

# **Nazareth Revisited**

OR

## **The Life and Work of Jesus Christ**

EXHIBITED ANEW

IN HARMONY WITH

### **THE SCRIPTURES OF MOSES AND THE PROPHETS**

TO WHICH JESUS APPEALED AS

#### **THE WORD OF GOD.**

---

**By ROBERT ROBERTS**

---

Third Edition

Birmingham: "The Christadelphian" 1926

# PREFACE.

## To the First Edition

It is no new thing to try to exhibit Christ's wonderful life in biographic form. varied in times past and recent have been the efforts in this direction. that the author should add to the number of such efforts may seem either superfluous or presumptuous:—superfluous, if previous efforts have been successful; presumptuous, if it argue an opinion that they have been failures, perhaps it is neither one nor the other. Other efforts may have been successful in a measure that still leaves the way open to something more complete.

But the author, with a sense of pain at the seeming arrogance, is impelled to go further and say that, in order to give a truthful conception of the personage whose memory is enshrined in the four gospels, something totally different is needed from any Life of Christ that has yet appeared. That this book is that something in an exhaustive form, he dares not, with a full sense of human insufficiencies, profess. But he thinks it is at least a step towards it. It has in some respects a new picture to exhibit—a new story to tell—new and not new—new as to current models, not new as to the original which it seeks to reproduce.

If most attempts at the Life of Christ have failed to exhibit this original, the author believes it is attributable to two palpably distinct causes: either they have tried to bring Christ into a merely human conception; or have tried to force him into the groove of a conventional theology to which he does not belong. If the author may have succeeded in a third line of treatment, it is because of another work that has been done in our age, of which the world has heard little, and which it esteems less—the rediscovery of the truth originally promulgated by the apostles in harmony with Moses, the prophets, and the apostles; and its extrication from obscuring association with mere ecclesiastical tradition of both Romish and Protestant complexion.

A re-investigation of the theological problems of the age, in the full light of what the Bible is in itself, compels the conviction that false views of God and man have for centuries prevailed in Europe through the influence naturally attaching to a State-supported ecclesiasticism. It is these false views that have chiefly interfered with a right apprehension of the subject in hand. Christ is built into the whole structure of the Bible; and it is essential to a right interpretation of him that the purpose of God as revealed and embodied in that structure be understood. If (as will be found to be the case) this purpose has been obscured by the theologies of all denominations of Christendom, it is the natural result that a consistent and truly rational biography of Christ should be impossible in professional theological hands, notwithstanding the great abilities brought to bear, and the abundance of the materials supplied in the writings of the apostles. If impossible in theological hands, how much more in the hands of the so-called rationalistic school.

It is the conviction thus foreshadowed that must be the author's excuse for entering upon a work apparently overdone already, and by men, too, whose names the world accepts as unimpeachable guarantees of capacity and scientific accuracy. EDDERSHEIM has produced a stupendous monument of what is understood by "learning," namely: acquaintance with ancient (and mostly valueless) writers on various phases of the subject. But his subject is lost in the attenuated spinning out of such material. The simple picture of the apostolic narratives disappears in the weak and steaming vapour arising from such elaborate cookery. FARRAR gives us a beautiful view of a certain sort, but it is the beauty of a highly-coloured picture in Berlin wool. It has no naturalness of outline or colour. It is gaudy and garish. It is reverent but artificial; worshipful yet derogatory to the surpassing eminence of his subject by reason of his deferences at human shrines. RENAN, in another line of things, gives us a piece of elegant superficiality, which, from a divine point of view, can only be fitly characterised as a lie, pure and simple. It is significant that CARLYLE, who, in the course of his voluminous writings, has exhausted the resources of universal literature in his passion for human biography, passes by on the other side when Jesus of Nazareth is in question—not in the spirit of derision, far from it. His few and brief allusions to him are those of profound reverence for the inscrutable. It was characteristic of the man not to meddle with what he did not understand. Yet to understand Christ (approximately) has been made possible in the Scriptures, and to present a clear and authentic picture of him is not an unattainable performance, as the author hopes to show in the following chapters.

In those chapters, the author goes very little outside the apostolic narrative. There and there alone are to be found the materials for a truthful presentment of the subject. Reference to other writers may have a show of learning, but can contribute little of real value to the main question. The Gospel-writers (with the exception of Luke) were "eye-witnesses" of what they narrate; and all of them were qualified for their work in a way which it is fashionable for "learning" now-a-days to ignore. The author is not afraid to avow the belief that the apostolic writers were guided by the Spirit of God in the execution of their work. This belief is unavoidable on the evidence, which is of a very varied and powerful character. It is impossible to believe in the Christ of the Gospels without believing this. Nay, the Gospels themselves are the most conclusive evidence of their divine inspiration. Both as regards the topics selected for treatment, and the mode and method of narrative and comment, the apostolic writings are as different from the turgid and puny efforts of man as the calm blue of heaven is different from the grimy walls of a human workshop. The stamp of divine wisdom is upon them to the eye that can recognise it.

It was a promise of Christ to the apostles before he left them that the Spirit of God would employ them as witnesses to testify conjointly with itself the things pertaining to Him: "The Spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me, and YE ALSO shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning" (Jno. XV. 26–27). The apostles were to be witnesses (that is,

testifiers) of the “things they had seen and heard” (Acts i. 8; ii. 32; iv. 20; v. 32; xxvi. 16, &c.). Hence the qualification of an apostle was that he should have been a companion of Christ from his baptism in the Jordan till his crucifixion and resurrection (Acts i, 21–22), or at the least that he should have seen Christ after his resurrection (1 Cor. ix. 1). A witness is one who speaks from personal knowledge. The apostles, as witnesses, spoke from personal knowledge, and to this extent, their personal characteristics would affect their personal testimony, as evidenced by the authorities perceiving that the inspired and boldly-speaking Peter and John were “unlearned and ignorant men” (Acts iv. 13).

But the Spirit of God was upon them to guide them in the what to say and how to say it. Their natural endowments were employed in the work, but they were employed by the Spirit of God, and in strict subordination to the purposes aimed at by the Spirit. Even their actions were checked and guided in harmony with these, as when Paul and Silas “essayed to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit suffered them not” (Acts xvi. 7), or as when John was about to write certain things that he heard, and a voice from heaven said “Write them not” (Rev. x. 4). When, therefore, we read an apostolic writing, we read a writing which, though humanly written, has been shaped by the Spirit of God for its own ends. When we peruse the apostolic testimony to the sayings and doings of Christ, we receive testimony which, though theirs, is only so much theirs in the characteristic sense, as the Spirit permits. This is a duality in the production which accounts for every feature in the case. The apostles and the Spirit both had to do with the production, but the apostles were under the strict control of the Spirit. This accounts for so much of the human peculiarity of the writer as may be visible in the productions, which is a very faint element in the case. The Spirit permitted it for its own ends. At the same time, it accounts for the superhuman tone and attitude that are their most conspicuous and striking features.

There are variations in the apostolic writings. How are we to estimate them? It is impossible to impute them to error if we allow the participation of the Spirit of God in the work. Jesus said the Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth (Jno. xvi. 13), and we must therefore recognise it as a cardinal postulate in the consideration of the question, that whatever appearance of discrepancy may exist, is not to be accounted for on the principle that there is an element of error in their writings. There are variations in the apostolic narratives, but variation is not error. Four men necessarily relate the same thing in different ways. Even the same person relating the same matter four times would narrate it differently each time. Mental operation is too subtle a thing to be held in stereotyped grooves. The apostolic variations are due to the diversity of the men employed by the Spirit of God to give testimony to Christ: but their diversities are held in strict subordination to truth. Their narrative was controlled by the Spirit. The Spirit knowing all meanings can secure the exact meaning in a diversity of forms. The diversity of form does not interfere with the presence and guidance of the Spirit in the diversity. Nay, it is rather an attribute of the Spirit, whether in creation or revelation, to delight in diversity in unity:—“Diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit

... Diversities of operations, but the same God which worketh all in all ... all these worketh the one and the self-same Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will" (1 Cor. xii. 4, 6, 11).

Hence, the variations are not inconsistent with the Spirit's guidance. First, as to the order of events in the four narratives: it is not the same. This would be a difficulty if there were a profession in each case that the exact order of the events as they occurred was observed. There is no such profession except in Matthew. In this, each scene is linked with what goes before in a way that involves historical sequence. But in Mark and Luke, there is no such exact placing of events. Hence the frequency of such general introductions as "It came to pass on a certain day," "And it came to pass as he went to Jerusalem," "And it came to pass as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees," &c., &c. They have an order but do not profess to give the order. Therefore diversity of order is not conflict. The order was immaterial, and was evidently not aimed at by Mark and Luke, except in a rough way, as a basis of what Jesus did and said

But the order of events has a certain importance. Therefore in Matthew we have a chronological basis on which the accounts of the others can be arranged. As for John, his effort was a supplemental one, with the specific object of giving the conversations and discourses of Christ that had a bearing on his relation to the Father. Here also the exact order of events is immaterial to the object, and is not professed to be given.

Then as to the words attributed to the actors in the scenes selected for narrative, there is no profession of a verbatim report. The substance of what passed is related and often in the identical words, though frequently with variations. In this there cannot be any difficulty when we realise that many words besides those reported must have been spoken in connection with each transaction. Each writer reports words spoken but does not profess to give all the words; therefore each may select different words while reporting the same matter, and the difference in the words does not mean that in either case there is a wrong report, but that a different selection is made from the words actually spoken, and that in their several places, each report is right.

The difficulty only arises when a false assumption is introduced as to what an inspired account ought to be. Those who oppose the inspiration of the Gospels tacitly contend that four inspired accounts ought to be exactly the same. In this they leave out of account the dual nature of the authorship. They forget that the apostles are used as witnesses, and that, therefore, their narratives, though shaped and guided by the Spirit, reflect, to the extent permitted, the diversities of natural spectatorship. Or, on the other hand, they wrongfully insist that if the Spirit has had anything to do with the selection of the words, the human aspect of the testimony ought not to be visible at all.

The variations are due to the plurality of minds concerned in the production of the narratives, but because all these minds were under the control of one mind, which was using them for its own purposes exclusively, the variations were so regulated as all to be consistent with truth. Even in such an apparently extreme case as the variations in the wording of the inscription over the head of Christ on the cross, it is not difficult to apply these principles. The writing was in three languages, and it is impossible to tell from which of the three the several writers made their selection. Matthew wrote in Hebrew and may have selected the Hebrew. Luke wrote with the educated world in view, and though he wrote in Greek, he may have selected his rendering of the inscription from the language of the ruling power—the Roman (Latin). John, writing for believers, after the dispersion, may have selected the Greek—the currently spoken language of the East—all making their respective selection under the guidance of the Spirit. Here would be a source of verbal variation, without the least literal inaccuracy. The idioms of the languages differ; whence a variation of language might arise.

In addition to this, there may have been an intentional difference in one inscription from another. Pilate's draughtsman may have varied them with a view to the spectators. He might introduce "of Nazareth" into the title for the strangers who might be in the crowd, and who might need a piece of local information unnecessary in the Hebrew and Roman versions which could be read by the Jews. Who knows? There are these uncertainties in the case, and we are bound to exhaust the possibilities they yield rather than give in to the suggestion of error in the apostolic writings which so many considerations exclude.

And even if there were not these alternatives, there would be an easy escape in another way. The several gospel narrators do not profess to give us the exact wording, though John does. They simply tell us that his accusation was written over his head, and they tell us what the accusation was. They do not say: "And this was the exact wording in which the accusation was expressed." MATTHEW says:—"He set up over his head his accusation written: 'This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.'" MARK:—"And the superscription of his accusation was written over him: 'The King of the Jews.'" LUKE:—"And the superscription was written over him in letters of Greek and Latin and Hebrew: 'This is the King of the Jews.'" JOHN:—"Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross, and the writing was: 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.'" "

There is no inconsistency in these four accounts. Only one of them professes to copy the writing. The others give the sense, and that, too, in nearly the very words. There is here only the variation of truth. There is scarcely even variation; it is only degrees of selection. There is in fact complete agreement. Mark says: "The King of the Jews." These words were in the inscription: he does not say they were the only words. Luke says "This is the King of the Jews"—two words more: these were in the inscription. Luke does not say they were the only words. Matthew says, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews"—three words more. These were in the inscription; he does not say there were no others. They all fit into one

another like different sized dishes. John adds “of Nazareth” to the words of the others, and omits the demonstrative pronoun—probably copying the exact phraseology of Pilate’s Latin. It must be obvious that these variations are but forms of truth, whose place in narratives self evidently divine compels us to include them in that supervision and sanction of the Holy Spirit from which an unskillful criticism would exclude them.

The same remark applies to other cases relied upon by those who contend for a fallible composition. Their explanation is found in the Spirit’s union with the apostles in the authorship, which imparted a liberty of variation not permissible to a merely human reporter. The Spirit was the author of all the sayings and doings recorded, and could therefore paraphrase or vary the description of His own acts or utterances, with the liberty that any author exercises in reference to his own productions. It is the failure to recognise the all-prevailing presence of the Spirit of God in the production of these writings that creates the difficulties of criticism. Rules applicable to merely human productions are applied to a class of composition which is outside the ordinary literary category altogether. There is no parallel between a human writer who puts down his own thoughts and impressions merely, and one whose mentality is fused for the time being with a guiding mind outside of his own, whose servant he is, and under whose influence he may even write things he does not understand.

The Spirit of God aimed in the apostolic narratives to present the essence of the facts recorded, and not the particular form in which those facts were presented or expressed at the time of their occurrence. The New Testament is not a newspaper, but a storehouse of spiritual power,—the power lying not in variant forms of expression, but in the things expressed. Hence, when it tells us that on a certain occasion, Jesus was publicly proclaimed the Son of God, it secures the record of the fact in a form beyond all question, but it does not give us all the details belonging to the occasion, nor tell us everything that was said. It is evident from John’s narrative, that much more passed, both as regard what John said, and as regards what the Spirit said, than what would appear in the other narratives. And if two forms of the Spirit’s words are given, “This is my beloved Son,” and “Thou art my beloved Son,”—it is just possible that both forms were employed during the transaction—one addressed to the spectators and the other to Jesus himself. The narratives are too meagre as narratives (though full of substance) to afford ground for a definite contention one way or other on a point like this. Any view is legitimate rather than the view that the Spirit of God helped the apostles and allowed them to blunder. The variations are all variations of truth; and if they were much greater than they are, they would be perfectly legitimate in the Spirit’s rendering of its own intentions in the record of its own work.

These remarks meet every case. The words recorded do not in any case profess to be all the words spoken. Many more words were spoken than are recorded. Those recorded are but a selection: and in different accounts, a different

selection is made, though the difference is not great. There is nothing in this inconsistent with perfect truth.

Let the two features of the case be distinctly apprehended: the Spirit's presence and control, and the part assigned to the apostles as witnesses, and all difficulty will vanish. The application of one or other of these to the exclusion of the others is the cause of the confusion—in the orthodox school on the one hand, and the critical school of merely human learning on the other.

Acting on these principles in the following pages, the author has endeavoured to fuse the four narratives of the New Testament into one harmonious story, embracing every particular and adjusting every apparent variation in the four evangelists. He sends forth the result with a degree of affectionate reverence for the subject that words cannot express, and with a desire unutterable that the public mind (starving on all kinds of intellectual inanity) might awake to the feast of fat things which God provided for the world 1850 years ago in the life and work of Christ; and for which he will shortly secure renewed attention in world-wide events that will cause every ear to tingle.

THE AUTHOR.  
Birmingham, 12th September, 1890.



# CHAPTER I.

## Christ a Reality.

WHATEVER view may be taken of Jesus Christ, he cannot be excluded from history; He is not a legend, or a superstition or a theory that may be brushed lightly aside. He is one of those “stubborn things” that men call facts. You may ignore him, but you cannot expunge him. You may neglect him or misinterpret him; but you cannot get rid of the fact, and whatever may grow out of the fact, that he has appeared and enacted a part among men which has left an indelible impress on their condition in all civilized lands.

To the most casual observer, he towers the most conspicuous figure in the backward sweep of the eye. To the acutest mind of philosophy, he is the most palpable and indubitable problem of history. His historical verity is now conceded on every hand. An ingenious learning has abandoned the vain attempt to make him out a myth. Whatever he be, he is no myth. Every church and chapel is in some way a memento of him. Every organised Christian State in Europe is a monument to his historical memory. Hoary Ecclesiastical Rome filling the centuries, though with but the merest travesty of his doctrine, and for ages manacled the human intellect in a name that was never intended to import anything but life and liberty to the human race, is at least a guarantee to all the world that that name had a personal reality for its foundation.

We are indebted for our knowledge of him to a piece of writing which is quite extraordinary, and which may be said to be his most stupendous monument on earth, namely, the four gospels, bearing the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The antiquity and literary quality of these productions combine to impart to them a value and a significance that cannot be overstated, though familiarity interferes with perception a little. By all the ordinary rules of literary transmission, they are the indisputable productions of Christ's friends and companions, they having been in the hands of the Christian community with that reputation ever since the beginning of Christianity. But it is their character that gives them their chief weight. They are unlike all biographical performances in this, that they make no effort to commend their subject to the reader. There is no attempt at panegyric; there is no extolling of Christ's virtues; there is no pointing out of heroic qualities; there is none of the customary praise or commendation of his hero that is natural to a biographical writer. There is nothing even in the nature of a complimentary allusion. All we have is a plain unadorned recital of what Christ said and of what he did—and this is in the simplest language. This is wonderful when we consider the scope there was for hero worship, and the temptation to indulge in it on the part of enthusiastic disciples. But how much more wonderful it is that this bald recital of facts conveys to the mind the impression of a personality unapproached in the whole range of human thought or writing—a character such as is never seen among men for godlike dignity,

purity, beneficence and power, a figure as far above men as the heaven is above the earth. What is the explanation of this unique literary phenomenon? If we accept the view exhibited by the apostles, there is a complete explanation; that the whole case was a divine manifestation, and that the Spirit of God employed the gospel narrators in its literary exhibition. If we reject this view, we are in the presence of a fact that defies explanation, on any known principle. The New Testament is a fact: the figure it exhibits of Jesus Christ is as much a fact as any superb picture in a gallery. That the human authors were with one exception illiterate men, is a fact. If a superhuman agency were not at work, how are we to account for this superhuman performance, that without human praise or human paint of any kind, these illiterate writers have produced in the simplest language such an ideal character in Christ as transcends even the most gifted of human imaginations?

There are two ways of dealing with the subject. It can be discussed from what might be called the newspaper standpoint, as a doubtful problem on which, as judge and jury, we bring to bear what information we may possess. Or it may be stated and illustrated and argued from the New Testament writers' point of view, with the ardour that naturally springs from appreciation and faith. If the latter course is chosen in the present case, it is because, while it surrenders none of the critical advantages that may belong to the former, it admits of a fuller statement and a more satisfactory result. The cold impartiality of the critic, however correctly applied, only leaves you at the door of the subject when you have done. When you have conciliated unbelief to the utmost; when you have gone the utmost length in your deferences to critical acumen or unfriendly bias, you have failed to do more than establish a probability, which has little influence on human motives. The better plan is to assume the historical verity of the subject in all particulars, and harmonise this view of the subject with all objections as you go along. The logic and polemics of earnest conviction take you inside the house, and set you down before the cheerful fire in the pleased society of hospitable inmates.

The wisdom of this line of treatment is forced on the mind when the nature of the subject is fully apprehended. It is not like ordinary subjects, which you may attend to or leave alone without compromising your well-being in any way. If Christ is what he is represented in the apostolic writings, it is at our hazard if we neglect him. Other subjects may be interesting, but this is of solemn and urgent moment. We may or may not attend to other things: the claims of this are imperative. The subject of Christ alone deals with personal futurity and eternity. Astronomy appeals overpoweringly to our sense of the stupendous, the exact, the infinite: the face of the earth stirs our love of the fair and the beautiful; her rocky depths excite our curiosity as to past conditions of the globe. Agriculture supplies us with the useful: chemistry with the theoretical; history, with the actual working of things among men in their present situation. Christ alone deals with the ever-pressing problem of the meaning of existence and the destiny of human life. All other subjects are here as dumb as the stars; dark as the night; or incoherent as the roar of the storm-tossed waters on the desolate strand.

If we are to accept Christ as apostolically exhibited, there is no extravagance in the words which declare him “worthy to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing.” It is not only as Pilate was made to record, that “there is no fault in him;” but as Paul declared, that “in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge;” that “in him dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily.”

Men glory in men. They see and praise greatness in the successful leading of soldiers, as in Napoleon; they admire the ability that can tell a graphic story, like a Dickens; or that can clearly delineate quick-eyed discernments and impressions of men and things, as a Shakespeare; they extol the capacity that can hold the political helm in stormy weather, like a Gladstone; or that can jingle composition in measured cadences, like a Scott or a Tennyson. But what is all this excellence but the exhibition of perishing mortal faculty in picturesque relations—impressing human mentalities, tickling human fancies, flattering human vanities, but futile in the eternal issues of things? At the best, it is the exercise of creature gift—like the strength of a horse, the constructiveness of a bee, the scent of a bloodhound, the instinct of a beaver. If we are commanded not to glory in man, it is reasonable we should not. Man is but a creature—a transient blossom of eternal power—no more to be adored for his qualities than a rose for its fragrance, a peach for its bloom.

But with Christ, it is otherwise. We are not only not forbidden, we are commanded to glory in him. The very angels were ordered to do obeisance: “Let all the angels of God worship him.” And the reason which tells us it is out of place to glory in men, tells us it is fitting we should glory in the Lord. If we are to accept the New Testament exhibition of him, the Father has planted in him intrinsic excellence, life, authority, and power; and where these are, the recognition of them in praise and deference is reasonable.

Jesus, while upon earth, said, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” These words appeal to a need most felt by those who are most alive in an intellectual sense: men who discern in the starry immensities around them the sphere of immeasurable aspiration—the potentiality of unutterable heights of faculty and glorious life—who, looking into themselves and out upon the face of the fair earth which they tread, with its multitudinous manifestation of life, with some latent intuition of the high meaning of things, have their hearts drawn out into infinite longings which nothing in human life, as it now is, can satisfy. All men experience the vanity of life as it now is upon earth, but none so keenly as these. They labour and are heavy laden: labour in the futile effort to grasp the reason of things: are heavy laden in the mental oppression which the immensity and the inscrutability of things brings upon their spirits. If Christ is what he alleged he was, there is peace for this intellectual perturbation which cannot elsewhere be found. In the light of his existence and mission, creation is delivered from the gloom in which it appears to merely natural eyes. If unbelievers say there is no gloom in creation for them, it is the mere repartee of

intellectual resentment, or the utterance of a crude experience which has not yet learnt the sadness of life as it now is—the sadness that inevitably waits when the effervescence of young blood has subsided, when the poetic ardours of fresh life have expended themselves, when business has lost its aim and its interest, and when mortal energy wanes, and man is forced to recognise in the encroachments of feebleness and the disappearance of friends in the universal grave, the sad tokens of the truth that comes home at last, however long ignored in pride or silenced in the din of folly—that man is subject to vanity, and that human life is in darkness.

There are plausible theories much current and popular among even Christian professors of our time, which logically undermine the position of Christ. They either bring Christ down to men, or level men up to him, which has the same practical effect. Almost all public teachers in our day incline to this habit, which must be held an offence against reason if the Christ of the apostolic narrative is to be accepted.

The Christ of apostolic narrative differs from all so-called great men that have ever arisen among men, in that he has both dynamical relation to the universe, and an indefeasible title to possession, according to the strictest methods of legal construction. We are leaving out of account for the moment the disparity between Christ and other men as to character. Even supposing it could be made out for a moment that their characters were equal, the difference here is an immeasurable gulf.

The brightest human intellect that ever dazzled mankind is but a burning taper in the wind, or, if you will, a glowing electric light on a spire-top. It is a thing of conditions. Take away the conditions, and the light is gone: and over the conditions, the light has no control. William Shakespeare has a brain of certain organisation: this brain has to be fed with the vital force which digestion extracts from food. Properly supplied thus, it has impressions and the power of representing them in terse words. It is no more than any other human brain, except in the larger development of specific departments of the brain. He cannot control or alter the laws that govern being, either for himself or others. His friends die and he cannot help them; he himself grows old and he cannot prevent it. The power he possesses is only such as exists in the imaginations of his admirers. The Marquis of Hertford sinks; the Queen can only send a message of sympathy. The Queen would feel mocked if the Marquis were to say, "Speak the word and thy servant shall be healed.'

With Christ, how different! if we are to accept the evidence which remains undissipated after the utmost alchemy of "higher criticism," or any other effort to bring Christ within the category of mere men. By the testimony of Christ and the apostles, supported by works of superhuman power, the eternal and fundamental force of the universe (the Spirit of God) is in his hand. "Power over all flesh" is the Father's gift to him —"all power in heaven and in earth." What he can do in the

exercise of this power has been illustrated. He can stop a storm: he can produce bread from the abstract elements, without the circuitous process of agriculture. He can discern the secrets of the human mind at any distance: he can make the dead alive again. All this he did when upon earth. Greater marvels wait, as his attested promise declares.

That a subject so unutterably sublime and so imperatively practical should be treated so indifferently is one of the saddest facts of an age in many respects the saddest, though the brightest, in human annals. It has more explanations than one. One is a lack of faith in the claims of Christ, in a large measure due to a lack of acquaintance with the true facts of his wonderful case. We propose the simple exhibition of these facts, as the best corrective of unbelief, with just that amount of attention to contested points which reason demands as they arise.

## **CHAPTER II.**

### **Christ's Place in History.**

BEFORE entering upon biographical particulars, it seems necessary to take a general view of Christ's position in history. It has become the habit among the fashionable thinkers of the world to regard it as "a development." They look at the state of the world before Christ appeared, and more particularly the state of the Jews; and profess to find in these a force or bias at work which, on natural principles, brought itself to a focus in the family of Joseph, and so produced that marvel of marvels, "the man Christ Jesus."

There is no arrogance in maintaining that this is a groundless view. The men who advance it are forced into a false position by their initial assumption that there can be no departure from the fixed and passive operations of nature as we see them. They find the Christ of the New Testament a case of continuous departure from these operations; they therefore pronounce him impossible. They find Christ a fact in history, but their principles compel them to refuse the only history that reasonably accounts for it, and so they east about for one that is in harmony with their own thoughts. They cannot remove Christ from history; they try to explain him, and, naturally, their explanations take the form of their own gratuitous thoughts. They reason gradiloquently on "tendencies." A mechanical age produces great engineers: a military age produces great soldiers: an art-loving age, great painters. So a religious age, argue they, produced the loftiest religionist the world has ever seen. Plausible this, but fallacious, when looked into—just plausible enough to carry off superficial thinkers, but manifestly enough fallacious to protect those acquainted with and discerning of the subject from being victimised.

It is fallacious on two heads, first, as regards the nature of the age that witnessed the birth of Christ, and, second, as regards the relation between age-production

and those produced. Taking the second point first: a man that really is the natural product of the age in which he lives, exhibits and exemplifies in an efficient form the principles and capacities already active before his time. He does not add to them, or go against them. The age and the man are one. The principles in the one are found in the other. A Stephenson embodies the mechanical science existing independently of him. A Napoleon expertly applies military principles universally in vogue before he was born. A Raphael reflects for you the artistic appreciations cultivated for generations before him.

But Christ—there is nothing in common between him and the age in which he was born, or any other age, before or since. Whether we take character, principles, aims, views, capacities, deportment, or achievements, he stands, not only at a measureless altitude above, but absolutely disconnected from the common ways and tendencies of men.

The best proof of this will be found in the history of his life as exhibited in the apostolic narratives in what are known as “the gospels”—of which this book aims to be but a modernised reflection. He had nothing in common with men beyond the infirmity of a mortal nature derived through his mother, from a common stock. His tastes lay where the human mind has no affinity. His intellectual interest—his mental affection—intensely centred on God, from whom man is naturally alien (Rom. viii. 7). Even at twelve years of age, he showed this powerful bias which distinguished him from all men: “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business” (Luke ii. 49); and “always” it is his own testimony concerning himself, “he did those things that were pleasing to the Father” (Jno. viii. 29). His case, with reference to his own age, is only fitly classified in his own language; “Ye are from beneath: I am from above; ye are of this world: I am not of this world” (Jno. viii. 23).

See how inconsistent the facts of the case are, with the philosophic theory which would make Christ the product of a particular epoch. The age that witnessed the birth of Christ was the most unpromising of all ages, in a moral sense, of any high moral development on natural principles. The Gentile world under Roman ascendancy was sunk in the grossest immoralities of Paganism, which the revelations of Pompeii may illustrate; and as for the condition of the Jews, it was one of self-conceited barrenness and formalism, which has not been exceeded by any recorded experience of that people. The condition of the Jews is more important to be considered than the condition of the Gentile nations, as it was in the midst of the Jews that Jesus was born, and of their common race and stock in the line of David.

Christ’s own portraiture of Israel’s state is vigorous, brief and decisive. Speaking generally, he said “This is an evil generation” (Luke xi. 29). Speaking particularly, he said “In them, is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah” (Matt. xiii. 14). We turn to the prophecy and find such expressions as “heart waxed gross,” “ears dull of hearing,” “eyes closed.” In another and parallel prophecy, this is what we read:

“Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men, therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.” Again, “they are drunken, but not with wine: they stagger, but not with strong drink. For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes” (Matt. xiii. 14, 15: Isaiah xxix. 13, 14; 9, 10). This is the divine definition of Israel’s condition at the time of Christ’s appearing. The truth of the definition is reflected in the Rabbinical writings of that and subsequent times. The grave discussion of trifles, conducted illogically, and distorted with childish legend, impresses the mind with a sense of mental paralysis and nightmare. There is much boast of Hillel and Philo: it is astonishing how little ground for boast appears in the reading.

“Dry,” indeed, was “the ground” in which the root of Jesse quickened and sprang in the beginning of the first century—as Isaiah had foretold—“A root out of a dry ground” (Isa. liii. 2). If there had not been a divine planting in the dry ground, no such “tender plant” could have shot forth in the cracked and arid soil. It had been dry and barren for generations. Since the last words of inspiration by Malachi, Israel had slowly settled into that shallow half-clever state of self-conceit and disobedience in which Jesus found them—punctilious as to trifles, but reprobate to the “weightier matters of the law:” on the best of terms with themselves, yet by their insubordination towards the highest requirements of the law, piling up the divine anger in a slow-gathering, terrible storm that descended shortly afterwards and swept them all away. Even Malachi’s words show them well advanced in spiritual decomposition in his days. “Who is there among you that would shut the doors (of the temple) for nought? neither do ye kindle a fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord, neither will I accept an offering at your hand” (Mal. i. 10; see also 12, 13; ii. 8,9, 17; iii. 7, 9).

Such an “age” could have nothing to do with the production of Christ. It was much more likely to produce monsters like the John and Simon who figured so flaringly at the siege of Jerusalem. Many such monsters it did produce, as Josephus’s works attest, answering to Paul’s portraiture, “filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful” (Rom. i 29). Christ it could not produce, and did not produce. Christ was the work of God direct. He had nothing in common with “the age.” He was a man apart from that age and all other ages. The testimony of his enemies will be found, on the strictest investigation, to be absolutely correct: “Never man spake like this man.” Had the “age” produced him, there would have been more than one of him, and he would have reflected the characteristics of the age. There was only one of him, and he was as unlike the “age” as possible. There never

was his like before or since. He will not classify thus. He will only fit the source he claims: "I proceeded forth and came from God" (Jno. viii. 42).

It is vain for the critics to explain him in any other way. He cannot be explained on any hypothesis but his own: and this hypothesis does not rest upon his own ipse dixit merely. It is supported and attested and proved in a variety of ways. He was careful to emphasise this. He allowed that he gave evidence on his own behalf, but pointed out that his testimony was confirmed externally. He admitted if it were not so, his self-testimony was not entitled to belief: "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me, and I know that his witness is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth.... But I have greater witness than that of John; the WORKS WHICH THE FATHER HATH GIVEN ME TO FINISH, the same works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me.... If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works" (Jno. vi. 31–33, 36; x. 37).

The nature of the "works" he pointedly defined when John's wavering message came from prison: "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?... Then Jesus answering, said unto them (John's messengers), Go your way and tell John what things ye have SEEN and HEARD, how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the DEAD ARE RAISED" (Luke vii. 20–22). These were "works" which certainly no man can do. Their significance, and even their truth, has been frittered out of public conviction through the sheer effect of perseverance on the part of hostile criticism. But the facts remain, after all their refinements; and the verdict of common sense is well formulated by Nicodemus: "We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (Jno. iii. 2). Had Nicodemus had the fact of Christ's resurrection before him at this time, he would have felt how immeasurably beyond question his whole conclusion had been placed; for if there is one thing that all men would be agreed in allowing, it is that a dead man has no power to bring himself to life again.

The attempt to explain Christ on any principle but the one furnished in the Bible narrative must be a failure on other grounds. He is part of a history extending over thousands of years. He is not an isolated phenomenon: he is built into the Bible as a whole. The bulk of the Bible existed before he appeared, and it bears upon him in a way necessitating that view of himself which he promulgated. He is part of a structure, apart from which he cannot be understood. Though the brightest figure in Israel's history, he is but the culmination of that history, which is the history of a work which God has been doing from the beginning; and He must be looked at in connection with that work. We can only truly ascend to the Christ of the Bible by the gradually rising level of the progressive work it records.

The modern habit of detaching him from the Old Testament scheme of things creates difficulties that do not belong to the subject itself. The theologian and the



Rationalist both fall into this mistake, each in a different way. The theologian brings to the subject a philosophy that not only enables him to dispense, but necessitates his dispensing with Jewish history and hopes in the ages before Christ came, and compels him to adopt views and theories of Christ's work that virtually transform him into another Christ than that exhibited in the Apostolic narrative. The Rationalist, on the other hand, perceiving that prophecy involves divinity, puts forth his whole strength in the endeavour to show that there has been no prophecy: that Christ was not predicted or foreseen: that he came as a happy accident, to which events and utterances that went before him were ingeniously accommodated.

Both views are inconsistent with the elementary facts of the case. The theologian we may dismiss in a word as the product of an organised corruption of apostolic truth: which began in the apostolic age (2 Thes. ii. 7; 1 Jno. ii. 18, 19), which it was predicted would obtain complete ascendancy (2 Tim. iv. 4), and which became finally triumphant in Christendom in the shape of Roman Ecclesiasticism, under whose baleful shadow the most elementary principles of revealed truth perished from the recognised orthodox Christian community. The man who regards immortality as the attribute of human nature, and who thinks it is in a disembodied state, that man becomes the subject of judicial retribution for good or evil:—such a man is not likely to find any connection with Christ in writings that deal only with bodily death and resurrection, and the future settlement of the earth on the basis of the covenants made with the fathers of the Israelitish nation, and amplified in the writings of the prophets that God sent to them.

The question introduced by the Rationalist is at once more vital and more difficult to the general run of mankind. At the same time it is more capable of a decisive settlement. The Rationalist says the Old Testament has nothing to do with Christ, because Christ has nothing to do with God except in the passive sense in which all men have to do with Him, which, practically, is no sense at all, for if God in nature is the only accessible form of God, we may as well cease to talk of God as distinct from nature. On the Rationalist hypothesis, there is nothing but nature, and, therefore, Christ had no more to do with God than tigers and elephants and worms; in which case, we have no hope: for nature gives no hope of life to come for the individual, which is exactly what is promised and pledged in Christ.

But Rationalism is not rational. It ignores facts that cannot be set aside. There is an ingredient in the situation that Rationalism does not take into account, and that is, the resurrection of Christ, which Christ himself plainly predicted, and the occurrence of which was the very essence of the testimony given by the apostles after the crucifixion. A dead man cannot raise himself, and if Christ rose, God raised him, and, therefore, endorsed him.

How much, for us moderns, depends upon this question of the resurrection of Christ. It cannot be exaggerated in its importance. Establish it, and there is an

end of all dispute or doubt. Its establishment is a process of logical demonstration. In this it may seem to have a weak foundation: but it is the foundation on which the bulk of human convictions rest. A logical demonstration, if truly logical, is of immense practical power where there is a capacity to perceive it. The power to act out a conviction logically is almost universal: but the power to discern the ground of conviction is unfortunately scarce, while the force of mere feeling of all kinds is great. Hence, the demonstration of the resurrection of Christ, though obvious, commends itself only to the few. This is not the place for the demonstration. It is exhibited in some measure in *The Trial*, a work by the present writer, intended to exhibit the correctness of Christ's resurrection in a popular and entertaining way. We refer to it as indicating where the citadel of faith lies. It is spending strength in vain to fight the assaults of Rationalism in the open. The citadel commands the whole position. Entrenched here, faith is impregnable. All attempts to get rid of the evidence of Christ's resurrection have, and ever must be, complete failures when the evidence is completely marshalled.

Settle the resurrection of Christ, and you settle the question of whether the Old Testament prophecy had any reference to Christ, for the risen Christ taught that it had. After his resurrection he said, "These are the words that I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses and in the Prophets and in the Psalms CONCERNING ME" (Luke xxiv. 44). Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures, and said unto them, "Thus it is written and thus it behoved Christ to suffer and TO RISE FROM THE DEAD, &c." "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures THE THINGS CONCERNING HIMSELF." (Ib. 27).

These sayings, uttered after his resurrection, refer us back to things he had said on the same subject while yet alive, before his crucifixion. Going back to these, we find that he made frequent allusion to the fact that he was contemplated in the written utterances of the prophets from the days of Moses downwards. Reading a passage from Isaiah in the synagogue of Nazareth on one occasion, he said, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke iv. 21). Recommending the Jews to "search the Scriptures" of the Old Testament, he said "They are they that TESTIFY OF ME" (John v. 39). Communing sorrowfully with his disciples on the very eve of his sufferings, he said, "This that is written must yet be accomplished IN ME, 'and he was reckoned amongst the transgressors' " (Luke xxii. 37). In his public teaching, combating the popular idea that he was putting himself in competition with Moses and the prophets, he said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets: I am not come to destroy but TO FULFIL" (Matt. v. 17). Chiding the Pharisees for putting forward Moses as a reason for their rejection of him, he said, "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for HE WROTE OF ME" (Jno. v. 46). Discussing for a moment the hypothesis of his consenting to evade the sufferings appointed for him, he said, "How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that THUS IT MUST BE" (Matt. xxvi. 54). There are other allusions of the same sort. They show that Christ's view was

that the prophets foreshadowed him; and if he rose from the dead, his view must prevail.

The matter establishes itself in another way: If Christ rose from the dead, Christ necessarily fulfilled the promise he made to his disciples,—that he should afterwards send upon them the spirit of God, who should guide them into all truth (Jno. xiv. 26 : xvi. 13), and who should put words into their mouths when brought before governors and kings (Matt. x. 19, 20). That this promise was fulfilled is a matter of record which cannot be denied (Acts ii. 1–4: v. 32). Consequently in the utterances of the disciples, we have words equally reliable to those of Christ, and on this subject, those utterances are plain beyond all ambiguity. All of them recognise that Christ was contemplated in the writings of the prophets. Take Peter, who was made the official mouthpiece of the apostolic band: “All the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow after, as many as have spoken, **HAVE LIKEWISE FORETOLD OF THESE DAYS**” (Acts iii. 24). In his letter (1 Pet. i. 10) he speaks of the prophets “searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ, which was in them, did signify when it testified beforehand **THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST AND THE GLORY THAT SHOULD FOLLOW.**” Paul, of equal or greater eminence as an apostle says, “To him (Christ) **GIVE ALL THE PROPHETS WITNESS**” (Acts x. 43). He also said to a Jewish audience in the provinces, in reference to the successful opposition of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem to the claims of Christ, “Because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath Day, **THEY HAVE FULFILLED THEM** in condemning him” (Acts xiii. 27). Zecharias, the father of John the Baptist, in celebrating the birth of Christ, said, “The Lord God of Israel ... hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, **AS HE SPAKE BY THE MOUTH OF HIS HOLY PROPHETS** which have been since the world began” (Luke i. 70).

There are many such like expressions in the apostolic writings. The case could not be made stronger by further quotation. It is plain that if we are to be guided by Christ and the apostles, we may dismiss the doubts raised by modern criticism as merely so much elegant mystification in which the writers have involved themselves and others, through the disturbing power of initial fallacies. The question of whether we should be guided by Christ and the apostles, is settled by the fact of Christ's resurrection and the effusion of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Therefore, we may, without reservation, accept it as an established truth, that the appearance of Christ 1800 years ago, was the fulfilment of what had been foretold by the prophets under the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

One step more, and we bring this chapter to a conclusion. In the estimation of those acquainted with the Scriptures of Moses and the prophets, it must ever be a self-evident proposition that those Scriptures foreshew the appearing of the Messiah (Hebrew) or Christ (Greek). The predictions of him are not vague or uncertain. If it merely rested on the statement made in the garden of Eden at the

crisis of human transgression, there might be doubt, though even then the indication would be felt by reflective minds to be strong: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." But it does not rest on this. There are plain and positive statements that cannot by unsophisticated candour be understood in any other way than as foretelling the appearance in Israel of a God-given leader, teacher and King. Such is the statement of Moses: "The Lord said unto me ... I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him" (Deut. xviii, 17, 18). Such also is the prophecy of Balaam: "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel" (Num. xxiv. 17). The words of Jacob cannot otherwise be reasonably understood: "The Sceptre shall not depart from Judah nor a law-giver from between his feet until Shiloh come: and unto him shall the gathering of the people be" (Gen. xlix. 10).

And what else is to be understood of the covenant made with David? (2 Sam. vii). Speaking now from the hostile critic point of view, even if it referred to Solomon, it was as much a prophecy as if it referred to Christ; and if prophecy was there at all, then the obligation arises to receive every application of the covenant that the spirit of prophecy in David and in the apostles may indicate. In this way, the voice of criticism is silenced: for the Spirit of God applies this covenant to Christ, both by David and by Peter. David in his "last words" which he attributes to the Spirit of God (2 Sam. xxiii. 2) alleges the substance of this covenant to contain "all his salvation and all his desire" (see verse 5); and he associates its realisation with a just king "ruling over men," the advent of whose day he compares to the dawn of a cloudless morning. Peter, speaking still more plainly after the promised effusion of the Holy spirit, says that David knew that God had covenanted "to raise up Christ to sit upon his throne" (Acts ii. 29). By these two, the truth is established that Christ was the king promised in the covenant that God made with David.

When we look at the other prophets—the books bound together as a prophetic collection from Isaiah to Malachi—it is like looking at a starry galaxy of glory, Christ shines in them all: not merely his light, but he himself appears in all their visions—palpably as a person—as palpably as Jesus of Nazareth appears in the apostolic narratives. A hurried sample or two from each will best illustrate this:

## CHRIST IN THE PROPHETS.

In ISAIAH, "A KING shall reign in righteousness" (xxxii. 1). "The Spirit of God shall rest upon him ... and shall make him of quick understanding ... with righteousness shall he judge the poor" (xi. 1–3, 4). "Of the increase of his government and peace, there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and his kingdom" (ix. 7). "Behold my servant ... I have put my Spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles ... the isles shall wait for his law" (xlii. 1–4). But first, "he is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (liii. 3).

In JEREMIAH, “a King (righteously branched from David) shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth” (xxiii. 5). “I will cause him to draw near and he shall approach unto me” (xxx. 21). “He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land,” in the days when “God shall perform the good thing promised to Israel” (xxxiii. 14, 15).

In EZEKIEL, the throne of David shall be “no more until he come whose right it is (xxi. 27). Israel shall then be one nation on the mountains of Israel, “and ONE KING shall be King to them all” (xxxvii. 22).

In DANIEL, a prophetic vision is seen in which “one like the Son of Man” appears and receives “a kingdom, glory, and dominion, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve and obey him” (vii. 13, 14). But first, Messiah, the Prince, should be cut off, and punitive desolation overwhelm Jerusalem and the temple, and overspread the Holy Land (ix. 26).

In HOSEA, the children of Israel, after many days of kingless wandering among the nations, should return and have one head—even a divine head. “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself: in me is thine help. I will be thy King” (xiii. 9, 10; i. 11; iii. 4, 5).

In JOEL when the captivity of Judah returns, war is proclaimed against the Gentiles; Jehovah’s mighty ones descend, by whom Jehovah thereafter dwells in Zion. “Then shall Jerusalem be holy, and no stranger shall pass through her any more” (iii. 1, 9–12; 17).

In AMOS, ‘I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof (which involves the re-establishment of the throne in a personal occupant) ... and I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel ... and I will plant them in their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land” (ix. 11–15)

In OBADIAH, “Upon Mount Zion shall be deliverance, and saviours shall come up on Mount Zion ... and the Kingdom shall be the Lord’s” (21).

In JONAH there is no direct allusion: it is the only exception.

In MICAH he was to be born in Bethlehem: smitten on the cheek: Israel scattered: but at the last “this man” should be the vanquisher of the enemy, the establisher of peace, judge among the nations, and “great to the end of the earth” (v. 2, 13, 4–6; iv. 3).

In NAHUM, he is saluted on the mountains as one that bringeth good things, consequent on whose appearance the enemy should be utterly cut off, and Judah resume the observance of her holy feasts (i. 15).

In HABAKKUK, God goes forth for salvation with His anointed (Christ), “and the earth shall be filled, with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (iii. 13, ii. 14).

In ZEPHANIAH, a day is exhibited when Israel shall be no more haughty, nor do iniquity. “In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, fear thou not ... the King of Israel, the Lord, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more” (iii. 11, 13, 16, 15).

In HAGGAI, “the desire of all nations shall come and I will fill this house with glory ... I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen” (ii. 7, 22).

In ZECHARIAH, “I will bring forth my servant, the BRANCH ... He shall sit and rule upon his throne ... Thy King (O Jerusalem) cometh unto thee, just and having salvation ... he shall speak peace to the heathen and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea ... The Lord shall be King over all the earth” (iii. 8; vi. 13; ix. 9, 10; xiv. 9).

In MALACHI, “The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant ... Behold he shall come, saith the Lord of Hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming?... Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness rise with healing in his beams.” (iii. 1, 2; iv. 2).

If these statements do not foretell the appearing of the Messiah, it is difficult to imagine how language could be framed to foretell it. In truth, the question is beyond controversy. It never could have been raised but for the necessity created by a false theory of Christ. The robust sense of scientific intelligence will always decide (against the artificial refinements of mercurial and invertebrate idealism—dreamy, speculative and illogical) that explain it how it may, the prophets foretold the appearing of Christ: and the same intelligence applied to the life of Christ, must necessarily come to the conclusion expressed in the words of Philip to Nathanael, “We have found HIM OF WHOM MOSES IN THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS DID WRITE” (Jno. i. 45).

Moses wrote of Christ in a way not yet hinted at. The whole economy of divine service established by his hand in the midst of Israel, was a prophetic allegory of him. This we have on the authority of Paul, who was guided by the Holy Spirit; and the statement which he makes is borne out by the results of the study of Moses from this point of view. The allegory is a complete and speaking one.

Let the reflecting reader consider how completely the fact of this continuous and extended prophecy of Christ, over so long a time, of itself establishes the divinity of Christ. If, in addition to this, he obtains a full view of Christ himself, as displayed in the apostolic narratives, and an adequate perception of all the evidences that prove his resurrection, he must needs feel so overpowered by conviction as to fling away all reserve, and accept the profession of the name of

Christ with all the earnest ardour which such a conviction must, in the highest reason, inspire. The apologetic tone of modern professors ill befits a subject so incontestably true and so unutterably stupendous in its importance.

## **CHAPTER III.**

### **The Necessity for Christ in the Divine Scheme of History**

We speak of his appearing 1,850 years ago. Why did he appear then, and not later or sooner? The general answer is plain, leading to one not so plain, but which is pleasing in its speculative interest. The general answer is, that the time appointed had come. This is what Paul says: "When the fulness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal. iv. 4). Jesus himself referred similarly to the matter: "The time is fulfilled" (Mark i. 15.) The vision shewn to Daniel necessitates this conclusion: for to him it was said by the angel who enlightened him, "From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto Messiah the Prince shall be," such and such a time which expired in the days of Christ

The next question would introduce a more difficult topic: "Why was such a time appointed?" We might well leave this. We might well be satisfied that the appointment of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will, must needs have its basis in perfect wisdom, even if our poor blind eyes could not see it. But it is not presumption to scan His work in the spirit of enquiring reverence. On the contrary, it is well pleasing to God that we do so: "The works of the Lord are great: sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." Christ is His greatest work upon earth hitherto: and those who love him most will find the most pleasure in seeking out all the divine "whys and wherefores" related to him that may be attainable.

One clue we get simply, when we look back and see that 1,850 years ago the time for the ending of the Mosaic system of things had come. The ending of it, then, is beyond all controversy. Both the law-worshipping Jew and the divinity-of-Moses-denying Gentile are compelled to recognise the historical fact (whatever their interpretation of it may be) that since that time the law of Moses has ceased to be a nationally operative thing in the earth. It has had neither the land nor the nation essential to its operation. The land has been in the hands of strangers and in a state of desolation: and the race on whom alone it was enjoined, have been scattered, down-trodden, and denationalised in the lands of "the heathen," as all Gentile nations are called in scripture.

Now, considering that the end of the system as a divinely operative system in the earth did actually, as a matter-of-fact not to be contradicted, arrive 1,850 years ago, we may easily see one reason why Christ should appear then, and not before or since. It is an apostolic declaration that Christ is “the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” on him (Rom. x. 4). It is another declaration, already quoted, that in becoming “the end of the law,” he was “made under the law.” He could not have been “made under the law,” if he had appeared after the law had passed out of operation; and he could not have become “the end of the law,” had he been born while it was in the full career of its national mission. His appearance at the exact time chosen was a necessity from this point of view.

But why, and in what sense, and how, did he become the end of the law? We will not enter largely into the field of contemplation to which these questions invite. Yet a glance at general outlines is necessary. The “why” requires us to remember that the law was of God’s appointing, and that Christ was of God’s sending, and that the one and the other were associated in God’s plan of things upon the earth. They were not disconnected. The Mission of the law could not be completed till it ended in Christ. It had to be fulfilled in him, as he said: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil,” and again, that “not one jot or tittle should pass from the law till all was fulfilled” (Matt. v. 17–18). Paul declared Christ to be substance of the things contained in the law (Col. ii. 17).

To us, the righteousness of God is manifested “without the law,” and made available by faith in Christ outside the law altogether (Rom. iii. 21); but though preached “without the law,” it was not developed “without the law.” It was generated under the law, in so far as Christ was born under the law, and obedient under the law, and died under the law. Paul denies that the faith of Christ made void the law; he contends it established it (Rom. iii. 31). The correctness of his contention we can see when we realise that the Christ who is offered for our faith is a Christ in whom all the excellence and virtue of the law became, as it were, personally incorporate. It was under it that he was “made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. i. 30). That is, he was in all things obedient while in that position, and therefore the rightful heir of whatever blessedness it was in the power of the law to confer upon those who “continued in all things written in the book of the law to do them,” which none else did but he. But this heirship was inaccessible to others so long as the law continued in force. It was needful the law should be taken out of the way, before those who were cursed by it (because of sin) could partake of the blessings secured in the sinless Christ alone. And it was taken out of the way—not arbitrarily—not in caprice; for it is not in God to change. It was taken out of the way in a manner that preserved the continuity and harmony and majesty of the divine action, while opening the way for forgiveness and favour to those believing in Christ. It was taken away by Christ dying, which placed him beyond its operation. “The law hath dominion over a man so long as he liveth” (Rom. vii.



1). When he is dead, it has no further jurisdiction. It was only ordained for living mortals. When Christ hung lifeless on the cross, it had no further hold on him. When he rose from the dead, he was a free man. This is Paul's argument: "Ye (who have been baptised into the risen Christ) are become dead to the law by the body of Christ (in his death) that ye should be married to another, even to him who is RAISED FROM THE DEAD" (Rom. vii. 4). It is in this connection that the force is apparent of Paul's declaration that Christ, in his death, "blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross" (Col. ii. 14); and further, that those who are in Christ are "no longer under the law, but under grace" and are to "stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. v. 1).

There were two purposes in the establishing of the law, that ended in Christ. Paul informs us that one was that sinful man might be manifest to himself, and that every mouth might be stopped in the conviction of his own helplessness. "The law entered that the offence might abound" (Rom. v. 20): that sin "might appear sin, work death by that which is good" (vii. 13), "that every mouth might be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God" (iii. 19). The other was, that what the law could not do for man left to himself, God in His love and grace might do, in sending His own Son, who should "magnify the law and make it honourable" in its complete observance, and who should then, in further and loving obedience, remove it out of the way in surrendering to the death of the cross, by which the curse of the law should come on him, for all who should come unto God by him. The law during the time it was in force completely accomplished these two things. First, Peter declared that Israel had found it a yoke which neither his generation nor their fathers were able to bear" (Acts xv. 10). Secondly, Jesus, who could challenge the Jews on the score of his perfect fulfilment of it, saying, "which of you convinceth me of sin?" (Jno. viii. 46), appeared just before it had run its course, putting away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and in rising again, laid the foundation for the salvation of all those who have faith in him as the Lamb of God.

These things bear upon the question of why Christ should have appeared before the disappearance of the Mosaic system from the land of Israel. They may not touch other enquiries that may arise. Why should the Mosaic system have disappeared 1,850 years ago? Why should it not have continued till the time for the setting up of the kingdom of God? And why should not Christ then have emerged from the tomb to ascend at once the throne of universal power and glory? We may be sure there is wisdom in the Divine plan on all these heads. We may even, with a little reflection, be able to discover it.

Israel's transgressions required their dispersion amongst the Gentiles for double the length of time occupied by their national existence; the land had to rest unoccupied and untilled for a protracted period to make up for the years that Israel stole from the land in violation of the law that required them to let the land

rest every, seventh year (Is. xl. 1; Lev. xxvi. 34<sup>nd</sup>;35). Both these eventualities were provided for in prophecy. Moses and all the prophets foretold the downtreading of the land and the scattering of the people. Both were necessities in the divine plan; and both involved the suspension of the Mosaic system. It was, therefore, impossible that that system could continue until the setting up of the kingdom under the seed promised to Abraham and the Son promised to David. A long interregnum of "many days" was inevitable, during which Israel was to be "with-out a king, without a prince, without a sacrifice, &c.," as was specifically predicted (Hos. iii. 4).

It was impossible for other reasons. It was necessary that there should be an interval between the sufferings of Christ and his exaltation as Jehovah's king in all the earth, in preparation for his effectual assumption of that position, both as regards the Jews and Gentiles. The Jews were not in any sense ready to receive hint at the time of his first appearing. He was a stranger to them, who interested them for a while by his extraordinary "works," and then alienated them by his unpalatable condemnations of the national ways. All interest in him ceased with his destruction. His resurrection re-kindled that interest in the heart of a class: but had the Lord at that time ascended the throne of David, instead of departing to the Father for a season, there would have lacked the pathetic interest and the dramatic triumph that will belong to his installation in their midst after more than 18 centuries' absence and rejection. For all that time the Jews have refused him, and cursed his name. They have not been allowed to forget him. "Bye a foolish nation I will anger you," said God, by Moses. In the providence of God, the civilization of the Gentiles, among whom Israel has been scattered, has been inextricably blended, with the name of the crucified Jesus; and in all the countries of their dispersion they have been kept in a chronic state of anger by the exhibition of the mementoes and symbols of their crucifixion of Christ, and by the taunts, and insults, and persecutions on that head to which they have been subjected at the hands of their Christian neighbours. They have been kept face to face, in all the generations of their exile, with the crucified Nazarene. With what an interest, so far as they are concerned, does this long and bitter interval invest the introduction of Christ to them at his second appearing. "They shall look upon me, whom they pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one who mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him" (Zech xii. 10).

Nothing in human narrative approaches in touching pathos the story of Joseph's contact with his brethren after their sale of him into slavery, and his separation from them for over 20 years. It brings tears to the eyes of strong men who have read it many times. So nothing in history will at all come near the sublime event of the revelation of "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews," after many centuries of scorn, to the nation whose fathers crucified him 1,850 years ago, and who in all the interval, have endorsed and justified their fathers' act. He will interfere in their behalf before they know him, and will be identified as the Crucified only after he has manifested himself as the Victorious against their foes. Who can conceive anything more superlatively interesting than such a

situation—a complete retribution, a more thrilling scene of national self-humiliation, a more eagerly willing people to serve and to glorify the man of God's right hand? All this will result from the plan by which Christ appeared and was rejected by Israel many centuries before the time appointed for the manifestation of his kingly glory in their midst. It will be a repetition, on the largest and grandest scale, of the wisdom and beauty and thrilling interest which have attached to all the arrangements in which God has had a hand in the past. They have all been characterised by perfect ripeness of result, intensity of interest, and completeness of climax.

When we consider the bearing of the interval on the Gentile world, it is not difficult to see, if not an exactly similar, at least an equally valuable preparation for what is coming. Had Christ proceeded to "reign over the Gentiles" at his first appearing, there would have been a want of that fitness of circumstances that makes things interesting. The principal part of European territory was in a state of native wildness. The Roman world was limited in extent and crude in condition, possessing a civilization that was more of the nature of barbarism. Had Christ been introduced to the world's notice at such a time in a political capacity, he would have found the situation in every sense unprepared. He would have been as unsuited to the situation as the situation would have been without a history and without an identity in the world's eyes, and the world would have been without a population, or an appreciation adequate to his kingly glory and power, whereas after 1,850 years of preparation, how differently the matter stands. Introduced to them as a doctrine—"preached among the Gentiles" by apostolic and many other agencies—talked of and debated about and wondered at—fought over, warred about, loved and hated, belauded and condemned,—a problem for philosophers, a theme for believers, a stumbling block for angry Jews and atheists, his name and renown have interwoven themselves with human affairs in all civilized countries. And his influence by these very means, has been made operative. His influence has altered human ways and modified human condition in many important respects. Europe of 1890 is a very different Europe from that of A.D. 34. Though the world is all dark and ungodly, there is a state of things on which the kingdom of God will more readily graft than it would have done upon the Roman society of the first century.

Above all, the world has become acquainted with his name in a way that prepares for his entrance upon universal power at his coming. Though Christ is not intelligently or savingly known in the world at large, all have heard of him, and have formed such an estimate of his greatness and worth (however distorted by superstition) that they will be predisposed to acquiesce in his authority much more readily when he comes than if they had never heard of him at all. This is the result of Christ having appeared 1,850 years ago and remaining absent for all the period since. There is a better and more developed world to inherit, and the conditions of a readier and heartier welcome existing than there would have been if the appearing of Christ as a sacrifice had happened just before his manifestation as a king.

But the principal object accomplished by having the sufferings and the glory so far apart, is doubtless that which has reference to the Lord's own brethren. These had to be developed in certain fixed numbers for the work of governing the nations with Christ upon the earth in the day of his glory. Many had been prepared for that work in the times of the law that went before Christ—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, and all that feared Yahweh's name, small and great—who, having pleased God by faith and obedience in their several generations, went to “rest” like Daniel, in faith of the promised Messiah, and in waiting for “the end of days” when they should rise at his coming to “stand in their lot” or inheritance. But they were not nearly sufficient in number for the great world-wide work to be done in the day of Christ. It was therefore needful to send out for “guests” to the Gentiles “by-ways and hedges,” that the number might be made up. And the interval of 1,850 years has proved a needful interval for this work. The interval is now nearly ended and the work nearly done. But not only the time has been needed; the doctrine associated with Christ's first appearing was a necessity in the work of their development. The brethren of Gentile times were to be developed by the preaching of the Cross in its scriptural relation to the kingdom. They were to be attracted by the offer of the forgiveness of sin through faith in the shed blood of the Lord Jesus; as of a lamb without spot, who died that they might live and reign with him. Their affections were to be drawn to him as the Purifier from sin and the Saviour from death, without whom they could do nothing. They were to be prepared to take part in the song which ascribes their deliverance “to Him who washed them from their sins in his own blood.” If Christ had not “appeared at the end of the (Mosaic) world to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself,” this could not have been done. But it has been done. The preparation had been accomplished, as it could in no other way, by the occurrence of the death of Christ 1,850 years ago, and its proclamation, in all the interval, as God's arrangement for the reconciliation of men. Many thousands, in the apostolic age and since, have “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” The true greatness of the triumph will not be manifest, however, till the thrilling moment arrive when a multitude that no man can number stands before the Lord Jesus in the day of his return, in the rapturous conviction declared in song, that they owe to him the acceptance they find, and the glory, honour, and immortality in which they rejoice.

From all these considerations, it becomes evident that it was not a matter of chance that Christ appeared 1,850 years ago, or that his manifestation in kingly glory has been far separated from the day of his rejection and shame. Both are matters of divine arrangement: and both are essential to the scheme of things which God has devised for the final deliverance of the earth from its woe.

## **CHAPTER IV.**

### **Preparation.**

THE “fulness of time” having arrived for the appearance of Christ “to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself,” we have to note the preparatory steps taken—divine steps; for this was to be a divine work in a sense in which no other work among men had been divine. In former cases, human instruments had been used; in this case, God himself, by the Spirit, was to do the work by a man expressly provided, in whom His glory should be manifest: as the Spirit had declared by Isaiah, “The glory of Yahweh shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together” (Is. xl. 5) In harmony with this character of the situation, is the opening incident.

The angel Gabriel is on the scene in the 36th year of Augustus Caesar, the first imperial head of the Roman empire, and in the last year but one of Herod, his vassal, who reigned in Judæa. We will not stay to consider these men, who figured so prominently in the age that witnessed the birth of Christ. They could contribute nothing valuable to the subject. They were men of strong individuality, but not in a good sense. They were vigorous specimens of the kind of men of whom Daniel says that God sets on high “the basest of men.” They were both able men, but bad men from a divine point of view, especially Herod, whose enormities filled the minds of men with detestation, and made his death an event of public joy. Nor shall we contemplate the situation of things among the people, either Jew or Gentile, or take any cue from the laborious and cloudy literature of their day, with which it is so fashionable for “learning” to cumber the subject. They have no more to do with the nature of the events transacted than the traditions and habits of an obscure country village of our day have to do with the aims and manners of Victoria’s Court. They were but the dung beds in which the heavenly plant was planted, by divine power, and nurtured by divine energy, contributing, by divine suction, some of the elements of growth in the case, but no more determining the character of that growth than the manure determines whether the root it environs shall grow roses or Crab apples.

We look at Gabriel, who asserted a peculiar dignity and authority in his rebuke to Zacharias for doubting his word, saying: “I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God” (Luke i. 19). There are myriads of angels, but here is one whose words suggest a special status in the Father’s presence—a special intimacy with the Eternal Creator. There is something fitting in such an exalted representative of the Divine Majesty being employed in the initiation of the work about to be done—the laying of the foundation of God’s house of everlasting glory upon earth. It was not Gabriel’s first appearance in the mighty transaction. Between five and six hundred years earlier, he was sent to Daniel to inform him of this very matter, viz., the appearance of the sacrificial Messiah to make an end of sins, and to bring in everlasting righteousness (Dan. ix. 24). Daniel says “While I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation, and informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel: I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplication, the commandment came forth and I am come to shew thee,” &c.

(verses 21, 23). It is very interesting to think of this angelic personage coming to Daniel by divine command to enlighten him with reference to the purpose of God in Christ; and then re-appearing on the scene, after a lapse of over five centuries, to perform acts in execution of that purpose.

The acts performed were simple but essential. Two visits had to be made; two announcements delivered; and power exerted in the accomplishment of the work in hand. This double form of Gabriel's errand arose from the double nature of the work. Not only was the long-promised Saviour to be born, but a forerunner was to be provided also, the necessity for whom may appear in the sequel. Not only was the name of the Father to be manifested in the seed of Abraham, but as became the dignity and the moral necessities of such an event, a man was to be raised up who should fitly herald such a manifestation in going "before his face and preparing his way before him." The two phases of the work were six months apart; and as was fit, the business of the forerunner had the first attention. Gabriel went first on this business to Zacharias, the husband of Elizabeth, who was related in cousinship to the virgin, of whom it was purposed Christ should be born. It was a suitable and happy arrangement that the forerunner of Christ should be provided from a related family. When men are allied both "in the flesh and in the Lord," the union has double power and sweetness.

Zacharias was a priest, of the course of Abijah, the eighth of the twenty-four courses into which the Aaronic families were divided by David for purposes of service by rotation (1 Chron. xxiv). His wife Elizabeth was also "of the daughters of Aaron." We may realise in this circumstance the unity and harmony of God's plan in working out His purpose upon earth. Aaron's family were chosen at the beginning to act the part of God's representatives in the midst of Israel. For many generations they had sustained this position; and now, as a new shoot in the heart of the old growth, leading to a new flowering of the divine work in the earth, a branch of that same family (just before the Aaronic priesthood is set aside) is chosen to furnish a man to go before the face of the Lord in the new manifestation, to prepare his way before him. Both Zacharias and Elizabeth "were righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless." For a lifetime they had sustained this character. Both were now old, and they were childless. Elizabeth's barrenness had been a deep disappointment to both, and had been the subject of frequent petition on the part of Zacharias (Luke 1. 13). The prayer was now to be answered, and the barrenness end in the birth of the greatest among the prophets; on which it has to be observed as a frequent—we might almost say, a constant—feature in the work of God, that He makes the accomplishment even of His declared purposes wait upon the prayers of His people; and makes use of human incompetences for the execution of His greatest works.

