

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD IN THE TARGUM.

THE Targums, as is generally recognized, seem at first to have arisen in connexion with the public reading of the Hebrew Scriptures in the synagogues. In order to make the Hebrew intelligible to the congregation it was accompanied by a running translation into Aramaic, the then vernacular of the non-Hellenistic Jews. When these translations or Targums assumed a stereotyped form is uncertain, as also is the date when they passed from oral tradition and became fixed in writing.

The date of the Targum on the Prophets is not easy to determine, but the following investigations may throw some light on the subject.

This Targum is associated with the name of Jonathan bar Uzziel who flourished in the first century B. C., and it is known as the Targum of Jonathan. Some portions of it, however, which are quoted in the Talmud are attributed to Rabbi Joseph bar Chija (*c.* A. D. 300). It is usually taken to have attained its present and final form not later than the fifth century A. D.

Generally speaking, the Targums do not provide much that is of value to any but the textual expert. Except in certain of the books of the Hagiographa, they consist, for the most part, of a more or less literal translation of the Hebrew of the O. T. into Aramaic. Every translator, however, has to be to some extent an interpreter of the meaning of what he translates. The Targums tend more to interpretations than do any other of the translations of the O. T. These interpretations are often of no little interest as embodying the historical, religious, and theological conceptions in vogue during the period when the Targums came into being.

We propose now to examine in the Targum the more important passages dealing with the Servant of the Lord, to see how these were viewed in what may prove to be the earliest interpretations of them extant. Of these Isaiah lii 13–liii 12 is by far the most important, not only as being a crucial passage but also because the Targumic treatment of it is abnormal.

A. The Targum of Isa. xl–lxvi shews that on the whole the Targumist has kept fairly close to the Hebrew text except for certain habitual Targumic periphrases and occasional paraphrases. Isa. lii 13–liii 12 is a notable exception to this, evidently because it was difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile the passage as it stood in the Hebrew with current Jewish hopes.

In any case the Targumist not only set his own distinctive interpretation on the text, but also somewhat elaborately twisted it to make it suit his own views, and in so doing preserved for us what was in all probability the accepted interpretation and views of the Jewish scholars of his time. Origen, in a well-known passage,¹ tells us how the Jews of his day (early third century) regarded this prophecy, and how they held what is now sometimes called the 'collective theory', viz. that the prophecy did not really refer to an individual person but to the chosen race, represented as this individual.

He says, 'Now I remember that on one occasion at a disputation held with certain Jews, who were reckoned wise men, I quoted these prophecies (viz. Isa. lii 13–liii). To which my Jewish opponent replied that these predictions bore reference to *the whole people regarded as one individual* as being in a state of dispersion and suffering, in order that many proselytes might be gained, on account of the dispersion of the Jews among numerous heathen nations. And this is the way he explained the words "Thy form shall be of no reputation among men"² and "a man under suffering"³. Many arguments were employed on that occasion during the discussion to prove that these predictions regarding one particular person were not rightly applied by them to the whole nation. And I asked to what character the expression would be appropriate, "this man bears our sins and suffers pain on our behalf", &c.⁴ But we seemed to press them hardest with the expression, "Because of the iniquities of *my people* was he led away to death".⁵

When we turn to the Targum, we find that it hardly accords with this Jewish interpretation, except to this extent, that it does represent the Jewish people as being in a state of dispersion and suffering.

We find, in the first place, that the sorrows and sufferings attributed to the mysterious personage or personified community of the passage are in the Targum systematically interpreted away, and made to light elsewhere. This transference and distribution of the sorrows of the Servant is made as follows:—

(a) In particular the sufferings are represented as falling on the unfortunate Jews, the reference being for the most part, not so much to the past calamities that had befallen their race, as to their present

¹ Orig. *Contra Celsum*, Bk. I, ch. iv.

² liii 3 R.V. 'He was despised and rejected of men'.

