

of righteousness and to leave the future, with simple trust, in the hands of God.

It is a lesson which we still need to learn. For which of us would not rejoice had he prophetic raptures and trances of which to boast, if men looked up to him as possessed of a solitary and mysterious power, and resorted to him that he might forecast their fate and interpret to them the mysteries by which they are perplexed? Which of us does not at times long to pierce the veil and learn how it fares with those whom we have loved and lost a while, or even what will be the conditions of our own life in years to come or when death shall carry us away, instead of waiting until in due time God shall reveal even this unto us? Let us, then, learn from Balaam, if we have not yet learned it from David or St. Paul, that to rest in the Lord and to wait patiently for Him is a higher achievement than to apprehend all mysteries; and that to do his will in humble trust is a nobler function and power than to foresee what that Will will do.

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ISAIAH, AN IDEAL BIOGRAPHY.

IV. UNDER HEZEKIAH, B.C., 726-698.

WE wonder, as we compare the characters of Ahaz and Hezekiah, how so evil a father could have been the parent of so good a son, how the child could have grown up to manhood uncontaminated by the corrupt atmosphere of the father's court. The answer to that question is in part found in the fact that he was born before the evil tendencies of Ahaz had had time to develop themselves, and that his early years were passed under the influences of a mother who was better than her husband. He was already nine years old when Ahaz succeeded to the throne; and at the time of his birth, the young father, then not more than sixteen, must still have been under the tutelage of the

righteous Jotham, and the bride of his youth was, in the nature of the case, as in the normal practice of Eastern monarchies, chosen not by himself, but by his father. As in other instances where the influence of the mother acted, for good or evil, on the character of the son, the historians, both of the Books of Kings and Chronicles, give the mother's name. She was *Abi*, or *Abijah*, the daughter of *Zechariah* (2 Kings xviii. 2; 2 Chron. xxix. 1). The name *Zechariah* (= *Jehovah remembers*) is throughout the history of Israel predominantly a priestly name,¹ and so far would suggest one of those intermarriages between the house of David and that of Aaron, of which we have an example in the union of *Jehoshabeath* and *Jehoiada* (2 Chron. xxii. 11). Two of that name belong to the period with which we are now dealing. There was the *Zechariah* who "had understanding in the visions of God," and who had been *Uzziah's* counsellor during the better and brighter part of his reign, while he yet "sought *Jehovah*, and God made him to prosper" (2 Chron. xxvi. 5). He belonged, of course, to a generation earlier than *Isaiah's*, but that prophet's mention of him (I assume, as before, that the Chronicler abridged from his memoirs of *Uzziah*) shews that he looked to him with reverence, and had probably drunk from the fountain of his inspiration. The other *Zechariah*, the son of *Jeberechiah*,² obviously, as associated with the high priest, a man of high position, and probably belonging to the priesthood, was one of the "faithful witnesses," whom *Isaiah* summoned to attest his prediction as to his "Hastebooty-Speed-spoil" son. It is, of course, impossible to prove that *Hezekiah's* mother was connected with either of these, but I submit the hypothesis that she was the daughter of the later, and of the family of the earlier

¹ Comp. *Zechariah*, the son of *Jehoiada* (2 Chron. xxiv. 20), the father of *John the Baptist*, and probably also the prophet of that name.

² The coincidence of names in *Zech. i. 1*, where that prophet is described as "the son of *Berechiah*," at least suggests the idea of a lineal descent.

Zechariah, as one which is probable in itself and which throws not a little light upon some of the obscurities of the time and the less known passages in Isaiah's life.

Ahaz, as we have seen, was but a boy of fifteen at the time of his marriage. His father Jotham acted as Isaiah would have wished a king to act, and "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord" (2 Chron. xxvii. 2), and probably under his guidance. The character of the boy prince who was growing up to be his heir already gave signs of its sensuousness and weakness. Would it not be wise to find a teacher and a wife who could guide him, and keep him out of the evils to which his nature was too quick to yield? Given the acknowledged facts of the case, nothing was more natural than that his choice of such a wife should have been determined by the prophet's counsels, and that Isaiah should have chosen one who belonged to a priestly and prophetic family, and so inherited principles that were in harmony with his own. The very name of Abijah (= *My father is Jehovah*) would, to one who dwelt so much on the significance of names, have been an augury of good. The task of influencing the young husband's character must have been almost as hopeless as that which devolved on Seneca when he found himself entrusted with the education of Nero. The prophet, however, had a consolation which was not granted to the philosopher. When Hezekiah was born he devoted himself to the work of superintending his education, and naturally followed the lines on which his own character had been formed. The book of the law of the Lord, and the maxims of the wise of heart which bore the name of Solomon, were to be the groundwork of the boy's training. All critics are agreed that the Book of Proverbs divides itself, in its present form, into four distinct sections: (1) An Introduction (chap. i.-ix.) characterised by the language of strong personal exhortation, by the iteration of the language of authoritative affection, "My son," "My

