

THE EXPOSITOR.

EZEKIEL : AN IDEAL BIOGRAPHY.

V.

IN writing a formal dirge or lamentation on the fate of the princes of Israel, as in Chapter xix., Ezekiel was following in the footsteps of Jeremiah. The book which we know as the "Lamentations" of that prophet was, indeed, of later date (B.C. 588), written after the capture and destruction of the city ; but there had been an earlier dirge, or series of dirges, on the death of Josiah (2 Chron. xxxv. 25), and Ezekiel now enters on a like task for two of that king's successors, whose lot it was to end their lives in exile. In language which reminds us, once more, of Æschylus, he paints Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin as young lion whelps, who were not slow to develop the fierceness and cruelty of the lion nature. After the manner of Chapter xvi. 3, the lioness "mother" of the parable represents the royal house of Judah, as idealized, so as almost to correspond with what we call the principle of *heredité*. The other "lions" with which she companied, were the great powers of the heathen world, neighbouring nations such as Moab and Ammon, Tyre and Zidon and Philistia. The "whelps" which she reared were, of course, the princes of Judah. Each of them, as it grew up, developed more and more the inherited qualities of the stock from which it sprang. We seem almost to hear the very words of the *Agamemnon*, which paint a like development as following on

the seeming harmless-ness of the lion-cub's earlier years.¹ So Ezekiel paints a like picture: "She brought up one of her whelps; it became a young lion, and it learned to catch the prey; it devoured men." The "young lion" in this case was Jehoahaz; and its fate was, as in the history of 2 Kings xxiii. 31-33; 2 Chron. xxxvi. 4, that "the nations heard of him; that he was taken in their pit;" that "they brought him with chains into the land of Egypt." But

"uno avulso, non deficit alter"

of like nature. Passing over Jehoiakim (probably because he, however ignominious his death and burial (Jer. xxii. 18, 19), at least died in his own country), the prophet paints with like vividness the career of Jehoiachin. He also "learned to catch the prey and devour men" (Ezek. xix. 6). Acts of outrage or of robbery² were as the prelude of

¹ The parallelism is so striking that it may be worth while to quote the whole passage from the Greek dramatist:—

"One was there who did rear
A lion's whelp within his home to dwell,
A monster waking fear,
Weaned from the mother's milk it loved so well:
Then, in life's dawning light,
Loved by the children, petted by the old,
Oft in his arms clasped tight,
As one an infant newly-born would hold,
With eye that gleamed beneath the fondling hand,
And fawning as at hunger's strong command.

"But soon of age full-grown,
It shewed the inbred nature of its sire,
And wrought, unasked, alone,
A feast to be that fostering nurture's hire;
Gorged full with slaughtered sheep,
The house was stained with blood, as with a curse
No slaves away could keep.
A murderous mischief waxing worse and worse,
Sent as from God a priest of Atè fell,
And reared within the man's own house to dwell."

Agamemnon, 695-718.

² The words of verse 7 have been variously read "he broke in pieces its palaces," or "he knew" (in the sense of "outraged") "its widows." Even they were not safe from his rapacity or lust. Ewald, following the *Targum*, adopts the former rendering, Keil and Hengstenberg the latter.

a reign of trouble and discord; but he too provoked the hostility of the nations, and he was taken in their pits, and the mountains of Israel heard the voice of his roaring no more, and "they brought him to the King of Babylon" (Ezek. xix. 7-9). From the parable of the lion, as an emblem of sovereignty, Ezekiel passes abruptly to that of the vine, as being the received symbol of Israel (Isa. v. 7; Ps. lxxx. 8; Ezek. xvii. 6). That had been fruitful and full of branches by reason of many waters, but she was plucked up and the East wind dried up her fruits, and now, in her captivity, she was "planted in the wilderness," and she "had no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule."

