

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

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

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

A FORGOTTEN POET.

HE lived in that strange twilight time when the old world was already dead and a new one waiting to be born. It was an age when all the ancient barriers that divided men seemed silently to fall away, and the waters of East and West, the Orontes and the Tiber, flowed into the common basin of a brimming and eddying civilization. The conquests of Alexander had united the East into a culture half-Greek, half-Asiatic; and Rome, which seemed to itself to have annexed and subjugated this magnificent territory, was in truth being assimilated to it and absorbed. And under that strong and tolerant rule the old distinctions of national prejudice and national faith were passing away. The brighter stars in the heaven of polytheism, each of which had separately attracted the aspirations and guided the destinies of a particular people, now melted one by one into a pantheistic haze. And not all distinctions only but all contradictions met and mingled in the complex pressure of that fulness of time—republicanism and imperialism in politics, stoicism and epicureanism in philosophy, and in religion the crudest tradition on the one hand with a new mysticism or magic on the other—all interfused, and none victorious. For accompanying all this wealth of suggestion and alternative poured out before mankind, was a deep dissatisfaction with them all. Outwardly, there was a world-wide and unexampled prosperity; but under this secure splendour of the free and cultured class, there extended everywhere the foul morass of slavery, festering and rotting from age to age. Yet as we read the literature of the time, the misery of the bondmen beneath is even less certain to us than is the despondency of the rich whom they served—the rich, smitten as they never had been smitten before with the curse of satiety. In the early days Homer and Herodotus reveal a world light-hearted as yet and in its youth

—a world to which the knowledge of good and evil had scarcely come. But in the age of which we speak—the age culminating in Tacitus and Juvenal—the whole atmosphere even of metropolitan culture is quivering with a consciousness of misery and loaded with the sense of sin.

In some year, to us unknown, of this the crowning slope of history, a man with Hebrew blood in his veins sat down to meditate in a city of the Eastern Mediterranean. He sat amid a glittering civilization which had oppressed and crushed the ancient hopes of his people. To a thinker in such circumstances scarcely any subject was possible except what a modern poet has called “the riddle of the painful earth.” And in the race to which our poet belonged, what had stimulated speculation from very early times was the practical paradox of life. “Wherefore do the wicked prosper?” they asked, and asked in vain; and kept silence, while inwardly the fire burned. So it was with him who now in a later day sits down to write, and dates his meditative vision “in the thirtieth year after the ruin of the city.” This ruin of the city was not that of Jerusalem by Titus. The writer may indeed have lived so late as to be a contemporary of the Flavian dynasty; but in his book he goes back for his surroundings to the old days of the Exile, and stands a poor captive amid “the wealth of them that dwell at Babylon.” “And my spirit was sore moved, so that I began to speak words full of fear to the Most High.” The words full of fear were not the eloquent ascriptions of praise with which he opens, though some of them are striking, as when he says, speaking of the revelation on Sinai, that “Thy glory went through four gates, of fire, and of earthquake, and of wind, and of cold.” They were rather his persistence in the daring challenge at the close. “Are *their* deeds then any better that inhabit Babylon, that they should therefore have the dominion over Sion? . . . Thou hast destroyed Thy people, and hast preserved Thine

enemies, and hast made no sign." But on this occasion the silence was to be broken. "The angel that was sent unto me, whose name was Uriel,"—the same Light of God, whom Milton long after introduces to us, as Regent of the Sun—"gave me an answer." And the answer was that which in all ages has repressed the speculative audacity of man. "Thy heart hath gone too far in this world, and thinkest thou to comprehend the way of the Most High?" But the reply was firm, "Yea, my Lord."

"And he answered me and said, I am sent to show thee three ways, and to set forth three similitudes before thee, whereof if thou canst declare me one, I will show thee also the way that thou desirest to see, and I shall show thee from whence the wicked heart cometh. And I said, Tell on, my lord. Then said he unto me, Go thy way, weigh me the weight of the fire, or measure me the blast of the wind, or call me again the hour that is past.

