

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

THE BOOK OF ISAIAH. CHAPTERS XL.-LXVI.

III. JEHOVAH GOD OF ISRAEL, THE INCOMPARABLE.

THE question has been put by some regarding the writer of these twenty-seven chapters, whether he is to be called a Prophet or a Poet? That he is a poet of the highest rank almost every line of his writing testifies; and in some parts, as Chapter *xlvii.*, he rises into pure and sustained lyrical expression. The truth, of such importance when we approach the question of Fulfilment, that Prophecy is also Poetry, is nowhere so well illustrated as in this book. Here, as in the case of the older Prophets, poetry and prophecy are still for the most part united, while in some other Prophets, as *Habakkuk*, they have become disjoined. This author, however, means to be and above all things is a Prophet. He speaks from God, and he speaks to the people of God as a People. He is no mere pastor, devoting himself to the care of individual souls; the community is his listener, and its destinies in the present, and for ever, and its relations to the largest forces in the universe, form his theme. Notwithstanding this, he is to such a degree a Poet that, besides the forms of poetry common to other Prophets, he has introduced another, of which only faint traces are to be seen elsewhere, namely the dramatic. He personifies, and, like the author of the first nine chapters of the *Proverbs*, introduces his personages—as *Zion*, *Jerusalem*, and the *Servant of the Lord*—speaking in character. This peculiarity throws difficulties in the way of the interpreter, for the more perfect a personification is the more difficult it is to distinguish it from a person, and in some

places where the Servant of the Lord comes forward, we may doubt whether it be a real individual that we hear speaking or only a collective idealized. The only thing that can help us here is to pay the minutest attention to the speaker—not so much to the main sentiment which he expresses as to the incidental allusions which he drops, for in these he will probably betray himself and reveal to us whether his true consciousness be that of an individual or that of a class. It is not quite easy to be a fair interpreter. Complete self-surrender to one's author is required. And this implies not only the positive power of sympathy, but the more difficult negative power of emptying one's mind of prepossessions and feelings which have long filled it, and presenting a *tabula rasa* for the Prophet to write his conceptions upon. Our aim should be to realize to ourselves his mind in its state of poetical intuition and to reflect it simply, asking no questions which the Prophet did not ask. For example, when he hears voices heralding the great King, or others proclaiming, The Word of the Lord shall stand! we are going beyond his intuitions, and sinking into prose besides, when we ask, What voices were they, angelic or prophetic? If we asked the Poet when he says,—

I hear a voice ye cannot hear which says I must not stay,
I see a hand ye cannot see which beckons me away,

what hand and whose voice it is that he refers to? his answer probably would not increase our self-esteem. And there are many parts of this book where to put such questions is to forget that we are reading a Poet. Such passages are the frequent apostrophes in the book, as to the arm of the Lord (li. 9), to Zion (lii. 1), to heaven and earth and all nature (xliv. 23). To institute grave enquiries from whose mouth it is that such apostrophes come, whether a company of doctors or a chorus of the heavenly host, seems to be to mistake the character of the com-

wait till then for any fulfilment of this ancient promise? Is there no other meaning in it; no nearer hope?" And happily we can reply, There are other meanings in it; there is a nearer hope, and St. Paul shall guide us to it. Writing to the Roman Christians of his day (Rom. xvi. 20) he took leave of them with this promise: "The God of Peace shall bruise Satan under your feet *shortly*." And whatever may have been the first and special intention of his promise, there is no doubt that it implies a great general truth such as we are now inquiring for, and which our own experience confirms. This truth is that wherever we find a good man, or a company of good men like that at Rome, engaged, as all good men are, in an open warfare with evil, there we may find a partial fulfilment of the promise made to Adam, and *see* good triumphing over evil. Do we not all know such men—men really and genuinely good, in whom all taints of nature, all defects of will, all vices of the blood, are being gradually subdued; to whom all temptations to evil are losing their power; who are daily growing in wisdom, in right living, in sweetness and purity of nature, so that we long to be like them and to share their peace? Talk with them, indeed, and they will still lament the undetected and unsubdued evils of their nature, still condemn themselves as unprofitable servants, still mourn that they are so far from all perfection. But whatever the estimate they may put on themselves, and however just it may be, you no more expect them to speak an untrue word, or to see them do an unjust or unkindly deed, than you expect to see the sun turn to darkness or the moon to blood. No doubt the strife is still going on within them; but none the less you feel that in them the victory is already won in part; that in the end it is assured, at least for them; and you would be as much amazed as grieved were they to fall away from the grace they have attained.

