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THE BOOK OF ISAIAH.

CHAPTERS xl.-lxvi.

THE last twenty-seven chapters of the Book of Isaiah are in several respects the most remarkable part of the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. Other prophecies, such as many parts of the first half of Isaiah, are more splendid examples of literary power; but, with the exception perhaps of some parts of Jeremiah, no other prophecies attain to such a depth of theological meaning. Many of the ideas, no doubt, occur in other prophets, particularly in Hosea, but the intensity of the emotion of the last prophet of the Northern Kingdom prevents his giving any fuller expression to his thoughts than in isolated ejaculations, while the calmer and more self-possessed mood of the prophet in these twenty-seven chapters enables him to give to his conceptions a broad and detailed treatment. The piece, indeed, is almost a pure theological projection, as much so as the Book of Job; and though the mind of the prophet may have been stimulated by the events of his time, and though these events form the background of his theological pictures, his ideas are anterior to the events, to which they lend their colour. This is true in the case of all the prophets. The great prophetic conceptions are not suggested by the events of history, they are older than history; historical movements only furnish an occasion for the vivid expression of them. The prophets see in the events befalling their nation, and in the revolutions and wars among the nations abroad, only illustrations of principles of which they are already in

possession. Sometimes, indeed, the startling providences which they witness seem to tax their principles to the utmost, and we observe that it costs them an effort to stretch their principles over the events. These events run counter to their hopes, or even seem to contradict the anticipations which the previous providence of God had led them to form, and they are perplexed and sometimes in despair. Ultimately, however, their great general conceptions gain the mastery, and then the irregular and amorphous events only the more signally illustrate their principles because to human wisdom they seemed at first to contradict them. It is at this point that we find anything that deserves to be called new in the prophetic literature. By modern writers on prophecy the prophets have been both unduly exalted as teachers and unduly depreciated as learners. They do not pretend to teach the people new principles, they seek to recall them to the faith and practice of truths which have been known from the beginning. And while they themselves learn, it is not new principles that they learn, it is rather the real scope and comprehensiveness of the principles which they already possess; and what they foresee and predict is the final form of the Church and the earth when these principles shall perfectly prevail. Under the influence of the great events of the Church's history however, and by combination with them, the general prophetic principles assume the form of distinct conceptions, which characterize the various prophetic writings and distinguish them from one another. And perhaps nowhere have the general prophetic ideas assumed so remarkable a form as in the last twenty-seven chapters of the Book of Isaiah.

The object of the following papers is to give an outline, necessarily very incomplete, of the peculiar conceptions which run through this remarkable prophecy. The author has been called the evangelist of the Old Testament. All

the prophets are evangelists, in the sense that they teach that salvation belongeth unto the Lord, that by grace are we saved through faith, not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. And in this the prophet of these chapters agrees with his brethren. But while other prophets content themselves with this general doctrine of grace, moving exclusively in the region of divine efficiency and operation, and suggesting no solution or principle of this operation beyond this, that God pardons sin of his mercy, having by the severe dispensations of his providence brought the sense of sin home to the people's heart, and thus fitted them to receive his mercy, this prophet, in his profound doctrine of the suffering Servant of the Lord, makes an extraordinary movement towards a solution, teaching that the sins of the people as a whole were laid by God upon the innocent Servant, and were atoned by his sufferings, and that thus the people were redeemed. It might be thought that this idea lay ready to the prophet's hand in the sacrificial system. Some terms which he uses in Chapter liii. make it probable that he did consciously combine the sacrificial conception with his other ideas; though the history of his people and their experiences for many years, and the complex situation before his eyes, with its various parties, some faithful to the principles of the covenant, and for that very reason suffering the deepest and undeserved afflictions, and others whose backsliding was healed through the patience and faith of their brethren, may also have been fruitful of suggestion to his mind. What is remarkable is that other prophets fail to make the combination with the sacrificial system which this prophet makes, and that he alone gives prominence to the idea of vicarious suffering. The latter idea is foreign even to the Book of Job, though this book is in such remarkable agreement with the second half of Isaiah in its delineation of an innocent sufferer. Job's sufferings have no bearing on any but himself, while