son," "O ye children" (Prov. i. 8, 15; ii. 1; iii. 1, 11, 21; iv. 1, 10, 20; v. 1; vi. 1, 20; viii. 1, 24), and by the earnest call to the pursuit of that true wisdom which has its beginning in the fear of the Lord (Prov. i. 7). (2) The collection of the Proverbs of Solomon specially so called (chap. x.-xxiv.), without these appeals of direct individual exhortation, dealing generally with the changes and chances of life, its weaknesses and temptations, from the standpoint of prudential ethics. (3) A supplementary collection of like Proverbs definitely assigned to the time of Hezekiah, dealing more emphatically with the duties of a king (Prov. xxv. 1-5, 15; xxviii. 2, 16; xxix. 2, 4, 12, 14, 26); and (4) An Appendix (chap. xxx., xxxi.), containing maxims, from other sources, of the wisdom of the East, one section having a special bearing on the education of a prince amid the temptations of a sensual and luxurious court, in which kings and princes were drinking wine and strong drink, and therefore forgetting the law and perverting the judgment of the afflicted (Prov. xxxi. 1-8, and comp. Isa. v. 12; xxviii. 7). At the risk of seeming to indulge in a somewhat venturesome hypothesis, I throw out the conjecture that the additions to the original nucleus of Chap. x.-xxiv., and therefore the whole form of the Book of Proverbs, may have been due to the editorship of Isaiah, and have been the manual of ethics on which he sought to mould the character of Hezekiah, training him in the wisdom, understanding, prudence, and knowledge which made up his "Ideal of a Patriot King."¹ Happily the boy did not disappoint his training. From youth upwards "he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord" (2 Chron. xxix. 2). There had been no king so true and devoted to Jehovah since the days of David, and there did not rest on him the stain of blood-guiltiness which marred the completeness of David as a pattern-ruler. Of all princes born to the purple, he had

¹ Comp. the portrait of the ideal Ruler in Isai. xi. 1-3, and note the identity of its ethical terminology with that of the Book of Proverbs.

least of the wanton arrogance of youth. In his early, as in his later, years he was the Alfred of Jewish history. We can think of the prophet as watching his growth with a thankful satisfaction, seeing in him at least an approximate fulfilment of the ideal anointed king, whose portrait is sketched in xi. 1-10, not apparently without a deliberate intention that Hezekiah should strive, as far as in him lay, to realize the ideal. With such a prospect before him, Isaiah could wait in patience till the reign of the wretched Ahaz came to its close, and Hezekiah ascended the throne at the age of twenty-five, the prophet himself having then reached, according to the calculation with which we started, the age of fifty-two. It was in view of the hopes of the new reign that he told Philistia, as we have seen, of the fiery king-serpent, wary and subtle and yet terrible in his wrath, whom they had now to dread.

We trace the hands of Isaiah from the very outset in the measures taken by the king. His threats against the Philistines were translated into acts, and they were subdued unto Gaza, "from the tower of the watchman unto the fenced city" (2 Kings xviii. 8). The worship of the high places, and the images and the obscene symbol of the Asherah with which Ahaz had defiled the holy city and its neighbourhood, were destroyed. Even the brazen serpent, to which the people burnt incense as to the relic of a venerable past, possibly not without some view to its being, like the snakes of Æsculapius and those in other forms of serpent-worship, a symbol of healing, was treated as a common thing, a mere Nehushtan (= bit of brass), and broken up and cast into the furnace. "After him there was none like unto him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him" (2 Kings xviii. 5). That was the judgment passed upon the general character of his reign by the writer of the Books of Kings. The Chronicler, however, here, as in the case of Uzziah, manifestly gives us an epitome of a history