Such as they are, such in some measure are all true

come under the same general principle, viz. that prophecies regarding Jehovah's revelation of Himself for salvation, and also for judgment, find their fulfilment in his self-unveiling in the Son. Jehovah the Redeemer and Judge is God manifest in the Son. Such an analysis of the idea of God was not yet effected by the Prophet, and such a development in the economy of God's self-manifestation remained hidden from him. The Christology of the Prophet runs on two lines, though to the Prophet himself neither of the lines was strictly Christological or Messianic in the usual sense. One line is formed by statements made regarding Jehovah's revelation of Himself and of his glory, of his saving his people, of his abiding among them for ever and feeding them like a flock. The identification of the voice crying in the wilderness with John, is an example how the early Christian mind felt that all such predictions of Jehovah's manifestation of Himself had been fulfilled in Christ. Echoes of this Prophet's words are heard everywhere in the New Testament. His saying that Jerusalem's "warfare is fulfilled," seems repeated in St. Paul's "when the fulness of time was come." "His glory shall be revealed" is heard, over again in St. John's "we beheld his glory," "he manifested forth his glory"; in the "brightness of his glory" of the Hebrews, and in St. Paul's "glory of God in the face of Christ;" and much besides, as the "good Shepherd" of the fourth Gospel. The other Christological line is made up of those statements that bear reference to the Servant of the Lord, his being upheld of God, endowed with God's Spirit, sent to preach good tidings unto the poor, his bearing the sins of the people and being the light of the Gentiles. How profoundly these passages affected the mind of Jesus Himself, and how nearly He saw in the Prophet's picture of the Servant the counterpart of his own consciousness, is evident from the Gospels. In such passages, as Delitzsch remarks, we have more pro-

found Christological conceptions than in any other part of Scripture. Of two things the Christian mind has always remained sure, and it is never likely to lose hold of them, whatever differences of view may prevail in other respects in regard to the Prophet's lofty ideal; these are, first, that the features of the Servant of the Lord as the Prophet delineated them, have appeared in Christ, and the Servant's work as he sketched it has been accomplished by Him; and, second, that the higher Wisdom which was directing the progress of redemption towards its goal, the death of the Son, with a march all too slow to meet the aspirations of some spirits in Israel, but almost too rapid for the backwardness of the mass, was at the same time causing this great event which was to come to illumine the heavens with its reflection beforehand, and leading the Prophet to throw out thoughts which suggested the event and prepared for it. The first of these truths is testified to by the consciousness of Christ Himself, and the second by the Messianic beliefs and hopes current among the people even before He put forth any claims to be the Messiah. Yet these truths being admitted, or rather insisted upon, there is still much room for enquiring what the Prophet's precise conceptions were. These conceptions cannot but bear traces of limitation, imposed on them by the age in which he lived, and have been far transcended on every side by the reality. The peculiar point, however, is that the Prophet's lofty ideal of the Servant has little in common with the Messianic idea of other prophecies. This idea is that of a King of the house of David (Isa. ix. 7; Mic. v. 2; Zech. ix. 9; Ps. ii. etc.). But such a royal personage has no place in these twenty-seven chapters. If David be a single time referred to in the prophecy, it is not one of his descendants, but the People, that enters into the inheritance of the "sure mercies" covenanted to him, and assumes the leadership of the nations which he was promised (Chap.

lv. 5; Ps. xviii. 43). Even if we supposed that the Prophet conceived the Servant as an individual—a supposition which many consider difficult to make—there is no evidence that he identified him with the ideal King of other prophecies. This idea of the King, indeed, has entirely disappeared, and a conception altogether different has taken its place.

These remarks in some measure anticipate what should come later, but some of them were necessary to supplement the exposition of Chapter xl. verses 1-11 given in a former article. The thread of that article may now be resumed.

