab*, concerning himself, according to *Josephus*^c; which he imagines he could not have done, if the *Chaldee* and *Hebrew* characters were not the same. He supposes he understood the *Chaldee* language, and could read that, having been some time in the court of *Darius* ;
but

^c Antiq. l. II. c. I. f. 2.

but that is not quite certain, since at his taking of *Babylon* it does not appear that the *Chaldee* tongue was much known in his army; for he then gave orders, according to *Xenophon*^d, to those who understood the *Syrian* or *Chaldee* language to proclaim that such of the inhabitants that were found in the streets, should be slain, but those that kept within doors should be safe; and it was immediately after this, even in the first year of his reign with *Darius*, that he gave liberty to the *Jews* to return to their own land, when he had knowledge of the prophecy of *Isaiab* concerning himself; and besides, why may he not be thought to know the *Hebrew* character also as well as the *Chaldee*, supposing them different? he was a very enterprising prince and had conquered many nations, and might be master of many languages, as *Mithridates* king of *Pontus* was, and especially of the *Hebrew*, if what is said by an *Arabic* writer^e is true, that he married the sister of *Zerubbabel*, and his mother also is said † to be a *Jewess*; and after all, the whole depends upon the testimony of *Josephus*,

^d *Cyropædia*, l. 7. c. 23.
Dynast. dyn. 5. p. 82.

^e *Abulpharag. Hist.*
 † *Hottinger. apud Pfeiffer.*
Theolog. Jud. Exercitat. 7. c. 1. th. 1.

sephus, that he did read the prophecy of *Isaiab*, who produces no authority for it; and if he did read it., it might be through an interpreter, or as translated for him, supposing him ignorant of the *Hebrew* language and its character: and it can hardly be thought that when the same *Josephus* says ^f that *Alexander* was shewn the prophecy in *Daniel* concerning himself, that he understood *Hebrew*, or the language in which it was written, but that it was read and interpreted to him. There is a passage I confess in *Josephus* ^{*}; which makes the *Hebrew* and *Syriac* character very similar; for according to him, *Demetrius* the librarian of *Ptolemy Philadelphus* told the king when he acquainted him with the *Jewish* writings, that their character was very much like to the *Syriac* letters, and were pronounced like to them; but according to *Aristæus* ^b, and whose words are also preserved in *Eusebius* ^c, *Demetrius* said very much the contrary; that the *Jews*, as the *Egyptians*, had a peculiar character, and a peculiar pronunciation; some think they used the *Syriac*, but it is
not

^f Antiqu. l. 11. c. 8. f. 5.

^{*} Antiqu. l. 12. c. 2. f. 1.

^b Hist. 72. Interpr. p. 4. 5.

^c Præpar. Evangel.

b. 8. c. 2. p. 350.

not so, says he, it is in another form and manner.

THUS have I traced the *Hebrew* letters and characters from the beginning of them to the times of *Ezra*, when the supposed change took place; what I undertook to shew was no more than that it is probable that the ancient letters of the Jews, and which they have always retained, are the square letters, as they are commonly called, or those in which the sacred scriptures are now extant; and I think I have made it appear to be probable. I lay no stress on the pillars of *Seth*, nor the tables of *Cainan*, and the writing of *Enoch*, nor the letters of the law, and the fancies of the *Jews* about them and the manna, nor upon any inscription on sepulchral monuments; but I think it is probable, that as the first language men spoke and was after the confusion of tongues called the *Hebrew* language, to distinguish it from others, if there were letters before that confusion, as it seems reasonable to suppose there were, they were such as were proper and peculiar to it, and it is probable that they afterwards continued in it; and whereas the alphabet of the *Hebrew* language ap-
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appears to be the first of the *oriental* languages, from whence the rest have the names, order, and number of their letters, it is probable, yea it seems more than probable, that the letters of the *Hebrew* alphabet were those of the square kind, since to them only the names of the letters in their signification correspond: it is probable that the law of the ten commands, was written and given in those characters, and not in the *Samaritan*; it is more probable the letters on the written mountains, supposed to be written by the *Israelites* in the wilderness, when encamped, and on their travels there, were of the same kind, rather than of the *Samaritan*, or any other; it is probable, that the letters on the plate of gold the high priest wore on his forehead were the same as now in use, and that *Moses* wrote his *Pentateuch*, in the same character; that *Isaiab* also wrote his prophecies in the same; and that the book of *Daniel*, and particularly the hand-writing that terrified *Belshazzar*, were written in the same; nor is there any just reason to believe that the *Jews* ever had any other sort of letters, nor that *Ezra* changed their ancient ones for those; for, as has been already