the sufferings of the Servant of the Lord effect the restoration of his people—by his stripes we have been healed; and whatever affinities there may be between the two books, there is here a fundamental difference of conception and a profound advance on the part of the prophet beyond the author of Job. On the other hand, Job's intercession for his three friends (Chap. xlii. 10) is too slight a point and enters too little into the fundamental ideas of the poem to warrant any comparison of it with the intercession or intervention of the Servant in behalf of his people (Isaiah liii. 12), which includes within it his bearing of their sins. It is this conception, together with the prominence which he gives to the general doctrines of grace, which has gained for this prophet the title of evangelist among the prophets. Students of the Old Testament, however, who remember that the revelation of truth was gradual, that religious ideas were not revealed abstractly or in their general form, but in a shape relative to the times and circumstances of the ancient Church, and above all, that the religious unit or person in the Old Testament times was not the individual but Israel, the people of God, though they may look for the Gospel in Isaiah, will not expect to find it in the exact shape in which we have received it. The ideas may be Christian, but they will be represented by Old Testament subjects. The prophet may paint a Christian picture as a whole, but he will set it in an Old Testament frame—the frame of the world, with its forces, as it then existed, though to our minds the frame may seem far too small for the picture. Even the Servant of the Lord, though we may be able to recognize his features in the Christian Messiah, can hardly be expected to stand out with the clear cut definiteness of the historical person. The prophet's creation here remains unfinished. He has proceeded far enough with his work to enable us to recognize his idea. But he has not yet

detached his figure from the great block of Israel out of which he hews it, or more strictly, which he fashions into it. This is as we should expect, and as thoughtful minds in all ages of the Church have recognized. Augustine's statement that the New Testament is latent in the Old is to be maintained literally, with its reservation as well as its affirmation. Christian feeling is sometimes apt to force the hand of the interpreter, and to demand of him that he should make the New patent in the Old. To Christian thought, however, the offence of exaggerating the dissimilarity between the Old Testament and the New might seem more venial than that of unduly extenuating it. To overlook or obliterate the immeasurable step of the Incarnation is a graver misconception of Revelation than it is to regard this event as so unparalleled that no approximation had been made towards it in the times anterior to it.

Many persons who would wish to study the second half of Isaiah are discouraged from making the attempt by a feeling that an insurmountable barrier of critical difficulties lies between them and any comprehension of the prophecy. This is, in great measure, a delusion. In spite of the fact that large critical questions rise in connexion with these prophecies, there is perhaps no part of Scripture to the understanding of which criticism contributes so little. Like the Book of Job, the piece is almost purely theological and occupied with ideas. It is a structure based upon and built out of the Monotheistic conception, the idea that Jehovah, God of Israel, is the true and only God. It need not be supposed that the author consciously started from this principle and logically deduced his other conclusions from it. This is not the method of Old Testament writers. Nevertheless, to us who read his work now the effect is the same as if he had done so; and obviously the question at what time or in what circumstances such

a theological structure was reared is only of secondary importance so far as understanding the work itself is concerned. It may be that many of the details of the structure point to a definite historical period; to many minds, indeed, the theological character of the work will be conclusive evidence that it cannot belong to a time anterior to the Exile; but such methods of reasoning shew that the meaning of the passage may be learned from itself independently of external aids, and that this meaning may be found to lead to critical conclusions rather than to receive light from them.

The great critical question agitated in regard to these twenty-seven chapters is, whether the author was a contemporary of the Exile, or was an older prophet, enabled by an extraordinary gift of foresight to transport himself into its circumstances and realize its conditions. The way in which such a question has to be put indicates how far scholars of all opinions are in agreement. It is admitted on all hands that, at whatever time the prophet actually lived and wrote, the Exile is the stage on which his personages move and on which the great drama which he exhibits is transacted. Delitzsch, who believes that Isaiah the son of Amoz in the age of Hezekiah was the author of the prophecy, makes this admission even in a more absolute manner than Ewald and Bleek do, who hold that the prophecy was penned in the age of Cyrus. It would be too much to say that difference of view on this point will exert no influence on the interpretation of the prophecy. It will exercise some influence, but the influence will not be great. And it is in no way necessary to settle the question before proceeding to study the contents and ascertain the meaning of the prophecy. It may be reserved till this more important process has been gone through.

