that he thought his call to prophesy had ended and that he was at liberty to take up a new line of action. He therefore organized his followers into a group which is known to historians as the "prophetic party."

163. What was the prophetic party?

Naturally, the prophet had drawn to himself a number of like-minded people who shared his confidence in Yahweh. To these he expounded his views (8:16) and taught his principles (chapter 8). Long after his death they carried on, eventually becoming the nucleus around which the spiritual life of the nation rallied for self-preservation.

164. What about the movement?

There is no evidence on the basis of which we can assert anything more than that it was a body of opinion which was opposed to the prevailing policy of the government. In no nation of antiquity had there been accorded so much freedom of speech and movement to critics of the government, in spite of the fact that repressive measures were often used (e.g., Amos). Prophets had been frank and candid. It was in such an atmosphere that the idea of the "opposition party" began, and in it was much of the spirit of Protestantism.

165. How could it be called Protestant?

The prophetic party proceeded on the principle that individuals had the right to hold an opinion differing from that of the party in power. Holding such an opinion, they believed they had the right to organize for the sake of propagating their idea by seeking, through peaceable means, to establish it in the thinking of the nation. In this we have all the essentials of Protestantism—the right of individual opinion, and the independence of the individual believer.

166. Did the prophetic party prosper?

As we proceed in our study of the Old Testament we will discover that in time it exercised a very significant influence and that it was responsible for some extremely important religious developments. It would be a mistake, of course, to think that it was organized as a modern church, with officers, constitution, treasury, and meeting place. It was, rather, a group of congenial spirits whose ideas were more or less similar and who worked together for a common end.

167. Was Isaiah the leader?

There is no question about the fact that he initiated the movement; but just how far he can be said to have taken active leadership it is impossible to state, though that would be a natural inference. From the fact that a silent period ensues, following this experience, it seems probable that he concluded that his prophetic career was at an end and retired at least temporarily from the public scene. It would have been easy for

him to believe that he had fulfilled his mission and ended his work. But the political situation in the East, always restless and agitated, did not allow him much respite. Soon he was thrust back into the scene again.

168. What happened to stir him up?

The Assyrian invasion of 732 B.C. was only the precursor of other expeditions; and in 721 B.C. the city of Samaria, after a brave resistance of three years, was finally captured and 27,290 leading citizens were carried off into captivity. It is a very strange but interesting fact that, so far as we can discover, we have no word from Isaiah concerning this tremendous event, for the fall of Samaria could not fail to shake Judah to her foundations. It is true, of course, that some scholars profess to find references to this tragic event in some of Isaiah's sermons, but such are debatable at best. Certainly there is nothing that can be positively identified as coming from that period.

169. What happened in Judah after Israel's fall?

When Ahaz sent his messengers to Assyria pleading for help, he committed his nation to a term of vassalage which continued, with exceptions of very short intervals, for one hundred and fifty years. During that time the land was thoroughly impoverished and the people suffered severely.

Ahaz died in 725 B.C., only a few years before the fall of Samaria, and was succeeded on the throne by his son, Hezekiah. The young king was patriotic, ambitious, and resentful under the Assyrian yoke bequeathed to him by his father. But the terrible havoc worked on Syria and Israel prevented him from taking any action, and year after year he paid the tribute with such grace as he could summon for the disagreeable task. Some of the other kinglets of Palestine were not so cautious.

170. What did other kings propose?

In 720 B.C., just a year after the fall of Samaria, rebellion broke out among some of the other provinces, supported by an Egyptian army. In this case some few remaining Israelite warriors joined, in stubborn determination to avenge the destruction of their great capital and happy land. But Sargon, the new king of Assyria, struck back savagely and the revolt failed. In 713 B.C. an upstart seized the throne of Ashdod, one of the small city-states near the Mediterranean, and undertook to arouse the other small states to resist Assyrian aggression. The rebel leader was quickly overpowered and the effort failed. To the credit of Hezekiah let it be said that he held aloof from this abortive effort. But the possibility of involvement in the uprising stirred Isaiah to speak out of his retirement, and as a warning against further participation in war the prophet did one of the most daring and spectacular things of his whole life.