

ART. VI.—STUDIES ON ISAIAH.

THE notes on chap. i. may be supplemented by one additional thought, having regard to the way in which sin causes us to misuse and misread God's work in Nature. The trees of "Judah and Jerusalem," made by God "very good"—things of beauty and of usefulness, intended to minister to our needs in various ways, become a snare to the perverted mind. The spreading oak, with its welcome shade, the pleasant garden, with all its varieties of leaf and fruit, become, in the then condition of the Israelite mind, things which lead it astray, and of which those who take pleasure in them have need to be "ashamed." Thus "Nature worship," though originally the cult of that which God had made, has become the synonym for every possible abomination. The phrase "to follow Nature" is one which covers every abuse of the true nature of man. The Greek philosopher, the Indian Gymnosophist, the Gnostic, the Manichæan, the ascetic, the hermit, the Stylite, the cloistered monk or nun, the Puritan—at least in some portions of his stern theology—have, in spite of the great principle laid down by the Jewish lawgiver as the fundamental principle upon which his religious teaching was based, come to regard everything material as more or less essentially evil. And thus natural enjoyments have seemed to many pious souls to have upon them the brand of Satan and of sin. Not until man has regained his mastery over himself; not until he has learned to govern his undisciplined impulses by the true law of his being, imposed by his Creator, and made known to him through his conscience, will he be able to revel in the enjoyments which Nature provides for him. "To the pure all things are pure." He who is master of himself, he who lives the life that God would have him—such a man will find a never-failing source of delight in the bounteous and God-given profusion of good things around him, which are only a snare to the thoughtless and self-indulgent.

CHAPTER II.

This chapter, as well as the two following, is addressed to "Judah and Jerusalem." The present chapter displays all the alternations of hope and fear, all the alternation of dread of the punishment which men's misdeeds must necessarily bring down upon them, and the certainty of the ultimate triumph of good which is so common in the Old Testament Scriptures, and which, moreover, is indelibly imprinted on the history of Israel. Modern criticism struggles hopelessly to evade the fact, but a fact nevertheless it is, that the con-

confidence displayed by the prophets in the final victory of truth and right—that is, of the cause of God—is inextricably intertwined with the Person and work of One who is to come, by whom this victory will be achieved. *Why* the modern critic should strive so hard to efface the universal belief of the Jewish and Christian Churches in a Divine supernatural plan, running throughout all human history, and united indissolubly with the Person of the Eternal Word, it is difficult to say. But the result of modern scientific discovery has been to exalt an evolution on purely natural lines into the place of God. And just when men of science are learning that this view of the facts cannot possibly be sustained, when Lord Kelvin, the late Sir G. Stokes, and other lights of science are telling us that the witness of science to supernatural creation and direction cannot be denied, theologians, in the impatience of the hour, are making a sacrifice of supernatural, or, to avoid the ambiguity which lurks in the phrase “nature,” let us call it *spiritual* religion, in order, as they say, “to effect a reconciliation between religion and science.” Such a reconciliation is not necessary. In real truth it never was necessary. But for Latinism—an “Augustinianism,” as it has been called, of which Augustine laid the foundations, but with which he never identified himself—on the one hand, and the undue impatience of men of science on the other, there would never have been any antagonism between them. In spite of the modern critic, we may safely declare the facts of our Divine origin and guidance to be ineffaceably stamped upon the history of religion. Nature and grace alike follow the laws of orderly, natural evolution, but not without Divine intervention whenever need so requires. Such interferences with purely natural law are what we mean when we use the word “supernatural.” In that much-misconceived phrase neither less nor more is meant than this: that there are forces at work in the world, natural and spiritual, which man cannot measure, and the effects of which are beyond his calculation.

I. The first four verses of this chapter strike the note of *hope*—a hope in the prophet’s day utterly unreasonable and ridiculous, save on the part of one who was under supernatural guidance—of a period of glory and triumph for God’s chosen people. No purely human experience, foresight or insight, could enable a man in Isaiah’s day to predict the state of things described in verse 4. As well might a man in those days have prophesied that rivers should run uphill or trees grow with their roots in the air! We have seen the possibility of such a day as is here predicted come sensibly and steadily nearer to us, though it is to be feared that it is still far off. We may be sure that He who has “begun” this

“good work among us will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ.”