Another critical question of less magnitude is, How far the prophet of these twenty-sev^e chapters has adopted

fragments from other prophecies, or other writers, into his own work? It is admitted that the bulk of the chapters forms a unity, and is from the hand of one author. But certain passages are thought to betray a different hand; while others, unlike the bulk of the prophecy, seem written from a point of view anterior to the time of the Exile. A passage of the latter kind is Chapter lvi. 9, *seq.*; while Ewald and others following him have suggested that Chapter liii., and other passages concerning the Servant of the Lord, have been drawn by the prophet from a *martyrology* already existing and composed in circumstances somewhat different and earlier. This view of Ewald has little to support it; and it may be urged against it that thoughts similar to those in Chapter liii. occur in many earlier parts of the prophecy in a less developed form, and that this chapter only forms the climax towards which the whole prophecy may be observed moving. At any rate if the prophet drew this passage from another source, an idea for which almost nothing can be said, its insertion was not an accident or an afterthought. The whole preceding prophecy has been influenced by its conceptions, and this supposed martyrology merely assumes the place of a powerful educating influence on the mind of the prophet, fertilizing his thoughts and elevating his view to that height which enabled him to bequeath to us such lofty conceptions. It is not imagined by Ewald or those who follow him, that the passages in question are interpolations, inserted by a hand operating on the prophet's masterpiece after his own hand had left it. The touches, whatever suggested them, are those of the master himself. And this is enough for the interpreter. The question he asks is not what may possibly have been the original meaning of Chapter liii., but what is its meaning now as it stands an integral part of the magnificent production of which it is the crown. The critics are very fond of going into the prophet's workshop, and revealing to us the whole genesis

of his great works. It is very pleasant to hear them talk, and to be told with certainty what suggested this touch, and to whom is due the merit of first creating this other beautiful line or charming curve. And their conversation so corruscates with first principles that no guide is so entertaining as a good critic. There are persons dull or dreamy enough to feel bored by them, who are so intoxicated by the beauty of a great creation itself that they do not care a whit how it arose, and who prefer to stand in silence before it, drinking in what of its meaning they are able through their own natural untutored eyesight.

Another question less strictly critical, but also partly exegetical and of a more internal kind, is the inquiry whether these twenty-seven chapters, admittedly in the main a unity and the work of one hand, have been composed all at one gush, or whether there are not distinct divisions in the composition, points at which the author paused, having rounded off his previous work, and from which he again started, in order to give his conceptions a more perfect development. Rückert, a poet and translator rather than a Biblical critic, found three such points at the end of Chapters *xlvi.*, *lvii.*, and *lxvi.*, indicated by the refrain, *There is no peace, saith the Lord, unto the wicked*, or similar words. Rückert's suggestion was eagerly caught at first and hailed as a discovery; but a more thorough comprehension of the connexion of the piece has caused it, as could not fail to happen, to fall into disfavour. This division into three sections of nine chapters each is entirely superficial and worth nothing except as an aid to the memory. It breaks down signally at the end of Chapter *lvii.*, where there is no trace of a pause in the sense. On the other hand, scholars whose opinion is not lightly to be set aside, such as Ewald, continue to find a distinct break at the end of Chapter *xlvi.* Ewald regards the first nine chapters as a distinct book, composed before the

capture of Babylon by Cyrus, or at least not later; the following chapters he considers posterior to this event, and to betray a change of circumstances. Mr. Cheyne agrees with this view so far as to place a large break at the end of Chapter *xlvi*. and to begin a new section with the following chapter, and remarks that "we hear no more of Babylon after this" (*ii*. 10). The remark is true in words, but misleading in fact. Babylon is no more mentioned by name, but it is frequently referred to, and in a manner which shews that the situation before the prophet's view in the first nine chapters of his prophecy remains unchanged in the chapters that follow. Mr. Cheyne indeed recognizes this, and tacitly neutralizes the effect of his own remark in various notes. On Chapter *li*. 13, on the words, "Where is the fury of the oppressor?" he observes that the prophet is "anticipating the sudden destruction of Babylon." And a note to the same effect is added on Chapter *lii*. 5. The argument in favour of a break and pause in the composition at Chapter *xlvi*. seems, therefore, to fall to the ground. In itself such a question is of no moment whatever. It is highly improbable that the prophet composed so lengthy a production otherwise than at considerable intervals. But the question whether the end of Chapter *xlvi*. be connected in sense with Chapter *xlix*. is of extreme exegetical consequence, and to place a break at the end of the former chapter and to commence an entirely new and unconnected section with Chapter *xlix*., as is done in Mr. Cheyne's Commentary, is either the cause or the corroboration of a view of the entire prophecy which we cannot help thinking to be liable to very serious objections. The truth appears to be that no important divisions are to be detected in the prophecy. The situation remains the same throughout, at least till toward the end of the piece. The prophecy, as J. A. Alexander has said, is a "desultory composition," in which the same subjects are