Moses, in Egypt, prays earnestly at the various critical points in the progress of the work of deliverance; Israel's various leaders and judges, the same, in times of affliction; David pours out his soul constantly in the trouble that preceded his elevation to the throne; Daniel, at the end of the seventy years, makes petition for

the promised return of Jehovah's favour to Zion.

The second point (God's use of human weakness) stands out with equal prominence. Here a barren woman is made to provide the Lord's forerunner; and a virgin is made the mother of the Lord himself. So a barren woman (past the time of life) gave Isaac, the child of promise: a barren woman, Joseph, the chief among the sons of Jacob: a barren woman, Samuel, leader among the prophets: a barren woman, the strongest among men, Samson. Going wider, a herd youth, despised among his brothers, is chosen as the founder of Yahweh's royal house in the earth; a runaway flockmaster is made the deliverer of Israel and mediator of the covenant of Sinai: a nation of serfs is made use of to manifest the divine power in the face of all the earth. The principle underlying this mode of procedure is defined prophetically thus: "Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit" (Zech. iv. 6); apostolically thus: "that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. i. 29). The principle will be found to have the sanction of the highest reason. The glory of all that man is, belongs to God from whom it springs. It is unreasonable that man should glory in himself as if he had made himself. It is not only unreasonable; it is degrading. Man's most ennobling honour is found in recognising God as the fountain of life and wisdom and power. Man can only find his chief joy in this recognition. God's purpose is to cause the discernment of this to be universal yet; and in prosecuting the purpose, he makes use of circumstances and conditions and instruments that exclude the possibility of man having any share in the glory or credit of the transaction.

To the husband of this barren woman, Gabriel presents himself in the temple, while Zacharias is attending to his office as priest. The angel appears "at the right side of the altar of incense." This is the divine symbol of acceptable prayer. That the angel should appear here to announce the granting of a request, is one of those inexpressibly beautiful coincidences of literal circumstance with spiritual analogy with which the Scriptures abound. The dispensational importance of the request to be granted adds to its beauty: this importance was beyond all expectation or knowledge on the part of Zacharias, who had asked a son, probably, for his personal comfort merely. Thus God, in granting our requests, may give us—"above all that we ask or think." When Zacharias saw the angel, he was afraid. We are all naturally startled by the appearance of a person in an unexpected place. In this instance, it was the holy place, outside the veil—a place above all others on earth protected from the likelihood of intrusion. But it was not only a visitor in a very unexpected place, it was a very unexpected visitor—an angel. This would add to Zacharias's perturbation. In most recorded cases, fear has been the effect produced by the appearance of an angel. The reason of this, probably, lies in the aspect of an angel, which was described by Manoah's wife (to whom an angel had announced the coming birth of Samson), as "very terrible" (Jud. xiii. 6)—a description illustrated by the statement that the angel that appeared to the woman at the sepulchre of Christ, had "a countenance like lightning" (Matt. xxviii. 3). The human aspect startles a beast; it is not wonderful that the angelic aspect should startle weak mortal man. But there is no cause for fear to the righteous. Though power greater than dynamite lies latent in

the graceful and brilliant form of an angel, it is under the control of perfect and beneficent intelligence. The passenger on board an Atlantic liner, who walks on deck over the engine boilers, has much more cause for fear than the God-fearing man who stands in the presence of the thunder that sleeps in angelic hands. "Fear not," said the angel to startled Zacharias: "thy prayer is heard; thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.... Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, ... to make ready a people pre-pared for the Lord."

Zacharias, calmed and re-assured by the angel's kindly manner, is able to let his mind dwell for a moment on what the angel has said. He realises its extraordinary import—that he, an old man, and his wife barren, and "well stricken in years," should have the gloom of old age lightened by the birth of a son—and a son, too, who should have a mission from the Lord "to turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just," for which he should be qualified by being "filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb." It naturally seemed to him incredible. He had been praying for it for years, and yet, when his prayer is heard, he is incredulous. How natural this is. It was so in the case of those who prayed for Peter's release: they could not believe their senses when Peter presented himself at the door (Acts xii. 5, 13–16). It is human weakness. The saints of the nineteenth century may hope to have their own joyful experience of this shortly, when after praying for a lifetime for the Lord's coming amid increasing human frailty, and, it may be, faltering expectation, the angel of his presence will announce that the prayer is answered to the joy of thousands, who will only find suitable vent to their feelings in tears.

Zacharias, not quite realising at the moment the guarantee contained in an angel's word, asks, "Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years." Tiffs was casting a slight on God's messenger, and therefore on God—an excusable error, perhaps, but still an error, and in a certain relation of things, the greatest offence a man can commit against God—to doubt His word. As faith is so pleasing to God as to be "counted for righteousness?" so distrust of His pledged word, when we know He has pledged it, is the most displeasing sin against Him a man can commit. It was visited in the case of Moses (Num. xx. 12), and it was now visited in the case of Zacharias (and these things were "written for our learning"). The mode of the visitation was gentle, adroit, and effectual: "I am Gabriel that stand in the presence of God, and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And behold thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believedst not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season." Thus was Zacharias rebuked and the verity of the communication authenticated in a very tangible manner, at the same time: for when the angel had withdrawn, Zacharias found himself unable to speak in a situation which made the fact very noticeable. He was "executing the priest's office before God in the order of his course:" and it was his business (having gone into the temple "to



burn incense”) to go forth now to the people who were waiting in the court outside, to pronounce the customary blessing before their dispersal. They were waiting for this: they had to wait longer than usual; for the appearance of the angel to Zacharias had detained him; and the people who knew nothing of it, “marvelled that he tarried so long.” When he went out to them, he could not speak to them, though his natural impulse in such a position would incline him to overcome any obstacle, if it were possible. “He beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.” They understood, from his gestures, that he had seen something in the temple which had deprived him of his power of utterance. The people dispersed and Zacharias retired.

This brought to a close the opening incident in the great and glorious work about to be manifested on the earth. Zacharias, having completed his period of service for the time being, “departed from Jerusalem to his own house,” in “the hill country of Judea”—probably in the neighbourhood of Hebron if not Hebron itself, which was a priestly city, assigned to the sons of Aaron, to whose family Zacharias belonged. Here, without delay, the angel’s words were fulfilled. “Elizabeth’s full time came that she should be delivered, and she brought forth a son.” It was no natural occurrence: that is, it was not the result of nature left to itself. It was a case parallel with Sarah’s “who received strength to conceive seed and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised” (Heb. xi. 11). It was the incipient fulfilment of the words of God: “Behold I will send MY MESSENGER, and he shall prepare the way before me” (Mal. iii. 1) A man who was Yahweh’s messenger was no ordinary man: and the child who was to be this man was no ordinary child. He was produced by divine interposition, and he was “filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb,” as Gabriel declared (Luke i. 15), which is the key to John’s life and characteristics—a puzzle to the natural-man thinkers and ecclesiastical traditionists of this benighted age, but “all plain” to those who have got into the groove of Bible thought instead of standing patronisingly outside, and trying to squeeze Bible things into human moulds.

John’s birth was a glad surprise to Elizabeth’s “neighbours and cousins,” who “rejoiced with her,” in the “great mercy the Lord had shewn her” in giving her a son in her old age. They did not understand the event in its true character at first. They made the usual arrangements to have the child circumcised and named. They settled among themselves that the child should be called Zacharias, after his father, who had been dumb for over nine months, and whom apparently they could not, or did not, consult on the subject. When the eighth day arrived, their arrangement was upset to their own astonishment and fear. First, Elizabeth insisted that he should be called John, not Zacharias. They were surprised at this, saying, there were none of her relations called by the name of John. They made signs to Zacharias himself, asking what the child should be called. Zacharias called for a writing table, and wrote, “His name is John.” They had not recovered from their surprise at his decision when he surprised them still more by breaking forth in a stream of speech, all the more voluble from having been so

long restrained, and from being now impelled by the Holy Spirit; for “he was filled with the Holy Spirit, and blessed God” that the time had come for the fulfilment of the longstanding promise of Christ. Then apostrophising the infant, he said: “And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for though shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation to his people, for the remission of their sins; through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us; to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke i. 76–79).

No wonder that those who heard these things “laid them up in their hearts,” saying, “What manner of child shall this be?” In process of time, it became manifest “what manner of child” he was. “The hand of the Lord was with him” (Luke i. 66), which explained all. He was no chance evolution of natural force. He was no phenomenal bud on the Adamic tree. He was the workmanship of God, for the specific work of heralding His son, and preparing His way. This feature is ignored in “learned” presentments of the subject, due to the learned fable that the apostolic narratives are not infallible narratives, but merely human recitals honestly written but largely marred by the presence of exaggeration and myth to which merely human miters of that age were naturally exposed. A recognition of the inspired nature of these narratives (proved in so many ways), fences off the nebulous and derogatory views of learning on this subject, and enables us to recognise in John “a man sent from God” to “bear witness of the Light” about to be manifested to Israel; and therefore not a man to be explained on any of the philosophical hypotheses with which the wise of this world delight to amuse themselves and their readers. There is still need to listen to Paul’s advice: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy or vain deceit.” Modern science is more respectable than ancient philosophy: it is more accurate in its diagnosis of the phenomena of nature. Nevertheless, it is as powerless as ancient philosophy to explain the ways of God, and as liable to obscure and pervert them by its presumptuous applications.

“The child grew and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the desert till the day of his shewing unto Israel.” This covers the whole interval from his birth till his appearance as a preacher on the banks of the Jordan. It tells us as much as we need to know. It does not mean that he lived no part of the time in his mother’s house, but that he remained in seclusion instead of beginning at twelve years of age, like other boys, to attend the feasts at Jerusalem regularly. He was unseen and unknown outside his own domestic circle till the hour for his public work arrived. His mother lived “in the hill country,” where desert abounded, and here he would doubtless spend much of his time in the open air, indulging in contemplation and prayer, and acquiring those habits of hardihood for which he became known to the crowds who afterwards listened to his preaching. When he introduced himself to public notice at the age of 27, “he had his raiment of camel’s hair and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.” The report was raised that he was demoniacally possessed. This

report was partly grounded on his eccentricity of habit, for “John came neither eating nor drinking” (Matt. xi. 18); and partly on the vehement dogmatism of his preaching, which was untinged with deference to the influential classes, and fired with a directness and intensity of denunciation against wickedness, that identified him with the prophets of whom Jesus said he was the greatest. These two peculiarities probably explain the attention of which he immediately became the object. He “did no miracle” (Jno. x. 41); yet there “went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan.” Had his preaching consisted of the incoherent rhodomontade of fanaticism, ancient or modern, this attention would soon have subsided. But instead of subsiding, it went on increasing for over three years, until the leaders of the people were themselves drawn by the popular current to listen to him, and even Herod, the king of the country, felt constrained to defer to his words (Mark vi. 20). This fact is proof of a powerful attraction in the work of John. There is no difficulty in discovering the secret of this attraction, when the nature of the times is considered in connection with the nature of his teaching. The time specified in Dan. ix. for the appearance of the Messiah was about to expire; and we learn from Josephus and Tacitus that there was a general expectancy of Messiah’s advent. This would tend to fix attention on John. As a matter of fact, Luke informs us that “the people were in expectation; all men mused in their hearts of John whether he were the Christ or not” (Luke iii. 15). John also (the other John) tells us that “the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, who art thou?” To whom he answered, “I am not the Christ” (Jno. i. 19, 20). This general suspense and anticipation would dispose the people to attend to a teacher so emphatic and peculiar. The nature of his teachings would rivet the attention excited by his peculiarity. He commanded them with authority to repent: to turn from their sins; and to submit to baptism at his hands for the remission of the same. With this command, he associated two solemn intimaations—first, that judgment was impending on that generation: the axe was lying at the root of the trees, and every tree failing to bring forth good fruit would be cut down and cast into the fire; and secondly, that THE COMING ONE was among them, about to make his appearance, “whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Jno. i. 26; Matt. iii. 10–12).

It is not surprising that such teaching—delivered with the fervour and fearlessness of divine authority,—should arrest attention at a time when moral earnestness had been killed by a punctilious and hypocritical ritualism; and when the public mind was in the tension of a justly-founded expectancy. His style was an acceptable contrast to the mumbling formalisms of the scribes, who, like the clergy of the present day, were mere “intoners” of word-forms in which they had no faith. It would be pleasing to the lovers of righteousness to see him turn on the Pharisees and Sadducees as he did when they at last ventured furtively to follow the crowds in their eager attendance on John’s preaching: “O generation of vipers! who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” John anticipated their claim on the score of Abrahamic descent. “Think not to say within

yourselves, 'We have Abraham to our father': for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." The context supplies the explanation of John's apparent brusqueness. He said, "Bring forth fruits meet for repentance"—implying that they were not fit subjects for the remission of sins. Remission of sins is offered only to those who confess and forsake their sins. The Pharisees and Sadducees were not in the mood to do either. They were in the state afterwards described by Jesus: "outwardly righteous," but in their hearts and lives, as God estimates them, full of iniquity. John, as a man by whom the Spirit spoke, was able to address words which, though extremely harsh, were perfectly suitable to their state. To those who came with sincere desire to know God's will, that they might do it, he spoke in terms of instruction. "The people asked him, What shall we do then? He answereth and said unto them, he that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none: and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also the publicans to be baptised, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence unto no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages" (Luke iii. 10, 14).

It has been a difficulty with the "learned" why John took such an extreme and authoritative attitude, and particularly why he baptised with water. Much labour and ingenuity have been expended for the purpose of showing that baptism was Orientally practised as a religious rite before the days of John, from which it is argued that John, whose fervour is attributed by this class to his emulation of the eremite asceticism of the first century, adopted it from predecessors. There is not the least room for this idea, or for any uncertainty on the point, when men accept the apostolic account (and if that is not accepted, there is no reason for attaching value to any account: for all other literature on the subject, ancient or modern, is hazy and incoherent. But most men have a curious propensity for preferring the cloudy and bewildering vaticinations of unbelieving bookworms, to the straight, clear, and authenticated record of apostolic inspiration). The apostolic account is simple and all-sufficient. John tells us that the Pharisees sent a deputation to John, enquiring, "Why baptisest thou?" (Jno. i. 24, 25)—(the very question of the modern "literati.") John's answer sets the question at rest for ever. The pith of it is contained in verse 33: "He (God) ... sent me to baptise with water." With what object, John? This also is settled: "After me cometh a man who was preferred before me: (for he was before me). And I knew him not, but that he should be made manifest to Israel, THEREFORE, am I come baptising with water" (verses 30, 31.) John's baptism was, therefore, part of the work God gave John to do. He did it because he was sent to do it, and commanded to do it. He was commanded to do it because the word of God came to him, conveying the command as distinctly and directly as that same word came to Moses and all the prophets, "not by the will of man," as Peter informs us, but "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." The very date of the coming of this word is exactly supplied: In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar ... THE WORD OF GOD CAME UNTO JOHN, the son of Zacharias, in the

wilderness” (Luke iii. 1). His baptism, his burning words, and commanding manner are all explained by this. He was the Lord’s messenger, specially raised up and equipped, “filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb,” and sent forth at the ripe moment, “in the spirit and power of Elias,” to do the work of “preparing the way of the Lord.”

## CHAPTER V.

### John the Baptist’s Work.

IT will be useful to know a little more about the nature, need, and upshot of John the Baptist’s work before going on to Christ’s work for which it was a preparation. We may realise the need for such a preparatory work if we consider the position of Christ before that work was accomplished. Christ was in the privacy of Nazareth—unknown and without access to the public eye or ear. To have obtained this access by his own personal effort would have involved an amount and kind of labour unsuited to the part he had to perform. Israel had to be roused from a state of spiritual dormancy. The right men to be his apostles and disciples had to be collected and prepared. They were scattered here and there in the hills and valleys of Galilee—mostly unknown to one another. A public magnet had to draw them together. Christ could not have been this magnet without prolonged and laborious efforts that would have been inconsistent with the work he had to do. And, then it was not fitting that he should introduce himself. No man can effectually introduce himself. The requirements of the case, on all points, called for a forerunner.

Such a forerunner was provided in John the Baptist; and his part was effectually performed. His teaching for over three years not only predisposed the community to submit to the requirements of righteousness, but drew public attention to the fact that the Messiah was in their midst and about to be manifested. It brought all eyes to bear expectantly on the moment and mode of his manifestation. That mode was connected with John himself. He was sent to baptise in order that that manifestation might take place. The unknown One was to come to his baptism. Upon his emergence from the water, the Holy Spirit would visibly identify him. This was revealed to John and proclaimed by him beforehand (Jno. i. 33). Such an identification was not only necessary for Israel, but for John himself; for John did not know him, as he declared (Jno. i. 31).

At first sight, it seems strange that John should not know him, considering that he was his own cousin. But the surprise lessens when we remember that they were both brought up in different parts of the country—Jesus at Nazareth, John in the neighbourhood of Hebron—about 50 or 60 miles apart, John’s secluded habits “in the desert” would prevent the intercourse between them which might have led to the recognition of the true character of his illustrious cousin. That John knew Jesus personally, though not knowing him as the Messiah, is evident from the

fact that when Jesus presented himself for baptism, John objected to baptise Jesus on the ground of his spotlessness of character: "I have need to be baptised of thee, and comest thou to me?" (Matt. iii. 14). John objected to the Pharisees being baptised, because his baptism was for repentant and reforming sinners; and he now objected to baptise Jesus because his baptism was not for righteous men: which shows personal acquaintance with Jesus. John knew Jesus enough to know that he was a righteous person: but he did not know him enough to know that he was "the one standing in their midst whose shoe-latchet he was not worthy to stoop down and unloose." Our difficulty in understanding John's deficient knowledge of him in this latter capacity arises mainly from the completeness of our own knowledge of what came after. We are liable, unconsciously, to take all this knowledge back with us to the privacy of John's secluded life, and to wonder at a want of apprehension which was natural to his circumstances.

It was probably a divinely-contrived thing that John should be ignorant of the Messiah-ship of Jesus. Had he known it, he would have been certain to have proclaimed his knowledge; and thus the testimony to Christ would not have rested on that wholly divine foundation that was essential. It would have appeared to rest on a human foundation. John, as a relative, might have been suspected of the partiality of kinship; and thus, confidence in the testimony to Christ would have been imperfect at the start, where it was necessary there should be no flaw. When we realise how unspeakably important it was that the claims of Jesus, as the long-promised Messiah, should not rest on either his own testimony or on that of any man, we get a glimpse of the purpose served by John's ignorance of him. John was as helpless as any in the crowd on the subject of who and where the Expected One was. He could not point him out. He knew he was among them. This had been revealed to him by the "word of God," which came to him "in the wilderness of Judea." "There standeth one among you whom ye know not ... and I knew him not, but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptising with water."

Thus the identification of Jesus was disconnected from all human bias or human sanction. All were alike ignorant and helpless in the matter. No one could say who the Son of God was; and it was not to be left to his own testimony. It was to be the work of God alone, to point him out and proclaim him. John's baptism supplied but the crisis and the opportunity when this could be effectually done. John was but a "voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord: make his paths straight." John's work brought all eyes to a focus. He told them the Holy One would come to be baptised by him, and that when he came, the Holy Spirit would openly and visibly manifest and own him, apart from which no man knew him. At last, Jesus stepped forth from the crowd: he gave himself to John's hands as others: no one knew that this unpretending carpenter was the one they were looking for. After a word of protest from John, he is buried in the water. He rises: and, while all eyes are upon him, a shaft of light strikes from the heavens, and converges in the bodily form of a dove upon his head. A voice then

plainly proclaims, in the hearing of the assembled crowd, "THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED."

And thus John's work came to its culminating point. Its particular object was now accomplished, Jesus, by its means, was manifested to Israel under circumstances that made the introduction effectual, and free from doubt. John, who till this time had to say, "I know him not," was able now to speak with emphasis in the opposite sense. He "bears record" that "this is the Son of God." On a subsequent day, he specially called the notice of his (John's) disciples to him: "This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man who is preferred before me.

He that sent me to baptise with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he that baptizeth with the Holy Spirit" (Jno. i. 30). Again, on another day, he directs the attention of two of his disciples to him, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." The natural effect of this was to cause these disciples to follow Christ and attach themselves to him.

Those who listened most intelligently to John would now most readily transfer their interest to Christ, to whom John's work was but a preparatory testimony. Many did not, but remained with John by preference. Others failing to find anything interesting in Christ, first doubted, and then denied him, notwithstanding their previous interest in John's work. Jesus afterwards reminded them of this, and of John's testimony to him: He said "He (John) was a burning and a shining light, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light... Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness to the truth. But I receive not testimony from man" (that is, the testimony to Christ's Messiahship did not rest on human authority, not even on John's, as we have seen, but on God's own declaration). "I have greater testimony than that of John's: The Father himself which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me,"—both in the announcement on the banks of the Jordan, and by the works which the Father enabled him to perform, of which he said, "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me."

John recognised that his work was done when Christ went forth as a miracle-working preacher of the kingdom of God, followed by thousands. But this was not quite obvious to all who had been attracted by John's preaching. Some of them inquiringly mentioned the subject of Christ's increasing popularity, as if to suggest that it was inconsistent with John's own position. Such would be of the class that were inclined in the first instance to regard John as the Christ. They said to John, "Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou bearest witness, behold the same baptizeth, and all men come to Him." John met the insinuation by reminding them that he had already told them that he (John) was not the Christ. "Ye yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but I am sent before him" (Jno. iii. 28). Then referring to Christ under the figure of a bridegroom, he added "The friend of the bridegroom which standeth and heareth

him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease." And from that time, John did decrease. He continued for a little while to teach the people righteousness, and the people gloried in his fearless word; but the very influence of his preaching was at last the cause of its suppression. The rebukes of unrighteousness which he administered to the people, extended to the king on his throne when opportunity served. He condemned the action of Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee, in taking Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. Herod, who exercised irresponsible power, could not endure this criticism at the hands of one whose words were so powerful with the people. He had him apprehended and put in prison. Herodias tried hard to get Herod to order his execution, but Herod could not be persuaded. He "feared John, knowing that he was a just man and a holy" (Mar. vi. 20): and he appears to have found pleasure in interviewing his prisoner occasionally, as Festus did Paul; and in listening to his counsels (ib.) It would have been better for John had Herodias had her way at the start: for he would then have been spared a lingering imprisonment which was very trying to him. It was probably needful for himself that he should have this trial. He had been honoured as no man had been honoured before him, in being the herald of the Son of God. For a considerable time, he had been a power with the whole Jewish nation, and a centre of righteous and purifying influence which even the rulers could not resist. His whole work had been gloriously crowned by the actual manifestation of the Messiah at his hands. And it was now probably needful for himself that he should have a taste of that affliction which prepares all the Sons of God for the due appreciation of the goodness in store for them. And so, he was "put in prison," for doing his duty.

How long he languished here cannot be determined with certainty—probably about a year. But it was long enough to exercise him very painfully. He "heard in prison the works of Christ," but apparently these works were not of the class he had expected. It is possible and probable that John the Baptist shared the expectation common to the disciples, that "the kingdom of God should immediately appear" (Luke xix. 11). He might suppose that the Messiah would proceed to his kingly work as soon as he was manifested in the world. If so, knowing that the Messiah had in very deed been manifested, he would anticipate his early assumption of royal power, and his deposition of Herod, and his liberation of John himself from the duration vile in which he was languishing. Instead of that, he only heard of his going about preaching and healing the sick, and of his avoiding the people when "they wanted to take him by force and make him a king" (Jno. vi. 15). It was a great trial to John's faith in the position in which he was placed. It appears to have caused him a degree of faltering. He called two of his disciples, to whom he would have access by Herod's goodwill, and sent them to Christ with this inquiry: "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?"

The putting of such a question by John has been a great difficulty with many. They think it inconsistent with the knowledge that John had of the true character



of Christ. There does not seem any real ground for this thought, when all the facts are held in view. John was an erring mortal man, and liable to be troubled by what he did not understand. The situation was such as had become unintelligible from his point of view; and it was therefore in the highest degree natural that he should seek to re-assure himself concerning Christ by direct enquiry.

John's messengers came to Jesus and went straight to the subject of their errand: "John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?" (Luke vii. 20). Jesus might have met the inquiry with a categorical answer. He might have said: "I am he; no one comes after me." But his answer was more effective than that. John's messengers standing by, "in the same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues and evil spirits, and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering, said unto them. Go your way and tell John what things ye have SEEN AND HEARD; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached" (Luke vii. 21, 22). There was an argument of irresistible power in these words. It was the argument reflected in the admission of Nicodemus: "No man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him" (Jno. 3:2). It was the argument of Christ's own statement to the Jews afterwards: "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me" (Jno. v. 37).

Jesus sent to John a supplementary comment which was also very telling: "And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended (or stumbled) in me." This was suggesting that though the appearance of things might present a cause of stumbling, true discernment would see through the appearances, or at all events hold on by the element of solid fact in the case. This element consisted of the works Jesus was able to perform, in addition to the Father's own proclamation of him on the banks of the Jordan. No unfavourable appearance could dispose of these facts, and wise men would hold on by the facts. The unfavourable appearance was due only to the incorrect ideas of the disciples with regard to the order of his work. If those impressions had not existed, if the disciples had recognised the teaching of the prophets that Christ had first to be a teacher, and then a sacrificial sufferer, and then an absent priest in the Father's presence, during the period of the Father's "hiding of his face from the house of Jacob," they would have felt no difficulty at seeing Jesus, after his baptism, take only the position of a quiet teacher, going about doing good, and avoiding all political aims and connections. But they lacked full knowledge, and were liable to be distressed and stumbled, till the Spirit comforted them with a full understanding of the things that belonged to Christ. If they had not held on to the indisputable facts of the case, the comfort of the Spirit would have come too late. They would have been among those Jews who "went back and walked no more with him." But they could not shut their eyes to plain light, though they did not understand all. They saw the works and believed, as Jesus commanded, though not able to

comprehend the programme. They endorsed Peter's attitude when asked by Jesus if they also would go away: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Thus it must be, and often is with ourselves, although in a different situation. We do not understand all; but we earnestly see much that cannot be doubted, and therefore we hold on to the main conclusion, enduring the unfavourable appearances there may be, in the confidence that full knowledge would dissipate all difficulties, and always remembering the words which, if applicable to John the Baptist, are specially applicable to us: "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended (or stumbled) in me."

When John's messengers had gone away, Jesus turned his discourse upon John in speaking to the people. It was a topic sure to find a ready ear, considering their relation to the matter. The whole population had been drawn to the preaching of John, the cessation of which by John's imprisonment was a comparatively recent event. The people who listened to Christ would therefore be deeply interested when "He began to speak to them concerning John," as we are told (Luke vii. 24). The question of what he was and who he was had been a matter of public speculation for a long time. Christ's remarks would therefore touch a chord of interest: "What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind?"—that is, an objectless movement: a something arresting attention and exciting curiosity but having no meaning? An emphatic negative is the implied answer: John was no mere strange phenomenon, but an earnest and essential part of the work of God among men. "But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment?"—a show? An effeminate dandy?—a gaudy personal exhibition such as children would run after? No: men of that stamp are not to be found in the desert where John did his work. "They that are gorgeously apparelled and live delicately are in king's courts. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, Behold I send my messenger before thy face who shall prepare thy way before thee. For I say unto you, among those that are born of women, there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist."

Here we have the position of John the Baptist settled beyond dispute or doubt. We may dismiss the speculations of the learned of this world on the subject. Christ settles it for us. John was "much more than a prophet"—even the messenger of the Lord of Hosts. This was a high rank for a young man whose career was over before he was 32. Christ went further and identified him with Elijah, the promise of whom bulks more largely in the Jewish eye than even the promise of the Messiah. "If ye will receive it," said Christ, "this is Elias, which was for to come" (Matt. 11:14). Jesus did not mean by this that John the Baptist was a substitute for the real Elijah, and that the real Elijah would consequently not come. He fenced off this interpretation by saying, "Elias truly shall first come and restore all things" (Matt. xvii. 11). He meant to say that the promise of Elijah had received an incipient fulfilment in John, which appears a perfectly natural intimation in view of what Gabriel said to his father, Zacharias, at the announcement of his birth: "He (John) shall go before the Lord IN THE SPIRIT

AND POWER OF ELIAS" (Luke i. 17). Elias was the promised forerunner of the Messiah when he should appear to Israel in power; and here was one to act the Elias part at his coming in weakness to suffer. It was appropriate; it was beautiful. It gave John the highest position it was possible to assign him in the estimation of a Jewish congregation. It was Christ's decisive contribution to a controversy that had engaged the minds of many since John "came into the wilderness of Judea, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." It closed the question for all who were divinely enlightened enough to see Christ in his true authority; and there has not arisen a necessity for reopening it since. John the Baptist remains for them the specially-provided and specially-qualified messenger of the Lord of Hosts, of an origin and a character that had nothing in common with the eremites and ascetics of the first century. He stands apart from human fanatics of every sort, in being the official and effectual herald of the Son of God, sent before, not only to proclaim his approach, but to cut a path for his progress in the moral wilderness that prevailed in all the land.

From a certain point of view, it is saddening to think of such a man in the hands of such creatures as Herod and his paramour; and sadder to think that his life should be sacrificed to the feminine malice created by John's upright attitude as a teacher of righteousness. But the sadness is only for a moment. It is the lot of divine things and divine men to be under the heel of wickedness in the day of sin's ascendancy. We can comfort ourselves with the thought that they do not come Under the heel by chance, or before the appointed time. It is part of the process by which they are prepared for, and ultimately introduced to "an eternal weight of glory." And there is the further consolation that to the victims of the oppression, the triumph of the enemy is "but for a moment." Death is the best thing that can happen to them. Their trials and distresses are annihilated at a stroke: and in a moment, they are face to face with the glory for which their distresses prepare them, for the simple reason that in death there is no knowledge of time, and therefore no conscious interval to the resurrection.

This reflection enables us to contemplate John's end with composure. It came quickly and without warning, which was a kindness to him. It was the result of a court whim, connected with the cause of John's imprisonment. Herod had convened the magnates of his realm to celebrate his birthday. In the midst of the festivities (approaching probably the character of carousals), there was a terpsichorean performance that pleased Herod well—so well, that he declared to the fair young dancer he would give her anything she asked. The damsel was daughter to the woman whom John said Herod ought not to have for a wife. She did not know what use to make of the splendid opportunity suddenly placed before her. In her pleasing embarrassment she appealed to her mother privately. That woman saw and seized the opportunity of venting her spleen. She had often tried in vain to induce Herod to put John out of the way: now she had him. She told her daughter to ask for John's head. The daughter, returning to the wine-heated company, preferred her request. Herod was momentarily stunned. Even in his revels he retained that respect for John that led him to fear him and listen

to him with pleasure. He would have refused, but that he had pledged his word in the presence of his courtiers. There was no escape, according to the code of honour recognised by them. With deep reluctance, he gave the order which despatched an executioner to John's cell. The executioner would probably share his master's regret, but had no choice. He would announce to John the King's order. In the weariness of his imprisonment, the announcement would probably not be unwelcome to him. He surrendered himself to God and the executioner's hand, and knew nothing of the ghastly presentation presently made to the damsel in Herod's brilliant banqueting hall, of a bleeding head in a silver charger.

John's disciples, hearing of the tragic occurrence, came, and were allowed to remove John's headless body, which they interred in a grave now unknown. They took word to Christ of what had happened. Christ appears to have been painfully moved by the occurrence. "When Jesus heard of it, he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart" (Matt. xiv. 13) He would naturally seek for solitude on hearing of an event which was not only calculated to distress him on every natural ground, but which would afflict him by bringing vividly before him his own approaching end. "They have done unto him," he said, "whatsoever they listed. Likewise also shall the Son of Man suffer of them."

Zacharias and Elizabeth, being "old and well stricken in years" at John's birth, had probably gone to rest some years previously to his death. They would be spared this "piercing sword" in their soul, which Mary the mother of Jesus, did not escape, either as regards John or Jesus. They rejoiced at his birth, and probably did not live to sorrow at his death. Whether or not, the whole noble company of them will be embraced together in the same glorious healing that will shortly abolish every curse, and wipe tears from every godly eye.

## **CHAPTER VI.**

### **Mary at Nazareth.**

WE return to Gabriel. After his visit to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, in the temple of Jerusalem, he appears in a private house at Nazareth, about eighty miles to the north of the city.—The visit to Nazareth was not immediately after the visit to Jerusalem. There was an interval of six months. Why should there have been such an interval? Why did not Gabriel go to Nazareth immediately after he had been to the temple? We are not told; but it was obviously appropriate there should be an interval. John was to "go before" Jesus. It was fitting, therefore, that John should be born before Jesus, rather than after him, or at the same time. The interval of six months allowed of this; and farther, it illustrated the deliberativeness that characterises all divine ways.

As to where Gabriel was, between the time he showed himself in the temple "at the right side of the altar of incense," to the time he entered the humble home at

Nazareth where Mary dwelt, it is of no moment for us to speculate. He was probably in the neighbourhood of the land of Israel, watching, with a calm angel's interest, the various complicated and busy movements of human life at a time when the cup of Israel's sins was slowly filling to the brim. But whether or no, it concerns us not.

What does concern us much, is his appearance at Nazareth. He went there on business affecting us in a way by no means manifest at that time. It was a very small event to have such a mighty significance as it proved to have. It was but a visit and a message to a fair and godly damsel; fair we may assume her to have been by all the laws of human probability: youth, leisure, culture, and godliness are almost a guarantee of comeliness in the gentle sex. Godly, she self-evidently was, from her rejoinders to the angel and her communications to her cousin immediately after; while we could conceive of none but a godly virgin being visited of God to be the mother of the Promised Deliverer. But we will not think of her as Roman Catholicism has stereotyped her. Mary has been metamorphosed by tradition into a goddess, with whose figure, sculpture and paintings have made the benighted populations of Europe as familiar as with those of Venus and Apollo. It requires not to be said that there is no more reality about the Madonna of ecclesiastical art than about the mythical gods of Greek polytheism. The portraits of Mary are as unhistorical as those of Christ. They are the gloomy fancies begotten of the doleful theology of the cloister. When we see Christ and Mary (as we shall, at the resurrection, if we are honoured with an accepted place there), we shall behold personages of a very different type from the insipid lugubrious presentments of the brush and chisel, at the hands of men who only knew the ignoble religion of the priests. It will be an endless marvel to Mary that she had been idolised for ages in such a caricature of her own clear and fervent intelligence. The "piety" of Romish superstition is a very different thing from the godliness of an ardent Israelite—man or woman. Heavy and gloomy and mawkish is the one: bright and joyful and noble is the other.

Why this visit to Mary? What she said immediately afterwards, and what Zacharias said three months afterwards, inform us. Mary said it was "in remembrance of His mercy, as He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever" (Luke i. 55); Zacharias, that the Lord God of Israel might do "as he spake by lite mouth of His holy prophets who have been since the world began" (Luke i. 70). This throws us back upon "the promises made unto our fathers." What those were, as bearing upon this matter, we have seen in a former chapter. They condense into the single sentence of Zacharias, that God would "raise up an horn of salvation in the house of His servant David." This promise presupposes the need for it, which we discover in the Bible history of man. Sin separated man from God at the beginning. Sin brought Israel into evil in all their generations. God's purpose was to effect reconciliation redemption, and deliverance on a plan that required that the deliverer be a Son of David, a Son of Abraham, a Son of Adam—as well as the Son of God. The moment had arrived to bring this deliverer on the scene. The angel Gabriel arrived with that moment

to announce the event, in the right quarter—not in China—not to a Scythian or Roman woman, but in the Land of Israel to a virgin of “the house of David.”

The proof that Mary was of the house of David need not trouble us long. The promise requires it, for if Mary were not a descendant of David, then was Jesus not “of the seed of David according to the flesh,” for He had no actual human father. Then the co-existence in the apostolic narrative of the two lines of descent from David involves the certainty that one of them (Luke’s) was Mary’s; for it is not conceivable that two mutually incompatible genealogies could have found currency among believers in the first century with apostolic sanction, as these two accounts undoubtedly did. They are mutually incompatible if they are both Joseph’s: but they are not so if one of them is Mary’s: they are in that case two co-ordinate pedigrees—both correct, and both germane to the case. That Mary does not appear by name in either of them is not a difficulty when we remember that it had ceased to be a custom at the time these genealogies were drawn from the public registers, to recognise the female element in the genealogy. If the woman were an important link, she appeared either by her husband or other male relation. In this case, she appears by her father.

Heli was Mary’s father, and Heli is the first link in the chain of descent given by Luke. This is somewhat obscured by the ambiguous parenthesis with which the chain starts. The parenthesis relates to the popular impression that Joseph was the father of Jesus; but in the common version, the parenthesis is made smaller than it really is. It consists of the words, “being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph.” The common version limits the parenthesis to the words, “as was supposed,” and creates the obscurity. The obscurity is at an end if we read Luke as having said, “And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed the son of Joseph, but in reality) of Heli, who was of Matthat, &c.” There would remain then but the simple question why Joseph’s genealogy should be given since Joseph was not the father of Jesus. This seems sufficiently answered by the reflection that there would have been legal confusion in Christ’s relation to David, if Joseph, the husband of his mother, had not also been of Davidic extraction. In the eye of the law, husband and wife are one, and if Joseph had not been of David, he would have eclipsed and marred the Davidic relation of Mary. Joseph, in his own right, as a descendant of Solomon, could have imparted “a title clear” to David’s throne: but Joseph was not to be the father of Jesus, though he was to be the husband of his mother, and the legal father only of her son. The case was totally exceptional and peculiar in all its bearings; and the difficulties and necessities of it were beautifully harmonised in Joseph and Mary being independently related to David through separate lines of descent—one (Joseph) through Solomon, and the other (Mary) through Nathan, thus uniting in themselves the royal rights of David’s house, which passed by law and blood to their wonderful Son.

The angel entered the house where Mary was. It is highly improbable that the site of this house is now known to anyone upon the earth. That it was in Nazareth

we know; that the priests point out the very spot to interested visitors is no proof that it was there, for among the many distressing things in the present state of the Holy Land, there is none more marked than the prevalence of baseless legends, with regard to the localities of scriptural events. It is something to be sure about Nazareth; and quite enough for purposes of historical association. The position of the place is remarkable, whether we consider its topography or the estimate in which it was regarded. the latter point is sufficiently illustrated in Nathaniel's question on hearing that the Messiah had been found in one belonging to Nazareth. "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John i. 46). It is evident from this that it was a place of no repute—we might almost say a place of bad repute—a place at all events that could lend no human lustre to Christ. Why should such a place be chosen? Why not Jerusalem, Hebron, or Cæsarea? The answer is doubtless to be found in the principle defined by Paul, that receives such frequent illustration throughout the course of Scripture: "God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty ... that no flesh should glory in his presence" (I Cor. i. 27, 29). Nazareth was among the "weak things" of the age. It could give no prestige to the work that God was about to do. Therefore that work would come before men without human claims or recommendations. The glory of God alone would be seen. It pleases Him that this should be so. It is reasonable that it should be so. But whatever we may think on this head, it is worth noting how completely such a line of action proves that God is in it, for when and where do men ever act on this principle? It is in the universal disposition of men to lean towards influence and respectability in their enterprises, and to avoid everything of a damaging or even questionable association. The very word Nazareth thus becomes a symbol of the divine nature and origin of the work of Christ; and of the principle upon which divine ends are achieved. Wherein God may have a work on earth at this time, it will be found that the same principle has been adopted. America has given us the gospel which venerable and learned England was alone supposed to be possessed of learning enough to discover. And it is in the hands of the poor and the unlearned that its work is being done.

Nazareth was off the highway of human traffic. It stands in a secluded part of the Holy Land in its northern section. The seclusion is obtained by the formation of a circle of hills in the heart of the mountain range that bounds the plain of Esdraelon on its northern side. Access to this circle of hills (forming a natural amphitheatre) is obtained from the plain by a narrow pathway, which strikes through a cleft in the side of the mountain. The pathway gradually opens out into a valley, which increases in width as the traveller advances, until at last it opens out into an amphitheatre of hills, on the northern side of which lies Nazareth, well to the top of one of the hills—a straggling village now—probably greatly reduced from what it was in the days of Christ, having shared in the shrinkage that has befallen everything in the Lord's land in this the day of its desolation. In this secluded nook there was greater quiet and simplicity of life than in the busier centres and channels of human activity, in more southerly parts of the land. It was fitting that such a quiet place should be chosen as the sphere of the Lord's

human life in probation. It was more adapted to the culture of a divine state of mind than the activity of a great city. It is one of the many defects of present civilisation that men are too much crowded together, too much occupied, too hurried in their occupation. They are blighted by their mode of life in their very attempt to live. Their minds are enfevered and distorted in the conditions which their struggle for existence imposes upon them. They cannot have that calm and deliberation which are essential to well-balanced development of the powers of body and mind. The result is seen in an endless variety of mental deformity. God will yet remedy these evils. He makes a beginning in Christ; and Christ begins in quiet Nazareth.

Gabriel, stepping into the house in this quiet village where Mary was, salutes her in a form of words that surprises and perplexes her: "Hail, highly favoured. The Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women." Women are accustomed to complimentary salutations. Whether it was as much so in the first century as now may be doubted, though, as human nature is the same, it is probable that the deference shown to the gentle sex in those days would be different only in form and not in sentiment. But there was something in this salutation that made Mary feel it was no ordinary salutation. The impressive appearance of Gabriel, and the grave and loving ardour of his manner, would impress her with this feeling. She is "troubled at his saying." While she is wondering, Gabriel tells her she is to be the mother of a son, whom she is to call JESUS. "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest. And the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of David for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end." Mary is a sensible, self-composed Israelitish damsel. Though full of faith and the love of God, she does not swoon and go into hysterics. She does not pose or ejaculate in the tragic styles of modern effeminacy. She asks the angel how such a thing is possible with an unmarried woman. The angel's answer is a consummate blending of literal accuracy with faultless delicacy: "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: and therefore that holy thing that shall be born of thee shall be called THE SON OF GOD."

The Holy Spirit—the Power of the Highest—when we have grasped the significance of these phrases, the angel's words tell us all we need to know of the origin and nature of Jesus, the Son of God. In the scientific sense, they cannot be grasped, except in the sense of noting them as expressing what is scientifically "unknowable"—for this also has come to be a term of the modern system of correct knowledge. The higher types of intellect perceive that there is at the root of all physical phenomena, a power or energy that is unknowable as to its nature, mode of subsistence, origin, or source of initiative. They know that there is a power unknowable—an apparent contradiction in terms, yet a mathematically demonstrable proposition. Sufficient that we know the Spirit of God as this unknowable power—a power pervading the universe, in which all things subsist, and by which all things have been made; and that this Spirit is a unity with the Father in heaven whose wisdom imparts to it that differentiating



organising power manifest in the diversities and marvels of heaven and earth. The fact of such a power we can know, for we see it in its effects. Its essence and mode of operation are inscrutable, but this is no bar to our recognition of its existence and work. This “power of the Highest” “overshadowing” Mary, fertilised the human ovum, and started the process of generation which gave to Israel that marvel of human history—the man Christ Jesus—the Son of Mary, the Son of God.

The theology of Rome has attached the name “the Son of God” to the invisible power that gave inception to the babe of Bethlehem. The Son of God became incarnate, according to this theology. The angel’s words affix the description, the Son of God, to the “holy thing,” “born” of Mary. The holy thing born of Mary was a babe of flesh and blood, generated from Mary’s blood during the ordinary gestatory period of nine months. It was this babe that was declared by the angel’s words to be the Son of God. This was in harmony with the whole operation. The invisible power at work was “the Holy Spirit,”—the “Power of the Highest”—the result was, the Son of God. This is what the angel said, and it is an intelligible declaration, and it must have been made to be intelligible. The idea of a pre-existing Son, incarnate or embodied in a flesh Son of Mary, has been erroneously deduced from certain enigmatical sayings of Christ, which may come under consideration in the course of future chapters—sayings that truly affirm a pre-existing divinity, but that do not stultify the angel’s words on the subject. The pre-existing divinity that became incorporate in the man Christ Jesus, was the divinity visible in the angel’s words—the divinity of the Holy Spirit, which is one with the Father, and made the Son one with the Father also, as His manifestation, and the reflex of His mind.

The process of which Mary became the subject, in accordance with the angel’s words, accomplished this splendid result; that, while on the mother’s side it gave Israel a Saviour, who was a brother in nature (sharing the same weaknesses and susceptibilities, and inheriting equally with them the woe-stricken results of Adam’s transgression; in whom, therefore, death could be destroyed in a resurrectionally-accepted sacrifice, and so open a way for our return to God through him), on the Father’s side, it gave them a man in whom God’s name was incorporate—a head and captain of divine wisdom and character—“the brightness of the Father’s glory and the express image of His person.” This completeness of qualification would have been unattainable in a mere son of Mary’s husband. It required both the elements exhibited in the angel’s words. The recognition of both explains all that came after. The neglect of either works confusion.

It is not probable that Mary understood anything of this at the time. She appears at various stages of the matter as “pondering these things” (Luke ii. 19) in the sense, apparently, of ineffectually trying to make them out. It was characteristic of all the early incidents of the wonderful work that “these things understood not His disciples at the first” (Jno. xii. 16). It was natural it should be so: for how

could unilluminated fisherman enter into the depths and mysteries of the nature and work of Christ in which at first they took but a superficial part? That they are exhibited in a state of non-understanding in the early stage is one of many proofs of the artless truthfulness of the narrative. When Jesus was glorified and the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles to equip and comfort and enlighten them in the things of Christ, then they understood and wrote of these things, whereby we also may come to understanding.

The angel finished his communication to Mary by apprising her of the condition of her aged and barren cousin Elizabeth, afterwards mother of John the Baptist, adding, "With God nothing shall be impossible." Mary, full of faith, had nothing but words of thankful compliance. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it unto me according to thy word," upon which Gabriel departed. Then here is a touch of nature: "Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste" to the city where Elizabeth lived. What woman does not feel that that is just what she would have done under similar circumstances? What livelier theme of interest among them at any time than that of motherhood, and how much deeper would this interest be between two enlightened women of Israel who had just been recipients of information connected with the realization of the hope of the promise that God made unto the fathers from the beginning? The Spirit of God was on them both: both were embraced in the brooding power that was about to manifest the glory of God in Israel. No wonder then that on Mary's arrival at the house, and eager salutation of her kinswoman, Elizabeth by the Spirit should respond with elated voice: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leapt in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed (a hint at her husband's dumbness inflicted for unbelief) for there shall be a performance of those things that were told her from the Lord" (Luke i. 42-45).

Mary's rejoinder is beautiful: "My soul doth magnify the Lord: and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed." Such a mode of communication between the two women has seemed unnatural to some; it can only seem so to such as leave out of sight the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the deep and holy excitement peculiar to the incidents that brought about their meeting. With these in view, their utterances not only seem unartificial, but inevitable and most fitting. If people under alcoholic stimulus can speak with a stateliness and an emphasis unusual with them, how much more must the presence of the Holy Spirit impart a glow and elevation of mind that can only find fit expression in the measured and holy cadences of inspiration? We are too liable to judge by the heavinesses of mortal mentality. We are liable to forget that the present position of man (cut off from intercourse and connection with God because of sin) is an abnormal position, and can afford a very insufficient conception of the mental state and personal bearing that would come with the abiding presence of the Spirit and the fulness of God's blessing.

It is worthy of note how remarkably the foreshadowing of Mary has been fulfilled with regard to the estimate in which she should be held in succeeding generations. It is true it has been Mariolatry; still, there is the fact, that ever since the events of the first century, Mary has been recognised and blessed by the civilised millions of the earth, as a favoured woman in having been the mother of the Lord Jesus. Doubtless, her words relate more particularly to the blessedness that will attach to her in the age to come when the gathered generations of the righteous will call her blessed. Yet, here is a preliminary fulfilment of them in all generations since her day having united to recognise her privilege. Nothing was less likely as a matter of human probability at the time she uttered the words than that a private damsel of the common people, living in an obscure mountain village of Galilee, should become famous throughout the civilised world. The fact that she has become so, though in a corrupt and superstitious way, must be regarded as a proof of the spirit of prophecy—one, and not the least, of the many evidences there are that God was in the whole situation to which she stood related.

## **CHAPTER VII.**

### **Bethlehem.**

MARY remained with Elizabeth for three months. It was natural she should stay with her a considerable time. The occasion was not one of ordinary visitation. Mary and Elizabeth were relatives; but it was not the interest or the claims of relationship that brought them together as we have seen. They had been apprised of the stirring and stupendous fact that the hour had arrived for the incipient commencement of that manifestation of the glory of God to Israel, and the whole earth, which had been for so long a time the expectation of the nation; and that they two were to be used in the work. It was this that brought Mary "in haste" from Nazareth to the hill country in the neighbourhood of Hebron; and it was this that led her to stay a much longer time than ordinary circumstances would have suggested. It would naturally be the theme of much interested communication between the two; and as they busily plied the needle together in the preparations inseparable from the prospect before them, the time would go swiftly by.

At the end of the three months, John was born. Mary left her cousin just before or after that event. It is more probable she would stay to see it over than come away just before. At all events, close upon the time, she returned to Nazareth, to prepare for her own coming experience. The narrative of events relating to Mary and Jesus from this time onwards to the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in the Jordan, is very meagre. There is no cause for much regret about this. The facts important to be known (those glanced at in the previous chapter) are clearly and amply set forth. The domestic incidents coming after would be interesting; but they are by no means essential, and perhaps might even hinder the right

apprehension of the divine aim and intent in the work of Christ of which the early domestic phase was but the necessary preparation. We know enough, however, to sufficiently complete the picture. The materials jointly furnished by Matthew and Luke enable us to fill in with tolerable fulness the gap that would otherwise exist between Mary's return to Nazareth and John's advent on the banks of the Jordan. Their narratives are usually imagined to be discrepant. They seem so to unfriendly readers, and perhaps to some that are not unfriendly. But they are not really discrepant. They are at the most but variant. They exhibit different aspects of the same matter. While coinciding in the main points, they supply incidents omitted by each other, and thus appear to tell a different story, while they are but telling different parts of the same story. Those different parts admit of each other. They appear to exclude each other only on one point, viz.: as to where Joseph and Mary went with the new-born Messiah after their visit with him to Jerusalem to perform the circumcision—whether to Egypt or to Nazareth. But this also will be found capable of such a suggested adjustment as to admit of the implicit reception of both accounts without any alteration. The joint narrative shows the following sequence of events.

Mary, though unmarried, was under espousal to Joseph, her future husband. We are not informed whether she had made him acquainted with the angel's communication to her on the subject of the coming birth of the Messiah. It is possible that maidenly modesty imposed on her an entire reserve with reference to the subject. If this were not so—if she frankly explained to him what had taken place, then Joseph did not and could not believe her, but attributed her condition to the only cause he could recognise. It was the occasion of extreme embarrassment and dismay to both Joseph and Mary. Joseph was "a just man;" he could not pass over the serious breach of behaviour that had evidently occurred. At the same time, his love inspired pity. If he must part with his intended wife, he would do it "privily." He was "not willing to make her a public example" (Matt. i. 19). Her whole previous character would prompt him to spare her as much as possible. "While he thought on these things," and while probably both he and Mary were deeply suffering from the peculiar situation, they were relieved of their distress in the only way possible in the circumstances. "The angel of the Lord appeared unto Joseph in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." This intimation would not only end a painful dilemma: it would serve also to strengthen the foundation upon which the knowledge of the divine sonship of Jesus rested: for now, not only Mary, but Joseph also, was made aware of the fact on the testimony of God, and no room was left for human tradition, or for a merely humanly-acquired conviction on a subject so all-important. Joseph thus enlightened and delivered from what must have been an almost killing embarrassment, "did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife, and knew her not till she had brought forth her first-born son."

How long they kept loving company thus at Nazareth, is not exactly apparent. It would be several months. What is specially interesting is this, that whereas it was written in the prophets, that Christ would “come out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was” (Jno. vii. 42; Micah v. 2), here was a position of affairs that seemed to make it certain that Jesus would be born at Nazareth, and would thus be lacking the initial proof of the Messiahship. It would have been difficult at the moment to suggest how this was to be prevented. The Providence of God was at hand to prevent the threatened miscarriage. A decree was promulgated from Rome, ordering the enrolment of the population of the empire with a view to taxation. This decree took every Jew for the time being to his ancestral home. “All went to be enrolled, every one into his own city.” It thus took Joseph to Bethlehem, where lay the hereditary family connection with the soil, and where therefore, his enrolment would have to be effected. It took Mary there also, which is one of the proofs of Mary’s Davidic extraction: for had she been of another house than the house of David, there would have been no need for her to go to Bethlehem, “the city of David;” and had it been unnecessary for her to attend for the purposes of the enrolment, it is inconceivable that Joseph would have subjected her to the fatigues of Syrian travel at almost the last stage of pregnancy. He would have gone alone, leaving Mary in the quietude and repose of Nazareth, exerting himself for an expeditious accomplishment of the enrolment business at Bethlehem, and a quick return to Nazareth. But he took her “to be taxed (enrolled) with” him in “the city of David which is called Bethlehem” (Luke ii. 4, 5). He took her because it was necessary for her to go, for she also was of the house and lineage of David; and thus compliance with a legal necessity of human origin for her presence at Bethlehem at that particular time, was the providential means of bringing about conformity with that higher necessity, that the Son of God and son of David should be born at Bethlehem.

It is worth while pausing to consider this peculiar combination of circumstances. Manifestly, it was a triumph of divine supervision that secured, by the operation of natural circumstances, the presence of Mary at Bethlehem at just the short particular period during which Christ should be born in the city of David, his human ancestor. But it might seem to a certain view of the case as if it would have been a more complete and natural realisation of the divine purpose on this point if Mary had been a resident of Bethlehem, instead of a visitor; and under no need to be regulated so as to secure the right birthplace for her son. It might plausibly be argued that such an arrangement would also have been much more likely to secure attention afterwards for Jesus, at the hands of the nation, than one that threw a veil over his Bethlehem parentage, associating him with Nazareth, and thus preventing the easy recognition of the fulfilment in him of the prophecy that Christ should be born at Bethlehem.

No doubt the residence of Mary in Bethlehem would have been effectual on these two points: but then, other points would have been interfered with. In our last chapter, we were able to recognise the need for Jesus being insulated from all human prestige—Jewish or Gentile. He was to be rejected of the nation: and

his work was to stand upon a divine basis purely—which two things necessitated his association with an obscure Galilean village, of which no one had a good opinion. In view of this, we can see why Jesus should not be known in his lifetime in connection with the royal city. At the same time, it was a prophetic necessity he should be born there. It is here where the providential circumstance we have looked at, appears in its true character of consummate wisdom. By a public incident, which had no apparent connection with the purpose of God, the mother of Jesus was brought to Bethlehem at the right moment for the birth of Jesus, without ceasing her connection with that other city, which had been chosen as the sphere of the Lord's mortal life till thirty years of age.

When Joseph and Mary arrived in Bethlehem, "there was no room for them in the inn." We need not stay to dilate on the difference between a modern "Inn," and the institution at Bethlehem designated by that name in the English version. The difference would be great in mechanical particulars; but nothing turns on that as regards the significance of the narrative. Suffice it that the inn patronised by Joseph and Mary would be a place of public accommodation like the modern caravanserai of the east, in which the housing and providing of asses, horses and camels, is quite as prominent a feature as the lodging of travellers—a place, therefore, in which there would be very little of the comforts to which the travelling public of the nineteenth century are accustomed. But even such comforts as it had, were not accessible to Joseph and Mary. The place was full. Many people had arrived for the purposes of the enrolment from various parts of the country before Joseph and Mary, and all the places were taken: "there was no room for them in the inn." There does not appear to have been room anywhere else.

Bethlehem was "their own city." Presumably, they might have friends and acquaintances in the place. If they had, they did not use their hospitality. Probably, the private houses would be full as well as the "inn;" and Joseph found himself very nearly in the position of the "way-faring man" from that very place about 1,400 years before, who arriving on his travels late at Gibeah of Benjamin, not far from Bethlehem, "sat him down in a street of the city: for there was no man that took him into his house to lodge," though there was both straw and provender for the asses, and bread and wine for himself, and his wife, and manservant who were with him. Joseph had probably straw and provender for the asses: bread and wine for his little company: but "there was no room for them in the inn." What was to be done? They had to accept the best accommodation they could get under the circumstances. There was an unoccupied corner in the yard or enclosure where the camels and asses were stalled for the night. It was usual for this corner to have a horse or camel in it: but it was empty. It had a manger in it for which an unexpected use was found. Here, among the hay and straw, and in the midst of the close and stuffy odours of a stable, they settled themselves down for the night, in all likelihood tired out by the fatigue of the previous day's journey. Before morning, Christ is born.

Such a lowly beginning to the life of Christ upon earth is an astounding fact. We have been so familiar with it ever since we knew the name of Christ, that it fails to strike with the force that belongs to it. A lowlier birth it would be impossible to imagine. Parents lowly, though of noble descent; and forced, for the moment, into the lowliest position in the city of their kindred, to herd with “the ox and the mule which have no understanding,” in circumstances offensive to every delicate sensibility, and repugnant to the most rudimentary sense of self-respect! What are we to think about it? It is surely easy to read the lesson. Christ, the highest, began the humblest. “God hath chosen the weak things of this world to confound the mighty.” This mode of operation will not cease to be exemplified till God’s own glorious power becomes visibly incorporate and manifest in the vessels of His choice.

Who among us, then, need weary or be ashamed of the humbling circumstances meanwhile associated with the truth? It is natural to be ashamed of them: but reason forbids. Who among us can wisely seek the great and honourable things of the present world? It is natural to seek them; but wisdom says; “Be content with food and raiment. Be not conformed to the world. Pass the time of your sojourning in fear.” If Christ, from the very start of his career, was “conducted with the despised.” we may gladly suffer with him on this point during the few days we are here. The reversal that comes with his return to the earth will compensate for all. The sufferings and humiliations of this present time are but “a light affliction,” “working out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

The birth of Mary’s child, though an incident of no account among the bustling visitors to Bethlehem, and unknown to the world at large, was not an insignificant occurrence to the angels, who are “sent forth as ministering spirits for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (Heb. i. 14). Jesus afterwards said: “There is joy among the angels over one sinner that repenteth.” If their spiritual interest and susceptibility are so keen as to be made glad by the reformation of one sinner, we may understand the interest they would take in the birth of one who came into the world to save a multitude of sinners. They manifested their interest in a way that has left its mark on the language and songs of mankind. They showed themselves outside Bethlehem on the plains, underneath the star-sparkling sky, where a company of shepherds kept watch over their flocks by night. First one only appeared. “The angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them.” The shepherds were thrown into great fear by the unusual spectacle. An angel in his brightness is an impressive and terror-causing sight in the light of day: how much more in the darkness of the night. Their alarm was soon quieted by the angels comforting words: “Fear not: for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people.” They wonder what tidings this can be. “Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” The shepherds must have been capable of understanding this announcement, or it would not have been made to them. Had it stopped short with the intimation of the birth of a Saviour, they might have

supposed it to refer to some ordinary deliverer such as had frequently been raised up in the course of Israel's history—a deliverer from the yoke of their enemies (in this case, the Romans) for which many were sighing: but the short addition “which is Christ, the Lord,” opened out the indefinite prospect of glory connected with the promise of the Messiah. For the understanding of the significance of these words, their acquaintance with the Scriptures must have prepared them; to none but such as are prepared does the Lord's further revelation come.

In their intense and painfully-roused attention, they gave heed to a further announcement that practically connected the angel's glad message with things they could see and handle (all God's genuine messages are of this realistic character). “This shall be a sign unto you. Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.” (The angel knew about the clothes that Mary had got ready, and had put upon her babe, and when she laid the child in a rude structure never intended for a cradle, other eyes than hers had observed the act, and were now proclaiming it all unknown to Mary outside the town on the plains). The simple but pregnant message being now complete, there is a brief pause, and then—“Suddenly! there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host.” They were invisible before: that is, the eyes of the shepherds had been held from seeing them; but now the pressure being removed, they see a multitude where but one glorious being had talked with them. Not only see, but hear! The heavenly multitude burst into song. Oh, that song. The only kind of song befitting the highest gift of reason—the measures and cadences that open the heart to the highest fact—the fact of facts—the Eternal Wisdom and Power of the Universe in which all things subsist—the Eternal Father, of whom and through whom and to whom are all things: “GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST! AND ON EARTH PEACE, AND GOODWILL TOWARD MEN.” These words have been set to gorgeous music since; but who does not feel that the highest human effort must come as far short of the angelic performance as the nature of man is lower than the angels. The shepherds heard music that has not fallen on human ear since, except in the case of John who heard, in vision in Patmos, the strains of the redeemed assisted by “an innumerable company of angels;” and perhaps Paul, who heard unutterable things when (in “visions and revelations”) caught away into Paradise. But the music will be heard again, and many times again upon earth. For the work that brought the angels to the plains of Bethlehem 1850 years ago is not arrested, but will go forward to the appointed climax when every knee will bow to the Bethlehem babe; no longer a babe, but the glorified sufferer, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. “Of his kingdom, there shall be no end”: and in his kingdom, there will be no sorrow, but songs of everlasting joy, in which the angels will take effective part.

It is interesting to reflect how much in harmony with human ways it was for the angels to communicate thus to the shepherds. How natural it is to communicate good news when you have it. The angels were full of interest at the arrival of a long-promised epoch in the purpose of God upon the earth. There is no evidence



that they were commanded to tell the shepherds of the fact. They appeared to have volunteered the information in the fulness of their own joy. Should we not feel moved to do the same if we knew any one that would be deeply interested in news we had to tell? Man is in the angelic image, and reflects angelic features in a faint degree. Making people glad when you can, is God-like. The tidings the angels had to tell would not have made any one glad. It would have had no meaning to a company of Roman soldiers, for example. To Israelite shepherds who knew the Scriptures, it was the best news they could hear.

The choice the angels made in them is suggestive in another way. They did not go to Herod's palace which was near by. They did not go to the respectable Jewish rabbi of "the city of David" where Christ had been born. They chose a company of lowly men, whose recommendation lay in this—that they were humble in their own eyes, and deeply interested in the promises of God. The fact is profitable to note, because the principle is an everlasting one, and will shortly receive another exemplification when the angels arrive to announce the return of Christ. "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble" will hold good to the end. Not this class will be honoured with the visits of the angels; but those to whom in all ages God's preference has been shown: "the poor of this world, rich in faith."

Having delivered their message, the angels "went away into heaven." The shepherds would see them depart, mounting aloft and gradually disappearing from sight. We look with the shepherds, and get a glimpse of a higher life than we know, yet one that has a practical interest for us, because we hope to be made "equal to the angels." The angels, glorious in nature, exhaustless in power, immortal in life and strength, have the faculty of traversing the dizzy depths and boundless fields of viewless space at will. Their number is countless; their mission, divine (Rev. v. II; Psa. ciii. 20, 21.) The contemplation of the fact impart a sublimer idea of the universe than is possible to those who suppose that "the splendid heavens a shining frame" exist for no higher end than the sustenance of the feeble orders of animal life that we know in this part of it. The universe becomes in Bible light, a peopled arcanum of glorious and noble life, whose vast ærial fields are but so many highways that can be traversed from world to world, as the errands of Almighty Power and wisdom may require. To the unenlightened secular mind, this revealed fact is but a pretty fable: to the higher intelligence, it is the garb of inevitable truth: for it seems a necessary induction of reason that the splendid framework of heaven and earth must have within it a use and application equal to its greatness and glory, which could not be recognisable if life, as it now is upon earth, is the only form of it throughout its measureless fields.

Having received a clue by which they might verify the extraordinary communication that had been made to them under the starlit and silent vault of heaven (while all the world was asleep), the shepherds repaired "with haste" to neighbouring Bethlehem, "to see (as they said) this thing which is come to pass,

which the Lord had made known unto us.” They were not long in finding Joseph and Mary, in the virtual cattle-pen at the inn. But where was the babe? Was it nestling in its mother’s bosom? Was it snugly laid in the straw by the side of its mother? It was very likely to be so. It was improbable that the babe—especially such a babe—would be put in a place used for the feeding of beasts. But there it was: they found the “babe lying in a manger.” This was the conclusive sign to them.

What more natural than that they should at once “make known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.” This is Christ the Lord. “All they that heard, wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.” It was natural it should be so. It is what would happen in any village at the present day. The people would open eyes and mouth and exclaim. The wonder would be but “a nine days’ wonder,” as it probably was at Bethlehem. Intelligence rests and feeds on wisdom: ignorance gloats on the marvellous. It was a complaint of Jesus afterwards: “except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe.” Signs and wonders are valuable in their relation to the facts required by wisdom; but not otherwise. Mary was a more attentive and thoughtful listener to the sayings of the shepherds than the people about the place. Her knowledge qualified her to be so. “She kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.” Her surroundings would indispose her to be communicative on the subject. Her state precluded it: and her position, amidst the bustle of a crowded inn, and amongst people mostly indifferent and unsympathetic, would not encourage her to say much on a subject of which, although she knew more than any one else at the time, she yet understood so little. “Pondering them in her heart” was the natural thing for her in all the circumstances. The shepherds were delighted. They had found things in accordance with the intimation made to them by the angels, and therefore felt the joy that was calculated to come from the confidence that this was the promised Messiah. They would look forward to the growth of the child and the manifestation of the man, with the anticipation that in a single generation at the most, the glory promised to Israel would be revealed in their midst. They returned to their flocks, “glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.”

