

The Theology of Isaiah.

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V.

THE first king of Israel fell fighting for the freedom of his country without having secured it. He had given a nominal unity to the tribes, and made them a nation; but in spite of many victories over their neighbours, he had not been successful in securing the nation's freedom from a foreign yoke. And his death in the moment of severe defeat seemed to undo all that he had accomplished. His successor, David, probably began by holding his kingdom as a vassal of the Philistines. His rule embraced only Judah, and had its seat at Hebron. Eventually circumstances led the northern tribes, hitherto owing allegiance to the house of Saul, to place themselves under his sceptre. The kingdom was again united at home, and consequently more able to cope with the enemies around it. By a series of successful wars, David not only defeated the Philistines, who had for a long time been almost suzerains of Israel, but extended his conquests on the other side of Jordan, from the south end of the Dead Sea as far north as Damascus. Edom, Moab, Ammon, and the Syrian states came successively under his sway. The country between the Jordan and the Euphrates virtually belonged to him. Israel was a powerful state, almost what in those days might have been called an empire. The youth who had risen from the sheep-cotes to rule Israel was the most brilliant conqueror of his time, and the memory of his deeds and the renown he won for his people was never effaced. Rather as men looked back to it in after ages, when the kingdom had long been divided, and great reverses had fallen on both halves of it, and it was tottering to its fall both in the north and south, the halo of light that encircled the Davidic age became brighter. As usually happens, the dark spots in the king's reign and life were not noticed amidst the blaze of splendour that hung over the whole—the bloodshed, the family intrigues and assassinations, and the personal failings of the monarch himself; what was seen was the extent of his rule, the national unity which he consolidated, the peace which he secured, and his zeal for Jehovah, God of Israel. And we must allow that this judgment was just. For though the king had failings, just

as in the face some one feature that is defective is lost sight of in the harmony and beauty of all the features, so in his character that which was evil was not noticed in the general greatness and nobility of the whole. He was a man of strong impulses not always controlled, but also of a most tender sensibility, and if his passions led him into great sins, the depth of his nature was shown in the agony of his compunction. His love for Jonathan, his paroxysms of sorrow over his little child and his son Absalom, reveal the emotional and impulsive type of his nature. His predecessor Saul was stately, proud, and kingly in his person and mind, but reserved and without the spell of sympathy which attaches men and inspires them with a personal affection, his relative Abner and his devoted son Jonathan being almost the only friends of his mentioned; but David's nature flowed out and mixed itself with the minds of men around him, and they loved him with an affection which, as he said himself, passed the love of women. The roll of his heroes, and the hazardous exploits they were ready to do for him on all occasions, amply attest his irresistible influence over them. His history and his character fitted him to be a nation's hero, and the historian remarks, when narrating his generous indignation at the murder of Abner and how he followed his bier to the grave,—though policy might have congratulated itself on the great supporter of the house of Saul being removed out of the way,—that whatsoever the king did pleased the people.

We are apt to form our ideas of David's religious life from the profoundly spiritual hymns in the Psalter, most of which we are accustomed to ascribe to him. It is critical extravagance no doubt to deny any part of the Psalter to be his, though it is very difficult to say with any certainty which of the poems there belong to him. It is very probable that many of the most purely spiritual psalms belong to a time very long posterior to him; yet neither tradition nor history can receive any satisfactory explanation except on the supposition that he was also a religious poet. Apart from the Psalter, other things indicate that he had an

important influence on the religion of Israel. The meaning of the rupture between Saul and the prophet Samuel is left by the historian rather obscure, but several things suggest that the true theocratic party in Israel had, at an early period of his reign, transferred its hopes from Saul and bestowed them on David. The priests at Nob favoured him, and brought on themselves the exterminating vengeance of Saul. Not only priests but prophets are mentioned as accompanying him in his flight and exile. So soon as he became king, this party, represented by men like Gad and Nathan, attached themselves to his court. The history places everything under a supernatural light, and informs us that Samuel, at God's command, anointed David to be king. The historian's object is to inform us how God guided the history, not to tell us how men's minds moved or co-operated. We have always to read between the lines in such narratives, and fancy to ourselves motives influencing men, and movements among them, operating for a considerable time, and culminating at last in such an act as that of Samuel. David justified the hopes of religious men in Israel, and showed his own devotion to the service of Jehovah by bringing the ark to Jerusalem as soon as his own rule was established there. Jerusalem was henceforth both the civil and religious centre of the national life. Probably the consequences of David's action were not clearly foreseen by him, and it is difficult to guess what purposes and aspirations filled his mind at this time, though we are more likely to err if we suppose them petty or narrow, than if we imagine them wide. Ewald, whose judgments on Scripture, whether we acquiesce in them or not, are always dignified and worthy, regards Ps. ci. as belonging to this time, and as containing a programme of the royal Psalmist's rule: "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me." Besides bringing the ark of Jehovah to Jerusalem, it was the king's purpose to build a house for the Lord. This purpose he communicated to the prophet Nathan, who at first approved of it, but afterward induced the king to abandon it and leave the execution of it to his son. The devout purpose of the king, however, was the occasion of