"Then answered I and said, What man is able to do that, that thou shouldest ask such things of me?"

"And he said unto me, If I should ask thee how great dwellings are in the midst of the sea, or how many springs are in the beginning of the deep, or how many springs are above the firmament, or which are the outgoings of paradise: peradventure thou wouldest say unto me, I never went down into the deep, nor as yet into hell, neither did I ever climb up into heaven. Nevertheless now have I asked thee but only of the fire and wind, and of the day wherethrough thou hast passed, and of things from which thou canst not be separated, and yet canst thou give me no answer of them.

"He said moreover unto me, Thine own things, and such as are grown up with thee, canst thou not know; how should thy vessel then be able to comprehend the way of the Highest, and, the world being now outwardly corrupted, to understand also the corruption that is evident in my sight?"

The way of the Highest—the whole ways of God with men, on the one hand; and the way the wicked heart cometh, or the origin of evil, on the other. Such were the hard and high matters which this thinker is charged with aspiring to; and he does not deny it. Nor can he refute the ever-recurring and baffling argument that even the smallest thing—the flower in the crannied wall, the apple

that tumbles from the tree—are to us absolutely incomprehensible. He cannot refute it, and he does not attempt refutation. But he does not retreat. He stands, Prometheus-like, upon the rock to which he is chained ; and the sternest and saddest of all those

“ Grey spirits, yearning in desire
To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought,”

might have spoken to Heaven the words that follow.

“ Then said I unto him,

“ It were better that we were not at all, than that we should live still in wickedness, *and to suffer, and not to know wherefore.*”

Into so brief an utterance is crushed much of the pain of many a generation in the past, and some of that which preys upon the heart to-day. Let us not forget that, with all its sullen honesty, and all its outspoken rebelliousness, it is spoken not away from but to a Divine messenger, and with a secret hope on the human side of the colloquy that the heavenly visitant may yet reveal the secret of the higher world. Uriel refuses ; and his next voice is a warning parable. The trees, he says, took counsel to make war against the sea, that it might depart and leave room for more woods ; and the floods took counsel against the forest, that it rather might yield and let the sea flow over another plain. “ If thou wert judge, which of these wouldst thou condemn ? ” He answers that they have both devised a foolish thought. And the reply is only too ready : “ Like as the ground is given unto the wood, and the sea to the floods ; even so they that dwell upon the earth may understand nothing but that which is upon the earth, and He only that dwelleth upon the heavens may understand the things that are above the height of the heavens.” Once more the gates of the unseen clash together, and shut us out with the poet-prophet who stood upright upon the

threshold, but ventures to stand no longer. Yet if he falls, he falls only upon his knees, and when he speaks it is in a tone of more passionate and prevailing entreaty. I have never read without deep emotion the words which follow :

“I beseech Thee, O Lord, let me have understanding : for it was not my mind to be curious of the high things, but of such as pass by us daily, namely, wherefore Israel is given up as a reproach to the heathen, and for what cause the people whom Thou hast loved is given over unto ungodly nations, and why the law of our forefathers is brought to nought, and the written covenants come to none effect, and we pass away out of the world as grasshoppers, and our life is astonishment and fear, and we are not worthy to obtain mercy. What will He then do unto His name whereby we are called? Of these things have I asked.”

And the pathetic prayer is heard. Not indeed without an intimation that “the more thou searchest, the more thou shalt marvel,” for this world (or *æon*, the word being used in the sense so familiar to us in the New Testament) cannot comprehend the good time to come. But something of the future “the affable archangel” promises to tell. And on the whole the coming vision is a dark one—dark, but with one flash of the brightest light across it later on. Whence comes the darkness? Evil, he says, was sown long ago, and the harvest of it must be cut down and swept away before comes the time of good.

