Finally, the Samaritans, among the inhabitants of Palestine, translated their only sacred book, the Pentateuch, into their own dialect. The critical study of this translation proves that the language which lies at its base was very much the same as that of the neighbouring Jews. Perhaps, indeed, the Samaritans may have carried the softening of the gutturals a little farther than the Jews of Galilee. Their absurd attempt to embellish the language of the translation by arbitrarily introducing forms borrowed From the Hebrew original has given rise to the false notion that Samaritan is a mixture of Hebrew and Aramaic. The introduction of Hebrew and even of Arabic words and forms was practised in Samaria on a still larger scale by copyists who lived after Aramaic had become extinct. The later works written in the Samaritan dialect are, from a linguistic point of view, as worthless as the compositions of Samaritans in Hebrew ; the writers, who spoke Arabic, endeavoured to write in languages with which they

were but half acquainted.

All these Western Aramaic dialects, including that of the oldest inscriptions, have this feature among others in common, that they form the third person singular masculine and the third person plural masculine and feminine in the imperfect by prefixing *y*, as do the other Semitic languages. And in these dialects the termination *ā* (the so-called “ status emphaticus ”) still retained the meaning of a definite article down to a tolerably late period.

As early as the 7th century the conquests of the Moslems greatly circumscribed the domain of Aramaic and a few centuries later it was almost completely supplanted in the west by Arabic. For the Christians of those countries, who, like every one else, spoke Arabic, the Palestinian dialect was no longer of importance, and they adopted as their ecclesiastical language the dialect of the other Aramaean Christians, the Syriac (or Edessene). The only localities where a Western Aramaic dialect, much changed from the old language, still survives are a few villages in Anti-Libanus.

The popular Aramaic dialect of Babylonia from the 4th to the 6th century of our era is exhibited in the Babylonian Talmud, in which, however, as in the Jerusalem Talmud, there is a constant mingling of Aramaic and Hebrew passages. To a somewhat later period, and probably not to exactly the same district of Babylonia, belong the writings of the Mandaeans (*q.v.*), a strange sect, half Christian and half heathen, who from a linguistic point of view possess the peculiar advantage of having remained almost entirely free from the influence of Hebrew, which is so perceptible in the Aramaic writings of Jews as well as of Christians. The orthography of the Mandaeans comes nearer than that of the Talmud to the real pronunciation, and in it the softening of the gutturals is most clearly seen. In other respects there is a close resemblance between Mandaean and the language of the Babylonian Talmud. The forms of the imperfect which we have enumerated above take in these dialects *n* or *l.* In Babylonia, as in Syria, the language of the Arabic conquerors rapidly drove out that of the country. The latter has long been totally extinct, unless possibly a few surviving Mandaeans still

speak among themselves a more modern form of their dialect.

At Edessa, in the west of Mesopotamia, the native dialect had already been used for some time as a literary language, and had been reduced to rule through the influence of the schools (as is proved by the fixity of the grammar and orthography) even before Christianity acquired power in the country in the 2nd century. At an early period the Old and New

Testaments were here translated, with the help of Jewish tradition. This version and its transformations became the Bible of Aramaean Christendom, and Edessa became its capital. Thus the Aramaean Christians of the neighbouring countries, even those who were subjects of the Persian empire, adopted the Edessan dialect as the language of the church, of literature, and of cultivated intercourse. Since the ancient name of the inhabitants, “ Aramaeans,” just like that of Ελληves, had acquired in the minds of Jews and Christians the unpleasant signification of “ heathens,” it was generally avoided, and in its place the Greek terms “ Syrians ” and “ Syriac ” were used. But “ Syriac ” was also the name given by the Jews and Christians of Palestine to their own language, and both Greeks and Persians designated the Aramaeans of Babylonia as “ Syrians.” It is therefore, properly speaking, incorrect to employ the word “ Syriac” as meaning the language of Edessa alone; but, since it was the most important of these dialects, it has the best claim to this generally received appellation. It has, as we have said, a shape very definitely fixed; and in it the above-mentioned forms of the imperfect take an *n.* As in the Babylonian dialects, the termination *ā* has become so completely a part of the substantive to which it is added that it has wholly lost the meaning of the definite article, whereby the clearness of the language is perceptibly impaired. The influence exercised by Greek is very apparent in Syriac. From the 3rd to the 7th century an extensive literature was produced in this language, consisting chiefly, but not entirely, of ecclesiastical works. In the development of this literature the Syrians of the Persian empire took an eager part. In the eastern Roman empire Syriac was, after Greek, by far the most important language; and under the Persian kings it virtually occupied a more prominent position as an organ of culture than the Persian language itself. The conquests of the Arabs totally changed this state of things.

