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THE REVISED VERSION
EDITED FOR THE USE OF SCHOOLS

ISAIAH
XL—LXVI

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ISAIAH

XL—LXVI

EDITED BY

THE REV. W. A. L. ELMSLIE, M.A.

AND

THE REV. JOHN SKINNER, D.D.

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PREFACE BY THE GENERAL EDITOR FOR THE OLD TESTAMENT

THE aim of this series of commentaries is to explain the Revised Version for young students, and at the same time to present, in a simple form, the main results of the best scholarship of the day.

The General Editor has confined himself to supervision and suggestion. The writer is, in each case, responsible for the opinions expressed and for the treatment of particular passages.

A. H. McNEILE.

January, 1914.

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INTRODUCTION

ISAIAH XL.–LXVI.

IN order to understand a book of the Bible, or any other ancient document, we must know something of the circumstances under which it was written, the personality of the author, and the people for whom he was writing. Very often that information comes to us in the shape of a reliable tradition; the writing is ascribed to a certain author, and no reason is found for doubting the correctness of the ascription. But there are many cases in which, either by accident or design, a work has been attributed to an author who could not possibly have written it, or whose authorship is at least highly questionable. It is therefore essential to estimate the value of tradition in any given case and to decide whether it be sound, doubtful, or positively incredible. The method of investigation will consist chiefly in a comparison between the character and circumstances of the alleged author and the contents of the book assigned to him, the object being to determine whether such a book could have been written or could naturally be supposed to have been written by him with his known personality and his known environment.

I.

TRADITIONAL AUTHORSHIP AND EXTERNAL EVIDENCE.

The prophecies we are about to study (Is. xl.–lxvi.) are traditionally associated with the name of Isaiah, the prophet whose work has been described in the first volume of this commentary. Isaiah, the son of Amoz, was born

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about 770 B.C. and his prophetic activity extended from 740 B.C., the year of King Uzziah's death, to 701 B.C., when Sennacherib, King of Assyria, failed in his attempt to capture Jerusalem. In the earlier portion of the Book of Isaiah there are many prophecies which are so obviously addressed to the circumstances of that period that we cannot doubt that they are genuine utterances of this great prophet of the eighth century, although there are also strong reasons for thinking that other passages in chs. i.–xxxv. were composed by other writers at a much later time. Now the chapters before us, xl.–lxvi., also form part of the volume which is entitled the Book of Isaiah; and further we know that they have held this position for a very long period, since in the Book of Jesus ben Sirach, a Jewish writer who lived soon after 200 B.C., reference is made to the Book of Isaiah in terms which make it perfectly certain that it then included chs. xl. ff. The belief that these chapters are the composition of Isaiah, son of Amoz, has hardly been doubted, or indeed discussed, until recent times. But it is easy to see that in a case of this kind the traditional opinion, despite its great age, might be mistaken. The chapters themselves (unlike such passages as ch. vi. in the earlier part of the Book) contain *no* claim whatsoever to be the work of Isaiah, and the traditional ascription of them to him rests solely on the fact that they form part of a volume to which his name has been attached. That, however, is a circumstance which could arise in various ways. We know for certain that the prophetic books of the O.T. were not arranged in their present form by the prophets themselves but by later editors who collected all the remains of the prophetic literature which they were able to find and put them together in four great volumes—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Minor Prophets (the last named being regarded by the later Jews as forming one book in the Hebrew O.T.). It might easily

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happen that in this process the judgement of the editors or compilers was sometimes at fault. If someone found these twenty-seven chapters without any name attached to them, various reasons might occur to him inclining him to add them to the Isaiah collection—either because he honestly but mistakenly believed them to be Isaiah's, or (though this is a possibility we need not seriously contemplate) because he wished to pass them off as Isaiah's, knowing they were not his, or (and this is the most probable reason) because their subject-matter and style appeared to him such as to form a desirable continuation to the group of prophecies containing Isaiah's actual utterances. Tradition, then, in this case is not very strong to begin with, and of course it becomes no stronger because it has been repeated from age to age. It is not strong enough to give us an indisputable assurance that here we are reading actual words of Isaiah. And since it is essential that we should endeavour to understand the situation in which the words were written or spoken, it is a duty forced upon us to investigate the tradition and see whether or not it puts us at a point of view from which we can really enter into the meaning of the prophecy.

But before proceeding to review this question, it is right to refer to an argument which is sometimes used to support this particular tradition and to rule out any attempt to criticise its accuracy. It is pointed out that our Lord and the N.T. writers generally shared the belief that Isaiah wrote these chapters; and from this the inference is drawn that we must hold the same opinion on their authority. Our reply to this argument is that, whilst the statement is correct, the conclusion is false. From such passages as Matt. iii. 3, viii. 17, xii. 17, Luke iv. 17, John i. 23, Acts viii. 28, Rom. x. 16, 20, it is clear that in this question (as in other matters of secular knowledge) our Lord and His disciples participated in the beliefs of

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the period. But to assert in consequence that all such beliefs must be correct or else the religious value of the N.T. revelation would be impaired is a quite arbitrary assumption, which betrays a very serious misconception of the nature of our Lord's supreme authority. A glance at the passages cited above is sufficient to show that in no case does the truth which our Lord desired to enforce depend on whether the words quoted were uttered by Isaiah. Such questions as the one now before us cannot be determined except by a careful examination of all the facts.