The Prophet's horizon is bounded by the restoration from exile. Between him and that event there are distinct occurrences, great steps towards the event; after it no occurrences take place: the restoration is the initiation of the perfect kingdom of God. Even the occurrences that lie between him and this event the Prophet invests with an ideal grandeur, but after this event he becomes wholly ideal. He works with his religious conceptions alone. Out of these he constructs the kingdom of God in its final form (Chaps. lx.-lxii.). That this kingdom of God is considered a kingdom on earth, and that, as the Prophet fashions it, it seems a singular mixing up of the miraculous and the natural, of what we suppose to be heaven and what we know to be earth, cannot lead us astray as to his general conception, or prevent our perceiving that it is his final form of the kingdom of God that he is presenting. It is not, however, with this final form, but with the events that precede it and that introduce it, that we are concerned in the meantime; only these events, or at least the way in which the Prophet regards them, cannot be understood in the remotest way, unless we consider them to be the immediate antecedents to the perfect form of God's kingdom.

The phenomena and forces which filled and made up the Prophet's world have been alluded to, and are familiar.

They were, Jehovah, God alone, and the false gods; the People of God, in bondage to that mighty world-empire which was but an incarnation of its own idolatry; the irresistible career of Cyrus, and the universal prostration of the idol-worshipping nations before him. These are the forces out of whose conflict has to arise the universal kingdom of the Lord. To many an eye the world might have seemed a chaos, as it did fill many of the Prophet's contemporaries with despair. They shared in the alarm of the other nations at the advance of Cyrus, fearing he might but forge heavier chains for them than those that now bound them (xliv. 8). In the events transpiring around them they could perceive no trace of a ruling God, and to none of them did the arm of the Lord make itself apparent (liii. 1). Their way was hid, and thick darkness touched their faces (xlii. 16). Querulousness and the captiousness of despair took possession of them; "Woe to him that striveth with his Maker! shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou?" (xlv. 9); they were wholly downcast and paralysed: "Why, when I am come, is there no man; when I call is there none that answereth?" (i. 2). Their God had forsaken them, and they trembled before the fury of the oppressor (xlix. 14, li. 13). But though to many minds in Israel all things might appear in confusion and turning to chaos, to no prophet of Jehovah could the world ever appear a chaos. It was not a chaos, though it might present a hard problem. It was a divine drama that was being played, complicated and extended, and only a prophet of the Lord could foresee how it would develop itself. He could foresee because to his mind the principal, or rather the only, actor in the drama was Jehovah Himself. And his foresight of it is little but his conception of Jehovah, of what He is and what his purposes are because He is who He is, flung into the wrestling mass of principles and forces which he perceived around him. The thought

of Jehovah, like the morning light falling upon the face of the earth in darkness, turns the wild confusion into order. Under the prophet's eye there starts, and proceeds step by step, the evolution which ushers in the kingdom. This evolution has two sides, an outer and an inner; but the power moving and operating in both is Jehovah, God of Israel. The Prophet's conception of the Lord gives unity to the movements and interprets them.

For, to take the outward evolution first, this Cyrus who was spreading consternation among the heathen, treading down kings and making their sword like dust and their bow like the driven stubble (xli. 2), and exciting terror in the breasts even of the captives, was Jehovah's instrument, whom He had raised up and called from the East, and who had come, obedient to his bidding (xli. 2, 25); and his raising him up was not a mere display of power or an act of vengeance, but a great operation within the sphere of his purpose of salvation: "I have raised him up *in righteousness*, he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives" (xlv. 13). The Prophet does not go beyond other prophets when he expresses the mere conception that Cyrus was Jehovah's instrument, whom He made use of for effecting his purposes with his people. For Isaiah had already named the Assyrian the "rod of Jehovah's anger," whom He used, as a passive instrument in his hands, wherewith to chastise his people, so passive that when he presumed to have thoughts and purposes of his own he was behaving as madly and monstrously as if "the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift itself as if it were no wood!" (x. 15). And in Jeremiah the Lord speaks of "Nebuchadnezzar my servant," and assigns to him as part of the service which he shall perform the destruction of the idolatries of Egypt (xxv. 9, xliii. 12); the latter conception one which is undoubtedly analogous to that of the Prophet whom we are

