

THE LITERARY STYLE OF ISAIAH

By J. M. Wyatt

"As a mere literary monument the English version of the Bible remains the noblest example of the English tongue." Such is the estimate of John Richard Green, the historian. Isaiah helped to make this statement true.

To appreciate the literary style of Isaiah we must think of the man and of his time. We must see him back in those far gone years, years of wars and factions, of compromise and intrigue, of idolatry and wickedness. There he stands, close to the helm of Judah's ship of state striving to guide her home. His is an impassioned appeal to fellow-citizens to stand fast and to fulfil the mission of their native land. It is a triumphant call, clear and stirring, sublime and tender—a rally note, now pleading in its earnestness, now thundering in indignation. It is the voice of a whole-souled, fired spokesman of Jehovah to a people who fear 'smoking firebrands' and who trust in 'horses and chariots.' It is the picture of a glorious possibility, of a golden age held out before a sleepy, fickle crowd who shut their eyes and turn a deaf ear to his entreaty "Oh, my people!" It is the denunciation, bold and severe, of a nation of unclean hands busy in ritual and of a people whose true God is all powerful, who do not trust Him, but who, when hard set, send to a stalwart yet idolatrous people, saying "I am thy servant."

In Isaiah, "Jewish literature reaches its highest perfection." Earnest, forcible, wonderfully gifted with imagination, he uses it to sketch with rapid hand his clear, bold pictures, perfect in outline and detail, possessing grace and beauty, precision and symmetry. Now, 'with no middle flight' he rises to sublime imagery and now tender pathos takes the place of bitter irony and indignation. "Words interwove with sight" find out a way as in simple accents he cries, "Oh, my people!" Everywhere he is within the pales of chasteness and beauty. Though the sweeping whirlwind and the devouring fire are his steeds, with master hand he guides their flight. Never do we feel they are beyond his control. Calm and sublime even in wrath, God guides the war-chariot for the reins are in