1. The first thing to notice in this glorious picture of days to come is that it is connected with the “mountain of the house of Jahveh.”¹ We are constantly told now that the idea of the Temple at Jerusalem being the centre of Israel’s worship was due to Deuteronomy, and that Deuteronomy was probably not written, and certainly not published, until the reign of Josiah. But here—for this prophecy is admitted to be Isaiah’s—we find this close connection between Israel’s prosperity and the Temple worship distinctly laid down. That prosperity is indissolubly conjoined with the “mountain of the house of Jahveh.” Of course, the “house of the God of Jacob” which the prophet sees with his mind’s eye is ultimately the heavenly Jerusalem. His words, in all their fulness, must apply to “Jerusalem which is above,” a “house not made with hands.” Still, the prophet, writing as he does in the reign of Hezekiah, clearly recognises the fact that the religion of Israel is closely bound up with the worship at the Temple. Here, as elsewhere in Holy Writ, prophecy has its nearer foreground, as well as its more distant and fuller realization.² The faithfulness of the Jew to the Mosaic covenant is the foundation on which the hope of future glory rests.

2. The passage further predicts that the Law shall hereafter go forth from Jerusalem as it had formerly done from Mount Sinai. For Christ, in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere, distinctly abrogates some of the enactments of the Law, beside putting forth a higher and more spiritual conception of it. This teaching was first publicly and authoritatively taught in His Name after His death, “beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke xxiv. 47), as He had ordained.

3. We are all bound to labour strenuously and continuously for the suppression of war, but not, as some in these days are tempted by impatience to do, irrationally. War is not an unmixed evil. With all its horrors—and they have been much mitigated by greater humanity on the part of the combatants, and by the tender care of the wounded by the officers of the Red Cross, among whose ministrations the tender solicitude of woman has its full place—in the element of discipline, of obedience, of self-repression, of devotion to a

¹ It may be as well to note, as the reason of my preference of “Jahveh” over “Jehovah,” (1) that the Jew never called God by the name of “Jehovah,” and (2) that “Jahveh” expresses the original idea that the God of Israel was the eternally existent one, and Jehovah does not.

² See “Davison on Prophecy,” p. 231 (sixth edition), a book which the modern critic will doubtless consider out of date, but which will possibly survive a good deal that is in fashion at present.

great cause, which is present in war in a higher degree than ever, the highest virtues of humanity are displayed. Readers of literature may remember how Lord Tennyson, in his "Maud," which was written in the time of the Crimean War, expresses eloquently and fervently the hope that society may rise to a higher level in consequence of the demands of men for self-effacement, and the opportunity given them of doing great and glorious deeds; how he hopes that the greed for gain which had seized on us, with all its degrading accompaniments, might be rendered as contemptible as it ought to be; how the man who "pestles a poisoned poison behind his crimson lights," as well as the other reptiles then preying on the vitals of English society, might be rendered ashamed of their degrading occupations.¹ Charles Kingsley, apropos of a shipwreck, remarks that, for whatever reasons, God takes less account of the mere animal lives of men than we should have been antecedently disposed to expect. Thackeray, too, in his "Denis Duval," puts the following words about war into the mouth of his good Dr. Barnard: "War is not altogether an evil; it is ordained of heaven, as our illnesses and fevers are, for our good. It teaches obedience and contentment under privations; it fortifies courage; it tests loyalty; it gives occasion for showing mercifulness of heart, moderation in victory, endurance and cheerfulness under defeat." When we have learned all these virtues, and a good many more, then, and then only, can the words be fulfilled, "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

II. The next division of the chapter, verses 5-9, is an

¹ A less well-known passage in "Maud" is the one in which the poet rebukes the unbalanced utterances of the preacher who denounces *all* war, under whatever circumstances:

"This broad-brimm'd hawker of holy things,
Whose ear is crammed with his cotton, and rings
Even in dreams to the chink of his pence,
This huckster put down war! Can he tell
Whether war be a cause or a consequence?
Put down the passions that make earth hell!
Down with ambition, avarice, pride,
Jealousy, down! Cut off from the mind
The bitter springs of anger and fear;
Down, too, down at your own fireside
With the evil tongue and the evil ear,
For each is at war with mankind."

TENNYSON: *Maud*, x. 3.

