

ISAIAH, AN IDEAL BIOGRAPHY.

II. UNDER JOTHAM, B.C. 758-741.

It might at first have seemed natural that the solemn call of Isaiah's vision should have been followed at once by his entering on the prophetic activity to which it summoned him. As a fact, however, it was not so followed. There are no traces of his having stepped forward as a preacher to the people during the reign of Jotham. It may be that at that early age he felt that he had little chance of obtaining a hearing, and that men would have "despised the youth" of the boy-prophet. It may be that, like St. Paul when he went into Arabia after his conversion, he felt the need of a time of discipline and preparation before he entered on his task. The question must have occurred to him, how had it come to pass that his countrymen were in such evil case. By what steps had they been led on in their downward path to that spiritual deadness, the description of which had been burnt in upon his soul? To answer that question it was necessary to study the history of the past. The long reign of Uzziah, stretching over nearly two generations of men, presented a definite period during which that deterioration of national character had been in progress. He felt, as others called to a like work have felt, that the foundations of prophecy must be laid in history. He set to work accordingly to write the history of that reign. In 2 Chronicles xxvi. we have manifestly an epitome of that book, dealing with outward facts rather than with underlying principles. One glimpse of those principles, as they presented themselves to Isaiah, we have perhaps in the state-

ment that the earlier part of Uzziah's reign was better and nobler than the latter. Then he had sought the Lord, and had followed the guidance of one (the prophet Zechariah) who "had understanding in the visions of God." He had that noblest element of a true ruler, the insight which discerns good from evil, and right from wrong, and so "God made him to prosper" (2 Chron. xxvi. 5). Then the prosperity which followed on his wise and righteous rule became a snare to him. He delighted in all the outward signs of material wealth and military strength. He loved husbandry, and the cattle and the vineyards of the royal domains were famous far and wide. Jerusalem became, or seemed to become, impregnable. Towers and walls were planted at suitable stations for strategic use. A military conscription was brought into play, till the armies of Judah, with their 2,600 officers and 307,500 soldiers, seemed to compete in number with those of the mightier monarchies of the East. New engines of war, catapults and the like, were introduced as artillery of defence. The walls of the old Philistine cities, Gath and Jabneh, were broken down, and new cities were built and garrisoned by the king's troops. The Arabians and the Mehunims were subject to him. "The name of Uzziah spread far abroad, even to the entering in of Egypt; for he was marvellously helped till he was strong" (2 Chron. xxvi. 9-15). The effect of this on the king's personal character was seen in the daring act of impiety of which I have already spoken, and on which the Chronicler concentrates his attention. To Isaiah the effect on the character of the people seemed hardly less disastrous. It fostered in them that temper of self-asserting arrogance which we have learnt to know, in the recent political history of France and England, as Chauvinism, or Jingoism. Men boasted that they had the horses and the chariots, and the money too (ii. 7), as if these, rather than "plain living and high thinking," or, in Isaiah's truer

language, "righteousness and the fear of Jehovah," were the secret of a nation's strength. With this, as the natural accompaniments, there came greed of gain, official corruption in high and low, a dominant sensuality, women no longer mothers in Israel, rearing up their sons in the fear of the Lord, but adopting the toilet and the morals of the harlots in the cities of the heathen, wasting on their jewels and their perfumes what might have served for the maintenance of the widow and the orphan (iii. 16-26). As a writer of history, Isaiah chronicled the facts, even the statistics, of Uzziah's reign. When that work was done, probably towards the end of Jotham's reign, he drew aside the curtain and laid bare to the gaze of men the festering sores that lay beneath that outward splendour. The first five chapters of his writings as they now meet us form a continuous commentary, perhaps rather a sermon, of which his history supplied the text. The king had "loved husbandry and planted vineyards," and men were told that "the vineyard of the Lord of hosts should be laid waste, and that briers and thorns should cover it" (v. 1-7). He had gloried in the fortresses with which he had strengthened Zion, and the prophet declared that the day of the Lord of hosts was coming "upon every high tower and upon every fenced wall" (ii. 15). Men had exulted in their commerce, and the new arts which they owed to commerce, and therefore that day was to be upon "all ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures" (ii. 16). For the daughters of Zion, mincing as they went, there should be "foulness instead of fragrance, and baldness instead of plaited and crisped locks, and the burning of the brands which marked them as the slaves of their conquerors instead of beauty" (iii. 16-26).