which Isaiah himself had written (2 Chron. xxxii. 33). It is scarcely probable, however, that he dwelt entirely in that history, as the Chronicler dwells almost exclusively, on the details of the religious reform and the re-organization of the worship of the Temple. The tone and style of the Chronicler are pre-eminently those of a compiler from the archives of the Temple, and not of a prophet. But we cannot doubt that that work of restoration would have Isaiah's entire sanction. It must have seemed to him a long step towards the fulfilment of his vision of a time when the "mountain of the Lord's house should be established on the top of the mountains" (ii. 2), when a man should cast away his idols of silver and gold "to the moles and bats" (ii. 20), when in that mountain the Lord should "make a feast of fat things for all the nations" (xxv. 6). It was Isaiah's work as a prophet to denounce a dead and formal ritual. It was not less his work as a statesman to rejoice in the re-establishment of a ritual which might be the expression of a new and higher life. As the most spiritual utterance of true penitence in Ps. li. had ended in words which spoke of the worship of the Temple, of sacrifices of righteousness and burnt-offerings, so it was with Isaiah. As himself a psalmist he could not but welcome the new burst of psalmody, the revival of the songs of David and of Asaph (2 Chron. xxix. 30), the new hymns of the sons of Korah, the purification of the Temple, the restoration of the old brazen altar which had been displaced by Ahaz. Without the organizing head and the working hand of a counsellor like Isaiah, Hezekiah could hardly, in the first year of his reign and with the suddenness of a *coup d'état*, have effected so great a change.

In the next phase of the king's policy the influence of Isaiah is even more directly traceable. His predictions as to the Northern Kingdom had received an *ex abundantia* fulfilment. The tribes on the east side of the Jordan had

been carried off by Tiglath Pileser, probably attacking them as the ally of Ahaz (2 Kings xv. 29). Shalmaneser, provoked by the revolt of Hoshea the last king of Israel, and the alliance into which he had entered with Sabacon (the So of 2 Kings xvii. 4) the Ethiopian ruler of Egypt, attacked and captured the king and laid siege to Samaria (B.C. 724). He did not live to see its fall, but his successor Sargon, in B.C. 721, completed what he had begun, and "the spoil of Samaria was taken away before the king of Assyria" (viii. 4), and the greater part of its population carried off to the cities of the Medes (2 Kings xvii. 6). A remnant, however, was left to till the soil, chiefly consisting, of course, as afterwards in the case of Judah (Jer. xxxix. 9), of the peasantry and the humbler townsmen who had been ready to submit; and the policy adopted by the king, at Isaiah's suggestion, was to present himself to them as their protector, and to invite them to return to the religion and worship of their fathers, which they had abandoned since the days of Jeroboam. The prophet, who remembered the dark days when Ephraim devoured Manasseh, and Manasseh Ephraim, while both, in spite of their mutual hostilities, were united against Judah (ix. 21), now looked forward to a time when Ephraim should no more envy Judah, and Judah should no longer vex Ephraim (xi. 13). Might not the restored unity of the monarchy have a yet wider influence for good, and be a rallying point for the exiles who had already been carried far off into "Assyria and Elam and Shinar and Hamath and the islands of the sea"? (xi. 11).

The hopes of the prophet, like other prophetic visions, had even then at least a partial fulfilment. The king sent his couriers to all Israel and Judah, with a special message to Ephraim and Manasseh, inviting them to keep the Passover at Jerusalem. The letters which they carried bear in every line the stamp of Isaiah's mind. The *nomen et omen*

of Shear-Jashub was, at last, fulfilled. They were to "turn to the Lord God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, that He might turn to the *remnant* that had escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria" (2 Chron. xxx. 6; Isa. i. 9, 16; vii. 3). There was the same hope that their repentance might lead to the return of their brethren who were now in exile, as that which, we have just seen, was uttered by Isaiah (2 Chron. xxx. 9). At first the result was disappointing. As the messengers posted on their way through Ephraim and Manasseh, even to Zebulun, the people laughed them to scorn and mocked them. There was, however, enough success to be to the prophet as the pledge and earnest of the future. Ephraim might hold aloof in the haughtiness of its hereditary pride, but "divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem" (2 Chron. xxx. 10, 11). It might well seem to Isaiah as if the good time was coming when the shame which had rested on the land of Zebulun and of Naphtali should be turned to honour,¹ and light should stream in upon "the people who walked in darkness, and dwelt in the land of the shadow of death" (ix. 1, 2).