II.

THE INTERNAL EVIDENCE.

I. It is at once obvious that the prophecy is addressed to the people of Israel, but equally plain is the fact that a large number of Israelites are spoken of as living far from their native land of Palestine—most of them apparently in Babylonia, but others in various distant parts of the earth (see xliii. 6; xlv. 13; xlviii. 20; xlix. 5, 12, 21, 22; li. 11, 14; lii. 5; lvi. 8; lx. 4, 9; lxvi. 20). Moreover we find that these exiles, at any rate those in Babylonia, are there under compulsion from the rulers of the Babylonian Empire. They are involuntary exiles from their native land, subject to the tyranny of the race which has conquered them; and we may gather how hard their lot had been made from the wrathful terms in which the prophet refers to the proud and pitiless city of Babylon (ch. xlvii., esp. *v.* 6). There are also numerous indications of the fact that Jerusalem had suffered a disaster at some date now long past from which it had not yet recovered—the prophet speaks of it as a ruined city, ‘desolate,’ ‘forgotten of Yahweh¹,’ its Temple burnt with fire (e.g. xlix.

¹ This form of the Divine Name, now generally accepted as correct, will be used throughout the volume in place of the familiar rendering ‘Jehovah,’ which rests upon a mistaken transliteration of the Hebrew word.

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14–21; li. 17–20; lii. 1, 2, 9; liv.). We know that this was not the case in the time of Isaiah. The exact date of his death has not been recorded. Tradition relates that he perished as a martyr in the reign of Manasseh, Hezekiah's unworthy successor. But in any case he can have known Judah only as an independent country, Jerusalem an unconquered city, and the Temple of Solomon an inviolate shrine. For the kingdom of Judah, although constantly menaced by the ambitions of the Northern Power, succeeded in maintaining itself as a separate state for more than a hundred years after the repulse of the Assyrian Sennacherib in 701 B.C., an event which was the climax of Isaiah's prophetic career.

Further we know exactly how and when just such a disaster overtook Jerusalem as is implied by the language of these chapters. In 607 B.C. the Assyrian Empire was conquered and its western territories acquired by the Babylonians. This change, however, in the controlling Power of the North only increased the peril of Judah, for the new Empire gave immediate proof of its strength by defeating in 605 B.C. a great Egyptian army, which had marched to Carchemish on the Euphrates. A few years later Judah began to be harassed by the Babylonian armies, and in 597 B.C. Nebuchadrezzar, the King of Babylon, with a great host advanced against Jerusalem, captured the city, and carried into captivity Jehoiachin, King of Judah, and the leading citizens. Finally in 587 B.C., in consequence of a foolish revolt in reliance on Egyptian help, Jerusalem was again attacked, taken, and sacked, its wall being destroyed and the famous Temple of Solomon burnt down. Most of the inhabitants were now deported to Babylonia, only the poorest being allowed to remain, and of these a large number shortly afterwards fled into Egypt. Here then we have that great national disaster, to which the author of Is. xl.–lxvi. looks back as an event of the past, at the same time

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declaring his prophetic conviction that the sad period of desolation and exile is on the point of ending. From this alone it is manifest that, whoever wrote this prophecy, it was not written regarding the men of Isaiah's time or addressed to their situation, but for a much later generation of Israelites, placed in such circumstances as would exist in the exilic period to which we have just referred.

2. We find in the next place that there are definite references in chs. xl. ff. to a great king and conqueror named Cyrus, who is declared by the prophet to be the destined agent of Yahwe in breaking the power of Babylon and setting the exiles free (see xlv. 28; xlv. 1-5; and cp. xli. 2, 3). Now in all history there is but one king named Cyrus, and fortunately we know a good deal about him although not all that we should like to know. The information we possess agrees perfectly with the allusions in the prophecy and helps us greatly to understand it. The name of Cyrus first appears on contemporary Babylonian inscriptions, where he is spoken of as King of Persia and Anzan, a state in Elam a country to the east of Babylon. In 549 B.C. he conquered Astyages, King of Media, becoming king of that country in his stead and thus founding the great power which was long known as the Medo-Persian Empire. The second stage in Cyrus' career was his defeat of Croesus, the King of Lydia, whose capital, Sardis, with its far-famed treasures fell into the conqueror's hands, 546 B.C. He next advanced against Babylon itself, which he entered in 538 B.C. after a short and almost bloodless campaign, for Nabonidus, the last of the Babylonian monarchs, had made himself extremely unpopular with his subjects and Cyrus was generally received as a liberator and benefactor. Such are the central and indisputable facts in a career which naturally startled the world by its unparalleled rapidity and success.

Beyond question, the features of chs. xl. ff. are in striking harmony with these events. Taken in conjunction with

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the circumstances set forth in paragraph 1, the two lines of evidence clearly indicate that the prophecy deals with the situation which existed in the exilic period of Jewish history shortly before 538 B.C.