studying. But in two particulars this Prophet goes beyond others; first, in the vast scope of the task which he assigns to Cyrus and in the constructive character of this task; for his mission is twofold, one part of it being to crush the heathen world-power, and thereby abolish idolatry and open the way for the expansion of "judgment" or the true religion; and the other being to set free the Lord's captives and build anew his temple, that the law might go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem: and, second, in the close intimacy with Jehovah Himself into which He brings the Persian hero, agreeably to the constructive nature of his operations in behalf of God's people, while the Assyrian and Babylonian were mere instruments of destruction used by Jehovah in his anger, and which He flung away or broke to pieces like a rod when his purpose was served with it. Cyrus is no mere instrument, he is the Lord's "anointed," whose right hand He holds (xlv. 1), whom He "loveth" (xlviii. 14), whom He goes before and prospers, whom He called by name when he did not know Him (xlv. 4), and who shall even call on his name (xli. 25). These last words suggest one of the most interesting questions that these remarkable prophecies raise, the question, what thoughts the Prophet had of the religious position of Cyrus, what hopes he entertained of him, and whether he anticipated that the conqueror would realize that it was the God of Israel who was crowning his arms with victory, and that he might be won over to the religion of Jehovah? No thought was too lofty or too wide for the Prophet in the passion of enthusiasm which the vision of a restored nation and a regenerated world raised within him. And, obviously, if such a great thought occurred to him, it would facilitate to his mind the solution of the great problem which above all attracted his thoughts, how the nations could be gained over to the true faith, and the kingdoms of the nations become the kingdom of the Lord.

Such a great work could not be accomplished by Cyrus, for this was the task assigned to another who alone could accomplish it, the Servant of the Lord (xlii. 2), as it could be effected not by conquest or strife, but by methods very different, by the unwearied gentleness of one who should not cry nor lift up nor let his voice be heard in the streets. Yet how mighty an impulse the adhesion of Cyrus might give to such a work, whether by his example or his influence!

In this way what might be called the external frame of the Prophet's dream of the universal kingdom of the Lord was set up—the idolatrous empire was laid low, the idols demonstrated to be vanity (xli. 29), those that served graven images turned back and put to shame (xli. 17), the ransomed of the Lord restored to Zion with everlasting joy upon their heads (li. 11), and Israel saved with an eternal salvation (xlv. 17). Such language is proof enough how ill-suited such a phrase as "external frame" is to express the Prophet's conception. The work of Cyrus was in truth the work of Jehovah; its whole significance to the Prophet lay in its being a religious work, a great stride taken by the kingdom of the Lord towards its full victory over all that was evil and false. Nothing could demonstrate how entirely the religious idea of it dominated the Prophet's mind so much as his eagerness to bring Cyrus, the great agent who was accomplishing it, himself into true relations to the omnipotent Redeemer of Israel and God over all. If the Prophet's hopes in regard to the Persian king were somewhat adventurous and but dreams, they were very profound dreams, significant enough to us of the scope and the complexion of the conceptions which he cherished. And, to come down from them to modern ground, it is perhaps possible to learn from them something pertinent to ourselves. If they must be clean that bear the vessels of the Lord (lii. 11), even those that guide the external fortunes

of the kingdom of God must perform their task with a mind attuned to his.

But, second, there is also a process of internal evolution needful to realize the universal kingdom of the Lord. The Prophet's idea is complete; he has comprehended the problem in all its details. The work of Cyrus in the world only overthrows heathenism and eternally discredits and puts to shame the idols and the idolators. This is but a negative effect. The nations are not thereby enlightened in the knowledge of the true God and "judgment." It is the mission of the Servant of the Lord "to bring forth judgment" to the Gentiles, and the isles shall wait for his law. Not to raise the question of the Servant here, whether he be Israel or another, the way in which the Prophet himself takes up his own words towards the end of his prophecy, and, speaking of Israel restored, says, "The Gentiles shall come to thy light" (lx. 3), shews that at any rate the Servant shall come into communion with the Gentiles through Israel redeemed, and, in this way, become their "light." Any missionary enterprises of individuals, however exalted, could not occur to the Prophet. Like all prophets of the Old Testament, he operates with nations and peoples. And if the nations are to receive "light" through Israel, it will be through Israel, again an imposing People before the world's eyes, just as the Law goes forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa. ii). All this clearly enough teaches what the Prophet has in view when he speaks of the restoration of Israel. It is no mere return of a few or even many exiles from Babylon. It is the reconstruction of the People in its former integrity, and the realizing in it of its ideal as the bearer of God's revelation in the world. But this implies a great internal revolution in Israel itself, a complete regeneration, a resurrection to life and gathering together, member to member, of all the

fragments of the nation scattered in every land,—a verification of the vision of another prophet when he saw bone come to his bone, and the spirit enter into them, and they stood up a very great army (Ezek. xxxvii.). It is in treating of this internal change in Israel itself that the Prophet reveals his profoundest conceptions, conceptions hardly hinted at by other prophets, and bequeaths his richest legacy to the religious thought of mankind. Yet, as before, it is the thought of Jehovah, God of Israel, that explains this process of regeneration to the mind of the Prophet, and gives unity to it.

