

General Miscellany.

Sketch of Nineveh

FROM THE BIBLE AND RECENT DISCOVERIES.

The history of the Assyrian empire, and of Nineveh its metropolis, is wrapped in obscurity. The empire had flourished and become extinct, for nearly two hundred years, at least, before classical history commenced. Its monuments have been buried in the city's ruins, for near three thousand years; and the traces of its literature and of its annals, if it ever had them, have been altogether lost. Till lately all hopes of possessing any true history of this the first empire of the world, has been all but abandoned; and even its existence has been transferred to the category of the myth.

We read in Genesis that the mighty hunter Nimrod, "had the beginning of his kingdom at Babel," and that either he, or some one connected with him, built Nineveh, and laid the foundation of the Assyrian empire. There is given to us, in profane history, a long list of kings from Ninus, or Nimrod to Sardanapalus, of whom we know nothing but their names, and whose story is doubtful. At different times it would seem that the neighbouring countries of Babylon and Assyria took the lead of each other; perhaps Babylon first predominating, then yielding to Nineveh, and afterwards again obtaining the ascendancy. With almost the only exception of the reference to Nimrod mentioned above, nothing is known of the Assyrian history till we find Paul invading Judea in the reign of Menahem, about B.C. 769. It is thought that he was the king "who repented at the preaching of Jonah." Tiglath-Pileser succeeded him, subdued Syria, affording temporary relief to the king of Judah, yet on the whole doing him much disservice. He was followed by Shalmaneser, or Esarhaddon, who took Samaria, and carried captive the ten tribes, destroying the kingdom of Israel, which had entered into alliance with the Egyptian king, with whom Shalmaneser was at war. Sennacherib succeeded; and his reign, though short, was striking, and had a marked effect on the future fortunes of the empire. He endeavoured to reduce Egypt to his sway; and to accomplish this the more effectually, and at the same time punish the disobedience of Hezekiah, he determined first to possess himself of the territory of the king of Judah. Jehovah, however, heard the prayer of Hezekiah, and asserted his superiority to the "gods of the nations," by destroying at a blow the flower of the Assyrian army.

From this blow the empire of Nineveh never entirely recovered. Taking advantage of it, probably, the Medes, who had been tributary, revolted. Before this, perhaps, Sennacherib had perished—murdered by his sons. Esarhaddon succeeded him at Nineveh, carried captive Manasseh to Babylon, afterwards allowed him to return, and maintained a war several years with the king of Egypt. During his reign he would appear to have been engaged in strengthening his empire; and this he did so effectually that in the seventeenth year of Nabuchodonosor, his successor, the Assyrians engaged and overthrew Arphaxad, or Phaores, king of the Medians, who had revolted about sixty years before. Having solicited the assistance of the former allies of his house, and having met with a refusal, on his return from Ecbatana, he prosecuted a series of successful wars against them. According to the author of the book of Judith, on invading Judea under Holofernes his general, he sustained a defeat, which, encompassed as was the Assyrian empire, brought about its final overthrow.

Cyaxares, the son of Arphaxad, having mustered a horde of Scythians which had overpread the east for twenty-eight years, prepared to avenge his father's death, and achieve again liberty for the Medes. Unit- ing with Nabopolassar, who had assumed independent regal power in Babylon, he attacked and took Nineveh in or about the year B.C. 606. Nineveh was overthrown, and the Assyrian empire finally destroyed.

Nebuchadnezzar ascended the throne at Babylon shortly after the destruction of Nineveh. He made several successful in-

cursions into Judea, and finally carried the king and people captive to Babylon. He afterwards destroyed Tyre, (Old Tyre), and by war and intrigue defeated Pharaoh Hophra, king of Egypt. He spent the rest of his reign, (with the exception recorded in Daniel) in enlarging and beautifying his metropolis. The later events of the Babylonian empire are better known. Belshazzar succeeded him; Cyrus invested Babylon, drained the river, entered the town while the inhabitants were feasting in security, slew the king, and transferred to the Medes and Persians the ascendancy of the East.

Such is a sketch of all that has been known of the Assyrian empire till within the last six or seven years. Tradition has to some extent kept up a confused remembrance of the site of Nineveh; and the earliest historians allude, in passing, to vast masses forming the ruins of the ancient cities of the Assyrians. On the river Tigris there have frequently been noticed, rising up from the general level of the country, vast heaps covered in the spring with luxuriant vegetation and several of them occupied by villages—vast heaps, which show only by the fragments of pottery strewn about them, that they owe their origin to the hand of man. Lately some of these mounds have been excavated by M. Botta, the French consul at Mosul, and by Mr. Layard, an enterprising countryman of our own. They are found to consist of the ruins of large edifices, temples or palaces, or perhaps more probably serving the two-fold purpose; and to have concealed within them monuments, which have lain for nearly three thousand years buried in their ruins.

