A librarian of our day fears fire more, perhaps, than he fears any other destructive thing. In peace-time he provides his library with fire-fighting apparatus. In this time of war the precautions against fire are increased and improved. As an extra precaution the librarian may remove his treasures to a comparatively safe place above or below ground.

But in ancient Assyria and Babylonia the fires started by an enemy in the city which he attacked, were a friend of books. It will be remembered that the books of those times were made of clay. To fire them was to harden them, and so lengthen their days. A maker of books, or a keeper of books, might have given this piece of practical advice to contemporary book-lovers in ancient Mesopotamia: “If you wish to preserve your books and your libraries, set fire to them”.

Ancient Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was attacked and destroyed in 612 B.C. Modern excavators have reported that its ruins show clear traces of the fires which raged in that last violent assault. Many persons must have perished in the flames. But books were preserved, and, with them, the abundance of literary sources from which much of our knowledge of contemporary political, religious, economic and military history is derived.

In the spring of 1850, Mr. (later Sir) A. H. Layard and Mr. H. Rassam excavated the South-west Palace in the northern mound which forms part of the extensive ruins of Nineveh (modern Quyunjig). Layard discovered two small chambers opening into each other. Here, “to the height of a foot or more

\[1\] A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on the 10th of December, 1941.
from the floor”, lay a mass of inscribed clay tablets and fragments of tablets. This, it is thought, was once the library of the temple of Nabu, “the holder of the tablet”.

On 22nd December, 1853, Mr. Rassam found tablets of all shapes and sizes in a chamber on the northern half of the mound of Quyunjiq. This, it was discovered, was a part of a library of the scholarly king Ashurbanipal (668–626 B.C.), “skilful in the art of writing of every craftsman of letters”.

From these two libraries, 27,073 tablets and fragments of tablets reached the British Museum. They include, in addition to documents which reflect all sides of business administration and traffic, books on grammar, law, geography, myth and ritual. There are also historical annals and about 1600 letters and fragments of letters, and it is these which supply the material necessary for any study of Assyrian wars and warfare. The bulk of the information set forth in this paper is drawn direct from the letters which date from c. 722 B.C. to 640 B.C.¹

We may describe much of the matter contained in these letters as despatches from various sections of the “Front”, understanding by that term both the scenes of actual combat and the areas of occupation after victory. Clausewitz held that war is merely a continuation of policy by other means. The Assyrians would seem to have held that peace was merely a continuation of war by other means. Most of the letter-writers show a talent for brevity, and it is only by slow degrees that the modern reader perceives the currents which pass to and fro between the lines of the ‘communiqués’. But as perception grows, and as these letters of the ancient dead come to life, thoughts such as these start up to tease the mind: “Now where have I read that sort of thing before, and recently?”, or “Wasn’t there something like that in a recent despatch from the battle front or from occupied territory?” This is not surprising, for, although modern wars are vastly different from the wars waged by ancient Assyria, yet the passage of time has not increased the essential tools with which war is waged. They are still what

¹ The letters present many difficulties to the translator. Translations other than those given here are possible, but they would not substantially differ from the translations offered here.
they were long ago: brain, brawn and impersonal things. Then, as now, authority said "life, limb and brain must be organised for the overriding purpose". And the material quoted in this paper will show that the brain of men-at-arms long ago was as active, as resourceful, as cunning then as now; that the brawn of those days struck as surely and as fatally as at any time since; and that both brain and brawn moved under the influence of a high morale and a whole-hearted devotion equal to that called forth by nobler causes of later times.

The writers of the letters quoted here are, on the one hand, the Assyrian kings: Sargon, Sennacherib, Esarhaddon, and Ashurbanipal, and on the other hand, their subordinate officials, military and civil, scattered over the wide area covered by Assyria proper and territories subdued and, in some instances, annexed by her.

As one reads the voluminous correspondence of King Ashurbanipal, one feels "He is a meddlesome fellow". But such royal meddling is of the essence of Assyrian kingship. It has been remarked that the contemporaries of Queen Victoria, in their ignorance of what Her Majesty did, assumed that she did almost nothing to influence national affairs. But the publication of her letters has shown that her active influence in matters of State was considerable. Had her contemporaries known the facts they might not have understood. But an Assyrian king, or a queen-mother, would have understood perfectly. For them, a king must rule indeed. He was no figure-head, no signe-tout, no puppet, but a master whose word was despatched to the uttermost frontiers of his sway, whose praise raised up and whose blame cast down, whose mind was exercised and decisive in all matters of State, religious, economic, political and military. For "kingship descended from heaven", and was to be exercised with energy under the eye of expectant deities. The taunts with which the Assyrian Rabshakeh taunted the Hebrews at Jerusalem's walls, were the voice of the god Ashur relayed to Jerusalem.

