

## CHAPTER III.

### THE VIRGIN MOTHER. Is. vii. 1-17.

#### INTRODUCTION.

**1. HISTORY AND OCCASION OF THE PROPHECY.**—We learn from IV. Kings xvi. 1-4 that Achaz despised the traditions of his fathers, and openly professed idolatry. Hence he was given over by God into the hands of the Syrian king, who carried off immense booty to his royal capital, Damascus. But the king of Israel too afflicted the kingdom of Juda with exceeding bitter afflictions (II. Par. xxviii. 5)—so much so that he slew of Juda a hundred and twenty thousand on a single day. But this war, which was a real chastisement of Achaz on the part of God, had also its special natural causes.

It appears that an alliance had been concluded between Phacee, king of Israel, and Rasin, king of Damascus, for the purpose of opposing a barrier to the Assyrian aggressions. Cherishing Assyrian proclivities as Achaz did, he did not join the coalition; the allies therefore invaded his territories, intending to dethrone Achaz and substitute for him a more subservient ruler, a certain son of Tabeel. The invasion caused great alarm in Jerusalem, though Phacee alone appears at first to have gone against the capital, while Rasin was occupied in reconquering the maritime city, Elath. After this victory he must have joined his ally in his assault on Jerusalem. Achaz meditated casting himself on Assyria for help—a policy of which the prophet Isaias strongly disapproved. He was divinely instructed to assure Achaz that his fears were groundless, and that

the two kingdoms were doomed to destruction. To overcome the king's distrust, the prophet offers to give him a sign; but through the king's diffidence the sign becomes an omen of ruin for Juda: the land will indeed be saved from the two kings according to God's promise, but the land of Juda will become the battle-ground in the conflict between the Egyptian and the Assyrian armies.

Achaz, however, sent his messengers to the Assyrian king Theglathphalasar, asking for his help in present distress (II. Par. xxviii. 16; IV. Kings xvi. 7). The Assyrian monarch complied with Achaz' request and invaded Damascus; the allied kings had therefore to abandon their warlike designs on Juda and provide for their own safety (IV. Kings xvi. 5, 6). Theglathphalasar transported the inhabitants of Damasens to Cyrene, and killed its king, Rasin (IV. Kings xvi. 9). Then he invaded also the kingdom of Israel, and transported a number of its inhabitants into Assyria (IV. Kings xv. 29). Phacee, the Israelite king, was slain by conspirators in the seventeenth year of his reign, and in the third year of Achaz' rule, i.e., in the same year in which the two allied kings had invaded the kingdom of Juda (IV. Kings xv. 30). But after subduing the Syrian and the Samaritan kings, the Assyrian conqueror invaded also the kingdom of Juda and devastated it without resistance, so that only few inhabitants with their herds and cattle remained (II. Par. xxviii. 20; cf. Is. viii. 7, 8).

**2. ERRONEOUS EXPLANATIONS OF THE PROPHECY.** — *a.* Several of the ancient Jewish writers maintain that the Emmanuel promised to be born of the virgin is Achaz' son and successor, Ezechias. But it must be remembered that Ezechias was about eight or nine years old at the time of the prophecy, for he was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, i.e., about 15 or 16 years after the prophecy was given (IV. Kings xviii. 2).

*b.* Several rationalistic authors and the Catholic writer Isenbiehl regard Emmanuel as the son of a virgin who will lose her virginity in the conception and birth of the boy.

The name Emmanuel is nothing but a symbol, just as the names Shear-lashub and Maher-Shalal-Chash-Baz are symbolic. The sign consists in Isaiah's predicting that the virgin will conceive in her first intercourse, and that she will bring forth a boy. The foreknowledge of both of these circumstances requires a special divine assistance, and is therefore rightly represented as a sign. This opinion will be refuted in the course of our treatment of the prophecy.

c. Delitzsch has a rather curious explanation of the prophecy. According to him God had revealed two future facts to Isaiah—the virginal conception of the Messiah and the immediate liberation of Juda from its oppressors. The *time* of the Messiah's coming had, however, not been made known to the prophet. Isaiah, therefore, trying to combine the two prophecies, was of the opinion that the birth of the Messiah would precede the liberation of the theocratic kingdom. The result is that the prophecy represents the Messiah as being about to be born, and describes the land of Juda as about to be freed before the Messiah will have attained the use of reason, i.e., before he will have reached the years of discretion. It may be of interest to know that Rosenmüller too gives a similar explanation.

If it be observed that according to this view there would be an error in the prophecy, both authors deny such an inference on the plea that the time of the Messiah's birth was not revealed to the prophet, but that the erroneous inference must be ascribed to his own private judgment. But if this be admitted as a true solution of the difficulty, it follows that in any prophecy we can hardly know what has been revealed by God to the prophet and what must be ascribed to his own private view on the subject.

**3. MESSIANIC NATURE OF THE PROPHECY.**—*a.* The Messianic character of the present prophecy appears first of all from the testimony of St. Matthew, i. 18-25: “. . . Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which the Lord

spoke by the prophet, saying: Behold a virgin shall be with child . . ." There are two exceptions to this argument: 1. It is said that the first two chapters of St. Matthew's gospel are spurious. But this can hardly be asserted without the greatest temerity, not to say without heresy. For the Tridentine and the Vatican councils (Trid. sess. iv., decret. de can. Script.; Vatic. sess. iii. c. 2) openly declare that the whole Bible, with all its parts, as it is contained in the old Vulgate edition, is sacred, canonical, and divinely inspired (Vat.); on the other hand, there is in our days no critic worthy of the name who rejects the first two chapters of St. Matthew's gospel without rejecting all the rest.

2. The second exception against our inference that Isaias' prophecy is Messianic because St. Matthew viewed it as such may be found in Isenbiehl (*Neuer Versuch über die Weissagung vom Emmanuel*, 1778). The author assures us that the evangelist's words, "that it might be fulfilled," may indicate a mere accommodation of the prophecy to Christ's conception. In support of this he appeals to St. Jerome's saying (Ep. 103 ad Paulin., c. 7), that Socrates' words were "fulfilled" in him: "I only know that I do not know." Again, Isenbiehl endeavors to prove that St. Matthew repeatedly uses the formula "that it might be fulfilled" where he applies an Old Testament prophecy to our Lord by mere accommodation. Thus Matt. ii. 15 applies to Christ what Os. xi. 1 applies to the people of Israel; Matt. ii. 18 applies to the infants slain at Bethlehem what Jer. xxxi. 15 applies to the lamentations over the national misfortune in the Babylonian reverses; Matt. ii. 23 applies the words "he shall be called a Nazarite" as if they were prophetic of Jesus Christ, though they are nowhere to be found in the prophets; Matt. xiii. 13-15 applies to the following of Christ what Is. vi. 9, 10 had said of his own contemporaries.