The two parables were, as the closing words indicate, predictive as well as retrospective. Yet another king was to be carried to Babylon. Yet another band of exiles was to follow those for whom Ezekiel wrote, and so he ends, with the strong emphasis of iteration, "This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation" (Ezek. xix. 14). Blow after blow was to fall till wailing and weeping shall seem the only natural utterance.

The precision with which the date is given at the opening of Chapter xx. indicates, as in Chapter viii. 1, that it was looked on by the prophet as a memorable epoch in his life; and the discourse connected with it, which includes Chapters xx.-xxiii. (as indicated by the recurrence of the question, "Will thou judge them, son of man?" in Chapters xx. 4, xxii. 2, xxiii. 36), as one of his most solemn utterances. Once again, "Certain of the elders of Israel" had come before him "to enquire of the Lord." What word of counsel had the prophet for them to guide them in their perplexities? What hope was there of restoration to their own land? Should they seek the peace of the land in which they dwelt, or conspire against it and try to throw off the Babylonian yoke? It may be inferred from the prophet's reply that they came with no true repentance, no real

wish to learn. They wanted one who would speak smooth things, as of old the false prophets had done in Jerusalem. And, therefore, the prophet is bidden to open his discourse with the same words as he had used before in Chapter xiv. 3: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be enquired of by you?" Before there could be any guidance such as they sought, any word of comfort and counsel, there must be the confession of their sins, the conviction of their sinfulness. It would seem to have been the prophet's desire to press this home upon them as an accuser clothed with an almost judicial authority; and the desire is recognized as legitimate, and he is told how to accomplish it. "Wilt thou judge them, son of man; wilt thou judge them? Cause them to know the iniquity of their fathers?" And upon this there follows what we may call Ezekiel's grand indictment, his review of the history of the people from the Exodus from Egypt onward.

I shall not attempt to follow that indictment, step by step, through all its counts. The points which are specially suggestive as throwing light upon the history of Israel are, (1) That the people had fallen during their sojourn in the land of Goshen, into the "abominations" of the Egyptian theriomorphic worship. The work of education had to begin from the beginning. Statutes were given in keeping which, if a man could keep them, there was life in its highest, truest sense. Of all outward institutions Ezekiel fixes on the Sabbath as the witness alike of the Unity of God as the Creator and Ruler of the world, and of the higher life of man (Ezek. xx. 11, 12). But statutes and Sabbaths were alike given in vain. They did not keep the one; they had not walked in the other. For this their sin one generation perished in the wilderness. That which followed deserved the same fate, but were spared by their Lord "for his name's sake, that it should not be polluted among the heathen" (Ezek. xx. 14). Their preservation,

under the discipline of partial dispersion, was a truer manifestation of the Divine character, of which the Name of Jehovah was the witness, than would have been found in their destruction. Yet another punishment was to come upon them; at first, it might seem, purely retributive—which Ezekiel describes in the terrible and startling words, “I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live” (Ezek. xx. 25). It would be at variance with every true principle of interpretation to read into those words the after-thoughts either of St. Paul or Marcion, as to the inferiority of the law given by Moses to the covenant given at first to Abraham and renewed in Christ. To Ezekiel the thought that the statutes in which he delighted could ever be described as the “weak and beggarly elements” (Gal. iv. 9), as “decaying and waxing old and ready to vanish away” (Heb. viii. 13), would have been as inconceivable as that which looked on the Law of Moses as the work of a *Demiurgus*, a creative secondary Power dealing with the imperfect material world, and not of the supreme eternal ONE. What he meant was that sin became the penalty of sin. Man was left to himself, “let alone” to reap the fruits of his doings, that he might learn to what measureless degradation he was capable of falling. With a keen incisive irony Ezekiel uses of that degradation the very words which belonged of right to the higher Law of righteousness. Here also there were “statutes” and “judgments,” but they were for death, not for life; for evil, and not for good. The false creed and the hideous and licentious worship were to run their course and do their worst upon the people, “to the end that they might know that their God was Jehovah.” Foremost among those evil statutes were the Moloch worship, with its burning fires, through which children were made to pass, and the ritual of the high places, with their groves of thick trees and their wanton and lascivious orgies (Ezek. xx. 26–28). It was