For, first, Jehovah, notwithstanding all that might seem to go against it, is still the God of Israel. His first words in this Prophecy are, Comfort ye my People. He has chosen Israel, and not cast them off (xli. 9). He asks evidence of any legal severance from his People that might seem valid: "Where is the bill of your mother's divorcement, with which I sent her away?" (l. 1). In answer to Zion's desponding cry, The Lord hath forgotten me, He replies, "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands" (xlix. 16). This whole episode of his anger against his people and return to them is like the "waters of Noah" to Him: "As I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I will not be wroth with thee nor rebuke thee" (liv. 9). He blots out their transgressions of his free mercy and for his "name's sake" (xliii. 25), and because He "loved" them (xliii. 4). God over all, He will make all "his hills" a way for them (xlix. 11), and command the ends of the earth to restore them: "I will say to the North, Give up; and to the South, Keep not back." And He will endow them with the principle of a new life: "I will pour out my Spirit upon thy seed."

Nevertheless, as He employed Cyrus "his shepherd" in gathering his scattered flock together, and reconstructing

the external framework of his kingdom, He employs another agent in kindling within them the glow of a new faith in Himself that shall unify them in spirit. This agent is the "Servant of the Lord." The very name given to this lofty ideal Figure, *servant*, indicates that he is designed to execute some great work for the Lord. His work indeed is vast, co-extensive with his title of servant "of the Lord," being none other in its widest view than to fulfil the purpose of Jehovah, God over all, with Jew and Gentile—to be a covenant of the People to restore the tribes of Jacob, and to be thus the light of the Gentiles. Whatever may be meant by the servant being "a covenant," there can be no doubt of what "the People" means. It is all Israel. Delitzsch (with whom Mr. Cheyne agrees), arguing in behalf of the view that the Servant is an individual, maintains that the covenant which the Servant is or mediates is made with the true "spiritual" Israel. Of course it is a truism that the covenant cannot be made with those who will have none of it—There is no peace, saith the Lord, to the wicked; but the terms which the Prophet employs, such as "the People" "Israel," "the tribes of Jacob," and particularly such words as "every one that is called by my name" (*i.e.* belongs to the people of Jehovah, xliii. 7), and such like, indicate sufficiently the nature of the Prophet's hopes; and he states elsewhere with decisive plainness who it is that he considers the subjects of the new covenant: "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters . . . Incline your ear and come unto me, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. . . . Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him" (chap. lv.). And then follows the jubilee of all nature over the redemption, not of those now the 'spiritual' Israel, but of Israel as a whole

(ver. 12, 13), for the Prophet's hope, like that of the Apostle Paul, is that "all Israel" shall be saved.

The picture which the Prophet gives of the Servant in the exercise of his task of "restoring the tribes of Jacob" is strange and attractive. The blindness of the People and their insusceptibility; their captious criticism of the events of providence and the ways of God, and the counter-schemes of their own which they prosecuted (l. 11, lv. 8); their harsh treatment of the Servant of the Lord, and utter misconception of what he was, which they afterward penitently confess (l. 4-9, liii. 1-6); his own momentary despondency, flashing up again into enthusiasm as he remembers the nearness of Him that justifies him (xlix. 4, l. 9); his making his soul an offering and his rising again among or in the People, and the prospering of the work of the Lord in his hand—all this and much more is described by the Prophet, and has formed a subject of wonder and meditation to the Church of all ages. We allude to it here merely in order to sketch the outline of the Prophet's scheme of the restitution of all things. It may be hazardous to fix upon any particular thought in the Prophet's mind, and decide that this thought was the germ out of which all his other thoughts grew; yet we can hardly be wrong in regarding his thought of Jehovah as the great idea which gave unity at least to all his other conceptions, and led his mind to the scheme which has just been described. That scheme in few words was this. Jehovah, God of Israel, is God alone. Being so, the nations are related to Him no less than Israel. As the one true God He must manifest Himself to be so, and destroy all else that is called God: "My glory I will not give to another, nor my praise to graven images" (xlii. 8); "I have sworn by myself that to me every knee shall bow" (xlv. 23). Yet, though God over all, and though He is about to manifest Himself to be so, He cannot

cease to be the God of Israel. Now also this relation is about to be fully manifested. Through his Servant He will turn the hearts of his People to Himself, and, gathering them into one from all lands, will appear in his glory among them. The dualism of Jehovah's relation as God alone to all and his particular relation to Israel, the Prophet removes by making the particular relation the means whereby the universal one is realized. Israel redeemed and restored becomes the "light" of the Gentiles. This task is assigned to the Servant of the Lord; but, as has been said, whoever we may conclude the Servant to be, he reaches the nations through Israel restored. His work in Israel itself is immediate; among the nations it is mediated through the People of God, now become true to their ideal.