The replies of the subordinates show that they realised their position vis-à-vis their commander-in-chief, the king at Nineveh. They are prompt to answer all his questions, to declare their
undying loyalty, to lay before him all the difficulties and the successes of their obedience. But our concern here is with the information which they send from their stations as to movements of enemy troops, progress of campaigns, threatened or actual revolts, the behaviour of citizens in lands overrun and occupied by Assyria.

Assyrian power over her neighbours was won by wars waged throughout more than half a millennium. They are recorded, in greater or lesser detail, in the annals of the Assyrian kings, and in the national records of Assyria’s neighbours, Babylonia, Armenia and Israel. They were not wars as more civilised peoples understand war, though they have certain features not unlike the features of war as it has been waged in our time in the full gaze of a shocked world. Against often defenceless peoples, Assyria perpetrated armed, large-scale brigandage; homes were sacked, families slaughtered or enslaved; lands laid waste, time and again, for the enlarging and enriching of the Assyrian Reich. Making war her bulwark, Assyria “gored the gentle bosom of peace with pillage and robbery”. “Hæc quidem gaudebat, sed tota terra gemebat.” But to Assyria all means were lawful to her end, which was to possess and to hold the passes of the world.

All this is part of the memory of mankind, and has been so often described in the histories of Assyria that we need not dwell further on it here. It is less usual to attempt to say something of the Assyrian soldier, of his mettle, his temper for such “bloody hunting”. This we shall attempt now, briefly.

Probably late in the second millennium B.C., some centuries before Assyria reached the zenith of her power, there was written in poetic form a description of Assyria’s struggle against her southern neighbours. The document, unusual both as to its great size and as to its form, was found at Nineveh by the late Dr. Campbell Thompson during diggings there after the last war.¹ According to this document, Assyria’s enemies covet Assyria and plot unceasingly to destroy her. Her soldiers are

eager to battle in her defence. An officer addresses the king: “My lord, from the beginning of your reign . . . battle and toil have been for us a feast. . . . Under your good rule we have become men. . . . Let us go forward. . . . He who advances lives; he who stays behind dies.” The king gives the order to battle. The gods come to assist the troops. The text continues: “The soldiers look death in the eye . . . they are in full fury; they tear their tunics apart; they cut off their hair; they swing the lance; they dance in the fatal play of weapons”.

As represented in this document, the spirit of these Assyrian troops, their eager delight in battle, their eagerness to meet the enemy, recall a later: “God be thanked who has matched us with this hour”. They saw what the gods and the king ordered, and behold it was very good. And like the Maccabees, “Proelium bantur proelium cum laetitia”.

It may be—for the tablet was long preserved at Nineveh—that this record of the past was remembered in after time. It may even be that its contents were related, recited in many a camp on the eve of battle. We may imagine a soldier in the Assyrian Army at a later time, praying that he, too, might be as one of these. We may picture a priestly warrior trying, by its means, to screw the troops up to sticking-point with this poetic account of the courage and prowess of those pioneers of Assyria’s greatness, reminding them that their “blood is fet from fathers of warproof”.

Service with the Assyrian forces entailed great hardships, which our sources sometimes describe. A letter written to King Sargon from the Front reports that the “troops are grumbling”. An order had been given to take the road to the city of Hirite. But the troops protest, saying: “There is no way possible. . . . there is no continuous road; the terrain is difficult, it lies amidst mountains; the waters are treacherous, the river flows strongly; swimming skins and keleks are useless”. The writer, for his part, reminds his lord: “The king knows that the troops are powerless against water”, and announces his own intention of taking the mountain road. We do not know whether such disobedience to G.H.Q. at Nineveh was

1 Harper, Assyrian and Babylonian Letters, 312.
or was not successful. For the sake of the official we must hope so.

On a cylinder, Ashurbanipal tells of an occasion when, operating against Elam, "the troops saw Iddie, a raging torrent, and were afraid to cross". Luckily someone had a dream in which Ishtar promised, "I will go before Ashurbanipal". The soldiers "put their trust in that dream and crossed the river in safety". We must assume that on the occasion reported in the letter just quoted, Ishtar or some other hesitated to disturb the sleep of grumbling armies. The difficulties of food-supplies must have been frequent. Ashurbanipal relates how in the campaigns against Arabian tribes the armies "crossed the Euphrates and the Tigris at flood, climbed high mountains, plunged through stretches of dense forests... crossed parched and thirsty desert, for a distance of 100 double hours from Nineveh, until they came to an oasis where the soldiers dug for water and then resumed the march across parched and waterless land, where neither bird nor animal could support itself alive".

