

BEAUTIES
OF
SACRED LITERATURE.

ILLUSTRATED BY EIGHT STEEL ENGRAVINGS.

EDITED BY
THOMAS WYATT, A. M.
AUTHOR OF "THE SACRED TABLEAUX," ETC. ETC.

"Scatter diligently in susceptible minds
The germs of the Good and the Beautiful !
They will develop there to trees, bud, bloom,
And bear the golden fruit of Paradise."

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PREFACE.

He is supremely happy, who, by well directed efforts, is able to advance the cause of Sacred Literature, and the means of unfolding to the reader of holy things, those mysteries of the Bible which to some are so dark and intricate.

The Editor rejoices that he is permitted to be the instrument in the presentation of the following work to the Christian public. In it he trusts is embodied, under the names of truly eminent writers, a mass of sacred erudition; where the most remarkable incidents in the Holy Scriptures are clearly elucidated, and made equal to the capacity of the humblest reader.

He would here present his grateful thanks to those who so generously aided him in this valuable work; and refer them to that beautiful promise of the same Bible from which they have chosen their subjects: "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days."

T. W.

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PROPHECIES OF NINEVEH AND BABYLON.

BY REV. A. ALEXANDER, D. D.

THE walls of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, are said to have been a hundred feet in height, sixty miles in compass, and defended by fifteen hundred towers, each two hundred feet high. Diodorus Siculus relates, that the king of Assyria, after the complete discomfiture of his army, confided in an old prophecy, that Nineveh would not be taken unless the river should become the enemy of the city; that after an ineffectual siege of two years, the river, swollen with long continued and tempestuous torrents, inundated part of the city, and threw down the wall for the space of twenty furlongs, and that the king, deeming that the prediction was accomplished, despaired of his safety, and erected an immense funeral pile, on which he heaped his wealth, and with which himself, his household, and palace were consumed. The book of Nahum was avowedly

prophetic of the destruction of Nineveh; and it is there foretold, "that the gates of the river shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved — Nineveh of old like a pool of water — with an overflowing flood he will make an utter end of the place thereof." The other predictions of the prophet are as literally described by the historian. He relates, that the king of Assyria, elated with his former victories, and ignorant of the revolt of the Bactrians, had abandoned himself to scandalous inaction; had appointed a time of festivity, and supplied his soldiers with abundance of wine; and that the general of the enemy, apprised by deserters of their negligence and drunkenness, attacked the Assyrian army while abandoned to revelling, destroyed a great part of them, and drove the rest into the city. The words of the prophet were hereby verified: "While they were folden together as thorns, and while they are drunken as drunkards, they shall be devoured as stubble fully dry." Much spoil was promised to the enemy: "Take the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold; for there is no end of the store and glory, out of all the pleasant furniture." Accordingly, the historian affirms, that many talents of gold and silver, preserved from the fire, were carried to Ecbatana. The prophet declares, that the city was not

only to be destroyed by an overflowing flood, but the fire was also to devour it ; which exactly agrees with the account of the historian.

The utter and perpetual destruction of the city was thus distinctly predicted : “The Lord will make an utter end of the place thereof. Affliction shall not rise up the second time ; she is empty, void, and waste. The Lord will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria, and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness. How is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in.” In the second century, Lucian, who was born on the banks of the Euphrates, testified that Nineveh was utterly perished — that there was no vestige of it remaining — and that none could tell where it was once situated. A late traveller, who has visited that country, testifies, “that neither bricks, stones, nor other materials of building,” are now to be seen ; but the ground is, in many places, grown over with grass, and such elevations are observable, as resemble the mounds left by the intrenchments and fortifications of ancient Roman camps ; and the appearances of other mounds and ruins less marked than even these, extending for ten miles and widely spread, and seeming to be the wreck of former buildings, show that Nineveh is left

without any monument of royalty, without any token whatever of its splendor or wealth ; that it is indeed a desolation, “empty, void, and waste ;” its very ruins perished, and less than the wreck of what it was. “Such an utter ruin,” says Bishop Newton, “has been made of it ; and such is the truth of the divine predictions.”

BABYLON.

