

the reign of the Messiah—*e.g.*, of that beautiful description in the thirty-second chapter, "Behold a king shall reign in righteousness," &c. The undercurrents of society, however, were but little changed by these surface measures of reform, and soon we find things drifting back into the old way of worldly policy and intrigue—the more that the Assyrian, long hanging like a storm-cloud on the horizon, has now become a near and imminent peril. Chap. xx., inserted in the collection of Oracles on Foreign Nations, is a striking glimpse into the troubled politics of the reign of Sargon.¹ The immediate object is to warn against the policy of seeking help against Assyria by alliances with Egypt. It is to this period that Mr. Cheyne refers many of the prophecies usually connected with the expedition of Sennacherib, but till at least further evidence is forthcoming it is safer to adhere to the ordinary view. In working up this later period of Isaiah's ministry, Mr. Smith is at his best. The episode of Hezekiah's sickness, under the title of "An Old Testament Believer's Sick-bed," is admirably handled, though the denial to Hezekiah of any hope of a future life—any, at least, which could be a comfort to him—seems put too absolutely. Mr. Smith has himself well stated the grounds of the Old Testament hope (p. 395). It is not fair to judge a man by moments of despondency and depression when his faith fails him, and all the gloom and fear attending the plunge into the unknown come back on him with unrelieved force. On the recovery from sickness came the embassy from Babylon, and Hezekiah's feet began to slip—one proof among others that at this time his wealth and prestige were acting unfavourably on his character. The policy of resort to Egypt was now in the ascendant, and for a time Hezekiah appears to have been carried away by it. Isaiah's voice alone was lifted up clear and strong in denunciation of its folly (xxx., xxxi.), and in

¹ Mentioned alone in this passage in all ancient literature, Sargon was long held by many to be a myth. His palace was the first to be disinterred in the Nineveh excavations. His inscriptions give a full account of the siege of Ashdod referred to by Isaiah, and of Hezekiah's implication in the plot.