



Fresh Light from the Ancient Monuments

A.H. Sayce

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EXCERPT (Preface):

The object of this little book is explained by its title. Discovery after discovery has been pouring in upon us from Oriental lands, and the accounts given only ten years ago of the results of Oriental research are already beginning to be antiquated. It is useful, therefore, to take stock of our present knowledge, and to see how far it bears out that “old story” which has been familiar to us from our childhood. The same spirit of scepticism which had rejected the early legends of Greece and Rome had laid its hands also on the Old Testament, and had determined that the sacred histories themselves were but a collection of myths and fables. But suddenly, as with the wand of a magician, the ancient eastern world has been reawakened to life by the spade of the explorer and the patient skill of the decipherer, and we now find ourselves in the presence of monuments which bear the names or recount the deeds of the heroes of Scripture. One by one these “stones crying out” have been examined or more perfectly explained, while others of equal importance are being continually added to them.

What striking confirmations of the Bible narrative have been afforded by the latest discoveries will be seen from the following pages. In many cases confirmation has been accompanied by illustration. Unexpected light has been thrown upon facts and statements hitherto obscure, or a wholly new explanation has been given of some event recorded by the inspired writer. What can be more startling than the discovery of the great Hittite Empire, the very existence of which had been forgotten, and which yet once contended on equal terms with Egypt on the one side and Assyria on the other? The allusions to the Hittites in the Old Testament, which had been doubted by a sceptical criticism, have been shown to be fully in accordance with the facts, and their true place in history has been pointed out.

But the account of the Hittite Empire is not the only discovery of the last four or five years about which this book has to speak. Inscriptions of Sargon have cleared up the difficulties attending the tenth and eleventh chapters of Isaiah's prophecies, and have proved that no “ideal” campaign of an “ideal” Assyrian king is described in them. The campaign, on the contrary, was a very real one, and when Isaiah delivered his prophecy the Assyrian monarch was marching down upon Jerusalem from the north, and was about to be “the rod” of God's anger upon its sins. Ten years before the overthrow of Sennacherib's army his father, Sargon, had captured Jerusalem, but a “remnant” escaped the horrors of the siege, and returned in penitence “unto the mighty God.”

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