

THE METAPHORS OF ST PAUL

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The Metaphors of St Paul by John S. Howson

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JOHN S. HOWSON

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By JOHN S. HOWSON, D.D.
DEAN OF CHERESTER.



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I.

ROMAN SOLDIERS.

EVERY part of Holy Scripture has its own distinctive imagery: and through the medium of this imagery its instruction is often conveyed. Thus, when we read the prophecies of Amos, "who was among the herdmen of Tekoa,"—himself a "herdman" in a wild and pastoral district,—the images are such as these: the fat "kine of Bashan, which say unto their masters, Bring and let us drink;" "the lion

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roaring in the forest ;" "the seven stars of Orion, before the shadow of death is turned into the morning ;" "the basket of summer fruit ;" "the grasshoppers in the shooting up of the latter growth." Unless we rightly apprehend the circumstances, the scenery, and the pursuits, in connexion with which it was God's will that His prophet should speak, we cannot fully understand the meaning of His words ; and so far, to us, their force and instructiveness is diminished.

The imagery of the Book of Amos is an emphatic and strongly marked instance of a principle which is applicable, in various degrees, to all parts of the Bible. The life of Joseph, the life of Moses, the life of Ruth, the life of Elijah, all have their appropriate atmosphere and colouring ; and if we look at them without

reference to these, they fade away into something abstract and dead. And so it is with the New Testament. But here, though the principle is the same, we feel that we are brought into a new world, and that the principle must be applied to very different details. Every part of the Old Testament has an oriental complexion. We illustrate it by referring to what travellers tell us of the tents of the Bedouin Arabs, of the courts of Eastern princes, of caravans and camels and palm-trees. And so it is, no doubt, to some extent, in the case of the New Testament. But still, on the whole, in passing from one to the other, we are conscious that a change has come over the scene, and that God has begun to speak to us now through similitudes of a different kind. We find ourselves brought in contact

with circumstances far more nearly resembling those which surround us in modern life. We are in fact, when the New Testament is our study, on the borders or in the heart of Greek civilisation, and we are always in the midst of the Roman Empire. It is no more possible fully to understand what the Apostles say to us, than what the Prophets say to us, if we dis sever their words from the circumstances of their lives. The metaphors they use are drawn (as indeed they must have been drawn, to be intelligible at all) from the things which were around them. My endeavour will be, in four sections, to illustrate certain groups of images which are common in one part of the New Testament, and, in the present section, while keeping in view especially one very notable passage in the Epistle to the Ephe-