It was in accordance with the width of the prophet's mind as one to whom (to give Tillotson's words a new application) "Charity was above rubrics," that the date of the Passover was altered, from the first to the second month, (2 Chron. xxx. 13), for the convenience of the people, to allow time for those who had to come from a distance, and for the necessary preparations for a festival of almost unprecedented magnitude. With a like disregard to the narrowness of rubrics, the *adiaphora*, or the "infinitely little," of all religions, the usual ceremonial purifications were in

¹ It will be seen that I follow most recent commentators in altering the Authorized Version, and reading as follows: "Surely, there is now no darkness to her that was afflicted. In the earlier time He brought shame on the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali. But in the later time He hath brought honour on the way by the sea, the further side of Jordan, the border of the heatben."

many cases dispensed with, and instead of repelling the strangers who thus came, as heretical and unclean, because they "did eat the passover otherwise than it was written," the prayer of Hezekiah went up, in the very accents of Isaiah, for those who had the true cleansing, though they lacked the outward symbol of it (i. 16): "The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary" (2 Chron. xxx. 18, 19). It was, in modern phrase, a great revival mission. The change from the formal and stately, but dead, worship of the days of Uzziah, was like that which has in our own time transformed the cold "Cathedral services" of the Georgian era into the warmth and glow of such gatherings as are now held in St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey. Nor was the voice of the preacher wanting. Hezekiah, refraining from the strictly priestly work on which Uzziah had ventured, entered, we can hardly doubt under Isaiah's guidance, on that of a preacher and a prophet. He "spake comfortably unto all the Levites," and they taught men "the good knowledge of the Lord" (2 Chron. xxx. 22). Levites and Priests sang day by day their appropriate hymns, and accompanied them with instruments of music. The enthusiasm of the people rose to such a height that the seven days of the Passover seemed all too short for their confessions and their joy; and, for the third time setting aside the strict letter of the Mosaic ritual, the feast was prolonged for yet another seven days of gladness (2 Chron. xxx. 23). Nor was the gathering limited to Israelites only. There were "strangers," proselytes, *i.e.* of various extraction, mingled with the congregation. It might well seem to Isaiah to be the beginning of that exaltation of the mountain of the Lord's house of which he and Micah had spoken (Isa. ii. 2; Mic. iv. 1, 2). It was, we may well believe, on some such occasion as this that the

sons of Korah wrote the psalm (Ps. lxxxvii.), which records how the natives of Rahab (= Egypt) and Babylon, of Philistia and Tyre and Ethiopia were all registered as naturalised citizens of Zion, no longer strangers and foreigners, but of the household of God.

The great Passover with its great joy, the like of which had not been known in Jerusalem since the days of Solomon, came to an end; but it was followed by sufficient evidence that the effect was something more than transitory. The iconoclastic work which had begun in Judah was extended to Ephraim and Manasseh, and the idols (the historian using almost the very words of the Prophet) were "utterly destroyed" (2 Chron. xxxi. 1; Isa. ii. 18). And with this, the joy and thankfulness of the people shewed itself in large and liberal offerings. Tithes and first-fruits which had before been paid grudgingly were now brought in abundantly, and were piled up in heaps, for which, so far did they exceed the average, special storehouses had to be provided (2 Chron. xxxi. 2-19).

The king, and his prophet minister, may well be pardoned if they saw in this re-union of Israel something like the dawn of a Messianic time. All things seemed to go well with him. He "wrought that which was good and right and truth before the Lord his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, he did it with all his heart, and prospered" (2 Chron. xxxi. 20, 21). It might seem a question, however, whether the foreign policy of Hezekiah was characterized by a like wisdom, whether he was guided in that policy by the counsels of the prophet. His success in restoring the unity of his kingdom led him to assert its independence: "He rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not." It seemed to him that this was the action of a patriot king, and undeterred by the fate of Hoshea, who had taken a like course, he refused the tribute

which was the acknowledgment of Assyrian suzerainty (2 Kings xviii. 7).

