

THE EXPOSITORY TIMES.

Notes of Recent Exposition.

Is it a mistake or is it a mercy that churchgoing people do not read the Bible carefully? Was it not the careful reading of the Bible that began the Higher Criticism and all our troubles? If the common people took to reading it carefully, would they not be likely to discover discrepancies? Some of them have already come upon the contradiction in the Book of Proverbs about answering a fool according to his folly. Some of them have even discovered the difficulty in the Epistle to the Galatians about bearing one another's burdens. But what would be the result if they read the Bible carefully enough to place side by side the two passages about the identification of John the Baptist with Elijah?

The Regius Professor of Hebrew in the University of Cambridge reads the Bible carefully. In an article in *The Interpreter* for January he takes these two passages and sets them down together. The passages are: Jn 1²¹, 'And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elijah? And he saith, I am not.' Mt 11¹⁴, 'And if ye are willing to receive it, this is Elijah, which is to come.'

The contradiction is evident. It is unseen while the Bible is read carelessly. As soon as the Bible is read as Professor Kennett reads it, the contradiction is evident. What are we to do with it?

One thing is certain. We cannot harmonize it as our fathers did. We cannot even attempt to harmonize it so. They were sure that the Bible cannot contradict itself, and they had always ingenuity enough to show that it never does. We are no longer sure that the Bible cannot contradict itself. We do not know what the Bible may do. We have no theory of inspiration to come to the Bible with. We take our theory out of the Bible itself. If we find that the Bible never contradicts itself we are content. But what if we find it does?

Professor Kennett has no *a priori* theory of inspiration. He finds that in one Gospel John the Baptist says he is not Elijah, and that in another Gospel Jesus says he is. He does not deny the contradiction. He does not proceed to harmonize it. If St. John had seen Matthew's Gospel, as all the harmonizers hold, and if he had been anxious to avoid verbal contradictions, he could no doubt have done so. Probably he had a higher sense of his calling than that. Professor Kennett is conscious that St. John had a higher sense of his calling. He does not suppose that St. John wrote either to contradict or correct. He wrote simply to tell that which he had seen and heard. He gave the facts; he left us to look after our theories.

Professor Kennett accepts the contradiction. It is evident, he says, that between our Lord and

His great forerunner there was a disagreement as to the interpretation of the Old Testament prophecy on which the expectation of Elijah's return was founded. And it seems to him that either John the Baptist was mistaken when he declared that he was not Elijah, or else Christ was straining the interpretation of Scripture when He said, 'This is Elijah which is to come.'

Was John mistaken? They that were sent to ask him the question were of the Pharisees. Now the current belief of the Pharisees was that Elijah was to come again like as Elisha had seen him go into heaven. Even yet there is a point in the Passover service at which the door is thrown open for Elijah to enter. He is expected to come in and announce the approach of the Messiah. And on the evening of the Day of Atonement a solemn litany, sung by the kneeling congregation, closes with the words, 'Michael, Prince of Israel, Elijah, and Gabriel, proclaim the year of Redemption, ere the gates of heaven are shut.' In John the Baptist's day the Jews expected a literal return of Elijah, as they expect it still. When Jesus hung upon the Cross and in bitterness of soul cried, 'Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani?' the bystanders said, 'Behold, he calleth Elijah. Let us see whether Elijah cometh to take him down.' So vivid, indeed, was the reality of the expectation, that Elijah had become a kind of guardian angel, occupying much the same place in their thoughts as the Virgin occupied in the belief of the Middle Ages. On the third page of the Talmud, Rabbi Jose is represented as telling how he once went into a ruin at Jerusalem to pray, and Elijah came to him there to protect and to warn him.

John the Baptist knew that in this sense he was not Elijah. He knew that he had never stood before Ahab, he had never called down fire from heaven, he had never been caught up to heaven in a chariot of fire. That was what the Pharisees meant when they asked him if he was Elijah. He answered that he was not. And he answered aright.

John the Baptist was not mistaken when he said that he was not Elijah. Was Jesus mistaken when He said he was? It is not certain whether Professor Kennett would deny that Jesus could ever be mistaken. He gives no sign that he is a follower of the modern Kenotic school. He denies that Jesus was mistaken now.