## **CHAPTER VIII.**

### **Childhood.**

IN seven days after the departure of the shepherds, the time arrived for the circumcision of the child; and circumcision was accordingly performed—probably in Bethlehem, by some official of the local synagogue. Why should “Christ the Lord” be circumcised? Because he was the seed of Abraham and of David, according to the flesh (Rom. i. 3: Matt. i. 1). But why should that be a reason for circumcision? Because it had pleased God, in carrying out His purpose towards the house of Israel (not yet fully accomplished), to proceed by covenant, and to

appoint circumcision as the sign of that covenant in all their generations (Gen. xvii. 10–14; Rom. iv. 11). Any descendant of Abraham neglecting circumcision was outside the covenant, as God told Abraham, and would be cut off from Jehovah's regard (Gen. xvii. 14). Jesus was a descendant of Abraham, and in a preeminent sense, "THE SEED" of Abraham (Gal. iii. 17), whose special mission it was to "confirm," or make sure the promises made unto the fathers (Rom. xv. 8). For circumcision to have been omitted in his case, therefore, would have been for the covenant to have been broken in its most essential application. But this failure was not possible; therefore the child Jesus was circumcised.

His name was published in connection with the ceremony according to the Hebrew custom. We are not told if it caused any surprise, as in the naming of John the Baptist. There was the same reason: "There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name." But probably Joseph and Mary's acquaintances would be all at Nazareth; and so the family strangeness of the name would not be known in Bethlehem to the few who would be present at the performance of the rite. The fact remains in all its power that the name was not derived from the family pedigree, and that Jesus "was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb." This fact is one of the many evidences of the divinity of Christ. The fact cannot be questioned, for it has been on record since the first century in writings of purity and truth, and is embedded in such surroundings as to be undetachable from the system of truth of which it forms a part. No other explanation of the name of Jesus can be given. Men may scoff and assert, but facts are not destroyed by that process. The concurrent agreement of the apostolic age cannot be disposed of. The very reason given for the bestowal of the name Jesus is sufficient to place it beyond the range of human invention; "for he shall save his people from their sins." It is not according to the habit of men to be governed by so large and so pure an idea. Human enterprise or inventiveness runs in the channel of human sympathies and passions; "the things that be of men" are visible in all their ways and thoughts. But here is a reason that relates alone to "the things that be of God," and is therefore self-evidently from a divine source.

It was not a new name in the sense of never having been used before: but it was new in Mary's circle, and in her use of it to name her son, it probably received for the first time its true application, of which previous uses were the typical adumbrations. For as the least informed may be aware, it is a Hebrew name in which the Creator's name is the leading ingredient—Joshua or YAH-SHUA—Jehovah shall save. Jehovah saved Israel by Joshua, the successor of Moses, and again by Joshua, who took a prominent part in the restoration from Babylon. But in these cases, the work was transitory, and performed indirectly. In the case of this newly-born child, the work was to be for ever in those for whom it should be effectual: and it was to be done in a direct manner by God himself, who was the Father of the child, and who made him what he was, and dwelt in him by the Spirit, working and speaking through him, as Jesus repeatedly testified afterwards, and as indeed was manifest from the nature of his words and works.

It was most fitting, therefore, that he should be called Yah-shua or Jesus: also Emmanuel—"God with us." He was, without much figure, "the Word made flesh"—the wisdom and power and fiat of the Father become incorporate in a man of the house of David, that sin might be taken away, and the way opened for friendship, love and life for evermore.

In a little over a month after the circumcision, the time came to present the circumcised child to the Lord, as the law enjoined. Thirty-three days were required to run for the mother's purification and recovery (Lev. xii. 3), after which, in the case of a first-born son, it was needful to discharge the claim the law had on him under Ex. xiii. 12: Num. xviii. 15. God slew the first-born of the Egyptians on the night of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, on which event he established a memorial claim for every male first-born of Israel, to be sacrificed to him afterwards, unless redeemed in the way appointed. This claim lay on Jesus at the very start of his life on earth: and from this (being "under the law" Gal. iv 4), he had to be redeemed like every first-born male child of Israel. There were two modes of redemption—one for the well-to-do, and the other for the indigent (Lev. xii. 8). The first was by the sacrifice of a lamb; and if the mother was not able to bring a lamb, then she was to offer two turtles, or two young pigeons. From Luke ii. 24 it would seem that Mary offered the latter, from which we have an incidental clue to her position in life.

The distance from Bethlehem to Jerusalem would be seven or eight miles—a distance not inconvenient for Mary, after the lapse of 40 days. The path lay through the beautiful mountainous district lying to the south of Jerusalem. On the back of a mule or ass, accompanied by Joseph, she would perform the journey with her first-born son, all undistinguishable in appearance from other first-borns, which might arrive at Jerusalem at the same time for the same purpose. How great the difference really was, Mary knew, though it is probable her very familiarity with the child in all her motherly offices would prevent her from having a very distinct sense of the difference. Arrived at the temple, she presents her offspring to the officiating priest, with the "two turtles or two young pigeons" (either brought with her from Bethlehem, or, which was more likely, purchased at those "seats of them that sold doves," which were afterwards so unceremoniously overturned by her babe grown to manhood). To the priest, it was an ordinary child, and he probably went through the ordinary routine with the indifference natural to official repetition.

But it was not so with all. "There was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon," to whom it had been revealed "that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ" (Luke ii. 25). This man was no carping theorist or idle lounge. He was "just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel." To such only does God draw near in loving and revealing confidence. "The Holy Spirit was upon him," and on the particular day when Mary arrived at the Temple with her little charge, the Spirit had drawn him to the same place, with the intimation that one of the children to be presented that day was he upon whom the hopes of

just and devout Israelites had been for ages fixed. We can understand with what interest Simeon would take up his position and watch the mothers who came to present their little ones; and when Mary, accompanied by Joseph, stepped forward with her child “to do for him after the custom of the law,” the Spirit, making known to Simeon who she was, the old man, with what must have been a cordial and emphatic movement, took up the child in his arms, to the surprise of all parties, perhaps, and said: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people: a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”

It cannot but appear most fitting that such an incident should attend the official presentation of the newly-born Messiah to the Lord. It was a new testimony from God to the divinity of Jesus—one of a series of testimonies divinely delivered at every well-marked stage of his introduction—first, at the conception: then a few months further on when Joseph was distressed: then at birth: now at the presentation: afterwards at other seasons. The reason for such a testimony will be apprehended when we realise that a foundation was being laid for faith in the most important transaction that had ever taken place among men. There was no aim to impart the kind of eclat that is associated in the popular mind with prodigies and wonders. There is a total absence of omens and auguries: no comets, swinging open of doors, or unnatural occurrences. But the divine attestation, was a necessity for the object in view, and this attestation was given at every stage, and in chaste and suitable form—in this case, by the movement of the Spirit in an old man of the divinely approved type, whose utterances, though devoid of power to impress bye-standers at the time, helped, at a suitable moment, to complete the divine endorsement of the work being done.

Not only Simeon, but Anna “a prophetess,” “of a great age,” was used for the same purpose. “She, coming in that instant,” gave thanks likewise to the Lord, and spake of him (the newly presented infant) to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. Joseph and Mary “marvelled at those things that were spoken.” They knew that the babe was “Christ, the Lord;” but they evidently had not the large views opened out in the prophetic utterances of Simeon and Anna. There was an element in Simeon’s words addressed to Mary that would perplex and trouble them in the mere rudimentary knowledge they had: “This child is set for the fall and the rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign that shall be spoken against (yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also).” The expectations associated with the appearance of the Messiah were those of blessing and prosperity only. It must consequently have appeared a curious darkening in the midst of light to speak of Israel “falling,” and of gain-saying against the new born Messiah, and a sword piercing his mother’s soul. Events soon showed the meaning of these painful prophetic allusions: but for the moment they must have been of difficult significance to Joseph and Mary, and must have increased the obscurity inevitable to their partial comprehension of the transaction in which they were being instrumentally employed.

It is by no means beside the point to note how signally the prophetic foreshadowings of Simeon have been realised. It must have appeared in the highest degree improbable that the helpless carpenter's babe which he held in his arms would affect public events in the land of Israel: or that such a child could ever have any relation to the Gentile world as a "light." Looking back, we see how entirely the natural improbability has become historical fact. Though the world sits in darkness, we are eye-witnesses to the fact that the brightest name in Gentile estimation is the name of Jesus, and that what little alleviation of natural barbarism the nations experience in these civilized times, is traceable to him whose infant form Simeon upheld. We refer to this fulfilment of his words rather than to the "fall" of many in Israel that followed Israel's rejection of him; or to the cruel sword which his crucifixion plunged in Mary's heart, because the reader might feel that these events were too near the time of the prophecy for him to feel quite sure that the fulfilment came after the prophecy. There can be no such reservation on the subject of enlightening the Gentiles (though we have not yet reached the full enlightenment contemplated). Simeon's prophecy has been on record for over 1,850 years; and the ascendancy and light-giving power of the name of Jesus is a fact before our eyes at the present moment. Whence this wonderful fulfilment of the word of Simeon? The narrative says:—"The Holy Spirit was upon him." This is a complete explanation, and contains within it a guarantee of the divine reality of all the rest. The result of any attempts to explain it on any other principle can only show by their weakness the truth of Luke's explanation alone.

Joseph and Mary, having "performed all things according to the law of the Lord," "returned into Galilee to their own city Nazareth." So Luke informs us. Matthew seems to say they went to Egypt (ii. 14). Whence this apparent inconsistency? It evidently arises from Matthew omitting notice of the matters recorded by Luke, and speaking of a later occurrence. That it is a later occurrence of which he speaks is manifest from a comparison of the leading features of the two accounts. In the case of Luke, all that is recorded happened within the first six weeks of the Lord's life. In the case of Matthew, the period was sufficiently extended to make Herod go as high as two years for the maximum age of the children to be slain ("two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men," Matt. ii. 16). The details require a considerably extended period.

It was "when Jesus was born in Bethlehem" that wise men came from the east. Their journey must have taken some time. They did not start till they had seen the star, and the appearance of the star coincided with the birth of Jesus, as would appear from Matt. ii. 7. They enquired on their arrival at Jerusalem, "where is he that is born King of the Jews?" Their enquiry troubled all Jerusalem. This must have been a work of time; so must the summoning of the "chief priests and scribes" by Herod, to ascertain from them the locality of the birth of Christ according to the prophets; and the departure of the wise men to find the child. All these things could not have come into the six weeks elapsing from the Lord's

birth to his presentation in the temple. Therefore, they must have transpired afterwards. If it be asked, how could that be, seeing that the wise men found the child in Bethlehem when, according to Luke, it had been conveyed to Nazareth, there are two suggestions, either of which may yield the answer. Either of them would allow a place for Matthew's incidents in the narrative of Luke, viz: either in Luke ii. 39, or between 39 and 40. The first is, that when Luke said "When they had performed all things according to the law," he only meant "after" they had "performed all things, &c.," without intending to indicate how soon after, and that, in fact they stayed a while, during which they received the visit of the wise men, and then went to Egypt, and then to Nazareth. On this supposition, Luke simply leaves the Egyptian episode out of the record, as having been already fully narrated by Matthew, with whose Gospel he would be acquainted before he began to write his own; giving prominence rather to details of which Matthew says nothing. The room for it, on this view, would be in Luke's word "returned" in verse 39: they "returned" (via Egypt) on their journey to which, he deemed it superfluous to say anything.

The other suggestion is that if Luke meant that Joseph and Mary returned to Nazareth immediately after the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, then they must have returned to Bethlehem sometime afterwards (possibly to complete the business of the family enrolment.) There is no record of a second visit having been made; but Matt. ii. is evidence of it, if they departed to Nazareth when Jesus was six weeks old; because it shows them in Bethlehem when he must have been an infant of months "according to the time which Herod had diligently enquired of the wise men." One or other of these hypotheses is necessitated: either Joseph and Mary did not return to Nazareth immediately, or they came back from Nazareth to Bethlehem after having returned.

A class of critics suggest a third, viz.: that Matthew's account is an interpolated myth. But this is inadmissible every way. The mere existence of apparent difficulty does not justify it; and as for the omission of these chapters from certain early manuscripts, the circumstance is of no weight, seeing the omission was challenged as a corruption at the time of its appearance (see comments on the Ebionite and Hebrew gospels by Epiphanius and Origen in the third century). The manuscripts in which these omissions occur differ in other features from the received gospel of Matthew, and contradict Mark, Luke, and John in details with which the received gospel of Matthew agrees. If they are of no authority in the other features, they are of no authority as to the first two chapters of Matthew. The received gospel of Matthew is founded on the concurrent evidence of a great number of ancient MSS. and versions (translations) supported by quotations made by the very earliest Christian writers, as well as by the internal evidence of the chapters themselves, against which no earnest man could place one or two manuscripts which were pronounced mutilations at the time they appeared, and which bear internal evidence of interference on the part of those who compiled them for their own purposes. Those who compiled them rejected parts which they could not receive. for no other reason than their inability to reconcile them with

their ideas of things. Consequently, to make the omissions in their documents a reason for omitting from ours would simply be to adopt their arbitrary prejudices against the weight of evidence. The only admissible course is to accept Matthew as much as Luke, and find a place for both in the mutual adjustment of the circumstances they narrate.

On this principle, we have to note the arrival of the wise men in Jerusalem, while Joseph and Mary remained for a short time in Bethlehem after the presentation in the Temple, or during their second temporary residence there, no longer in “the inn,” but in a “house” (Matt. ii. 11). Who these wise men or magi were need not be a subject of any concern. They may have been Israelites belonging to the deported ten tribes who were taken eastward; or they may have been Chaldean students, with a smattering knowledge of the prophets, and the hope of Israel growing out of them. In either case, they stood related to the truth. It may seem strange that a star should be mixed up with their enquiries after Christ. It looks as if they had been astrologers, but it may not have been so. The star they saw was evidently not of the ordinary heavenly bodies. It was neither a “fixed star,” a planet, nor a meteor. Its motion was local and slow and steady, and subject to an intelligent guidance, which caused it to “stand over where the young child was.” This was a phenomenon entirely outside ordinary astrological occurrences. The idea that the star they saw was an appearance caused by the brilliant conjunction of leading planets at their perihelia, cannot be maintained if we are to accept Matthew’s account (as to which we hold there can be no true question.) An appearance so caused would not travel before the eastern visitors and locate itself over a particular house.

The suggestion is particularly to be objected to on account of the implication associated with it, viz., that an unusual natural appearance was misinterpreted and exaggerated by the writer of Matthew, and applied in a legendary manner to the events connected with the birth of Christ. There may have been a conjunction of leading planets about the same time. It would seem from an astronomical calculation that there was: but to call this “the star of Bethlehem” is to beg the question. There is no reason why we should not take the narrative just as it stands. Its unusual or miraculous character need be no obstacle. The whole situation of which it forms a part was miraculous. The birth of Christ by a virgin—the introduction of Emmanuel upon the scene—the announcement thereof by an angel and its celebration by a multitude of the heavenly host—the activity of the spirit of prophecy in Mary, Zacharias, Elizabeth, Simeon, &c.—surely all was miraculous: and why not a miraculous star, if to divine wisdom it seemed necessary or suitable? A cloud, which at night turned to radiance, went before Moses and the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt: why not a star in connection with the work of the prophet like unto Moses? There is nothing to be said against it except that it is strange and unusual, and apparently superfluous: but there is no weight in this against the testimony of Matthew whom the spirit guided into all truth, as Jesus promised.



These “wise men from the east” were evidently God-fearing men on the watch for the Messiah, whom many beside them in that age were expecting to appear, on the strength of Dan. ix. And this travelling star appears to have been given them as a sign. Even if it could be proved they were astrologers, this would not dispose of the attested fact that in this matter of looking for the promise, God had regard to them and communicated with them at a time when angelic communications on the subject were rife. Balaam was a soothsayer, and yet was the subject of true revelation on a certain occasion when appropriate use could be made of him. So the witch of Endor was used to make known the truth of Saul’s doom. There would have been nothing more incongruous in God employing a company of the kind of men that were popularly supposed to be learned in occult things, in garnishing the situation that witnessed the birth of his beloved Son.

## **CHAPTER IX.**

### **From Childhood to Manhood.**

WE are not yet done with the circumstances of the childhood of Christ. We must follow him in his babyhood to Egypt, in his boyhood to Jerusalem, before we stand with him in his manhood on the banks of Jordan, and follow him in his fully developed divine teacherhood, through the land of Israel for three years and-a half.

The enquiry of the wise men, on their arrival in Jerusalem, was, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? However strange such an enquiry appears in modern ears, after the long ascendancy of the artificial ideas of Christ that have become prevalent through ecclesiastical influences, it had no uncertain or inappropriate sound in Jerusalem, where the prophets were read every Sabbath day (Acts xiii. 27). The one foretold by the prophets, and of whose appearing many were now expectant, was to be “a king” (Jer. xviii. 5) sitting on the throne of David (Isaiah ix. 7) governing and dispensing justice from Jerusalem as a centre of universal law (Micah iv. 1–7), binding all nations in the bond of that political and social unity which all thinking men see to be so desirable, but to which none can suggest a practical attainment. The arrival of a band of men in Jerusalem with enquiry as to the whereabouts of this coming one, and the implied intimation that he had been actually born, was calculated to produce the agitation that followed their question. When it became generally known, all Jerusalem was troubled. The report came to Herod’s ears. It particularly affected him. He was the actual king of the Jews for the time being; his jealousy was excited by the reported birth of one long looked for by the nation as their heaven-sent head and king, destined to rid the earth of all rivals. His natural impulse was to get hold of the new-born King if he could, for the purpose of his destruction.

But how could he get hold of him? No one knew where he was. The enquiry of the wise men excited universal curiosity and surmise, but could find no answer. The wise men could only tell of the star which for the time had disappeared. They knew nothing of the locality where the mighty personage was, to whom it pointed. In the dilemma, Herod had recourse "to the chief priests and scribes of the people." He "demanded of them where Christ should be born." Why should he expect them to know? Because in their custody were the holy oracles which had been "committed" to Israel, and in which was "shewn beforehand the coming of the just one" (Acts vii. 52). Herod must have been aware of this, in a dim and traditionary way, before he would have applied to them for the information wanted. He would hear of it from time to time from his courtiers, or in his dealings with the people in various relations. It might be supposed that Herod's recognition of the prophetic character of the newly-born child would have withheld him from the attempt he made to destroy it. It would have had this effect on a fully informed and tractable mind. But this was not Herod's case. He was an enlightened and headstrong tyrant who would class Hebrew prophecy with Greek or Roman augury which could sometimes be circumvented.

"The chief priests and scribes of the people" were able to supply the information desired by Herod. The categorical question "where Christ should be born?" they met with the categorical answer, "In Bethlehem of Judæa." They did so on the strength of Micah's prophecy: "Out of thee (Bethlehem in the land of Judah) shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel." It is interesting to note this frank and ready application of the words of the prophets. It is in strong contrast to the cloudy and bewildering exegetics of modern commentators of the Jewish school, who inherit the demoralising effects of centuries of Rabbinical efforts to divert the indications of prophecy from Jesus of Nazareth. It is also a condemnation of the so-called "Christian" treatment of the prophets, which equally with the Jewish treatment, though in another way, nullifies or makes them void, by artificial and false canons of interpretation. Had Herod's question come before either the Jewish Rabbis or the Gentile ecclesiastics of the 19th century, it would have received no such direct and explicit answer. The said authorities would have peered critically at the etymology of the terms, and finding that Bethlehem meant "house of bread," would doubtless have suggested, in long-drawn elegant sentences, that the term contained no geographical indication, but pointed to heaven as the great source of all life-sustenance, and, therefore, of the Messiah as the bread of life sent down from heaven; that, in fact, no one could tell where Christ was to be born, or, for the matter of that, that he was to be literally born at all, as the prophecy might be taken as the fore-shadowing, in a personified form, of the Messianic age, to have its origin from heaven. Had "the chief priests and scribes of the people" treated Herod's question in this way, they might have been in danger of being treated as Nebuchadnezzar's astrologers and magicians were treated when they professed their readiness to interpret the king's forgotten dream, but their inability to supply a knowledge of it. But they had not yet become so sophisticated. They boldly answered that, according to the prophets, the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem—which, as we have seen,

he was—a fact that supplies a clue for the reading of the prophets in matters not yet fulfilled.

Having obtained this information, Herod called for the wise men privately, and ordered them to go to Bethlehem, and “search diligently for the young child,” and bring him word when they had found him. To veil the dark purpose that he had formed, he told them his reason for wanting to get at the child was that he might “worship him.” The wise men, believing in their simplicity that Herod’s statement was sincere, set out with all alacrity towards Bethlehem to find the object of their search. But how, after all, were they to get at it? They could easily enquire their way to Bethlehem, but how were they to identify one particular unknown child among hundreds, perhaps thousands, in Bethlehem? They might hear the report of it when they arrived; but they might not: and if they did, report might be conflicting. Their uncertainties were soon at an end. As they went along the road “lo, the star which they saw in the east went before them.” We may understand why, on seeing this, “they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.” They would now be able to identify the newly-born “King of the Jews” without any doubt. It may seem as if it were not necessary they should be able to do so. It might even seem as if it were expedient they should not be able to find him out, seeing that the aim of Herod, on whose business they came, was to destroy the child. A reconsideration may suggest other thoughts. In the wisdom of God, it was evidently necessary for the wise men themselves that they should discover Christ; and their homage, at his cradle, was a part of the situation that it pleased Him should attend the introduction of his Beloved into the world. Consequently, to have concealed Christ, would have marred His plan on these two points, and it would not, after all, have screened Christ from Herod’s designs, as the wholesale slaughter of the sequel shows. Therefore “the star went before them till it came and stood over where the young child was.” They entered the house indicated by the stoppage of the star; and “there they saw the young child and Mary his mother.” They not only saw; they gave vent to the feelings which the sight was calculated to stir in them: “they fell down and worshipped him.” They also unpacked the treasure they had brought with them, and “presented unto him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.”

To this, some demur as a sentimental extravagance out of keeping with the fact that Mary’s child, though the son of God, was also the son of Adam, of a like nature with the rest of Adam’s children. How little reason there is in this demur must appear on reflection. God said, centuries before, by Isaiah, “I have sworn by myself; the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto Me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear” (Is. xlv. 23). Now we learn from the Spirit in Paul that this homage was to be received by proxy, that is, in and through the son of His love, who is the image of the invisible God, the express image of His person: “At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow ... and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. ii. 10, 11). Hence also, in the Apocalypse, they are conjoined in the ascription joyfully offered by the company of the glorified saints,

“To him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.” Now, was it not fitting that at the very commencement of the life of him who was to be the Father’s representative and manifestation, there should be a recognition of the kingly majesty veiled and involved? The angels celebrated the event of his birth: and here we have the representatives of what was esteemed in that age the most honourable order of men upon earth, prostrating themselves in the presence of the child, and offering costly gifts. It is fitting; it is beautiful. The impulse of all hearts in genuine sympathy with the work of God, will be that if they had been there, they would have taken joyful part with the wise men’s adoration of the babe in whom was fulfilled the heart-stirring prophecy, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called WONDERFUL, COUNSELLOR”

Meditating a return to Herod, they are “warned of God in a dream” not to do so, but to depart unto their own country another way. They hasten to comply, and are well on their road, when another message comes to Joseph, ordering him to leave Bethlehem at once, with “the young child and his mother, and to flee into Egypt,” and to remain there till fresh word came to him. The reason of this became quickly apparent. When Herod had waited long enough to be sure that the wise men had no intention of returning, he issued an edict for the destruction of the entire babyhood of Bethlehem, under two years, in the hope of being able thus to compass the death of the object of his jealousy. This barbarous edict was thoroughly carried out by the willing instruments always at the disposal of a despotic government. Thereupon arose a wail rarely heard upon earth—the wail of a multitude of bereaved mothers. It is impossible to conceive a more acutely natural agony than that inflicted on the mothers of Bethlehem. As no human affection is stronger than that of a mother for her child, so no suffering could be greater than that caused by this cruel slaughter. Many have been the efforts of the pencil to depict the scene—various the success—tragic enough, all, but doubtless none of them coming up to the reality. It is one of the most harrowing episodes in the story of human suffering—a long, dark, dreadful story. Then was indeed fulfilled, in its most literal and striking manner, that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying “In Ramah was there a voice heard, lamentation and weeping and great mourning.” The primary application of this prophecy was to the removal of Israel in captivity from the land, but the richness and depth of the mind of God are often seen in two or more analogous coming events being covered in the same prophecy. Had Joseph and Mary and “the young child” been in Bethlehem at the time, nothing short of a miracle would have saved the child from Herod’s executioners. A miracle, no doubt, would in that case have been performed; but God does not work miracles unless they are absolutely necessary. He shielded His Son from harm by having him removed beforehand. He has other sons who may hope for similar providential favour; for all His sons are precious to Him.

But another purpose seems to have been served by the descent into Egypt. It had been written in the prophets: “Out of Egypt have I called my Son.” On the face of them, these words seem to be a historical reference (exclusively) to the

exodus of Israel under Moses; but by Matthew, we are instructed in a deeper additional meaning. He says that Christ's residence in Egypt occurred "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, Out of Egypt have I called my Son." At first sight, it is difficult to understand how a historical allusion to the exodus can be a prophecy with reference to Christ. So difficult is this felt to be, that many Bible students have, in all ages, refused to receive it; and, indeed, have made it a reason, along with others, for refusing to believe that Matthew wrote the chapter where the statement occurs. But we have seen that this mode of solving the difficulty is inadmissible. Matthew wrote the words undoubtedly, and that, too, by the inspiration of the Spirit of God, which rested on and guided all the apostles to the end, as Christ promised. The question is, on what principle can two meanings be conveyed in one form of words? It is not a question of two opposite meanings, or two dissimilar meanings, but of two cognate and related meanings in the terms employed by inspiration. There is a first and proximate meaning to all the facts and statements recorded in Moses and the Prophets, but was there not a secondary meaning, congruous to the first—not apparent at the time of the first meaning, but latent and left for future elucidation? However repugnant such an idea may be to limited human intellect, it is impossible to deny that such is the teaching of the New Testament concerning the writings of inspiration. That teaching is not confined to isolated instances like the quotation about the exodus. It runs throughout the apostolic writings.

It is peculiarly a New Testament revelation that there was in the scope of Old Testament events, institutions, and statements, a meaning not obvious to those who stood immediately related to them. Of family incidents in the life of Abraham, Paul says, "WHICH THINGS ARE AN ALLEGORY" (Gal. iv. 24.) We should not have known this otherwise. He tells us that in the law of Moses existed "the form of knowledge and of the truth" (Rom. ii. 18); that it was "a shadow of good things to come, whose substance was of Christ" (Col. ii. 16. 17.) We should not have known this had we listened only to Moses. Christ speaks in the same way. He says that not one jot or tittle could pass from the law till all was fulfilled (Matt. v. 18; Luke xvi. 17.) He said he had come to fulfil it, and that "all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses ... concerning him" (Luke xxiv. 44). We should not have known there was anything in the law of Moses to fulfil if Christ had not spoken thus, and Paul after him. There need be no difficulty about the fact when the fact is obvious. It is characteristic of high mentality even in its human manifestation, to delight in analogies and involved meanings: to hit off two significances in the same expression. That this should prove to be an attribute of the Eternal mind, not only need be no difficulty, but it is both to be expected and will excite admiration. Analogy and type and double entendre run through the whole history of divine doings upon earth. Thus "the seed of Abraham" covers the kernel of the seed—Christ. Thus Israel, first-born nation, covers the first-born son (Jesus); and a prophecy of the one is often a prophecy of the other, e.g., Isaiah xlix., and others that will readily occur). Thus, also, in Moses, Joshua, David, and Solomon, we deal with foreshadowings of Christ, and read a prophecy of him in them.

That Matthew should seem to strain prophecy is only an appearance. It is impossible to sympathise with those who would strive to remove this appearance by saying that Matthew did not write it, or that in writing it, Matthew was not inspired. The Spirit of God's own way is the best; and although its ways are often hard to see through, they improve with acquaintance, and, become more lucid and beautiful as we master them.

Israel was the Son of God, as Moses was commanded to say to Pharaoh: "Israel is my son, even my first-born... let my son go that he may serve me" (Ex. iv. 22, 23). By this, Israel was a prophecy of Christ, as the plant is a prophecy of the flower. The two were connected. The one came out of the other. Israel became the son of God for the working out of God's purpose in Christ, the ultimate and real son; and one pattern running through the whole work made it possible to foreshadow the one in the other, and make the one a prophecy of the other. In calling the one out of Egypt, the fact became, and was intended to be, a prophecy of the other, coming out of Egypt as well; for the one was the other drawn to a focus as it were.

The principle receives several illustrations. Topographical coincidences run through the whole plan. The offering of Isaac on Moriah required that Jesus should be offered there also. The birth of David at Bethlehem required the same thing of Jesus. David's flight up the face of the Mount of Olives from the presence of Israel's rebellion seems to find a counterpart in Christ's ascent from that Mount from a nation that said "We will not have this man to reign over us;" and David's return via that Mount, a counterpart in Christ's coming back to the Mount of Olives before his enthronement in Jerusalem. Israel's scattering among the nations finds Christ so scattered in his body during all the times of the Gentiles. The holy portion of the land in the age of glory covers the place of Abraham's sojourn in the land as a stranger, and David's flight among the rocks of Engedi; and Christ's trial, mockery, condemnation and death. The divine plan is full of such interesting and fitting coincidences, among which, we are bound to place the fact that not only the national but the personal Messiah, came out of Egypt in the beginning of his existence upon the earth.

Herod's death opened the way for that event. "The angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, arise, and take the young child and his mother and go into the land of Israel; for they are dead that sought the young child's life." In obedience to which, the little band returned from Egypt and made for Judæa. Why Joseph should purpose going to Judæa, we are not told: it would probably be connected with the circumstances and acquaintances arising out of his previous visit to Bethlehem in connection with the family enrolment. At all events, on arriving in Judæa, he found his way barred. Herod's son, Archelaus, was in power, and fearing that the son might retain the feelings of the father in reference to "the young child," he went northwards, and "turned aside" to Nazareth, "that it might be fulfilled," says Matthew, "which was spoken by the prophets, he shall be called a Nazarene." There is no prophecy in these terms to

be found in any of the prophets. It is evident from the way it is introduced that it was not intended as a citation of express words. It is introduced as something “spoken by the prophets;” this is not the way an exact prophecy would be referred to. It is a way of alluding to some general sense of what the prophets have said. What have they said that would connect his name with Nazareth? This depends upon the meaning attached to Nazareth.

There are two meanings, both of which would yield some analogy to what is predicted of Christ “by the prophets.” The first is that which is yielded by the Hebrew root of the name Nazareth, *netzer*. Though its primary meaning is to reserve, preserve, it comes by derivation, as a noun, to signify “a plant, sucker, or young tree springing from the old root and reserved or preserved when the tree is cut down,” therefore, a branch, as translated in Is. xi. 1, and other places: “a branch shall grow out of his roots.” Scholars suggest that the reason of Nazareth being called by a name having this meaning was the exuberance of its foliage. However this may be, there was a fitness in the man who was to be known as the Branch of David, being brought up in a city having that idea in its name, however derived. It would in that case be one of the many correspondences with which divine ways and things abound as we have seen; and Christ’s transference to a place with such a name would be an incipient commencement of the fulfilment of the prediction that his name would be the Branch.

The second meaning would be found in the unfavourable impression conveyed to the popular mind in Matthew’s day, by a man being known as one brought up at Nazareth. This sense is expressed in the question put by Nathaniel when he heard that the Messiah had been found in Jesus of Nazareth: “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Nazareth was in poor repute; it was a despised place. To be a Nazarene was to be a despised man. Now this is what was “spoken by the prophets” that Jesus was to be—a man despised and rejected—a Nazarene in the sense attachable to the epithet at the time of Christ’s birth.

There is a third meaning for which there is something to be said, though its fitness is not so apparently complete as in the other two cases, viz., the possible correspondence of the name of Nazareth with the Nazarite law which prefigured Christ as much as all other parts of the law which have their “substance” in him. He was to be a separated and holy one unto God after the type of the Nazarite; and this general prophecy may have been taken as corresponding with the name of the city where he was to be brought up; or, indeed, as required by the law of correspondences already glanced at, that he should be brought up in a city so named.

Finally, it is possible that in the far-reaching and richly involved operations of divine wisdom in the arrangement of these matters, the whole three meanings were intended to converge in the name of that particular spot upon earth which was to be honoured as the mortal home of Earth’s Immortal Lord and Owner.

## CHAPTER X.

### In Preparation for Public Life.

THE last chapter brought us to Nazareth. Very little is disclosed of Christ's life there during the time that elapsed to the day of his introduction to the nation of Israel. We have just one or two glimpses. First, we have a general view of the years of his childhood presented in these words: "The child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him." (Luke ii. 40). This shows us a thriving healthy child, and a child of well marked character from the first; quiet, probably, and grave; but of clear, decided, and original mind. It must have been so in the childhood of a man like Jesus. It is said "the child is the father of the man." This is a universal truth, even in cases that may seem to be exceptions. The man is but the expansion and development of the germ existing in childhood. The pattern of "the man Christ Jesus" was latent in the child born of Mary. That pattern was the impress of the Spirit—the impress of God—"the power of the Highest" overshadowing her. The Spirit took this part that it might do this work; for it was in order that there might be such an one as Jesus, that the Spirit departed from natural methods, and operated directly in the begetting of a child who was not the son of Joseph, except in family relation. It was "of God," that Jesus "was made unto us righteousness, sanctification, wisdom and redemption" (1 Cor. i. 30). With such an inception to his being, it was in a sense natural that his developing childhood should exhibit the "strength of spirit," and "fulness of wisdom" recorded by Luke.

Till the age of twelve, there are no practical illustrations recorded of these mental characteristics. There was no need that there should be. The brief and chaste declaration of Luke sufficiently describes early years which chiefly became interesting from the manhood that followed. Curiosity might have been gratified by personal details: but the mere gratification of curiosity never comes within the design of the Spirit of God's communications. What we are told is enough to illustrate its work in Christ. What uninspired men would have done with the narrative is shewn by every biography that issues from the press; and most strikingly of all, by those apocryphal gospels which profess to give us particulars of the childhood of Christ. It is well for us to know that these productions have been repudiated by those having knowledge from the day they appeared. But this fact would almost have been unnecessary for us to be certain of their spurious character. The reading of them is sufficient to bring this conviction. The style of composition is weak and undignified, and the matters narrated, puerile and absurd. For example:-

"When the Lady St. Mary had washed the swaddling clothes of the Lord Christ and hanged them out to dry upon a post, the boy possessed with the devil took down one of them and put it upon his head. And presently the devils began to come out of his mouth and fly away in the shape of crows and serpents.... Then



the Lord Jesus (while a baby) answered and said to his mother, when thirty years are expired, O mother, the Jews will crucify me at Jerusalem. They went on to a city of idols (in Egypt), which, as soon as they came near to it, was turned into hills of sand.... There was a leprous woman who went to the Lady St. Mary, mother of Jesus, and said, O my lady, help me.... St. Mary replied to her, Wait a little till I have washed my son Jesus and put him to bed. The woman waited as she was commanded, and Mary, when she had put Jesus in bed, giving her the water with which she had washed his body, said, Take some of the water and pour it upon thy body, which when she done, she instantly became clean.... And when the Lord Jesus was seven years of age, he was on a certain day with other boys, his companions about the same age, who when they were at play, made clay in several shapes, namely, asses, oxes, birds and other figures, each boasting of his work and endeavouring to exceed the rest. Then the Lord Jesus said to the boys, I will command these figures which I have made, to walk. And immediately they moved.... And Joseph, whensoever he went in the city, took the Lord Jesus with him, where he was sent for to work to make gates, or milk pails, or sieves, or boxes. The Lord Jesus was with him wheresoever he went. And as often as Joseph had anything in his work to make longer or shorter or wider or narrower, the Lord Jesus would stretch his hand toward it, and presently it became as Joseph would have it, so that he had no need to finish anything with his own hands, for he was not very skilful at his carpenter's trade."

In complete contrast to this foolishness, is the brief, pure, and comprehensive statement of Luke, that "the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him." The incident of his thirteenth year shews us this process of growth far advanced. "His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover." Whether Jesus accompanied them on those occasions before he was twelve years old, may be doubtful. The prevalent opinion is that he did not. This may or may not be a correct opinion. Probably it is incorrect. The law of Moses required every male to be present at the yearly passover "in the place which the Lord shall choose," and all the members of the household besides; "thy son and thy daughter, thy man-servant and thy maidservant" (Deut. xvi. 14.) It is more likely that Joseph and Mary would act literally on this command than that they should yield a partial obedience. In that case, Jesus went with them every year from his earliest infancy. If on the other hand the reduced state of the Jewish nation under the Roman yoke, was made a reason for a curtailed compliance with Mosaic requirements, then they did not take their household with them, but contented themselves with their own personal attendance—leaving Jesus and the other members of the household at home. However, this may be, "when he was twelve years of age," they took him with them to Jerusalem to keep the feast; and it was on this occasion that we have the first recorded exhibition of the deeply marked character of Jesus in his earliest years.

According to the custom, a considerable "company" of "kinsfolk and acquaintances" journeyed together from Nazareth and neighbourhood to

Jerusalem. Other companies from other districts would repair to the Holy City for the same purpose. The various roads through the country would be alive with joyous travelling companies converging upon Jerusalem for a six days' holiday observance of the feast of unleavened bread, concluding on the seventh day with "a solemn assembly." Israel in their dispersion may be seen in our great cities striving to give some effect to this beautiful appointment of the annual feasts. They may be seen on particular days of the year streaming towards their synagogues. Alas! when they get there, it is only to go through a liturgy, and listen to sermons about as vapid and lifeless as those of their Gentile episcopalian neighbours. It is all that is left meantime of the glorious institutions of the past. In the days of Jesus, though the shadows of night were hovering on the horizon, the day had not quite departed. The beautiful land of promise sustained a numerous and stirring Jewish population, who (enjoying a quasi-national independence under Roman ascendancy) were at liberty to repair annually to Jerusalem to keep the feasts of the Lord, as appointed.

When he was twelve years of age (in the spring of A.D. 16, true era) he might have been found a grave and thoughtful boy in one of the companies passing along the road leading through the plain of Esdraelon and past Mounts Ebal and Gerizim towards Jerusalem. Beyond his quietness and reserve there would be nothing to distinguish him, in the eyes of a passing observer, from other lads. "Subject to his parents," he would help in this and that practical little matter as need arose on the road. Arrived in the holy city, the company would settle in quarters arranged beforehand, and duly proceed next day with the exercises of the feast, in which the boy Jesus would take a more lively interest than was ever taken by boy before; for he had a deeper sympathy with God than all that went before him or came after, and would enter with a deeper penetration and keener relish into the various associations of the passover, both as to the history it brought to mind, and as to the foreshadowing it contained of the more glorious deliverance that the Father purposed to effect by himself. The remark he presently made warrants us in believing as much as this.

The feast was finished: the concluding solemn assembly was held on the seventh day, and all preparations were then made for departure, by the various companies that had come from all parts of the country. The things brought for use at the feast would be got together: baskets would be packed: bundles tied up: clothes and utensils put into convenient form for transport on the backs of animals. All being ready, the company to which Jesus belonged started on its northward journey homewards. Jesus did not accompany it. He "tarried behind in Jerusalem." He "tarried behind" because of attractions. It was not the attraction of the "shows" that are usually to be found at all feasts and fairs, and which probably would be present in some form on those annual occasions at Jerusalem. It was not the attraction of games or sight-seeing. It was the attraction of matters above the understanding, and far beyond the sympathies of ordinary boys—matters appealing to the interest only of the grey-headed rabbis of the temple and doctors of the law, matters connected with the work and will of God

with man. He had got into contact with the heads of Israel with whom he could converse on such topics; and he “tarried behind,” while the procession of his “kinsfolk” and acquaintance moved forward on the road. His absence was not at first observed. The company was numerous; and Joseph and Mary would have enough to engage their immediate attention: perhaps younger children to look after. They supposed he was in the company somewhere. When they had been a day on the road, not noticing him, they asked after him, but could not find that any one had seen him. They went through the whole company, but “found him not.” They then began to be alarmed. Leaving the company to go forward, they returned to Jerusalem to seek him “sorrowing.” Most parents have at some time or other experienced the pang of discovery that a child is lost, and will therefore be able to enter into the feelings of Joseph and Mary, as they vainly sought to get tidings of such a boy as this. For several days they were a prey to the agony of bootless search. They could hear nothing of him. They probably indulged in self-recrimination at not having made sure of his presence in the company at the time of starting. At last, “after three days,” they found him. “They found him in the temple sitting in the midst of the doctors!” They found him “both hearing them and asking them questions.” A boy of twelve, listening to grey-headed men on subjects having no interest for boys in general, and asking questions in reference to them; and not only so, but answering questions put by these same grey-headed men to him, and answering them with an intelligence that filled all who heard him with “astonishment at his understanding!” Extraordinary as the incident may seem, is it not in perfect keeping with the whole surroundings? Does it not seem perfectly natural that such a man as Jesus (so entirely beyond the range of all men) should have a boyhood differing from all ordinary boyhood? and that a babe begotten by the direct action of the Spirit of God should develop into a boy with a super-human sympathy with divine things? The unnaturalness would have been in any other state of things.

When Joseph and Mary saw him in this situation, “they were amazed.” The “doctors of the law” were in reverence with all the people, and Joseph and Mary doubtless shared the feeling, and would therefore experience a mixture of astonishment and fear at finding their boy right in their midst, in free and fearless converse. Their joy at finding him would be for a moment checked. It was quickly known who they were. We can imagine the relaxing of the strained attention of which Jesus had been the object, and the turning of the enquiry of the learned doctors to the agitated parents: “Is this your boy?” Mary, with a mother’s impulse, was the first to respond. Addressing herself directly to Jesus (probably laying her hands on him), she said, “Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.” This is the language of reproof. The distress that was the uppermost feeling while as yet he was lost, had given way to a sense of annoyance at having been put to so much trouble by his neglect to be in his place. Is not this true to nature everywhere? The boy answered with such a fascinating mixture of innocence, beauty and depth: “How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” Apparently, he did not or could not enter into a distressed parent’s point of view. Another

view, invisible to most men, absorbed his eye. His Father and his Father's business filled his field of vision. The circumstances and exigencies of this ephemeral existence, which are all-controlling with merely natural men, were of small consequence in his estimation. Nothing is more prominent in his after life and teaching than this state of sentiment. It is a sentiment having reason as its basis, and that at last more or less infects and affects all true disciples of Christ, with the result of their being mis-appreciated by the people of the present world.

However, the time had not come for the complete assertion of his character and mission in this respect; and so, surrendering to the eager affection of his sorrowing and reproachful parents, "he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." The next eighteen years of his life are shrouded in obscurity nearly amounting to total darkness. There are one or two dim rays of light. The first of these consists of the words "and was subject unto them." This brings before the mind the daily routine of domestic life, with its quietness and simplicity, as the sphere of the boy Christ's upbringing, instead of in the stirring and ceremonious surroundings usually provided for those who are in training for a throne. Part of that quiet routine would consist of work at the bench when he was old enough. We may gather this from the questions of neighbours afterwards, "Is not this the carpenter?" He learnt his father's trade while "subject to his parents at Nazareth." We all know this, but how feebly the fact impresses us, except when we happen to get a glimpse of it in its right connection. It is best seen from the point of view of Christ's exaltation. An unexciting lowly life of private manual labour was chosen by God as the right school for the training of His beloved son, for "the heirship of all things." How comforting this must be to Christ's lowly brethren of the poor of all ages, who have to earn their bread by the labour of horny hands. Rightly viewed, it will reconcile them to their present lot as the best adapted to develop true human character at its best when other conditions are favourable; and as the best preparation for the exaltation to which all men are invited who accept His Son. To think of the coming king of all the earth having been a working man! What curious thoughts it suggests. Working men are looked down upon by the children of plenty; and lo, a working man is destined to divest them of their wealth and send them empty away. The life of a working man means the full development of manhood's strength, a strong frame, a firm and kindly muscular hand, a simple and independent character, combined with humility of deportment. If to these we add the clearness of a divine intellect, the fire of a godly zeal, and the tenderness of true kindness and compassion, we get an approximation to the carpenter of Nazareth, in whom God was working out the archetype to which his family will be conformed. Such a training would give personal strength and plainness of appearance. The word of prophecy had said, "When we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him;" and probably, had we seen Christ in the days of his flesh, we should have seen such a man as the children of this world would not be likely to fancy,—plain, grave, absorbed, noble within, but the nobility of earnestness and purity, and conscious communion with God—not the showy nobility that makes a man popular—not delicate and refined, but manly and

strong. That he had great strength of constitution was shewn by his endurance of the incessant fatigues of a three years and a half daily ministry. He would be a Jew of the best type, with a Jewish look (the woman at Jacob's well recognised him as a Jew). The portraits of Christ that have become current are all fanciful. Most of them are after Gentile models. Some of them may resemble him on some points, but it is more likely that we shall find him a totally different looking man to anything represented by them. We shall be more than satisfied we know, and there we may rest. It is not the person of Christ, in the artistic sense, that has been presented for our love, though that will be lovely enough: it is his character, and the great things that centre in him as THE TRUTH. Still, it is well, in the exercise of a little common sense, to get rid of the conventional fogs in which the subject has become obscured.

Another ray of light shines from the remark of townsmen about Christ's relations. He was in Nazareth on one occasion, after he had commenced his public work. We are told "they were offended at him;" that is, they stumbled at his pretensions, on account of their familiar knowledge of him: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joses, of Juda and of Simeon, and are not his sisters here with us?" (Mark vi. 2). It is no great exercise of imagination, in the light of this piece of local knowledge, to picture Jesus, between 12 and 30, mixing in a busy family circle, and, as the eldest brother of the family, taking a prominent part in various domestic matters common to them all, yet differing from them in the intensity of his character, and the gravity and earnestness of his demeanour. This difference would not be apparent to them. A stranger would have distinguished him from the rest by his reserve and seriousness, amounting to sadness: but we know that daily contact familiarizes the mind with even the extremest peculiarities. And, therefore, as a member of the Nazareth community, Christ would simply be known as the quiet pensive son of Joseph, without challenging recognition as "the greater than Solomon." The time was coming for his manifestation: but till 30, he was simply one of the inhabitants of Nazareth.

The last reliable clue that we have to his life in Nazareth is contained in a single but significant expression. We are informed that after his baptism, "he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read." From this we gather that he was a regular attendant at the synagogue, and took part in the exercises conducted there, especially that one exercise of which his whole life was a glorification—THE READING OF THE SCRIPTURES OF MOSES AND THE PROPHETS. It was "his custom" to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath Day, working the six days with his father (though there is a tradition that his father died while he was young and that the business and family affairs had to be carried on by him). He rested the seventh day according to the commandment, "not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words," "but calling the Sabbath a delight,—holy of the Lord, honourable." We are not to infer from this that Jesus paid no attention to the words of God on the other days of the week. On the contrary, he was obedient in all things, and

therefore carried out the other instruction of Moses to Israel, to treasure the words of God “in their heart,” talking of them “when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up, binding them as a sign upon thine hand and as a frontlet between thine eyes, writing them upon the posts of thy house and upon thy gates.” Jesus would have “the fear of God before his eyes all the day long.” He would therefore “in everything give thanks.” At his daily meals, God would thus be recognised, as well as when he came to feed a multitude and to institute the breaking of bread. Could we have followed him in his business transactions, we should have found them conducted with gravity and sincerity, and “sound speech that cannot be condemned.” And in his social intercourse, we should have found no “jesting and foolish talking, which are not convenient.” We should in everything have found him an example. He is the ideal to hold up before us. The ideal is blurred and defaced by popular thoughts. We get back to the original by the Scriptures, and not by the disquisitions of the schools.

“Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” God’s favour never left him, but man’s favour did—not, however, while he was a private resident of Nazareth. He was liked so long as he was a passive, guileless, and obliging neighbour: but when he began to point out in public teaching that the ways of the people were wrong, aversion took the place of favour, and he became an object of positive hatred. This was not till a considerable time after “the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar.” In that year, John “came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.” This was the commencement of the opening up of the way for Christ’s entrance into public life, for which at thirty years of age he was ready, and for which John the Baptist was expressly sent, as we have seen in a former chapter, that he might prepare his way.

## **CHAPTER XI.**

### **On the Banks of the Jordan and in the Wilderness.**

THE work of John the Baptist had been some time in progress when Jesus “cometh from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptised of him.” The nature, object, and upshot of that work we considered fully in chapters iv. and v. We now note the fact of Christ’s entrance upon his public work, and his introduction to the nation of Israel occurring in connection with that work. Christ is first seen in the act of submitting to the ordinance of baptism at the hands of John the Baptist.

Many have wondered why he should have been baptised, in view of the association of baptism with repentance and the remission of sins. There is no real occasion for quandary. There was a need for some circumstance or situation as the occasion for Christ’s “manifestation” to Israel: and John’s institution of

baptism (first made an object of public attention in the way exhibited in chapters iv. and v.) was provided for this purpose. Secondly, there was a fitness in Christ's submission to that ordinance, in view of the work he had come to do. Nay, we may go further and say there was a necessity. The work he had come to do was first of all a work of obedience in himself. ["By one man's obedience, shall many be made righteous"—(Rom, v. 19). "He learnt obedience by (or in) the things that he suffered" (Heb. v. 8).] Now, John's baptism was a matter of divine command. We have seen in the chapters referred to that it was no adaptation by John of a previously practised ceremony, but an institution of direct divine appointment. Consequently, submission to it was obligatory on every faithful Israelite. Its observance was part of the "obedience" which Christ rendered. He had to be obedient in many things: for he was "made under the law," which imposed many duties, to all of which he had to conform in the process of extricating the faithful from the dominion of the law. He had to be obedient even unto death. But he had to be obedient also at the hands of John. Without this submission, the "righteousness" he wrought out for repentant sinners would have been incomplete. Hence it is easy to understand his response to John's demur to baptise him. "Thus it becometh us to fulfil ALL righteousness." Whatever God appoints to be done is righteousness in the doing of it. For this reason, Christ's baptism in the Jordan was part of the righteousness he developed.

But why, it has been asked, should he who was sinless be called upon to submit to an institution which was for the remission of sin? We need not ask this question. It is sufficient if God required him to submit to it. But the question will be asked, rejoins the curious; and there ought to be an answer. Well, and there is an answer. Although Jesus was not a transgressor by his own action he was partaker, for the time being, of a sin-constitution of things. He was born into a state that was evil because of sin: and he partook of all the evil of that state, even unto death itself, working in the nature he bore as the son of Mary. It was to open a way out of that evil state for man that he was "made of a woman, under the law." The way had to be opened conformably with the divine principles involved. A beginning had to be made with himself, as the foundation on which other men could build. In the first instance, as "the son of David, the son of Abraham," he was as much subject to the reign of death, established in Adam's race by sin, as any of those he came to redeem. His mission was to break into this reign of death by obedience, death and resurrection, illustrating and establishing God's righteousness in all its bearings. For his sake, men's sins were to be forgiven. Therefore, he was "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." In view of all this, it was not incongruous—on the contrary, it was in beautiful harmony with his work, that, on the threshold of the public phase of it, he should be called upon to submit to a ritual act which symbolised the putting away of sin.

After his baptism, Jesus was impelled by the Spirit into a neighbouring wilderness—one of the many wild and untilled spots with which the mountainous country of Judæa abounded. We are not informed which of them it was. It matters nothing at all which; but curiosity has naturally speculated, and is

probably not far wrong in fixing on the precipitous bluffs standing in the midst of scorched and arid desolation to the south west of Jericho, overlooking the Dead Sea. This is a little to the south of the spot where John's baptismal operations are believed to have been conducted, and would be a fitting locality for the purpose of Christ's spirit-enforced seclusion. The purpose was that he might be "tempted of the devil." Paul says "he was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. iv. 15). His temptation in the wilderness must, therefore, come into the category of our experiences. This at once excludes the popular idea that it was the supernatural personal devil of popular theology that tempted Jesus. No man is ever tempted in this way, but always by the incitements of the flesh, either operating spontaneously within, or presented to us in an objective manner by the suggestions of a person external to ourselves. The whole narrative of the temptation shows it was a temptation of the latter sort—a temptation brought to bear by an external tempter—a person—but not the popular Satan, who exists only in the Papalised imaginations of such as derive their theological ideas from inherited tradition, and not from the study of the scriptures. The Bible devil and the pulpit devil are two different things. The Bible devil, with many shapes, has a common derivation—the insubordination of flesh and blood to divine law. This devil exists in his largest form in the present political constitution of things upon the earth. In detail, he presents himself in our own feelings, and in the persons of those who, on any pretext whatsoever, would draw us away from divine ways and thoughts. Who he specifically was in the case of Jesus, we are not informed, and do not know: but his generic identity is unquestionable.

It is an idle question that has been raised by theologians, whether Christ was "peccable" or "impeccable," in view of the fact that he was driven into the wilderness expressly for the purpose of being tempted of the devil. If he was not capable of sinning, he was not capable of being tempted. A popular writer has well said: "Some, in a zeal, at once intemperate and ignorant, have claimed for him (Christ), not only an actual sinlessness, but a nature to which sin was divinely and miraculously impossible. What then? If his great conflict were a mere deceptive phantasmagoria, how can the narrative of it profit us? If we have to fight the battle, clad in that armour of human free will which has been hacked and riven about the bosom of our forefathers by so many a cruel blow, what comfort is it to us if our great captain fought not only victoriously, but without real danger? not only uninjured, but without even the possibility of wound?" It is facts, and not the metaphysical theories of facts, that wise men concern themselves with. Metaphysics land a man in the inconceivable. We have no faculty for dealing with the abstract. We cannot follow God, as it were, in the process by which He has concreted His eternal spirit into the forms and functions of created life. It is the practical relations of the latter that concern us. On this principle, it is sufficient to note that Christ was tempted, without enquiring whether or not it was possible he could yield to temptation. The speculation only becomes material, and that in a bad sense, when it is made to interfere with that free volition of Christ, which was essential to the righteousness he came to fulfil, the very nature of which consists



in the willing and witting subordination of the human will to the divine: (“not my will but thine be done”).

The time at which the temptation occurred is suggestive in several ways. It was just when Jesus had been openly acknowledged by the Father as His beloved Son, and when the Spirit of the Father had visibly, and without measure, come upon him, with that endowment of power and wisdom which qualified him to perform those works and speak those words beyond the power of man, which, for three-and a-half subsequent years, filled Judæa and Galilee with his fame. Why, at such a time, and not before, or later in his career, was he “driven of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil?” Jesus himself afterwards proclaimed it as a principle of divine action, that to whom much is given, of them much is required. This seems to supply the answer. Jesus, endowed with a special measure of the Father’s favour, was sent forth to be put to a proof equal to the new greatness conferred upon him. He had been, during a thirty years’ private life at Nazareth, subjected to the temptations common to men. Anointed now “with the Holy Spirit and with power,” it was meet he should be subjected to a correspondingly increased test of faithfulness before going forth in the plenitude of this power to bear the Father’s name before Israel.

He was tempted in three particulars only, but it will be found that they comprise, in principle, all the temptations to which we can be exposed. First, there was the proposal that Jesus should illegitimately minister to his own need in the matter of food. The temptation on this point was made as keen as it was possible to be. It was not brought to bear when Christ had eaten. It would have been no temptation had the proposal not coincided with a strong desire in the direction proposed. It came to him after a fast of forty days; when the Spirit having sustained him all that time with a supply of the vital energy ordinarily derived from the alimentive process, permitted him to hunger. As the proverb has it, “Hunger will break through stone walls.” Even lawlessness committed from the force of hunger is leniently viewed by men in general, as it is written, “Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry.” The hunger of Christ, therefore, made the temptation a very strong one. But the temptation was made still stronger by the way the tempter put it: “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.” This was as much as to say that the proof of his Messiahship required him to do what was proposed, and that if he failed to do it, he would give his tempter ground for doubting the proclamation that had just been made on the banks of the Jordan. Thus Christ’s desire to testify the truth was cunningly brought to the help of his hunger to incline him to provide himself with food. But the power to make bread at will, which Christ possessed, as afterwards shown by his feeding a multitude with five loaves and two fishes, was not given to him to provide his own natural wants, but to exhibit his Father’s name to Israel. Consequently, though he had the power which the tempter challenged, he was not at liberty to put it forth at the time and for the purpose proposed. It would have been sin in him to comply with the suggestion. He repelled the suggestion by a quotation from the Scriptures, which involved the

assertion of those facts: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

The power of this rejoinder may not at first sight be manifest; because, so far as appearance went, the proposal was not to discard the Word of God, but merely to provide the bread which the answer recognised as an element, though not alone, in the process of living. If we understood, however, that the proposed mode of providing it was wrong, the strength of it appears. "Bread alone" will finally land a man in the grave, because bread cannot bestow immortality. Bread, with the Word of God believed and obeyed, will be a stepping-stone to life that will never end (and it is in this sense that the Scriptures speak of men "living"). In fact, in this connection, bread becomes part of the pathway to eternal life, for without the bread first to develop and sustain the natural man, the Word of God could not have the ground to work on which leads to everlasting life (first that which is natural, afterward that which is spiritual). But bread, with the word of God disobeyed, is "bread alone," so far as life-giving power is concerned; for the word of God confers no everlasting life on the disobedient. Consequently for a man to obtain bread on terms that involve his non submission to the word of God (and this was the tempter's proposal) is to take his stand on "bread alone." To such a case, the Scripture quoted by Jesus has obviously a most forcible application. The rejoinder was unanswerable.

"Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." Here we have a different class of temptation. In the first, he was invited, for two powerful reasons, to make a forbidden use of power entrusted to his hands. In this the tempter goes to the other extreme, and invites Jesus to throw himself ostentatiously on the promises of God. This, perhaps, was more difficult to meet than the other. It was as if the tempter said, "Thou art the Messiah, art thou not?"—"Yes." "It is written, is it not, that He shall give His angels charge concerning thee, and they shall bear thee up?"—"It is so written." "Cast thyself down, then; how canst thou expect me to believe if thou dost not?" How was this to be met? By the assertion of a principle ignored in the tempter's application of scripture—a principle which all divine promises presuppose, and which would have been violated by compliance with the tempter's challenge; viz., that there must be no familiarity or presumption towards God: that we must make a wise and full use of all that He has put in our power, and that divine help is only for the need that remains after there has been a humble, wise, and loving employment of the means already in our hand. This principle Jesus asserted by quoting Scripture: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Had he thrown himself down, as the tempter proposed, he would have done what the Scriptures thus forbid, and would have forfeited his claim to the promise to which the tempter so sophistically appealed. The protection promised in that promise was protection from evil beyond control, and not from evil rashly and presumptuously incurred.

“Again, the devil taketh him up to an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” Here the temptation takes a different direction. Having failed to induce Jesus to illegitimately gratify the cravings of the flesh or to transgress in the direction of presumption towards God, the tempter tries the effect of present honour, wealth and exaltation offered on the simple condition of doing homage to the offerer, as the kings and governors of the Roman earth were in the habit of doing to Cæsar for their position and dignities. Jesus utterly repels the suggestion, reminding the tempter that the Scriptures command one service only. “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.”

The temptation of Christ is a remarkable episode in a remarkable history. It deserves more attention than it receives, as regards the lessons it conveys. There is no temptation that can come to us but what was in principle involved in the specific temptation to which he was subjected in the wilderness after his baptism. The consideration of his resistance to the suggestions of the tempter, will help us in all our exposures to similar trial. Is it proposed to us to gratify some craving of the flesh in a forbidden direction? to make a vain-glorious or presumptuous use of spiritual privileges? to obtain temporal advantage by paying court to the enemies of God in any form? Let us cast our eyes to the wilderness of Judea, and remember the principles asserted by the Lord in Scripture quotations, in answer to similar proposals.

It is also a remarkable feature of the temptation of Christ, that he employed the Scriptures in repelling the suggestions of the tempter. This is a feature worth noting in a day like ours, when the universal tendency is to give the Scriptures a less and less commanding place. With Christ, the fact of a thing being “written” was a sufficient reason for making it a rule of conduct, which is becoming less and less the case in a day when more and more the theory finds favour that the Scriptures are partly or wholly the product of human thought, and subject to human judgment and conscience as to the obligation of its precepts. The implication is obvious that we only stand with Christ fully when we recognize that “all Scripture is given by inspiration of God,” and therefore, as he said, “cannot be broken” in its truth or authority. Corollary to this line of thought is the view which the temptation affords of Christ’s acquaintance with the Scriptures. His ready responses to the tempter show both acquaintance with them, and that memory of their practical instructions that was able to apply them in the hour of need. If Jesus thus knew the Scriptures, it was because “his custom was” to frequent the synagogue and read the Scriptures (Luke iv. 16). His being God manifest in the flesh would lead to a powerful proneness in a scriptural direction; but it did not make him independent of the testimony which the Spirit in David says was his study all the day, and the understanding of which made him wiser than his teachers (Psa. cxix. 97–104). In Christ, therefore, we have an example of that endeavour to become familiar with the Scriptures in daily reading, which is the characteristic of the modern revival of the truth. We have also, in his treatment of

them, a justification for regarding the Scriptures as the unerring source of information in matters pertaining to God.

Jesus was in the wilderness forty days, at the end of which the temptation occurred. We are not informed in what manner the Lord was occupied during that time, or for what purpose he was so long a time secluded "with the wild beasts." We can scarcely escape the thought that it was for preparation. He had come straight from the home associations of Nazareth to John's baptism, and it would scarcely have been fitting that he should at once have passed from those associations into the wide public work which he had to accomplish before his death. We all know the need for pause in changing from one occupation to another. How much more must he have felt it who stepped from a carpenter's bench to the position of a nation's instructor with the power of God upon him, and the work before him of "taking away the sin of the world." Doubtless, he had a strength in himself that made such a transition easier for him than for ordinary men. Still, as "touched with the feeling of our infirmity," he must have felt the effects of village life sufficiently to make it needful that he should have a season of majestic and heart-enlarging solitude before entering upon his journey through the multitudes of Israel as the name-bearer of Jehovah. The length of the period brings to mind many similar periods in the work of God. In years, we have Moses in exile forty years; Israel in the wilderness forty years; the land in frequent rest from affliction forty years; David's reign forty years; Solomon's reign forty years, &c., &c. In days, we have the flood descending forty days, Moses in Mount Sinai forty days, the spies searching the land, forty days; the Philistine defied Israel forty days; Elijah in the wilderness forty days; Jesus forty days with his disciples after his resurrection. The recurrence of this number suggests that it enters into the plan upon which the purpose of God with the earth is being worked out. Forty days were at all events a sufficiently long time to prepare the heart of Jesus for the work upon which he was about to enter.

When the temptation was ended, Jesus "came into Galilee." The enemies of the Bible make a great deal of the apparent discrepancy on this point between John and the other gospel narrators. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all speak of the temptation as occurring immediately after Christ's baptism in the Jordan, while John not only omits the temptation altogether, but appears to represent Jesus as remaining in the neighbourhood of the Jordan several days after his baptism, and departing thence to Galilee. The explanation of this is to be found in the nature of John's account as distinguished from the others. It is not a chronological biography, but a report of special sayings and discourses of Christ, for which there is only so much of circumstantial narrative introduced as is needful for a frame-work. There is no doubt some truth in the tradition that John's gospel was written last, and, not only last, but long after the others had been in circulation among believers. Its existence is doubtless due to the perception which John had of the necessity there was for a fuller exhibition of the sayings of Christ, in confutation of the erroneous ideas about him that had sprung into activity with the course of time. So much as was already well known, he would naturally think it

superfluous to write (and the Spirit was with him to guide and direct). Therefore, the temptation (three times already recorded) he would omit, equally with the particulars of his birth. But, says the caviller, "he ought not to have contradicted the other accounts. He ought not to have represented Christ as in the neighbourhood of the Jordan, and departing to Galilee during the forty days he was in the wilderness." The answer is, John does not do so. He only appears to do so on a rough reading. He does not record the baptism of Jesus. He only records the Baptist's remarks about it, and these remarks were made some time after it had occurred, for they are descriptive of its having occurred. How long after, does not appear. It may have been some weeks. It may have been long enough to give time for Christ's forty days' absence in the wilderness. True, it speaks of Jesus coming to John the same day; but may not this have been after the return of Jesus from the wilderness? If the place of temptation were, as believed, to the south of the place of baptism, it would be natural that Jesus on his way to Galilee, which lay to the north, should re-pass the scene of his baptism where the Baptist was still at work with the multitude; and what more natural in that case than that the Baptist, on seeing him again, should say (as John represents him saying), "Behold the Lamb of God.... I saw the Spirit descending from heaven, and it abode upon him?" It is evident that Christ's baptism had happened some time before: in which case, there is no discrepancy at all between John and the other recorders, but merely a different order of narrative.