To understand the series of events which followed, we have, in the judgment of nearly all Assyriologists, to modify the chronology of the received text of the Old Testament records.¹ That chronology, as it stands, gives the dates of the chief events of Hezekiah's reign as follows :

B.C.

- 726. Accession of Hezekiah.
- 723. Shalmaneser lays siege to Samaria.
- 721. Capture of Samaria by a king of Assyria not named in the Old Testament, but identified by the Assyrian inscriptions with Sargon.
- 713. Sennacherib invades the fenced cities of Judah—Illness of Hezekiah—Embassy from Merodach Baladan.
- 710. Siege of Jerusalem—Mission of Rabshakeh—Destruction of Sennacherib's army.
- 698. Death of Hezekiah.

The Assyrian annals, however, as interpreted by most experts, give the following additional data.

- 722. Death of Shalmaneser, and accession of Sargon.
- 711. Invasion of Philistia by Sargon.
- 721-710. Merodach Baladan ruling, as a rebel against Sargon, at Babylon.
- 705. Death of Sargon and accession of Sennacherib.
- 701. Sennacherib's invasion of Judah.
- 698. Death of Hezekiah.
- 681. Death of Sennacherib.

¹ The necessity of a change is recognized by Sir H. Rawlinson, Dr. Hincks, Sayce, Schrader, Kuenen and Cheyne, and Le Normant. Differences of detail in the solution of a somewhat difficult problem were, of course, to be expected. Most agree in supposing that the arrangement which placed the narrative of the king's sickness and the embassy after that of the destruction of Sennacherib's army, led to the erroneous inference that those events were actually later, and that we must place them, in order to reconcile them with the inscriptions in which Sennacherib describes his victory over Hezekiah, as taking place in the third year of his reign, at a much earlier date. Le Normant (*Ancient History*, vol. i. p. 181), ventures on a still bolder hypothesis, *sc.* that they followed Sennacherib's retreat, but that the reign of Hezekiah lasted for forty-one years, Manasseh having been associated with him in the kingdom from his birth, and that the annalist took the date of his birth, B.C. 641, as the beginning of his reign, and therefore the close of Hezekiah's.

It was probably not long after the fall of Samaria and the partial restoration of the unity of Israel, that Hezekiah determined on the assertion of his independence. Sargon, who records the capture of the capital of the Northern Kingdom, makes no mention of any attack on Judah. He led his armies southernwards against the king of Gaza, and Sabaco, the Ethiopian king of Egypt, took the first of these princes prisoner and imposed tribute on the latter, and then returned to wars in Armenia. Then came an expedition against Ashdod, B.C. 710 (of which we have a trace in Isa. xx. 1), and that in its turn was followed by the final subjugation of Merodach Baladan, who had for eleven years ruled at Babylon as the head of a successful revolt (Le Normant, *Anc. Hist.*, vol. i. pp. 392-397).

Hezekiah would seem to have calculated on Sargon's hands being full. Visions of an extended empire floated before his eyes. As the years passed on without any immediate cause of fear, his plans became wider and more ambitious. For a time the sharp stroke of sickness came, as if to teach him lowliness. The tone of Isaiah in announcing that the end was near and that he must put his house in order, is that of one who looks with some touch of disappointment at the career which seemed to be coming to an untimely close. The king had been careful and troubled about many things, had made his palace stately and gorgeous, but the "inner house," the mansion of the soul, (the words, perhaps, include also, the true building up of the life of the kingdom), had not been set in order. The prayer of Hezekiah averted the evil for the time. He could appeal, perhaps not without a touch of undue self-praise, to the integrity of his life, to his zeal for Jehovah. He had prayed for life, not only for the mere joy of living, nor from a craven fear of death, nor a shrinking from the vague dimness of the shadow-world of Hades, but because he desired to complete the work of delivering his king-

dom and his city from the threatening power of Assyria. And the prophet tells him that both his prayers were answered. Fifteen years were to be added to his life, and the God of David his father would defend the city from the hands of the king of Assyria. The obvious wish of the prophet was to lead him to trust in that protection and not in an arm of flesh. It is noteworthy that here, as in the case of Ahaz, the prophet offers a sign in confirmation of his promise, and that there was in this instance no sullen refusal. The reversal of the shadow on the sundial of Ahaz¹ was the token that the times of the lives of individual men and of kingdoms were in the hands of Jehovah; and the king's psalm of thanksgiving expressed the fulness of faith with which he received the promise which was thus confirmed. As yet apparently he had no heir to succeed him. That which he most rejoices in is the prospect that he, as "a father to his children," should make known the truth, the faithfulness of God (Isa. xxxviii. 19).

