

ARTICLE VIII.

THE PURIFYING MESSIAH. — INTERPRETATION OF
ISAIAH LII. 15.

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בְּכִן יִזְרֹק אוֹתָם רַבִּים. “*So shall he sprinkle many nations.*” There is something so evangelical in these words, so strongly favoring the idea of an expiating, purifying power in the coming Messiah, so directly pointing, in fact, to the Christ of the Gospels, that the rationalist or unevangelical commentators, who cannot bear such an idea, have labored very hard to destroy its force. The verb זָרַק, or זָרַק in Hiphil, is best explained from Num. xix. 18, 19: “And a man who is pure shall take hyssop, and dip it in *water* and sprinkle it upon the tabernacle,” זָרַקוּ עַל-הַתְּאֵמֹלֶת. In like manner, Lev. viii. 10, 11: “And Moses took the oil of anointing, and he *sprinkled* thereof upon the altar.” The nature of the action indicated, the substance used (a fluid of some kind — blood, water, oil), or the immediate object, as well as the remoter object (the tabernacle, the altar, etc.) are so clearly presented, that no lexicon could give a better definition than that which offers itself in the very words of the passages quoted. Both in Hebrew and Arabic there are many terms far more frequent in their occurrence, but which leave, nevertheless, a far less distinct impression of their primary significance upon the mind. This clearness and uniformity of meaning appears in all places where it is to be found; as in Kal, Lev. vi. 20, 2 Kings ix. 33, Isaiah lxiii. 3; in Hiphil, Lev. iv. 6, 17, v. 9, viii. 11, 30, Ex. xxix. 21, Lev. xiv. 7, 16, 27, 51, xvi. 14, 15, 19, Num. viii. 7, xix. 4, 18, 19, 21. The ceremonial nature, too, of the actions indicated would fix it deeply upon the mind. It would give it a kind of sacredness, rendering very unlikely any departure from the usual and primary

image in any metaphorical application, or any substitution for it, or any confounding with it, of an unusual sense derived from a cognate dialect and found nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible. This would especially be the case with any prophetic application of it to the kingly and priestly Messiah, such as it is, on all hands, admitted to be in the passage before us. Here the old consecrated language of the law would most readily come to mind, as something peculiarly emphatic, and peculiarly demanded in the announcement of the Messiah's office.

In view of the well-established meaning of the word, there is only one objection that seems to have any real force, and that vanishes entirely on a close examination. In other cases, says Rosenmüller, the object of the verb is the fluid sprinkled, whereas in this place [Isa. lii. 15] it is the persons or nations sprinkled. But the very same change takes place in respect to other Hebrew verbs, and is common to all languages. Witness the Greek βάλλω, *to throw*, which may have for its object the weapon thrown, or the person at whom it is thrown. It is the same with the Greek ραίνω, ραντίζω, *to sprinkle*, corresponding in this and all other respects to the Hebrew רָחַץ. Thus it is all the same whether we say ραίνειν αὐτοὺς ὕδατι, or ραίνειν αὐτοῖς ὕδωρ, *sprinkle them with water*, or *sprinkle water upon them*. Compare Aristophanes, Ranae, 1440, ὄξιδας ραίνοιεν ἐς τὰ βλέφαρα τῶν ἐναντίων, "Let them sprinkle vinegar in the eyes of the enemies"; for examples of the other idiom, see Pindar, Isthm. viii. 110:

μέλανι ραίνων φόνος πεδίων,

"sprinkling the plain with blood," ραίνειν αἵματι βωμόν, Euripides, Iph. A. 1600. This is the Greek word by which the LXX everywhere render the Hebrew רָחַץ, and the manner in which they employ it, whether actively or passively, shows how easy and natural it is to take it either way. It is not peculiar to any form of the word, either Greek or Hebrew, but is grounded on the very nature of the action expressed, which may have either the person or the thing for its object; as is clearly shown in the use of our own corresponding word:

“I will *sprinkle* clean water *upon* you,” or, “I will *sprinkle* you with clean water, and ye shall be clean.”