Plausible as this exception may appear at first sight, it does not rest on solid ground.  $\alpha$ . First of all, the author

who urges it does not distinguish between the typical and the literal meaning of the prophecies, and consequently he does not keep in mind that as the literal meaning of a prophecy is properly and not by mere accommodation applied to the people of Israel or to Old Testament occurrences, so may its typical sense be applied to Christ and to events of the Christian dispensation without on that account becoming a mere accommodation. In this manner St. Matthew (ii. 15, 18) applies the prophecies of Os. xi. 1 and Jer. xxxi. 15 to Christ's flight into Egypt and to the slaughter of the holy Innocents. *β.* Again, Isenbiel is not aware that St. Matthew ii. 23 most probably reads "flower," and thus alludes to Isaias' prediction, xi. 1, where the future Messiah is called a flower from the root of Jesse. *γ.* In the third place, the author disregards the fact that a number of prophecies apply properly, not by mere accommodation, to a series of events rather than to any single fact of history. An instance of such a prediction we find, e.g., in II. Kings vii. 14, where the divine promises regard the whole line of David's descendants. They are not all fulfilled in every member of the series, but they are fully accomplished in the whole series taken collectively. Hence they may be properly and literally applied to any Davidic king. In the same manner St. Matthew applies Is. vi. 9, 10 to the unbelieving Jews in xiii. 13-15.

*b.* The second proof for the Messianic character of the prophecy is taken from the unanimous testimony of the Fathers on this point. A list of the patristic testimonies may be seen in Kilber's *Analysis Biblica* (editio altera, t. i. pp. 354 f.). There are again two main exceptions to this argument from the Fathers: 1. The Fathers speak on the false supposition that Isaias' prophecy rests on divine authority; 2. The Fathers express in their opinions on the present passage, not the doctrine of the Church, but their own private conviction. *α.* As to the first exception, it suffices for our purpose to recall the decree of the Vatican Council (iii. 2), according to which the agreement of the

Fathers on a doctrinal point is in itself sufficient to command our assent, or at least to force us not to contradict the patristic testimony. *β.* As to the second exception, we must insist that the Fathers do not express their interpretation of the prophecy as a private opinion, but they represent it as the doctrine of the Church on a matter of Scripture interpretation, so that according to the council we are bound not to differ from it in substance. For though the Fathers may differ among themselves in details, they surely agree as to the main drift of the prophecy, giving it a Messianic signification.

*c.* The third argument for the Messianic character of Isaias' prophecy may be taken from the general agreement of this prediction with other evidently Messianic prophecies.

*α.* First of all, the very context of the prophecy bears witness to its Messianic nature. The child who is to be born, according to the seventh chapter, as a sign unto Achaz must naturally be expected to surpass in its nature any other sign that Achaz himself could have asked of God. Then in the next chapter it is announced in verse 8 that "the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Emmanuel." If we compare the ninth chapter with this statement, it appears that Emmanuel shall be the Lord of the land of Juda. Since then at the time of the prophet none other than Achaz and Ezechiel were the lords of the land of Juda, to neither of whom the prediction could apply, we must suppose it applies to some one much above either of them—to the Messiah himself. Again, in the ninth chapter, the prophet predicts salvation to the land of Juda through the child that is to be born. Now if this be not Emmanuel, of whom there is question in the seventh chapter, it must be Maher-Shalal, of the eighth chapter. But the latter was never king in Juda, nor did he ever perform any act that would be worthy of attention. Hence it is clear that the child who will save Juda is the Emmanuel of chapter seven. But the liberator of Juda is evidently identical with the Messiah. Consequently,

the Emmanuel of our prophecy is the Messiah. In the eleventh chapter the prophet again returns to the rod that is to spring from the root of Jesse, to the most renowned offspring of David, whose reign will cause universal peace, under whose reign the Lord will possess the remnant of his chosen people. Now this one can be no other than the hero described in the ninth chapter, and the Emmanuel promised in the seventh chapter, i.e., the very Messiah (cf. ix. 2-4, and x. 20-22; Rom. ix. 27).

*β.* The Messianic reference of the present prophecy appears also when we compare it with the well-known prophecy of Micah (v. 2 ff.) The similitude between the two predictions is so striking that we must admit either that Isaiah reproduced the prophecy of Micah, or that the latter repeated the prophetic promise of the former. Micah says that God will give "them up even till the time wherein she that travaileth shall bring forth and the remnant of his brethren shall be converted to the children of Israel . . . and this man shall be our peace." How beautifully all this illustrates the prophecy of Isaiah, if we suppose the latter prophet had about the same time uttered the prediction of the virgin's conception and her virginal child-birth! And, on the other hand, how clear the prophecy concerning the virgin and her son Emmanuel becomes if we suppose that Isaiah alludes to the prophecy of Micah which had recently been uttered (cf. Is. x. 20-22; xi. 11; iv. 3). But if Isaiah speaks about a virgin concerning whom nothing else was known to the people of Israel, all becomes a riddle and an enigma. These five prophecies therefore form, as it were, one single whole; so much so that they have been regarded as constituting a single book—the book of Emmanuel. And if they be considered from this point of view, their Messianic character can hardly be called in question even by the most exacting of critics.

*d.* Three other arguments for the Messianic nature of

Isaias' prophecy are better omitted, since they are not altogether convincing.

α. For if it be urged that the child which is to be born will be the offspring of a virgin, and that this is a distinctly Messianic note, it must be remembered, on the other hand, that, prescinding from the New Testament, it is not clear from the text of the prophecy whether the promised child will be the offspring of a virgin in any other sense than any first-born child is the offspring of a virgin. The virgin may be said by the prophet to conceive and to bring forth, as the blind are said to see, the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk. Nor can it be maintained that the virgin must remain a virgin in her conception and delivery, because otherwise there would be no sign which the prophet had promised to give. For the sign may consist in the wonderful nature of the child, or in several other particulars connected with the prediction, as will be seen in the course of the commentary.

β. Another argument for the Messianic character of the prediction is based on the fact that in the prophecy there is question of "*the* virgin;" the definite article, it is claimed, indicates that the virgin spoken of is virgin by excellence, and not merely as the mother of any first-born child is a virgin. But this consideration has not much weight, since the definite article in Hebrew has not necessarily that meaning, even when it is used with a noun that does not occur beforehand. For even in that case the noun is at times considered sufficiently known to require or, at least, to admit the definite article. This is seen in Gen. iii. 24: "and (he) placed before the paradise of pleasure Cherubim (Heb., the Cherubim)"; Ex. xv. 20: "So Mary the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel (Heb., the timbrel) in her hand;" Gen. xiv. 13: "and behold one that had escaped (Heb., the one that had escaped) told Abram the Hebrew."