It was, we may believe, in the hope of avoiding the peril of an interrupted succession, that Hezekiah, within two years after his recovery from his sickness, married the mother of Manasseh. The prophet would seem to have looked on that marriage with a sanguine hope. In the name of the new queen, Hephzibah (= *my delight is in her*), he saw an augury of good which determined the form of one of his most glorious prophecies of the restoration of Israel (lxii. 4), and which he contrasts with the name Azubah (= *Forsaken*), which had been that of the mother of Jehoshaphat (1 Kings xxii. 42). The name given to the heir apparent, on his birth, was also emphatically *nomen et omen*. Manasseh bore its witness to the king's wish

¹ We note in the description of the dial (literally, *steps*) another instance of the art culture of Ahaz. The Chaldean astronomers of Babylon were the inventors of the dial, and this, perhaps in the form of steps marked with degrees to indicate the time, with a tall *gnomon* to cast the shadow, was probably imported either directly from that city, or mediately through Damascus.

to restore the unity of Israel by conciliating the remnant of the most powerful of the Northern tribes. Its meaning (= *Forgetfulness*) proclaimed an amnesty of all the evil and rebellious past.

The lessons of sickness had, however, been learnt imperfectly, and temptation came from a new and unexpected quarter. Merodach Baladan, who had for some years been carrying on a successful resistance at Babylon to the power of the Assyrian kings, assuming for himself the title and insignia of an independent monarch, heard both of Hezekiah's power, and of his recovery from sickness. The latter furnished him with the occasion for which he had been seeking. Ostensibly the embassy which he sent was one of formal congratulation. Really it had for its object the formation of an alliance offensive and defensive against their common enemy. The king, who seemed as if he were likely to revive the old greatness of Israel in the days of David and Solomon, would be a welcome confederate in that cause. The letter which the ambassadors brought with them was, we cannot doubt, full of flattering and persuasive words. Hezekiah was led to think that he held the balance of power in his hands, and was the arbiter of the fate of nations. We can scarcely wonder that he fell into the snare. The Babylonian ambassadors were invited to see all the treasures of his palace, all the silver and the gold, all the weapons of his arsenals. They probably looked on them with somewhat of the feeling which led Blucher to say, as he walked through the streets of London, "*Himmel!* what a city to plunder!" It lies in the nature of the case that the officials of the king's court, the chamberlain, and the secretaries, and the treasurers, must have taken part in the reception of the ambassadors, and apparently without a word of opposition. They too welcomed the prospect of what seemed a valuable alliance (xxxix. 1, 2).

But Isaiah did not welcome it, and consistent with

himself, from first to last, would not tune his voice according to the time. To him it seemed that the teachings of the history of the past had been forgotten, and that Hezekiah was pursuing the very policy against which he had protested almost at the outset of his public life. Merodach Baladan would be to him what Tiglath Pileser had been to Ahaz, a source of weakness and not of strength. Hezekiah was entering on an unknown future of trouble and disaster. The step which he had taken seemed to Isaiah the infatuation of one whom God had for a time left, "to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chron. xxxii. 31), in whom therefore there was no longer the "spirit of counsel and of judgment, of wisdom and the fear of Jehovah." In a tone as authoritative and almost as indignant, as that in which he had spoken to Ahaz, he questioned him as to the reports which he had heard—Could such things be possible?—and drew from him, in spite of the weak evasive apology that the country from which the ambassadors had come was too remote to affect the interests of Judah, the confession of the truth, and told him of the doom which he had thus drawn upon himself. The treasures in which he gloried, inherited and accumulated, should be one day carried off to Babylon. The yet unborn sons (the form of the prediction confirms the conclusion already suggested that Hezekiah, at the time of his illness, was still unmarried), should be eunuchs in the palace of its king.¹ The king's acceptance of the sentence, though not wanting in an

