

ART. II.—STUDIES ON ISAIAH.

CHAPTER VI.

A DATE is given to chap. vi. It is the year of Uzziah's death. "The normal methods of interpretation and criticism," when applied to the Bible, appear to be these: to dispute every statement found in it which it suits one to dispute, and call upon its defenders to prove that statement. Needless to say, such "methods" are not adopted with any other history or literature in the world. It would be impossible to write a single line of history on this principle. Yet every statement of the Bible is called in question by some one or other, as the exigencies of a theory may seem to require. Be it so. So long as unbelief lasts men will be found who call in question the revealed Word of God. It is therefore to be expected that it should be compelled to fight its way to acceptance through the fiercest fire that ever a literature sustained. Such a conflict is a necessity of its Divine origin. The only misfortune is when those who are its sworn defenders are found in the attacking ranks. *Then* there is indeed reason to complain. It need hardly be said that there is no reason whatever for questioning the date assigned to this prophecy. But it has evidently been placed in the midst of another prophecy or prophecies of later date. This need not disturb us. The prophecies, at least of the greater prophets, seem to have been collected and arranged after the death of the writers. The order of Jeremiah's prophecies in the LXX. and in the Hebrew is not the same. And it is probable that, as the Septuagint translation was executed in Egypt, its arrangement is to be preferred to that found in the Hebrew text. That Isa. vi. has somehow got displaced in its order is clear from the fact that the sentence, "for all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still," is found, not only in chap. v. 25, but in chap. ix. 12, 17, 21, and in chap. x. 4. Thus chaps. v. and ix., x. 1-4, appear to belong to the same prophecy. Not only so, but the "woe" pronounced in chap. x. 1-4 seems to be connected with those which we have already considered in chap. v. Chap. v. 26-30 is probably a prophecy of the Assyrian invasion some time before its occurrence. The prophecy of the same event in chap. x. 5-14, 28-34, seems to agree with the history in chap. xxxvi., and is no doubt a vivid prophetic anticipation of it. There is no reason why chaps. v., ix., and x. should not belong to the same period. "Normal methods" of criticism do not allow the

insight of the prophet to anticipate events by more than a year or two. But if it be, as in fact it is, demonstrable that something more than moral and statesmanlike insight is to be found in the writings of the prophets, there remains no reason why a supernatural or, at the very least, abnormal prevision of what was to come should not have been vouchsafed to Isaiah, and that chap. x. may, like chaps. vii.-ix., be assigned to the reign of Ahaz.

Chap. vi., however, stands apart from all the rest, and, as we have seen, bears the date of the last year of King Uzziah. It has the deepest possible interest for us as being the history of the call of the greatest prophet the world has ever known. Modern criticism has whittled away the greater part of his majesty. It has deprived him of the great and glorious utterances, which stir our nature to its depths, to be found in chaps. xxxv., xl., xlix., liii., lx. But modern criticism is not always *intentionally* irreverent. And so it has done something approaching to justice to the grandeur and awfulness of the call and the greatness of the prophet who received it. Let us note, as briefly as so grand a vision will permit us, some particulars of the instruction it has for us.

I. Not every prophet received such a call. There was the same difference between the prophets of Israel as there has been among the clergy of the Catholic Church. Some have been mere official prophets, trained in the schools (see 1 Kings xx. 35; 2 Kings ii. 3, 5, 15, iv. 38),¹ while some have been special messengers to their generation, rebuking the iniquity of God's people, and calling them to repentance by a voice clearly coming from above. Of the latter kind have been men such as Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, John the Baptist, and, under the New Covenant, Athanasius, Bernard, Savonarola, Wiclif, Hus, Luther, Wesley, and others whom we may call to mind. Of the former class are men who have witnessed boldly for God when occasion required, without having the special vocation and supernatural powers required for rousing a sinful generation. Such were Nathan, Azariah (2 Chron. xxvi. 18), Ambrose, Anselm, Grindal, Burnet (whose noble letter to Charles II. rebuking his immorality and bidding him beware of the judgment to come is less known than it ought to be), Ken, and many others. It may safely be said that the higher the standard a Christian clergyman or layman sets before him in these days, the more likely he is to rise to the level of the former class.

