

cellery in dealing with its Semitic subjects. (For picture of Assyrian and Aramaic scribes working together, see Burns, Judg. p. 256 n.) Similarly, the official documents in the book of Ezra appear in Aramaic. The Jews equally succumbed to the new language, both in the Babylonian Diaspora (where they adopted the current Aramaic type of script as against the elder Phoenician or Hebraic type) and in Palestine, where the rapid corruption of the Hebrew vernacular was fast proceeding, as the Bible testified (Neh. 13.23 ff.). The process went on apace, and the patent testimony thereto is found in the Aramaic portions of two of the canonical books, Ezra and Daniel, as well as in the extensive Aramaic contamination of the later Biblical literature. Aramaic became the vernacular of the Jews as of the other peoples of the Semitic world, Hebrew being reserved for the synagogue and the school, at the most surviving as a vehicle of intercourse in the speech of cultivated circles. As the first vernacular of the Christian Church, Aramaic has immeasurable interest.

The Aramaic also brought under its sway the hordes of Arabs which were ever filtering into the borders of civilization from Arabia; The Arabian Nabataeans and Palmyrenians adopted the language with its script, and in sum it became the lingua franca of the Semitic world. It found a rival in the intruding Greek language, which had it at a disadvantage as a literary vehicle, but it held its own against it, and the religions which did not succumb to Islam, the Christians, Jews and minor sects, preserved their Aramaic heritage as a sacred ~~xxx~~ language and keep it to this day. As a vehicle of civilization, the Aramaic also made its progress into the Far East. It gave the alphabet to the Indian literatures, and the Aramaic Manichaeans gave letters to the barbarians of Turkestan.

It succumbed only before a more potent sister language, the Arabic of Islam, with the result that it survives in various dialects only as an ecclesiastical language, having remained a vernacular till recent times only in certain remote provincial quarters.