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## EZEKIEL : AN IDEAL BIOGRAPHY.

### VI.

THE section on which we now enter (Chap. xxiv.) brings us to the culminating sorrow of Ezekiel's personal, though, it may be, not of his prophetic, life. In the ninth year of his exile, in the tenth month and the tenth day of the month (he particularizes the date as one which was indelibly imprinted on his memory), the word of the Lord came unto him. And he knew that on that very day the king of Babylon was gathering his forces for a final attack upon Jerusalem. The vision of the boiling caldron which had been the starting-point of his master's prophetic work (Jer. i. 13) came before him in all its terrible distinctness. He had to utter his woe against the bloody city whose scum and filthiness—the rapine and oppression and cruelty of which her rulers had been guilty—were in the midst of her. And the pile for the fire was to be made great, and the wood heaped up and the fire kindled, till the very brass of the vessel should be molten. In no other way than this could the work of purification be accomplished. Wrath must do its strange and terrible work before the love of Jehovah could find room for once more manifesting itself as in the days of old (Ezek. xxiv. 1-14).

And with this there came a grief which at any other time would have seemed the heaviest blow that could have fallen on him, but which was now almost a light thing in comparison with the great desolation that was to come upon the Holy City. The "desire of his eyes" was taken from him at a stroke. The companionship of years came to an end. And yet in that hour of sorrow he was told that

he was neither to mourn nor weep. He was to "forbear to cry, and to make no mourning for the dead." Not with his head bared and ashes sprinkled on it after the manner of mourners, not with bare feet and covered lips, not taking himself or inviting others to the usual funeral meal,<sup>1</sup> but going on, as usual, in the attire and with the habits of his daily life, he was to appear among men, when they knew that his wife was lying dead in the house,<sup>2</sup> as though nothing had happened out of the common. It was no wonder that the neighbours, who knew how he had loved the wife to whose memory he seemed thus indifferent, should ask the question "Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us, that thou doest so?" (Ezek. xxiv. 19). And then came the answer which explained it [all: A greater than any private sorrow was hanging over them all. The sanctuary of Jehovah was to be laid waste, and the sons and the daughters whom they had left in the Holy City were to be cut off, and then they too would find that all personal affliction would be swallowed up in the misery of that national disaster; and they should mourn, one to another, not for the loved ones whom they had lost, but for the iniquity which had contributed to the desolation of Jerusalem (Ezek. xxiv. 15-27).<sup>3</sup>

The sections that follow are connected rather with Ezekiel's work as a prophet uttering the judgments of Jehovah against the nations that had exulted in the downfall of Jerusalem than with his personal history; but they

<sup>1</sup> The "bread of men," *i.e.* such as men sent to the house of the mourner in token of their sympathy (Deut. xxvi. 14; Hos. ix. 4; Jer. xvi. 7).

<sup>2</sup> Hengstenberg's view that the prophet's wife did not die, that it is doubtful whether he ever had one, that the whole narrative lies in the region of allegory or vision, may be noted as an instance of the fantastic arbitrariness of commentators. It has its parallel, however, in those who adopt a like interpretation of the Gomer-history of the first three chapters of Hosea.

<sup>3</sup> I may refer for an illustration of this episode in the prophet's life to the poem of "Ezekiel," by B. M., in which the whole story is told with great dramatic power.

shew, at least, something of the inner workings of his mind. The judgments that fell upon the Holy City he had been taught to bear in silence. But the malignant joy of the enemies of his people roused him to a keen and burning indignation, and this was allowed to find utterance as in a word of Jehovah (Ezek. xxv.). Ammon and Moab, and Edom and Philistia, had all taken their part in the great chorus of exultation, and for each of them accordingly Ezekiel has a word of judgment. He echoes the language of the Psalmist of the Exile against the children of Edom who said of Jerusalem, "Down with it, down with it, even to the ground" (Ps. cxxxvii. 7).