often handled, and many variations are executed on the same fundamental theme. This does not imply that no progress is to be observed, or that certain subjects may not receive fuller treatment in one part of the prophecy than in another. It means that the same general conceptions and view pervade the whole piece. And when it is said that the bulk of the passage is a unity, and from the pen of one writer, this does not hinder a question being raised in regard to certain passages towards the end of the book, which some suppose written from a point of view later than that assumed in the great bulk of the prophecy. If such an opinion can be sustained, these pieces may be foreign additions, though this is not necessary, as the author may have changed his point of view. If he was a true contemporary of the Exile, he may have lived to witness the return; if he saw the Exile in vision, he may also have had a foresight of the restoration. So far as the ideas of the great mass of the prophecy are concerned, these final passages are of inferior importance.

After an attempt to argue that critical questions, however large, are, on the whole, irrelevant to the exegesis of this prophecy, and may be reserved by the expositor, it might seem unsuitable to refer to the great critical inquiry concerning the actual age to which the author of these chapters belonged. It is not improbable that in the Papers that follow a bias in favour of a certain view may appear, and as there are prejudices in many minds against this view, and the grounds on which it is held are liable to be misunderstood, these grounds may be shortly stated with some illustrations. No attempt will be made to argue the question as a whole. Such an argument would be unsuitable for the pages of an exegetical Journal. An outline of the general argument on *one* side only will be presented.

Criticism, in the hands of those who use it with reason-

ableness, is entirely an inductive science. Its argumentation is of the kind called probable, and its conclusions attain to nothing more than a greater or less probability, though the probability in many instances may be such as entirely to satisfy the mind. The criticism of the prophetic literature starts with no *à priori* principles as to the nature of prophecy or the capabilities of the prophetic gift. It examines the prophecies and observes the facts, and its conclusions are those which such an observation leads it to consider probable. It eschews the region of abstract principles. Some who practise it have no doubt spoken of certain things, such as the projection of a prophet's view into the minute circumstances of a period a century ahead of him, as "psychological impossibilities." These are aberrations; but aberrations which, from the love of the human mind for general principles that go further than mere conclusions founded on the registration of facts, it is difficult to avoid; and they are to be paralleled by similar excesses on the part of investigators in physical science. Such things in both cases are merely the unscientific extravagances of individual men, and are not to be laid to the charge of the science itself.

The prophecy commences with the words, "Comfort ye my people, saith your God; speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned." The people of God have been subjected to a long warfare which is now over, the consequence of iniquities which are now pardoned; their God, who seemed to have forsaken them, now returns for ever, and Jerusalem is bidden to shout from the hill-tops to the cities of Judah across the valleys, Behold your God. He cometh to abide with them, to feed his flock like a shepherd. The prophet's position is that of one who stands on the outer edge of the darkness of the Exile, and sees the day begin to dawn and the shadows to flee away. That

the warfare or hard campaign which he refers to is the Exile, with all its physical hardships and spiritual sorrows, abundantly appears from other passages: "Thus saith Jehovah, who confirmeth the word of his servant, and saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof; that saith of Cyrus, He is my servant, and shall perform all my pleasure; even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid" (Chap. xlv. 26). To "build" in Hebrew is in English to rebuild. Similarly, Chapter li. 3: "The Lord will comfort Zion, he will comfort all her waste places, and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord." So too Chapter lxii. 4: "Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken, neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate, but thou shalt be called Hephzi-bah (my delight is in her), and thy land Beulah (married)—for the Lord delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married." Passages to the same effect are Chapter lii. 9, lviii. 12, lxi. 4, lxiv. 10, and many others.

