

## ART. V.—STUDIES ON ISAAIAH.

## CHAPTERS VII.—XII.

AS has already been stated, the contents of these chapters seem to have been handed down without arrangement. No arrangement I have seen seems satisfactory. I do not, of course, regard the following attempt at Higher Criticism as "the final result of modern scientific methods," to use a phrase to which one has become accustomed of late. But I venture to suggest it as a temporary expedient till something more satisfactory has been arrived at. The Parable of the Vineyard is, I believe, the introduction to the whole series of prophecies—chap. vi., of course, excluded—which end with chap. xii. The events which call forth the prophet's condemnation are the result of the degeneracy, disobedience, and apostasy of God's people. The woes denounced fitly herald the prediction of Divine retribution and ultimate deliverance. The "woe" in chap. x. 1-4 I would, as I have already intimated, place at the conclusion of those in chap. v. 8-23. It is true that a critic of the modern school<sup>1</sup> dismisses the idea with the remark that "it seems unnecessary." But I can hardly regard this as a conclusive argument. Then follows, probably, chap. vii. 1-17, which contains the prophecy of Immanuel, uttered in consequence of the alarm occasioned in Judæa by the confederacy of Rezin and Pekah, accompanied by the disquieting discovery of a conspiracy to dethrone King Ahaz. In connection with this we may take chaps. viii. 1-8 and ix. 8-21, in which the idea of the invasion by Syria and Israel is still prominent. A second incident in connection with this invasion, namely, the birth of Maher-shalal-hash-baz, is introduced. As the name was not given to the child until after his birth, there is no reason to conclude that this portion of the prophecy must have been uttered at a different time to those which precede and follow it; that is to say, the time when the invasion was imminent. Chap. ix. 8-21 again refers to the same event. The passage, chap. viii. 9 to ix. 8, seems a consecutive whole, and has reference (1) to the rebellion of the peoples against the Eternally Existent, and (2) to the coming of the Promised One, who shall vindicate His authority on the earth. Then follow the predictions about invasion by the Assyrian host, chaps. v. 26-30 (which has already been treated), vii. 18-25, x. 5-34. As chap. viii. 7 points out, this is closely connected in the mind of the prophet with the alliance between Syria

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<sup>1</sup> In "The Cambridge Bible for Schools."

and Israel. Indeed, as the history shows (2 Kings xvi. 7), this alliance was the cause of the Assyrian invasion. Ever after the application for help by Ahaz, the Assyrian monarch looked on Judah as a tributary. Not only so, but till Hezekiah's successful attempt to shake himself free from his dependence, he actually *was* a tributary king. And as soon as his hands were free, the Assyrian invaded Judæa, in order to punish Hezekiah for his neglect of duty (2 Kings xviii. 13-16).

The whole series of prophecies, we may not unreasonably suppose, concludes with the prophecy of the "Shoot" in chap. xi., which may be taken in close connection with the prophecy of Immanuel in chap. vii., and of the "Mighty God" who is to sit on the throne of David in chap. ix. The whole is appropriately wound up with what we may call the "choric ode" contained in chap. xii. Whether this be in reality the order in which the prophecies were originally delivered or not, it is unquestionably the order of the thoughts contained in them—the only order, so far as I can see, in which an expositor could present a connected idea of their contents to those to whom he was expounding them.

We will follow this order, then, for convenience sake, in our exposition. But if we are fully to understand the purport of the prophecy, we must commence by reviewing the circumstances under which it was uttered, remembering that chap. v., with which we have already dealt, forms a part of the same series. If we would clearly grasp the situation to which the prophecies relate, we must bear in mind that the whole history of the kingdom of Israel presents us with continued conflicts with Syria. "Three years without war" in Ahab's time is mentioned in 1 Kings xxii. 1 as a remarkable circumstance. The King of Syria had besieged Samaria, though unsuccessfully (1 Kings xx.). His forces (1 Kings xx. 27) enormously exceeded those of Israel. Ahab himself fell in battle against Syria, though in the field of Ramoth Gilead he had the help of Jehoshaphat. In the days of Jehoram Samaria was again besieged and reduced to great straits (2 Kings vi. 24). The land of Reuben and Gad, and of the half tribe of Manasseh beyond Jordan, was taken by Hazael from Jehu (2 Kings x. 33). In the reign of Jehoahaz, Jehu's successor, the Syrian monarch brought the fortunes of Israel to a very low ebb indeed. The army of the latter kingdom was almost destroyed, and "made like the dust in threshing" (2 Kings xiii. 7),<sup>1</sup> though some mysterious mention is made of a "saviour" who delivered Israel from utter destruction.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Or, rather, trampled it into the dust.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Jeroboam, in his father's lifetime.

