

## EZEKIEL : AN IDEAL BIOGRAPHY.

## VII.

THE sorrowful feeling of the fruitlessness of his labour with which Ezekiel closed the prophetic utterance of Chapter xxxiii. was followed by a denunciation of those whose misconduct was mainly responsible for that fruitlessness, and by the utterance of a better hope for the near or distant future. We are so much accustomed to associate the pastoral office with the functions of the priesthood, that we forget that the "shepherds of Israel," against whom the prophet speaks in Chapter xxxiv., were its civil, not its ecclesiastical rulers. So however it was. With the Hebrews, as with the Homeric Greeks, kings and rulers were "shepherds of the people" (*Iliad*, *passim*). David had been called from the sheep-fold to feed Israel as the people of the Lord (Ps. lxxviii. 71). When their king was dead they were men scattered on the hills as "sheep that have no shepherd" (1 Kings xxii. 17). The charges against the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves must therefore be taken as brought against kings like Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. They are of the same nature as those which we find in Jeremiah xxii. They had not protected the flocks, but had slain them that they might clothe themselves with the wool and eat of the flesh. They had, *i.e.* ruled selfishly and oppressively, indulging in a profligate luxury, had taken no steps to protect the poor or to bring back the exile; and so the people were scattered far and wide, upon every hill, in the "cloudy and dark day." But the flocks were not forgotten by their true Shepherd. He would seek out his sheep that were lost, and bring them back to those "mountains of Israel" which were ever conspicuous in the exile's vision of his fatherland. They should lie in a good fold, and feed on a fat pasture. The false shepherds should receive the reward of their neglect and

cruelty. The goats and other beasts, who were not the sheep, that had "trodden down the residue of the pastures," and "fouled the waters with their feet," and "pushed all the diseased with their horns"—the workers of evil whom the shepherds of Israel had allowed to mingle with the sheep—should be placed by themselves, and the true Shepherd should "judge between cattle and cattle." And this guidance and judgment should not be that of an unseen unmanifested King. He would set up one shepherd over them, the true David, the representative of the ideal which David had imperfectly shadowed forth; and He should be a prince among them, and He would make a covenant of peace with his people, and the evil beasts should cease out of the land, and they should "dwell safely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods," and there should be "showers of blessing," and none should make them afraid. And then—the thoughts of the prophet going back, with a change of imagery, to Isaiah's visions of the future—there should be "a plant of renown" among them, or, perhaps (for the word may have the collective force of "plantation," as in Chapter xvii. 7), He would make the whole land fair and beautiful as a grove of trees planted by the waters, the praise and joy of the whole earth. All blessings should be summed up in the words, "Ye, my flock, the sheep of my pasture, are men, and I am your God, saith Jehovah" (Ezek. xxxiv.).

All readers of Ezekiel will have felt the exceeding beauty of the language in which his hopes were thus clothed; comparatively few, perhaps, realize the extent to which they fashioned, if one may so speak, the thoughts and words of Him in whom they were fulfilled. Reading the gospels in the light of Ezekiel's prophecy, it is hardly possible to avoid the conclusion that He deliberately reproduced the language which He found here. When the Christ said that his own mission was to the "lost sheep of the

house of Israel" (Matt. xv. 24); when He sent his disciples to those lost sheep (Matt. x. 6); when He claimed for Himself the title of the "good shepherd" as contrasted with the thieves and robbers who had preceded Him (John x. 8, 14); when He spoke of leaving the ninety and nine in the wilderness till He had found the sheep which had been lost (Luke xiv. 4); when He said that those who were his sheep should go in and out and should find pasture (John x. 9); when, in this instance developing and extending the prophet's hopes, He spoke of bringing in the sheep "not of that fold" who yet were his, and of the time when there should be "one *flock* and one shepherd" (John x. 16),—He was virtually travelling over the same ground as Ezekiel, and claiming to be all, and more than all, that he had painted in such vivid colours. Even in that closing picture, which shadows forth the separation of the righteous and the wicked under the figure of the shepherd who divided his sheep from the goats (Matt. xxv. 32), we may find, with scarcely the shadow of a doubt, the transfigured reproduction of Ezekiel's image of the supreme eternal Shepherd who should judge "between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he-goats" (Ezek. xxxiv. 17).

