

ISAIAH AND ISAIANIC.

IN the present paper an attempt will be made to answer a question concerning the Book of Isaiah, which by its very nature is closely connected with a number of other critical problems, the question namely how all the prophecies contained in the sixty-six chapters of the book came to be bound up and issued as one work. The statement made by Cornill, and in one form or another practically accepted by all modern writers of the critical school,¹ that the later portions of the book, and presumably also much in chapters i.-xxxix., were united with the prophecies of Isaiah the son of Amoz "by error or accident," can only be accepted as a solution of despair. If no other answer could be given, one should indeed be obliged to have recourse to this one. That, however, another solution is possible the present paper is designed to show; and it will be seen presently that if the theory here proposed can be accepted, an answer would be found which in a measure is capable of mediating between the traditional view of one Isaiah only and the modern critical theory of two or more Isaiahs.

We must first of all bear in mind that the problem is intimately bound up with the study of parallel passages. The defenders of the traditional view of the unity of the book, whose last great representative was the elder Delitzsch, have always made much of the fact that there are a number of striking linguistic and other affinities running through the prophecies ascribed by tradition to Isaiah the son of Amoz. Later investigation has, however, shown that the differences between the acknowledged prophecies of Isaiah and other

¹ The latest statement on the subject is found in Prof. Sanday's article, "Bible," in the second volume of Hastings' *Encyclopædia of Religion and Ethics*. The error is there ascribed to the inclusion of heterogeneous prophecies in one leather scroll.

parts of the book are even more incisive and more numerous than the affinities,¹ and the force of the latter by themselves is undoubtedly diminished by the fact that similar correspondences (which, however, still await some further study and tabulation) can be shown to exist between II. Isaiah and several others of the earlier prophets.

But the evidence afforded by the study of parallel passages has so far only been allowed to play a part in the discussions concerning the unity or diversity of authorship of the Book of Isaiah, whilst the question as to how—on the theory of divers authorship—the different prophecies came to be united in one work has not been closely associated with this branch of investigation. What we want is a theory that would not only explain the affinities and diversities of the prophecies, but also throw light on the circumstances under which the compilers decided to issue the book in the form in which it has come down to us. If such a theory could be successfully formulated, it would clearly possess the merit of accounting for more facts than the older explanations were able to embrace, and it is just such a theory that the present writer ventures to propose.

The existence of the book in its present form may be explained on the supposition that Isaiah the son of Amoz was the founder of a prophetic school, which continued to bear his name down to the exile and later. We know that there were in early times societies or guilds of prophets. In the time of Elijah and Elisha these societies, which have been aptly designated as schools, come before us definitely under the title of "sons of the prophets." Some think that the phrase "I am no prophet, neither a prophet's

¹ See Essay VIII. affixed to Prof. Cheyne's *Prophecies of Isaiah* (1882); the same author's *Introduction to the Book of Isaiah* (1895), p. 251 sqq.; Dr. Driver's statements on the subject in his *Isaiah: his Life and Times*, and *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*.

son" in Amos vii. 14 bears testimony to the existence of such schools of prophets in the period to which Isaiah the son of Amoz himself belonged. This inference is, indeed, very doubtful, for the term "a prophet's son" might properly be taken to refer to the ordinary relationship of father and son. But much more decisive testimony on the essential point (though not on the title "prophet's son") is found in an undoubted utterance of Isaiah himself. There is namely the prophecy (or part of a prophecy) contained in Isaiah viii. 11-16, which concludes with the words: "Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among My disciples,"¹ thus showing with absolute clearness that the address beginning, "Say ye not, A conspiracy, concerning all whereof this people shall say, A conspiracy," was spoken to a circle of disciples,² who formed the prophet's close entourage, and into whose midst he retired when all around looked dark and hopeless. It is also probable that Isaiah xxviii. 23-29 (likewise an undoubted prophecy of Isaiah the son of Amoz) refers to the method, dealt out in various degrees of severity, which the prophet found it necessary to use in the instruction and disciplining of certain classes of disciples. It would, indeed—even apart from the extant decisive evidence—seem hardly likely that such a mighty prophetic figure as Isaiah the son of Amoz should not have had a following among the younger and less mighty prophetic spirits of his age, who, in the full sense of the term, would form an Isaianic school of prophecy; and one has a right to think that such a school once formed would be capable

¹ On this passage, see Dr. Skinner's remarks in his work on Isaiah, vol. i. p. xxxi. (Cambridge Bible).