## **CHAPTER XII.**

### **From the Wilderness to Cana of Galilee.**

WE now go forth with Jesus to behold his wonderful works and hear his wonderful words for the next three years and a half. We are not of those who say they can do without his miracles. On the contrary, they are indispensable. It is his miracles that tell us he is from the Father. As he said: "The works that I do in my Father's name, the same bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me" (Jno. v. 36; x. 25). The absence of miracles would be the absence of proof that he is Christ, the Saviour of the world. Jesus admitted that, in the absence of miracle, the Jews would have been without sin in rejecting him: "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin" (Jno. xv. 24).

But say some, "Christ is so beautiful in himself; his teaching is so exalted above all men's, before or since,—that miracle cannot add to his excellence." What shall we say in answer? That his beauty can be improved? That his excellence can be added to? No. But is beauty enough? Is excellence all that we need in one who offers himself as our hope? Need we not a guarantee that with the beauty and the excellence, there is power? Need we not assurance that the beauty is not that of the transient rainbow or the golden sunset, or the blooming garden, or the flowery lea? The questions suggest the answer. Those who set light by the miracles—especially those who would dispense with them (especially

the greatest of them, Christ's own resurrection), would give us a Christ whom we might admire, but could not trust; a Christ whom we might copy as a beautiful model, but to whom we could not look as one having authority, and power to save all who come unto God by him.

Christ's reply to John's messengers remains full of the power there was in it when uttered in the presence of those who had seen his miracles: "Go tell John what things ye have seen and heard: how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me" (Luke vii. 22, 23). The men who saw such things could carry back but one answer to John's question, "Art thou he that should come?" And we who authentically hear of them can have no other. They bring with them the conviction uttered by Nicodemus, "No man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him;" and the wonder expressed by the cured blind man to the Jews who sceptically interrogated him concerning Jesus: "Why, herein is a marvellous thing that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes." True, it is, that Jesus seemed to disparage the miracles sometimes, as when he said "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe" (Jno. iv. 48). But this was in rebuke of the mere sight-seeing curiosity, whose appetite is for the marvellous rather than for the meaning of it. This is in no way inconsistent with the place he assigns to miracle, as the evidence that God had sent him.

Jesus having successfully come through the trial of the wilderness, returns "in the power of the Spirit" to Galilee. On the way, he revisits John, whose labours continued on the banks of the Jordan till his imprisonment. John sees him approach, and salutes him in the hearing of those standing by, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. This is he of whom I said, &c." (and he proceeds to relate what occurred at his baptism, concluding with the words, "and I saw and bare record this was the Son of God"). How long Jesus stayed with John that day is not stated—probably a short time—perhaps half-an-hour. At the end of that time, he would retire either to the open country or to the house in which he would stay while in the neighbourhood. At all events, next day he was near John again: and "John, looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God." Here we seem to see Jesus in the act of walking, We naturally clutch at everything that helps us to realise him in the dark days of our widowhood: "whom having not seen, we love." But we shall see him yet, walking, and sitting, and talking and eating, and performing all the acts of life, with all the grace of noble innocence, love and power.

Two of John's disciples, who had evidently pondered what they heard John say on the previous day, hearing him now again call attention to Jesus as he passed, walked after Jesus. When they had done so for a little time, Jesus turned, and asked them what they wanted. They scarcely knew what to say, but they asked him where he was staying. Jesus did not tell them where, but asked them to "Come and see," probably because the house where he was staying would not

be capable of description in the way of address. It would be one of the many temporary booths erected without much plan or order all round the place where John was baptising, and let to visitors from a distance. A dwelling place among such structures could only be got at by the help of a guide. This guide was Jesus himself, with whom "they came and saw where he dwelt," and not only saw, but "abode with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour," that is, four o'clock in the afternoon. What an honour for these two young men (Andrew and John): Christ's guests under Christ's own roof (even if only a hired one), for one night! What would we not give for such an opportunity now? He is away, and we are out in the dark—loving, and longing, and seeking, but unable to find our beloved in all the city. We are like Solomon's sister-spouse: Yea, we are she (or constituents of her): "My beloved had withdrawn himself and was gone; my soul failed while he spake. I sought him, but I could not find him. I called him back, but he gave me no answer. The watchmen that went about the city found me. They smote me: they wounded me. The keepers of the walls took away my veil from me. I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, that ye tell him I am sick of love. What is thy beloved more than another beloved?" (Song v. 6–9). Well, our opportunity is coming and is not very far off. If we are accepted, Christ will actually be the host of the great house into which we shall be invited, as he himself has promised: "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching. Verily, I say unto you that he shall gird himself and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them" (Luke xii. 37).

What passed between Jesus and these two during the evening, night, and morning they were together (the first of the disciples to be called to his side) would be interesting to know. But we are not informed. Whatever it was, the words and deportment of Christ, and everything connected with him, were sufficient to confirm the conviction created in their minds by John's testimony, that he was indeed "The Lamb of God." This is shown by what they did the very first thing next day. Andrew "first findeth his own brother Simon (Peter), and saith unto him, We have found the Messias." Peter lent a willing ear, and allowed himself to be taken by Andrew into Christ's presence. This is Peter's first appearance upon the scene, from which his name was never afterwards to disappear. We are informed that "Jesus beheld him" and addressed him. This suggests a fastening of Christ's eyes on Peter in a penetrative contemplative manner. Jesus had before him the disciple to whom he was to entrust the keys of the kingdom, and who was to be a foremost figure in the work of planting the name of Christ in the earth, and who was to glorify God in a specially agonising death—like his master. Jesus knew all this: for, as John takes pains to tell us in his second chapter (verse 24), "he knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man." He knew that this ardent impetuous Simon, faithful but infirm, was first of the twelve foundations upon which the holy city was to be built. That he should fasten his eyes on him, when first introduced to him, was natural, and also that he should address him in words few, but full of meaning, with regard to Peter's future: "Thou art Simon, the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas" (a stone or rock). Christ's words were always few, but

pregnant. He could deliver a long discourse, but in colloquy, his words were brief and terse. Solomon says, "A fool is known by the multitude of his words." The reverse was illustrated in Christ. He did not apostrophise Peter in long-winded obscurities, after the manner of pretenders in all ages: but fixed his place in one word. This was the third day after his return from the temptation.

The next day (the fourth) Jesus desired to depart from Galilee, about 80 miles to the north of the scene of John's labours, where he had begun to gather the disciples prepared for him by John. Before making a start, he wished to call one or two others to his side who were still in that neighbourhood. He went forth, and without much search, found Philip, who was evidently in attendance upon John's teaching. To him he simply said, "Follow me." The words would be said in a way to mean much. By look and tone they would be made to say, "I am he to whom John bare testimony, as ye know: I am he whom ye seek: I am he whom God hath sent. I am the Messiah. The Messiah has need of you. Come." Philip had evidently been in such a prepared state of mind that it needed not another word. Philip was a fellow-townsmen of Andrew and Peter, who both belonged to Bethsaida, a fishing town on the north-eastern shore of the Lake of Gennesaret. With them he would be acquainted. With them he had evidently kept company in submission to John's baptism. He would all the more readily respond to the command of Christ, that Peter and Andrew were before him with their allegiance. His obedience was prompt and his conviction ripe. The first thing he did was to communicate his discovery of Christ to Nathanael of Cana, who was also in the throng of attendants upon John the Baptist. Cana of Galilee was not far from Bethsaida; and the probability is that Philip and Nathanael were acquainted. That he should go straight to Nathanael would prove this. The communication he made was indicative of the acquaintance they all had with the Scriptures of Moses and the prophets, and of the expectation of the Messiah's appearance, which they entertained in common as the result of their readings of them. "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write," that is, the promised seed of Abraham, the prophet like unto Moses, the son covenanted to David, the Messiah foreshown by all the prophets. It was good news that Philip made known to Nathanael, but Philip made an addition that excited his incredulity: "Jesus of Nazareth the son of Joseph" (not that he was really the son of Joseph, but this was his social status in the town and neighbourhood where he lived—the reputed eldest son of Joseph). It was the town that staggered Nathanael. He knew Nazareth (it was not many miles from Cana), and he knew it was a poor place every way—secluded among the hills and having very little of that intercourse with the outer world which is necessary to sharpen village people. "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" he said. Philip, as a young fisherman living at Bethsaida on the sea, probably did not know so much about it as Nathanael, and could not debate the affair with him in the abstract, but as regarded Jesus, he could give the best of all answers: "Come and see." Whatever might be the case with regard to Nazareth and Nazarenes in general, he was quite sure that, in Jesus, the best thing that had ever come out of anywhere for man had come out of Nazareth. He invited Nathanael to satisfy



himself by personal inspection—the very best advice that can be given on this subject ever since. Though Christ is not on the earth to be looked at as Nathanael could look at him, there are monuments and mementoes of him extant which make the examination of him possible—notably the Scriptures. Any man who will to the extent of his opportunity, do what Philip told Nathanael to do, must, if he have an open eye and a loving heart, come to the conclusion that Philip announced.

Nathanael was a man of this stamp. He went with Philip to see Jesus. Jesus made the way very plain for Nathanael, because he was a childlike man, desiring only to know the truth (probably, Jesus does the same yet, though in a different way of working, as his different relation to things on earth requires). Jesus seeing Nathanael approach, and knowing all about him as he did about Peter, opens the way for him by saluting him—not with a compliment, as some think, but with a simple declaration of truth: “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile.” Nathanael did not know Jesus, and supposed that Jesus could not know him. He therefore, in surprise at his salutation, asks him how he knew him. Christ’s answer spoke volumes to Nathanael: “Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.” In view of all that had gone before—the arrival of the time for the Messiah to appear—of John the Baptist’s declaration that the Messiah was in their midst,—of the divine identification of Jesus in the act of baptism six weeks previously, of which Nathanael would hear if he did not witness it,—and of Philip’s information, this incident was irresistible. Nathanael could not avoid the conviction which he immediately expressed: “Rabbi, thou art the Son of God: thou art the King of Israel.” Jesus then volunteered a gracious comment: “Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? Thou shalt see greater things than these ... Hereafter ye shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.”

Much that is sublimely interesting is suggested by this whole incident. Jesus saw Nathanael at a distance and through natural obstructions, which a man possessing merely natural power could not have done. This power of the Spirit of God to extend natural faculty is illustrated more than once in the history of God’s work upon earth. The King of Syria, perplexed by the baffling of his plans against Israel through the oozing out of secret information, was informed by his servants to whom he at least appealed for the discovery of the traitors, “Elisha the prophet that is in Israel telleth the King of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber” (2 Kings vi. 12). On Jesus, the Spirit of God, after his baptism, rested without measure. He was therefore able to see as God sees, who says “Can any hide himself in secret places that I should not see him?” (Jer. xxiii. 24.) Nathanael recognised in this an evidence of his Messiahship; but Jesus overwhelmed his faith, as we might say, by telling him of coming manifestations of a far higher order. Seeing Nathanael under the fig tree was a case of Jesus seeing, but Jesus told Nathanael of what Nathanael would see in the day of God’s finished purpose in Christ—heaven open and the angels ascending and

descending upon the Son of Man. This is suggestive of very great things. We are accustomed to conceive of the universe and its possibilities from the standpoint of our mortal faculties. Are these the highest faculties? What man of Ordinary intellectual prudence and information would be guilty of affirming such a thing? Are the powers and faculties of mortal man upon the earth the utmost development that is possible of the senses of seeing and hearing? The question suggests its own answer. There are higher things in heaven and earth than mortal man dreams of. Jesus touches some of these in his answer to Nathanael. We have occasional glimpses in other parts of the Scripture: "Lord I pray thee open his eyes that he may see," said Elisha, concerning his alarmed servitor, when a Syrian host besieged them at Dothan, "And the Lord opened the young man's eyes and he saw, and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2 Kings vi. 17). "They that be with us," said Elisha, "are more than they that be with them." When "heaven" is "open" in the sense of Christ's intimation to Nathanael—that is, when our eyes are open to an enlarged vision of things, the universe will not seem the yawning empty abyss it looks to mortal eye and heart. "In the spirit" which fills all space, we shall feel one with all and at home everywhere, and in connection with the busy angelic multitude who are meanwhile hid from our eyes. The earth in open communion with heaven, through the visible commerce of angels,—converging upon Christ as the "one head" under whom all things are to be confederate—is the vision shewn to us in the words of Jesus to the guileless believing Nathanaels of every age.

Jesus now departs to Galilee—whether accompanied or not by the five who had just become persuaded of his Messiahship, and who were afterwards appointed Apostles—(Andrew, John, Simon, Philip, and Nathanael)—does not appear. If they accompanied him, it would be as fellow travellers homeward; for we afterwards find them in their several places of stay, and Jesus at Nazareth. Jesus was not long home from his six or eight weeks' absence, when he received an invitation to attend a marriage at Cana, a village a few miles to the north of Nazareth. His mother and such disciples as had already attached themselves to him (probably during the few years' private tuition preceding his baptism by John) were included in the invitation. He went. It was probably the marriage of some near relation—and being a semi-public occasion, he chose to take occasion of it to make a beginning of the miracles which were to "manifest forth his glory" to the nation at large. Being all assembled, the company, which was probably larger than anticipated, ran short of wine. Mary, who had "pondered all things in her heart" concerning her first-born from the very beginning, appears, with a woman's quick intuition, to have formed the conclusion that Jesus was now possessed of power to do all things. She told him suggestively, "they have no wine." Jesus answers abruptly, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come." There must have been a reason for this apparent, impatience. We are probably not far wrong in attributing it to the difference between the view that Jesus would have in putting forth miraculous power, and that which would be entertained by those who wished and saw and admired it. Christ would realise that this exercise of miraculous power was a condescension on the part of God,

for the purpose of manifesting and establishing His Anointed One, with a view to His own great purpose towards man—a purpose of love and salvation truly, but first of exalting and hallowing His own great name, and condemning the universal insubordination of man. Miraculous power would therefore be in Christ's estimation an implement of holiness; but Mary's view for the moment appears to have been that it would be a human convenience, and likely enough there was mixed up with this view a little of a mother's pride in the greatness of her Son. Christ had proposed to supply the wine, but he would not do it at human call or to gratify human complaisance. He therefore answered his mother in a way that in modern times would be considered equivalent to a snub. Mr. Gladstone says he does not understand Christ's deportment in this instance. This shows that Mr. Gladstone is a mere Greek. To an Israelite indeed (with whom God is all in all and man an earthen vessel of divine fabrication), there can be none of the difficulties that beset the whole subject of Christ for minds imbued with the prevalent idea that man is of immortal status in the universe; and the fountain of intellectual and moral excellence.

Mary gathered from Christ's manner, notwithstanding, that he intended to supply the wine. So she said to the servants, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." The servants, all alacrity, hear him tell them by-and-bye to fill with water the six stone water-pots that were set near the door, "after the manner of the purifying of the Jews." They do so at once, "to the brim," and doubtless wait with fixed attention for the next direction: "Draw out now and bear unto the governor of the feast." "And they bare." The ruler of the feast finds that what the servants have brought is the very best wine. He is ignorant of its origin, but it is so good that he feels impelled to remark that the custom was to bring out the good wine first: but here, the good had come last. It must have been prime liquor to have evoked such a tribute from a connoisseur who had partaken freely of other wine during the evening. His verdict is a confutation of the extreme teetotal suggestion that the wine Jesus made was the unfermented juice of the grape. An unfermented vegetable juice would have been the reverse of appreciated by men who had "well drunk" of ordinary wines. What Jesus made was wine, and that, the very best. Vegetable juice is not wine. It must undergo vinous fermentation before it can be so designated. This, however, is merely aside.

The marvel consisted of the instantaneous transformation of common water into rich wine. The nature of the marvel has been discussed in *The Visible Hand of God*. Jesus tells us how it was done. "I cast out demons by the Spirit of God" (Matt. xii. 28). It was not magic. It was the exercise of the power by which all things have been made, and in which they subsist. This power is in all the universe, for the Spirit fills immensity. But no man can use it except he to whom God gives the power, for the power is His and in Him. He gave this power to Jesus (Acts x. 38), and the works done by him were, therefore, the Father's works, as Jesus said. They were "miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of Israel" (Acts ii. 22).

“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed on him” (Jno. ii. 11). Before this, the few disciples that had begun to gather round Jesus had only the testimony of John the Baptist to rest on, strengthened by such arguments from Moses and the prophets as Jesus might bring to bear on them. But now they saw with their own eyes the manifestation of the power that was latent within him as the anointed of God: and which afterwards blazed forth as a great light in all the coasts of Israel, drawing multitudes after him and filling the land, and, at the last, the world, with his fame.

## **CHAPTER XIII.**

### **The First Visit to Jerusalem.—Nicodemus.**

FROM Cana of Galilee, where the first miracle had been performed, in the turning of water into wine, Jesus, his mother, his brethren, and his disciples, “went to Capernaum” instead of returning to Nazareth. Capernaum was situate on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, near its northern end; and from the description left us by Josephus, was a busy and thriving place, in a most pleasant and salubrious situation. Here, we are informed (Jno. ii. 12), Jesus and his company “continued not many days, but went up to the passover at Jerusalem.” But why did they come to Capernaum, instead of returning to Nazareth? Probably because the time to attend the feast was too near to make it worth while to go back to the seclusion of Nazareth, from which they would so soon have to re-emerge. At Capernaum, they were on the highway of public traffic, on which so many travelling companies would soon set out to the Holy City. With these they would journey along the valley of the Jordan, reaching Jerusalem in two or three days.

Arrived there, Jesus performed an act which many have been unable to understand. Finding the approaches and outer court of the temple occupied by traders of various descriptions, he “made a scourge of small cords,” and “drove them all out,” overthrowing the tables of the money-changers and the seats of them that sold doves, and clearing out droves of sheep and oxen. The apparent harshness of this procedure shows in a strong light, when we recollect how such intruders came to be there. Sheep and oxen were required for the offerings of those who attended the feast; doves, likewise, for the poorer of the community, who were not able to offer an expensive animal. Many of these, coming from long distances, would be unable to bring the sacrificial animals with them, but would come provided with money (as the law of Moses prescribed) to buy, offer and eat on the spot. The provision of these animals for sale in the neighbourhood of the temple would therefore be a great public convenience. So with the money-changing. Many would come to the feast unprovided with money current in Jerusalem, and eligible for the tribute payable by every son of Abraham to the priests for the maintenance of the temple service. They would have money, but

money belonging to a distant province, and not “taken” in the Holy City. How were such to obtain suitable coin without the money-changer? It would seem on the face of things as if it were not only an unobjectionable, but an indispensable and praiseworthy institution that the dealers in all these things should offer their wares to the frequenters of the temple.

The words which Jesus addressed to these dealers, as he broke into and upset their arrangements, indicate another view of the situation, and one which probably none but himself entertained. “Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise.” The action and the words would savour of intemperate zeal in the eyes of merely natural thinkers. Zeal there certainly was. “The disciples remembered that it was written of him, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” Intemperate zeal there was not: zeal founded on a reasonable appreciation of things is not intemperate, however strong. Men universally recognize zeal in a good cause to be a beautiful thing. They do not universally discern the cause of the zeal in this case to be good.—“The zeal of thine house,” This kind of zeal does not appeal to most men. The nature and source of it Jesus made manifest on a later occasion. When acting a similar part, he called attention to a statement in the prophets: “Is it not written, my house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves.” Jesus recognised something inconsistent with the true object of the temple service in the eager turning of the supply of its physical requirements into an occasion for making money. He would have had men come with supplies in the spirit of service—not with the object of gain. There is a time for everything. His sympathy was with the praying, not with the trading. His sympathy amounted to zeal—a zeal so intense as to be an eating up zeal—an executive zeal—a zeal impelling to action. He flourished a whip of small cords about the ears of the chaffering rabble. He glanced scorching rebuke at them as he overturned their tables and scattered their money, and with imperative gesture, ordered them all out. He apostrophised them in terms that would be considered by the majority of educated men in our day, transcendent rhodomontade: but which reveal a glimpse of highest wisdom. It is a side of Christ’s character entirely overlooked in popular presentments of him. It is one that has a useful place. Christ is the model for his people. “Imitators of Christ” is one of the Revised-version definitions of true disciples. The imitation ought not to be confined to one phase. He is to be imitated in his zeal for God as well as in his compassion for man: not that we have his authority or his opportunity, but that we must have his spirit, which, in a day like ours, will find scope in an earnest contention for Divine faith and appointments against the countless corruptions of a community which owns his name, but is reprobate to all his requirements.

It is a singular thing to contemplate that this, at this time, unknown young mechanic (for he was only 30), in the garb and dialect of a provincial Galilean, should be able to overawe and coerce a crowd of Jerusalem Jews, in the face of the temple authorities, and actually expel them from the precincts of the temple, with the loss of their money probably in many cases. Some artificial suggestions

have been made about the power of moral influence over guilty consciences. We may be quite sure that this had nothing to do with Christ's ascendancy over a crowd of huckstering traders who are notoriously insensible to moral influences of any kind, and who in this case, were the lowest class in a whole nation of whom it is declared that their hearts had become gross, and their eyes closed and their ears dull of hearing. We must look higher than to human susceptibility to find the explanation of this heroic situation. We must look to the holder of the "whip of small cords" and not to the cowering crew who betook themselves, abashed, from his presence. There is no lack of explanation here. God was in him in the immeasurable abiding presence of the Spirit. This power, directed indignantly, was irresistible. It paralysed the hands of his enemies on more occasions than one. He was enabled to make a lane through their ranks on the brow of the Nazareth heights; and to arrest their stone-filled hands in Jerusalem when his cutting words had goaded them to deadly intent; and to throw a whole band of soldiers on their faces when they came to arrest him. The power of God which was often "present to heal," was always present to protect His anointed, until his hour had come. "In the shadow of His hand hath He hid me" is the prophetic description which explains all. The fire of God's indignation streamed from his eyes upon the profane multitude that were defiling His courts, and therefore they were powerless to raise a finger against a young man whom otherwise they would not only have disregarded, but overpowered; whose interference they would have resented as intolerable presumption.

When they had recovered themselves a little, they asked a token of his authority to do such things. His answer combined obscurity and pointedness in a remarkable manner—"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The obscurity lay in his apparently referring to the literal temple whose holiness he was vindicating; the pointedness lay in the fact that his resurrection in three days after they should put him to death, would be the unanswerable demonstration of his authority to do everything. Some have asked, Why should his answer have been obscure at all? Even the disciples were impressed on this point: "Why speakest thou to them in parables?" Such was their question on a subsequent occasion. His answer may not seem much of an explanation to some: "That seeing, they may see and not perceive, and hearing, they may hear and not understand, lest at any time they should be converted, &c." (Mark iv. 12). Why should the teaching of Jesus have been couched in a form calculated to obstruct the light? The answer may be learnt from the prophets. For a long season Israel had turned a deaf ear to God's expostulations. There is a limit to the Divine patience. Therefore we read, "Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouths and with their lips do honour me but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men, therefore behold I will proceed to do a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid." "The Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep and hath closed your eyes" (Is. xxix. 13, 14, 10).

When Jesus appeared in Israel, their spiritual reprobateness had reached a climax. His mission was in harmony with the time. "His fan is in his hand," said John the Baptist, "and he shall thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. iii. 12). The prophet Malachi had said (iii. 2, 3, 5) "He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap. He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.... I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages." It was partly in execution of this mission that he expelled the traders from the Temple, and that he systematically veiled his meaning in parabolic discourse. It was a time of retribution, which culminated in 40 years in the fiery overthrow of the State, and the destruction of the people.

They imagined he meant that he could rebuild Herod's Temple in three days if it were to be destroyed. "Forty and six years," said they, "was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?" "But he spake of the temple of his body." Jesus knew his work from the beginning. No part of it was an afterthought. His death was before him as a known appointment of the Father's; and his resurrection the end, of which he never lost sight. He steadily pressed forward towards it in the midst of all the blindness and confusion and misunderstanding that prevailed around him, deflecting not in the least from the path he was called upon in his faith to follow. In this he hath "left us an example that we should follow in his steps." We are not told what rejoinder Jesus made to the incredulous enquiry of the Jews. Probably he observed silence—often the best answer. His words—not understood—remained with some who heard them, for they were made the pretext of an accusation against him, when at the last he was led as a lamb to the slaughter. They were for this purpose perverted. He was accused of having said that he would destroy the temple. A slight change in words makes a wonderful difference to the meaning sometimes; and enmity never hesitates at changes that are even not slight. The words were not understood by his disciples any more than by his enemies. The words even passed from their memory. They came back afterwards: "when he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them." They remembered because they were helped to remember. Jesus had promised that when he was glorified, he would send the Holy Spirit to them, "who should bring all things to their remembrance whatsoever he had spoken unto them" (John xiv. 26), "and guide them into all truth" (xvi. 13). This promise was fulfilled, so that the Apostles were able to speak and write unerringly concerning the wonderful words and works of the Son of God.

Jesus remained in Jerusalem some little time after the temple incident. We find him working miracles in the presence of the crowds who were present during the days of the Feast of the Passover (John ii. 23). We are not informed what the miracles were. They were probably of the same character as those he afterwards performed in Galilee, of which we read that "he healed all manner of sickness, and all manner of disease among the people" (Matthew iv. 23). Whatever they

were, they produced the effect they were calculated to produce and designed to produce: "Many believed in his name when they saw the miracles which he did." They were mostly the common people of whom this is testified. Had Jesus been of the character imagined by some who, wishing to get rid of his divinity, invent theories that bring him into the category of human aims and errors, he would have laid eager hold of the popular faith thus created by his miracles, and would have fanned and encouraged it. Instead of that "Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men. And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man" (John ii. 24). He knew that the newly-born faith of the "many" referred to was a mere effervescence of sensationalism—the admiration of the marvellous and the excitement of novelty, and not the appreciation of the divine aims with which the miracles were wrought: an empty, ugly thing compared with the fear, faith, and obedience of God in righteousness, holiness, and love, which it was the aim of Jesus to induce in the people who were to be taken out for his name. He therefore stood irresponsively apart from the popular enthusiasm, aiming merely to do the work God had given him to do in the laying of the foundation of the coming glory of God on the earth.

The ruling class stood aloof altogether. But there were some among them who could not close their eyes to the extraordinary things that were being enacted before them. Though not convinced that this man, introduced by John the Baptist, was "the very Christ," they could not help thinking the hand of God was in the matter in some way. Among these was Nicodemus, "a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews." His earnest curiosity desired a closer view, but not in public. He did not wish to compromise himself with an affair of which he was in doubt, and which was odiously regarded by his class. He came to Jesus "by night." By what means he obtained an introduction, and where the interview took place, we are not informed: and it is not important. Such particulars, bulking large in human narratives, are kept in their true insignificant place in a divinely written record. We may be sure that a man of Nicodemus's position would have no difficulty in finding his way to the presence of a carpenter. Seated before him, by the light of a flickering Eastern lamp, Nicodemus, probably after some unrecorded preliminaries, unburdens the leading feeling of his mind:

"Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him."

It is presumable that Nicodemus imagined that this was a great concession on his part. He might even—probably did—think it would be acceptable to Christ as an important patronage of his cause at the hands of a ruler of the Jews,—opening the way perhaps to that establishment of the kingly power of the Messiah which they were all looking for, and which all thought in common "would immediately appear" (Luke xix. 11). The presence of this complacent and purely human view of the situation would account for the abrupt and apparently otherwise irrelevant rejoinder of Christ:



“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Nicodemus was hoping to see the Kingdom of God, as a Jew according to the flesh, and perhaps as a result of lending his official influence to the Messiah, if this were he. Christ’s declaration was therefore of a very pointed application. But Nicodemus did not understand it. He thought he was speaking literally: “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus explains that this is not what he means, but that nevertheless there is a second birth of which a man must indispensably be the subject before he can inherit the kingdom. “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”

If we suppose Nicodemus here asking, “Why?” we may see the point of his next observation. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” But again, a question: Why is this fact (that that which is born of the flesh is flesh) a reason going to show the necessity for being born again? It is as if Jesus had said, “No wonder you must be born again, seeing that having only been born of the flesh, ye are only flesh, which cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.” Paul, indeed, uses these latter words: “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God” (1 Cor. xv. 50). If we ask, why? he answers, “Corruption doth not inherit corruption.”

If we ask, Is man corruption? we do not require to wait for an answer: we know it. If we ask, “Is the Kingdom of God incorruption?” though we have to wait the answer, the answer is equally clear and certain. The prophets tell us that the Kingdom which the God of heaven will set up on earth when human kingdoms have run their course, is to be given to “the saints of the Most High” (Dan. vii. 27)—and that it is not to be left to other people (Dan. ii. 44)—but will last for ever; shall not pass away. “Of his kingdom, there shall be no end” (Dan. vii. 14; Luke i. 32). Consequently, a man to inherit the Kingdom must be immortal. Jesus says its inheritors will be so, in saying “They shall not die any more” (Luke xx. 36). Now, a man merely born of the flesh is mortal and corruptible, as we all know. He has no element of immortality in him. Therefore, he must be the subject of a great change before he is fit to enter the Kingdom, which requires a man to be immortal in order to inherit it.

This great change Jesus describes as a being “born of water and of the Spirit.” Why he should so characterise it becomes apparent only when certain first principles of the truth are understood. It is one of those first principles that men are not born children of God, but children of Adam and heirs of the death that came by him (Rom. v. 12–19; Eph. ii. 3, 12). It is another, that God purposes to generate from among this death-doomed race, a family for Himself whom He will glorify with salvation (Acts xv. 14; 1 Pet. ii. 9; 1 Thess. v. 9). It is another, that the mode He has chosen in the development of this family is to present the gospel for acceptance, and to require the assumption of the name of Christ in baptism (1

Cor. i. 21; Acts x. 48; Rom. vi. 3, 4; Gal. iii. 27). It is another, that those submitting to faith in Christ Jesus are considered as having entered the new family for the first time (2 Cor. vi. 17, 18; Gal. iii. 26; Eph. ii. 13; Peter ii. 10). Begotten by the Word brought to bear upon their mind, they have, in baptism, been “born of water,” but are not yet finally incorporate in the family of God. At this stage, they may perish, as Paul recognises (1 Cor. viii. 11). At the return of Christ, they have to appear before him for judgment, to be dealt with according to the state of the account they will be called upon to render (2 Cor. v. 10; Rom. xiv. 12).—If this is not acceptable, they are rejected and depart to death. If it be such as the Lord can approve, they become the subject of that change which Paul calls “the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom. viii. 23). As the result of this physical change, which is effected by the Spirit “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” they become finally and unalterably sons of God. “They are the children of God, BEING THE CHILDREN OF THE RESURRECTION” (Luke xx. 36). This consummation of their adoption is figuratively compared to a birth, as in the case of baptism. Baptism is not a literal birth, but as it is the act by which a man not a child of God becomes such, it is a natural figure which speaks of it as a birth of water. So the operation of the Spirit of God upon the mortal nature of the accepted saints (Rom. viii. 11; 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52; Phil. iii. 21) is not a literal birth, but as it is the act by which a son of the earth becomes a son of heaven (Cor. xv. 49), so it is natural to speak of it as a birth—a being born of the Spirit.

Without this divine birth in two stages, it is impossible that any man can enter upon the possession of the kingdom which the Lord will establish at his coming. The administration of that kingdom will require powers that do not belong to mortal man. It will require such a knowledge of the thoughts of men as Jesus evinced, and such a capability of eluding human observation and control as he manifested after his resurrection. The rulers of the age to come must be as independent of man as the wind. As Jesus added: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (Jno. iii. 8).

With the ideas that Nicodemus had of a kingdom of God to be administered by mortal men, it is not wonderful that he was surprised at such doctrine. “How can these things be?” said he. Christ answered as if he had said “how can they not be?” “Art thou a master of Israel and knowest not these things?” As much as to say, that as a man in Israel whose position presumed an acquaintance with the scriptures of Moses and the Prophets, he ought to have known these things. There is much more in Moses and the prophets than people are aware of. It requires close and constant reading to become acquainted with all that they reveal. The majority of people read them scarcely at all; and those who do read them, mostly do so without discernment. Nicodemus, from his position, must have been a reader, but evidently, he was in the position of those rulers of Jerusalem described by Paul when he said that “they knew not the voices of the prophets which were read in their synagogues every Sabbath day” (Acts xiii. 27).

Jesus found the resurrection proved in part of Moses where the priests could not discern it, viz., in God's declaration that he was the God of three men who were at the time dead (Luke xx. 37). By the same process of reasoning, the spiritual and immortal nature of the rulers of the future age is deducible from many parts of the prophets. Had Nicodemus been an enlightened student of them, he would have "known these things," and would have at once recognised and endorsed Christ's sayings as the truth.

## **CHAPTER XIV.**

### **To Galilee, Through Samaria, via Jacob's Well.**

THERE was no further "conversation" between Jesus and Nicodemus after the point reached at the end of the last chapter. What followed was in the nature of a discourse by Christ uninterrupted by any questions or remarks by Nicodemus, who was probably silenced by the authoritative manner of his interlocutor, and by the rebuke his ignorance had just suffered. Christ, besides appealing by implication to the prophets for proof of the necessity for spiritbirth, proceeds to allege his own authority and the tangible ground of it. "We speak that we do know and testify that we have seen, and ye receive not our witness" (verse 11). This is a characteristic of Bible revelation. It is a matter of knowing, as men know anything; and of having seen, as men see anything. It is not an affair of what is called "subjective" experience, as when a man dreams. When a man dreams, the sensation is subjective to himself: it is not open and obvious to any one present at the same time. But in the case of revelation, the things revealed were things palpable and open to view. Bible revelation is not a matter of opinion, founded either upon personal speculation or upon arguments presented by others; nor of conviction founded upon evidence. It is an affair of personal knowledge, as when a man sees and hears and has experience, as of his own business or family affairs, for example.

Jesus and John (for presumably they were the "we" whose testimony was known to Jerusalem and not believed)—were personally acquainted with the matters they spoke of: they had not received them from hearsay or persuasion. The Word of the Lord had come as actually to John as the word of a man comes to his neighbour: John had seen the Spirit descend upon Jesus as really as a man sees the lightning on the day of thunder. It had happened in accordance with previous notice as practically and really as an eclipse follows an almanac date. He had heard the words of the divine proclamation as really as any man ever hears words uttered in his hearing. Jesus had himself also seen and heard all these things and much more besides—behind all which was the actual voice of the Spirit audible to him in the inner temple of his being. It was knowledge and experience that John and Jesus testified to unbelieving Israel.

Jesus now pressed this home upon Nicodemus, and at the same time; emphasised another thought. The testimony in question had related to things and incidents on earth: but there was a day coming when Jesus would tell of a higher class of things—of things related to the heaven to which he should ascend. If Nicodemus and his class were incredulous of divine things in their first stage, how would they be able to believe in those things testified of in their second stage in the day of “heaven open” spoken of to Nathanael? He anticipates the question how any man on earth could know of things in heaven. He adds, no man had been to heaven to learn. At the same time he foreshadowed his own coming ascent thither. He did so in language a little obscure. It reads in the C. V. thus: “No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven” (Jno. iii. 13). The obscurity is increased by the present participle *wn* (being) having been turned in translation into the present indicative—is. “The Son of Man being in the heaven” gives us the point of view of the “coming down.” He is not in heaven till he ascends: and he cannot descend till he ascends. The idea is more easy to catch when freely paraphrased thus: “It will not be affirmable that any man has ascended up to heaven until the Son of Man having ascended thither, and being there for a while, descends to the earth again.” He will then be able to say, “I have been to heaven, and the only man who has ever been there: for though Enoch and Elijah have been away from the earth, they have not been to the presence of the Father, and cannot testify of the things that are there.” Jesus, when on earth, said to his disciples, “I go to him that sent me.” When he returns, he will be able to say, “I have been to him that sent me.” We who now live in the interval of his absence, can see the bearing of this. He is “gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God, angels and principalities and powers being made subject unto him” (I Pet. iii. 22). At his return, he will be able to tell us unutterable things. The wide universe and its movements are a great mystery to created intelligence: still more, the residence and surroundings of the Personal Father-Deity, the fountain and source of all power and being. What may we not expect in the way of enlightenment on these stupendous themes from him who not only has power to bestow such capacity of understanding in the change from the mortal to the immortal, but who has been basking for 18 centuries in the inner sunshine of the Father’s glory, and who intimately knows the highest things?

The other matters glanced at in Christ’s discourse to Nicodemus belong to first principles, and present no feature of difficulty. Jesus appears to have closed the interview with a mild rebuke of Nicodemus for coming to him by night: “He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God.” The open courageous course expressed by the English word “straightforward,” is doubtless the one that most commends itself to God and man. The timid patronage of truth that shrinks from human knowledge is of little value to anyone. It is best that a man’s conviction be known. It is demoralising to seek concealment. It is best to confess Christ before men. The only excuse for carefulness would be uncertainty. A man thinking a hated thing to be the truth, but not being sure, would naturally and justifiably avoid an open

connection (or what might be construed to be such) until investigation had satisfied him. This was doubtless partly the case with Nicodemus. His brethren in the priesthood held or professed that Jesus was a deceiver. This would make Nicodemus feel, in a degree, uncertain. At the same time, the miracles of Jesus convinced him that God was with him for some purpose or other. He therefore looked closer, and apparently at last with decisive results; for we find him afterwards taking part with the people in favour of Christ (Jno. vii. 50, 51) and at last, no more by night, but openly identifying himself with him at a moment when the death of Christ seemed to confute all his claims (xix. 39).

Retiring from Jerusalem after the interview with Nicodemus, Jesus, accompanied by a few of his disciples, repairs to the neighbourhood of Jordan, and there remains some time. He teaches; and baptizes those who submit to his teaching. He did not personally immerse believers. The act of immersion was performed by his disciples: but done by his direction and authority, it was considered as done by him. (Jno. iii. 22: iv. 2). The non-performance of baptism by Christ's actual hands is an intimation at the very start that its virtue depends in no way upon the administrator. Sacramentalism is outside the scope of the system of Christ. The spirit of his doctrine is this, that we must believe what God says, with the simplicity of little children, and perform what He commands in the same humble spirit. The idea of baptism or any other institution owing its efficacy to the ministrations of a particular operator belongs to the system of spiritual sorcery that has since taken such deep root in the world—as foretold.

When Christ (to whom John gave testimony) appeared in the same capacity as John himself, viz.:—as a teacher and a baptizer, the people naturally turned in greater numbers to Jesus than to John. This was no distress to John, though his attention was called to it (John iii. 26). It simply led him to re-affirm his testimony to Jesus: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” But the fact was noticed by the Pharisees, who, from that day forth, observed the progress of Jesus with jealous eyes. They feared the influence he was gaining with the people. Had they known, they need not have feared, for Jesus had no disposition to use or encourage the favour of the populace. On several occasions he distinctly declined their advances, knowing that not then, or by them, would his Kingdom be established, but “after a long time” and when suffering had prepared the way. But this they did not understand, and consequently they began to watch him with unfriendly eyes. Jesus, knowing their state of mind, went away from the neighbourhood of their power. “He left Judea,” and started on his return to Galilee (John iv. 3). Why should the feelings of enemies affect the movements of one who had the power of God upon him, and who could not be touched till his “hour had come?” It was but a preferring of circumstances favourable for his work. The work he had to do was designed to influence a suitable class who were to become his disciples, and this work was best to be done in peace. He chose peace when he could have it. The time came when he could no longer have it: but then his work was nearly done. At the moment in question, he was but entering upon it, and, therefore, he preferred to get away from the heat and

the excitement, and the sense of insecurity caused to the multitude by the opposition of the Scribes and Pharisees.

To get to Galilee, it was necessary to pass through the province of Samaria, which lay between Judea and Galilee. On the way through Samaria, an interesting incident occurred, in the narration of which, by John, we get closer views of Jesus than in some parts of the apostolic narrative. We find him on the road, "wearied with his journey." This in passing tells us interestingly more things than one. It not only tells us of one "touched with the feeling of our infirmity" (Heb. iv. 15), but it shows us that the Spirit of God, though resting on him without measure, was not available for his personal needs during "the days of his flesh." The Pharisees embittered his dying moments by shouting, "He saved others: himself he cannot save." Their cruel taunt carried a certain truth with it concerning his whole career. He gave strength to the weak; he healed the diseased; he raised the dead. But his own personal needs and sorrows he endured in the weakness of mortal flesh, supported by that faith in the Father, which he possessed in a measure transcending that of all his disciples. The power of God placed at his disposal was for the manifestation of the name of God, and not for the supply of his personal needs. So here we have him toiling along the road in a burning Syrian sun, footsore and weary, and sitting down to rest in the neighbourhood of Sychar or Sychem, where Jacob dwelt, "in the land of promise as in a strange country," some 1,700 years before. He sits down by a well—a well that Jacob had made in those far-off days, and which had retained his name during the long interval. His disciples go away into the city to buy food.

The well exists to this day. It is in a valley, and in full view of Mounts Ebal and Gerrizim, which stand north and south of Shechem. The surrounding scenery is impressive, and has witnessed many events in Israel's history. Chief among them was the muster of the tribes here when Joshua brought them into the land. An imposing array, they stood, six of the tribes on one of these hills and six on the other, while the priests, standing between, recite the principal points in the law, to each of which the people shouted a hearty "Amen" (Deut. xxvii, 11–26; Josh. viii. 30). That was very different from the scene now before us: a solitary man sitting tired at the well in the midst of the quietness and solitude of the picturesque valley, overlooked by two majestic hills. The two scenes were not unconnected, however; they were parts, though widely separate, in the one great work which God, through Israel, is working upon earth for the realisation of His own object in the creation of it. In the one case, He was instructing and developing the nation for the work before it; in the other, He was "last of all" speaking to them by His son, the heir of all things, preparatory to the long reign of desolation about to be established in the land, in punishment of all their sins.

While Jesus "sat thus on the well," a woman from the town approaches to draw water. The woman is "a woman of Samaria"—a descendant of those Assyrian colonists whom Shalmaneser settled in Samaria when the ten tribes had been taken away nearly nine hundred years before. She is one of those therefore, with

whom the Jews would have no dealings, though the Samaritans adopted the traditions of the land and claimed kinship. This fact supplies the key to the conversation that ensued. Jesus, being thirsty, asks the woman for a drink of water. The woman expresses surprise that a Jew should ask a drink from a Samaritan. (We note, by the way, that the woman recognised in Jesus a Jew. He must, therefore, have looked like one, for the woman had no other guide. He was, therefore, unlike the current portraits of him, which nearly all give him an English aspect.) Jesus did not, as most other Jews would have done under the circumstances, proceed to justify the Jewish objection to the claims of the Samaritans. He might justly have done so: but this would have been low ground. It belonged to a state of things which was nearly past and spent. The time had nearly come to give the work of God a wider extension: and Jesus was come expressly as the instrument of that extension. He therefore draws attention to himself. "If thou knewest the gift of God and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink, thou wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water." This was probably said in a tone of kindly dignity that would encourage the woman. She naturally did not see through the figure of his speech. She understood him literally. "Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep, Whence then hast thou that living water?" It then occurs to her that the stranger is perhaps claiming some especial gift in the case. She continues, during a momentary pause which Jesus does not offer to occupy: "Art thou greater than our father Jacob who gave us the well?" (Though a Samaritan woman, she claims Jacob as "father," after the manner of the Samaritans). Jesus does not disparage Jacob. He speaks of things as they are. It is the well that is in question: Whoever drinks of this will thirst again, but he that drinks of the water Jesus can give will never thirst. The water so given will be in him a perennial spring. Jesus was speaking in figure of the immortal life he should bestow; but the woman could not understand this. She supposes he is speaking of literal water which by some medication or virtue, would, in one draught, permanently satiate the thirst of the drinker. She would like to get a drink of such water, and so be saved the trouble of coming constantly to the well. She asks him to give her some of this water.

The superhuman dialectical skill of Christ, so often manifested in collision with his foes, is here apparent in a delicate dilemma. The woman had taken him at his word, and in child-like simplicity, asks him for the superior water he had said he could give. To have said to the woman that she did not understand him, would simply have blocked her path. To have explained that he was speaking in figure would have embarrassed her understanding, and assumed an inconvenient onus of exegesis. He therefore adroitly throws the subject into a channel suited to her capacity, and which relieves it of the necessity for explanation which she was not prepared to receive. He says, "Go, call thy husband." The woman says, "I have no husband." Jesus knew that she had no husband. Why, then, did he ask her to call him? To give him the opportunity of displaying a superhuman knowledge which the woman would herself recognise as an indication of his true character. The opportunity he instantly seizes: "Thou hast well said, I have no husband; for

thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband; in that saidst thou truly.” The effect is instantly as Jesus anticipated and intended. The woman’s attention is arrested as it could not have been by the most lucid explanations of the meaning of his figurative language. “Sir, I perceive thou art a prophet.”

And here there must have been a pause—a brief pause—during which (the woman’s eyes wonderingly and enquiringly fixed on Christ) reflections would occur to her, filling up the apparent gap between the remark that he was a prophet, and the allusion she proceeded to make to the long-standing controversy between the Samaritans and the Jews. She was evidently quick witted and well-informed according to the standard of her day. Discerning the evidence of the power of God with this Jew, her mind opens to the possibility of the Jews being right in their objection to the Samaritan worship. She is, at all events, drawn toward the topic with a disposition to handle it enquiringly. “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye (Jews) say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” Again Jesus avoids the discussion of the Samaritan issue in its narrow sense. He admits that the Samaritans worshipped ignorantly, and that enlightenment in this matter was with the Jews, to whom salvation appertained. But, knowing as he did, that the moment was at hand when worship of every kind would be suspended in the land by the judgment of God overhanging the nation, and when worship would be transferred by the gospel to individual hearts in all parts of the world, he addressed himself to the personal and practical bearing of the question:

“Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father ... the hour cometh and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”

Here was an enlarging of the subject that must have been new and welcome to a Samaritan; though at the same time conveying a rebuke. Christ’s words soared away from the question of locality, which was the vexed question between Samaritan and Jew. They obliterated it altogether—“neither in this mountain (Gerrizim), nor yet at Jerusalem.” Where then? Anywhere and everywhere—wherever there were true worshippers—people knowing God as revealed to Moses and the prophets, and to whom in their conscious hearts, God was a reality, and who in their sincere and loving spirits adored Him. “The Father seeketh such to worship Him,” rather than the genuflecting formalists with whom the Samaritan woman would be familiar, and with whom worship was a matter of performance, rather than of heart. That the Father should seek the worship of men, and find pleasure in it, is a great revelation, on which we may constantly rest with consolation; but it is not this simple fact that Jesus presses on the woman’s attention so much as to point out the sort of worshippers who were acceptable, in contrast to the formalist multitude that then filled the land—both



Judæa and Samaria. Men of light and love would henceforward approach the Father acceptably everywhere, without having to come to a certain place to offer their worship.

This must have been a pleasing view to a sincere woman such as she with whom Jesus was conversing. But a rebuke would be contained in the words, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." To the Samaritans, God was—well, as Jesus said they "knew not what." The ten tribes worshipped Jeroboam's calves at Dan and Bethel, and Baal and other gods of the Canaanites besides. The people who were put in their place "served their own gods" (2 Kings xvii. 29–31) variously named Succoth-benoth, Nergal, Ashima, Nibhaz, Tartak, Adrammelech, Annamlech, &c., mere idols of wood and stone. How much of this idol worship was retained by their descendants, the Samaritans, we have no means of knowing exactly; but the probability is that much of it remained, with the result of preventing them from having any idea of the true nature of God, or acceptable worship. Jesus now rebukes the Samaritan idea which led them to insist so strenuously on a particular place. It is as if he had said—"God is not 'like unto gold or silver or stone, graven by art and man's device': God is not a man; He is not even as one of the imagined deities of the Greeks or Romans. He is spirit—"immortal, invisible, the only wise God." We cannot go from His presence. He is everywhere present. He is an indivisible unit, filling heaven and earth, though having His personal nucleus in heaven. Nothing is hid from His sight. The thoughts of the heart are naked before Him. Consequently, worship can be tendered to Him at any place and at any moment. The essential thing is that it be true worship—the actual adoration of a man's spirit—the homage of felt sincerity and truth."

The woman knew enough of Moses and the prophets to associate this enlarged knowledge with what the Messiah would do for them at his coming. "I know that Messiah cometh," she said ... "when he is come, he will tell us all things." Now was the time for the topstone of the discourse. "I that speak unto thee am he." After all that had passed, this declaration went home to the woman's conviction. She felt it must be so, and in the intensity of her feeling, the disciples having returned, she left further discourse course, and leaving her water pot, went straight back to the city to divulge the great discovery. While she was away, the disciples brought of the food they had procured, and asked Christ to eat. He was evidently too much absorbed with the incident that had just occurred, and with all the great ideas it would awake in his mind, to do so.

The proposal of his disciples was probably made in a callous matter-of-fact way, entirely out of harmony with the spirit he was in. He answered in a way that seemed to rebuff their kindly ministrations. "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." Probably, as in almost all cases among people to-day, the manner of the disciples would seem to unduly magnify the importance of the secular affairs in hand, or to convey a disparagement of "those things that be of God." The disciples, in their unenlightened simplicity, took him up literally. They said among

themselves, "Hath any man brought him ought to eat?" They probably supposed the woman whom they found him talking with had brought him something. He meets their surmisings in words that have probably done more than any other to create a right and adequate idea among disciples in every age, of the kind and degree of earnestness with which the things of God should be held and followed: "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work." It was for the sake of their influence that the words were uttered and recorded. "For your sakes," is the explanation of much—nearly all that Christ said and did. "I am glad for your sakes I was not there." "For their sakes I sanctify myself." "I have given you an example." These are illustrations of a fact that requires to be kept in view. Men who read the sayings of Christ without this fact in view, will often mistake the assertions of lofty truth for petty self-vindication.

When the woman arrived at Samaria, she said to her townsmen, "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?" by which she probably meant that the super-human knowledge of her affairs displayed by Jesus was proof that he was what he had asserted himself to be—the Christ. They were not slow to respond to her words, and soon Christ had a large audience round the well. What he said to them is not recorded. But the favourable impression made upon the woman was evidently extended to them, and was strengthened by what they heard for themselves; for at the end of their interview, they pressed him to break his journey and stay with them a little. He yielded to their request, and stayed with them two days. Their intercourse with him during that time led them finally to the conviction which they expressed before he left, that "This is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."

It is probable that when a few years afterwards, "Samaria received the Word of God," at the hands of the Apostles, Sychem would be among the places visited by Peter (Acts viii. 14–25). If so, the recollections of the Sychemites, going back to this visit of Jesus himself, would be very striking and useful. Some have had a difficulty in reconciling Christ's action on this occasion with the direction he shortly afterwards gave to his disciples, to "go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any cities of the Samaritans enter ye not." There need be no difficulty. Christ did not visit the Samaritan district on this occasion in what we might call an official capacity. He was passing through it on his way to Galilee. What happened was in the way of a private incident and a personal condescension. It was a little before the time in a dispensational sense. If he forbade his disciples to include Samaria in the scope of their evangelistic labours, this was no reason why he should not, in the exercise of his prerogative as the Master, himself, in passing, accept the hospitality of these privileged Sychemites, and speak to them of the great things of God.

## **CHAPTER XV.**

## From Jacob's Well to Capernaum, via Cana and Nazareth.

BIDDING farewell to the Samaritans of Sychem, Jesus, resuming his journey, passes from the shadow of Mount Gerizim, into the open hill-environed country to the north of that mount, traversing which, with his (at this time) very small band of disciples, he enters the gorge at the southeastern extremity of the Carmel range, and emerges upon the plain of Esdraelon, and shortly afterwards enters Galilee. He and his little company of fellow-travellers would be seen by many an indifferent eye as they moved along the dusty toilsome road northwards. Little would the casual on-looker in field and vineyard suspect the greatness of the ordinary-looking band of men that for a moment was visible on the road, and then disappeared as other passers-by. There would be nothing in their outward mien to distinguish them from the ordinary Jewish foot passengers, who traversed the land in great numbers, about the time of the feasts, to and from the Holy City. Jesus had to be seen in the act of teaching before the difference between him and other men was apparent. And even then, at this stage of his work, he would but appear as an unusually grave, dignified, and earnest Jew. It required subsequent events to manifest the true greatness of him in whom at first Israel saw no beauty that they should desire him.

Arrived in Galilee, Jesus made straight for Cana, where he had wrought his first miracle. He had not been long there when the news got abroad that he had returned from Jerusalem. The news reached Capernaum, where the son of an eminent citizen, styled "a nobleman," and said to be one of Herod's officers, lay at the point of death. This man, hearing of it, went to Cana where Jesus was, to ask Jesus to come and heal his son. Why should he suppose Jesus could do this? He must have heard of the miracles of healing he had performed at Jerusalem. He had probably made the acquaintance of Jesus during his first visit to Capernaum already referred to, and acquired some idea of who he was. He would doubtless be aware of John's ministry, on which he would probably be an attendant; and would not be ignorant of the testimony borne to Jesus as the Messiah. For some or all of these reasons, he had confidence in Christ's ability to disperse the shadow that lay on his house; for his son "was at the point of death." He "besought Jesus that he would come down and heal his son." But Jesus did not meet the nobleman's request with the ready and sympathetic compliance he showed on other occasions. He rather held the man off with something of a chiding manner. "Except," said he, "ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." There must have been a reason for this. Probably the nobleman's importunity was too much of the self-interested order, like the push of a crowd for some advantage. Possibly, also, there was an unacceptable element of challenge in it, as much as to say to Jesus that if he were the Messiah, he was bound to do this. Likely also, with many others, he showed more interest in the signs than in the thing indicated by them. So Jesus uttered a reproof which, however, did not check the natural ardour of the man. "Sir, come down ere my

child die.” He expected Jesus would have to go down to Capernaum. It was literally a going down, for Capernaum lay on the margin of the sea of Galilee in the Jordan valley, while Cana was among the hills to the west. Perhaps Jesus would have gone down (as he did in other cases) had the man’s attitude been such as to command his entire approval, but he did not do so. He granted his request without going. His power was greater than the nobleman knew. “Go thy way; thy son liveth.” The nobleman’s faith in Christ was strong enough to place the most implicit faith in this brief word. He started at once for home, twenty miles off. His mind being at rest, he probably rested for the night at one of the wayside inns; for it was next day when he reached the neighbourhood of Capernaum. He was met outside the town by his servants with the good but not surprising news that his son was all right. He asked them when the improvement began. They told him the hour—“Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.” The father recognised this as the very hour at which Jesus spoke the words of healing, “and himself believed with his whole house.” How could it be otherwise?

Was ever such power seen on earth before ? It was power superhuman that turned water into wine on the spot at Cana, and that cured the sick people brought to his presence at Jerusalem, of which the Galilean people had been witnesses (Jno. iv. 45); but here was healing performed at a distance of 20 miles with the rapidity of lightning—simply by the utterance of a word. Peter afterwards spoke of “miracles and wonders and signs which GOD did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know” (Acts ii. 22). This is the all-sufficient and only explanation of the marvel. God alone has command of the universal, invisible, inscrutable energy of creation, in which all things subsist, out of which they have been made by His contriving power and commanding word. To Him distance and locality are no impediment. The impulse of His will is equal to the instantaneous accomplishment of anything, anywhere. He places His power at the disposal of His servants when His work and wisdom require—sometimes angels—sometimes men. To manifest His existence and power to Israel and the Egyptians, He placed His power in the angel that appeared to Moses, who exercised it at the prayer and signal of Moses by appointment. To establish Jesus as His Name-bearer in the midst of Israel, He placed His power in him by His presence. Jesus, as the Son of David, did not the works, as he said, “The Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works.” It was needful that the works he did should be such as should truly bear witness of him—that is, that they should be works beyond the range of human accomplishment. For had they been such as man, by any contrivance, could do, they would not have constituted the proof that was necessary; the way would have been open for men to think that perhaps Jesus did them as a man of contrivance, and that, therefore, God was not with him. It was needful that the foundation of faith in him, as the Saviour, should be laid in a manner admitting of no doubt. It was, therefore, necessary that he should do works beyond all human possibility. It is his doing of such works that leaves men no excuse for not believing in him. Jesus would have no fault to find with men for not believing in him if he had only done ordinary things. This is what he said: “If I had not done among them works which none other man did, they

had not had sin" (Jno. xv. 24). That he did such works will be realised by all who give attention to them. There have been many pretenders of one kind or another; and they have done wonderful things in their way: healing, and demon-out-casting, and sign-working of a certain sort, Jesus admitted to be on the list of their accomplishments (Mark xiii. 22; Matt. xii. 27). But which of their achievements will compare with those of Jesus and his apostles, who with a word could even raise the dead at any distance?

After remaining a short time at Cana, Jesus makes what would appear to be a farewell visit to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and where he was well known to all the townspeople, only as such could know him—that is superficially, as a person with whose face and figure they were familiar, whose family and affairs they knew, but whose inner man they could no more know or fathom than they could plumb the dizzy depths of the universe. As the proclamation of the gospel was afterwards by his orders to "begin at Jerusalem," so his own part in the work was to "begin at Nazareth." "As his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read." There was a good attendance. It was no strange or striking thing for them to see Jesus rise to read. They were to hear strange and striking things before they dispersed. They had heard strange and striking rumours about him and his doings at Cana, Jerusalem, and Capernaum: but the effect was only to fill them with disgust and envy at his presumption. "They were offended at him." Their state of mind was indicated by the question, "Is not this Jesus, whose father and mother we know? and are not his sisters here with us?" True, O small-minded people of Nazareth, who have kindred in all the earth in every age. This was the Jesus of your acquaintance, but not of your knowledge: you did not and could not know him. You could know the colour of his eyes, the shape of his face, the contour of his person, the sound of his voice; but you could not enter into his mind or understand or sympathise with his loves and aims. You could but know the outside, and even this not accurately. His father and mother you knew: yet his father you did not know: for as Jesus afterwards said, 'Had ye known me, ye would have known my Father also.' Ye thought that he, Jesus, was the mere son of Joseph—a mere Jew like yourselves: ye knew not that he was 'the Word made flesh,' the son of the ever living and only true God."

And so when he stood up to read in their synagogue, they were very little in a mood to receive what he had to say. People whose self-esteem is overshadowed and hurt are liable to be incapable of discerning greatness when it is before them. They were privileged to hear the Son of God read a portion from the prophet Isaiah; but it was no music in their ears to hear these words: "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound: to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." He would read this with impressive deliberation and significant intonation, he read no more. He closed the book or roll, and handed it back to the officiating rabbi and sat down,—with

gravity and dignity. Doubtless all eyes were now upon him. His manner, coupled with the rumours that were afloat, accentuated their attention. What would he say or do next?

He spoke. His words were brief, but not ambiguous. "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." There could be no mistaking the meaning of this. It was plainly to say "I am he to whom Isaiah refers." Most of the audience saw this, and were for the moment impressed with his words; but their prejudiced feelings soon began to get the upper hand. "Is not this Joseph's son?" As much as to say, how can a man who is Joseph's son, whom we know, be the Christ, whose origin when he comes no man will know? (for this was the tradition—John vii. 27). A hum of sceptical conversation passed around. They began to suggest "surely he will shew us some miracles."

Jesus anticipates and answers their line of thought. "Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do here in thy country." Well, what had he to say to this apparently unanswerable challenge? Only this, that the gift of God is not for all, in this state of sin: that He doeth as it pleaseth Him: working all things after the counsel of His own will. But He does not put the fact in this naked form, which would have had no force with them. He does it by reference to the Scripture history in which they trusted: "Many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land. But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha, the prophet, and none of them was cleansed saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luke iv. 25–27).

The inference arising from this citation was obvious enough to sting severely. A greater than Elijah or Elisha was before them, but it did not follow that the power of God which was with him would be put forth on their behalf. Israel's disobedience in the days of Elijah and Elisha had withheld from them the good that might have come: and the same cause might produce a like effect now.

Why did Jesus adopt this austere attitude towards them? We are told that, as a matter of fact, Jesus "could do no mighty works there because of their unbelief" (Matt. xiii. 58); not that their unbelief disabled him for the performance of anything he might choose to do, but that their negative state put it out of the question that he should do works which he never performed except good was to be done by it. No good is to be done with some people; and this was the case with the inhabitants of Nazareth, who had been too familiar with Jesus from his infancy to admit of their estimating him truly. It was an illustration of a rule that is almost universal. As Jesus told them, "No prophet is accepted in his own country." The current mediocre mind is incapable of distinguishing between appearances and realities. The first, local and limited impressions take shape as the permanent truth of a thing or person, and from this they never can emancipate themselves,

or open their minds to discern the true and actual worth of a man whom they have known from the beginning. On the other hand, this same class of mind, from a similar incompetence acting in another way, is easily impressed and even captivated by the pretensions of a stranger, who may be an empty wind-bag of pomposities, or plausibilities. Loud-sounding humbug is liable to succeed in this shallow world, especially if bedecked with the meretricious attractions of title and fame. On this principle, false Christs have succeeded where the true was crucified. The true Christ was modest, and glorified his Father; the false were arrogant and self-assertive. Hence the popularity of Barchochebas, where Jesus was hated. As Jesus said beforehand, "I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not. If another come in his own name, him ye will receive."

The words of Christ had the reverse of a soothing effect on the audience in the Nazareth synagogue. To soothe and please, you must put people on good terms with themselves; and to do this, you must flatter—that is, say undeserved good things to or of them. This was what Jesus did not—could not do. His words had an exasperating effect. The people, "when they heard these things were filled with wrath," and their wrath was not noisy harmless wrath—noisy enough very likely, but not harmless. With the excitability and impetuosity of the Jews, "they rose up" en masse and laid hold of Jesus and turned him out of the building, and tumultuously led him to the edge of the steep hill on which Nazareth was built, and which is to be seen, as travellers tell us, to this day. There their purpose was to throw him down headlong, and so destroy him; but they strangely failed in their purpose. When they reached the spot, their resolution or their skill forsook them. Jesus, releasing himself from their hands, simply made his way through them, and no man felt able or disposed to stop him. They opened the way for him, and he went his way down the upper slope of the hill in the direction of Capernaum, 20 miles off, to which he repaired. The fact is, he was under a protection which, though invisible, was invincible; and through that protection no man could break till permission was given. As it is written on another occasion, "His hour was not yet come;" and until that hour had come, he was under the shadow of Jehovah's hand, hid in which he was as safe in the midst of the threatening, surging multitude as in the solitude of the mountain top to which he of times resorted for prayer.

In Capernaum, to which he now removed, Jesus was no stranger, and here he spent quite a considerable time before departing on the extensive journey which he afterwards undertook. His plan was to get at the public ear of Capernaum through the synagogues. This was easy for him to do. The synagogues were open to all Jews, but especially to a Jew of whom such strange reports were in circulation, and of whom such high expectations were beginning to be entertained by many. The Jews assembled in the synagogues for reading and exhortation out of the law and the prophets every sabbath day, and Jesus availed himself of this opportunity, taking several synagogues by turn, sabbath by sabbath. Large audiences listened to him every sabbath. "They were astonished at his doctrine, for his word was with power" (Luke iv. 32). The sense in which

“his word was with power” is explained by the statement of Matthew, that “he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” The scribes would be like our modern clergy—the mechanical rehearsers of dead formulas, without the snap and ardour that come with intelligent conviction. Jesus taught with emphasis and fire—quiet and grave, but with the animation and pointedness of tone and gesture that result from certainty and knowledge. He likewise taught with a simplicity that enabled him to say much in little, and to be easily understood. “The common people,” we are told, “heard him gladly.” They will never hear his like again till Christ send forth a host of similar teachers in the happy day of his kingdom. But it was his miracles that imparted the principal zest to what he had to say. The people never knew what he might do. At every little interval, some great work of power would be performed, and that, too, of a kind that conferred benefit on the subjects of it.

He had not been long in Capernaum, when, on a certain sabbath, in one of the synagogues in which he was discoursing, the quiet of the assembly was broken by the shout of a madman in the audience. “Let us alone,” said he, under the excitement produced in a disordered mind by the impressive words of Christ: “What have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art: the Holy one of God.” We can imagine the momentary tumult that would be produced in the audience by this outburst. It was soon stopped by Christ. The man’s madness is described as having been “a spirit of an unclean demon.” To this the words of Christ were addressed as distinguished from the helpless sufferer from the dementing disorder: “Hold thy peace, and come out of him.” On this the man leaped forward into the midst of the synagogue, and after a momentary paroxysm, in which the disordering spirit worked its way out of his organism, he was seen to be quite himself, cured of his madness. The people present were naturally amazed at such an exhibition of power. “What a word is this?” exclaimed they among themselves, “for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out.”

