

CHAPTER I

Who are the Bantu?

In order to obtain something like an answer to the question, "Who are the Bantu?" it has been necessary to look into the past and obtain from its history such material as may be a help. Calmet provides us with a starting point, and we make use of his views concerning the entry of the Hamites into North-East Africa, as well as of his dates. It is perfectly well known, however, that other writers give various views on the subject, and differ from Calmet as to dates. The latter, however, is, as has been stated, a sufficient authority to provide a starting point for what follows. The Bible represents Noah as having three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. Japheth appears to have been the oldest and the progenitor of the European races, Shem being the second, and Ham the youngest son. The sons of Ham are placed in the following order: Kush, Mitsraim, Phut, Canaan, but in the *Rozit ul Suffa* (*Asiatic Miscellany*, p. 48, Calmet's *Bible Dict.*) it is written that God gave Ham nine sons, viz., Hind, Sind, Zenj, Nuba, Canaan, Kush, Kopt, Berber, Hebesh, and that on account of their children multiplying marvellously, they were made to speak different languages, and for that reason they were forced to separate, and to form independent communities. There is some doubt as to the identity of the racial descendants of several of these sons of Ham, but the majority may be fairly easily traced. It is stated that—

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1. Hind was the progenitor of the Hindoos of India ;
2. Sind was the progenitor of the races on both banks of the Indus ;
3. Zenj was the progenitor probably of the races along the Zanzibar Coast ;
4. Nuba was the progenitor of the Nubians ;
5. Canaan was the progenitor of races as stated in the Bible ;
6. Kush (?)
7. Kopt was the progenitor of the Egyptians ;
8. Berber was the progenitor of the Berbers in North Africa ;
9. Hebesh was the progenitor of the Abyssinians.

Notwithstanding that the inheritance of Ham was to be Africa, yet Hind, Sind, Kush, and certain sections of Canaan remained in Asia, the land of their birth. This helps to confirm our knowledge of the existence, at the present day, of powerful Hamitic tribes in Asia. These did not enter into their African heritage. Then again, Asia was appointed as the inheritance of Shem, yet we find Shemites occupying the northern coast of Africa on the sea-board of the Mediterranean and Northern Atlantic.

As regards Canaan, when we study *Genesis*, ix, 25, we note that the Hebrews believed that it was Canaan who exposed his father's condition to Ham, and Noah having found this out cursed Canaan. Others think that Ham was the offender, and Noah believed that by cursing Canaan, the favourite son of Ham, he would the more surely make Ham suffer. Following up a little further

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the subject of Ham's descendants, we learn that Canaan's eldest son, Sidon, was the progenitor of the Sidonians, otherwise the Phoenicians. Ten sons of Canaan became the progenitors of ten tribes, the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, Girgasites, Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, Zemarites, and Hamathites. The greater portion of all these tribes remained and multiplied in Palestine and Syria, but did not take possession of their African inheritance; that is to say, they remained in Asia.

The Canaanites multiplied greatly, but on account of their wickedness came under Divine displeasure, and God handed over their land to the Israelites, in the time of Joshua (*Calmet, Bible Dict.*)

Before allowing the Israelites to enter into Palestine, Joshua attacked the Canaanites and destroyed great numbers of them, scattering the remnants. Certain sections of these fled through Asia Minor to Greece, others were driven into North Africa. We see, then, that the first occupation of Africa by the Hamites took place during the time of Joshua's leadership of the Israelites, before they crossed over Jordan and entered Palestine, 1446 B.C. (*Calmet*): 1607 B.C. (*Hales*).

Now, the tribes which entered into North Africa in the time of Joshua were descendants of Canaan, and from them in the process of time issued the Bantu race.

It is not clear at what period the Shemites entered Africa and became part of its inhabitants. They apparently passed through Syria, crossed the Red Sea, and took possession of Northern Africa.

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The general position occupied by the Shemites was along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, and they settled more especially in the portions of country now known as Tripoli, Algeria and Morocco.

The Hamites, on the other hand, faced southwards, keeping close to the western shore of the Red Sea, settling along it, and spreading therefrom westwards towards North-Central Africa. In these our days the descendants of Ham are recognized in the children of Mitsraim, that is the Egyptians, the Abyssinians, Berber, Somali, Gala, Masai, Huma and so on.