3. But it may be urged that all this does not prove that these chapters were not written by Isaiah. Isaiah was a prophet, and might have foreseen the situation described and have written a book which would suit it when it came to pass. We do not deny that this is *possible*; but the task before us is not to decide what is possible, but first to weigh the evidence and form our opinion as to what actually happened. We shall then reply, that such a phenomenon would be absolutely without parallel in the records of prophecy. There are many cases, of course, in which a prophet makes a prediction or for a moment transports himself to some future time and speaks as if it were already present (e.g. Is. x. 28–32); but always with a view to instructing his contemporaries. Here, however,—on the supposition that Isaiah is the author,—his contemporaries are altogether ignored; he speaks not only *about* the future but *to* a far future generation and as if he were their contemporary.

Again the present case would in no way resemble the flashes of foresight or vivid imagination of the future found in other prophets. If Isaiah were the author we would here have an instance of a prophet not only transferring his whole consciousness to an imagined future (without a single lapse into his real present), but also from that standpoint forecasting a yet more distant future, supporting his arguments and rebukes by references to events in a past which was actually still future, and moving with perfect ease and naturalness in an imagined present, which confronts him with all the elements of a complex and quite definite historical situation. The astounding nature of this supposed *tour de force* is further heightened by the consideration that it is presented in a form quite

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unlike that which we might have expected, were Isaiah anticipating the future. Thus, for instance, we might conceive him predicting—‘Israel will be taken captive and Jerusalem will become desolate, and after a certain time a great conqueror [Cyrus] will arise and set Israel free.’ But here we are told ‘Cyrus *has* arisen and is shortly going to release Israel and at last Jerusalem shall be rebuilt.’ We must again remind the reader that we are not discussing possibility but probability; and we must insist that the supposed phenomenon is absolutely improbable. We reject the theory that Isaiah in these chapters is foreseeing the future not because it would be marvellous, but because the theory does not really cover the facts, and is totally opposed to the nature and inspiration of the prophetic writings.

4. The above considerations are sufficient by themselves to show that chs. xl. ff. were written by an unknown prophet during the Babylonian captivity about 540 B.C. But they are confirmed by others of a more intricate nature which cannot be fully stated here. Each prophet has an individuality of his own, which appears quite clearly in the range of his ideas as well as in the style of his writing and the vocabulary he employs. With regard to range of ideas, we may notice that in Isaiah’s acknowledged prophecies the dominant note is warning, lest Israel should incur the penalty of Yahwe’s wrath, whereas in chs. xl. ff. it is comfort, because the penalty has been borne and the revelation of Yahwe’s merciful pardon is now at hand. Again, to Isaiah the righteousness of God signifies that quality in the Divine Nature which will not tolerate injustice between man and man; in this writer it denotes in the first place Yahwe’s faithfulness in His purpose of redemption, and then it passes into the concrete meaning of the status of salvation, and so salvation itself. There is agreement that Yahwe is supreme, but whilst Isaiah does not dwell on the might of Yahwe as Creator

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of Nature and of Man, the author of chs. xl. ff. makes that doctrine a fundamental factor in his argument. The conceptions of the Remnant and of the Messiah, prominent in chs. i.–xxxix., vanish in chs. xl. ff., and the destiny of Israel is set forth under the figure of the Servant of Yahwe and in a way that implies a quite different expectation concerning the ideal age which is to come. Moreover, the relation of Israel to the Gentiles in chs. xl. ff. expresses a note of universalist sympathy, which transcends the point of view reached by Isaiah. Thus, in chs. xl. ff. the ancient belief (shared by Isaiah) that Israel is the chosen people of God is maintained in strong, perhaps hyperbolic, terms (xliii. 3). But this prophet, with wonderful religious insight, further perceives that the privilege of Israel is but the measure of her responsibility. Not that He may pamper Zion has Yahwe chosen her, but in order that in her history, that is in His dealings with her, the character of the true God may be convincingly displayed.

Turning to the question of literary style we find a no less significant distinction. The utterances of Isaiah have the tone of public pronouncements, are couched in forcible and concise style, and deal with ever-varying themes, whereas the prophecy of chs. xl. ff. is remarkable for the impassioned reiteration of a few favourite thoughts, which are expanded in stately, imaginative language. The one prophet is a commanding orator, the other a persuasive poet. Various minor characteristics may be mentioned as typical of the style of chs. xl. ff.:—duplication of words or phrases (xl. 1; xliii. 11, 25; li. 9, 12, 17); descriptive clauses added to the Name of God or of Israel (xl. 28 f.; xli. 8; xliv. 24–28); frequent use of rhetorical questions (xl. *passim*; xliv. 7, 8, 10); and peculiarly vivid personification (see esp. lii. 13–liii. 12). This general impression as to the style is overwhelmingly supported by a minute examination of

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the vocabulary employed. It must here suffice to say that chs. xl. ff. both lack the characteristic expressions found in Isaiah and are themselves characterised by a different set of words and phrases (esp. particles). So great is the contrast in this respect that a change of author is clearly implied.

