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## EZEKIEL—AN IDEAL BIOGRAPHY.

### IV.

THE portion of the prophet's work on which we now enter (Chapter xvi.) is, with its companion picture in Chapter xxiii., one of those on which the reader looks with mingled feelings of fascination and repulsion. The terrible nakedness of its imagery shocks those who are accustomed to the euphemisms which had their birth in the emphatically Christian modesty which looks on sexual sins as things not even to be named, and which reproduces itself in the conventional decencies of those even who are without that modesty, and who tolerate the sins themselves. We must not, however, judge the prophet by a standard not his own. A man living in the midst of a fathomless debasement is stirred, as Juvenal and Persius were stirred, by a *sæva indignatio*, which will not let him veil the abominations against which he has to bear his witness. He must make men see themselves as in a mirror which will shew them to their own gaze in all their hideous deformity. Stroke after stroke, line after line, is added to the picture, till it is complete in all its loathsomeness. What strikes us as revolting in such a picture is in itself neither corrupt nor corrupting. The prophet does not speak *virginibus puerisque*, but to men and women in many of whom conscience has been seared as with a red hot-iron, and the sense of shame deadened, so that they needed to be roused to a new activity by the very sight of their own shamelessness.

In the main thought which is expanded with this dramatic fulness Ezekiel was following, as elsewhere, in the footsteps of Jeremiah. He too had painted the early days of the

Divine betrothal, of the covenant between Jehovah and Israel, as at once his people and his bride. "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness" (Jer. ii. 2); and had reproached the faithless wife of Jehovah, for "the lightness of her whoredom," whereby she had "defiled the land" (Jer. iii. 9). It is as though the later prophet had brooded over that thought till the germ developed itself into a long history, which reminds us, in its turn, of that strange sad story which meets us in the first three chapters of Hosea, as at once a biography and a parable. The opening words must have sounded strange in the ears of those who boasted of their descent from the patriarchs, who thought that they were the children of Abraham, the friend of Jehovah. "Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother a Hittite" (Ezek. xvi. 3). The prosaic literalism of some commentators has led them to see in the prophet's withering scorn the statement of an ethnological fact—Jerusalem had been originally, they urge, a Jebusite, *i.e.* a Canaanite city. Hittites and Amorites were found among the *colluvies gentium* that dwelt in her, before she became the city of David, the capital of Judah. To one who has any capacity for entering into the thoughts of a poet, it will be obvious that Ezekiel speaks of the spiritual, not the physical, parentage; not of the material city, but of what we may describe as the Church and people that dwelt in it. The opening words testify to the sense of *heredité*, which lies at the root of almost every modern form of Eastern scorn and reviling. Jerusalem was as heathen in its life as the Hittite wives whom Esau married, and who were a "grief of mind" to Isaac and Rebecca (Gen. xxvi. 35); as the Amorites whose iniquity was not yet full when Abraham came into Canaan (Gen. xv. 16). The picture that follows, full of details of that which in modern literature, save perhaps in the

terrible realism of writers of the Zola-type, we relegate to the region of the indescribable, may possibly have been drawn from the life. A childbirth on the march of the exiles from Jerusalem to Chebar, followed by the death of the mother, would have presented just such features as Ezekiel describes. The usual offices of the midwife were left undone. The infant lay in "its blood," neither washed nor, after the custom of the East, at once sanitary and symbolic, rubbed with salt. Had the prophet looked on such a sight and taken the part which he assigns to Jehovah, and saved the child from the death which a few hours more of neglect would have brought on it? Had he said "Live," when to have said nothing, done nothing, would have ended life? (Ezek. xvi. 6). Historically the period thus described answers to the early sojourn of Israel in Canaan and Egypt, and it presents a striking parallelism to the language put into the mouth of every Israelite as he offered his first-fruits: "A Syrian ready to perish was my father" (Deut. xxvi. 5). The growth of the infant to the maturity of womanhood corresponded, in like manner, to the sojourn in Egypt, during which the tribe grew into a nation, and, as such, attracted once more the pity and the love of Jehovah. There was in that full-grown womanhood much that was loveable, but the taint of evil was still there. There was still the squalor of filthiness and blood. After the manner of the East, Jehovah, who loved her, threw his mantle over her, with a symbolism which was half that of adoption and half of betrothal, as Boaz spread his garment over Ruth (Ruth iii. 9).<sup>1</sup> This was followed by the cleansing and anointing that prepared the betrothed maiden for the marriage, of which we find an illustration in the elaborate purification of Esther and the others