Jesus knew as well as John what the popular expectation about Elijah was. He knew that if He declared that John was Elijah they would be sure to identify them in the most literal manner. So He prefaced His statement with the words, 'If ye are willing to receive it.' Yet He made the statement. 'If ye are willing to receive it,' He said, 'this is Elijah, which is to come.'

For it was part of the mission of our Lord, as it was no part of the mission of John the Baptist, to be an interpreter of Old Testament prophecy. Professor Kennett thinks that John the Baptist believed in the literal return of Elijah, as his contemporaries did. He knew the prophecy of the return. He could not tell how it was to be fulfilled. But he accepted it literally, as they did, and simply said that it was not fulfilled in him.

Our Lord knew how it was to be fulfilled. He knew that it had already been fulfilled in John the Baptist. How comes it, asks Professor Kennett, in a good paragraph, 'how comes it,' he asks, 'that Jesus of Nazareth alone in His generation rightly understands the prophets? How comes it that the prophecies, which priests and scribes literalize and distort, Jesus quotes in their natural sense? How is it that, while the Rabbis look for a literal "Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven," Jesus sees the fulfilment of Daniel's vision in the victory of the truth; that while the learned look for the historical Elijah, He, the ignoramus, perceives the true meaning of the promise? Whence has this man, this carpenter, wisdom? Surely flesh and blood have not revealed these things to Him, but the Father which is in heaven.'

And yet the meaning of the prophecy was there for any one to see. The prophecy does not say that Elijah was to come again. It may not be very easy for us to observe that in English. For, as Professor Kennett properly protests, we translate the Bible as we translate no other book, retaining the words of the original as if we were in bondage to the doctrine of verbal inspiration, and ignoring the idiom of the English tongue.

What Malachi (4⁵) means to say is not 'I will send you Elijah the prophet,' but 'I will send you a prophet Elijah.' Shakespeare would have rendered it aright. It is the idiom which he puts into the mouth of Shylock, who calls Portia 'a Daniel come to judgment.' Malachi's promise is not the literal return of Elijah. If that were all that his promise carried it would have been small comfort to the Jews and less to us. A prediction? One unmistakable prediction unmistakably fulfilled? What good would that have done us? Surely it is better far, surely it is more like God the Father, to promise that through all the ages He will never leave Himself without a witness, that none shall ever perish without warning, that in every crisis there will be raised up some one to declare the truth as against the falsehood, some Elijah to withstand the powers of error as Elijah the Tishbite once withstood Ahab.

Thus the new student of the Bible is a better harmonist than the old. John said that he was not Elijah, and he was right. For the Pharisees understood, and probably he too understood, that Elijah would literally come back again to the earth. Our Lord said that he was Elijah, and He was right also. For He knew that the prophecy of Malachi had a larger fulfilment than that. The contradiction is harmonized, not by insisting upon a prediction, but on a loftier plane of interpretation. And each passage is taken in its natural sense.

Is it a mistake or is it a mercy that the common people do not read the Bible carefully? It is a profound mistake, and much of our ungodliness is

due to it. Were they to read the Bible carefully they would discover its contradictions—and its Christ.

The title of Professor Kennett's article, just referred to, is 'Christ the Interpreter of Prophecy.' Have the men who make so much of the 'ignorance' of our Lord considered this matter fully? They say that His knowledge of the Old Testament was the knowledge of contemporary Judaism. They say that when He spoke of the 110th Psalm as David's He knew no better. Have they considered how often He separated Himself from contemporary Judaism when He had occasion to refer to the Old Testament? In this very conversation on the 110th Psalm He asked a simple question. He referred to an obvious difficulty. 'If David calls the Messiah his Lord, how is he then his son?' But obvious as it was, the Pharisees had not thought of it, and could not answer Him.

Why do we not see that in the interpretation of Scripture He is separate from His brethren? Because His interpretation is ours. What astonishes us is, not that He knew the Old Testament so well, but that the Jews of His day knew it so ill. For He has opened the Scriptures to us. We forget that one of the gifts He has given us is the Old Testament. If we could put ourselves in the place of the two whose heart burned within them while He spake to them in the way and opened to them the Scriptures, we should understand better how original His attitude to the Old Testament was.