The general absence of stone in the plains of the Euphrates and the Tigris, compelled the founders of these early cities to use, in building, the clay of which the soil consists, and which, hardened by the great heat of the summer's sun, affords enduring materials for structures. The bitumen, which bubbles up in many parts, serves as a cement; and the present condition of those ruins, supplies a faithful comment on the building of Babel: "They had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar." It is obvious, however, that against the combined agency of fire and water, such materials could not long stand. From many of the remains which have been disinterred, it is plain that the tradition of Nineveh having been destroyed by fire was a true one; and the bricks crumbled by the heat, would dissolve when exposed to the action of the rain, long before the twenty-five hundred years that have elapsed since Nineveh was overthrown. The sand, drifted by the wind of every successive century, would not fail to complete the work of destruction; and we have presented before us in these vast ruins a literal fulfilment of the prophecy, "The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved," for "Nineveh is laid waste."

From the centres of several of those heaps of ruin, several sculptures and other monuments have been dug out. They principally consist of bas-reliefs on oblong slabs of alabaster, which is to be found in considerable abundance in the neighbouring mountains. These monuments are evidently the products of the earliest arts, being deficient in perspective, and without anything resembling the graceful finish of Grecian remains. They, however, possess much boldness of outline, and vigour of execution; and the subjects show that they were the work of a people who had carried to a considerable height the arts both of peace and war.—The sculptures chiefly represent hunting or battle scenes. One now deposited in the British Museum, sent home by Mr. Layard, containing a picture of the siege of a fortified city, will serve as a sample of the rest. The besieged are on the walls of a city discharging arrows on their assailants. The king is represented leading his army on foot, three warriors being probably to be considered as personifying the whole of the troops, and accompanied by an attendant, a eunuch. There is drawn up against the wall of the city a battering-ram, on a stand constructed apparently of wicker work, resting on wheels and surmounted by a tower, from which warriors are discharging arrows against those on the walls. Stones are re-

presented falling from the wall in consequence of the blows of the battering-ram; and one of the besieged appears to be holding up his arms, as if suing for peace. As an instance too, of the way in which Scripture is corroborated by these sculptures, it is worthy of notice that while the battering-ram is not mentioned in classical history till a much later period, in the prophecies of Ezekiel repeated reference is made to it.

Besides the historical pictures which adorned the walls, there have also been discovered several bas-reliefs, and some statues, consisting of monstrous or mystical representations. There is frequently found the hawk-headed winged figure of a man, having a basket in one hand, and a fir-cone in the other. Much discussion has arisen as to what these figures were intended to represent; some holding it to be the god Nisroch, others a statue of Nimrod, the founder of the empire; while others regard it as either a religious or political allegorical figure. A beautiful specimen of this figure is in the museum, and along with the other remains will amply repay the time bestowed in their examination. Two colossal images of the winged human-headed bull and lion, emblems respectively of royalty and power, have also somewhat recently arrived in England.

One of the most interesting features of the sculptures is a figure representing what has been regarded as a symbol of the Deity, and appears as the only object of worship on the earliest Assyrian monuments. It consists of the bust of a man enclosed in a circle, and having on each side and beneath the wings of a bird. The figure is frequently seen accompanying the monarch, being raised a little above his head, and seemingly engaged in watching over him, and directing his actions. The resemblance which these figures bear to those spoken of in the first chapter of Ezekiel, both in their shape and the office assigned to them, must strike the most superficial reader. "Whithersoever the spirit was to go, they went, thither was their spirit to go; and the wheels were lifted up over against them; for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels. — When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood: and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up over against them." It would quite exceed our limits were we to enter into the discussion of the real nature of these representations; nor perhaps can it be at all satisfactorily determined till the inscriptions found on the sculptures are more thoroughly understood.

These inscriptions are in the cuneiform, or arrow-headed character. This character having no resemblance to any now existing, and the key to it having been lost, so far as we know, for above two thousand years, was entirely unknown till within the last five-and-twenty years. Professor Grotefend, Major Rawlinson, and others, have made wonderful progress in deciphering and translating these inscriptions. As in the case of the Rosetta stone, furnishing a clue to the Egyptian hieroglyphics, there have been discovered a few inscriptions in two other characters besides the cuneiform. Starting from these alone, an alphabet of forty letters has been determined on, and a proximate translation given to many of the inscriptions. When the meaning has been assigned to those already found, as well as to many more which the continued investigations will probably lay bare, much additional light will be shed on the Assyrian history.

