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Archibald Henry Sayce.

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THE subject of this memoir is a man whose literary and scholarly activity may be described as universal. Since the year 1871, when at the age of twenty-five he attained a European reputation by an article on Sumerian philology, he has constantly contributed to Oriental and Classical philology and to Semitic and Egyptian history and religion. For a period of nearly fifty years not one has passed without a book or important article from his pen. Their influence has been varied and profound.

Born in 1846 in the west country of Shirehampton, of Celtic extraction, he was educated at Grosvenor College, Bath. The Rev. Bradford Waring Gibson, Trinity College, Cambridge, was head master at that time. The principal interest of the master was mathematics, which may perhaps partially explain Sayce's aptitude for astronomy when he began the interpretation of Babylonian astronomical texts. He matriculated at Brasenose College, Oxford, in 1864, but was immediately

elected scholar of Queen's through the influence of two well-known classical scholars, Bywater and Pater. He obtained a first in Moderations and in the Final Classical Schools, graduating 1868 in the class of Andrew Lang, E. A. Knox (Bishop of Manchester), T. Humphrey Ward, and K. A. Muir-Mackenzie. Of delicate health he was compelled to spend one winter during his undergraduate days in the south of France. It is said by those who knew him in those days that this circumstance gave him opportunity for a wider range of reading than the severe Oxford system of examination usually encourages. He was elected Fellow of Queen's College in 1869, and did tutorial work in Classics and Theology from 1870 to 1879. He was acquainted with Mark Pattison and vigorously supported his crusade for the encouragement of research at Oxford. In fact, he consistently stood for the encouragement of original scholarship, and the result of his lifelong endeavour is that his own college has a great number of profound scholars and is renowned for its contributions to learning.

In 1871, when he began to publish, the languages and strange scripts of Western Asia were in process of being deciphered. Grotefend, Rawlinson, Hincks, and Oppert had founded the science of Assyriology by means of the trilingual cuneiform inscriptions of the Achæmænian Empire. The first of the versions was found to be Old Persian, an Aryan language whose affinities with Sanscrit were at once discovered and which soon gave up its secrets. The third version, largely through the remarkable ingenuity of Edward Hincks of Dublin University, was proved to be a Semitic language, that is Babylonian. The second version of these inscriptions was still more or less of a mystery in the early seventies. Its precise geographical relation to other languages remained obscure until 1885, when Sayce proved that it was written in the language of Elam, the native land of Cyrus himself. I shall return to this discovery later. The third or Semitic Babylonian version of the cuneiform royal inscriptions of the Persian Empire was by far the most important linguistic recovery of modern times. Here we obtained the key to the literatures of Babylonia and Assyria and several other peoples of Western Asia who made use of their language and script. George Smith, Edwin Norris, and others had already begun the publication of

historical, literary, and grammatical texts, and much progress had been made in their interpretation before 1870. The linguistic character of the language spoken and written at Nineveh and Babylon was determined. The outline of their history was known and some of their great legends were vaguely understood. But the Babylonian inscriptions revealed the surprising fact that this most ancient of Semitic peoples had borrowed their system of writing, their culture, and most of their religion from an earlier and a vanished people whose language was a complete puzzle. Great numbers of bilingual tablets had been excavated at Nineveh and brought to the British Museum, and these were found to be lexicons and reading-books written to instruct the Semites in this ancient and sacred language. Oppert, Hincks, and others had already discovered its non-Semitic character, and this problem was the first one to which the young Oxford scholar consecrated his great linguistic ability. In the *Journal of Philology* of the year 1870¹ appeared an article on 'An Accadian Seal,' an inscription of twelve lines mentioning Dungi, king of Ur, who reigned 2456-2399 B.C. This was the first attempt to translate a classical inscription unaccompanied by a Semitic version. He was wrong in deciding in favour of Hincks' term 'Accadian' as the name of the language, for the future history of Assyriology was to prove Oppert right in describing it as Sumerian. But there was great controversy in those days between these two terms, and no one then could divine that the ancient city of Accad was the first Semitic capital in Babylonia and that Accadian really meant 'Semitic' as distinctive from Sumerian, the agglutinating language of the more ancient people in the extreme south. He nevertheless determined for all time the agglutinating nature of this language which we now call Sumerian, and fixed several of its grammatical rules and its phonetic peculiarities. His natural gift for phonetics is truly remarkable, far more so than his published works would lead any one to believe. Time and again the writer, in his endeavour to settle the phonetic system of Sumerian in a Sumerian grammar forty years after this pioneer work, found him a resourceful phonetician, ready to give invaluable advice concerning most difficult sound changes. If any one will take the trouble to read this now historic but naturally somewhat anti-