The resort to the Arabic *نزل* is still more weak and far-fetched, showing a desperate determination to get rid, for some reasons, of the easy and most fitting sense that comes from the common Hebrew usage of the word. The sense of *نزل* is *saliit, exciliit, he sprang, he leaped*. In the Hebrew the Kal and Hiphil are both transitive. To make it grammatical here, yet keep the Arabic sense, it must be rendered in the fourth conjugation, *he caused to leap*, a far greater force upon the word than giving to the Hebrew the personal object.¹ The Arabic will not bear this as commonly used, or in the few cases where that conjugation of this particular word occurs; and if it could, it would be to the last degree frigid and extravagant. Metaphorically, these translators would say, he, the Messiah, shall make the nations leap for joy. That sounds well enough, if there were not two strong reasons against it. First, it is quite a rare word in Arabic; that is, rare in their gravest and most classical writings. It is not to be found in the Koran, though the cases are many in which the sense here given by Gesenius and others, “to cause to rejoice,” “to make to leap for joy,” would demand this word for its expression, if it were at all appropriate. It occurs but a very few times in the Seances of Hariri, who so affects the antique Arabic. This unusual occurrence in the graver writings is because of its low and somewhat obscene sense. It is used only of animals: *proprie de brutis et feris dicitur* — *assilivit mas femellam*. The very few cases of its occurrence in Hariri are sufficient of themselves to show how unfit a word it is for the use the prophet is supposed to make of it, and especially in the high connection in which it is here found. In Hariri, Seance xii. p. 136 (De Sacy ed.) we have the noun *نزوة* Plur. *نزوات*, *assaults, leaps (assilio, assultus)*:

¹ The Hiphil sense of the Hebrew word is not causal, but simply intensive; that is, to *sprinkle*, not to *cause to sprinkle*. In this respect it would seem like the Kal, which is also rendered to *sprinkle* in Leviticus. But to the Kal more particularly belongs the primary image, which is, to *spirt*, etc; having the fluid for its subject. Hence, in Hiphil, to *cause to spirt*, that is, to *sprinkle*.


“Protect me, Allāh, من نزغات الشياطين, from the attacks, the provocations of the devils, and from the *assaults* (the sudden leapings or springing upon me) of kings” من نزوات السلاطين. In Seance xxxi. 393, 8 the same writer employs the participle in an obscene comparison, or proverb, كل كثر الى قتل وكل ناز الى لين, which cannot decently be translated, it is so animal and brutish. Seance xliii. 571, 6 ونزا نزوان العنطب “He leaped the leap of the male locust.” These are the only places in which it occurs in the fifty Seances of Hariri. In the Life of Timour by Ahmed ibn Arabschah, another storehouse of unusual Arabic words, it is found but once, and then with the same obscene allusion, though occurring in one of its most turgid metaphors, (Vol. ii. 228, Manger’s ed.) ولا زال محل كلامه ينزو على حجر جرهم nec destitit admissarius orationis ipsius *insilire* in vulvam mentis eorum. The apology for giving even a Latin translation here, is the desire to show how utterly unfit was this word, or any metaphor drawn from it, for expressing the great thought of the prophet. There is no example to be found, either in Arabic prose or poetry, of its ever being used in the sense of exultation or leaping for joy. In the examples cited from Hariri, the Scholiast explains it, as a rare word, by the more common term وثب which always has the sense of leaping at, springing upon, or *assaulting*. Even if it were the case, however, that there were examples of its being used in a different way that might be deemed suitable here, still it would give us no reason for taking an unusual term, rare in Arabic, and, in this sense, occurring nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible.

And this suggests the second argument, namely, that the Hebrew abounds in words to express exultation, or leaping for joy and triumph, if that had been intended here. We have a striking example of this, Isaiah xlix. 13, where the verbs are all of this metaphorical class, in their primary sense expressive of sudden and rapid motion, and thence trans-

ferred to the expression of joy: **רָם שְׂמַיִם וְגִילֵי אָרֶץ וּמִצְדוֹ הַרִים**: “*Ring out ye heavens, and exult* (בלל primary sense *whirling, rolling, dancing, comp.*) O earth, *break out*, ye mountains with a *ringing* sound (רָמַץ), for the Lord hath comforted his people, and hath had compassion on his poor.” The primary sense in רָמַץ, רָמַץ is a trembling, vibrating, reverberating, pulsatile, or rebounding echo, that of מִצְדוֹ, a *breaking forth*, used here to denote exulting, joyous action, that could not be restrained. Can we rationally suppose that if the prophet had intended to express this idea of exultation, in either its intransitive or causal sense, he would have overlooked such words as these with which his language so copiously favored him, words so purely Hebrew, and so vivid in their significance, and have taken, instead of them, a much rarer word, in a rare sense only found in a cognate dialect, and even as there employed having associations which utterly unfitted it for such an application? The difficulty of such a supposition is greatly enhanced by the consideration, before mentioned, that this word רָמַץ is, in its Pentateuchal use, so consecrated, we may say, to a different idea, or so hallowed by being employed in cherished memorial rites, as to preclude its easy association with any other action, though the philological imagination may ever so remotely connect it with its supposed primary sense. It is hard to be believed. Such a far-fetched view demands the credulity of the rationalist, determined to shut his eyes against any highly spiritual or evangelical idea which the Old Testament writers may connect with Messiah’s mission.