In these first five chapters of the present collection of his writings we have, it would seem, the first appearance of Isaiah as a public teacher. They were probably read

openly in the gate of the city, or in some conference of friends, and placed in the hands of copyists for such a measure of publication as their art could give them. They were, in part, a call to repentance, a denunciation of existing evils, an announcement of the certainty of judgment, and so they were the first conspicuous step in his labours as a prophet. But they were something more than this. As Burke's "Thoughts on the present Discontents" defined his position and determined his career in the politics of the Georgian Era, so did this discourse determine the position and career of Isaiah among the prophets, *i.e.* among the orators and statesmen, of his time. They announced the line he meant to take in foreign and domestic policy. To work for a thorough-going reform in the judicial administration of the country (i. 17); for an economical reform in all households, from the king's palace downwards; to call men and women to something nobler than their dinners and their toilets (v. 8-12); to protest against the influence of women and children, concubines and minions (what we should call the *harem*-influence), in the king's counsels (iii. 12),—that was what he set before himself as the task and business of his political, and therefore of his prophetic, life. But beyond this he had to put his finger on a yet deeper plague-spot. What shocked and pained him most was the hollowness of the people's worship, the practical atheism which veiled itself in the guise of an orthodox decorum. There was no traceable connexion between their religion and right doing. Sacrifices were offered, and solemn feasts observed, by crowds who did not repent of a single sin, or abandon a single vice. He could in part lay bare the evil by direct denunciations like those of Chapter i. 10-15. He found what seemed to him a more effective remedy, in emphasizing throughout his preaching, two Divine Names, each of which had a special significance in its relation to the other. The God whom the people worshipped was at once "Jehovah

Sabaoth," the Lord of hosts, of the armies of earth and heaven, and the "Holy One of Israel." The Almighty (this is St. John's equivalent for the Lord of hosts, Rev. iv. 8), was also the All-holy. No worship that was divorced from holiness was acceptable to Him. The use of the latter name was indeed the characteristic note of Israel's teaching. It irritated and galled the formalist and the hypocrite, and they sneered at him, though for widely different reasons, as Danton sneered at Robespierre's *Être Suprême*.¹ They would not rest until they forced him to leave off harping on that note, and had "made the Holy One of Israel to cease from before them" (xxx. 10). In their arrogant defiance they taunted the prophet, after the manner of the scoffers of a later time (2 Pet. iii. 4), with the delayed fulfilment of his predictions, and bade the "counsel" of that Holy One "draw nigh, that they might see it" (v. 19).

Over and above this entrance on his public work, the sixteen years of Jotham's reign were memorable for Isaiah's marriage. That marriage was almost as intimately connected with his work as a prophet as had been that of a contemporary prophet of the Northern kingdom, whose history could not have been unknown to him. He was not indeed prompted, as Hosea had been, to take a "wife of whoredoms," and to bring up children upon whom rested the brand of their mother's shame, that so he might learn, by the intensity of a husband's compassion for the unfaithful wife, something of the pity and long-suffering of Jehovah for the people (Hos. i. 3). To him it was given to find a wife like-minded with himself, a prophetess even as he was a prophet (viii. 3), one of those nobler types of Hebrew womanhood of which we find examples in Miriam and Deborah and Huldah. It is not, perhaps, altogether fantastic to trace in some passages of his first published prophecies the influence,

¹ "Tais-toi donc, avec votre Être Suprême tu commences m'ennuyer."

direct or indirect, of such a wife—her knowledge of the minutiae of the toilet-luxuries and jewelry of the daughters of Zion (iii. 16-24), her indignant scorn of their frivolity and vanity, her pitying glance at the time when instead of being wooed and courted, they should themselves be suitors, seven women hanging on the skirts of one man's garment, and entreating him, though he could give them nothing else, to give them a home and to take away their reproach (iv. 1). We may, perhaps, read in the latest of Isaiah's writings the old man's recollections of that bright and happy time: "As a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee; and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over his bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee" (lxii. 5).