¹ Yet even they often displayed the power of foreseeing things to come, as the passages cited above plainly show.

II. Note the *time* of the call. It was not at the moment when the danger was at hand. A man wants *preparation* for so tremendous a task as lay before Isaiah. So our Lord taught us, when he remained unknown for thirty years, in spite of the stupendous work He came to achieve. So we learn from St. Paul, who retired into Arabia for three years before commencing his lifelong task of ministering to the Gentiles. For similar reasons the whole reign of Jotham was given to the inspired prophet after his call to prepare him for the adequate discharge of the high, difficult, and dangerous duty to which he was called, of denouncing the great apostasy under Ahaz and of "comforting" God's "people" in the imminent peril through which Judah and Jerusalem had to pass in that unbelieving King's reign.

III. The *nature* of the call. Most of the prophets belonging to the second of the classes above mentioned seem to have had a special call. But that of Isaiah presents the most remarkable features. That of Jeremiah (Jer. i. 4-10) was very simple and unattended by visions. That of Ezekiel commenced with a vision, which, mysterious as it was, lacked the special solemnity presented by that seen by Isaiah. Unlike that of Isaiah, Ezekiel's prophecy is marked by continuous special intimations from above. Both visions partake of the character of those vouchsafed to Moses (Exod. xix. 3-25, xxiv. 9-11, xxxiii. 7-23), but are evidently an extension and advance of his. The call of Amos was attended by no vision, but was a simple inward impulse (Amos vii. 14, 15), which, however, like that of Jeremiah, was of an imperious character which could not be disobeyed (Jer. xx. 7-9, and Amos iii. 8). There was One, however, be it remarked, to whom no such vision was vouchsafed. And if it were *not* vouchsafed, it was because He needed it not. So intimate was the union between the Godhead and the Manhood in Him—a fact, by the way, which modern critics of the Old Testament have found themselves constrained to deny—that He needed not the assurance with which men less uniquely related to the Eternal Godhead could not dispense. Though the limits of even His Divine humanity were, we may well believe, too confined to transmit to us all that the Divine mind held within it, yet the Hypostatic Union was too close to allow of the need on His part of the Divine assurances of pardon, favour, protection, guidance, which were needed by other men, how highly gifted soever they may have been.

Great was the solemnity of the prophet's supernatural vocation, and great his need of preparation for it. Great, too, is the solemnity of the prophet's call under the Christian dispensation, whether the mission of the prophet be to a parish

or to a nation. And though the supernatural character of the call be less externally evident in this case, it is none the less a fact. The sense of vocation seems to have undergone, to some extent, an eclipse among us of late years. The necessity and responsibility of the task is perhaps a little less realized. A hundred years ago, when undisguised ungodliness and profaneness were rampant, when men openly scoffed at the name of God and at the name and restraints of religion, *then* God's minister felt that his duty was to "save souls" by preaching the urgent need of conversion. In these days, when there is at least a nominal profession of Christianity, the sense of the need of conversion is less keen, and the work of the presbyter is regarded rather as one of *building up* the flock than of summoning men to join it. And in these times, when such undue attention is paid to statistics and details of ceremonial, and the less weighty matters of the law generally—when the essential *inwardness* of the Christian life is not so intensely felt—there has been a tendency to water down the conception of a clergyman's duty to a mere professional recitation of offices and discharge of functions, supplemented by what may obviously very easily become a most perfunctory "hearing of confessions." Yet every man may be an Isaiah if he will, at least, to his own parish. As the Ordination Service abundantly shows—it is surely unnecessary to quote it—the building up of the flock is a most solemn and weighty function, and needs as much earnestness and watchfulness and faithfulness and plainness of living and speech in a luxurious age like the present as in any age that has preceded it—perhaps more, now that the perils to faith lie far more beneath the surface than in former times. Well does the Church bid the pastor think of the gravity of the work that lies before him, and of the terrible punishment which will ensue if he neglect it! Let him, therefore, meditate upon each detail in this most striking vision, which will bring before him, point by point, (a) the holiness and glory of Him whose commission he holds, (b) the deep sense it behoves him to entertain of his unworthiness for so great a work, (c) the readiness with which, nevertheless, he is bound to undertake it, (d) the patience with which he should bear with the weakness, waywardness, and wilfulness of those to whom his testimony must be delivered.