And it was original not only in the things He said, but also in the things He did. There is one Old Testament Scripture which is very familiar to us, and held very dear—the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. What a revolution came over the interpretation of that chapter when it was found that upon the cross Jesus of Nazareth suffered for sins, the just for the unjust. Up till then the 53rd chapter of Isaiah was overlooked. Now it is 'the evangelical chapter,' and its author is 'the evangelical prophet.'

When did the followers of Christ discover this chapter of Isaiah? Professor Schmiedel thinks they must have discovered it very early.

Professor Schmiedel is troubled about the conversion of St. Paul. He does not deny the fact of St. Paul's conversion. We have got beyond that. He does not deny that the cause of it was his conviction that he had seen the Risen Christ. We have got beyond that also. The only question which now remains is, whether St. Paul actually saw the Risen Christ or only thought that he saw Him.

In his new book on the *Testimony of St. Paul to Christ* (Hodder & Stoughton; 10s. 6d. net), Professor Knowling discusses St. Paul's conversion. He recognizes the issue, the only issue, that is left. Did St. Paul see Jesus of Nazareth, or was it only in one of those 'visions and revelations' of which he speaks, that he thought he saw Him, and concluded that He had risen from the dead?

Now if we are to believe that in one of his visions Saul of Tarsus thought he saw Jesus of Nazareth, and thought he heard Him speak, and thence concluded that He had risen from the dead, he must have been ready to see Him and ready to believe in the resurrection. Professor Schmiedel admits that. He proceeds to show that Saul of Tarsus was ready.

In the first place he was predisposed to 'visions and revelations.' Was he? That first step is challenged. After he was 'in Christ,' that is to say, after the conversion occurred, he had 'visions and revelations of the Lord.' But there is no evidence whatever that before that he ever had any such thing. No doubt the 'thorn in the flesh' may be called in here. It has been called in by Pfeiderer and by Weinel. But what do we know of the thorn in the flesh? It was epilepsy, they say. We do not know that. And, whatever it was, we do not know that he had it before he was a Christian.

So the other argument is considered safer.

Whether St. Paul had a predisposition to visions or not, at least it was in a vision, in a vision on the road to Damascus, as he says himself, that he first saw, or thought he saw, Jesus of Nazareth. He must have been fully prepared to see Him, and thus easily persuaded himself that he had done so.

There is the suspicion that the word vision is used in this argument in a double sense. But let that pass. The question is, What evidence is there to show that before his conversion Saul of Tarsus was ready to see Jesus and to believe that He had risen from the dead?

Dr. Knowling gives more attention to Professor Schmiedel than his confident perversity deserves. But in that respect he is in the fashion, and we may follow him. Well, the Jews, says Professor Schmiedel, were already aware that the death of a righteous man might avail with God as an atonement for sin. Then, perhaps,—watch Dr. Schmiedel's 'perhaps,' it is the most useful word of his vocabulary,—'perhaps the Christians had already begun to quote in support of this view Isaiah 53, which Paul, in all probability, had in mind when in 1 Cor. 15⁸ he says that he received by tradition the doctrine that Christ, according to the Scriptures, had been delivered as a propitiation for our sins.'

Now, in the first place, the Jews had no such doctrine in the time of St. Paul. Listen to Holsten. Of Carl Holsten, as Dr. Knowling points out, Professor Schmiedel speaks in the highest praise, and he is still quoted on all sides as giving us the most searching analysis of the state of St. Paul's mind at the time of his conversion. Holsten says: 'This idea of a suffering Messiah, suffering even to death, was so far removed from the orthodoxy of Jewish belief that a suffering Messiah during the lifetime of Jesus was still to His disciples an inconceivable and enigmatical representation.'

