

ISAIAH xxi IN THE LIGHT OF ASSYRIAN HISTORY.

I

Verses 1-10.

THE Burden of the Wilderness of the Sea has long possessed a strong attraction for students of prophecy because of what appeared to the older commentators the undoubted fulfilment of the predictions contained in it. The LXX by their rendering of verse 2—Ἐπ' ἐμοὶ οἱ Ἐλαμῖται, καὶ οἱ πρέσβεις τῶν Περσῶν ἐπ' ἐμὲ ἔρχονται¹—brought the subject-matter of this prophecy down to the Persian era, and so prepared the way for the well-known traditional interpretation, which prevailed from the days of Jerome to within about a generation of the present time. According to this view of the passage, Isaiah xxi 1-10 is a prophecy of the taking of Babylon by Cyrus; Media and Elam in verse 2 stand for the Medes and Persians, and the disturbed banquet in verse 5 is the counterpart of Belshazzar's feast and of that festival carousal of the Babylonians on the night of the capture of their city as related in the pages of Xenophon. So admirably did all seem to fit in, that for a long time everybody was satisfied. To such an interpretation, however, modern criticism has offered some strong objections. Assuming the prophecy to be the work of Isaiah, or at least to belong to the Isaianic age, it is difficult, as Dr Driver observes,² to see what 'intelligible purpose could be subserved by the prophet announcing to the generation of Hezekiah an occurrence lying in the distant future and having no bearing on contemporary interests'; while at the same time the traditional view altogether fails to account for the alarm and aversion with which the prophet contemplates the fall of the great oppressing city. To these considerations it may be added that there is no evidence that when Cyrus entered Babylon he treated the images of the gods in the way described in verse 9. On the contrary, we are expressly assured that his entrance was a peaceful one, and that there was no cessation whatever of the temple worship.³

¹ In translating the Hebrew assonance סְלַע יָלֻע 'up! upland', the LXX for סְלַע read סְלַע 'against me'; whilst בְּנֵי אֶצְבֵּעַ 'besiege' is regarded by them as the status constructus of בָּנָא 'a rock', i. e. protector, and rendered accordingly by πρέσβεις 'princes', as being the protectors of the state.

² *Isaiah, his Life and Times* p. 96.

³ See *The Annalistic Tablet of Cyrus* Rev. Col. i 15-20.

The first person to suggest a more satisfactory explanation of the passage was that gifted Assyriologist the late Mr George Smith.¹ Comparing Isaiah chapters xx and xxi with the Annals of Sargon, Mr Smith pointed out that chapter xx refers to the events of Sargon's eleventh year, viz. the capture of Ashdod ; chapter xxi 1-10 to the Babylonian campaign of the two following years, undertaken by Sargon against Merodachbaladan the Chaldaean, who for twelve years as king of Babylon had resisted the might of the Assyrian arms. According to this new view, which was worked out in some detail by Kleinert,² the subject of this prophecy belongs to the Isaianic age, and the siege of Babylon here foretold was carried out by Sargon. But this interesting solution of the problem had scarcely begun to find acceptance with scholars when a fresh difficulty began to shew itself. The entrance of Sargon into Babylon at the close of the year 710 B.C. was shewn to have been even more peaceful than that of Cyrus 170 years later.³ The Babylonians, tired of the rule of Merodachbaladan, sent out a deputation to meet the conqueror and to welcome him into their city as a deliverer ; whilst, instead of any sacrilegious treatment of the Babylonian gods, Sargon appears to have outdone all his royal predecessors in the costly offerings he made at their shrines or in their behalf.⁴ If verse 9 was not fulfilled by Cyrus, still less was it fulfilled by Sargon. It is to meet this difficulty that the following article is written. I shall hope to shew that while verses 1 to 5 refer to Sargon's Babylonian campaign in 710 B.C., verses 6 to 10 are to be looked upon as a prophecy of the destruction of Babylon by Sennacherib in 689 B.C. I shall also endeavour to prove that verse 2 contains a remarkable prophecy of the downfall of Assyria, introduced parenthetically into the middle of a 'grievous vision' unfolding to the prophet the threatening advance of the Assyrian arms in Babylonia.

The remarkable vision, or rather group of visions, at which we are to look, is entitled 'the Burden of the Wilderness of the Sea'. This is a name descriptive of the kingdom of Merodachbaladan. The hereditary principality of this Chaldaean ruler lay at the head of the Persian Gulf, and was known to the Assyrians as 'the Country of the Sea'. In this Burden, however, the name is used in a wider sense and applied to the whole of the alluvial plain stretching from Babylon to the Gulf, which in 710 B.C. was subject to Chaldaean rule. This extensive tract could

¹ *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* ii 328-329.

