

who might have drawn up a description of the construction of the Tabernacle, would have thought of elaborating it twice over, once in the form of instructions how to make it, and then again in an account, equally detailed, of the way in which these instructions were carried out. It is just a reflection of the joy that filled the great Lawgiver's heart in the possession of a privilege that had been so nearly lost.

E. W. SHALDERS.

ISAIAH vi. 9, 10.—There is no passage of Holy Writ that has a better title to be regarded as a *locus classicus* than this. It is quoted in each of the Synoptical Gospels. St. John recalls it when recording the unbelief of the Jews, and St. Paul twice quotes it in illustration of the same painful fact. There are striking variations in the uses thus made of it from the original passage, which furnish a pertinent example of the freedom with which the sacred writers handled previous statements of Scripture.

The forms of quotation in the New Testament range themselves into two diverging lines, one tending to assert that an influence is brought to bear upon men's minds by which they are rendered insensible to moral truth, the other that their blindness is the result of their own unwillingness to understand and obey. To the former may be referred Mark iv. 11, 12; Luke viii. 10; John xii. 39, 40; and Romans xi. 8; to the latter, Matthew xiii. 14, 15; Acts xxviii. 26, 27. Since the last two passages are an almost verbal quotation from the LXX., it may be said that the leaning of the New Testament is to discern between the lines, if not in the form, of the original passage a judicial chastisement of the perverseness of the Jewish people.

It becomes therefore an interesting question, What was the precise meaning of the message conveyed by the Divine Spirit to Isaiah's mind? Did it represent the ministry to which he was solemnly deputed as a forlorn hope, because, from the moral temper and confirmed habits of the people, an unfavourable result was antecedently certain? This seems the sense in which it was understood by the authors of the LXX., and its form, if Hebrew idiom be taken into account, is by no means inconsistent with this meaning. It is a mode of expression, very characteristic of Hebrew thought, to represent the result of a course of action as designed which is only foreseen or confidently anticipated. Familiar with forms of government in which the sovereign power appeared wholly without control, the Hebrews transferred ideas derived from this source to the government of God. They had a conviction, that the Judge of all the earth must do right, but the conception of the rights of the creature and correlative

responsibilities of the Creator did not lie within the horizon of their thought. Their overwhelming sense of the Divine Power, absolutely ordering all events and giving no account of its dealings, permitted them to say, without any idea that they were imputing evil to God, "Why hast thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear?" It may be said that in the passage under consideration the utterance is not the prophet's, but God's. But this makes no difference, since Isaiah's mind was the field of revelation, and, strictly speaking, there is no more difficulty in the idea of God's accommodating Himself to modes of human thought than in his employing our modes of speech. It is a necessity limiting the absolute truth of revelation. If men's minds are to be reached, the Spirit must use such avenues of approach as have been thrown up for other occasions. God's communications to Isaiah would be tintured by Isaiah's habits of thought as inevitably as the prophet's publication of them.

By a similar idiom to that which moulds this passage, a prophet is even said *to do* what he simply announces. Thus, to Jeremiah God says: "Behold, I put my words in thy mouth. See, I this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to ruin, and to destroy, to build and to plant" (Chap. i. 10); meaning, of course, not that he should control the destinies of nations and kingdoms, but that he should announce the Divine Will respecting them, and that events would so answer to his predictions that it should seem as though his word alone determined their rise or fall. There is no thought here of an irreversible decree published by the prophet, as we may see from the repetition of these very words in the application of the Parable of the Potter. "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if *that nation*, against whom I have pronounced, *turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil* that I thought to do unto them" (Chap. xviii. 7, 8).

Still there must have been some reason for expressing the anticipated failure of Isaiah's mission in such a strong, not to say repulsive, form. Shall we say then that God bids Isaiah choose such methods of presenting truth as would have the effect of stupefying the moral sense of a people already perverted, and so insure their becoming an example of Divine judgment? I need scarcely say that this harsher construction has been put upon the passage, but I think unwarrantably. For the Divine word is not a secret instruction to the prophet respecting the *form* of his ministrations, but a solemn warning to be openly proclaimed to the people. The man whose life was henceforth

to be devoted to the preaching of repentance to a nation that had corrupted its way, was to tell them at the outset that his ministry was to make them blind and deaf, and harden their hearts, lest the result which he was ever labouring to accomplish should be brought about, and they should turn and find pardon! Surely, if solemn irony was ever uttered, we have it here. Nowhere do we find Isaiah employing language of that mystic character which only special sympathetic insight could understand. Whenever he warns, rebukes, or invites to repentance, he is as plain as an evangelist.