Nearly two years passed away, of which we have no record in Ezekiel's work, and then two of the great world-powers of the time come into a fresh prominence in his prophetic visions as they had done in the history of the period. The defeat of Pharaoh Necho at Carchemish (B.C. 604) had been followed by his retreat to Egypt, and he gave himself to the two great enterprizes which have made his name memorable, the attempted construction of a canal from the Red Sea to the Nile, and the circumnavigation of Africa by a fleet of Phœnician ships (Herod., ii. 158, iv. 42). He was succeeded in B.C. 596 by his son, Psammitichus II., and he in his turn (in B.C. 590) by Hophra (the Apries of Herodotus, and the Uah-prahet of the Egyptian monuments). It was to him that Zedekiah had turned in the hope of finding an alliance that would enable him to resist the Chaldæans. The confederacy was joined by Ethbaal III., king of Tyre. Nebuchadnezzar had to encounter the whole force of this triple alliance, and did not shrink from the conflict. He again laid siege to Jerusalem. His armies marched into the Delta and laid it waste. Tyre proved the most formidable of the three confederates. It stood out alone in its resistance for thirteen years, and when driven from the mainland, its people took refuge in their island fortress, and

it was not till B.C. 574 that Nebuchadnezzar, who had come in person from Babylon to conduct the attack, succeeded in carrying it by storm, and gave it over to be plundered by his army.

It was in the early stage of this conflict that Ezekiel wrote the six chapters, of which three (xxvi.-xxviii.) deal specially with Tyre, and three (xxix.-xxxi.) with Egypt. To him, as to his master Jeremiah, the end was certain. Not all the wealth and glory of Tyre, not all its wide-spread commerce, which he describes in Chapter xxvii. with unexampled fulness, stretching west to Chittim (Cyprus) and Tarshish (Spain) and Javan (Greece), and north to Tubal and Meshech (Scythia), and east to Damascus and Assyria, and south to Egypt, and Lud, and Phut (Ezek. xxvii.), should avail to secure her from destruction. The prophet writes as one who had seen, if not with his bodily eyes, yet in mental vision, the stir of the rejoicing city. To him that exultation in ships and money and men, that defiance of the chances of fortune or the chastisements of Jehovah, was nothing less than an idolatrous self-apotheosis: "Thou saidst, I am a god, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas" (Ezek. xxviii. 2); and therefore with a stern and terrible irony he paints the imagined glory of which she boasted and her coming downfall. In words which remind us in part of Isaiah's description of the king of Babylon, as Lucifer, the light-bearer, the son of the morning, who sought to ascend the very throne of God (Isa. xiv. 12-15), he addresses the king of Tyre as "one who had set his heart as the heart of God," who deemed himself to be "full of wisdom and perfect in beauty." In his own esteem he had been in "Eden, the garden of God," the region of ideal glory and greatness (comp. Ezek. xxxi. 8); he had dwelt as in a city of gold and gems, the description of which seems almost to anticipate that of the New Jerusalem in Revelation xxi. 18-21. From the day of his accession to the

throne, which, after the analogy of Psalm ii. 7, is described as a birth or a creation, he had surrounded himself with the "tabrets and pipes," the minstrels and dancers, which were the delight of the Phœnician kings.<sup>1</sup> In words eminently characteristic of the priest-prophet, Ezekiel speaks of the prince who claimed an all but Divine glory, as being, like the cherub which with its out-spread wings covered the mercy seat, a cherub which had been anointed as reigning by the grace of God. To him the rock-citadel over which he ruled was as "the holy mountain of God," and he felt as secure in it as though he had, in very deed, a wall of "stones of fire" on the right hand and on the left. In his own sight (the irony waxes more intense at every step) he had been "perfect" from the day of his creation, *i.e.* of his accession—or, perhaps, taking the existing king as the representative of his house, from the date of the foundation of the dynasty—till iniquity was found as the result of an unrighteous traffic, supported, as in the slave trade of which Tyre was the chief agent (Ezek. xxvii. 13; Amos i. 9), by violence and fraud, and therefore the judgment of God should fall upon his kingdom, and it should be utterly destroyed. The fire should devour it. All that knew it in its greatness should be astonished. It should be a bye-word and a terror, and it should cease to be (Ezek. xxviii. 1-19). Questions have been raised as to the time and manner in which this prediction was fulfilled. Josephus relates, on the authority of the Phœnician history of Philostratus, that Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Tyre, then under the rule of Ethbaal, for thirteen years, but says nothing of its capture