² *Theologischen Studien und Kritiken* for 1877.

³ Cyrus, despite his assertions of a peaceful entry, appears to have encountered some resistance. See Pinches *Old Testament* pp. 417, 418.

⁴ According to the Khorsabad Inscription, Sargon gave to the gods and for public works at Babylon the tribute due to him for three successive years.

no doubt be flooded as the Dutch flooded Holland in the days of Napoleon. Nebuchadnezzar, describing the defences of Babylon, tells us how he 'carried round the land great waters, so that the crossing of them was like the crossing of the surging sea of the briny flood'.¹ It is also highly probable that the name points forward to the fate in store for Babylon herself, when in accordance with the prophecy of Isa. xiv 23 she shall become a veritable wilderness of the sea. This will seem yet more likely, when we consider that verse 9 foretells the dire calamity in which that prophecy will find its fulfilment.

The opening vision of the Burden, verses 1 to 4, realizes to the full Ewald's enthusiastic description : 'The language is borne aloft on the wings of very recent agitation, high inspiration, and beautiful animation.'

As whirlwinds sweeping on in the South
It cometh from the Wilderness, from a land of terror.
A grievous vision is shewed unto me ;
The treacherous dealer dealeth treacherously, and the devastator
devastateth.

—'Go up, O Elam ! besiege, O Media !
All the sighing that he causeth² have I made to cease'—
Therefore are my loins filled with pain ;
Pangs have taken hold upon me like the pangs of one in travail ;
I am so tortured that I cannot hear ; so terrified that I cannot see.
My heart fluttereth, horror hath affrighted me ;
The twilight that I love is turned into trembling unto me.³

It is the calm still evening ; Isaiah's favourite time for meditation and communion with his God. But this particular evening is to become to him a time of horror and dismay. For like the hot fierce blast of the sirocco in the South Country of Judah, whirling clouds of dust and sand through the air as it hurries along, so from the Wilderness of the Sea, a land where terrible deeds are being done, there sweeps upon the prophet's spirit 'a grievous vision', at first dim, vague, and indistinguishable, but speedily unfolding itself as it draws rapidly nearer. For Isaiah, like the reputed Highland seer, is now gifted with second sight, and what he sees may best be expressed in the poet's words,

‘A field of the dead rushes red on my sight,
And the clans of Culloden are scattered in fight.’⁴

If for the Highland clans we substitute the tribes living on the western border of Elam, we shall catch at once the force of this passage.

¹ India House Inscription, Col. vi 41–46.

² The suffix is feminine in the original, the reference being to Assyria.

³ In the translations offered in this paper I am indebted for some valuable hints to Dr Glazebrook's *Studies in the Book of Isaiah*.

⁴ Campbell in *Lochiel's Warning*.

The campaign of Sargon against Merodachbaladan began with the despatch by the Assyrian king of a strong army-corps down the eastern bank of the Tigris, through districts inhabited by Semitic peoples, the object being to cut the Chaldaean off from his Elamite ally. We may suppose that Isaiah was permitted to see this opening phase of the campaign, and that the sight of the havoc and carnage going on, and possibly a knowledge of who the sufferers were, moved him deeply. But the full secret of his distress undoubtedly lay in his realization of the final result of the war. He foresaw that the last barrier against the tide of Assyrian conquest and Assyrian vengeance was on the point of being swept away.

At the time of the siege of Ashdod the hope had been entertained in southern Palestine that Egypt might prove a match for Assyria. Accordingly, the small Palestinian states, Judah, Edom, and Moab, began, as Sargon informs us, to hatch plots of rebellion against Assyria.¹ Great, then, must have been the terror when Ashdod fell. In the words of the prophet, 'The inhabitants of this coastland shall say in that day, Behold such is our expectation, whether we fled to be delivered from the king of Assyria; and we, how shall we escape? '² Egypt under her Ethiopian ruler³ had failed them, but it was just possible that Babylon under her Chaldaean ruler might still be able to hold out. We can thus conceive some idea of the prophet's grief, when he beheld in vision the rapid advance of the desolating Assyrian whirlwind and saw only too clearly what would be the issue of the campaign.

But if the tone of alarm and anguish which characterizes the opening verses be thus explained, what are we to make of the six short sentences so dramatically grouped together in verse 5?

They prepare the table, they spread the coverlets, they eat, they drink : Arise, ye princes ! anoint the shield !