IV. The vision itself. Observe that Isaiah is describing *what he saw*, doubtless in an ecstasy such as that which rapt St. Paul to paradise, to hear unspeakable things which it is impossible for man to utter; or as when St. John was in the Spirit, and was permitted to behold, not one, but a whole series of such visions, that he might thereby imprint on the conscience of the Church the reality, the long duration,

and the deadliness of the struggle between good and evil. Modern criticism does not generally make for reverence; yet we may be thankful to note that even it is constrained, in some cases at least, to bow its head and hold its breath before such a sublime vision of things unseen as is here presented to it. Professor Driver ("O, si sic omnia!") has a magnificent description¹ of the scene which the enkindled soul of the prophet here brings before us with a few graphic touches. Would that he, whose own faith does not suffer from his treatment of Holy Writ, would remember that a branch severed from the vine cannot flourish, and that though flowers may bloom for a time apart from the plant from which they spring, they ultimately fade. Once reduce the inspiration of Scripture to a level with God's ordinary dealings with mankind, and though reverence for it and its contents may linger among us for a time, as a sweet odour lingers about a spot when its source is removed, yet it must eventually die away, and its place be taken by indifference or contempt.

It was a wondrous sight which presented itself either to the prophet's eyes or to his mind. Whether "in the body or out of the body" we "cannot tell: God knoweth." But either before his natural or his "mind's" eye there floated the most glorious vision which had ever yet been seen by man. He *felt* rather than *saw* that the eternally existent One was before him. He does not attempt to describe Him. We may believe that the prophet neither "heard" an audible "voice" nor "saw" a visible "Form"—nothing but a vague indication of shape. His "skirts" or "train," filled the Temple.² The "house," we are told, was "filled with smoke"—that is, the Shechinah, or visible symbol of God's glory, of which we read frequently in Holy Writ.³ This cloud of glory indicated to the inspired soul of the prophet the shadow only of an awful Form, which at once suggested Itself and eluded his grasp. The "throne" was doubtless nothing more than the centre toward which everything else that was visible converged. Above it stood the seraphim, the exalted beings who ever dwell about God's throne—beings burning with eternal love to Him and to all things He has made, filled with reverence for His Majesty, even as was the case with the four-and-twenty elders and the four living creatures seen by St. John in the great unveiling which was vouchsafed to him;

¹ In "Isaiah, his Life and Times."

² This must have been the Temple at Jerusalem, as it is called the "house" in ver. 4.

³ Exod. xix. 9, 18, xxiv. 15, xl. 35; Lev. xvi. 2; 1 Kings viii. 10; 2 Chron. v. 13, 14, and elsewhere.

their faces covered as though unable to bear the brightness of Him who "inhabits the unapproachable light"; their feet covered as indicating their lowly devotion to His will; their remaining wings for ever employed in speeding them to His service, wheresoever their unceasing activity might be required.¹ We will not attempt to pry into the mysteries of the existence of those who inhabit the presence-chamber of the Most High, to discuss the various orders and activities of the heavenly host, to distinguish between the office of seraphim and that of cherubim, to decide whether the living creatures and elders of the Apocalypse are identical with or dissimilar to the wondrous beings Isaiah was permitted to behold. Suffice it for us to have been enabled, through his instrumentality, to feast our souls on a scene of scarcely imaginable and almost indescribable majesty. Voices of praise are for ever heard around the throne of God. Thrice holy is His name, and in its threefold repetition every humble Christian will delight to believe the mystery of the Trinity in Unity to have been indicated thus early in the history of Divine Revelation. Holy is He in Himself, for ever dwelling in His consecrated aloofness of essence, apart from created beings. "The earth is full of His glory"²—that is, the impression or *χαρακτήρ* of His ineffable greatness and goodness—the shadow, as it were, of His Being, which is all we inferior beings can spiritually attain. This is spread abroad through all creation, reflected, so to speak, by the visible universe. So mighty was the voice of praise—and has not its sound gone out into all lands, and its words unto the end of the world?—that the thresholds of the heavenly places, symbolized by the earthly temple, were shaken to their foundations as by a great earthquake. Such was the clearest vision vouchsafed to any of the saints of the Old Covenant—Daniel himself not excepted—of the majesty and glory of Him Who made the heavens and the earth, and all things that are therein; Who was before them all, and holds them all in the hollow of His hand.

