

CHAPTER XVIII

The Statesman Prophet--Isaiah

Isaiah, Chapters 1-39

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Isaiah, in Jerusalem, is aware of Israel's deflection and begins his prophecy with an arraignment of her, "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know; my people doth not consider." After all, is not this the cause of all deflection, national and individual? Man does not *consider* that, each being a unit in the whole, certain obligations necessarily ensue and must be fulfilled. The universe is a vast machine, not mechanical, but intelligent, and the welfare of all depends on the conscientious fulfillment of the work apportioned to each unit. The Millenium will be the result of this knowledge and the application of it.

Isaiah is the prophet of the spiritual era; he is the father of Christianity for it was conceived in his consciousness seven centuries before the birth of its founder. He is the prophet of divine forgiveness, and brings distinctively a new something into his writings that we have not previously had in Biblical literature. Before this there were seers who, looking into the heart of Life, saw a Power which was beneficent when obeyed and disastrous when disobeyed; or they were astute observers of natural law, which they considered a weapon used by this arbitrary Power to reward the good or to mete out inexorable punishment to the evil.

The prophet, since the time of Samuel four centuries before, in the establishment of the monarchy and the rise of the Prophetic Order, lived apart from the national life, a decrier of its evils. Isaiah came in another capacity. He was a part of the national life, keenly alert to the political parties which swayed, now to one side now to the other, the shifting opinions of a people not grounded in the faith that they professed; for Judah had the same political parties that agitated Israel, the one demanding an alliance with Egypt, the other with Assyria. Isaiah, however, was not a politician but a statesman; and every statesman relies on the strength of the state, not on an outside alliance. He contemptuously refers to one party as "the fly from Egypt," and the other as "the bee from Assyria." And unwearingly for over forty years he preached, wrote and exhorted, that faith in God alone and His righteousness as the standard of action, could save Jerusalem from the fate meted out to Israel.

Not only as a statesman does Isaiah differ from his predecessors but in possession of the faculty of the seer--plus intellect and reason. Isaiah strikes the first modern note in the Bible; he makes an appeal to the reason in man, instead of the blind belief in an arbitrary God. Thus he comes before us as a man of genius well tempered with sanity. Of extraordinary versatility is he, a statesman, an orator, a writer, a poet, a historian,

for modern critics assert that he possibly is the author of Deuteronomy. Above all, he is a prophet of God who holds the Golden Age of spiritual attainment in his consciousness. Intensely practical is he also in the minutiae of national affairs; and he is a prophet who saw many of his own predictions fulfilled.

No better introduction can be given the great prophet Isaiah than that of Richard Moulton in the Modern Reader's Bible: "In this writer it is easy to see that we have an orator who wields with ease the whole armory of rhetoric. It is easy to see also that with him imagery and poetic expression are much more than accessories; he loves to linger upon his images, and rapidly shift them, until they become lovely pictures which we love to dwell upon for their own sake. But Isaiah goes far beyond this; he is essentially a creative writer, and regularly conveys his thought in indirect forms of dramatic presentation."

To those who are seeking the inner connection, that which lies back of clarity of expression, the thought that grows clear as the Vision breaks through the consciousness of man, Isaiah stands out in distinctness, for he is the prophet of the New Age. He is represented in an old Greek miniature, with Night, sullen and veiled, behind him, while in front with torch held aloft is the child IMMANUEL (God-with-us), the dawn of infinite promise.

In the latter days of Israel, Isaiah was witness to one of her most disgraceful acts. Israel made an alliance with the king of Syria and together they marched against Jerusalem. It is harder to meet treachery from our own kith and kin than it is from strangers. News was brought to Ahaz, the king, "Ephraim is confederate with Syria. And his heart was moved and the heart of his people as the trees of the forest are moved with the wind." Whatever the trial that confronts us we must meet it; and the way of mastery is in the advice given the king by Isaiah, "Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither let thine heart be faint; for thus saith the Lord God, it shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass." "Ephraim shall be broken in pieces that is shall cease to be a people." And Isaiah lived through the year 722 B.C., when faithless Israel ceased to be a nation, destroyed by the Assyrians.