A similar passage, inveighing against the philanthropist who strives to make men love one another by abusing his neighbours, will be found in Dickens's "Mystery of Edwin Drood," chap. xvii. It is remarkable that this is the last, unfinished novel by Dickens, as "Denis Duval," quoted above, is the last, unfinished novel by Thackeray.

indictment of a backsliding people. Instead of maintaining the manly vigour, the industry and frugality, the lofty morality, the pure faith of their fathers, they were ready to adopt the superstitions and fashions of their neighbours. "The east" was the home of sorcery—see Balaam's "enchantments" (Num. xxiv. 1). We learn about the soothsaying of the Philistines in 1 Sam. vi. 2; 2 Kings i. 2. The critics are puzzled by the denunciation of those who "please themselves" or "strike hands" with the children of strangers. But it is because they are bound hand and foot by their theories that Deuteronomy and what they call "the Priestly Code" were written subsequently to Isaiah's day. But if we adopt the view which, until quite lately, most critics have adopted, there is no difficulty whatever. The Israelites were to avoid too much intimacy with the "children of the stranger," lest they should be led astray by their false religion and loose morality. It was this "backsliding" which, as we have seen, had brought about the wretched condition which is described in chap. i. "Judah and Jerusalem" had multiplied riches, and riches, unless well and wisely used, are apt to bring luxury in their train. "Horses and chariots" are condemned, not in themselves, but as a form of personal display which contrasted with the simple habits of Israel in earlier days. It is difficult, once more, to see why Israel should *not* fill his land with horses and chariots, unless he had been forbidden to do so. Luxury might be rejected as contrasting with the sturdy simplicity of the past. But this particular form of it would not have been obvious, save for the prohibition in Deuteronomy, which was evidently known to Isaiah. It is noteworthy that in Deborah's song we find witness to that earlier simplicity of life. The great men of her day "ride on white asses." The horse was a rare thing. On the hills of Palestine chariots were unknown (Judg. i. 19; v. 10). The associations and habits of Israel in later times brought about their natural consequences. Growth in material prosperity tended, as it often does, to a materialistic religion, and materialistic religion is nearly allied to superstition, and superstition, as we often see, even in these days of boasted enlightenment, "meets" and touches its opposite "extreme," infidelity. Faith is allied to trust, superstition to fear, and fear is the opposite of trust. History is full of instances of all this. First and foremost there is the example of Solomon. Prosperity first of all produced luxury, and luxury self-indulgence. The habit of self-indulgence led to his multiplying wives and concubines. Alliances with foreign princesses undermined the simplicity of his faith. He first tolerated, then imitated, their errors. And so the pious founder of the Temple, the man who

crowned the edifice of Mosaism by making the capital the centre of worship as well as of government, became in his old age the patron of idolatry, the first to undermine the very system which his own hands had brought into being. Criticism is at present inclined to deny to him the authorship of Ecclesiastes. As has before been said, questions of authorship ought not to be made tests of orthodoxy, and critics at once sound and skilful have denied the Solomonic authorship of the book. But at least let it be remembered that it is certainly not *proved* that Solomon did not write Ecclesiastes. And if he did *not* write it, who did? If the modern critic be correct, the Jews were fonder of handing down anonymous writings than other nations seem to have been. Why this remarkable exception on their part to the ordinary practice of humanity? Moreover, so masterly an analysis of character as is found in the remarkable book of which we are speaking shows its author, if he be *not* Solomon, to have been some 2,500 years in advance of his age. No other such powerful dramatic conception saw the light until the time of Shakespeare. How self-indulgence produces a general scepticism, and how scepticism leads to a double life—a life of wild indulgence combined with an attitude of philosophic inquiry and doubt—is most wonderfully portrayed in that sketch of the wise king. And scepticism and superstition, as has just been remarked, go hand in hand. The sybarite and sceptic depicted in Ecclesiastes might well, as intellect and the capacity for enjoyment grew dulled, become the idolater of 1 Kings xi. 5. Other examples of the law laid down in the chapter of which we are speaking crowd on the mind of the student of history. The decay of morals in Imperial Rome; the degradation of the noble simplicity of the German and Gothic conquerors of the Roman Empire; the *noblesse* of France, eating and drinking and being merry, indulging in their hollow courtesies, their contempt of the *canaille* below them, on the eve of the French Revolution—these and many other instances (*cf.* Matt. xxiv. 37, 38) may be adduced of the same state of things as that which enervated and disunited the Jewish kingdom, and made it an easy prey to the Assyrian invader. All this should be a warning to ourselves. The rapid growth of luxury among all classes of society in this country during the last fifty years has tended to impair the manhood of the nation. Has *tended*, we say, for the tendency is kept in check by the leaven of Christianity which is still working in English society, as well as by the taste for manly sports which, when gratified in moderation, braces the body and gives tone to the mind. But an ominous softness, if not effeminacy, is nevertheless gaining ground among us,