But meanwhile, even in Edessa, a considerable difference had arisen between the written language and the popular speech, in which the

process of modification was still going on. About the year 700 it became a matter of absolute necessity to systematize the grammar of the language and to introduce some means of clearly expressing the vowels. The principal object aimed at was that the text of the Syriac Bible should be recited in a correct manner. But, as it happened, the eastern pronunciation differed in many respects from that of the west. The local dialects had to some extent exercised an influence over the pronunciation of the literary tongue; and, on the other hand, the political separation between Rome and Persia, and yet more the ecclesiastical schism—since the Syrians of the east were mostly Nestorians, those of the west Monophysites and Catholics—had produced divergencies between the traditions of the various schools. Starting, therefore, from a common source, two distinct systems of punctuation were formed, of which the western is the more convenient, but the eastern the more exact and generally the more in accordance with the ancient pronunciation ; it has, for example, *ã* in place of the western *ō*, and *ō* in many cases where the western Syrians pronounce *ū*. In later times the two systems have been intermingled in various ways.

Arabic everywhere put a speedy end to the predominance of

Aramaic—a predominance which had lasted for much more than a thousand years—and soon began to drive Syriac out of use. At the beginning of the 11th century the learned metropolitan of Nisibis, Elias bar Shinnāyā, wrote his books intended for Christians either entirely in Arabic or in Arabic and Syriac arranged in parallel columns, that is, in the spoken and in the learned language. Thus, too, it became necessary to have Syriac-Arabic glossaries. Up to the present day Syriac has remained in use for literary and ecclesiastical purposes, and may perhaps be even spoken in some monasteries and schools; but it has long been a dead language. When Syriac became extinct in Edessa and its neighbourhood is not known with certainty (see Syriac Language).

This language, called Syriac *par excellence,* is not the immediate source whence are derived the Aramaic dialects still surviving in the northern districts. In the mountains known as the Tūr 'Abdīn in Mesopotamia, in certain districts east and north of Mosul, in the neighbouring mountains of Kurdistan, and again beyond them on the western coast of the Lake of Urmia, Aramaic dialects are spoken by Christians and occasionally by Jews, and some of these dialects we know with tolerable precision. The dialect of Ṭūr ‘Abdīn differs considerably from all the rest; the country beyond the Tigris is, however, divided, as regards language, amongst a multitude of local dialects. Among these, that of Urmia has become the most important since American missionaries have formed a new literary language out of it. Moreover, the Roman Propaganda has printed books in two of the Neo-Syriac dialects. AI1 these dialects exhibit a complete transformation of the ancient type, to a degree incom- parably greater than is the case, for example, with Mandaean. In particular, the ancient 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 Ṭūr ‘Abdīn 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 Aramaeans have all adopted a motley crowd of foreign words, from the Arabs, Kurds, Persians 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, firstly from Assyrian, later from Persian and Greek; but, if we leave out of consideration the fact that many Syrian authors are in the habit of usipg, as ornaments or for convenience (especially ín 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 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. The literal reproduction of Greek phraseology and Greek construction is contrary to the whole spirit of the language. 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 *shěwā).* 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 Man­daean, which expresses every vowel **by** means of a vowel-letter.