And a letter, possibly to the same king, reports that the troops are disgruntled because there is no food for them, except the inadequate supplies which they have brought with them; and the enemy have cut out the water supply.

As our last illustration, in this necessarily brief notice of the morale of Assyrian soldiers in face of difficulties, here is a memorable letter from the south country. The troops of Ashurbanipal take up a position opposite the enemy on a bank of a river. Changing their tactics, they move up stream, seize a ford and cross it. But too late they realise that the enemy at this point greatly outnumbers them. Nevertheless, they take the offensive saying, *ki nimuttu ina šumi ba-ba-ni nimut*, "If we are to die, let us die with a name full-honoured". The writer reports that thanks be to the gods, they slew many and routed the rest. And we, so long a time after, can but salute brave men who went into battle against great odds with such a cry on their lips.

The evidence suggests that Assyria had the arms and she had the men; men with an innate fighting quality and power of

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1 Luckenbill, *Ancient Records*, vol. II, § 823. 2 H[arper, l.c.], 774. 3 H. 520.
endurance, backed by a deep consciousness that the gods were with them.

Troops such as these waged war and held down populations far from Nineveh, sometimes hundreds of miles away, in the extreme south of Babylonia, the far western hill country, in Palestine and in Egypt. But wherever they were, whether in active warfare or in occupation, they were in contact with Nineveh, and Nineveh with them. This contact was maintained by written despatches sent to the king, or from the king, either directly by a runner, or indirectly by relay from one official to another along the line. The large number of reports or despatches which have been preserved is an evidence of the efficiency of this department of the war administration. The discovery at Nineveh of letters of the king to personnel far away suggests that copies of the king’s letters were kept in the royal archives.

From G.H.Q. at Nineveh go out orders such as this: “Invade the territory of the Mannai”, only to be met with the reply from the subordinate on the spot: “Not all the troops went in”.¹ From the field come requests to Nineveh for troops: “Why”, Ashurbanipal is asked, “why is it that I have twice sent to the lord of kings my lord for 300 horses, but the lord of kings my lord has not sent them to me? . . . He has not replied”.² But to another official Ashurbanipal asks for an explanation of repeated requests for troops, seeing that “I have sent you troops”.

Advice concerning measures to be taken against an enemy was sometimes sent in from the field. Thus, a man on the spot advises King Esarhaddon: “Let chariots and waggons be stationed on either side of the pass . . . and let them march in to plunder the Mannai plains. . . . Erect a fort there against the enemy; let the entire army make an attack.”³

The need of reinforcements to retake lost territory is stressed in the following letter: “Whilst I was in the land of the enemy, the Pukudu by assault made an end of Bit-Amukani who are servants of the king my lord; cities which were for garrisons of

¹ H. 1237. ² H. 462. ³ H. 774. ⁴ H. 1237.
the king my lord they have captured; they forced the soldiers of the king my lord to withdraw; they attacked the cities, killed troops and violated women, and assaulted the guard Zabaia. . . .

The Bit-Amukani are exterminated, and the Pukudu have settled in their land. Troops have not come out with us. . . . Let the king my lord say the word and soldiers will surely go forth against the city wherein they have settled.”

The letters sent to the king contain much information concerning Assyria’s enemies. A great deal of this information was got by the Assyrian intelligence service. Ashurbanipal laid down the principle which should govern the conduct of all his loyal subjects, whether within Assyria proper or stationed abroad. It is formulated in one of his letters in these words: “The man who loves his master’s house promptly informs his lord of what he sees and hears.” And the king’s representatives acted on that principle. One assures the king: “News and talk which I shall hear . . . I shall send to the king my lord.” Another writes: “I shall send continuous reports to the king my lord”.

From the instructions which the king gives in his letters, it is clear that he did not wish his loyal servants merely to sit and await the coming of information; they were to take active steps to obtain it. One letter reads: “With reference to what the king wrote saying: ‘Send out spies’, I have sent them out twice; some came back and made reports detailed in the letter to the effect that five enemy lieutenants have entered Uesi in Armenia, together with commanders of camel-corps; they are bringing up their forces which are of some strength.” Another reports to the king: “For news of Armenia I sent out scouts; they made a reconnoissance and reported: ‘the governor of our opponents, together with his second-governor is in Harda. . . . City to city, all the way to Turushpa stretch in an unbroken line’.”