with reference to these that the prophet adds a play upon the Hebrew word for "high place," *Bamah*, after the manner that was characteristic of the Hebrew prophets generally, and specially of Micah, in whose first two Chapters we find some dozen examples of it. Separating the two syllables of the Hebrew, he finds in them, as by a fancied etymology, "Go, Whither?" not, perhaps; without a latent reference (as Ewald suggests) to the fact that the "whither" to which they were bound was the "whoredom," literal as well as spiritual, which mingled with their abominations. It was because of this that Jehovah declared that "He would not be enquired of at all by them." It was in vain that they tried to cheat themselves with the belief that they could abdicate their high position, and be simply "as the heathen, the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone" (Ezek. xx. 31, 32). They could not thus divest themselves of their calling and its responsibility, or be, even in their apostasy, "less than archangel ruined." For the heathen there might be the "more tolerable" judgment; for those who had been called to be witnesses of God there must be the "many stripes" and the sorer chastisement, even "the stretched out arm, and fury poured out." But in the very severity of that punishment, terrible as it was, there was a ground for hope, the only ground that, under the conditions of the case, was possible. Jehovah would repeat the discipline of the Exodus, and bring them into the "wilderness of the nations" (Babylonia or any other land of exile may be included under that term), and plead with them there (comp. the parallel of Hos. ii. 2, 14), as He had pleaded with their fathers. He, as the Shepherd of his people, would bring them under the rod which was used at once to smite and to guide them. "Face to face," as amid the lightnings and thunders of Sinai, they should find themselves in his presence. They would be brought into

what Ezekiel, with a wonderful boldness, calls the "bond of the covenant" (Ezek. xx. 37), the "bond" which included in its significance, punishment and love; the "covenant," of which the essential element was that Jehovah was to be their God and that they were to be his people. The fiery process of purification should continue till the rebellious were purged out; and then there rises before the prophet's gaze the wonderful picture of a restored people, worshipping God with a true and therefore an acceptable worship, offering their first fruits and their holy things as a "sweet savour" to the Lord (Ezek. xx. 40, 41). The words in which, Ezekiel speaking, we may well believe, out of his own experience, paints the mingled feelings of the restored people, stretch, like those of all true prophetic utterances, beyond their immediate scope. They contain, if I mistake not, the key of the great problem which weighs on the mind of this generation as, perhaps, it has never weighed before. At least an approximation to the solution of that problem is found in the thought that an element of punishment finds its place, retributive, corrective, preservative, in the state of the redeemed, the saved, the restored. An everlasting punishment is compatible with an everlasting blessedness. What the prophet thought of as belonging to the earthly Jerusalem of a restored Israel, we may transfer to the citizens of the heavenly city. There is for them no water of Lethe such as the Greek mythos dreamt of, such as even Dante makes the soul drink of as it passes from the mountain of purification into the borders of the *Paradiso*.¹ "Ye shall know

¹ Dante thus speaks of the river which he finds in the earthly Paradise at the summit of the Mount of Purgatory.

"On this side it descends with power endowed,
Which takes from men the memory of their sin,
As that recalls each single deed of good.
So here it doth the name of Lethe win,
And Eunoë there, and till men both shall taste,
Will not to do its wondrous work begin."

Purgatorio xxviii. 12—132. (From an unpublished translation).

that I am the Lord, when I shall have brought you into the land of Israel. . . . And there shall ye remember your ways and all your doings wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils which ye have committed. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O ye house of Israel, saith the Lord God." In that memory of the evil past, which in the nature of the case, must be more keen and terrible in proportion to the illumination of the spirit that remembers, it will find that which will deepen its sense of the infinite compassions of the Most High. Repentance and humility and lowliness, will be, in that state which is "measured not by time," as it is under our time-condition, now, at once the groundwork and the safeguard of its eternal blessedness. In proportion as it knows God, it must know itself even as also it is known, and feel that God has not dealt with it "after its evil ways," but after his own unfathomable love. We can scarcely wonder that the prophet's words should have seemed strange and incomprehensible to the elders of Israel who came with their hypocritical pretence of enquiring of the Lord; that they should have said of him, as men have said of other prophets of the wider hope who have sought to reconcile the goodness and the severity of God: "Doth he not speak parables?" Is not his teaching an enigma or a dream?