a remarkable promise being given him through the prophet from God: "The Lord telleth thee that He will make thee an house. And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, and I will establish his kingdom. I will be his father, and he shall be My son" (2 Sam. vii. 11). The point of the promise is that Jehovah will build David a house, that is, He will establish a dynasty to him on the throne of Israel. The passage, in its present form, may, as some writers think, be later and amplified; but, to put it on no higher ground, such a promise was the most natural thing in the world. And to assume that everything of the nature of promise or anticipation is nothing else than a later fact antedated, is to "pitch the pipe too low," and to forget the prophetic gift of all religion, or at anyrate what was just the characteristic of the religion of Israel, its outlook into the future. What cannot be denied to Isaiah must be conceded to Nathan, unless there be good reasons to the contrary.

The last half of the eleventh century and the early part of the tenth form the most remarkable period of Israel's history. The nation awakened out of the lethargy and materialism into which it had sunk during the time of the Judges. And the new life expressed itself in forms and institutions which were permanent creations and dominated all the succeeding ages. Foremost among these new manifestations of Israel's irrepressible religious energy was the prophetic order. The prophets first appear as religious enthusiasts, attaching themselves to the various shrines of Jehovah worship throughout the country; next, they are found in the court of the early monarchs acting as their ministers and advisers; and, finally, they become an independent class which charge themselves with the religious destinies of the nation. In all the religious history of mankind there is nothing that can be compared to the prophetic order in Israel. Next in meaning was the creation of the monarchy. The kingship in Israel derived its significance from the previous idea that Jehovah was the true King of the people. The monarch was His representative, sitting on His throne, at His right hand. He was His son and fellow. This conception naturally suggested lofty ideas of the king. But in point of fact it is not the bare idea of the kingship that we find in the literature of Israel, it is always the Davidic kingship. The character and career of this monarch gave a complexion to the idea of the

kingship which became part of its essence. He was a man according to God's heart, which does not mean one immaculate morally, but one truly obedient to the will of his God, and ruling in righteousness. His kingdom was such as to suggest the idea of universality as the world was then known, and in the dynasty which he founded it was perpetual.

The faith of the inseparable connexion of the house of David with the throne of the kingdom of God is common to all the prophets, *e.g.* Amos ix. 11, "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen down"; Hos. iii. 5, "Afterward shall the children of Israel return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, in the latter days." But by far the most remarkable predictions regarding the house of David occur in the contemporary prophets, Isaiah and Micah—Isa. vii.—xi. and Mic. iv., v. The prophecies (Isa. ix.) of the Son given, and (Isa. xi.) of the shoot out of the stock of Jesse, are recognised by all writers to be Messianic, *i.e.* to refer in the prophet's own mind to a future ruler of the perfect kingdom of God. Very many deny the prophecy of Immanuel (ch. vii.) to have any Messianic reference.

The passage (ch. vii.) is so encumbered with difficulties and obscurities that it may seem, and perhaps is, a waste of time to discuss it. The whole passage (chs. vii.—ix. 6) is fragmentary, and things are alluded to in a way so brief that their meaning and connexion cannot be discovered. Further, it cannot be denied that the passage has suffered interpolation through glosses from the margin having got into the text. The clause, ver. 8, "within sixty-five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people," is obviously foreign. And the same is true of the explanations, "the king of Assyria," ver. 20, at least, and viii. 7. In these circumstances, therefore, scholars are not to be accused of sacrilege if it seem needful to them to remove some other passages in order to gain a rational sense.

Briefly, the question is, Is Immanuel a sign to Ahaz in reference to the Syro-Ephraimitic coalition? or is he a sign in reference to something larger and more distant,—in reference to that coming day of judgment and desolation, the premonition of which filled the prophet's heart from the beginning of his ministry, and the instruments of which he now saw on the horizon in the Assyrian power? or, as interpreters usually called

conservative endeavour to hold, is Immanuel a sign in reference to both things? First, if Immanuel be assumed to be a sign in reference to the Syro-Ephraimitic coalition, the point of the sign lies partly in the *time* when Immanuel shall be born and partly in the symbolical significance of the name—God is with us. Immanuel and his mother are no persons in particular, they are mere ideal magnitudes, *x* and *y*. The sign means: in a year hence or so, when maidens now marriageable shall have become mothers, they will be found calling their sons Immanuel, God is with us, in token of deliverance from the Syro-Ephraimitic alliance. This interpretation is simple, but the objections to it are insurmountable.