This is a second vision, unfolding another episode in the same Babylonian campaign. After despatching, as we have seen, a strong force down the eastern bank of the Tigris, Sargon with the main body of his army advanced directly against Babylon, but as he neared that city he swerved somewhat to the west, and crossing the Euphrates entrenched himself in Dur-Ladinu, a fortress in the Chaldaean state of Bit-Dakkuri.

¹ '[The people] of Philistia, Judah, E[dom], and Moab, dwelling beside the sea, bringing the tribute and gift of Ashur my lord . . . speaking seditions, acting with base wickedness, who, in order to stir up rebellion against me, to Pharaoh king of Egypt—a prince who did not save them—brought their offerings of peace and requested of him an alliance.' See the broken cylinder of Sargon translated in George Smith's *Assyrian Discoveries* chap. xv.

² Isa. xx 6.

³ Sabaco, the founder of the 25th Dynasty.

Thus placed between two armies, deprived of the help of his Elamite ally, and conscious of the disaffection of his Babylonian subjects, Merodachbaladan was seized with panic fear and fled from Babylon by night. In the words of Sargon, 'the victories of Ashur, Nebo, and Merodach, which they had won over those towns'—viz. the cities on the Elamite frontier—'Merodachbaladan, the king of Kar-Duniash,¹ heard of in Babylon in the midst of his palace. Fear for himself surprised him, and together with his allies and his soldiers *he fled by night.*'² Interpreting the prophecy, then, by what we hold to be its fulfilment, we see in verse 5 a vision of Merodachbaladan's sudden nocturnal flight from Babylon. The prophet sees the evening meal being prepared, the coverlets spread for the guests to recline on, the banquet already begun, when on a sudden the alarm is given, 'Rise up, ye princes! anoint the shield!' Now according to Sargon what actually led to Merodachbaladan's flight was the news of the Assyrian successes on the Elamite frontier. It thus appears that the carnage and devastation seen by Isaiah in his first vision—verses 1 to 4—was the actual cause of the Chaldaean's flight, so vividly portrayed in this second vision of verse 5. And as that flight was a nocturnal one, so it is possible that it was shewn to the prophet Isaiah on the very evening on which it took place.³

We have now arrived at the end of the first strophe of this Burden, indicated in the Hebrew Bible by a blank space within the line. The second strophe, verses 6 to 10, is ushered in like the second part of the Burden upon Arabia with the following words:—

For thus hath the Lord said unto me.

What do these words mean? They mean possibly something like this: 'Be sure that what I have told you is true, for the Lord and Master of the world has shewn me something further, a more startling catastrophe, connected with the events I have just foretold but at the same time altogether eclipsing them.' This further vision may be presented to the English reader as follows:—

Go, station the watchman; let him declare what he seeth:
And should he see a troop, horsemen in pairs,
A troop of asses, a troop of camels,
Let him hearken attentively, aye, very attentively.

¹ The district round Babylon.

² Winckler *Annals of Sargon* lines 289, 290. Compare the Khorsabad Inscription, lines 125, 126: 'Forth from Babylon to Iqbi-Bel like a *sudinna* bird he fled by night.'

³ In the same way the siege of Jerusalem was revealed to the prophet Ezekiel on the very day on which it began. Compare Ezek. xxiv 1 with Jer. lii 4.

And he (viz. the watchman) cried as a lion,
 'On the watch-tower, my Lord, I am standing continually by day,
 'And in my ward I am set every night'—
 And behold! (as he was speaking) there came a troop of men,
 horsemen in pairs;
 And it (viz. the troop) answered and said, 'Fallen! fallen! is
 Babylon,
 'And all the graven images of her gods are shivered to the ground.'

Notice here at the outset the very marked contrast between this second strophe and the first. In the first strophe a 'grievous vision', drawing rapidly nearer, forces itself upon the prophet's notice, and breaks in on the quiet evening of his meditation: but in this second strophe he describes himself as waiting long and impatiently for a vision that has been promised to him, but which seems as if it would never appear. In the first instance he is forced to see what he would rather not see: in the second he has to wait a long time to see something which he much desires to see.