5. Having thus determined the age of the prophecy and its author (whom for convenience we may term II Isaiah), we may go on to inquire into a less important point, viz. the *place* where he lived and wrote. Here we shall find ourselves unable to reach so positive a conclusion. Both Egypt and Phoenicia have been suggested as the place of composition; but the evidence is very slender, and both these localities may be ruled out. There is strong evidence in favour of Babylonia as the place of origin, especially as regards chs. xl.–xlviii. Thus, besides the references to Babylon and its interests, it may be argued that the stress laid on idols and image-making, sorcery, and astrology, as well as the keen interest shown in the progress of Cyrus, favour Babylonian surroundings. Important also is the close resemblance between Is. xlv. 27–xlv. 3 and the official Babylonian style, as exemplified in the inscriptions of Cyrus.

But to all these points an answer can be given, and a strong case made out for Palestinian origin. Granting that the prophet (II Isaiah) does appeal to the exiles in Babylon, it does not follow that he is resident among them. His plea may be uttered from Jerusalem, and indeed such passages as xli. 9, xliii. 6, lii. 7, II, seem to imply this, although it is of course open to those who maintain the Babylonian origin to reply that the prophet in those verses is but imagining himself to be in Palestine. Moreover it is undeniable that his exhortations and encouragements are often addressed directly to Jerusalem and that they are eminently suitable to the situation of its despairing population, sighing for the return of the

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Israelites exiled and scattered throughout many lands though chiefly in the territories of the Babylonian tyrant.

Again it may be urged that the strong Babylonian colouring, with which the Book of Ezekiel (certainly composed in Babylon) is impregnated, is reduced in chs. xl. ff. to just such general references and feelings as would naturally result from the Babylonian domination of Palestine. The strongest argument, however, for the Palestinian origin of these chapters is that the illustrations and phraseology, esp. in chs. xlix. ff. but *also* in xl.-xlviii., reflect in the most natural fashion the agricultural conditions of Palestine. We must not pursue the subject further, although a great deal more may be said on both sides. For the time being, the matter must be considered an open question. Not a few commentators hold that chs. xlix.-lxvi. are Palestinian, whilst xl.-xlviii. are Babylonian. The present writer inclines to the belief that undue weight has been given to the supposed indications of Babylonian origin, and that even chs. xl.-xlviii. may be the work of a prophet resident in Jerusalem.

There is general agreement that chs. lvi.-lxvi. were composed in Palestine (see § 6 *c*, below).

6. One other question of this kind demands consideration. Is the prophecy a unity? Was it all written by one man and at one time, or was its composition spread over many years and does it perhaps combine writings of several prophets? At the end of ch. xlviii. and of ch. lvii. there occur the words 'There is no peace, saith the Lord, to the wicked,' and the same sentiment is expressed by the last verse of ch. lxvi., a fact which naturally gave rise to the supposition that the author intended the prophecy to fall into three parts of nine chapters each. But the theory fails to stand the test of careful consideration, which reveals that there is no real break between chs. lvi. and lvii., and that the real division is rather chs. xl.-xlviii., xlix.-lv., and lvi.-lxvi. (see §§ *b*, *c*, below).

E.

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Apart from the fact that occasional glosses have been added by later editors and copyists, the unity of chs. xl.–lxvi. may be questioned in respect of the following portions.

(a) Four wonderful passages, known as the Servant-songs (xlii. 1–4; xlix. 1–6; l. 4–9; lii. 13–liii. 12), present a deeper conception of the Servant of Yahwe than is found in the other passages where the title is used. Whether the difference is due to a change of author depends largely on the view taken as to the personality of the Servant in the four Servant-songs (see pp. xxvii ff.), and is indeed a question so intricate that it cannot adequately be discussed here. It is certain that in all other passages except these four the Servant is a title denoting the nation of Israel. If therefore the opinion that in the Servant-songs the Servant denotes an individual be correct, a difference of authorship would seem highly probable, since the same writer would surely not use the same title in different senses without any indication of the change. If on the other hand the Servant personifies the nation of Israel in some sense in these four Songs just as elsewhere in the prophecy, the problem is more difficult. Against the view that the Songs have been inserted by a later author is the difficulty of seeing any reason why they have been separated one from another and assigned to the particular positions in which they now stand. Moreover we should expect, if the Songs were interpolations, to be able to detect in the context the ‘hand’ of the editor who inserted them. Now, when the verses which immediately follow the Songs, and are supposed to be linking verses inserted by the editor, are closely scrutinised, they are seen to have the precise form and style of II Isaiah’s acknowledged writings and to disclose such subtle points of connection with his thought that altogether they cannot plausibly be regarded as the work of an editor. It is therefore probable that the Songs were written by II Isaiah himself,

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or possibly by an earlier prophet, whose work II Isaiah has adapted and incorporated with his own utterances. The former view is preferable, and, even if the latter were true, it is clear that the passages now form part of II Isaiah's teaching and 'for all practical purposes may be treated as if they were his own work.'