That question is, it is true, separated from the context to which I have referred it by another section which is more directly parabolical in its nature. Ezekiel was to set his face against "the forest of the South Field" (the field of the *Negeb*, or south country of Judah, here taken, a part for the whole, as representing the entire kingdom). He was to proclaim that the fire of God's judgment (a literal conflagration of literal trees is, of course, out of the question as we

look at the inner meaning of the passage) should be kindled against that kingdom. In words which were manifestly present to our Lord's thoughts as He spake, on the way to Golgotha, to the daughters of Jerusalem (Luke xxiii. 31), the prophet says that that fire shall "devour every green tree and every dry tree." The "flaming flame" should not be quenched, and all faces, from the south to the north, should be burnt therein. Ezekiel's words were, we may well believe, as terrible to those who heard them as those which spoke of "the worm that dieth not and the fire that shall not be quenched" (Mark ix. 44, 46, 48) were to our Lord's disciples. They felt that it spoke of a certain and tremendous judgment. Jehovah had kindled it, and it could not be quenched. But they shrank from facing that conclusion. With something like a sneer they asked, and this seems to have been the special point of attack, the question already quoted: "'Doth he not speak parables?' Who is this who attempts to combine the incompatible, now dwelling on the mercy of God as triumphant over evil, and not dealing with men according to their iniquity; now threatening them with the fire unquenchable of his wrath?"

The prophet met the sneer with words which were so literal that none could fail to understand them. Instead of "the forest of the South," he told them that Jerusalem and the holy place and the land of Israel from the south to the north, were definitely the regions of which he spoke (Ezek. xxi. 2, 3). Against *them* the sword of Jehovah should go forth, and there should be sighing and bitterness, even among the captives of Chebar, and in the prophet's own heart, for the tidings that should reach them from their fatherland. After a short interval of silence, indicated by the words, "The word of the Lord came again unto me" (Ezek. xxi. 8), he bursts forth into what we might almost call the Song of the Sword of Jehovah. Of that

sword (the imagery seems suggested by Deut. xxxii. 41, 42) Ezekiel says, that it is sharpened and furbished, glittering as it slays. He adds, in words that are perplexing enough in the Hebrew, and utterly unintelligible in our English version: "Should we then make mirth? It contemneth the rod of my son, *as every tree.*" Of this passage, as might be expected from its difficulty, very different explanations have been given. I select three of the most prominent.

(1) Hengstenberg sees in the phrase "the rod of my son," the rod of Jehovah for the chastisement of Israel as his rebellious child. The chastisement was to be heavy in proportion to the knowledge and the consequent guilt involved in that relationship; and therefore the rod "despised all wood," *i.e.* exceeded all other punishments, in its severity, looked down on them as from the height of its superiority. (2) Keil, on the other hand, looks on the words as put dramatically by the prophet into the mouth of his unbelieving hearers. Shall we rejoice (saying), "The rod of my son," the sceptre of the king of Judah, as the chosen child of God, "despiset all other wood," *i.e.* is above every sceptre of the heathen nations, which is the symbol of their authority. Shall we make that the ground of our confidence and security? (3) Ewald, adopting a conjectural reading, renders the clause: "No weak rod of my son, the softest of all wood;" and looks on it as completing what is said of the sharp and glittering sword. That will be found to be "no weak rod. . . ."