The prophecies respecting the taking of Babylon, its utter destruction, and the complete desolation which should reign where this proud city once stood, have been remarkably fulfilled.

The very nations by whom Babylon was to be taken and destroyed, are predicted by name by the prophet Jeremiah. “Go up, O Elam ! (this was the ancient name of Persia,) besiege, O Media ! The Lord hath raised up the spirit of the kings of the Medes ; for his device is against Babylon to destroy it.” And Isaiah says, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen ; and all the graven images of her gods he hath broken unto the ground.” “Thus saith the Lord, that saith unto the deep, Be dry ; and I will dry up thy rivers ; that saith of Cyrus, he is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure. And I will loose the loins

of kings, to open before him the two-leaved gates ; and the gates shall not be shut." " Thus saith the Lord to Cyrus his anointed, to subdue all nations before him."

This prediction of Isaiah, in which Cyrus is named, must have been uttered at least two hundred years before he was born, and when the Persians were an obscure and inconsiderable nation.

A confederacy having been formed between the Medes and Persians, and Cyrus having in person taken the command of the Persians, and having disciplined them with consummate skill, and inspired them with heroic courage, joined his uncle Cyaxares, (by Daniel called Darius the Mede,) and their united forces having conquered the Armenians, the Hyrcanians, the Lydians, the Cappadocians, and other allies of the king of Babylon ; and having so treated all these conquered nations as to conciliate their friendship, and add their forces to their own, they marched towards the city of Babylon. Although Cyrus commenced his military career with a small army of Persians, yet, by conquest and wise policy, his army had become exceedingly numerous before he reached the famous city. But what could be done by courage or military skill against a city so defended on every side ? This consummate general,

as soon as he had arrived on the ground with his army, made it his first business, in company with some of his chief officers, to ride entirely round the walls, and to ascertain whether there was any weak point where an assault might successfully be made. But he found every part fully secured, so that there seemed no possibility of taking the city but by a long siege. He therefore sat down before it, and dug a trench entirely around the walls, and towers were erected, and every other preparation made for a regular siege.

Thus, in the prophecy, it is said, "They camped against it round about. They put themselves in array against Babylon round about. They set themselves in array against Babylon, every man put in array."

Another important circumstance distinctly noticed in the prophecy, is, the cowardice of the Babylonians. Formerly her armies were a terror to the whole earth, and nothing could withstand their fierce courage. But now, faint-heartedness had come over them. "The mighty men of Babylon have forborne to fight. They have remained in their holds. Their might have failed, they became as women." Their timidity was manifest in their shutting themselves up; and all the challenges of their

enemies could not provoke them to come out and meet them in the open field. Xenophon relates, that Cyrus challenged the king of Babylon to decide the contest by single combat, which he declined. The people within the walls, though very numerous, made no sallies from their gates; nor did they use any efforts to disperse or annoy the besiegers.

Literally, "they remained in their hold, and the hands of the king of Babylon waxed feeble." Cyrus, as we have said, found every thing secure against assault; for what could battering rams, or other engines of war, accomplish against walls which were thirty, or, as some assert, fifty feet in thickness?

He was, therefore, not a little perplexed until the thought occurred, that an entrance might possibly be obtained by turning out of the channel the river Euphrates, which flowed through the city. This hazardous enterprise, as a last resort, was determined on, and the work was commenced, but the design was carefully concealed from the besieged; for, as Herodotus observes, if they had had the least intimation of the device, or if they had discovered the Persians while passing through, they could not only have prevented its execution, but have destroyed the whole army of Cyrus while pent up within the channel of the river. All that was necessary to

prevent the Persians from entering was, to close the gates, which gave entrance to the city through the embankment built upon both sides of the river.

To guard against the danger of discovery, Cyrus selected for the execution of this important but dangerous enterprise, the season of a great Babylonish festival, on which occasion he knew the whole population gave themselves up to revelling and drunkenness.

