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# CRITICAL DISQUISITIONS

ON THE

Eighteenth Chapter

OF

**Isaiah.**

IN A LETTER TO

EDWARD KING, ESQ. F. R. S. A. S.

BY

SAMUEL LORD BISHOP OF ROCHESTER,  
F. R. S. A. S.



PHILADELPHIA:

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

**T**HE old English Bibles, occasionally cited in the following pages, are Coverdale's, the great English Bible, the Bishop's Bible, and the English Geneva Bible.

COVERDALE's translation was printed in folio, in the year 1535, and made its public appearance in the summer of the following year. It was the work of the pious and learned Divine, whose name it bears, Myles Coverdale, afterwards Lord Bishop of Exeter. Of all our authorised translations it has the least pretensions to accuracy. By the author's own account of it, he relied more upon earlier translations, than upon any examination of his own, of the original texts. For he professes, that he "translated purely and faithfully  
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“ out of foregoing interpreters,” who had translated the Scriptures, “ not only into Latin, but also into Dutch.”

The GREAT ENGLISH BIBLE is the translation made under the direction of Archbishop Cranmer, and printed in large folio in 1539. A noble work, well corresponding with its title: “ The Byble in Englyshe, that is to say, the content of all the holy scripture both of the olde and newe testament, truly translated after the veryte of the Hebrue and Greke textes, by the dylygent studye of dyverse excellent learned men, expert in the forsayde tonges.”

The BISHOP'S BIBLE is the revised and amended edition of Cranmer's, made by the most eminent divines and scholars of the times, under the direction of Archbishop Parker, and splendidly published in folio in 1568.

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The ENGLISH GENEVA BIBLE is the translation made by the English Protestants, in exile at Geneva, in the reign of Philip and Mary. It was first printed at Geneva in 1560; and between that time and the year 1616, it underwent above thirty editions at London, in different sizes. It was the common family Bible in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and is often cited by the title of Queen Elizabeth's Bible.

The editions that have been used upon the present occasion have been, of Coverdale's and the Great Bible, the original editions in the Archiepiscopal Library at Lambeth.

Of the Bishop's Bible, the original edition in the Library of the Collegiate Church of Westminster.

Of the English Geneva, the 4to's of 1589, and 1599, both in the possession of the author.

# TO EDWARD KING, ESQUIRE.

DEAR SIR,

CONSIDERABLE portions of my time, for some years past, have been employed in the study, of all studies the most interesting, of the Prophetic parts of the Holy Scriptures; and among the rest, the Prophecies of Isaiah, have deeply engaged my attention. But it was a conversation with you, in the early part of last spring, that put me, at that time, upon a more minute examination, than I had ever made before, of the XVIIIth Chapter of that Prophet. The conclusions to which I found myself inevitably brought, differ in some very important points, though concerning the general scope of the Prophecy they agree, with the interpretation which you communicated to me. I felt however no inclination to agitate the question (even with yourself I mean, for there was nothing at that time to bring into discussion before the Public) and after much deliberation with myself, I  
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thought it better avoided; knowing, that your opinions are not rashly taken up; conceiving, that you might re-consider the subject; and persuaded, that a man of your learning and upright intention, is more likely to set himself right by his own meditation of an abstruse question, than to be set right by another. But now that you have given that same interpretation of this Prophecy to the Public, in your Supplement to your Remarks on the Signs of the Times, I should think myself wanting to the duties of the station, to which God has been pleased to call me, if I were any longer to suppress the result of a diligent meditation of so important a portion of the Prophetic Word. I cannot however enter upon the subject without professing, not to yourself, but to the world, how highly I value and esteem your writings, for the variety and depth of Erudition, the Sagacity and Piety which appear in every part of them; but appear not more in them, than in your conversation and the habits of your Life, to those who have the happiness, as I have had the happiness, to enjoy your intimacy and friendship. I must publicly declare, that I think you are rendering the best service to

to the Church of God, by turning the attention of believers to the true sense of the Prophecies. For you are perfectly right in the opinion you maintain, that a far greater proportion of the Prophecies, even of the Old Testament, than is generally imagined, relate to the Second Advent of our Lord. Few comparatively relate to the First Advent by itself, without reference to the Second. And of those, that have been supposed to be accomplished in the First, many had in that only an inchoate accomplishment, and have yet to receive their full completion. While we agree in these great and leading principles, I hope that a difference of opinion upon subordinate points, upon the particulars of interpretation (so far as either of us may venture upon particular interpretation, which is to be ventured upon with the greatest caution, with fear, indeed, and trembling) will be received, on both sides, with that candour and charity, which is due from one to another, among all those who, in these eventful times, are anxiously waiting for the redemption of Israel, and marking the awful Signs of its gradual approach.

This XVIIIth Chapter of Isaiah is, as  
you



you have with great truth remarked, one of the most obscure passages of the ancient Prophets. It has been considered as such by the whole succession of Interpreters, from St. Jerome to Bishop Lowth. "The object of it," says the Bishop, "the end and design of it, the people to whom it is addressed, the history to which it belongs, the person who sends the messengers, and the nation to whom the messengers are sent, are all obscure and doubtful." Much of this obscurity lies in the diction (*propter inusitata verba*, says Munster, *propter figuratas sententias*) in the highly figured cast of the language, and in the ambiguity of some of the principal words, arising from the great variety of senses often comprehended under the primary meaning of a single root. Few, I fear, will have the patience to follow me; but you, I flatter myself, will be one of the Few that will, in the slow and laborious method of investigation, by which I endeavour to dispel this obscurity; which however is the only method, by which obscurity of this sort is ever to be dispelled. Discarding all previous assumptions, concerning the design of the Prophecy, the people to whom it is addressed, the history

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ry or the times to which it belongs ; I enter into a critical examination of every word of which the meaning is at all doubtful ; and I consider the meaning of every word as, in some degree, doubtful, which has been taken in different senses by different interpreters of note. I consider the etymology of the word ; I enquire in what senses it is actually used, by the Sacred Writers in other passages ; and I compare with the original, and with one another, the translations of Interpreters, in different languages, and of different ages.

And here I must take occasion to remark, that, among the ancient translations, attention is principally due to the Syriac, to the fragments that are come down to us from Aquila, and to the Septuagint. To the Syriac, because it was the work of Christians in the very earliest age of Christianity ; it gives us therefore the sense, which was received by the immediate successors of our Lord's Apostles. To what remains of Aquila's version, for the contrary reason ; it was the work of an enemy ; and gave that sense of the Original (where the sense was at all uncertain) which was the least favourable to Christianity. To the

the Septuagint; not only because it was a translation made before the Hebrew ceased altogether to be a living language, but, being made by Jews long before the birth of Christ, the authors could be biassed by no prejudice against the particular claims of our Lord Jesus to the character of the Messiah of the Israelites. And whenever it gives a sense particularly favourable to his pretensions, and such a sense it gives in many passages, every such interpretation may be taken as an admission of the adversary. It is much to be lamented, that this translation is not come down to us in a more perfect state. Great indeed would its authority be, had we reason to receive it as the genuine unadulterated work of Ptolemy's translators. And yet, even in that perfect state, the authority, I should have allowed to it, would have been far short, I confess, of what you seem to ascribe to it; I should not have made it my Text. I should have claimed for myself, and other men of learning of the present day, a full competence to judge of the sense of the Original, in opposition to the sense of the Seventy-Two. The fact however is, that this translation having been the most used, both in the