There must, however, be some foundation in the passage itself, beyond the form of its irony, for the use that is made of it in the New Testament. Between the alternative interpretations just mentioned there must be a *via media*. This I will endeavour to indicate.

A people, chosen to be witnesses for God, and to accomplish a certain service in the education of the world, may fulfil this design in two ways: by the attainment, on the part of some, of religious faith and character; and by the exhibition, in the case of others, of the consequences of unfaithfulness under special privileges. Obviously, there will come a time in their history when, so far as the latter are concerned, these privileges will become positively injurious. Nevertheless, the continuance of the means of moral and spiritual instruction after they have ceased to be a benefit to the greater part of the nation may still be required, in order to accomplish God's purpose of grace to the men of honest and good heart. A college professor would not be doing his duty towards his conscientious and diligent students if he forbore to proceed to the higher branches of the subject of his prelections, because his teaching would have the inevitable effect of confusing and discouraging the idle men who had failed to master his elementary course. So it is the appointment of Isaiah's mission, notwithstanding its foreseen failure in the case of all but a remnant of the nation, which gives it a judicial character, and makes it a menace of judgment.

Hence our Lord's use of the passage to justify his having recourse to parables while prosecuting his ministry in the midst of a nation that had already shewn a strong disposition to reject Him. He puts his teaching into a form in which it could be apprehended by such as were willing to do the will of his Father, but which would hide it from those whose disobedience to known truth had deprived them of spiritual insight. This was a chastisement upon their perverse and prejudiced minds, because a virtual withdrawal of his saving ministry from them. It was like closing their day of visitation. Yet in another aspect the adoption of this course was an act of mercy; for

teaching, the meaning of which is obscure to the unwilling hearer, is less hardening than plain truth, because it does not provoke such obstinate resistance. So also there was mercy in Isaiah's ministry to his hardened fellow-countrymen. It was to be continued until their cities were desolate, without inhabitant, and the Lord had removed men far away. Then its gracious purpose to them would become manifest, for when suffering Divine judgments they would be thrown back upon neglected warnings. Though so long unavailing, as unavailing as if their very design had been to confirm them in their disobedience, these warnings would eventually become weird fingers pointing to the cause of their sufferings, and indicating the way of salvation through repentance and turning to God (Verses 11-13). For the severest lines of the prophet's message plainly imply that, even after a course of obstinate impenitence, to *turn* is to put a constraint upon God's mercy, and draw forth his forgiveness: "*lest,*" he says, "*they convert, and be healed.*"

To sum up: these verses are an utterance of warning in the form of solemn irony; but the appointment of a ministry of warning and rebuke, when the temper of the nation was such that it would be more likely to harden than to win to repentance, was a judicial chastisement of disobedience to truth. This thought explains our Lord's use of the passage to illustrate his adoption of the parable as a means of conveying or hiding his meaning, according to the state of mind of the hearer. It is also the justification of the use made of the passage by St. John and St. Paul, to point their own statements respecting the moral blindness which overtakes those who fail of the grace of God.

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COLOSSIANS i. 24.—Dr. Gloag, in his article on "The Complement of Christ's Afflictions," in the March number of *THE EXPOSITOR*, has done scant justice to the view of this passage advanced by Meyer, and stated in these words:—"Paul describes his own sufferings as *afflictions of Christ*, in so far as the apostolic suffering in essential character was the same as Christ endured. The collective mass of these afflictions is conceived in the form of a definite measure. He only who has suffered all has filled up that measure." Dr. Gloag adds the following paraphrase, by Meyer, of verse 24: "I rejoice on account of the sufferings which I endure for you, and am in the course of furnishing the complete fulfilment of what, in my case, still remains in arrear of fellowship of affliction with Christ." Here it will be observed that Meyer understands the expression, τὰ ὑστερήματα τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ, to mean, not any deficiencies *in* the afflictions