With this coincides the frequent reference to the condition of the returning exiles in their passage through the wilderness on their way back to Jerusalem, *e.g.* Chapter xli. 7 *seq.* Sometimes this new wandering through the wilderness is compared or contrasted with the Egyptian wandering: "Thus saith the Lord, which maketh a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters, remember ye not the former things, behold I will do a new thing, I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to my people, mine elect" (Chap. xliii. 16). And as there is a new wandering in the wilderness, this naturally is preceded by a new Exodus out of Babylon: "Go ye forth of Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans, say ye, The Lord hath redeemed his servant Jacob, and they thirsted not when he led them through the deserts, he

clave the rock and the waters gushed out" (Chap. xlviii. 20). And so Chapter lii. 11, *seq.* "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence" (Babylon). And once more of Cyrus (Chap. xlv. 13), "I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways, he shall build (rebuild) my city, and he shall let go my captives." It would be altogether absurd to argue that many of the above passages are largely hyperbolic and not capable of being realized actually, and are therefore to be interpreted spiritually. Of what spiritual truth is the name Cyrus a symbol? The passages are no doubt poetry—a thing which always perplexes commentators; but they are to be interpreted literally with that understanding. Any other treatment of them is nothing short of exegetical madness. All the great subjects of which the prophet speaks,—Babylon, Cyrus, the Wilderness, Israel, Zion, the cities of Judah, the Temple, the restoration to the land of promise,—are to be taken in their natural sense. Such names express always these actual things; they are never mere symbolical expressions of spiritual conceptions. But, of course, these actual things, or most of them, had in that age a spiritual meaning also, and it is as embodying this spiritual meaning that the prophet speaks of them. Breaking the yoke of Babylon and letting Israel go free is not an operation on the stage of mere earthly politics, however wide; it is the crushing of idolatry where its seat is, and the triumph of Jehovah, God of Israel, the true and only God, over it, and the restoration of the people of Jehovah, the Church of God, to its true and final rest. Those who fail to recognize that such apparently political and national events as the return from Exile and the rebuilding of Zion had to the prophets profound spiritual significance, though they may not offend against common sense in the way those do who make rebuilding Zion and the Temple nothing but a figure for the spiritual expansion of the Church, really

err further from a true conception of the Old Testament than the other class of interpreters do.

These things, then, of which the prophet speaks being real, and all belonging to the era of the Exile, his familiarity with this epoch, with its great forces and personages, and the various parties among the exiles and their feelings, whether hopes or despondencies, being minute and detailed, in spite of his tendency to idealize, the argument is that his apparent position was his true historical position, and that he was an actual contemporary of the Exile and lived among the captives. The whole complexion of the prophecy, it is thought, makes this probable. The prophet never predicts the Exile. He takes his stand in the midst of it, or rather towards its close. He is everywhere surrounded by "the desolations of many generations" (Chap. lviii. 12, lxi. 4). The manner in which he refers to the circumstances of the Exile is so detailed and complicated that the mere reading of the prophecy gathers an accumulation of probability difficult to resist. For example he introduces the people praying as follows: "Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity for ever; behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people. Thy holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house where our fathers praised thee is burnt up with fire. Wilt thou refrain thyself for these things? wilt thou hold thy peace and afflict us very sore?" (Chap. lxiv. 9 *seq.*). Further, though this is but a phase of the same peculiarity, many of the great theological conceptions of the prophecy, those that distinguish it from other prophecies, such as that of the Servant of the Lord, are rooted in the soil of the Exile. Its Christology—for the word may be justly used, as Delitzsch says: "though we find in these discourses nowhere a proper Messianic prophecy, they are more profoundly Christological than all

Messianic prophecies taken together"¹—is wholly different from that of Isaiah in the earlier chapters of his book, and is a reflection of the sorrows and experiences of the people in the age of the Captivity. The connexion of history and doctrine is held by writers on Old Testament theology to be organic. The historic epoch to which the doctrines of this great section of the Old Testament correspond is the Exile. This is admitted by Delitzsch, and one of the most curious facts to be found in the history of interpretation is the consequence. This writer, as has been said, attributes the prophecy to Isaiah in the age of Hezekiah, and yet in his "Old Testament History of Redemption" he assigns it a place in the development of Old Testament theology *after* the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.² One half of this proceeding or the other is preposterous—we speak, of course, strictly etymologically.

It need not be said, that this general probability is supported by many subsidiary lines of argument, such as the difference of style, which any reader of the original will *feel*. And even those who do not read the original could be made to understand how markedly different from all other prophetic writings the phraseology of this prophecy is.