Different as the conditions of the two cases were, however, the history of Hosea and Gomer had taught Isaiah how the incidents of home life might be turned to account in his prophetic work, how the children whom God gave him might be "signs and wonders" to the people whom he found slow to listen to other forms of teaching (viii. 18). Those names, Jezreel, Lo-Ammi (=not my people), Loruhamah (=there is no mercy), with the subsequent withdrawal of the negatives, had summed up the message of Hosea (Hos. i. ii.). When a son was born to the two prophet-parents, Isaiah was led to give a name to his first-born which was an epitome both of the terrors and the hopes which entered into his first message and flowed out of his first great vision. *Shear-Jashub*—"a remnant shall return"—that name spoke of defeat and desolation and exile, of the survival of those who were counted worthy to survive, of their return from the land of their captivity to carry on the history of their nation. It summed up the history of the two centuries that followed.

As the reign of Jotham drew to a close, we may reasonably think of Isaiah as already known and recognized as a prophet. He had "disciples" who gathered round him

(viii. 16), and looked to him for guidance and for counsel. In the scanty records of that reign in 2 Chronicles xxvii. we may trace his influence even on the king's conduct. "He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord," following in the footsteps of his father in all but that last insane impiety of the assumption of the priesthood. He "became mighty because he prepared his heart in the ways of God" (2 Chron. xxvii. 2-6). Isaiah, however, saw too clearly to cheat himself with the hope that this was the beginning of a national reformation. It was probably, as we have seen, during this period that he drew up the "great indictment" with which his prophetic volume now opens. "The people did yet corruptly," and the king was gathered to his fathers at the early age of forty-one.

Reserving the evidence which seems to me to make the hypothesis a probable one, I will content myself for the present with saying that I find reason for believing that Isaiah's work as a historian and a teacher brought him, as might naturally be expected, into prominence; that those who were about the king, and the king himself, honoured and consulted him. I find reasons even for thinking that he filled, in relation to the training of the youthful Ahaz, a position analogous to that which Nathan had filled in relation to that of Solomon (2 Sam. xii. 25; 1 Kings i. 22-38), and that the king followed his counsels in choosing a wife for his successor.

III. UNDER AHAZ, B.C. 741-726.

The reign of the young king who now came to the throne at the age of twenty or twenty-five,¹ fulfilled all the worst anticipations of Isaiah's forecast. He threw himself with an eagerness which had not been known in Judah

¹ "Twenty" in the Hebrew. The LXX. moved, probably, by the fact that Hezekiah was nine years old at the time of his father's accession, give twenty-five.

since the days of Solomon, into the idol-worship of the nations round. The ritual of Baalim and Moloch and Ashtaroth, and the Asherah, or "grove" (probably a phallic *cultus* like that of the *Lingam* of India), reappeared in all their cruelty and foulness. The king's own child, it lies in the nature of the case that it was probably the first son born after his accession, was made to pass through the fire in the horrid worship of the Ammonite deity (2 Kings xvi. 3; 2 Chron. xxviii. 3). All old forms of idolatry were resuscitated, and every high place and hill, and every green tree, became the scene of a worship which made the people more and more forgetful of the Holy One of Israel. As if this were not enough, the king, irritated, we may believe, by the protests of the servants of Jehovah, set himself in direct antagonism to the priests, the prophets, and the Temple of the national faith. The doors of the house of Jehovah were shut up, its sacred vessels profaned and destroyed. Its treasures were used, a little later on, as a bribe to purchase the assistance of the Assyrian king (2 Chron. xxviii. 21).

Judgment came as the natural consequence of these acts of apostasy. The neighbouring nations, Syria and Israel, who, in their desire to form a great confederacy against Assyria, had threatened Jotham with hostilities, because, guided probably by Isaiah's counsels, he refused to join them, watched the opportunity presented by a king who was thus alienating the bravest and truest of his people, and entered into an alliance against him. The armies of Pekah the son of Remaliah, and Rezin, king of Syria, were united in a great host, and encamped against Jerusalem (2 Kings xvi. 5; 2 Chron. xxviii. 5, 6; Isa. vii. 1). They brought with them one of the ambitious princes of the time, the son of Tabeal (the name is found in an Assyrian tablet as among the allies of Rezin and Samaria), whom they intended to place upon the throne of Judah after deposing