In the Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel the prophets are compared to watchmen, who from some point of vantage see things in the distance and give warning of their approach. The nearest parallel to the present passage is found in Hab. ii 1, 'I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will look forth to see what he will speak with me'. But what makes the present passage unique is, that the prophet is bidden to divide himself into two persons. He is to station his prophetic spirit on the watch-tower, and his spirit is to report to him what it sees. Further, he is told beforehand the sight for which his spirit is to be on the look-out, viz. a cavalcade of horsemen riding in double file, followed by a troop of asses and camels, the baggage-train of an army laden with spoil.¹ When this procession comes across the field of view, he is to hearken diligently, for he will hear momentous tidings. In a spirit of thrilling expectation the prophet sets his watch. Day after day, night after night, he watches ceaselessly. At last he can bear the suspense no longer and is breaking out into a loud cry of impatience, when lo, across the scene comes the promised spectacle, a cavalcade of warriors riding in double file, and from their lips is heard to go up a cry of triumph, 'Fallen! fallen! is Babylon, and all the graven images of her gods are shivered to the ground.'

The warlike train which the prophet sees is evidently returning victorious from the sack of Babylon, and the question as to what nationality it represents is solved by the twice-repeated words, '*horsemen in pairs*'. In any scenic representation of an Assyrian army

¹ Compare Isa. xxx 6.

horsemen would form one of the most striking features. Ezekiel pictures the Assyrian officers as 'warlike governors and commanders, clothed in coats of mail,¹ cavalry-men, horse-riders, all of them charming young men'.² But that which most clearly marks the force seen by the prophet as an Assyrian one is the significant addition '*in pairs*'. The bas-reliefs from Kouyunjik, Nimrud, and other ancient sites, reveal to us the fact that the Assyrians had a great fondness for fighting in pairs. Everything, it would seem, must be done in couples in order that the soldier might be cheered and encouraged by the presence of a comrade at his side. Thus in the well-known bas-relief, representing the siege of a city by Ashurnatsirpal,³ all the Assyrian warriors are seen to be thus grouped; while the Gates of Balawat, which give us so vivid an idea of the conduct of Assyrian campaigns, offer many illustrations of the spectacle for which the prophet was to look—'horsemen in pairs'.⁴

The prophet, then, sees an Assyrian army returning victorious from the overthrow of Babylon and the destruction of the images of her gods. The sight was one to fill him with the deepest astonishment, for Babylon, as being the cradle of their race,⁵ was always treated by the Assyrians with the most marked respect. Whenever Assyrian kings entered Babylon they were always most careful to make the customary offerings at the shrines of Bel and Nebo. Only one Assyrian king, so far as we know, ever ventured on such a sacrilegious act as is here described. Sennacherib, enraged beyond measure by the constant troubles stirred up by his rebellious Babylonian subjects, determined on the utter destruction of the city, and in 689 B.C. carried it out in the most ruthless fashion. After slaying the inhabitants and carrying away all the portable treasures, he threw down the walls and ramparts, the temples and temple-towers, and by digging ditches set himself to work to cover the ground with water, and so to efface the very site of the city: in all this fulfilling most exactly the prophecy of Isa. xiv 23 'I will also make it a possession for the porcupine, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the LORD of hosts'.⁶ With no less exactness was fulfilled also this later prophecy: to quote the very words of the conqueror in his Bavian inscription, '*The gods dwelling therein, the hands of my men took, and they brake them in pieces*'.⁷

¹ Or rather 'panoplies'. See Ezek. xxxviii 4, where the same word occurs.

² Ezek. xxiii 12, Ewald's translation.

³ British Museum, Nimrud Gallery, Nos. 13–15.

⁴ See Bands 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 12. The artist has forgotten in some instances to depict the second rider.

⁵ Gen. x 10, 11 R.V.

⁶ Compare also Isa. xiii 19.

⁷ *Ilani ashib libbishu qâtâ nishi-ia ikshusunutima ushabbiruma*. The last word is radically identical with the 'שׁבּוּ' of verse 9.

But if no prophecy was ever better interpreted by its fulfilment, let it be noted also that the late date of that fulfilment throws great light on what is meant by the prophet's long watch on his watch-tower. Twenty-one years in itself is not a long time to wait for the fulfilment of a prophecy ; but as we have seen, the first part of this Burden was revealed to the prophet probably at the time when it was taking place, viz. in 710 B.C. Further, it is to be borne in mind that during those twenty-one years, 710 to 689 B.C., Babylon passed through many and great vicissitudes. In Assyria, indeed, there was but one change of ruler, Sargon being succeeded by his son Sennacherib. But in Babylon no fewer than eight kings sat upon the throne, while the sovereign power shifted about in an amazing fashion, the city being by turns in the hands of the Chaldaeans, the Assyrians, the native Babylonians, and the Elamites. Thus in Babylonian history the interval may be said to have been a long one ; and if the prophet very eagerly desired to see this great catastrophe, the destruction of Babylon by the Assyrians, then the remarkable character of this part of the Burden might be intended to teach him that he would have to wait some time for the fulfilment of the vision. It would, so one thinks, convey to him the message, 'The vision is yet for the appointed time, and it hasteth toward the end, and shall not lie : though it tarry, wait for it : because it will surely come, it will not delay'!¹

The surprising and altogether unexpected nature of the revelation thus made to the prophet shews us in what light we may best regard the pathetic close of this remarkable Burden :—

O my trodden one, child of my threshing-floor,
That which I have heard from Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel,
I have declared unto you.