The river was a full quarter of a mile wide, and twelve feet deep, but there was an artificial lake in the neighborhood, prepared to receive the surplus waters, when it overflowed its banks, or where, for any other reason, it was desirable to diminish the waters of the river. The scheme succeeded to their most sanguine expectation. The channel of the river being left nearly dry, the army of Cyrus entered by night. One detachment was placed where the river entered the city, and another where it left it; and the Persian army entered so silently, and the inhabitants were so completely drowned in their drunken revels, that no alarm was sounded, and no care had been taken to close the gates leading to the river, no danger being apprehended on that side. So completely were the Babylonians surprised, that Cyrus had reached the royal palace before a

messenger arrived to tell the king that the city was taken. The noise of the invading army, at first, was not distinguished from the mad tumult of the rioters. Even the guards stationed around the palace were found intoxicated, and slain; when the Persians rushed into the splendid hall, where Belshazzar and his thousand lords, and wives, and concubines had been drinking out of the sacred vessels of the Lord's house, which had been impiously brought forth on this occasion. But their profane mirth had already been arrested before the arrival of the victorious Persians, by the appearance of a hand, writing certain words in a strange character on the wall. This had produced the utmost consternation in all the assembly; although none could decipher the writing, until Daniel was brought in, who quickly denounced the fatal destiny of the monarch, and the overthrow of his kingdom,—“And in that night was Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans, slain.”

How exactly the events, described above, were predicted, will be at once seen by the following quotations from the prophets.

“I will dry up thy sea, and make thy springs dry; that saith to the deep, *Be dry, I will dry up thy rivers.*”

“ And one post did run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to show the king of Babylon that his city is taken at the end, and that the passages are shut.”

“ But a snare was laid for Babylon. It was taken, and it was not aware. How is the praise of the whole earth surprised ! For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness and in thy wisdom, and thy knowledge it hath perverted thee ; therefore shall evil come upon thee, and thou shalt not know whence it ariseth ; and mischief shall come upon thee, and thou shalt not be able to put it off ; none shall save thee.” “ In their heat I will make their feasts, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not awake, saith the Lord. I will make drunk her princes and her wise men, her captains and her rulers, and her mighty men, and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep.”

“ The gates [i. e. those from the river to the city] were not shut. The loins of kings were loosed to open before Cyrus the two-leaved gates.”

“ The king, hearing a noise and tumult without, sent some to see whence it arose ; but no sooner were the gates of the palace opened, than the Persians rushed in.” “ The king of Babylon heard the report of them. Anguish took hold of him.”

He and all about him perished. God had "numbered his kingdom and finished it." It was "divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

The multitude of soldiers who now entered the city, and the slaughter of the citizens in the streets, are exactly foretold: "I will fill thee with men as with caterpillars. Her young men shall fall in the streets, and all her men of war shall be cut off in that day." The number of the Persian army, which was reviewed immediately after the capture of the city, is said by Herodotus to have amounted to one hundred and twenty thousand horse, six thousand chariots of war, and six hundred thousand infantry.

Cyrus issued a proclamation that the people should remain in their houses, with strict orders to slay every person who should be found in the streets. Cyrus now became master of all the hidden treasures of Babylon. "The treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places being given into his hand," that he might know "that the Lord, which had called him by his name, was the God of Israel."

From the time of the capture of this famous city by Cyrus, her glory began to fade. God had predicted her downfall, and his word never fails. After its first conquest, it was, according to Herodotus, reduced from an imperial to a tributary city; which

seems to be foretold by the prophet, when he says, —
“Come down and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon ; sit on the ground, there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans.”

The next step towards the downfall of this famous city was after the rebellion against Darius. When he captured the city, he ordered the height of the walls to be reduced, and all the gates to be destroyed. To which the prophet alludes in express terms : —
“The wall of Babylon shall fall ; her walls shall be thrown down.” Xerxes, after his return from his unfortunate Grecian expedition, entered the city and rifled its most valuable and sacred treasures, laid up in the Temple of Belus. This the prophet Jeremiah had foretold. “I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring out of his mouth that which he has swallowed up. I will do judgment on the graven images of Babylon.”

