

The Theology of Isaiah.

BY PROFESSOR THE REV. A. B. DAVIDSON, D.D., LL.D., EDINBURGH.

VI.

It is impossible to say anything of the "virgin" in Isaiah vii. which has not been already often said, and is familiar. If Immanuel be identical with the "son" of the house of David in chap. ix., the "virgin" must belong to that house. There is nothing in the text to warrant the idea of Delitzsch that the "virgin" was regarded by the prophet as one of obscure birth. The term translated "virgin" in the Septuagint has no technical meaning, though perhaps always used of an unmarried young woman. Even if the more technical *bethulah* had been employed, ambiguity would still have remained, for this term is occasionally used of a young married woman (Joel i. 8); the sense put upon the passage in the New Testament could have been expressed unambiguously only by a circumlocution. Something depends upon the use of the article with the word—*the* virgin. Those who fancy that Immanuel is a sign to Ahaz in regard to the Syro-Ephraimitic coalition regard the article as generic—the maiden, that class. This is virtually equivalent to a plural in English, as when it is said "the horse for preservation is a vain thing," "as the dog laps," etc. This use of the article with such a word as "young woman" is rather improbable; it occurs usually in the case of the lower creatures, where the individuals are indistinguishable from one another, and the class is seen in any individual. The article here is more probably either the usual one, indicating a *known* person, in which case we must assume that the virgin had already been referred to in some parts of the prophecy no more existing, for that the reference could be to a young woman present, or known from her station or relations to Ahaz and the bystanders, has no probability; or the use of the article is the idiomatic one not uncommon in Hebrew, where the agent is made definite just by the act which he performs. Thus in 2 Sam. xvii. 17, it is said that Jonathan and Ahimaaz waited at En-rogel and "the wench always went and told them," where the wench is not the priest's girl, but just *the* girl that did the act. And probably here "the maiden" is just *the* maiden who shall bear Immanuel. In the prophecy of Micah the article

is wanting, "till the time that a bearer shall bring forth" (ch. v. 3), and though it is rather precarious to argue on the absence of the article in elevated style, the language of Micah may be held to confirm the above interpretation of the article in Isaiah. Micah's prophecy can hardly be independent of Isaiah's, and as it must be a number of years later, it casts some light on the way in which the prophecy of Isaiah was understood, particularly on the *time* when the prophet expected Immanuel to be born. Micah either did not read Isaiah to mean that the Messiah would be born quite soon, or if he so understood the prophecy, he did not regard Isaiah's expectation in reference to time as an essential part of his prophecy, for he himself, while adopting the prophecy, regards its fulfilment as still in the indefinite future: "He will give them up (to disaster), until she that bears shall have brought forth."¹

The prophecy of Immanuel is in the main merely the prophet's fixed conceptions embodied in a historical form. From the beginning he had expressed his assurance from the nature of Jehovah and the condition of the people that great judgments must overtake them, though a full end

¹ Micah names Bethlehem as the place out of which the Ruler shall come forth. This might mean nothing more than that he should be of the seed of David, who arose out of Bethlehem. At the birth of our Lord the Jewish authorities interpreted the words more strictly, and they were literally fulfilled. Dr. Arnold of Rugby had an interesting theory of the fulfilment of such prophecies, which he called fulfilment *ex abundantia*—all that Micah meant, he thought, was that the Messiah would be of the seed of David, and all that Zechariah meant in his prophecy of the Messiah riding on an ass was that He would be lowly or a peaceful Ruler; but God in His providence brought about a literal fulfilment, which was more striking and a greater confirmation to faith. It may be said, however, not at all in the interests of a literal fulfilment of prophecy, but in the interests of accurate interpretation of Micah, that the prophet probably used the term Bethlehem literally. He looks forward to the complete destruction of Jerusalem, and, naturally, to the entire fall of the Davidic house. The population of Jerusalem goes forth and dwells in the field, that is, is scattered over the country. And probably he conceives the royal house reduced to the rank of citizens or dwellers in a country ruled by others, and regards it as having returned to its paternal home in Bethlehem.

would not be made. These general conceptions dominated all he said from his first appearance. But they were conceptions which were rather of the nature of moral necessities, articles of belief, but held abstractly. But with the appearance of the Assyrian, called in by Ahaz, there suddenly presented themselves before the prophet's view the instruments through which his great moral certainties were to find historical fulfilment. Assyria would devastate Ephraim and Judah in common, reducing the country to a pasture land and a forest. In this way would his anticipations of judgment find fulfilment. But behind this his anticipations of final salvation would also be realised. The house of David, now corrupt, would suffer greater humiliations than overtook it even at the revolt of the ten tribes. To Amos, perhaps, the tabernacle of David seemed thrown down by this revolt, but it would suffer greater disasters. The same fate would befall it that would overtake the people. Like the nation the stock of David would be cut down to the roots, but out of the root of Jesse a shoot would grow, on whom the spirit of the Lord would rest. There is nothing new in this, strictly; circumstances, such as the attempt of the northern allies and the condition of the Davidic house, merely made the prophet apply to the royal house what he had from the beginning predicted of the nation as a whole—its destruction and its revival. What is new is the lofty ideal formed of the Davidic king of the new and perfect era. And even one-half of this ideal is not new, for it is but the old idea in a new form that salvation is through the perfect manifestation and presence of Jehovah among His people. But what is wholly new is that this perfect manifestation and presence shall be in the person of the Davidic king.