Assyrian officials, curious about the enemy’s movements, obtain information from any who have knowledge of the enemy or his country, as, for example, traders who pass to and fro across the frontiers of peoples at war, as in the following

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1 H. 275.  
2 H. 288, 402.  
3 H. 521.  
4 H. 282.  
5 H. 444.  
6 H. 424.
letter: "On the 13th of the month Tammuz, a caravan of the city of Lahiru, passed this way. The sons of Mr. I. and Mr. S. were bringing wool from Bit-Imbia. They say: 'The palace steward and the troops of Upper Elam are all at this moment in Bit-Imbia. On the river Abani they have forced a crossing.' I send this news to the minister of my lord; may he report it in the palace. Let the army take up stations over against them at Der." 

Intelligence is sometimes volunteered by neighbours. Three prominent men of the Kummai, says one letter writer, "have come to me, and standing before the guard they said: Let your messenger bring us to court. We intend to give our information about the enemy's country to the king... we shall not declare it to you, nor to the guard. Conduct us to court." 

Deserters from the enemy's camp were an excellent source of information which the Assyrians were quick to tap. King Esarhaddon writes: "When a fugitive from the Mannai, the Medes or the Hubuskians escapes, you shall put him speedily in charge of a messenger, and send him to the crown prince. If there is a statement in his mouth, advise him thus: 'You will speak with the crown prince in friendship, and tell him the news from your side.'" To which the addressee replies: "Two fugitives from the Mannai have escaped: the one is an officer, the other is a 'bearded one'; there is a statement in their mouths. I am sending them on to the crown prince." One writer sends to the king prisoners who have news from Elam of a revolt in that country, and of the relative strength and distribution of the troops of the opposing sides.

There are indications that difference of language presented some difficulty when prisoners and deserters were to be questioned. This would be the case especially in the hill country of Armenia (Haldia) where the inhabitants, a perpetual menace to the Assyrians, were not Semites, and their language was quite unlike that of the Assyrian court and army. But Assyria had men for the job. Thus Sargon is told: "The king my lord knows that Ishtar-Babilia is a master of language (bel lishani). I have sent him from the city of Tikrish (on the border of the Mannai, east

1 H. 781. 2 H. 206. 3 H. 434. 4 H. 280.
of Nineveh; he formed this opinion and reported it to us." ¹ And King Esarhaddon, in a letter to his men on the borders of the Mannai, directs that when a fugitive from the Mannai has a tale to tell, a scribe of the Mannai shall stand by "to write it down from his lips" ².

The piecing together of many letters from the same area indicates that the Assyrian agents showed a vigilance of observation of the highest military value. From one area—the Armenian Front—beyond which lay the power which most nearly threatened the success of King Sargon, we are able to follow, by means of letters, the movements of the enemy's king, about which Sargon was very anxious. He had written asking for news of his movements and his present address. To which, in a series of letters, the responsible authority on the spot replies, in the first letter: "The king of Armenia has set out for Turushpa". In the next: "The king of Armenia is in Turushpa"; in the next: "The king of Armenia has left Turushpa"; and finally: "The king of Armenia has suffered defeat at the hands of the Cimmerians".

The news of the disaster was of such importance that the crown prince, in a letter ⁴ to his father, substantiated the fact with evidence from three different sources: "May the king be of good heart. The Ukkai have sent me word: 'the king of Armenia went to the country of the Cimmerians, and his forces perished utterly'. That is the report of the Ukkai. Ašur-rišua has sent me word: 'the news concerning Armenia which I sent on a previous occasion is true; there was great carnage amongst them. . . . Qaqqadanu, the commander in chief was taken captive. The king of Armenia is in the land of Uazaun.' That is the report of Ašur-rišua. Nabu-li'u, the governor of Halšu, has sent me word: 'when I sent to the garrisons of the fortresses on the border for news of the king of Armenia (I was told): 'when they came to the land of the Cimmerians, his army was wiped out. Three chiefs along with their forces, were killed; he himself got away and entered his own country; to-date his camp has not yet arrived'.' That is the report of Nabu-li'u. . . . All the garrisons of the fortresses on the frontier

¹ H. 342. ² H. 434. ³ H. 492, 381, 444. ⁴ H. 197.
are sending the like news.” This news, so amply confirmed, must have been very welcome to Sargon of Assyria, but the removal of one enemy left the field to another. It seems probable that it was when fighting against these, the Cimmerians, that Sargon met his death in 705 B.C.

