

**The Last Edition of Delitzsch's
"Isaiah."**

Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of "Isaiah."

By FRANZ DELITZSCH, D.D. Translated from the Fourth Edition. With an Introduction by Prof. S. R. DRIVER, D.D. Vol. I. T. & T. Clark, 1890.

THIS work may be considered Delitzsch's last gift to the Christian Church. Within a few months after penning the preface to it, he passed away. A short paper, contributed to the *Expositor* in the autumn of last year, and two or three articles in the *Theologisches Literaturblatt* were actually the last literary work of Delitzsch's long career; but this final edition of his "Isaiah" was the last considerable stone added to the building of a lifetime, before the busy master-hand was stilled in death. It is marked by the characteristics which distinguished this great Hebrew scholar from the first. Wide range of learning, minute accuracy in detail, careful observation of all that appeared in the literature of three or four countries touching his subject, complete candour and frank acceptance of new arguments, followed not seldom by a frank acknowledgment of changed views—those characteristics of the true scholar were in Delitzsch combined with many of the qualities of the theologian, the religious insight, the mysticism, and especially the profoundly devout spirit of a man who understood thoroughly the religion as well as the language of the sacred writings he expounded. Such was the general character of the work of one whom many in England loved to call master, and such it continued to be to the end. It is hardly necessary to say that the present writer makes no pretension to review or criticise a work by Delitzsch, but as one who has given some attention to the subject, he has undertaken, at the editor's request, to give some account of the last production of this eminent scholar, and the relation of his critical views on Isaiah to those at present in the ascendant.

The four editions of the commentary on Isaiah are dated respectively 1866, 1869, 1879, and 1889. The substance of the work has remained unaltered throughout, yet every edition has shown signs of the most careful and minute revision on almost every page. As Delitzsch himself says, in each edition of his commentaries he leaves so much that is peculiar to each, that no one becomes quite antiquated by its successors. A careful comparison of the first edition of the "Isaiah" with the last leaves one wondering at the "infinite capacity for taking pains" which marks the true artist, whether be commentator, painter, or architect.

On the first page we find a new explanation of the Massoretic name for the prophetic portion of the Old Testament Scriptures, and on the last, certain significant changes in the language used concerning Asshur and Egypt, and the cycle of prophecy contained in chaps. xxiv.-xxvii. Such changes are but representative of scores which we have marked, but which we only refer to here in passing, to illustrate the amount of patient revision which every line of the commentary has undergone.

Our readers will be most interested in Delitzsch's views on the unity of the Book of "Isaiah" and the degree to which he was brought to modify his earlier opinions. After rapidly sketching the history of criticism during the last half-century, he says: "If we take our stand on this eminence, then the Book of Isaiah is an anthology of prophetic discourses by different authors. I have never found anything inherently objectionable in the view that prophetic discourses by Isaiah and by other later prophets may have been blended and joined together in it on a definite plan. Even in that case the collection would be no play of chance, no production of arbitrary will. These later prophets so closely resembled Isaiah in prophetic vision, that posterity might on that account well identify them with him. In view of this fact, the whole book rightly bears the name of Isaiah, inasmuch as he is, directly and indirectly, the author of all these prophetic discourses; his name is the correct common-denominator for this collection of prophecies, which, with all their diversity, yet form a unity; and the second half particularly (chaps. xl.-lxvi.) is the work of a pupil who surpasses the master, though he owes the master everything. Such may possibly be the case. It seems to me even probable, and almost certain, that this may be so; but indubitably certain it is not, in my opinion, and I shall die without getting over this hesitancy. For very many difficulties arise." Delitzsch then proceeds to describe these difficulties, some of the chief of which are, that there is no parallel to such a phenomenon in the other canonical books of prophecy, that history knows nothing of such a series of prophets, their very names and existence—if they ever existed—having been forgotten, as well as the fact that the type and style of the disputed prophecies by no means stands in sharp contrast to the remainder.

