

HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.¹

FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM.

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V. To the Destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans.

OUR MINDS still bear the fresh impression of the terrible events in Samaria and Jerusalem. What will be the fate of the blood-stained usurper of the throne?

It was but six years until righteous retribution overtook Athaliah. Jehoiada the priest, who had taken his nephew, the crown-prince Joash, into the temple for safety and there kept him hidden, established relations with the captains of the royal body-guard and managed to win them for his plan. We learn in this connexion that the whole royal body-guard did duty in the temple on the Sabbath, and that only one-third of them returned to the palace for service there, while two-thirds remained in the temple as a sort of guard of honor. One Sabbath when there was a numerous concourse in the temple Jehoiada detained the whole body-guard in the temple, so that the royal palace was without any military protection whatever and Athaliah had no troops of any kind at her command. Now Jehoiada brings the seven-year-old crown-prince to what we would call the royal box in the temple, and there anoints and crowns him, whereupon a thundering "Hurrah" from the guards and the whole people greets the legitimate ruler. At the sound Athaliah goes to the temple to learn the cause of it; at the command of Jehoiada she is seized and taken out and slain at the entrance to the temple; the temple she had erected to Baal is destroyed and the priest appointed by her likewise slain.

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From the forty years' reign of Joash only one occurrence is reported in detail, which however throws a peculiar and glaring light upon the conditions of the time. As a matter of course the priest Johoiada at first conducted the government as guardian for his nephew, and the authority and influence of the priesthood was greatly increased by this relationship; but unfortunately the priesthood made a very material use of this. In the twenty-third year of Joash there was a sharp accounting between him and his uncle the priest. The priests were in the habit of receiving from the people voluntary offerings for the service and the temple, but were evidently allowing these gifts to find their way to their private cofers; therefore the king deprived them of this office of trust, and a contribution-box was placed in the temple, into which thereafter all offerings were to be put. When this "chest with a hole in the lid," as the Bible account briefly but clearly describes it, was full, royal officials came and emptied it, and carried the money away; and this arrangement became permanent, being expressly mentioned as late as the time of King Josiah.

Jehu died without having been molested, and bequeathed the usurped throne to his descendants even to the fourth generation; but then an even more fearful fate than in the case of Athaliah overtook the ruler.

From this point on, Assyria is the determining factor, and the whole history of Israel is intelligible only when we know the history of Assyria. This may also be maintained in a certain sense for earlier times. The pan-Israelitish kingdom of David would not have been possible save for the fact that Assyria, which had already prepared under Tiglath-pileser I., 1110, to establish itself in Coele-syria, was in David's time in such a condition of weakness and impotence that we do not even know the names of its kings for a century and a half.

From the time of Salmanasar II. on, Assyrian and Hebrew history are, as it were, two connected vessels, where the height of the water in the one is always governed by that in the other: if Assyria was powerful, Israel was prosperous; but if the power of Assyria was declining, Israel suffered accordingly.

In the year 842, probably the date of the two violent usurpations in Samaria and Jerusalem, Salmanasar marched for the fifth time against Damascus. This time he succeeded in inflicting upon King Hazael a decisive defeat. He besieged him in his capital, but could not take Damascus. Under the circumstances it was a correct and reasonable policy, humanly considered, for Jehu to throw

himself into the arms of the Assyrians, the mighty enemies of his hostile neighbor: he sent a considerable tribute to Salmanasar, which the latter caused to be depicted among other things upon his famous black obelisk.

And yet, Jehu had reckoned without his host, as the saying goes. Salmanasar came again, indeed, in 839; but then there followed a period of thirty-eight years in which no Assyrian made his appearance in that region. Now the people of Damascus threw themselves with all the force of hatred and revenge upon Israel,—with what result we will let the Book of Kings tell: “In the days of Jehu the Lord began to cut Israel short, and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel.” He seems to have taken from Israel the whole of the territory east of the Jordan, and he carried his warlike and victorious incursions even to the country of the Philistines: he took and destroyed Gath, and Joash of Judah was enabled to ransom Jerusalem from siege only by the delivery of all the treasures in temple and palace.