γ. Other authors, again, have urged the following argument in favor of the Messianic character of Isaias'

prophecy: according to the Hebrew text it is the mother who will name the child Emmanuel; for we must either render "thou shalt call his name" (the phrase being a direct address to the mother), or "she shall call his name." Therefore, they say, Emmanuel has no human father who can perform this duty. But, on the other hand, we see in the Old Testament that the mother in several instances named her child, although its father was actually present (cf. Gen. iv. 1, 25; xix. 37; xxi. 32; xxx. 18 f.; xxx. 24; I. Kings i. 20, etc., exemplifying this statement).

c. But there is another proof for the Messianic reference of Isaias' prediction which cannot be omitted here; Jewish tradition considered the passage as referring to the promised Messias. In the first place, we may draw attention to the fact that St. Matthew applied the prophecy to Jesus Christ without any one contradicting him. And this is the more remarkable, since the Evangelist wrote his gospel for the Jews, proving to them the Messiaship of Jesus from the fulfilment of all the prophecies in his sacred person. Besides, we have the implicit avowal of the LXX. translators, who rendered the Hebrew word "virgin" in this prophecy, though in four other passages they had translated it by "woman." Then again the Hebrew as well as the other national traditions, according to which virginity is worthy of special honor, and which make their divine heroes sons of virgins, without the intercourse of man, show that Isaias' prophecy must have been understood by the ancients as referring to the birth of the future Redeemer.

#### Is. vii. 1-17.

And it came to pass in the days of Achaz the son of Joathan, the son of Ozias king of Juda, that Rezin king of Syria, and Phacee the son of Romelia king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem, to fight against it; but they could not prevail over it. And they told the house of David, saying: "Syria hath rested upon Ephraim;" and his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind. And the

Lord said to Isaias : <sup>1</sup> "Go forth to meet Achaz, thou and Jasub thy son that is left, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, in the way of the fuller's field." <sup>2</sup> And thou shalt say to him :

<sup>1</sup> **Go forth to meet Achaz.** The first sentences of Isaias' account are clear from the historical paragraphs that have been premised to this prophecy. While Rasin besieged Elath, Phacee had endeavored to deal with the capital ; "but they could not prevail." After Elath had fallen into Rasin's hands, the latter joined his troops with those of Phacee, "Syria hath rested upon Ephraim," whereupon Achaz' heart was moved and the heart of his people, as the trees of the woods are moved with the wind. Preparations for a serious and protracted siege must now be made at Jerusalem ; hence Achaz is occupied near the upper pool from which the city had to receive the greatest part of its water supply. The fuller's field, i.e., their washing or bleaching-place, lay either on the western side of the city (Robinson, Schultz, van Raumer, Thenius, Unruh, Schick, etc.), or, according to a less probable opinion, to the northeast (Williams, Kraft, Meier, Hitzig, etc.). To this place, then, the prophet was told to repair, together with Jasub, or Shear-Jasub, his son. The very names of the two visitors were real symbols of their divine mission. Isaias, meaning "salvation of the Lord," announces the hopeful character of the visitation, while "Shear-Jasub," meaning "the remnant shall return," or "the remnant is converted," is in itself a commentary on Is. vi. 11-13, and combines in a brief summary God's threats and promises. There will be final safety for Israel, but only for its remnant, so that the divine curse in a manner precedes the divine blessing.

<sup>2</sup> **And thou shalt say to him.** The divine message to Achaz may be divided into three parts : 1. God warns the king to "be quiet," i.e., not to act precipitately, and not to be afraid of the two tails of these fire-brands, i.e., the two fag-ends of wood-pokers, half burned off and wholly burned out, so that they do not burn, but keep on smoking. 2. In the second place God gives Achaz a prophecy in order to show him that his advice indicates the proper course to follow. In the introduction to this prediction the prophet summarizes the whole situation of the three kings ; then he assures Achaz in general terms that the intentions of the king of Syria and of Samaria will not be put into practice : "It shall not stand, and this shall not be !" After this general prediction, Isaias adds three more prophecies regarding the special fate of the three kingdoms concerned. *a.* Syria is to gain nothing by the undertaking. It will be in future, as it has been in the past : "the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rasin." *b.* Regarding Samaria the prophet utters a double prediction : the first has reference to the far-off future, "within threescore and five years Ephraim shall cease to be a people ;" the second is concerned with the immediate future of the northern kingdom, "the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria the son of Romelia."

It may be noted in passing that the sixty-five years assigned to the time of Samaria's final destruction do not end with the beginning of the Assyrian captivity, which began in 722 B.C., but terminate at the

“ See thou be quiet ; fear not, and let not thy heart be afraid of the two tails of these firebrands, smoking with the wrath of the fury of Rasin king of Syria and of the son of Romelia. Because Syria with the son of Romelia hath taken counsel against thee, unto the evil of Ephraim, saying : Let us go up to Juda, and rouse it up, and draw it away to us and make the son of Tabeel

time when Assyrian settlers were colonizing Samaria under the reign of Asarhaddon. For since the present prophecy was uttered in the beginning of Achaz' reign, the 11 years of that king, together with the 29 years of his successor Ezechias and the 22 years which his successor Manasses ruled before he was carried off to the land of his exile, will give about the required number of 65 years. We know that this explanation of the 65 years rests on several suppositions that are not absolutely certain ; they are, however, sufficiently probable to justify our conjecture. For though the year in which Samaria was thus colonized is not certain, it seems very natural that this should have taken place after the defeat of Manasses, which the Talmud in the tract “ Seder Olam ” places in the 22d year of Manasses' reign.

This explanation, in itself very probable, becomes still more so when compared with other attempts of interpretation that have been given concerning the passage. *α*. For some contend that the term from which the 65 years must be reckoned is the time when Amos (vii. 11, 17) gave utterance to his prophecy, i. e., the 25th year of Ozias. The term at which the 65 years end is the 6th year of Ezechias, when Samaria was subdued in war and ceased to be a kingdom. The 65 years are, then : 27 under Ozias, 16 under Joathan, 16 under Achaz, and 6 under Ezechias (Euseb., Procop., Barh., Haimo, St. Thom., Malv., Pint., Mald., Lap., Mar., Gordon, Schegg and certain Jewish commentators). It is plain that this exposition of the text hardly agrees with the words of Isaias. *β*. Another way of interpreting the 65 years is found in Sanchez, Rohling, Oppert, etc. ; according to this view the years refer to the past, so that the term to which they bring us is the 27th year of Jeroboam II., when Samaria was for 10 years deprived of its independence by Syria. The sense of the passage is then that, as in the past Samaria has suffered reverses in war, so it will in the future be entirely destroyed. But the Hebrew particle that precedes the number 65 points to the future rather than to the past (*betod*). *γ*. There is still another class of interpreters who explain the difficulty by endeavoring to remove it entirely ; the second part of verse 8 is, according to these authors, to be expunged from the text as an interpolation. The principal reasons for this opinion are reduced to the following : the prophecy becomes too definite by the number 65, and the second member of verse 8 destroys the metrical harmony and poetic parallelism of the passage (Eichhorn, Gesenius, Maurer, Hitzig, Ewald, Umbreit, Dietrich). On the other hand, the exact number of years stated by the prophet cannot seem objectionable to any one who admits the supernatural character of the prediction. The phraseology of 8b. is in strict accord with that of Isaias in other passages (cf. xvi. 16, xvii. 1 ; xxv. 2)

king in the midst thereof :” thus saith the Lord God : “ It shall not stand, and this shall not be ! But the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rasin, and within threescore and five years Ephraim shall cease to be a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria the son of Romelia. If you will not believe, you shall not continue.”