If there was some consolation in the thought that the fickle Babylonians, who were so ready to oust Merodachbaladan, would presently be overthrown by the very power which they were now welcoming, yet it must have required no small share of faith to believe such an unlikely announcement. Isaiah, therefore, assures his countrymen that the vision which he has just proclaimed is no invention of his own, but what he has heard from Jehovah of hosts, who is still as ever the God of Israel and the real Master of the world.

But it is possible that the solemn assurance of this closing verse points back to yet another revelation, made much earlier in the Burden, and at which we have still to look. In preferring the rule of Assyria to that of Merodachbaladan the Babylonians undoubtedly acted in a manner inimical to the political interests of Judah ; but at this time

¹ Hab. ii 3.

the real tyrant, whose cruel, grinding oppression, like some threshing-instrument of iron,¹ had made itself felt in Judah, was not Babylon but Assyria : if at this epoch Judah was 'trodden', she was trodden not by Babylon but by Assyria. Now this Burden contains within it a most thrilling assurance that the Almighty will presently put down that great persecuting power. For while the prophet is bewailing the horrors perpetrated by the Assyrian 'devastator' during the Babylonian campaign, his wail of sorrow is arrested for a moment by a strange mysterious voice, calling as it were from the clouds :

'Go up, O Elam ! besiege, O Media !
All the sighing that he causeth have I made to cease.'

This voice is a parenthesis, for as soon as it ceases the prophet resumes his strain of lamentation : a thing not to be wondered at, seeing that the vision of carnage is still present to his view after the voice is silent. With regard to this mysterious voice we are sure that the Speaker can be none other than He, at whose bidding alone 'sorrow and sighing shall flee away'.² In the words of the learned Vitringa, 'Id hic primum est quod teneo ad interpretationem horum verborum ; esse videlicet hic verba Dei. Patet utique id ex subiecta sententia, Omnem gemitum cessare feci, quae nemini quam Deo aut Spiritui eius convenit'. Elam and Media, then, are here summoned by the Almighty to 'go up' to battle, not against Babylon, but against Assyria, the great 'devastator' who is the real cause of all 'the sighing', and by whose suppression Jehovah will 'make it to cease'. Now this summons to Elam and Media would not, perhaps, seem so remarkable a thing to the prophet as the revelation of the destruction of Babylon by the Assyrians, for the very reason that these two nations were very prominent at that time as the most determined foes of Assyria, so that it might seem natural that they should be called upon by Jehovah to put the Assyrian down.

To suppose that Elam here stands for Persia is an anachronism, since the first beginnings of the Persian power under Achaemenes did not make their appearance till half a century later ; whilst yet another century was to elapse before that power grew into an empire under Cyrus. The Elam of the prophet's Burden is the power which in 721 B.C. met and stopped the troops of Sargon, thereby securing the throne of Babylon to Merodachbaladan for the next twelve years. Against this Elam Sennacherib directed five out of his eight campaigns recorded on the Taylor cylinder. This was the nation which suffered such heavy chastisement at the hands of Ashurbanipal in 660 B.C. and again about 645 B.C., as recorded in great detail in the long inscription

¹ Amos i 3.

² Isa. xxxv 10.

on the Rassam cylinder. So terrible was the vengeance there poured out on that unhappy people that many historians have imagined the nation to have been wiped out. But Elam, as her story shews, had a wonderful power of recuperation, and such scraps of history as we possess go to shew that she outlived Assyria. Nineveh fell in 606 B.C., yet Elam, according to the Book of Jeremiah, survives in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, 604 B.C., and is mentioned as being still a powerful nation in a prophecy dating from the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah, 597 B.C.¹ When, however, we come to the close of the twelfth year of Jehoiachin's captivity, 586 B.C., we learn from the Book of Ezekiel² that Ashur, Elam, Meshech and Tubal, Edom, and the Zidonians have all gone down to Sheol, and as the order of the names is not geographical we may presume it to be chronological, and thus another evidence is afforded that Elam outlived Assyria. Now if this be so, then the strong presumption is, that Elam, having suffered so severely at the hands of Assyria, would not be behindhand in doing her part to bring about the downfall of that oppressing power. And this we shall presently see was actually the case.