I cannot bring myself to look on any of these interpretations as satisfactory, and venture to submit another, based upon the fact that the second Psalm containing, as it does, both of the peculiar phrases, was probably the starting point of Ezekiel's thoughts. That Psalm had addressed a king of Israel as "my son." It had also spoken of a "rod" as placed in his hands, even a rod of iron, with which he should crush the nations like a potter's vessel

(Ps. ii. 7, 9; comp. Ps. xlv. 6). May not those words have suggested to the prophet the thought that there was an unseen king of Israel, in very deed the son of Jehovah, wielding at once the sceptre and the sword, contemning the resistance of every power (the "tree" standing, as in Ezek. xix. 10, xvii. 6, for the symbol of princedom) that opposed itself? Starting with this view of the meaning, what follows seems coherent enough. The prophet, as representing the terror of the people, is to "cry and howl" and "smite upon his thigh" (Ezek. xxi. 12), for the sword is to be "upon all the princes of Israel." The "trial," *i.e.* the test, the crisis, is, he says, come, and "what if the rod that contemneth (*i.e.* the sceptre of the son as the true righteous king) shall not be there, saith the Lord?" What if there is only the sharp sword that smites, and not also the sceptre that symbolizes a righteous sovereignty? That will give cause enough for wailing and smiting of the hands. And the sword should go on to do its dread work, to the right hand or to the left; for that work was not confined to one nation only, and it seemed to depend on chance on which nation it would fall first. Ezekiel sees, as in a vision, the king of Babylon who wields for the time the sword of God, halting at the point where the great highways diverged—one leading to Rabbath of the Ammonites, which had taken a prominent part in the revolt against Babylon (Jer. xxv. 21, xl. 14, xlix. 1-6), and the other to "Judah in Jerusalem the defenced," the city that thought itself secure in its fortifications. There he uses divinations after the manner of the Chaldeans. The names of the two cities are written on arrows, and the king is to draw lots with them. He consults the teraphim, in what precise way we know not. The victims are sacrificed and their entrails are inspected, as in the like divinations in Greece and Rome, that so the soothsayers may determine the strategical problem (Ezek. xxi. 19-22). And the lot falls upon Jeru-

saalem; and so the siege begins with its usual array of mounts and battering rams and forts. And yet even then, so great was the infatuation of the defenders of the city in their reliance on the false prophets who predicted that Jerusalem would not be taken (comp. Jer. xxviii. 3),¹ that it seemed to them as if all was a lying divination, they believed that they still had "weeks of weeks" before them; but in spite of that infatuation Jehovah would call to remembrance their iniquity and discover (*i.e.* lay bare) their transgressions. For the "profane wicked prince of Judah," *i.e.* for Zedekiah, there was written the decree that his diadem and his crown should be taken from him. With the terrible emphasis of a triple iteration there is the knell of doom, "I will overturn, overturn, overturn" (Ezek. xxi. 25-27). There was to be a time of anarchy and confusion, till at last "he should come whose right it is" (Ezekiel apparently adopts that explanation of the "Shiloh" prophecy of Gen. xlix. 10²), the true Anointed of the Lord, He who was indeed his Son, mightier than the sword of the king of Babylon, "contemning" all the "trees," *i.e.* all the principdoms of the world. To Him the Father had given that sovereignty, and it should be exercised in reversing the false judgments of mankind (as in words which seem to have been deliberately reproduced in Luke i. 52, xiv. 11, xviii. 14), in exalting him that is low and abasing him that is high (Ezek. xxi. 26). But the prophet will not leave the Ammonites to the delusive comfort of the thought that, because the divinations of Nebuchadnezzar had turned the march of his armies in the first instance against Jerusalem, they were therefore to escape. Their soothsayers might exult in what they heard of the omens of the teraphim and the *extispicia*, but the "glittering sword" was drawn

¹ I adopt Ewald's reading and rendering of the words translated in the Authorized Version by "to them that have sworn oaths."