1. Of these objections, perhaps not the most serious is that the interpretation necessitates the deleting of ver. 15—thick milk and honey shall he eat. For this food is not a dainty but a hard necessity, and implies that the land where it is had recourse to is no more cultivated in wheatfields and vineyards, but reduced to a pasture land by the desolations of war (vers. 22, 23 *seq.*). Now, whoever Immanuel be, he and his mother are Judeans; for, on the supposition made, she gives him his name in token of deliverance from Ephraim. Obviously, therefore, ver. 15 is totally incompatible with this interpretation, for it is in Judah that everyone shall eat thick milk and honey. And, of course, ver. 17 is equally incompatible, and must be expunged, or at any rate detached from its present connexion. But is not "the thick milk and honey," and all the conditions that it suggests, protected by its recurrence in ver. 22 and the context there?

2. This interpretation makes the sign of Immanuel a thing exactly of the same kind as that of Maher-shalal in ch. viii. It is most improbable that the prophet should have given two signs of the same kind in reference to the same event, and yet the signs have so much difference that the one cannot be regarded as merely a literary duplicate of the other, a twice-told story of the same event.

3. Is it probable or possible that Isaiah should conceive Judean mothers expressing their thankfulness for deliverance from Ephraim and Syria by using the name Immanuel? He has himself the utmost contempt for the northern alliance (ver. 4, viii. 12?), the danger does not seem to him to lie there. But the question is, Had he at this moment any clear conception of the causes that would make

the attempt of the allies abortive? The context assumes that he had, and in ch. viii. he certainly has,—it is the Assyrian invasion that will paralyse the power of Ephraim. But everywhere in the passage (chs. vii.—ix. 6) he assumes that the Assyrian will devastate Judah also. His country will become the battleground where Egypt and Assyria will contend for supremacy (ch. vii. 19). The Assyrian flood will sweep into Judah, its waters will rise to the neck and cover the breadth of the land of Immanuel (ch. viii. 8). The Assyrian desolation will extend over Israel and Judah *in common*. It is, therefore, impossible that Immanuel could be meant to be a symbol of deliverance from Ephraim and Syria, because the deliverance was to be effected only through a calamity infinitely greater.

4. To these considerations another may be added: Immanuel is elsewhere brought by the prophet into connexion only with the Assyrian desolation—the outspreading of his (the Assyrian's) wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel. Rage, ye peoples; but ye shall be broken in pieces . . . speak a word, but it shall not stand, for Immanuel, God is with us (ch. viii. 8–10). The abrupt way also in which reference to the “child born” (ch. ix. 6) is made seems to imply that this child must somewhere have been already alluded to, and that he is to be identified with Immanuel.

The prophecy is to be explained partly, no doubt, from the historical circumstances, but mainly from the circle of thoughts which filled the prophet's mind, from ideas regarding the house of David that had long formed part of the national faith, and from the degenerate condition of that house at this time. The historical circumstances of the prophecy were these: In the days of Ahaz, the kings of Syria and Ephraim formed an alliance and made war on Judah. The object of the allies was possibly to compel Judah to enter into a general confederacy, having for its object to stem the advancing tide of the Assyrian power. The king of Judah had refused to listen to the overtures made to him, and the northern allies had, therefore, resolved to dethrone the Davidic house, and set upon the throne a tool of their own, a Syrian called the son of Tabeel: “It was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim, and his heart was moved as the trees are moved with the wind.”

The prophet was bidden go to meet the king, taking with him Shear-jashub his son, and to say