The author of this prophecy, says Delitzsch, "leads a life in the spirit among the exiles." This is certain, that he is not merely transported on occasions into the Exile, or enabled to catch glimpses of the condition of the exiles, but "leads a life" among them; the question remains whether this be "in spirit" or in the body. As has been said on a previous page, so far as interpretation of the prophecy goes, Delitzsch's admission suffices. If this passage were not part of the prophetic scriptures, two opinions would not be held as to the age of the author. The question thus arises, is there anything in the fact that

¹ Third Edition, p. 405.

² Translation by Curtiss, pp. 141 *seq.*

the passage is part of the prophetic literature which neutralizes the probability already reached, that the author's apparent position was his real one? Let it be said again that no question is here raised of what is possible, or of the compass of prophetic foresight. Does an examination of the prophetic literature indicate that a prophet's apparent historical position is usually his real position or no? What conclusion does such a general examination make on the whole probable?

The answer given to this question is twofold. First, an examination of the prophecies leads to the conclusion that the prophet's apparent position is in fact usually his real one. And second, an examination of the prophecies leads to the discovery of a principle of prophecy which enables us to understand why this should be the case, and serves to corroborate the fact.

If we look into the writings of any of those prophets whose age is known, such as Amos or Hosea, Jeremiah or Ezekiel, we observe that the events and persons they refer to are those actually transpiring and existing around them. The state of society which they found their discourses upon and the persons they appeal to are those of their own day. A prophet of the Assyrian age moves amidst its forms and relations, and has respect to them in his prophetic utterances. And a prophet under the Chaldean empire constantly shews his consciousness of its relations.

This is the general fact. But a further examination of prophecy enables us to reach a principle which explains the fact and corroborates it by shewing that in general it must be so. This principle is that prophecy as exercised in the Kingdom of God in Israel subserved moral purposes, and was exercised in the main for the immediate interests of the persons among whom the prophet lived, and for their practical guidance in life and thought. The deduction to be drawn from this is that mere minute predictions reaching

into distant times and a movement of the prophetic mind in these periods would have been in general of no practical use to the people. It would have been like preaching a sermon to us on a condition of things only to supervene a century or two after our day. Of course the declaration to the people by the prophets of general issues of the Kingdom of God only to be realized many years later might be helpful to them, because these issues many times were full of encouragement to them in their own struggles, or they were issues that depended on their conduct now and might be furthered if good, or retarded if evil, by their moral demeanour; and the announcement of them was meant to act upon their present life. Thus Jeremiah says: "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city, all the words which ye have heard. Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will repent him of the evil which he hath pronounced against you" (Chap. xxvi. 12). And the instance of the prophet Jonah will occur to every mind, and the prediction of Micah, referred to in the same chapter of Jeremiah, which was held to have been revoked in the longsuffering of God. There were, no doubt, prophecies which were absolute. Many of the promises of God were so which contained statements of the purpose of his grace; as for example, that the house of David should for ever bear rule in his kingdom, and many others which depended on his will alone. But Jeremiah expressly formulates the moral principle of prophecy when he says in the name of God: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up and to break 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. And at what instant I speak concerning a nation and a kingdom to build and to plant it, if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice,

I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them. Now, therefore, go to, speak to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Behold I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you; return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good" (Chap. xviii. 7 *seq.*). This moral design of the prophet makes it to be a characteristic of prophecy that the actual conditions of the prophet, and the state of things and parties among the people when he lived, should be the things which he makes the basis of his words. And from the appearance of such things, from the condition of the people alluded to, and its political relations and the like, we may draw an inference as to the time when the prophet lived. He may be assumed to have been an eyewitness of the movements and a participator in the events which he describes.

A. B. DAVIDSON.

ABRAHAM'S GOSPEL.

JOHN viii. 56; GALATIANS iii. 8.

WE all, even those of us who never formulated the impression, feel very much more at home with the men of the Patriarchal than with the men of the Levitical age. Abraham, Isaac, and even Jacob, command a more intimate sympathy from us than Aaron or any of the great priests of Israel, or than any of the zealots for the Law, down even to the Pharisees and Scribes who flourished two thousand years after them. Even Moses, the great lawgiver himself, despite the romance of his life, hardly touches us so close. In these Arab sheykhs of an antique