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The Theology of Isaiah.

By Professor the Rev. A. B. Davidson, D.D., LL.D., Edinburgh.

II.

A satisfactory or any final judgment regarding either the unity of Isa. i. or the historical period to which it belongs is difficult to form. The passage consists of two parts, vers. 1–20 and vers. 21–31. Both passages, particularly the latter, have the appearance of belonging to the very earliest period of the prophet's public life. The appeal to heaven and earth (ver. 2), and the elegiac lament over the degeneracy of Jerusalem (ver. 21) seem to express the first vivid impression made upon the prophet by the city's debasement. Neither such an appeal, nor the comparison of Jerusalem to a harlot, occurs again in the genuine writings of Isaiah, though both find frequent

parallels in the earliest prophecies of Jeremiah. It is not easy, however, to find a suitable historical situation for the prophecy as a whole. Vers. 7–9 must be read literally as giving a picture of the state of the country at the time. The precise situation is not altogether clear. The country had been overrun with foreign soldiery, and the whole, except the capital, appears to have fallen into their hands: "The daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers" (vers. 1–8). On the other hand, the danger to the capital appears to be over: "Except the Lord of hosts had left us a remnant, we should have been as Sodom" (ver. 9). The people had begun to breathe again. The foe, whatever he was, though his track was marked by fire and desolation (ver. 7), appears to be in retreat, his enterprise against the city abandoned. Two situations have been suggested, that created by the Syro-Ephraimitic invasion under Rezin and Pekah (734), and that produced by the campaign of Sennacherib (701). The grave and exaggerated terms used by the prophet (vers. 7–9) have no resemblance to the contemptuous manner in which he speaks of the Northern coalition, the two heads of which are mere "smoking tails of firebrands" (vii. 4). And if we should suppose that ch. i. was spoken when the allies were in retreat, having failed in their attempt to dethrone the house of David (vii. 1), the supposition can hardly be reconciled with chs. vii.–ix., which give a connected account of the prophet's operations during this period, and into which it is impossible to intercalate ch. i. Besides, the outlook of the prophet during the Syro-Ephraimite period is a much wider one than it appears in this first chapter. On the other hand, the picture of the desolate state of the country, the preservation of the capital and of a remnant would correspond very well to the last stage of Sennacherib's invasion, when the Assyrians had withdrawn from before Jerusalem and were in retreat. But the extreme severity of the prophet's denunciations accords very ill with the tone which he adopts in the Sennacherib period. There is indeed a terrible threat in ch. xxii. 14: "Surely this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord, the God of Hosts." But if this passage belongs to the period of Sennacherib, it must be to the earlier stages of his invasion, and has reference to the conduct of the people on a particular occasion. The characteristic charges against the people in ch. i. are those of the prophet's earliest period (ch. ii.–v.), *e.g.* judicial venality and corruption (vers. 21, 23, 26), oppression of the poor and defenceless (ver. 17), formalism in religion (ver. 10 *seq.*), private idolatry (ver. 28 *seq.*). The prophet despairs of the nation. It is a people laden with iniquity, and he is filled with a presentiment of doom, a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries: "Thus saith the Mighty One of Israel, Ha! I will ease me of mine adversaries and avenge me of Mine enemies. . . . The strong one shall be as tow, and his work as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them." Whether, therefore, ch. i. be a historical or only a literary unity, its thoughts belong to the earliest period of the prophet's ministry.

First, Jehovah's complaint over the rebellion of His children and their insensibility, which is greater than that of the beasts: "Hear, O heavens, for Jehovah speaks; I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knoweth his owner, Israel doth not know." Heaven and earth may well listen when Jehovah speaks, much more when He speaks such things as He is about to say. Before whom could this Father complain, but before the universe? And in truth His relation to Israel, and His operations within it, have a moral significance as wide as the world and its history, just as Christ suggested the same idea of universality when He said, "I am the vine, and My Father is the husbandman." Isaiah is a poet, and endows the heavens and the earth with life and intelligence. But there is more than poetry here; to him and all the prophets the universe is moral; the heavens look down with never-closing eyes on the ingratitude and perversities of men, and pass judgment on them: "Be astonished, O ye heavens at this, and be desolate, be ye utterly appalled" (Jer. ii. 12; vi. 9; xxii. 29). It would be to deviate from the simplicity of the prophet's idea to raise questions, in the manner of a later theology, over the nature of the sonship of God's "children." The prophet's object is to humanise the relation of Jehovah to His people, and give them the true idea of it, that they may think how He has borne Himself to them, and how they have requited Him. Neither would it be wise to distinguish between "nourished" and "brought up." There may be a general reference to the long,