In the days of Jehoash, and still more in the days of his able son, Jeroboam II., the fortunes of Israel revived a little. The latter even "recovered Damascus, as well as Hamath" (2 Kings xiv. 28), which, as the sacred historian remarks, had never been under Israelite yoke since the days of Solomon.<sup>1</sup> The revival of Assyrian power under Pul, of which mention was made in the introductory notices, had already been felt in Israel, and probably in Syria also. The policy, therefore, of Rezin and of Pekah was to put an end to the continued conflicts between the two nations, and to unite against the alarming encroachments of the Assyrian. They attempted, after repeated crushing victories over Judah, which are recorded in 2 Chron. xxviii, 5, 6, to foment a conspiracy in Judah by setting up a tool of their own, a "son of Tabeal" (Is. vii. 6), in the place of the incompetent and unpopular Ahaz, and thus to put an end to the Davidic dynasty. They doubtless hoped to find this substitute for a king of the House of David a more pliant vassal than a monarch who, whatever his failings, was of no mushroom growth. Well might Ahaz "despair of the republic," for not only was he exposed to the overwhelming forces of Syria and Israel combined on his northern and eastern frontier; not only had they twice defeated him with tremendous slaughter; not only had they threatened Jerusalem itself; but the Edomites had invaded his dominions on the south-east; while the Philistine power had revived, and was occupying the cities in the south-west of Judah (2 Chron. xxviii. 16-18). It was under such disastrous circumstances that Ahaz preferred, as other men have done since, a more distant to a nearer and more pressing danger, and "sent unto the kings of Assyria to help him."<sup>2</sup> The historical books give us little but dry facts. Yet what they tell us agrees with what we find in the prophets, who draw aside the veil and depict for us the state of society under a king who "did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord" (2 Kings xvi. 2-4; cf. 2 Chron. xxviii. 2-5, 22-27). It was under such circumstances as these that the prophecies with which we have now to deal were delivered. We must

<sup>1</sup> It had, he notes, "belonged to *Judah*." He regards the kingdom of Judah as the kingdom of David and Solomon.

<sup>2</sup> It is noteworthy that in a book intended for the young, "In Schools and Colleges," the history in Chronicles is entirely ignored, though it throws great light on the situation. And this because a well-known critic has pronounced it to be untrustworthy on account of its tendency to magnify Judah. Is this one of the "methods of scientific criticism"? Is Thucydides henceforth to be ignored for his Attic, or Xenophon for his Lacedaemonian, sympathies? Are we to cast Livy aside because he was a courtier of Augustus, or Tacitus because in the days of the successors of Augustus he found signs of the decay of Roman greatness?

read the prophecies in the light of the history, and the history in the light of the prophecies. The picture of Judah's degradation in chap. i., as well as the "woes" in chaps. v. and x., will enable us to understand the social disorders which inevitably bring about political disaster. We should also consult the pages of Hosea and Amos, the latter of whom prophesied as early as the days of Uzziah. The former, it is true, prophesied only to Israel, and seems to have regarded Judah—probably only by comparison, however—as free from blame (chap. xi. 12). Amos, however, denounces the iniquity of Judah. From all which we may draw this conclusion, that there was no longer in Judah the reserve of moral strength which once was hers, and that, therefore, she could no longer offer effectual resistance to the overwhelming numbers of those who would be her oppressors.