<sup>1</sup> Hävernîck cites a passage from Athenæus (xii. 8, p. 581) which throws light on this part of the description. Strato, the king of Zidon, he says, "with flute-girls, and female harpers and players on the *cithara* made preparations for the festivities, and sent for a large number of . . . singing girls from Ionia and from all parts of Greece, with singers and dancers." With this we may compare the address to Tyre in Isaiah xxiii. 16, "Take a harp, go about the city, . . . make sweet melody, sing many songs."

(*Ant.*, X. ii. 1); and it has been inferred from Ezekiel xxix. 17-20, which also describes a siege of protracted severity and much suffering to the besiegers, but speaks of it as bringing no adequate reward for the labour spent on it, that the city was not conquered, but retained its independence, and capitulated on more or less honourable terms. It has to be noted, however, that in that passage the prophet represents the Chaldaean king as receiving payment at the hands of Jehovah for the work he had done, and finding that payment in the riches of Egypt, and it is at least a natural inference from this that he had accomplished what he had been sent to do, and had inflicted a severe blow on the haughty arrogance of the great commercial city.<sup>1</sup> Jerome (*in loc.*) gives an explanation of the passage which, though not confirmed by any independent historical authority, is probable enough in itself, *sc.* that the Tyrians being attacked from the mainland, defended themselves in their island citadel, and when they found that the operations of the besiegers in forming a road of heaped-up masses of rock from the shore to the island were successful, made their escape to sea with all their treasures, so that there was no plunder to reward the invaders; and that the promise of the spoil of Egypt was given as by way of compensation for this disappointment. Here, however, as in other cases, such, *e.g.* as those of Edom and Babylon, the work of destruction was gradual and not catastrophic. In the time of Alexander the Great, Tyre was again a flourishing royal city, so strongly fortified that it held out against him for a seven months' siege (Diod. Sic., xvii. 40; Arrian, *Alex.*, ii. 17). It appears in Acts xxi. 3 as still populous, and the seat of a Christian Church, which developed later on into the see of an archbishop. We trace it under the rule of the

<sup>1</sup> So Josephus (*c. Apion*, i. 19) speaks, on the authority of Berosus, of Nebuchadnezzar's having conquered Phœnicia, and of his carrying off Phœnician captives to Babylon.

Saracens from A.D. 636 to A.D. 1125. Its real ruin began when it passed, in A.D. 1291, without a struggle, under the hands of the Egyptian Sultan, El Ashraf, after his capture of Acre. When it again came into the hands of the Saracens its fortifications were demolished. The mound which Alexander had constructed became a permanent causeway, and the island city became a peninsula. It is now, for the most part, in ruins, which spread to a distance of half a league from the gates of the present town; the houses are little more than huts in narrow and squalid lanes. Its population (between three and four thousand) support themselves, not by commerce, but as fishermen. It is, at least, on its way to the ultimate desolation of which Ezekiel speaks, and from which, whether from the prophetic, or historical, point of view, there appears no prospect of recovery.