The belief was almost universal in the days of Jesus, that mental malady of every kind was due to the presence of a demon, which had taken up its abode in the man, perverting his faculties. What a demon was, according to this belief, is only to be learnt from the writings of the Pagans (Greek and Roman), but even these do not give us any clear conception, beyond this, that demons were invisible, intelligent, immaterial beings, inhabiting the air, and fulfilling a sort of mediatorial function between the gods and men—working in the latter the will of the former—for good or evil, but mostly evil. Of their origin, they have nothing beyond the suggestion that many of them were once men. The whole conception is, of course, a thoroughly heathenish one, and foreign to the scheme of things exhibited in Moses and the prophets.

Jesus took no pains to confute the idea. His mission was to show the power of God, and not to demolish heathen theories of human woes. He took things as he found them, and spoke of popular things in the popular style without committing



himself to popular views. Beelzebub was the prince of the demons, according to popular thought, and by league with him, it was supposed Jesus exorcised the demonised. But there was no Beelzebub in reality. He was one of the imaginary gods of the Philistines. Yet Jesus argued as if Beelzebub were a reality, saying:—"If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out?" So in the curing of madness in its various forms, he spoke as the people spoke, without meaning to endorse their foolish thought. In a sense, he could do so without impropriety. When a man is in a state of lunacy, there is literally an unclean spirit in him—that is, a diseased electric virus, the extraction of which restores him to soundness. It applies to other things besides madness. In various kinds of diseases, an evil spirit or influence exists, and can be taken out and transferred from one to another. Cure by mesmeric application has made us familiar with this. I remember curing a person of an acute rheumatic pain which lodged itself in me the moment the person lost it, and remained with me several days. Jesus brought all kinds of unclean spirits out of people by a word. He could, therefore, use the language of the time, as in a rough way expressing a fact, without, however, meaning to sanction the heathenish idea in which it had its origin.

In all cases, the afflicted were the speakers of the things imputed to the demons. It is a diseased man that is before us. The incidents and the utterances are all within the boundary line of a medical explanation. The one or two cases that may seem an exception to this we shall have under our notice as we proceed. In the case before us, a madman is in the audience. Madmen were to be met with frequently in those days—not that madmen were more numerous than now, but that no system had been adopted of collecting and having them in asylums. They would be under private restraint here and there, but mild cases would be allowed at large, and easily might a harmless lunatic obtain admission to a synagogue where Christ was to be heard. Christ's preaching had a powerful effect upon his weak and deranged intellect; but the principal part of this effect would be due to the prevalent excitement caused by the report circulated everywhere that the Messiah had appeared. Of this excitement, a weak-minded man would have more than his share.

The Messiah's appearance, it was well known would not be an unmixed blessing. John the Baptist had declared that "his fan was in his hand and that he would thoroughly purge his floor, and burn up the chaff with fire unquenchable." There would, therefore, be a strong ingredient of apprehension in the public anticipation that existed. A sense as of impending judgment would rest on many. This explains the madman's ejaculations. He went with many others to hear one who was said to be the Messiah. He listened to him in a crowded and heated synagogue. He instinctively felt as he listened to one who "spake as one having authority," that this was indeed the Christ. His fear grew to excitement. His ungovernable feelings boiled over. It was the natural language of such a state of mind for him, speaking as one of the audience, to say, "Leave us alone; what

have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God.”

## CHAPTER XVII.

### The “Sermon on the Mount.”

THE last chapter introduced this subject. The “blessedness” pronounced on the “poor in spirit,” the “mournful,” the “meek,” and those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” is also proclaimed by Jesus, on behalf of “the merciful,” “the pure in heart,” “the peacemakers,” and “the persecuted,” implying characteristics of kin with those already noticed. It was something new to extol such qualities; and their glorification by Christ has done much to disseminate them, even in the present chaotic phase of the work of God upon the earth. The manners and practices of civilised mankind are much milder and more humane since these words of Christ were uttered and recorded. The sentiment of mercy was comparatively unknown in the times of Greek and Roman paganism. Purity, peace, and submission to maltreatment have been practiced only where Christ’s doctrine has been influential. The eulogy of them and the declaration of a blessing on those who practice them, implies that without them, saivation will not be attained. And this is indeed what is taught expressly in other parts of the apostolic writings, such as “He shall have judgment without mercy that hath shown no mercy” (Jas. ii. 13), “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. xii. 14), “Woe unto you when all men speak well of you” (Luke iv. 26).

But if the eulogy of mercy, purity, and peace distinguished Jesus from all who went before him, how much more was he marked off as a new and revolutionary teacher by his command to “Resist not evil,” to “love those who hate,” and submit to the compulsions of evil men, yea, even go beyond their desires in our compliances. Such precepts were opposed to the radical impulses of flesh and blood. The injunction of them is one of the strongest proofs of what Christ asserted when he said to the Pharisees: “Ye are from beneath. I am pore above. Ye are of of this world, I am not of this world, I proceeded forth and came from God: neither came I of myself, but he sent me ... He that sent me is true, and I speak to the world those things that I heard of him.”—(Jno. viii. 23, 42, 26). Had Jesus been a natural thinker, he would have taught in harmony with nature’s impressions and instincts, as do the “philosophers,” so-called, of every age and country. He would, therefore, have inculcated self-defence, and would have glorified the virtues of “patriotism” as appreciated and applauded by flesh and blood everywhere. He would have scouted principles and practices which, apart from their special objects, are pusillanimous, cowardly, and contemptible. But he did none of these. He deprecated the class of character in highest repute among the Greeks and Romans, and Britons too; and enjoined that which is with them convertible with poltroonery. And he did so, not as the result of a moral philosophy he had embraced or conceived. He did not enjoin the maxim of non

resistance on the ground of its tendency to conciliate a foe or develop control. It was simply a matter of command resting on authority. "These things I command you" (Jno. xv. 17). And the authority of the command rested with the Father. "The Father who sent me, he gave me a commandment what I should say" (Jno. xii. 49). And the commandment simply called for obedience and left no room for anything else. "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you" (Jno. xv. 14). "When ye have done all say, Behold we are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do" (Luke xvii. 10). In this, we learn the object of the command—the performance of duty: and on this hangs the question of acceptance. "He that doeth the will of my Father shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt. vii. 21). "He that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, shall be likened unto a man that built his house upon a rock" (Matt. vii. 24).

When this is apprehended, all mystery and difficulty vanish from "the Sermon on the Mount." The commandments it contains were not uttered as moral maxims best fitted for the regulation of the world, but for the test of obedience, and for the restraint and discipline of the natural man in those who are called to share and reflect the glory of God in a future state of existence (on the earth by resurrection). Their inconvenience and their hardness, instead of being enigmatical, become transparent in the wisdom of their adaptation to the object in view. How is a man tested but by a difficult feat? How is he trained but by difficult exercises? When God would prove Abraham, did he ask him to make a feast for his servants? No; he asked him to "offer up his only son Isaac whom he loved." When God would prove men in advance for the unspeakable exaltation of His kingdom, should it be by exercises that leave pride and wilfulness untouched, or by those which test obedience to the utmost, and give opportunity for that humbling of ourselves as little children, without which Jesus said we shall in no case enter into the kingdom? Reason cannot falter in the answer, and the answer justifies to the utmost those very features in "The Sermon on the Mount," which are stumbling blocks to the wise of this world. It is all a question of faith in the declared purpose of God. Will God set up a kingdom? (Dan. ii. 44). Is Jesus the appointed king? (Acts xvii. 7). Has Jesus "called" for associates from among the world? (Rev. xvii. 14; Jno. xv. 16–21). Does he, in the choosing of them, adopt a process of "purifying them unto himself a peculiar people?" (Tit. ii. 14; Rev. iii. 19). When a man is sufficiently enlightened to give a bold "Yes" in answer to these questions, he will have no difficulty in recognizing the perfection of wisdom in those commandments in "The Sermon on the Mount," which, with nearly all men, are impossible rules of life, but which with Christ in view, become habitual principles of action.

The superhuman character of the discourse is manifest from other features. Who, for example, as a matter of mere moral philosophy, would have thought of addressing disciples as "the salt of the earth," and "the light of the world?" (Matt. v. 13, 14). Mere moral philosophy—alias, the speculations of mortal flesh as to the ways of God—places all men on a level in the operation of its laws and principles. But here is a declaration which assumes that all men outside the

narrow circle addressed are in corruption and darkness. This, indeed, is the express teaching of the Spirit of Christ elsewhere—that without him there is no hope (Jno. vi. 53–57, Eph. ii. 12): that the way is narrow and the gate strait that leads to life, and the finders of the way few (Matt. vii. 14). It is this exclusive claim that is at once the stumbling-block of the naturally-minded, and the evidence of the divinity of the work of Christ. It is not in man to put forth such claims, except in madness; and even when occasionally put forth by madmen, it is the aberrated refraction of Christ in a distempered mind. It is not original, as in the case of Christ: nor has it the dignity and self-evident truth that it has in the case of Christ. There are not in any case the proofs that there are in the case of Christ. No man can maintain that Christ was mad in view of his teaching, his miracles, and his resurrection. Not being mad, such claims are in themselves evidence of the truth of what he said—that God was in him, and that God sent him, and that his words were the words of God (Jno. xiv. 10; xii. 49; viii. 42).

His disciples—i.e., those who fully receive and faithfully re-echo his teaching, which is THE TRUTH as nothing else is—are “the light of the world” in so far as they reflect his light; for, primarily, it is he who is “the light of the world,” as he said (Jno. viii. 12), and away from the truth, all is the darkness of nature. Jesus therefore commands them to let their light shine that men may see it. Hence it is their duty to let it be manifest to those among whom they are situated, that they are children of the light—believers, lovers, and performers of the truth. This is done when the hope is professed according to seasonable opportunity, and its invitation pressed upon attention, and its power shown in the effect it has upon action. This attitude is intensely odious to those who are not disciples of Christ. It is the attitude of obedience and wisdom for all that, and will be acknowledged and rewarded openly at a time when the mightiest of natural men will be glad to stoop at the feet of the meanest of Christ’s accepted disciples.

Jesus supplies the key to his mission in the next statement. People were supposing that he had come to set up “a new religion”—disjoined from all that God had done and said to Israel by Moses and the prophets. He gives the death blow to this misconception in the words: “Think not that I am come to destroy THE LAW OR THE PROPHETS. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil” (Matt. v. 17). The Christ of the New Testament as distinguished from Christ of modern theology and philosophy is—CHRIST THE FULFILMENT OF MOSES AND THE PROPHETS. This puts “the Old Testament” in its right place, and brings to bear the true light in which Jesus is to be regarded. If we cannot understand Jesus in harmony with Moses and the prophets, we have not got hold of the scriptural Jesus, but “another Jesus” than that preached by the apostles. This is indeed the position of the professing Christian world. They hold and promulgate a conception of Jesus which either compels them to put aside Moses and the prophets, or at least renders that preponderating section of the Holy Scriptures utterly useless to them. Hence, all classes of so-called “Christians” deal very loosely with the Old Testament Scriptures, and in many cases surrender them altogether. Jesus declares that not “one jot or one tittle” of them should remain

unfulfilled. It was his mission to fulfil them, and to fulfil them all. He has already done much in their fulfilment. In what he has done, he laid the basis of a complete fulfilment. The complete fulfilment awaits his second coming, when, as he afterwards caused to be proclaimed by John in Patmos to all his disciples throughout the ages, "The mystery of God shall be FINISHED, as he hath declared to His servants' prophets (Rev. x. 7).

He next exhibits an aspect of his teaching which is exactly nullified by the "evangelical" and other preachings of the day: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v. 20). "Only believe," is the cry of preachers of all kinds. It is an easy, pleasant doctrine, but false. Believing on Christ will commend us to God, but it will not secure salvation unless it is accompanied by obedience of what God by Christ commands. Jesus says so in this very discourse: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. vii. 2). The will of the Father is expressed in the commandments of the Son; and the righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees is the righteousness that consists of doing those commandments. The seed of the woman are defined as those who "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. xii. 17). As Jesus says, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you" (Jno. IV. 14). It is in view of this that the commandments in "The Sermon on the Mount" become so important.

He proceeds to rehearse them: the chief of them we have already glanced at. He goes on to prohibit unjust anger, contemptuous epithets, the nursing of wrath, lustful contemplations, swearing, the resistance of encroachment, the refusal of alms. He enjoins merciful liberality, the returning of good for evil, anonymousness of almsgiving, secrecy and brevity of prayer, the cheerful and unmurmuring endurance of affliction, abstinence from hoarding (in connection with which he makes the pointed declaration: "YE CANNOT SERVE GOD AND MAMMON.") He deprecates anxiety as to livelihood, positively forbidding the questions, "What shall we eat? What shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be clothed?" "After all these things," says he, "the Gentiles seek. Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of those things. Seek ye FIRST the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." He condemns the hypercriticism that hunts after blemishes in a neighbour's character; forbids the "judgment" which is his prerogative alone; (as Paul says, "Judge nothing before the time until THE LORD COME, who will make manifest the hidden things of darkness"—I Cor. iv. 5); recommends care in the exhibition of holy things; boldness in prayer, and a sympathetic regard for our neighbour's point of view in all transactions—doing unto him as we would that he should do to us. Reminding disciples of the difficulty of being saved, he warns them against false prophets, who always teach an easy way for the pleasing of men. He tells them that such are to be discerned by their anti-scriptural characteristics. He assures them that a nominal or theoretical acknowledgment of his lordship will be of no value to any

man at last: that only those are acceptable who do what he has required, and that many at last will claim his favour on the score of preaching and prophesying, and even miracle working, whom he will reject as in reality workers of iniquity. He concludes with the well-known house-building illustration of the folly of admiring his teaching without acting it out: the house built on the sand comes down on the day of flood.

Of the immense audience who listened to him, we are told, they were “astounded at his doctrine”—not so much at the matter as the manner; “for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes.” The scribes were uncertain, timid, and formal: Jesus was earnest, clear, unhesitating, authoritative. The scribes feared and taught by a human standard—the tradition of the elders. They taught thus, not as a matter of individual conviction, but as the accepted rule with which it was convenient to comply: Jesus taught with the emphasis of knowledge, divinely derived, and with the ardour of a pure love, and the clearness and dignity of a noble purpose. Jesus knew what he was about: the others did not. Solomon says, “knowledge causeth a man’s face to shine.”

There is a great difference between imitators and men that speak from the heart: between such as aim to please men and those who seek to please God: between conventional garnishers of accepted principles, and those who draw truth as living water from the hidden primeval rocks. Such was the difference between Jesus and the scribes—a difference which the people could see in his manner.

The situation is somewhat reversed now. It is in writing and not in speaking that we have to make the acquaintance of the words of Christ—by reading, not by hearing. It is the matter rather than the manner by which we have to judge, and a right judgment on this head will engender the same astonishment that the listener felt at his manner. The matter is truly sublime. The difficulty of estimating it aright, arises from familiarity. The “Sermon on the Mount” has been so long before the world as to have become an obsolete and worn out form of speech with the fastidious Athenians whose taste is always itching for a new sensation. It requires an effort of the understanding—(an effort which repetition will reward with success)—to disentangle it from the smothering associations of modern life, and go back and see it as it appeared when it came from his lips on that picturesque day in the open air on the mountain side. It came forth then as a constellation of electric brightness against the dark sky of human sterility and insignificance. And it shines still with glory undiminished for the eyes of those who can see. The smoke of a bonfire will hide the stars from the people heaping on the fagots: but the stars shine all the same, and reveal their stupendous form and splendour to a telescope in the next street. The people are all engaged in bonfires of one kind and another, and they cannot see the glory of the “Sermon on the Mount” for the smoke they make: but it is all there for those who will apply the instruments of spiritual eyesight.

Here is no uncertain human philosophy, bewildering with its cloudy vagueness, and fatiguing the mind with futile abstractions. Here we have an authoritative rule of life—simple as the alphabet, and reliable as the guidance of the pole star to ships at sea:—a straight, definite, dogmatic enunciation of duty in the practical relations of this mortal life,—authoritative because divine—and bringing with it the most beautifying moral results whether as character seen by the observer, or mental state as experienced by the man who obeys. Its excellency will be seen in the beautiful results necessarily developed where it is accepted and practised as the rule of life,—especially when these results are compared with the moral and intellectual stolidity of Greek and Roman paganism.

What, for example, can exceed the beauty or the comfort of the anticipation of ineffable good created in the mind of the believer by the assurance of “blessedness” as the upshot of a course of mercy, meekness, purity, and righteousness, pursued even in sorrow or persecution? What can induce a greater sense of circumspection than the information that Christ regards us as the light of the world and the salt of the earth? What can tend more powerfully to elevate and purify the character than the intimation that righteousness only will secure an entrance into the Kingdom of God? What can more powerfully modify the harshness, or mollify the asperity of the natural character than the declaration that even anger is sin, and the use of terms of personal reproach an offence endangering salvation? What more conducive to chastity than the reprobation of impurity even in thought? Consider, also, the chasteness of speech engendered by the command to “Swear not at all:” the gentleness of character calculated to result from the command to resist not evil: the kindness and urbanity necessarily springing from the effort to give in to importunities, even of unreason, and even to return benefits for the harm done by those who hate us; the modesty and genuineness certain to result from the enjoined habit of doing good unseen and unknown, and praying in secret. How noble, also, the recommended cheerfulness that endures grief without parading it: and the industry that is busy without avarice; and the stewardship that is faithful without anxiety.

Such a model of perfect character was never conceived before the days of Christ. “Virtue” had been philosophically lauded, but the thing meant by that term was a nebulous abstraction, or else a quality attaching to only one or two limited excellencies. The “virtue” of pagan morality was as unlike the “new man” outlined in the precepts of Christ, as the works of man are unlike the works of nature. If there was courage in it, there was no compassion. If there was hardihood, there was no tenderness. If there was endurance, there was none of the patience that puts up with evil that can be dispensed with. If there was valour or friendship, there was none of the magnanimity that can pass over an injury or benefit a foe. Ambition, and not the love of God, was the ruling motive: to get gain, and not to do duty, was the recognised policy: to vanquish foes and not to relieve the afflicted, was the crowning glory. Truth was always held in subservience to interest.

There have been disparagements of “the Sermon on the Mount” that are not consistent with it as a whole. Cynical criticism has seized on isolated features, and exaggerated them to the exclusion or eclipse of other parts which give them symmetry of beauty. Enlarging on the pronounced blessedness of “the poor in spirit,” or on the obligation to “resist not evil,” or on the command to “take no thought for to-morrow,” enmity has sought to represent the whole discourse as an emasculating and contemptible rule of life. Such tactics are very old, and will only be successful with those whose predispositions are in harmony with them. They Cannot prevail with those who exercise moral discernment on the word of Christ themselves.

Such discernment perceives a counterpoise operating in all parts of the discourse, with the result of preventing any of the moral imperfections that would spring from an isolated precept acting by itself. A perfect equilibrium comes from the action of the whole, and it was never intended that any part should be left out. A man of meekness, resisting not evil, and taking no thought for the morrow, will not degenerate into effeminacy and sloth, when he is called upon also to let his light shine before men, to exceed the Pharisees in righteous deeds, to be prompt in seeking reconciliation with the offended, to do good to those who hate him, and at the same time to have a quick eye for spiritual imposture. All this would indicate and foster an executiveness of character quite equal to that required in the affairs of the children of this world: only it would be executiveness tempered and mollified by the law that makes gentleness and non-resentfulness a matter of obligation. The sinners have the vigour and the executiveness without the oil of moral repression. Consequently, there is an undercurrent of harshness in their moral composition which is ready to flame into anger and destructiveness against any interference with their rights They know nothing about doing good and suffering for it and taking it patiently; because they lack that faith in God which is the inner light and inspiration of the whole “Sermon on the Mount.” The “Sermon on the Mount” pre-supposes the recognition of “the Father who seeth in secret” (Matt. vi. 4), and who “knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (32). Take this away, and the discourse would fall shrunk and lustreless as a dead fish. In fact, the discourse would cease to exist if this element were withdrawn. Allusion to the bearing of the Father’s recognition and power on actions commanded, runs throughout (not taking into account “The Lord’s Prayer,” in which it comes to brilliant focus). No true judgment of the discourse can be formed if this is left out of view. It is the beautiful underglow of the whole. A man who sees God, as this discourse requires: who loves him as the discourser did: who has the faith in Him that He commands, would be the last man on earth to be spiritless or vapid or slothful. There probably lives not the man whose conformity to it has been perfect in all particulars; but there are measures of attainment in the case: and it will remain an incontrovertible truth to the end of the world, that those who come most nearly to the commandments of Christ in the sermon on the mount, are the most interesting and lovable of the human race.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### From the “Sermon on the Mount” to the First Tempest on the Sea of Galilee.

THE “Sermon on the Mount” being concluded, the people looked at each other and exchanged expressions of surprise and admiration. They had never heard such a teacher before—bold, grave, emphatic, ardent, lucid, independent, authoritative. They would all agree with the verdict of the officers sent to apprehend him on another occasion, and returning without doing “their duty:” “Never man spoke like this man.” None had presumed, as he had done, to place his authority above Moses. Several times he had said, “It was said unto them of old time ... thus and so; but I say unto you, thus and so.” It was something new for a public teacher to say “Behold a greater than Solomon—a greater than Jonas—is here”—“In this place is one greater than the temple”—“Lord even of the Sabbath day” (Matt. xii. 6–8; Luke xi. 31, 32).

The pleasure his teaching gave them was not very deep. It charmed them by the novel sensation it imparted to them: it impressed them with its benevolent positiveness and its grave and righteous emphasis. Except as regards a few, its true nature was not discerned. Had they known that “the Spirit of the Lord God was upon him” (Is. lxi. 1), filling him with wisdom and understanding (Is. xi. 2), making his mouth a sharp sword and a polished shaft (Is. xlix. 2), and pouring grace upon his lips, and rendering him fairer than the children of men (Psa. xlv. 2)—had they known that in very deed, the God of Abraham dwelt in this human form in the abiding fulness of His presence, and addressed them through the earnest eyes of this Galilean mechanic, they would have listened with the reverent and rapt attention that will be the universal habit in the day when every knee shall bow to him, and every tongue confess, to the glory of God the Father. Though they did not “behold his glory” as the disciples did (Jno. i. 14), they were attracted by the charm of his teaching and the wonderful nature of his works.

When he came down from the mountain, they followed him. A long straggling procession might have been seen as he moved away from the place. Jesus excused the people: he pitied them, realising, as he did, that “they were as sheep having no shepherd.” They had no one to look after them with the needful wisdom, kindness, and power Men require looking after. They cannot manage themselves so as to live to any true purpose. They do not look after one another, but destroy one another. It has been the case in every age and country since Adam was sent out of Eden to shift for himself. When, therefore, a great leader like Christ presents himself with a clear and certain voice, and power to bestow the blessings to which he points, it is inevitable that the people should follow him. Jesus understood it, and allowed a measure of it, at the same time knowing that it could be to no practical purpose as yet. He knew the Father’s plan he had

come to execute. He knew that the work before him was a brief teaching work of three years and a half, to be closed in that laying down of his life for the world, which excluded all idea of present triumph, and to be followed by a long absence during an appointed interval of darkness and silence. This knowledge would intensify the compassion with which he would tolerate the attendance of the shepherdless crowd, while leading him also to that non-committal attitude of which John speaks (Jno. ii. 24).

Arrived by "the lake of Gennesaret" (or Sea of Galilee), he evidently rested a few days—probably at Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. We may infer this from the incident that happened by the shore "The people pressed upon him to hear the Word of God." The thronging was inconvenient. A crowd can be managed when there are barricades and police; but here were no such helps, but only the moral influence of a defenceless man and his friends in the presence of a mass of people whose interest had been aroused to the point of obtrusiveness. To escape the embarrassment of the situation, Jesus got into one of the empty boats standing close to the shore, which turned out to be Peter's, in which in fact he had been fishing the previous night, while Jesus was resting. Peter's boat would not be likely to be moored after a night's fishing, at any other place than his own. Peter might have a house at Capernaum and carry on the fishing business at Bethsaida, which was not far distant. Jesus "prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land." Peter complied with alacrity, and, the boat having been moored, Jesus "taught the people out of the ship," a striking situation certainly,—the shore lined with spectators to the water's edge, and Jesus addressing them from the boat, perhaps fifty yards off. We may be sure the people would be very attentive. They would all hear, for a smooth water surface is a capital conductor of sound.

What was said is not recorded. We must judge from his utterances on other occasions. In the state of mind generated by the truth, we naturally wish that every word had been preserved—every speech reported. But we may be sure we have enough for the purpose for which any record at all was made. We are greatly privileged in having so much. It might easily have been that we had known nothing of "the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth." Some may think that a fuller report would have been more influential with the common run of men. As to that, there are various reflections. If we say, "perhaps it would," we have also to say that the purpose of God does not require more than is secured by the actual means employed; for the means and the end are always in the divine work exactly adjusted. But it is permissible to say "Perhaps not." What Jesus says about Moses and the prophets applies here. He said that men who did not believe Moses and the prophets, would be unconvinced by the rising of a dead man from the grave. If men are faithless and uninterested in Christ while having the apostolic narrative, we may be almost sure their attitude would have been no wiser had we had a verbatim and newspaper account of all he said and did.

Having finished his discourse, Jesus suggested to Peter to set out on a fishing cruise. He probably thought that sailing away from the spot would be the best way of escaping the lingering crowd on shore. Peter had been out fishing all the previous night, and had caught nothing. (No wonder: the constant fishing of a small sea like the Sea of Galilee by the large fleet of boats which Josephus gives account of being on it, must have kept the stock of fish low and difficult to get.) Having fished a whole night without result, Peter was not much inclined to go out again. "Nevertheless," said he, "at thy word I will let down the net." And having set sail, he let down the net—with a result that surprised him greatly. The net was instantly filled with a struggling mass of fish, so numerous that a single boat was unable to deal with them. They could not pull the haul aboard. Besides, the net was breaking with the weight of the catch. They beckoned to the other boat which had accompanied them. The boat drew near, and the fish were gradually got out of the net, into both the boats, which were then so heavily laden that the gunwales were dangerously level with the water. Peter was overpowered by the event, in view of his own futile efforts the night before. He attributed it all to Christ. He recognised it as his work, and an evidence of his divinity. Prostrating himself before Jesus as he sat in the boat, he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." These were the only words in which he could express his sense of the greatness of Christ as thus evidenced. They seemed fitting enough words, notwithstanding the difficulty of some to understand them. They express the profound sense that Peter had of his unworthiness to be the companion of one who could show such power. Such a sense is a qualification for such a companionship. Jesus gives us to understand that there will be many on excellent terms with themselves who will claim his friendship in the day of his glory, whom he will promptly reject and dismiss from his presence.

As to the miracle, we need not discuss whether Jesus made the fish, as he afterwards made bread to feed over 5,000 people; or whether he drew them by his power from other parts of the lake. He could do either. The great object was to show to the men of whom he was to make choice as Apostles, the evidence of his having come from the Father, in exercising power that belonged only to the Father. It had the intended effect, as evidenced by Peter's words, and Jesus instantly seized upon those words to apply the purpose of the miracle. "Fear not," said he (in the hearing of James and John, and others, in the two boats), "from henceforth thou shalt catch men."

As with the incident of Jesus clearing the temple of money changers, so with this of "the miraculous draught of fishes:" because a similar incident occurred afterwards, the enemy, who so easily snatch at the least unfavourable appearance, have jumped to the conclusion that one of the Gospel narrators has blundered, placing after the resurrection an occurrence that happened before it, or vice versa, and so discrediting both. The suggestion is absolutely gratuitous. It has nothing to rest upon but a superficial resemblance. It does not occur to them to allow the possibility of the same thing (substantially) happening twice. They do not reflect that if Christ rose from the dead, he fulfilled his promise that he would

send them the Holy Spirit to abide with them to witness for him, and to guide them into all truth, and that, therefore, their testimony (oral and written) was the joint work of themselves and the Holy Spirit, and, therefore, not liable to the error that befalls the mere work of man.

Having secured their extraordinary haul of fish, the two boats made for the land. arrived at which, the disciples, who had made up their minds to “forsake all and follow Christ,” handed over the craft with their contents and belongings to the charge of the servants. Thenceforward, till the day of his crucifixion, they were to be found only in his service.

While Jesus and the disciples were out in the same neighbourhood a few days afterwards (followed, as had now become usual, by a crowd while journeying along), a leper—“a man full of leprosy”—who, by the law of the country, ought to have been in rigid seclusion, managed to edge his way through the crowd, and to get close enough to Jesus to present himself at the next halt, right before him, kneeling to him and saying, “Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean.” As before remarked, Jesus had not come as a disease-healer in the philanthropic sense, else would he have sent his healing power throughout all the country without waiting for personal contact with the afflicted. He had come to show the great power of God in proof of his identity as the appointed way of approach to the Father. But blended with this there wrought that noble element of loving-kindness which gives grace and beauty to every gift. Jesus was “moved with compassion” at the suppliant form before him. The man took the acceptable attitude. He did not demand to be healed. He did not claim the exercise of Christ’s power. He acknowledged the existence of the power, and Christ’s right to refrain from putting it forth. Jesus “put forth his hand and touched him, and saith unto him, I WILL; BE THOU CLEAN. And immediately the leprosy departed from him.” How simple! how graceful! how beautiful! “Truly this man was the Son of God,” is the exclamation which his every look and word and action compel.

The man cured of his leprosy was very likely so perfectly satisfied that he did not desire any further exercise. But Moses had commanded something in such a case. A leper cured of his distemper was to bring “two he-lambs without blemish, and one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, and three-tenth deals of fine flour for a meat offering, mingled with oil, and one log of oil” (Lev. xiv. 10); and the priest was to present the man before the Lord, and make an atonement in the way which is elaborately prescribed. Was this to be ignored by him who had come to fulfil the law and the prophets? Some might have argued that as Jesus had come to “blot out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us ... nailing it to his cross” (Col. ii. 14), he might appropriately have embraced this opportunity of ignoring it. Such an argument would show an incomplete apprehension of the ways of God. Though it was part of the work of Jesus, concerning the Mosaic law, to “take it out of the way,” the performance of this work required that he should be “made under the law,” and be obedient to all its requirements (Gal. iv. 4). While laying down a new law, he was submissive to the

old till the hour should arrive for the abolition of the old in his death under its curse (Gal. iii. 13). To everything there is a time and a season. The law of Moses was an absolutely divine institution, established for a purpose (Rom. v. 20). While it was in force, Jesus conformed to it, and under it, was aiming, by obedience, to develop the righteousness by which he was to abolish it in the sense of superseding it by realising the end of it. The leaders of Israel could not understand this, but supposed he set himself against the law as a thing he wished to overturn: and against Moses as one whom they were not to follow. He sought to correct their misapprehension: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." The case of the cured leper presented an opportunity of illustrating his true attitude. He embraces it. "Go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them."

Jesus told the man not to say anything about the miracle of his cure to anybody else. We may understand why he did this, when we recollect that Jesus knew that his time was short, and that his end was rejection and death. He spoke of this several times to his disciples, and in a way that showed that it lay burdensomely on his spirit. On one occasion, he said, "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." This state of mind explains why he was desirous of suppressing all useless public sensation and excitement about himself. It would only have been in his way. It is not, therefore, so surprising as it seems, that he should say to the cured leper, "See thou say nothing to any man." But the man could not enter into Christ's thought on the subject. He disobeyed him—probably out of gratitude. "He went out and began to publish it much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places" (Mar. i. 45).

After a time, Jesus directed his steps to Capernaum again, when an unusually instructive incident occurred. A Roman centurion having heard of the Lord's wonderful power to heal, sent influential Jews to him to tell him of a servant at his house, who was "grievously tormented" with the palsy. Jesus said he would come and heal him, and started to go with them. The centurion, who seems to have been deeply impressed with the greatness of Christ, objected to Christ coming to his house. He sent messengers to stop him, saying, "I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed." Jesus could not but be pleased with such implicit faith—a faith greater, as he said, than any he had yet found in Israel; especially it was backed up by an illustration which showed the centurion's absolute and unbounded confidence in Christ's authority, and his understanding of the origin of Christ's power. "I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Come, and he cometh, and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it." This was as much as to say to Christ, "You have received authority from the Highest, to control the forces of heaven and earth. You have, therefore, but to speak the word, and they will obey you."

Whence had this pagan soldier derived so clear a conception of Christ's relation to the Father? We are not informed, but we may infer something from what we are told. He was stationed in Galilee, among the Jews, and was in daily contact with them, and had every opportunity of becoming acquainted with their institutions, their ways, and their scriptures. That he profited by this opportunity, is manifest from what the Jews said to Christ about him: "He loveth our nation and hath built us a synagogue." A military man would not have built a synagogue unless he had been more than ordinarily interested in Israelitish affairs. Consequently, we may conclude that he knew the scriptures, and recognised in Christ the Messiah promised in them. It was the case of a Gentile being more intelligent in, and more in love with, Israel's great matters than Israel themselves, as is often the case in the present day. Jesus yielded to the centurion's argument; and said to the centurion himself, who appears to have come on behind the friends he sent, "Go thy way, as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee," upon which the servant was instantly cured without Jesus seeing him or entering the house. Jesus then said to those around, "I have not found so great faith, no not in Israel. And I say unto you that many shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Here was a looking forward to something of deep interest to us Gentiles: and what was more particularly expounded afterwards by the apostle whom he sent forth to declare "the mystery which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men ... that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. iii. 5). The time had not come for the promulgation of this purpose; but Jesus knew it was at hand, and it was most appropriate that he should seize this incident of the centurion's manifested faith to tell the on-lookers, that when the time should arrive for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's resurrection and appearance in the Holy Land as the heirs of the kingdom, "many" of the centurion's stamp—obedient Gentiles full of faith—would muster from the ends of the earth to share with them the glory of the kingdom of God. It was a very unwelcome doctrine to the Jews. It was a doctrine frequently reflected in his teaching,—such as in the parable of the king's marriage, and his remark, "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold," and his statement to the apostles, "Ye shall be my witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth," &c., &c. It was the doctrine for which Paul was detested above all others by the Jews, because he was "the apostle of the Gentiles." It is a doctrine rooted in all the Scriptures. The very earliest promise ensures the ultimate extension of the blessing of Abraham to "all the families of the earth." (Gen. xii. 3). It is one of the fables of the learned world that the preaching of Christ to the Gentiles was an after-thought of Paul's.

But the doctrine has to be received with the qualifications which the Scriptures themselves impose. It is nowhere taught that the Gentiles as Gentiles are to be fellow-heirs. The conditions of heirship are strictly defined: "If children, then heirs"

(Rom. viii. 17). How to become children? This also is plainly answered. "Ye (the believers who had been baptised on the reception of the Gospel) are all the children of God by faith IN Christ Jesus: for as many of you as have been baptised INTO Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. iii. 26, 27) Jesus did not mean to say that the Gentiles who would come from the east and the west and sit down with Abraham in the Kingdom, would be unenlightened or disobedient or carnally-minded Gentiles; but that among those who should inherit the Kingdom, would be Gentiles, enlightened, reconciled and adopted, through submission to the requirements of the Gospel, when multitudes of the faithless Jews according to the flesh (the natural "children of the Kingdom") would be cast out, to their great dismay.

Next day, Jesus paid a visit to Nain. On the way, he was accompanied by much people. As they approached the place, a funeral, as we call it in western countries, emerged from the gate. There were unusual manifestations of grief amongst the people forming the procession, on account of the nature of the bereavement that had taken place. A young man had died who was the only son and support of a widow mother; and he was now being carried to his grave amid the lamentations of his mother and a large crowd who sympathised with her. The people who followed Jesus formed one procession; the funeral cortege another. The two processions, likely to come into collision, came to a mutual halt. Those with Jesus were disposed, sympathetically, to make way for the funeral. The widow's lamentations touched every one—none more than Jesus. He was "moved with compassion." He addressed himself to the agonised woman: he was able to do so to some purpose. "Weep not," said he. There was sympathy in the words: there would be sympathy in the tone in which they were uttered; and the weeping woman would be comforted. But he did more than speak comforting words. He stepped forward to the bier on which the dead was being carried. The bearers, noticing the action, stopped: a hush of expectation fell on the company as all gathered round. "Young man, I say unto thee arise": few words, but words of power. "He that was dead sat up and began to speak." Jesus directing the widow's attention to him, handed him over to her. The overjoyed woman could scarcely believe her senses. The crowd were thunderstruck. Never had a funeral had such an ending. "Fear came on all." The extraordinary character of Jesus of Nazareth was recognised. In various exclamations, the crowd gave expression to their feelings: "A great prophet is risen among us." "God hath visited his people."

The same day Jesus appears to have returned to Capernaum. An incident like the cure of a public functionary's servant, and the restoration of a dead man to life, did not tend to decrease the public interest in the work of Christ. The people collected from every quarter. He did not refuse to receive them. "He healed all that were sick" (Matt. viii. 16). At the same time, desiring a little seclusion, "he gave commandment to depart to the other side (of the sea)." His disciples proceeded to get ready the boat. While preparation was being made, admirers in the crowd seized the opportunity of making private communications to him. A scribe (a man of position and influence with the people) said, "Master, I will follow

thee whithersoever thou goest.” Jesus gave him a discouraging answer: “The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.” From this we may gather that the scribe’s decision was due to a calculation of chances. If this were the Messiah (and the miracles made him think he must be), the Kingdom of God was immediately about to appear, and an espousal of his cause would secure a good place in a temporal sense. The answer of Jesus was calculated to extinguish false zeal, or sorely put to the test the true. How it acted in the scribe’s case, we shall not learn till the day of the muster with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.—To another looking earnestly on, Jesus said, “Follow me”: he answered, “Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.” Was not this a reasonable request? It might have been reasonable under ordinary circumstances, but not when the Son of God commands. Divine obligations are imperative. This is the lesson.

The answer was apparently unfeeling: “Let the dead bury their dead.” It will not seem unfeeling to those who have learnt to estimate things as Jesus estimated them—and that is according to the standard of eternal truth. The whole race of man without God are “the dead,” in a sense easy to understand when the supposition of human immortality is dismissed, and the Bible doctrine of the reign of death by sin accepted. The whole race is under sentence of death. Death is only a question of time. A hundred years will see something like two generations disappear from the land of the living into the grave. Now, where men have no connection with God, it is impossible that this death-state of theirs can be changed. Continuing in alienation from Him, they are “the dead” in contrast to that section of them who have “the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. i. 1). Their burial is, therefore, from Christ’s point of view, a very insignificant affair, and not to be allowed to come at all into collision with affairs connected with the great and stirring hope and work of life which he, and he alone, has in hand.

Where men see human life as Christ saw it, they will think and act in it as he did—and with a like appearance of harshness and a like certainty of being misunderstood by the children of the flesh—with whom the affairs of the flesh are everything, and the affairs of Christ of secondary practical moment. Another said, “Lord, I will follow thee, but let me first go and bid them farewell which are at home at my house.” This receives no more consideration at the hands of Christ than the plea about the funeral. It would, of course, be lauded by every class of natural writer as altogether a praiseworthy concern on the part of the young man; and, under ordinary circumstances, it is legitimate enough to consider the natural claims of those to whom we may be domestically related—but not when Christ calls. Christ required the young man at once. Had the young man sufficiently understood the proffered honour, he would have given an immediate and obedient response. But he hesitated under the power of natural feelings. The answer, apparently rough, was just in the circumstances. “No man having put his hand to the plough and LOOKING BACK is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke ix. 62). This is “written for our instruction.” We cannot receive a personal call in our



day such as was addressed to the young man; but a call has come to all who have ears and eyes, and there are often times and situations when funerals and friends at home (who rank so highly as important affairs with the mere children of nature), will at the hands of children of God, receive that altogether secondary regard which Jesus sanctions in the few words uttered while the boat was getting ready.

Luke appears to place these incidents later on: but the fact is, he does not “place” them in a fixed sense at all. He says “it came to pass” that these men said these things—a form of speech admitting of their occurring at any time. Luke was not an eye-witness, but a reporter of the testimony of eye-witnesses; and though, in this, he was used and guided by the Spirit of God as much as the eye-witnesses were, his narrative is that of a collector of information, and not that of a spectator. When the action of inspiration is understood, there is no difficulty in this. Inspiration uses and limits (or as we may say “revises”) the natural when it employs it, but does not obliterate it. It keeps it in such form and in such channels as are suitable to its own purpose, but it does not interfere with the nature of the agent it employs. It does not change a reporter of what other men saw and heard into an eye-witness, though subscribing every jot and tittle of his report.

## **CHAPTER XIX.**

### **In the Storm—Matthew Called.**

THE boat being ready, Jesus entered, and several of his disciples. It was the work of a few minutes to unfurl the sail, lift the anchor, and make for the open, steering straight for “the other side.” Jesus, wearied with his recent efforts, laid himself down on some cushion-work in the hinder part of the boat, and was soon fast asleep. Gaily the little craft sped over the glistening waters, kissing the freshening breeze, and sending the spray right and left as she cut her way through the dancing waves. But suddenly, there came a change, as is the wont with storms on the same lake to this day. The sky overcast, the wind rose, and the water roughened into a heavy swell. Rapidly the wind increased to a gale, and the sea, quickly responding, rose in great white-crested waves that tossed the vessel about like a plaything, and broke around and over it in a very threatening manner. The disciples exerted themselves to the utmost to avoid the waves—probably by running her before the wind; but the strength of the storm was too much for them. They could not prevent the breakers boarding her, and nearly filling her with water. The peril was great. Christ was yet asleep. They did not wish to disturb him; but every minute the danger was increasing. The vessel rocked, and plunged and creaked and shipped water in a style that threatened to send them all to the bottom in little time. She was now nearly filled with water. At last they awoke Christ. “Master! master!” exclaimed they, “we perish. Lord save us. Carest thou not that we perish?” That they supposed he could help them in some way is probable: that they thought he could check the storm is disproved

by what happened. Awaking, Christ said, "Why are ye fearful?" This was as much as to say there was no cause for fear. Well, there was not, as it turned out, but to mere human perception, there was every cause for fear.

There never is or can be such apparent just cause for apprehension to men as when they are in a storm at sea in a frail vessel that is being overwhelmed by the waves. Men never fear more than in such circumstances. That Jesus felt differently was due to the power he possessed. That he expected the disciples to share his feelings on the subject was due to the evidence he had previously given them of his possession of that power. "O ye of little faith!" It was the smallness of their faith he rebuked. Faith is trust on the ground of evidence. He had given them the evidence; and on this, faith ought to have worked with the effect of inspiring confidence in all circumstances. But man is weak, and their faith failed them in the presence of unfavourable appearances.—Having uttered these few quiet words of rebuke, he rose and addressing himself to the elements, said "Peace: be still!" The effect was instantaneous. The rush of the wind was arrested; the tumult of the waves stopped. The water ceased its convulsions and immediately settled to a quiet level. The storm was gone, and the ship, dripping, glistening with the water that had covered it, was riding in calmness and safety. In the presence of this great and sudden change, Jesus again looked at his disciples, and said, "Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?" questions far more telling, under the circumstances, than the most fervid effort of rhetoric.

It would be impossible to imagine a situation in which the power of Christ could be more impressively shewn, or more stringently and convincingly tested. Never is man so powerless as in the presence of the elements in their raging power. A pretender may do something with appliances and protected platforms and dark rooms. But place him on the storm-swept deck of a reeling vessel in a gale, and he is as helpless as the struggling cattle that are washed overboard. It does not even want a storm to show the impotence of man in dealing with nature. The quiet side of a mountain, the expanse of primitive moorland, the depths of the forest, or the face of the smiling ocean at any time in the finest weather, overwhelm a man with a sense of mortal littleness and helplessness. We have all heard in history of the vanity of monarchs or the extravagant loyalty of subjects that has sometimes claimed dominion over nature, and that has received its quiet but effectual confutation from nature itself. We have heard of the Persian Xerxes vainly apostrophising a mountain that he wanted out of the way, and whipping the waters of the Bosphorous for presuming to sweep away his bridge of boats. We have heard of Canute planting his throne by the edge of the sea, and vainly commanding the rising tide to stop its advance. But here is a man who says, "Peace be still," and at whose word the rage of the tempest itself stops, and the sea becomes smooth. What more appropriate comment can be made than the one the disciples passed one to another: "What manner of man is this that even the winds and the sea obey him?" What manner of man, indeed!

Most momentous question, which many are content to leave unsettled, or to settle in a most superficial and absurd manner. The question cannot be burked or ignored. The question is there. Christ did all these wonderful things. The New Testament is the evidence of it. The New Testament has been in the hands of the world all these ages. It was written by the men who were his companions: whose competence as witnesses is shewn by the writing; whose integrity is proved by the fact that they had and could have no object in the writing but the testimony of truth, since that testimony brought them nothing but evil; the truth of whose narrative is proved by the narrative itself. The question is constantly ringing in the air for those who have ears to hear: "what manner of man is this?" The answer is a glorious one, though mankind in their woe may be sick of hearing it. It is the only answer that solves the whole wonderful problem. "God was in Christ." God, who made all things, can control all things, whether it be the physiological conditions of the body, or the momentum of the atmosphere, caused by the mechanical action of the laws of heat. It is in His power to radically change the one, or put a brake on the other. It is a question of the object and opportunity. There is a time to show the power, and a time to conceal it. One time to show it was when Jesus, the Son of God, was on earth to declare the Father's name, and open and shew the way of life and love in the ministry of reconciliation. It was shewn in such a variety of ways as to exclude the possibility of doubt as to its being the power of God: and one of the most impressive certainly, was the demonstration that even the wind and the sea were subject to the will of Christ

The storm having ceased, the boat resumed her eastward course, and shortly arrived at the other side. They landed "in the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee." The district lies on the eastern margin of the sea of Galilee, towards the southern end, where the land rises abruptly, forming that "steep place" which was signalled by an incident now about to happen—of which the three apostolic narratives, read together, furnish the following particulars.

When Jesus had landed, a man at a long distance off was seen running towards him at the top of his speed, accompanied by another man who did not figure prominently in the transactions that followed. The men were madmen, who lived, not in the city, but among the tombs in the neighbourhood of the city. They were naked, and possessed of abnormal strength. They had been the terror of the neighbourhood for a long time—particularly the first man, who, night and day, at spasmodic intervals, made the air ring with his maniac shouts, as he cut himself with stones and cried out. Many attempts had been made to put him under restraint, but all in vain. Chains and fetters had been successfully put upon him several times, but each time, with the strength of Samson, when left to himself, he snapped them asunder in the paroxysms of his madness. He now ran towards Christ, whom, from a distance, he had seen landing. The fame of Christ had "spread into all the regions round about." Consequently, this madman had heard something of him, and ran to worship him. Jesus saw him coming. It is probable that the disciples also would apprehensively direct his attention to the approach

of a madman. Jesus knew the state of the man, and before he had come quite close, he sought to disarm him by cure. He said, "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit." The man, mistaking Christ's adjuration for an imprecation of judgment upon himself, fell on his knees and responded in a voice of terror, "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the most High God? I adjure thee by God that thou torment me not." Jesus then speaks kindly to him: "What is thy name?" The man said, "My name is Legion, for we are many." This was the man's hallucination. Jesus had recognised but one unclean spirit (that is, the deranging influence that obstructed his faculties), saying to him, "Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit." But the man imagined himself inhabited by a multitude of demons.

The mental hospitals to-day will furnish instances of a similar delusion: the difference is, they are not at large, and there is no living Christ going about, for their aberrated faculties to act on. The man proceeded to earnestly implore Christ not to send him (that is, "them": for the man and the demons were identical to the man's deranged mind)—not to send him out of the country. It was a revealed work of the Messiah, that he would "cause the unclean spirit to pass out of the land" (Zech. xiii. 2). John the Baptist had spoken of him "standing in the midst" of Israel while he spake, and of having the "fan in his hand" with which he would "thoroughly purge his floor" (Matt. iii. 12; Jno. i. 26). This phase of the Messiah's work is the one that would most readily be apprehended by the populace. It would easily and naturally diffuse itself as a panic which the madmen of the country would catch up and reflect in an aberrated form. Consequently, we may understand this madman's anxiety as he kneels imploring Christ to spare him the banishment which he feared at his hands, and suggesting to him that he would, instead, allow him to go among the swine that were feeding in multitudes on the hill brow overlooking the sea. Of course, it was mixed up with the hallucination that he was a legion of demons; and the suggestion took that form. "Suffer us to enter into the swine." Jesus acted on the suggestion. The culture of the pig was a breach of the law of Moses. It was part of the disobedience which he was about to revenge on the nation in a baptism of fire (effected 40 years later). It was therefore a fitting thing to mark with his displeasure in the way now suggested. He said, "Go," and at his word the maddening influence which had so long possessed the man was transferred from him to the 2,000 swine, and transformed into a judicial impulse which projected them in a general stampede down the brow of the hill into the water, where they were all drowned—as intended.

The idea that the "demons" in the case were intelligent beings is precluded by the way they are treated in the narrative. They are, both by Jesus and the narrator (Luke), treated as "an unclean spirit"—a spirit of madness. Their existence in the man is the man's own theory of himself, propounded in answer to Christ's kindly question, "What is thy name?" and merely adopted in some parts of the narrative in accommodation to this introduced aspect. Had they been intelligences literally seeking transfer to the swine, as a more congenial sheathing or dwelling, they

would not have instantly frustrated their own wishes by destroying the swine in the sea. The whole of the circumstances adapt themselves to the view that Christ in benevolently curing a violent madman, judicially transferred the madness to a herd of swine that had no business in the land of Israel. The narrative is necessarily tinged with the notion universal in the world at the time, that madness was due to the presence of malignant beings: tinged with it, that is, in the sense of its being taken into account just as we take into account the views of children or lunatics, when we talk to them about their affairs: but not tinged in the sense of its being accepted as true: only in the sense in which the doctrine of Beelzebub tinged the discourse of Christ when he seemed to assume the existence of that mythical deity, in his conversation with those who believed in it (Matt. xii. 27). It is one of the evidences of the divinity of the Gospel narratives, that while necessarily dealing extensively and minutely with the heathen theory of demonology in its record of the cure by Jesus of mental disorders of all kinds, it steers clear of an endorsement of the theory as such.

The people who were in charge of the immense herd of swine were thrown into consternation at the inexplicable frenzy which impelled the swine to destruction in the waters of the Galilean lake. They ran into the town in hot haste, and reported what had happened. The people instantly flocked out to the hill to behold the evidence of the truth of the report in the hundreds of pigcarcases floating ashore. While wondering at the occurrence, their attention was drawn to the group on the plain. Jesus and his disciples were there: and the crowd streamed towards them. There they found their formidable neighbour—the incurable maniac—“sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind.” (No doubt the disciples furnished clothing among them for the man, when he was cured). The people quickly understood the situation: Jesus had transferred the madness from the man to the swine, and caused their destruction. This filled them with a superstitious fear of him. They were afraid of further calamities. They implored him to get away from them; and he went. Poor misguided people! How many millions there have been since, who would gladly at any time have given all that they had for one hour of the company which these Gadarenes put away from them. There have been many, also, who like the Gadarenes, have put Christ away, because of the temporal inconveniences.

Jesus walked back to the ship—the cured madman accompanying him to the water's edge. When he had got aboard with his disciples, the man implored Jesus to allow him to go with him. But Jesus would not consent. To one he said, “Follow me;” to this, “Follow me not.” “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the sun.” The cured madman was not fit to be a companion of Christ, and not suitable for an apostle. Jesus “knew all men,” and knew this man, and therefore “suffered him not” to have his wishes gratified. There was, however, a sphere of service for him. “Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.” As the boat drew off, we can imagine the poor man looking after it with longing eyes as he stood among the other people who, with a very different mind,

watched the departure. He would watch its receding form till no longer able to discern the forms of its occupants; and then, with the dispersing multitude, many of whom would gather round him and talk with him, glad at his change, though vexed at the loss of their grunting property, he would at last go away. He did not and could not forget what had been done for him. "He departed and began to publish in Decapolis (the ten cities) how great things Jesus had done for him; and all men did marvel" (Mark v. 20).

Arrived at Capernaum (which he had made "his own city" by removal from Nazareth) Jesus found the town crowded. "Great multitudes had come together to hear and to be healed by him of their infirmities." Among the crowd were "Pharisees and doctors of the law out of every town of Galilee and Judæa and Jerusalem" (Luke v. 17). These had heard reports of his wonderful doings and sayings, and had come to study him. At first, Jesus retired before the crowded state of the town, and again "withdrew himself into the wilderness and prayed." But again rallying himself to the work "after some days" "he entered into Capernaum" (Mar. ii. 1). It was soon reported that he had arrived and was in the house where he made his stay when in the place. "Straightway many were gathered together, insomuch as there was no room to receive them, no not so much as about the door." While thus clustered thickly together in and about the house, "he preached the word unto them."

Our exclusive acquaintance with western houses interferes with our understanding of such a scene as this—as regards its mechanical adjuncts. If the house was like the eastern houses which travellers describe to us, it would be a flat-roofed building of one storey, with a wide door opening to a paved court in front. Jesus would be seated inside some distance from the door, with the people standing and sitting all about him, filling the room and overflowing through the doorway into the court yard. The "doctors of the law" had secured a place in the inner circle. Jesus discoursed to the assembly in terms not recorded. The Pharisees and lawyers were sitting with ears attent. They were in the keenly observant mood of a perplexed scepticism which desired to find a flaw, but could not resist the wisdom of his speech or deny the wonder of his works.

While he was speaking, a noise in the roof attracted attention. Slabs were being removed, and in a little time a large space had been cleared over the heads of the assembly—large enough to admit the entrance of a couch containing a palsied man, which the operators proceed to lower into the presence of Christ. No doubt people in the house would expostulate with the intruders, and endeavour to persuade them to withdraw the strange burden, and restore the roof. If so, it was all in vain. They were terribly in earnest, and would take no denial. There were four of them. The palsied man was probably a relative. They had heard of Christ's wonderful works of healing, and had probably brought him from a distance to be cured; but on arriving they had found the house blocked with people, and no way of getting at him, but by breaking the roof Their earnest stratagem, however objectionable to the company assembled in the house, was

not displeasing to Christ. He “saw their faith,” and anticipating their object, said to the palsied man, “Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

These words startled the aforesaid “Pharisees and lawyers.” They looked at each other and whispered, as much as to say, “Ha! did you hear that? We have got something now.” Their actual words (under their breath) were, “Why doth this man thus speak blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God only?” Jesus perceived the movement, and knew their thoughts. Turning to them instantly, he said, “Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed and walk?” He places the two things on a par in point of power and authority. If he could do the one, was it not evidence of ability to do the other? Who could cure the palsy with a word but God only? and if God gave the Son of Man power on earth to cure the palsy and do many other works that no man could do, why should he not confer upon him the power to forgive sin also, which was neither more difficult nor more easy? Pressing home this argument, he said to them, “That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power upon earth to forgive sin— (then turning to the palsied man) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed and go thy way unto thine house.”

All eyes were now upon the man, who arose with the ease and strength of a man in perfect health, packed up his couch, and lifted it on his shoulder. A passage being made for him among the people, he carried it out before them all. Everyone was simply amazed and struck with admiration, “We never saw anything like this before.” They “marvelled that God had given such power unto men” (Matt. ix. 8). The Pharisees could only be silent. Jesus then motioned to pass out, and a way being made for him, “he went forth again by the seaside, and all the multitude resorted unto him, and he taught them.” “The common people heard him gladly.” The uncommon people did not. On the contrary, they heard him, first with curious interest, then with suspicious dislike, then with open hostility, and lastly with implacable hatred and determination to compass his destruction. But things did not reach this pass all at once. As yet they were in the studious mood. The common people were intent on hearing him; and the leaders were obliged to follow in their train.

Returning from the seaside, Jesus passed the tax-collector’s office (for Capernaum) in which an official was seated who had been keeping an open and interested eye on the movements of Christ, and on whom Christ now had his eye. This was “Matthew, the publican,” who belonged to a class that was not in good savour with the higher ranks of society in Israel at this time. He was a Jew, but a servant of the Romans, and was therefore looked down upon as an unpatriotic and defiled Israelite. Besides this, the publicans as a class were extortioners. They paid a stipulated sum to the government as the taxes accruing from the district over which they were appointed, and collected as much more as they could, by pressure and extortion, thereby enriching themselves at the expense of the community. It is the system of farming the taxes which is in vogue

in Turkey at the present day. The publicans were, therefore, as a class, in great odium. But in all classes, there are men better than their class. And Matthew was not an unjust man, though a publican. He was a man fit in Christ's estimation to be an ambassador of Christ; and the time had come to call him. Jesus therefore stopped before the office, and fixing his eyes on Matthew, simply said, "Follow me." For this summons, Matthew had evidently been previously prepared; for, without any hesitation or delay, "he arose and followed him."

## CHAPTER XX.

### Matthew's Feast—Two Blind Men Cured.

MATTHEW, as a publican, was a man in good circumstances. He was consequently able to do what his affection for Christ inclined him to do on accepting his invitation to become his follower and companion: "He made him a great feast in his own house," to which he invited "a great company of publicans and others." The great company included "many publicans and sinners" who came and sat down with Christ and his disciples—a company, not of the select order—not such as would suit a punctilious "respectability" in that or any other age:—a company made up of the lower class, the toiling class, and such even as were not irreproachable on the score of principle or behaviour. The Pharisees, keenly watching every movement, were shocked or professed to be shocked that Christ should keep such company. They took the first opportunity of attacking the disciples on the subject—afraid apparently of addressing themselves direct to Christ.

"Why eateth your master with publicans and sinners?" Why not with the righteous of the nation? This catechetical insinuation was very telling: It was much more effective than a direct imputation. A thing hinted at is always felt more keenly than a thing plainly said. The disciples no doubt were embarrassed by the question, and did not know what to say. They reported the question to Christ. His rejoinder was one of the many master strokes that at last made the Pharisees afraid to encounter him. There was no rudeness in it; on the contrary, it was gentle and grave. But it was the simple assertion of unquestionable truth, and made the question of the Pharisees recoil with withering force on themselves. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." What could they say? The company to which they objected, if sinners, were the sick: why were not the Pharisees (the professional healers of the people) attending to them? How could they find fault with him for doing it? There was no answer. It was a mouth-shutter. It bore another way. The Pharisees were the righteous in their own estimation. Therefore, on their own premises, it was needless to look after them. He followed up his delightfully powerful answer with an adjuration only a little less severe to men who professed to be teachers: "Go and learn what that meaneth; I will have mercy and not sacrifice."



The Scribes and Pharisees laid great stress on the divine obligation of the sacrifices, which were profitable to them. Jesus now reminds them that God, who had appointed the sacrifices, had also declared that those very sacrifices were not acceptable to Him, and even an abomination to Him, when offered without that sentiment of merciful kindness in which the institution had its very origin (Amos V. 21–24; Is. i. 11–17). Against this attitude of mercy to the poor and the needy, they were now placing themselves in objecting to Christ's familiar association with the common people; and they had their answer, which had no tendency to mollify them, but the reverse. It made them more and more bitter and inclined to put the worst construction upon all he did.

They took advantage of his very eating to raise an evil report. They did it gently at first. They did it by way of question, and they made use of other people, though at last they spurted it out in the directness and heat of inflamed animosity: "Behold a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber—the friend of publicans and sinners." If the action of the Son of God could be thus misrepresented, what can his friends expect, who can never attain his perfection? The Pharisees approached the subject at first through John's disciples. Some of John's disciples had a difficulty about the difference between John's ways and Christ's. John was abstemious and given to periodical fasting, which he also enjoined upon his disciples, as befitting the exigencies of the spiritual reformation he had come to effect in preparation for Christ. But Christ was a free eater, and laid no obligation of fasting upon his disciples.

The Pharisees, putting them forward, and taking part with them, asked Christ on the subject: "Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft; but thy disciples fast not?" Christ's answer was an effective question turning upon a custom of the country, which is more or less a custom of all countries—viz., to make a wedding a time of festivity: "Can the children of the bride-chamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?" Fasting is a concomitant of mourning, and would be out of place in a joyful situation. This was the argument of his question, which assumed that he was the bridegroom, and that it was a happy circumstance for them to have him with them. So it was. He said so plainly. "Me ye have not always" (Mar. xiv. 7). "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (Jno. ix. 5.) "Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you" (xii. 35). The fact thus affirmed would be patent to all the people, though it might be denied by the Scribes and Pharisees; and therefore his words had great force: "as long as they (the disciples) have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast." No, indeed! He was the light of their eyes, and the joy of their heart, and the strength of their ways. His presence excluded the very idea of fasting. It would have been as much out of place in their circumstances as a new piece of cloth in a rotten garment, or new wine in decayed wine-skins.

But there was shortly to be a change. He would not always be with them. The fact was sorrowfully before his mind, and he now gives it utterance in prophetic words affecting ourselves in so far as we painfully participate in their fulfilment:

“THE DAYS WILL COME when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them: and then shall they fast in those days” (Mar. ii. 20). These days did come; and they have long prevailed—so long that some men say he was never here, and many others, that though he was once here he will never be here again. They are sorrowful days, in which faith has much hard work to resist the blighting effect of the darkness and the cold. But they will come to an end. Christ, whose words are proved true by the very darkness of the time, has said, “If I go away, I will come again, and your heart shall rejoice.”

We are not told at what time of the day Matthew’s dedicatory feast, at which this keen passage of arms occurred, was held. It was probably a mid-day gathering. The incident with which it concluded could not well have happened at night. The principal rabbi at one of the synagogues, Jairus by name, came forward into the presence of Christ in a state of mental agony. He had only one daughter, about twelve years of age, and the child lay at the point of death. In fact, the distracted father was sure she was “now dead.” He prostrated himself before Christ, and earnestly besought him to come to her, expressing the confidence that if he would lay his hand on her, she would live. Jesus respected the man’s faith, and rose from his place at the board. The father led the way out of the house, and Jesus followed him, accompanied by his disciples. In addition to the disciples, a great crowd followed. The company in Matthew’s house had witnessed the rabbi’s petition, and as Jesus passed out, word would quickly pass among the people outside that he was going to bring a dead child to life. They eagerly went after him, and “thronged him,” jostling against him, as is the manner of crowds.

On the way, he stopped, and the crowd gathered round. He asked them who had touched him. No one answered. He repeated his question; still all were silent. Pressing his question, the multitude, wondering what could be the meaning of it, began to say to one another, “Not I: not I.” Jesus said, “Some one hath touched me, for I perceive that virtue has gone out of me.” Peter suggested that a good many had touched Christ, and that the question scarcely seemed called for: “Thou seest the multitude thronging thee: and sayest thou, ‘who touched me?’ ” Jesus had a reason for his question. He had been touched in a way that was not mechanical. He was conscious of healing virtue having passed out of him in response to a touch that was a touch of faith. He knew who had done it. It was not for information that he asked the question, but to call attention to one of the many “works” by which God was manifested and glorified in him. He looked round on the crowd, and fixed his eyes on a woman. She cowered beneath his calm searching gaze. She knew what had happened, and she now felt that he knew, and that it was no use concealing the matter. “Fearing and trembling and knowing what was done in her,” she came forward, “and fell down before him and told him all the truth.” What was the truth? That she had for twelve years suffered from a debilitating flux, for which she had in vain and at much expense, consulted every likely doctor. Hearing of Christ, she had come to the conclusion that if she could only get near enough to him to touch the hem of his robe, she would be healed; and she had that day seized upon her first opportunity with the

anticipated result. She now felt in herself that she was cured, but she was in that state of mind that leads a person to feel they must most humbly apologise for having taken a great and unwarrantable liberty. Christ's object was realised in the eliciting from the woman this statement of the facts. He soon calmed her fears. "Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole. Go in peace, and continue whole of thy plague."

In this we have an insight into what might be called the physical aspect of Christ's miracles, and of all miracles. Though above nature, they are operations of real power acting upon and in nature. They are not magical. There was material "virtue" in the person of Christ, with which his very clothes became charged, so that in the performance of works of healing, "there went virtue out of him and healed them all" (Lu. vi. 19). The same thing is observable in the case of Paul afterwards, who was filled with the same spirit: "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul, so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them" (Acts ix. 11, 12). In the case of Peter also, we read that "they brought forth the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might over-shadow some of them ... and they were healed every one" (Acts v. 15, 16). This was the fulfilment of Christ's promise: "The works that I do, ye (the apostles) shall do also, and greater works than these shall ye do because I go unto my Father" The works in both cases were done by the same power. "The power of the Lord was present to heal" (Lu. v. 17). The power of the Lord is real power. It is the power out of which all things have been made. It is what modern philosophers have conceived to themselves as "force." It is a reality, though a reality out of human control.

When this is clearly apprehended, there will be no liability to fall into the mistake of those who class the miracles of Christ and his apostles with the achievement of mesmerists and so-called "faith-healers." They are not in the same category at all, though related to the same power. Human beings have life-power, which they can in certain conditions irradiate from themselves by the action of the will, and by the means of it can produce certain effects. But the power is weak. It is strictly within the organic limits assigned to the human organization in the constitution imparted by the will of the Creator, and can accomplish nothing beyond those limits. Streaming from the eye, it may deflect a needle suspended by a silk thread, but it cannot stop a storm. It may stimulate secretions in the living body, but it cannot produce bread on the spot to feed thousands. It may impart a momentary vigour to a debilitated organ, but it cannot make a dead man alive. There is a certain faint resemblance between its mode of action and the miraculous operations of Jesus and the apostles; but there is no more parallel than between the working of a machine and the motions of the heavenly bodies. The one is the power of nature, as forming part of the constitution of nature, and strictly bounded by the laws of nature; the other is the working of the energy that produced nature, and can therefore control nature so absolutely that "nothing is impossible with God." The one is the power of man, the other the power of God,

between which the gulf is unfathomable and immeasurable. This is shown in any comparison that may be made between the works of all who ever went before or came after Christ.