Besides this, it may be said that there is another Arabic verb نَزَّ (*nazza*) which, although of the double Ain form, is closely allied to נָזַח in its primary Pentateuchal usage. Its predominant sense is to *spirt*, as water from the pores or crevices of a cask that has no outlet. For a vivid example see Calila et Dimna, or the Fables of Bidpai, 79: **وَنَزَّ مِنْ نَوَاحِي كَثِيرَةٍ** “whence it will flow and *spirt* (sprinkle) itself on many sides, etc.” This is the exact idea of

רוח or רוח, as seen in the operations indicated in the Pentateuchal passages, denoting something more intense and active, yet less diffuse, than the more frequent word רוח.

Jarchi renders it, "He shall lay his hand upon many nations," or, רוחו יגבר עליהם, "his hand shall prevail against them." In this he confounds רוח with רוח; either misunderstanding it, as we can hardly suppose, or intentionally avoiding what would seem to be the more Christian sense; since he must have been very familiar with the usage of רוח in the Law. We see in it also his strong prepossession in favor of the idea of a conquering Messiah. The Hebrew Lexicon of Rabbi Sal. Parchon gives only such senses of the word as are found in the Pentateuch. In the Hebrew Lexicon of Menahem Ben Saruk, it is not defined. The LXX has οὕτως θαυμάσονται ἔθνη πολλὰ ἐπ' αὐτῷ, "So shall many nations be astonished, or shall wonder, at him." This, however, besides giving a sense altogether different from any that can possibly be attached to רוח, except by a most far-fetched association, utterly confounds the syntax. They may have regarded רוח as from רוח the intensive verb of sight, or confounded it with it in some way, so as to get the idea of *wondering* from that of *gazing*, looking with emotion, like the Greek θαέομαι, or they may have been influenced by the Hebrew רוח in the verse above. Gesenius would reconcile this with the view he takes of רוח, as denoting the *leaping* or rising from the seat in reverence; but nothing could well seem more strained or far-fetched. The sense of sprinkling, or purifying, too, he regards as inconsistent with that of "the many being astonished," as expressed in verse 14, or of "kings shutting their mouths at him" (vs. 15), but this only shows the utterly unevangelical mind, which can never recognize the spiritual harmony there is between Messiah's kingly rule, and his priestly or expiating office. The Vulgate has it literally, and in accordance with the Pentateuchal sense of the word: Iste *asperget* gentes multas. The Syriac, by far the best of the ancient versions, renders it , "He shall purify many nations." The translator has simply

given the obvious secondary, or metaphorical sense, derived immediately from the Pentateuchal image of sprinkling. There was evidently in his mind such passages as that of Ezek. xxxvi. 25: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be purified from all your defilements, and from all your idols will I cleanse you."

To return again to the Arabic *نزا*, which is regarded as giving the best rendering here, it may be said that Gesenius cites from Hariri one of the places just referred to, and that the unfitness of the word nowhere more strongly appears than in the very testimony which it gives us. He takes it, as others have done, from the definition given in the lexicons (*saliit, assilivit*), without any reference to the peculiar low and obscene sense which, in the places cited, invariably accompanies it, as the context most abundantly shows. Thus Hariri, Seance xxvii. 287 *ينزو ويلين*, *assiliit tunc remittet*, and xxxi. 393, before cited, *كل ناز الى لين وان هاجا*, together with the scholium that accompanies the first, are given by him as proverbial sayings simply denoting that "after activity comes weakness," but without taking any notice of the low association of ideas on which it is grounded. Thus also, he only refers generally to the expression Seance xxxi. 393, without citing the place, and pays no attention to its very explicit and unmistakable scholium giving the same *untranslatable* explanation that belongs to it in all these places of its occurrence. It is on the words *وان هاجا* at the end of the sentence or line just before cited: *هو من هيجان الفحل : وهو ان يهدر في شغفته ويشتهي الضراب*. As in any way differing from this uniformly low sense, Gesenius refers only to one meaning given by Freytag, and that in the eighth conjugation, without any examples: *assiliit animus in rem — concupivit*. If there are any cases where this occurs in any Arabic writing, it would most probably be found to contain a turgid metaphor similar to the one already quoted from Ahmed's History of Timour. Of this, too, Gesenius takes no notice, although it is the only place in which it occurs through