No efforts made by the conquerors of Babylon to restore her glory, or even to prevent her decay, were at all successful. Cyrus made Babylon his usual place of residence, but his successors preferred other cities ; and when Alexander conquered Babylon, it was fully his purpose to restore that city to her pristine glory, but the counsel of Jehovah was adverse. The prophet had long before signified that

all such attempts would prove ineffectual. "Take balm for their pain, if so be that she may be healed. We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed." The proximate cause of the rapid decline of Babylon was twofold; first, the turning of the river inundated the surrounding country, and filled it with stagnant pools; secondly, the building of another city in the neighborhood drew off multitudes of inhabitants, who transferred their residence and wealth from the old to the new city. Babylon also was oppressed with some of the most cruel tyrants that ever ruled over any city.

One of these, named Humerus, who lived about one hundred and thirty years before Christ, reduced many of the inhabitants to slavery on the slightest pretexts, burned the forum and some of the temples, and banished many of the people into Media.

The cruelty of the conquerors of Babylon is strongly portrayed by the inspired pen. "They are cruel both in anger and fierce wrath, to lay the land desolate." This has been in an eminent degree verified, in the Persians and Medes, the Macedonians, the Parthians, the Syrians, the Romans, and the Saracens; all of whom, in their turn, by their cruel anger and fierce wrath, assisted to render desolate this once famous city, and these once beautiful

and fertile regions. The decline of Babylon was gradual but constant.

In the second century of the Christian era nothing remained but the walls; and in the fourth century these were repaired to serve as an inclosure or park for wild beasts, and Babylon became a hunting-ground for the kings of Persia. Under the Saracens the desolation became complete, and for many ages past the following prediction has been literally fulfilled: "No man dwelleth there, and no son of man passeth by. Neither shall the Arabian pitch his tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their folds there." The only remains of the former city are heaps of ruins and mounds of half decayed bricks, in exact conformity with the prediction of Jeremiah: "Babylon shall become heaps. Her foundations are fallen. She shall never be inhabited from generation to generation." "Our path," says Mignan the traveller, "lay through great masses of ruined heaps on the site of shrunken Babylon; and I am perfectly incapable of conveying an adequate idea of the dreary, lonely nakedness that appeared before us." Porter remarks, "that a silence profound as the grave, reigns throughout the ruins. Babylon is now a silent scene, a sublime solitude." According to Rauwolf, even as early as the sixteenth

century, there was not within the limits of ancient Babylon a single human habitation: "The eye," says he, "wanders over a barren desert, in which the ruins are nearly the only indication that it was ever inhabited."

"It is impossible," says Keppel, "to behold the scene, and not be reminded now exactly the predictions of Isaiah and Jeremiah have been fulfilled." As the wild Arabs inhabit the wilderness, and often visit this region, it may seem strange and improbable that they should never pitch their tent on the ruinous site of Babylon; but Mignan informs us, that nothing will induce them to remain all night near the principal mound, as they have a superstitious belief that evil spirits dwelt there. He informs us that he was accompanied by six Arabs, well armed, and accustomed to the desert; but no inducement could have prevailed on them to remain on the ground after night.

Among the ruins, travellers inform us, there are many dens of wild beasts. On the very mound, supposed to have been produced by the ruins of the Temple of Belus, Porter saw three large lions. The hyena and the jackal abound there. Who can fail to see, in these circumstances, the exact fulfilment of that prediction,— "Wild beasts of the

desert shall be there, and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures, and owls shall be there, and satyrs shall dance there."

The western bank of the Euphrates has now disappeared, and the river, having no barrier, freely overflows the adjacent land, so that on this side a large part of the ruins of Babylon are inundated; and for a great distance, even after the river has subsided, the whole country is one continued swamp, which is entirely inaccessible to the traveller.