² See Dean Payne Smith's note in Bishop Ellicott's *O. T. Commentary*.

against them also. That sword must do its work, and their own sword, powerless to resist, must return to its sheath. They should be delivered into the hands of "brutish men," fierce, godless, ruthless, "skilful to destroy," as with the skill that comes from long experience. For them there was no hope, as there was for Judah, of national restoration. They were to vanish from the history of the peoples, and to be no more remembered.

The Chapter that follows is once again of the character of a great indictment. The iteration of such indictments is, we may well believe, characteristic of every true prophet's work. He must say the same things over and over again; line must be upon line, and precept upon precept. He must hammer on the nail till he has driven it in. There is not the same reason for us, in our calmer retrospect of that work, to go once again through every count of the accusation. It will be enough to say that it includes well-nigh every sin that can corrupt and pollute the heart of a people, and eat like a canker into its very life; idolatry in its foulness and murder in its hatefulness; Sabbaths profaned, father and mother dishonoured; lust triumphant over the sanctity of marriage alike in its inner sacredness and in its half-physical half-ceremonial laws of purity; the minds of men set on usury and increase and extortion, and exulting in their dishonest gains; the priests violating the law of Jehovah, and profaning his holy things, putting no difference between the holy and profane, between clean and unclean, and hiding their eyes alike from the outward obligations and the inner significance of the Sabbaths of Jehovah; the princes, like wolves ravening for prey, shedding blood and destroying souls; the people using oppression and exercising robbery, vexing the poor and needy, and oppressing the stranger wrongfully. Above all, the crowning evil was that those whose lips should have kept knowledge, who should have been as lights shining in

the world, were exemplars only for evil. The prophets were joined together "in a conspiracy, devouring souls," and taking treasure and precious things wherever they could get them, even from the widow and the orphan (Ezek. xxii. 25), still scamping their work, as builders up of the national life, by erecting a wall with no foundation but that of lies, constructed not with the stone of righteousness but with the worthless rubble of false divinations, saying, "Thus saith the Lord God," when the Lord had not spoken (Ezek. xxii. 28). What wonder that the prophet should say, as the spokesman of Jehovah, after this exhaustive analysis of "all sorts and conditions of men," as Jeremiah (Jer. v. 1) had, with different imagery, said before: "I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none." And, therefore, the sentence was decreed; and the fiery furnace was to consume the base metals, the brass and tin and iron and lead, and the dross of silver which had taken the place of the fine gold (Ezek. xxii. 18). They were to be consumed (always of course with the reserved hope which had been uttered before in Chapter xvi. 60, though now the prophet, absorbed in the immediate issue and limiting his gaze to the horizon of the nearer future, does not utter it) with the fire of the Lord's wrath. The law of retribution was to do its dread and terrible work. "Their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord God" (Ezek. xxii. 31).

I pass over the long parable of Chapter xxiii.—a *replica* so to speak, of that of Chapter xvi.—with hurried footsteps, as I should pass, in a history of Latin literature in its bearing on Roman life, with equal speed over the sixth Satire of Juvenal. At the time it was emphatically the right thing to say. It shocked no nerve of modesty. It did not introduce the things of shame to those who

were till then ignorant of them. Its purpose was to make men feel that there might be as terrible an evil, as entire a departure from all purity of heart, yes, even from the living God, in diplomatic negotiations and political alliances as in the vilest forms of the debasement of the harlot. But for us, in cold blood, and, writing for those who are under the influence, at least in some measure, of the higher standard of Christian purity, and of the law that such things should not "even be named among us," to comment on them in detail, is, I conceive, neither necessary nor desirable; and I content myself with touching on such points as illustrate either the prophet's character or the political history of his time.