(*b*) There is a distinct alteration of theme and of outlook between chs. xl.–xlviii. and xlix.–lv., for with ch. xlix. the denunciations of Babylon and its idols and the references to Cyrus cease, whilst the central idea changes from the comforting of Israel, the nation, to the comforting of Jerusalem, Israel's city (see further the head-note to ch. xlix.). There is, however, hardly any perceptible change of style or vocabulary, and the two sections are significantly united by the 'golden thread' of the Servant-songs, three of which occur in chs. xlix.–lv. The difference in the subject-matter may therefore be regarded as sufficiently accounted for by the supposition that chs. xlix.–lv. were composed by II Isaiah somewhat later than chs. xl.–xlviii. (If chs. xl.–xlviii. were composed in Babylon, and xlix.–lv. in Palestine [see p. xviii f.], we must suppose that II Isaiah returned to Palestine with the first band of released exiles, about 537 B.C., shortly after the accession of Cyrus.)

(*c*) Much more important are the features which distinguish chs. lvi.–lxvi. from xl.–lv. An analysis of these last eleven chapters of the Book shows that they consist of a number of separate or very loosely connected utterances, having for the most part some general resemblance to one another, but differing from chs. xl.–lv. in style, ideas, and historical outlook. For details the reader is referred to the notes on these chapters, pp. 83 ff. Many features combine to establish a very strong probability that the author (or authors) of these passages confronts the problems and needs of the post-exilic community in Jerusalem about 460–450 B.C., nearly a hundred years after

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the period to which we assign the writings of II Isaiah, and shortly before the advent of Nehemiah and Ezra. The standpoint of the prophet is certainly Jerusalem, but a Jerusalem in which the Temple has been restored (an event which we know definitely was brought about in the years 518–516 B.C.), although the walls of the city still remain unbuilt. It is true that the style and thought of one section (viz. chs. lx.–lxii.) bear the closest resemblance to the writing of II Isaiah, esp. in ch. liv.; but there are certain points of detail which seem to imply that even this passage belongs to the later date. The other sections of lvi.–lxvi. are differentiated from the work of II Isaiah by profound divergences of style, ideas, and feeling, whilst the resemblances or reminiscences which can be traced are only such as would be accounted for by supposing that the author of these sections had known and admired the utterances of his great predecessor.

III.

THE TEACHING OF THE BOOK.

Having thus reached the conclusion that Is. xl.–lxvi. is the work of a prophet (or prophets) of whose career we know only that he (or they) wrote these chapters at a certain period of history and to people in clearly defined circumstances, we have next to inquire into the purpose and leading ideas of the prophecy. What does the writer (we shall use the singular) chiefly wish to impress on his audience, or to teach them, or call on them to do? In a word, what is the message of the book?

1. The first thing that strikes us is that the prophet is eager to impress on his countrymen a due sense of the majesty, the power, the incomparableness of Yahwe, the God of Israel, who is the only true and living God. This prophet is perhaps the greatest monotheist of the O.T. At least it is he who has most adequately brought out and

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most eloquently expatiated upon, the doctrine of the unity and omnipotence of God. The idea of Yahwe as the Creator and Ruler of the Universe is set forth in splendid language. By His unaided wisdom and power (see esp. xl. 12–26) He created and controls the stars in the heavens (xl. 26; xlv. 12, 18), the earth with its mountains and seas (xl. 12; li. 10), and all living creatures, both man and beast (xlii. 5). By His will the face of Nature may be transformed in the most wonderful fashion (xli. 18, 19; l. 2, 3). Existent from eternity (xl. 28; xlv. 6), supreme in knowledge and power, He can foresee and direct the development of human history. Providence is but the unfolding of His will. No combination of men and nations, no matter how powerful they may seem, will be able to prevent the realisation of His purposes (xl. 23, 24). But, if the opposition of human enemies is vain, what of the gods whom the heathen nations worship? No help, the prophet declares, can be found in these so-called deities and their images. Upon the folly of worshipping idols, the work of men's hands, mere pieces of wood and stone, the prophet pours ironical scorn (xl. 19, 20; xli. 7; xlv. 9–20; xlv. 6, 7). As for the beings whom these images are supposed to represent, they are nonentities, creations of the human imagination, powerless to work good or evil. The question is brought to a dramatic issue, the test chosen being the capacity for making successful prediction. In answer to the challenge of Yahwe it appears that the idols and their worshippers can cite no instance of verified prediction and are unable to foretell the events now about to happen (xli. 21–24; xliii. 9), whereas Yahwe, with Israel as His witness, can triumphantly point to former prophecies fulfilled (xlv. 8; xlviii. 6, 7) as a guarantee that the promises now uttered will also be proved true.

When the impotence of the false gods is thus set in contrast with the omnipotence and omniscience of

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Yahwe, it is no wonder that the prophet loves to enforce the thought of His uniqueness: He is Yahwe, the incomparable (xl. 25; xlv. 18, 21; xlv. 5), the ‘Holy One’ (as alone possessing the attributes of true divinity), the ‘First and the Last, beside whom there is no God’ (xli. 4; xlv. 6; xlviii. 12).