In its general bearing the section which fills Chapter xxxv. is a reproduction of the words that had been spoken against Edom in Chapter xxv. 12-14; but it appears to have had, like the prophet's other utterances, a distinct historical starting-point. There was not only, as before, a malignant exultation at the disasters that had befallen Israel, but a new and more ambitious form of hostility. Ezekiel had heard, probably from some of the fugitives from Jerusalem, of the new schemes of the king of Edom and his counsellors. It seemed to them that the time was ripe for an extension of their kingdom. "Thou hast said, These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess them" (Ezek. xxxv. 10). This was the out-

come of the "perpetual hatred" which they had shewn against Israel, of the thirst for blood which had become insatiable. They looked upon the "mountains of Israel," so dear to the prophet's heart, and said, "They are laid desolate, and are given unto us to consume" (Ezek. xxxv. 12). They forgot in their fierce ambition that the laws of retribution work slowly but surely, in the lives of nations as in those of individual men. They forgot also that "Jehovah was there" (Ezek. xxxv. 10), even in the land which they thought He had abandoned; and therefore the sentence pronounced against them is solemnly reinforced. They should stand out in history as the typical representative of the nations who war against God's people, who think that might is right, who in their lust of conquest trample upon the weak and the oppressed. And therefore they are warned that they are bringing upon their nation the doom of destruction. When the whole earth should rejoice in the blessedness of a restored Israel, they (Seir and Idumæa) should be left "most desolate"; the hills and the valleys should be filled with the carcasses of the slain; the cities should be empty, and none should go out or come into them (Ezek. xxxv.).

The sentence thus passed on the would-be conquerors of the mountains of Israel leads, in Chapter xxxvi., to a direct prophetic address to those mountains, which is every way remarkable. We have seen, in Chapter vi., that at an early stage of Ezekiel's work he had prophesied against them. Now he turns to them, (how characteristic it was that the thoughts of the exile in the plains of Chebar, with their long expanse of level, should turn to the *mountains* of his native country!) as sharing in the blessings of the restoration of his people. The exulting cry of the Edomites and the other enemies of Israel, "Aha! even the ancient high places" (the sanctuaries, which had been polluted with a false worship) "are ours in possession!" (Ezek. xxxvi. 2)

touched the prophet's soul to the quick, and he hastens, so to speak, to comfort the hearts of the mountains with the glad tidings which he is commissioned to declare. For Idumæa and its allies there was the sentence, "They shall bear their shame" (Ezek. xxxvi. 7). For the mountains of Israel there is the promise that they should be tilled and sown, that God would multiply upon them man and beast, that He would "settle them upon their old estates," and do better for them than at the beginning. Men should walk on them, and they should be henceforth no more bereaved (Ezek. xxxvi. 5-12).

The promise of restoration is followed by one of Ezekiel's characteristic summaries of the history of God's dealing with his people. It was not without cause that He had scattered the people in the lands of their exile. It would not be without cause that He would bring them back. He had poured out his fury upon them because they had shed blood, and had polluted the land with their idols. They had deserved their punishment. But the prophet could not say that they had deserved their restoration. That rose out of the Divine compassion, not only for Israel as his people, but even, as Ezekiel puts it, with a bold anthropomorphism, for Himself. He had "pity on his own holy Name." He could not bear that that Name should be profaned among the heathen, who thought, in their blindness, that He had abandoned his people (Ezek. xxxvi. 21). Therefore He would bring them back, that that Name might be sanctified among the heathen.