The parallelism rather demands than excludes the second part of verse 8, since it will be seen that concerning Juda too the prophet predicts both the immediate and the far-off state of affairs (cf. Delitzsch, i. pp. 199 ff.; Knabenb., i. p. 156).

c. The third prophecy which the seer utters concerns Juda, indicating the general method which the Lord will follow in his future dealings with that state ; it is both threatening and conditional in its nature. “ If you do not believe, you shall not continue.” The only condition, then, on which Juda can retain its political independence is full trust in God ; Assyrian help will be no safeguard against political destruction.

3. The third part of Isaias’ prophetic mission to Achaz consists in trying whether Juda does trust the Lord. Juda is represented by the actual head of David’s royal house,—by Achaz,—so that on Achaz’ faith or unfaith depends the safety of the theocracy. God’s decree is : If Juda does not believe, it shall not continue. But does Juda believe ? The trial will show it. “ Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God.” If the sign is asked, this will prove a sufficient token of Juda’s trust in the Lord God. But Juda answers in its representative : “ I will not ask, and I will not tempt the Lord.” The king’s hypocritical answer decides the fate of Juda for more than two thousand years, as far as our experience goes. Alluding to Dent. vi. 16, where presumption is forbidden, Achaz seeks in that passage a cloak for his continuance in his Assyrian policy. Deliverance he desires, but does not expect or wish it through God’s help.

Juda’s trial over, the prophet announces more in particular the future fate of the kingdom. More in particular, we say, because it has been announced already in general terms. “ If you do not believe, you shall not continue.” But you do not believe. Therefore you shall not continue. The detailed description of Juda’s future regards first its far-off future, secondly, its nearer future. a. As to the far-off future of Juda, the child Emmanuel, who shall be born of the well-known virgin, the stay, the hope, the crowning glory of David’s royal house, “ shall eat butter and honey,” i.e., he shall live in the country of butter and honey, outside of Juda, and consequently in exile ; and he shall eat butter and honey, the food of the poor and the lowly, so that at his time the royal house of David will be reduced to poverty and exile. b. In the immediate future the fate of Juda will be varied : before the child that is appealed to would attain the use of reason, if it were born here and now, the two hostile kings will have disappeared from the confines of Juda ; but since Achaz has been found wanting in faith, the Assyrian, in whom he trusts, will invade Juda and make it the battle-ground between his and the Egyptian armies.

And the Lord spoke again to Achaz, saying: "Ask thee" a

<sup>1</sup>**A sign.** The prophecy speaks of a double sign: 1. Achaz is invited to ask for a sign; 2. the prophet himself gives a sign. Both signs call for a word of explanation. 1. Isaias invites Achaz to ask for a sign. *a.* Hitzig maintains that the prophet here "played a dangerous game," in which the Lord would surely have "left him in the lurch," if the king had chosen to ask for a sign. Meier observes that it cannot have entered the prophet's mind to wish for a miracle. De Lagarde says that the failure of his sign would have subjected the prophet to punishment for lying. But all these are mere *a priori* arguments, resting on the supposition that miracles do not happen. *b.* Omitting the question whether we ought to render the prophet's words "ask it either in the depth or in the height above" or "make it deep unto Sheol or heighten it to on high," it must suffice to enumerate a few opinions regarding the nature of the offered sign. *a.* Choose between seeing the earth split down to the abyss of hell, and beholding the heavens opened to the throne of the Most High (Haimo, Pint., Sash., Lap., Men.) *β.* The sign in the heavens might be similar to that granted to Josue (Jos. x. 12), or to the thunder, the storm, and the fire which occurred in the days of Sannel and Elias (I. Kings xii. 17, IV. Kings i. 10), while the sign in the deep might resemble the destruction of Core, Dathan and Abiron, or the death of the Egyptians in the Red Sea, or again the miraculous deliverance of Jonas from the belly of the great fish (Basil, Procop., Thom., Sanch., Calmet).

2. The prophet promises a sign in spite of, or rather because of, Achaz' refusal to ask for one. Explanations. *a.* Delitzsch (p. 210) is of opinion that the sign consists in the mystery which surrounds the prediction about the pregnant virgin bringing forth a son—a mystery which threatens the house of David, and which affords comfort to the prophet and to all believers. It hardly needs proof that such a mystery is, at best, a very unsatisfactory explanation of the promised sign. *b.* The sign consists in the prophet's prediction that a certain virgin would conceive in her first intercourse with man, that she would give birth to a son rather than a daughter, and that this son would be called Emmanuel—a name which resembled in its symbolic meaning the names of Isaias' two sons. *c.* But, according to this explanation, Emmanuel is entirely distinct from the Messiah, which contradicts the above proofs for the Messianic character of the prophecy. *β.* Again, history knows nothing of a son called Emmanuel whose age of discretion was accompanied by the liberation of Juda from the kings of Syria and Samaria. *c.* The sign consists in the prediction of Juda's liberation from the oppression of its enemies. *a.* But the whole context would in this manner become extremely insipid and meaningless. *β.* Besides, the sign is intended to strengthen the king's faith in the divine promise of Juda's future liberation, and can therefore be hardly identified with this prophetic promise. *d.* The sign consists wholly in the fact that a virgin, remaining virgin, will conceive and give birth to a son—the very Emmanuel, or the promised Messiah. *a.* This explanation supposes that the sign that God gives to Achaz is a wholly favorable sign. Now

sign of the Lord thy God, either unto the depth of hell or unto

it appears from the context that this cannot be the case. Juda has not believed; therefore it will not continue; therefore "the Lord himself shall give a sign" to Juda. *β.* The sign must represent the double character of God's dealing with David's royal house: he will chastise it with the rod of men, but will not take away his mercy from it. Now the fact that the Messiah will be born of a virgin, remaining a virgin in his conception and birth illustrates only God's mercy to the house of David, but does not exhibit his justice. *ε.* The sign consists partially in the virginal birth of the Messiah, but partially also in his having to eat butter and honey, i.e., in his having to live far away from the capital of his ancestors in poverty and exile. The composite character of this sign satisfies the two essential conditions which it requires: *α.* God's mercy will not depart from David's royal house, since the Messiah will be born indeed. *β.* God will, however, chastise the royal house of Juda, since its worldly glory will be humbled to the dust of the earth. *γ.* The phrase "he shall eat butter and honey" implies such a state of humiliation as is required by the context. For "butter and honey" means either the thickened milk and honey, which are the usual food of the tenderest age of childhood (Gesenius, Hengstenberg, etc.), or the food that is usually taken in the desert (Delitzsch). Now the former of these two meanings is excluded by the sentences that follow the phrase "he shall eat butter and honey." For in them the child is, on the one hand, represented as eating the assigned food up to the years of discretion, and, on the other, the land before whose two kings Achaz is in terror will before the same period of time be laid waste, so that only the food of the desert will remain (cf. Delitzsch, pp. 210 f.).

