

The Colophon at Isa. xxxviii. 8 in the Peshittā Version.

PROF. JOHN BINNEY.

MIDDLETOWN, CONN.

THE text of the Syriac version of the Old Testament contains a certain number of insertions, mostly in the way of headings to sections, or short notes for the guidance of the reader. They correspond on a small scale with the headings to the chapters inserted in the A. V. There are not very many of them, and while sometimes interesting, they rarely possess any critical or exegetical value. There is, however, one such insertion in the text of Isaiah to which I wish to call the attention of the Society, because it seems to me at least possible that it may have an important bearing on the history of the criticism of the book. This is a point on which I particularly desire to have the judgment of scholars.

The Syriac text of Isaiah is particularly free from insertions of the kind of which I have spoken. In the whole book there are but four, in addition to the colophon, "end of the Book of Isaiah," which follows lxvi. Three of these are headings of the common sort. At xxxiv. 1, the words **אתרא דדינא**, 'the place of judgment,' are prefixed to the prophecy of Jahweh's judgment upon Edom. At xlii. 10, the title **תשובותא דאשיא**, 'the hymn of Isaiah,' introduces the world's song of praise for the coming of the Lord. At xxxv. 2 is a longer insertion: **שלמת פלנותא קדמיתא וזדרא ולובבא דמחילא** : **דאתא פרוקא ופרק להון** : 'End of the first half. Warning and encouragement to the weak that the redeemer shall come and redeem them.' This is obviously intended to mark a division of the book at this point into two portions almost exactly equal in extent; while the latter part of the note introduces the prophecy, "Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees."

The fourth insertion in Isaiah is of a different character. Here, at xxxviii. 8, after the account of the recession of the shadow on the dial of Ahaz, are the words **שלם אשיא**, '*Finis Esaiæ.*' Then follows, as in the Hebrew text, the title, "The writing of Hezekiah,

king of Judah, when he had been sick, and was recovered of his sickness." It will be remembered that this part of Isaiah (xxxvi.—xxxix.) is an extract from xviii.—xx. of the 2d Book of Kings. On turning to the parallel passage, 2 Ki. xx. 11, in the Syriac, we find that the note **שְׁלֹם אֲשַׁעִיָּא** does not occur there. It is an insertion in the Syriac text of Isaiah and not of Kings. The question is, What was it intended to mark?

The only note just like this which I have found in the Syriac Old Testament occurs at 2 Ki. xiii. 21, where we find the words **שְׁלֹם אֲלִישַׁע**, 'The end of Elisha,' inserted after the account of the raising of a dead man to life by touching Elisha's bones. This obviously marks the end of the history of Elisha, and answers to a title previously inserted at 1 Ki. xvi. 28, at the beginning of the history of the reign of Ahab, **אֵלִיָּא נְבִיא וְאֲלִישַׁע אַחֲדֵדְעוּ**, 'Elijah the prophet and Elisha became known' (or flourished). The note at Isa. xxxviii. 8 cannot, I think, be explained in this way, as marking the end of an episode in the narrative. The few personal allusions to the prophet Isaiah which have preceded, do not constitute a history; and again, what personal history there is, is continued immediately by the mention of the prophet at the end of xxxviii., and through xxxix. To my mind the note, **שְׁלֹם אֲשַׁעִיָּא** has all the appearance of a distinct colophon, and denotes that in the judgment of the scribe who wrote it, the Book of Isaiah ended here. Colophons of this sort are inserted at the end of nearly every book in the Syriac Old Testament. They are generally rather fuller than this. Thus, at Isa. lxi. 14, we have, 'End of the Book of Isaiah'; after Hosea, 'End of Hosea the prophet'; after Zechariah, 'End of the prophecy of Zechariah the prophet'; and so forth. The colophon to Joel, however, is simply, **שְׁלֹם יוֹאֵל**, 'The end of Joel';—exactly the same phrase as is found at Isa. xxxviii. 8.

But if the note at Isa. xxxviii. 8 is a colophon, why should it have been inserted just at this place, right in the middle of the illustrative extracts from the Book of Kings? The only explanation which I can suggest is that at one time the Book of Isaiah did end just here, and that the passages which follow, and which are no integral part of the text, were subsequently added. Just as the colophon at the end of Lev. xxvi. shows that xxvii. was a later addition; and as the colophon at the end of Jer. li. shows that lii. was a later addition; so the note in the Syriac text at Isa. xxxviii. 8 shows that all which follows it was originally no part of the Book of Isaiah. The book grew, first by the addition of the poem attributed to Hezekiah

which forms the rest of xxxviii.; then by the extraction from the Book of Kings of the embassy of Merodach Baladan, which forms xxxix.; and finally by the inclusion of the entirely distinct book of the anonymous prophet, the Great Unknown, which fills xl.-lxvi.

If I am right in thus regarding this Syriac note in Isaiah as a colophon, and in my inference as to its significance, then we have here a fact of obvious importance for the history of criticism. So far as I know, the earliest allusion that has been found to the dual authorship of the Book of Isaiah occurs in the commentary of Aben Ezra written in the twelfth century. The date of the Syriac Peshittā version of the Old Testament, as given by Wright, in his *History of Syriac Literature*, is the second century A.D. Here then, a thousand years before Aben Ezra, we have the Syriac translator recording that the Book of Isaiah was marked as ending at xxxviii. 8. No Syriac translator in the second century, whether Jew or Christian, could have inserted such a note of his own mind. The higher criticism was not yet born, to raise questions of authorship and perplex the common mind "with fear of change." All the same, there is the note in the Syriac version; and I can see no way of accounting for it, unless the Syriac translator found it in the Hebrew text, which he has always faithfully followed. To him such a note must have been unintelligible; yet he has preserved it. That it should very early have fallen out of the Masoretic text, and that it should not appear in any other ancient version, is very easily accounted for. But its existence in the Syriac text is not, to my mind, accounted for, unless it came from the hand of an early scribe of the Hebrew original, and was intended to mark the limit of the book of the prophet Isaiah as first published.

I put forth this view with great diffidence, desiring to have the judgment of scholars more familiar with ancient versions, and more practised in criticism.