2. Another element of fundamental importance in the teaching of the prophet is his view of the character of God. For if the Almighty has at His disposal infinite resources of wisdom and power, it is of the essence of any truly religious message that it should contain a clear declaration of the purpose to which these resources will be applied; and that must depend on the character of the Being who controls them. The prophet declares that the omnipotent Yahwe is a Being of morally perfect character. This conviction he expresses for the most part by dwelling upon the righteousness of Yahwe. The term is used with a depth or a width of meaning which cannot be fully stated here. As regards Yahwe it denotes fundamentally the quality of trustworthiness, reliability, faithfulness to a purpose, self-consistency in word and deed. His righteousness therefore is displayed in every act which conduces to the execution of His object. And since His object is the deliverance of Israel and, ultimately, the salvation of all mankind, the idea of Yahwe’s righteousness comes into vital relationship with the thought of His redemptive power. Yahwe is ‘a just and saving God’ (xlv. 21), the only ‘Saviour’ (xliii. 11). In fact so inevitably is ‘redemption,’ ‘salvation,’ the result of Yahwe’s righteousness, that in certain passages (e.g. xlv. 13; li. 6, 8) ‘righteousness’ denotes not the attribute but its actual outcome, i.e. ‘victory,’ ‘success.’

The prophet also emphasises another aspect of Yahwe’s moral perfection—namely, His wonderful tenderness. His care for Israel exceeds that of a mother for her infant child (xlix. 14, 15; cp. lxvi. 13); like a shepherd He will

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lead home His people with the most compassionate regard even for the weakest of the flock (xl. 11); and, above all, His wrath will be seen to have lasted but 'for a moment' when compared with the everlasting mercy which is now to be revealed (liv. 8).

3. The central message of the prophet is that this Almighty, faithful, and merciful God is about to sum up human history in a final manifestation of His glory, by a series of stupendous physical and political convulsions which will result in the triumphant restoration of the exiled people of Israel to their own land, and, eventually, in the joyful acceptance of the true religion by all nations of the earth. Repeatedly it is predicted that the desert lands are about to experience a transformation into fertility and beauty as a preparation for the march of the exiled Israelites, whom Yahwe Himself will lead back to their ancient home (xl. 3, 4; xli. 17–19; xlii. 14–16; xliii. 19, 20; xlix. 9–12). The political 'sign of the times' is to be found in the career of Cyrus, who is declared to be unconsciously the agent of Yahwe's purpose—raised up and sustained by His resistless will (xli. 2, 3; xlv. 1–6), and destined shortly to conquer Babylon itself (cp. xlvii.; xliii. 14; xlv. 1, 2), to set free the captive Israelites, and to command the restoration of Jerusalem (xliv. 28). At Yahwe's bidding the peoples of north and south and east and west will give up the exiled Israelites (xliii. 5, 6; xlix. 12, 22), who will return through the transformed deserts to the joys of a restored and glorified Jerusalem (li. 3; lii.–lv. *passim*; cp. lx., lxii.). Finally, the nations, overcome by this amazing spectacle, will be convinced of the folly of their idolatrous worship, and will eagerly come, in humility and penitence, to be taught by Israel the knowledge of the one true God (xlv. 14, 22–24).

4. But the prophet's inspiration reaches a yet higher level in his conception of the religious mission of the people of Israel. Not only is Israel's restoration and exaltation to

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be to all the world a proof of the glory of Yahwe, the God of Israel, and of His universal supremacy, but Israel itself is to be the means of converting the world and instructing it in the true knowledge of God. This idea is developed by the prophet through the lofty conception of the *Servant of Yahwe*. It is quite impossible in this place to discuss fully the problems which arise in connection with this title, as even to summarise the present trend and balance of opinion. All that can be done is to indicate in a few words the main facts regarding the phrase and its religious significance in II Isaiah.

(a) *The Servant of Yahwe*. On the one hand there are a number of passages (e.g. xli. 8; xlii. 19, 20; xlv. 1 f.; xlv. 4) in which there can be no question that the title 'Servant of Yahwe' denotes the historic nation of Israel. Even we are accustomed, in such a phrase as 'England expects every man to do his duty,' to personify the nation, and speak of it as an individual. But the orientals, and especially the Hebrews, carried this tendency much further than is natural for us, and could freely speak of a nation as born, acting in a personal manner, dying, rising from the dead, and so forth. So far there arises no difficulty, the only question being *in what sense* is the historic people of Israel termed the Lord's Servant. Doubtless Israel might be called Yahwe's Servant simply because it acknowledged Him as its God. But an examination of the passages where the title is used shows that the prophet has a deeper meaning in mind. He lays stress upon the peculiar privilege of Israel in having been specially 'called,' 'chosen,' 'created' by Yahwe, as though implying that Israel has some signal mission to fulfil for its God. In xlii. 19, it is acknowledged that Israel has been blind and deaf in the execution of this mission. Nevertheless, though it has remained passive and unconscious of its duty, Yahwe has caused it to be instrumental in achieving His purpose; for He has made

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its history a revelation of His character. Thus its misfortunes and sufferings reveal the consequences of sinning against the moral law and thereby display Yahwe's perfect ethical holiness, whilst the coming prosperity of Israel will manifest in equally signal fashion His faithfulness and His mercy. From this point of view, then, it may truly be said that Israel is His *witness* unto the peoples of the earth. In all this, however, it is obvious that the Servant is conceived as serving Yahwe, not so much actively as passively; he has been, as it were, a mirror in which the attitude of God to man is clearly but mechanically reflected. There is, at any rate, no suggestion that the Servant has a mission towards the world which must be accomplished by positive, purposeful action.

