verbal tenses have almost entirely disappeared, but have been successfully replaced by new forms derived from parti­ciples. There are also other praiseworthy innovations. The dialect of Túr 'Abdín has, for instance, again coined a definite article. By means of violent contractions and phonetic changes some of these dialects, particularly that of Urmia, have acquired a euphony scarcely known in any other of the Semitic languages, with their “stridentia anhelantiaque verba” (Jerome). These Aramæans have all adopted a motley crowd of foreign words, from the Arabs, Kurds, and Turks, on whose borders they live and of whose languages they can often speak at least one.

Aramaic is frequently described as a *poor* language. This is an opinion which we are unable to share. It is quite possible, even now, to extract a very large vocabulary from the more ancient Aramaic writings, and yet in this pre­dominantly theological literature a part only of the words that existed in the language have been preserved. It is true that Aramaic, having from the earliest times come into close contact with foreign languages, has borrowed many words from them, in particular from Persian and Greek ; but, if we leave out of consideration the fact that many Syrian authors are in the habit of using, as ornaments or for convenience (especially in translations), a great number of Greek words, some of which were unintelligible to their readers, we shall find that the proportion of really foreign words in older Aramaic books is not larger, perhaps even smaller, than the proportion of Romance words in German or Dutch. The influence of Greek upon the syntax and phraseology of Syriac is not so great as that which it has exercised, through the medium of Latin, upon the literary languages of modern Europe. With regard to sounds, the most characteristic feature of Aramaic (besides its peculiar treatment of the dentals) is that it is poorer in vowels than Hebrew, not to speak of Arabic, since nearly all short vowels in open syllables either wholly disappear or leave but a slight trace behind them (the so-called shĕwâ). In this respect the punctuation of Biblical Aramaic agrees with Syriac, in which we are able to observe from very early times the number of vowels by examining the metri­cal pieces constructed according to the number of syllables, and with the Mandæan, which expresses every vowel by means of a vowel-letter. When several distinct dialects so agree, the phenomenon in question must be of great antiquity. There are nevertheless traces which prove that the language once possessed more vowels, and the Ara­mæans, for instance, with whom David fought may have pronounced many vowels which afterwards disappeared. Another peculiarity of Aramaic is that it lends itself far more readily to the linking together of sentences than Hebrew and Arabic. It possesses many conjunctions and adverbs to express slight modifications of meaning. It is also very free as regards the order of words. That this quality, which renders it suitable for a clear and limpid prose style, is not the result of Greek influence may be seen by the Mandæan, on which Greek has left no mark. In its attempts to express everything clearly Aramaic often becomes prolix,—for example, by using additional personal and demonstrative pronouns. The contrast be­tween Aramaic as the language of prose and Hebrew as the language of poetry is one which naturally strikes us, but we must beware of carrying it too far. Even the Aramæans were not wholly destitute of poetical talent. Although the religious poetry of the Syrians has but little charm for us, yet real poetry occurs in the few extant frag­ments of Gnostic hymns. Moreover, in the modern dialects popular songs have been discovered which, though very simple, are fresh and full of feeling.@@1 It is therefore by no

means improbable that in ancient times Aramaic was used in poems which, being contrary to the theological tendency of Syrian civilization, were doomed to total oblivion.

*Assyrian.—*Long before Aramaic another Semitic lan­guage flourished in the regions of the Tigris and on the lower Euphrates which has been preserved to us in the cuneiform inscriptions. It is usually called the Assyrian, after the name of the country where the first and most important excavations were made ; but the term “Babylonian” would be more correct, as Babylon was the birthplace of this lan­guage and of the civilization to which it belonged. Certain Babylonian inscriptions appear to go back to the fourth millennium before our era ; but the great mass of these cuneiform inscriptions date from between 1000 and 500 B.c. Assyrian seems to be more nearly related to Hebrew than to Aramaic ; we may cite, for example, the relative particle *ska,* which is also used as a sign of the genitive, and is identical with the Phoenician *ash* and the Hebrew *asher (she, sha),* also the similarity between Assyrian and Hebrew in the treatment of the aspirated dentals. On the other hand, Assyrian differs in many respects from all the cognate languages. The ancient perfect has wholly dis­appeared, or left but few traces, and the gutturals, with the exception of the hard *kh,* have been smoothed down to a degree which is only paralleled in the modern Aramaic dialects. So at least it would appear from the writing, or rather from the manner in which Assyriologists transcribe it. The Babylonian form *bél* (occurring in Isa. xlvi. 1 ; Jer. 1. 2 and li. 44,—passages all belonging to the 6th century B.C.), the name of the god who was originally called *ba'l,* is a confirmation of this ; but, on the other hand, the name of the country where Babylon was situated, viz., Shin'ar, and that of a Babylonian god, 'Anammelekh (2 Kings xvii. 31), as well as those of the tribes Shó'a and Kó'a (Ezek. xxiii. 23) who inhabited the Assyrio- Babylonian territory, seem to militate against this theory, as they are spelt in the Old Testament with '*ain.* The Assyrian system of writing is so complicated, and, in spite of its vast apparatus, is so imperfect an instrument for the accurate representation of sounds, that we are hardly yet bound to regard the transcriptions of contemporary Assyrio­logists as being in all points of detail the final dictum of science. It is, for example, very doubtful whether the vowels at the end of words and the appended *m* were really pronounced in all cases, as this would presuppose a complete confusion in the grammar of the language. However this may be, the present writer does not feel able to speak at greater length upon Assyrian, not being an Assyriologist himself nor yet capable of satisfactorily distinguishing the certain from the uncertain results of Assyriological inquiry.

The native cuneiform writing was used in Babylonia not only under the Persian empire but also in the Greek period, as the discovery of isolated specimens proves. It does not of course necessarily follow from this that Assyrian was still spoken at that time. Indeed, this language may possibly have been banished from ordinary life long before the destruction of Nineveh, surviving only as the official and sacerdotal tongue. These inscriptions, in any case, were intended for none but a narrow circle of learned persons.

*Arabic.—*The southern group of Semitic languages con­sists of Arabic and Ethiopic. Arabic, again, is subdivided into the dialects of the larger portion of Arabia and those of the extreme south (the Sabæan, &c.). At a very much earlier time than we were but lately justified in supposing, some of the northern Arabs reduced their language to writing. For travellers have quite recently discovered in the northern parts of the Hijáz inscriptions in a strange character, which seem to have been written long before our

@@@1 See Socin, *Die neu-aramäischen Dialekte von Urmia bis Mosul,* Tübingen, 1882; comp. *Z.D.M.G.,* xxxvi. 679 *sq.*