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observed,

observed, he never would have done it without a divine command, which it does not appear he had; and if he would have done it, and had had ever such an inclination to it, he never could have done it; nor is it credible that the Jews in *Babylon* so forgot their language, and their letters, as to make such a change necessary, which is suggested*. Can it be thought that the men who remembered the first temple in its glory, and wept at laying the foundation of the second, *Ezra* iii. 12. should forget their language and the *alphabet* of it, when the greater part were only fifty-two years there? for the seventy years are to be reckoned from the fourth of *Jeboiakim*, eighteen years before the destruction of the city and temple by *Nebuchadnezzar*, and their being carried captive by him into *Babylon*; where they lived together in bodies, did not mix with the *Chaldæans*, nor intermarry with them, and conversed together in their own language, had their sacred books in it to read, held a correspondence with *Jeremiah* by letters, at the first of the captivity, and had the ministry and sermons of *Ezekiel* to attend upon in it *Ezek.* i. 1, and iii. 15, and xxx. 30, 33.

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*Jer.** *Eliæ Præfat. Methurgeman.*

Jer. xxix. 1, 25, 31. nor is it true that their language was corrupted in *Babylon*; the captives that returned spoke the language of the Jews purely, only the children of some few, whose fathers had married wives, not in *Babylon*, but women of *Ashdod*, *Ammon*, and *Moab*, after the return from the captivity, who spoke half in the language of those people, for which *Nebemiah* reprov'd them; and this shews it was not a general thing: and certain it is that the prophets *Haggai*, *Zechariah*, and *Malachi* wrote in pure *Hebrew*, as it was in the days of *Moses*; the same roots, prefixes, suffixes, idioms, constructions, and terminations, are to be observed in them as in the *Pentateuch* of *Moses*. Upon the whole, the Jews certainly spoke the *Hebrew* language after their return from the captivity, and some when they came back to *Persia* again, in *Nebemiah's* time; nor had he forgot it, nor disused it, for walking before *Susa*, the chief city of *Persia*, as *Josephus* * relates, he overheard some strangers lately come from *Jerusalem* discoursing together in the *Hebrew* tongue, and understanding them, he
asked

* *Antiqu.* l. xi. c. 5. f. 6.

asked the questions as in *Neb.* i. 2. he himself wrote in *Hebrew*, as did *Ezra*, not only his own book, but the books of *Chronicles*, as is supposed; yea, some of the *Psalms* were written after the return from the captivity, as *Psf.* cxxvi. cxxxvii. and even as late as the times of *Antiochus Epiphanes*, and all in pure *Hebrew*. *Daniel* in the captivity wrote in *Hebrew*, excepting what concerned the *Chaldæans*; and so did *Ezekiel*. The book of *Esther*, supposed to be written by *Mordecai*, was written in pure *Hebrew*; and if *Ahasuerus* was *Xerxes*, it must be written many years after the captivity; and in his time, *Psf.* lxxxviii. is by some thought to be written. It is the nature and glory of the *Hebrew* language to have been always constant and invariable, and so it is probable its letters were; the Jews glory in their sacred writings, that no innovation was ever made in them. *Josephus* * says, “ it is manifest in fact in what
 “ veneration and credit we have our let-
 “ ters or books; for though so many ages
 “ are past, (as almost 3000 years, as he
 “ says) yet no man has dared to add any
 “ thing to them, nor to take any thing
 G 2 “ from

* Cont. Apicn. l. i. f. 2.

“ from them, nor to change them :” it is plain from hence, that this historian knew nothing of the change of the letters of the sacred writings made by *Ezra*, which must be an innovation in them. *Philo the Jew*^h, says “ our law only is firm, “ unmoveable, unshaken, sealed as it were “ with the seals of nature ; it remains “ firmly from the time it was written, “ until now ; and it is to be hoped it will “ remain immortal throughout all ages, “ as long as do the sun and moon, the “ whole heaven, and the world.” The eighth article of the *Jewish* creed runs thus : * “ I believe with a perfect faith, i. e. “ sincerely, that the whole law which is “ now in our hands, is that which was “ given to *Moses* our master, on whom be “ peace, without any change and alteration ;” but we have a greater testimony than these, of the unalterableness of the law, and even of the letters in which it was written, the words of *Christ* in Matt. v. 18. *for verily I say unto you, 'till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled ;*