As regards Media it may suffice to say that during the Isaianic age that country was twice invaded by Tiglathpileser III, viz. in 744 B.C. and in 737 B.C., and that on one occasion he carried away 60,500 captives. An inscription of the same monarch also informs us indirectly that Media had been invaded by the Babylonians, mention being twice made of Silkhazi, a town in Media which was popularly known as 'the Stronghold of the Babylonians'.³ This explains the reference to the Medes in Isaiah's prophecy against Babylon—chap. xiii 17—a prophecy which appears to belong to the short period, 728 to 727 B.C., when Tiglathpileser lived at Babylon, and assumed the title 'King of Babylon'. Coming somewhat nearer to the time of this present Burden we find that Sargon was much engaged with invasions of Media during the four years 716 to 713 B.C. With regard to later kings it will be found that Esarhaddon, who claims like Tiglathpileser to have penetrated Media as far as the mysterious mount Bikni,⁴ speaks of the Medes in terms of marked respect, whilst in the inscriptions of Sennacherib and Ashurbanipal they are barely mentioned. With these facts in view it cannot seem strange to us, any more than to Isaiah, that Elam and Media should be summoned by the Almighty to put down Assyria. It only remains to shew how this mysterious summons was fulfilled.

There are three accounts left us of the downfall of Assyria: the

¹ Jer. xxv 25 and xl ix 34-39.

² Ezek. xxxii 22-30. For the date of this prophecy compare verses 1 and 17.

³ Tablet Inscription from Nimrud, lines 31, 32, 38.

⁴ Supposed to be Mount Demavend.

Medo-Persian, preserved in the pages of Herodotus; the Babylonian, found in extracts from Abydenus, a disciple of the Chaldaean historian Berossus; and the almost contemporary testimony of Nabonidus he last king of Babylon. According to the Medo-Persian tradition, Phraortes, king of Media, fell in battle against the Assyrians about the year 635 B.C. His son Cyaxares, bent on avenging his father's death, reorganized the Median army, marched against the Assyrians, defeated them, and proceeded to lay siege to Nineveh. But the end was not yet. An invasion of the Scythians, which lasted for twenty-eight years, obtained a reprieve for Assyria for nearly a generation. At the end of that time Cyaxares, having rid himself by craft of the invaders, marched a second time against Nineveh, which fell an easy prey to his victorious arms.¹ This account is very probably true as far as it goes, but, as we shall see, it does not tell us the whole story.

The extract from Abydenus, containing the Babylonian tradition, records faithfully the following facts; viz. Sennacherib's subjugation of Babylon, and his campaign against Cilicia, the conquest of Egypt by Esarhaddon, and his being succeeded on the throne by Sardanapalus, i.e. Ashurbanipal.² Some credit is thus lent to this historian's account of the downfall of Assyria, which follows immediately after and runs thus: 'After him (viz. Sardanapalus) Saracus (i.e. Sin-shar-ishkun, the last king of Assyria) reigned over the Assyrians: and when he was informed that a very great multitude of barbarians had come against him from the sea,³ he sent Busalossarus (i.e. Nabopolassar) as his general in haste to Babylon. But he, having with a treasonable design obtained Amuheam (Amytis) the daughter of Astyages, the prince of the Medes, to be affianced to his son Nabuchodrossarus (Nebuchadnezzar), marched straightway to surprise the city of Ninus (Nineveh). But when Saracus the king was apprised of all these proceedings, he burnt his royal palace and Nabuchodrossarus succeeded to the empire.' This account, which assigns the chief glory of the war to Babylon, is probably coloured to some extent by Babylonian vanity. All the more striking, then, is the admission that the revolt against Assyria commenced, not with any action on the part of Babylon, but with the advance of an immense host which marched up from the sea.

Who, then, were this barbarian host? In all probability they were the Elamites, who crossed the head of the Persian gulf to attack Assyria, just as Sennacherib ninety years before had crossed that gulf to attack

¹ Nahum iii 12.

² There is also a misty reference to the murder of Sennacherib by his son Adramelus (Adrammelech).

³ 'Multitudinem barbarorum maximam e mari exisse.' According to another version 'Exercitus locustarum instar a mari exiens'.

