A PRIMER OF ASSYRIOLOGY

CHAPTER I

THE COUNTRY AND ITS PEOPLE

Geography.—The civilizations of Babylonia and Assyria grew up on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates. The Tigris was called Idikna and Idikla in the Sumerian or primitive language of Babylonia, from which the Semites formed the name Idiklat, by means of the feminine suffix *-t*. In later times the name was shortened into Diklat, and finally assimilated by the Persians to the word Tigra, which in their language signified 'an arrow.' It is from Tigra that the classical name Tigris is derived. In Genesis (ii. 14), however, the ancient name Idikla, there written Hiddekel, is still preserved. The Euphrates was called Pura-nun, or 'great water,' in Sumerian,

and was frequently known as simply the Pura or 'Water,' just as the Nile is known to-day to the modern Egyptians as simply 'the Sea.' Hence it is often spoken of in the Bible as 'the River,' without the addition of any other name. From Pura came the Semitic Purat, with the Semitic suffix *-t*; and Purat, the Perath of the Old Testament, was changed by the Persians into Ufratu, with a play upon their own word *u* 'good.' The Persian Ufratu is the Greek Euphrates.

The alluvial plain of Babylonia was the gift of the two great rivers. In the early days of Babylonian civilization they both flowed into the Persian Gulf. But salt marshes already existed at their mouths, and as time went on the marshes extended further and further to the south. What had once been sea became dry land, the silt brought down by the rivers forming an ever-increasing delta in the north of the Gulf. To-day the two rivers flow into one channel, and the point where they unite is eighty miles distant from the present line of coast. The marshes are called 'the country of Marratu' or 'the salt-sea' in the inscriptions, a name which reappears as Merathaim in Jer. l. 21.

One of the oldest of Babylonian cities was Eridu, 'the good city,' which was originally built on the shore

of the Persian Gulf, though Abu-Shahrein, which now marks its site, is far inland, the sea having retreated from it for a distance of 100 miles. In early times, however, it was the chief Babylonian port, and through its intercourse with foreign countries it exercised a great influence on the culture and religion of Babylonia. Further to the north, but on the western side of the Euphrates, was Ur, the birth-place of Abraham, whose ruins are now called Mugheir or Muqayyar; and still further to the north, but on the opposite side of the river, were Larsa (probably the Ellasar of Gen. xiv. 1) now Senkereh, and Uruk or Erech (Gen. x. 10) the modern Warka. Considerably to the north of these again came Nipur (now Niffer), which played a leading part in the history of Babylonian religion. Nipur stood at the spot where the Tigris and Euphrates tended to approach one another, and northward, in the narrowest part of the territory which lay between them, were the important cities of Babel or Babylon, Kutha, and Sippara. Babylon, called Bab-ili, 'the gate of God,' on the monuments, lay on both sides of the Euphrates, its south-western suburb being Borsippa. The great temple of Bel-Merodach, called Ê-Saggila, rose within it; that of Nebo, the prophet and interpreter of Merodach, being at Borsippa.

Ê-Zida, the temple of Nebo, is now known as the Birs-i-Nimrûd. Kutha (now Tell-Ibrahim), to the north of Babylon, was surrounded by vast cemeteries, which were under the protection of its patron-god Nergal. Sippara, still further to the north, was a double city, one part of it, the present Abu-Habba, being termed 'Sippara of the Sun-god,' while the other half was 'Sippara of the goddess Anunit.' It is in consequence of this double character that the Old Testament speaks of it as Sepharvaim 'the two Sipparas.'

Northward of Sippara the Tigris and Euphrates again trend apart from one another and enclose the great plateau of Mesopotamia. To the east of the Tigris come the mountains of Elam, 'the highlands,' and to the north of them the Kurdish ranges, which were known to the primitive Babylonians under the name of Guti or Gutium. At the foot of these ranges, and northward of the Lower or Little Zab, the kingdom of Assyria arose. It took its name from its original capital of Assur, now Kalah-Sherghat, on the western bank of the Tigris, not far to the north of the junction of the latter river with the Lower Zab. The supremacy of Assur afterwards passed to Calah and Nineveh, which lay northward between the Tigris and the Upper

or Greater Zab. Calah (now Nimrûd) was close to the junction of the two rivers; Nineveh (now Kouyunjik and Nebi Yunus opposite Mosul) was built along the bank of the Tigris, the stream of the Khoser flowing through the middle of it. Some miles to the north, under the shelter of the hills, Sargon built a palace which he called Dur-Sargon (the modern Khorsabad), and between Nineveh and Calah lay Res-eni 'the head of the Spring,' the Resen of Gen. x. 12.