The southern limit of these tribes is the Tana River, which enters the Indian Ocean north of Mombasa. This limit is, however, being gradually over-stepped.

The Bantu Race.

The widely spread Bantu race, which has extended itself over the southern portion of the African continent, is stated by modern authorities, who are ethnologists and philologists, to have had its birth-place in the neighbourhood of the Victoria Nyanza, or more precisely in the Tana Basin. Sir H. H. Johnston, on the other hand, suggests the origin of the race to have been much further west. At best, however, this is a matter of speculation.

We would take particular note of the manner in which the country below the Shemites is inhabited. South of the Shemites and central Hamites there is a stretch of country inhabited by Negroes. The name indicates the colour of

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the skin, and is derived from the Latin *niger*—“black.” This race is distinct in many of its human characteristics and in language from the other races of Africa. It is asserted by some that it “is incapable of rising except by miscegenation,” but dogmatic statements of this kind are not always borne out by scientific investigation. It is not clear whether or not the Negroes are aboriginal inhabitants of Africa.

If a line is drawn from Cape Verde on the west to the confluence of the Nile and Sobat rivers (W. C. Willoughby, *Race Problems*, p. 15) and from there up the Nile to the northern shores of the Victoria Nyanza, and from that point to the estuary of the Tana river on the east, then this line forms the southern boundary of the Shemites and Hamites and at the same time the northern boundary of the Negroes. The southern boundary of the Negroes has its starting point about the Camerun mountains on the west. From here it stretches over to Zongo, under the great bend of the river Ubangi, whence passing south of Victoria Nyanza it also joins the estuary of the Tana River. The country within these two boundaries is called the Black Belt, and is the home of the Negroes.

All tribes south of this Belt, with the exception of Hottentots and Bushmen, are of Bantu stock.

Ethnologists believe that the Bantu race is not a stock race, like the Negroes, Hottentots and Bushmen, but is the offspring of other races. If we study carefully the land occupied by the Negroes, we will notice that it becomes attenuated towards its eastern limit. Here the Hamites and Negroes are in close juxtaposition, and here,

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through intermarriage, have produced a new race, to which we now give the name "Bantu." It might be said that this is a mere assumption, but it is, at least, built upon evidence which has led ethnologists to arrive at such a conclusion. That is to say, then, that the Bantu race is a development from the intermixing of Hamitic and Negro blood.

The Eastern Bantu, those occupying the coastal districts, have superimposed upon this a further admixture, that of Arab blood; yet among these tribes, spread along the shores of the Indian Ocean, the mingling of Arab blood varies considerably; some, like the Swaheli, having a larger share while others have less. Furthermore, tribes inhabiting the central portion of the continent of Africa are darker in colour than the tribes along the eastern sea-board, because their blood has been without the admixture of the blood of the lighter coloured Arab.

The Wa-Huma or Wa-Tusi.

The Hamitic influence on the Bantu is maintained to-day in a striking form, though it applies more to the north-eastern tribes than to those further south. It is indicated amongst other things by the fact that among the Bantu tribes in the neighbourhood of the Victoria Nyanza and Mt. Kilimanjaro, the Wa-Huma, an essentially Hamitic tribe, invariably occupy the position of chiefs among the northern Bantu tribes. In this connection, A. H. Keane, in his book, *Africa*, Vol. II, p. 12, remarks "the Wa-Huma present some points of great anthropological interest, probably affording a solution of the

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difficulties connected with the constituent elements of the Bantu races in East Central Africa." Speke, a traveller and famous hunter, "had already observed that the chiefs of the Bantu nations about the great lakes were always Wa-Huma, a pastoral people evidently of Galla stock, and originally immigrants from the Galla country. . . . The Wa-Huma, who, under the name of Wa-Tusi, are found as far south as the U-Nyamwezi country."

To quote further from Keane, "The Wa-Huma are also distinguished by their intense love both of personal freedom and political autonomy, Such is their horror of captivity and a foreign yoke that those who have failed to maintain their independence are no longer regarded as true Wa-Huma." "Traits of this sort would almost alone suffice to suspect at least a very large infusion of non-Negro blood in the Wa-Huma race. This element we may now trace with some confidence to the Hamites of North-East Africa as its true source" (Stanford, *Ethnology of Egyptian Sudan*, p. 10). The two sources, Negro and Hamite, from whose union has been produced the Bantu race are widely different in the essential qualities, character, and all those attributes which make for social advancement and racial development. For, according to many authorities, if we accept their thesis, the Negroes are of themselves incapable of civilization and intellectual advancement, unless their blood has had an infusion from that of more highly developed races. Hence, through union and intermarriage between Negro and Hamitic races, the latter possessing character and intelligence of a high order, there has issued

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from these two sources a race with noble characteristics, courage, love of freedom, and a mental equipment of no mean order, so that there is no wisdom, no honour, personal or national, to which the Bantu race may not aspire.