the representative of the house of David (vii. 6). The prospect before Ahaz was dark and gloomy enough, all the more so as there was treachery within the walls of Jerusalem as well as an invading army without. There were those, probably even in the king's council-chamber, and certainly among the people, who hated and despised him, and "rejoiced in Rezin and Remaliah's son" (viii. 6). Ahaz saw no hope of safety except in turning to the help of the great king, the king of Assyria, Tiglath Pileser. His grandfather Uzziah had acknowledged the suzerainty of that empire. Why should he not call on its ruler to protect him against the confederate kings, who, like himself, were vassals of the Assyrian? An embassy was in contemplation, perhaps had been already sent, carrying the treasure which was to be the purchase-money of this protection. What part was Isaiah to take in the midst of all these complications? He could not bring himself, with the discontented populace, to wish for the success of the invaders, or, with the king and his counsellors, to invite the assistance of the power he had long dreaded, ruthless and overwhelming in its strength. Like all statesmen of the loftiest type, he stood apart and aloof from others. He was as solitary in the politics of Jerusalem as Dante was in the politics of Florence. The evil on both sides was, that men were trusting in an arm of flesh, in miserable intrigues and alliances, and not in the eternal laws of justice and of truth—not in Jehovah Sabaoth as a Power that made for righteousness. He, at all events, could not remain silent. Accompanied by his son, probably still in his early boyhood, whose oracular name had made him famous even in his infancy, the prophet made his way to the district of the city where the king was giving directions for the work of strengthening the fortifications and securing the aqueducts that supplied the city with water (chap. vii.), as Hezekiah did afterwards (2 Chron. xxxii. 3, 4; Isa. xxii. 11). He came

at first as clothed with the authority of one who had been the adviser of the king's father, and possibly in early days the instructor of the king himself, with words of encouragement and comfort: "Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted." The sentence of failure was written on the schemes of the confederates: "Thus saith the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass." The smoking firebrands should burn themselves out, but the conflagration should not spread to the House of David. And not only should the immediate danger pass away, but the king was told that the Northern kingdom, of which he stood in dread, was already entering on its last stage of decadence. It would grow weaker and ever weaker, till in threescore years and five it should be no more a people.¹ He delivered his message, and, instead of being met with thanks, was received with looks of a sullen incredulity. Even that did not baffle him. In the power of his inspiration, he offered a sign "in the heavens above, or in the earth beneath," such as Samuel had offered to the people (1 Sam. xii. 17), or the man of God from Judah to Jeroboam (1 Kings xiii. 3), thunder from the clear sky, or sudden darkness, or the healing of the sick, or the cleansing of the leper. The king met that offer with a reply which was half hypocrisy and half sarcasm. Was not the temper that asks for a sign precisely that which the higher teaching of the Law and of the prophets had condemned? He, for his part, would leave such "tempting of the Lord" to the prophet who was tempting him. Isaiah's answer shews that the sneer had stung him into a righteous indignation. The House of David, as represented by Ahaz, were wearying not men only, but God, with their perverseness—all the more

¹ Historically the prediction received its fulfilment when Esarhaddon (circ. B.C. 678) brought his Babylonian and Chaldean colonists and settled them in Samaria.

detestable because it simulated piety. But he would give the king a sign, though he declined to choose one. It should have all the notes of a true sign, should be beyond human foresight or control, should not be thrown into the far future, should be capable of verification at no distant period. "*The bride*" (Isaiah's prophetic-wife, still in the bloom of youth—possibly, as some have conjectured, a second wife, and, at the time, literally a "bride"—may well have been known even then by that endearing title) "conceives, and bears a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Isaiah's first son had been a sign and wonder. His second should be so in a yet higher measure, and with a deeper and diviner meaning. His birth was foretold. The name which was to be given to him was to bear witness ("with-us-God") of a Divine Guide and Protector present with his people.¹ It suggested, at least, the thought of