1. *The Woe pronounced against those who Promulgate Unrighteous Sentences* (chap. x. 1-4).—As has been said, this woe follows on those pronounced in chap. v. The last of those woes denounces men of the Judge Jeffreys type, who are intoxicated on the judgment-seat, and openly take bribes. Those whom we have at present to consider are men of a slightly different type—less openly scandalous, but at heart quite as unrighteous. They seem to be persons who combine legislative with judicial functions, for the word translated "decrees" is often rendered "statutes." In this passage, moreover, the word translated "judgment" signifies the decrees of the tribunals, and that translated "right" is the word (*mishpat*) usually, and unfortunately, as I have before remarked, translated "judgment."<sup>1</sup> So that the sense here is correctly given. Perhaps the clerks or registrars are here meant—the minions of the judges, who obtain judicial signature to processes which may enable them to seize the property of the widow and the fatherless. Again, we may remark that a prominence is given to this crime which would be hardly intelligible if, as modern criticism pretends, a large portion of the ordinances which denounced it were as yet unwritten. The high morality of the law gives point to the question, "Where will ye flee for help, and what will become of all your pomp and splendour," filched as it has been from those of whom ye are the official protectors? and the answer, "What remains for them but to creep for refuge behind the captives, and to hide themselves under the bodies of the slain" (vers. 3, 4). Another reason this for the refusal of the Eternal One to be reconciled to His people.

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<sup>1</sup> In Revised Version as well as Authorized Version.

2. *The Futility of Human Calculations* (chap. vii. 1-17).—The situation has already been described. A vivid description is given in ver. 2 of the effect of this new and most pressing danger. It was apparently totally unexpected, and combined with rebellion at home (vers. 5, 6). The policy of Ahaz was, as we have seen, to turn for help to Assyria. As Isaiah deprecated the resort to Egypt in the days of Hezekiah, and maintained that Judah must trust only to valour and devotion of her own sons, and that her only safety lay in the observance of the Divine Law, ceremonial and moral, and in worshipping the One True God, so now. First he goes to meet Ahaz at the conduit which led to the Upper Pool (still existing and bearing Hezekiah's name). He is to be accompanied by his son, whose name (Shear-jashub—a remnant shall return) bears witness to a marked feature of Isaiah's ministry.<sup>1</sup> He is to go to the field where cloth is thickened and cleansed by the "fullers." Ahaz is probably attending to the water-supply in case of a siege (as we know, the siege actually took place). The prophet is ordered to encourage him. Serious as affairs look, there is, the prophet declares, more smoke than fire in these formidable antagonists. They are mere ends (Heb., *tails*) of smoking firebrands, and will soon be burnt out. Within sixty-five years<sup>2</sup> will Ephraim, which, as the strongest member of the Israelite confederation, frequently stands for the whole of it, cease any longer to have a national existence. Damascus! Samaria! what are they? Rezin, and the son of an obscure Israelite!<sup>3</sup> What are they to be afraid of? Believe in the power of the Eternal One, and they can do nothing against you. Failing that, you will be unable to make head against them.<sup>4</sup>

Soon afterwards Ahaz is bidden to ask for a proof of the truth of God's words. It is a bold challenge, but, as of old, in the days of Moses and Samuel, God's prophet knows who is behind him. The sign may be one which comes from the

<sup>1</sup> One of the modern critical school confesses this. But he does not note the facts (1) that such a name is a prophecy—a supernatural prophecy—of the Babylonish captivity, and (2) that the deliverance to which the name of Shear-jashub refers is as much a feature of the prophecies attributed by modern critics to another author as of those they admit to be genuine prophecies of Isaiah.

<sup>2</sup> The actual time was far less than that—possibly not more than twelve years. There may have been, here as in many other places, a mistake in the figures. But they are found in the LXX. Version, which was made before the Christian era.

<sup>3</sup> Remaliah.

<sup>4</sup> See 2 Chron. xxviii., where we learn that even in Samaria public opinion was not altogether united in favour of Pekah's policy.

depths of Sheol, or one above in the skies.<sup>1</sup> Ahaz has a good face to put on his obstinate refusal. He has himself no faith in Divine protection in the hour of danger, but he pretends that it would be irreverence on his part to put God to the test. The prophet, therefore, gives him a sign. A child should be born shortly, and before it can judge or act for itself both the kings whose alliance constitutes such a danger to Judah shall have been dethroned.