gracious history of the people, but the pathos of the figure would be lost by running into details. Another prophet teaches us how to read this one: "When Israel was a child, I loved him. I taught Ephraim to walk, taking him on My arms. I drew them with bands of love; but they knew not that I healed them" (Hos. xi. 1–4). And yet another suggests to us the two great lines on which the Lord's nurture of His children proceeded: "I brought you up from the land of Egypt, to possess the land of the Amorite. And I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazarites. Is it not even thus, O ye children of Israel? saith the Lord" (Amos ii. 10). The solicitude and tenderness, the prodigal goodness and affection of this Father, is not limited to temporal things, nor yet to spiritual things. But His children are more insensate than the beasts: "The stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed time, but My people know not the ordinance of the Lord" (Jer. viii. 7). There is pathos, even wonder, in the words "Israel," "my people," doth not know. A history like theirs, and not understood! The same complaint is heard throughout the prophets: "Who is blind but My servant, or deaf as My messenger, whom I send?" (Isa. xlii. 19). God is so conscious of His own love and beneficence towards men that men's insensibility to it appears to Him wonderful. And in the same way Christ was so conscious of His own greatness, and the greatness of His works, that the dulness of His disciples perplexed Him: "How is it that having eyes ye see not?"[1]

There are no definitions in the Old Testament, whether of sin or of righteousness. Its starting-point is always Jehovah, what He is and does to men. Men do not seek Him and find Him; He bows the heavens, and comes down among them. They do not rise by thought or contemplation, either on themselves or upon nature, up to Him; He unveils Himself to them, and they know Him. He appears, and they see Him; He speaks, and they hear His voice. Sometimes He gives declarations regarding Himself, proclaiming His Name as the Lord God, merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity; but He manifests himself most in deeds of redemption and beneficence. He is present in the history of men, and there they learn to know Him. "He made known His ways unto Moses; His acts unto the children of Israel." Such a revelation was not to the effect that He was, nor what He was and required; it was the manifestation in the life of the people, and in all their history of a living moral Being, with all that belongs to such a Being, of mind and emotion and activity. And what was required of men was something of corresponding breadth—a response to all that Jehovah was and did. And such a response could not be given except through mind and emotion and activity. Such a response was righteousness; the want of it was sin. The relation of men and God was immediate; it was always that of two persons. Sin was not transgression of the Law; it was something done against God—"they have rebelled against Me." The word "rebel," or "transgress," as it is often rendered, means rather to revolt, *deficere*, and expresses better than any other word the Old Testament conception of sin. It is an act of a person done against a person. It is primarily the failure to realise and respond to that which Jehovah is among men; and then, of course, it descends to active defection. It is, first, a thing of the mind, and then conduct: "They have forsaken the Lord; they have rejected the Holy One of Israel; they are gone away backward" (ver. 4). In Isaiah and all the earlier prophets this defection is in morals, or social and civil duties; in the later prophets, it is in ritual, though the reason of this is plain enough: the ritual, particularly at the rural sanctuaries, had drawn into itself so much of the Canaanite orgies, that it elevated immorality into an act of worship, or if in other places it had not gone so far, it had become so debased that, though nominally rendered to Jehovah, it was in truth the service of a being altogether different from Him. Hence Amos says, "Seek *Me*, and seek not unto Bethel."