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synagogue and in the church, in the first ages of Christianity, has for that very reason been the most tampered with both by Jews and Christians. It has been corrupted, by the very means, that were used to preserve and improve it. For I cannot but agree with St. Jerome, though I know how much his judgment in this point has been decried, that Origen's additions and detractions, however guarded by his asterisks, his lemnisks, and his obelisks, were, in the nature of the thing, a source of inevitable corruption (for I give the name of Corruption to any alteration, though for the better, of an author's own words.) And in the present state of this Greek Version, it is impossible to distinguish, with certainty, what is pure Septuagint, what is Septuagint corrected by Origen, and still more corrupted by careless transcribers or presumptuous emendators of Origen's corrected Text. Great attention still is due to it; but not more than is due to an imperfect vitiated copy of a venerable original. Which original was but itself a shadow of the Hebrew Verity, the only prototype. It ought always to be consulted in difficulties, and much light is occasionally to be derived from it. But

I say without hesitation, that upon the whole, it represents the whole of the Hebrew Text with less exactness, than either the Vulgate or the common English translation. In these sentiments, I fear, you will not concur. But this is a point upon which I think it my duty to speak out. For it would be very mischievous in the present times, very contrary to the interests of sacred truth, if a party were to be formed in favour of any particular translation. But to return to the immediate subject.

When by this process, by scrutinizing etymologies, exploring usage, and consulting translations, I think I have ascertained the plain literal meaning of a word, and have selected, from a variety of senses, that which seems the best suited to the context; my next step is to consider, what the thing denoted by the word, in the literary meaning, may figuratively represent, according to the principles of the prophetic imagery; for these two things, the literal meaning, as the foundation of the figurative, and the figurative meaning, according to the principles and usage of the prophetic style, are the only sure basis of interpretation; which will ever be precarious  
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and delusive, if it be founded only on some general resemblance, hastily caught up by the imagination, between particular detached events, and the expressions of the Prophet loosely and fancifully expounded. And such, I believe, all interpretations will be found to be, which refer texts of Prophecy to events merely secular ; not connected, or but very remotely connected, with the state of Religion and the fortunes of the Church. These fanciful interpretations, in one way or other, always are mischievous. Either they take ; and then they spread a general error ; or, if they find few admirers, they raise a prejudice against the interpreter, who in other respects may deserve attention, or, what is worse, against the word of Prophecy itself. And for this reason, I confess, I have often wished, that the formation of the Goodwin Sands, the invention of the Telescope, the discoveries with regard to Fixed Air, and the invention of the Air-Balloon, had not been brought forward, as things at all connected with the effusion of the tremendous Vials of Wrath, on the Sea, the Sun, and the Air. Great as these things seem to the narrow mind of Man, I cannot think, that even greater things  
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than these, not even the discoveries of Copernicus and Newton, were worthy of the notice of that Spirit, which was in the Holy Prophets.

The method of investigation I have described, if men had the patience to pursue it, in most cases, I am persuaded, would discover the general subject of a prophecy, and even develope the particulars of the accomplishment, when the general subject lies in any part of the history of past times, if the detail of that part of history is accurately known. But when the accomplishment of a prophecy is still future ; when once the general subject is ascertained, at that point interpretation ought to stop for the present, reverently expecting the farther comments of Time, the authorised and infalliable expositor. You have well remarked, that, with respect to the detail of things future, “ Sacred Truth should  
 “ be very much left to speak for itself,  
 “ by slow degrees.” And for itself it will speak, in God’s good time ; and it is only to a certain extent, that Man should attempt to speak for it : just so far, as to lay hold of the general subject, that we know whereabouts, if we may so speak, in what particular quarter of the  
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world Politico-Ecclesiastic, we may watch for the completion. If we go beyond this, and attempt to descend into particulars, it is difficult, I am persuaded, even for a man of the most sober mind to keep his Imagination in order. And, though among the fanciful guesses of a man of learning and judgment, one perhaps in twenty, which I think is a large allowance, may turn out true; it is far better to leave this truth to be brought to light by Time, than to hazard the credit, both of the exposition and the text, by the other nineteen, which Time will confute. No mischief is done in the one case; much, in the other.