V. The vision of God thus granted to the prophet conveys two ideas to us: first, the awful aloofness of God, as far as essence is concerned, from all creatures whatsoever—this is

¹ Origen, both in his "De Principiis" and in his treatise against Celsus, strangely regards the wings of the seraphim as veiling the face and feet of God!

² This is by some translated, "His glory is the fulness of the whole earth." This may be the literal translation of the original into English. But I confess that for myself I can attach no meaning to the words in English, whatever may be their force in other languages.

contained in the thrice-repeated word "kadosh" (holy);¹ and, next, the influence which His incommunicable Majesty should have on the minds of inferior beings. The immediate result on the prophet's mind was the consciousness of infirmity and of sin. This is the inevitable consequence of all conceptions of God which are in any degree commensurate with the reality. We find it flashing on Simon Peter when the miracle of the draught of fishes impressed him with the truth that a Divine Being was before him. "Depart from me," he cried, "for I am a sinful man, O Lord." And this, as the experience of thousands has demonstrated, is invariably the first effect on man of *any* nearer revelation of the presence of God. The ancient Hebrews had an idea that none could look on the face of God and live (Gen. xvi. 30; Exod. xxiv. 2, xxxiii. 20; Deut. v. 24; Judg. vi. 22, etc.), and this was doubtless due to their antecedent conception of the holiness of God and of the unworthiness of man. In other words, this belief witnesses to the existence of an idea of God in the earliest times opposed *toto cœlo* to the subsequent degradation of that idea involved in polytheism and the so-called nature worship. From this point of view the sense of sin was not *produced* by the vision; it was due to antecedent conceptions of the Divine purity and holiness, which the vision intensified and impressed on the seer. But however this may be, the vision of God seen by the prophet brought home at once to him the holiness of God insisted upon by the law from the beginning (*cf.* Exod. xxviii. 36, xxxix. 30²), as well as the sinfulness of himself and the people to whom he belonged. Dr. G. A. Smith has a long and deeply interesting extract from the writings of Mazzini, the well-known Italian patriot, showing the searchings of heart with which he undertook the task of delivering Italy from her oppressors. No doubt the supporters of established institutions in this country, as well as the believers in revealed religion, have felt an unjust prejudice against this great man in consequence of his opposition

¹ The critics have, as usual, endeavoured to minimize the force of this meaning by pointing out that the word which signifies separation and consequent consecration is equally used of the impure gods of Canaan. But the most conspicuous fact in the creed of Israel was its fierce antagonism to the degradation of the conception of God which is found in Phœnician and also in Babylonian worship. It may be observed that *no such condemnation* of the religion of Egypt is even hinted at. All this strengthens the impression derived from the phenomena displayed in the Pentateuch, that Abraham and Moses alike endeavoured to clear the original conceptions of God from the degrading accretions which, in the course of ages, gathered round them.