This prophecy must be read in connection with chap. viii. 1-8. The child is undoubtedly the child of the prophet himself, by the wife who is called "the prophetess" in chap. viii. 3. For the prophecy, it will be observed, is repeated in chap. viii. 3, 4. And it has been universally admitted that most Messianic prophecies have an immediate, as well as a final, fulfilment. That the word translated "virgin" does not necessarily mean one who was "unknown to" man must, in all honesty, be admitted. *Bethulah*, not *'almah*, is the usual word for a *virgo intacta* (2 Sam. xiii. 2). On the other hand, it is admitted, even by critics of the most modern school, that the expectation that the Messiah should be miraculously born of a virgin was widespread, even before the birth of Christ. And the LXX. translates, not by *νεάνις*, but by *παρθένος*. But the sign to the Jews of Isaiah's day consisted in the fact, not of a miraculous birth, but that before the child which was to be born could speak, the confederacy at which the Jews were so affrighted should have vanished away like smoke. The fulfilment of that prophecy would be a guarantee to them that God was still with them.<sup>2</sup> There are other reasons beside the fact of this prophecy why He of whom Maher-shalal-hash-baz was a type should be virgin-born. And until the Gospels shall be proved to be as worthless historically as some would make us believe the books of the Old Testament to be, the belief in the virgin-birth will remain an *articulus stantis aut cadentis ecclesie*.<sup>3</sup>

*Critical Note.*—(1) The word translated "change" by A. V. in ver. 10 is the same as that used in chaps. xl. 31, xli. 1, and

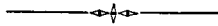
<sup>1</sup> Probably through the agency of the prophet, as the Hebrew of ver. 10, "added to speak," implies.

<sup>2</sup> I am inclined to prefer the LXX. to the Masoretic interpretation of ver. 14: "Thou shalt call his name Immanuel"—*i.e.*, he shall be a sign of God's Presence with His people. The child's actual name was Maher-shalal-hash-baz.

<sup>3</sup> I confess I prefer the rendering, "Curds and honey shall he eat, in order to know how to refuse the evil and to choose the good." The meaning seems to be, You may try to hasten his development as much as you please, but before he can tell good from evil the danger that threatens you will have passed away for ever. This rendering is supported by 1 Sam. xiv. 27-29.

translated "renew." It is an unusual sense of the word, that of *revival* or *renewal*—an indication of common authorship of the "first" and "second" Isaiah. (2) The word translated "rush" is only found in this passage in xxxix. 15, and in lviii. 5—another indication of unity of authorship. (3) A *third* indication is the expression "in one day" (ver. 14). A similar passage is found in chap. xlvii. 9. (4) The expression "to eat of human flesh" occurs again in chap. xlix. 26. A fuller parallel is found in Eccles. iv. 5. Still, the idea is not common, and the argument for common authorship drawn from the two passages in Isaiah is at least as strong as some adduced on the other side.

(To be continued.)



#### ART. VI.—PHYSICAL DETERIORATION.<sup>1</sup>

THIS is the first volume of the Report of the Committee appointed to consider "the alleged deterioration of certain classes of the population"; "to determine the steps which should be taken to furnish . . . the nation at large with periodical data for an accurate comparative estimate of the health and physique of the people"; "to indicate generally the causes of such physical deterioration as does exist in certain classes"; and "to point out the means by which it can be most effectually diminished."

Though only the first volume of the results of the Committee's investigations, it is complete in itself, for it contains the Report *in extenso*, the summary of the Committee's recommendations, and certain valuable appendices on particular points connected with the inquiry. Two more volumes are to be issued: Volume II. is to contain a list of the witnesses examined, with the minutes of their evidence, while Volume III. is to contain some twenty-five more appendices.

The volume before us, which costs only 1s. 2d., is a very valuable document, and I have no hesitation in saying that it should be in the hands of all who work among the poor. The number of subjects, or "problems," with which it deals is very large, and they are just those problems with which the parochial clergy and district visitors are constantly face to face.

The Report is practically a summary of the evidence given

<sup>1</sup> "Report of the Committee on Physical Deterioration." Eyre and Spottiswoode, London, 1904. Price 1s. 2d.