But the prophet could not rest satisfied with the thought of a restoration to mere earthly prosperity. Following in the track of Joel and Isaiah and Jeremiah, he thinks of a conversion of the soul and spirit as the crowning blessing. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness will I cleanse you." He repeats from chapter xi. 19 the promise of the new heart,

the heart of flesh, full of human sympathies, open to the touch of Divine emotions, which is to take the place of the old "stony heart" of the past. But beyond this there was the higher gift of a more directly supernatural grace, purifying and sanctifying, "I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them." They should dwell in the land as a renovated as well as a restored people, and they should be Jehovah's people, and He would be their God (Ezek. xxxvi. 25-28). But, true to his former teaching in Chapters xvi. 61, xx. 43, the blessedness is not to be without its element of a purifying chastisement. Memory, the memory of past evil, is to do its appointed work. In the midst of all outward and inward blessings, with this new spirit working in their hearts, and the fruit of the tree and the corn of the field given them in abundance, they were still to remember their own evil ways, and their doings that were not good, and to loathe themselves in their own sight for their iniquities and their abominations (Ezek. xxxvi. 31). And as the crowning result of these mingled chastisements and blessings, the prophet adds significantly, in deliberate contrast with what he had said at an earlier stage of his ministry (Ezek. xiv. 3; xx. 3), that then Jehovah would be willing to be "inquired of" by his people (Ezek. xxxvi. 37), that He would hear and answer their prayers, that He would give counsel and guidance to those who were in perplexity. A sight which had once been familiar to the prophet furnishes him with a fit illustration of the populousness of the land under its new conditions; and he ends his description with the picture of the desolate cities filled with men, as being like "the holy flock, the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts" (Ezek xxxvi. 38), when the sheep and goats and oxen which thronged her streets might be reckoned, as in Josiah's passover (2 Chron. xxxv. 7), at many myriads.

The expectant attitude of Ezekiel's mind, thus dwelling on the blessedness of the future, must have clashed with all that he witnessed and experienced in the present. He looked around him, and saw a people in whom all spiritual life seemed dead, who were mouldering, as it were, in the "graves of lust," among whom traditions, ceremonies, institutions seemed all to have lost their life. How was the resurrection of such a people possible? If possible, by what means was it to be accomplished? The intensity of his meditations on this question passed, as at other times, into a state of ecstasy. "The hand of the Lord was upon him, and carried him out in the spirit of the Lord" (Ezek. xxxvii. 1). He passed, in this spiritual journey, to "the valley," presumably to that which had been mentioned before in Chapter iii. 22, the valley or "plain" by the river Chebar. Whether what he saw in his vision represents an actual spectacle which had met his gaze there, or was part of the spiritual vision, we have no adequate *data* for determining. The picture which he draws was one which might have been seen on many of the plains on which Assyrian or Chaldæan armies had fought their battles. The bodies of the slain had been left unburied, a prey to dogs and vultures; the ground was covered with their bones, and the bones were "very dry." That, as the vision was afterwards explained, was a fit parable of the state of Israel. Christian prophets and teachers have often felt how true a picture it presented of the Churches and nations in which they lived. Institutions and ordinances that were once instinct with life have become lifeless, are reduced to the "dry bones" of formularies and ceremonies. There is no living breath to inspire and quicken. If there is not the putrescence of moral and spiritual decay, there is at all events but the skeleton of what was once a living and potent reality. To those dry bones the prophet was commanded to prophesy. It was indeed what he had been

doing ever since his prophetic work began. If he had judged by the judgment of experience and of sense, he would have refused to enter upon so hopeless a task. But he had faith to believe that there was a supernatural power working through him. And so in his vision he preached to the bones—and the pulse of life began to beat. And every stage of the progress had its analogue in the spiritual recovery of the nation. There is, first of all, “a noise and a shaking”; and then the bones that had been separated come together; and then they are clothed with skin; and then, last of all, there comes the quickening spirit from the four winds of heaven, and the dead dry skeletons stand up once more as an exceeding great army (Ezek. xxxvii. 1–10). So, in the spiritual resurrection of which this is the parable, there is first the agitation and the movement caused by new thoughts, new fears, new hopes; and then there comes the clothing of the dry bones of forms and ordinances with a new investiture adapted to the coming life, and what was fragmentary and isolated is drawn together to a coherent whole; and then, at last, life comes in its fulness, and the men, the Church, the nation, the institution is once more a living and potent unity.