It was natural that Ezekiel, after speaking thus of Tyre, should have something to say also of its sister city. The prophecy against Zidon is, however, brief, and with one exception, has nothing which specially calls for notice. That exception is, in its way, significant enough. It is said of Zidon that it shall no more be "a pricking brier unto the house of Israel." That is the judgment which the prophet passes on the whole of its past history. The phrase is taken by him from Numbers xxxiii. 55, where it is applied to all the Canaanites who were left in occupation of the land. As used by Ezekiel we may think of it as pointed by his recollection of the evil hour when Ahab united himself with the Zidonian princess Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, and so brought the taint of Baal-worship first into Israel, and afterwards, through the usurpation of Athaliah, into Judah. Recent political combinations had brought both Tyre and Zidon into an alliance with Zedekiah (Jer. xxvii. 3), and just as Rabshakeh had spoken of Egypt as a "broken reed" that would pierce the



hand of him that leant upon it (Isa. xxxvi. 6), so Ezekiel could not regard Zidon as anything more than still a "pricking brier" and a "piercing thorn" (Ezek. xxviii. 20-26).

The four chapters that follow (Chaps. xxix.-xxxii.) have a continuity of subject, as dealing throughout with Egypt as it was, or was to be, under Pharaoh Hophra and his successors; and the sections contained in them are recorded with a very definite precision, as having been uttered at intervals in the tenth, the eleventh, and the twelfth years of Ezekiel's exile, while a fourth prophecy is inserted from the twenty-seventh year (the latest, as far as we can judge, of all his utterances) in connexion with the siege of Tyre by Nebuchadnezzar of which I have already spoken. It is probable, in the nature of things, that each prophecy was called forth by some special circumstances in the political relations of Egypt which came to Ezekiel's knowledge, though, as these are lost to us, we must deal with them rather in their collective unity of subject and of purpose.

The prophet begins then with thinking of Egypt, after the manner of the older prophets (Ps. lxxiv. 13; Isa. xxvii. 1; li. 9), under the symbol of the "dragon," *i.e.* the crocodile, which was, as it were, the monarch of the Nile. The Pharaoh of Ezekiel's time, Apries or Hophra, looked on himself as the creator of the revived power of Egypt. He boasted that he had made the river for himself. That boast will come to nothing. The crocodile should be drawn out of the river by hooks such as the inhabitants of the Nile valley used for the purpose (Herod., ii. 70; Job xli. 1-7), and cast into the wilderness to perish. This, he adds (with a startling change to another familiar figure, 2 Kings xviii. 21; Isa. xxxvi. 6), should be the doom of Egypt, because it had all along been as "a staff of reed to the house of Israel," bringing shame and failure to those who

leant on it (Ezek. xxix. 6, 7). Then, putting both images aside, he speaks in plain direct terms of the desolation of the country, not, as the A. V. has it, from "the tower of Syene to the border of Ethiopia," but "from Migdol (the fortress of that name about twelve miles from Pelusium in the Delta of the Nile) to Syene" (the modern *Assouan*, which recent events have brought into a fresh prominence), "which is the border of Ethiopia." The phrase so taken described the whole extent of Egypt, as "from Dan to Beersheba" did the whole extent of the land of Israel. The desolation thus brought was to last, Ezekiel says, "for forty years" (the round number must be taken as used symbolically for an undefined but not protracted period), during which, as in the revolt of the Egyptian troops after they had been led to failure in an expedition against Cyrene (Herod., ii. 161), which they imputed, rightly or wrongly, to design and not to chance, there should be a general collapse of the power of the boastful king. So far as we may set the actual course of events side by side with Ezekiel's predictions, the return of the Egyptians from this dispersion (partly, it may be, consequent on Nebuchadnezzar's adoption, when he conquered it, of the common Oriental policy of deportation), and their settlement in the land of Pathros (Upper Egypt or the Thebaid), would coincide with the revival of the kingdom under Amasis. One result of these vicissitudes, however, the prophet saw with no uncertain vision. The restored monarchy should no more take its place among the great powers of the world. It should no more tempt the house of Israel, as it had tempted it of old, to rest its confidence on false promises and delusive alliances. We can picture to ourselves as the last fact in Ezekiel's life of which we have any knowledge, the satisfaction with which, fifteen years later on, he must have inserted among his collected prophecies the short section which now stands as Chapter xxix. 17-21, finding in

Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Tyre and his subsequent conquest of Egypt the fulfilment of what he had spoken in the name of the Lord when the issues of events, measured by human foresight, were as yet doubtful. During those fifteen years there had been no attempt to revive the old policy of an alliance between Judah and Egypt. Exile had been the doom of the one, abasement of the other.