³ liii 3 R.V. 'A man of sorrows'. In both these cases Origen is quoting LXX with considerable freedom and some inaccuracy.

⁴ liii 4 R.V. 'Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows'.

⁵ liii 8 R.V. 'For the transgression of my people was he smitten'. Again Origen is quoting the LXX, which here represents a slightly different Hebrew text from the M.T. of the Hebrew from which the R.V. is taken. Origen's argument rests on the words 'of my people', which are in both the Hebrew and the Greek.

unhappy condition. E. g. 'He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, he hid as it were his face from us, he was despised and we esteemed him not' is rather violently turned into 'Surely the glory of the whole Kingdom *is despicable* and come to an end: we (?) are feeble and wretched, yea *like a man in pain and appointed to sickness: and even* as we were when the Shekinah went up from us, *we are despised and of no reputation*'. Similarly, 'We did esteem him, stricken smitten of God and afflicted' is turned into 'We were esteemed as beaten, stricken from before Jahveh and afflicted'.¹

(b) In one instance the sufferings are interpreted as those which befell the Temple. liii 5, 'But he was wounded for our transgressions' reappears as 'And He will build the Holy House, which was violated on account of our sins, and profaned on account of our iniquities'.

(c) At other times again the sufferings of the Servant are transferred to the Gentiles, e. g. 'As a lamb that is led to the slaughter and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb, yea he opened not his mouth' becomes 'The strong ones of the Gentiles he will deliver up like a lamb for slaughter and as a sheep dumb before her shearers: and there is none who opens his mouth against him to speak a word'. Similarly liii 8, 'He was cut off out of the land of the living' is transformed into 'For he will wrest the power of the Gentiles from the land of Israel'.

(d) Lastly, the pains and penalties are made to light on the wicked in general, e. g. liii 9, 'And they made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death' becomes 'And he shall deliver up the wicked to Gehenna, to mortal perdition, and the rich in "goods" who have played the oppressor'.

In one way or another then, the predictions of suffering are interpretatively transferred from the 'Servant' of the Lord to the Jewish people, or else distributed in other quarters. But on the other hand, and this is a most important point, nowhere in the passage is the Servant identified with the chosen race. Instead, the distinction between the two is more clearly drawn in the Targum than in the original Hebrew. That is to say, even if the Jews of Origen's time were rightly understood by him to have held the 'collective' interpretation of the 'Servant' in this particular prophecy, it is ruled out in this Targum.

In the next place we find what is even more remarkable, that *the Servant is specifically identified by the Targumist with the Messiah*.

In lii 13, where the R.V. following the Hebrew renders 'Behold My SERVANT shall deal wisely, he shall be exalted', &c., the Targum has 'Behold MY SERVANT THE MESSIAH shall prosper, he shall be exalted', &c.

What follows right to the end of the fifty-third chapter is what is quite

¹ Cf. also liii 10, &c.

clearly taken to be a prediction of the career of the Messiah, from which, however, all hint¹ of sufferings and death has been carefully eliminated in the manner illustrated above.

According to this interpretation, the Messiah is to be exalted among the nations and the national prestige of the Holy People is to be bound up with His (lii 13–liii 2). Apparently with this desired consummation in view, He will intercede with God on behalf of the chosen people, and for His sake their sins will be pardoned. ('Surely for our guilt HE (אֲנִי) will intercede and on his account our sins will be forgiven', liii 4.) His prayers will prevail mightily with God. ('He prays and he is answered; and before he has opened his mouth, he is accepted', liii 7 (a).)

He will rebuild the Temple, and through His teaching peace and forgiveness will come to the people. ('And he will build the Holy House which was violated for our sins and profaned on account of our iniquities, by his teaching peace will be multiplied upon us, and when we give ear to his word our sins will be forgiven us.')

He it is who will bring back the Dispersion ('From chastisement and from retaliation he will bring our captivity', liii 8), and He will likewise rid the Holy Land of Gentile Dominion ('For he will wrest the power of the Gentiles from the land of Israel', liii 8).