The question whether the parable implied a belief in the ultimate resurrection of the dead, as many interpreters, both patristic and modern, have contended, seems to me to lie almost, if not altogether, outside the limits of an interpretation of Ezekiel's parable. The primary thought is obviously that of a national, spiritual, resuscitation. All that can be said is that the imagery of the parable tended to suggest the belief, and that it is, at least, possible that Jewish interpreters may have looked on it as Christian interpreters have done; and that thus it may have become the starting-point of the belief of the Pharisees in “the resurrection of the dead at the last day,” which took the place of the vaguer belief of the older Israelites as to the

continued existence of the soul in the unseen world, the Hades of the Greeks, the Sheol of the Hebrews.

It is at once more profitable and more interesting to trace in this tale, as in that of Ezekiel's parable of the shepherd and the sheep, the extent to which the teaching of the prophet was reproduced in that of the Christ. To me it seems hardly possible to read the fifth chapter of St. John's Gospel without finding such a reproduction. There was no light, and therefore no life, in the people or the priests, in the sects and parties into which Judaism was divided. The very institutions which had once been instinct with life had passed into the state of the things that are "decaying and waxing old and are ready to vanish" (Heb. viii. 13). The sensuous and money-loving people were dead, though they had a name to live, and were mouldering as in the graves that were full of all uncleanness. One who looked out upon their spiritual condition might well have asked the question, Can these dry bones live? And, behold, there came the voice of One who was able to say, "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (John xi. 25), who united in his teaching the truths of the spiritual and the literal resurrection—the hour that then actually was, when the dead should hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that heard should live; the hour also when all that were in the graves (here the eternal resurrection, which is partially manifested in the present, can scarcely be excluded) should also hear that voice and come forth from their graves, according to their characters, to the resurrection of life or of judgment (John v. 25-29). Nor is this all. When He spoke of the Son as sharing with the Father the prerogative of quickening whom He will (John v. 21), of the Spirit as giving life (John vi. 63), we have once again distinct echoes of Ezekiel's teaching.

Yet another symbolic action was to be given as the

pledge of the fulfilment of the prophet's hopes. The long disunion between Israel and Judah, running like an ever-widening rift through the whole course of the nation's history, must have seemed to him an almost incurable evil: what hope could there be for the future as long as that disunion continued? Ezekiel, after the manner of his predecessors and followers in the prophetic office, of Zedekiah (1 Kings xxii. 11), of Jeremiah (xiii. 1-7; xviii. 1-4; xix. 10; xxvii. 2), of Agabus (Acts xxi. 11) answered that question by an acted parable. The two sticks that were marked with the names of Judah and of Ephraim were joined together and became as one; and when the people inquired what was the meaning of the act, they were told that in the Divine purpose for the future they should be no more two realms nor divided into two kingdoms, but should find that unity was strength, and so, under the true ideal king of the house of David, they should all have one shepherd, and they should walk in the judgment of Jehovah, and observe his statutes, and God would make a covenant of peace with them, even an everlasting covenant, and his tabernacle should be with them, and He would be their God and they should be his people (Ezek. xxxvii. 15-28).

Few portions of Ezekiel's prophecies have been a greater perplexity to commentators than the chapters (xxxviii. and xxxix.) on which we now enter. We ask how Gog and Magog came within the range of his vision; who they were; why they occupy so prominent a place in his predictions; in what way and at what time the prediction has been fulfilled, or whether it yet awaits fulfilment in the near or distant future? The fact that the same names re-appear in the Revelation of St. John, as leading the nations against the saints of God at the close of the millennial kingdom (Rev. xx. 8), adds another problem, of which we must endeavour to find at least an approximate solution.

The *data* of that solution are found in the following facts.

(1) Meshech and Tubal have already appeared (Ezek. xxxii. 26) as the names of Scythian tribes who, for the reasons given in a previous paper, had attracted Ezekiel's notice as among the enemies of Israel.