Isaiah, unlike preceding prophets, was sought by the successive kings of Judah who reigned during his long ministry. His friendship and advice were valued. Well would it have been had his advice always been followed. His influence at court has led to the conclusion that he was of royal origin. It makes no difference to the seer of any age whether Isaiah was of royal origin or not; for well he knows that all men are of royal lineage, as children of God, and differences between man and man are but degrees of insight into this essential truth. From this basis we shall have to concede that Isaiah was a royalist of the Royalists, for, standing on the Watchtower of Faith, his was the vision of Reality.

"O Lord, I stand continually upon the watchtower in the daytime,
And am set in my ward whole nights."

No enemy can steal upon him unaware here. After the destruction of Israel, Assyria turns her attention to Judah, and marching upon her walled cities takes them all save Jerusalem; and besieging Jerusalem, the envoy comes to demand her surrender.

In his distress, Hezekiah, the king, sends to Isaiah, "Lift up thy prayer for the remnant that is left." And the Watchman sends back word, "The remnant that is escaped from the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of Mt. Zion they shall escape; the zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this. Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, he shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither shall he come before it with a shield, nor cast a mount against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return. I will defend this city and save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake."

The only power that our enemies have we invest in them ourselves. All power had been taken from Assyria by the lone Watchman, and in the night a mysterious disease breaks out in the camp and smites "a hundred and fourscore and five thousand; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses." The besieging army leaves and shortly after the king of Assyria is killed. Thus would fade from our lives all the enemies that flesh is heir to were we to stand on the Watchtower of Faith and divest them of all the power that they have, *our belief in them as power*. Ignorance, disease, poverty, old age, death, have no *power*; they are mere negations, and all the power they have they derive from our belief.

Doom songs are not usually lovely, yet we must grant that the Doom Song of Isaiah lingers with a charming insistence on account of its persistent refrain. On a single sentence in which he sees evil and the inevitable destruction which follows in its wake will he turn and see,

"For all this His anger not turned away,
But His Hand is stretched out *still*."

And comfort it surely is to know that wherever man stands in belief, steeped in sin, foul with disease, debased by ignorance, he has but to right-about-face and see "*His hand is stretched out still*." Isaiah's repetition of this beautiful symbol carries with it the conviction which brings the "peace that passeth understanding," for it is the Vision of Reality.

Nothing escapes his keen observation. The "women who sit at ease"; the "boaster that sitteth still"; the formal religionists who offer sacrifices yet fail to live in truth and righteousness; the folly of kings and princes who are rebellious; the time-servers who follow after rewards, and love gifts; all feel the stinging sarcasm of his facile tongue and pen. Yet never does he strike a note of despair. "Wash you, make you clean; put away evil from mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, let us reason

together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as wool. If ye be willing and obedient ye shall eat of the good of the land; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

Jesus quoted Isaiah frequently in his numerous references to Scripture. Jesus had memorized Deuteronomy until it had become his subconscious self. It was to him the great Book of the Law. The word means "the law repeated" and the book is the history of the last days of Moses and his farewell orations to his people. Who could understand and translate the great Leader who received the law on the Mount, as he who stood on the Watchtower as he made his report, even though six centuries lie between them?

Deuteronomy is said to be the most spiritual book in the Old Testament. The invisible God illuminates it, and its religion is to live in the Light and reflect that Light. Yet so practical is it that the two ways in which man may tread are clearly outlined; "the narrow way which leads to life, and the broad way which leads to destruction." It is the dramatic presentation of the lifework of Moses: "The Lord was angry with me for your sakes." Thus the failure of Moses to lead the people into the Promised Land is described. Yet in the fuller light that is given us we know that Moses alone can lead us to the Land of Promise; and he must forever stand on Pisgah's heights and overlook it; for the moment we violate the Law, we must leave; only under his eye can we safely abide there.