And (1) there are the two names of the sinful sisters, which formed, we cannot doubt, an essential feature in the prophet's teaching. They are like in form, as if to indicate similarity of character; they are sufficiently unlike to indicate also the diversities of their positions. Samaria is represented by Aholah (=Her tent). That name emphasized the fact of her schismatic and self-chosen, religion. Do what she might to establish a worship and a ritual, building her temples in Samaria, and setting up her calves in Bethel and Dan, there was from first to last, no Divine Presence there. It was her own tent, the tabernacle she had made for herself, and that was all. With Judah, however, represented by "Aholibah" (=My tent is in her), it was widely different. She had been called to be the dwelling-place of Jehovah. He had chosen her to set his name there. She had a higher vocation, and therefore a greater responsibility and a deeper guilt.

(2) Reading not the parable, but the history which lies beneath it, we note that it describes in this bold figurative speech, what had been the traditional policy of the Northern Kingdom, from the first. The taint of Egypt had never been eradicated, and was perpetuated in the

golden calves at Bethel and at Dan. In later times Israel had, as we should say in euphemistic phrase, "coquetted" in her diplomacy with both Egypt and Assyria. She was in Hosea's language (Hos. vii. 11), as a "silly dove" fluttering between the two eagle powers of the world. "They call to Egypt, they go down to Assyria;" and as the retribution for this vacillation she was delivered into the hands of the stronger of the two powers, and became a "bye-word"¹ among women, *i.e.* among the nations. Judah, on the other hand, the Aholibah of the parable, had first courted the Assyrian alliance (Ezek. xxiii. 12) as in the days of Ahaz, attracted by the strength of her armies, her captains, and rulers, "clothed most gorgeously," her horsemen riding upon horses; and then, as in the time of Hezekiah (Isa. xxxix.), had allied herself with the Chaldeans (Ezek. xxiii. 14), sending messengers unto them and inviting their support. They had brought "bracelets and beautiful crowns" (Ezek. xxiii. 42), *i.e.* a seeming increase of prestige and prosperity had followed from the alliance; but it was, notwithstanding this, fatal in its ultimate results. The power that she had courted turned against her. The mind of Jehovah, her true King, was "alienated" from her, and He sent against her the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, their "rulers and lords and nobles" (the probable rendering of the words given in the A.V. as proper names, "Pekod and Shoa and Koa"²) who were to come with their chariots and wagons, and buckler and shield and helmet, and to mutilate her power, and stone her with stones and slay her children with the sword, and burn up their houses with fire. All the pomp and pageantry with which the later kings of Judah sought to gild their corruption when they "built a

¹ Literally, "a name." The "famous" of the Authorized Version looks like an attempt to naturalize the sense of the *famosa* of the Vulgate.

² So the Vulgate, *nobiles, tyrannos, principesque*.

wide house and large chambers, and cieled it with cedar and painted it with vermilion,” were but as the decking of the harlot’s face and the furnishing of her table (comp. Jer. xxii. 14, 15, and Ezek. xxiii. 40, 41). And, therefore, for her there must be also the harlot’s doom. Aholah and Aholibah, Samaria and Judah, must bear the recompense of their lewdness and the sins of their idols.

E. H. PLUMPTRE.

“ABOUT MY FATHER’S BUSINESS.”

A PLEA FOR A REJECTED TRANSLATION.

LUKE II. 49.

THE set of modern critical opinion seems to favour the rendering of the above clause adopted by the late Revisers of the New Testament: “*In my Father’s house*,” in preference to the old reading of the Authorized Version: “*About my Father’s business*”; which latter form is admitted to be no less “*linguistically correct*” than the former.¹ And plausible reasons are alleged for this preference. It is proposed in the following pages to offer some considerations which appear to the writer to invalidate the force of those reasons, and to establish the claim of the Authorized Version to be retained.

It has been implied that, grammatically, there is nothing to choose between the two translations. The grounds, therefore, for adopting the one rather than the other must be sought in the context, and in the circumstances attending, or supposed to attend, the utterance of the words.

From the context it is argued in favour of the modern rendering, that the force and meaning of our Lord’s previous question: *τί ὄτι ἐζητεῖτέ με*, depends upon his assump-

¹ Meyer’s *Commentary on Luke*, in loc.