¹ We commonly find the fulfilment of the prediction in the Babylonian Captivity, and the presence of Daniel and his companions "children of the king's seed," as eunuchs in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. i. 3-7). It is probable, however, that there was an earlier fulfilment. If Manasseh, the king of Judah, was carried in fetters to Babylon (2 Chron. xxxiii. 11), it lies in the nature of the case that he may have been accompanied by princes of the royal house. It was quite after the manner of Assyrian kings that they should be treated as Daniel and his friends were afterwards treated by the king of Babylon.

apparent humility, thankful even for a respite, betrays, I venture to think, something like a deterioration of character. David in a like crisis, brought on by a like self-will, thought of others rather than himself ("Lo, I have sinned and I have done perversely; but these sheep what have they done? . . . Let thine hand, I pray thee, be on me and on my father's house" 2 Sam. xxiv. 17; 1 Chron. xxi. 17). Hezekiah's resignation ("there shall be peace and truth in my days") has in it something of the selfish complacency of "*Après moi le deluge.*"

It is a natural, if not a necessary, inference from Isaiah's action in this matter that he had had from the first neither part nor lot in the king's plans. The broad outline of the prophet's counsel had all along been to "wait on the Lord;" to accept, that is, the guidance of events, to abstain from schemes and policies, and grandiloquent talk about what we should call interests and glory and prestige. If the guiding hand of God had led them to acknowledge the suzerainty of Assyria by the payment of a tribute, it was better to endure that burden than to stake all in the desperate game of double or quits, independence or absolute subjugation and captivity. Isaiah who opposed, as we shall see, every plan that was the natural corollary of the assertion of independence, was not likely to have approved of that policy in its inception. Rather would he urge men, as Jeremiah did afterwards, and, at the same cost of seeming to men faint-hearted and unpatriotic (Jer. xxxvii. 14), to be content with leading their own life as a nation, walking in righteousness and purity and truth, instead of mixing themselves in schemes and diplomacies and intrigues that could have no satisfying issue. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength" (xxx. 15) was at once his watchword as a statesman, and the burden of his teaching as a prophet. One indication of this policy and of the desire to impress it,

in every possible way, upon the people of Jerusalem, is seen in a strange episode of Isaiah's life. Sargon had sent his Tartan (= commander-in-chief) to lay siege to Ashdod. Alarmed at the nearness of the Assyrian army, the advisers of Hezekiah urged the plan of an alliance with Egypt and its Ethiopian ruler. Words of warning fell dead on the ears of an eager and excited people, and the prophet was led to try the power of symbolic acts. He laid aside his sack-cloth dress, the "rough garment" of his order (Zech. xiii. 4), and was seen month after month, for three years, in the streets of Jerusalem, in the dress, or rather the no-dress, of a prisoner of war marched off to exile, barefoot and with just a short tunic over his naked body. That, so he taught men, would be the fate of the Egyptians and Ethiopians and those who trusted in them (xx.).

Hezekiah, however, had counsellors who thought themselves wiser than the prophet. They sneered at his perpetual iteration of that text as to the true rest, the true refreshing of the weary (xxviii. 12). They were, for the most part, new men who had pushed themselves into prominence and wealth, and indulged in all the vices of a sensuous luxury. As he had in his earlier days spoken of the rulers of Jerusalem as the princes of Sodom and Gomorrah (i. 9), so he speaks of these as the "drunkards of Ephraim," reproducing in the holy city the coarse excesses of Samaria (xxviii. 13). They found supporters in priests and prophets whom they invited to their banquets, and who applauded them to the echo, inflamed with wine and strong drink, taking their drunken dreams of victory for true prophetic visions (xxviii. 7). The prophet does not shrink from reproducing the very syllables of their sarcasm: "Is he," they said, "preaching to children just weaned, that he thus harps for ever on the same string," "*semper eandem canens cantilenam, ad nauseam usque*"—always "precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little," with a wear-

some monotony (xxviii. 7-13)? To them his speech seemed as contemptible as St. Paul's did to the scoffers of Corinth (2 Cor. x. 10). Isaiah pleads guilty to the charge, even as St. Paul did. The Word of the Lord which it was given him to speak could not fail to be monotonous. They were as children, needing that iteration of the first elements of a true teaching. If they would not listen to him, God would find other teachers, the barbarian conquerors of "stammering lips and another tongue," of a strange speech and utterance that seemed unintelligible, who would weary them with harsh commands and brutal insults (xxviii. 11). In that day, they should be "drunken, but not with wine, and stagger, but not through strong drink" (xxix. 9).