While the situation under Jehu was sad, it became absolutely hopeless under his son and successor, Jehoahaz.” “At that time,” says the Book of Kings, “the anger of the Lord was kindled “against Israel, and He delivered them into the hand of Hazael “king of Aram (Syria) and into the hand of Ben-hadad, the son of “Hazael, continually. He left to Jehoahaz but ten chariots and “fifty horsemen and ten thousand foot soldiers, for the king of “Aram (Syria) had destroyed them and ground them to dust.”

By the most probable assumption, Jehoahaz is the unnamed king in whose reign occurred the siege of Samaria reported in the story of the prophet Elisha, when famine raged so frightfully that mothers slew and devoured their own children, and when one of these wretched women appealed to the king because she had shared her son the day before with another woman and the latter now refused to reciprocate in kind. But this siege was suddenly raised because Ben Hadad received tidings that his own land was threatened by an invading foe. This foe must have been the Assyrians.

In fact the Assyrians are again found in Coelesyria in the years 805, 804, and 803, and strange to say it is a woman who begins the mighty advance of the Assyrian arms. The nominal ruler in Nineveh was King Rammannirari III., but being yet a boy, his mother, the Babylonian princess Sammuramat, wielded the sceptre for him, and with a strong hand: she resumed the policy of her father-in-law, Salmanasar, and sent out her generals and troops

into all quarters of the world to announce to astonished humanity that a woman was preparing to renew the glory of Assur.

There can be no doubt that we must recognise in this vigorous and energetic Babylonian princess and Assyrian queen-mother the Semiramis of the Greeks. And among other places she sent her troops three years in succession into Coelesyria, and thus Israel had a breathing spell; Joash, the brave and vigorous successor of Jehoahaz, succeeded in defeating Ben-hadad three times decisively, and in giving Israel relief from this tormentor. But Joash must needs turn his victorious arms against Judah also. There King Joash, after a reign of forty years, had been murdered by two high officials and succeeded by his son Amaziah, who avenged the death of his father upon the murderers, but had only the murderers executed and not their families. He also succeeded in defeating the Edomites and in again subjecting this old province.

What follows must be told in the very language of the Bible account: "Then Amaziah sent messengers to Jehoash (Joash) 'king of Israel, saying: 'Come, let us look one another in the 'face!' And Jehoash answered Amaziah, saying: 'The thistle 'that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon, saying: 'Give thy daughter to my son to wife.'" And there passed "by a wild beast that was in Lebanon, and trode down the thistle. "Thou hast indeed smitten Edom, and thy heart hath lifted thee "up; glory thereof, and abide at home; for why shouldst thou "fall to thy hurt and Judah with thee?" But Amaziah would not "hear. And so they looked one another in the face at Beth-she-"mesh. And Judah was put to the worse before Israel; and they "fled every man to his tent. And Jehoash took Amaziah prisoner "at Beth-shemesh, and brought him to Jerusalem, and brake down "the wall of Jerusalem a space of four hundred cubits, and took "away all the gold and silver in the temple and in the palace, and "hostages also, and returned to Samaria." Indeed the conjecture has been put forth, and the attempt made to support it, that Jehoash put a complete end to the kingdom of Judah for the time being and formally incorporated it with the kingdom of Israel.

Amaziah came to a like end with his father Joash. The people grew weary of the rule of the indiscreet and thoughtless monarch and murdered him. They took his sixteen-year-old son, Azariah or Uzziah—he has both names—and seated him upon his father's throne. Uzziah was evidently not the eldest son and heir-apparent, but this time the popular choice had hit upon the right man. His reign of fifty-two years must have been powerful and prosper-

ous and a period of new progress for Judah, although we know surely from this whole long time only the one fact that Uzziah reconquered the Edomite seaport Elath and fortified it. But the descriptions by the prophet Isaiah, who was consecrated prophet in the year of Uzziah's death, declare loudly and clearly that outward conditions in Judah at that time were prosperous and even flourishing.

But we must now return to Israel. In the year 797 the Assyrians had finally taken Damascus, though they did not immediately dethrone King Mari, son of Ben-hadad, but allowed the country to continue its existence. But in the following fifty years they returned five times, so that a lasting restoration of the kingdom was impossible. Thus Israel was left free, and the son of Jehoash, Jereboam II., succeeded not only in regaining the former possessions, but in taking from Damascus a part of its territory and subduing all Moab, and thus in restoring the kingdom of Israel to the same compass as in the time of David. He ruled over the whole country from Edom to Damascus, and seems to have been on friendly terms with Uzziah of Judah; at least we hear of no dissension between them.

