

many parts of it remain to the bulk of readers unintelligible or obscure. There is no prophet whose writings are more frequently quoted in the New Testament than the Prophet Isaiah. Many passages from his prophecies are familiar to us as household words. Yet how

DIM A FIGURE

does Isaiah remain to most of those who thus hear his name. Who he was, when he lived, what were the political, and social, and religious circumstances of his age, what occasions called forth his prophecies, and gave them their particular character and colouring—of all this they know nothing, and have never, perhaps, thought it important to enquire. Yet it would be as hopeless to attempt to understand Isaiah's earlier prophecies—most of them manifestoes called forth by the state of morals in Judah, or by some grave turn in the course of political events—without some knowledge of contemporary circumstances, as it would be to collect the sense of the leaders of our morning newspapers without a modicum of acquaintance with the public policy and questions of the hour.

It might have been that we had no means of answering the questions we would like to ask about Isaiah. He might have been to us as Shakespeare, regarding whom we know very little more than the name. We know the book, not the man. As the case actually stands, it is far otherwise. Isaiah is a living, energetic personality, standing out against a clear background of history. He is a central figure of his age, not merely an undaunted preacher of righteousness, but a leading actor in the political movements of the times, a statesman and counsellor of kings, the hope and mainstay of the nation in its hours of sorest crisis. An invaluable aid has of late been obtained in reconstructing our knowledge of his times from

THE UNCOVERED PALACES,

the crewhile buried libraries, and the newly deciphered monuments of Assyria. It is exactly this period of "the days of