He will judge the wicked and give them their portion in Hell ('And he will deliver up the wicked to Gehenna', liii 9).²

It may possibly be suggested that this identification of the Servant with the Messiah is not continued throughout. But the remote possibility is dismissed by the fact of a second specific mention of the Messiah by name near the end of the chapter. 'They shall see the *kingdom of their Messiah*, they shall multiply sons and daughters, they shall prolong their days', liii 10.

After this follows a brief *résumé* of the triumphant redemptive career of the Messiah, who will 'bring deliverance from bondage to the Gentiles', 'will bring many into subjection to the Law and make effective supplication for "rebels"'. ('From bondage to the Gentiles he will deliver their souls', liii 11. 'By his wisdom will he conquer the conquerors, bringing many to subjection to the Law', liii 11. 'He will make supplication for many sins and the rebels will be forgiven for his sake', liii 12.)

We find, then, that this, which is probably the earliest extant Jewish interpretation, clearly identified the hero of this passage with the Messiah and nowhere with the Jewish race, but instead holds the two elaborately distinct from one another.

¹ With one notable exception which is examined later.

² It is not clear that this refers to the Judgement.

It seems inconceivable that this specific identification can have been made and officially accepted by the Jews after Isa. liii came into the forefront of the Christian apologia, which it apparently did almost at once after the first Pentecost (e.g. Acts viii 32-35). For it gives the case for a Suffering Messiah into the hands of the Christians. It is true that, in the Targum, there is elimination and transference of the Sufferings, but the original Hebrew and the LXX in which the sufferings of the Servant were plain enough could not be got rid of. In any case the identification of the 'Servant' with the Messiah remained.

If the Targum was still in the making and not yet in an officially recognized fixed form when the propaganda of the early Christian Church began, the only course for the official exponents of Judaism, from whom assuredly the Targums emanated, was to refuse to make any such identification, and instead, if they made any attempt at all to interpret the passage, to do like Origen's opponents and most later Jews, and identify the Servant here at least with the persecuted nation.

But as we have seen, the Targum goes out of its way to take the opposite course. If, however, the Targum was already in existence, the intense conservative loyalty to what had become the recognized order of things, would have prevented, and apparently did prevent, any change being made, even though here it gave a most inconvenient handle to Christian controversialists.

It might be held that the elimination of the sufferings attributed to the Servant had been done in the interests of anti-Christian polemic; but this, so long as the identification remained on the one hand and the original Hebrew on the other, would have been like locking the stable door after the horse had been stolen.

The dislike of attributing suffering and calamity to the Messiah, the difficulty of even conceiving of it, and on the other hand, the desire to represent Him as utterly triumphant, would have been as natural in the first century B. C. as it was in later times.

We may therefore conclude with some certainty, (*a*) that the Messianic interpretation of Isa. lii 13-liii 12, which we find in this Targum, was officially recognized and popularly held at least as early as the time of our Lord. This identification of the Servant of the Lord and the Messiah would then be known to our Lord and His circle.

(*b*) We may further conclude that this part of the Targum on the Prophets had become unalterably fixed well before the formation of the Christian Church. The reference to 'wresting the power of the Gentiles from the land of Israel' points to a date later than the Roman occupation. So we may date the Targum on Israel at least as having assumed its present form somewhere between about 50 B. C. and A. D. 30.

There is one more point to be noticed in connexion with this passage.

We have seen that the sufferings of the Servant-Messiah have been carefully turned away from him, so as to represent, not a suffering, but a wholly Triumphant Messiah. There is, however, an extraordinary omission which undoes all the careful expurgation by the Targumist.

In the very last verse the Targum runs, 'Therefore will I divide for him (i. e. the Messiah) the spoil of many peoples; the goods of many strong cities he will divide as plunder *because he delivered up his soul to death* and made rebels subject to the Law'.¹ How this came to be left when all else kindred to it had been interpreted away it is difficult to say. It does not seem likely that it can have been accidentally overlooked. However that may be, the fact remains that though the Targum elsewhere does away with the Suffering of the Servant-Messiah, it actually leaves a statement that the Messiah had submitted to death.