But the other side also played the same game of espionage. A messenger reports \(^1\) that certain persons had gone to someone non persona grata to the Assyrians, and both sides swore on the name of the deity: “By the terms of our oath, we shall send to you all the news we hear”. But the agreement was sealed by something more material than an oath to the deity, for the messenger reports that “As a pledge thereof they bring oxen and ask him to allow their sheep to pasture” in a meadow which they specify. The writer urges the King Ashurbanipal to send a messenger to the opprobrious person threatening him: “If you shall send anything into Elam for a price, and if one sheep goes to the Elamite meadow, I shall not let you live”. On another occasion the King Sargon of Assyria is informed \(^2\) that the king of Armenia rewards deserters to his side with fields and plantations and orchards. And the Assyrian intelligence department has information that the Armenian king is advising neighbours not to make a treaty with Assyria.

As one studies the letters which passed between the Assyrian kings and their subordinates, the impression grows that Assyria strove by deliberate planning and organisation to counter any spontaneous and independent forces which might seek to restrain her. The watchful activity of her agents on enemy borders—Elam, Media, Armenia—whence might develop an attack on the territories which Assyria had overrun, was but one item in that organisation for defence. Deportation of native populations was another; she sought by these deportations to reduce the number of such independent forces. And by establishing subordinate officers in areas she chose not to devastate or depopulate, she made each city state, each district “occupied territory”, in which her soldiery, whether Assyrian or native pressed into her service, constituted an army of occupation.

But the situation, as might be imagined, and as the records

\(^1\) H. 282. \(^2\) H. 252.
show, was always precarious. The system established by the sword, and kept in being by local administrations—puppet governments—stiffened by Assyrian violence or the threat of it, was always, especially in the outlying areas, in great danger of disintegration.

The natives in the occupied or annexed countries showed spirit. We can hardly call them a V army, nor can we point to a contemporary Colonel Britton. But they did some of the things against the enemy which the V army of our time is urged to do. For example, an Assyrian underling, in a letter to the king of Assyria, Ashurbanipal, writes:¹ "The king our Lord knows that all the people of the land hate us, for they say: You send the king news of the country which you hear". More than that; they were in communication with the enemy of the great Assyrian Reich. Thus, King Ashurbanipal is told in a letter.² Certain persons who have on several occasions been admitted to the king's presence, and have been put in charge of work of national importance, are, according to the writer of the letter, what we might call Fifth Columnists, for, the writer says: "These persons are no lovers of the house of my lord. It is not good to admit them. With news of the country of the king my Lord they open the ears of Elam, and if there were a famine in Elam, they would see that it had food." And here is a sentence which has a modern ring. Certain Pukudeans "do not want the prosperity of the land at the disposal of the king my Lord (Ashurbanipal). They seek revenge... they are unwilling to co-operate."³ Even a ruler of Babylon refused to co-operate. Of him it is said: "The king of Babylon does not perform the work. Whoever revolts he promotes."⁴

This was a dangerous attitude to take up against Assyria, for Assyrian reprisals were ruthless. Recall Ashurbanipal's reprisals on rebels against his authority in Babylonia: "As for those men", he writes, "and their vulgar mouths, who plotted evil against me, I slit their mouths and brought them low. The rest of the people alive... I cut down... their dismembered bodies I fed to the dogs, swine, wolves and eagles, to the birds of the heavens and the fish of the deep. After I had accomplished this work, had

¹ H. 736. ² H. 277. ³ H. 774. ⁴ H. 1263.
quieted the hearts of the great gods, my lords, the corpses of the people whom the plague (-god) had brought low, and of those who had lost their lives through hunger and want, what was left of the feast of the dogs and swine of their members which blocked the streets and filled the squares, I ordered them to remove from Babylon, Kutha and Sippar, and to cast them on heaps."