^h De vita Mosis l. 2. 656. * Seder Tephillah, fol. 86. 2. Abarbinel. Prefat. in Jer.

fulfilled; which though it is not to be understood of the bare letter *Yod*, which as it is sometimes redundant, so in some places wanting, as in 1 *Sam.* xxi. 2. 2 *Sam.* xvi. 23. and xxi. 8. *Nehemiah* xii. 46. and though it is a proverbial expression, signifying the unchangeableness and unalterableness of the law, with respect to the least precept in it; yet it is founded upon, and is an allusion to the writing of the law, and the letters of it; not to any copy of it in any language whatever; but to the original writing of it, and its letters, in which it had continued unto his time, and in which the *Iota* or *Yod* is the least of the letters; and therefore could have no respect to the *Samaritan* copy of the law, in which language it is not the least letter, but a very large one; which has besides the stroke above, three large prongs, descending from it, each of which is as large again as the *Hebrew Yod*; which is so small, that *Irenæus*¹ calls it half a letter; and to which our Lord manifestly refers: and this makes it at least highly probable, that the law was originally written not in the *Samaritan*, but in the square *Hebrew* letters,

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letters,

¹ Adv. Hæres. l. 2. c. 41.

letters, which had unalterably remained unto the times of *Christ*: all which make it greatly probable, that the Jews only had one sort of letters, which always remained with them, and are what are extant to this day.

Bianconi^k, the learned writer before-mentioned, is quite clear in it, that the *Hebrew* letters were never changed by *Ezra*, nor by any public authority; and which he judges improbable, since neither he nor *Josephus* make mention of any such change; and from the great numbers of Jews left in the land at the captivity, and the return of multitudes from it; and from *Ezra's* coming to them with a large number also, and that sixty or eighty years after the return of the first; and from the prophecies of *Haggai* and *Zechariah*, and from the shekels in the times of the *Maccabees*, which supposing such a change would have been not in the *Samaritan*, but in the square character; and from the unlikelihood of a conquered people taking the characters of an enemy's language, and quitting their own, and that after they had been many years delivered from them.

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^k De Antiqu. Liter. Heb. p. 18.—22, 25, 26.

He supposes, that the *Hebrews*, *Chaldæans*, *Phœnicians*, and *Samaritans*, had all the same characters originally, and that there was a change made among the Jews long after the times of *Ezra*, from the ancient character to the square one; and that it began in the shekels, in the time of the *Maccabees*, in which he observed a mixture of the ancient and modern characters, and supposes, that by little and little the change was made, from frequent transcribing the Bible, and daily writing; and that the modern letters were gradually formed from use, and the swift manner of writing, and for the convenience of it: but it does not seem probable that a character should be mended through swiftness of writing, and that such a grand, majestic, regular, and well-formed character, as the square letter is, should be produced in that way; but rather that the ill-shaped, ragged, rough, and deformed *Samaritan* character, should spring from thence; and which seems to be the fact, but not so late as the times of the *Maccabees*; but as early as the division and dispersion of the nations, in the times of *Peleg*; so *Gaffarellus* * ob-

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serves,

* Unheard-of Curiosities, c. 13. f. 6. p. 46

ferves, that the *Samaritan* characters are corrupted from the *Hebrew*; and he adds, this is so certain a truth, as that it is a point of infinite perverseness to offer to doubt of it. According to Dr. *Bernard's* table of alphabets, called *Orbis eruditi Literatura a caractere Samaritico deducta*, it has been thought, that the letters of all nations must have sprung from the *Samaritan* character; but this seems to depend much on fancy and imagination; and I am inclined to think, that all are deducible from the *Hebrew* square character, the *Assyrian* first, then the *Phœnician*, from that the *Greek*, and so on; according to *Hermannus Hugo*¹, the *Hebrew* letters (the present ones) were the first; next sprung from them the *Chaldean* letters, which he says are scarce extant; then the *Assyrian*, or *Babylonian*, and the *Syriac*, or *Aramean*, and from the *Syriac*, the *Samaritan*.