I incline to the view of those interpreters who limit the inserted passage to the last five verses of Chapter xxix., and treat Chapter xxx. as belonging to the earlier period of the prophet's work. That chapter is, as it were, a *replica* of Chapter xxix., with the outline more filled up, the names of the great Egyptian cities brought into greater prominence, the name of Nebuchadnezzar more definitely proclaimed as the appointed scourge of God. In Chapter xxxi., on the other hand, written a few months later, we have the working up, in another picture, of Ezekiel's favourite image of the cedar as the emblem of a kingdom, of the "garden of God" in Eden as the symbol of the world contemplated as made up of such kingdoms. In words which are almost an echo of Chapter xvii. 4-8 he paints the beauty of that tree with its outspreading branches, the birds of heaven making their nests in its boughs. It grew to a great height, but, as it grew, its heart was lifted up, and therefore it was delivered "into the hand of the mighty one of the heathen," *sc.* as before, of Nebuchadnezzar. This, after the fashion of the like teaching in the induction which the Greek historian puts into the mouth of Artabanus (Herod., vii. 10), was to be an example and a warning to the other trees of that garden of God. Then, as in the dissolving views of the phantasmagoria of the prophet's visions, the Eden, the Paradise of God, melts as into Sheol, the unseen world of things extinct and dead, the "nether parts of the earth." Other trees of Eden were seen standing as with blasted majesty in that dreary region. The proud cedar of

Lebanon, which represented Assyria, had been brought down there (Ezek. xxxi. 3), and its fate is held out as the pattern of that which should fall on Egypt also. That picture might have been followed at once by the survey of that Hades of departed kingdoms which meets us in Chapter xxxii. 17-32, but the prophet plays with, and broods over, his imagery, and cannot satisfy himself, unless he reproduces, as before in Chapter xix., the animal as well as the plant symbolism which rose before his mental gaze as he thought of the kingdoms of the world. To him Pharaoh king of Egypt, is "like a young lion of the nations" and "as a whale" (*i.e.* as before, a crocodile) in the sea-like waters of the Nile, troubling the waters and fouling the rivers, an element of evil and confusion in the great drama of the world's history. And therefore this monster-beast of the river should be taken in the net of God's judgments, and its fall should fill the hearts of the nations with terror, and the land of Egypt should be desolate, and the stars of its heaven should be made dark, and the sun and the moon should not give their light, and the daughters of the nations should lament for Egypt and all her multitude. And then the vision of the departed kingdoms of the earth (based apparently upon that of Isa. xiv. 9-20) becomes wider and more distinct. Egypt takes her place with those of the daughters of the famous nations who are gone down to the pit, and the shadowy forms of those who meet her out of the midst of Hades (Sheol) greet her as she appears among them. Asshur (Assyria) is there with all his company; and Elam, not the Persian monarchy to which the name was afterwards transferred, but the people of Elymais, or Susiana, who had served in the Assyrian army (Isa. xxii. 6), and who shared in its overthrow, against whom Ezekiel's contemporary Jeremiah had uttered his message of doom, at a time, probably, when Zedekiah was disposed to court its alliance as a counterpoise to the power of the