“For the grain of evil seed hath been sown in the heart of Adam from the beginning, and how much ungodliness hath it brought up unto this time? and how much shall it yet bring forth until the time of threshing come? Ponder now by thyself, how great fruit of wickedness the grain of evil seed hath brought forth. And when the ears shall be cut down, which are without number, how great a floor shall they fill?”

The appalling vision drives the inquirer out of his newly attained self-repression and modesty; for after asking, “How and when shall these things come to pass?” he cannot forbear his old *de profundis* sigh, “Wherefore are our

days few and evil?" And Uriel's answer, reminding us that the sigh is older than the days of Jerusalem or of Babylon, reminds us also, as many things in this book do, that it has arisen in every later land and time. As we turn these ancient pages we seem to hear the muffled tread of the long procession of the generations of men, who have fallen like the leaves of the forest—*fortes ante Agamemnona*, sages earlier than Thales, and lovers of wisdom before Pythagoras; young men with hope in their hearts and light upon their foreheads; old men who fixed their eyes upon a fast vanishing goal, and held it not too late to seek a newer world—all, whose names we know not, whose very existence we forget, with all their glowing visions, all their proud hopes, all their burning convictions, all their daring convictions: all perished and past, and mingled now in the undistinguishable dust of death. For what answer does the Hebrew sage report as made to him from above? "Did not the souls of the righteous ask question of these things in their chambers, saying, How long shall I hope on this fashion? when cometh the fruit of the floor of our reward?"

Hebrew speculation, we see, clings and eddies around righteousness and its hope of harvest. For it also has a harvest; and the answer made to its hope of fulfilment is, "The day shall come when the number of the seeds is filled in you; for God hath weighed the world in a balance." Then Esdras breaks in with the suggestion that it is our sins—that of his generation—which prevents the floor of the righteous from being filled with harvest. But even this penitential thought is gravely put aside by the angel. There is a deeper mystery than that. "In the grave"—the great unseen around us—"the chambers of souls are like the womb of a woman": those shadowy chambers make haste to deliver their burden, but they cannot till the appointed time. So he again makes request, "Show me whether

there be more to come than is past, or more past than is to come"; and in vision he is answered that the past is far longer, and the time to come is short. "Then I prayed, and said, May I live, thinkest thou, until that time? or what shall happen in those days?" As to the prophet's own life the angel could say nothing; as to the latter days he closes his visit by the announcement of a dark day at hand, when "the way of truth shall be hidden, and the land shall be barren of faith, and iniquity shall be increased" beyond what the world has known. And in this evil time, after the third trumpet heard, there shall fall out many ominous signs: "blood shall drop out of the wood, and the stone shall give his voice . . . and salt waters shall be found in the sweet." But these are not to be the signs of a gracious change, but of a deeper moral desolation. For

"Then shall wit hide itself, and understanding withdraw itself into his secret chamber, and shall be sought of many, and yet not be found: then shall unrighteousness and incontinency be multiplied upon earth. One land also shall ask another, and say, Is righteousness that maketh a man righteous gone through thee? And it shall say, No. At the same time shall men hope, but nothing obtain: they shall labour, but their ways shall not prosper."

And with these chilling and desolating words the angel leaves him, not so much "dazzled and sunk with colloquy sublime," as paralysed with "extreme fearfulness" at the unrelieved sadness of the unfinished revelation.

Before going on to the second fytte or dialogue or dream of this mystic poem, one thing may be noticed. Its speculations on the vision of the world, and all the wonder that will be, are moulded and coloured throughout by the strongest nationalism. In older times this was not always so even with men of the same separate and sacred blood. The poetic plaints of Job, and the large-thoughted murmurs of the Ecclesiast, had and have an authority to

which our apocryphal writer never attained : but they deal with the problem of the world in the most general terms—neither starting from, nor returning to, nor in any respect hampered by Jewish nationality, or even Jewish history. It was otherwise now, and this adds deeply to the pathos of what we go on to read. The Roman empire, it was said long ago, made the human race for the first time feel that it was one ; but to the later Hebrew this consummation, now at its height, looked like the extinction of all his hope. To him and to his special aspirations, cosmopolitanism meant death.