The passage chs. viii. 5–ix. 6 pursues the same line of thought as ch. vii., and need not be dwelt on. It appears to be now at least a literary unity, though it probably contains the outline of prophecies extending over a considerable period. Some of these prophecies betray quite a different tone of feeling from others, and they may not have been uttered in close succession to one another—*e.g.* ch. viii. 6–8 compared with vers. 9, 10. The deepest gloom and the brightest light stand side by side. The reference also to Zebulun and Naphtali may suggest that the deportation of the population of Galilee had already taken place, or,

at any rate, that the Assyrian invasion was imminent. First, under the figure of a great inundation of the river the advance of the Assyrian power is described. He fills all his channels, rises over all his banks, overflows Ephraim and sweeps also into Judah, rising to the neck and submerging all beneath his waters, and the outspreading of his wings fills the breadth of the land of Immanuel (ch. viii. 6–8). But at the thought of Immanuel the prophet's courage rises, and he flings defiance at the Assyrian and all nations of the world under his standard: “Rage ye peoples, but ye shall be broken in pieces. Gird yourselves, but ye shall be broken in pieces. Purpose a purpose, and it shall come to nought, for Immanuel—God is with us” (vers. 9, 10). Or if the words did not immediately follow in delivery the verses preceding, they express the prophet's feeling in other moments.

From depicting the great calamity that is imminent, the prophet turns to exhort the people and to teach them, particularly the pious among them, what attitude to observe until the judgment be overpast: “Call not anything a conspiracy which this people calls a conspiracy, neither fear ye what they fear. Sanctify Jehovah, and let him be your fear.”¹ It is not the external foe that is the true object of dread, it is Jehovah; not that which is without the people, the forces of the world, but He who is in the midst of them. And then the prophet expresses the attitude which he himself will take: “I will wait for Jehovah, who hideth His face, and will look for Him.” To him the Lord's face is already hidden. But speedily the hiding will appear to all; a darkness will settle down on the land with no daybreak (ver. 20). And then some terrible pictures are given of the scanty, famished population, wandering over the desolated and sterile land (vers. 21 *seq.*). The passage is extremely fragmentary and obscure. The transition from darkness to light is probably made in ver. 21, “they shall look upward,” and ver. 22 seems to say that the darkness is dispelled. For the next verse proceeds: “For there shall not be gloom to her that was in anguish. The people that walked in darkness have seen great light. For the yoke of his burden, the rod of the oppressor Thou hast broken, as in the day of Midian. For every boot of him that stampeth in the fray, and

¹ Secker's proposal to read “holy thing” (*godesh*) for “conspiracy” (*qesher*), though followed by several commentators, has nothing to recommend it.

the garments rolled in blood, shall be for fuel of the fire. For a child is born to us, and the government is upon his shoulder." A few great shifting scenes, the great darkness and distress, the breaking of the day, ushered in by the downfall of the oppressor, the end of war, and issuing in the eternal reign of the Prince of Peace. These scenes follow one another in near succession. It did not occur to the prophet that it would take 700 years to unroll his picture and translate it into history. If it had, how could his faith have been sustained? The hope was presented to him and his contemporaries in such a way as to appear realisable in a brief space. It was a salvation, like salvation at all times, ready to be revealed.

Interpreters of prophecy have had trouble in explaining this crowding of great issues, separated far from one another in fulfilment, close upon one another. The peculiarity has been called "perspective" in prophecy, or, in the phrase of Delitzsch, the "foreshortening of the prophet's horizon." Just as one at a distance from a mountainous region sees one mountain rise up behind another and fancies it close at the back of it, but when he reaches the first he finds that the other which seemed close to it has receded and really stands far away, so to the view of the prophet great events crowd close behind one another which, however, in actual fulfilment are drawn widely apart in time. The term perspective is merely a new name given to the phenomenon, unhappily it is no explanation of it. The explanation is usually sought in the prophetic vision. But "vision" in the strict sense was rare, and if we look into our Lord's prophecy of the end we observe the same peculiarity. A satisfactory explanation may not be easy to find. It may be said, however, that the religious conceptions of the prophets really constitute prophecy, and that the forms in which it seems to them their conceptions will find realisation are secondary. The conceptions are common to all the prophets, the forms vary from age to age, just as in some temple of God the thoughts expressed by the builder are permanent though the material may decay and need renewal in successive centuries. The prophet's conceptions were not abstract, but of the nature of intuitions clothed in forms by the phantasy, and the phantasy could not do otherwise than operate with the materials about it, the forces material or moral in the world around, and construct its own new