<sup>1</sup> Ewald illustrates the practice from the German law term, *Mantelkind*, used of an illegitimate child adopted after the marriage of the father with the mother, or with another woman.

who were selected as candidates for the place from which Vashti had been deposed in the court of Ahasuerus (Esth. ii. 3, 9, 12). Then came the adornment of the bride in the day of her espousals, which the prophet describes, as with a conscious and elaborate symbolism, in terms that correspond with the decorations of the tabernacle and the priesthood. There was the "broidered work," the "raiment of needlework" (as in Exod. xxvi. 36, xxviii. 39, xxxvi. 37), the badgers' skin (possibly seal-skin) of Exod. xxv. 5, xxvi. 14, the "fine linen" or byssus turban, which appears in Exodus xxix. 9; Leviticus viii. 13, as the "bonnet" of the high priest. What follows is more distinctively feminine, the dress of a queenly beauty, of a bride "adorning herself with jewels," as in Isaiah lxi. 10, the bracelets, the nose-rings, the ear-rings. The luxury and pomp of the Davidic and Salomonic rule are painted under the image of the "fine flour, and honey and oil," which were the food of the queenly bride who sat as "a princess among provinces" (Lam. i. 1), and the "renown of whose beauty went forth among the heathen," as did that of the glory of Solomon. And then came, in the parable, as in the history, the immediate and terrible downfall. In words which remind us of Juvenal, the prophet paints the degradation of a spiritual Messalina, prostituting herself to every passer-by, adopting, *i.e.* the idolatry of every nation with which she came in contact, lavishing on them all the glory and beauty and wealth which had been given her by her true Lord for his own glory, slaying even her children and making them to pass through the fire that she might gratify her insatiable craving for the excitement of a new worship. Every "eminent" or *arched*<sup>1</sup> building on the high places of Israel was spiritually—often indeed, as in the worship of Astarte and the Asherah,

<sup>1</sup> The agreement of this meaning of the word with the received etymology of the word "fornication" is a curious though accidental coincidence.

literally—a place polluted by whoredoms. The history that followed, the apostasy which began under Solomon and left its taint through the later centuries, is described under like imagery. Judah and Israel had adopted the idolatries of Egypt, grosser and more bestial than that of any other nation, and this had been followed by famine and weakness, so that even the daughters of the Philistines, as, *e.g.* in the days of Ahaz (2 Chron. xxviii. 18) had risen and prevailed against her (Ezek. xvi. 26, 27). Then had come, as also under Ahaz, the Assyrian alliance and with it the adoption of Assyrian worship, such as that of Ishtar the “queen of heaven” (Jer. xliv. 17). Within Ezekiel’s own memory there had been a fresh addition to the confluent polytheism of Jerusalem. Intercourse with, and subjection to, Babylon had brought in the new fashion of Chaldean worship, to say nothing of the Thammuz ritual of Syria and the adoration of the sun which we have seen as dominant, in Chapter viii. And then with a bitter irony the prophet points out that, in one respect, the sin of the guilty city differed from that of the literal harlot. The latter had, at least, the hire, from which in most languages her evil calling received its name; but Jerusalem had no profit of any kind to set against her sin. Her whole course had been one at once of outward and spiritual degradation. She had, as it were, courted her lovers and paid them the rewards of her own infamy. And, therefore, there was to come upon her the punishment of faithless wives. She was to be stoned as they were stoned (Lev. xx. 10; Deut. xxii. 21–24), to be stript of her garments and her fair jewels, and to be left once more naked and bare, and to be thrust through with the sword. So, and not otherwise, would the jealousy of the Divine Bridegroom depart from her so that He “would be quiet and be no more angry” (Ezek. xvi. 42). The chastisement was sent in love, as it had been sent on her sisters Sodom and Samaria.