² I need hardly say that I do not recognise the alleged post-exilic date of these regulations.

to both. They have not sufficiently understood that the established governments in Italy in his day were instruments of cruelty and oppression, nor are they aware of the extent to which Italian Christianity—in fact, the Roman form of Christianity everywhere—has degenerated into a number of childish and degraded superstitions, reaction from which has driven many good men, who have identified those superstitions with the religion they have obscured, into a renunciation of Christianity. But, in truth, the introduction of Mazzini and his mental struggles, as would have been the mention of Rienzi, another noble and patriotic Italian, whose aims and history are in some ways not unlike those of the great Triumvir, is *nihil ad rem*, and that for two reasons. First of all, Isaiah's alarm and self-depreciation *precedes* his mission. It is due, not to it, but to *his sense of the awful purity of God*. And next, his mission was not to deliver his countrymen from tyranny, but to *rouse them to a sense of their duty to God*. The two positions are by no means identical. Isaiah's commission, being one of a more inward and spiritual character, might well induce searchings of heart of a far deeper kind to those which would beset a deliverer of people keenly sensitive of their wrongs, and which, as we may remember, were strongly felt by Moses (Exod. iv. 10). It is one thing to identify one's self with an oppressed nationality for the benefit of those who compose it; it is a far different and more solemn thing for one who knows himself to be a sinner to undertake the task of rousing other people to a sense of their sin. The searchings of spirit which have attended the resolution to minister to the needs of other men's souls have frequently, as the experience of thousands of pious clergy has shown, "pierced even to the dividing of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow," and compelled them to search into and to "discern the thoughts and interests of their own hearts." And in so doing they are but following in the steps of Him who had to wrestle with temptation in a special form before entering on His ministry of redemption and regeneration. Though, unlike the rest of mankind, none could "convict Him of sin," yet both in the Temptation and in the Agony the shrinkings of mortal flesh from a more than mortal work must needs be felt.

VI. The live coal. There is a deep mystery in this act of purgation, which could not adequately be explained till Christ had come, and which is hardly adequately understood nearly twenty centuries after His coming. Of course, those who deny to an inspired prophet of the Most High the power to see beforehand the things which should happen a hundred years after his time will hardly allow that he could have foreseen the revelation of truth which was not made for

nearly eight hundred years. They naturally, therefore, fall very far short of the truth in their exposition of this passage. It is not contended that the prophet fully understood the meaning of what he saw. But no reasonable person, acquainted with the idea of revealed religion universally entertained in the Christian Church until lately, can doubt that there is contained here the germ of the great doctrines of Atonement and Justification, as taught by the Apostles of Christ. Many patristic, Anglican, and Lutheran divines have seen in the live coal a type of Holy Communion, as the application to individuals of the great Evangelical facts of Atonement and Justification which Christ made known to His disciples. Taken from an altar burning with the fire of love and laid on the lips of the penitent, it is a token of the perfected humanity of Christ, with which the soul, conscious of its sin, comes into contact by the means of faith. The sense of pardon coalesces with the power of renewal and quickening unto better things which the indwelling of the man Christ Jesus communicates to the heart. The lips are here taken to represent the whole man. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." And so it comes to pass that "by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

VII. The mission. On this little need be said. The whole contents of Isaiah's prophecy, the whole history of the Christian Church, are a commentary on it. The prophet is sent to a people steeped in indifference, forgetfulness, or open disobedience, and he is to strive to awaken them to a knowledge of their state. It is only when he realizes the gracious pardon he has received from above that he dares undertake a task so overwhelming. But that act of grace once realized, he is willing, and even eager, to accept the Divine call. May his eagerness be emulated by those who are called to a similar service now!

VIII. The effect of the mission. At first sight it appears a remarkable one. It appears to be one of hardening rather than of awakening. But that is always the case in mission work. The heart of man does not, as a rule, respond at once to the appeal to embrace the truth. When Jesus came, they crucified Him. When His Apostles carried His words to the ends of the earth, bonds, imprisonment, stripes, even death, awaited them. Wherever the truth of God is first proclaimed, wherever forgotten truths are revived, wherever the progress of human thought reveals new aspects of Christian truth, the first effect is always to intensify men's prejudices, and to stimulate their passions and their hatreds. And so vers. 9, 10 are more than once quoted in the New Testament, and their

