THE MODERN READER'S BIBLE

# ISAIAH

THE MACMILLAN CO.

*THE MODERN READER'S BIBLE*

A SERIES OF WORKS FROM THE SACRED SCRIPTURES PRESENTED IN MODERN LITERARY FORM

# ISAIAH

*EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES*

BY

RICHARD G. MOULTON, M.A. (CAMB.), PH.D. (PENN.)

PROFESSOR OF LITERATURE IN ENGLISH IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

LONDON: MACMILLAN & CO., LTD.

1905

Set up and electrotyped January, 1897. Reprinted October, 1897; March, October, 1898; August, 1899; May, 1900; August, 1901.; July, 1902; May, July, 1903; July, 1905.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing & Co. — Berwick & Smith
Norwood Mass. U.S.A.

# *INTRODUCTION*

To him who at this day reads in the Book of the prophet Isaiah the paramount question is still, 'Understandest thou what thou readest?' The literary instinct is drawn to this wonderful book by a charm which often seems to be flying from us if we press it beyond beauty of expression to clearness of thought. The version of King James's time, so grand in its English sentences, so imperfect in that connectedness of thought which lifts language into literature, has lulled too many of us into being content with prophecy as a storehouse of sacred sayings. If, desirous of something more, we go to the commentators whose Hebrew learning makes them our natural advisers, we find them intent upon other things: upon constructing out of Isaiah's writings the history of his times, upon the grand question of authorship — whether there are two or even more Isaiahs. And when in regard to some particular obscurity we seek from them exactly what has been said, no matter by whom nor when, our eagerness is dashed by finding that in the opinion of these eminent authorities

we may have only the rough notes of the prophet, made yet more disconnected by the illegitimate glosses of some wholly superfluous editor.

From the Modern Reader's Bible questions of authorship are excluded: what is elsewhere claimed to be a Second Isaiah will here appear in its place as a seventh book, nothing more being postulated than what all schools of criticism may admit — that we have in these chapters a separate literary composition complete in itself. In applying the plan of the present series to the Biblical *Isaiah*, all other discussion must be subordinated to the settlement of the text. Not indeed in the ordinary sense of that phrase: for the critical determination of the Hebrew text, and the translation of its sentences into their English equivalents, it is a principle of this edition to accept the Revised Version (text or margins). But an editor's work is only half completed when he has printed his author in solid columns of type, like a newspaper without the assistance that even a newspaper gives with its headings. The true form of the literary work must be presented to the eye. At present the effusion of a poetaster in the corner of a provincial journal is printed with more discrimination of poetic form than the masterpieces of the Bible. The task of the present edition is to ascertain, from internal evidence and the analogy of other prophecy, what are the separate compositions of which the whole book is made up, and what is the true literary form of each, and to pre-

sent these to the eye with the conventional external arrangement to which a modern reader is accustomed.

It has been no easy task: the morphology of Hebrew literature goes far outside that which has been made familiar to us in a criticism founded upon modern and classical authors. I have in former volumes dwelt upon the distinction of Hebrew among the great literatures of the world: how its verse is based upon a parallelism of clauses which also belongs to rhetoric; how there is therefore an overlapping in Hebrew of verse and prose, and also of those modes of thought to which verse and prose serve but as outer expression. In the Introduction to *Job* I endeavoured to describe how marvellous an instrument of literary power is found in this infinite flexibility of Hebrew style. But what is true of *Job* is true in an equal degree of *Isaiah*. In this writer it is easy to see that we have an orator, who wields with ease the whole armoury of rhetoric. It is easy to see also that with him imagery and poetic expression are much more than accessories: he loves to linger upon his images, and rapidly shift them, until they become lovely pictures which we dwell upon for their own sake. But Isaiah goes far beyond this: he is essentially a creative writer, and regularly conveys his thought in indirect forms of dramatic presentation. And I would suggest further that we find in his writings a fusion of all other literary forms in that new form which is here called a Rhapsody.