Attempts were made by propaganda to bring about revolt against Assyria—or at least disaffection. Such anti-Assyrian propaganda within territory held by her, is mentioned in letters to the court. Natives, according to one writer,² were being told "as long as you live Assyria will never love you"; they are advised to transfer their allegiance elsewhere. A foreigner declares "the king of Assyria shall not rule over you . . . you are my people".³ And King Ashurbanipal, in a long letter,⁴ defends himself and warns the Babylonians against propaganda which has had some success amongst them, thus: "I have heard all the windy words which this no-brother of mine has spoken to you. They are wind. Trust him not. I swear by Ashur and by Marduk my gods, that I shall keep in my heart all the evil words which he has spoken against me, and that which I by my mouth have declared: he is plotting further deceit when he states: 'I will put to shame the name of the Babylonians who love both him and me'. . . . Near to my heart are you. Do not listen for a moment to his lies. Do not foul your reputation which is established before my eyes and before all countries, nor commit sin before God." But royal appeals were not always effective. Just lies put out by the king's official, said some. And the Assyrian king in the eyes of neighbours meant the Assyrian armed forces, a terror to all the peoples. A letter⁵ seems to imply that Assyria's ill-repute was used in Elam by turbulent elements who, "in advance of the troops of the king my lord, like a plague have brought in terror, with intent to do the greatest possible destruction". This reminds us of the panic amongst the populations of Belgium and France in 1940 when it was rumoured that "the Germans are coming".

This last letter was sent to Ashurbanipal. The conduct of

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¹ Luckenbill, l.c., § 795. ² H. 1204. ³ H. 1114. ⁴ H. 301. ⁵ H. 460.
this king in Elam, where the mere mention of his name caused panic, is on record. He has recorded it himself: ¹ "I mustered my armies and marched straight against Ummanaldasi, king of Elam. . . . The people who did not come forth and greet my majesty I slew. Their heads I cut off. I pierced the lips (of others) and took them to Assyria as a spectacle for the people of my land. . . . The son-in-law of the king of Elam I took alive . . . bound him hand and foot with fetters of iron and brought him to Assyria. . . . Fourteen of the royal cities, together with countless small cities, and twelve districts of Elam, the whole of it, I captured, I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire. . . . In a month of days, I ravaged Elam to its furthest border. The noise of people, the tread of cattle and sheep, the glad shouts of rejoicing, I banished from its fields." Such conduct would provide any panic-monger with an armament of tales which would demoralise the defenders and reduce the defences of any district and throw the gates wide open to the rebel forces.

To return to occupied territory: even in the matter of local cult, order could not be guaranteed. A letter² informs King Esarhaddon that the writer has had a demand for "an account of the oxen and sheep due to the god Nabu", and an order to requisition rams from the houses of the citizens of Borsippa "for the regular offerings as of old". But "they have not brought in the fat rams for Nabu; the shepherds have made gifts to the chief magistrate of Borsippa" (the same person who had demanded them of him !). "Up to now they have not accounted for the bulls and the sheep, but the rams for the regular offerings have been requisitioned. During the month of Nisan, not one first class ox was slaughtered, and the royal sacrifices were not performed. The eyes of the herdsmen see the bulls, the offering of a devotee, turn them back from the gate, thus diverting them from the table of Nabu. Concerning one ox of the first class, the sacrifice of a worshipper, which was made ready before the goddess Nana, I have heard this: It had no right kidney. All the citizens of Borsippa protest saying: The oxen and sheep of Nabu cover the face of the land. Why then have the shepherds scattered them? I have heard that: among the great ones there

¹ Luckenbill, l.c., §§ 799-811.
² H. 1202.
is one with whom the shepherds are co-operating." Call this black market, or sabotage on the religious front, as you will. There is no doubt that this letter discloses an organised racket which by cutting off the supplies destined for the gods, would compromise the position of the ruling power, Assyria, in the eyes of the local deities. A thing intolerable. But we have no information of the steps which Assyria took against the racketeers.

Assyrian native man-power was not of itself adequate to all the tasks which the wide expansion of Assyrian power imposed on her rulers and her troops. Hence the need to conscript foreigners into the armed forces of the master State. In the army of Sargon were men of Samaria, of Hamath, and of Carchemish; in that of Sennacherib were Philistines, Elamites, and men of Bit-Yakin in southern Babylonia; in that of Ashurbanipal were Elamites and Akkadians. This last king relates how, after he had slaughtered the people of Akku (Acre), and hung their corpses on stakes all round the city, he carried away those who were left, and added them to the many troops which the god Ashur had given him.

