

**THE MODERN  
READER'S BIBLE.  
ISAIAH, PP. 1-235**

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The Modern Reader's Bible. Isaiah, pp. 1-235 by Richard G. Moulton

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**RICHARD G. MOULTON**

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**THE MODERN READER'S BIBLE**

**A SERIES OF WORKS FROM THE SACRED SCRIPTURES PRESENTED  
IN MODERN LITERARY FORM**

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**ISAIAH**

**EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES**

BY

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## *INTRODUCTION*

To him who at this day reads in the Book of the prophet Isaiah the paramount question is still, 'Understandest thou what thou readest?' The literary instinct is drawn to this wonderful book by a charm which often seems to be flying from us if we press it beyond beauty of expression to clearness of thought. The version of King James's time, so grand in its English sentences, so imperfect in that connectedness of thought which lifts language into literature, has lulled too many of us into being content with prophecy as a storehouse of sacred sayings. If, desirous of something more, we go to the commentators whose Hebrew learning makes them our natural advisers, we find them intent upon other things: upon constructing out of Isaiah's writings the history of his times, upon the grand question of authorship—whether there are two or even more Isaiahs. And when in regard to some particular obscurity we seek from them exactly what has been said, no matter by whom nor when, our eagerness is dashed by finding that in the opinion of these eminent authorities



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we may have only the rough notes of the prophet, made yet more disconnected by the illegitimate glosses of some wholly superfluous editor.

From the Modern Reader's Bible questions of authorship are excluded: what is elsewhere claimed to be a Second Isaiah will here appear in its place as a seventh book, nothing more being postulated than what all schools of criticism may admit — that we have in these chapters a separate literary composition complete in itself. In applying the plan of the present series to the Biblical *Isaiah*, all other discussion must be subordinated to the settlement of the text. Not indeed in the ordinary sense of that phrase: for the critical determination of the Hebrew text, and the translation of its sentences into their English equivalents, it is a principle of this edition to accept the Revised Version (text or margins). But an editor's work is only half completed when he has printed his author in solid columns of type, like a newspaper without the assistance that even a newspaper gives with its headings. The true form of the literary work must be presented to the eye. At present the effusion of a poetaster in the corner of a provincial journal is printed with more discrimination of poetic form than the masterpieces of the Bible. The task of the present edition is to ascertain, from internal evidence and the analogy of other prophecy, what are the separate compositions of which the whole book is made up, and what is the true literary form of each, and to pre-

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sent these to the eye with the conventional external arrangement to which a modern reader is accustomed.

It has been no easy task: the morphology of Hebrew literature goes far outside that which has been made familiar to us in a criticism founded upon modern and classical authors. I have in former volumes dwelt upon the distinction of Hebrew among the great literatures of the world: how its verse is based upon a parallelism of clauses which also belongs to rhetoric; how there is therefore an overlapping in Hebrew of verse and prose, and also of those modes of thought to which verse and prose serve but as outer expression. In the Introduction to *Job* I endeavoured to describe how marvellous an instrument of literary power is found in this infinite flexibility of Hebrew style. But what is true of *Job* is true in an equal degree of *Isaiah*. In this writer it is easy to see that we have an orator, who wields with ease the whole armoury of rhetoric. It is easy to see also that with him imagery and poetic expression are much more than accessories: he loves to linger upon his images, and rapidly shift them, until they become lovely pictures which we dwell upon for their own sake. But *Isaiah* goes far beyond this: he is essentially a creative writer, and regularly conveys his thought in indirect forms of dramatic presentation. And I would suggest further that we find in his writings a fusion of all other literary forms in that new form which is here called a Rhapsody.

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I am sensible of the awkwardness of attempting to introduce a new technical term in connection with literature so sacred and so familiar. But the new term is needed because the matter to be described is not paralleled in other literatures. If we are to be limited to received nomenclature, perhaps it would be best to describe the compositions which I have in view as 'spiritual dramas.' The highly dramatic instinct of the Hebrew mind, denied its natural outlet of a theatre, permeates all branches of literature alike; and so prophecy has special forms which certainly leave on our minds as we read the general effect of dramatic realisation. But these prophetic dramas are such as no theatre could compass. For their stage they need all space; and the time of their action extends to the end of all things. The speakers include God and the Celestial Hosts; Israel appears, Israel Suffering or Israel Repentant; Sinners in Zion, the Godly in Zion; the Saved and the Doomed, the East and the West, answer one another. There is often one who speaks in the name of God, yet is not God — the Voice of Prophecy may express the idea; at times the same personality seems to be present in the scene of his ministry, and becomes the Prophetic Spectator. Not infrequently 'Voices,' 'Cries,' with no more of personality than these words imply, carry on some part of the movement. Monologue is made to do the work of dramatic dialogue; especially where the Divine monologue, apostrophising nations or classes,