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## The Presbyterian Review.

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### \*A New History of Israel.

THE field of historical research in the East has engaged the attention of many eminent scholars for a long time. Its records, unlike those of Western lands, did not exist in great public libraries, and in languages easily accessible, but amid the ruins of ancient cities, buried for centuries under the earth, and in tongues whose decipherment baffled, for a great while, the genius of the best savants. As early as A.D., 1618, the Spanish Ambassador, De Figueroa, called attention to the cuneiform inscriptions, in the ruins of Persepolis, but it was only in A.D., 1778, that fresh interest was excited in regard to them, by Niebuhr. To Grotefend, however, belongs the honor of deciphering the first inscriptions in A.D., 1802, assisted by Muntzer. During the present century, great activity has been manifested in the work of excavation, and translation, by many distinguished explorers, including, among others, Rawlinson, Layard, George Smith, Botta and Hormuzd Rassam. Especially since 1870, a new and genuine enthusiasm has been shown, in this novel science, resulting in the unearthing of a vast amount of literary treasure, which has shed a new light over the "youth time of the world," and added immensely to our knowledge of the ancient peoples of the East. Sayce, Lenormant, Schrader, Delitzsch, Hommel and Hilprecht are among those who have labored in this field with signal success.

But, notwithstanding all that was done by these scholars, there yet remained a very important work to be done, and that was to tabulate and arrange all the results which had been obtained, in a form accessible to ordinary readers, especially in their bearing on the study of the history of the Old Testament. It is to this necessary and highly useful work, that Prof. McCurdy has applied himself, with conspicuous ability and learning, with the result that he has produced a volume of surpassing interest, and of the greatest importance to the readers and students of the Old Testament. It cannot be denied that the ordinary student of the Old Testament history has long felt the want of new light upon it. More particularly upon the relations of the people of Israel to the people surrounding them, and influencing their destiny. Every one has desired to know more than has ever been written in commentaries

"History, Prophecy and the Monuments," by James Frederick McCurdy, Ph.D., L.L.D., Professor of Oriental Languages in University College, Toronto. MacMillan & Co., New York, 1894.

regarding the nations which were of kindred-origin with Israel, from whose midst Israel's progenitor came, and who were in an advanced state of civilization long before Abram emigrated from Ur of the Chaldees. All this, and very much more, the present volume supplies, its aim being, as the author states, "to help those, into whose hands it may fall, to apprehend in its true relations the history of that ancient people, the Semites, (of whom Israel was one branch), through whom the world has gained most of its heritage of moral and spiritual light and power.

Accordingly, after a short preface, indicating the nature of the work. Prof. McCurdy introduces his readers to an admirable and able description of the chief characteristics of the Semitic peoples, as a whole, showing their contributions to the world's progress, as contrasted with those of the Aryan (European) peoples. After stating the division of the Semitic race into the Northern Semites: including the Babylonian, Aramaean, Canaanitic and Hebraic peoples (embracing Hebrews, Moabites, Ammorites and Edomites), and Southern; Sabaeans, Ethiopians and Arabs; and alluding to the constitution and character of the Northern Semitic communities, their political development, and expansion. Dr. McCurdy leads us back to the early home of the Semitic race, so far as it is disclosed by the light of the inscriptions. This lay in North-western Arabia, whence one section emigrated, and went up and possessed the land of the south-eastern Euphrates and Tigris, extending as far as the Persian Gulf known as Babylonia; another portion going to the westward, and northward, into the country ultimately known as Assyria; another going still further west, and south, to form Syria and Canaan.

The story that the monuments have to tell us is, that as far back as we can go, in the history of the Semites of Babylonia, some 4,000 years before Christ, we find the people in an advanced state of civilization, which at once challenges the correctness of Messher's Chronology. The opinion generally entertained by scholars is that this branch of the Semites inherited the fruits of the culture of a people, non-Semitic, whom they dispossessed. Dr. McCurdy combats this view, known as the Sumerian theory, chiefly because no trace of any such a people is to be found.

There is evidence to show that the Babylonians made expeditions as far as Syria and Palestine, and even to Cypress, being carried over the sea, by the traders of Phoenicia, the beginning of whose celebrated maritime enterprises could not therefore have been later than B.C., 4,000.

As with Babylonia, so also the author deals at length with Assyria, and Syria, constructing a continuous history of the various branches of the Northern Semites replete with interest and instruction. A chapter each is devoted to the Canaanites, the Egyptians and the Hittites (Hittites). Concerning the racial connections of this latter people, Dr. McCurdy does not hazard an opinion, though he apparently holds, with Haleny, and Jensen to their Semitic origin.

We now come to the Exodus, which the author puts as late as B.C. 1,200, some three centuries after the received chronology, on the ground that the Egyptian control of Palestine, which lasted long after B.C. 1,500, would have made the Exodus impossible, at so early a date. It is with the Exodus, virtually,