But from a damaged and incomplete letter we learn that attempts by Assyria to persuade other districts to supply men for the Assyrian army were not always successful. The writer states: "I have sent one of their officials to them to say: 'Come! . . . let me give you weapons'. They neither listened nor came; they mistrusted their official. . . . I sent the major-domo to them saying: 'Come, let me talk matters over with you'. But they went away and fled. Not one of them would come near me. I had already said in the presence of the king my lord in Nineveh: 'In vain; they will not listen; they will not supply soldiers'. And the king: 'Take two or three of their cities. . . . I put them in your command'. And I: 'I shall go; I shall speak with them, and if they do not listen to me I shall write to the king my lord'. Let the king my lord send a guardsman to them to say: 'If you do not . . . your soldiers to-morrow or the day after to my officials . . .'." Unfortunately the damaged condition of the tablet deprives us of the sanctions mentioned in this ultimatum.

1 Luckenbill, I.c., § 830. 2 H. 610.
Napoleon had a notion that he could "make commerce manœuvre like a regiment" to serve his will. It cannot, of course, be pretended that any king of Assyria had the same notion as that of Napoleon, or anything like the ability or the favourable conditions for carrying it out. But the letters from the days of the Assyrian expansion do suggest something parallel to what the Corsican, or better, the German of to-day, have proposed in the field of economics.

There is evidence enough to suggest that Assyria had a plan for that part of the ancient Near East which was within reach of her armies. According to that plan, Assyria should be the centre around which the other lands should form a ring of satellites. A State, defeated in battle, or demoralised and disarmed by fear of Assyrian might, was allowed to survive on condition that it helped to supply the economic wants of Assyria to the degree fixed by Assyria and guaranteed by the sworn statement: "We are the servants of Assyria". The law ruling this—we may call it, with some reservations, this planned economy—was the will, the appetite of the Great State, which planned to unite the world around her on a basis of tribute, of partial servitude. Perhaps we ought not to call this plan mere robbery, for although Assyria seems to have given nothing economic in return, she guaranteed to protect her vassals against enemies. She took them under her protection!

There are many references in the letters of the period to the collection and transport of 'tribute'. It is interesting that the very word 'tribute' had sinister connotations. Esarhaddon takes up the point in a letter to the peoples of the south country: "I know", he writes, "that you are saying: 'Behold, because we rebelled against him, our tribute has been increased'. But it was not 'tribute'; that name (for it) implies too much."

Advance letters are sent to court, informing the king of the coming of goods; of chiefs bringing seven stalls of mules with their tribute; of large and small numbers of horses; of quantities of timber; and of various kinds of livestock and of luxury goods. The king occasionally asked for more than the district could supply: e.g. in one letter to the king we read: "the

1 H. 403.  
2 H. 241.
king asks for horses, oxen, lambs”; to which it is replied “oxen in this land are very few.”

On another occasion the difficulty is not any shortage of the thing levied, but a superabundance, e.g.: “The king my lord knows that the levies in kind for the month of Tebet are delayed for lack of storage room in which to store the wines of the king my lord. . . . The wine of the king my lord is plentiful. Where shall we store it?”

We sometimes read to-day that, e.g. German technicians are sent to occupied territory to speed up deliveries of needed material to Germany. Here, from a letter, is something similar: The King Sargon had given orders that the delivery of wool and fruit be expedited. But the merchants say: We tried to collect seven talents (worth of wool), but the (native) people were unwilling (they allege): “Our supplies are not very great”. The merchants, therefore, recommend that weaver women of the king be sent. If the tribute is not forthcoming, the defaulter receives a reminder from the king: “Come with your tribute.”

But, as we know from the Assyrian Annals, it often happened that the tribute was deliberately held back. Such refusal of what had been promised on oath must have made the Assyrian realise that it is one thing to overcome people by force; it is quite another to compel them to go on living under conditions imposed on them. But refusal brought retribution, sometimes very fearful retribution; an indication that Assyria depended greatly on the regular supply of the goods from her vassals from abroad.