The man whose writings we are tracing was indeed no vulgar Jew. In his eyes the prosperity of his people was closely associated with that of the world. And the prosperity, alike of the world and of Israel, could not in his view be merely external or secular—it was based upon “righteousness that maketh a man righteous,” and it was to be the righteous man’s reward. Nor was it to be of this world alone. The good time coming was to be in a future world—a Divine age ; after death had passed even upon the Messiah and after judgment had passed upon all men. Yet with all this larger scope and deeper vision, here is how, after seven days’ fasting, he begins “to talk with the Most High again.”

“O Lord that bearest rule, of every wood of the earth, and of all the trees thereof, Thou hast chosen Thee one only vine : and of all lands of the whole world Thou hast chosen Thee one pit : and of all the flowers thereof, one lily : and of all the depths of the sea Thou hast filled Thee one river : and of all builded cities Thou hast hallowed Sion unto Thyself : and of all the fowls that are created Thou hast named Thee one dove : and of all the cattle that are made Thou hast provided Thee one sheep : and among all the multitudes of people Thou hast gotten Thee one people, and to this people, whom Thou lovedst, Thou gavest a law that is approved of all. And now, O Lord, why hast Thou given this one people over unto many ?”

And then he adds this bitter-sweet reproach, “If Thou

didst so much hate Thy people, yet shouldst Thou punish them with Thine own hands"—a word whose too great daring is atoned for by the greater word of the immediate Divine answer: "Thou art sore troubled in mind for Israel's sake; *lovest thou that people better than He that made them?*" And his reply puts the thing again on its true footing: "No, Lord; but of very grief have I spoken; for my reins pain me every hour, while I labour to comprehend the way of the Most High and to seek out part of His judgment." Once more to this immemorial complaint comes back the ancient answer, "Thou canst not": and both voices then pass off into that more poetic strain which I have sought to untwist as often as I may from this book's too closely compacted thought.

"And I said, Wherefore, Lord? whereunto was I born then? or why was not my mother's womb then my grave, that I might not have seen the travail of Jacob, and the wearisome toil of the stock of Israel? And He said unto me, Number Me the things that are not yet come, gather Me together the drops that are scattered abroad, make Me the flowers green again that are withered, open Me the places that are closed, and bring Me forth the winds that in them are shut up, show Me the image of a voice: and then I will declare to thee the thing that thou labourest to know."

In the remainder of this vision Esdras presses first for the *hastening* of the future; and this is met by the immovable answer, "I will liken My judgment to a ring; like as there is no slackness of the last, even so there is no swiftness of the first." And then he presses again for the *revelation* of the future; and though this is delayed and obscured, still "tokens" of the final change are given him, and he is able to hope that after the time of hard and icy unbelief with which his last vision closed is past, a better morn shall break. "Whosoever remaineth from all these that I have told thee shall escape, and see My salvation, and the end of your world."

"Whosoever remaineth!"—but how many shall remain,

how many of the generations of men, past, present, and to come, shall see life and good? The third vision is filled with speculations on this which have always reminded me (chiefly perhaps because I read the two books originally at nearly the same time) of our Laureate's *In Memoriam*. That great poem of our age takes its rise in sorrow for the death of a particular friend—a sorrow which in the first instance refuses to be diverted, even for purposes of solace, to more general considerations:—

“That loss is common would not make
My own less bitter,—rather more:
Too common! never morning wore
To evening, but some heart did break.”

But as the poem moves on, it spreads and grows like a river, with larger reaches and more sweeping curves. Less and less it is found to be “private sorrow's barren song,” until at the last the poet closes his speculations on the destiny of man with the words to his friend:—

“Behold I dream a dream of good,
And mingle all the world with thee!”