² תלמידי. It is in view of this theory noteworthy that תלמידי in exactly the same sense only occurs again in II. Isaiah (ch. l. 4: twice); the full title having probably been תלמידי יהוה (disciples of Yahweh, ch. liv. 13). The תלמידי, My disciples, in Isa. viii. 16 must indeed go back to יהוה in v. 11. The other two passages in which the form is found are in Jeremiah (cha. ii. 24, xiii. 23), but the application is quite different there ("A wild ass used to the wilderness"; "accustomed to do evil").

of carrying on its traditions to later epochs of Hebrew history.

If, moreover, the persistent tradition of Isaiah's martyrdom in the time of Manasseh (possibly referred to in Heb. xi. 37: "sawn asunder") has (as may, indeed, reasonably be supposed) a basis in fact, the theory of the continuance of an Isaianic school of prophecy would appear to be strengthened; for it is only too well known how much—in the providence of the Eternal, as one may rightly add—the sufferings of the founder of a school have to do with its subsequent energy and vitality.

But if the idea of an Isaianic school of prophecy lasting beyond Isaiah's lifetime be favourably considered, there would be no difficulty in assuming that such a prophetic school would, besides a name, also have a local habitation, and that this habitation may have been from time to time changed in consequence of such events as the captivity and the vicissitudes which followed.

Now assuming such a condition of things, the prophetic writings of the original Isaiah and also those of the chief Isaianic prophets of subsequent times would naturally be kept in such a habitation, so that when the time came for editing the prophecies, utterances of later representatives of the school would be found side by side with—and in some cases even seem indistinguishable from—the prophetic portions which emanated from the founder of the school. And a satisfactory explanation would at the same time be provided for both the affinities and the diversities that have been noted in the prophecies included in the Book of Isaiah. There would naturally be a systematic close study of the writings of the founder by the later members of the school, and each of these—if he had any original genius at all—would at the same time develop a style of his own, besides making use of the literary vocabulary current

in his own days, and being more or less influenced besides by prophets of other Schools.

On this view, it may be regarded as very probable that the intention of the early editors was not to edit the prophecies of Isaiah the son of Amoz only, but to make a collection—and possibly merely a selection—of the prophecies uttered by members of the Isaianic school of prophecy belonging to different times. They would, of course, head the work with prophecies spoken by the great founder of the school, and then proceed to arrange the rest partly in a chronological order, and partly according to the subject matter or some other principle of which no certain knowledge is perhaps now attainable.

When they arrived at the great prophecy of the restoration, beginning with what we now call chapter xl., they may even be assumed to have indicated the fact by a distinct break in their text, so as to show that a fresh period of Isaianic prophecy was commencing. Such a distinction would, however, become disregarded by copyists or even editors of later times, when the historical perspective became blurred, and the literary sense more or less blunted. It is to these later forms of the text that on this theory the misapprehension and confusion that have so long reigned in Isaianic studies may be ascribed. The original editors, it is here suggested, had quite sufficient light and to spare to distinguish between the work of Isaiah the son of Amoz and the great prophet of exilic times, who indited the great prophecy of hope and consolation in the reign of Cyrus. For let it be remembered that criticism in very many cases merely rediscovers what had been clearly understood, say, thousands of years ago. Criticism—the true kind of course only is meant—is the light of reason capable of illumining the distant past in the sight of men whose span of life lies in the present.

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