Unfortunately we know no details of the forty-one years' reign of Jeroboam II. But the light which Jeroboam caused once more to illumine Israel was only the glow of evening, a last flickering of the dying taper. Under Jeroboam's son, Zachariah, Nemesis overtook the house of Jehu: after a rule of six months he was murdered by a certain Shallum, who in his turn was overthrown after one month by Menahem and slain in a war waged with barbarous cruelty. And now destiny came upon Israel with giant strides.

In the year 745 a usurper named Pul had mounted the Assyrian throne, and as a sort of declaration of his purposes he adopted the name of the first great Assyrian conqueror, Tiglath-pileser. And he carried out his programme with brilliant success. As early as 745 he had begun systematically to conquer Coelesyria. Menahem took pains to purchase his friendship and protection by means of a tribute of a thousand talents of silver. This tribute was raised by a poll tax, and Menahem demanded of every man of means in Israel fifty shekels of silver. This is an interesting item for the student of national economy, as it proves that there were at that time in Israel 60,000 men of means. And Menahem did manage to die a peaceful death and was able to bequeath the kingdom to his son Pekahiah, who, however, was soon slain by an adjutant

named Pekah, who mounted the throne destined to be the next to the last king of Samaria.

And now begins an almost incredible spectacle. The doves over which the hawk is already hovering ready for his mortal swoop, begin pecking and fighting one another. In Jerusalem the crown had just been assumed by Ahaz, the grandson of Azariah, evidently still very young and of very youthful character. Israel and Damascus profit by his weak and unpopular rule. They combine against Judah in order to drive the house of David from the throne and make the king a vassal dependent on them. First they expel the Judeans from Elath, which they give back to the Edomites, and invade Judah itself, bringing it into direst distress. The capital, Jerusalem, was besieged and hard beset, and this situation probably brought about that resort to the last remedy of despair, reported of Ahaz by the Book of Kings: he sacrificed his own son, just as King Mesha of Moab in extreme distress made a burnt offering upon the walls of his beleaguered city of the son who was to succeed him as king.

Finally Ahaz knew no other way out of the difficulty but to send a message to Tiglath-pileser, saying: "I am thy servant and thy son; come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria (Aram) and of the king of Israel." That this petition was supported by jingling arguments is a matter of course. Under the circumstances Tiglath-pileser would perhaps have interfered of his own accord; at any rate he did not wait for a second invitation, but came straightway. Damascus was besieged and a part of the army sent against Israel. Pekah's life was ended by the murderous steel of a certain Hoshea, who was recognised as an Assyrian vassal but was compelled to resign the country east of the Jordan and the entire North to Assyria. After a siege of three years Damascus was taken, King Rezin was executed, and his country appropriated as an Assyrian province.

Thus the kingdom of Damascus had vanished and Judah and the decimated remainder of Israel had become dependencies of Assyria. Ahaz understood the situation, and was shrewd enough to keep quiet, but in Israel the old, defiant spirit of independence flashed forth mightily.

In the year 727 the powerful Tiglath-pileser had died, and at about the same time Egypt had received an energetic and enterprising ruler in the forceful Ethiopian prince Shabakah (also Sabe, Sebech, Sewe), the Biblical So. For Egypt it was a vital matter that the Assyrians should not establish themselves on her border; self-

preservation compelled her to interpose. Therefore Shabakah entered into negotiations with the rulers in Palestine, and Hoshea allowed himself to be deluded by the voice of the siren, and broke his allegiance to the Assyrians. Forthwith the son of Tiglath-pileser, Shalmaneser IV., marched against him. Hoshea indeed surrendered and was imprisoned; but Samaria itself, even without a king, made desperate resistance; only after three years did the Assyrians succeed in overcoming the creation of Omri. It was taken in the year 722, while the Egyptians and Ethiopians never lifted a hand for its relief.

This is the end of the Kingdom of Israel. The Assyrians seized the country as a province and put it under the immediate rule of Assyria. But they did not destroy Samaria itself. On the contrary it became the seat of the Assyrian prefect, after 27,280 persons, that is, certainly the whole population which had survived the siege, had been carried away from it into exile.