B. Turning to the other prophecies of the Servant of the Lord, we do not find much that calls for detailed comment. As a rule, the immediate context does not leave much doubt that the Servant must be identified with Israel.

(i) In xliv 1, however, we find the same identification of the Servant with the Messiah as in Isa. lii 13:—

'Behold my Servant *the Messiah* whom I will bring
My chosen in whom my Word² is well pleased.'

In the rest of the passage the Aramaic follows the Hebrew fairly closely, the only verse which is at all expanded being v. 7. 'To open the eyes of the *house of Israel* who are as blind to the law.' Again we have to note that rightly or wrongly the 'collective' interpretation of the Servant is not set forth.

(ii) In xlviii 10 also, where it seems rather forced, Servant and Messiah are once again identified.

'Ye are witnesses before Me, so also is (lit. and) my servant *the Messiah* in whom I am well pleased.' One would have thought it fairly obvious that the prophet meant to say 'Ye are my witnesses, and ye are my Servant', &c. The Targumist apparently did not think that the Servant was to be equated with the witnesses. He evidently thought that the witness of the Messiah was to be added to that of the children of Israel.

(iii) In the Servant Song in chapter xlix there is nothing special to

¹ There is just the bare possibility that the Aramaic should be rendered '*instead of delivering his soul up to death and of making rebels subject to the law*'. This, however, makes very poor sense. ܩܠܝܢ is ambiguous, and, like the corresponding phrase in the Hebrew, its exact meaning has to be determined by the context.

² A common Targumatic periphrase for ʾנְשִׁמָּה 'my soul' when applied to Jahveh.

remark. There is no reference to the Messiah; perhaps *v.* 3 precluded such reference.

(iv) The Targum of the song in l. 4 sq. is more worthy of note. In it the Servant is identified with the Prophet. So that the sufferings and contumely there portrayed present no special difficulty. It may be worth while to quote a portion of this song verbatim, partly in order to shew the difference between the way in which the clauses dealing with suffering are treated here, and the way in which they were treated in chapter liii; partly because in it is a considerable section which has no equivalent in the Hebrew M.T.

l. 4. 'Jehovah God gave to me a teacher's tongue to make me know how to teach wisdom to the righteous who labour (lit. pant) at the word of the Law. Therefore morning by morning he rose early to send his prophets if perchance the ears of sinners might be opened and they might receive teaching.' *v.* 5: 'My back I have given to the smiters and my cheeks to them that pluck out hair, my face I have not hid from humiliation and spitting.' *v.* 10: 'Who is there among you worshippers (or fearers) of Jahveh who has hearkened to the voice of *his Servant the prophet*; who has obeyed the Law in adversity, like a man who walks in darkness and has no light? Let him hope in the name of Jahveh and stay upon the salvation of his God.'

[The Gentiles replied before him, 'Our Lord (Ribbona), it is not possible for us to labour in the Law, for all the time we are contending with one another in warfare and when one of us conquers another we set fire to their houses, capture their little ones and their goods; and in this manner our days are spent, so it is not possible for us to labour in the Law.' The Holy One, blessed is he, answered and said to them] *v.* 11: 'Behold all ye that kindle a fire, that temper a sword, go ye and fall on the fire that ye have kindled and on the sword ye have tempered. This have ye had of my word, ye shall return to your scorching.'

(v) The last passage which may be a Servant song is lxi 1 sq. This passage one would have naturally expected to find treated as Messianic, especially in view of *v.* 1 (*δ*), 'because Jahveh hath *anointed* me', which gives a more obvious opening for Messianic interpretation than anything else in Isaiah. The Targum, however, specifically identifies the speaker with the Prophet, and changes 'anointed' to 'reared'.

'Thus said the prophet, the spirit of prophecy from before Jahveh God is upon me

'Because Jahveh hath reared (רבי) me.'