Having comforted the cured but disturbed woman, Jesus was about to resume his journey to the house of Jairus, when messengers arrived, and addressing themselves to Jairus, said there was no need to trouble Jesus further; that all was over: his daughter had just expired. We can imagine the effect which such an announcement would produce on the fond and distracted father. Jesus had seen the arrival of the messengers, and had heard their message, and had noticed its effect, and he turned to the father and said: "Fear not; only believe, and she shall be made whole." From the mouth of an ordinary physician, such words would have been mockery. How could the little girl be "made whole" when she was actually dead? But Jairus and others had seen and heard enough of this man to dispose them to rest with indefinite expectancy on anything he might say. Probably, therefore, Jairus was comforted by his words. He would probably find it easy to conform to the adjuration, "Only believe." It is remarkable how constantly this condition is required in connection with the miracles of Jesus and the apostles. We have seen it in connection with the woman who stole a cure, as it were, while Jesus was on his way to Jairus. Christ told her her faith had saved her. To another he said, "Thy faith hath made thee whole" (Luke xvii. 19). To another, "Receive thy sight. Thy faith hath saved thee" (Luke xviii. 42). Still more emphatic, he said to another, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark ix. 23); and one of his miracles he prefaced by the inquiry, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" (Mark ix. 28). It is recorded of Paul in the cure of an afflicted man at Lystra, that he "perceived that he had faith to be healed" (Acts xiv. 9).

This prominence of faith as an accompaniment of these works of healing has given rise to evil surmise, and led to some imposture. Some have imagined that the effects called miracles were not the results of God's power at all, but of credulousness in the subjects operated upon. Others, like the Mormons, have assumed the ability to work miracles, but allege the want of faith on the part of their hearers to be the cause of their inability to show them. Both ideas spring from an incomplete apprehension of the facts. Though faith was a desired and suitable accessory to miraculous operation, it was not indispensable to the exercise of that power on the part of either Christ or his apostles. Walking on the sea, stilling the storm, the multiplication of five loaves to feed thousands of people, and the raising of the dead—were all operations that could have no assistance of faith from the subjects operated upon. So in the case of the apostles; it required no faith in Ananias and Sapphira to be struck dead, or in the prison doors for them to open. The power of God is irresistible, and "needs not help from man."

But there is nothing in this inconsistent with the requirement that men who are to be benefited by the exercise of that power should honour God by putting faith in

the operation. No doubt the exercise of faith predisposes for its effectual working; but it has no more power to produce the effects than favourable soil has to bring forth choice plants without seed or planting. Men have only to try to produce the miracles of Christ by faith to see how incapable faith is without the co-operation of the power of God. And as for those who say they could work miracles if people only had faith, let them try their hand on their own lame, blind, and dead, and their mistake will be apparent. Though Christ asked for faith and esteemed it highly, he did not have to wait for it in order to be able to show forth the power of God.

Having asked Jairus to have faith, Jesus quickly went forward to his house where the dead child lay. He appears to have forbidden the crowd to follow, and to have allowed only Peter and James and John to accompany him, with the father of the damsel. Arrived at the house, he found the professional mourners in full work. This is a feature peculiar to Oriental life, especially in the days of Jesus, as all are aware. When a death occurs, these people will do any amount of demonstrative mourning for a consideration. They can “weep and wail” to order, and “make a great ado.” They had in this case doubtless heard the little girl was dying, and were early in attendance for the job. When Jesus arrived, he found them “making a great tumult.” He asked them to stop: “Why make ye this ado and weep?” Why? Didn’t he know? A chief man’s nice little daughter of twelve just dead? Oh yes, he knew. He knew more than they did. The girl was dead and not dead. “The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.” But the professional mourners—a callous and melancholy set—knew not the speaker. They heard his words, and interpreting them by their poor light, they saw only cause of mirth in them. “They laughed him to scorn.”

Why did Jesus say the damsel was not dead when she was really dead? For a reason that we may easily apprehend if we can imagine ourselves possessed as he was of the power of restoring a dead person. Such a person we would naturally think of as in a state of suspended animation merely. Even in natural relations, we only recognize a person as dead when he is beyond the action of restorative agency. He may be to all intents and purposes dead, as when in a drowning case, he has been in the water for twenty minutes or half an hour before he is taken out; or when he has swooned off into a pulseless state of unconsciousness, through the stoppage of the action of the heart: we do not consider him dead if we possess the means of removing the cause that has suspended vitality for the time being.

In the case of Christ, he had the power to remove the conditions that had stopped the life of Jairus’ child, and because he intended to use that power, he could not recognise the child as dead—in the state, namely, in which the cause of death was beyond the power of removal. To him, she was but in a sleep, though for the time being really dead. We see the same thing in the case of Lazarus, whom Jesus was intending to raise: he said, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.” The disciples thought he spoke literally. “Then said Jesus unto them

plainly, Lazarus is dead" (Jno. ix. 14). It was the relation of ideas that led him to speak of "sleep" in both cases. Jesus, beckoning to the father, got the house cleared of the noisy heartless "wailers," and with the father and mother of the damsel, and the three apostles mentioned, he entered the chamber where the dead child lay. He at once took the child by the hand and said, "Damsel, I say unto thee, Arise." Immediately the vital energy of the spirit entered and transfused and healed the lifeless frame: the child opened her eyes, and rose, and stood on the floor, as the natural impulse of the returned sensibilities of health would incline, in the presence of strangers. Jesus handed the child to her parents, to their inexpressible astonishment, and advised them to give her something to eat. The child, wasted by fever and now restored to healthy life, would be in need of nourishment. Gladly, we may imagine, would the parents comply with his direction. But they could not get over the surprise of their child's restoration, and were evidently in a mood to speak emphatically on the subject. Jesus advised them to say nothing about it to anyone, for the reason that led him in previous cases to avoid public sensation. But he could not prevent the inevitable. "The fame thereof went abroad through all that land."

Leaving the house of Jairus, he was accosted by two blind men who learnt from the hum and talk of the crowd that Jesus was passing. He took no notice of them at first. They followed him, calling aloud as they went, "Thou Son of David, have mercy upon us." The people knew that the Messiah was to be the son of David. They were disposed to regard this man as the Messiah because of his mighty works. Therefore it was the popular mood to speak of him as the son of David, though they probably knew little or nothing of his family extraction. Jesus allowed the men to continue their invocation without attending to them, and walked on till he came to the house where he abode in Capernaum, which he entered, and sat down, the crowd probably lingering outside. The blind men persevered, and found their way at last into the presence of Christ in the house. They renewed their entreaty to be cured of their blindness. The Lord dealt with the matter in a much more interesting manner than by at once granting their request, as unskilful kindness would have done. He said, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" They at once answered affirmatively, upon which Jesus said, "According to your faith be it unto you," and, touching their eyes, restored their sight. The men were delighted: but Jesus told them to enjoy the gift of God in quietness, and say nothing of it to any man—a commandment which they did not and could not possibly obey: "When they were departed, they spread abroad the fame in all the country." In all this there is a perfect life picture. There is nothing artificial or manufactured in it. How sadly noble the desire of Jesus to avoid public ovation while showing forth the glory and power of the Father in the performance of miracles: it is in harmony even with the poor specimens of worth and modest manhood we are sometimes permitted to know even now. How unlike the impostor or charlatan to entreat the subjects of his benefaction to keep the matter secret! How like human nature, for the blind men to disregard Christ's request, and blaze the matter abroad to the utmost. How godlike for Christ to let them persevere in their request before granting it: to even interpose an obstacle to put

their earnestness to the test: and to extort a confession of their faith before imparting the coveted benefit.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### From the Cure of the Blind Men to the Call of the Apostles.

As the two cured blind men passed out of the house (at Capernaum), a dumb man was brought in. With no more difficulty than he could open the eyes of the blind, Jesus could loose the tongue of the dumb. A word sufficed to expel what was supposed to be the demon causing the dumbness. The supposed demon, though a myth theologically, was a reality physiologically, as we have before had occasion to notice. The dumbness was caused by a real disturbing presence, and the popular name for this was "demon" in the days of Jesus. In removing this, Jesus removed what was universally known as the demon. It mattered nothing that the notion in which that name originated was a heathenish notion, and an untrue one. It was facts and not their names with which Jesus dealt. He cured the dumb man with a word, as he had cured the blind men. The bystanders were amazed at the power evinced in such performances. "It was never so seen in Israel," said they.

The implication contained in this exclamation (that Jesus was from God) was offensive to the leaders of the people—the Pharisees. Many of the Pharisees were privately of the same opinion; but, as a body, they highly resented it. If the numerous and incessant and unprecedented miracles of Christ seemed to compel the conviction which they refused, they found their escape in the "theory" of the matter they had formed for themselves. They said "He casteth out demons through the prince of the demons." They did not question the miracles, but they tried to explain them away by a theory which they propounded on more than one occasion, and with increasing emphasis and distinctness as the fame of Christ's miracles grew more prevailing. "This fellow," said they, "hath Beelzebub, the prince of the demons; and by the prince of the demons casteth he out demons" (Matt. xii. 24; Mar. iii. 22).

How foolish this theory was, Jesus showed in a sentence; and how wicked, he presently declared in words which are not exceeded by any of his utterances for terrible solemnity. On the first point, he argued that if Beelzebub were a prince of the invisible realms, it was not likely he would use his power (through Jesus or in any other way) to pull down his own kingdom. It must be a power adverse to Beelzebub that was dislodging his minions right and left as Jesus was doing. He appealed to their own doings in the case. Exorcism was an art practised among their disciples. Their theory of the art was that God gave them power to expel demons. They never imagined that Satan used his power to cast himself out.

Now, said Jesus, "If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges." In all this, Jesus took for granted the reality of Beelzebub, the heathen divinity whom Israel in their darkness had come to regard as a reality; and the reality also of the demons Beelzebub was supposed to have under his control. The question was not as to them, but as to the nature of the works of Christ.

There was no answer to Christ's question on the Pharisean theory of these things. His works could not be of diabolical origin on their own theory of diabolical operation. But the Pharisees were of the class of theorists who are inaccessible to reason, and on whom he could only "look round about with anger, being grieved at the hardness of their hearts" (Mar. iii. 5). Nevertheless, for the sake of others who were to be reached by his recorded words for ages afterwards, he finished his argument, and uttered words of heavy moment. "If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God is come unto you. ... All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men. Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (Matt. xii. 28–32). Mark adds "BECAUSE THEY SAID, He hath an unclean spirit" (Mar. iii. 30). It needs not this addition to shew the meaning of Christ's words about the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The whole connection shews it. It was the crime of the Pharisees that was in view. The unforgiveable blasphemy of the Holy Spirit of which they were guilty consisted in attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to another agency.

That the offence should be unpardonable was, in the circumstances, just. It was both against reason, and against the evidence of their senses. It was therefore on a par with the "presumptuous sin" for which there was no forgiveness under the law (Num. xv. 30). The spirit in both cases was the same—a spirit of wilful, wanton, presumptuous rebellion against the light—a spirit which in any case makes the difference between that "sin unto death," and that sin which is not unto death of which John speaks (1 Jno. v. 16). It is this which gives character to the declaration of Paul in Hebrews that "it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come (a description applicable only to those who were the subjects of the miraculous gifts of the apostolic age)—if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance" (Heb. vi. 4–6); and also the statement that "if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversary" (x. 26).

Much mental torment that might have been spared has been endured in connection with this subject of the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Sensitive persons have feared they may have been guilty of the offence without being



aware of it. An enlightened apprehension of the subject will shew them that such a case as sinning against the Holy Spirit without being aware of it is not possible; and further, that it is doubtful if the offence is possible at all in our age when the Spirit does not visibly assert itself. The ground of the special responsibility existing in the apostolic age was the evidence. "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin" (Jno. xv. 24). In our day, the evidence has become obscure and difficult of apprehension for the common run of minds. The Bible is truly the work of the Spirit of God, and the man who says it is human literally commits the sin which Jesus says will never be forgiven. But the circumstances are different, and it is questionable if in the circumstances of an era like this, when God's face is hidden, such an offence would be estimated so heinously as in a day when the voice and hand of God were visibly displayed in attestation of His truth.

Before Jesus left the subject, he made a declaration much deserving to be pondered by all who recognise the voice of God in him. It bears seriously upon a habit of irreverence and thoughtlessness of speech which is more prevalent in modern than in ancient times. He said "I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment: for by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. xii. 36). This solemn statement was evoked by the rash sayings of the Pharisees that his miracles were the work of Beelzebub; but it is evident that Jesus intended it to have a very wide application to "every idle word." The saying of the Pharisees gives us to understand what is meant by an "idle" word—not an idle word in the literal English sense of a meaningless word said in an idle purposeless mood, but a word spoken unwisely and with a meaning detrimental to the honour or truth or majesty of God. Such may be spoken through ignorance or "of malice aforethought." In either case it is an offence, though more an offence in the latter case than the former. It is an offence to which men are peculiarly liable in this age.

The misapplied constructions of science have nearly dissolved all sense of responsibility, and extinguished all sentiment of reverence. Human consequences are a check upon action, but in speech, unbounded license is the order of the day. The language of the psalm expresses the common feeling: "Our tongues are our own: who is Lord over us?" It is one of the many symptoms of the deep disorder that prevails in the world. It is a time for David's prayer, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth: keep the door of my lips;" protect us from the flood of irreverent speech that passes on every hand—the impure, frivolous, reckless, foolish chatter that undermines wisdom in every heart, turning reverence to scorn, and love to a theme for jest. The words of Christ will act as a wholesome antidote in the hearts of those who give heed. "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

Reverence is the highest and the noblest faculty in the human constitution. Like all other faculties, knowledge opens the way for its exercise. The profundities and infinities and inimitable contrivances of the universe tell us of power and wisdom that inspire adoration; the revelation that God has made of himself through Moses and the prophets discloses to us the source and nature of those exquisite powers, and supplies the mind with a perfect fulcrum for the action of that faculty of reverence which finds adequate expression in the act of worship alone. Worship in the true sense is the highest function of created intelligence. It is the one that is most under a blight in the present state of things upon the earth. It is either allied with darkness, and amounts to nothing more than a superstition; or it is burnt away to nothing in the flaming light of mechanical intellect applied to mercenary use. Christ is the type of the few who will be selected from the chaos for the new cosmos of the coming time—men of light and reverence. The development of this type is a work of great difficulty in the barbaric environment of modern life. But the Word of God makes it possible; and one of its moulding influences lies in the recollection that the irreverent and foolish use of the God-like faculty of speech will be brought into question in the great day of account.

After the cure of the dumb man, Jesus left Capernaum for a local circuit among “the cities and villages” of the district, “teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.” This prominence of “the Gospel of the Kingdom” calls for notice (Matt. iv. 23; ix. 35; xxiv. 14; Mark i. 14; Luke iv. 43; viii. 1; ix., 2, 11; Acts viii. 12; xx. 25; xxviii. 31.) The kingdom was a constant feature, whether in his formal discourses or in his private and conversational contacts with the people and their leaders. It is impossible to understand his teaching without an understanding of the kingdom. The understanding of this has become difficult only on the assumptions of popular theology, which are inconsistent with the truth. When these are dismissed with the doctrine of the immortality of the soul out of which they grow, the difficult subject becomes easy, and a key is obtained which fits every part of his teaching—whether his parables, his public discourses or his preceptive allusions.

Jesus never defined in an elementary or formal way what the kingdom was. He assumed that it was understood by his hearers,—which it was. Nevertheless, we may gather a clear idea of the subject from his allusions; and the idea so to be gathered is exactly what is to be derived from Moses and the prophets, as we should expect from one who said, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.” This is a very different idea from that of popular sentiment. The most favourite form of that sentiment in our day is that which thinks of the Kingdom of God as the relation of divine ideas to the human mind, individually applied. The whole realm of divine ideas is thought of as the kingdom, and our connection with the kingdom an affair of sympathetic contact with that realm, so that a man is conceived of as in the kingdom who is in subjection to divine ideas. That this was not the conception

governing the language of Christ becomes evident from almost any attempt to harmonise that language with it.

When he speaks of his coming, he says, "Ye shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, and many shall come from the east and from the west ... and shall sit down in the Kingdom of God" (Luke xiii. 28). This is the language of locality and futurity, and is used of men who were already (historically viewed) in the state of mind popularly understood by the Kingdom of God.

Again, when he speaks of public events as signs of the time, he says: "When ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (xxi. 31). The same remark applies: futurity is intimated for "the kingdom" of this statement, and it is regarded as a thing of political and social relations.

Again, at the last passover celebrated by himself and his disciples, when referring to the future bearings of the scheme of things that bound him and his disciples together, his words were "I will not any more eat thereof until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God ... I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God shall come" (xxii. 16–18).

Such language could not be harmonised with a view which regards the Kingdom of God as a mental realm or state having constantly immanent relation to every man. It is only intelligible in view of the Jewish idea of an actual kingdom to be established in the Holy Land in the age of the Messiahs glorified presence. That this was the idea before the mind of Christ is evident from three things:—

1. That the earth is recognized in his teaching as the scene of the kingdom when established.
2. That the Jewish constitution of things, involving land, institutions and people, is always in view as the basis of that kingdom.
3. That the recompense of his servants is always linked in his parables and otherwise, with his second coming to enter into possession of the kingdom.

The proof of these three points is capable of an easy and brief establishment; and their establishment will not be out of place, in view of the key they furnish to the mass of his teaching, which we have yet to pass in view in the further consideration of the life of Christ.

The first point is illustrated by such a statement as "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. v. 5.) The "shall" of this promise shows futurity, and experience shows it has no fulfilment in the present. Take this inheriting of the earth in connection with the invitation to the righteous on the day of judgment, "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom" (Matt. xxv. 34), and we see the earth and the kingdom associated. The well-known petition in "the Lord's

prayer” shews the same association: “Thy kingdom come: thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Consider also the assurance, “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” in connection with the revealed consummation of the work of Christ as exhibited to John in Patmos: “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.”

The second point (the Jewish basis of the kingdom) is established first by his relation to David, the king of Israel, to which the angel gave political emphasis in the preliminary announcement of his birth: “The Lord God shall give him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke i. 32); secondly, by his claim to be the king of the Jews (Jno. xix. 21), which was the ground of accusation that led to his crucifixion (verse 19); thirdly, by the promise to his disciples that in the day of his glory, they would be enthroned with him in kingly supremacy over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. xix. 28; Luke xxii. 30); and fourthly, by the apostolic anticipation that he would “restore again the kingdom to Israel” (Acts i. 6) at his re-appearing at the time spoken of by all the prophets (Acts iii. 20).

The third point (the connection which he always makes between judicial recompense and his second appearing) is one of the most conspicuous features of the case, whether we regard formal declaration or the involved implications of discourse. “The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matt. xvi. 27). “The Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.... What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch” (Mar. xiii. 34). “And it came to pass that having received the kingdom, and having returned” (Luke xix. 12). “Blessed are those servants whom their lord when he cometh shall find watching” (Matt. xxiv. 46). “Take heed ... lest that day come upon you unawares” (Luke xxi. 34). “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself” (John xiv. 2).

This must suffice as an illustration of the evidence afforded by the direct utterances of Christ, of the real and political and Jewish character of the Kingdom of God, which was the subject of the gospel he preached. The evidence in the same direction to be found in the promises made to the fathers, the covenant made with David, and the many statements of the prophets—those “holy men of God who spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit,” it would be out of place to set forth here. The cases cited give ample indication of the nature of the “gospel of the kingdom” which he preached in the synagogues of Galilee in connection with the works of healing which he performed. That the tidings of the approach of a kingdom in which mankind will be governed and managed on the principles of heaven, should be considered good news (as the term gospel imports), will appear natural to everyone who realises how much human well-being depends upon the material and educational conditions to which men are

subjected. But how much greater do the good news appear when they come to us in the form of an invitation to possess the glory and honour and immortality of the kingdom—to become fellow, heirs with Christ of his throne (Rev. ii. 26). Those who may be disposed to think of such a conception of the kingdom as gross, and low, and sinister, have only to think the subject out to discover their mistake.

The Kingdom of God, foretold by the prophets, and preached by Jesus, is exactly suited to all the needs of this afflicted world—whether we consider the relations of man to himself, man to man, or man to God. There is no desire of any reformer; there is no sentiment of any idealist; there is no yearning of any philanthropic heart; there is no aspiration of any divinely thirsting mind, but what the Kingdom of God provides for the realisation of in the most effectual form—all the more effectual because political. To be effectual, it must be political. A remedy that was not political would leave untouched and unaffected the most vital conditions of human weal. It is a false philosophy of human nature that has obscured the glorious character of the kingdom of God as the remedy exactly fitted to meet all the wants of the afflicted state of things now prevailing upon the earth.

It is part of the unapproachable completeness and greatness of Christ, that while inculcating the noblest principles of present action ever conceived by man, he should ally them with the highest motives of which the human heart is capable, by proclaiming the approach of an age and a government in which human life should be taken in hand by God, and so regulated as to yield the beauty and the joy of which it is capable, but which, under the conditions now prevailing, are unattainable.

The multitudes drawn by the teaching and the miracles of Christ during the circuit through Galilee now under consideration, excited his pity. “He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted (or, as the margin reads, ‘they were tired and lay down’), and were scattered about as sheep having no shepherd” (Matt. ix. 36). They had come from great distances, and persistently kept him company from day to day, and began to show signs of the fatigue inseparable from the irregularities of unsettled life. What led them to subject themselves to this privation? It was doubtless the hope and expectation of something good at the hands of Christ. They sought good in vain in all ordinary quarters. As sheep without a shepherd, they had no one to look after them, and made poor shift for themselves as they best could—nibbling pasture when there was an opportunity, but more often fleeing in apprehension from the approach of the marauding stranger. In Jesus, they thought they had found one who would provide what they needed, and they flocked after him, and he pitied them. His compassion for them was something to which the people were unaccustomed. It was something pleasant to them, as compassion is to all human beings—a something absent from all ordinary human leaderships.

It was something, however, with a painful side to it. His compassion, though active, was powerless for any effectual purpose, such as the people eagerly looked to him for. Had they made a mistake in looking to him as “the good shepherd” who “careth for the sheep?” Oh, no: but the circumstances were not such as admitted of the putting forth of his tending, protecting ministering power. They did not know this, and he did. “They thought the Kingdom of God would immediately appear,” and he knew that the days of vengeance were at hand, long-gathering over Israel, and about to burst in unparalleled tribulation on the heads of that generation, who, notwithstanding the companies following him, were busy filling up the measure of their fathers’ iniquities, in approving and imitating their God-neglecting deeds. Forty years afterwards, the storm descended, and swept them all away.

There was a deep meaning to Christ’s compassion. No wonder that he often “sighed deeply.” No wonder that he wept, when on a later occasion he beheld Jerusalem in her pomp and glitter. No wonder he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. He wished the people who followed him the very best from the bottom of his heart, but he knew it could not be. The laws of God are inflexible; the people were such as could not prosper in accordance with their operation. Sin and evil are inseparable. Sin submerged the land like a flood, and it was not possible that the blessings which the people longed for could be allowed. Yet they sought after those blessings, and followed him because they thought he could bestow them. They thought not wrongly of him, but they discerned not the impregnable barriers that stood in the way, requiring even his own soon coming death. Therefore, the compassion that stirred his bosom was a painful compassion—a compassion that would bless and could not, and yet could—a compassion that could only yearn and weep and wait. How much a similar conflict belongs to the present state of things on the earth those can testify who have learnt to look on things with the light, while with the love, of God.

Jesus said to his disciples, looking on the multitude around him, that the harvest was great, if the labourers were few. He meant the harvest in a limited sense, for the true “harvest,” as he afterwards said, in explanation of one of his parables, “is the end of the world” (aion). He had gone forth sowing the seed of the word, and the result had been multitudes of listeners everywhere, which he spoke of as a harvest which there was a lack of harvestmen to gather in. He was, in fact, almost the only one there was to look after it. He had disciples, but they took no part separably from him. They went with him, hanging on his words and admiring his works, and boasting in their connection with him. They were not such a help as the situation called for. He felt himself single-handed, and though that hand was a powerful hand, still, as a man subject to human infirmity, he felt the burden, and eased his mind, as well as prepared the disciples for the next phase of the work, by saying to them: “Pray ye the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.”

Did they do what he told them? Did they pray to the Father that He would increase the instrumentality in proportion to the need of the growing work around them? We do not know. Possibly they did, but probably they did not, for as yet they were but children in the work in which they had become associated with Christ. They would have such confidence in the sufficiency of Christ for all things that it would probably seem to them unnecessary that they should burden their minds with solicitude towards God on behalf of the work in which they were engaged. Here let us learn from Christ that men "ought always to pray," and even on behalf of such men and such works as may seem the strongest. He asked the prayers of his disciples on behalf of a work which he himself had in hand. Thus, also, Paul entreated: "Brethren, pray for us." The dependence of all things and creatures on the Eternal Father, through his boundless spirit filling and upholding the universe, and through which His will can affect the subtlest and the smallest conditions, would teach us, if we could but have our eyes open at all times, that prayer is a necessity for all work that is to prosper in the Lord.

Having pre-disposed the minds of the disciples in the direction of the need for a more effectual work by the distribution of labour, Jesus at the next recorded opportunity proceeded to separate certain of them for a more especial co-operation with himself. In this, we have the first proper appointment of the twelve apostles, as distinguished from the body of disciples that had gathered around him, and of whom they constituted but individuals in common.

## **CHAPTER XXII.**

### **The Twelve Apostles: Their Call, Their Qualifications, and Their Instructions.**

IT is recorded that before the day on which he called his disciples together to choose from among them "twelve, whom also he named apostles," "he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God" (Luke vi. 12, 13). There is probably a deep connection between these two things. Jesus had just enjoined his disciples to pray to "the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth labourers into his harvest;" and here we have him engaged "all night in prayer to God" just before performing the most important operation in connection with that work—namely, the appointment of twelve special men who were to take the leading part in the planting of the gospel in the earth, and who, with one exception, were to rank next to him in the glory of the kingdom of Israel restored (Luke xxii. 29, 30; Acts i. 6; Jno. xiii. 18, 21). Our estimate of the greatness of Christ may interfere somewhat with our appreciation of his dependence upon prayer. This is because of our inability to reach to the greater greatness above him, even the Father, of whom he said, "My Father is greater than I" (Jno. xiv. 28). Jesus "knew what was in man," and "needed not that any should testify what was in man" (Jno. ii. 25). Therefore, we are liable to conclude that he needed not

to pray the Father to guide him in the selection of men for companionship in suffering and glory. We may learn the blindness of such a thought as we behold him retire to a mountain solitude during the darkness of night to pray all night to God.

God had prepared the men. John the Baptist, as we saw him in an early chapter, was sent before him to do this work—"to prepare his ways" (Luke i. 76), "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (verse 17). John having done his work in the preparation and gathering together of a people, Jesus was introduced to notice, and the prepared people transferred to him. Jesus refers to this in the beautiful prayer of John xvii., "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me" (verse 6). A part of the process by which they were so "given" by the Father to Jesus, we see in this earnest and prolonged entreaty by Christ for guidance in the selection from the whole multitude of the disciples of the twelve, who were to be with him in a special and intimate manner. In this we may learn the need for our own application at all times to the same source of direction. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, and he shall direct thy steps." On the other hand, we will be protected against the presumption of so-called modern "faith," by observing that Jesus, having sought direction, proceeded to take the measures for the appointment of the apostles, instead of sitting down supinely to wait for God to bring them to Him. We must use the means; we must work with God. This is His beautiful arrangement by which God is glorified without man being spoiled.

The sun having risen, Jesus returns from his night-long communion with the Father on the solitary mountain side, and comes to where his disciples are within call, which appears to have been at the lower part of the hill. He went so far down the hillside towards them, and seating himself, sent word round that they were to come to him. They assemble before him—in what numbers is not stated—but, probably, several hundreds. He informs them that he is about to "ordain twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth, and to have power to heal sickness and to cast out demons." He then "called unto him whom he would, and they came unto him." First, Peter, whose first name was Simon; second, Andrew, Peter's brother; third, James, the son of Zebedee; fourth, John, the brother of James; fifth, Phillip; sixth, Bartholomew; seventh, Thomas (Didymus); eighth, Matthew; ninth, James, the son of Alpheus; tenth, Lebbæus Thaddeus (also called Jude or Judas); eleventh, Simon the Canaanite; and twelfth, Judas Iscariot. These, as their names were called, would step to the front, one by one, and stand before Jesus, who addressed special words to them.

Before we consider the words of the address, we will look for a moment at the appointed men—not as regards their personal aspect and peculiarities, for of that we have little means of judging, but as regards their characteristics in common with the class to which they belonged, and their qualifications for the work to which they were separated in so special a manner. Those qualifications were not at all such as would commend themselves to ordinary human judgment. Among



the many eccentric observations (“idle words”) of Henry Ward Beecher is one to the effect, that the apostles were “poor stuff;” and that Christ could have found “better material” at Athens. From Mr. Beecher’s point of view, which is the ordinary point of view of the natural man, Mr. Beecher is right. The apostles were mostly fishermen, which is enough to exclude the idea of those excellences which commend themselves to human taste and judgment. Literary culture or great breadth of mind are not usually found among fishermen, and did not characterise the apostles. The absence of educational polish is expressly noted in Acts iv. 13, where it is recorded that the rulers “perceived that they (Peter and John) were unlearned and ignorant men.” The natural crudeness of character mostly belonging to them comes out in a variety of instances: such as the dispute among them who should be greatest in the Kingdom (Mar. ix. 34); their repulsion of the mothers with their children, who were seeking the blessing of Jesus (Mar. x. 14); their impulse to invoke judgment on the Samaritans (Luke ix. 54); the obstinate scepticism of Thomas (Jno. xx. 25); and Peter’s threefold denial of Christ in the hour of darkness (Matt. xxvi. 74, 75).

But it does not follow that peculiarities which would have disqualified them for the execution of a human enterprise, were disqualifications for a work which God proposed to accomplish through them. On the contrary, it is possible to see that the supposed disqualifications were positive qualifications. To see this requires that a man take the Bible point of view in looking at the subject, and this, on thorough reflection, will turn out to be a thoroughly rational point of view—intellectual prejudice to the contrary notwithstanding. The object in view is always everything in judging of means. A smoked glass, under ordinary circumstances, is an impossible medium of sight, yet it is the thing to look at the sun with. The object of the apostolic enterprise must be considered in rightly estimating the qualifications of the men chosen to carry it out.

That object was God’s object, and therefore it is with His view we must look to see the matter rightly. The principle underlying it comes out very clearly in various parts of Paul’s writings. “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus our Lord” (II Cor. iv. 5). “I came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom ... that your faith should NOT stand in the wisdom of men BUT IN THE POWER OF GOD” (1 Cor. ii. 1, 5). “We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God AND NOT OF US” (2 Cor. iv. 7). “Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the things that are mighty ... THAT NO FLESH SHOULD GLORY IN HIS PRESENCE ... according as it is written. Let him that glorieth, glory in the Lord” (1 Cor. i. 26, 31).

The object being to exhibit the wisdom and power of God, in the salvation of men by His grace for His glory, it was needful to make use of instruments who would not frustrate or obstruct this exhibition by distracting attention to themselves. Men of great polish and high natural gift would have been liable to fall into this

mistake, without design. They would have figured largely in the eyes of the public, and would have been in danger of becoming important in their own eyes, especially with miraculous power at their command. God would not have been so visible as the instruments. This was the (unpremeditated) crime of Moses for which he was excluded from the land of promise. "Ye sanctified me not in the eyes of the congregation." In a moment of natural impatience with Israel's obduracy, he appeared to take the credit of giving them water out of the rock: "Hear now, ye rebels, must WE fetch you water out of this rock?"

Thus God was hidden when he was aiming to be seen, and thus it likely would have been with the apostolic work had men of position, parts, and education been chosen as its instruments, instead of men of obscurity, deficiency, and illiteracy. The exigencies of the work by-and-by required a man of superior stamp like Paul, but even then the same principle was brought to bear in a special way. The danger of using him was neutralised by having allowed him first in his blindness to go to extreme lengths as a persecutor, and then by inflicting special disabilities of a humbling character. "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me.... For this thing I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. xii. 7-9).

Hence, that very poorness of the material made use of in the selection of apostles which Mr. Beecher laments, was a necessity in the case. God was about to show His glory and His goodness in the offer of eternal life through a miraculously-attested agency; and His purpose in this offer required that the authority and the credit of it should be manifestly His own, and not those of the men employed at all. This object was secured by choosing fishermen of no education. But though of poor qualifications, as regards accomplishments that rank highly in human estimation, they were not (except as to one of them), without positive qualifications that rendered them precious in God's eyes, and perfectly suitable to be employed as His special servants. These qualifications were not such as appeal to human admiration, but were nevertheless in themselves of great and rare excellence and value. The nature of them comes out in the remark that Jesus made on a certain occasion, when, being in the heart of a crowd, a message was brought to him that he was wanted by his mother and his relations. "He stretched forth his hands towards his disciples and said, Behold my mother and my brethren, for WHOSOEVER SHALL DO THE WILL OF MY FATHER who is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt. xii. 49).

Here Jesus bears testimony that his apostles belonged to the class that did the will of the Father. If we consider what this "will" is, as expressed in the precepts of Christ, we shall ascertain what were the governing characteristics of the apostles as a body. The first had regard to himself: "This is the work of God that

ye believe on him whom He hath sent" (Jno. vi. 29). This was God's own command: "This is My beloved Son, hear ye him." This the apostles did. They possessed an adoring faith in Christ. This was their first qualification which accomplished men would not have been likely to possess in the same intensity. Next, there were Christ's commandments to them, concerning which he said, "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I have commanded." Christ owned the apostles as friends (Jno. xv. 15). Consequently, they were men who kept his commandments. Look at these. They began with God: "Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," "Have faith in God." They extended to the promises of God: "Receive the kingdom of God as little children." They ended with themselves: "Be humble as little children." "Be kind to the unthankful and the evil."

The apostles, though fishermen and unlearned, were strongly imbued with these dispositions, and therefore were interesting men, and fitted to be the instruments of the grace of God, bringing salvation—interesting in a different way than modern taste would compute, but still interesting. They were not the colourless and insipid men which it is customary to assume in the absence of station and accomplishments. Men who love God, and adore Christ, and believe in the kingdom, and practice mercy, and speak truth, submit to wrong, and are kind to all men, and humble in their own deportment, and small in their own estimation, are not the sort of men with whom modern life has made us familiar in the lower class,—who mostly love themselves and adore nobody, and believe when they see, and act unfeelingly, and tell the truth when it suits them, and stand up for their rights, and are kind only to chums, and democratically self-assertive in their attitude, and as good as any other man in their own eyes. The working man is glorified wonderfully by modern politicians who depend upon his vote; but the working man, whether by the seaside or in the heart of the country, is not the type of the men whom Christ chose for apostles from among those who had been gathered together out of Israel by the preaching of the word of the Lord by John the Baptist. "Poor stuff" they may have been according to Gentile modes of reckoning men, but according to divine views, which are the lasting views, they were the "salt of the earth," the "little children" whom the Father loved—the men chosen as the altogether suitable instruments for the attested declaration of the Father's love, and the after manifestation of His glory, as foundation stones in the new Jerusalem of the ages to come.

They varied among themselves as regarded natural characteristics: but the variation was a variety of suitable dispositions. Their very weaknesses were turned to account. If Peter was impulsive, it was mostly in the direction indicated by Paul when he said, "it is good to be always zealously affected in a good cause;" and Peter was required for the apostolic initiative which required what people in our day understand by "go." If he was weak and denied the Lord, his fault (washed away in instant bitter tears) qualified him, by the very abasement it brought with it, for that leadership of the apostles which might have filled a faultless man with too high notions of his own importance. If Thomas was unreasonably faithless of Christ's resurrection in the presence of evidence, his

scepticism evoked the most powerful demonstration of its truth which believers then unborn have since had to rest on; whilst, as a dark background, it set forth his subsequent conviction with a striking prominence that loudly says, "Here is invincible unbelief convinced: how was it done? Ponder the cause, and believe ye." John as "the disciple whom Jesus loved," exhibits the combination of goodness and severity that belongs to God and receives His approval: gentle and loving when circumstances admitted of it, but decisive even to the sharpness of "a son of thunder" when other circumstances called for denunciation of "the high things that exalted themselves against the knowledge of God," as when he says:—"He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John ii. 4). James, sombre, stern, and faithful, was a pillar of stability in the times that came after, when men were liable to let justification by faith overshadow the necessity for the works by which faith is made perfect. Of the other apostles we know but little, except of Judas, and on him we need not dwell, except to note that contact with high privileges does not necessarily secure the just appreciation and faithful use of them, and that from the highest station it is possible, like him, to fall "by transgression." To teach such a lesson, as well as to provide a needed "vessel unto dishonour"—the traitor through whom the Son of Man's delivery into the hands of sinners was to be effected—was doubtless the object of his permitted entrance into the apostolic circle, by him who knew all men, and was aware of the true character of Judas (Jno. ii. 24, 25; vi. 70).

With the exception of Judas, whose place was afterwards filled by Matthias (Acts i. 24–26), the twelve men chosen by Christ from the body of the disciples, were all fit men to be used by the Holy Spirit in the work to which he called them; and afterwards (in the Kingdom to be set up by the Lord at his return) to fill the positions implied in Christ's promise of twelve thrones by his side (Matt. xix. 27), and in the inscription of their names on the twelve foundations of the wall of the symbolic holy city (Rev xxi. 14). They were child-like men, of earnest purpose, with a zeal of God according to knowledge. Such men Christ could not have found at Athens if he had gone there. He might have found "certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics" of the sort that afterwards encountered Paul (Acts xvii. 18), who seemed to them a "babbling." This class abounded through the prosperity of the schools that flourished there. They were in great reputation among the paganised and ignorant multitudes of Greece and Rome; but they were not in reputation with God. He did not choose them (1 Cor. i. 26). Why? Because "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God" (1 Cor. iii. 19). Inspect their philosophy, and you see it is even so. It consists mainly of cloudy speculations on metaphysical abstractions on which the human intellect is not qualified to profitably operate. From the point of view of even modern science, most of it was sheer nonsense; how much more so in the eyes of Him who knows the ways of infinity about which mortals speculate in vain, and when to the futility and barrenness of their philosophy we add the intellectual pride with which it was allied, we may understand why they were not serviceable to Him with

whom no man is acceptable, “except he humble himself and receive the Kingdom of God as a little child.”

Having appointed and separated the twelve, the next thing was to send them out in execution of the work which Jesus had in hand. Hitherto, Jesus had been the only preacher—attended and assisted, it is true, by the disciples, but not helped by separate and independent operations on their part. He and they were but a single harvesting agency, the whole burden of which fell on him. The work was now to be subdivided and extended through all the land. The twelve (and afterwards seventy) were to be sent forth, two and two, in all directions, enforcing and illustrating the Word which Jesus had come to preach. Before despatching them, Jesus addressed to them a few words of direction. His first instruction had reference to the limits of their work. They were not to go anywhere and everywhere: “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. x. 5, 6).

There is much significance in this circumscription of their work. Popular theology cannot explain it. According to the pulpit theory of the work of Christ, all men are immortal souls in danger of going to hell and the devil, and Christ had come to save them all, or offer them salvation at least. By this theory, “the Gentiles” and the “Samaritans” stood as much in need of the apostolic ministrations as “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” and in a sense, as men reason, might be considered as more entitled to them, seeing they had not been for ages the subject of disregarded privileges as Israel had. Yet Jesus says, “Go not into” their way. Confine your work to Israel. What is the meaning of this? Negatively, it is to be found in the fact that men are not what ancient philosophy and modern pulpitology unite in alleging them to be. Men are not immortal beings in any sense, but perishing forms of life under a specific and hereditary sentence of death from which man can only be delivered in God’s way (Gen. iii. 19; Rom. v. 12–21; 2 Tim. 1:1–10). The bulk of mankind are no more to God than the grass that springs on a thousand hill sides (Psa. xxxix. 4, 5; ciii. 15, 16; cxliv. 3, 4; Isa. xl. 6–8, 17; Dan. iv. 35; James iv. 14; 1 Pet. 1, 24, 25).

This fact is demonstrated in *Elpis Israel*, *Christendom Astray*, *Man Mortal*, and other publications, and need not be enlarged upon here. It is referred to merely as furnishing an explanation of the otherwise inexplicable limitation of the work which Christ put into the hands of the Apostles. The human race are but the raw material with which God is working out His own purpose with the earth, “after the counsel of His own will.” This purpose is formed in wisdom, and involves a time to work and a time to refrain from working: human material to be used and human material not to be used: which explains to us every arbitrary limitation in the working out of the plan. The men that come not within the plan pass away like the beasts that perish—without hardship, without injustice, without issue or trace of evil left behind (Psa. xlix. 14–20; Isa. xxvi. 14; Obadiah 16).

Next, Jesus told them what they were to preach: “As ye go, preach, saying, the Kingdom of heaven is at hand, ” “The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you” (Luke ix. 10). There is no real cause for the difficulty that some experience in reconciling this message with the view of the Kingdom of God outlined in the last chapter. We have but to consider the practical teaching of the Lord and his disciples to discern the sense in which a kingdom yet to be established had come nigh to Israel in the ministry of Christ. The question in its bearing upon those to whom they preached, was a question of “entering into” it—“inheriting” it when it should come. Such statements as these illustrate the point; “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.” “Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of heaven.” “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.” “Hath not God called the poor in this world, rich in faith, HEIRS of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him.”

Now, in this sense—in the sense of an invitation to the inheritance of the kingdom, the Kingdom of God had come nigh to that generation for the first time. As Jesus said, “The law and the prophets were until John, and since that time, the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.” Before the days of John the Baptist, they were under the law of Moses, which did not offer immortal inheritance of the Kingdom of God (though its obedience kept the door open for the recompense of faith with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), and they were under the reproof of the prophets, whose mission it was to bring Israel back to the obedience from which they had deeply strayed. The full and formal invitation to the kingdom began with the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus—being offered in connection with the resurrection of the dead at the coming of Christ. In this sense, the Kingdom of God had “come nigh,” “approached,” and was “at hand.”

It had not come nigh in the sense of being about to appear. This is shewn (if there were nothing else) by Christ's express confutation of that idea, as when we are informed in Luke xix. 11, that Christ spoke the parable there recorded “because they thought that the Kingdom of God should immediately appear.” The parable speaks of a nobleman going into a far country, and being a long time away. “After a long time, the lord of those servants cometh” (Matt. xxv. 19). He taught them to look for that coming: and having spoken of signs of the approach of the event, he said: “When ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand” (Luke xxi. 31). In the literal sense, therefore, the Kingdom of God is not “nigh” till it become so in Christ himself arrived to set it up. But in the sense of having come near to them in the offer of inheritance, it had come nigh to them in the wonderful seven years covered by the mission of John the Baptist and Jesus. Having come near in that sense then, it remained near, and had no longer to be proclaimed as having just come nigh. “If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then is the Kingdom of God come unto you” (Matt. xii. 28). That is, the miraculous power shown in the casting out of demons was

proof that the kingdom had come nigh, both in a genuine divine offer and in the presence of the very king whose power would form that kingdom when extended in all the earth. The attempt to attach any transcendental meaning to the proclamation creates conflict and confusion between one part of Christ's teaching and another.

## **CHAPTER XXIII.**

### **Christ's First Address to the Twelve Apostles.**

IT is natural that in a special address delivered by Christ to the twelve apostles before sending them forth the first time, there should be notable features demanding a careful consideration. We have looked at two of them. Those that remain are of a more special character in some respects. Having told the newly-selected twelve what they were to preach, he next instructed them as to what they were to do and how they were to behave in the various circumstances in which he foresaw their work would place them. His words go beyond the limited errand on which he was just sending them. They stretched forward to the time when he should be no more with them, and when, in a larger field of operations, after his resurrection and ascension, they would themselves be arraigned before kings and governors, and slain.

They were to exercise the miraculous power which the Father had placed at his disposal, and which he placed at theirs. They were to "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons." It has been a question how they were to be able to do these things in advance of the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, which was to confer miraculous gift. It need not be a difficulty in view of Christ's own exercise of these powers. "The power of the Lord was present to heal" with him; and worked from him at their invocation. As the seventy afterwards said, "Lord, even the demons are subject unto us through thy name." At the name of Jesus, the power rooted in Jesus was put forth in the performance of miracle. The power was not in themselves at this stage, but after the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, the power was rooted in the twelve themselves, and they had power to bestow it by the imposition of their hands (Acts viii. 18). The possession of it was a necessity for proof that their message was from God.

They were not to provide themselves with money or baggage. They were to take nothing but the clothes in which they stood. "The workman," said he, "is worthy of his meat;" we might add, not only worthy, but in the case of the apostles thus sent forth, he was in a position to command it, which rendered provision superfluous. This is the explanation of an apparently unwise procedure. Any man going on a journey in a thickly-populated country, with power to work miracles—(and this power they were to put forth without stint,—for, said he, "freely ye have received, freely give")—any such man, journeying as an emissary of Christ,

whose fame filled the country, would command a ready hospitality. There would, in fact, be a competition among the people for the honour of it. It would therefore be a question of choice with the apostles. "Into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy." They were to select quarters accordingly. If the people of the place did not receive them favourably, it was to be reckoned a crime entailing severe results afterwards. "Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily, I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city" (Matt. x. 15).

All this was natural to the circumstances. The apostles were being sent forth as the trustees of the most honourable responsibility ever entrusted to man; and it was reasonable so far as they were concerned that a trial of faith should be linked with it in the command to go forth absolutely unprovided. On the other hand, the places visited by them were actually approached in their persons by the authority and power and majesty of God in Christ. It was, therefore, reasonable that they should be held under a paramount obligation to render the homage of attention and accommodation. But the attempt to apply these instructions of Christ to modern instances is self-evidently out of all propriety, and must lead to the most hideous and ridiculous caricatures. The attempts of Mormons and others to act the part prescribed to the apostles, in this matter of gratuitous accommodation, are really disgusting impostures—attributable to ignorance in many cases, no doubt, but none the less odious and detestable, and powerful to bring a totally unmerited reproach on the apostolic procedure.

Jesus said the apostles so sent forth were "as sheep in the midst of wolves." In no terser or more comprehensive phrase could the ideal character of Christ's disciples be sketched in a word: in no more expressive manner could the difference be indicated between them and the itinerant impostors of all kinds and times since, who have prowled about the world on the pretext of godliness, preying like wolves upon the sheep—coming, not as honest wolves, but as hypocritical wolves, clad in the fleece of the flock—sheep's clothing. Sheep do not prey upon others. Sheep-men yearn to bestow a blessing. They are not "looking out for number one." Like Christ, their prototype, they have "come, not to be ministered unto, but to minister." The population of the earth is mostly made up of such as "seek their own," in the accomplishment of which they are as unfeeling as the wolves in their acts of unmercy. It is still the case that the disciples of Christ areas sheep in the midst of wolves: sheep in their harmlessness, sheep in their defencelessness: sheep in their running from aggression instead of fighting it.

But they are not sheep in witlessness. Jesus said, "Be ye therefore WISE AS SERPENTS, harmless as doves." Though kind and unresentful, they were not to be simpletons, but quick-witted and fertile in their expedients for avoiding evil. While they were not to fight the wolves, they were not to offer themselves to them, but to evade them by their adroitness. "When they persecute you in this



city, flee ye into another.” They were not to court persecution, like the crowds, who, under the unwholesome influence of Ignatius in the second century, rushed to the stake. There were to “beware of men,” because men were dangerous. “They will deliver you up to the councils; they will scourge you in their synagogues.” The men who would do this were Jews, who have in all ages shown an almost insane antipathy to those sent from God to them to bring them to the right ways of God. But the Gentiles also would be like them in their opposition. “Ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake.”

This was not a pleasant prospect for dove-like and illiterate men. It was indeed a part which they could not have sustained by their own resources. They would have been overawed and silenced by the majesty and power of authority. But they were not to be left to their own resources. Jesus gave them a good reason for dismissing all dismay on the subject: “When they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you.” “I WILL GIVE YOU A MOUTH AND WISDOM which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.”

But why did not Jesus, in his great power, prevent all collision between them and the authorities? Such a question has been asked. It is answered by the explanation that they would be brought before kings and governors, “for a testimony against them and the Gentiles” a testimony against these authorities—Jew and Gentile. Jew and Gentile were both to be punished for their opposition to God and His anointed, but they were first to have an opportunity of shewing that opposition in a form justifying their condemnation—an opposition which amounted to sinning against the light, seeing they were to have the very apostles in their hands, with whose “works” which plainly testified to honest intelligence that their message was a divinely authorised one.

Why should both Jew and Gentile manifest such repugnance towards so beautiful and glorious a thing as the apostolic enterprise? We may know if we consider. Men are always hostile towards what they dislike. They are always friendly towards what is in harmony with their feelings; Divine thoughts and demands are not in this harmony, but in fundamental antagonism. Jesus says “That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God” This saying may be reversed, “That which is highly esteemed by God is abomination in the sight of men.” Paul virtually avers this in saying “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. ii. 14). He also says “The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. viii. 7). With this, Christ’s description of Peter’s diabolism agrees: “Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (Matt. xvi. 23).

Because, then, the things the apostles had to submit to the consideration of men were such as were opposed to human tastes, prejudices, and superstitions, their work would evoke deadly hostility on every hand. "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." It would extend to their very relations, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household!" "The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child, and the children shall rise up against the parents and cause them to be put to death." These were rough words, and excluded all ideas of peace as the result of the labours of the apostles. The apostles appear to have entertained such ideas. They appear to have thought that Christ had come to bring peace at that time. He expressly denies it in this address to them. "THINK NOT that I am come to send peace on earth, I came not to send peace, but a sword."

There is, of course, no inconsistency between this declaration and the announcement of the angels at the birth of Christ that there would be "peace on earth and goodwill to men;" or of the prophets, that he should "speak peace to the heathen," and that his name should be the "Prince of Peace." The two things belong to different stages of the same work. Peace at last,—profound, perfect, imperturbable—will be the effect of Christ's work upon earth: but in the first stage—in the absence of his enforced power, the reverse of peace is the result. The introduction of the truth concerning him creates parties for and against—a small party for, a great party against—and there is no peace between such, but war which cannot end till he come. There is no greater proof of the divinity of the word and work of Christ than that he should predict such a result. We have had a fulfilment of 1800 years' duration. The world is no nearer peace about him now than ever it was; and left to itself it never would approach it. There would be an endless repetition of the frictions and antagonisms that have prevailed for centuries, and that have lost none of their asperities with the latest generation. A shallow reading of the situation would have predicted peace: Christ, with an eye that penetrated to the remotest labyrinth of time and to the deepest springs of human action, foretold war: and war it has been and will be till he stop it by his own appearance upon the scene.

Meanwhile in this discourse to the twelve, he tells them what to expect and the part they must act (and what he said, though primarily intended for them and their special journey, is applicable to all his friends in all circumstances, and was written because so applicable). They were to expect misconception—hatred—persecution. The comfort he gives them is this: "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough that the disciple be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" It may seem poor consolation to be told that some one else, less deserving of it, has suffered the same or worse treatment than you. But there is a real consolation in it. If Christ, the perfect servant of God, was misconceived—hated—killed, it is easier for the erring servants to endure a similar experience. Suffering in good company is always felt to be easier suffering than suffering by ourselves. This is the help

Christ gave to the apostles: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." it is a real help. It strengthens the mind to that performance which Paul describes as "enduring hardness." It fortifies us for the bitter experience of being regarded and hated as evil doers for a course of life that is in reality dictated by the highest considerations of righteousness, truth, and benevolence. The experience is inevitable, and therefore the strength to endure is a necessity. "All that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. iii 12).

If our experience is otherwise,—if all men speak well of us,—if we are on cozy terms with the world right and left, it is a proof either that we are not godly, or that the godly savour of our life is not manifest. Our light is hidden in some way. Men do not know that we belong to Christ—exclusively animated by the principles incarnate in him. If they did, their feelings would not be those of friendship. This ignorance on their part could only come of our not confessing Christ before men. On this Christ had something to say in his address: "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven.... He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me."

These maxims were intended for the guidance of the twelve in the work upon which he was sending them forth: but it is evident they were also intended for all to whom their testimony should be presented. The "who-soever" shows this. Consequently, we may realise what Christ contemplated as a satisfactory result of the truth. It is evidently very different from what is popularly and clerically recognised as a sufficiency of Christian attainment. It is something more than a theoretical acquiescence in Christian principle. It is something more than a fair external conformity to Christian behaviour. It is evidently a thing of fervour amounting to devotedness, and of courage amounting to heroism, of conviction amounting to an all-suffusing faith inspired by knowledge amounting to illumination. Only such a pronounced and consecrated type of discipleship could be worthy of what he promises: "I will confess him before my Father who is in heaven." With what pleasure or propriety could Christ acknowledge in the Father's presence men who are disciples only in name, whose faith is ready to die, and whose hearts are in the present evil world, which is God's enemy? He has told us how he feels towards these lukewarm, self-satisfactionists: "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. iii. 16).

He makes a point of endurance. "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." The very word brings with it the idea of bearing what is disagreeable. No one would speak of "enduring" what was pleasant. Hence, Christ intimates that the position to which he was calling men was not a position of satisfaction, nor a position in which there would be much to gratify,—on the contrary, much to

mortify; much that would involve the infliction of pain—so far as the human bearings of the position were concerned. Experience shows the truth of his words. This is why so many fall away, and have done since the very day the apostles themselves were in the field of labour. Jesus foretold that in the generation immediately succeeding his departure, “the love of many should wax cold,” because of the disagreeables. A man can only endure these disagreeables steadfastly who retains confidence in the main facts; and he can only retain this confidence by keeping their evidence before his mind in the persevering perusal of the Scriptures; and he will only maintain this perseverance by the adoption of a wise plan of reading which he incorporates in the programme of his daily life. In the case of the apostles, they had the help of the Spirit’s abiding, enlightening, and comforting presence. Still, it is evident their endurance was tested as thoroughly as that of any less-privileged believers: for if they had greater help, they had greater labour, responsibility, opposition, and suffering.

As regards their persecutors, they were to “fear them not”—for three reasons, 1, things covered up would in the end be revealed in their true light; 2, their enemies were only able to kill the body; 3, the faithful servants of God were precious to God Himself, and in His keeping. The combined force of these reasons was very great. The appearance of things for the time being was all against the apostles. Their enemies, the priests and rulers, were not only in great reputation with the people, but were apparently the righteous of the earth, and were officially the chosen and divinely-appointed leaders in spiritual things. On the other side, Jesus was but a carpenter, without any origin or status such as could weigh with a people so beholden to caste, and accustomed to Mosaic sanctities. And his apostles were engaged in a work that was in apparent rebellion against the divine authority established in the nation. The whole situation was “covered” and “hid” as in a fog or under a veil, in which the true relations of things could not be discerned, and appeared the reverse of what they were. Jesus tells the disciples that this would be altered; that nothing was hid but what would be revealed; the true wickedness of their apparently righteous adversaries would be made manifest: the true worth and godliness of the work of Christ which was evil spoken of would be triumphantly revealed in the upshot of things. Therefore, they were to fear not their adversaries, but to go forward, and proclaim on the housetops, in the teeth of all opposition, the things whispered to them by him in secrecy.

The worst their adversaries could do was to kill them, and this was not to be feared at the hands of those who could only break up the present mortality, and could not touch the issues of life (translated “soul”). Those issues were in God’s hands, who purposed the bestowal of life eternal at an appointed time, as he said “This is the Father’s will that of all that He hath given me I should lose nothing, BUT should raise it up again at the last day” (Jno. vi. 39). They were therefore to fear Him who could and would in certain cases destroy both body and life at that time—causing some who had saved their lives to lose them, and some who had lost their lives to find them. To Him faithful lives were precious; and His power

was equal to their preservation against that day. All things even now were embraced in that power. Even a sparrow, hunted, caught, and sold for less than a penny, could not fall without the Father's permission. If He chose to interfere, He could prevent it. His all-prevalent, subtle discernment extended to the number of the very hairs on the head. How much, then, might those who to Him were "of more value than many sparrows." go forth in the strength of His declared will, and boldly front any antagonism in the obedience of His commandments. They could never be out of His reach: never away from his presence: never out of touch with that permission without which they could not be prevailed against.

He presented a final consideration of great power to sustain them in their work, and which contains within it the seed of some serious reflections for those who are inclined to the modern habit of disparaging the apostles and their work: "He that receiveth you receiveth me: and he that receiveth me receiveth Him that sent me" (Matt. x. 40). He states the matter conversely thus: "He that despiseth you despiseth me, and he that despiseth me despiseth Him that sent me" (Lu. x. 16). What deeper source of confidence and boldness could men have in the execution of any enterprise than the certainty that they represented Christ, who represented God, and that God and Christ would reckon all that was done to them as done to themselves? This certainty the apostles possessed without presumption, because derived from Christ's express assurance; and it would be a constant comfort to them in all their tribulations. It is a Roman Catholic corruption to maintain that this relation of things extends to any "successors" so-called. The apostles can have no successors. Their qualification was intransmissible. They were to speak as witnesses of what they had seen and heard, which nobody could do for them, except at second-hand, and this anyone could do without involving "successorship."

In the exercise of this function of witness-ship, they were to be used and guided by the Holy Spirit, which would even dictate their speeches to them when arraigned before the authorities. In this inspired presentation of truth, no one could succeed them who was not inspired: and none of the clergy, Catholic or Protestant, are inspired. It is therefore presumption and blasphemy for them to claim the Divine delegation assigned to the apostles. We are not hearing Christ in hearing the clergy: we are not despising Christ in despising the clergy. But there is a form of things in which we may commit the crime of despising Christ, and of this crime none are more guilty than the clergy. The Holy Spirit moved the apostles to commit their testimony to writing. If we despise or make light of that testimony, by nullifying or casting their writings behind our backs, we depise the apostles and, by consequence, Christ who sent them to speak and write; and by further consequence, God, who sent Christ. A man's attitude to the apostolic writings is his attitude to Christ and to God.

Hence the heinousness of the treatment that these writings receive at the hands of all classes of men. The clergy nullify them by substituting their own authority and teaching their own fabulous traditions. Critics of all sorts and complexions

make them of none effect by attributing their authorship, either wholly or partly, to the erring fishermen of Galilee. Men in vast multitudes, professedly Christian, despise them by neglecting the study of them, and by living in daily violation of their most elementary precepts. By one process or another, the word of God is made of none effect, and God rendered morally powerless among men. It is a crime that will shortly be purged in great judgment, when happy shall they be who are found in the position of listening to the apostolic testimony with the deference its authority demands.

Jesus concluded his discourse on this occasion by a declaration intended to procure a favourable reception for the apostles in the mission on which he was sending them, but which at the same time is full of comfort in its subsequent application. It has needlessly occasioned surmise with some as to its meaning. It is this: "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet's reward, and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you he shall in no wise lose his reward." The apostles were the "righteous men," "prophets," and "little ones" of this assurance, which amounts to this, that all who would receive and help the apostles in their character as Christ's servants, and the doers of Christ's work, would share in the reward to be bestowed on that work in the day of recompense. To receive a righteous man in the name of a righteous man is to receive him because he is what he is. To receive him for some other reason would not be receiving him in the name of a righteous man. To be kind to him because he is a native of the same country, or a scion of the same family stock, or an inhabitant of the same town, would not be shewing kindness to him in the name of a righteous man, but in the name of a townsman or in the name of a kinsman, or in the name of a fellow countryman.

It is evident that Jesus means no mere philanthropy, but kindness arising from a full perception and hearty endorsement of the principles and aims identified with the apostolic work. None but those who believed in Christ would be likely to show this kindness to the apostles as such, and give the typical cup of cold water to the least of Christ's disciples. The importance of the discernment lies here: some have concluded from the words of Christ that salvation will be ensured by mere acts of kindness, irrespective of that reception and conformity to the faith of Christ which the apostles preached as essential. This would be to put Christ in contradiction with himself, for he clearly taught what his apostles afterwards more abundantly made manifest, that none could be saved but those who believed in him and obeyed his commandments. His words assume the reception of the faith of Christ on the part of those receiving and helping the apostles or their work. Their special value lies in the intimation they give us that men may share in the apostolic blessedness to come who have no opportunity of taking the direct and public part of the apostles themselves, if they so approve and appreciate their

work as to help it, according to opportunity, by all the facilities in their power, even if amounting to nothing larger than the cup of cold water.

## **CHAPTER XXIV.**

### **After His Discourse to the Twelve.**

Two things must strike the reflective reader in connection with the work upon which Christ sent forth the apostles in the address considered in the last chapter. The first is, that fishermen, “ignorant and unlearned men” should have been chosen for it; and the second is, that such men should have succeeded. Both facts powerfully yield the one conclusion which is the all important one in the case, namely, that the work was in no sense of human contrivance, but was purely divine and true. A human enterprise would have laid hold of men of position, education and influence—men that were “somebody” and likely to throw some weight into the scale. A new principle of choice was at work in the selection of the humblest class in the community. The reasons leading to such a choice have been looked at. Such reasons could only operate where God was at work. It never occurs to man—it could not in the nature of things occur to man—to make use of instruments likely to be uninfluential with men.

The apostles were such. And that such men should have succeeded both in obtaining a hearing, and in producing conviction among thousands everywhere, not only in the absence of favourable conditions, but in the very face of every form of opposition which authority could offer, and influence could bring to bear, argues the possession by them of some weapon of argument altogether out of the category of error or imposture. We examine the case, and find the all-sufficient weapon in the earnest testimony of personal knowledge, supported by miraculous co-operation. The men knew the truth of Christ’s works, and afterwards the reality of His resurrection, and “the Lord worked with them and confirmed their word with signs following.” These two things account for all. These two elements of their operation explain the character of their work and all the results that came from the efforts of ignorant and unlearned fishermen. In the absence of either of these elements, it is impossible to understand their work. Either of them denied involves the whole subject in a fog, and presents an impossible historical problem. Both admitted, invest the whole work and word of Christ and His apostles with transparent light, and a magnitude of urgent personal importance that nothing can equal.

In the course of his address, Jesus made one remark that appears a little obscure: “Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come.” Did he mean that he himself would arrive at the places he was sending them to before their work would be finished? This would seem to be favoured by the statement in Luke x 1, about the sending out of the seventy, that he sent them “two and two before his face into every city and place whither he himself

should come.” But such a meaning is not borne out by what happened. The seventy “returned with joy” to him: he did not overtake them (verse 17).

Or did he mean that after he should be taken away from them and they should depart on their larger labours, their work would be interrupted by his second coming before they had actually “gone over the cities of Israel?” This seems equally out of harmony with the facts, even if we suppose, with Dr. Thomas, that the destruction of Jerusalem was the event referred to, for the apostolic work was all over by the time the Roman legions pitched their camp outside the walls of Jerusalem. Even Paul’s “course” was “finished” before that event.

The probable explanation may be found in the tense of the verb which Jesus actually employed. He did not use the language of absolute futurity as in the common translation. He spoke subjunctively—in the potential—the possible—*elqh*—may come; as if he had said “Ye may not have finished your work till the Son of Man come.” Did he not know exactly then? He expressly said he did not know. ‘Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels that are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father’ (Mark xiii. 32). He said the Father had reserved the knowledge of the times and seasons (Acts i. 7). This knowledge was afterwards revealed to Him and communicated by Him to His servants (Rev. i. 1). But at the time of the discourse he did not possess that fulness of knowledge which would have enabled him to speak with certainty on questions of “when,” What he probably meant to convey was, that the disciples were not to be checked by persecution, but were to persevere in the face of it, fleeing from one city to another as it arose, with this pleasant reflection in view, that the Son of Man might himself arrive on the scene before their labours were completed.

Having finished his address, he sent the apostles on their several journeys, and himself proceeded to that work of “teaching and preaching” in the cities in which he had been for some time engaged. At this stage, several notable sayings of his present themselves. It was at this time that the enquiry came from John in prison whether he were really the Christ. We considered this closely in chapter v. and need not repeat. At this time also, while repelling the charge of being a gluttonous man and a wine drinker, he admitted eating freely with the people in a way John did not do, and at the same time defended John in his abstemiousness on the ground that “Wisdom was justified of all her children,” of which she had various sorts, for various works and various times. “Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works had been done, because they repented not” (Matt. xi. 20). Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum were specially singled out, and heavily condemned.

These, up till now, had seen his chief miracles, and appear to have been least moved in a reasonable way with regard to them, and Christ now declared that Tyre, Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrha would have been more impressible, and would not have come into the judgment that destroyed them if they had the same opportunities. How abandoned and insensible must have been the condition of



communities of whom such things could be affirmed. Josephus bears testimony to this condition, though not in this connection. He told the Jews in his speech front outside the walls of Jerusalem in the last days of the siege, that they were the most impious generation the world had ever seen. Upon them accordingly came the most scathing judgments ever experienced.