Balancing this party in the courts of Hezekiah was another of a higher temper and of a character from which more might be hoped. They did not mock the prophet; they paid him much outward honour. They were half-disposed to follow his counsel when they could do so without danger. But even on these Isaiah could not look with unmixed satisfaction. A memorable passage (xxii. 15-25) brings before us two typical representatives, leaders of the two parties. There was Shebna, the head of the open antagonists of the prophet; a man of ignoble, perhaps of foreign, birth, who made his way to the high position of treasurer (literally, *associate*) and chamberlain ("over the house"), and was, in fact, the grand vizier of Hezekiah. He had accumulated wealth, not altogether with clean hands, and was one of the millionaires of Jerusalem. The "chariots of his glory" were more stately than those of the king himself. Priests and prophets courted his favour and sat at his table. As a *novus homo* he had no sepulchre of his fathers connected with the memories of ancient days, and therefore he constructed one for himself hewn out on high, in the face of a lofty rock, of exceptional magnificence, outdoing even the tombs of the kings them-

selves. Such a man was obviously one whom Isaiah could not look on without indignation and antipathy. In this last act of presumption he saw the "haughty spirit which goes before a fall," and with the indignant question which mocked at his ostentatious arrogance: "What hast thou here, and whom hast thou here?" he predicts accordingly the varying stages of his fall, loss of office (so a few years later we find him reduced to the lower position of a scribe, or secretary, xxxvii. 2), degradation, exile.

In striking contrast with Shebna, at the head of the opposite party in the king's cabinet, was the respectable Eliakim, a man with an inherited position of dignity and not unworthy of it, conspicuous for kindness and integrity, free from the oppressive violence and corruption which were common in Eastern rulers. In him Isaiah saw one who had it in him to be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, worthy to be the king's chief minister, bearing the key of the house of David with supreme authority, so that none could shut where he would open, or open where he would shut.¹ Such a man might well be as a "glorious throne in his father's house." But even here there was an element of weakness, and Isaiah paints it with a master-hand. Such a statesman was as a peg driven into a wall, firm and strong. Men could, in the most literal sense of the word, *depend* upon him. But what if these dependents multiplied, if relations and friends, servants and parasites, gathered round him and fed upon his greatness? What if there should hang upon that peg, not only the "glory of his father's house," but the "offspring and the issue, vessels of clay as well as of silver, cups and flagons of all sorts and sizes?" Well, in that case, the answer was not far to seek. The peg that had seemed so firm would then be removed and be cut off, and with it would fall all that hung upon it. In that

¹ The reader will remember the higher and, as it were, transfigured application of the words to the true Prince of the House of David, in Rev. iii. 7.

parable Isaiah, with a grave and earnest irony, indicated the evils of the nepotism and favouritism from which even statesmen of the better class (Bacon occurs to one's thoughts as a memorable instance) are not always exempt. It was not long before a new crisis presented itself in the foreign politics of Judah in which the two parties took, as might be expected, their natural lines of action, Isaiah standing apart from, and above them both, as in a solitary greatness.

E. H. PLUMPTRE.

*TEXTUAL CRITICISM ILLUSTRATED FROM THE
PRINTING-OFFICE.*

III. AWKWARD READINGS.—The second of the great critical canons which we have to consider is the one which states, under a variety of forms, that the reading which has about it something difficult, or apparently untrue, or harsh, ungrammatical, or in any way awkward or unlikely, is *more* likely to be correct than the one which naturally appears so. And do I really suppose, it will be gravely asked, that a law which is stamped with the authority of Bengel and Griesbach and of all the great critics since criticism began, can be overthrown by a statement deduced from the mistakes of modern compositors? No, I do not; but unless human nature has itself changed in the interval, I do think that it has been made a very great deal too much of. It seems to assume, in fact—and that in the most downright opposition to all other textual phenomena but the particular one with which it happens to be engaged—that all our various readings came about by editorial operation alone! Did the homœotels come about editorially, or were they not rather the most mechanical of transcribers' oversights and requiring editorial care to set them right? And if Codices B and N enjoyed least of any of this editorial care, and one of them at any rate has great numbers of