For them also the door of hope was open, though "pride and fulness of bread and abundance of idleness had been in them and in their daughters" (Ezek. xvi. 49). The prophet, with that inextinguishable trust in the compassion and long-suffering of Jehovah which characterized him, as it had characterized his brother-prophets, looked forward to a time when they also should "return to their former estate," and then she would "remember the days of her youth," and He would remember the covenant He had made with her in those days, and she should receive the elder and the younger sisters in whose evil ways she had trodden, they also being forgiven and restored, though not in the same measure as herself, and should accept her punishment and her shame, and be joined to her Lord once more in an everlasting covenant, "not opening her mouth any more," but silent, as in a repentance too deep for words, resting in the assurance that He who had so severely punished was at last "pacified towards her" (Ezek. xvi. 44-63). In their bold utterance of the wider hope the words remind us in part of Isaiah's prophecy of blessing as coming, after punishment, upon Egypt and Assyria (Isa. xix. 24, 25), in part also of those which declared that if Tyre and Sidon had seen the works which were done in Capernaum, they would have repented in sackcloth and ashes, and that therefore there should be for them a more tolerable judgment (Matt. xi. 22). It may be questioned whether there is anywhere, even in St. Paul's thoughts of the restoration of Israel, in Romans xi., so startling a contrast between the immediate future of punishment, and the ultimate triumph of compassion. Jerusalem, that had fallen to lower depths of shame than either Sodom or Samaria, was one day to be again joined to the Lord of Israel, as in the day of her espousals, and the two cities of evil fame were to be to her in that day as "the virgins that were her fellows and should bear

her company" (Ps. xlv. 14). To the mind of the Israelites of the prophet's time the revelation of the Divine purpose, thus given, must have seemed as strange as that which St. Peter gives of the work of Christ as "preaching to the spirits in prison," of the gospel being "preached even to the dead" (1 Pet. iii. 18, iv. 6) that they may pass through judgment unto life, has often seemed to Christian interpreters.<sup>1</sup>

I have suggested that the elaborate parable of which this is the conclusion, may have had its starting-point in the incidents of Ezekiel's journey to the land of his captivity. It seems to me probable that the imagery that follows in Chapter xvii. may have had its origin in recollections of the same journey. The cedar "is confined in its geographical distribution to Asia Minor, coming south as far as Lebanon. It does not reach Palestine proper and should not be included among the trees of that country" (Carruthers, in *Bible Educator*, vol. iv. p. 358). The "great eagle," probably the golden eagle (*Aquila Chrysaëtos*), was not common there, being found for the most part in the northern mountain regions" (Houghton, in *Bible Educator*, vol. ii. p. 294). But both cedars and eagles may well have come before the prophet's gaze on the slopes of Lebanon as the exiles took their weary way to Babylon, and what he saw may have suggested, at the time, or when it came back

<sup>1</sup> Keil's note is, I think, worth copying as bearing on the much-vexed question of our time. "And from this it clearly follows that all the judgments which fell before the time of Christ, instead of carrying with them the final decision and involving eternal damnation, leave the possibility of pardon open still. The last judgment, which is decisive for eternity, does not take place till after the full revelation of grace and truth in Christ. Not only will the gospel be preached to all nations before the end come (Matt. xxiv. 14), but even to the dead, who did not believe at the time of Noah, it has been already preached, at the time when Christ went to them in spirit, in order that, although judged according to man's way in the flesh, they might live according to God's way in the Spirit." Keil's *Ezekiel*, vol. i. p. 235, in Clark's *Foreign Theological Library*. Compare also the present writer's Sermon on *The Spirits in Prison* (Isbister & Co.).



upon his memory afterwards, the parable on which we now enter, and which must have had a prominent place in the minds of the "rebellious house" when they said of their teacher, "Doth he not speak parables?" (Ezek. xx. 49). Guided by the prophet's own interpretation we can fix, without the shadow of a doubt, the meaning of each detail. What we know of his training and environment, of the imagery of Hebrew literature and Assyrian symbolism, may help us to yet fuller illustration. The poetry of all nations has seen in the eagle, as the strongest of birds, the natural symbol of the rulers of mankind. So Jeremiah (xlviii. 40, xlix. 22) had already spoken of Nebuchadnezzar under that image, and Isaiah (xlv. 11) had compared the yet future Cyrus to "a ravenous bird from the East." So in the *Agamemnon* (l. 114) of Æschylus the two eagles that are seen hovering over their plundered nest answer to the leaders of the Argive host. Here, however, there was a special ground for Ezekiel's choice. The eagle-headed figure which appears so frequently on the Assyrian monuments, and which has been identified by Layard (*Nineveh*. vol. ii. p. 458) with the god Nisroch—the name, according to one etymology, meaning the "great eagle"—must have often met his eyes, so that he saw in it the emblem of the Assyrian monarchy, to the inheritance, and to the name, of which Babylon had succeeded; and that symbolism he recognises in the opening words of his parable. The "great eagle with great wings, long pinioned, full of feathers which had divers colours" (Ezek. xvii. 3), is none other than Nebuchadnezzar as the king of many "peoples, nations, and languages" (Dan. iii. 4, 7). The "cedar of Lebanon" was, as it had been before to Jeremiah, when he spoke of the "king's house of Judah" as "the head of Lebanon" (Jer. xxii. 6), the type of the dynasty of David; partly, perhaps, because the palace of the kings of Judah was so largely constructed of cedar-wood as to be known as