In the case of our great contemporary the stimulus to doubt and speculation is found, first in the frustration of youthful hopes by death, but later on in the hard and heavy revelations which modern science seems to make. The poet turns his ear to listen to

“The murmur of the homeless sea,
The sound of streams that swift or slow
Draw down æonian hills, and sow
The dust of continents to be.”

He strains his eyes to discern the myriad life which those continents have during successive millenniums imprisoned in their stony bosom, and he finds that nature, while seemingly sometimes careful of the type, is ever “careless of the single life,” and sweeps generation after generation

out of her way with savage prodigality. And so it is with a burdened mind and a troubled heart that he rises to the aspiration :—

“ Oh still we trust that somehow good
 Will be the final goal of ill,
 To pangs of nature, sins of will,
 Defects of doubt, and taints of blood ;
 That nothing walks with aimless feet ;
 That not one life shall be destroyed,
 Or cast as rubbish to the void,
 When God hath made the pile complete.”

The older poet, in his sadder, darker time, had far more pressing calamities without, while within there was the pressure of creed—and that the narrow creed of a race. The very opening speech of this third vision ends with these amazing yet pathetic words :

“ Thou, O Lord, madest the world for our sakes. As for the other people, which also come of Adam, Thou hast said that they are nothing, but be like unto spittle : and hast likened the abundance of them unto a drop that falleth from a vessel. And now, O Lord, behold these heathen, which have ever been reputed as nothing, have begun to be lords over us, and to devour us. But we Thy people, whom Thou hast called Thy first-born, Thy only begotten, and Thy fervent lover, are given into their hands. If the world now be made for our sakes, why do we not possess an inheritance with the world ? how long shall this endure ? ”

Nothing can be stronger than his protest for Jewish exclusiveness and against cosmopolitanism ; yet we see it leaves him in doubt, on more sides than one. And among the many things fitted in that age to cause such doubts, there was one above all. Wherever men of that race now met and congregated, it was whispered that a new sect was to be found among them, in Jerusalem or in Antioch, who welcomed cosmopolitanism, and even professed to combine it in some marvellous form with the faith of their Hebrew fathers. Inconceivable as it was, the new men did this—

and they did more. They held to Messiah, not coming but come; and this Jewish Messiah they actually offered to the world. In quoting this book of Esdras, I have taken nothing from the two first or the two last chapters, which are supposed to be Christian additions to the original book. But even in that part of it where interpolation is not suspected, or from which it has been removed by criticism, there seem to me to be signs of a certain acquaintance, if not with Christianity, at least with Christian ideas. This applies to the very part with which we are now dealing, and to the important declaration in it of what is to happen in the winding up of this world or æon previous to the final judgment.

“Behold, the time shall come, that these tokens which I have told thee shall come to pass, and the bride shall appear, and she coming forth shall be seen, that now is withdrawn from the earth. And whosoever is delivered from the foresaid evils shall see my wonders. For My son shall be revealed with those that be with him, and they that remain shall rejoice within four hundred years. After these years shall My son the Christ die, and all men that have life. And the world shall be turned into the old silence seven days, like as in the former judgments: so that no man shall remain. And after seven days the world, that yet awaketh not, shall be raised up, and that shall die that is corrupt. And the earth shall restore those that are asleep in her, and so shall the dust those that dwell in silence, and the secret places shall deliver those souls that were committed unto them.”