There are, however, two main difficulties against this explanation of the prophecy: 1. The Messiah will be born more than 700 years after the date of the prediction. His virginal conception and birth, and his poverty and humility cannot then be given as a sign to the contemporaries of Isaias. 2. According to the text Rasin and Phacee will leave Judea before the child shall attain his years of discretion; now this happened within two years after the prediction. Again, according to verse 22, Judea itself shall be devastated, so that "butter and honey shall every one eat that shall be left in the midst of the land." Emmanuel too shall share this fate, as appears from the connection of the prophecy. Now Judea's devastation by the Assyrians happened after they had laid waste the kingdoms of Syria and Samaria. Hence it seems that the promised Emmanuel must have been born immediately after the time of the prophecy.

Different answers have been given to both difficulties. Answers to the first exception: *a.* The sign must precede the event in confirmation of which it is given when there is question of a common miraculous sign; but in the case of a prophecy, when the one who utters the prediction is generally acknowledged as a prophet, it is not necessary that the fulfilment precede the event in confirmation of which it is given. Similar instances we find in 1. Kings x. 2-8; Ex. iii. 12; IV. Kings xix. 29; Is. xxxvii. 30. In the case of Isaias we may add the following consideration: It might well be that the

the height above." And Achaz said: "I will not ask, and I will

king and the people generally acknowledged the prophetic character of Isaias in religious matters, and in matters connected with the future Redeemer, but did not acknowledge the divine character of his political mission to Achaz. Since he, therefore, did not find faith in the latter among his contemporaries, he confirmed his divine mission by a Messianic prophecy. It is clear that such a sign needed not to be seen or verified by experience in order to have its full effect with those whom the prophet addressed, still, there are authors who refer us to the experience which the prophet's hearers were to have in limbo of the prophecy's fulfilment (Jo. viii. 56)

*b.* Drach follows St. Chrysostom (Lettres d'un Rabbin converti, 3e. lettre, pp. 30, 31) and Theodoret in explaining the sign as one that necessarily implies the thing signified. The two hostile kings, they say, were about to exterminate the house of David (Is. vii. 6), in order to make Tabeel king instead of Achaz. The prophet comes with the assurance that the enemies will so poorly succeed in their attempt that the house of David will even after seven hundred years give birth to the promised Messiah. But it may be observed *a.* that the two hostile kings did not necessarily wish to exterminate the whole house of David in order to accomplish their design, *β.* that the salvation of the house of David does not necessarily imply Achaz' deliverance from his two enemies at the juncture for which the prophet predicted it; *γ.* according to this explanation the prophet would have had to foretell in clear language the Messiah' descent from David's royal house. Though this may be gathered from Is. ix. and xi., it is not clearly stated in Is. vii.

*c.* A third answer to the difficulty has been offered by Hengstenberg. According to this author, with whom Corluy appears to agree (Spiel, i. p. 409), the prophet's argument is *a fortiori*, so that we may propose it in this manner. God will give to the house of David the very Emmanuel, the son of the virgin; therefore, he will not refuse it what is much less—liberation from its present enemies. A similar manner of reasoning we find in Rom. viii. 32; in point of fact, the prophet's inference was truly logical: the future Messiah was the source of all blessings for the whole human race, and therefore we find that both Isaias and Ezechiel console the people with similar reasonings under the most trying circumstances. But on the other hand, this explanation by far exceeds the obvious meaning of the passage, and should not be accepted without necessity. The first answer seems to be, after all, the most satisfactory.

The second difficulty finds a contradiction between the context of the prediction and its Messianic interpretation, because according to the latter the virgin's son must be born after seven centuries, while according to the former the virgin's son must be born in the immediate future. There is no need of repeating here the divers explanations of this difficulty which deny the Messianic character of the prediction, since they have been duly considered in the preceding paragraphs. We shall limit ourselves to a few explanations that may be admitted by Catholic theologians.

*a.* Rich. Simon, B. Lamy, Huftius, Moldenhauer, Trinius, etc.,

not tempt the Lord." And he said : " Hear ye therefore, O house

distinguish here, as in other prophecies, between the literal and the typical sense of the prediction. In the literal sense, Emmanuel is Isaias' son who was called Mahershalal-chashbaz (Is. viii. 3); the virgin is the prophetess whom Isaias had married when she was a virgin (Is. viii. 3). This explanation is based on the following reasons :  $\alpha$ . Almost immediately after the prediction of the boy's conception and birth, the prophet describes the conception and birth of Maher-Shalal, before whose attaining the years of discretion the land was freed from its two oppressors, as Isaias has foretold about Emmanuel (Is. viii. 1-3).  $\beta$ . In Is. viii. 18 the prophet explicitly appeals to his two sons, whom God had given him as a sign for Israel.  $\gamma$ . The fact that Isaias' son of whom he speaks viii. 1-3 is not called Emmanuel does not contradict the explanation, since Emmanuel signified rather the present help of God than the actual name of the child to be born ; this must occasion so much the less difficulty, since not even Jesus received actually all the names that had been given him in Is. ix. 6. According to this view the words " he shall eat butter and honey " mean only that Emmanuel will be nourished with the food usually given to children, until he will know how to refuse the evil and to choose the good.  $\delta$ . In accordance with the same view Emmanuel typically signifies the Messias, as the virgin mother is a type of the Blessed Virgin, conceiving and giving birth to her son without detriment to her virginity. The liberation of Judea is the type of the Messianic salvation from the yoke of sin and satan.

Still, there are various considerations apt to make us dissatisfied with this explanation.  $\alpha$ . In the first place, the type must properly represent its antitype, in that wherein it is a type. Now, a married woman, conceiving in the ordinary, natural manner, does not properly represent a virginal conception and a virginal motherhood. Nevertheless, St. Matthew testifies that Isaias' prophecy was fulfilled precisely in the virginal conception of Jesus Christ. Consequently, the prophetic passage cannot literally apply to a married woman, such as the wife of Isaias was. Nor can it be said that St. Matthew had no intention of insisting in his gospel on the virginal conception of Jesus, but that he merely insists on his being conceived of the Holy Ghost, and that he thus argued from the conception of Emmanuel, who too was conceived through the special mediatorship of God. For this exception is against the whole context of the Evangelist. St. Matthew tells us how the angel solved St. Joseph's doubt concerning the mysterious pregnancy of the Blessed Virgin. The revelation of her virginal conception alone could fully allay St. Joseph's anxiety regarding this matter. Besides all this, the Fathers insist repeatedly that Isaias' prophecy has been fulfilled by the virginal conception of the Son of God.

