AN EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH LII, 13, 14, 15 AND LIII DELIVERED BEFORE THE COUNCIL OF THE SENATE IN THE LAW SCHOOL ON FRIDAY, APRIL 28, 1882

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S. M. SCHILLER-SZINESSY

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Trieste

כי כאשר ירד הגשם והשלג מן השמים ושמה לא ישוב כי אם הרוה את הארץ והולידה והצמיחה ונתן זרע לזרע ולחם לאכל: כן יהיה דברי אשר יצא מפי לא ישוב אלי ריקם כי אם עשה את אשר חפצתי והצליח אשר שלחתיו:

ישעיהו נה: י׳ י״א.

TO THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR

THE REVEREND JAMES PORTER, D.D.,

MASTER OF PETERHOUSE,

THE COLLEGE WHICH BEARS THE NAME OF

THE GREAT APOSTLE TO THE HEBREWS,

THIS DISSERTATION ON THE MOST GLORIOUS HEBREW PROPHECY

IS BY PERMISSION DEDICATED

WITH RESPECT AND GRATITUDE

BY A HEBREW OF THE HEBREWS.

MR VICE-CHANCELLOR AND GENTLEMEN,

THE prophet, one of whose predictions I am to expound to you this day, is, in a certain sense, the greatest of all the seers of Israel. If 'there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Eternal knew face to face[1],' as the Hebrew Scriptures have it, we must not forget that the selfsame Scriptures immediately add the qualifying words: 'as regards all the signs and the wonders which the Eternal had sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and as regards all that mighty hand and all the great terror which Moses wrought in the sight of all Israel[2].' Moses was, indeed, the greatest prophet that arose *in* Israel *for* Israel; but Isaiah, although he also arose *in* Israel *for* Israel, did *not* arise for Israel *exclusively*. For this is what he says of himself and his mission: and He (God) said: 'It is a light matter that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to bring back the captives of Israel: I will also give thee for a light unto the nations, to become my salvation to the end of the earth[3].' If Isaiah did not, and indeed could not, say anything opposed, or even unknown, to Moses, seeing that 'Moses was faithful in the whole house of God[4],' he could, and, in fact did, bring out more plainly that which was well known to, and by insertion in the Pentateuch officially sanctioned although not further dilated on by, Moses: that there should one day a star come forth from Jacob and a

[1] Deut. xxxiv. 10.
[2] Deut. xxxiv. 11, 12.
[3] Isaiah xlix. 6.
[4] Numb. xii. 7.

sceptre rise from Israel, that would smite the nobles of Moab and violently shake all the children of Sheth[1], that is, that would move all heathendom to its foundations. But if Moses, of uncircumcised lips[2], had to teach for the first time, to his people that God was not only omnipotent and perfectly wise, but also eternal and above all *holy*, and that Israel, because of his being His firstborn, must also be holy[3],—a truth without which all virtue and morality can only be sporadic—Isaiah, whose lips had, as it were, become circumcised, by the touch of the holy fire from the altar[4], was chosen to make known the thrice-holy God[5] to his own people and by that people to the Gentiles. He was chosen to teach these Gentiles, that they indeed could enter Jerusalem the holy, in the midst of which the thrice-holy God dwelt, but not as long as they were uncircumcised, that is, unclean, in heart[6]. He had to teach them that they must be sanctified first before they could claim communion with God's own saints. If Moses, in the name of God, had to proclaim to Israel, as a *duty*: 'and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation[7],' Isaiah had the privilege of proclaiming as a *promise*: 'and ye shall be called priests of the Eternal, ye shall be named ministers of our God[8].' Isaiah had the privilege of addressing to his people the soul-stirring words: 'Arise! shine! for thy light hath come and the glory of the Eternal hath risen upon thee. For, behold, darkness covereth the earth and thick darkness the nations, whilst upon thee is risen the Eternal and His glory is seen upon thee. But nations shall walk by thy light and kings by the splendour of thy shining[9]!' And again: 'Many nations shall go and say, Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Eternal, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us *some*[10] of His ways, that we may walk in His highways[11]!' Now, no doubt, there is one in Israel greater than Moses and greater than Isaiah; one whose office it is to proclaim this priestship of Israel, and this sanctification of the Gentiles not only as a *duty* and not only as a *promise*, but as a *fact*—he