I am sensible of the awkwardness of attempting to introduce a new technical term in connection with literature so sacred and so familiar. But the new term is needed because the matter to be described is not paralleled in other literatures. If we are to be limited to received nomenclature, perhaps it would be best to describe the compositions which I have in view as 'spiritual dramas.' The highly dramatic instinct of the Hebrew mind, denied its natural outlet of a theatre, permeates all branches of literature alike; and so prophecy has special forms which certainly leave on our minds as we read the general effect of dramatic realisation. But these prophetic dramas are such as no theatre could compass. For their stage they need all space; and the time of their action extends to the end of all things. The speakers include God and the Celestial Hosts; Israel appears, Israel Suffering or Israel Repentant; Sinners in Zion, the Godly in Zion; the Saved and the Doomed, the East and the West, answer one another. There is often one who speaks in the name of God, yet is not God — the Voice of Prophecy may express the idea; at times the same personality seems to be present in the scene of his ministry, and becomes the Prophetic Spectator. Not infrequently 'Voices,' 'Cries,' with no more of personality than these words imply, carry on some part of the movement. Monologue is made to do the work of dramatic dialogue; especially where the Divine monologue, apostrophising nations or classes,

makes them thereby present to the scene; or where it alternates between judgment and mercy, indignation and tenderness. Nay, paradoxical though it may sound, Silence itself is a speaker in these dramas: when, in the great Isaiahan rhapsody, Jehovah challenges the idols, their dumb impotence is made by him a step in the action of the scene; similarly in the Awakening of Zion, the movement of this realistic vision is made by reiterated appeals to Zion which are met with no response, until at the very end the Watchmen of Jerusalem awake and rouse their city to the glad tidings.

Thus what of drama these prophecies contain is purely spiritual drama. But they contain also elements that are distinctly non-dramatic. The discourse of God, or of some other speaker, will be interrupted by lyric songs, rejoicing over or emphasising what has been said: and with these lyrics no personality can possibly be associated, but they come, like the chorales of an oratorio, as abstract meditations upon the situation that has been dramatically presented. Even prose discourse may have at least a prefatory place in the rhapsodies. At times, again, the movement may be carried on by fragments of narrated vision; or critical points may be announced by the author in his own words, like the elaborate 'stage directions' of the theatrical drama: in both these cases the work of drama being done by the narration which is the very antithesis of dramatic presentation. There is a difference greater even than this

between the sacred rhapsodies and the drama of secular literature. In the nature of things dramatic action can never go back: the acts of a play must succeed one another in order of time. This characteristic is found in some rhapsodies, in others it is markedly absent: there may be an advance in the movement of such a rhapsody, but it is an advance which is logical and not temporal. The 'Rhapsody of Judgment' with which Isaiah concludes his 'Dooms of the Nations' falls naturally into three parts. In the first we have a destruction that embraces the whole earth; in the second it has extended to take in heaven as well as earth. The scope of the prophecy cannot be further enlarged, but in the third section there is an advance in intensity: what before was a whole picture is now seen in the steps of its progress; the destruction which was complete in part two, is only threatening to fall upon the world at the commencement of part three; yet through this third part the quickened alternation of doom and hope makes an adequate climax. Dramatically such retrogression in time would be impossible: we have here a spiritual literature which transcends the limits of dramatic form.

Thus Hebrew prophecy obliges us to make an addition to the nomenclature of literature; and the term 'Rhapsody' — consecrated alike by poetry and music to express the most vivid presentation, and that a subjective or spiritual presentation, combined with the smallest limitation of form — may serve the purpose. It is to be observed that

not only must we recognise complete rhapsodies, but the rhapsodic form is found to leaven other literary forms of prophecy in all degrees of completeness. The great Assyrian discourse of Isaiah is purely discourse, except that just as the crisis of the boastful invasion is reached there is a momentary change to rhapsodic realisation — panic cries tracing the enemy's advance to the very gates of Jerusalem: then discourse resumes to narrate the overthrow of the invader and the Messianic peace that succeeds. Again — if my interpretation is correct — Isaiah's discourse of comfort to Ahaz is punctuated by snatches of the enemy's ballads repeated by the prophet in realistic scorn; the climax also to this group of prophecies is made by triumph cries of the invading enemy alternating realistically with bursts of vision of their overthrow. A type of rhapsodic treatment more developed, yet still incomplete, is found in the interesting cluster of prophecies that centre around the idea of the Prophetic Watchman. He is presented as taking up his post on the outskirts of the Holy land, peering over the eastern wilderness into the darkness of the future. Floods of vision rush upon him at intervals: the Divine voice is heard cheering on the hosts to their work against Babylon, or spectacles of rout and panic are seen: these realised visions are made to alternate with the prophet's own feelings at what he sees, or his explanations and admonitions. I have in this volume distinguished three portions of prophecy as rhapsodies in the completest sense:

and of these the most elaborate is that which covers the last twenty-six chapters — the Rhapsody of Zion Redeemed, with its seven acts or 'Visions': The Servant of Jehovah Delivered from Bondage; The Servant of Jehovah Awakened; Zion Awakened; The Servant of Jehovah Exalted; Songs of Zion Exalted; Redemption at Work in Zion; and The Day of Judgment.

As regards literary form then *Isaiah* is discourse tempered by rhapsodic presentation in various degrees. What is the character of the thought which under such various forms is presented to us?

The Isaiah of the first six books may be described as a man of one idea: and his one idea is the main thought of all prophetic writing. To the corruption and evil around him he holds up a picture of a golden age in a future to be reached through a purging judgment from which only a remnant will escape. Whatever may be the immediate circumstances in which he speaks, this is always the drift of his message. He and his children are for signs and wonders in Israel: one son he has named 'Remnant Return,' the other 'Spoil and Harry.' In the vision of his call, when amid rocking temple and smoking altar and answering voices Isaiah, like Moses, is permitted to see the skirts of the Divine presence, his lips must be purified with the coal of fire before he may offer himself as messenger. And his message is to confirm the guilty in their guilt —

to make their heart fat and close their eyes and ears—until the land has been purged into a desert: even if there be but a tenth left it shall be purged again, and the final remnant shall be as the stock of a tree that has been felled.

The topics of sin and judgment are everywhere being emphasised. Sin is the rebellion of children against the Divine parent, the unfaithfulness of a wife to a husband; it is the carefully tended vineyard bringing forth wild grapes; it is to forsake the rock of strength for the planting of pleasant plants and setting of strange slips and watching over the morning of blossoms—but the harvest is a heap in the day of grief and desperate sorrow. The judgment is the burning of fire under the glory of the thickets until they roll upward in volumes of smoke; it is a Day of the Lord, cruel with wrath and fierce anger, when men fling away their idols to go into the caves and rocks and holes of the earth before the terror of the Lord, and his glorious majesty when he ariseth to shake mightily the earth. The message is not always in general terms: the prophets are the statesmen of Israel, opposition statesmen, standing for the theocracy against the established secular government. To the panic-stricken Ahaz the ideal of Divine presence is held up in the child Immanuel and the child Wonderful; elsewhere the rulers of Judah are denounced as confiding in a refuge of lies, a covenant with death, which will be swept away by the overflowing scourge that is to pass through; the Divine vision has become a

closed book, which the ignorant will not read because he is not learned, and the learned will not read because it is closed; the national iniquity is a breach ready to fall swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh at an instant. Judgment is to descend also upon the foes of the chosen people: these advance like rushing waters, they are chased away like dust whirled before the storm. Babylon, for all its glory, will become like Sodom and Gomorrah, a desert where not even the Arab wanderer will harbour, but doleful creatures will inhabit there and satyrs dance on its ruins: the morning star falls, and the underworld moves to meet him, peering curiously at the power that once made the earth to tremble. Or all things are included in one general judgment, when the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll, and the host of the heavens fall like fading fig leaves, rivers of earth will become pitch and its dust brimstone: the smoke will go up for ever.

From such universal judgment there will be gleanings — the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost branches of a fruitful tree. For such a remnant there will be a golden age: when the scarlet sins will have become white as snow, when the harlot city will be the city of righteousness, purged with the blast of judgment; when the mountain of the Lord's house will be established at the head of the mountains, and many peoples will be flocking there, as to a judge whose reign of peace will beat