out that extensive work, and its beastly sense, as there used, is so precisely like what we find in Hariri. Gesenius admits that the word which he would thus apply to the office of Messiah, is used mainly *de bestiis*, of the beasts, *de locusta*, *de asino*, etc.; but then he says also, *dein de hominibus*, omitting to notice, however, that the application to men is chiefly in the way of this beastly comparison, and that, therefore, to say it of nations would be altogether anomalous.

Again, he perverts the order of etymologies. It is more easy and natural to deduce the sense of leaping (*saliendi*), or of *springing* (see the analogy in the two senses of our word *spring*) from that of *sprinkling*, scattering (*spargendi*), than vice versa. So it is with the words to which he compares it, namely, נָצַח and נָצַח. To *fly* is their secondary sense from the primary *splendere*, *scintillare*, *emicare*, to *flash*, *flutter*, *vibrate*, *glimmer*, *gleam*, *sparkle*, all agreeing in their primary sense-image with *spargere*, *radiare*. Compare Virg. Aen. iv. 584. *Spargebat lumine terras*; or *spargens lumen*; this Latin word having a double object like the Greek *ῥαλνω* and the Hebrew נָוּח. Hence to נָצַח, נָצַח, and נָצַח, there is also the sense *florere*, נָצַח, *flos*, *flower*. So נָצַח and נָצַח, *flos*, נָצַח, *flosculus*, נָצַח *scintilla*, נָצַח, *plumage*, all allied to נָוּח and closely connected with the image of *scattering*, *dispersion*, *radiation*. Nothing presents this more vividly than the rapid motion, or *leapings*, of drops of water when sprinkled, and hence the secondary sense of leaping, occurring in the Arabic, but not found in the early Hebrew. It is onomatopoeitic. The primary sense of *spiriting* (intransitively, the action of the fluid itself) might be almost known from the hissing, stridulous, *whizzing* sound of the root. The same might be said of that other Arabic word نَزَلَ, and the Hebrew נָוּל, where the addition of the liquid letter gives the idea of a more equable or flowing motion, *defluere*, *distillare*, *de rore ex nubibus*. Hence the Arabic sense of נָוּל (نَزَلَ) *to descend*, as the rain. Fuerst well compares נָוּח with the German *netzen*, *nässen*, to which we can in no way regard the idea of *leaping* as primary, any more than to the Greek *νέλω*, to *wash*, which

has the same radical syllable. It is gratifying to find that the learned Fuerst in his Concordance Lexicon adheres to this old primary sense of sprinkling as truly belonging to the passage in Isaiah.

That which tries our patience to the utmost, in reading such commentators as Gesenius and Rosenmüller is their continual begging of the great question which divides them from "Christian interpreters," to use their own phrase. "*Christiani interpretes,*" says the latter, "*magno consensu hoc oraculo Messiae facta describi statuunt.*" It is thus spoken of only to express an opinion adverse to its true claims. The "great consent of Christian interpreters" goes for nothing with this school. They speak as if they were themselves inspired to teach the contrary. "Not a trace," say they, *nullum vestigium*, "is to be found in the Old Testament, from which it could be gathered that the Messiah, whom they expected, was to do (or suffer) any such thing as is supposed to be set forth in this and similar passages." "Every where," they say, "it is the image of a powerful and glorious hero, painted in colors drawn from the pomp of Solomon, David, and other Oriental kings." They know all about this, far better than any men who lived nearest the times, far better than our Saviour and the Apostles whom he commissioned and inspired. The process of critical examination by which they arrive at such a sweeping conclusion is not a little curious. They take up all the passages which seem to teach something different, and deliberately deprive them, one by one, of any such meaning, or dogmatically assert that they cannot possibly have any such meaning, notwithstanding the fancies of "Christian interpreters," and then cry out, *nullum vestigium deprehenditur!* They have no objection to their "great and conquering hero," *felicissimus, potentissimus et gloriosissimus*, as they conceive him. Keep it in that form alone, and they can treat it as they do the myths of other nations, that never had, nor are expected to have, anything like a true historical realization. They can magnify to the utmost this grand "epic conception of the old Jewish bards";