Such is a bare skeleton of the thoughts which the Prophet preaches to his people. The discourses in which he develops these ideas compose his great prophecy. Commentators differ much as to the limits of these discourses. In some cases a division presents itself naturally, but for the most part the stream flows on without interruption. The various divisions proposed have been provided by their authors with headings, expressing the main idea of the respective sections. Such inscriptions are more or less appropriate. It can hardly be doubted, we think, that the great conception of the Prophecy is, Jehovah, God of Israel. This conception naturally suggests both combinations and antitheses. In the first six or seven chapters of the Prophecy the antithesis prevails; Jehovah is spoken of more as God alone in opposition to idols, as Creator and the like, and in general more on the abstract and external side of his Being. In the middle chapters his attributes as Redeemer of Israel, his love and grace and pardoning mercy, are dwelt upon. In these chapters the argument for, or rather the exhibition of, his sole

Godhead, is departed from, having been exhausted in the early chapters. To exhibit the Prophet's teaching his whole prophecy would have to be copied out. An example may be given in Chapter xl. 12-31, which might be inscribed, *Jehovah, God of Israel, the Incomparable.*

12 Who measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out the heavens with a span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? 13 Who directed the spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor taught him? 14 With whom took he counsel and who instructed him? . . . 15 Behold the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance; behold he taketh up (sustaineth) the isles as a very little thing. 16 And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. 17 All the nations are as nothing before him; they are counted by him as of nothing and vanity.

18 To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?

19 The idol—a workman casteth it, and a goldsmith overlayeth it with gold, and worketh silver chains. 20 He that is too impoverished for such an oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to set up an idol that shall not totter. 21 Do ye not know? will ye not hear? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? 22 He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in. 23 That bringeth princes to nothing, and maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. 24 Hardly are they planted; hardly are they sown; hardly hath their stock taken root in the earth, when he also bloweth upon them and they wither and the whirlwind taketh them away as stubble.

25 To whom then will ye liken me, that I should be equal to him? saith the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes on high and see! Who created these? that bringeth out their host by number and calleth them all

by name ; by the greatness of his might and the strength of his power not one is missing.

27 Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, my way is hid from the Lord, and my right is passed away from my God? 28 Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard? an everlasting God is the Lord, creator of the ends of the earth; he fainteth not, neither is weary; there is no searching of his understanding. 29 He giveth power to the faint, and to him that hath no might he increaseth strength. 30 And though youths faint and be weary, and young men utterly fall; 31 yet they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

The passage is the first homily of Comfort to the people of God, shewing them what He is who is God of Israel. It sustains the great promises of Chapter xl. verses 1-11, exhibiting how Jehovah, being such as He is, can effect them, and that in his being such as He is lies the necessity of their being effected. The main idea is the immeasurable power and intelligence of Jehovah, who works with the infinite masses of the material universe as men do with the smallest things, who with his breath withers up and scatters like dust before the wind the mightiest combinations of human power in empires and states, and compared to whom all created things, whether the nations or the world, are as nothing. The delineation is in the main abstract, simply exhibiting the Greatness of Jehovah, a thing in which the Prophet delights, the application or appeal to Israel founded on the delineation being reserved for the concluding verses. The passage consists of three parts. As the Prophet develops his conception of Jehovah, the idea grows in his own mind, acquiring such force at last that he breaks out into the exclamation, "To whom then will ye liken God?" (ver. 18). This suggests the idea of the idol, also called God, and starting with this the Prophet runs his idea of Jehovah through a new development, this time referring

more to his rule among the nations, as the former verses referred to his creative power, till again his idea overmasters him, and he exclaims in Jehovah's name, "To whom then will ye liken me?" (ver. 25), rounding off his conception by a reference to the starry heavens, the host of Jehovah, who brings them forth on their nightly parade, and at whose roll-call not one is missing. And, finally, the application is made to Israel: "How sayest thou, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord? Jehovah is the strong and the giver of strength; they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength."