The complaint of Jehovah, in which pathos and sorrowful wonder predominated, is taken up by the prophet in bitter reproaches. "Ah, sinful nation! a people laden with iniquity." It is not the present generation only but the nation, which has a moral identity throughout history, on which there lies a load of iniquity. It has been accumulating from age to age. Nations have a life like individuals, and at the end the penalty of all the past is exacted of them—"that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the world may be required of this generation" (Luke xi. 50). The verses which

[1] The words, "My people *doth not consider*," do not mean, doth not *think* or *reflect*, in general, but doth not *perceive* or understand particular things, in this case God's whole fatherly upbringing of them.

follow form the crux of the chapter. They have great resemblance to Amos iv. 6 *seq.*, which is a review of Israel's past history, and all the judgments with which it has been filled because of their sins. Even the comparison to Sodom is not wanting: "I have overthrown you as God overthrew Sodom, and ye have been as a brand plucked out of the burning." If Isa. i. 5–9 could be read as a similar review the interpretation of the chapter would be greatly simplified. But vers. 7, 8 seem to resist such an exposition, though the wounds and bruises (long seams of former strokes), and fresh (not putrefying) sores, very well consort with it.[1] Passing from his figure of the State as a body gashed and bleeding from a hundred wounds, which no ministering hand has bound up or mollified with oil, but which remain exposed in all their cruel rawness, the prophet thunders out the literal truth in the people's ears: "Your country is desolated, your cities burned with fire, a foreign soldiery swarms in the land; only the capital is left, like the lonely booth of the watchman who guards the wide expanse of vineyards; but for the mercy of the Lord who has left us a remnant the overthrow would have been as complete as that of Sodom."

Secondly, ver. 10 *seq.*, the mention of Sodom gives the prophet's mind new impulse, and with no pause, but with greater fire he goes on. Did I say, we should have been like Sodom! Ye are like Sodom. "Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom, hearken unto the *torah* of our God, ye people of Gomorrah!" By a sudden transition, suggested by the thought of Sodom, he passes from the fate of Sodom which had been nearly theirs to the character of Sodom which is theirs altogether, rulers and people alike. The *torah*, unhappily rendered *law* in our versions, belonged to the priest; it was the decision or judgment, as time went on more and more on ritual, given him immediately by the oracle of God—"*torah* shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet" (Jer. xviii. 18). Did Isaiah here invade the province of the priest, stepping in between him and the people with a *torah*? With the books of Amos and Hosea, and even of Jeremiah before us, it would not be necessary to suppose any particular occasion for the prophet's assault upon ritual or any particular scene suggesting it. And it is not probable that his denunciation was uttered just at the moment of some great sacrifice. While this is true, vers. 5–9 suggest that the time in Jerusalem was one of extreme anxiety, and this was always a time of great ritual extravagance. The three things named by the prophet, sacrifice, personal appearance in the temple, and much prayer (vers. 11–15), indicate alarm and great religious fervour. The courts were thronged by worshippers from without, and priests were everywhere present superintending the offerings. The city probably was crowded with fugitives, the nation was before the prophet, intent as one man on what it deemed the service most grateful to its God, and he cries in their ears: Listen to the *torah* of our God, ye people of Gomorrah! On another occasion, roused to passion by the cold incredulity and want of enthusiasm of Ahaz, he exclaims, Will ye weary "my God" also? But here, with the nation before him, it is the *torah* of "our God," his and theirs, the historical God of Israel. Then follows the *torah* of "our" God, the God of Israel's history. What makes the rulers "judges of Sodom," and the populace "people of Gomorrah" to the God of Israel is the bloodshed, the partiality in justice, and the inhumanity to the helpless (vers. 15–17), and what relevancy have other things to Him, the God of Israel. "To what purpose to *Me* is the multitude of your sacrifices?" Such things are irrelevancies to *Him*, and not merely irrelevancies but a satiety (ver. 11), an abomination (ver. 13), and an unbearable burden (ver. 14). He repudiates their whole service and worship in all its forms, their material offerings to Him (ver. 11), their personal presence in His courts (vers. 12–14), and their service of prayer (ver. 15). Then follow the things in which the God of Israel has interest: well-doing, seeking justice, righting the oppressed, doing judgment for the orphan, pleading the cause of the widow.