fulfilment remarked upon. If to this day the task of the genuine preacher of Christ remains a difficult one, let him remember that all faithful preaching of Him must go through four stages: (1) incredulity, (2) opposition, (3) struggle, (4) conviction and victory. The first and second stages, moreover (see vers. 11, 12) last a long time, and for the moment defeat seems not only possible, but certain. But however fierce the conflict may be, however near defeat may appear, the conscientious worker need not despair. Victory is certain in the end. And so, as ever in the writings of Isaiah and other prophets (see what has been said above on chaps. ii., iii., and iv.), the picture of ruin and desolation, apprehension and despair, is ever balanced by one of reviving joy and hope. There is ever a "tenth" remaining (ver. 11). The "stock" is never destroyed, but is left to spring up again. There are always "seven thousand in Israel," whether we know it or not, who have not "bowed the knee to Baal." So it always is in the history of Christ's Church. Elijah in Horeb; John Baptist in the castle of Machærus, Athanasius *contra mundum*, when the world seemed to have abandoned the Catholic faith and to have become Arian; Luther at the Wartburg, wrestling with the fiercest and most subtle temptations; Tyndale in the castle of Vilvoorde, expecting death from day to day; Henry Martyn, persevering in his work in India, though he made not a single convert, are witnesses from among thousands of the universality of the principle. And the history of every great movement for the improvement and progress of humanity is a confirmation of its truth.

NOTE.—This chapter, unique at once in the writings of the prophet and in the Old Testament at large, does not contribute much to critical analysis. One would not expect many of Isaiah's usual phrases here. Yet, in relation to the theory of composite authorship, beside the use of the term "Lord of Hosts," which is so largely characteristic of this book, there is also the fact that the word translated "shut," applied to the eyes in ver. 10, scarcely occurs outside the book usually ascribed to Isaiah. It is found here, in chaps. xi. 8, xxix. 9, and in lxvi. 12. Elsewhere it is only found in Ps. xciv. and cxix., and there not in its literal sense of *closing up*, but in its figurative sense of *blinding to all defects*, and therefore being *pleased*.

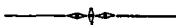
In connection with what I said in the last paper about the degrading effects of tame submission to cruel and brutalizing oppression, such as used to take place in Siberia, and to a certain extent takes place there still, I might have quoted Milton's words in support of my view:

"But what more oft in nations grown corrupt,
And by their vices brought to servitude,
Than to love bondage more than liberty—
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty."

And he further notes how such are wont

"At last
To heap ingratitude on worthiest deeds."
"Samson Agonistes," lines 268-276.

J. J. LIAS.



ART. III.—THE BOOK OF GENESIS (*continued*).

WHEN we leave the first three chapters of Genesis behind in our investigations into the credibility of the narrative, which we hope have not been wholly profitless, we expect to come into less troubled waters. But the modern critic never seems to be so happy as when he is upsetting cherished notions. At the same time, he occasionally omits to clear up difficulties. One could not tell, for instance, from the book with which we are more immediately concerned, that there was any difficulty as to the interpretation of the last words of chap. iv., "with *the help of the Lord*"; but such there is.

It would be impossible to deal exhaustively with all the points that are suggested by a perusal of each chapter of Genesis in succession. The following, however, may be mentioned:

1. It is implied by the commentators that Abel and Cain were uncivilized persons. This is, of course, a pure assumption. It is also asserted that no such motive as thankfulness for the fruitfulness of the ground and of the herds and flocks is alluded to in the account of their offerings. This bare assertion is simply based upon one theory of sacrifice that is now current, and is, to say the least, far from being established. Noah, at any rate, would appear to have offered up burnt-offerings in thanksgiving for his deliverance from the Flood.

2. Many more statements are made as to the history of Cain and Abel, which to most minds will be held to be incapable of proof. Such are the following: That (*a*) according to the existing Book of Genesis it is plain that there could have been no one (in existence in the world at the time) to slay Cain; and (*b*) that the presence of Jehovah is regarded as confined to the garden of Eden and its immediate neighbourhood.