A somewhat decided change of view is here perceptible as compared with the confident advocacy of unity which marked earlier editions, and it is a mark of the freshness and activity of mind of Delitzsch that in advanced age he was so open to conviction and so ready to acknowledge any modification of views previously expressed. But the cautious judgment here given stops considerably

short of giving up the unity of the book as incredible. Convinced, on the whole, that more hands than one have been at work in the composition of these prophecies, and that peaks, which had seemed from a distance to blend into one lofty mountain, must in reality be distinguished,—convinced, moreover, that a believer in the Divine inspiration of the utterances loses nothing by the change, the truly prophetic and supernatural character of the prophecies remaining unaltered, Delitzsch does not hesitate to avow that the balance of argument seems to him to lie that way. But he recounts at length the arguments on the other side, which to the last he asserts have never been met by the advocates of the theory of composite authorship. Delitzsch's own view clearly is, that it is quite possible to pay too much attention to these critical questions, which can never be closed beyond the reach of controversy. He fears lest the Divine word should "completely disappear behind the tangled thorns of an overgrown criticism." He is quite prepared to grant to criticism "its well-founded rights," but objects strongly to that "naturalistic contemplation of the world which demands foregone conclusions of a negative character," and is chiefly anxious that whether one Isaiah, or many, be recognised, the God who spake by the prophets should not be forgotten, nor the perennial significance of divinely inspired words be overlooked.

It would, perhaps, be impossible to describe an attitude towards current criticism of the Old Testament more sound and satisfactory than this. It is as foolish as it is useless to take a stand upon traditional views, and meet all the investigations of critics with an unintelligent *non possumus*. If it can be shown that the utterances of many men of God, extending over a considerable period have become blended under one great name, our belief in prophecy and the God who spoke through many voices will not fail us. If the sublime words of the "Deutero-Isaiah" were not penned centuries before the exile, the character of the prophecy is but little altered, and its value as a divinely inspired composition can hardly be said to be lessened. But caution is needed before accepting current fashionable hypotheses, and the tone adopted by Delitzsch is more conservative and decidedly less confident than that adopted by the two eminent English scholars—Canons Cheyne and Driver—to whom he has dedicated this volume. These are the days of "victorious analysis." It is the fashion at present to pull to pieces, confidently to mark out the precise share taken by each one of a dozen several writers or editors in a composition which for centuries has been held to be the work of one man. Great is the power of analysis, and marvellous indeed is the acumen of modern critics; indeed, it needs no little courage just now to hint that critical analysis is anything short of omnipotent. A reaction, however, is

probably not far off, and the balance will ere long be redressed. Meanwhile, lesser critics may at least learn from Delitzsch not to allow the matter of the sacred text to be neglected, while incessant battle is being waged concerning its form, date, and authorship.

It is hardly needful to point out that the literature of the subject is in this edition brought fully up to date. Little seems to have escaped Delitzsch's eye, and as regards English literature, not only do substantial works on Isaiah, like those of Cheyne and G. A. Smith, receive due recognition, but reference is made to articles in the *Church Quarterly* and elsewhere, and a passing remark of the late Bishop Patteson, in one of his published letters, draws forth comment. The bibliographical table on p. 45 is useful. Space will not permit us to point out some of the chief changes we had marked in the body of the commentary. The views taken of the prophecy concerning Babylon in chaps. xiii., xiv., and that concerning Tyre in chap. xxiii., are illustrations of these. Here and there a long note is added, as, for example, the reference to Pentateuchal criticism on p. 2. On the other hand, some omissions have been made, chiefly of technical matter, so that the length of the whole work remains substantially the same.

English readers may well be grateful to Messrs. Clark for bringing within their reach this valuable work, the last fruit of a tree that has borne so many ripe and rich clusters. Characteristically modest is the author's estimate of it, who tells us, with a touch of pathos, that the book, complete as he has striven to make it, "will, sooner or later, in my eyes shrink into a very imperfect and insignificant production. Of one thing only do I think I may be confident, that the spirit by which it is animated comes from the good Spirit that guides along the everlasting way." We may conclude by saying that, in our opinion, those who would enter into the meaning of that Spirit as He spake long ago by Isaiah, words of comfort and hope which have not lost their significance to-day, cannot find a better guide, one more marked by learning, reverence, and insight, than Franz Delitzsch.

W. T. DAVISON.

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