“the house of the forest of Lebanon” (1 Kings vii. 2), and partly also, because the more recent sovereigns had kept up the tradition by building palaces that were “ciled with cedar” (Jer. xxii. 14). Ezekiel could hardly fail to have heard or read the words in which the contemporary prophet had spoken to Jerusalem, the royal city, as the “inhabitriss of Lebanon that made her nest in the cedars” (Jer. xxii. 23). The top of the highest branch of the cedar which the eagle cropped was, accordingly, none other than the last king but one of the house of David, Jehoiachin, whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried into captivity into “a land of traffick (literally, *of Canaan*), a city of merchants,” *sc.* to Babylon, as the great emporium of Eastern commerce. As in Chapter xvi. 29, the prophet plays upon the secondary meaning of Canaan, as signifying “merchant,” and applies it to the city of which it had been said that it was “a golden city” (Isa. xiv. 4). But the work of Nebuchadnezzar did not end with the deportation of Jehoiachin. He had set up Zedekiah as king in his stead, and that fact also had to be stated in symbolic language. The eagle took up the “seed of the land,” of the home-born stock of the house of David. It grew, first, “as a willow by the water-courses,” and then as “a spreading vine of low culture,” which “brought forth branches and shot forth sprigs” (Ezek. xvii. 5). In the other great eagle which next appears on the scene we find the rival monarchy of Egypt, less composite in its character, and therefore without the varied feathers of the first. To that eagle the vine turned its branches. In other words, Zedekiah sought to strengthen himself against Nebuchadnezzar by an alliance with Pharaoh Hophra, the king of Egypt. Of that alliance Ezekiel, following in the footsteps of Jeremiah, could see no good result as possible. He asked the question, as the mouthpiece of Jehovah, “Shall it prosper?” and made answer to himself, “Shall he not

pull up the roots thereof and cut off the fruit thereof that it wither?" (Ezek. xvii. 9). There was no need of "great power, or of many people to pluck it up." It would waste away in its own inherent feebleness, "when the east wind toucheth it." Zedekiah, instead of accepting his appointed position as the vassal king of Nebuchadnezzar, had rebelled against him, and sent his ambassadors to Egypt; but the outcome of it all would be that he should die "in the midst of Babylon," and Pharaoh, with "his mighty army and great company," his "mounts" and his "forts" for sieges, should not avail (Ezek. xvii. 17). Exile and imprisonment should be the doom of the rebellious vassal. But beyond that doom there lay the hope of a restoration, which he conveys in the same symbols as those with which he started. Not now the "great eagle," the Chaldean king, but the Lord God Himself should take yet another of the highest branches of the high cedar, and plant it upon a high mountain, and it should bring forth boughs and bear fruit and be a goodly cedar, and under it should dwell all fowl of every wing, and He who had dried up the green tree should make the dry tree to flourish (Ezek. xvii. 23-25). That was Ezekiel's version of Isaiah's thought, that there should come forth "a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and that a Branch should grow out of his roots" (Isa. xi. 1), that "the mountain of the Lord's house should be established in the top of the mountains" (Isa. ii. 1). We trace something like an echo of the thoughts and of the phrase, translated and transfigured to a higher meaning, in the words which spoke of the kingdom of heaven as like the grain of mustard seed which should become a tree, "so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof" (Matt. xiii. 32).

