The Theology of Isaiah.


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 betulah 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 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 bear­eth shall have brought forth.”

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 abundanti—a 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 root of J esse a shoot would grow, on whom the spirit of the Lord would rest. There is nothing 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" (qodesh) for "conspiracy" (qesher), though followed by several commentators, has nothing to recommend it.
THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

the garments rolled in blood, shall be for fuel of
the fire. For a child is born to us, and the gov-
ernment is upon his shoulder." A few great shift-
ing 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 contem-
poraries 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 "per-
spective" 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 phan-
tasy 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 con-
temporaries. 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 concep-
tions. 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 Im-
manuel 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. These are names proper to a ruler and
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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 dis-
cover 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 "might," which was originally warlike prowess,
is here used rather of spiritual power, just as the
tr'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 dis-
played 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 dis-

tinction 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 ex-
presses 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

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 apppellations in
ch. ix., such as God mighty, when in ch. xi. it is
said that the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, a spirit of
counsel and might. Here the counsel and might
may be doubted, for in ch. xi., where virtually
the same statements are made, it is said the
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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

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-saving 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 sub-
stance. A question of identity of substance be-
tween 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 salva-
tion 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 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.