¹ I do not undertake here to discuss the various interpretations of the mysterious words. I am, of course, aware that that which I have adopted differs from the traditional interpretation which has its starting-point in St. Matthew's Gospel. On the other hand, (1) the definite article in the Hebrew implies a reference to some woman known to Isaiah and his hearers, and not to an unknown maiden in a far-off future. (2) The promise of a supernatural birth not to be fulfilled for seven or eight centuries, would have been no "sign," in the prophet's sense of the word, to the king of Judah and his people. (3) There can be no question that the word translated "virgin" means strictly a young woman who has reached the age of marriage, and may be applied to a young wife as well as to a maiden (Delitzsch, and Cheyne, on Isaiah vii. 14). (4) The analogy of Isaiah's prophetic use of his other children makes it probable that this fell under the same category as a sign. (5) It may be noted that when referring to these very children as "signs and wonders" (viii. 18), he does not speak of them as two, as was customary when there were only two (comp. "the two sons of Eli," 1 Sam. ii. 34; iv. 4, 11), but uses the plural. (6) A prophecy of the mystery of the Incarnation at such a time seems out of harmony with the historical occasion, and with the immediate context as to the "butter and honey" food of the Immanuel child. (7) There are no traces of this passage ever having suggested the idea of a virgin-born Messiah to Isaiah himself, or to later prophets, or to pre-Christian Jewish interpreters. (8) St. Matthew's application of the passage stands on the same footing as his use of the words, "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses," of Isaiah liii. 4 (Matt. xvii. 9). It was not, as some have said, the prophecy that suggested a mythical fulfilment, but the facts of the case that, as in the case of the potter's field (Matt. xxvii. 9), prompted an interpretation that would fit in to them. (9) It must be remembered that

some yet fuller manifestation of that Presence. The yet unborn child was the embodiment of that thought for father and for mother. And his forecast went beyond the child's birth. The infancy of the young Immanuel should be passed in a dark and troublous time, when the culture of the corn-fields and the vineyards and oliveyards should cease, and they should be covered with briars and thorns; when the clotted milk and honey of a nomadic people, who were not tillers of the soil, should take the place of the bread and the wine and oil that strengthened men's hearts and made them glad and joyful (comp. vii. 21-24). But this should be for a short season only. Before the child "should know to refuse the evil and to choose the good," should reach *i.e.* the age of choice and will and conscience, the land which Ahaz hated, the land of Samaria and Damascus, should be "forsaken of both her kings." Practically, of course, in offering this "sign" to the unbelieving king, Isaiah was asking for a delay of something under a year before he took any further action in the direction of the Assyrian alliance, from which the prophet sought to dissuade him. Ahaz, however, adhered to his resolve with the persistence of a dogged silence, and the prophet, turning from the defeat of the king's enemies, draws aside the veil of the nearer and more disastrous future. The king of Assyria should come, not as an ally, but as a conqueror. That invasion should stir up the jealousy and intervention of other powers, and Judah should be the battle-field of their wars. The "fly" from the rivers of Egypt should meet the "bee" from the land of Assyria in the fair fields of the country round Jerusalem (vii. 1-20).

this is the only reference to this prophecy of Isaiah in the New Testament. St. Luke, who gives the Gospel of the Infancy, does not allude to it, nor is it cited by St. Paul, or St. Peter, or the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where it would have been natural that they should cite it, had they accepted what has become the traditional interpretation.

The interview ended. The months passed on, and the expected son was born, and named as Isaiah had said he should be named. To that child Immanuel, Isaiah looked as the representative of an ideal which yet he did not realize. He was the witness of an Immanuel greater than himself, his very name the symbol of a Divine Presence dwelling in the midst of men. As such Isaiah could speak of the land as being his land, the land of "With-us-God" (viii. 8). That name was, as it were, the watchword on the banner which he raised against all hostile confederacies and alliances. "It shall come to nought; it shall not stand," for "With us is God," Immanuel (viii. 10). Yet another birth, however, was needed to make up the triad of symbolic children. In this case the name was solemnly registered before specially chosen witnesses, nine months prior to the birth. The new name was yet more mysterious than the former. Maher-shalal-hash-baz, "*Speed spoil—haste prey.*" The announcement was made with every element of solemn publicity. The name was written in large characters, such as in Greek we should call *uncials*, and on a roll or tablet of more than the usual size. "Faithful witnesses" were chosen to attest its authenticity and its date. One of these was "Uriah the priest," probably the high-priest who afterwards complied with an order which Ahaz gave him as to the new altar after the pattern of that at Damascus (2 Kings xvi. 15, 16), the other, Zechariah, probably also a priest, and perhaps intimately connected, as will be seen hereafter, with Isaiah's hopes for the future. And the name was associated with the thought of a more rapid fulfilment than in the case of Immanuel. There the *terminus ad quem* was the time of the child's attaining the age of the knowledge of good and evil. Here the limit was that of the boy's first utterance of the names of Father and of Mother (viii. 1-4). As the prophet's horizon grew clearer he declared that before

that time the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria should be carried away before the king of Assyria.