We have already noticed that collaboration with Assyria was not always, and under all its aspects, popular with the native populations under Assyrian domination. But, as far as we can judge from the letters, the local Gauleiters whom Assyria had set up to serve her interests, tried hard to do their job. They sent constant reassurances to the Assyrian court of their loyalty and undying devotion. And they affected great gratitude if their services were rewarded. An outstanding example of such sentiments is the following comparatively long letter to King Ashurbanipal by the Gauleiter of Babylonia: “As to what the
king the lord of kings my lord wrote me, "Now be of good heart: the desire of your heart shall not be withheld in the future"... these words are pleasing in the sight of god and man. ... I had become a beggar. As the father behaves towards his children, so has the king acted towards his servants. From the time when men existed, what king is there who has shown graciousness such as this to his servants, and what benefactor has made such return as this to his beneficiary? May the great gods of heaven and earth do like graciousness to the children of the king my lord so long as heaven and earth shall endure. On hearing this good word and seeing this gracious deed which the king my lord had done, I took heart and came to life. ... During the long life of the king my lord, and when the king my lord shall be old, according as I have been true to the king may I die as fate ordains, and may the king my lord raise my funeral pile. On a mountain may it be set, and may they set it up for me personally. ... In respect of what the king wrote to me: 'You, your brothers' sons and the sons of your father's brothers, you shall stand before me', in like manner may Ashur with his family, Bel and Nabu with their families, the great gods of heaven and earth with their families, gather together and grant a place in their presence to the son, the offspring, the descendants, the posterity, the progeny of the king my lord."

But it was not always thus. The writer of the above letter is sternly rebuked by the same king for acting without orders, and thereby setting a bad example to others: "You who are my companion and have experience of majesty, you have so done. How will he do who lacks (that) experience?" Indeed, the lot of those who were appointed to carry out the wishes of their Assyrian overlord cannot have been an easy one. The greater their services to Assyria, the greater their guilt before the native population. The slightest sign of disloyalty, inefficiency, or of any sort of suspicious conduct, was observed and reported to court, and had to be accounted for. These officials must have dreaded the arrival of messengers of the king. A servant of the king relates that a prefect of a neighbouring town came to him one day. "I asked him", he says, "why have you come here?"

1 H. 291.  
2 H. 88.
And the visitor replied: “There came a message from the king saying: ‘All the city lords came and stood before me; why did not you come? why was it that only you failed to come? And why did the Uppai effect the plunder of Sippar? And why did you call out your men and remove them?’ I was overcome at this message. I will go.”

The letter just quoted contains a reference to the duty of officials abroad to report to the king at Nineveh. This duty of making ad limina visits was strictly enforced. It symbolised servitude, and it promised perseverance therein. Any failure to carry out this duty had to be explained. Here is one such letter of explanation from Babylonia. The absentee writes: “The first reason is that people who came from Elam to the king, in order to achieve their own purposes, slandered me at court; both the ordinary person and an enemy who comes from Elam have made evil reports about me and sent them to court. I heard and was afraid, and did not go although I was eager to serve the king.” It would not be surprising if the fickleness of the Assyrian monarch whose ear was open to every tale which circulated concerning his servants, at last aroused in the servant hatred of his master and of his own servitude; a hatred which, when occasion offered, was finally converted into the positive action of revolt. In many instances a rebel could rely on the support of the inhabitants pressed down under the weight of the burden of tribute.

A last letter. The folk in the southern sea-lands around the Persian Gulf write to inform the Assyrian king that they have had a visit from the messenger of the brother of the king of Elam, bearing a demand that they welcome forthwith amongst them a certain Nabu-ushallim who, as we know, planned to take over control of that country. The Sealanders refuse, saying, “We are servants of the king of Assyria” (Ashurbanipal). They will not receive the outsider without the authority of their lord at Nineveh. But Nabu-ushallim is not to be put off. He has confederates in the district, and sends messengers to say in his name: “If you do not come to me and parley with me, I shall come to your land and tear down your houses. But you will say

1 H. 283.  
2 H. 576.
‘We are afraid of the king of Assyria’. For my part, the fear of the king of Assyria has departed.” Clearly the Sealanders preferred the devil they knew to the devil whom they did not know. They served Assyria in fear. So it was wherever Assyrian power extended. Assyria spread a fear of living. A sense of insecurity permeated society everywhere, whether among the loyal who feared her reprisals if they failed her, or amongst the courageous who feared her cruel vengeance if they defended themselves and were defeated.

Nabu-ushallim is reported to have said: “For my part, the fear of Assyria has departed”. This may have been mere bravado fitted to the occasion, to impress a waverer. It was not a sentiment which any of the small powers amongst Assyria’s neighbours could say with great effect at any time during the five hundred years from the year 1100 B.C. Many must have realised that the fear of Assyria would not depart from amongst men until armies comparable to her own had carried war into Assyria proper, right up to her gates and into the centre of her strong capital fortress, Nineveh. Only thus could war against her be won. But that day must have seemed long in coming to many a generation of her neighbours. It came at last in 612 B.C. It is a pity that letters have not survived describing the Fall of Nineveh. We must be content with the thought that the fires which consumed her in her hour of weakness have preserved the memory of what she was in her hour of strength.