Were these judgments just? Who can doubt it that believes in the divinity of their origin? If they were just, they were deserved; and if deserved, the people must have been responsible for the state they were in. If that state had been a helpless state, they could not have been held responsible, on the principle enunciated by Jesus: "If ye were blind, ye should have had no sin" (Jno. ix. 41). But they were held responsible, and therefore it was a state that could have been otherwise had they willed and laboured for it to be otherwise. What Jesus charged against them was that they had "neglected weightier matters of the law,—judgment, mercy and faith" The neglect of God's expressed will is sure to lead to a state of spiritual insensibility, because the human mind can only be kept in a state of living susceptibility by exercise in that which develops it. God's ideas, brought to bear in His spoken word, constitute the power by which man is brought and kept in mental harmony with Him. Separation from this will soon lead to estrangement, and estrangement will deepen to deadness. In any subject, a man soon drops away from knowledge and sympathy who ceases his contact with that subject, even if he have a native partiality for it. How much more is this the case with divine ideas which are foreign to fundamental human sympathies and tastes.

Hence Paul's advice to Timothy: "Meditate on these things, give thyself wholly to them." Hence also the counsel of Solomon to search for wisdom as hid treasure, to watch daily at her gates, waiting at the posts of her doors. Now if a man or nation, through disobedience of these divine commands, sinks into a state of spiritual hardness of heart, in which there is reprobateness to every good word and work, the man or the nation is responsible and obnoxious to judgment for that state, though at the moment of judgment, the state may be a helpless one. God himself may make it helpless after a certain time of neglect, long before the natural workings of things would lead to it. Of the Jews, it is testified he poured the spirit of slumber for this very reason (Is. xxix. 10–14), and on the Gentiles, to whom the Gospel was sent, but who received it not in the love of it, but in the mild patronising spirit of approbation which we often see exemplified in the present day, which is an insult to its priceless wealth and majesty, it was foretold (2 Thess. ii. 11), and the prophecy has long since been fulfilled,—he would send strong delusion that they should believe a lie, and all be condemned.

Jesus said it would be "more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment," than for those places that had been unmoved by the unspeakable honour of his personal presence, and miracles among them. We may understand this when we remember that the restitution of the land of Sodom is one of the promised events of "the day of judgment" (Ezekiel xvi. 53, 55, 61; xlvii. 8, 9). The

day of judgment, in its largest sense, is the day when God will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained (Ps. xcvi, 13; Acts xvii. 31)—a day which, though commencing with judgment on the house of God, extends to the whole earth, and lasts a thousand years and beyond. In this day, Sodom as a place re-appears, and shares in the blessedness of the age; but not so Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, which were swept away in the wave of destruction that passed through all the land 40 years after Christ's ascension, and whose very sites will probably be buried for ever at the bottom of the capacious inland sea that will be formed when waters pour in through the earthquake cleft on the Olivet range, and fill up the valley of the Jordan to the Mediterranean sea level. The earthquake that thus buries the sites of these doomed places in a watery grave, will probably elevate Sodom and Gomorrha to a pleasant position overlooking the lovely water expanse thus formed in the heart of the land of promise. There is no reason to anticipate the resuscitation of the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha. On the contrary, the righteous judgment of God which swept them away will keep them away, for God changes not. But "the land of Sodom" is to be recovered, and will form part of the paradise of God, as the delightful habitation of a new and righteous generation. For this reason Jesus was able to make the striking declaration concerning Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum, which in effect made them worse than Sodom.

He added words which cannot receive too much attention in the special connection in which he spoke them. They were words of address to the Father, uttered in the presence of his disciples, but bearing instructively in human directions. They are a sort of commentary on the unbelief of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matt xi. 25). From this it would seem that the inhabitants of these places were what in our day would be considered "knowing ones"—people considered and considering each other the intelligence and respectability of their several neighbourhoods: "the wise and prudent," the discerning and the not rash, not fanatical—the proper and not impulsive—not carried away with the enthusiasm of simpletons and babies. Jesus, taking them at their own estimate, thanks God that the things which he had in hand were "hid from" them, and revealed to a class whom they despised as mere "babes." Did Jesus disparage capacity, then? and glorify incompetence and shallowness and ignorance and craze? Far from it. He is himself to be taken as the perfect type of the class he means by "babes." Let us look at him, and we see them. Was he dull? Was he shallow? Was he ignorant? On the contrary, who so "sharp as a two-edged sword, piercing asunder to the dividing of soul and spirit?" Who so quick witted and profound? Who so ample in his knowledge of all things—great and small—and yet so adroit and subtle in question and answer that his enemies were at last afraid to ask him any more questions?

In what, then, did he show himself one of the babes as distinguished from the wise and prudent? This point deserves and demands clear, strong, and decisive

apprehension—the failure in which is the failure to discern Christ and his little ones of all ages. The difference between him and his clever enemies lay in the object to which his unparalleled intellectual powers were directed. What did he love? At what did he labour? To what taste, or theme, or aim did he consecrate his life? Was there ever his like for deep and constant fervour towards God? Was there ever his like for burning zeal on behalf of what God required? Was there ever his like for detestation and condemnation of what God disapproved? Look at his enemies of that age and this, and see the difference between them and him. Clever they may be, but clever to what end? Not to promote divine ends, but human ends always and only. “I know you,” said Christ, “that ye have not the love of God in you.” This is their character in all generations—“wise and prudent” in human expedencies, but not in those ends and aims that constitute true wisdom and true prudence—wise to serve themselves, but not to serve God; prudent to avoid temporal dangers, but not those connected with the purpose of God; sagacious and diligent in all things likely to bring human honour and human gain, but as absolutely insensible to the will and the honour and the purpose of God as if God had no existence. And because this is a wisdom and a prudence that all men appreciate, all men applaud their successful exercise.

The wise and the prudent are in high esteem universally. But Jesus has said, “That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.” In this he fixes the status of the wise and prudent in divine estimation. Is it without a reason that he should promulgate a view so apparently harsh and illiberal? Why should “the wise and the prudent” be an abomination to God? Because they are truly the reverse of what they are considered. They are not truly wise: they are not truly prudent. They are “wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight” (Is. v. 21) and in the sight of men, but not in the sight of God—when looked at from the standpoint of the eternal relations of things. True wisdom and prudence consist in the discernment of that which is truly good from that which is only seemingly so, and in the determined choice of the same in the face of all obstacles. The wise and the prudent, so called, are not equal to this truly noble performance. Isaiah says of them, they “call evil good, and good evil: and put darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (Is. v. 20). It will be found upon a thorough inspection of their case in its modern form, that this is just what they do. There is a great appearance of light and dignity with them; but examine it, and it disappears in the process. Their philosophy, their science, their art, their associations, their degrees, their honours, their professional titles and distinctions are all reducible to this—a little knowledge of nature in her transient relations, and a great inflation of personal importance on the strength of it. This wisdom all ends in nothing. It imparts no knowledge of the object of existence; it furnishes no reliable rule for the guidance of life; it sheds no light on the problem of the future. It supplies no materials on which love, joy, and peace can feed. Death comes and sweeps away its painful ornamental labours as completely as the rising tide obliterates the forts and ditches dug by children in the sand.

If God had not spoken—if a Gospel had not been preached—if evidence were not before us right and left of the reality of a divine purpose shaping earth's development, pity could but weep over the vain and useless labour, while commending the men who sought to turn the prevailing vanity to the best account. But another element comes into the case with Christ standing before men in the apostolic writings, declaring the name of Father, and expounding his wisdom, his will, and his purposed kindness, and beseeching them by apostolic hands to be reconciled to him on the reception of the truth, and submission to its requirements, with the certain prospect of emancipation from this sin-blurred and imperfect state, and introduction to a glorious and immortal efficiency of life at the return of Christ from heaven. The wisdom of men which looks upon this as so much childishness, and glorifies its own abortions as the true wisdom, calls good evil, and evil good; light, darkness; and darkness, light, &c. Or if it be not so bold as to charge the name and work of Christ with childishness and untruth, but practically relegates them to a position of contempt and neglect while making a nominal obeisance in their presence, then it is convicted of the highest form of impudence, and puts bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

It is on the whole easy to see why Jesus gave thanks that the things of God had been hid from the wise and the prudent, and revealed unto babes. The wise and the prudent self-complacantly reject His truly wise and beneficent proposals, while idealising and worshipping the puny conceptions of their own limited powers of intellect and imagination. They are a sort of race of spiritual monkeys, grimacing and capering about in the enjoyment of their own limited agilities, and scorning, in their stupendous conceit, the exalted operations that are going forward outside their cage. Such are not suitable for the Father's use. Therefore, he arranges circumstances in such a way that wisdom is hid from their eyes. "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight" The "babes" are men of rational and reverent mind, with an eye to behold, and a heart to receive truth with the docility of little children. Though children in their earnest simplicity, they are not children in understanding. They are in reality more lucid than the wise and prudent, and for that reason more humble and pliable to the divine will, and more acceptable to the divine regards. They see what the wise and prudent see, but they see farther and more. They see not only nature, but the intelligent power which has organised nature. They see this power in a larger purview of the universe and a larger contemplation of human history than is habitual with the rejectors of divine truth.

They see not only the present but the past; not only Britain of the hour, but the Holy Land of Joshua and David and Christ; not only the proximate bearings, but the future issues of things: not only pleasure, but wisdom: not only themselves, but others: not only man, but God. They surrender to facts without dictating to facts what they ought to be. They open their hearts in adoration and trust to the God of heaven and earth; the God revealed in the Bible: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. And they accept His Son with joy and love and enthusiasm, yielding themselves heartily to his

service, and bind-themselves by his law, in the certainty of his promised appearing, to render to every man according as his work shall be. The muster of this class, from every age, to whom God's high things have been revealed, and their union under the visible headship of Christ at his coming, will reveal the most noble community that it ever entered into the heart of man to conceive.

Jesus then proceeded to utter deep things concerning himself, in which it is far from unprofitable to follow him: "All things are delivered unto me of my Father." A mighty fact in simple words—Jesus, made possessor of the earth,—Disposer, Lord and Judge of all, by "the Father, Lord of heaven and earth." Who can he be who claims to have had such an absolute position assigned him? Such a question appears to be anticipated in the next statement. "No man knoweth the Son but the Father." Men knew Jesus, but not as the Father knew him. Men understood him not, and this is the evident sense in which the word "know" is here used. Looking on him, men saw him but a man as other men—graver, perhaps, and more thoughtful looking, and more interesting on account of what he did and said, but still merely an individual man—a member of the genus homo—a remarkable variety of the species. They did not know as they looked upon his form that they looked upon more than man. Even the disciples, while calling him "Lord and Master," looked up to him as to a trusted leader, rather than with the fulness of understanding to which they attained when the Holy Spirit "took of the things that were Christ's and showed them unto them" (Jno. xvi. 13–15).

The Father only, at that time, looking down on the teeming multitudes of Israel, could discriminate the man Christ Jesus from the rest in his true nature and character:—"My beloved son in whom I am well pleased; who could say, "I and my Father are one:" "The Father dwelleth in me." "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." The facts afterwards made known so fully in the writings placed in the hands of believers and transmitted to our day—that Jesus was begotten of the Holy Spirit, and guided and developed by it from his infancy upwards, and finally anointed with it effulgently at his baptism, constituting him the manifestation of God in the flesh—were not generally understood or known among the multitudes while Christ walked among them. In this sense, he was not known among the people, though he walked among them.

Neither was the Father known, as he proceeded to say—"Neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal them." This is the authentic revelation of the actual state of things in the heart of the nation that God had chosen for Himself. They were religious in the ceremonial sense; but they knew not the God of their fathers in any intelligent or living manner. They understood Him not, discerned Him not, apprehended Him not in any real sense, and, therefore, loved Him not. He was but a name to them—a name of mystery, superstitiously regarded as at this day; not a glorious, actual Eternal Living Being whom they loved—whose character they knew, whose will they understood, whose word they rested on, whose power they trusted, and in

whose service they delighted. Jesus knew Him as no man knew Him; and it was his work to reveal Him to all whom the Father had given him, that they, knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he had sent, might have life eternal.

It was in the execution of this mission that he uttered the beautiful words with which he concluded the discourse delivered on this occasion: words which have lingered as music in the air from that day to this. "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me: for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." It is well said that a man's mouth makes or destroys him. In an important sense, a man's words are himself. Nothing more powerfully attests the superhuman character of Christ than these words of invitation and assertion. We have only to imagine any other man saying them to see and feel the unutterable difference between "all that ever came before" Christ or after him. What "rest" can any other man give us? The statement David made about "ransom" may well be applied to rest: "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him." No man can give his brother rest. All are alike distressed and powerless—burdened with sin, oppressed with weakness, devoid of the least ability to change the hapless state of man, or avert the inevitable issues of vanity. But here is one who says "Come unto me: I will give you rest."

And his words are not mere words: that is, our confidence in them does not rest on the words alone, though the words alone greatly inspire confidence. They come from the mouth of one who wrought miracles, and as he said, "though ye believe not me, believe the works." They come from the mouth of one who rose from the dead, and therefore they are words sealed, ratified and confirmed as no words have been that ever came out of human mouth before. They are the illustration of God's meaning when he said to Moses concerning him: "I will put my words in his mouth." They are therefore words that we can trust absolutely, and to which we can commit our lives without the least reservation.

Jesus said on another occasion, "All that the Father hath given to me shall come unto me." Some have concluded from this that such would therefore come to him by a law of spiritual gravitation,—without means, and without necessity, and without distress. But Christ's words under consideration are the disproof of this. He gives the invitation, and he addresses himself to those who are "heavy laden." If, therefore, the invitation come under a man's attention, he may consider himself within the scope of the process by which God gives men to Christ, though he never felt himself disposed in such a direction before; and he need not be deterred, but rather encouraged, by the fact that instead of finding himself in the mood of a spontaneous gravitation to Christ, he labours troublously and is heavily laden in the burden of his spirit. To such, the invitation has been given, with the assurance that the yoke to be assumed is a light one, and that in the Master imposing it, we shall find one, not austere, exacting, and harsh, but one who is meek and lowly of heart, in whose service and society, we shall find perfect rest and joy at last.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### In Collision with the Pharisees.

THE exact locality in which Jesus uttered the words considered in the last chapter is not stated, and it matters little. It was somewhere in that journey among “the cities and village of Galilee” to which he departed after despatching the twelve on their first preaching tour in twos. During that same journey occurred a small recontre between Jesus and the rarely-absent Pharisees, which, though occupying but a minute or two of time, gave birth to one of the many utterances of wisdom which have been operative for all time ever since. It was on a Sabbath Day, in the open air, when many people would be out enjoying the blue sky, clear atmosphere and beautiful scenery of a Syrian climate, in the interval between the Synagogue attendances. Jesus also was out, and passing through a field of ripening corn (Matt. xii. 1) Some of the disciples were with him, though not the twelve. Some, also, of the Pharisees were near and observant. As they walked along, the disciples began to pluck ears of corn, as the law allowed (Deut. xxiii. 25), and rubbing them in their hands, to eat the same. The Pharisees, on the outlook for something to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people, seized on this as a breach of the Sabbath law: “Thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the Sabbath day.”

Well, the breaking of the Sabbath was unlawful, and it is a good thing to be opposed to “that which is not lawful;” but it is a different thing to show this opposition only when the object is to condemn another. This is a common and grievous form of wickedness. Righteous men are scrupulous round the whole circle of God’s commandments, and not at one or two points only; and they show their scrupulosity in subjecting their own life to them on all points, rather than in hunting up the shortcomings of their neighbours. It is a suspicious thing when a man shows a great and unusual zeal on behalf of some one element of righteousness, to score a point against an adversary. Jesus has called such zeal “hypocrisy,” and the most searching reflection will show that it is nothing else. Zeal of this sort is apt to be very shallow in its constructions, and it is always deaf to reason. The only way to deal with it effectually, next to passing it by on the other side (which Jesus sometimes did, and wisdom sometimes calls for), is to question it on its own premises. This is what Jesus did in this case.

Their zeal ostensibly was all on behalf of what had been written. Very well: “Have ye not read what David did when he was an hungered, and they that were with him?—how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shew bread which was not lawful for him to eat?” If David did an unlawful thing, which the Pharisees palliated, why were they to condemn Jesus and his disciples if a similar palliation existed? The palliation in David’s case was David’s need and David’s discretionary power as Yahweh’s anointed servant, on whom the Spirit of the

Lord rested. An identical palliation existed in the case of Jesus: his disciples were hungry, and he had a far higher measure of divine authority than David.

Again, he said, "Have ye not read in the law how that on the Sabbath days, the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless." The priests, notwithstanding the command to do no work on the Sabbath day, were to offer up special sacrifices on that day, or to circumcise children whose eighth day might fall on the Sabbath, that God's will on other points might be done. In doing this, they were blameless, though technically guilty. The Pharisees were aware of this—that the temple law suspended the Sabbath law where the law otherwise required it, without involving unrighteousness. Yet they were condemning disciples of Jesus for doing on the Sabbath day what the Sabbath law required—viz.: the eating of food to supply nature's wants; and that, too, under the sanction of one present who was "greater than the temple!"

It was a poor and paltry quibble, as the sanctimonious carpings of enmity generally are. But what a crime when directed against "the Son of Man who is Lord even of the Sabbath day." "If ye had known," said Jesus, "what this meaneth, 'I will have mercy and not sacrifice,' ye would not have condemned the guiltless." "If ye had known": how much is involved in this. There is a knowledge, of which the Pharisees had their full share, which does not go deep enough for the true apprehension of the meaning of things. It is exact enough and apt enough so far as it goes, but it does not go below the outside appearance of things. It stops short at their external form—their human bearings—how they will affect this one and that—what this one and that will say. The form of an institution is sharply discerned by this class of intellect, without any sense of its intent. Israel was never deficient in this microscopical and petty breadth of mind which they possess in wonderful density to this day. With a strong sense of what might be called the mechanical sancities of the Mosaic law, they lacked the deep probing penetration that goes to the bottom of things, and the mental amplitude that can take in "the breadth and length and height" of which Paul speaks. They accepted and stickled for the washings, and the fastings, and the sacrifices, without seeing what was under it all—righteousness, mercy, obedience, faith. God rebuked them more than once for the multitude of their sacrifices in the absence of the spiritual "salt" that made them acceptable—not that the sacrifices were not enjoined, but that they were out of place when divorced from the sentiments of which God intended them to be the symbol and expression.

Jesus is here directing them to one of those reproofs by Hosea (vi. 6). "I desired mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." He says if they had understood this saying, they would not have condemned the disciples for eating corn on the Sabbath. Why not? What had the saying about mercy versus sacrifice to do with the Sabbath? Directly, nothing: but indirectly, everything, as Christ's remark shows. It showed that as in sacrifice, so in the Sabbath, they must obey and interpret the law of it in the spirit in which it was instituted—which was a spirit of mercy and wisdom. The Sabbath was ordained



for rest and refreshment—not for penance and oppression. “The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath,” as he said on another occasion. As expounders of the law, they ought to have understood this, and not to have substituted a censorious legal exactness for the spirit of benevolent common sense in which the commandment originated. The disciples were “guiltless”—for so he pronounced them—though they ate corn in the fields on the Sabbath day: and the guilty ones were the Pharisees who condemned them—ostensibly in a spirit of zeal for the divine law, but in reality in a spirit of hostility to him who was, by pre-eminence, the Servant of Righteousness, who had mortally hurt their dignity by championing its claims against their traditions.

Leaving them to rankle under the arrow of his righteous words buried in their hearts, he sped his way to the local synagogue. Here, there was a large company, and here also were Pharisees, and probably the very men who had attacked him on the Sabbath question in the cornfield. They were all alive on the question. There was a man in the synagogue who had a withered hand. The custom of Jesus was to heal. It became evident—probably from the people calling Christ’s attention to the man—that such was Christ’s purpose in this case. But it was the Sabbath. Should such a thing be done on such a day? This was the question the Pharisees immediately put. “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?” Christ’s answer was an order to the man to “Stand forth.” If a sincere and godly scruple—a fear of violating the will of God—had been the real inspiration of the question the Pharisees had put, it would have received some consideration at the hands of Christ, who was always patient with the contrite. But such was not at all the case, as shewn by their habitual disregard of the will of God in a hundred other things. He therefore dealt with their words in anger: “He looked round about upon them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts” (Mar. iii. 5). He asks, with flashing eye, as we may well imagine, as he glances round,—“Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days? to save life or to kill?” He waited a moment for an answer. There was none.

He follows with another question in tones of righteous warmth: “What man is there among you, who, if he have a sheep fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will not lay hold and lift it out? How much, then, is a man better than a sheep?” There was a force in these argumentative questions, propounded before an audience, that was simply overwhelming. Away from the presence of the people, doubtless, answer would not have failed them; they would have quibbled and confused the issue with all the loquacious agility and finesse which distinguishes Jew and Gentile to the present day, when confronted with a dilemma they will not, or cannot, face. But the Pharisees desired, above all things, to keep their reputation with the people for common sense, and, therefore, their tongues were tied—they could not utter a word. They could not appear to contend that it was wrong for a man to save imperilled property on the Sabbath day. They had, therefore, no answer but silence.

Jesus gave words to the obvious verdict *nem. con.* “Wherefore, it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath day.” To this verdict, he proceeds to give effect. Addressing the man who was standing in the centre of the assembly during this passage of arms, his helpless hand visible to all, and all the people looking on with eager interest, he said, “Stretch forth thy hand.” Brief, emphatic words of command; no incantations; no mummerly; nothing resembling the mystic ceremonies of Greek priestesses or Persian magicians, whose nonsense is reflected in the plays of Shakespeare and in the rites of performing wizards and necromancers. The word of God is powerful as lightning, and needs no mystery-mongering. The man obeyed: “He stretched forth his hand; and it was restored whole as the other.” The audience broke up in a rapture of admiration.

The Pharisees retired discomfited and stung to the quick. They convened a hurried meeting among themselves to see what was to be done. The conclusions they came to was that Jesus must be got rid of in some way. How to compass it, they did not exactly see; but that he must be destroyed, they were resolved. What a perfectly melancholy picture; a conclave of shallow egotisms—(egotisms are necessarily shallow, for with any depth, self-consciousness becomes a merely steadying power, as intended)—a league of pious mediocrities, whose piety consisted of long-faced and holy-toned superstition; a band of petty respectabilities, whose respectability consisted of carefully doing nothing that would hurt a human sensibility or shock human propriety; and most carefully and industriously doing, or appearing to do, what everybody was agreed to consider the right and the meritorious thing; a company of ornamental, self-satisfied parasites and monopolists, trading in the name of Moses while outraging his wisdom and righteousness, professing to serve God while most skilfully and decisively serving the craft only; simulating mercy and righteousness, while systematically practicing the vilest oppression and wickedness in secret.

Such a set of human contemptibles sitting in solemn judgment on the Son of God—the glorious Son of God, who, with power to hurl them all to destruction in a moment, patiently accommodated himself to a worthless population, while exhibiting in their midst the grandeur of God’s character in his own compassion, and wisdom and dignity; and His power in the undeserved healing of all their diseases—such a picture is the saddest the sun ever looked down upon. Its sadness is unutterable if we look at it by itself. But enlightenment cannot look at it by itself. It must be looked at in connection with the whole work of which it forms but a momentary phase. The completion of that work will show Christ enthroned in the scene of his humiliation, under circumstances that will owe their principal satisfaction to the bitter humiliations of the day of probation in which Christ preceded all his brethren.

Jesus heard that the Pharisees were plotting against him. The time to fall into their hands had not come. He therefore made arrangements to depart to another neighbourhood, in which for the time he would be beyond their reach. The people

heard he was going and followed him in great multitudes. He submitted to their company in sorrow for their hapless state. They toiled along the road in a straggling mass. Among them were numerous sick and ailing people who hoped to share the benefit of his healing power. Arrived at the end of the journey, "he healed them all." In their jubilant feelings, they avowed their belief that he was the Messiah. "Is not this the son of David?" He gave their enthusiasm no encouragement. He knew it was of the superficial and transient character of the feelings of any crowd in the immediate receipt of some benefaction. He further knew that his rejection and death were at hand, and that popular feeling in his favour would only be an embarrassment. "He charged them that they should not make him known." Matthew says (xii. 17), that thus was fulfilled what had been written in Isaiah xlii. 1: "He shall not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break: a smoking flax shall he not quench till he send forth judgment unto victory."

The fulfilment of this will be seen in all its force if we compare the attitude of Christ during his ministry with the course usually observed by aspirants to popular fame and leadership. He did not get up a political agitation. He did not head a party, or get up a sedition. He made no suggestion of revolt against the authorities. He made no appeal to the suffrages of the people on his own behalf. He delivered no harangues intended to inflame them against their rulers, and to draw them away from their allegiance and gather them around himself. He quietly went about from place to place doing good in the healing of disease without partiality, announcing the purpose of God, and explaining what was acceptable to God and what was not, comforting the poor, and encouraging the lovers of righteousness. He counselled no resort to violence; on the contrary, he preached submission. He resorted to none of the artifices of strife; on the contrary, he retired before personal opposition. His occasional ardours and polemical thrusts were all employed in the enforcement of truth, and never in the promotion of personal or political aims. He never strove nor cried in the public sense of those terms. He abstained so entirely from coercive, or constraining measures, that he could not be said to break even a bruised reed, though that required no force; or to extinguish a smoking flax, though that was easy of accomplishment. The time will come when "he will bring forth JUDGMENT unto victory," but till that time should arrive, his part was (and his part is continued in all his disciples) to observe a passive attitude with regard to the institutions and movements of the present evil world. Knowing this, he forbade the healed and gratified people to make him known.

This feature presents itself several times in the course of his life. It is a remarkable and a significant one, well deserving the attention of uncertain believers. If they think it out, it must bring conviction. It is not a usual thing for a public teacher, or leader of any kind, to try to stop his own fame, or to limit or interfere with his own recognition. Jesus did so regularly. There must have been a reason. What was it? Every suggestion fails but one. It cannot be put down to weakness, for he showed himself strong and independent as teacher never was

before. It cannot be put down to policy, for he had none, but voluntarily walked into the jaws of death. It cannot be attributed to insensibility to the people: for he evinced such compassion towards them as no one ever showed before or since. Why then did he systematically seek to set bounds to his recognition at the hands of the people? He alleges a reason: that he was about to suffer death (Matt. xvi. 20, 21). He did suffer death, we know. If this was the reason (and there could be no other), it proves him a prophet, and it proves him divine: for he said he had come to lay down his life for the world, and that it was a commandment he had received from the Father (Jno. x. 18). The more this is thought about, the weightier it will be felt in its proof that Jesus was the Son of God.

Certain of the Scribes and Pharisees had joined the crowd that followed him in his departure to another place. Though they saw the marvels of healing he performed, they pooh-poohed them as the mere tricks of necromancy, and attributed them to his league with Beelzebub, as on a previous occasion. How he dealt with this we have seen in a former chapter. We may now realize the irrational and aggravating character of their demand at this time for a sign. "Master, we would see a sign from thee." See a sign! What sign could be availing to those who saw no sign in the healing of the sick, the raising of the dead, the restoring sight to the blind? If men could seriously attribute such things to "Beelzebub," how could they be expected to see anything divine in anything that could be done? And if they make such a suggestion, not seriously, but in the flippancy of a scornful animosity, how could they be worthy of any sign at all? Jesus answered in the spirit of these questions, in doing which Mark informs us that "he sighed deeply in his spirit." No wonder.

His answer was: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign: and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas." What sign was that? "As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." That is, the great sign of Christ's divinity would be Christ's resurrection. He would be crucified, and killed, and buried, but Would only he in the grave for three days. He would come to life again and leave the grave on the morning of the third day. This certainly would be the sign of signs. The prodigies performed by a living man were always open to the suggestion that they were his own performances by some occult natural law peculiar to himself: but how could a dead man raise himself? This sign would be given, and none else. Were his wonders of healing, then, no sign? Certainly they were, as Peter afterwards said, "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles, wonders and signs which God did by him in the midst of you." (Acts ii, 22). But they were not signs in the sense of the request made by the Scribes and Pharisees. They said "show a sign from heaven." They wanted something showy, something spectacular, something impressive. Jesus could have shewn them such. He could have shewn them "twelve legions of angels" marshalled in shining phalanx around him. He could have shewn them Mount Ebal or Mount Gerizim plucked from its base and hurled

into the Mediterranean. He could have shewn the country filled with horses and chariots of fire such as surrounded Elisha. But there would have been no object in such a display. It would not have wrought conviction. It would merely have gratified an idle curiosity, which would have found excuse for disbelief in some reservation, or theory of the Beelzebub order. The minds that could not see the hand of God in the healing of multitudes by a word, and the raising of the dead, would not have seen it in anything.

Jesus went further than this on another occasion. He said, "If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." The truth of this was shewn in the case of his own resurrection. The "sign of the prophet Jonas" produced no effect. The Scribes and Pharisees, when this great sign from heaven was granted, shut their eyes and ears, and sought to destroy the witnesses, and to suppress the miraculous confirmation of their testimony. God did not raise Christ in the presence of the assembled inhabitants of Jerusalem. He could have arranged to have it so, but His object precluded such a plan of operation. It is evident that God intends men to exercise their senses, and only grants so much evidence as is sufficient to afford a basis for intelligent faith. From what Jesus says about Moses and the prophets, it is evident that the class of mind that cannot be convinced by the evidence contained in the Scriptures, and the confirmation which it receives in various ways from the history and condition of mankind, is too far below the elementary endowments of intelligence to possess the faith that pleases God, and without which it is testified "it is impossible, to please Him" (Heb. xi. 6). How much more must this have been true of those who, like the Scribes and Pharisees, could listen to Christ's wonderful teaching and behold his wonderful works without perceiving, with Nicodemus, that he was "a teacher come from God."

We may therefore understand why he proceeded to give his contemporary generation a poor place in comparison with some of the ancients: "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and behold a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it, for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon is here." The Ninevites showed some susceptibility to the claims of righteousness at the mouth of an erring prophet. The Queen of Sheba showed some reverent appreciation of excellence coming to her merely as a matter of report. But here was a generation who could set up their opposition to him to whom all the prophets gave witness, and who could cry down the impersonation of all wisdom and worth though exhibited in their very midst. Is it a wonder that he spoke of them as "this wicked generation," whom he likened to a cured madman, who relapses and allies himself at the last with seven others, more mad than himself, and makes with them a pandemonium of his house, which had been put into an orderly state when he was cured. "Even so," says he, "shall it be also unto this wicked generation." The history of the case shows the application. At the first the

nation submitted to the preaching of John the Baptist, followed by that of Jesus, and became morally sane, but afterwards they returned to the leadership of the Scribes and Pharisees, and sank into a worse state than they were in before, and were given over to destruction at the hands of the Romans.

While Jesus was uttering these things, he was surrounded by a crowd who naturally listened with great eagerness to what passed between Jesus and their own clergy (for such the Scribes and Pharisees were). It requires no great exercise of fancy to imagine the dense silent packing of the people and their, eager outstretched heads straining to catch the words of the speakers. What a privilege to be there, though they did not know it. It generally is the case that people “know not the day of their visitation.”

At this point, the silent attention was broken into. A message came from the skirts of the crowd, and was passed over the heads of the people, and delivered to Christ by one close to him. “Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.” Jesus did not receive the intimation with any great manifestation of respect for his relations according to the flesh, thus conspicuously introduced to notice. He said (probably with an air of quiet dignity) “Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?” He did not own to the claim implied in the assertion of blood relationship. In the world, then as now, blood relation was everything: with Jesus, it was nothing outside the special relation he had come to create—the relation of men to God in reconciliation, love, and obedience. If mothers and brothers were inside the circle of this relation, well and good; if not, he was not theirs, nor they his. He did not know any man after the flesh. His mother and his brothers were to be found among those who did the will of God.

To this doctrine, he gave emphatic enunciation at this time. “He stretched forth his hands towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren: for whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother.” Did Jesus mean then to ignore the command of God by Moses that father and mother should be honoured, and that near of kin were to be regarded? Nothing could be further from the purpose of him who came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil. He did not mean to undermine the force of any divine law, but rather to enforce the foundation of all law—viz., the doing of the will of God. He meant to say that where this foundation was absent, no law and no relation had any efficacy. The Jews were very zealous for human custom and tradition, and for divine enactment only in so far as it was in harmony with these. They were zealous for their distinction as the chosen nation, for circumcision as the token of it: for their laws and customs as its fence and protection, but not zealous of God Himself or His will as such. And, therefore, it came to pass that even the part of their service that was according to the law, was unacceptable: the offering of sacrifices and the holding of feasts, which, as God said by Isaiah, had become intolerable (Isa. i. 11–14). On the same principle, Jesus taught that natural relationship was of no force if there

were not engrafted upon it the affectionate recognition of God, the loving submission to His will in all things—of which he himself was the highest example.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### By the Sea of Galilee.

IT is worth while to dwell for a moment on the reason that led the mother and brethren of Jesus to seek for him at the time mentioned in the last chapter. This reason is stated by Mark (iii. 21): He says, "They went out to lay hold on him, saying, He is beside himself." "Beside himself!" Mad! What a view to entertain of Christ! It was the only conclusion which the very sane and proper mediocrities of Christ's family friends could arrive at in the contemplation of a man and his performances so altogether above them. Had that man been a stranger, they might have thought better of him, but "Jesus, the carpenter," their own brother, whom they had known from his boyhood, and who had come out and in among them in a quiet familiar way—it was intolerable to their small self-loves that such an one should set up as a teacher come from God; and it was easy for them in that temper, to discover madness in his continuous application to public work, and in the crowding of the people to hear him in such numbers that it was with difficulty that Jesus and his disciples could so much as eat bread. For as yet, "neither did his brethren believe on him" (Jno. vii. 5).

They afterwards yielded to the overpowering evidence of facts, and identified themselves with the company of his disciples (Acts i. 14). But at this stage, they contributed an ingredient to the bitterness of the Lord's humiliation in openly proclaiming their conviction that he was "beside himself." It may be that they borrowed the idea from the Pharisees who publicly declared him to be in league with "Beelzebub." But whatever the cause, it completed the dishonour cast upon Christ in the days of his flesh, that while the public men of the nation said, "He hath a demon and is mad: why hear ye him?" his own private friends, who ought to have been the first to shield him from such an imputation, actually sought to interrupt him in the act of his public labours, and to take him under their restraint on the plea that he was "beside himself."

At first sight, it seems unaccountable that perfect wisdom and goodness should have been mistaken for insanity. The difficulty softens when we realise to ourselves the process of reasoning by which such a conclusion is arrived at. The people who thought Christ insane naturally judged by their own views and feelings. Their inner consciousness supplied them with no principle or recognisable motive which could lead to the course Jesus pursued. They could not conceive themselves to act in the way in which Jesus acted. They felt they must be mad before they could do what he did; and therefore they concluded it must be so with him. The popular criteria of madness are usually correct enough; but there is a possibility of their being out of application altogether through the

presence of an element which it is beyond the capacity of the people to understand. Such was the case with machinery and the electric telegraph when first heard of by the ignorant. They were set down to witchcraft, because ignorant people had no knowledge of how they could be soberly true. So the power by which Jesus worked and the objects for which he worked being beyond the understanding of the people, they came to the only conclusion that was in harmony with their theory of things. Their rough and ready conclusion seemed to them an explanation, but was in reality the highest form of blasphemy man can utter.

In some measure, all Christ's brethren have to suffer from the same ignorance and illogic. They show a bias and pursue a course which are inexplicable on the principles of worldly people, and therefore worldly people, who are nearly all the people, suppose they must be quietly insane. It is a great trial to be the subject of such a misconception. But it is a trial for which Christ expressly prepared his disciples: "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household" (Matt. x. 24). There are, of course, mad folks, who are proveably such on every principle: but this is not the character of those in any degree whose only symptom of madness is the intellectual reception of Bible history from Moses to Christ, on grounds which they can formulate and establish; and a life in logical harmony with that conviction.

"The same day," Jesus "sat by the sea side," that is by the shore of the sea of Galilee or lake of Gennesareth—a lake of quiet beauty, surrounded by hills. Bro. Collyer recently visited the honoured water, and found it much quieter than it was in the days of Jesus, but much busier than it was 50 years ago. With Jesus were the people, crowding in inconvenient numbers round him. To avoid the pressure and be enabled easily to speak to them, he entered one of the fishing-boats with his disciples, sat down and directed the guardian of the craft to push out a little and cast anchor. This done, retaining his sitting posture, he began to address himself to the people who crowded the beach to the water's edge for a considerable distance along each way. His address on this occasion consisted of a number of parables delivered in a desultory way; that is, he did not "make a speech" in which the parables were strung together without interval, but spoke one, then paused: conversed with those round about him about it: then spoke again, and again receiving the attention of the people intermittently, according as he addressed himself to them, or subsided in conversation with those near him. It was an extremely interesting and picturesque occasion. Not unlikely, other boats drew near from behind the boat containing Christ and his disciples, and contributed a floating audience in addition to those who stood on the shore. We are told that "He spake many things to them" on this occasion. Only a portion of them is recorded. First is

### **The Parable of the Sower**



In this, a man is introduced in the act of sowing seed in a field, containing various kinds of soil. The difficulty with us Westerns as regards the mechanism of the parable is to understand how there could be in one field such a variety of conditions of ground as is here depicted. This difficulty disappears when we learn from travellers, that Oriental agriculture differs in nothing more from agriculture in the west than this, that the fields put under seed are not really enclosed patches of land, all of a sort, but he scattered over a hill side containing all the varieties mentioned in the parable. The feature of the parable is the difference of the yield in differently conditioned soil: "Some seed fell by the wayside (that is on a trodden path), and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth. And when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit—some a hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, and some thirty-fold."

Nothing more thoroughly illustrates the difference between ecclesiastical theology and the teaching of Christ than this parable: and nothing, at the same time, more strikingly shows the harmony between that teaching and the simple unsophisticated facts of nature. The theology of the pulpit, in all sects and denominations, is based on the metaphysical speculations of pagan philosophers. All their ideas are based on the assumption that men are immortal in their inner constitution, and owe their intelligence to the possession of a spark of the divine nature. On this supposition, men are tacitly assumed to possess similar moral powers and mental capacities, and are practically held to be amenable to similar rules and conditions. The practical differences among men are set down partly to will, and partly to the influence of antagonistic spiritual beings. Such an idea as comparing human hearts to different classes of soil would never occur to such a philosopher. Such a comparison is inconsistent with the first principles of theological "science," and would be extinguished at its inception by the doctrine that men are fundamentally alike in their powers and capacities, through all of them having in common what are popularly called "immortal souls."

But here is Jesus making the comparison. Here is Jesus proclaiming a truth which has been thoroughly discerned in modern times, and which has been embodied in the practically true though professionally spurned-system of "phrenology"—viz., that men are by no means the same in their moral and intellectual natures: that there is just as much diversity in their mental constitution as there is variety of earth and stone in the constitution of the crust of the earth: that some are as impenetrable to all fructifying influences as the road side: some as irresponsive as ground in which there are more stones than soil: some as cumbered and obstructed as a thistly patch: and some like the generous garden mould, ready to yield to every effort of tillage. These are Christ's own comparisons, and they are true to nature.

The seed, he afterwards explained, is “the word”—the word ministered by himself and co-labourers. “The word,” it is perhaps needless to say, is a synonym for the class of ideas comprehended in the gospel, called “the word” because it has been divinely spoken (1 Thess. ii. 13), and “the truth,” because it is pre-eminently that form of truth without which men cannot live in the ultimate sense (Jno. viii. 32). The comparison of this spoken word of God to seed is a very happy comparison. Viewing the mind of man as soil, there is a strict analogy between the one and the other. Just as soil—the very best—has no power to yield garden flowers without seed or its equivalent, so the human brain has no power to evolve knowledge or wisdom without the impartation of ideas from without. Ideas are not innate in the human mind. The mind of a new-born babe is an absolute blank: and the mind of a grown man would be the same, if from his babyhood he were kept away from all contact with idea-acquiring agencies and sources. The kind of ideas he forms depends upon the class of ideas implanted by these external agencies. His mind will develop according to the influences acting upon it from without.

No more baneful philosophy is taught under the sun than that which teaches man to look into himself for light. There is no “light within” unless it has been put in, and it is “light” not because it is “in,” but because it is “light” before it is put in, quite irrespective of the vessel into which it has been put. Ideas having such a power to form the mind are most naturally compared in this parable to seed. They germinate according to their nature. False ideas if bad ideas, taken in and nurtured and assimilated, will bring forth false results—bad results—first in thought and then in action—both being comprehended in the term “fruit.” The seed in the parable is “good seed,” because it represents good ideas—ideas that have come from God—“the seed is the word of God” (Luke viii. 11). Admitted to the mind and nourished, the good seed will bring forth good fruit.

But the extent of the result depends upon the state of the soil and the nature of the husbandry. The good seed falling into unfit minds will prove abortive, notwithstanding its goodness, because the soil is bad: so Christ teaches, and so experience shows. The good seed falling into good soil will bring forth good fruit if the soil is not pre-occupied with other growths which absorb the power of the soil. Thorns and weeds of all kinds will thrive in good soil, of course. If they are allowed to do so, the plant shot up by the good seed will have little chance of “bringing forth fruit to perfection.” The weeds require keeping down. What they are, Jesus tells. “The care of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things.” These, he says, “choke the word, and he (the man) becometh unfruitful” It is not enough, therefore, to have good soil, or a mind capable of understanding and appreciating the truth revealed in the gospel. There must be a care to protect the mind from those influences that are calculated to undermine the power of the gospel. There are many things competing for human affection; and for most of them, the mind possesses a natural affinity. The danger therefore is great: the need for wise and energetic horticulture very pressing. Happy are they who practically recognise this and act accordingly. As for the seed that fell

into good ground, Christ's explanation is very clear and simple: "The good ground are they who in an honest and good heart, having heard the word and understood it (Matt. xiii. 23) keep it, bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke viii. 15).

Those who are accustomed to the indiscriminating gush of "Evangelical" Christianity may revolt at this view. That may feel it to be a harsh and repulsive doctrine which teaches that men can only be influenced by the gospel to the extent of their capacity to receive it. But it is a true doctrine, even if it is "harsh," as many true things in the universe are. It is impossible for intelligence to ignore the fact that it is the doctrine of Christ and the lesson of painful experience. It is not alone this parable. The whole of Christ's practical teaching is tinged with it, as when he says: "To him that hath shall be given" (Luke xix, 26), "He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" (Matt. xix, 12), "Ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep" (John x. 26), "No man can come unto me except the Father who hath sent me draw him" (John vi. 44).

And every man who has any extensive contact with his kind in this present evil world, is bound to learn that the men are more rare than precious stones who have capacity to discern or taste to relish the good things of the Spirit of God. The patches of good soil are few and far between: and more often than not, they are too covered over with vigorous thistle growth of all kinds to make it possible for the good seed to have an opportunity. As to why the matter should be so, that is another and not a very practical question. God is the worker out of his own plans. There are no other plans with stability in them. The revolutions of time kill them all off the surface of the earth. God having his plans, and having adopted his own means of working them out, it is ours simply to learn what they are, and what demands of conformity they may have for us which it may be in our power to render.

It was part of the seeming obscurity of this plan and its method that Jesus should speak in parables to the multitudes. When he had uttered this parable of the sower and the seed, "The disciples came and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" The answer seemed abrupt and unsympathetic—"Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." Why not? "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath" (Matt. xiii. 11, 12). A certain class would turn the logic of these sayings just the other way. They would say if a man have not, it is a reason why something should be given to him, and not taken away; and if a man have, it is superfluous to give him "more abundance." There is a certain common-sense smartness, no doubt, about this kind of criticism, but it has no application to the subject in hand. It might apply to food or clothes or money; but it does not apply to those spiritually-enlightened moral and intellectual attainments which commend a man to God. If a man lack these, there is nothing to work on to lift him higher. But if he have them, the tendency is for him to increase in attainment and in acceptability with God and man. When, in addition

to this, we take into account the judicial element underlying the case, any remaining mist entirely disappears.

A man or a nation's poverty in the matter in question is largely the result of neglect and misuse of opportunities given. God gives these, and asks men to seek him. If they turn away, or remain supine in the presence of proffered mercy, God may choose to withdraw the privileges, as it is written in Isaiah: "Forasmuch as this people ... have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precepts of men, therefore behold I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people—the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, &c." (xxix, 13, 14); and as it is also written concerning the Gentiles: "They received not the love of the truth that they might be saved: and for this cause, God sent them strong delusion that they should believe a lie" (2 Thess. ii, 10, 11).

"Therefore speak I to them in parables," said Jesus, "because they seeing, see not: and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand, and in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah." Here again it might be said "Surely, if they are deficient in sight and hearing, that is a reason for speaking very plainly, and not for cloaking meanings in parabolic forms of speech." Yes, to a merely human view of the case, that might seem sound reasoning. But it is impossible for a merely human view to be a right view of the ways of God. How can mortal man conceive what is right and fitting from God to man? It is God's view that is all-governing. The judgment of God would never be congenial to human views. The population in Noah's day would, no doubt, have voted unanimously against the flood. But the views of God prevailed, and the population was drowned with a strong and decided hand that faltered not in the doing of what was right, as God saw things. So in this matter: God is a dreadful majesty, and will be held in reverence, and when men are blind and deaf to Him through their habitual and presumptuous negligences for a long season, it is not unreasonable at all that God should hide his wisdom from them. God requires to be approached with the humility and docility of little children. When men do this, they will experience the truth of what is written, "I love them that love me, and they that seek me early shall find me."

"Blessed are your eyes," said Jesus, "for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." None of us can have any difficulty in understanding this blessedness. It was a privilege and an honour confined to that generation, and to the few lowly men in it whom God saw fit to admit to it—the privilege of witnessing the glory of God manifested in Christ. It is a privilege to be renewed in a more impressive form when God's work on earth has reached a riper stage: "for God shall send Jesus Christ ... (in) the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." But how few in our generation do themselves the advantage, and God the honour, of looking forward with any interest, or even faith, to this

prospect. Jesus speaks of “the prophets and righteous men” of ancient times. He says they “desired to see those things” which the apostles were admitted to witness.

Herein we may discern a divinely-approved characteristic which is of very little value in the eyes of the common run of people: this characteristic of “desiring” the day and the things that God has promised to bring. The “prophets and righteous men” spoken of by Christ had this “desire,” and we read that they will hold a prominent place in the day when the things promised become realities (Luke xiii. 28; Rev. xi. 18). Do we imagine that God will estimate men by a different rule in our day? Do we imagine that He can find any pleasure in those who treat his promises as doubtful matters of opinion, or in those who cannot find even so much diversion from earthly things as to think even that mild thought on the subject, but who are wholly regardless and unbelieving? Is it not revealed that it is to those “who look for Christ,” and who “love his appearing” (Heb. ix. 28; 2 Tim. iv. 8), with the same earnest desire that the prophets and righteous men had who are spoken of by Jesus, that Jesus will award the crown of life—so joyfully to be worn by the faithful—so vainly to be desired and lamented by the rejected in that day?

“Another parable put he forth unto them,” and another, and another. In all, over thirty parables are recorded as having been spoken by the Lord on this and other occasions. Having commenced to notice them, it would perhaps be well to notice them all in order at this stage, rather than wait for them to come up one by one in the course of the narrative.

## **CHAPTER XXVII.**

### **The Parables.**

IN the last chapter, the parable of the sower engaged attention. It bears particularly on the individual results of the word preached.

#### **The Parable of the Tares**

The parable of the tares deals with a larger matter. It deals with “the kingdom of heaven” in a history extending to the rectification of all things. The kingdom of heaven is a phrase interchangeable with the kingdom of God as we saw on page 115. We must have in view the truth concerning the kingdom of God before we can understand parables that illustrate it. The kingdom of God is not exclusively an affair of futurity, though it mostly belongs to the future. The foundation of it has been laid in what God has already done upon the earth. His work with Israel by Moses—his work by Christ—have both contributed important and powerful elements; and even his work in Providence among the Gentile nations is doing something towards it in the way of preparing the earth and mankind. When the

kingdom is finally and fully established, it will have been “prepared from the foundation of the world.” The parable of the tares represents that phrase of it that embraced the personal work of Christ. This appears from Christ’s explanation. We will look at that explanation item by item:

“A man sowed good seed in the field.”

EXPLANATION—The sower, Christ: the field, the (Jewish) world: the good seed, the truth, as embodied in its true believers.

“While men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat.”

EXPLANATION—The enemy, the devil, consisting of the authorities of the nation, who everywhere stealthily neutralised the teaching of Christ, disseminating evil doctrines, and scattering wide their sympathisers and disciples, who drew away the people, and multiplied their own number greatly by the energy of their operations and the popularity of their influence.

“When the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared forth tares also.”

EXPLANATION—When Christ’s teaching began to take effect in the development of earnest disciples, the result was not so general as might have been expected, for the Scribes and Pharisees had meanwhile been very busy on the quiet, and out of the sight of Christ, and the people sided with them in larger numbers than would have been the case if they had been let alone to consider the works and words of Christ for themselves.

“So the servants of the householder came and said unto him: Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, an enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?”

EXPLANATION—The surprise of the Apostles that the people did not submit to the word of Christ, and their proposal (as on one occasion) that they should command that fire should come down from heaven and destroy them.

“But he said, Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.”

EXPLANATION—The destruction of the wicked would have interfered with the development of the righteous, which requires that the wicked prosper for a while in their disobedience.

“Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.”

EXPLANATION—Both the wheat-class and the tare-class in Israel to be left unmolested till the arrival of their respective times, to be dealt with “according to their deeds.” The tare-class to be harvested “FIRST”: the wheat-class afterwards—the one a long time after the other, as the event has proved. The harvesting to be performed by the angels in both cases, under Christ’s command, but the harvesting of the tares to be done in the way of Providence, in which the angels work by influencing natural circumstances, while the harvest of the wheat would be done by them in an open and visible manner. The parable has been nearly all fulfilled, except the glorious part which is still future. “First” as the parable required, at the end of the Jewish world, the tare-class were gathered into Jerusalem, as into a furnace of fire, where there was wailing and gnashing of teeth, where they were destroyed with every circumstance of suffering and horror, as a study of the details of Josephus’ account of the devastation of Judea, and the destruction of Jerusalem, nearly forty years after Christ’s ascent to “all power in heaven and earth,” will abundantly shew to the reader. Thus were retributively “gathered out of his kingdom all things that offended” during his personal ministry, and “them who did iniquity.” The kingdom of the Holy Land is his kingdom which enables us to understand the interpretation.

If we supposed with modern theologians that “his kingdom” was “heaven” or the “church,” it would be difficult to apply the statement that he is to gather the workers of iniquity out of his kingdom. But with an understanding of the kingdom, there is no such difficulty. The destruction of the whole generation of Jews that were honoured by his presence and wonderful works, and proved themselves so utterly unworthy by rejecting and crucifying him, enables us to recognise the historic application of a parable which was at the same time a prophecy. The gathering of the wheat is next in order—tares “first,”—wheat afterwards. The wheat-class will be gathered openly by the angels at Christ’s return. “He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven even to the other” (Matt. xxiv. 31). The “gathering of the wheat into the barn” will have its fulfilment in the entrance of the righteous into the Kingdom of God. “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” It reads as if the shining forth of the righteous in the Kingdom would be immediately after the gathering out of the Kingdom of all that do iniquity, but the scope of the parable compels us to attach the larger meaning of “then” to its use in this case. When we say, “first this, then that,” we do not define time, but order. “First the tares, then the wheat” gives no indication of the length of the interval. As a matter of history, it has already run into more than 1800 years. The righteous will shine forth in the kingdom when the angels come forth to gather them for an entrance therein. It is a long time since the tares were burnt up on the same spot with fire unquenchable. It does not follow from this that there is no judgment and rejection

of the unfaithful at the second coming of Christ. There is a place for every part of truth: and one part of the truth is that the tares of Christ's own day were cast into a furnace of fire for consumption within forty years or so of the utterance of the parable.

### The Parable of the Mustard Seed

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.”

This is a parable which carries its meaning on its face. Least of all things among men at the beginning: greatest of all things at the end: such is the kingdom of God in every aspect in which it can be viewed,—whether as first planted in the earth in the promises; or as first introduced to any man called to be an heir thereof; or as first manifested in the earth at Christ's return. When first planted in the promises, it was confined to one old man who must have seemed demented as he sallied forth from the midst of his friends to an unknown land, or as he afterwards sojourned among the inhabitants of Canaan with the quiet confidence that he would one day be the possessor of “all these countries.”

What an indescribable contrast to this will be the occupancy of Palestine by Abraham and his multitudinous seed with Christ at their head, not only as the joyful inheritors of the most glorious of lands, reinstated in more than its original glory, but as the rulers of the entire habitable globe, whose enlightened inhabitants will joyfully repair to worship God and make obeisance at Jerusalem.

When first introduced to a man's notice, in the testimony of the gospel, the kingdom seems to him the most insignificant of his personal affairs. Slowly his view enlarges until he begins to discern its importance, and submits to the requirements associated with it. At last he dies in the confidence of the hope thereof; and at the resurrection, he awakes to find all his personal affairs perished and gone, except this one momentous element of them—that he is an heir of the Kingdom of God which he enters in the unspeakable joy of a glorified nature and a position of everlasting power and honour, friendship and joy.

Finally, when Christ steals into the world as a thief, the Kingdom of God arrived in his person is the smallest political fact on earth for the time being; but soon, the mustard seed sprouts. He awakes the dead; he gathers them to judgment with the few living who stand related to his tribunal; he separates the unworthy element from among them; with the accepted and glorified remnant he commences belligerent operations against “the kings of the earth and their armies”—first shattering the Gogian hosts encamped against Jerusalem; then proceeding in detail against all countries and all governments, till the whole fabric



of human power is prostrated in the dust, and the Kingdom of God the only ruling authority on the earth. A knowledge of the Kingdom of God is the easy key to the parable of the mustard seed.

### **The Parable of the Leaven**

“Another parable spake he unto them, the kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened.”

There have been fanciful interpretations of this. The leaven has been taken in its evil sense (for it was undoubtedly used to denote the spreading tendency of evil principles). It has been suggested that Christ meant the working of apostasy in the Church till Christendom should be overrun with error. In this interpretation, the woman is taken as “the church,” and the “three measures of meal,” as the three great ecclesiastical divisions of Christendom—the Greek Church, the Roman Church, and the Protestant communions. There is a certain superficial appropriateness in this that is pleasing at its first proposal: but deeper thought will not confirm it. Jesus spoke his parable with a meaning that his discerning hearers could penetrate. The coming state of the Christian world so-called was certainly not within their horizon; and it is not likely that Jesus would concern himself with the temporary triumph of darkness as the subject of a parable, or that he would speak of such a triumph as a matter in which the kingdom of God was “like” something else. In the Apocalypse, apostate Christendom is spoken of as “the court which is without (outside) the (mystical) temple,” and which was not to be measured because “given to the Gentiles.” It would be incongruous if a system sustaining such a relation to the divine regards should have been the subject of a parable speaking of it as “the kingdom of heaven.”

We must look for an interpretation that will steer clear of such an anomaly. It is not difficult to find one. Leaven has characteristics apart from evil. One of these is its tendency to quietly work in secret with a power that will conquer a mass out of all proportion to its own bulk. A small quantity divided among three “batches” will leaven the whole. It is evident this is the aspect in which Christ finds a likeness to the kingdom of God. His work is “hid” “till the whole is leavened.” This is the feature—a change extending to a certain “whole” brought about by a something “hid” and working quietly. As in the Case of the mustard seed, so in this; it is not difficult to see a perfect parallel in the relation of the kingdom of God to the earth in which we dwell.

It was a long time ago put into the mass or bulk of human affairs, as leaven is put into dough. The form in which it was so introduced was the word and work of God “at sundry times and divers manners.” It has been quietly affecting them ever since. In the laws established in Israel; in the word written by the Spirit, and studied by the faithful; in the gospel preached by the apostles, and received, more or less intelligently by thousands, there has been a gradual modification of

the state of things on earth, apart from which, the whole world would have been in the condition of the uncivilized races at this day. A principal part of the work done in this leavening process has been the development in all the ages of a people in harmony with God, from Abel downwards; who, in the further unfolding of the process, will re-appear in the land of the living, and be made use of in the position of governors of mankind, to powerfully affect the populations of the globe with the word-leaven till all are brought into sympathy with God, and the glory of the Lord fills the earth as the water covers the sea.

### **The Parable of the Hidden Treasure**

“Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which when a man hath found he hideth, and for joy thereof, goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field.”

The discovery of hidden treasure is not so frequent an occurrence in our time as to enable us so readily to see the aptness of this comparison as those would see it who lived in the days of Jesus in the countries of the east. It is, however, even for us, easy to understand the pleasurable excitement with which a man would discover that a certain piece of land contained a mine of wealth, and the promptness and energy with which he would contrive to find the means of purchase. This is the point of the comparison. The kingdom of God is the hidden treasure. The title to it is contained within the promises, and offered to men. But in the days of Jesus, these promises and this offer were not widely known. There was nothing for the bulk of mankind but the present life, with its imperfection and its shortness. When a man got to know that God had offered life eternal and a kingdom to all who should conform with the requirements associated with the offer, he was in the position of a man making a sudden and unexpected discovery of treasure trove; and this parable gives us to understand that Jesus expects that a man becoming acquainted with this supreme fact will be as enthusiastic and prompt and enterprising in his measures for securing its advantages as men always are to secure temporal wealth when suddenly brought within their reach.

### **The Pearl of Great Price**

“A merchant man, seeking goodly pearls, found one pearl of great price, and went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

The evident lesson of this is the same as in the parable of the treasure hid in the field, only it is put in a stronger light. The finder of the treasure in the field appears only as an accidental finder. In this case, the man is on the outlook for something good to buy, and, finding a particular gem, recognises its value so decisively as to sell his whole stock that he might obtain it. The parallel intended by Christ is that of a thoughtful man pondering life with a view to find good, and discovering the gospel of the kingdom, and God’s invitation associated with it,

perceives that it is of a value with which nothing else in human reach can be compared, and therefore bends his whole energy that he may attain it. The faithfulness of this to human experience will be most appreciated by those who have the most clearly seen and grasped the truth as it is in Jesus. Investigation, study, and labour are all found fruitless at the last when not directed towards God and His purpose in Christ. The part offered by God in him is the only “good tiling that shall not be taken away.” This was Christ’s description of it in the house of Martha and Mary, when he commended Mary’s unmistakable preference for the things of God.

### **The Parable of the Net**

“Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was east into the sea, and gathered of every kind; which, when it was full, they drew to shore and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.”

This is another phase of matters. It refers to what may be called the collective results of the offer of the kingdom in the preaching of the gospel, as distinguished from the individual applications suggested by the parables of the treasure and goodly pearl. Jesus called the apostles “fishers of men” (Matt. iv. 19). Their business was to take out of the sea of human life, for God’s after use, a proportion of the rational creatures swimming in its waters. In the parable, we are shown the implement by which the fishing was to be performed—the kingdom preached was the net let down into the sea.

The parable is of great value in one way. It shows us that the collective results of gospel word are not all genuine: that is, that the mere acceptance of the truth and enclosure in its net by the preliminary submission to baptism is not a certain guarantee of fitness for divine selection. If we were not plainly taught this, we should be perplexed at the result of the truth’s operations. Imagining that everyone who received the truth must necessarily show the spirit of the truth, we should be distressed at the fact that comparatively few show themselves true disciples of Christ. But here is this parable: “every kind” in the net, including “bad” that are “cast away.” The meaning is placed beyond doubt by Christ’s interpretation: “The angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” This puts everyone on his guard, and prevents him from leaning on man. Even a “brother” is but contingently a son of God. Our trust must be in what is written—not in mortal man’s thought or utterance. If we lean on a brother because he is a brother, without reference to whether he reflects the mind of the Spirit or no, it might turn out that we are following one of the useless fish, that is, permitted to swim in the net for the time being.

It has been a question with some why useless fish should be allowed to be enclosed in the net of gospel operations. There need be no question. Man’s part is to accept facts—not question them. But the question is not without an answer,

if we could know it. It is not difficult to conceive that if everyone admitted to the fellowship of the gospel were truly begotten of God, that fellowship would be too sweet to allow of the development of spiritual hardihood, which is the object of probation. "Coddling" never tends to strong or proper growth. We require to be thrown upon ourselves and upon God. There is nothing like a little rough usage for this: and no rough usage comes home like that experienced from fellow-fish, who snap and bite like dog-fish among herrings. The odiums and the oppositions of "those who are without" have scarcely a sting. But the enmity of those who are members of the household by recognized status is keen and nigh to killing. For this reason, it is used as part of the apparatus of probation, by which the man of God is trained to the robustness which, without losing the tenderness and the sweetness of the new man in his normal relations, can "endure hardness," and "contend earnestly" with the valour of "a good soldier of Christ Jesus."

The parable of the net was the last of the parables spoken by Jesus on this occasion, according to Matthew. After the parable of the leaven "Jesus sent the multitude away." He would draw to shore and land, and walk to the house where he made his stay in Capernaum,—the multitude dispersing. In the house the disciples asked him to explain the parable of the tares, which he did, and then appears to have added the parables of the hid treasure, the goodly pearl, and the net—after which he asked them if they understood. They said, "Yes." He then remarked that every man in that position—that is, who was "instructed unto the Kingdom of Heaven"—was like a well-stocked householder, able to bring forth out of his hoard "things new and old," as occasion might require. The object of this remark was evidently to signify that wealth of mental resource, in the statement and illustration of the truth, would be the characteristic of those who had the understanding he was referring to, as contrasted with the meagreness and nakedness of those who, not having made wisdom an object of search, had no stock of the article.

## **CHAPTER XXVIII.**

### **The Parables. (Continued).**

#### **The wise and foolish Builders**

This was not a parable in the sense of a complete story. It was more in the nature of a simile interwoven with plain discourse. Still, it is instructive, as the conveyance of important truths by illustration.—A man built a house on the solid rock: another built his on the loose sand—a supposition borrowed from the practice of the East, and not so obvious in the West where the nature of the foundations, though of some importance, is not so important. While the weather is fine, the difference between the two houses, as regards the foundation, is

immaterial. But a time of storm and inundation comes. The difference is then both great and apparent. The one falls to ruins; the other is unhurt by the violence of the storm, and remains a useful habitation when the storm has passed away.

The application is of great importance. Jesus supplies it. The building of the house is the acceptance of the teaching of Christ, in both cases. (Note by the way: apart from this acceptance, a man has no house—no abiding place in futurity: must die without hope. Ergo, the growing and popular view that “morality” will save, especially the thought that all will be saved, is a delusion). But a man may accept the teaching of Christ and not conform to it. His house—his hope, is in that case on the sand. For only that acceptance of the truth which is accompanied by affectionate submission to its requirements will be acceptable with God. “Not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom, but he that doeth the will of my Father” (Matt. vi. 21). Faith will not save a man whose “works” are not in accordance with faith. Without faith, he cannot please God: but he cannot please God by an inoperative faith. “Faith without works is dead” (Jas. ii. 20). A disobedient man’s belief of the gospel will go for nothing in the day of the issues of things—the day when the judgment will “try every man’s work, what sort it is” (1 Cor. iii. 13). The house of hope which he has built will fall to ruins in the day of storm,—lacking a stable foundation—even that foundation to which Paul refers when he exhorts rich men to “lay up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come” (1 Tim. vi. 18).

“But the man who heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them is like a man who built his house on the rock.” The judgment of God is coming like a storm to “sweep away all the refuge of lies” (Is. xxviii. 17). In that terrible day, the man will stand unmoved who has acted the part of a friend of God in the midst of “the crooked and perverse generation” now upon earth in apparent safety. He will pass unharmed through the destructive revolutions in which thrones will perish and society itself be dissolved. He will be “under the shadow of the Almighty” during “the time of trouble such as never was:” and when the storm has passed, and the sun shines out, he will stand forth in safety and glory as one of those “kings and priests” whose work it will be to re-build the shattered fabric of human life, and lead mankind in ways of peace, blessedness and well-being. But in vain will you look round at that moment for those believers who merely have a name to live during these times of probation, but who are dead, as shewn by their non-submission to all the requirements of the Word of the living God. The difference between the two classes is scarcely discernible now; it will be known and read of all men then.

### **Seed cast into the ground**

“So is the Kingdom of God as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself: first, the blade: then,

the ear: after that, the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle because the harvest is come.'

A knowledge of what God has revealed concerning His Kingdom makes it easy to understand this parable. Although the Kingdom of God is not yet in existence in the sense of an actually developed and visibly established institution in the earth, yet it is a thing for which great preparations have been made "from the foundation of the world," and are still going forward. If we imagine ourselves at the crisis of its establishment (even in the presence of Christ at his return), we can the more easily realise this. For what is the most striking aspect of things then? The retrospective.