Verse 12 expresses Jehovah's immeasurable Greatness. The reference in the words, "Who measured?" is to creation. The question does not need to be answered: none but Jehovah. The meaning rather is, What is One who measured the waters in the hollow of his hand! It is assumed that Jehovah is Creator, and the question is designed merely to bring vividly before the mind the Greatness of One who measured, etc. The point lies in the smallness of the measures, the hollow of the hand, the span, the tierce (third part of an ephah) and scales, along with the infinite magnitude of the things measured. Man can hold a few drops in his palm, Jehovah gathers into *his* the oceans. With these small measures of his, measures which men use for the littlest things, Jehovah measures the immeasurable masses of the universe. What is expressed is the Greatness, we might almost say the magnitude or bulk, of Jehovah. It might be that under weighing and measuring is also suggested the order, the fixed proportion, the embodiment of rhythm and number in the universe. This is doubtful. The idea rather is, that immense as the masses of the material world seem to men, they are known to Jehovah and were fixed by Him, and that He manipulates them as men do the smallest things.

Verses 13, 14 deal with Jehovah's absoluteness and suffi-

ciency in Himself. In his work of Creation He was alone. The question, Who directed the Spirit of the Lord? differs from the last question. The answer is: None. And as the former question brought out the physical greatness of Jehovah, this one suggests his incalculable mental power. Unaided, with no suggestion from another, He projected, with no counsellor He executed, the mighty works of creation. The question in these verses is subordinate to that in verse 12, the two questions bringing out the might and wisdom of the Creator, the absolute greatness and self-sufficient mind of Jehovah.

Verses 15-17 set forth the inappreciableness to Him, or in comparison of Him, of all that exists. The idea throughout is Jehovah's greatness, and the impression of it increases in intensity. The nations to Him are as a drop on or in a bucket to him who carries it,—inappreciable in its weight; or as the fine dust on the balance, which does nothing to incline it either way. The reference in the words "the nations" and his "taking up" the isles or countries is not to his providential rule of them, but to his sustaining them, or to his exerting his power on them were He to do so. They are as a grain of dust as He upholds them or as He wields them.

And were a sacrifice to be made to Him, not to say that would be worthy, but that would be to Him an offering at all, a thing to which such a name could be given, Lebanon would not suffice for wood, nor all its beasts for a holocaust—so transcendent in magnitude is the God of Israel. Nay, so great is He that, in comparison of Him, or rather from his point of view, all nations are as *nothing*; before his magnitude, or, to Him when He thinks of Himself, all things that exist cease and recede into the sphere of nothingness.

Carried away by his own conception of Jehovah, the Prophet exclaims, To whom then will ye liken God?

The words, What likeness will ye compare unto Him? mean, What object can ye set over against Him as like Him or comparable to Him? The words, of course, do not mean, What representation can ye make of Him? or, Can ye represent Him under any form? The idea expressed is that of his incomparableness, his uniqueness and absolute transcendence. This thought, however, of the transcendent greatness of Jehovah, God of Israel, suggests the idol, which also bears the name of God. But the idol is not referred to in order to ask, Is the idol a fit representation of Him? There is no reference here to the representation of Jehovah under forms. The antithesis is expressed between the God of Israel and all that otherwise is named God. The Prophet is not assailing idolatry in Israel, but idolatry in itself. He is moving among principles, we might almost say dogmas. The magnitude of the true God suggests the littleness of the idol-god. *He* is incomparable; *it* is by no means so. Its genesis and manufacture are known. It is a cast metal, gilt article, upheld with chains lest it should totter and tumble to the ground. Or it is a hardwood tree fashioned into a block by a cunning workman.

With a feeling deepened by his own sarcastic treatment of the idol, the Prophet returns to his thought of the true God, astonished at the blindness and insensibility of mankind, who close their eyes and ears to that which the world from its foundations declares of God, and what has been handed down from all time regarding Him (ver. 21), and what may be seen of Him in his rule of the nations—He who from his seat on high upon the circle of the earth, the heavenly arch that overspans the earth, looks down on puny men as grasshoppers, and with his breath withers and blows away their most powerful combinations in empires and armies, dissolving them into their elements and scattering them abroad to enter into new forms, as the hot wind

of the desert withers up the luxuriant plant and scatters its dust afar (ver. 22-24). And such a thought forces once more to expression the exclamation, To whom then will ye liken the Holy One? And, finally, with an instance good for all, the Prophet rounds off his delineation of the Greatness of Jehovah by pointing men's eyes to the heavens, to the glittering parade of the starry host, which Jehovah leads forth, and who come, each one answering to the call, and not one lacking (ver. 25, 26).