In the early Christian Churches, with the Eastern half of which this book was a great favourite, “My son,” in the fifth line above, was changed into “My son Jesus,” and the whole volume, with a much earlier date ascribed to it, was received as an ancient Jewish writing, anticipating Christian ideas. That such ideas were in the air around the writer I cannot doubt. How far they, and especially the idea that salvation might be no longer a national matter, were consciously present to him, or pressing upon him, no one can say. It is certain that they were not accepted so as to substitute for his dejection the new

enthusiasm of hope which men of his own blood were at that moment rousing in every city around the Mediterranean Sea. On the contrary, this man, hedged in like most of his race, but rising above them in moral stature, was by that very fact doomed to an outlook of greater sadness than they. For his faith was fixed on a future judgment of the just and of the unjust (not merely of nation and nation), and a vision of this follows. (It is contained chiefly in a missing fragment, extending to some eighty verses, which has only been discovered during the present century, and should be inserted between the 35th and 36th verses of the seventh chapter in the Vulgate edition of the Latin and its English translation.) But if all nations except Israel are to be rejected, and if even Israel is to be sifted by the Divine judgment, who then can stand? Esdras asks whether in that day the prayers of the good may not avail to avert the doom of the bad, and receiving an unwelcome answer from above, he replies bluntly in the characteristic words, "This is my first and last saying, that it had been better not to have given the earth unto Adam; or else, when it was given him, to have restrained him from sinning." And then, in his freer and more poetic vein, he breaks out into a magnificent lamentation:—

"O thou Adam, what hast thou done? For though it was thou that sinned, thou art not fallen alone, but we all that come of thee. For what profit is it unto us, if there be promised us an immortal time, whereas we have done the works that bring death? And that there is promised us an everlasting hope, whereas ourselves being most wicked are made vain? And that there are laid up for us dwellings of health and safety, whereas we have lived wickedly? And that the glory of the Most High is kept to defend them which have led a wary life, whereas we have walked in the most wicked ways of all? And that there should be showed a paradise, whose fruit endureth for ever, wherein is security and medicine, since we shall not enter into it? (For we have walked in evil places.) And that the faces of them which have used abstinence shall shine above the stars, whereas our faces shall be blacker than darkness?"

From this height again he plunges into speculations on the number of them that be saved and of them that perish. The latter, he believes, exceeds the former as a wave is greater than a drop; or, as the Divine answer to him puts it, "The Most High hath made this world for many, but the world to come for few." And this is confirmed to him by a figure. "When thou askest the earth, it shall say unto thee, that it giveth much mould whereof earthen vessels are made, but little dust of which comes gold." This simile is merely touched in passing, but another which follows is dwelt upon with more detail of reasoning. It is the same which had such a fascination for the young Cambridge poet, when a broken friendship led him to thoughts of immortality, and when his hopes of immortality were chilled by the immeasurable waste—the reckless and unbounded destruction—of the germs of life, which we see all around us, and which we see not less but more in the geologic years gone by. I, says Tennyson, speaking of nature,—

“ But I considering everywhere
Her secret meaning in her deeds,
And finding that, of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear,

I falter where I firmly trod,
And falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope through darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith.”

The hands of faith of our old Hebrew were fettered rather than lame. He belonged to a race which has always sought success in this life, and which in those old days is supposed to have looked to this life for the rewards even of righteousness—a race which, a great English bishop has argued, never had at any time either the promise or the hope of a life to come. Yet this man, living in an age when his

people were ground to the dust by calamities, and when their promise for this world seemed to have failed, never shows, from beginning to end of his writing, the least doubt of his own immortality, or of that of all around him. Throughout he speaks to God in the consciousness that all live unto Him, and shall live unto Him, and abide His judgment in that world to be. The doubt and the difficulty of our poet-prophet is how that judgment is to be passed—not by himself, for to himself and those who with him are faithful there comes a wonderful word of promise; but by the masses of mankind who are sown carelessly in the furrows of time and bring forth no fruit to God. And for them he pleads, before any word uttered for himself. His petition is strange. He pleads, as to them, that God would ignore them, would forget them, would turn His face from them as though they had not been—that He would remember only those whose pilgrimage has been towards salvation and reward. And if his prayer is not wholly accepted, so neither is it wholly thrown aside. And in the high and dark answer comes in again the simile of the seed and the souls of men. “Some things thou hast spoken aright, . . . and so shall it come to pass. For as the husbandman soweth much seed upon the ground, . . . even so is it of them that are sown in the world—they shall not all be saved.” Then Esdras makes the last speech to which we shall listen from him.