But perhaps the early Christians had already

discovered it. If they had, they had lost no time in making the discovery. For Professor Schmiedel and his friends place St. Paul's conversion in the very year of Christ's death, or, at latest, the year after. Still perhaps they had, and perhaps they were already quoting Isaiah 53 in support of it. That is, after all, a small difficulty to get over. Besides discovering the vicarious character of Christ's death, they had to communicate it to Saul of Tarsus, before his conversion, and he had to receive it. He had to receive it on the ground of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead. For if the early Christians believed it, that was the cause of their belief. That is to say, before Saul started on his mission to Damascus to persecute the Christians, he already believed that Jesus had risen from the dead. In other words, he was converted before his conversion.

What is the explanation of Mariolatry? The human cry for sympathy, we have hitherto been helplessly told. As if the approach to Mary could ever have interfered with the approach to Christ on the score of sympathy. There were many in the Church who almost lost their Redeemer. But that was not because the Redeemer had no invitation to the weary and heavy-laden. The cult of the Virgin did not take the place of the worship of the Christ. It was there already. Dr. Farnell tells us that. When the missionaries of the Cross came preaching the gospel of a Saviour, and added that He was born of a Virgin, the Anatolians and the Greeks accepted the Virgin and let the Christ go, because they worshipped a Virgin Saviour already.

Dr. L. R. Farnell, of Exeter College, Oxford, has published a book on the *Evolution of Religion* (Williams & Norgate; 5s.). He is not concerned with the truth of the Christian religion or of any other. He has to do solely with the facts of history. And he finds that the worship of the Virgin did spread most rapidly and take the

firmest hold in those places, like Alexandria in Egypt, which already worshipped a goddess named Kore or the Maiden, or like Asia Minor and Thrace, where the beloved One had the name of Parthenos or the Virgin.

Now Dr. Farnell does not mean to say that the very idea of a Virgin as the Mother of our Lord came into the Christian religion from paganism. He has too little bias against Christianity and too much acquaintance with history to say so. 'It would be, in fact,' he says, 'unreasonable to maintain that the Christian doctrines concerning the Virgin Mother could have been evoked merely by the spontaneous demand of the Anatolian or Greek converts.' What he means is that when the doctrine of the Virgin birth was presented to these nations, 'their own traditions had prepared their imaginations to receive it as congenial.'

There is a passage in the Panarium of Epiphanius in which the worship of the Maiden in the city of Alexandria is described. On the night of the 5th or 6th of January the worshippers met in the sacred enclosure or Temple of Kore, and having sung hymns to the music of the flute till dawn, they descended by the light of torches into an underground shrine and brought up thence a wooden idol on a bier representing Kore, seated and naked, with the sign of the cross on her brow, her hands, and her knees. And with the accompaniment of flutes, hymns, and dances, the image was carried round the central shrine seven times before it was restored again to its nether dwelling-place. Whereupon Epiphanius adds, 'And the votaries say that to-day at this hour Kore gave birth to the Eternal.'

Epiphanius quotes the rite as an example of pure paganism. Dr. Farnell affirms that it cannot be so. The image has been signed with the cross. That is not done in mockery, it is the deliberate work of the worshippers. And he cannot believe that the significant formula with which Epiphanius

closes his description, 'the Virgin has born the Eternal,' is part of a purely pagan liturgy.

Nor is the service purely Christian. 'At least,' says Dr. Farnell, 'I imagine that a naked Virgin, kept in a cavern shrine and carried round with timbrels, would be a unique fact in Christian archæology.' He has no doubt that we see in this ceremony the union of two rival systems of worship, the blending of at least two rival creeds in a time of transition.

But it was not the cult of the Virgin that gave the strongest impulse to Mariolatry. It was the worship of the Mother. When Christianity was making its conquest of the Roman Empire, the Phrygian religion of the Mother had already captured the greater part of the Græco-Roman world. The sacred title, 'the Mother of God,' says Dr. Farnell, was sympathetic with a very ancient and dominant Mediterranean faith. In prehistoric times from Crete, and at a later period from Phrygia, had gone forth the worship of the divine mother, known generally as 'the God's Mother,' or simply 'the Mother,' which had left a deep impress upon the religious imagination of the various races of the Greek and Roman world. That the Mother of Christ was a Virgin gave the preaching of the Cross its first sympathetic hearing; but the motherhood rather than the virginity gave Mary her deepest hold. There was no lack of sympathy in the Son of Mary, but in the heart of these early Christians the place was already occupied by a Mother and not a Son.