$\beta$ . Then, again, the son of Isaias by the prophetess cannot be the Emmanuel mentioned in Isaias vii. For it is highly improbable that one and the same child should have received, at the express wish of God, two entirely different symbolical names. Nor can the prophetess be the virgin mentioned in the prophecy ; for the view that Isaias married after the present prophecy a virgin with whom he

of David: is it a small thing for you to be grievous to men, that

had intercourse rests on nothing but a mere conjecture, which in itself is most improbable. And if Emmanuel's mother was identical with Maher-Shalal's mother, why should not Isaiah have said: "Behold, the prophetess shall conceive . . ." ? or what could have prevented his saying: "and I went to the virgin . . ." ? Besides, there seems to be no point of resemblance between Maher-Shalal, the son of Isaiah, and Emmanuel, born of the root of Jesse, inheriting the throne of David forever. Nor can Calmet maintain that Jesus' not being called Emmanuel favors his manner of interpretation. For Jesus does not on that account become equal to the son of Isaiah. Emmanuel, applied to the Messiah, shows what the Messiah is, while the same name applied to the son of the prophet only indicates the symbolical meaning of the child.

*b.* Drach (l. c.) and Marani (De divinitate Christi, p. 36) have therefore endeavored to solve the difficulty in a manner different from Calmet's answer. According to them the 15th verse alone is Messianic, while the boy of whom there is question in the following verse is Shear-Jasub, the son of the prophet. These authors admit that the prophet, after announcing the virginal conception and birth of Emmanuel, after predicting his eating butter and honey in order to show that he is a man like ourselves, suddenly changed his attitude, and pointing with his hand to Shear-Jasub uttered the prediction: Before that boy shall attain to the years of discretion, the land whose two kings thou fearest shall be vacated by its inhabitants.

They urge a number of reasons for their interpretation, which are answered without much difficulty: *α.* Unless this explanation is admitted, there is no reason why Isaiah should have been commanded to take Shear-Jasub with him to Achaz. But the very name of the boy was a sufficient reason for this command, since the name of both father and son served as a symbolic prophecy to the unhappy king. *β.* As to the assertion that the prophet should have used the word "child" and not "boy," had he referred in the 16th verse to the Emmanuel, it can claim only an apparent probability. Its fallacy becomes clear as soon as one reflects that Emmanuel at the age at which the prophet refers to him is no more a child. *γ.* The circumstance that Shear-Jasub too had been given to the prophet for a sign serves only to confirm what we said above; the child's mere presence was a sign to the king. *δ.* The last reason urged by these authors in favor of their explanation only shows the weakness of their position. For though prophets may and do make sudden transitions from subject to subject, still this peculiarity of theirs is limited to type and antitype. And even when they treat of matters so intimately related to each other as type and antitype are, the context commonly shows, at least, signs of the transition. In the present passage of Isaiah there is not only no sign of such a transition, but there is not even question of connected subjects; for it would be difficult to prove that Shear-Jasub is a type of Emmanuel. *ε.* Besides all this, the connection of the 16th verse with what precedes and follows is so close that it hardly admits such a sudden transition from Emmanuel to Shear-Jasub. In fact the 16th verse

you are grievous to my God also? Therefore the Lord himself begins with the causal particle "ki" (כִּי); so that it must contain the reason of the preceding statement. The language used by the prophet forbids the belief that he pointed out the boy of whom he spoke; for had he done so, he should have said: "hanna'ar hazzeh," and not merely "hanna'ar." Finally, in the 22d verse it appears that Emmanuel himself is in some way supposed to be present in the desolated territory, and to be among those who will have to eat butter and honey after the destruction of Achaz' kingdom. The suggested explanation would therefore leave the difficulty unanswered.

*c.* Vitringa (Comment. in Is. in h. l.; Observat. sacræ, l. v.) and Patrizi have suggested another solution of the difficulty. According to them there is no connection between vv. 15 and 22; the former tells us that Emmanuel will indeed eat butter and honey as a sign of his true humanity, but that his years of discretion constitute only an ideal term before which the predicted liberation will take place, since the terminus from which the years must be reckoned is not the real but the ideal birth of Emmanuel, i. e., the moment at which the prophecy is uttered. It is true that the prophet clearly distinguishes the stated two periods both in the life of Achaz and in that of Emmanuel. The difficulty of the prophecy consists precisely in the prophet's referring the distance between the two terms in both cases to the same period of time, so that the term from which the time up to Achaz' delivery must be reckoned coincides with the conception and birth of Emmanuel, while the time of the actual delivery of Achaz precedes Emmanuel's age of discretion. Now this point is not sufficiently kept in view in the solution offered by the authors mentioned before. Besides, their assumption that vv. 15 and 22 are not connected contradicts the testimony of the text itself.

*d.* Bossuet (Explication de la prophétie d'Isaie, vii. 14) proposes another solution of the question. According to him the prophet mingles type with antitype in the passage, or rather he mixes the part which refers literally to the Messiah with that which refers to him only typically. Literally, the Messiah is referred to only in the words: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel." Everything else refers literally to Isaias' son Maher-Shalal, who is the type of the Messiah. The transition from antitype to type is evident from the divine attributes which are predicated of the former, and the human characteristics attributed to the latter. But there are certain considerations which render Bossuet's explanation very improbable.  $\alpha$ . First, it is hard to find out any similitude between Maher-Shalal and Emmanuel in those precise points with regard to which the former must be the type of the latter. We need not repeat what we have said about the impossibility of the virginal conception and birth of Emmanuel being typically represented by the conception and birth of Maher-Shalal.  $\beta$ . Besides, it seems highly improbable that Isaias' son should be called by two different names in the same passage; the one applying to him in his historical bearing, the other representing him in his typical capacity.

*e.* Hengstenberg in his Christology, Knabenbauer in his Commem-

shall give you a sign. <sup>4</sup> Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear

tary on the present passage, and Corluy (*Spicil.* i. p. 418) prefer another solution of the difficulty. *α.* According to these authors, the prophet uses in the present passage the figure of vision; he sees in his prophetic vision Emmanuel's conception and birth as happening there and then. The years of Aclaz' delivery from his enemies are, therefore, rightly reckoned from the moment at which the prediction is uttered or from the birth of Emmanuel; Emmanuel is rightly represented as eating butter and honey with his afflicted fellow citizens; the delivery, finally, takes place before Emmanuel attains to the use of his reason. *β.* Such a vivid description we meet in *Is.* ix. 6, where the prophet represents the Emmanuel as already born; the manner of thus identifying the Messiah with the actual condition of his people is perfectly legitimate, since all the salvation of Israel was derived from the merits of the Messiah. *γ.* As to the exception which may be urged against this explanation, that such a figure could not have been understood by Aclaz and his contemporaries, it must be remembered that the Israelites were by other prophecies, uttered about the same time and by the same prophet, clearly forewarned that the Messianic salvation would come only after a very long space of time. In chapter xi., e.g., there is question of the root giving birth to the promised Redeemer, and in the same chapter (v. 12) the prophet distinctly announces that Israel and Juda will have to suffer dispersion and national ruin before the period of the Messiah.