(b) *The Suffering Servant*. On the other hand there are some passages—four in particular—which have long been singled out by scholars and, for convenience, entitled the ‘Servant-songs’ or ‘Servant-passages’ (viz. xlii. 1–4; xlix. 1–6; l. 4–9; lii. 13–liii. 12), in which a healing and enlightening mission to the whole world is clearly assigned to the Servant; and in these the Servant is portrayed, not as ‘blind and deaf’ to his duty (cp. above), but as willing, active, blameless, and indefatigable in faithful pursuance of his high calling, which has brought upon him scorn, suffering, and even death itself. From this last of evils, however, Yahwe will presently deliver him by restoring his life, and, in reward for his integrity, will grant him to see the success of his work. It is evident that the ideal of the Servant in these four passages is profoundly different from that presented elsewhere. Whether the distinction is due to a difference of authorship has already been discussed (see p. xx f.). There is room for very great diversity of opinion on the questions here involved. The whole subject is immensely complicated by the fact that many readers feel these four passages to be so highly individual in their colouring that they

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cannot believe the 'Suffering Servant' is a mere personification of the nation ; they hold that he is a real person, and not Israel at all.

How to decide between these conflicting impressions is the much-discussed problem of the Servant of the Lord in II Isaiah. So baffling and intricate is the evidence both for and against the various solutions which have been proposed, that we cannot do more than indicate the main lines of thought.

i. We may start from the impression that in these four passages the Servant is an individual, and maintain either that the prophet, who elsewhere uses the title as the equivalent of Israel, on these four occasions has deliberately employed it with a different significance, or else that the change of meaning is to be explained by a change of author. Both these explanations are open to serious criticism, and further the 'individual' theory of the Servant is exposed to the following objections. (a) In xlix. 3, the Servant is expressly called 'Israel,' and no convincing reason has been given to show that the word is not part of the original text. (b) The idea of a personal resurrection, such as is predicted for the Servant in liii. 10–13, is improbable in the light of what we know of the growth in the O.T. of belief in individual immortality. (c) The *rôle* of the Servant, his world-wide mission, and his unique relation to Yahwe, are of a quite different order to the expectations which the prophets entertained of any, even the greatest, individual men. (d) The difficulty of identifying the Servant with any known person has hitherto proved insuperable. Neither Jeremiah, nor Zerubbabel or Jehoiachin (as Davidic King), nor an unknown teacher of the Law in the time of Nehemiah, nor yet Eleazar, a martyr in the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes—fits all the requirements of the part. The one interpretation of this class which must always be treated with respect is that the

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Servant represents an ideal individual who shall appear in the future, the Messiah presented in a new and profoundly impressive aspect. It is, of course, true that, from the Christian standpoint, the ideal figure of the Servant did find full and final realisation in the person of Jesus Christ ; and we may legitimately measure the height of the prophet's spiritual nature by 'the marvellous degree in which he has been enabled to foreshadow the essential truths concerning the life and mission of the Redeemer'; but this fact does not give us the right to conclude that the person of Jesus Christ or any Messianic figure was the idea present in the mind of the prophet in delineating the character and work of the ideal Servant. However attractive that view may appear, it meets with a great and seemingly fatal objection in the numerous direct statements according to which it is evident that much of the Servant's career—his humiliation, suffering, and death—is regarded by the prophet as *already* past : only his resurrection and triumph belong to the future.

ii. Or we may start from what is quite certain—namely that the title does *sometimes* in chs. xl. ff. denote Israel, and say that it must bear the same meaning throughout : that the ideal Servant of the four Servant-songs still represents the *nation of Israel*, although the personification is carried much further than in the other passages where the title is employed. This theory is supported by many considerations, amongst which we may single out the fact that in xlix. 3 and xlii. 1 (Septuagint¹) the Servant is definitely named 'Israel' (see the note to xlix. 3). On the other hand it is opposed by these two difficulties, first, that the ideal elements of the Suffering Servant's character, his patience, humility, innocence, and faithfulness, appear too sublime to be applicable to the disappointing career of historical Israel ; and, second, that in three verses (xlix. 5, 6 ; liii. 8) a distinction seems to be made between the

¹ Hereafter referred to by the abbreviation, LXX.

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Servant and Israel as a whole. (It should, however, be noted that the evidence, on which this second objection is based, is by no means certain. Several scholars believe that the words in question are capable of a different meaning, and that the apparent distinction disappears as a mere misinterpretation of the Hebrew : see the notes on liii. 1–10, esp. *v.* 8 ; and xlix. 5, 6.)

Accordingly various modifications of the theory have been proposed. Thus it is suggested that the Suffering Servant typifies an *Ideal Israel* ; but if by this phrase is meant an abstract idea existent only in the hopes of the prophet, the solution is open to the fatal objection that it does not leave room for the statements that the Servant has undergone historical experiences : e.g. his past sufferings and death. Strong though the element of idealisation is, the picture does not seem to be entirely sundered from concrete reality.