The thoughts of the prophet were carried on, it would seem, beyond even this threefold experience. If the birth of each child of his had coincided with a message from God of glad tidings and deliverance, what might not there be of fulness of blessing from yet another birth more wondrous than any that had been given to him? What if from that root of the house of David that seemed now all rotten and decayed, there should one day come a true Immanuel, who should unite in Himself all names and attributes of sovereignty: "Wonderful, Counsellor, the God-hero, the Father of the Ages, the Prince of Peace" (ix. 6). Throwing himself, as in vision, into that future, which from Isaiah's stand-point—to whom, as to other prophets, it was not given to know the times and seasons when the promise should be fulfilled (1 Pet. i. 11; Acts i. 7)—might be either near or far, the prophet seemed to hear the exulting sound of the nation's joy: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder." It was the first germ of that Messianic ideal which was afterwards to develop itself in many different phases and with ever-increasing clearness in the prophet's teaching. Its first aspect was determined in part by the circumstances of the time, in part by the language of that Melchizedek psalm which at an earlier date had, as we have seen, exercised so profound an influence on his life.¹ The child that was to sit upon the throne of David was to be a warrior-king, even as David himself had been, and as the Melchizedek priest was painted, heaping up the bodies of the slain, and drinking of the brook by the way, as if weary of the slaughter (Ps. cx. 6, 7), but the deliverance which he was to accomplish was to be something more than that of the confused noise of battle and "garments rolled in

¹ See the first part of this Biography, in the *EXPOSITOR* for January.

blood." The spear and shield and weapons of war should be heaped together, as the spoil of Oreb and Zeb, of Zeba and Salmana, had been in the day of Midian (Judg. vii. 25; viii. 21-26), and should become as fuel for the flames, and the reign of the victorious king should be one of righteousness and peace, of judgment and of justice (ix. 1-7). He was, as it were, to unite the characteristic features both of David and of Solomon.

Shear-jashub, Immanuel, Maher-shalal-hash-baz—we ask ourselves what became of the three children who were thus ushered into the world with so strange a significance, whose very names were "signs and wonders" to the people. Of their after history we know nothing. They come like shadows and so depart. But if the inference is correct which connects the prophet-father with the priests of Anathoth, then we must remember that the sons were priests also, and they may thus have helped to perpetuate the Messianic traditions which were afterwards to reappear with fresh developments, both of form and substance, in Isaiah's great successor. Whether there or elsewhere, even in the absence of those gifts of inspiration which, like those of genius, are seldom inherited by descent, they were silent witnesses to kings, priests, people, in the city, in the Temple, in the country, of a captivity which had not yet come, and of the return of but a remnant from that captivity; of the doom of destruction which was, in the long run of history, the end of every kingdom built upon violence and wrong, of the ever-abiding presence of God with his people, to be manifested in many varying methods, degrees and forms, culminating, at last, in the revelation of that Presence, as it had never been revealed before, in the person of the heir of the House of David, a hero-God mighty in battle, and yet also the Prince of Peace, upon whom should rest "the Spirit of Jehovah, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, and the fear of the Lord," in

whom should be manifested at once the severity of a righteous judge, and the pity of an all-embracing charity, who should have "faithfulness for the girdle of his loins, and righteousness as the girdle of his reins" (xi. 1-5).

The absence of any chronological notes to the greater part of Isaiah's writings makes it difficult to determine the range of his prophetic activity during the remaining years of the reign of Ahaz. The success of Pekah and Rezin in the great pitched battle which was fought in Judah, and in which Maaseiah, the king's son, probably his destined heir and successor, was slain, and the capture of a vast host of men, women, and children, who were led as prisoners to Samaria, must have seemed at first to falsify the prophet's confident assurance. In the restoration of the captives, under the influence of the prophet Oded (2 Chron. xxviii. 9), we may, perhaps, trace the influence of the respect felt by all true members of the prophetic order for the two great representatives of that order, Micah and Isaiah, of whom the former, as we know (Mic. i. 1), prophesied concerning Samaria as well as Jerusalem, and must, therefore, have been known to his brethren in that region. It is, of course, clear that Isaiah exercised little or no influence on the mind of Ahaz. The king had taken his own line, had entered, in spite of Isaiah's warnings, into an alliance with the king of Assyria, and the result had been what Isaiah had foretold. He made the ignominious profession of servitude: "I am thy servant, and thy son," and plundered the treasures of the Temple to purchase the king's support. Tiglath Pileser "distressed him, and helped him not." He had to attend as a vassal king upon the great monarch at Damascus, and saw the treasures and population of that city carried far off into the northern province of Kir (2 Kings xvi. 5-9).¹ Even that lesson was lost upon him, and