Population and Language.—Babylonia already had a long history behind it when the kingdom of Assyria first arose. The main bulk of the Assyrian population was Semitic, and the common language of the country was Semitic also. But it was otherwise in Babylonia. Here the pioneers of civilization, the builders of the great cities, the inventors of the cuneiform system of writing, of astronomy, of mathematics, and of other arts and sciences, belonged to a non-Semitic race and spoke an agglutinative language. It is in this language that the earliest records of the country are written and that the older clay-books were compiled. For want of a better name scholars have called the language and people to whom it belonged

Accadian or Sumerian, or even Accado-Sumerian. Accad and Sumer were the names given to the northern and southern divisions of Babylonia respectively, and as it was in Sumer that the old race and language lingered the longest, 'Sumerian' would appear to be the best title to apply to them. Indeed it is possible that the city of Agade or Accad, from which the district of Accad seems to have derived its name, was of Semitic foundation. In any case the Semitic element in Accad was from very early times stronger than that in Sumer, and consequently the Sumerian dialect spoken in the north was more largely affected by Semitic influence and the resulting phonetic decay than was the dialect spoken in the south. Sumerian was agglutinative, like the languages of the modern Finns or Turks, the relations of grammar being expressed by suffixes (or prefixes) which retain an independent meaning of their own. Thus *dingir* is 'god,' *dingir-ene* 'gods,' *dingir-ene-ku* 'to the gods;' *mu-ru* 'I built,' *mu-na-ru* 'I built it.'

The Semitic dialects of Babylonia and Assyria differed very slightly from one another, and they are therefore called by the common name of Assyrian. We can trace the history of Assyrian by means of contemporaneous monuments for nearly 4,000 years,

beginning with the records of Sargon of Accad (B. C. 3800) and ending with documents of the Parthian epoch. Assyrian belongs to the northern group of Semitic languages, being more closely related to Hebrew and Aramaic than it is to Arabic or Ethiopic.

The Chaldaeans.—When the Semites first obtained political power in Babylonia we do not know. The earliest Semitic empire known to us is that of Sargon of Accad. Babylon did not become the capital of a united kingdom till much later, Khammurabi (B. C. 2350) being apparently the first who made it so. Strictly speaking, it is only after this event that the name of 'Babylonia' is applicable to the whole country. In the Old Testament the Babylonians are called Kasdim, a word of uncertain origin. It is rendered 'Chaldaeans' in the Authorized Version; the classical Chaldaeans, however, took their name from the Kaldâ, a tribe settled in the salt-marshes, of whom we first hear in an inscription of the twelfth century B. C. One of their princes was Merodach-baladan (Isaiah xxxix) who made himself master of all Babylonia. It is probable that Nebuchadrezzar was also of Kaldâ descent. After the time of Merodach-baladan the Kaldâ formed so in-

tegral a part of the population as to give their name to the whole of it in the writings of the Greeks and Romans, and after the fall of Babylonia, when Babylonian astrologers and fortune-tellers made their way to the west, 'Chaldaean' became synonymous with 'diviner.'

The Kassi.—Another element in the Babylonian population consisted of the Kassi (the Kossaeans or Kissians of the Greeks), who came from the mountains of Elam. They spoke originally a non-Semitic language, and gave a dynasty of kings to Babylonia which lasted 576 years and nine months. The dynasty was reigning in the century before the Exodus when the cuneiform tablets of Tel el-Amarna were written, and we learn from them that the Babylonians were at that time called Kassi (or Kasi) in Canaan.

Natural Products.—The soil of Babylonia was exceedingly fertile. It was the natural home of the wheat which still grows wild in the neighbourhood of Anah. Herodotus tells us that 'the leaf of the wheat and barley is as much as four fingers in width, and the stalks of the millet and sesame are so tall that no one who has never been in that country would believe

me were I to mention their height.' It was calculated that grain produced on an average a return of two hundred for one on the seed sown, the return in favourable seasons being as much as three hundred. The chief tree of the country was the palm. Prices were frequently calculated in corn and dates, and the dates among other uses served to make wine. Though vines seem to have been grown, most of the grape-wine drunk in the country was imported from abroad.

Canals.—The whole country was intersected by canals, and carefully irrigated by means of machines. The canals thus regulated the supply of water and enabled it to be carried beyond the reach of the rivers. The two principal canals were called the Nahar-Malcha or Royal River and the Pallacopas (Pallukat in the inscriptions).

Architecture.—Babylonia was devoid of stone, which had to be brought from the mountains of Elam or elsewhere. In this respect it offered a striking contrast to Assyria, where good stone was plentiful. To this absence of stone may be traced some of the peculiarities of its early culture. It caused clay to become the common writing material of the country,

the cuneiform characters being impressed with a stylus upon the tablet while the clay was still moist. It further obliged every building to be of brick. This led to a great development of columnar architecture, the wooden columns which supported the roof being subsequently imitated in brick. The use of brick further led to the use of stucco and painting. The walls of the Chaldaean houses, as we learn from Ezekiel (xxiii. 14), were decorated with 'images pourtrayed with vermilion,' unlike those of the Assyrian palaces which were lined with slabs of sculptured alabaster. Assyrian art was, however, borrowed from that of Babylonia; hence the colouration of the Assyrian bas-reliefs on stone; hence also the great mounds on which the Assyrian palaces were built. Such mounds were needful in the flat country of Babylonia where inundations were frequent; in Assyria they were not required.

Asphalt and Naphtha.—Besides clay, Babylonia also furnishes asphalt and naphtha. According to Poseidonios the naphtha was partly white, partly black, the latter being that which was used for lamps. Naphtha is still found near Hit, 130 miles to the north of Babylon.