

**THE RESURRECTION OF ASSYRIA:  
A LECTURE DELIVERED IN  
RENFIELD PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH, GLASGOW, ON  
JANUARY 31, 1875, PP. 1-61**

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RESURRECTION OF ASSYRIA:

A LECTURE

DELIVERED IN

RENFIELD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,  
GLASGOW,

ON JANUARY 31, 1875.

BY

W. R. COOPER, F.R.A.S., M.R.A.S.,  
*Secretary of the Society of Biblical Archaeology.*

"The Pride of Assyria shall be brought down." *Zec. x. 11.*



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## THE RESURRECTION OF ASSYRIA.

NAHUM, CAPS. II. AND III.



**T**WO thousand five hundred years ago,<sup>1</sup> amid the roar of brazen trumpets, the clash of cymbals, the hissing of innumerable arrows, the irrepressible rush of waters, the crackling of myriad flames, the triumphant shouts of armed men, the shrieks of women, and the crash of rending walls, Nineveh, the mighty city, the proud metropolis of Western Asia, unresisting, fell.<sup>2</sup> The waters of the great river, once her defence, and now her destruction, melted her clay-tiled battlements, and dissolved her ponderous walls. Desperate and defeated, Assuracus,<sup>3</sup> the effeminate monarch of a voluptuous people, killed himself in despair, and with him perished the often divided but now fatally united Empires of Assyria and Babylonia. Then the horse hoofs of the troops of Cyaxares, trampled into blackened earth the cedar palaces of Sennacherib, and crumbled into lime the marble corridors of Sardanapalus, and the enamelled chambers of Assur-nazir-pal.

<sup>1</sup> As there are at least six Chronological systems, I have used that of *M. François Lenormant* as perhaps the best known of them all.

<sup>2</sup> About B.C. 606.

<sup>3</sup> Reigned from B.C. 625, to the ruin of the kingdom.

So perished Nineveh, the crown of the Chaldean race, so completely perished Nineveh, that only a chance line in the Historian Berosus records her destruction, and the Roman compilers confounded this latter with a previous demolition<sup>1</sup> to the extreme confusion of Science and Chronology. Even the very name of the shapeless mounds where once the proud city stood, was lost, and the only detailed account of its ruin was that uttered years before by Nahum in the chapter which has just been read, and which after the lapse of twenty five centuries has been proved to be accurate by the testimony of the Assyrian records themselves. So fell the mighty Nineveh, and so were buried in its ruins the earliest histories of the Semitic and Turanian races. Here and there among the *debris* of some of her dependent towns, on the tottering walls of roofless divans, scraped on the lofty mesopotamian cliffs, and incised over the portals of neglected tombs, were various singular inscriptions, deeply incised, and carefully spaced, dumb witnesses of an ethnical tragedy, unintelligible signatures to an open deed. Forgotten by the sensuous Greek, the voluptuous Parthian, and the disdainful Roman, occasionally noticed by chance travellers, and then shudderingly avoided as the work of malignant genii, these ruins and these inscriptions roused but an indifferent curiosity among the scholars of Europe till the advent of the memorable year 1803, when by a mighty effort of inductive reason a German student, Grotefend, conjectured the magic words which like the mystic signal in an Eastern tale, gave a voice and utterance to the uncoffined dead.

Of the process by which this wonderful discovery was wrought out by Grotefend, I must now give a very brief description.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> About B.C. 789. See Lenormant, *Manual of Ancient History*, Vol. I., p. 387.

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed history of the successive steps in this joint elucidation, see *Vaux, Nineveh and Persepolis*.

On the steep sides of some lofty rocks at Behistun, 300 feet from the ground, there existed a long inscription, with various bas-reliefs representing monarchs receiving prisoners, and making offerings to a winged deity. This inscription was known to have been executed by the order of one of the Assyro-Persian kings, and was supposed to have been written in three languages, Assyrian, Median, and Persian. Over the head of the monarch were certain characters which Grotefend conjectured to be personal names, these two had different terminations, so at first the names of Cyrus and Cambyses were tried, but they could not be thus written, for both in the Greek terminated and began with the same letters; then Cyrus and Artaxexes, but then those two names were of unequal length. Suddenly the happy idea occurred to the scholar of testing the effect on the groups of characters of the names, Darius, in Persian Daryavesh, and Hystaspes, written Gustasp, and from this slender coincidence a clue was obtained to the interpretation of the Persian characters, which clue still further developed by the perfect knowledge of the Persian language, and the penetration of Sir Henry Rawlinson, and the later studies of MM. Hincks, Oppert, and Fox Talbot, revealed the mystery of the Cuneiform inscriptions, and by the famous test Cylinder of Tiglath Pileser II., translated independently in 1857 by the same four scholars, with a remarkable uniform result, placed the decyphering of the Cuneiform characters among the accomplished facts of Science, and restored to the modern world the Proto-Archaic languages of Assyria and Babylonia to the vast advantage of the study of Philology. Time will not allow me now to tell more of what these ancient Inscriptions have declared to us about themselves, how they have shown that with a Cuneiform alphabet, having the vowels more or less inherent, five different languages, Accadian, Assyrian, Armenian, Turanian, and Elamitic were written; how this