None of the other passages referring to the Servant contains anything noteworthy.

This ends our investigation of the treatment of the Servant of the Lord passages in the Targum.

C. It may be worth while to append a translation of Isa. lii 13–liii 12 *in extenso* as there are still a good many minor points of interest in it which have not been specified. It should be noted that though it seems to have departed far from the original Hebrew, yet actually the Targum has stuck remarkably close to the letter of the Hebrew. There is hardly a particle in the Hebrew which has not some equivalent in the Aramaic, and very little in the Aramaic that is not represented in some way in the Hebrew. The liberties that have been taken are in reality much slighter than they appear by a comparison of the English translations :—

‘Behold, my Servant the Messiah shall prosper, he shall be exalted and increase and wax exceeding strong : for as many days as the House of Israel have thought that their appearance among the Gentiles was obscure and their splendour (hidden) from the sons of men. So shall he scatter many nations, kings shall be silent at him, their hands shall they put upon their mouths ; for that which hath not been told them have they seen, and that which they have not heard they have understood.

‘Who has believed this good news of ours, and to whom has the strength of the mighty arm of Jehovah been revealed ?

‘The¹ Righteous (race)² shall be glorified ; behold like a sucker which sprouts, and like a tree which puts forth its roots by streams of water, so shall the Holy Family multiply in the land where it has been in poverty. Its appearance shall be extraordinary, and its splendour shall be a holy splendour to which all who behold it shall give recognition. Surely the glory of the whole kingdom is despicable and come to an end : we³ are feeble and wretched, yea, like a man in pain and appointed to sickness ; and, even as we were when the Shekinah went up from us, we are despised and of no reputation.

‘Surely for our guilt *he* will intercede, and on his account our sins will be forgiven ; yet *we* are thought to be smitten, stricken from before Jehovah and afflicted.

‘And *he* will build the Holy House which was violated on account of our sins and profaned on account of our iniquities ; and by his teaching peace will be multiplied upon us : and when we give ear to his word our sins will be forgiven us.

‘All of us like sheep have been scattered abroad, each of us has gone into exile his own way ; but it is the good pleasure of Jahveh to forgive

¹ Omitting ‘and’.

² lit. ‘righteous one’.

³ Hebrew ‘they’, but probably error for ‘we’

the sins of all of us for his sake. He prays and he is answered; and before he has opened his mouth he is accepted.

'The strong ones of the Gentiles he will deliver up like a lamb which is for slaughter, and like a sheep dumb before her shearers. And there is none which openeth his mouth against him to speak a word.

'From chastisement and from retribution he will bring our captivity, and the wonderful things which will be done for us in his days who can relate? For he will wrest the power of the Gentiles from the land of Israel, and [take away] the sins which my people have sinned before he come to them.¹

'And he will deliver up the wicked to Gehenna and to mortal perdition, and the rich in goods who have played the oppressor; so that the doers of sin shall not abide nor speak deceit with their mouth.

'And it has been the good pleasure of Jahveh to refine and purge the remnant of his people, so as to purify their souls from sins. They shall see the kingdom of their Messiah, they shall multiply sons and daughters, they shall live to a great age,² and they shall prosper by his good pleasure.

'From bondage to the Gentiles he will deliver their lives³: they shall behold the punishment of them that hate them, they shall be satiated with the spoil of their kings. By his wisdom will he conquer the conquerors⁴ and bring many into subjection to the Law; and for their sins *he* shall make supplication.

'Therefore will I divide for him the spoil of many nations. And the goods of the strong cities will he divide as plunder, because he delivered his soul to death and brought rebels⁵ into subjection to the Law, and he will make supplication for many sins and rebels⁵ will be forgiven for his sake.'

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¹ Reading *טמ* for *טמ*, which makes nonsense.

² lit. 'prolong days'.

³ lit. 'souls'.

⁴ Or 'justify the just'.

⁵ Or 'transgressors'.