¹ The article is dated February 4, 1870.

quoted article on 'An Accadian Seal' he will be unable to understand how any one at the age of twenty-four years could have done such a performance. It shows an intimate knowledge of the grammar and phonetics of Aryan, Semitic, Turanian, and the whole group of Asianic agglutinating languages.

In 1874 the ingenious Semitic scholar of Paris, Joseph Halévy, disputed the very existence of Sumerian, and explained it as cryptographic. The term finally employed was *Allographie*, and I still have by me a pathetic letter from that valiant but misguided *savant* which accompanied his last book (1912) on the subject sent to me. It has always been a mystery to the younger generation of Assyriologists how any one could have taken Halévy seriously. But many did, and even the distinguished Friedrich Delitzsch was deceived for a time. Sayce, however, like Jules Oppert, was far too good a linguist to be influenced by an impossible theory, and in his admirable paper on Sumerian phonology (1877) he made no reference to the attack on Sumerian, and, in fact, never has done so. To the great loss of Assyriology he broke off his Sumerian studies here and devoted his attention to other problems. He has, however, paid close attention to all the work which has been done, as those who know him can testify. Knowledge of Sumerian is absolutely essential not only for the interpretation of cuneiform texts, but even for Assyrian grammar. And so when in 1872 he wrote the first really comprehensive Assyrian grammar, his Sumerian studies profited him and Assyriology much. This was his first important work in Semitic languages, and reveals a good knowledge of that group. So far as I know we find here the first correct statement of the relation of Assyrian sibilants to the sibilants of cognate languages. That is, of course, one of the most important things to know about any Semitic language. In 1875 appeared his *Elementary Grammar of the Assyrian Language*, which passed into a second edition in 1876. At the same time he began to publish translations and interpretations of Assyrian texts chiefly in the first series of the *Records of the Past*, published by the Society of Biblical Archæology. In volumes i., iii., iv., v., vii., ix., xi., published during the years 1873-78, appeared translations of historical, religious, divination, and astronomical texts. Most of this material was revised and republished, together with many new texts, especially selections from the famous

Amarna Letters, in the new series of the *Records of the Past*, 1888-92, six volumes, edited by himself, with the assistance of such scholars as Maspero, Amiaud, Pinches, Ball, and Rogers. His own contributions included one on Egyptian place names. He had, in fact, paid much attention to Egyptian and had studied under Maspero in Paris. The now famous Assyriologist, Père Scheil, was a fellow-student with him in Maspero's classes. The plan of the *Records of the Past* did not encourage exhaustive study of any one branch of literature, a most unfortunate circumstance for the future of Assyriology in England. But the series did spread abroad a knowledge of the subject and aroused great interest. Citations from the series occur abundantly in the theological literature of the period.

A long monograph on astronomical texts in the *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archæology*, 1874, pp. 145-339, was the first scientific investigation of Babylonian astronomy. The author shows a good knowledge of modern astronomy. It contains a résumé of all references to Babylonian astronomy and astrology in classical authors. In the light of our more scientific knowledge of Babylonian astronomy, which has developed into an exact discipline now, it would be distinctly unfair to criticise this pioneer work which began what turned out to be a complicated and very important subject. He foresaw, with the acumen usual in him, that astronomy was one of the fundamental elements in Sumer-Babylonian religion. We cannot interpret their vast theological system without it, and his *Religion of the Ancient Babylonians*, delivered as the Hibbert Lectures in 1887, shows that he appreciated this fact. Here we find for the first time the statement that the Babylonian (really the Sumerian) calendar originated in the period when the sun at the vernal equinox stood in Taurus. He placed the passage of the sun from Taurus into Aries in the twenty-sixth century B.C., but modern calculations place it at about 1900. Taurus is a long sign, and the sun entered it about 4500 B.C., and in that remote age the civilization of Sumer began. Having discovered that the sun stood in Taurus during the first month of the year throughout the period 4500-2500, he then explained the Sumerian name of what in the later period, about 2400, is the name of the second month *gud-si-di*, 'the directing bull.' Now when the sun passed from Taurus