their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Sometimes the happy future appears gradual in its coming: amidst the bread of adversity and water of affliction there is yet the blessing of visible teachers and voices guiding at every turn of the way; the picture enlarges with pastoral imagery of streams of water on the high hills, cattle feeding in broad pastures, the increase of the ground fat and plenteous; again the light of the moon becomes as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun increases sevenfold; songs of victory abound as in the night when a holy feast is kept, while every stroke of the appointed staff laid on Assyria is with tabrets and harps and rejoicing. Or, on the other hand, the veil of judgment darkness that wraps the nations is suddenly rent for the Saved on the holy mountain, and there break out songs of death swallowed up for ever and tears wiped away from all faces. On such a mountain of holiness the Shoot out of the stem of Jesse will judge with equity in a reign of eternal peace, the venom passing from the snake, the wolf, fatling and lion's whelp playing together with a little child to lead them, while songs of deliverance rise daily around the wells of salvation. The happy remnant will see the King in his beauty, their eyes will behold a far-stretching land, a place of broad rivers and streams, where no war galley can pass along: Jehovah will be judge, law-giver, king, saviour.

Quite apart from any question of theology, it may be

said that no more precious legacy of thought has come down to us from antiquity than this Hebrew conception of a golden age to come. It is difficult to overestimate the bracing moral influence of an ideal future. The classic thought of Greece and Rome took an opposite course: their age of gold was in the remote past, the progress of time was a decline, and the riches of philosophy claimed to be no more than a precarious salvage. The result was the moral paralysis of fatalism, or at best individualism. The imaginative pictures of Biblical prophecy inspire spiritual energy by bringing a future to work for, and, on the other hand, the weakness of a luxurious optimism is avoided in the writings of an author who, while he puts forth all his powers to exalt the future, insists always that the only way of entrance to this future is the forcible purging out of evil.

When we turn from the six books to the *Rhapsody of Zion Redeemed*, we find the same general conception, which indeed is the thought of all prophecy, but it is now expanded, and placed in a new setting, associated with new historic surroundings. It may be safely asserted that nowhere else in the literature of the world have so many colossally great ideas been brought together within the limits of a single work.

The first of these great ideas is the prophetic significance put upon the conquering career of Cyrus and his deliverance of Israel from Babylon. The force of this

part of the prophecy has been much obscured by the widespread tendency to dwarf 'prophecy' into 'prediction': and it has been argued as if all the tremendous machinery of the first Vision, with its scene of all the nations of the earth summoned before the bar of God, were put in motion for no further purpose than to exhibit Jehovah as capable of predicting a future which he was capable of making. In actual fact, the words of the Vision associate 'foreseeing things to come' with 'declaring the former things': what the idols are challenged by Jehovah to do is to put upon the course of events such significance as the significance these events are found to bear when they are viewed in the light of Jehovah's purpose. This counsel of Jehovah is elaborately brought out: how he had chosen his people from among the nations; how, unfaithful to their calling, they became blind and deaf, and, to magnify the law, they were permitted to be hidden in the prison houses of exile; how their captors abused their office, and laid burdens on God's people, as if these were but their natural captives; how therefore Cyrus is raised up as an instrument of righteousness to strike the nations down and set Israel free; how Israel comes forth from his prison houses 'a blind people that hath eyes, a deaf people that hath ears.' It had been too light a mission for Israel to raise up his own fallen people, he is to bring forth judgment also to the Gentiles; the dispersion of Israel has been the means of leavening the nations, and opening

to them a way of salvation by which all nations of the earth may be blessed. It is as if the ages had been slowly and blindly dragging into place the different elements of some magnetic circle: the final event of Cyrus's career has completed the circle, and Jehovah's purpose from the beginning has been flashed forth to the world. If we go no further than this, it appears that in this rhapsody men's thoughts are for the first time lifted to a philosophy of world history.

Closely associated with this is another of the great ideas of the rhapsody — that of spiritual conquest. The authority that proclaims Israel as Jehovah's Servant to bring judgment to the Gentiles, proclaims also that this work is to be done without violence: he is not to strive nor cry; the bruised reed he is not to break, nor quench the smoking flax. The image describing his mission is the gentle agency of 'light,' with its irresistible illumination: he shall not burn dimly until his light has reached the farthest ends of the earth. This is among the loftiest moral conceptions of all human thought. How new an idea it was is measured by the length of time it has taken even the leaders of thought to grasp it. In actual history, the men of the Return were distinguished by a spirit of violent exclusiveness, that sought to draw tighter the bonds of hereditary privilege; their literary production, *The Chronicles*, delights to dwell upon a religious reform like that of Asa, with its covenant 'that whosoever would not seek the LORD the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether