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THE PRESENT POSITION AND THE ORIGINAL  
FORM OF THE PROPHECY OF ETERNAL  
PEACE IN ISAIAH 2. 1-5 AND MICAH 4. 1-5

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THE prophecy of Eternal Peace, which is found in a double recension in Isaiah 2. 1-5 and Micah 4. 1-5, has been the object of a bewildering number of widely differing conjectures.<sup>1</sup> As far as modern Biblical scholars are concerned, agreement among them seems to have been reached only on one point, viz. that in both passages the prophecy stands isolated and has no connexion with the context.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, one only has carefully to read the verses preceding and following our prophecy in order to realize that both in tone and content they differ completely from it. To be sure, various attempts were made, particularly by the older commentators, to establish a logical connexion between the prophecy and its context, but it is now recognized on all sides that these attempts are nothing but artificial makeshifts.<sup>3</sup>

Realizing the isolated position of our prophecy in the texts of Isaiah and Micah, we are immediately confronted

<sup>1</sup> A good summary of the various theories will be found in Marti's *Commentary on Isaiah*, p. 27 f., and in J. M. Powis Smith's *International Critical Commentary on Micah*, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> Comp. Gray, *International Critical Commentary on Isaiah*, I (1912), p. 48.

<sup>3</sup> Comp. especially Kuenen, *Historisch-kritische Einleitung*, II, 36, 38.

by a new difficulty: Which were the motives that prompted the men who were responsible for the collection and arrangement of the prophetic writings, in other words, the compilers or editors of Isaiah and Micah, to insert our prophecy in a context which is entirely foreign to it? As far as the passage in Isaiah is concerned, Kuenen<sup>4</sup> is inclined to assume that the present arrangement was due to a desire to show the immense contrast between the ideal future depicted in our prophecy and the sordid facts of reality described in the surrounding verses. This view is, in substance, identical with the traditional explanation, repudiated by Kuenen himself, except that the former regards as genuine logical sequence of prophetic thought what Kuenen prefers to consider the result of subsequent editorial arrangement. For the traditional exegesis interprets, in an almost identical manner, our prophecy in Isaiah 2. 1-5 as an intentional contrast to verse 6 ff. Now the arguments advanced by Kuenen against this conventional explanation, viz. the extremely loose and artificial connexion with the context, apply with equal force to his own conjecture. For the discrepancy between our prophecy and the surrounding verses which makes it impossible to assume an *original* connexion between them should also have prevented the *editor* from placing them side by side. Gray, indeed, in his elaborate commentary on Isaiah,<sup>5</sup> is frank enough to confess that 'the reasons for the particular place given elude us'.

In the following I venture to offer a conjecture which seems to me to explain the difficulty in a more natural and satisfactory manner, and may be found to apply in other cases where, in a similar way, the sudden change of tone

<sup>4</sup> *loc. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>5</sup> *loc. cit.*

in a prophetic discourse appears to suggest other than logical principles of textual arrangement.

It has long been observed that many, if not most, of the prophetic writings (comp. Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, Habakkuk, &c.) are marked by a 'happy ending' which frequently stands in obvious contrast to the preceding verses. This observation has led a number of modern critics to deny the authenticity of these concluding passages. But it seems far more natural to assume that the men who collected, or rather selected, the prophetic discourses, and drew on a much larger material than the one preserved in our Bible abstracted these comforting utterances from a different context, belonging to the same prophet and no more transmitted to us, and placed them deliberately at the end of their prophetic compilations in order to leave the reader in a happy frame of mind. It is exactly the same consideration which is responsible for the Talmudic rule that in those Biblical books in which the concluding verse is of a threatening or derogatory character—in Isaiah, Malachi, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes—one of the preceding verses of a consoling nature be repeated.

Now it seems to me that the same psychological motive which called for a 'happy ending' also demanded a 'happy beginning' for the prophetic collections. Most prophetic discourses—this is entirely in accord with the character of the true prophet who is always more readily inclined to prophesy evil than good<sup>6</sup>—were violent arraignments of the sinfulness of the generation, and predictions of dire punishment for such sinfulness. They were read, in the final shape which they received in the time of the post-exilic community, by a people which had exchanged their

<sup>6</sup> Comp. 1 Kings 22. 8.

heart of stone for a heart of flesh, and having received, at the Lord's hand, double for all its sins, lent a willing ear to the word of God. The prophetic denunciations, originally hurled against their rebellious forefathers, were entirely unjustified in their own case, and could only have the effect of discouraging those who both needed and deserved the encouragement of prophecy. Hence the compilers of that later generation found it necessary to place the comforting utterances of the prophets—and such utterances could be selected in abundance from the writings of every prophet now lost to us—at the *beginning* of the prophetic collections in order, as it were, to take off the edge of the denunciations that were to follow.

A striking example of this editorial tendency is found in the book of Hosea. Chapter 1 is in the nature of a biographical introduction, undoubtedly from the pen of the editor. Chapter 2 marks the beginning of the prophetic discourses. It was long ago suggested<sup>7</sup> that the prophecy contained in this chapter, which represents a fierce arraignment of faithless Israel, actually begins with verse 4, and that the preceding three verses which paint in glowing colours the future happiness of that very same Israel, originally belonged to the *end* of the discourse, a sequence which is still reflected in a quotation of the New Testament.<sup>8</sup> The reason for this intentional misplacement seems obvious. It was to counteract the painful impression which the violent denunciation of the prophet was bound to produce on the mind of the hearer, or rather reader, of the prophetic discourse.

A similar motive seems to have actuated the editor or compiler of the initial chapters of Jeremiah. Chapter 1 is

<sup>7</sup> See Kuenen, *Einleitung*, II, 19.

<sup>8</sup> Romans 9. 25-6.

again of an introductory character. The prophetic discourses begin with chapter 2. Here, too, it is evident that verse 4 inaugurates the prophecy which is a violent attack upon Judah. The keynote is struck by the question in verse 5: 'What iniquity have your fathers found in me that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and have become vain?' The first three verses of the chapter, whose sublime tenderness strangely contrasts with the intense bitterness of what immediately follows, have been deliberately placed at the head of the collection for the purpose of soothing the reader and reconciling him to the prophetic denunciation which might otherwise have a disheartening effect on him.

To return to the subject of our discussion, it is generally recognized<sup>9</sup> that the second chapter of Isaiah, which is separated from the preceding chapter by a superscription of its own, marks the beginning of an older collection of the prophet's discourses. The natural beginning of the violent attack upon Judah's life and morals which runs through chapters 2 and 3 is 2. 6. As the initial word of the latter verse indicates (כי 'because'; the translation 'but' is a makeshift), the opening of this denunciatory prophecy is fragmentary, and was, in all likelihood, removed from its original context. The preceding verses (2. 1-5), which are of a diametrically opposite character, had originally no connexion whatsoever with the prophecy introduced in verse 6. But they were assigned this place, at the beginning of the collection, in order to put the reader in a hopeful frame of mind, and to fortify him against the prophetic attack in the following verses.

<sup>9</sup> Comp. Kuenen, *Einleitung*, II, 147. Duhm, *Commentary on Isaiah*, p. viii, suggests that chapters 2-4 formed originally a separate collection.

Of course, the explanation just set forth, even assuming its correctness in the three instances quoted, need not apply in all cases. It is possible, and even highly probable, that other tendencies and principles, besides the one suggested above, were operative in the arrangement of the prophetic writings. For once it does not seem to apply in the case of Micah 4. 1-5, where our prophecy is duplicated. Indeed, it has been conjectured<sup>10</sup> that in the latter passage the position of our prophecy may be due to a 'catch-word arrangement', the phrase 'Mountain of the House' in 3. 12 having suggested the sequence of our own prophecy, in which the 'Mountain of the House of the Lord' (4. 1) occupies a central place. The conjecture is plausible, although, when taken by itself, it presupposes a principle of arrangement which is too mechanical. But it gains considerable strength when taken in conjunction with another more internal motive. As a matter of fact, it is highly probable that in the Micah text, too, the position of our prophecy is, to quote Wellhausen's phrase,<sup>11</sup> due to a desire 'of putting a plaster on the wound inflicted by 3. 12'. On the other hand, it may be possible that also in Isaiah the arrangement has been prompted, in addition to the motive set forth above, by the same catch-word, since the 'House of Jacob' is referred to both in verse 5 (on which see anon) and in verse 6. In any event, the tendency of editorial arrangement advocated above ought to be borne in mind whenever a prophetic text reveals a sudden change of tone which cannot, unless sophistical arguments be resorted to, be explained on logical grounds.