into Aries naturally the first month became the second. In other words, *gud-si-di* probably was the name of the first month in the Taurus period, although it has not been found as such in that period. In short, this name, 'the directing bull,' for the month Nisan in the period when the sun stood in Taurus during that month is explained on astronomical grounds, and convincingly explained in my opinion. It is unnecessary to comment upon the acumen of a remark like that made at the very beginning of our studies on Babylonian religion. We cannot but surmise that the whole pan-Babylonian astronomical school of Germany, which sees practically nothing but astral religion in Babylonia, obtained their inspiration from Sayce.

In 1874 we find him attacking the second version of the Achæmenian inscriptions, which were obviously neither Persian (Aryan) nor Semitic. Now Layard had found cuneiform inscriptions in the plain of Mal-Amir on the road from Susa to Persepolis, and François Lenormant had published a few more of similar character from Susa. Sayce discovered at once that they were written in the same language as that of the second version of the royal inscriptions of Darius and Xerxes. The unknown language, therefore, was that of Elam. In *P.S.B.A.*, 1874, pp. 465-485 (separated at no great length from the monograph referred to above on astronomical texts), he fixed the character of this language and gave it the name Elamitic or Susian, which it has borne since. Again, at the Sixth Congress of Orientalists (1885), he read on the *Inscriptions of Mal. Amir* (vol. i. 639-756) a long monograph which is generally recognized as having fixed the direction which the new science must take. The excavations at Susa have produced an extensive literature of Elamitic, due almost exclusively to the work of one man, Père Scheil of Paris. It is not often that it falls to the lot of a scholar to determine the character of what proved to be a great language and historic civilization.

Sayce came early under the influence of Professor Max Müller and devoted apparently half of his attention to Aryan philology. He possessed a working knowledge of Sanscrit, was a splendid Greek and Latin scholar, knew all the important modern Aryan languages of Europe, and being of Celtic extraction was able to command the resources of that group in his studies in comparative philology. Not infrequently does he refer to

Finnish and the whole Tartar group for illustration. In 1876, in a lecture on Comparative Philology, he insisted upon a most sound principle: 'Grammar and grammar alone forms a true basis for Comparative Philology. Mere similarity of roots is delusive.' Even at this time he was able to discuss the whole Aryan, Semitic, Celtic, and Magyar group. He became Deputy Professor of Comparative Philology (which in those days meant Aryan philology) in 1876. His *opus magnum* is *Introduction to the Science of Language* (1880), two thick volumes. *Principles of Comparative Philology*, published in 1874, which passed through three editions, was his first important book.

Undoubtedly his real interest from about 1885 turned toward the history of religion, especially the religions of Egypt and Babylonia, and in particular the religion of the Hebrews. His books on these subjects have had great influence, and have also been the subject of much diversity of opinion. *Religion of the Ancient Babylonians* (1887) was the first essay to outline the character of that great religion. It passed into six editions and was widely used as a text-book at the end of the last century. There is here no attempt to illustrate the religion of the Hebrews from this source. But in 1883 was published a small book, *Fresh Light from the Monuments*, in which the historical records of Assyria and Egypt were abundantly utilized to illustrate and confirm portions of the Old Testament. The school of Higher Criticism of the Old Testament were rewriting the history of the Hebrews and reinterpreting their religion in the light of literary criticism. It is difficult to state precisely his position in this controversy, which continues to the present day. His major thesis is that the literary critics fail to do justice to the historical surroundings of the Hebrew people in every period, particularly in the Mosaic period. *Fresh Light from the Monuments* passed through nine editions, 1883-95. There is no reason to suppose that Sayce at first denied the documentary composition of the Pentateuch. His opposition to the modern school of Old Testament critics is that they carry their analysis too far and greatly underestimate the literary character of the Mosaic Age. In his *Life and Times of Isaiah* (1889) he at any rate makes use of only chapters 1-39, and one concludes that he correctly sees the impossibility of attributing chapters 40-66 to that prophet. He employs prophetic utterances as legitimate