Elam. No doubt their object in choosing that route was to join hands with their old allies the Chaldaeans.¹ Nabopolassar, whom Abydenus calls a general of Saracus, according to the canon of Ptolemy succeeded Kineladan, i.e. Ashurbanipal, on the throne of Babylon in 626 B.C., and this is borne out by the contract tablets. But the two statements are reconciled if we look upon him as a sub-king, holding the same position at Babylon as was formerly held by Ashurbanipal's rebellious brother Shamash-shum-ukin. Though not actually sent to Babylon, Nabopolassar may yet have received orders to march from Babylon against the Elamite host, and it is not to be wondered at that under the circumstances he should have disobeyed those orders.

But whatever attack was thus made by the Elamites in conjunction with the Babylonians on their hereditary foe, was not made on the heart of the empire but only on its southern frontier. This we learn from our third source of information, the now well-known historical inscription of Nabonidus, drawn up in 555 B.C., about half a century after the fall of Nineveh. Nabonidus begins his record with the destruction of Babylon by the Assyrians. He tells us how Sennacherib, 'acting as with the anger of a god, came to Babylon, cursed the shrines, erased the sculptures, and caused the ceremonies to cease'. This, it will be noticed, is another witness to the fulfilment of the prophecy in verse 9. The next event recorded is the murder of Sennacherib by his son, which Nabonidus regards as an act of righteous retribution on the part of Merodach for the destruction of Babylon. In the same light he views the downfall of Assyria, which he thus describes:—

‘A helper he (Merodach) gave him (Nabopolassar),
an ally he granted him.
The king of the host of the Manda (the Medes),
who was without a rival,
he (Merodach) subdued to his command (i.e. to the command of
Nabopolassar),
and he caused him to go to his help.
Above and below,
on the right hand and on the left,
as a deluge he overwhelmed,
avenged Babylon,
multiplied retribution.
The king of the host of the Manda,
the unfearing,
he (Merodach) caused to overthrow the temples of the gods of
Assyria, all of them.

¹ The rulers of the New Babylonian Empire were Chaldaeans. See Ezek. xxiii 15 R.V.M., Ezra v 12, and Josephus *c. Apion.* i 19.

Also the cities on the border of the land of Akkad (Northern Babylonia),

which from the king of Akkad (viz. Nabopolassar) had revolted
and did not go to his help—

he (Merodach) overthrew their shrines, not one of them he left :
he laid waste their cities,
he caused destruction to overflow like a deluge.

The king of Babylon (Nabopolassar),—

the command of Merodach concerning plundering caused him pain ;
he did not lay his hands on any of the shrines of the gods,
he was perfect' (viz. in his obedience to Merodach).

The above most interesting and curious account of the final onslaught upon Assyria shews us that in spite of the help of the Elamite host the position of Nabopolassar must for a while have been very critical, seeing that the cities of Northern Babylonia still remained faithful to their Assyrian overlord. It was at this juncture that the Babylonian king found a powerful ally in Cyaxares, the king of the Medes, and it was this latter people, and not the Babylonians or Elamites, who dealt the final blow. For Nabopolassar—we are somewhat quaintly told—was not allowed by Merodach to take any part in plundering the temples of Assyria and Akkad, and like a dutiful worshipper acted in perfect obedience to the will of his god. Perhaps it may be allowable to suppose that Nabonidus is here making a virtue of necessity, and that in point of fact the king of Babylon was forestalled by his powerful ally. Be this as it may, in the above extracts from Abydenus and Nabonidus we seem to see the exact fulfilment of that summons from the lips of the Almighty, 'Go up, O Elam ! besiege, O Media ! all the sighing that he causeth have I made to cease'. In the last conflict with the old Assyrian lion, Elam was to lead the way, Media to deal the final stroke. To Elam, therefore, is addressed the word of more general, to Media, that of more restricted, meaning. Elam is to 'go up' to the war, to begin the campaign, but the siege and capture of the famous Assyrian cities, including great Nineveh herself, are reserved for Media.

But it may be asked why is not Babylon included along with Elam and Media in this summons to put down Assyria? To this question three answers can be given. In the first place, this prophecy reveals the destruction of Babylon by Sennacherib, but does not reveal her resurrection under Esarhaddon. Had Babylon, then, been included, the prophecy would have been confusing in the extreme. Secondly, Babylon, as we have seen, neither initiated nor completed the putting down of Assyria: what part she did take, according to Nabonidus, was

only a secondary part. But probably the truest answer lies in those words of Abydenus, 'Nabuchodrossarus succeeded to the empire', i.e. *Babylon succeeded to the empire of Assyria*.¹ For this statement, though only partially true, expressed a very real truth so far as the Jews were concerned. In the words of Jeremiah, 'Israel is a scattered sheep, the lions have driven him away: first the king of Assyria hath devoured him; and last this Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon hath broken his bones'.² So far from putting down Assyria, Babylon perpetuated Assyria in a slightly different form.