[1] Numb. xxiv. 17. [2] Exod. vi. 30. [3] Lev. xix. 2.
[4] Isaiah vi. 6, 7. [5] Isaiah vi. 3. [6] Isaiah lii. 1.
[7] Exod. xix. 6. [8] Isaiah lxi. 6. [9] Isaiah lx. 1, 2, 3.
[10] מורכין; comp. Acts xv. 20, 29. [11] Isaiah ii. 3.

is none other than Messiah the son of David, the Anointed of the Lord. But of him anon. Let me conclude this comparison between Moses and Isaiah by adding one more touch to the picture. Moses, like other prophets, as, for instance, Jonah and Jeremiah[1], went forth in God's service, but only reluctantly[2]; he had to be forced by the Spirit to do his duty: Isaiah, on the other hand, went willingly and prepared for all sacrifices. When he heard the voice of the Eternal: 'whom shall I send and who will go for us?' he, at once, exclaimed: 'Here am I, send me[3]!' And again: 'The Lord God hath given me an instructive tongue, understanding the teaching of the word to the weary; morning by morning He wakeneth mine ear to hear according to the instructions. The Lord God hath opened mine ear and I was not rebellious, I turned not back. I gave my back to the smiters and my cheeks to them that pluck off the hair. I hid not my face from shame and spitting. But the Lord God will help me; therefore, shall I not become confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint and I know that I shall not be ashamed[4].' But if Isaiah excelled in some points even 'the father of wisdom and the father of the prophets' as Moses is called[5], shall we hesitate to say that he excelled in more points still 'the teacher of the prophets[6]' as Samuel is called? Who has ever compared these two without ascribing, indeed, disinterestedness, patriotism and some miraculous acts to Samuel, but breadth of view, fervour of sentiment, beauty of diction and a noble self-sacrifice to Isaiah? And if he be in some points greater than Moses, and even in more points greater than Samuel—the two men placed on a level by the Psalmist[7]—shall we hesitate to award to Isaiah the palm of excellency over all the other prophets of Israel? It is, indeed, a true characteristic of all Israelite prophets that they were pre-eminently men who jeopardised their personal safety for their prophetic office, that they vehemently denounced sin wherever they discovered it, whether in the humble hut

[1] Jonah i. 3; iii. 3. Jerem. i. 6; xx. 9.
[2] Exod. iv. 1, 10; vi. 12. [3] Isaiah vi. 8. [4] Isaiah l. 4–7.
[5] *Tanna debe Eliyyahu, Rabbah*, cap. vi. [6] *Midrash Shemuel*, cap. xxiv.
[7] Psalm xcix. 6; T. B. Ta'anith 5[b].

of the peasant, or in the proud palace of the king. But if they were fearless, Isaiah was fearlessness itself. And as regards their prophecies: the conceptions of all of them are grand and the execution of these conceptions is lofty; but if their thoughts and their diction are noble, Isaiah's are simply sublime! Isaiah! What would Israel, what would Christendom (if the existence of Christianity could be imagined without Isaiah) what would the world have been without him? Certainly not Messianic. True, Isaiah is not the only, nor the earliest Messianic prophet: the Messianic idea goes on from Moses the first, to Malachi the last, prophet. It is the golden thread which runs through all the books of the Bible. But Isaiah is the best, the clearest, the most enlightened and the most enthusiastic of its expounders. The Messiah, in whom other prophets saw a mere mighty ruler of Israel, or, from a higher point of view, a righteous king of his people, or, from a still higher point of view, a righteous conqueror of the nations of the world, whose wickedness he would neutralise by his material might, Isaiah conceived and proclaimed to be a king glorious in the spirit, whose simple word, without any outward force, was to guide the nations to, and in, the way of righteousness; a king in whose kingdom no person and 'no thing that maketh a lie' can exist; a kingdom on earth, indeed, but of heaven; a kingdom of love; a kingdom, in which no passion, no persecution, no war, no vice, no 'sin, the wages of which is death[1],' would exist. A glorious prophet, indeed, is our Isaiah!

Now, Mr Vice-Chancellor and Gentlemen, of this glorious prophet's glorious prophecies I will read and expound to you the most glorious; a prophecy well known to all of you inasmuch as on it, in a measure, your Christian faith rests: and yet a prophecy that has not found to this day an expositor. Not that there are no commentaries on it to be found; on the contrary, the reader labours under an *embarras de richesses*[2]. But no commentator, either Jewish or Christian, accessible to

[1] Ezek. xviii. 20.

[2] See Neubauer, Driver and Pusey, *The Fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah*, Oxford, 1876. 8vo.