In the meantime, very much has been done by way of illustrating many passages of the old testament. The chariots and horsemen, the bow and quiver, the "gorgeous attire," the profusion of ornament, the pride of the rulers, their strongholds, the employments and dignity of their officers, the material of which the city was composed, its vast extent, the lion as a symbol of the empire; these and many more are subjects which bring to light, and invest with new force the meaning of many of the prophecies. It has been said, indeed, that if nothing more had been achieved by the investigation at Nimrod than the illustration of two verses of Ezekiel, (xxxiii, 14—16,) the labours incurred had been amply repaid. — For a most interesting elucidation of these verses we must refer to the fifth of Mr. Blackburn's lectures.

It is not, however, merely as illustrating the Old Testament that these discoveries are important; they are quite as valuable as witnesses of its truth. Striking coincidences are seen to exist between these books and sculptures which have been buried for twenty-five hundred years. Such coincidences must be perfectly undesigned; the facts now discovered have not been known to classical authors during the whole period of literature; resemblances are traceable even in minute particulars, and all evidently possessing, in the sacred narrative, the air of reality. Were there to be discovered after the same lapse of time a narrative by some uninspired penman corroborating the sacred story by name, even this would be more open to suspicion, and less entirely satisfactory, than the vast monuments now after so many centuries disinterred. Here, at least, there can be no collusion; and they go far to prove that our sacred books were written in the countries and at the times which they profess. They present us with a fresh assurance that increased light will only render more conspicuous the truth of the word of God. — *London Baptist Magazine.*

Family Circle.

A little Boy tried, and found Guilty.

My mother was of a family of the Puritans. Over us, her little children, she held the reins of government lovingly, yet most firmly. She as really punished us in love, as she kissed us in love. She went to her rod one day, and found it broken, and broken in such a way that it must have been with hands. Some one of the children, she said, has done this. We all denied. Mother grew in earnest, and said the one that did it had better own it, for she should find it out. We all denied it again; and mother turned away.

By and by, one of the children went softly up to her and told her that I did it, and she saw me. Mother came to me alone, and laid it to my charge. I denied it, but she produced her evidence. I began to be silent. As soon, she said, as I get the baby to sleep I shall reckon with you. I noticed she felt deeply, and could not sing to the babe as usual, but would once in a while cast her black and piercing eyes upon me. Soon she made all ready. The moment of trial had arrived. She took me by the hand. She summoned her witness, and took the Bible in the other hand, and led me away to the barn. And when she had closed the barn door, she sat down and placed me before her. She opened the Bible, and read very distinctly the words, "All liars shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone." Then she looked to me with anger, being grieved. She asked me again if I was guilty. I pleaded not guilty. She called up the witness. Witness cried, and I cried. But the court was firm. The court sent for the very stick that had been broken. And when I looked at it and my sister told the court how I did it, all in a moment I knew I did it. But even now my head is gray, I can say I really thought myself innocent, until I saw how the stick was broken. Solemn day, solemn moment! The judge was convinced. The culprit was convicted. I told her I forgot—I forgot, but she bade me not add sin to sin.

Mother told us it was not the stick that she cared for: it was the lie. I told her I was sorry and would never do so again. Oh, she said, you are sorry now because I am going to punish you. She went on and explained the crime. She rehearsed the evidence and the aggravations attending the sin, and how God looked down on my wicked heart. She told us how one little sin would lead to a greater and that to a greater. "And now my son you are come to this." I looked at her, and tears stood in her eyes. And every time I looked at her I felt a crying as if my heart would break. She still kept her finger on the passage about liars, once in a while reading it. That passage was the law, the verdict and my death warrant. And all the hope I had was that mother said she was sorry for me, and hoped that God, for Christ's sake, would forgive me.

She said she should thought it time to bound me fore him; we all left pitied me.

When whole man she had b at me, and ed thing i hoped be mother th thought I punish me.

Then n me it wa me in a li God to fo to do so a words d there was mother. her water, more thar have occ sin. And allude to ter, and a ed her i and I we said, "T more that

C

Conversion

The me at the ele eternity, t they may a dying b give God make an knowledge sinners w blessed tr flinger aro death. I warn ever per not to

Withou rate, as bi who began She wa personal a and sprigl standing. And, mar Her moth this loved heavenly pressed w as most y that decid which eve Heaven nary Com time when freshest g

She at and that s with all tl who have or sought willing to fatal. A tenderly t covery, an interest i she was meeting i what a bl stool of th breathing Scripture "vials ful

Some o also in pr afterward state of h the subje standing c she coul sins, but t was point to cast he following