Writing an estimate of Isaiah, possibly the greatest of the prophets, in one article, and having to choose from illustration after illustration little pictures of exquisite beauty, the best one can do is to choose a couple at random. For instance, can anything be lovelier than his plea to Jerusalem, for the "faithful city" has become deficient also, and only complete repentance can save her:

Parable of the Vineyard

"Let me sing of my well beloved, a song of my beloved touching his vineyard.
My well beloved had a vineyard
In a very fruitful hill:
And he made a trench about it,
And gathered out the stones thereof,
And planted it with choicest vine,
And built a tower in the midst of it,
And also hewed out a winepress therein:
And he looked that it should bring forth grapes--

and it brought forth wild grapes! And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it

should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?"
(Modern Reader's Bible.)

Two distinct pictures make Isaiah supreme in Prophetic literature: his Watchtower, and his prediction of the advent of IMMANUEL. From his watchtower he sings:

"The morning cometh,
And also the night
If we will inquire, inquire ye;
Come ye again."

From this high tower of spiritual insight he sees the process of life. Life and its good gifts are not on the surface; he who would understand must go beneath the exterior; seek its principles and understand its processes. Again and yet again must we come to the fountain of Knowledge to "inquire."

For the night of self-renunciation must precede the morning of spiritual illumination. Personal ambitions, material beliefs and pleasures, and selfish desires must be lost before the morning can dawn which ushers in the day of the new spiritual era. This "Day" will dawn when we learn, "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength." How can we rise into this except we take the Watchman's advice, "Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils: from wherein is he to be accounted of?" The more understanding that we acquire of the absolute nothingness of the material, the more quickly shall we understand the perfection of the Spiritual.

In Isaiah, "the Remnant" becomes a characteristic expression. It is they alone who save Jerusalem; and from them shall the Saviour be born:

"For unto us a child is born,
Unto us a son is given;
And the government shall be upon his shoulders:
And his name shall be called *Wonderful Counselor,*
Mighty God, Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace."
(Modern Reader's Bible.)

And this "King shall reign in righteousness, his princes shall rule in judgment." More than this, in this kingdom every individual can say, "The state it is I," for the Messianic Kingdom is made up of its units. Each unit is represented in the greatest summing up of the component parts of character that has ever been given. "A man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land."

As nothing can excel perfection, this will forever stand the greatest definition of character that has ever been written. It is what we shall all be; when God's ideal of himself, spiritual man, breaks through into consciousness. This kingdom is within the consciousness of man; it is his established character. Those who are "greatest in the kingdom" are those who have wrought this into their characters in the most positive degree. The "least in the kingdom" are those who have these characteristics the least developed.

In looking up the word "character" in my dictionary I find: "A sign, an engraved mark." It is what we have engraved upon ourselves; and as the Vision of spiritual Man can come to us only as we ascend into the Watchtower, it is what we have engraved upon ourselves from *here*. Established in truth, can we not hide those whom the winds of mortal destiny still buffet from the tempests within and without? Will we not make a "covert," in which man may be sheltered from sin and disease? Could a greater tribute be rendered character than that it should be, "rivers of water in a dry place," where lips and hearts scorched by mortality's unfertilizing drought stretches her weary wastes over and under them? Who that has been in desert wastes does not realize the shelter of the great rock from scorching sun, and drifts of sand sweeping by? Has he not seen the tender green shoots that will venture out even in the midst of the bleak desert under its shadow? Cannot an established character so stand in the midst of unrighteousness, defend the right no matter how unpopular it seem, and arrest the drift that prevents spiritual ideals from growing in men's thought? So can the great spiritual Character stand in the midst of disease, materialism and death; a Rock under whose shadow faith, love and life are established.

N.B.--The Book of Isaiah ends with the thirty-ninth chapter. From the fortieth to the sixty-sixth chapter is a book written at least one hundred and fifty years later. This prophet has been called "The Great Unknown," and wrote, not from Jerusalem but from Babylon in captivity. In this series he will be found in his proper historic place, under the title of "The Shadow Christ."