To this the prophet seems to have alluded, when he says, "The sea is come upon Babylon; she is covered with the waves thereof." But that which, at first view, appears to be incompatible with this description, is nevertheless true. Babylon is described by the prophets as a "dry land, a wilderness, and a desert." But the fact is, that while on one side of the river the site is inundated, on the other it is exceedingly dry, and a mere arid desert. As far as the light of history reaches, among the structures ever reared by the hands of men, the Temple of Belus seems to have been the most elevated. This temple was built on the foundation of the Tower of Babel, and, according to the lowest computation, was higher than the greatest of the Egyptian pyramids. The highest mound now among the ruins is

supposed, by discerning travellers, to be on the site of this famous temple. This ruin covers more ground than the temple did when standing. This hill is called by the Arabs *Birs Nimrud*. Of this vast ruin Sir Robert Ker Porter has given a very particular and interesting account. "On the summit of the hill are immense fragments of brickwork, of no determinate figures, tumbled together, and converted into vitrified masses." Some of these huge fragments measure twelve feet in height by twenty-four in circumference; these fragments have been entirely preserved, while every thing else is crumbled to dust, because they have been exposed to the action of the fiercest fire; they are completely molten.

The high gates of the Temple of Belus, which were standing in the time of Herodotus, have been burnt with fire. The noble palaces of Babylon, the larger of which was surrounded by three walls of great extent, have entirely disappeared. Although the strength of the walls seemed to promise durability, and almost to bid defiance to time; yet now, of these palaces, the most splendid the world ever saw, nothing but mere vestiges of the walls which surrounded them remain. The circumference of this ruin is about half a mile, and its height one hundred and forty feet; but it is a mass of confusion, the

receptacle of wild beasts and venomous reptiles. Mignan says, "On passing over the loose stones and fragments of brickwork, which lay scattered through the immense fabric, and surveying the sublimity of the ruins, I naturally recurred to the time when these walls stood proudly in their original splendor; when the halls were the scenes of festive magnificence; and when they resounded to the voices of those whom death has long since swept from the earth. This very pile was once the seat of luxury and vice, now abandoned to decay, and exhibiting a melancholy instance of the retribution of heaven. It stands alone. The solitary habitation of the goatherd marks not the forsaken site." "Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of the viols; the worms are spread under thee, and the worms cover thee."

In this famous city there was nothing more wonderful than the height and thickness of the walls. They were so broad, that six chariots abreast could be drawn on them, and their original height is said to have been three hundred and fifty feet. Darius lowered these walls; but where are they now? Not a vestige of them any where remains. It was predicted that "Babylon should be an astonishment. Every one that goeth by Babylon shall be astonished." How pre-

cisely this accords with the feelings of modern travellers, may be learned from their own language.

Porter says, "I could not but feel an indescribable awe, in thus passing, as it were, into the gates of the fallen Babylon."

"I cannot portray," says Mignan, "the overpowering sensation of reverential awe that possessed my mind, while contemplating the extent and magnitude of ruin and devastation on every side."

In another place Porter adds the following interesting remarks, expressive of his feelings while surveying the scene: — "The whole view was particularly solemn. The majestic stream of the Euphrates, wandering in solitude, like a pilgrim monarch, through the silent ruins of his devastated kingdom, still appeared a noble river, under all the disadvantages of its desert-tracked course. Its banks were hoary with reeds; and the gray osier willows were yet there, on which the captives of Israel hung up their harps; and, while Jerusalem was not, refused to be comforted. But how is the rest of the scene changed since then! At that time those broken hills were palaces — those long undulating mounds, streets — this vast solitude, filled with the busy subjects of the proud daughter of the east, now wasted with misery; her habitations are not to

be found, and for herself, 'the worm is spread over her.'"

The Rev. Alexander Keith concludes with these pertinent remarks: "Has not every purpose of the Lord been performed against Babylon? What mortal shall give a negative answer to the questions subjoined by the author of these very prophecies? 'Who hath declared this from ancient time? Who hath told it from that time? Have not I, the Lord? And there is no God beside me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient time the things that are not yet done; saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.' Is it possible there can be any attestation of the truth of the prophecy, if not witnessed here?"

"The records of the human race, it has been said with truth, do not present a contrast more striking than that between the primeval magnificence of Babylon, and its long desolation. How few spots are there on earth, of which we have so clear and faithful a picture as prophecy gave of fallen Babylon, when no spot on earth resembled it less than its present desolate, solitary site! Or could any prophecies, respecting any single place, be more precise, or wonderful, or numerous, or true, or more gradually accomplished, through many generations?"