sources of history which proves clearly enough that he regards the Hebrew Scriptures as standing upon a different level from any other literature. His standard work on the Old Testament is *The 'Higher Criticism' and the Verdict of the Monuments* (1893), which passed at once into three editions. His attitude toward the Higher Critics is well stated there. 'What may be called historical hair-splitting has been the bane of scientific criticism. It has been mainly due to a want of sympathy with the age and writers of the documents which are criticised, and to a difficulty of realizing the conditions under which they lived, and the point of view from which they wrote.' In this book he massed practically all the known Egyptian and Babylonian sources illustrative of Hebrew history and followed it down to the time of Ezra. Archæology certainly vindicates his position about the possibility of the Hebrews having been able to write in cuneiform in the age of the Judges, and he insists time and again that there is a reference to the scribe and the stylus in Jg 5¹⁴. Also in numerous articles on the 'Archæology of the Book of Genesis' in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, he argues that the early Hebrew records were written on clay tablets precisely as the early Canaanites of the sixteenth and fifteenth centuries wrote their letters to the kings of Egypt, and, what is more, he believes that these tablets may still be found. That is an inspiring hope and a prophetic inspiration.

But increasing age brings ever a tendency to conservatism. In his *Early History of the Hebrews* (1897) he apparently denies the documentary analysis of the Pentateuch and defends the Mosaic authorship. Those of us who have been trained in the modern school of criticism find it difficult to follow him now, but it must be said that many exponents of this school unnecessarily aroused his hostility by persisting where he had proved them to be wrong. In consequence they are subjected to severe criticism in a little book *Monumental Facts and Higher Critical Fancies* (1904). Here he goes over to the archæological method as the only one possible in the interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

He is more and more drawn to pure archæology now, and in 1907 appeared an important book, *The Archæology of the Cuneiform Inscriptions* (Rhind Lectures at Edinburgh, 1906, with additional chapters). Here he shows himself

thoroughly schooled in pottery, geology, glyptic, Babylonian art, and metallurgy. The special point of this book is to describe the culture of every one of the peoples who used the Cuneiform script, Sumerian, Elamite, Babylonian, Assyrian, Hittite and Cappadocian, Mitanni, Chaldian (Vannic), and Canaanite.

The Gifford Lectures at Aberdeen (1902) were on *The Conception of the Divine among the Egyptians and the Babylonians*. Here we have an eloquent expression of what every profound student of Egyptology and Assyriology comes to feel, namely, the preparation in these ancient religions for the preaching of the prophets and the founding of Christianity. "God's light lighteth every man that cometh into the world," and the religions of Egypt and Babylonia illustrate the words of the Evangelist. They form the background and preparation for Judaism and Christianity. Christianity was the fulfilment, not of the Law only, but of all that was truest and best in the religions of the ancient world.' In his second edition, 1913, he recognized that the religion of Babylonia was too vast a subject to be dealt with so briefly. The writer painfully believes that Sayce greatly undervalued the ethical standards and religious rituals of Sumer and Babylonia, especially of the former. One of the desiderata of our literature is a book by him on Sumero-Babylonian religion in view of recent progress.

It is perhaps not generally known that Sayce is a preacher of marked ability. There is no better sermon in our language than the one preached at All Saints, Cairo, on Easter Sunday, 1906, and published under the title *The Preaching of St. Paul*. Paul spoke only of a risen Christ, God revealed in the flesh. He preached dogma and more than a personal Christ. 'Stoicism could point to an Epictetus and a Marcus Aurelius, but that is all; and Seneca's pupil was Nero!' 'It is only the few to whom virtue comes, as it were, naturally.' 'My own tutorial experience at Oxford led me to assign a very much higher value to what is commonly called dogmatic teaching than the theories of the study had inclined me to ascribe to it.' He has here, of course, the modern German theological school in mind which centres all upon the Person of Christ. He is far too good an Anglican and a Catholic to follow in that train.

