

of ordinary political sagacity must see that its time also was near at hand—as in fact it did yield to Assyria in the succeeding reign, under Sennacherib's greater son. Still, the Prophet calmly pronounced Assyria's doom. While "a remnant" of Israel was to be saved in perpetuity, the boastful, remorseless, resistless Assyrian power was to come to an utter end, as soon as its purpose had been subverted. The most astounding thing of all is that the prophet was right. It is evident that he was accustomed to walk with Jehovah his God on commanding heights of observation and prevision.

Such a prophecy as this presents two broad aspects, either of which looks straight and clear upon the region of Oriental discovery. One of them has to do with God's providence; the other with His moral revelation. On the one hand we are impressed by the conception held by the prophet himself as to the political movements of his time. He seems to assert that the most powerful empire yet known to men flourished and maintained itself at an enormous cost of human life and effort, mainly in the interests of one of the feeblest of its subject states, which, moreover, it was at that time intending to put summarily out of existence. If this view is correct, it would seem worth while to inquire whether Oriental history generally did not turn upon the same apparently insignificant issue. We are then induced to seek and inquire further, and that with added interest. We observe that the Old Testament abounds with references not only to Assyria, but to that other country whose widespread dominions antedated that of Assyria by a score of centuries, and outlived it by seventy memorable years. So we look up next the records of Babylonia, and find that they run back to the beginnings of the race, and forward to the close of the ancient Semitic domination and the new era under Cyrus the Persian. In reading Old Testament history and prophecy anew in the light of all the knowledge gained by this inquiry, we see the same relations maintained and the same lesson taught. We discover, in brief, that the whole environment of ancient Israel, which determined so largely its political and social history, ministered to its providential destiny; that, indeed, according to Isaiah's bold conception, the peoples of Western Asia with which the Bible is concerned lived, and moved, and had their being largely for the sake of little Israel. To learn this lesson, the great lesson of all ancient history, secular or sacred, we must have a knowledge of the facts both in themselves and in their genetic development. Such knowledge is only obtainable through the disclosures of recent Oriental science.

But we are still more interested in Isaiah's theodicy, on the practical ground that it is a mode of revelation of the moral and spiritual truth of the God of Israel. What, after all, was Isaiah's great business in life? He was a preacher of righteousness. Look at the text again, and notice that it is one of a series of discourses whose central theme is the need of moral and religious reform, in accordance with the character of Jehovah Himself. And the "teaching" with which He was commissioned is not given in the guise of abstract propositions, but in the form of positive precepts. It was wickedness that was destroying the nation: directly from within by its own inherent curse; indirectly from without as a primitive judgment. This chastisement was coming from Him who was not, as the transgressors supposed, a securely retained patron, as the God of His own people, but the impartial Sovereign at once of Israel, of the nations at large, and of the universe. The "remnant" could and would be saved only on condition of righteousness. This very judgment here announced, which was coming in like a flood, was "final and decisive, overflowing with righteousness" (ver. 22).

Can we bring ourselves back in imagination and sympathy to the times and conditions of the prophecy? Can we make the memorable situation and the great eternal issue real to ourselves? It is perhaps easy to realize in some degree the position of the prophet, as he agonizes with the burden of his message. But