Verses 27-31 give the application to Israel. Such is the God of Israel; how shall Israel despond? or how think that this God is unobservant of her history and fate, or wearied with the rule of the world and unable to give heed to its demands, or that his understanding fails to grasp the right moment for interference or the right means to success. An "everlasting" God is Jehovah, and such a word carries all with it. He is alone strong, and the source of strength—He giveth power to the faint. That which is strongest and most beautiful in its strength among men, faints and utterly falls; they that wait on Jehovah gather in Him fresh strength.

The cure for religious despondency is in the thought of God. Israel, a solitary slave in Babylon, kept murmuring, muttering to herself, My way is hid from the Lord—my condition, my fate, and manner of being treated, is unobserved by Him. Either He cannot see it or He cares not to look at it. And my judgment is passed away from my God—my right He has let slip from Him and no more upholds; that judgment which should be done me, or at least used to be done for me, the right against foes and protection from the heathen, is no longer afforded. Israel thought she was fallen out of the view of her God, who was absorbed with other interests, or unable to grasp and unite in his hand all the complex forces of the world. To all this the Prophet replies, An everlasting God is Jehovah.

He is the strong One, and they that wait on Him become partakers of his strength.

All strength which is not Divine is weakness. Natural strength has no permanence—the youths faint and become weary. It is a great mystery to us, this fainting and wearying of the youths,—premature death, the exhaustion and burning out of greatly endowed, but passionate natures, that utterly fall. The expenditure of life in the universe is incalculable. Nature is prodigal of her means. Her greatest promises are those oftenest unfulfilled. It is the “choice young men” as the word means, that weary. We have seen some young spirit endowed with the greatest gifts rise like a star upon the horizon, and move among other lights in the sky, easily to be detected from all others, with a light like none else, a colour of luminousness peculiar to himself, which the world had seldom seen and longed to retain; but just when the eyes of many worshippers were being turned to it, it was seen to become troubled or to shoot away into the darkness. And there is another faintness that comes over the strong, a weariness with life as unsatisfying, which makes them fling aside their weapons, and retire from the strife, crying,—

“Death is the end of life: Ah, why should life all labour be?”

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. It may not be explainable, but perhaps must be left as a fact of experience.

When it is said, “they shall mount as eagles,” “they shall run,” and “walk,” it is scarcely meant that some shall “mount” and others “run” and “walk.” All shall do all, each in its own time. They shall mount with wings like eagles, soaring in moments of high thought and feeling, with strong wing and eagle eye, to God Himself. They shall run and not be weary; in the struggle of life, in the race and battle, they shall be girt and strong, and where

others stumble or fall off the course they shall be victorious. In the crisis, in the hurried moment of swift decision, and prompt action, they are strong. And they shall also walk and not faint. In the dull weary journey of life, in its monotonous, hard, uphill, uninteresting road, when the way to come is like the way gone, hard, uphill, and monotonous, in the dull grey walk of life, they faint not.

These three, "mount," "run," "walk," might seem a falling climax, but perhaps they are not. It is easier to mount heavenward, in short, rapid, far-piercing flights of thought direct as it were to the throne of God, than to run the race of life, the hot keenly contested struggle with passion or the world or men. And this is easier than the walk, the lonely, lifelong, monotonous track, when one is cast quite on himself, without excitement or emulation, or immediate gain or prize. It is easier to weather the storm, than to endure and wait when one is becalmed upon the sea of life. To live an ordinary life well is the greatest of all deeds.

A. B. DAVIDSON.

THE WORTH OF SPARROWS.

MATTHEW x: 29-31 ; LUKE xii. 6, 7.

THERE is no quality which Christ required of his disciples in a higher degree, or sought more earnestly to cultivate in them, than that of *courage*. In "the man Christ Jesus" this attribute of our nature (which through the masculine speech of Rome has given its name to *virtue*, as being the proper distinction and excellence of *a man*) attains its perfect, because its most purely moral, exhibition and expression. And the truest courage, if its type be in Him, finds its source and its stay in faith in the living God. The highest manliness is one with godliness.