alphabet was originally pictorial, or hieroglyphic as in the long lost Susian, how like the European languages, they were generally written from left to right, how they all were more or less a trouble to the scribes who wrote, and there is some indication also to the people who spoke them; how the grammarians assisted the interpretation of their script by the introduction of determinative signs, and peculiar suffixes and prefixes; how the very characters themselves were capable of bearing either a phonetic or a syllabic value, and how, finally, the clumsy Cuneiform tongues died out, transmitting a few words to the Hebrew and Greek languages, and finally handing down to latest posterity the strange words of conjuration used by magicians and gipsies, words which have long ceased to have any significance, and have been preserved by ignorance to justify conceit.<sup>1</sup>

It is a strange and almost a Providential circumstance that now at the very period when the genius and idiom of these old languages can best be analyzed, they should be rediscovered. At no time has the very existence of history been more threatened by the development of the myth theory than the present, and by no possibly stronger evidence than these monuments and inscriptions could that theory be rebutted. At no time has Scripture been more cleverly assailed, and at no time more irresistibly defended. Still, *festina lente*, for there are looming difficulties yet to controvert, and despite the vast amount of material recently discovered in the pursuance of Assyrian excavation, yet for some time to come the illustration and corroboration of Holy Writ afforded by the Assyrian Records, will have to be collateral and incidental rather than consecutive. Of an older date and more authentic character than any other testimony, the Assyrian inscriptions certainly are, but they are also from

<sup>1</sup> As the terms *Hilka*, *Besha*, etc., used by Rommany prestidigitators. *Lenormand*, I., p. 443.

the very nature of the materials employed in their compilation more imperfect. Still I would not wish to say anything that would have the effect of disparaging the Cuneiform inscriptions, I would only guard myself from encouraging the wild dreams of those popular writers, who expect to find a detailed record of Old Testament history in the ruins of Mesopotamia, and who are grievously disappointed if they find it not, and also the erroneous expectations of another body of authors, mostly clerical, who anticipate that the annals of *Assyria* should concern themselves chiefly with *Jewish* history, a most mistaken hope, since the peoples of Judea were probably the least important, geographically, of all the nations attacked or subjugated by the Chaldeans, and the very exclusiveness of their religious system would deprive their conquerors of any accurate information concerning them, and by consequence the official documents of Assyria also from preserving any detailed account of their rites for the information of later posterity.

This premised, I will now divide my subject into two divisions, to each of which I crave the favour of your careful consideration.

I. Of what *kind* the Assyrian inscriptions are.

II. In what *condition* these inscriptions remain to us; and first of the first: Of what kind the Assyrian inscriptions are. They may be divided into four chief classes:

- 1 The official, containing the records of battles, sieges, and invasions, military and political reports from the various royal cities and their satraps.
- 2 Scientific, being chiefly carefully prepared treatises on nearly every known Science, and bilingual vocabularies and lists of animals, places, and things.

- 3 Sacred, including the mythological tablets, omen tablets, incantational poetry and exorcisms, and
- 4 Fourthly, domestic and legal, comprising a large series of reports of Law cases, mercantile decisions, tablets relating to the sale of houses, lands, and slaves, and miscellaneous personal memoranda.

The *first* class of these inscriptions is that which at once arrests attention as being likely to be the most important to the Biblical and historical student, and to a certain extent they are; these inscriptions are again of two kinds; Mural, and Terra Cotta; and first, mural inscriptions, such as those of Assur-bani-pal, Sennacherib, and notably Assur-nazir-pal. These are chiefly pompous narrations of the principal events in which the monarch took part, from the first year of his reign, to the date of the completion of the building, upon the walls of which they were inscribed. Some of these relations are of considerable interest, and it is by almost chance paragraphs among these, that the truth of Biblical history has been confirmed. Frequently, however, these inscriptions are carelessly transcribed, and by no means follow one another in regular succession, the intention of the scribe having often been simply to cover so many superficial feet of wall space with inscriptions to the personal glorification of the monarch, and it has been more than suspected by Assyrian scholars, that like the Egyptian Pharaohs, some of the Assyrian kings have borrowed a few battles and victories from the reigns of their predecessors. Again many of these mural texts are written in an idiomatic and careless manner, occasionally, as in the Annals of Assur-bani-pal ascending to a style of elegant simplicity and almost Homeric dignity; and at another time, as in the Annals of Assur-nazir-pal, descending into the most monotonous and heavy common place. The Assy-