The opinion is very prevalent that the whole population of Israel was carried away to Assyria, but this is decidedly an error. On the other hand, the Assyrians flooded the land with foreign colonists, thus entirely destroying its nationality; in Judea it soon became the custom to regard the Samaritans as half heathen. The fact that the race, surrounded by powerful enemies and in the midst of domestic anarchy and constant revolutions, nevertheless maintained itself with honor for over two hundred years and finally perished honorably, is a shining proof of its inherent worth and of its indestructible vitality. Yet even after its destruction the kingdom of Israel was pursued by misfortune: an undeserved reproach clings to its memory.

Later Judean historiography, which fixed the picture of Israelitish history for all following times, and whose views have entered into our very flesh and blood as Bible history, sees in the House of David the legitimate and divinely appointed dynasty for all Israel, and in the Temple of Solomon the only legitimate sanctuary for all Israel, and accordingly regards the ten tribes as rebels and heretics, who have renounced through wicked arrogance and sinful defiance the legitimate dynasty and the true religion. The final consequence of this view appears in the latest historical book of the Bible, the Book of Chronicles, to which only Judah is Israel, and which consequently ignores entirely the kingdom of the ten tribes and tells after the division in the kingdom only of the kingdom of Judah. Indeed, some have gone so far as to regard the claim of the kingdom of the ten tribes to the name of the Promise, the name

Israel, as boundless presumption and an utterly unjustified pretension. But this whole point of view is unhistorical. The centre of gravity of the race, materially as well as intellectually, was in fact with the kingdom of the ten tribes: it was really the people of Israel, beside which Judah can only be regarded as a part which had separated from the whole body. That the kingdom of Judah was only an appendix to the more powerful neighbor kingdom until after the destruction of Samaria is shown as plainly as possible by the accounts of the Book of Kings itself.

The religious judgment of later times has been influenced by the bull-cult, which was practised officially in the kingdom of the ten tribes. But in this connexion the fact is highly noteworthy, and yet is not generally given a clear explanation, that we do not hear a single word of rebuke on this subject from the prophet Elijah. When he denounces Baal in Samaria and Israel, he is simply advocating the "calves of Dan and Bethel" as the only customary form of worship in the kingdom of Israel, which he himself did not attack. The view that this whole species of worship was pure heathenism, and the worship of God in an image folly and absurdity, is first found in the prophet Hosea, and is an outgrowth of literary prophecy.

In the pre-prophetic times according to the express testimony of the Book of Kings itself, religious conditions in Judah were not a whit better than in Israel, indeed we have documentary evidence of the worst distortions and perversions only in Judah. And especially let us not forget that the greatest spiritual power that ever arose in Israel, prophecy, is, if I may use the expression, an exclusive growth of North Israel, which bloomed and developed on the soil of the kingdom of the ten tribes: Joseph, and not Judah, gave this divine blessing to mankind. Samuel, Elijah, and Hosea were North Israelites, and even the native Judean Amos worked exclusively in and for Israel.

With the loss of national and political independence this relation changes immediately: Samaria is thenceforth only an Assyrian province, and Judah receives the inheritance. After 722 Judah really became Israel, and the spiritual life too is centred in Jerusalem: the prophet Nahum, for instance, although a native of Galilee, regards himself altogether as a Judean, and does not even connect with the destruction of the universal empire of Assyria the hope of a restoration of the kingdom of the ten tribes.

True, Judah was also an Assyrian dependency, and remained so a whole century; but if it dispatched its annual tribute duti-

fully and conscientiously to Nineveh, that was all the Assyrian government cared for. In domestic affairs it was still wholly its own master, and could develop unchecked and unhindered; indeed, the question may fairly be raised whether the dependency on Assyria was not actually a blessing for its interior development, inasmuch as it guaranteed a positive security and permanence of conditions and relieved it of the necessity of cultivating international politics, for which the petty state of Judah, about the size of the English county of Kent, or half again as large as Rhode Island, had neither the power nor the means, and in which it would inevitably have worn itself out. Hence we can fully comprehend how a man like the prophet Isaiah, who was certainly a genuine patriot and did not underestimate the destiny of his people, could actually regard it as the object of his life to keep Judah in peaceful subjection to Assyria and preserve it from unwise adventures.