I have left myself no space to describe even briefly his work on Herodotus (Books I.-III.,

text and commentary, 1883), and his *Ancient Empires of the East* (1884), in both of which he proves the inaccuracy of the Greek historian. In some instances Herodotus has partially recovered his reputation, for Sayce did not leave him much. However, so far as Herodotus was concerned with Babylonia, it is difficult to deny the full claims of Sayce's severe criticism. Still less sufficient is my space for an account of his decipherment of the language of the empire of Urartu whose capital was at Van in Armenia, in the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. Without any bilingual inscriptions at all, he made a fairly successful outline of the grammar and translated some of the inscriptions of that lost empire, whose people spoke an agglutinating language, and who preceded the Aryan race in that region. This remarkable linguistic feat was published in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. xiv. (1882), pages 377-732. When de Morgan, and later Belck, found a bilingual inscription at the pass of Kelichin ten years later it was seen that his decipherment was in the main correct.

In the Amarna Letters, published by Winckler in 1888, he detected at once a long letter written in the language of the Mitanni, and at once set to work on that. Curiously enough, unknown to each other, Jensen and Brünnow in Germany each sent in to the *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* (1890) an article on the language of the Mitanni; all three appeared together. There was considerable agreement. Perhaps the most notable of all Sayce's achievements has been his persistent attempt to decipher the hieroglyphs of Asia Minor and Syria, commonly supposed to be Hittite. He began at this in 1876, and has published articles on this most difficult of all unsolved scripts continuously ever since. He assumed from the first that the language of the hieroglyphs of Hamath, Carcemish, and Karabel (in the west of Asia Minor near Ephesus) is identical with the language of the cuneiform tablets of Boghaz-Keui in the sixteenth and fifteenth centuries B.C. His method of determining the ideographic and syllabic values of these hieroglyphs is a long tale and difficult. A popular book by him on the Hittites is *The Hittites: The Story of a Forgotten Empire* (1888), which passed into three editions (1903). But he has made great

progress since, and has now identified nearly all the signs and has translated some of the inscriptions. The present state of Hittite studies is too uncertain to permit of a popular résumé. His system is gaining ground and he is the only one who has succeeded in doing much with the Hittite hieroglyphs. In 1872 he worked at Karian, and published his results in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature*, a work which he pursued in another article, *P.S.B.A.*, 1886, 112-166. His work on this Greek alphabet has become one of the accepted acquisitions of Greek Epigraphy.

Even a bibliography of his books and articles would have filled all the space at my disposal. Perforce much is omitted. His travels and explorations have been extensive and always productive. Any one who wishes to see how brilliant he is in that line is referred to *P.S.B.A.*, 1911, 171-9, 'Notes on an Unexplored District of Northern Syria.' Here his journey from Aleppo to Carcemish, to visit the British excavations at the latter place, is described. Half a dozen Arabic *tels* are identified with ancient Assyrian names mentioned by Shalmanassar, and the geology and palæontology of the region are discussed in the manner of a specialist. The simple account of the work of A. H. Sayce requires no adjectival additions to describe his ability. He became Professor of Assyriology at Oxford in 1891, and resigned in 1914. In 1897 he succeeded Sir P. Le Page Rénouf as President of the Society of Biblical Archæology, a position which he held until that Society was combined with the Royal Asiatic Society (1918).

A raconteur of delightful tales, he possesses a mild humour which is rare in our day. A tale is told of his undergraduate days which may well end this all too brief and imperfect sketch. He belonged then to an exclusive debating society organized for semi-scientific purposes, but some of the members became dubious about its usefulness, and finally one of them proposed to debate on the question as to what the society really existed for. Sayce humorously defined the activity of the society as consisting in throwing pebbles into the ocean of infinity. It ceased to exist after that.