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A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

Isaiah xliii. 22=25.

BY THE REVEREND PREBENDARY MELVILLE SCOTT, D.D., STAFFORD.

But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob ;
 Yea, thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.
 Thou bringest me not the small cattle of thy burnt-offerings,
 And with thy sacrifices dost thou not honour me.
 (But) I have not caused thee to serve with offerings,
 And I have not wearied thee with incense.
 Thou boughtest me not sweet smelling boughs with silver,
 And with the fat of thy sacrifices didst thou not satiate me.
 Ah, it was to make me serve with thy sins ;
 It was to weary me with thine iniquities.
 Yet I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions, for my own sake,
 And I will not keep thy sins in remembrance.

I HAVE ventured to give my own rendering of this important passage in order that it may be more easily compared with the emended rendering to be given later, and that the mind of my readers may be concentrated upon the one change which I am to advocate, and thus be better able to weigh the reasons for or against that emendation.

But what I have first to do is to point out a feature of the text as it now stands which has not, I think, been hitherto appreciated.

In the first place, the view of the importance of material sacrifices as here apparently given is quite unworthy of a prophet bearing, or writing under, the name of Isaiah. Let a comparison be made between this passage and Is 1¹⁰⁻¹⁸, and the difference of attitude will be manifest. Moreover, it would seem from a reference to v.¹⁴ that the earlier chapter was in the prophet's mind :

Your appointed feasts my soul hateth ;
 They are a trouble unto me,
 I am weary to bear them.

There is also a resemblance too close to be fortuitous between v.¹⁸ of the earlier chapter :

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord,
 and v.²⁶ of the present chapter :

Put me in remembrance ; let us plead together.

These resemblances make it all the more strange that the view of sacrifice given there should be so different from that given here.

But is the view really different ? If v.^{23b} stood

alone it would be clear that the view of sacrifice was identically the same in both passages :

I have not caused thee to serve with offerings,
 And I have not wearied thee with incense.

But there is a further consideration. The references made to particular sacrifices in the present passage are all capable of a highly depreciatory, and even of a bitterly sarcastic sense.

This must now be shown in detail :

The small cattle of thy sacrifices—

if the reading be right—is not so depreciatory as it sounds, for the word rendered 'small cattle' means sheep or goats—but as elsewhere it is 'thy sacrifices,' not 'my sacrifices.'

'Honour me' should better be rendered 'burden me.'

The line which I have rendered :

Thou boughtest me not sweet smelling boughs with silver,

seems certainly sarcastic. The play on words which I have tried to indicate by *boughtest* and *boughs*, and the reminder that these offerings were merely a matter of purchase, seems undeniably to suggest a hostile view.

Still more is this so with :

With the fat of thy sacrifices didst thou not satiate me.

The references to fat are obviously sarcastic in 1 S 15²², and in Is 1¹¹, 'I am full of the fat of fed beasts.' This reference is very significant, since, as shown above, this very chapter seems to have been in the mind of the writer. In Dt 32³⁸ it is said of heathen gods—'They did eat the fat of their sacrifices.'

Surely this last reference makes it clear that it would have been utterly impossible for Isaiah to speak of his exalted Deity as complaining that his worshippers had not satiated Him with the fat of their sacrifices. Even the word 'satiated' is capable of, and indeed requires, a contemptuous sense. It is used elsewhere of anything excessive, e.g. intoxication, and I have ventured to render it 'drench.'

Now it is passing strange that all these references to sacrifices should by a mere chance be capable of, and indeed invite, a contemptuous rendering, if it had not been the original intention of the writer to make use of them in that sense. He knew from Is 1 that one of them had been so used in a scathing invective against unspiritual sacrifice. I find it therefore impossible not to conclude that the intention is derogatory of sacrifice.

It is now necessary to pursue another line of argument, drawn from the passage as a whole. It seems to me, after repeated study of it, that it does not hold together. The complaint that sacrifices have not been brought is difficult to reconcile with the couplet :

I have not caused thee to serve with offerings,
And I have not wearied thee with incense,

though it may, of course, be interpreted that the demands of God for sacrifice had not been excessive. This interpretation gives a sense incredibly weak. It does not explain the contrast inherent in the adverb אֵינִי , nor how the withholding of sacrifice could be said to be a weariness to God, whereas the offering of sacrifice might well be this. Last of all, it does not give any ground in reason for the verse which follows :

I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions
for my own sake,
And I will not keep thy sins in remembrance.

For this reason, recent commentators have omitted this verse, though without suggesting any reason for its appearance in the text.

It has now been sufficiently shown by many converging proofs that the passage cannot stand. My suggestion is simple, viz. that the word 'not' was added in v.²³, because it seemed to be required by the previous verse, and that this having been done once with apparent success, three more 'nots' were afterwards added.

The passage will now appear as follows :

But thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob ;
Yea, thou hast been weary of me, O Israel.
Thou broughtest me the small cattle of thy burnt-offerings,
And with thy sacrifices hast thou burdened me.
(But) I did not cause thee to serve with offerings,
And I did not weary thee with incense.
Thou boughtest me sweet smelling boughs with silver,
With the fat of thy sacrifices didst thou drench me.

Ah, it was to make me serve with thy sins ;
It was to weary me with thine iniquities.
(Yet) I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for my own sake,
And I will not keep thy sins in remembrance.

The contrast throughout is between the essential service which Israel has withheld and the lesser services which God only regards as a weariness. God has not wearied Israel by imposing upon them an elaborate ritual, but Israel has wearied Him by giving Him what He had not asked, and by withholding what He really desired. It may be objected that this emendation presupposes a wilful alteration of the text in the supposed interests of orthodoxy. This is to think too hardly of the Scribes. The insertion of the first 'not' removed what must have seemed a serious difficulty. Indeed, the very fact that this insertion, if it be an insertion, has passed so long undetected is some justification of the scribes in their insertion of the first 'not,' the later insertions of the same word being merely consequential. Now at length the passage stands in its original form, and is perhaps the noblest of all the prophetic assertions of the spirituality of religion. Now at length the concluding verse has its intended force. God does not need sacrifices offered with the object of conciliating Him, for He is ready to forgive 'for His own sake,' so soon as the nation is ready to renounce sin.

In spite of the arguments already brought forward, some objection may be made against what is undoubtedly a bold emendation. Thus I have reserved my final argument for my conclusion.

In Jer 6²⁰ we read as follows :

To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba,
And the sweet cane from a far country ?
Your burnt-offerings are not acceptable,
Nor your sacrifices pleasing unto me.

The four words here used for sacrifices—incense, cane, burnt-offerings, and sacrifices—all occur in this one passage of Isaiah, and *cane* does not occur in this sense in any other prophet. I submit that this amounts to a proof that Isaiah was actually quoting from Jeremiah ; and further, that if so, it is impossible to suppose that he could have quoted a passage derogatory to sacrifice, if he was insisting upon the necessity of sacrifice. This seems a conclusive proof that the four 'nots' were a later addition to his text.