

ISAIAH IN MODERN SPEECH

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Isaiah in modern speech by John Edgar McFadyen

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JOHN EDGAR MCFADYEN

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ISAIAH

IN MODERN SPEECH

BY

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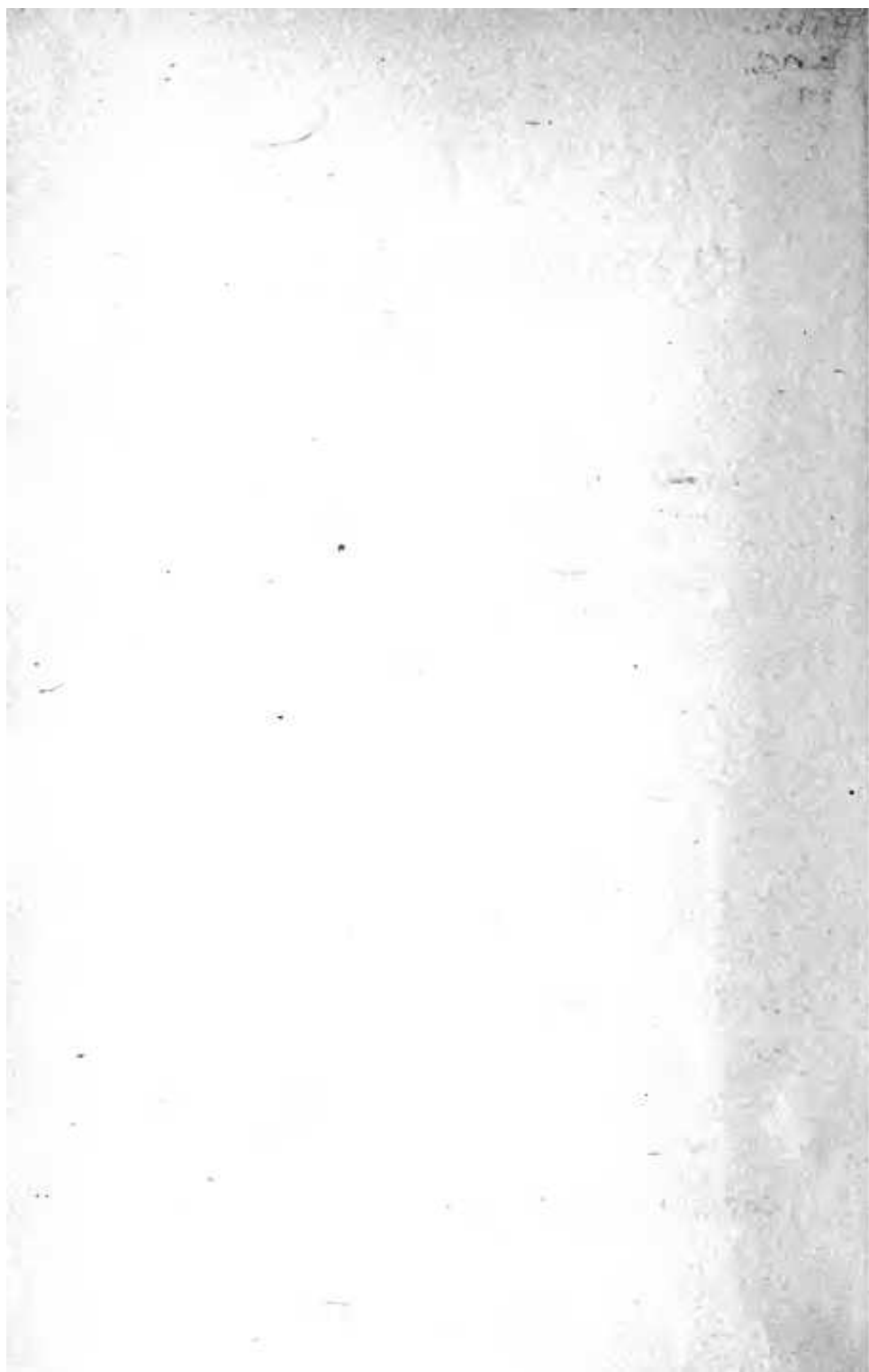
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PREFACE

THE Hebrew prophets stand incontestably among the supreme religious forces of the world: the tragedy is that they are so little known. Lamentable as this is, it is far from unintelligible. Their text is often difficult and obscure, the transitions are frequently abrupt, wide intervals of time occasionally separate contiguous prophecies; and their historical background, without which their real force can only be very inadequately appreciated, and sometimes not at all, is seldom familiar except to the special student.

This widespread ignorance of prophecy is the more to be regretted, as the prophets have so much to say to our own troubled generation. Their world, like ours, was perplexed and in part intimidated by the unscrupulous and devastating efficiency of great military empires. In the arrogant speech of the Assyrian king in Isaiah x. 8-14, or of the Rab-shakeh in xxxvi. 13-20, we already—nearly three millennia ago—confront Prussianism of the most naïvely unadulterated type. And it is here that Isaiah can render an incomparable service—Isaiah with his serene faith in a supreme Ruler of the universe and in His world-plan which, whatever else miscarries, is sure of its triumph (xiv. 26f.). When the hearts of men, to use his own picturesque phrase, are “shaking like forest-trees before the wind” (vii. 2), his

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vision, his faith, his courage, his sublime interpretation of history as illuminated by a glorious Presence and inspired by an invincible Purpose, help us to keep our heads cool and our feet steady amid the welter of these present evil times. But Isaiah is also the critic of his nation, laying bare her sins and follies with inexorable truth: and, like the rest of that great prophetic succession of which he is the most brilliant and regal representative, he points unerringly, in words that can never grow old or be superseded, to morality and religion as the only permanent basis of national welfare as of international security.

This great writer was poet as well as prophet, and in this volume an attempt is made to do some justice to this aspect of his activity. It will be found, I believe, that so far from obscuring the prophet's thought, the rhythmical form, so dreaded by people who imagine that they care nothing for poetry, not infrequently invests it with an even greater lucidity than sometimes attaches to the familiar prose translations.

I have added brief notes at most points where a question would naturally arise in the mind of a thoughtful reader of the text. As these points—in view of the frequency of the historical and other allusions interwoven throughout with prophecy—are necessarily more numerous than in the two previous volumes, "The Psalms" and "The Wisdom Books in Modern Speech," the notes in this volume are considerably more extensive; but here, as before, they are reduced to the minimum necessary for the intelligent appreciation of the text, and they are not to be regarded as a substitute for exegetical comment.

On the vexed question of the use of "thou" or "you"

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in a modern translation, I have adopted no uniform practice, but treated each passage on its merits, in the light of the implications of the context. In all utterances, however, attributed to Jehovah I have used "thou," as more consonant with the dignity and solemnity of divine speech.

The figures in the text indicate the points remarked upon in the notes at the end ; italics indicate refrains ; and small type, later additions.

I hope soon to be able to follow up this volume with one on Jeremiah.

JOHN E. McFADYEN.

GLASGOW,
June 28, 1918.