THE principal argument by which the hypothesis opposed, is supported, is taken from some coins or shekels, said to be dug up in *Judæa*, with these words on them, *Jerusalem the holy*, and *the shekel of Israel*, the letters of which, it is asserted,

¹ De prima Scribendi orig. p. 54.

ferted, agree, in form, with the *Samaritan*. Now as the *Samaritans*, because of their aversion to the *Jews*, and the ten tribes after their separation from the other two, had nothing to do with *Jerusalem*, nor any esteem for it, neither of them can be thought to strike these pieces; and it is inferred from hence, that they must have belonged to the *Jews* before the captivity, and to the *Israelites* before the separation of the ten tribes; and consequently the *Samaritan* letters, supposed to be the same with those on the coins, were the ancient *Hebrew* characters, and in which the books of the Old Testament were written; and this argument is thought to be unanswerable: but it should be observed, that the letters on the most unexceptionable of these coins differ considerably from those in the *Samaritan Pentateuch*, and seem to resemble, in some instances, the *Hebrew* almost as much as the *Samaritan*; and besides the oldest of them do not precede the settlement of the high-priesthood in the *Asmonæan* family, and were not much above one hundred and fifty years before the æra of Christ, and some of them are
later;

later^m; to which may be added, there are coins, both silver and brass, with inscriptions in the square character, which according to them are much more ancient than the other, and so prove the superior antiquity of the square character to that of the Samaritan. Rab. *Azariab* saysⁿ, that he saw among some ancient coins at *Mantua*, a silver coin which had on one side of it the form of a man's head, and round about it, *King Solomon*, in the holy tongue, and square writing, and on the other side the form of the temple, and round about it written *the temple of Solomon*; and *Hottinger*^o affirms, he saw one of the same sort in the collection of the Elector *Palatine*. The Jews in their *Talmud*^p, speak of a *Jerusalem* coin, which had *David* and *Solomon* on one side, and the words, *Jerusalem, the holy city*, on the other side; and of a coin of *Abraham's*, having on one side, the *Hebrew* words for *an old man* and *an old woman*, and on the other side, those, for a *young man* and a *young woman*; and the learned *Christopher Wagenfeil*

^m See the Universal History, vol. xvii. p. 302, 303, 304. ⁿ Meor Enayim, c. 58. fol. 174, 2. See fol. 54. ^o Præfat. ad Cippi Heb. p. 41. ^p T. Bab. Bava Kama, fol. 97, 2. vid. Wafer. de Num. antiqu. l. 2. c. 5.

Wagenfeil ^a assures us, he had both these coins in his own possession, of which he gives the figures with the words on them, in the square letters ; besides *Abraham*, the Jews * speak of three more, that coined money, *Joshua*, *David*, and *Mordecai*; the coin of *Joshua* had on one side a bullock, and on the other, an unicorn. See *Deut.* xxxiii. 17. that of *David's* had a staff and scrip on one side, and a tower on the other ; that of *Mordecai's* had sackcloth and ashes on one side, and a crown of glory on the other ; elsewhere † it is said, it had *Mordecai* on one side, and *Esther* on the other : there was also a coin of *Moses* ; I myself have seen a coin of his †, having on one side, his face, with his ears horned, like rams horns, and underneath is the word משה, in square characters, and on the other side, the first commandment, in the same character, לא יהיה לך and *thou shalt have no other God before me* ; and which exactly agrees with one *Mr. Selden* ^b had in his possession, found among some rubbish at *Shene* in *Surry*.

^a Sotah, p. 574, 575. * Bereshit Rabba, Parash. 39. fol. 34, 4. † Midrash Esther, fol. 95, 4. † Penes Mr. Richard Hall in Southwark. ^b De Jure Naturæ, l. 2. c. 6. p. 187.

Surry. It will be said, these coins are spurious; the same may be, and is said of those that have the *Samaritan* characters on them; nor is there any reason to believe that those shekels or coins which have on them, *Jerusalem the holy*, and *the shekel of Israel*, are any of them indisputably genuine. *Ottius* and *Reland*, who have applied themselves closely to the study of those coins, have as good as confessed it; and *Spanheim*, by what he has said, appears to be in a very great doubt about it^t. The celebrated *Charles Patin*, so famous for his skill in coins and medals, and who had free access to the cabinets of all the princes in *Europe*, declared many years ago to the learned *Christopher Wagenfeil*^u with great assurance, that he never found in those collections, an *Hebrew* coin, but what was manifestly spurious: wherefore these coins are not to be depended on, nor can any sufficient argument be drawn from them in favour of any hypothesis. Moreover, it has been said; that the ancient *Hebrew* or *Samaritan* characters, were given to the *Cuthites* or *Samaritans*, and left