world out of them. It would have been possible no doubt to dislocate the prophet from the conditions of his time, and plant him amidst those of distant centuries, but it would have been to make him unintelligible to his contemporaries. Thus the structure reared by Isaiah is composed of materials of the Assyrian age, that of second part of Isaiah of materials from the Babylonian age, that of Daniel of those of the Greek age, and, it may be added, that of John of those of the Roman age. The materials have long since decayed, but the conceptions remain, and will be realised. The forms which the beast, the false prophet, and the harlot had or seemed about to assume in John's day have succumbed to time, and their dust has gone to the creation of other shapes, embodiments of the same conceptions. What shapes they have now, one may speculate; what forms they will at the last assume, who can guess? But consideration of prophecy and its changes from age to age entitles us to throw the conceptions of the prophets into the forms of life of our own day. This is application of prophecy. But interpretation of the prophets is another thing. To *interpret* the prophet, we must throw ourselves back into his age, not bring him forward into ours.

In ch. vii. it is not expressly said that Immanuel shall be of the seed of David, though the prophecy being given to the house of David this is naturally suggested. The "son given" in ch. ix. is to sit upon the throne of David. The four names given to the child are: Wonder of a Counsellor, God mighty, Father for ever, Prince of Peace. These are names proper to a ruler and king—he is a wonder of a counsellor, purposes, projects enterprises beforehand in a superhuman way. He is God mighty, a name describing what He is in the execution of His purposes. He is everlasting Father of His people, and finally Prince of Peace. This is the final issue of all, for "peace" is what we call salvation, embracing all blessings. It is difficult to discover whether this Prince be represented as taking any part in that conflict which results in the destruction of the foe of Jehovah's kingdom, or whether this be not attributed to Jehovah alone, as it is in other places (comp. ch. xiv. 24, 25, x. 33), in which case this great ruler appears only as the king of a people delivered by Jehovah, and the salvation which He introduces and secures is

more that inner salvation of righteousness (ch. xi.). The term "God mighty" might suggest "might" in war; as the word is often so used, but in ch. xi., where "might" is ascribed to the Prince, it is said that He smites the earth with the rod of His mouth, and slays the wicked with the breath of His lips (comp. Hos. vi. 5 ; Jer. i. 10), and it is possible that "mighty," which was originally warlike prowess, is here used rather of spiritual power, just as the *trū'ah* or battle-shout came to be used of the joyful shout of the worshippers in the temple.

It is certainly the meaning of the prophet that the attributes expressed by these divine names really belong to the Davidic king, and are displayed by Him in the rule of the people. It is said His name shall be "called" Wonder of a Counsellor. But it is not just to draw a distinction between being and being called. Being called anything implies being that thing. In ch. i. 26 it is said of Jerusalem, "Afterwards thou shalt be called City of Righteousness"; and in ch. iv. 3 it is said, "He that remaineth in Jerusalem shall be called holy." The name expresses that which the person is, or particularly that which is visible and recognised in him. The meaning is not that the Davidic king is a sign that Jehovah is present with His people in counsel, in might, in fatherhood, and peace; Jehovah is present in these attributes and operations in the person of the King, or the King is the manifestation of Jehovah present in these attributes. This cannot be doubted, for in ch. xi., where virtually the same statements are made, it is said the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, a spirit of counsel and might. Here the counsel and might are certainly personal attributes, though, according to Old Testament conception, they are also attributes of the Spirit of God. How the divine and human coalesce is left a mystery. It might seem a descent from the lofty appellations in ch. ix., such as God mighty, when in ch. xi. it is said that the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon the Prince. This Spirit is threefold: a spirit of wisdom and discernment, referring probably to the Ruler's function as judge in particular causes that may come before Him (cf. vers. 3, 4); a spirit of counsel and might, pointing to His more general function as regent of the people as a whole; and a spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord, referring to His personal religious mind. From ways of thinking into which we have fallen, mere

endowment with the Spirit of God seems a less thing than to be called God mighty. But the Old Testament conception of the Spirit of God may correct this feeling. The Old Testament teaches not that Jehovah is a Spirit, but that He has a spirit, just as man has a spirit. And though in speech we can distinguish between man and His spirit, virtually the spirit of man is man. And the spirit of God is God, but with that connotation which "spirit" always carries of energy or power. The Spirit of God is God exerting power, especially life-giving power, or that highest power which we call spiritual.