to him in regard to the purpose of the northern kings, “It shall not stand.” Perhaps, while the prophet was speaking, he detected signs of incredulity in the cold and reluctant king, and he adds, “If ye will not believe, ye shall not be established.” Probably at a subsequent time, shortly after, the prophet offered the corroboration of any sign which the king might ask. This offer Ahaz also rejected, putting it away under the pretext that he would not put God to the trial. Roused to a pitch of excitement, the prophet exclaimed, “Is it too small a thing for you to weary men, that ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign.” It is out of the question to suppose a sign forced upon Ahaz, or that the sign now to be given would be one of the same kind as that formerly offered.¹ It is something larger, something that reaches to the history of the house of David and the nation to its furthest limits: “The Lord will bring upon thee and upon thy father's house days that have not come from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah.” Now, here are the elements out of which the prophecy is composed. First, the declared purpose of the northern allies was to set aside the Davidic house. In the prophecy it is not Ahaz himself that is spoken of or spoken to, it is always the house of David. It is to this house that the sign is first offered and ultimately given. The crisis of its history has come. What is needful to carry it through the crisis, faith in Jehovah, is wanting. “If ye will not believe, ye shall not be maintained.” Yet the “sure mercies” of David remain, and will ultimately be realised, whatever humiliations—greater far though they be than the rending away of the kingdom of the ten tribes from him—may yet have to be undergone. For, secondly, these humiliations are imminent. The people of God and the world-power are now to be confronted. The Assyrian is at the gates. The conditions and the instruments of fulfilling that which the prophet had from the beginning foreseen to be inevitable are now present. The outlines of his first vision, the desolation of his country, and the ultimate

¹ The prophet continues to use the word “sign,” but it is a mistake to suppose that the sign must be something that Ahaz could immediately or shortly see in corroboration of something else. The sign is the coming fact, just as it was said to Moses, Ex. iii. 12, “And this is the sign to thee, that I have sent thee. When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.” Comp. Isa. xxxvii. 30.

preservation of only a remnant are going to be filled up. Under the overwhelming flood both nation and royal house shall go down, yet not to perish. A darkness, to which there seems no dawn, shall settle on the land; but those who have faith will wait on Jehovah, who hideth His face (ch. viii. 17). And the darkness shall yet roll away before the eternal day. "For there shall not be gloom to her that was in anguish. In the former time he brought into dishonour the land of Zebulun, . . . but in the latter time hath he made it glorious, the way of the sea, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light. . . . For a child is born to us, a son is given to us, and the government is upon his shoulder." There passes before the prophet's eye all the coming history, as in a panorama. For the real thing in the prophets is their faith, not the particular events predicted or projected in which they give their faith embodiment. These events are always the events occurring immediately around them in their day, which they fill out and animate with the meaning of their own universal conceptions.

According to this interpretation, the sign does not lie in the meaning of the *name* Immanuel, but in the person of Immanuel himself, whom his name interprets. He is the same as he who is the Wonder of a Counsellor, God the Mighty of ch. ix., and as the shoot out of the root of Jesse, on whom the manifold spirit of the Lord shall rest, of ch. xi. But the question comes, Does not this interpreta-

tion require the omission of ver. 16, "Before the child know to refuse evil and choose good, the land shall be a desolation, before whose two kings thou art in terror?" Even if this should be the case, we must choose that side on which there appears to lie the greater probability. The chapter and the succeeding ones have not escaped interpolation. It is not impossible that the same hand from which came the date in ver. 8 may be found in this other reference to the northern kingdom. The verse in its present form cannot be read along with ver. 17; at any rate, if retained, it must sink into a mere subordinate clause, and be part of the statement that the Assyrian devastation shall involve north and south *alike*; and that Judah shall be devastated is the burden of the passage, and to this alone the sign of Immanuel has reference. Besides the improbability of the near date for the birth of Immanuel, the language of the verse otherwise is peculiar. It is strange that Syria and Israel should be spoken of as a single "land"—"the land before whose two kings thou fearest." It is certainly probable, if the verse be original, that it ended differently, or that its last words were "the land shall be forsaken"—the "land" in this case being Judah, and used absolutely as in ch. vi. 12, "a great forsaking in the midst of the land." In this case the mistaken explanatory gloss would consist merely of the words "before whose two kings thou fearest." There are indications in some MSS. of the Septuagint of some confusion of text in the end of ver. 16.

The Inspiration of Waiting.

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"And, behold, I send forth the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high."—ST. LUKE xxiv. 49.

"He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, said He, ye heard from Me."—ACTS i. 4.

If we had only the Gospel of St. Luke, we should probably have believed that our Lord ascended up to heaven immediately after the Resurrection, either that same night or early the next day. St. Luke does not say that this was the case; yet he does not make it clear that there was a considerable interval between Easter day and Christ's return to glory. But the other three Gospels show

that there must have been an interval in which the appearance or appearances in Galilee took place; and St. Luke himself in the Acts tells us exactly how long the interval was. He says that Jesus "showed Himself alive after His passion by many proofs, appearing unto the apostles by the space of forty days" (i. 3). In his Gospel, St. Luke condenses into one consecutive speech what seems to have