The conquest of Samaria was not achieved under Shalmaneser IV., but belongs to the beginning of the reign of Sargon. This Assyrian ruler, perhaps the mightiest of all, was, as it seems, a descendant of the old Assyrian royal family overthrown by Tiglath-pileser. He was obliged to continue warfare in Palestine. In the year 720 there occurred a general revolt of the countries from Hamath to the Egyptian border, which had but shortly before been subjected by Assyria.

And now Shabakah finally prepared for armed intervention. But the whole coalition was dispersed by Sargon, the Egyptians were defeated at Raphiah southward from Gaza, and when, five years later, Sargon returned to these regions the Egyptians hastened to lay tribute at his feet,—the decadent empire of the Pharaohs was no match for the rising power of Assyria, and the time was past for Egypt to pursue an international policy. Its only resort was to plot and instigate in order if possible to derive some questionable advantage from the dissensions of others. These conditions were characterised most drastically by Isaiah in the names he applies to Egypt, “blusterer and laggard,” that is, making a mighty clanking with the sword and finally when matters become serious refusing to draw.

In the year 715 King Ahaz died and was followed by his son Hezekiah. Ahaz had persisted steadfastly until the end in his voluntary subordination to Assyria, and thus secured for his country twenty years of unbroken peace. Hezekiah was differently constituted. Even from the descriptions of the tradition which greatly favors and glorifies him we derive the impression that he was an un-

decided, vacillating character, easily influenced and partial to great plans, but just as easily discouraged and dispirited. Under him the national party again came to the surface regarding the dependency upon Assyria as a disgrace and disposed to use the first opportunity to regain their former independence. The danger became so great that Isaiah went about for three years in the humiliating garb of a military captive, as a standing warning that such would be the fate of all enemies of Assyria.

In the year 711 especially the situation became critical. In Ashdod a certain Yaman had expelled the Assyrian vassal king, Achimiz, and raised the standard of rebellion; according to the report of Sargon he had entered into the plots with Judah, Edom, and Moab. But the Assyrian army made a swift end of this war of liberation. When he recognised that his cause was lost Yaman fled to Egypt, but was delivered to Sargon in chains by the Pharaoh,—with this disgraceful act Egypt with her own hand effaced her name from the list of first-class powers.

During the life of Sargon we hear no more of disturbances in Palestine. But in 705 the great king died suddenly a violent death, murdered, it appears, by his son and successor, Sennacherib. This was the signal for revolt and rebellion in the whole extent of the great empire, for it was not to be expected that a second Sargon would follow the murdered king, and fear and submission had been due alone to the person of Sargon. The threads of conspiracy run from Babylon to the Nile. The Book of Kings informs us that there came to Hezekiah an embassy from the Babylonian king, Merodach-baladan, to whom Hezekiah showed all his armories and treasures: this embassy must have come in the first year of the reign of Sennacherib (704), in order to win Hezekiah as an ally, for in the very beginning of the year 703 Sennacherib threw himself with all his might upon Babylon and expelled Merodach-baladan.

Furthermore Isaiah gives us a vivid description of an embassy of tall, bronzed Ethiopians, who also came to Jerusalem with the evident purpose of forming an alliance against Assyria. In the year 704 the young and vigorous Tirhakah had become king of the Ethiopians and had succeeded in carrying Egypt with him. Now with two such great powers as support there was no stopping the movement. All the Phœnician and Philistine rulers, Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Judah were in outspoken rebellion. King Padi of Ekron, who remained loyal to the Assyrians, was taken prisoner by his own people and brought in chains to Hezekiah at Jerusa-

lem, in order that the latter might hold him in safe keeping. This shows how general was the confidence in the impregnable position of Jerusalem.

In one of his most powerful and most stirring appeals Isaiah describes half in fierce mockery, half with bleeding heart, the delirium of heroism and warlike enthusiasm that seized upon Judah on this occasion: he sees these holiday troops already dispersed and scattered to the winds, captured without the firing of an arrow. And all too soon it became manifest how justly Isaiah had judged his people.