In his volume on *The Growth of Christian Faith* (T. & T. Clark; 7s. 6d. net), Dr. Ferries shows that a change is coming over our ideas as to the manner of conversion. The demand is no longer universally made for an abrupt and violent separation from the past. But if there is a change in the manner, there is a greater change in the means. Spurgeon's sermons are still circulated. They are still published indeed, week by week. But

there is one thing in Spurgeon's sermons which we have so completely left behind that it is sometimes quoted now for our amusement. It is his appeal to the terrors of hell.

And it seems to be an uncompensated loss. Having lost the appeal to the fear of hell, we have not found an appeal to the hope of heaven. Why have we not?

There seem to be two reasons. The one is that we do not know enough about heaven; and the other is that we cannot make what we know sufficiently attractive.

We cannot make heaven attractive enough. For it needs the use of the imagination, its vigorous, daring use, and in the things of the Spirit we have not yet attained to that. Of recent writers, perhaps Christina Rossetti makes the most of heaven. That was her gift. In the things of the Spirit she knew no fear. She kept close to the imagery of the Apocalypse, but she translated it into her own tongue and her own time. And in the translation it did not become prosaic and ridiculous. Transplanting the Eastern flower of the spiritual imagination into Western soil, she kept it a flower still.

Christina Rossetti's heaven, no doubt, is a heaven, because it is a home. There is love in it. There is some one to love and be loved by. No doubt this is half the secret of its attractiveness. It was the love of Christ that constrained her when, with admirable daring, she gave herself to the joy of making heaven attractive. But so is it with the Paradise of the Apocalypse. And so surely may it be with ours.

How know^o I that blessedness befalls who dwell in
Paradise,
The outwearied hearts refreshing, rekindling the worn-
out eyes,
All souls singing, seeing, rejoicing everywhere?
Nay, much more than this I know, for this is so;
Christ is there.

But we not only cannot make heaven attractive

enough, we do not know enough about it. Surely Christ did not intend us to use the hope of heaven as a means of salvation. For if He had, surely He would have told us more about it. What has He told us? We have seen already that He has told us there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage there. He has also told us that in heaven the angels of the little ones do always behold the face of the Father who is in heaven (Mt 18¹⁰).

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This is something new about heaven. This is information. We knew already about guardian angels. It is not quite certain that it is guardian angels here. At least it does not seem to be an angel set apart for each of the little ones. That does not seem to be in Christ's thought. What He seems to say is that the lowest on earth have the highest in heaven to attend to them. For the figure is Eastern. It is an Eastern king's court. They 'see the face' of the king who are admitted to his presence. And they who always see his face are next to him in rank and glory.

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So it is not one angel for one child and another for another. That does not seem to be in it, though there may be nothing in it against that. It is this rather, that the concern of the highest in heaven is not (as the disciples supposed it would be) with the highest on earth, but with the meanest and the lowliest.

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That is why it is a warning. We do not wish to be out of touch with God in all our estimates. But the temptation is very great. For after all that He has said, after all the solemnity of this warning, we still refuse to think of the little child as the greatest in the Kingdom of God. We still believe that the ripe saint must be greater and of more interest to the hierarchy of heaven.

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It is a revelation about children. They are better than we have believed them to be. Driven by the logic of our theologies, we have not been able to see their goodness. The very pagan (we mean the modern pagan) has found more goodness

and more joy in the little ones than we have. If we read a gathering of poetry about children, such as that delightful one of Scottish poetry, made by Robert Ford, and called *Ballads of Bairnhood*, we shall see, and be ashamed to see it, that there is not a Christian poet among them. Well, there is George Macdonald, no doubt, but George Macdonald is most the poet of the children when he is most in revolt against historical Christianity.

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And it is a revelation about God. For upon this earth the little ones are often shamefully treated, and He does not interfere. Is there anything more wonderful about God than the way He holds His hand? We are only dimly beginning to see how great an attribute it is. We still cry out against Him when we think of the miserable estate of the little ones. But He knows. He feels. He holds His hand because it is better.