^t *Universal History*, ut supra, p. 303. ^u Ut supra, p. 576.

left with them out of hatred to them, and that the square letters in the times of *Ezra* were chosen, taken, and retained by the *Jews* for their use; but then how comes it to pass that the *Samaritan* characters were re-assumed and inscribed on the coins three hundred years after, namely, on those of *Simon* the high priest, of *Jonathan* his brother, and of *John Hyrcanus*, his son, as the coins published by Mr. *Swinton* shew ^w? and by *John Hyrcanus*, the last of these, *Samaria* was destroyed, the temple in *Gerizzim* demolished, after it had stood two hundred years, and the *Samaritans* made tributary to the *Jews*; and it is observable, that upon the coin of *Hyrcanus*, on one side are *Samaritan* letters, and on the other *Greek* letters, and which was usual with the *Carthaginians*, *Syrians*, and *Sidonians*; and there is an instance of it in a coin of *Demetrius*: ^x and by the way, this furnishes us with an answer to a question of *Bianconi* ^y, who asks, why the *Maccabees* did not put *Greek* letters on their money, a well known custom in that

^w Differt. de Num. Samar. p. 46, 49, 61. ^x Montfaucon. Diar. Italic. p. 355. ^y De Antiqu. Liter. Heb. p. 23, 24.

that age, and common to all the east, for it seems he never saw any ; and addè, that *Jewish* coins with two sorts of letters were never seen. But to proceed ; from the different letters on the coin of *Hyrchanus*, from the one, it can no more be inferred, that *Samaritan* letters were in use among the *Jews*, than that from the other, *Greek* letters were ; and though I profess no skill in coins, I should think that the reason of those different characters were designed by *Hyrchanus* as an insult on both people, and as a triumph over them, and to perpetuate the fame of his conquests both over the *Samaritans* and the *Greeks*, or *Syro Macedonians* : however, it appears, that from these coins no argument can be taken to support the hypothesis, that the ancient *Hebrew* characters were the *Samaritan* ; and indeed it is entirely inconsistent with it ; for how does it appear that those letters were left to the *Samaritans*, and others taken by the *Jews* ? and it is also clear that there is no necessity to give into the notion of a twofold character in use with the *Jews*, the one sacred, in which their holy books were written, namely,

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the square character ; and the other common, used in coins and civil affairs, as the *Samaritan*; to which some Jews^z and christians^a seem to have been led by the above coins ; for though the *Egyptians*^b had their sacred characters and their common ones, and so had the *Greeks*^c yet not the *Jews*, whose priests had no juggling tricks to play, as the priests of *Egypt* and *Greece* had ; and though some later *Jews* have given into the notion of a double character, as in use formerly, yet it is not mentioned in their ancient writings, as if they had one for the sanctuary and sacred uses, and another for common use ; the only place I have met with, that seems to favour it, is the *Targum* of *Jonathan*, on Gen. xxxii. 2. “ and he called the name of the “ place in the language of the holy house, “ *Mabanaim*,” which is not to be rendered the language of the house of the sanctuary, or the temple, as by some, since that is usually called, בית מקדש or בְּיֹקְדֵשׁ, as in Gen. xxviii. 17, 22. and not בית קודשא as here ;

^z Maimon. & Bartenora in Misn. Yadaim, c. 4. f. 5. ^a Vid. Buxtorf. de Lit. Heb. f. 45. ^b Herodot. Euterpe, five, l. 2. c. 36. Diodor. Sicul. l. 1. p. 72. & l. 3. p. 144. Clement. Alex. Stromat. l. 5. p. 555. ^c Theodoret. in Gen. Quæst. 60.

here ; but the language of the holy house, or family, the people of God, that is, the *Hebrew* tongue ; to which may be added, an ancient writer among the christians, *Irenæus**, who says, that “ the ancient and first letters of the *Hebrews*, and called *sacerdotal*, are ten in number ;” but that he means to distinguish them from any other letters or characters, used by the *Hebrews*, does not appear ; besides, he speaks only of ten, and what he means is not easy to say ; however, by them he cannot mean the *Samaritan* letters, because among these letters he reckons the *Yod*, which he calls half a letter, which cannot agree with the *Samaritan Yod*, but does with that of the square character.

* Adv. Hæref. l. 2. c. 41.