



THE DESTRUCTION OF SENNACHERIB

first published in 1815

by *George Gordon, Lord Byron*

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

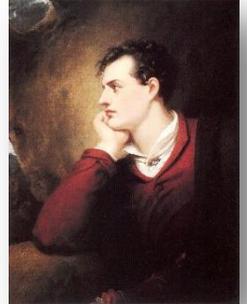
Like the leaves of the forest when Summer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset were seen:
Like the leaves of the forest when Autumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail:
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!



The Destruction of Sennacherib is a poem by Lord Byron first published in 1815 in his *Hebrew Melodies*. It is based on an event described in the Bible (2 Kings 18-19) during the campaign by Assyrian king Sennacherib to capture Jerusalem. The rhythm of the poem has a feel of the beat of a galloping horse's hooves (an anapestic tetrameter) as the Assyrian rides into battle.

The poem relates the Biblical version of Sennacherib's attempted siege of Jerusalem, and takes place in one night. At sunset the huge Assyrian army were bearing down upon the unnamed Jerusalem 'like the wolf on the fold': overnight the Angel of Death 'breathed on the face of the foe'; by morning most of the

Assyrian army has died, mysteriously, in their sleep. The poem describes the dead soldiers and their horses then touches, briefly, on the grief of the Assyrian widows before concluding that "The might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword, Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord."

The poem is faithful to the Biblical account, which claims that 185,000 Assyrians died; however Assyrian chronicles, giving Sennacherib's own version of the events, describe the campaign as a success, claiming that Jerusalem surrendered and offered tribute. The Chronicles do not mention any significant loss of Assyrian life.