<sup>10</sup> Gray, *Isaiah*, I, 48.

<sup>11</sup> Wellhausen, *Die kleinen Propheten*, 3rd edition, p. 143.

For this change of tone may represent the border-line between two originally independent collections.

In connexion with the above a word may be added about the relation of the recension of Isaiah (2. 1-5) to that of Micah (4. 1-5). In this place we are not concerned with the question of authorship which, as may be gauged from the mass of contradictory theories advanced by modern scholars, is not yet ripe for solution. But this much seems certain and is generally agreed upon: that the text of Micah represents a fuller recension of the prophecy than that of Isaiah. Whether Micah 4. 4 ('But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it') is from the same pen as the rest of the prophecy or not—with Kuenen<sup>12</sup> and Marti<sup>13</sup> I emphatically believe that it is—it certainly represents a *plus*, and it seems most natural to assume that it has been either intentionally dropped or, what is more probable, accidentally lost in Isaiah. In other words, the texts in Micah and Isaiah are two copies of the same original, with the deviations that are customary in such copies.

Again, verse 5 in Micah ('For all people walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever') is recognized on all sides to correspond to verse 5 in Isaiah ('O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord'), and while some scholars regard the verse in Micah as an expansion of the one in Isaiah (Cheyne), others, conversely, hold that the verse in Isaiah is an abbreviation of that in Micah (Marti).<sup>14</sup> But after what has been said concerning

<sup>12</sup> *Einleitung*, II, 35.

<sup>13</sup> *Commentary on Isaiah*, p. 26.

<sup>14</sup> Comp. Gray, *loc. cit.* 'Micah asserts what Isaiah exhorts to' (*ibid.*).



the relationship of the two texts, their undoubted similarity of content suggests a more natural solution. The two verses do not, as is generally supposed, *substitute* one another; they rather *supplement* one another. Micah 4. 5 is a *continuation* of Isaiah 2. 5. The two verses represent the two halves of a common fuller recension which has been fragmentarily reproduced in each of the two texts.

The passage thus reconstructed is made up of the following verses: Isaiah 2. 1-4 (duplicated, apart from the superscription, in Micah 4. 1-3) + Micah 4. 4 + Isaiah 2. 5 + Micah 4. 5. After the glowing description of the ideal *future*, when the nations will flow into the mountain of the Lord, and, having been taught of His ways, will beat their swords into plowshares, and when Israel, too, in happy contrast to the war-ridden times of the prophet, will enjoy perfect peace under his vine and his fig tree, follows an admonition for the *present*, calling upon the Jewish people to act in a manner deserving of so glorious a future. 'O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord (as *all* nations will do in the future).' 'For all people walk (at present) every one in the name of his god (i. e. all the nations are loyal to their gods, although they are "no-gods"; compare Jeremiah 2. 11), and we will (i. e. how much more should we; '*anahnu* is emphatic) walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.'

The question as to whether the last two verses are from the same hand as the prophecy itself does not affect the above argument, which is merely concerned with the re-

'What is here [Micah 4. 5] as a firm decision is found in Isaiah 2. 5 as an exhortation' (*International Critical Commentary on Micah*, p. 88). Compare, on the other hand, Duhm, *Commentary on Isaiah*, p. 15: Isaiah 2. 5 was written by a reader who was 'guided' by Micah 4. 5.

construction of the original form of the *text*. To be sure, some of the modern commentators have answered that question in a very definite manner. But where the evidence is so meagre, certainty, or even probability, is not to be expected. Biblical science, with its bewildering divergence of opinion, even where the authorship and date of entire books is involved, has not yet reached the stage, if it ever will, of being able to indicate, with more than self-complacent arbitrariness, the origin of individual verses.