for there is little more of a faith demanding spirituality in it than there is in the Greek conception of a Hercules. Such a hero has never appeared upon earth, nor is likely to appear; so that they are not at all afraid of him, nor of anything severely religious associated with such a belief. But a suffering Messiah, an atoning Messiah, a "sprinkling Messiah," walking solitary "in the greatness of his strength," "treading the wine-press alone, and of the people having none with him," such a hero Messiah, though he be "mighty to save," "potentissimus, gloriosissimus," they cannot believe in. It introduces, at once, a new order of thought, a new world of ideas, of which they can find "*nullum vestigium*" in their lifeless exegesis. "It is not according to Jewish ideas," they say. "The notion of the Messiah must be in harmony with fundamental conceptions as we find them in the Old Testament." The canon of interpretation is most sound; but are such interpreters aware of certain positions to which it must inevitably lead them? The figure of *anointing* in the Old Testament, whence came the name Messiah, had certainly a most pregnant significance. This name represents to the fullest whatever is included of the priestly as well as of the kingly office. "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchisedek." Surely this was a Jewish notion, however much they may have failed in their blindness and in their hardness to understand the wide meaning embraced in the deep idea of such a priesthood. Is there "no trace" of this in the Old Testament? And if there is, then it includes all that belongs to the thought of a suffering and sprinkling Messiah, although the Jew, as well as the Rationalist, had his mind most occupied with the lofty language that described the kingly state, whether it were a worldly or a spiritual glory. If a priest, "then must he have something to offer," even that which was most precious in the sight of God, namely, *self-sacrifice*, as when he "made his soul an offering for sin, and poured out his soul (his life) unto death"; when he said, "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not (that is other sacrifice), holocaust and sin-offering thou askest not.

Lo, I have come; to do thy will (רציתי) is my delight, and thy law is in the midst of my heart." The Hebrew word here rendered *will* has a strong propitiatory or expiatory sense — that which is pleasing or makes pleased — and is used here, like the Greek *θέλημα*, Matt. xxvi. 42, Luke xxii. 42, to denote that one great act of propitiation which Christ came to earth to perform, and of which he spake with Moses and Elias upon the Mount of Transfiguration.

Let go the idea of expiation, if it is so distasteful; but is there not heroism in such a sacrifice? Is not he a hero, an אִישׁ גִּבּוֹר (Isaiah ix. 5), who can so offer himself? May he not most truly be called "*felicissimus, potentissimus, gloriosissimus*"? The Rationalist would surely say this in expressing his admiration of a Codrus or a Decius; shall it be thought a trait of character of which "not a vestige" can be found in him whom they are so fond of calling "the hero Messiah of the Jewish bards"? There is one view that settles this conclusively. Did the priestly idea enter into the Jewish conception of the Messianic office? And is this priestly idea inseparable from that of suffering and sacrifice, either personally, or by typical representation? These are the great questions of which the rationalist disposes in such a summary way. If they are answered in the affirmative, there is then not merely "a trace," but a broad and luminous manifestation of such a priestly, sprinkling, purifying Messiah throughout the old scriptures. Then, too, may we say that no word would be better adapted to express this healing, cleansing, expiating power than the one which the prophet has so appropriately transferred from its consecrated use in describing the sprinkling rites of the old typical law, in which outward purity ever symbolizes the inward sanctification.

We may add here, by way of note, that in the Arabic version of Rabbi Saadias Phijumensis, the Hebrew word מִן is rendered in a way which shows that the translator had in mind the primary sense, as it appears in Leviticus, whilst giving it an entirely different application through an Arabic

word that conveys only the secondary image. He thus translates the Hebrew, *وكذلك يبدد الامم الكثيرة*, "He shall disperse, or separate, many nations." Now here is something strange. This Hebrew word occurs quite a number of times in the Pentateuch. It is employed uniformly to denote a distinct typical religious act of purification. The Pentateuch, it should be borne in mind, is that part of the Scriptures which the Jews regard with most reverence. It is to them, as it really is in itself, the purest fountain head of "the sacred language." Their commentators are ever fond of referring to it in explanation of words. It would seem, however, that in respect to this word, occurring as it does but once out of the Pentateuch, with the exception of the single example in Kings, this honored Rabbi had gone out of his way to get a different meaning, although everything in the prophetic passage is in such harmony with the old typical usage, and the old idea of purification in its highest and most sacred sense. The anti-Christian motive is obvious; and yet to every right-thinking mind the very manifestation of such a feeling on the part of Jews and Rationalists is proof of the real meaning and spiritual power of the passage.