Isaiah says nothing here but what his predecessors had said before him, and what is said by his successors after him. "I hate, I despise your feast days . . . but let justice run down as waters, and righteousness as a perennial stream" (Amos v. 12). "I desire goodness and not sacrifices, and

[1] The text is no doubt in disorder. The phrase "overthrow of *strangers*" (ver. 7), has no meaning; and if *Sodom* be read with Ew., ver. 9 stands in the way, for no writer would say, "Your country is desolate like the overthrow of Sodom," and then add, "But for God's mercy we should have been like Sodom."

to each of the twelve he gives fair scope and further suggestion, yet he does not rend it from its environment. He does not forget that every effect has a cause, and is a cause. Once at least—it is the Arian Controversy—he makes the study a study of cause and effect. Nevertheless, the book is a book of Waymarks. That is its open endeavour, and that is its worth of accomplishment.

SACERDOTALISM. By W. J. Knox Little, M.A. (*Longmans.* Crown 8vo, pp. xxiv, 318.) The four parts of which this volume is composed were touched upon as they came out. But the volume is greater than its parts. For the argument is meant to gather momentum as it goes. And besides that, each part has been revised ere it was fitted into the volume, and its temporary and perishable matter so far as possible suppressed. Now it is the *Apologia pro Vita Sua* of modern Sacerdotalism.

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY SERMONS. By the Hon. and Rev. A. T. Lyttelton, M.A. (*Macmillan.* Crown 8vo, pp. 327.) College and University Sermons demand close mental attention. It would be a breach of etiquette if they did not. They are, therefore, seen to best advantage and profit in the printed page. There are twenty such sermons in this new volume. Each sermon handles some formidable subject—the Person of Christ; the Meaning of Sacrifice; Original Sin; Eternal Punishment; the Power of the Will,—and in nearly every sermon this instructed scribe brings forth out of his treasury things that are new rather than old. So they demand hard thinking; they compel slow and repeated reading. And then they repay it all.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES. By the late Frederick Denison Maurice. (*Macmillan.* Crown 8vo, pp. ix, 348.) A new book by Maurice is a surprise. We are not told why these sermons have not been published till now. The sixth is lost. Perhaps it is a mistake to suppose that the editors have been looking for it all this time, and have only now found courage to issue the book without it. In any case the book is welcome. We were as anxious to hear Maurice on the Acts of the Apostles as on anything. How will his doctrine stand the test? How will the book of the Acts endure when his doctrine is made to play upon it? These are our wonderings. So the book is thoroughly welcome; and we shall not grumble if there are others yet to come.

THE ANOINTING. By the Rev. J. B. Figgis, M.A. (*Marshall.* Foolscap 8vo, pp. 88.) Some "great texts" in the First Epistle of St. John are considered, mainly to discover and commend the "higher life" of which they speak. The little book gains its title from the third. And the title is well chosen. For the Anointing is the whole secret and security.

ENGLISH LEADERS OF RELIGION: CARDINAL MANNING. By Arthur Wollaston Hutton, M.A. (*Methuen.* Crown 8vo, pp. xii, 260.) "English Leaders of Religion" was a happy idea for a series of handy volumes. The only objection is the limitation to English. Perhaps Messrs. Methuen may see their way to drop the adjective, and give us Savonarola and all the rest in this attractive shape.

Mr. Hutton's *Cardinal Manning* is not a new book, it is only new to this series. And it fits in admirably. For it is an excellent piece of literary workmanship, which has had as wide and hearty a welcome as any recent volume of biography.

THE BIBLE BY MODERN LIGHT. By Cunningham Geikie, D.D., LL.D. (*Nisbet.* Crown 8vo, pp. 550.) This is already the third volume of Dr. Geikie's new series on the Old Testament. It carries us from Samson to Solomon. And all the way it gleans industriously. It is not a commentary, not an accredited reaper, but only a gleaner in the great harvest-field of biblical exposition. Yet the handfuls are many and rich that archæology now lets fall. And had Dr. Geikie been content with them, and spared us some of the Bible narrative, for which we can so easily go to the Bible itself, our gratitude and our praise had been ungrudging and complete.