One minor difficulty yet remains to be dealt with. The conquering race who achieved this task are called by Nabonidus the Manda, and hence it has been argued that they were not Medes at all. But this term 'Manda', the meaning of which is very uncertain,³ is probably an appellative rather than an ethnic name. Sargon applies it to the people of Nagira, Esarhaddon to the Gimirrai—the Gomer of Gen. x 2—and Cyrus to the people of Gutium. A term so widely used, and applied to the descendants of Gomer, might, so one thinks, be applied with equal suitability to the descendants of Gomer's brother, Madai, i.e. to the Medes of the Old Testament and of the Classical Writers.

In concluding this article it may be well to add a few remarks as to the authorship of this astonishing Burden. And here the first thing to be noticed is that the prophecy is inserted just at that point in the Book of Isaiah where the history of those times would lead us to expect it, viz. immediately after a prophecy foretelling the fall of Ashdod. From a chronological point of view, therefore, this Burden occupies its right place. Secondly, observe that it bears upon its face frequent indications of Isaianic authorship. These are looked upon by Dr Cheyne as an 'Isaianic colouring' due to 'the imitative skill of a later writer'.⁴ But surely it is a simpler and truer view to regard these supposed imitations as signs of actual authorship. For a prophet of such originality, who could compare the coming of a 'grievous vision' to the sirocco sweeping across the Negeb of Judah; who could imagine his own personality divided, and that for a seemingly long period, had no need to imitate and would hardly be likely to do so. I regard, then, this 'Isaianic colouring' as so many touches which betray the master hand; and certainly for so short a passage these touches are fairly numerous. Thus the figure of the whirlwind, so strikingly employed in verse 1, appears no less than four times in the earlier

¹ Similarly Herodotus (Rawlinson, i 178), speaking of Babylon, says: 'Whither after the fall of Nineveh the government had been removed.' ² Jer. 1 17.

³ According to Sayce it signifies 'nomads', according to Halevy 'barbarians'. Winckler and Delitzsch give it the sense of 'northerners', Hager that of 'hordes'.

⁴ *Introduction to the Book of Isaiah* p. 125.

part of this book.¹ Further, to describe the advance of this Assyrian whirlwind the prophet uses the same Hebrew verb *khalaph*, which in chap. viii 8 he uses to describe the advance of the Assyrian deluge. In verse 2 the word for 'vision' is found in xxviii 18 and xxix 11, but nowhere else except in the Book of Daniel. The description of the Assyrian in this verse is identical with that in xxxiii 1, while the phraseology may be compared with xxiv 16 'the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously'. Also the tone and sentiment of the last clause of this verse appear again in xxv 8 and xxxv 10. In verse 3 the same simile is employed as in xiii 8.² In verse 4 the word translated 'panteth', literally 'wandereth', is a favourite one with Isaiah, being found no less than eleven times in the earlier part of this Book. With the manner in which the prophet introduces the asseveration, 'For thus hath the Lord said unto me', verses 6 and 16, compare xviii 4, even though the divine name in this latter passage is Jehovah and not Adonai. The unusual sense of 'troop' attached to the Hebrew word *rekev* in verses 7 and 9 is found again in xxii 6. Also the mention of asses and camels in verse 7, no doubt as beasts of burden, may be compared with xxx 6. Lastly, the remarkable combination of similar words in this same verse—which, literally rendered, reads thus, 'Let him attend attentively, aye very attentively'—finds its best parallel in xxiv 16, referred to above. It thus appears that the 'Isaianic colouring' is not only very marked but well maintained throughout. Inasmuch, then, as this prophecy is seen to be so well interpreted in the light of events which with one exception³ took place in Isaiah's days, I submit that the remarkable group of visions at which we have been looking may very properly be regarded as one of those prophetic Burdens 'which Isaiah the son of Amoz did see'.⁴

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¹ See v 28, xvii 13, and xxix 6.

² In *The Churchman* for October, November, and December, 1902, I have defended the Isaianic authorship of 'the Burden of Babylon', in which this verse is found.

³ Viz. the downfall of Assyria.

⁴ Isa. xiii 1.