

## SENNACHERIB'S CATASTROPHE AT NOB.

(ISAIAH X, 28-32.)<sup>1</sup>

By the REV. W. F. BIRCH, M.A.

THE scene of Sennacherib's disaster has been placed at Pelusium (Herodotus), Libnah and Jerusalem (Josephus). The first two are excluded by the oath in Isaiah xiv, 24, *seq.*:—Pelusium was not in the land of Israel, nor Libnah in the mountains of Judah, but in the Shephelah. Josephus is very near the truth. The obscurity of Isaiah x, 28-32, has led to the most diverse views: some refer the advance to Sargon, others assign it to the beginning of Sennacherib's invasion, although it obviously belongs to its close, and finally the passage has even been regarded as merely poetical. I observe with pleasure that since 1891 Sargon has become a broken idol, "subduer of Ya-u-da,"<sup>2</sup> not necessarily referring to Judah. Biblical scrutiny reveals the required move against Jerusalem, noted indeed by the LXX, but overlooked in A.V. and R.V. and by writers predisposed to an Egyptian or southern campaign. The prophet is really filling in details of a fact distinctly recorded in 2 Kings, xix, 9, viz., the final march of Sennacherib's host.

The question turns upon the right treatment of שׁוּב, which occurs seven times in 2 Kings, xviii, *seq.* In verse 14 it is rendered *return* from me; in xix, 8, "*returned and found*"; so again, 36, "*returned and dwelt*." Now, Hebrew allows *returned and* to be translated simply *again*. In verses 8, 36, however, translators have declined an *again*, but (in 9, "*returned and sent*") have rivetted a misleading *again* upon Sennacherib at Libnah; his sending *again* to Hezekiah enabling them to send him against Tirhakah. Thus the story was obscured. Happily truth will leak out. It is noteworthy that Delitzsch, on Isaiah xxxvii, 9, observed that the second "heard" appears to have been altered from "returned," yet he slavishly adopted the rendering "[sent] again," though, by rightly placing the disaster near Jerusalem, he was afterwards amazed at the enormous size of Sennacherib's army, if a detachment lost 185,000 men.

It has been too hastily assumed that Isaiah x, 28-32, cannot refer to the end of the campaign, as Libnah lay to the south-west of Jerusalem. But Sennacherib's first object in his operations against Jerusalem was to secure a strong position for his "baggage" at Michmash, and, besides, the route selected was the best available as far as Gibeon. The Pentinger short cut to Jerusalem was not paved in his day.

To sum up, the Bible distinctly states that Sennacherib *returned* from Libnah when he heard of Tirhakah's approach. There may even be a trace of his route in the Talmudic tradition that his army was destroyed

<sup>1</sup> See the *Quarterly Statements*, 1891, pp. 314, *seq.*; p. 316, line 24, for "west," read "east"; p. 317, line 34, for "Moab," read "(probably) Gilead."

<sup>2</sup> [Mušakniš mātu Ya-u-da.]

in the famous pass of Beth-horon. Isaiah grandly describes the march past Ai to Nob north of and near to Jerusalem. That Sennacherib would make a dash at Jerusalem was likely enough. Ewald observed, "The course of its history would have been totally different had Sennacherib been able to throw himself victoriously into the great fortress at Jerusalem, and there calmly await the attack of Tirhakah. But . . . he was overtaken by two decisive disasters" (really only one).

In regard to the *cause* of the disaster to Sennacherib's army, whereby 185,000 perished, Vitringa rightly, it seems to me, gathered from Isaiah xxix, 6, and xxx, 30, that it was due to a terrific thunder and hail storm. The havoc inflicted by the storm in Egypt (Exod. ix) and at Beth-horon (Josh. x) shows that it is unnecessary to interpret the language in Isaiah as figurative or poetic. Finally, the *time* of the disaster was doubtless the Passover as stated in Jewish tradition.

#### NOTICES OF FOREIGN PUBLICATIONS.

*Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palaestina-Vereins*, vol. xxiv, parts 2 and 3.—The most important paper is a philological study of the dialect spoken by the fellahin of Central Galilee, by Mr. W. Christie, which has been translated from an English original. The paper contains stories in the dialect which were obtained from Christian, Moslem, and Druse villagers, and a discussion of the grammatical and other peculiarities. The district to which the paper refers is, roughly speaking, bounded on the north by *Wady Zerka, el-Jish*, and *W. Fâra*, on the south by a line from *Tantârah* through *el-Hârithîyeh*, Nazareth, *Kefr Kenna*, and *Lâbiçh* to Tiberias; on the west by the sea; and on the east by the crest of the heights above the Jordan Valley. The population is about 60,000, and excluding Christians, Moslems, Metâwileh, and Druses, of known descent, there remains a very large residue which speaks only the fellahin dialect, and is possibly of Canaanite origin.

The other papers are by Professor Dr. Hartmann, on the Arabic inscriptions at Salameya, in Northern Syria, and by Professor Dr. Gautier, on his journey round the Dead Sea, with illustrations from his work, "Autour de la Mer Morte," which was noticed in *Q.S.*, 1901, p. 206.

*Mittheilungen und Nachrichten des D.P.V.*, 1900. Nos. 3-6.—No. 3 contains a paper, with plans and sections, of the Jewish tomb on the road from Jerusalem to 'Anâta, which was discovered in October, 1899, and fully described in the "Revue Biblique" for 1900 (vol. ix, pp. 106-112). The inscriptions on the ossuaries are discussed by E. Kautzsch, some of whose conclusions are criticised by Dalman in No. 6. The publication of the inscriptions collected by Schumacher in and near Jerash is completed. In Nos. 4 and 5 Dr. Schumacher's report on his work in southern 'Ajlûn