The Chapter that follows presents a striking contrast to all that has gone before it. There are no visions of the glory-cloud, and the living creatures, "the cherubim," and

the wheels within the wheels; no elaborate parables like those which we have just now examined. The prophet finds himself face to face with one of the great problems of the Divine order of the universe. He heard it in the cynical fatalism, or the self-excusing apathy, of his countrymen. He heard it also, we may believe, in the whisper of his own heart. What were the limits, in modern phrase, of the law of *heredité*? How far were the sins of the fathers visited upon the children? That there was such a "visiting" all experience shewed. It was asserted as one of the most solemn sanctions of the Divine Law (Exod. xx. 5). He, as we have seen, had been trained under a teacher who had given him the right answer as in germ and in outline (Jer. xxxi. 29). When he heard the proverb which men used in exile, as at home, concerning the land of Israel, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek. xviii. 2), he knew, taught by the word of Jehovah which developed that germ and filled up that outline, what to reply, and how to deal with it.

The problem was one which has at all times tried the souls, and laid heavy on the hearts, of devout thinkers. Not far from the time at which Ezekiel lived we find it exercising the minds of the poets and historians of Greece. There was the thought of Herodotus that the Divine Power was, in quite another sense than that of the Hebrew faith, a "jealous God" (*φθόνερον τὸ θεῖον*) envious of man's success, afraid of his independence, aiming his thunderbolts at the loftiest trees simply because they are the loftiest (*Herod.* i. 32, iii. 40), smiting the pride of over-boastful kings, and infusing a panic-terror into their armies, seeing that "He does not will that any but himself should be exalted" (*Ibid.* vii. 10). That thought was not without its truth as a law of the Divine government, and it finds utterance in the prophets of the Old Testament, notably in the

language of Isaiah to Sennacherib (Isa. xxxvii. 29), and of the confession of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. iv. 37). With this there mingled in the mind of the Greek historian the thought that the sins of the fathers were visited on the children, so that the punishment, *e.g.* which fell on the sons of Spermias and Bulis, who had offered themselves as victims to atone for the murder of the Persian envoys of Xerxes by the Spartans, seemed to him of all the facts he had known to be the most marvellous instance of Divine interposition (*Herod.* vii. 137). The latter rather than the former thought commended itself to the mind of Æschylus as in harmony with a true conception of the Divine government. The idea of a transmitted curse, an *Atê* passing from sire to son through many generations, lies at the root of all, or almost all, his dramas. It was not prosperity itself that brought disaster, but the wanton reckless haughtiness which prosperity engendered. The sequence of evil might always be traced to the fountain-head of some sin which might have been avoided; but which, once committed, went on with accelerating force. At every stage each evil act received its just recompense of reward, but that very recompense was brought about through the instrumentality of a fresh transgression, waiting in its turn for punishment. The "woes of Atreus' line," the curse that rested on the house of Ædipus, the misery of Troia, are all referred to a root-sin which remained unrepented and unatoned for. Even in this approximation to the thought of a righteous order the Greek poet felt himself almost as an *Athanasius contra mundum* in protesting against the Herodotean view of the Divine jealousy.

"There lives an old saw, framed in ancient days,  
In memories of men, that high estate  
Full-grown brings forth its young, nor childless dies;  
But that from good success  
Springs to the race a woe insatiable.

But I, *apart from all*  
*Hold this my creed alone ;*  
 For impious act it is that offspring breeds,  
 Like to their parent stock ;  
 For still in every house  
 That loves the right, their fate for evermore  
 Hath issue good and fair."

*Agam., 727-737.*

But with this there was the thought of which the *Eumenides* of the great trilogy is the supreme utterance. The entail of curses might be cut off. The Avengers might become the Gentle Ones. *παθεῖν, μαθεῖν*—"pain is gain," *παθήματα, μαθήματα*—"sufferings are schoolings," was stamped in the mint of his mind as one of the generalized lessons of experience. And so he stands at least on the threshold of the higher truths which it was given to the prophet on the banks of Chebar to proclaim in its fullness.

I have dwelt at some length on this unconscious parallelism because it helps us, if I mistake not, to understand the thoughts of the prophet as he pondered over the proverb which represented Israel as swayed by an inherited curse, bearing the punishment of the sins of an earlier generation. That punishment was for correction and not destruction, that pain may be the truest gain, he had already taught when he declared that in the latter days men should acknowledge that God "had not done among his people without cause all that he had done in it" (Ezek. xiv. 23). Now from that truth he passes on to the higher conception of the responsibility, and therefore of the freedom, of each individual man. Men should have no occasion to use the "sour grapes" proverb any more in Israel. No facts of *heredité*, no apparent visitation of the guilt of many generations on the head of one, was to stand in competition with the great law as uttered in the words, "Behold all souls are mine ; as the soul of the father, so

also the soul of the son is mine; the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. xviii. 4).