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And last of all, it is a revelation about heaven — 'Their angels in heaven . . . my Father which is in heaven.' Not that there are angels there. We knew that. Nor that there is a Father there. We had almost discovered that also. But that the chief interest of the chief of the angels, of the angels who are always at home with the Father, and therefore the chief interest of the Father Himself, is the little ones upon the earth.

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It is a revelation of the occupations of heaven. In one of his most glorious moments of inspiration, St. Peter tells us that the angels have an interest in the salvation of men. But already our Lord had told us that they have an interest in the little men and women who one day will need salvation. And it is clear enough, and this is the wonder of it, that oftentimes it must be a painful interest. Not always. No doubt they see more good in children than even our pagan poets do. No doubt they have more joy than the joy of a father over his firstborn. And no doubt there is joy in the presence of the angels in heaven when a Samaritan upon earth takes charge of a child at one of life's difficult crossings.

But often it must be a painful interest. This is the wonder of it. This is the revelation about heaven. For the angels must hold their hand, as the Father does. What is it that 'their angels' do for the little ones? That we cannot tell. But it is clear that they do not shield them from all harm.

It is clear that they do not shelter them always from foul disgrace and contempt. Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for it will be all the more fearful for you that their angels in heaven have observed your neglect and have held their hand.

The Messianic Teaching of Isaiah.

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THE Messianic doctrine of the Old Testament, in its wider sense, embraces the conception of the ideal kingdom of God as well as that of the ideal king. The second of these notions arose historically out of the former, and cannot be understood apart from it. In Isaiah's mind this development of the spirit of prophecy found a chief instrument; and the volume of Isaiah became the great text-book of Old Testament Messianism. The *kingdom* this prophet is always thinking of; the coming *king* was the subject of special and detached oracles, and emerged at a particular crisis in his ministry. But though the passages describing the Messiah-king are few in number and brief in extent (9^{6,7} 11¹⁻⁵:¹ the inclusion of 7¹⁴⁻¹⁶ and 8⁸ in this list is questionable, as will afterwards appear), they occupy a salient position in Isaiah's life-work, and signalize a critical epoch in the growth of his own ideas and in the unfolding of the purposes of God concerning Israel. Is 9^{6,7} and 11¹⁻⁵ stand close together as amongst the summits of Old Testament thought—points at which the inspired genius of Israel reached its loftiest flight and took its furthest view into the future.

The Israelite constitution was fundamentally theocratic, admitting in its original form of no earthly monarch; a revolution was accomplished under the prophet Samuel, which met with decided resistance and took effect only by degrees, when the throne of David was established and a sacrosanct character was conferred upon his line. Henceforth the divine rule was impersonated in the reigning son of David; but his administration

¹ The school of German critics with which Dr. Cheyne associates himself, cuts out these passages, and all other strictly Messianic oracles, from their Isaianic context.

often tended to lower its ideal, and threatened during the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh its complete effacement from the minds of the people. Especially at such epochs the prophets were compelled to recall and meditate upon 'the pattern shown' them 'in the mount.' They worked under two fixed presuppositions—axioms of prophecy from the date of the oracle of 2 S 7—namely, the ethical perfection and integrity of Jehovah's rule in Israel, and the perpetuity of the Davidic throne. The history of the Judæan monarchy showed, through one bitter experience after another, that these necessities could be reconciled only in a superhuman son of David; they demanded a prince filled with the spirit of Jehovah and furnished with royal qualities such as no child of man had ever shown, one who should stand in a relation of nearness to God hitherto unexampled, and lifting him above human frailties and limitations. As it was with the political *kingdoms* of Israel and of Judah in turn, so it proved with the historical *kings*: from the failure of the actual and the present the religious thinkers of Israel took refuge in the region of the prophetic future, where the true soul of the people learnt abidingly to make its home. Isaiah 'looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose maker and builder is God'; he looked at the same time for the king of that city, the perfect Prince and Son of God, who should be 'set upon the throne of David, to establish it with judgement and with righteousness for ever (Is 9⁷). Otherwise God's promises will be made void; and the holy city and royal house, marvellously preserved in the general overthrow, will have been saved to no purpose. Therefore 'the zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this.'

Thus with the calamities falling on the Israelite