(2) "Magog" appears in the ethnological table of Genesis x. as among the descendants of Japheth, and is joined with the two tribes just mentioned, and with Gomer and Madai and Javan and Tiras and Togarmah (Gen. x. 2, 3).

(3) Gog is not found elsewhere in the Old Testament, and may presumably be taken here as the name of an individual chieftain.

(4) The word translated "chief" is taken by the LXX. and by many commentators as a proper name, "The Prince of Rosh," and is assumed to have been that of another Scythian tribe, possibly to have been the remote parent of our modern "Russian." We have already seen that the great Scythian invasion of Asia Minor and Syria in the reign of Josiah might well have directed the thoughts of Ezekiel to a power which had been so formidable, and which later on threatened the stability of the great Persian monarchy under Cyrus and Darius.

I am disposed to go further, and to look for a more directly personal starting-point. Placed as Ezekiel was, he may well have come into contact with these Scythian tribes, either as part of Nebuchadnezzar's army, or by a journey on his part into the regions north of Ararat. May we not picture the prophet as actually in the midst of those barbarian hosts, hearing their boastful threats with somewhat of the same feelings as a Christian teacher might have listened to the boasts of Attila or Jenghis Khan? Would it not be natural for the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal to threaten that what they had done once

before they would do yet again; that they would pour down upon the land of Israel, and lay waste its cities, and plunder and profane its sanctuary, bringing with them the mingled barbaric hosts of Pharas and Cush and Phut? <sup>1</sup> Would it not be as natural, that, on hearing such threats, the prophet should fall back on his faith in Jehovah as the righteous ruler of the nations? The invasion of the new barbarian hosts should have the same issue as that of the armies of Sennacherib. The daughter of Zion should once again shake her head at the invader, and the land should be covered with the carcasses of the slain. The valley of their slaughter (probably the valley of the Jordan) should receive a new historic name, and be known as Hamon-gog, "the multitude of Gog." So once more would Jehovah sanctify Himself among the nations and shew that He was the protector of his people (Ezek. xxxix. 11-16).

There is no fact in the history of the past that in any degree answers to this picture. I do not see any reason to anticipate a literal fulfilment of the prediction in the future. It can scarcely be questioned indeed that we are here in the region, not of predictions strictly so called, but of forecasts and anticipations. The prophet has a firm grasp and clear vision of the law that God's true people will, in the end, be protected against their enemies and come forth triumphant from the conflict with barbarism, as they had done of old from that with the great empires of the world. Something of that feeling must, I conceive, have impressed itself on the mind of St. John as he studied the prophecies of Ezekiel. He too saw that over and above the warfare of the saints of God with Babel and Sodom and Egypt, as the representatives of a corrupt civilization,

<sup>1</sup> I do not enter into the questions connected with the identification of the three names. They stand in the English Version as "Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya."

there might be a time in the future when there should be also a struggle with barbarians, who were represented by Gog and Magog. All attempts at a literal interpretation are destined, so it seems to me, in the future as in the past, to failure. But I can well understand that the words of the older seer, as of St. John, may have come with a message of strength and comfort to the Christians, who, after the Roman empire had accepted the sovereignty of the Cross, found themselves face to face with perils of another kind, with the wild barbaric hosts of the Goths, the Vandals, and the Huns. For them also there would be the assurance that the threatened tyranny would soon be overpast, that God would not hide his face from his true people, that He would once again pour out his Spirit upon the house of Israel (Ezek. xxxix. 29).

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*THE SEPTUAGINT ADDITIONS TO THE  
HEBREW TEXT.*

X. Of additions which have a doctrinal aspect there are not many forthcoming. The most famous is the one at the end of Job (Chap. xlii. 18): "And Job died, old and full of days. And it is written that he shall rise again with those whom the Lord raiseth." This has been considered to be an interpolation by a Christian hand; but there is no necessity for this assumption. By the time the Septuagint version was made, the doctrine of the Resurrection of the body was generally believed among the Pharisees, as may be seen by a reference to the martyrdom of the seven brethren in 2 Maccabees vii., who were supported in their cruel tor-