In the year 701 Sennacherib moved with the whole force of his kingdom against the rebels, and the petty kingdoms sank one after the other like barley blades before the sickle. The very beginning of the attack brought the whole coast of Phœnicia and Philistia to terms. Then Hezekiah too lost courage. "And Hezekiah," so the Book of Kings reports, "sent to the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying: I have offended! Return from me; that which thou puttest on me will I bear. And the king of Assyria appointed unto Hezekiah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord and in the treasures of the king's house. And he even had all the gold stripped from the doors and pillars of the temple, and gave it to the king of Assyria."

Further King Sennacherib informs us that Hezekiah set free King Padi of Ekron, whom he held captive, and delivered over to him his daughters and the women of his household. Gladly we would doubt this statement. But it is not possible; we are really obliged to believe that Hezekiah made a contribution of his own flesh and blood to the harem of the mighty Assyrian monarch. It was not possible to humble himself more deeply before Sennacherib. But the situation soon changed. The combined Ethiopian and Egyptian forces actually began to advance, and now it appeared to Sennacherib hazardous to leave in his rear an unreliable vassal like Hezekiah in such an important strategic position as Jerusalem. Therefore he now demanded the surrender of the capital and the acceptance of an Assyrian garrison.

But now Hezekiah remained firm: he could not consent to this. According to the account of the Book of Kings it was chiefly the prophet Isaiah who urged him to hold out, promising him most positively that the Assyrian would not send a single arrow into Jerusalem, but would return again the way he had come. And contrary to all expectation this bold prophecy was fulfilled.

The immediate results of Hezekiah's refusal were indeed terrible for the land. The Assyrian captured forty-six walled cities, and countless fortresses and smaller places, devastated the land systematically, and took two hundred thousand one hundred and fifty persons and all the cattle as booty to Assyria. He himself reports that he at least undertook the siege of Jerusalem, and there is no reason to doubt this. But he did not accomplish his object. The final result of this undertaking is veiled in obscurity.

At El Tekeh on the border between Judah and Philistia Sennacherib came upon the combined Egyptian and Ethiopian armies, and defeated them completely. Several Egyptian princes and a considerable number of the enemy's highest officers were made captives by the Assyrians. Sennacherib pursued the retreating hosts and had doubtless already determined upon an advance into Egypt, but was compelled to turn back on the Egyptian border. Herodotus was told by the Egyptians that an army of mice attacked the Assyrian army in the night, destroying all the leather of their equipment and weapons, thus disabling the army of Sennacherib.

The Bible account also tells of a great catastrophe that befell Sennacherib: "The angel of the Lord went forth in the night and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred four-score and five thousand." At any rate the great expedition came to naught. It is possible that a threatening turn of affairs in Babylon urgently demanded Sennacherib's presence at home and hastened his return. Before going he assigned all the cities of Judah to his loyal Philistine vassals and returned to Nineveh. He never saw Palestine again. Jerusalem was indeed saved, but in what a condition? The prophet Isaiah shall tell us:

"Your country is desolate;
 Your cities are burned with fire;
 Your land,—strangers devour it in your presence,
 And the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard,
 As a lodge in a garden of cucumbers,
 As a besieged city.
 Except the Lord of Hosts had left unto us a very small remnant,
 We should have been as Sodom,
 We should have been like unto Gomorrah."

Of the next hundred years we know almost nothing. For the history of Israelitish religion, it is true, scarcely any other period is so significant and important as this very seventh century: yet concerning the secular history we know but little. The Book of

Kings goes on to tell that Hezekiah drove the Philistines beyond Gaza : so he evidently succeeded in regaining those portions of his territory which had been separated from Judah by Sennacherib and promised to the neighboring Philistine kings. But we are obliged to infer that he returned to his former dependence upon Assyria and sent his yearly tribute to Nineveh afterwards as before, for his son and successor, Manasseh, appears always and everywhere in the ranks of the tributary vassals of Assyria.

Of Manasseh we know only that he was twelve years old when he ascended the throne, that he ruled fifty-five years, that he persecuted the prophets with fire and sword, and filled Jerusalem with the blood of the innocent. His son and successor, Amon, was murdered in the second year of his reign by a conspiracy in his own household, but the people slew the conspirators and placed upon the throne Josiah, the eight-year-old son of the murdered king. And here a ray of light falls upon the history of Israel : Josiah, from all that we know of him, must have been a good and noble character, who took his duties as regent seriously, ruled with justice and mildness, and was a father to his subjects. His contemporary, the prophet Jeremiah, bears the best of testimony for him, and the Book of Kings praises him as a second David ; but unfortunately we have no details regarding his reign.