THE JESUS OF THE EVANGELISTS. By the Rev. C. A. Row, M.A. (*Norgate.* Crown 8vo, pp. xxiii, 324.) This is not a book of the month, nor even a new edition, but it is here, and it deserves all the space it will occupy. Prebendary Row has written many books since he wrote *The Jesus of the Evangelists.* He has made

sacrifices, bidding the people secularise even the burnt-offering, and eat flesh to their heart's content: "Add your burnt-offerings unto your sacrifices and eat flesh!" God is so indifferent in regard to the flesh they give to Him that they may have it to themselves. It is scarcely conceivable that the prophet, with Deuteronomy before him, could mean to say that God gave no commands at the Exodus regarding sacrifice. In such a case he must not only have dissented from the contents of Deuteronomy itself, but also from its view that the Book of the Covenant was Mosaic law. Such a historical judgment as this can hardly be attributed to him, though in his own teaching he goes his own way in regard to Deuteronomy, and emphasises the weightier matters of the Law, like all his predecessors.

The Books of the Month.

PART II.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF HEBREW. By J. T. L. Maggs, B.A. (*Kelly*. Foolscap 8vo, pp. viii, 190.) Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to write Introductions to the Study of Hebrew, and nearly all have failed, it is with moderate expectation that one examines a new attempt, which perhaps is an advantage to Mr. Maggs. It is certainly an advantage to us. For the pleasure of genuine surprise is ever the keenest pleasure. This is by far the most likely book for the mere beginner in Hebrew. It is here, and all the rest are nowhere. Perhaps Mr. Maggs never could have written a Larger Grammar or a Higher Hebrew Syntax; but he has written this. He has written it with so manifest a nearness to the beginner, that one hesitates to criticise it even in trifles. It seems that space is lost and little else gained by the frequent transliteration of Hebrew words. It seems that the beginner who cannot pronounce וַעֲבָדָיו, for example, will not do much with "vă-ʿabhā-dhāyv." But the beginner and Mr. Maggs know best.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGE. By Thomas G. Selby. (*Kelly*. Crown 8vo, pp. 272.) Mr. Selby is an able preacher, and mostly effective, though sometimes he o'erleaps himself. This seems to be his best book. It is also most hopeful of profit to us. For it carries us through one great subject—the doctrine of the Holy Spirit—not with precision of method, but all the more profitably by touching important Waymarks, and touching them with firmness and ease. It is the first of a new series, the "Life Indeed" series of books, and it opens the series hopefully.

THE LAY PREACHER'S HANDBOOK. By the Rev. Charles O. Eldridge, B.A. (*Kelly*. Foolscap 8vo, pp. xii, 180.) Why the Lay Preacher's Handbook it is hard to see. No word it contains is inapplicable to the preacher that is clerical. It is simply a book on the art and practice of preaching. Perhaps Mr. Eldridge offers it specially to the Lay Preacher because it is plain and plain spoken. But we are all so conscious of our need of improvement as preachers that we resent nothing that is plain, if only it is profitable to boot.

THE THEOLOGICAL STUDENT. By J. Robinson Gregory. (*Kelly*. Foolscap 8vo, pp. xii, 308.) To this new edition of a handbook which was heartily commended here and without repentance, Mr. Gregory has added a very useful Glossary of theological and kindred words.

WAYMARKS IN CHURCH HISTORY. By William Bright, D.D. (*Longmans*. Crown 8vo, pp. 436.) There seems to be three possible ways of studying Church History. The first is to live laborious days on Neander or Robertson, plodding on through volume after volume, and gathering the whole story as you go. The second is to skim the surface in some of the innumerable shortcuts. You may buy the whole History of the Church for half a crown, and read it in an afternoon. The third way is to select "Waymarks" and master them.

The third is the way Canon Bright commends in this volume, as he has commended it before. On a long road, for it runs from the Gnostics to Archbishop Laud; he chooses twelve Waymarks. And