Chaldæans (Jer. xlix. 34). Looking out upon other kingdoms that had fallen, or were about to fall, under the power of Babylon, he adds to his list, besides Edom, and Zidon, and "the princes of the North" (probably of the north of Palestine, and therefore including, as the like phrase seems to do in Jeremiah xxv. 26, the many principedoms and tribes that we class together generically as Aramæan), two names that till then had not been conspicuous in history, "Meshech, Tubal, and their multitude." The two nations, identified with the names of the Moschi and Tibareni (Herod., viii. 34; vii. 78; Xenoph., *Anab.*, v. 3, 5), which the Greeks gave to two of the Scythian tribes, had been named by Ezekiel before (xxvii. 13) as conspicuous for their trade in slaves and copper with Tyre, and meet us again in connexion with the memorable prophecy against Gog in Chapter xxxix. In some way or other these Scythian tribes had become prominent in Ezekiel's time, and seemed to him one of the representatives of the great world-power. It may have been that he thought of them chiefly as having been among the subjects of the great Assyrian kings. On the other hand, however, there appears from Herodotus (i. 106) to have been a great Scythian invasion of South-western Asia about the time of Psammitichus and Josiah. They poured down upon Palestine, took Ascalon, and the Egyptian king had to bribe them to withdraw. In this way they may have become known to Ezekiel as a power that was once formidable but had now fallen into decay, and had ceased to take its part in the great drama of the world's history. For them there is in the prophet's vision a worse degradation than for other nations. Their chieftains are not to be buried, as other warriors were, with their weapons beside them (Ezek. xxxii. 27), but to be cast into the pit without honour, their "iniquities," their deeds of outrage and violence, bringing upon them, by a righteous retribution, the doom of a dishonoured grave.

We pass in Chapter xxxiii. to the prophet's work among his own people, and to his own estimate of his office, and so far we enter again upon a region which is more distinctly autobiographical in its character. What he has now to say was connected with an epoch in his life almost as memorable as that which took away from him the "desire of his eyes" by a sudden and sharp stroke. "It came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, in the fifth day of the month, that one that had escaped out of Jerusalem came unto me, saying, The city is smitten" (Ezek. xxxiii. 21). For that issue the prophet had, of course, been, in a measure, prepared. Thoughts as to his own work as a prophet led up to the reception of the dreaded tidings. It was not strange that in that meditation there should be echoes of many thoughts which we have heard before. A prophet does not seek for rhetorical variations, but iterates and re-iterates. And so we have, as from Chapter iii. 17, the thought of the watchman whose office it is to be on the look out and to give notice of the coming danger (Ezek. xxxiii. 1-9), and who must bear the penalty if any, through his negligence, die unwarned; and as from Chapter xviii., the proclamation of the will of Jehovah as One who has "no pleasure in the death of him that dieth," and the call to repentance, and the law of individual responsibility as contrasted with the thought that men came into the world laden with a burden of evil which they can never thoroughly shake off, and in which they must be content to "pine away" with no prospect of deliverance; the same call to the wicked to turn from his wickedness and live; the same assertion that "the way of the Lord is equal, that the ways of men are unequal" (Ezek. xxxiii. 17). It is clear that all this repetition implies a protracted survey of all the prophetic work that lay behind him in the past. He tracks the unity of thought which had underlain all the manifold variety of his speech and