“If I have found grace, let me speak. Like as the husbandman’s seed perisheth, if it come not up, and receive not Thy rain in due season: or if there come too much rain, and corrupt it: even so perisheth man also, which is formed with Thy hands, and is called Thine own image, because Thou art like unto him, for whose sake Thou hast made all things, and likened him unto the husbandman’s seed. Be not wroth with us, but spare Thy people, and have mercy upon Thine own inheritance: for Thou art merciful unto Thy creature.

Then answered He me, and said, Things present are for the present, and things to come for such as be to come. For thou comest far short that thou shouldest be able to love My creature more than I: but I

have ofttimes drawn nigh unto thee, and unto it, but never to the unrighteous."

And after this sovereign word he is charged to ask no more questions as to "the multitude of them that perish," or as to the degree in which they fail and come short of what might have been their destiny; but to open his ears to the heavenly hope which comes to himself and those who are like him. And what follows has always appeared to me to sound like the voice of

"Lyric Love,
Half angel and half bird,
And all a wonder and a world's desire!"

It rises and soars above all the troubled speculation of this book as a lark springs out of a thundercloud.

"For unto you is paradise opened, the tree of life is planted, the time to come is prepared, plenteousness is made ready, a city is builded, and rest is allowed, yea, perfect goodness and wisdom. The root of evil is sealed up from you, weakness and the moth is hid from you, and corruption is fled into hell to be forgotten; sorrows are passed, and in the end is showed the treasure of immortality."

With this third vision ends what seems to me the characteristic and seminal part of a book accessible to all, but surely too much forgotten in our day. What remains is occupied with an answer, through the means of successive apocalyptic symbols, to the question put, "At what *time* shall these final marvels happen?" The meaning is hard to gather, and not valuable when attained, though an exception ought to be made for the very first scene described. Here Esdras, dwelling seven days in "a field of flowers, where no house is builded," sees at last a woman with her clothes rent, loudly lamenting. She had been barren thirty years, and had then borne one son, and brought him up, and when the time came for his marriage, she made a feast. But when he rose from it and entered into his wedding-chamber, he fell down and died, and now she sat upon the ground

continually, no more to eat and drink till the end. The prophet tries to console her and reason with her, in vain; but "while I was talking with her, her face shined exceedingly, so that I was afraid of her, and suddenly she made a great cry very fearful, so that the earth shook at the noise, and I looked, and behold, the woman appeared unto me no more, but there was a *City* builded." The woman and the city no doubt represented Sion, which the seer loved from the days of old; but was it still Sion in the narrow and national limitation? Or was there in his mind some dawning of the vision of that greater city, the invisible foundations of which were even then being laid in every people around—a city bounded by no walls, circumscribed by no charter, vassal to no land of earth; a city whose gates stand four-square, and are open day and night continually, that the righteous nation may enter in; and yet, as it should seem, may enter not wholly, as he once thought, because of their righteousness, for the many-tongued "people that dwell therein are forgiven their iniquity"?

A. TAYLOR INNES.

ADVICE ABOUT COMMENTARIES.

I. THE PENTATEUCH AND JOSHUA.

SEVERAL papers entitled "Notes on Commentaries," appeared some ten years ago in the pages of *THE EXPOSITOR*, and it has been considered desirable to include in the present series a few articles on the aids available for the use of the student, in the shape of commentaries and subsidiary works upon the books of the Old Testament. The object of the present article is to introduce the subject by giving a sketch of the literature on the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua, especially in relation to the controversies still pending with respect to the composition and authorship of those books.

Dr. Samuel Cox took occasion, in the former set of papers, to warn at the outset "the inexperienced student" of the inutility