The history of the races of the world proves to us that an admixture of blood, instead of being a disadvantage to a race, is rather of assistance in its uplift. We have an instance of that in the case of the British race, whose blood has undergone a great deal of infusion from other races, notably from the Angles, Saxons, Celts, Danes, Norwegians, Picts, Scots, and others, and yet there is no race under the sun so glorious as the British race. It should be evident, then, that the union of these two races of whom we have been speaking, the commingling of the two blood strains of Negro and Hamite which have produced the Bantu race, have secured to the Bantu a capacity for development and progress equal to that of the more advanced Hamite, or at least greater than that of the less developed Negro, for their Bantu descendants.

The Zenj.

The name "Bantu" is of modern application. When Bleek made use of the word "Bantu" as a comprehensive term for all the dialects of the inhabitants who formed the largest section of the people of Southern Africa, he had no intention of applying it to the people themselves. Nevertheless, it has been so used, and is adopted as a generic term to designate the people. What then was the name by which this race was known to

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those of more ancient times? There is little doubt that all east coast tribes, from Somaliland down to Sofala, were in ancient times called "Zenj." In considering this matter, we note that according to the Scriptures, the sons of Ham were Kush, Mitsraim, Phut and Canaan, but it is not stated that these complete the list. In the *Asiatic Miscellany*, already quoted, the number of the sons of Ham is given as nine, the third one of these being Zenj. Now we find that this name "Zenj" was applied to the Eastern inhabitants of Africa down to 1154 A.D. That is to say, the term was in use up to that date to indicate the Bantu race.

As is well known, on account of wars and national disturbances in Asia in early times, certain tribes of the sons of Ham entered Africa from the north, and moved southward along the shores of the Red Sea and the eastern sea-board of Africa, forming settlements and taking possession of the country. Theal (*Ethnography of S.A.*, p. 157) says, "In the year 30 B.C., Egypt became a Roman province, and nine years later—in 21 B.C.—an army under Petronius entered Abyssinia, where such success awaited it that Kandake, the queen of that country, was obliged to become a tributary. At that time it is evident that no Bantu were living so far north." This extract is important to us only in that it determines the non-existence of the Bantu so far north as Abyssinia, but though their birthplace was much further south, we find later on that they come under the same racial designation as the Abyssinian, and other Hamites. The term "Zenj" was first applied by early historians to the Hamitic tribes of North-East Africa. Ultimately, however,

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it was made to include the Bantu further south, probably in recognition of their source of origin—to wit that they were of Hamitic stock.

Writing on the subject of the Zenj, Theal quotes Strabo, traveller and historian, of Amasa in Pontus, who visited Northern Africa, as reporting in 21 A.D. that the country along the west coast of the Red Sea was inhabited by Ethiopians. These people were at that time as at the present day Hamites. Strabo's knowledge of Africa was very limited; consequently, we get nothing from him in respect of the people south of the Ethiopians. It is clear, however, that there were no Bantu tribes known to him or he would have probably mentioned the fact. After Strabo we have no further information about that part of Africa, until 880 A.D. when Abou Zeyd-Hassan of Syraf wrote a book. From him we learn that the inhabitants on the east coast of Africa were called "Zenj," but he does not define their boundaries.

Here, then, we have our earliest notice of the name "Zenj" as applied to the Bantu in those days. It seems reasonable to conclude that this name is derived from that of the son of Ham, and it indicates that the Bantu are of that stock.

Then again, Aboul-Ali el-Masoudi of Bagdad (Theal, *ibid.*, p. 169) who travelled and wrote before his death in 956 A.D. a book containing notes on the Bantu gives the name "Zenj" to the people who lived along the east coast of Africa. He writes about a branch of the Nile as entering the ocean on the east of the African continent—Theal believes this to be the Gulf of Aden. This branch of the Nile, Masoudi says, issued from the great basin of the Zenj, and separated the country