and it is naturally most visible where wealth is greatest. Our *jeunesse dorée* care little for great causes or great thoughts. Their minds are filled with trifling matters. Their life is one long craving for, and indulgence in, excitement. Gambling, racing, and other occupations, some harmful, some merely foolish and childish, take up the whole of their time. The deep and earnest aspirations after truth and righteousness which occupied so many minds in the middle of the last century seem to have lost their savour for the great mass of the younger folk of to-day. If they have deeper aspirations, they are great adepts at concealing them. In politics, in religion, even in social questions, the cynical scepticism of "the Preacher" seems to have taken the place of the stern determination to face the problems of the age which some of us can remember. In art and literature sensation is the passion of the hour, not truth. And so a dangerous lassitude is creeping over English society. The great leaders of thought in the past—so people are confessing in every branch of thought except natural science—are one by one being withdrawn, and their places filled by men far their inferiors. Statesmen are being replaced by administrators, theologians by destructive critics, great thinkers by narrow specialists, leaders of men by panderers to the passion of the hour. The *Zeitgeist* has been diverted into a number of tiny gusts and eddies, each whirling its circle of dust and stubble around. Only by a determination to recur to first principles, to "ask for the old paths," to fall back on the essential truths of the Christian revelation, can we check the moral and spiritual paralysis which seems to be seizing on the nation. Yet, while we note and lament the dangers of the hour, while we brace our energies to resist them, let us not forget that our ultimate victory is certain, through "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." There are moments in human history in which the onward sweep of progress appears to be arrested. And the present, in spite of its boastfulness and self-satisfaction, is one of them, just as the fifteenth and, in some ways, the eighteenth centuries appear to have been. But "the hour will come, and the men" who will overcome the languor of the moment, and will once more impel us forward toward the ultimate goal of humanity.

III. The remainder of the chapter is one of the finest examples of the unparalleled eloquence of the great prophet. Other splendid word-pictures, such as we find in no other Old Testament author, will be found in chaps. xxxv., lx., lxiii., lxiv. 1-4. But nothing more finely illustrative of the majesty of God's Presence, and the awe which it inspires, can be found unless it be in our Lord's description of the awfulness of God's

judgment, in Matt. xxiv., or the sublime pictures of the same tremendous fact in Rev. vi. 12-14; xviii. 10-24. Save in these last, no such picture of the greatness of God and the littleness of man can be found anywhere. It is strange—is it not?—that in these days, when science has revealed to us God's greatness in a way and to an extent of which no previous age had even dreamed, the "fear of Him, and the dread of Him," seem so entirely to have passed away. True, it has been the task of the Incarnate Word to reveal the Father as Love, and it has been the privilege of the present age to grasp that great fact as it has never been grasped before. But we must not forget that we cannot grasp that blessed truth aright unless we know that Infinite Love involves Infinite Wrath—the "Wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. vi. 16). There can be no love which does not burn like fire at cruelty, meanness, oppression, luxury, selfishness, cowardice, cold-heartedness, indifference to sorrow and suffering, sloth, frivolity, folly, neglect of what is earnest and serious, high and holy. These evils are present in every age; they are by no means absent in our own. There is need of One Who will arise and lay hands "upon all that is proud and haughty, and upon all that is lifted up." And *He will come*. He will come unto His own, and, unlike the Jews of old (John i. 11), they will eagerly and joyfully "receive Him." And then shall men fling the idols which they have loved "to the moles and to the bats," and shall "creep into the caverns of the rocks, and into the clefts of the ragged rocks, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of His majesty, when He ariseth to shake mightily the earth."

J. J. LIAS.

ART. VII.—THE MONTH.

THE Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline has commenced its labours, and its first steps are satisfactory. It is ready to receive evidence of "breaches or neglect of the law relating to the conduct of Divine Service in the Church of England and to the ornaments and fittings of churches prevalent within the last twelve months. In selecting the witnesses who will then be called to give evidence, special consideration will be given to those who are, or have been, Church officers of any parish, or are qualified to speak from wide or special knowledge." This will admit two classes of evidence, which are of equal importance—that of laity in the parishes in which such breaches or neglect of the law have