The ninety years which we have just hastily covered include the greatest splendor and the greatest power of the Assyrian Empire as well as its sudden end. The wild and barbarous Sennacherib was murdered, 681, by two of his sons, who thus avenged his act of parricide, but the throne was not their reward. Another son, Esarhaddon, who had evidently been selected by Sennacherib for the succession, marched against his brothers and was generally recognised as king. He was destined to attain the utmost goal of Assyrian ambition and conquer Egypt.

Tirhakah still kept up his interference in Palestine in order to stir up revolts. Therefore Esarhaddon determined to put an end to the matter : he entered Egypt in 670, defeated Tirhakah completely and subdued the whole country, and Tirhakah withdrew into his native Ethiopia. Thus Egypt also became an Assyrian province, and remained so a considerable length of time. Under Assurbanipal, who ascended the Assyrian throne, 668, came the turning-point. Outwardly, indeed, the empire is more brilliant and more powerful than before, but within are seen already unequivocal signs of dissolution. Assurbanipal continued, indeed, to wage wars, more cruel and bloody than any of his predecessors ; but he

himself no longer appears in the field. On the contrary he has the captive enemies and rebels brought to Nineveh, there to feast his eyes upon their torture and death, pursuing in the intervals the pleasures of the chase and the harem—he is the Sardanapalus of the Greeks—and incidentally showing an active interest in art and science. In his palace he founds an immense library, into which he gathers all that could be found of Babylonian and Assyrian literature.

It deserves attention, and is the evidence of a very unusual personality, that no one throughout his reign of forty-two years ventured to contest the throne with this unwarlike monarch. Nevertheless the beginning of the end was at hand. Egypt seems to have freed itself soon from Assyrian domination, and enters upon a new period of political and national progress in the long and prosperous reign of Psammeticus I. In the Aryan mountaineers, the Medes, a dangerous enemy arises in the rear of Nineveh, and at the same time another fearful storm sweeps over all Asia. From the north, the countries about the Black Sea, hordes of predatory horsemen, similar in nature to the later Huns and Mongolians, invade the civilised countries of Asia, marching through and plundering them for about thirty years: Herodotus calls them Cimmerians. As a matter of course all political ties were loosened by this, and the Assyrian Empire was shaken to its foundation.

Now Phraortes, king of the Medes, considered the time come to venture an attack upon Nineveh; but he was utterly defeated and met his own death in the undertaking. His son, Cyaxares, proposed to avenge his father, and already had assailed and besieged Nineveh when an invasion of the Cimmerians into his own country recalled him and relieved Nineveh. But this was only a stay of execution. About fifteen years later Cyaxares united with Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, for a final blow at the Assyrian Empire, of whose last two kings we do not even know the exact names. After a siege of three years Nineveh was taken and razed to the ground, and the whole nation obliterated. This took place 606, just twenty years after the death of the mighty Assurbanipal.

The whole history of the world shows no catastrophe equal to the destruction of the Assyrian Empire; no nation was ever so completely destroyed as the Assyrian,—a just retribution for the abominations which it had perpetrated for centuries. The two victors divided the spoil, the lion's share falling to Media.

But meanwhile a third rival had arisen. In Egypt Necho, son

of Psammeticus, had ascended the throne of the Pharaohs in 610. This enterprising and restless monarch also wanted to secure his share of the Assyrian spoil, and set out for the Euphrates with a mighty army in 608. King Josiah of Judah tried to arrest him but was utterly defeated at Megiddo and himself mortally wounded. The people, who knew well what they had to expect of the crown-prince Jehoiakim, made Jehoahaz, the younger son of the deceased, king in his father's stead. But only three months had passed when Necho summoned the young man before his tribunal at Riblah and sent him in bonds to Egypt. He punished the people for their arbitrary action by a heavy tax, and put Jehoiakim upon the throne at Jerusalem as an Egyptian vassal.

But the Egyptian glory was not to last long; a year after the destruction of Nineveh the Babylonian crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar, met the Egyptians at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Necho was so completely defeated that he sought safety in wild flight. Nebuchadnezzar followed closely after him, but was overtaken by the news of the death of his father, Nabopolassar, so that his presence at home became absolutely necessary. Accordingly he made peace with Necho, who ceded to Babylon all his conquests in Asia as far as the Egyptian border in consideration of being allowed to return to his country unmolested.

