

predictions of the approaching investment of Jerusalem by the Assyrian (xxix). It was in truth the time of

ISAIAH'S GREATEST ACTIVITY,

and ended in the sublimest possible vindication of a ministry carried on for thirty years in the midst of almost continuous opposition, mockery, and unbelief. Ere long Sennacherib¹ was actually in the country (701 B.C.), devastating it in every direction, reducing its fenced cities, and taking captive enormous multitudes of its population. The effect on the capital is vividly depicted in chap. xxii. Confidence was exchanged for panic; the cowardly rulers who had been the inspirers of the Egyptian policy fled; pestilence broke out in the crowded city, and the demoralised populace, throwing off all restraint, gave themselves up to riot and debauchery. The very acuteness of the crisis, however, brought with it in a measure its own remedy. For the moment Sennacherib was bought off by heavy tribute (2 Kings xviii. 14-16). At the instigation of Isaiah (xxii. 20-25; cf. xxxvii. 2), Hezekiah had changed his advisers; and now convinced of the folly of his worldly trusts, suffered himself to be guided entirely by the prophet. The people were rallied, and something like order was restored.² It was a terrible disappointment, after all they had gone through, when a new contingent of Sennacherib's army appeared before the gates of Jerusalem, again demanding the surrender of the city. The story of the deliverance is familiar to every one. It is not doubted that now when things were at their blackest, as formerly when the invader was yet remote (xxix.), Isaiah with unfaltering confidence predicted the deliverance—predicted it in strains of scornful exultation

¹ To this period belong not only the discourses relating to the invasion of Sennacherib, but many of the oracles now embraced in the collection (chaps. xiii.-xxiii.).

² In his undoubtedly powerful chapter on this subject, Mr. Smith in a somewhat far-fetched manner attributes this change to Isaiah's preaching a Gospel of forgiveness, based on the fact that God had fulfilled His promise of deliverance to the city—the deliverance, forsooth, consisting in Hezekiah's humiliating payment of excessive tribute.