<sup>4</sup> **Behold a virgin.** Explanations: 1. The virgin is no definite person at all; according to Duhm, mother and son are merely representative ideas; according to Reuss the virgin is "la femme comme telle;" according to Henry Hammond (1653), pregnancy, birth, and maturity are in their primary sense only parabolical facts, subservient to the chronological measurement of time, while Lowth, Koppe, Gratz, I. D. Michaelis, Eichhorn, Paulus, Stachelin, Hensler, Ammon, etc., maintain that the prophet's words are merely conditional, meaning that if a virgin were to conceive now, and bring forth a child, he would attain the use of reason only after the land would be freed from its two powerful enemies. But all this contradicts the positive statement of the prophet, which admits no condition. It is also opposed to *Is.* viii. 8, which demands that the virgin applies to a definite person.

2. The house of David is the virgin, and her son is a future new Israel as it is represented in *Is.* liv. 4-7 (Hofmann, Ebrard, Köhler, Weir); or the congregation of the pious and of the God-fearing in Israel at the time of Aclaz is the virgin who will bring about a future reformation of the nation (Schultz), or the Church is the virgin who will bring forth a countless number of children to God and his Redeemer (Hervéus; the author proposes this only as a secondary and mystical meaning of the prophecy, after he has explained it literally of the Messiah). But not to mention other inconveniences, this explanation is opposed to *Is.* viii. 8, 10; ix. 6, and also to the common figurative manner of the prophet's address to the people, which he never calls simply "virgin."

3. The prophet must, therefore, speak of a definite physical person

a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel. He shall eat

in the present passage. Some of the ancient Jewish commentators who are mentioned by the Fathers (Justin. cont. Tryph. nn. 66, 68, 71, 77; Cyr., Proc., Jerome) understood the word "virgin" as applying to Achaz' wife, the mother of Ezechias, whom they identified with Emmanuel. This view is clearly refuted by Driver (Isaias, p. 40). According to IV. Kings xvi. 2, Achaz on ascending the throne was twenty years old, and according to IV. Kings xviii. 2, Ezechias was twenty-five years old on his ascending the throne. Now, according to III. Kings xvi. 2, Achaz reigned sixteen years, and the present prophecy was uttered in the beginning of his reign. Ezechias was, therefore, nine years old at the time when Isaias uttered the prophecy. If it be said that according to this calculation Achaz died at the age of thirty-six, and that he therefore was only eleven years older than Ezechias, who ascended the throne at the age of twenty-five, we answer that according to the LXX. and the Pesh., Achaz was twenty-five on ascending the throne, so that he died at the age of forty-one, and became father of Ezechias at the age of sixteen. But this does not affect the fact that Ezechias was several years old when Isaias announced the divine sign to the godless Achaz.

4. Some of the later Jewish commentators, as Abarbanel and Kimchi, are of opinion that the virgin refers to another wife of Achaz, not to the mother of Ezechias, and that Emmanuel is a son of Achaz who is unknown in history. But since this view is gratuitously asserted, it may be denied without an express statement of the reasons for the denial. Besides, it is extremely improbable that a common child, who was to have no special natural or supernatural prerogatives, should be the subject of Is. viii. 8, 10; ix. 6, etc.

5. Another class of authors holds that the virgin of the prophecy is the wife of Isaias, either the mother of Shear-Jasub, or a younger wife, newly married to the prophet, who became the mother of Maher-Shalal. The latter is, according to this view, the Emmanuel of the prophecy (Aben-Ezra, Jarchi, Faustus Socinus, Crell, Grotius, von Wolzogen, Faber, Pflüschke, Gesenius, Hitzig, Hendewerk, Knobel, Maurer, Olshausen, Diestel, etc.). It may be noted that certain Catholic authors have given assent to this opinion, applying, however, only the literal sense of virgin and Emmanuel to the prophet's wife and son, while they understand both in their typical meaning of the Messiah and his virgin mother (cf. St. Jerome's opinion about those who adhere to this view).  $\alpha$ . But how can we conceive Isaias addressing his own son as the Lord of the laud of Juda, and how can he represent his son as the cause of Israel's liberation from its enemies (Is. viii. 8, 10)?  $\beta$ . Again, the hypothesis that the prophecy refers to a wife of Isaias recently married to him is nothing but a makeshift, resting on no single positive argument, while the assumption that Isaias indicated by "virgin" the mother of Shear-Jasub contradicts the very name given to her. For whatever meaning may be assigned to the Hebrew word "'almah," it can surely not be applied to a married woman who has had children.

6. Castalio, Isenbiehl (formerly), Bauer, Cube, Steudel, Umbreit (formerly), and H. Schultz maintain that the prophet addressed his words

butter and honey, that he may know to refuse the evil, and to

to a virgin who happened to be present at the time of the prophecy. Pointing to her, Isaias predicted that she should conceive and bear a son, and that the country should be freed from its enemies before her son would reach the age of discretion. *a.* It has already been shown that the sign thus offered can in no way satisfy the context of the prophecy. *β.* Not to mention that the authors who hold this view do not give any proof, they contradict what the prophet says concerning the Emmanuel in viii. 8, 10; for it is incredible that the lord of Judea and the liberator of his native country should have remained as unknown to history as is the virgin's son of whom Isaias is supposed to prophesy in the present passage.

7. If this be true of the explanation according to which any immaculate virgin and her son are the subjects of the prophet's prediction, what are we to think of Nilgelsbach's opinion, which contends that a sinful woman and a child born of sinful intercourse are the virgin and the Emmanuel of whom Isaias speaks? The virgin is a daughter of Achaz, who has conceived secretly, and whose sin is as yet unknown to her father. Isaias reveals her shame to her father, and thus offers him a divine sign of his supernatural mission and of God's faithfulness to his promises. The incongruity of this explanation is so clear that it needs no further refutation.

8. Finally, the commonly received opinion of Catholics maintains that the "virgin" in Isaias' prophecy refers to the Blessed Virgin in its literal sense, and that Emmanuel refers in its literal meaning to Jesus Christ. The text of the prophecy, its context, and its traditional interpretation render this explanation certain beyond dispute.