I do not care to enter fully into the grounds which led the prophet to enumerate the transgressions of the law which the righteous man avoids, and which bring condemnation on the evil-doer. To us he may seem to mix up the ethical and the ceremonial, the laws of the Ten Commandments with the precepts of Leviticus. I cannot doubt that the prophet's words were not without a purpose and a meaning. Sins against purity of worship, sins against purity of life, whether those sins did or did not involve the violation of another's rights, or shewed only the mastery of appetite over reverence and self-control, sins of violence and fraud, the sins of the oppressor and the usurer, of hardness and un pitying selfishness, these he grouped together because he found them all eating, like a canker, into the nation's life, and his very training as a priest led him to put away the reticence which would have hindered him from mentioning any of them, or made him stop short in his catalogue of abominations. What it is well to know is the distinctness with which he proclaims, as one who was the preacher of a gospel pre-evangelized, the eternal Love which was ready evermore to welcome and forgive the penitent. In words as clear as those of St. Paul, when he taught that "God willeth all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. ii. 4), as those of the Christ when He proclaimed that it was not "the will of his Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (Matt. xviii. 14), Ezekiel was led to utter as an oracle of God that which has been the burden of every true evangelist: "Why will ye die, O house of Israel? . . . I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God; wherefore turn yourselves and live" (Ezek. xviii. 32).

And it is not without significance in its bearing on other

and even deeper controversies that the prophet recognizes, in those to whom he speaks, the existence of what has been called a "verifying faculty," the power, and therefore, with the power, the right and the duty, to judge of what claims to be a revelation of the mind of God, according to its conformity with the standard of right which conscience has been taught to recognize. When he seeks to vindicate the ways of God to man, he takes for granted that men may and ought to judge whether his vindication is satisfactory. He, at all events, would have shrunk from defending the *horribile decretum* of a predestination to evil and to punishment simply on the ground that men may not question the Divine Omnipotence, or that their thoughts on justice and equity are no measure of the meaning of those words as applied to Divine Acts. As Abraham had asked of old, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. xviii. 25), so Ezekiel, with all the freedom of a living faith, puts into the mouth of God, as an answer to those who murmured that the way of the Lord was not equal, the question, "O house of Israel, are not my ways equal, are not your ways unequal?" (Ezek. xviii. 29). Because they were so, he could add that the Lord would judge those who so murmured; on that ground he could invite even them to repentance and reformation. He had offered in his love to give them "one heart and a new spirit" (Ezek. xi. 19), but they were to be fellow-workers with God in that great work, and were, on their side, to make for themselves "a new heart and a new spirit" (Ezek. xviii. 31). In this as in other things he anticipated the teaching of an age of fuller illumination, and the words spoken on the banks of Chebar find their echo in St. Paul's earnest appeal, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do" (Phil. ii. 13); and the ground of that appeal was found by the prophet as



by the Apostle, in the thought of the "good pleasure" of the will of God, which finds its satisfaction in life and not in death, which is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. iii. 9).

E. H. PLUMPTRE.

## THE EARNEST OF THE SPIRIT.

### II. CORINTHIANS V. 5.

ST. PAUL opens this verse by saying, "Now he that wrought us up for this very thing is God." What *is* this very or selfsame thing? *What* is the end which God has in view in all that He does in, and for, and upon those who walk by faith and not by sight? It is, as we are told in the previous verse, that "mortality may be swallowed up of life." *This* is the end He has set before Him, and keeps before Him,—that all which is mortal in us, all that *can* die, may be lost, absorbed in, transmuted and glorified by that in us which cannot die.

And *when* is this end to be reached? It is to be reached, as we also learn from the previous verse, when this mortal shall have put on immortality, when we shall be clothed upon with the white raiment of a spiritual and imperishable life, when the frail tenement of our mortality has been replaced by the house of God, the building not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens.

1. The first thought suggested by this passage is, therefore, that our true life does not and cannot consist in that which is mortal, or perishable, in us. So far from consisting in that of which death may rob us at any moment, our true life is, according to the holy Apostle, hampered, clogged, restrained, thwarted by our mortality. It groans