This Eighteenth Chapter of Isaiah is one instance among many, in which Expositors have perplexed themselves by gratuitous assumptions, concerning the general scope of the Prophecy, before they attempt to settle the signification of the terms in which it is delivered; and then they have sought for such interpretations of the language, as might suit the applications they had assumed. But it is a preposterous way of dealing with any writer, to interpret his words by his supposed meaning, instead of deducing his meaning from his words. It has been

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assumed



assumed by most interpreters, first, that the principal matter of this prophecy is a Woe, or Judgement. 2. That the object of this woe is the land of Egypt itself, or some of the contiguous countries. 3. That the time of the execution of the judgement was at hand, when the prophecy was delivered.

I set out with considering every one of these assumptions as doubtful; and the conclusion to which my investigations bring me, is, that every one of them is false. First, the prophecy indeed predicts some woeful judgment. But the principal matter of the prophecy is not judgment, but mercy; a gracious promise of the final restoration of the Israelites. Secondly, the prophecy has no respect to Egypt, or any of the contiguous countries. What has been applied to Egypt is a description of some people, or another, destined to be principal instruments in the hand of Providence, in the great work of the re-settlement of the Jews in the Holy Land; a description of that people, by characters by which they will be evidently known, when the time arrives. Thirdly, the time for the completion of the prophecy was very remote, when it was delivered,  
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and is yet future ; being indeed the season of the Second Advent of our Lord.

You may say perhaps, that in stating these conclusions here, before I have discussed the difficulties and ambiguities of the language of the Sacred Text, I am myself doing the very thing I blame in others ; that I assume a certain general application, which I mean to confirm by critical reasoning on the holy prophet's words. But you will find, that my own conclusions are not assumed in any part of my enquiry, any more than the assumptions of others, which I discard. I consider the words in themselves ; and I come to the conclusions by a grammatical examination of the words, independent of all assumed applications. My only reason for stating my conclusions here is, that I think the disquisition, upon which I am entering, will be more perspicuous, and the length and minuteness of it less tedious, if the general result in which it is to terminate, be previously known. Just as, in any mathematical investigation, the analytical process is more luminous and satisfactory in every step, if the theorem, to which it conducts, is distinctly enounced in the beginning.

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As far as the conclusions which I have stated, go, I have the satisfaction to think you agree with me. The difference between us lies chiefly in this: You maintain in your Remarks on the Signs of the Times, that it is expressly declared in certain passages of Isaiah's prophecy, by *what people*, and *from what place*, and at *what time*, the Jews shall be restored. In your Supplement, you alledge the 18th Chapter of Isaiah, as giving the fullest information with respect to the matter: And you think the French are described, in that chapter, as the restorers of the Jews. It is my opinion, on the contrary, that the time for the restoration of the Jews is no otherwise defined than as the season of our Lord's Second Advent. I contend, that although this XVIIIth Chapter of Isaiah describes a people destined to be instruments of Providence in the restoration of the Jews, it describes that people only by certain characters, which have actually belonged to different people in different periods of the history of Man, and leaves it undetermined to what people, among the various nations of the earth, these characters may belong, when the time shall come for the accomplishment of the prophecy;

phesy ; and I contend, that it is a matter equally undetermined, from what place the restoration of the Jews will begin. But although I pretend not positively to say, what nation God has chosen to be the conductors of the Israelites to their ancient seats, and maintain that Prophecy gives no clear light upon that question : I say, negatively, that there is no reason to believe, that the Atheistical Democracy of France is destined to so high an office. The grounds, upon which I find myself compelled to differ upon these points will appear in the sequel. I shall now give you my analysis of the Sacred Text, in the shape of notes upon the public translation. To these I shall subjoin a translation of the whole chapter, accompanied with short explanatory notes, for the information of the common English reader. For this I take to be the only way, in which the result of these critical enquiries can be communicated to the unlearned. And to them it is to be communicated. For I never will admit, nor would you, I think, be inclined to admit, that our Religion has belonging to it, any secret doctrine, from the hearing of which the illiterate laity are to be excluded. The  
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