¹ An inscription of the Assyrian king gives a list of the vassal kings who were

while at Damascus, with that taste for the outer forms of culture which we have learnt to know as æstheticism, and which history presents so often, as in Nero and Leo X. and Louis XIV., as the accompaniment of an effeminate and ignoble nature, he was attracted by the altar which he found in the temple of Rimmon as being more stately and magnificent than that which Solomon had placed in the Temple of Jerusalem. He found a high-priest, the very man whom the prophet had called as a "faithful witness" (the fact has to be remembered as we think of Isaiah's work), servile enough to construct a new altar after the designs which Ahaz had sent him, and the old time-honoured brazen altar was removed from its place, and reserved for the rare occasions on which the king was pleased to consult Jehovah, while king, priests and people alike offered their daily-sacrifices and sprinkled the blood upon the new altar, not, we may believe, without the idolatrous emblems that told the tale of its origin (2 Kings xvi. 10-16). As with Solomon and Ahab, so with Ahaz, this was obviously the result of the *harem* influence to which the weak unstable king willingly yielded. To the prophet it was another instance of the temper that pleased itself in "the children of strangers" (ii. 6), of the evils of a time "when children are princes and babes are rulers" (iii. 4). But even thus the measure of degradation was not yet full. The prediction that the king of Assyria should sweep over the land did not wait for its fulfilment till the invasion of Sargon or Sennacherib. Tiglath Pileser (or possibly his successor Shalmaneser) appeared at Jerusalem in his character of suzerain, and the stately colonnade which led from the king's palace to the Temple, and which had witnessed on every Sabbath the procession of the king and his household, was in part demolished, in part reconstructed, the gates

present at this gathering. It adds to the irony of the situation, that we find among them both Pekah of Israel and Ahaz of Judah.

which opened into the Temple being closed up, in order to serve as a passage by which the king of Assyria might enter into the palace (2 Kings xvi. 18). There is no trace in the rest of the king's career even of a late repentance. And when he died, the scorn and loathing which was the natural consequence of his evil and oppressive reign was not slow to shew itself. They "brought him not into the sepulchres of the kings of Israel" (2 Chron. xxviii. 27). He was buried, if not "with the burial of an ass," yet without the stately funeral which followed usually upon a king's death.

We can hardly think, however, that the prophet, who was so prominent during the early part of the reign of Ahaz, was inactive till its close. The body of hearers and disciples (viii. 16) probably became stronger and more numerous. The issue of the war with Syria and Israel, and the disasters that followed on the alliance with Assyria, must have spread his fame far and wide, not in Judah only, but among the neighbouring nations. To the reign of Ahaz we may assign probably the greater part of the prophecies that lie between Chapter vii. and Chapter xiii. The Assyrian invader of Chapter x. is probably Tiglath Pileser or his successor, and the march from Aiath to Jerusalem is that of the visit in the character of suzerain which has been referred to above (x. 28-32). To the same period, not, as we shall see, without a special starting-point in the history of the time, belongs the vision of a golden age, the good time coming, of Chapter xi. But during those later years that preceded the wretched king's death, the work of the prophet took a wider range. He looked out upon the nations round, and saw what part each was about to play in the next act of the great drama of the world's history. It is even probable that, owing to his fame as a prophet, he was consulted, then as afterwards, by "the messengers of those nations" as to their coming fate (xiv. 32). They sent to him as one who could forecast the future, and give them counsel as to

averting the coming evils, after the manner of the time, as Balak sent to Balaam, as the Athenians, at a great crisis in their history, sent to Epimenides. At a later period, probably towards the close of Hezekiah's reign, these "burdens," or "oracles" were collected together, as in Chapters xiii.-xxiii, and formed, as it were, a separate volume of the prophet's works.¹ The "burden of Babylon," which stands first in the order of arrangement, was probably the last in order of time, owing its position, like the Epistle to the Romans in the collected writings of St. Paul, to the prominence of its subject-matter, and will therefore come under our notice in a later section; and most of the others (I must not now comment on them in detail) probably belong to the reign of Hezekiah. One, however, is definitely fixed by the prophet himself, or by the disciple who edited the volume, as uttered in the last year of the reign of Ahaz,² and a brief notice of it, as shewing the character of the prophet's work at this period, will be a fit conclusion of the present paper.