Thus Jehoiakim of Judah had been transformed from an Egyptian vassal into a Babylonian. His policy was prescribed by his circumstances: unconditioned submission to Babylon. But he would none of this, and rebelled against his feudal lord. At first Nebuchadnezzar did not consider it worth the while to go himself, but stirred up the neighboring peoples against the unhappy land. In the midst of this situation Jehoiakim died. His eighteen-year-old son, Jehoiachin, entered upon an evil inheritance, and had to atone for his father's sins. After a reign of three months he was forced to capitulate and surrender to the Chaldeans without conditions. Nebuchadnezzar took the treasures of the temple and the palace with him and led the young king and ten thousand of the best inhabitants, the whole aristocracy of birth and intellect, into exile in Babylon, where Jehoiachin himself was kept in close confinement. But Nebuchadnezzar made one more attempt with a native ruler and placed Zedekiah, the full brother of Jehoahaz, who had formerly been chosen by the people, and an uncle of the captive Jehoiachin, upon the throne in Jerusalem as a Babylonian vassal prince. This took place in 597. Before four years of Zedekiah's reign had passed Jerusalem was again filled with discon-

tent, and there were plots which however finally came to nothing. Of course the matter could not remain concealed from the Babylonian government, and the seriously compromised Zedekiah went in person to Babylon, but came off cheap and conducted himself discreetly for the next five years. Then misfortune brought it about that the restless and aggressive Nahabrah (Apries) ascended the throne of the Pharaohs and immediately resumed the policy of his grandfather, Necho. So all eyes were turned longingly toward the Nile, whence the liberator from Babylonian subjection was expected. Nahabrah promised assistance, and Zedekiah could no longer resist the pressure: he actually rebelled, and thus the fate of Judah and Jerusalem was sealed.

On the 10th of January, 587, the Chaldeans began to besiege Jerusalem; but Nahabrah kept his word, and a mighty Egyptian army started for Palestiue and the Chaldeans withdrew. The rejoicing in Jerusalem knew no bounds. But the prophets of evil were justified: the Chaldeans returned, and after a resistance conducted with the heroism of despair, when the most terrible famine was already raging in Jerusalem, such that women were devouring their own children, the city fell into the hands of the Chaldeans, on the 9th of July, 586. In the first confusion Zedekiah escaped with a few attendants, but was overtaken and brought before the tribunal of Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah. But now Nebuchadnezzar knew no such word as mercy. All the captive nobles were executed and Zedekiah's children were all butchered before the eyes of the wretched father. That was the last thing he was ever to see, for he himself was blinded and taken to Babylon in chains, where he declined and perished miserably in prison. Thus ended the last descendant of David that had ruled in Jerusalem.

The city itself was looted and then given over to the flames; the whole people that had escaped the executioner and the sword was led into exile at Babylon. "Only of the poorest of the land did they leave some in Judah as vinedressers and husbandmen." Over this miserable remnant was set a certain Gedaliah as Babylonian prefect; but when Gedaliah perished soon after by the hand of a murderer, those who had remained in Judah fled to Egypt from fear of the vengeance of the Chaldeans, and there they vanished and left no trace. Edomites and other neighbors spread over the unclaimed land—Judah had ceased to be.

If Israel had been merely a race like others it would never have survived this fearful catastrophe and would have disappeared in the Babylonian exile. But Israel was the bearer of an idea; this

was not to be annihilated with the state, and its eternal destiny was not closed with its political life. On the contrary. It seems as though only now, when the body was dashed to pieces, was the spirit really able to develop unhampered. The death that Judah died was a death suffused with dawn. While its sun seemed set in eternal night, already in the east a new day was breaking, destined in the fulness of time to illumine the whole world with its light. Israel went down to the grave with the hope of early resurrection, and this hope was not disappointed. Forty-nine years after Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian captain of the guard, set fire to city and temple, a burnt offering from those who had returned to the fatherland was again smoking to the God of Israel on the spot where the brazen altar of Solomon had stood. The flame that had consumed Jerusalem was for Judah a purifying fire ; from the seed-field of the exile sown in tears was to spring up a precious and immortal harvest.