



The Story of Assyria

James Baikie

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At the beginning of all things, when the world was new, and men were finding out bit by bit what they could do and how to do it, there were two countries that were more important than any others. They were both the valleys of great rivers, and it was the rivers that made them what they were. The one country was Egypt—that wonderful land where the Nile comes rolling down from the Great Lake Basin of equatorial Africa, and flows for hundreds of miles between temples and pyramids erected by the greatest builders the world has ever seen. About Egypt, two of these little books have already told you."

The other country was known by several different names. There were really two kingdoms in it—Babylonia and Assyria; but the name that was given to the whole country by all the other nations of the world, though it sounded different in the various languages, always meant the same thing. If it was a Greek who spoke, he said "Mesopotamia"; if it was an Egyptian, he said "Naharina"; if it was a Hebrew, he said "Naharaim": but they all meant "Between the Two Rivers," or "Land of the Two Rivers," for the great feature of the country was that it lay between two big rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, which come down from the mountains of Asia Minor, and flow south-east into the Persian Gulf.

If you will look at your map, you will see that almost from the north-eastern corner of the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf there runs in a slanting direction a comparatively flat strip of country. It is rather hilly, or at least high upland country, at its upper end near the Mediterranean; but it grows flatter and flatter the further you go east, till, near the Persian Gulf, it is as flat almost as a table. On the one side of this land rise the great mountain ranges that form the outer wall of Kurdistan and Persia, huge forbidding hills, with only a few wild and narrow passes leading up into their solitary fastnesses; on the other side, the great desert rolls away towards Damascus and Arabia, wave after wave, mile upon mile, of barren sand and shingle. But the land between, wretched and poverty-stricken as it looks now, was once the Garden of the World, the place where men first learned to be men and not brutes, and where the two great rivers, as they rolled on towards the sea, reflected the walls and towers and temples of many of the oldest and greatest cities that the world has ever known. Egypt is the only other land that can claim to have a story which goes back as far as that of the country about which we are thinking...

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