

THE GREAT IMMANUEL PROPHECY

extending from chap. vii. to chap. ix. 8.¹ Isaiah is sent to reassure the king, terrified by the invasion; but Ahaz, who has already his own plans formed for calling in the help of the Assyrian, hypocritically rejects the sign that is offered him, and so further "wearies" God. It is then that, turning on him with unconcealed indignation, Isaiah gives, not for the sake of Ahaz, but for the godly in Judah, the sign of Immanuel—the maiden's Child—in whose birth and reign is found the guarantee for the perpetuity of David's house. The prophecy has its difficulties;² but if any one thinks it is an ordinary child whose birth is here predicted, he has only to read the chapters through to see good reason for a contrary opinion. Amidst all the trouble and desolation that was to come upon the land, it was the Child Immanuel which was the secret source of the prophet's hope. Do the Assyrians come in like a flood? His hope of deliverance is in the fact that it is the land of Immanuel (viii. 8). Do the peoples associate themselves and take counsel together? Their counsel shall come to nought. Why? "For Immanuel" (viii. 10). Shall the long, oppressive night of

¹ To this period also belongs the prophecy against Damascus (chap. xvii.). The fragment (ix. 9—x. 4) appears to be a continuation of chap. v. 25-30.

² The chief difficulty is in the apparent connection of the birth of the child with the events of the Syro-Ephraimitic war. The fulfilment is in the future, but it is not exactly as a future event that the prophet foresees it. The Hebrew is, "A virgin [or maiden] *is* with child, and *beareth* a son," &c. Not in fact, but to his inner eye the birth of this child is a present event, it has all the force of present reality to him—he speaks of it as present. It is to him as good as realised. He does not picture this child as away on in the future, but in his vision as now and here before him—he sees it growing up in poverty amidst the desolations which the people's sins have brought upon the land—and picturing it in this way as already present, he is able to interweave with it a definite prophecy of the near destruction of the actual invaders of Israel. Before this child, pictured as already born, would have arrived at years of discretion, "the land whose two kings thou abhorrest shall be forsaken." This prophecy, however, though fitted to console and strengthen the faith of those who were already believers, was too intangible a sign to produce much effect on the general body of the people. Accordingly a supplementary sign is given of a more palpable character—that of Maher-shalal-hash-baz (viii. 1-4).