action. And then there came that which, though he had foreseen and foretold it all along, was unspeakably sad and terrible now that it had at last actually come. We may believe that he received the tidings of the capture of Jerusalem with somewhat of the same silent tearless submission as that with which he had bowed to his wife's death: "The hand of the Lord was upon me in the evening before he that was escaped came." That, I take it, does not imply a prophetic utterance before the arrival of the fugitive, but rather a state of foreboding expectation, a time of constraint, to which we may refer all that retrospect of his prophetic work and its conditions, which, after the crisis was over, he wrote down as setting forth the principles that were to guide him in his action for the future as they had guided him in the past. By the time the fugitive came to him his lips were unsealed. And when he hears the terrible but not unlooked-for tidings, he shews that he has learnt the lesson which his wife's death had taught him. He does not waste his strength or time in vain and profitless lamentation. The traveller had reported not only the fact of the capture of Jerusalem, but the effect it had had upon the hearts and minds of those who still remained in the land of Israel. That effect was not such as the prophet hoped. There had been no repentance, no conversion, no acceptance of their punishment. Just as we find them in Jeremiah's nearer survey (Jer. xl.-xliv.), so here also, they were still full of plots and schemes and groundless hopes. With a blind persistence which simulated faith, they, dwelling, as the prophet says with emphasis, in the "wastes" of the desolated country, fell back, as those of a later generation did (Matt. iii. 9; John viii. 33, 39), on the fact that they were children of Abraham, and constructed a somewhat singular argument in favour of their hopes. Abraham had been "but one," had received the promise of Canaan when he was yet a solitary pilgrim. They were

“many”; a multitude, every one of whom could plead the promise of Abraham as being of his seed according to the flesh. The answer of Ezekiel to that confident boast is, in its essence though not in its form, like that which was afterwards given by the Baptist, by our Lord, and by St. Paul. They only were the true seed of Abraham who followed in the steps of his faith and righteousness. Were a people disobedient in their outward and their inward life, transgressing alike the precepts of Noah and the law of Moses, ceremonially and morally unclean,<sup>1</sup> were they, he asks, to possess the land? No, he answers; because of their evil deeds the land should be left utterly desolate, and the pomp of her strength should cease. The chapter ends with the expression of a more distinctly personal feeling. Ezekiel had not to contend, as Jeremiah had done, with open opposition. There were none who sought his life, or smote him on the face, or said that he was mad, as had been the case with other prophets. He found an outward show of reverence and love. They talked much *about* him (the A. V. “against” is misleading) “by the walls and in the doors of the houses,” *i.e.* secretly and publicly. They were led by an eager curiosity to come and listen to him, as we have seen, as though they would enquire of the Lord (Chaps. viii. 1; xiv. 1; xx. 1). They came, “as the people cometh,” *i.e.* in crowds, to hear him. They made loud professions of friendliness and good-will. But with them, as with the Pharisees of later days, and the religious world of all times, there was a root-evil, eating, like a canker, into their lives. “Their heart goeth after their covetousness.” The greed of gain, the whole mind set on immediate profit, made them apathetic to the prophet’s teaching, callous to

<sup>1</sup> It is characteristic of Ezekiel that here, as in Chapter xviii., the two classes of sins are mixed up together. The precedence given to the command against “eating flesh” with the blood thereof is probably due to the fact that it belonged to an earlier dispensation than that of Moses (Gen. ix. 4).



his warnings, heedless as he preached to them of "righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come." They came and listened to it all as a performance, admiring skill, language, intonation. He was unto them as "the singer of a pleasant song, playing well upon an instrument," and that was all. Like all who have shared in any measure in the prophetic spirit, Ezekiel had learnt how hollow and unsatisfying was that form of praise and popularity: "They hear thy words, but do them not." The prophet must have written those words as with a profound sense of failure and disappointment. To feel that he had no influence for good even among those with whom he dwelt, that he had to be satisfied with compliments and a vague unsympathizing admiration, this must have been harder to bear even than the greatest personal sorrow, or the calamities that fell upon the holy and beautiful city in which he had lived. And therefore it was, we may believe, that the next word of the Lord which came to him, that against the shepherds of Israel, held out the promise of a brighter day, when the people should know their teachers, and the true Shepherd should guide out and seek the sheep that had been lost.

E. H. PLUMPTRE.

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*ABSALOM.*

2 SAMUEL xiv. 25.

ST. PAUL divides the whole human race into what, for want of more exact equivalents for his Greek epithets, we are compelled to call—"natural" men and "spiritual" men. By "the natural man" he means man unmoralised—men who are animated and ruled by the soul which they possess in common with the animal tribes, men who walk after the