The oracle in question deals with "Palestina," *i.e.* with the country of the Philistines. The relations of Judah with that people during the two preceding reigns had been of a somewhat peculiar nature, and there were, as we shall see, special reasons for the interest which the prophet took in them. Under Uzziah, as has been already stated, they were subdued, and the fortifications of Gath and Jabneh and Ashdod levelled with the ground (2 Chron. xxvi. 6). The subjugation continued, we cannot doubt, under

¹ The view taken of these "oracles," is, it is submitted, probable in itself. It is confirmed by the fact that a like series of oracles was despatched by Jeremiah, through the messengers who had come from neighbouring nations to Zedekiah. They carried back with them the "burdens" of the false prophets who spake smooth things. The true prophet throws, as it were, his written utterance into their letter-bag, by way of counterpoise (Jer. xxvii. 3).

² It is significant that the formula is the same as that of vi. 1. "In the year that king Ahaz died." I infer, as before, that the actual date was shortly before the death.

Jotham, who "prospered in all his ways" and his wars, and was able even to reduce the much stronger nation of the Ammonites to the position of tributaries (2 Chron. xxvii. 5). Of their influence on the religious life of the people as stimulating the passion for soothsaying and divination I have already spoken, and the natural result was that Isaiah looked on them with an undisguised antipathy. To him they were not only enemies, but rivals. The wizards that "peeped and muttered" (*i.e.* whispered in the low weird falsetto of their incantations), and drew the people after them when they should have been listening to "the law and the testimony" as expounded by Isaiah (viii. 19), were mainly of their training. Naturally they took advantage of the weakness of Ahaz, and made inroads and took towns in the low country to the south of Judah (2 Chron. xxviii. 18). The insurrection was so far successful; but it was one thing to defeat Ahaz himself, and quite another to resist him when he was backed, as he was after a time, by the whole strength of the Assyrian armies. The Philistines were accordingly reduced again to submission,¹ and they appear with the Syrians (obviously after Tiglath Pileser's capture of Damascus) as taking part, it lies in the nature of the case, by compulsion, in the attack on Ephraim and Samaria (ix. 12). It was to them a constrained and hateful service; and when Ahaz was dead or dying, there was a shout of joy through all the cities of Philistia (xiv. 29). That premature exultation Isaiah checks with the prediction that they had seen as yet but the beginning of their troubles. The rod of one smiter might be broken, but another and yet another and a mightier should succeed him: "Out of the serpent root should come the basilisk, out of the basilisk the fiery flying

¹ We find the name of Mitenti, king of Ascalon, among the princes who were summoned, with Ahaz and Pekah, to do homage to Tiglath Pileser at Damascus (Lenormant, *Anc. Hist.*, vol. i. p. 390).

serpent" (xiv. 28-32). Interpreters differ as to the meaning of the symbols. Did the prophet speak of two Assyrian kings, Sargon and Sennacherib, as the successors of Tiglath Pileser, or of the kings of Judah who were to follow Ahaz? The latter seems to me the more probable interpretation. The promise that "the firstborn of the poor should feed, and that the needy should lie down in safety," hardly fits in with the idea of an Assyrian conqueror. It does agree entirely with the picture of one such as Isaiah looked for from the tribe of David,¹ who should "judge the poor with righteousness and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth," and yet should also "smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips should slay the wicked" (xi. 1-5), who should be at least a partial fulfilment of the ideal of the Anointed King, the Messiah of the future. What grounds Isaiah had for expecting such a king in the heir and successor of Ahaz, who was that "basilisk," "king-serpent" (the "cockatrice" of the Authorised Version), wise with the serpent's wisdom alike for mercy and for judgment,

"Parcere subjectis et debellare superbos,"

we shall see in the next section of our biography.

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¹ Historically, Isaiah's words were fulfilled in Hezekiah, who "smote the Philistines even unto Gaza and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchman unto the fenced city" (2 Kings xviii. 8).
