acquainted with Arabic than with the other Semitic languages of antiquity. The opinion sometimes maintained by certain over-zealous Assyriologists, that Assyrian is the “ Sanskrit of the Semitic world,” has not met with the approval even of the Assyriologists themselves, and is unworthy of a serious refutation.

A comparative grammar of the Semitic languages must of course be based upon Arabic, but must in every matter of detail take into consideration all the cognate languages, as far as they are known to us. In the reconstruction of the primitive Semitic tongue Hebrew might perhaps afford more assistance than Ethiopie; but Aramaic, Assyrian, and even the less known and the more modern dialects might furnish valuable materials.

The method by which these younger languages, especially the dialects of to-day, have received their present form, may be traced with tolerable comprehensiveness. Thus we gain valuable analogies for determining the genetic process in the older tongues. At the same time, a conscientious investigation forces upon us the conviction that there are many and important phenomena which we are powerless to explain; and this applies, in part, to cases where, at first, the solution appears perfectly simple. So, although we have seen that the main features of the correspond­ence between the Semitic languages have long been definitely established—years before Bopp scientifically demonstrated the connexion of the Indo-European tongues—still in our domain it is a task of extreme difficulty to create a comparative grammar which shall be minutely exact and yield permanent results. Only the most accomplished philologist could attempt the task, and it is very doubtful whether the time is yet ripe for such an attempt.@@1 Much careful and minute investigation is still indis- pensable. One great obstacle lies in the fact, that, in most Semitic languages, the sounds are very inadequately transmitted. It would probably be easier to give a comparative presentment of Semitic syntax than of Semitic phonetics and the theory of Semitic forms.

It is not a formidable undertaking to describe in general terms the character of the Semitic mind, as has been done, for example, by Lassen (*Indische Altertumskunde,* i. 414 sq.) and by Renan in the introduction to his *Histoire des langues sémitiques.@@*2 But still there is a danger of assuming that the most important characteristics of particular Semitic peoples, especially of the Israelites and of the Arabs, are common to all Semites, and of ascribing to the influence of race certain striking features which are the result of the external conditions of life, and which, under similar circumstances, are also developed among non-Semitic races. And, though it is said, not without reason, that the Semites possess but little talent for political and military organization on a large scale, yet we have in the Phoenicians, especially the Carthaginians, in Hamilcar and in Hannibal, a proof that under altered conditions the Semites are not incapable of distinguishing themselves in these domains. It is a poor evasion to deny that the Phoenicians are genuine Semites, since even our scanty sources of information suffice to show that in the matter of religion, which among Semites is of such supreme importance, they bore a close resemblance to the ancient Hebrews and Aramaeans. In general descriptions of this kind it is easy to go too far. But to give in general terms a correct idea of the Semitic languages is a task of very much greater difficulty. Renan’s brilliant and most interesting sketch is in many respects open to serious criticism. He cites, for example, as characteristic of the Semitic tongues, that they still retain the practice of expressing psychological processes by means of distinct imagery. In saying this he is taking scarcely any language but Hebrew into account. But the feature to which he here alludes is owing to the particular

stage of intellectual development that had been reached by the Israelites, is in part peculiar to the poetical style, and is to be found in like manner among wholly different races. That the Semitic languages are far from possessing the fixity which Renan attributes to them we shall see below. But, however this may be, certain grammatical peculiarities of the Semitic languages— above all, the predominance of triliteral roots—are so marked that it is scarcely possible to doubt whether any language with which we are tolerably well acquainted is or is not Semitic. Only when a Semitic language has been strongly influenced not only in vocabulary but also in grammar by some non- Semitic speech, as is the case with Amharic, can such a doubt be for a moment entertained.

Many attempts have been made, sometimes in a very super­ficial fashion and sometimes by the use of scientific methods, to establish a relationship between the Semitic languages and the Indo-European. It was very natural to suppose that the tongues of the two races which, with the single exceptions of the Egyptians and the Chinese, have formed and moulded human civilization, who have been near neighbours from the earliest times, and who, moreover, seem to bear a great physical resemblance to one another, can be nothing else than two descendants of the same parent speech. But all these endeavours have wholly failed. It is indeed probable that the languages, not only of the Semites and of the Indo-Europeans, but also those of other races, are derived from the same stock, but the separation must have taken place at so remote a period that the changes which these languages underwent in prehistoric times have completely effaced what features they possessed in common; if such features have sometimes been preserved, they are no longer recognizable. It must be remembered that it is only in exceptionally favourable cir- cumstances that cognate languages are so preserved during long periods as to render it possible for scientific analysis to prove their relationship with one another.@@3

On the other hand, the Semitic languages bear so striking a resemblance in some respects to certain languages of northern Africa that we are forced to assume the existence of a tolerably close relationship between the two groups. We allude to the family of languages known in modem times as the “ Hamitic,” and composed of the Egyptian, Berber, Beja (Bishārī, &c.),and a number of tongues spoken in Abyssinia and the neighbouring countries (Agaw, Galla, Danḳali, &c.). It is remarkable that some of the most indispensable words in the Semitic vocabulary (as, for instance, “ water,” “ mouth ” and certain numerals) are found in Hamitic also, and that these words happen to be such as cannot well be derived from triliteral Semitic roots, and are more or less independent of the ordinary grammatical rules. We notice, too, important resemblances in grammar—for example, the formation of the feminine by means of a *t* prefixed or affixed, that of the causative by means of *s,* similarity in the suffixes and prefixes of the verbal tenses, and, generally, similarity in the personal pronouns, &c. It must be admitted that there is also much disagreement—for instance, the widest divergence in the mass of the vocabulary; and this applies to the Semitic languages as compared not only with those Hamitic languages that are gradually becoming known to us at the present day, but with the Egyptian, of which we possess documents dating from the fourth and perhaps fifth millennium before the Christian era. The question is here involved in great difficulties. Some isolated resemblances may, improbable as it appears, have been produced by the borrowing of words. Uncivilized races, as has been proved with certainty, sometimes borrow from others elements of speech in cases where we should deem such a thing impossible—for example, numerals and even personal suffixes. But the great resemblances in grammatical formation cannot be reasonably explained as due to borrowing on the part of the

@@@1 By this we do not wish to call in question the merits of the following works: William Wright, *Lectures on the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages* (Cambridge, 1890, a posthumous work); O. E. Lindberg, *Vergleichende Grammatik* *d.* *semitischen Sprachen* (ρt. 1, Göteborg, 1897); Heinr. Zimmern, *Vergl. Gramm. d. semit. Sprachen* (Berlin, 1898); C. Brockelmann, *Semitische Sprachwissenschaft* (Leipzig, 1906) and *Grundriss der vergl. Gramm. d. semit. Sprachen,* vol. i. (Berlin, 1908).

@@@2 Cf. Th. Nöldeke, Some Characteristics of the Semitic Races, in Sketches from Eastern History (London and Edinburgh, 1892), 1 ff.

@@@3 The following is an instance of the manner in which we may be deceived by isolated cases. “ Six ” is in Hebrew *shēsh,* almost exactly like the Sanskrit and modern Persian *shash,* the Latin *sex,* &c. But the Indo-European root is *sweks,* or perhaps even *ksweks,* whereas the Semitic root is *shidth,* so that the resemblance is a purely accidental one, produced by phonetic change.