*a.* The text of the passage: In the text we shall first consider the word "virgin," Heb. "'almah"; secondly, we shall say a word about the clause in which the word "virgin" occurs. 1. As to "'almah," whatever etymological derivation we give for the word (אַלְמָה, אֲלֻמָּה, אֲלֻמָּה), in any case it may signify a chaste virgin, so far as its derivation is concerned. Now the Scriptural *usage* of the word determines that, in point of fact, "'almah" does mean "virgin." For it occurs only six times in the Old Testament outside of the present passage. in Gen. xxiv. 43 it is applied to Rebecen, who is expressly called a virgin who had not known man (Gen. xxiv. 16); Ex. ii. 8 applies 'almah to the sister of Moses, who was only a little girl; Ps. lxxvii. (lxxviii.) 26 reads "princes went before joined with singers, in the midst of young damsels playing on timbrels." Now we infer from Jer. xxxi. 4; Judges xi. 34; Ex. xv. 20 that the damsels employed in this office were commonly virgins. Cant. i. 3 uses the word of virgins who love their royal spouse where no meaning but that of pure virgins can be thought of. Cant. vi. 8 (Vagl. 7) has the passage: "There are three score queens, and four score concubines, and young maidens without number." Here again, it is clear that the young maidens indicated in the Hebrew text by the plural of 'almah must be pure virgins, since they are distinguished from queens on the one hand, and from concubines on the other. The sixth passage in which "'almah" occurs offers greater difficulties. It reads: "Three things are hard to me, and the fourth I am utterly ignorant of: the way

choose the good. For before the child know to refuse the evil,

of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent upon a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea, and the way of a man in youth" (Prov. xxx. 18, 19). The word rendered "youth" reads in the Hebrew text "'almah," so that we should read "the way of a man in a virgin." Only one Hebrew codex has the reading "'almuth" that is required by the present English, Latin, Septuagint, and Syriac rendering "youth;" all the other codices and old versions require the rendering "virgin."

A number of explanations of this difficult passage have been offered, which we can only enumerate without fully investigating any one of them.

*α.* The "virgin" spoken of is a prostitute, so that the whole passage means: as there is no sign left of the eagle's way in the air, of the serpent's path on the rock, and of the ship's course in the waters of the sea, so there is no certain sign of a man's intercourse with a prostitute. 1. But in the first place, the subsequent pregnancy would serve as such a sign. 2. Again, this meaning does not agree with the verse which immediately follows the passage: "Such is also the way of an adulterous woman, who eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith: I have done no evil." For what imaginable "way" of the adulterous woman can thus be compared with the way of the eagle, the serpent, the ship, and the man?

*β.* A second explanation admits that "'almah" in the passage may mean a "virgin" who is immaculate before her intercourse with man. This view supposes that man's way in the virgin is hidden because it cannot be discovered on the man himself. 1. But in the first place, this explanation is against the analogy of the preceding three unknown ways: they are called unknown, not because they cannot be detected on the eagle, or the ship, or the serpent, but because they cannot be discovered in the air, in the sea, and on the rock. In the same manner, then, must the fourth way be undiscoverable on the virgin. 2. Besides, the same argument may be urged against this explanation which we urged against the first solution, and which was taken from the impossibility of finding an analogous "way" of the adulterous woman.

*γ.* Others again have thought of explaining the passage in a metaphorical sense; the Wise Man says, according to this view: I do not know how the mighty eagle can sail through the thin air; I do not know how the serpent without feet can glide over the solid rock; I do not know how the bulky ship can be upheld in the liquid waters of the ocean; I do not know how the libertine can be impelled by his impure passion to corrupt the immaculate virgin; and in the same manner the deceitful way of the adulterous woman is a mystery to me. It is clear that according to this explanation all the necessary conditions of both text and context are fully satisfied.

*δ.* There is another explanation which seems more satisfactory to some scholars, because it does not appeal to a metaphorical meaning of the word "way." The 'almah is supposed to be a chaste virgin,—at least in the estimation of men,—and the writer insists on the fact that even in a virgin there is no certain sign of her intercourse with

and to choose the good, the land which thou abhorrest shall be

man. As, therefore, an adulterous woman may eat and wipe her mouth and say, "I have done no evil," so may a reputed virgin, even after her sin, be without any outward signs of her violated virginity (cf. Kimb. p. 170).

c. We hardly need to state all the other explanations that have been attempted by divers authors: Rohling, e.g., proffers the view that the writer merely warns virgins against illicit intercourse, since they alone have to bear the punishment and the shame, while their accomplices retain no trace of the sin; Hengstenberg explains the "way" of man in the virgin as meaning the curious manner in which a virgin often conceives a passion for a man without any assignable reasonable cause; Lapidé mentions the opinion of some that the writer addresses a warning to parents to keep their daughters well guarded from all attempts against their virginity, since there is no external sign to show them whether a fault has been committed.

It follows from these explanations that in order to satisfy both text and context of the difficult passage, "'almah" must signify a pure virgin—a virgin who is pure, at least, in the opinion of men. And combining this result with the result of our investigation of the other passages in which "'almah" occurs, we must conclude that the word commonly means a pure and undefiled virgin.

This conclusion is confirmed by the LXX. version, in which 'almah is four times rendered *παρθένος*, or maid (Ex. ii. 8; Ps. lxxvii. (lxxviii.) 26; Cant. i. 3; vi. 7), once *νεοτῆς* (Prov. xxx. 19), but in the present passage *παρθένος*, or virgin. There must, then, have been a special reason, be it tradition or the current explanation of the text, which induced those writers to adopt this version. It is not surprising that Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion relinquished the rendering *παρθένος*, because at their time the Christians already began to use the text in their controversial writings (cf. Iren. iii. 24; Justin, Tryph. 71).

2. It must further be noted that 'almah in the Hebrew text has the definite article, and that it is followed by two participles, so that we must render literally: "Behold, the virgin is pregnant, and is bringing forth a son, and his name she shall call Emmanuel." If we then insist on the literal meaning of the prophecy, the virgin, though she is virgin, is pregnant and bringing forth her son, so that she is both virgin and mother. It appears from the following verb that the prophet intended his words to be explained in this literal sense, for he does not say "and she is calling his name Emmanuel" but he continues, "and she shall call his name." The prophecy in its literal meaning has, therefore, not been verified in any one except in the Blessed Virgin, so that she alone is literally spoken of by Isaiah. Draeh (De Harmonie entre l'Église et la Synagogue, Paris, 1844, t. ii. pp. 237 ff.) has shown that it is probably owing to Isaiah's prophecy concerning the virgin mother that virginity has been held in such high esteem among most nations of even pagan antiquity.

b. The context of this passage too requires that it be applied to the Blessed Virgin in its literal sense. For, according to the context, the

forsaken of the face of her two kings. The Lord shall bring upon thee and upon thy people, and upon the house of thy father, days that have not come since the time of the separation of Ephraim from Juda, with the king of the Assyrians.”