Nor is it quite convincing to hold that the Servant personifies the *righteous section* of the nation. This view is attractive because, as is natural, many features of the Servant's character and career correspond with the experiences of the prophets and saints within Israel. But the unambiguous assertion of the Servant's death (liii. 8), which according to Hebrew thought is a quite natural metaphor to denote the loss of national independence at the time of the Exile, becomes hard to understand if applied merely to the righteous persons in Israel, for they did not actually die out at the Exile or any other period. Equally great, in the opinion of many scholars, is the difficulty of supposing that the righteous in Israel were singled out for such scorn and persecution as could account for the language of ch. liii., at least at any period early enough to be suitable. The terrible sufferings of certain faithful Jews in the Maccabean period might conceivably have called forth such sentiments as are found in ch. liii. ; but, whether this opinion

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be justified or not, the date (*circa* 170–165 B.C.) is too late to make an identification of the Servant with those martyrs at all probable. And, in general, the notion that the Servant is only the spiritual kernel of the nation, imposes an undesirable limitation upon the idealism of the writer. ‘Like all prophets of the O.T. he operates with nations and peoples. And if the nations are to receive “light” through Israel, it will be through Israel, again an imposing people before the world’s eyes.’

iii. Each of these aspects, taken separately, is open to objections more or less serious, yet all reflect features present in the wonderful picture of the Servant of the Lord. It remains to consider whether they ought not somehow to be combined. May it not be that the Servant represents Israel, not in some sense, but in many senses; that the Servant is always ‘Israel,’ and that the complex features in his personality may be accounted for by fluctuations in the aspect under which the prophet happens to be thinking of his people? In the present writer’s opinion this is on the whole the best interpretation to put on the apparent contradictions of the existing text. We could then maintain that, in passages other than the four Servant-songs, the prophet has in mind the character and career of the whole nation as it had actually existed in history. If so, then it is natural that the Servant should there be represented as deaf and disobedient, yet not wholly cast off and not wholly useless. On the other hand, in the Servant-songs he is thinking of Israel as it should be, a perfect Israel, the nation as it is in the mind and purpose of God. Not that the prophet regards this conception of Israel as an abstract ideal, quite unrealised in actual life. He means by it real, historical Israel—but Israel seen in the light of his inspired optimism. Just as a Christian to-day might think or write of the ideal Church of Christ as really existent in the actual historical churches despite their imperfections now and in the past, so there

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was a way of looking at the actual people of Israel which enabled the prophet to feel that the perfect Israel was more than an unrealised dream. It had had some historical embodiment in the faithful members of the nation, who, though numerically a part, might be thought of as ideally the whole nation, the true Israel, the faithful Servant. This would leave room for the inclusion of historical experiences in the Servant's past career; whilst we could also maintain that the Servant does not typify a pious minority in the nation, but is indeed the whole people, ideally considered. Finally, if the three verses, liii. 8, xlix. 5, 6, do really imply a distinction between Israel and the Servant, we might answer this objection by insisting on the fact that in such a conception of the Servant as has just been indicated an element of paradox was natural and only to be expected: looking forward to the Servant's universal mission the prophet would see an Israel perfect in all its members, looking back upon the actual chequered past he would see not merely the rebellious sin-stained people, a very imperfect Servant, but also—such is the triumph of his faith—the presence of the Ideal Israel, personified at least in the persons of those who, in the face of all opposition, patiently and heroically, had maintained amongst their brethren the knowledge and worship of the one true God.

IV.

THE RELIGIOUS VALUE.

Whatever be the opinion we may prefer to hold upon these difficult literary and historical questions, it is right that in conclusion we should emphasise the value of the ideal portrayed in the figure of the Suffering Servant. How can such a life and death as his be reconciled with the belief that the world is controlled by a gracious and all powerful God? The prophet faces this mystery as it

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appeared in the sufferings of his nation at the hands of its ruthless and idolatrous oppressors. He finds an answer in the thought that, in the purpose of God, Israel is called to be—the Prophet of the Gentiles. As such, her tribulations seemed but the counterpart of the persecution endured by the prophets *within* Israel; and the life of such a man as Jeremiah was sufficient proof that ignominy and suffering might be willingly accepted in the task of leading Israel to know and serve its God. Moreover the *redemptive* power of such a life was manifest beyond dispute: the blood of the prophets had been the life of their people. And this fact was enough to sustain the prophet's faith in God, and to lead him on to the conviction that ultimately—though the fashion of it transcends our human imagination—God would not fail to vindicate His Servant. Now the origin of new religious truth is in personal experience, and we may be sure that the writer shared in the heroic spirit of the prophets, and knew something of their pain. Hence, although we see that the teaching of these chapters was uttered primarily in regard to the life of the nation, it may with justice be applied to the experiences of the individual. The picture of the Suffering Servant is more than an intellectual feat; it is a victory of faith achieved in the stress of life.

Taking chs. xl.–lxvi. as a whole, we may say that the faith which pervades them is based on the conviction that God has a kingdom of righteousness and love to establish, first in Israel but finally among all nations; that He seeks the cooperation of men as His servants; and that in the end His purpose shall be accomplished, for His power is measureless and His mercy everlasting.

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