The prophet hardly means that the Messiah is God, though Jehovah is really present in Him; there is union, it might almost be said, coalescence. The idea of the divine *ousia* or nature is probably not to be found in the Old Testament. God is not said to be spirit, in the sense of a kind of substance. A question of identity of substance between Jehovah and the Messiah could not rise. God is conceived as energetic, not as substantial. And under this conception the prophet's words imply that Jehovah is fully present in the Messiah, who is His manifestation. And the significance of the prophet's conceptions lies perhaps just in the turn which he gives to the current belief that salvation would be realised through the manifestation of Jehovah among men. Faith had hitherto hardly ventured to imagine *how* Jehovah would manifest Himself. Isaiah gives a form to the manifestation; Jehovah will manifest Himself in the Messiah—God with us. A loftier Messianic doctrine is hardly conceivable, at least on Old Testament ground.

The prophet's general eschatological view is very wide, and in various ways much more developed than that of Amos and Hosea. Contact with the empire of the world widened his horizon, and he draws the nations into his picture of the final salvation: "Many nations shall come and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths" (ch. ii. 1-4). There are two very remarkable chapters, xviii. and xix., the one referring to Ethiopia, the most distant land, and the other to Egypt. "In that day there shall be brought a present (a token of homage) from a people tall and smooth, a people strong, strong and all-subduing, whose land the rivers divide, to the Lord of hosts, to Mount Zion." More surprising even is the prediction regarding Egypt, because it

rises to the most perfect universalism, including in the salvation of the Lord Israel's mortal foe the Assyrian:—"In that day there shall be an highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptian shall worship Jehovah with the Assyrian. In that day shall Israel be a third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth; for the Lord of hosts shall bless them saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance." This is so extraordinary as to seem to many incredible from the age of Isaiah. There are, no doubt, difficulties in regard to the date of the prophecy, though it is almost equally extraordinary to whatever date it may be assigned. Possibly the passage belongs to the time following the great disaster to Sennacherib's army, and the retreat of the Assyrian. Judah enjoyed peace, the aged prophet's battles were all fought and won. Never had Jehovah been so exalted, and amidst a world at peace the prophet was free to follow out the

ideals of Jehovah's sovereignty which had always floated before his imagination. The condition of peace under the Messiah's reign is universal. The peace descends even upon the lower creation. Man rises to his place of supremacy, and the little child, the weakest thing among men, leads the most savage and plays with the most deadly of the creatures. Even the enmities in the lower world itself cease—the wolf and the lamb lie down together. This may be poetry, but it is profoundly moral poetry. The violence of creature to creature could not but jar upon the sensibility of this idealist and blur the picture of perfect peace which he beholds when the earth is filled with the knowledge of the Lord. The joy which fills his heart embraces all nature in its arms. But we must not hold him responsible here for a historical prediction. It is as if a painter in a great picture of the peace and security of a perfect age were to throw in, in order to enhance his idea, a sketch in the background of a little child leading a lion.

The Great Text Commentary.

THE GREAT TEXTS OF SECOND CORINTHIANS.

"But we all, with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit."—2 Cor. iii. 18 (R.V.).

EXPOSITION.

We all.—Note Paul's emphasis on the *universality* of this prerogative. This vision does not belong to any select handful; the spiritual aristocracy of God's Church is not the distinction of the lawgiver, the priest, or the prophet, does not depend upon special powers or gifts, which in the nature of things can only belong to a few. There is none of us so weak, so low, so ignorant, so compassed about with sin, but that upon our happy faces that light may rest, and into our darkened hearts that sunshine may steal.—MACLAREN.

With unveiled face.—From which a veil has been taken away; put forward in conspicuous contrast to the veiled heart (verse 15) of Israel.—BEET.

Reflecting as a mirror.—It is a question

whether the single word rendered in our version "beholding as in a glass" means that, or "reflecting as a glass does." The latter seems more in accordance with the requirements of the context, and with the truth of the matter in hand. Unless we bring in the notion of reflected lustre, we do not get any parallel with the case of Moses. Looking into a glass does not in the least correspond with the allusion which gave occasion to the whole section—to the glory of God smiting him on the face, till the reflected lustre with which it glowed became dazzling, and needed to be hid. And again, if Paul is here describing Christian vision of God as only indirect, as in a mirror, then that would be a point of inferiority in us as compared with Moses, who saw Him face to face. But the whole tone of the context prepares us to expect a setting forth of the particulars in which the Christian attitude towards the manifested God is above the Jewish. So, on the whole, it seems better to suppose that Paul meant "mirroring" rather than "seeing in a mirror."—MACLAREN.