The past is gathered up into that moment with a reality and a brightness impossible at any other time. Here are "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets" (Luke xiii. 28). Here are the multitudinous "many" who have come from the east and the west, and the north and the south to sit down with them. "These HAVE come out of great tribulation." The joy of the hour is largely made up of what is past. Even the Lord Jesus, the centre of the manifested glory of God, draws much of his joy from looking back: "He shall see (the result) of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Is. liii. 11). The history of the land, the history of the nation, the history of the Gentiles, all contribute their ingredient to the perfect satisfaction that will be the experience of each individual constituent of that wonderful assembly. That history has developed them all. They (the very kernel of the Kingdom of God) are the result of all that has gone before: and in all that has gone before, the hand of God has been the chief agent. For had not God made promises to Abraham: had He not spoken by the prophets: had He not issued an invitation by the hand of the Apostles: had He not given His own son as a propitiation for our sins: had He not raised him from the dead, and exalted him to His own right hand: had he not confided His plan to the hands of the angels (then present in their hosts to witness its completion), had He not taken steps to prepare for Himself a family by the ministry of the Word, and by the guidance of their affairs in chastisement and discipline and instruction, how could the glorious result that will then be manifest have been achieved?

When we realise that the Kingdom of God is the result of a work of long preparation, involving all that God has done in past times, we can see how it is like seed cast into the ground, which, though invisible to the passer by, is slowly advancing by a process of germination, and a result of harvest that are alike independent of man. The ripening of natural grain comes at a fixed time; and the reapers come at the ripeness. So with the Kingdom of God: the maturity of God's plan will be reached, and the harvesting will come off at a time that is fixed in the nature of things, independent of the knowledge or care or will of man. In this there is great ground of patience and peace for those who are instructed in the testimony. Their motto is, "Patient waiting, through all apparent delays, and in the face of the most adverse occurrences." It is a waiting for God who has given His word: and He has said "They shall not be ashamed that wait for me." Our life is

“but for a moment.” There is no waiting after our threescore years and ten: and the waiting may stop long before that, “Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind: watch and be sober.” Walk worthy of the calling to which ye have been called, “Be holy in all manner of conversation.” The hope of the righteous shall not always be deferred. The grain is ripening: the harvest is coming.

### **The two Debtors**

“There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave the most. And he (Jesus) said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged” (Luke vii. 41).

The bearing of this is best seen in connection with the circumstance calling it forth. Jesus had accepted a Pharisee’s invitation to dine. In the house, while reclining Oriental fashion at a table, a woman of blemished character approached Jesus from behind, and began to kiss his feet and wipe them with the hair of her head, and anoint them with precious ointment. The Pharisee, who knew the character of the woman, watched the proceeding with some considerable contemplations. He was undecided in his mind as to the true character of Christ. He had evidently asked him to dine for the purpose of getting a closer view of him than he could get out of doors or in the synagogue, and this incident of the woman taking such liberties with him unrebuked, exercised him unfavourably. The argument going on in his mind was, “This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him.”

The parable was Christ’s way of meeting this argument, for he not only knew who and what manner of woman the woman was, but he knew what was passing in the Pharisee’s mind, though the Pharisee was not aware of it. Christ’s application of the parable was that the very character of the woman was the explanation of her affectionate attention—so different from the Pharisee’s cold courtesy. Her greater love was the result of the forgiveness of her many sins. “To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.” On reflection, it will be found that this principle goes beyond the individual case that called forth its enunciation. It supplies the key to the plan on which God is guiding the earth to its everlasting place in the universe. That plan is the permission and the cure of evil, with reference to the supremacy of His declared will in the minds and actions of men. It is a distressing process while it lasts: as Paul testifies, and we all know from experience: “The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” But enlightened intelligence is enabled to endure it in view of the other testified fact, that the affliction is “working out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” But for the evil, the good never could have been appreciated as it requires to be—in humility and gladness. The prevalence of sin provides the occasion also for forgiveness of sin; and forgiven sin opens the way for love and joy. The multitude of God’s glorified children could never have sung the thrilling

strains of the gladsome song heard in vision by John in Patmos, if there had not first been a population requiring to be washed from their sins by the blood of the Lamb. It required the reign of sin, misery and death to prepare the way for that glorious song, and all the unutterable glories it represents in detail: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and wisdom, and riches and honour, and glory and blessing.... Thou hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue and people and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth."

### **The Good Samaritan**

The meaning of this parable is shown by the incident that called it forth, and by the application that Christ made of it. A certain interesting young man who was rich, asked him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asked him what he found written in the law; to which, the young man responded by quoting that summary of its principles contained in the words of Moses: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart; and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." Christ's answer was: "Thou hast answered right: this do and thou shalt live."

This ought to have closed the colloquy, because the question was completely answered. But we are informed that the young man was "willing to justify himself." He evidently concluded—(probably from the manner of Christ's answer)—that Christ implied shortcoming on his part in the desired conformity to the command; not as to God, but as to his neighbour. He took quite a complacent view of his own case on this point. He was evidently of opinion that he not only rendered unto God the things that were God's, but that he fulfilled a neighbour's part as well, or at least that if he did not, it was for lack of opportunity. Perhaps he was one of those who retire into a comfortable corner, and shut their eyes to the miseries of their race, and who become so absorbed in their own personal affairs as to forget that there are any neighbours to love and serve; or, who at the most, think their duty in that direction discharged by a reluctant donation unsympathetically flung here or there. "Willing to justify himself," he said, "and who is my neighbour?"

This is the question which the parable is designed to answer, and does answer. It has probably done more than anything else uttered by Christ to foster acts of disinterested kindness wherever his teaching has become influential. The parable does not introduce to notice a next-door neighbour or a fellow townsman or a compatriot, but a total stranger in faith and blood. And the man who acts the right part is not a priest or a Jew, but a detested Samaritan. The priest and the Jew are shown avoiding their duty. "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment and wounded him and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and



passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan as he journeyed came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, 'Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.' "

The application of the parable Jesus drew from the man's own mouth by a question: "Which now, of these three, thinkest thou was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?" There could be but one answer: "He that shewed mercy on him." What then? "GO AND DO THOU LIKEWISE." Here is what is meant then by "Doing good unto all men as we have opportunity." "Relieve the afflicted" when it is in your power. "Deal thy bread to the hungry; bring the poor that are cast out to thy house: when thou seest the naked, cover him: hide not thyself from thine own flesh (that is, from human nature). Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee, and the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer: thou shalt cry, and He shall say, 'Here am I' " (Is. lviii. 7–9).

This practical benevolence towards the afflicted is the most beautiful of all the fruits of the Spirit. It is one, however, requiring great hardihood for its cultivation. It has often to be brought forth in great bitterness. The tendency of things as regards man is to make you shut up the bowels of your compassion, and pass on with the Levite and the priest. It seems a hopeless, thankless, useless business. Nothing will keep a man to it but the constant setting of the eye on God and Christ, who have required it, and the constant realisation of the fleeting character of the state of things to which we are presently related, and the certainty of the glorious age that God has promised, which will chase away the self-denials and confusions incidental to the present evil world.

A word—not exactly on the other side—for there is not another side, but in deprecation of the extreme to which the helping of the distressed can be and is carried. Christ did not mean to hide any other part of the truth by telling the young man to imitate the Good Samaritan. He did not mean to say that salvation was to be found in the succouring of the destitute, though the succouring of the destitute is one of the duties connected with it. Though he shows a Jew disobedient and a Samaritan doing a neighbourly part, he did not mean to deny or cast the least discredit on what he said to the woman at the well of Samaria, concerning the Samaritans and the Jews respectively: "Ye worship ye know not what: we (Jews) know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews." Nor did he mean to weaken the words he spoke to his disciples, when he told them to "Go not into the way of the Samaritans;" or when he spoke to the Syrophenician woman of the non-Jewish people as "dogs." The modern treatment of the subject calls for this remark.

Where the Samaritan example is recognised at all, it is generally done with the effect of nullifying very much else of the teaching of the Spirit of God. The doing of good to the poor in the matter of temporal supplies is made to take the place of the “righteousness of God, which is by faith in Christ Jesus.” The outcast position of Adam’s race is denied: the mortal and hopeless relation of man to God, both by nature and character, is not admitted: the imperative necessity for the belief of the Gospel, and submission to its requirements before men can become acceptable worshippers of God or heirs of life eternal, is completely ignored—because of the parable of the Good Samaritan. This is a great evil, and calls for circumspection: “We must contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints,” even against many who may seek to shine in the work of the Good Samaritan. We must, on the other hand, contend for the neighbourly part against those who would confine the service of Christ to the agitation of doctrines. We live in a world where there is a constant tendency to extremes; and even good itself carried to an extreme becomes evil. But there is less likelihood on the whole, perhaps, that the parable of the Good Samaritan will be overdone than that it will be overlooked.

### **The Good Shepherd**

“He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door, is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth: and the sheep hear his voice, and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers” (Jno. x. 1–5).

“This parable,” we are told, “Jesus spake unto them, but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.” Presently, however, he explained, and anyone may understand who is capable of the necessary attention and discrimination. The explanation shows that Christ himself is the import of more than one feature of the parable. The sheep occupy a secondary place.

The parable itself was a literal truth apart from any spiritual application. Sheep-culture was a prominent occupation in the country as it is to this day. It differed from modern sheep-raising as regards the domestic relations subsisting between the shepherd and the sheep. The sheep were provided with substantially-made folds, into which they were driven at night for safety from the wolves and other dangers. The fold had a solid entrance at which a porter waited, ready to deny entrance to those who were not entitled to it. The sheep-stealer did not present himself at the door, but clambered over some unprotected part of the wall. The lawful owner had no object in using any but the proper entrance. This owner also knew his own sheep as no western sheep-farmer knows his; and so intimate were the relations between them that they knew his voice and went after him

when he called them to go forth upon the hill sides for pasture—not driving but leading them. To the voice of a stranger they could not be made obedient. They scampered off at the unaccustomed tones.

These are facts in which Jesus asks us to recognise a figure of himself and his people. It is profitable to trace the correspondence and its nature. The thing signified is, of course, much higher than the figure; but there is an analogy which helps the understanding of the matter. There is a variety of points, but all are beautiful and instructive. There is the shepherd, the fold, the door, the porter, the sheep, the wolf, the hireling shepherd, the shepherd's voice, the listening flock, the shepherd's death in defence of the sheep.

THE SHEPHERD.—“I,” says Jesus, “am the good shepherd.” Here is the key of the parable. How simple, yet how much there is in it. For who is the “I?” “Who art thou, Lord?” “I am Jesus of Nazareth.” But who is he? The Son of Mary (and therefore of Joseph, David, Abraham, Adam), but, which is of much more consequence (for there were plenty of that sort of no benefit to themselves or their kind)—Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God—begotten of the Holy Spirit, and therefore one with the Eternal Father, who sent him forth to be “righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and redemption” to all who should receive him. The Good Shepherd is God thus manifest in the flesh. It was not the first time the character had been so associated. It had been written (Isaiah xl. 10), “Behold the Lord God (Yahweh Elohim) will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him ... He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, &c.” The Creator in Shepherd-manifestation by the Spirit: this is the glorious idea before us in the parable put forth by the son of David, in the hearing of an undiscerning audience in the Temple. Here are power and kindness in combination. You may have power without kindness, and kindness without power: and either or both without wisdom. But when the Creator of the ends of the earth steps into the arena, we have all in combination. The wonderful phenomenon presented to view of a kind, strong, wise, unerring, SHEPHERD-MAN, in whom the Father dwells. When, in the history of heads and leaders was ever leader like this? Misguided indeed are the men who seek a head or leader among men. There is no master but Christ—no shepherd but the good Shepherd. All before him, or after him (claiming the same position) are but thieves and robbers—seeking their own advantage on the pretext of serving the sheep. This shepherd truly loves the sheep, and is able to save them, and will at last show his power and his kindness in gathering them from the dark mountains into his safe and loving fold, where they will hear his voice and live and rejoice in his presence for evermore.

## **CHAPTER XXIX.**

### **The Parables (Continued).**

THE SHEEPFOLD.—The place where the sheep are collected and defended—principally required at night. Paul says: “The night is far spent: the day is at hand.” We are at no loss to recognise the night. It is now, while darkness prevails over all the earth in consequence of the hiding of the face of God (the glorious sun of the universe). During such a time, a fold for the sheep is necessary. If none had been provided, the sheep must have remained squandered and exposed to depredation and death. Literally speaking, if God had made no arrangement for the spiritual development and nurture of men and women, barbarism must have prevailed for ever, as in the many dark places of the earth at the present day. The provision of sons and daughters must have remained an impossibility. But He has not left the earth in so hapless a state, His purpose being to fill the earth with His glory, in the sense of ultimately populating it with a race which should ascribe to Him the glory of His own works. He arranged for their development in the due measure required by that purpose at various times. This arrangement, taking different forms at different times, according as His wisdom saw fit, took, in the days of Christ, the form of creating a community—founding a church or ecclesia—establishing a fold.

This community by another figure is considered as a house or temple—“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets; Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” By another figure, it is spoken of as a body of which Christ is the head. “There is one body,” says Paul, “composed of many members.” We are unfavourably placed in the 19th century for judging of the character and the beauty of this institution, and its adaptation to realise the object of its appointment. We are living at the end of a disastrous history. As the Israelitish nation departed from divine ways after the death of Joshua, and the elders who overlived Joshua, so the community founded by the apostles changed, when the apostles and their co-labourers had passed away, from being “the House of God, the pillar and ground of the truth” into “the synagogue of Satan,” whose constituents “turned away their ears from the truth, and turned unto fables,” as Paul had foretold (Acts xx. 30; 2 Tim. iv. 4). Ecclesiastical history is a history of the corruptions and bickerings that ensued upon this change—the effect of which has been to blight and destroy, instead of conserving and invigorating the work of the Gospel.

What was once the fold for the sheep has become a well-fortified enclosure of fat wolves and other noxious creatures, from whose association the sheep of the flock have fled in panic long ago. Whether we look at the Church of Rome or the Church of England, or other kindred communions, we see systems which suffocate, suppress, and destroy the truth, instead of nourishing and cherishing it. We see a different spectacle from what was presented to view in the first century, when the friends of Christ were organised into loving and enlightened communities, under the fostering care and guidance of shepherdly men, “feeding the flock of God, over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers” (Acts xx. 28). It is a day of devastation and downtreading for divine affairs, both in the national fold and the individual fold. It would be a beautiful and a glorious thing if

God were to permit a clearing out and renovation and revival of the fold in which real and healthy sheep might multiply and dwell in safety.

The prophetic word does not justify any hope of this sort, till the Great Shepherd of the sheep himself arrive, for, to the last, it speaks of darkness prevailing till the coming of Christ, and the prosperous ascendancy of ante-diluvian indifference till the very hour of his manifestation. The most to be done with present agency is for believers, in the spirit of loving co-operation, to approximate, as nearly as they can, to the primitive assemblies, doing all things decently and in order, and all things for the edification of all, in the spirit of mutual and affectionate submission in the fear of the Lord. By this co-operation, the one fold in little sections may be planted here and there, in which a little may be done in this evil day for the keeping alive of the testimony in the earth, and the development and preservation of a people controlled by the knowledge, love, and obedience of the truth. All such, in all time, are in the one fold in the highest sense; they are constituents of the one community that God is forming for Himself out of the mixed material of the passing generations, and every one of them will, at the appointed time, be gathered from the accomplished ages of probation, and set in his appointed place in the happy day when "there shall be one fold and one shepherd."

THE DOOR.—Jesus says, "I am the door." This is one of those graphic figures that carry their meaning home at a stroke. By Christ only, can we enter the sheep-fold. He immediately adds a comment to this effect: "By me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved." This is enough. Men who work apart from Christ work without hope; that is, any hope they indulge must prove illusory. Men are naturally without hope, as Paul testifies in Eph. ii. 12. They are straying on the inhospitable mountains of sin-caused evil and death. Remaining there, they must perish. There is a fold in the mountains, entering which, there is safety. The door of this fold is Christ: and how we enter in was expounded by the apostles. It was their work to do so. The mode is too simple for most men. It was defined by Christ himself in the memorable words about the Gospel which he addressed to the apostles before he sent them forth: "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved" (Mar. xvi. 16). What this double process of faith and baptism does for the believer is stated by Paul, in terms which can only be read with one meaning; "As many of you as have been baptised INTO Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. iii. 27).

When a man believes the Gospel apostolically delivered, and submits to the baptism apostolically enjoined, he enters in by the door of the sheep-fold. He enters by Christ, than whom there is no other entrance—a negative fact of the first importance to recognise. Men who think there are other doors are liable to neglect him. There are many such now-a-days. Almost all men nourish the idea that a fairly moral life will secure salvation (if there is any, of which many are in doubt). In this, they hold the views of "natural philosophy," which Paul, in his day, declared to be a foolish and a spoiling, because an untrue thing (1 Cor. iii. 18, 19; Col. ii. 8). The foolishness of the world's wisdom has not become the wisdom of

God with the progress of time. "The simplicity that is in Christ" remains the truth, though unfashionable now as ever. Christ is the door, and "by him," and by him alone, "if any man will enter in, he shall be saved."

THE PORTER.—"To him (the shepherd of the sheep) the porter openeth," Jesus says. If we are justified in giving a specific application to this, we might fix on Moses as the porter in the first degree, and John the Baptist in the second degree. Both acted in the porter capacity to Christ. As regards Moses, this may not be apparent on the first suggestion, but it will be found to be true. First, Jesus says, "He (Moses) wrote of me." Paul says, "Moses was faithful in all his house as a servant, FOR A TESTIMONY of those things which were to be spoken after, but Christ as a son over his own house, whose house are we" (Heb. iii. 5). And again, "The law was our schoolmaster unto Christ" (Gal. iii. 24). Again, "To him gave all the prophets witness" (Acts x. 43), and again, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. x. 4).

Thus Moses, in whom the Jewish leaders made their boast,—the great pioneer of the (shortly-to-be-finished) work of God with Israel, was the great opener of the way for Christ, whom they rejected. Moses expressly told Israel (Deut. xviii, 18) that God would raise them up such an one to whom they would listen (which they had not done to Moses); and in all the laws and institutions delivered by his hand there was a shadowing of the glorious realities connected with this greater "prophet like unto Moses."

In the case of John the Baptist, the analogy to the porter is still more obvious. He stood at the very threshold of the work of Christ, calling direct attention to him, and introducing him to all in Israel who feared God. He was sent to "prepare his way." "He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light" (Jno. i. 8), and, having done his work, he announced: "He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease." He declared to them: "There standeth one among you whom ye know not. He it is that coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe latchet I am not worthy to unloose;—that he might be made manifest to Israel, therefore I am come baptising with water." John's work attracted great attention and exercised a powerful influence with the whole nation, as we saw in the chapter devoted to the consideration of that matter. To him Jesus appealed in confirmation of his own claims as the good shepherd. "Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness to truth.... He was a burning and a shining light, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. But I have greater witness than that of John; the works that my Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me" (John v. 33–36). To Jesus, the good shepherd, the porter-ministry of John the Baptist (which was known to the hearers of Christ's discourse), opened the door of the sheepfold, in which they might have recognised an incontestable evidence of his claims.

THE SHEEP.—Who they are, Jesus makes plain: "My sheep hear my voice: and I know them, and they follow me" (Jno. x. 27). Here is their characteristic

wherever found: men who submit to the word of Christ and do what he commands. This is a more cordial and distinct type of discipleship than is common among the multitude who recognise the lordship of Christ in the abstract. It is the only type of discipleship acceptable with him, and the type acceptable with him is the only type of ultimate value. He spoke very plainly on this subject more than once: "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (John xiv. 21). "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I have commanded" (xv. 14). "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. vii. 21).

The apostles spoke with equal plainness. Thus Paul: "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. viii. 9). Thus John: "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also to walk even as he walked" (Jno. ii. 6). Thus Peter: "If, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning" (2 Pet. ii. 20).

The men who submit to the word of Christ and obey his commandments are most aptly represented by sheep. The sheep is a strong but harmless animal, from which no living thing suffers injury. There could be no more powerful exhortation than the employment of such an animal to figure the disciples of Christ. He is himself the Lamb of God, and those who follow him are like him in the strength of their spiritual attachments and the guilelessness and inoffensiveness of their characters.

**THE WOLF.**—The nature of this animal is well known. He will stop at nothing in the gratification of his hunger, provided he runs no risk. He attacks the weak and shies at the strong. In contrast to the sheep, he represents the rapacious character which is common in the world—headstrong, unscrupulous, merciless men who will sacrifice everything but their own skins in the accomplishment of personal ends. They prefer the weak for their prey. Therefore, the sheep are their especial victims, because the true sheep are not given to fighting. "The wolf catcheth the sheep and scattereth them." The wolf may be taken to represent any danger that arises to the sheep, but more particularly the one danger with which the name of the wolf is particularly associated in the sayings of Christ and the apostles—the spiritual wolf. This wolf is given to disguises. If he came in his open character, the sheep would flee. So he puts on the fleece. He professes to be a true and humble sheep, and above all, g tending sheep, a bell wether, a kind of shepherd sheep. With holy tone and pious grimace, he gets on the weak side of his victims, and has them in his maw before they are aware, and feeds and feasts on them without them knowing it, for he has the art of magnetising his subjects so that they feel no pain in the process of deglutition, and see not that their bones and flesh are slowly disappearing down his gullet.

These are false teachers, clever men of shallow intellect and no conviction, who live by their wits in the religious realm. They have always been a numerous tribe, as at this day. Jesus foresaw their activity, and forewarned his disciples. "Beware of false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are RAVENING WOLVES. Ye shall know them by their fruits." Paul also foretold their advent and success when the restraint of his presence should be removed:—"I know this, that after my departing shall GREVIOUS WOLVES enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Even of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts xx. 29, 30). Elsewhere, he speaks of them as "evil men and seducers," who should "wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim. iii. 13). By their ravages, the sheepfold of the apostolic age became emptied and desolate soon after the apostles' death. The fleece-clothed wolves "caught the sheep and scattered them," because of the officialism of the hireling.

THE HIRELING.—The apostles were not hirelings, nor the men who came immediately after them. They were men in earnest love with the work for Christ's sake, at the peril not only of their living, but of their lives, serving in the spirit enjoined by Peter, who said to them, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet. v. 2). A hireling is a man who is paid for his job, and who works because he is paid, and ceases to work when he is not paid. This class of worker has been numerously developed by the clerical system. Paid work in spiritual things is liable to become poor Work and mercenary. Paul, who had a right to be maintained, refused on this ground, "lest the gospel of Christ should be hindered" (1 Cor. ix. 12). He did not refuse occasional help, prompted by love and the appreciation of his labours (Phil. iv. 10–17).

But he declined a set maintenance, as all wise men have done since his day. The hirelings have no objection to a set maintenance. On the contrary, it is what they most particularly appreciate and aim to secure. The consequence is seen in what Jesus says happens in times of peril: "The hireling fleeth because he is an hireling and careth not for the sheep." When he sees the wolf coming in the shape of any danger, "he leaveth the sheep and fleeth." How little he cares for the interests he professes to have in charge becomes apparent when he cannot turn them to his personal advantage. To be out of pocket or put up with disgrace is quite out of the line of what he feels himself called upon to submit to. This is quite beyond his calculations of prudence. The least smell of danger in this shape makes him look round for a decent pretext to get away. In complete contrast to this is the shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

THE SHEPHERD WHO LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP.—This primarily refers to Christ himself, who offered himself a sacrifice of "sweet smelling savour" to Him who required this declaration of His righteousness, "that he might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus" (Rom. iii.). But it



is true of all shepherd-men who have received the truth in the love of it, and estimate the work of Christ as their sweetest occupation and their highest honour. There is "a chief shepherd" (1 Pet. v. 4), viz., "that great shepherd of the sheep," our Lord Jesus, who was "brought again from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb. xiii. 20). This implies under-shepherds, namely, the apostles and all who enter into their work in the line of things indicated to Timothy in the words of Paul: "The things that thou hast heard of me, among many witnesses, the same commit thou to FAITHFUL MEN, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. ii. 2). Men of this qualification are the true "successors of the apostles," and they have been found wherever faithful men of ability have received and espoused the faith of Christ with the ardent appreciation and disinterested aims of the apostles. They require no hiring to look after the sheep, and when the wolf of danger in any shape presents itself, they sally forth with clubs to beat off the beast at the peril of their lives.

THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE AND THE LISTENING FLOCK.—"The sheep hear his voice, and he calleth his own sheep by name and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers." These are the natural facts in the case. Their spiritual meaning is plain. The shepherd's voice is what Christ has said for the guidance of men, but with this is bound up much more than the precepts that actually came out of his own mouth. What he said himself is only part of the message of God to man. For the rest of the message, he refers us to Moses and the prophets: "Think not," said he, "that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil" (Matt. v. 17). "They have Moses and the prophets: let them hear them. If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead" (Luke xvi. 29). "If ye believe not his writings (the writings of Moses), how shall ye believe my words?" (Jno. v. 47). "The Scripture cannot be broken" (Jno. x. 35). "The Scripture must be fulfilled" (Mark xiv. 49).

Such are a few illustrations of the way in which, in so many words, he binds up the message of God in the "Old Testament" with his own personal word in the New. In addition to these, the instances in which he does so by implication, and in which such an association results of necessity from his teaching and his work, are more numerous and weighty than the casual reader of the Bible can be aware. The conclusion resulting from them all is that the Shepherd's voice is co-extensive with the Bible. The Shepherd's voice is the voice of the Spirit, as especially manifest from the pendant to each of the messages sent by Jesus to the seven ecclesias: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches: "concerning all of which messages, he says "I, Jesus, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches" (Rev. xxii. 16). Because, therefore, the Scriptures of Moses and the prophets are given by inspiration of God—because their authors were "holy men of God who spoke (and wrote) as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" and not as impelled by human

will (2 Pet. i. 21), those only truly listen to the voice of the shepherd who listen to those Scriptures, as interpreted and applied by the Spirit in Jesus and the Apostles.

The voice of Jesus is not a different voice from the Holy Scriptures which were read in the Jewish synagogues every sabbath day in the days of Jesus, and now placed in the Providence of God in the hands of Christendom. The voice of the personal Jesus is but a supplementary and explanatory expression of the same Eternal mind. The Old Testament Scriptures, in conjunction with the Apostolic testimony to Jesus as their fulfiller, were able to “make men wise unto salvation” in the days of Paul (2 Tim. iii. 15); and they are still able to work that great result for men if they will allow them. God not only spake by Jesus, but the prophets also, as Paul says: “God, who at sundry times and divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers BY THE PROPHETS, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son” (Heb. i. 1). So also Jesus teaches in the parable of the vineyard—the proprietor of which sent first various messengers, and then his son.

Now, the voice of the shepherd being of this amplitude, we have to note how the fact bears on the claims of many in our own day who are regarded as his sheep. If that which constitutes and distinguishes men as the sheep of Christ’s parable is the hearing of the shepherd’s voice, and if that voice be the voice of God in the entire Scriptures of Moses, the prophets and the Apostles, where do myriads stand professing his name, who not only neglect making the acquaintance of these Scriptures, but who actually, in an increasing multitude of cases, discard them as the obsolete and infantile conceptions of a past age? They are manifestly not even hearers of the Word, let alone doers. They do not recognise the voice of the Shepherd, and therefore follow him not. The sheep are to be found among those who are enlightened in this matter—who discern the voice of the shepherd in the “whatsoever things” that have been written aforetime for our learning—who “hear what the Spirit saith,” whether through Jesus, or the apostles, or the prophets.

Such are strongly characterised by that other sensibility of which Jesus speaks, when he says his sheep “know not the voice of a stranger.” “A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him.” A knowledge of the Scriptures, in the understanding thereof, gives them a quick sense of the alien element. They quickly detect what is foreign to the mind of God. Philosophy in all its branches comes under their reprobation, where it claims to guide in divine matters. They see with clear eye that Paul uttered no empty flourish when he spoke of philosophy as a spoiling thing, of which believers had to beware. They can exactly tell why. They can define the limits of philosophy in relation to religious truth, and demonstrate the radical distinctness of the two realms of thought. They know the whereabouts of the natural thinker, while the natural thinker cannot place the sheep, except by a blundering hazard which attributes their conceptions to mental peculiarity bordering on aberration. Paul expresses the fact well when he says, “He that is spiritual judgeth (discerneth) all men, but he

himself is judged (discerned) of no man.” The eyesight of the spiritual man not only covers the ground occupied by the natural man, but extends much further, like the visual range of the man at a higher altitude than his fellows, e.g., a mountain observatory overlooking a plain. They know enough to know that Christ is the only guide for man in relation to the things of God and futurity. Therefore they hear his voice and follow him, while they flee very determinedly from any man or system who poses as a substitute, or rival, or equal. These things are discerned by all who truly know Christ. They know his voice, and they know all counterfeits.

## **CHAPTER XXX.**

### **The Parables (Continued).**

#### **The Man with the Barns.**

“The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully, and he thought within himself, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God” (Luke xii. 16).

This is not so much in the nature of a parable as an illustration. The object of its employment is manifest from its concluding sentence. It is to illustrate the ultimate folly of making self-provision the engrossing rule of life, as it is with the common run of men. The occasion of its introduction gives even greater piquancy to the lesson. We are informed that “One of the company” on a certain occasion, “said unto Jesus, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.” This was invoking Christ’s authority in a case of disputed title to property. Such an appeal is generally considered important and respectable. In the present circumstances of human life (in which men to whom God has spoken are on probation as to the question of doing the will of God), Jesus could not look on questions of human property as men generally look upon them.

First, he denied jurisdiction in such matters in the present state of affairs, though he will have jurisdiction enough when he comes to exercise judgment and justice. “Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?” Next, most men would reckon he goes out of his way to have a needless fling at covetousness which more or less animates most men in their dealings. “Take heed and beware of

covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth." The man who asked him to interfere must have felt this as an unkind rebuff, and the majority of people in our day would sympathise with him. He would feel he was only wanting "his own," and that if he asked Christ to help him, it was because the influence of a just man would be powerful. Yes, but there was another side to the question to which most men are blind. The lust of possession is a snare. It catches the heart and deadens it to other and higher considerations which ought to be supreme. Hence Jesus says "Beware," and speaks of "the deceitfulness of riches;" their tendency to cheat the heart out of wisdom. He, therefore, advises men to turn "the mammon of unrighteousness," when it comes their way, into a friend, by its use for God in a good stewardship of which He alone, and not man, is judge.

Universal experience shows the necessity for his exhortation. Nothing is more common than for men of enlarging wealth to make use of it for still greater enlargement in self-provision and self-ministration to themselves and families. And nothing seems more ghastly and sterile in the day of death than munificent and skilful arrangements in this direction to the neglect of what God requires at a man's hand in the way of faithful stewardship. Nothing will emancipate a man so thoroughly and wholesomely from the bondage of riches as the use of them in the various duties which God has attached to this probationary state. This is what Jesus calls "being rich towards God" in contrast to a man "laying up treasure for himself." Being rich towards God may not seem much of an acquisition in the day of health and liberty, but the matter wears a different aspect when that day sets in clouds and darkness, as it inevitably does sooner or later. When the dead rise, and the Lord sets up His throne in judgment, the reality of treasure laid up in heaven will be manifest in the eyes of men and angels.

### **The Barren Fig Tree**

A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree and find none: cut it down. Why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it, and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that, thou shalt cut it down" (Luke xiii. 6).

The connection of this parable shows its meaning. The parable itself seems to carry its interpretation on its face. Some of the crowd attending Jesus on a certain occasion reported to him some recent occurrences of a tragical character—the slaughtering of some Galileans to be offered with their own sacrifices: the crushing of some 18 people to death by the falling of a tower. Their report was apparently made in a tone that suggested the opinion that the said persons must have been more wicked than ordinary mortals for such things to happen to them. Jesus at once offered a comment unfavourable to this view, and made one of those man-lowering remarks that distinguished him from all human

teachers: "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay: but except ye repent, YE SHALL ALL LIKEWISE PERISH."

Then he adds the parable which likens them all to barren fig trees spared at the request of a patient gardener, in the hope that a little further treatment may induce fecundity, but on the distinct understanding that a further failure is to be decisive as to their removal as useless pieces of herbage. The parable was, doubtless, uttered and recorded for general use afterwards. It invites men to regard the continuance of their privileges as a mark of divine patience, and not as an indication of their own merit. How naturally most men reason otherwise. When prosperity lasts, they complacently take it as a matter to which they are entitled. When adversity comes, they ask, "What have I done?" If they would realise that human life is altogether a matter of divine toleration, because of God's own purpose, and not because of human desert, they would most easily enter into this parable, and take the truly modest and perfectly reasonable attitude apostolically enjoined when we are commanded to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," and to "pass the time of our sojourning here in fear."

There was, of course, a special applicability in the parable to the generation contemporary with Jesus. The divine displeasure had been gathering over the land of Israel for generations. The iniquity of the people was coming to a head, and the long gathering storm was about to burst, which would sweep Israel from their place among the nations, if reformation did not avert it. "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish," had special point as addressed to those who were to be engulfed in the flood of destruction that came with the overflowing of Roman victory 40 years later. We of the nineteenth century stand related to a similar situation. A dispensation is culminating, and judgment impends that will sweep away vast multitudes for the same reason—divine patience long misunderstood and abused. God is gracious and long-suffering. The parable illustrates this, and though the fact will remain absolutely without influence as regards the population at large, it is a source of comfort and encouragement in personal cases where there is a disposition to turn from evil.

### **The Parable of the Lowest Place**

"He put forth a parable to those who were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms. When thou art hidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room, lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him. And he that bade thee and him, come and say to thee, Give this man place, and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room, that when He that bade thee cometh, He may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher; then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee" (Luke xiv. 7).

This, like the last, seems not so much what is technically understood by a parable, as a piece of preceptive counsel. Yet it is a parable in so far as it selects one sort of occasion, and one form of humility to inculcate a lesson that applies to all occasions and any form. Invitation to partake in wedding festivities is a casual occurrence, and it would be a poor modesty that was to be confined to such occasions. It is, therefore, a parable in teaching a general lesson by a special instance. The need of the lesson may not be very apparent in modern educated circles where it has become embalmed in the forms of their etiquette: but a different feeling is created in the contemplation of either the harsh and undisguised emulations of Greek and Roman life, or Jewish life either, 1,800 years ago: or the barbarous self-assertiveness still prevalent in the vast mass of human population on the earth. To the end of Gentile times, Christ's parable will remain the unmistakable indication and inculcation of the kind of behaviour that is acceptable with him. He emphasized the lesson with the immediate remark: "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased: and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." The lesson may have no power with the mass of men, but it will to the last prevail with those who conform to the mind of Christ with the docility and zeal of true disciples. A modest and retiring disposition everywhere is more or less the indirect result of the commandment which took shape in this parable.

### **The Vineyard Labourers**

Jesus had declared that the salvation of the rich would be a difficult thing. Peter drew attention to the fact that they (the disciples) were not rich but poor, and that this poverty was in a large measure voluntary: upon which he invited Jesus to state to them the advantages of their sacrifice. In this, there was a mixture of child-like simplicity with just a trace of complacency verging on vain glory. This accounts for the double nature of Christ's answer, which deals with both aspects of Peter's attitude. First, Jesus deals with the sincere aspect. He tells the disciples frankly that the counterpart of their fellowship with him in the day of his contempt would be a participation in his power and glory, when he should sit upon his throne in the day of restitution. He further says that "everyone" who had sacrificed for His sake would be recompensed a hundredfold and inherit everlasting life. But He adds a statement that suggests a qualification: "But many that are first shall be last, and the last first." The mere giving up of worldly advantage for His sake would not ensure final acceptance with God unless the act were performed and accompanied with an acceptable spirit of modesty and self-abasement: "For"—and he proceeds to employ a parable which can only be rightly understood in view of these attendant circumstances.

It is a parable of hired labourers. The owner of a vineyard goes out early in the morning and employs all that accept service at a penny a day (about 8d). About nine o'clock (to adopt modern time) he goes out again, and finds other hands loitering unemployed in the market place. He sends them to his vineyard with the general assurance that he will make their wages right. He did the same at twelve o'clock, and three. Again, at five, when the day is nearly done, he pays another

visit to the market place, and finding another batch of men idle, he sends them to work in his vineyard. At the close of the day, the whole of the labourers were mustered for payment of wages. Payment began with those who had come last. The early comers, looking on, imagined that as they had worked all day, they would get more than those who had worked only a part, although the contract was for one day's pay. When their turn came, they received what they had agreed for: but because the others had received a greater amount, they grumbled. Hearing their grumbling, the owner of the vineyard reasoned with one of them on behalf of the rest: "Friend, I do thee no wrong. Did'st thou not agree with me for a penny?.... Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?"

It is customary to understand this parable as teaching that every one of the accepted will be alike in their status in glory; that those who have just believed and taken on them the name of Christ and passed away without the opportunity of faithful stewardship, will rank equally with those who through long years of trial have "borne the burden and heat of the day." Another favourite idea with some is that it teaches that every one who believes will be saved without reference to their "walk and conversation." Those who take this view speak of "the penny of eternal life." They suppose the penny to teach that every one called to the vineyard will receive eternal life, and that the difference between acceptable and unacceptable labouring will be in the position assigned to them in the state to which eternal life will introduce them.

There are reasons for rejecting both views. The first reason lies in the interpretation which Jesus himself gives of the general drift of the parable. He concludes it with this remark: "So the last shall be first and the first last: for many be called but few chosen." As the labourers represent the "called," this makes it certain that they are not intended to stand indiscriminately for the saved. They stand for the called—not for the chosen, though they include the chosen. The parable is employed expressly to teach that it is not everyone casually employed that is selected as a permanent servant by the owner of the vineyard. This reason is of itself decisive. There are others. It is not fitting that any class of the saved should be represented by those who "murmur against the good man of the house," or who have an "evil eye." The idea that all are to be equal would conflict with the plainly enunciated doctrine of the New Testament that the standing of men with Christ in the day of account will be determined by the account they have to render. This doctrine is rejected by the Christianity of the day, as a great many other true doctrines are. It has been nullified by the mis-application of that other true doctrine, that salvation is "by grace" "not of works, lest any man should boast."

There is no conflict between these doctrines, when it is seen that the doctrine of salvation by grace applies to the foundation and initiation of the plan. If salvation primarily depended on "works" no man could be saved: for "all have sinned, and the wages of sin is death." One sin is quite enough to ensure death, as shown in the case of Adam in Eden. Salvation, to be possible at all, has to be "by grace,"

by favour. This favour takes the form of the forgiveness of sins, by which a man becomes justified in the sight of God, and an heir of life eternal. But forgiveness is on conditions. The preaching of the Gospel is a proclamation of the conditions. The conditions not only determine the question of forgiveness or no forgiveness, but they also affect the question of how high in glory those who are forgiven will rise, for there are degrees of attainment in Christ: and it is here where the element of "account" comes in. It is here where "works" will determine a man's position. The man who in this connection exclaims "Not of works" does not "rightly divide the word of truth," but wrests it to his own destruction. Nothing is more plainly or more frequently indicated than that the called will be judged with reference to their works, and that their position will depend upon their account. Let these examples suffice:—"Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. xxii. 12); "The Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt. xvi. 27); "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (1 Cor. iii. 8); "He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (2 Cor. ix. 6); "Have thou authority over ten cities ... be thou over five cities" (Luke xix. 17-19).

What then is the teaching of the parable? That not every one who labours in the vineyard will receive the Lord's favour at the last; that not even the forsaking of houses and lands and relations, or the bearing of the burden and heat of the day, will commend to God a man who is a murmurer, or has an evil eye, or who is great in his own eyes: that it is a necessity that a man recognise the absolute sovereignty of the Lord of the vineyard, both as to possession and the right to do as he wills, uncontrolled by any will, or wish or whim, on the part of those whom he favours with employment: in a word, that "except a man humble himself as a little child, he shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven." The paying of the penny is a mere part of the drapery of the parable, but if a specific counterpart to it is insisted on, it is found in the fact that the Lord is just, and will give all that the holders of the covenant can justly claim to receive—which is merely resurrection. Everything beyond this is favour-grace: and the Lord bestows this of His own bounty, and only where men find favour in His eyes.

### **The Lost Sheep**

Jesus said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." "The son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." The religious and well-to-do classes of the nation generally had too good an opinion of themselves to regard themselves as the lost: and Jesus took them at their own valuation. They considered themselves the Lord's saved elect, like thousands in the present day. Therefore he did not go after them, but after those whom they despised. "I came not," said he, "to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." To the publicans and sinners he addressed himself: and this class paid attention



to him. At this the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." This gives the key to the parable he spoke:

"What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after that which was lost until he find it? And when he hath found it he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing, and when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost" (Luke xv. 4–6).

He spoke this parable in answer to their cavils. Therefore, it applies to those to whose association on the part of Christ the Pharisees were objecting—the sinners. They are the lost sheep—(all were, in fact, for all had sinned, but all did not recognise the fact)—Jesus had come to seek and save them. It was with this view he humbled himself to their society. He did not associate with them as sinners, but as sinners willing to be saved, which is a very different class of sinners from those of whom David speaks when he says: "Blessed is the man that standeth not in the way of sinners" (Psa. i. 1). Jesus did not associate with sinners to entertain them, or to take part with them in their pleasures or their sins. He humbled himself to them that he might teach them the way of righteousness: and if they would not listen to this, he turned away from them, and they from him. If they listened to him, and conformed to the Father's requirements as made known by him, then he received them gladly, and could say of such to the Pharisees, "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Nay, he not only thus received them: what said he in finishing his parables? "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." "More than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance."

If a Pharisee was glad at the recovery of living mutton, why should he be envious at a spiritual recovery which caused joy among the angels? This was the argument of the parable. The lesson it conveys, it is easy to see; but how flat the lesson falls in our worse than Laodicean age, when the gladness of the angels is esteemed a myth, and interest on behalf of the fallen is pitied as an enthusiasts' craze. Yet there are those who as in Peter's day will "save themselves from this untoward generation." Let such be very courageous, and go in the face of the sublime complacency of a generation of shallow wiseacres who think themselves profound and learned and great and excellent, when the state of the case is tremendously the reverse when estimated in the light of divine common sense. "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."

### **The Lost Money**

A woman has lost money, and makes diligent search and finds it, and is so glad that she convenes her neighbours to rejoice with her (Luke xv. 8). This parable

was spoken on the same occasion as the parable of the lost sheep, and has the same meaning,—the figure merely being changed.

### **The Parable of the Prodigal Son**

There have been many fanciful interpretations of this. There is no need for special ingenuity. The meaning of it is evidently very simple. It follows the parables of the lost sheep and the lost money, and was spoken in the same connection, and is therefore to be read in the light of the cavils and feelings that suggested them. The Pharisees and the Scribes murmured at Christ's reception of publicans and sinners. Christ aims by parable to exhibit the true meaning of his attitude, which on the surface appeared ambiguous. This he could not have more effectively done than by supposing the case of a man with two sons, one of whom, having received the portion his father had set aside for him, should emigrate and squander his substance in riotous living, and afterwards rue his course of life, and resolve to return home and throw himself upon his father's mercy. That a father should compassionately receive a son under such circumstances must have seemed natural even to the fossilised Scribes and Pharisees. How much more was Divine clemency to be shown to the fallen classes of Israel, who listened gladly to Christ, with an earnest resolution to walk in the ways of righteousness? There was a power in this argument which must have gone home even to the perceptions of the "blind Pharisee."

But Jesus did not stop his parable there. He introduced a picture of the odious part the Pharisees themselves were playing. This he did in the case of the second son who stayed at home and behaved correctly, so far as outward decorum was concerned; and who, finding his vagrant brother received, in his own temporary absence, with joy and festivity, "was (on his arrival) angry, and would not go in." His father went out to him, and expostulated with him. The son complained that the father had never made him a feast, although he had faithfully served him so many years. The father pointed out that he was always at home, and that the whole establishment was at his command, and that it was reasonable they should make merry at the return of a son who had been as good as lost and dead to them all. The whole parable was an answer to the cavils of the Pharisees at Christ consorting with sinners. The record of it has been at the same time an encouragement, during all the ages that have since elapsed, to the erring who desire to return to the ways of right. It is, in a parabolic form, a reiteration of the comforting words of the Eternal Father, by Isaiah, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Is. lv. 7); or by Ezekiel, "If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. All the transgressions that he hath committed shall not be mentioned unto him" (Ezek. xviii 21).

### **The Unjust Steward**

At the same time, "Jesus said also unto his disciples, there was a certain rich man who had a steward, and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him and said unto him, how is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship: for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my Lord taketh away from me my stewardship. I cannot dig: to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, an hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, an hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill and write fourscore. And the lord (that is, the lord of the steward) commended the unjust steward because he had done wisely," to which Jesus adds the comment, "The children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light."

The sense of this remark we realise on reflection. It was good policy on the part of the steward to use his vanishing opportunity while it lasted, as to make it provide a future for him which it did not yield in itself. The point of Christ's remark lies here, that the children of light—(those who embrace and profess the faith of the kingdom)—do not, as a rule, make a similarly wise use of their vanishing opportunity. They have only one life to live, and but a short time in which to use the power and opportunities they may have as stewards of the manifold grace of God. And yet, in most cases, they live as if this life would last for ever, and as if its one business were to provide for natural and personal wants. The consequence will be that, sowing to the flesh, they will reap corruption (Gal. vi. 8). In this they are not so wise as the children of this world, who, when they see a thing is going from their hand, make the most of their chance, "making hay while the sun shines." That is the view Jesus wished to enforce by the parable, is evident from the remarks with which he accompanied it. "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."

The mammon of unrighteousness is a phrase by which Jesus defines worldly wealth. Why he so designates it, we need not concern ourselves to enquire beyond noting that, as a rule, wealth is acquired and used unrighteously, which sufficiently accounts for Christ's expression. The important question is, How can the Mammon of unrighteousness be turned into "friends" against a time of failure? The time of failure is certain, in view of the fact that everyone of us must shortly part with all that we have. Death dissolves a man's connection with all he may have: and resurrection will not restore it. He will emerge from the ground a penniless man. How can wealth be so handled now as to be at such a time a "friend" providing us "everlasting habitations?" Jesus indicates the answer in saying, "He that is faithful in that which is least (mortal wealth) is faithful also in much (that which is to come)... If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye

have not been faithful in that which is another man's—(the property of Christ in our hands now as stewards),—who shall give you that which is your own?" (what a man receives in eternal life will in a peculiar sense be "his own").

Faithfulness, then, in the use of what we have now is the rule of promotion when the time comes to "give to every man according to his works." "Unrighteous mammon" used in the service of God will be found to have been turned into a friend for us in the day of account, when we have no longer any control over it. How it may be so used is abundantly indicated throughout the Scriptures. It is not confined to any particular form, but certainly does not consist in bestowing it wholly on one's own respectability and comfort, whether in self or family. The mode is indicated in Paul's words to Timothy about the rich: "Charge them that are rich in this world ... that they do good; that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. vi. 17–19). Jesus strongly recommends this application of the unrighteous mammon, by which a dangerous foe is turned into a friend. He emphasizes his exhortation by dogmatically asserting, "No servant can serve two masters ... Ye cannot serve God and mammon." The doctrine may be unacceptable, but it is true, as will be found in joy and grief by two different classes in the day of the issues of life.

There is no real ground for the difficulty that some feel about Christ parabolically holding up an unjust steward for imitation. He did not do so in the matter of the unjustness. The falsifier of his master's accounts is only introduced to illustrate the wisdom of providing for future need. The children of this world do it in their way, the children of light are exhorted to do it in theirs, by a faithful use of "the unrighteous mammon."

## **CHAPTER XXXI.**

### **The Parables (Continued).**

#### **THE Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke xvi. 9)**

There are two questions to be considered in the study of this parable: first, the significance that Jesus intended to convey by the use of it; and secondly, the light it may throw on the state of the dead. These are totally distinct questions, and it is important they should be kept separate.

The first question presents no difficulty. The lessons of the parable are apparent on its face, especially when viewed in the light of the circumstances that called it forth. It was evoked by the opposition shown by the Pharisees to the teaching of

his previous parables—those considered in the second half of our last chapter. Jesus had especially emphasized the doctrine that it was impossible to serve God and mammon; and that the way to use riches to spiritual advantage was to make use of them as a means of abundant well-doing. We are told that “the Pharisees, who were covetous, hearing all these things, derided him.” This drew his attention directly to them. They were in great reputation with the people for superior sanctity; which made their opposition particularly galling in view of the light way they treated the obligations imposed by Moses and the prophets, and the selfish objects with which they used their influence, and the hypocritical arts they employed to keep up that influence.

This was the first point he touched: “Ye are they which justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts, for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God” (verse 15). The second point was their trifling with the law of Moses and the prophets to make room for their own traditions. This he condemned by affirming that “the law and the prophets were (in full force as the binding expression of the will of God) until John; and that since then,” the preaching of the kingdom of God by himself and his disciples, which was resisted by the Pharisees as an innovation, had been attested as the latest manifestation of the will of God, with the result that thousands of the common people accepted it gladly, though the Pharisees held aloof. As for the law of Moses, with which they trifled, it was easier for heaven and earth to pass than for even the smallest of its provisions to fail. The laxity of the marriage law, as interpreted by the Pharisees, was in direct violation of the Mosaic precepts, though so popular with the Pharisees and their disciples.

This was the situation which the parable of the rich man and Lazarus was introduced to illustrate, and on the true nature of which it throws the light of a divine interpretation. The Pharisees had one view of that situation, and this shows another. They thought themselves the righteous of the earth, and monopolised the fat things of life as their just portion from God, regarding with a supercilious contempt the low class to which Jesus, in their eyes, belonged. The parable shows them a tolerated class for a time merely, and the Lazarus class as the beloved of God, to be exalted in due time when the triflers with the Scriptures would be brought down and made suppliant at the feet of the Lazaruses they now despise. But suppliant in vain, for a wide gulf will divide the rejected of God from the accepted in that day, rendering it impossible for one to render good offices to the other if ever so disposed, which will not be the case when the day of opportunity and mercy is passed. “They have Moses and the prophets; LET THEM HEAR THEM.”

This is the great lesson of the parable put into the mouth of Abraham. Jesus considers the claims of Moses and the prophets to be established on such grounds, that the submission of true and docile reason is inevitable, and in effect says that a man standing out against those claims is beyond reach of conviction. “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though

one rose from the dead.” This declaration ceases to appear extravagant when we become acquainted with the character of Moses and the prophets, and with the facts involved in the existence of their writings.

The lesson of the parable is quite evident. The question remains as to the form in which it is propounded. Does Jesus by this teach the existence of the dead as conscious beings in a disembodied state? It is universally assumed that he does; and certainly such is the impression that any one would receive from a rough and casual reading of the parable. But second thoughts will show many reasons against this view. In the first place, it was not the nature of “the future state” that was at all in question between Christ and the Pharisees when he uttered the parable. The question was as to God’s estimation of the position and teaching of the Pharisees and of Christ respectively. Jesus dogmatically defined this, and then, as was his wont, uttered this parable in illustration of what he said. In the doing of this, he might employ figures drawn from ordinary literal experience (as when he spoke of a man losing a sheep); or from the views entertained by those around him without any reference to their truth (as when he discussed the abstract possibility of his doing miracles by the power of a mythical god—Beelzebub); or from imagination of the impossible (as when he spoke of keeping the left hand ignorant of what the right hand was doing, or the stones crying out). Which of these it was we must decide by investigation of what is true outside the parable itself.

This is not the place for such investigation. It has been fully entered upon in other places (*Man Mortal; Christendom Astray*, etc.) The result is to show that the dead are truly in a state of death, not only having no capacity for any rational function whatever, but having no existence of any kind, except in the history which their life has written in the book of God’s indelible memory. It is the great doctrine of the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments, that on the foundation of this history, their existence will be resumed by the Resurrection power God has given to Christ, at whose command the dead will be re-organised and come forth for judgment in accordance with what he may deem the deserts of mortal life; incorruption of nature and consequent deathlessness, with every attendant circumstance of glory, honour, and joy, being awarded to those of whom he approves; and condemnation to second death, corruption and final perdition to those whose case in his judgment calls for so terrible a fate.

This being the unanswerably demonstrated literal truth in the case, it is inadmissible to put such a construction on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus as would make the dead alive, the soul immortal, and the occurrence of death the occasion of a man’s experience of the judicial issues of life. We must look for such an aspect of it as will harmonise with Christ’s own doctrine that man is mortal, and resurrection at his coming the time for every man to receive “according to his works.” Such we find in the second and third of the above-indicated classes of the parables he used.

The parable bears a precise resemblance to what the Pharisees believed concerning the state of the dead, as anyone may see who reads the treatise on Hades, by Josephus, himself a Pharisee, and living in the same age of the world. That their view was untrue is nothing to the point in the way of its employment. Christ was addressing them, and it was natural and effective that he should make use of their view of how the dead are affected by death, when he wished parabolically to introduce the testimony of Abraham, in whom they boasted. If it confirmed them in a delusion, we must remember that this was one of the objects of the employment of parable, as Jesus himself declares in answer to the question of the disciples, "Wherefore speakest thou to them in parables?" "That seeing they might see and not perceive, and hearing they might hear and not understand" (Luke viii. 10; Matt. xiii. 10–13). Such an idea may shock modern critics; but modern critics must not shut their eyes to the fact of Christ's promulgation of that idea when they make it an objection to a particular interpretation of a parable, that it would tend to perpetuate a delusion.

His employment of an erroneous view of the death state in conveying a denunciation of Pharisaic morality and pretensions, was admissible on the principle of the second mode of constructing parables, referred to above, viz., the use of impossible incidents in the figurative enforcement of a lesson. The things believed by the Pharisees were impossibilities, but this was no bar to their employment in a mode of teaching which made frequent use of such figures. The sea making a declaration, for example (Is. 23:4); the elements verbally repudiating the possession of wisdom (Job xxviii. 14–22); the floods clapping their hands (Ps. xcvi. 8); corpses making a stir and talking when the King of Babylon dies (Is. xiv. 9), are all examples of representing the impossible as occurring. Still more striking in this respect are the parables of Jotham, the son of Abimelech; of the trees sending a deputation and proposing a government (Jud. ix. 8), and of Joash, King of Israel, imputing marriage and political achievements to the thistle (2 Chron. xxv. 18); also Joseph's dream of the planets and sheaves of corn doing him homage, and Pharaoh's dream of corn eating corn.

They are all instances of a beautiful and rich poetic drapery of literal truth, which is not mistaken for literal truth in these cases, because the nature of the literal truth is recognised on all hands. That a similar figuration of speech and movement in the case of the dead should be literally construed, is due to the existence of a philosophical belief that the dead are not dead because incapable of death, and alive and active in another state. Jesus gave no countenance to this philosophical view in his plain teaching, but on the contrary, taught doctrines subversive of it altogether. That he should speak one parable appearing to countenance the philosophical view is not a wonder in all the circumstances. It is the part of wisdom to discriminate an accident of truth from the truth itself.

The meaning of the parable, as in the case of some of the parables, has been the subject of a variety of laboured elucidations. The labour and the ingenuity have only helped to perplex a simple subject. As already remarked, its lesson is

on its surface. The context shows that the rich man personates the opulent Pharisee whom the common people held in high estimation for sanctity. Lazarus stands for those on whom they looked with a lofty disdain—Jesus and his brethren—who in their eyes were no more than beggars frill of sores. What happened when the two died exemplifies the relation of parties when the two classes are on the other side of death by resurrection—the Lazarus class comforted in the bosom of Abraham: the rich man class tormented in the affliction that Jesus told them awaited them when they should see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God, and they themselves be thrust out, with weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. There may at that time be some detail corresponding to the five brethren; but that is not essential to the purport of the parable as a whole. It belongs to the practical lesson that Jesus wished to enforce on the Pharisees, and which has had a current application ever since—that men must look to written revelation, and not to personal illumination, for the understanding of the ways of God.

The enforcement of this lesson required the supposition of the existence of the rich man in death—a supposition which Christ's employment of the view of the Pharisees as the basis of the parable made easy and natural. The "great gulf" belonged to the literal frame work of the parable (it is expressly mentioned by Josephus). If it have a specific counterpart in the actual truth shadowed by the parable, it may be found in the fact before alluded to, that in the state that separates the rejected from the accepted, it is impossible for the latter to render any service to the former then, or for the rejected to pass into communion with the accepted; an impassable gulf divides them. The great lesson of the parable in a sentence is to be found in the literal declarations with which Jesus prefaced it: that men and things as God looks at them are very different from the estimation in which they are humanly held: that it belongs to the divine family to be now in affliction, but that a great reversal will ensue in the day of death's ending; that the right rule of conviction meanwhile is enlightenment in Moses and the prophets: and that men who are impervious to the evidences that cluster around them would be deaf to the voice of a person restored to life.

### **The Unjust Judge (Luke xviii, 1–8)**

This parable is directed against the view of some, that prayer is of no use. The indicated lesson of it is that "men ought always to pray," which is the frequently inculcated precept of Scripture. That men should think it is of no use is natural in the absence of immediate apparent results, and in the absence of any power on their part to feel how God regards prayer. It is because of this that it was necessary that the Spirit of God should teach us, as He has done, by Christ and the apostles and prophets, what the truth is on the subject, that in the faith of it we might do what is wise and needful in the case, "Pray without ceasing." Jesus gives us to understand by this parable that it is not only regarded by the Father, but that it is effectual in leading to results—always pre-supposing that the prayer is by an acceptable supplicant. The argument of it evidently is—if an unjust man



is moved by continual entreaty to do what is requested, that he may get rid of the troublesomeness of importunity, how much more will God, who is kind and just, be moved by the continual requests of those he loves.

But there is a caution against impatience. He may “bear long” with those who are afflictions to his people. There are various reasons for this. God may by them be accomplishing the very purposes of his love in subjecting his people to needed chastisement. But whatever the reason may be, we are not to be discouraged at the apparent want of response, but to persevere, praying and waiting, in the confidence that God will do what is best, and cause “all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose.” It will at last happen that God will refresh his people by a great and visible interposition on their behalf, delivering them from all enemies, and bestowing goodness upon them, above all that they can ask or think.

### **The Pharisee and the Publican**

This immediately follows the other parable about the duty of prayer, and seems designed to bar the way against the extravagance that might be run into with regard to the subject, and that as a matter of fact has been and is run into. Though “men ought always to pray and not to faint,” there are qualifications to be observed. Men are not to suppose they will be “heard for their much speaking” (Matt. vi. 7); neither is the mere offering of prayer acceptable unless it is offered in an acceptable mind. What constitutes this acceptability of mind is variously revealed. This parable is one of the revelations. It was spoken we are told in the verse introducing it, concerning “certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others;” and it is concluded by the declaration on the part of Christ, that “everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” The language of the two men in the parable shows what is meant. The Pharisee, who had a powerful backing of favourable human reputation, was well pleased with his attainments; the publican, whom the Pharisee and Jews in general regarded in an odious light, realised his dependence on the divine clemency for permission even to live. Their prayers were tinged with these sentiments respectively; and, in consequence, the one was acceptable, and the other obnoxious.

Why did the Pharisee think so well and the publican so ill of himself? We get the clue in that other expression of Christ’s, “Thou blind Pharisee.” A man whose eyes are open—a man who understands things as they are—has such a sense of the eternal power, greatness, and holiness of God, and the ephemerality and weakness and sinfulness of man, that his own attainments, however excellent by comparison with bad men, must always appear as nothing in his eyes. His own righteousness must appear to him as filthy rags in the light of the purity and power and correctness of the Spirit-nature. This is the estimate that the Scriptures always put into the mouths of acceptable men. And it is the language

of reason and not of cant, though canting use has been largely made of it in the ecclesiastical ages.

### **The Unmerciful Servant**

A servant owes a large sum to his lord, which he is unable to pay. He entreats his lord to give him time, promising to pay all. His lord forgives the debt altogether. The servant afterwards demands of a fellow-servant the payment of a small debt. The fellow-servant is unable to pay, and asks time. The servant refuses to wait or to forgive, and has the fellow-servant imprisoned. The lord of the servants hearing of it, sends for the first servant, reinstates the forgiven debt, and orders him into prison and affliction till the debt is paid.

The application of this is both clear and important. Its meaning is established by the occasion of the parable, and by the comment which Jesus makes on the action of the lord of the servants in reviving the debt and imprisoning the man who had shown no mercy. The occasion was a question of Peter's: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Till seven times?" Jesus said unto him, "I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven." A parable intended to illustrate a saying like this must be a parable enforcing mutual forgiveness as a paramount duty among the servants of Christ; but it goes further than this, and shows that a failure to render this duty will be a very fatal affair to the offender. His own forgiven sins will be revived against him if he assume an exacting and unforgiving attitude towards others. The importance of the matter is shown by the way Christ binds it up with the petition he puts into the mouths of his disciples for the forgiveness of trespasses: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." By this association of words he confronts us with our duty to others every time we ask forgiveness for ourselves. It is a good test of our standing in the matter, whether we are able to make our forgiveness of others the measure of the forgiveness we request for ourselves. The remark with which Jesus concludes the parable is decisive. "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do unto you (as the lord of the parable did to the servant) if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses."

## **CHAPTER XXXII.**

### **The Parables. (Continued).**

#### **Parable of the Talents**

This parable Jesus spoke on two separate recorded occasions, and in two different forms—first, when in Jericho on the way to Jerusalem for the last time

(Luke xix. 1–11); and next, after his arrival in Jerusalem and his presence there for some days (Matt. xxv. 14: in connection with chap. xxiv. 10). On the first occasion, he employed “pounds” as the subject of trust; on the second, “talents,” and he varied the number entrusted to the servants—one time from the other, and also the decisions upon the accounts rendered, thus giving rise to one of those cases of so-called “discrepancy” on which some men so easily, so flippantly, and so entirely without real cause, found objections to the wholly-inspired character of the apostolic narratives. That Jesus, employing the same parable on two different occasions, should vary it in some of its features, is not only consistent with divine intelligence, but its necessary result. It is a very limited and wooden kind of intellect that adheres exactly to the same words and forms when having to repeat a matter.

The parable is very well known, and easy to understand when the first principles of the truth are apprehended.

When Jesus repeated the parable in Jerusalem in discoursing privately with his own disciples, he substituted “talents” for “pounds,” and gave “five” and “two” to the first and second instead of one. This was accompanied by a change in the central character of the parable from a nobleman going on a political journey, to a simple traveller leaving domestics in charge of his affairs in his absence. The reason of the change may be found in the difference of the audience to which the one and the other was addressed. But whatever the cause of the difference, the fact of the difference creates no difficulty when the separateness of the occasion is recognised. The teaching is the same, and the teaching is manifest when once the mind is cleared of the ideas implanted by early theological education.

Recognising death as a reality, and the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, as essential to renewed life and the reaping of the moral issues of the present life, we easily see Christ in “the nobleman,” and “the man travelling into a far country.” He has “gone into heaven.” He has been “a long time” there. His absence is connected with the “receiving of a kingdom.” For the Father’s invitation to Him was “Sit thou at my right hand till I make thine enemies Thy footstool,” that is, till the time come for that to be done. When it comes, then the decree is, “The Lord (YAHWEH, the eternal Father) shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion. Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.” The upshot is exhibited in the well known words: “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign for ever.” The particular kingdom he is to receive as the basis of all these operations is the kingdom of David (now fallen), as said the angel Gabriel to Mary: “The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David;” and the prophet Isaiah, “On the throne of David and his kingdom,” and many others to a like purport.

Christ having departed into the far country to receive this kingdom—that is, to be invested with its title and authority and power, as against the opposition of the Jews and their rulers, who said, “We will not have this man to reign over us,”—he

presently returns to assert his right, and to “take to himself his great power.” That he would so return he plainly teaches by this parable; for if he be the nobleman departed, he must return to fulfil the part. It is what he several times said to his disciples he would do, in language which, from its association with the fact of his departure, leaves open no other meaning. “If I go away, I will come again.” “I will see you again and your hearts shall rejoice.” “This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go” (Acts i. 10).

When he returns in the personal sense required by the whole current of apostolic teaching, the judging of the servants falls into natural order. He is held forward in apostolic teaching as the judge and awarder of the final issues of life. He was particular to enjoin his apostles to make this prominent. So Peter says: “He commanded us to preach unto the people and to testify that it is he which is ordained of God to be the judge of the living and of the dead” (Acts x. 42). What they were commanded to do, the apostles did. In their writings, nothing is more explicit than their declaration that “we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ,” that at his hands “we may receive according to what we have done” (2 Cor. v. 10). This judging is to be “at his appearing and his kingdom” (2 Tim. iv. 1).

The parable is in exact agreement with these apostolic attestations, and with all their attestations on the subject. They tell us that the judging is to be “according to our works.” This is the one thing that is most conspicuous in the parable. With what other object could Christ have introduced servants of various degrees of administrative success obtaining recompense in these varying degrees—ten talents, ten cities; four talents, four cities; no talents, no recognition at all? On the practical application of this in the resurrection, the parable may be taken as a revelation. Our status in the Kingdom will depend upon our attainments in probation. This is a question of capacity imparted in the first instance. All men differ: some have much more native gift than others: some, five talents; some, two; some, one. It is not the number of talents that is the rule of judgment, but the use of them. Increase by faithful use—this is the rule of acceptance. The holder of the one talent would have found equal favour with the others if it had been put out to use. The words of the judge show this. His offence was his sloth and indifference to the charge committed to him, such as it was. He did not turn what he had to account. Had he done so, he would have entered equally with the others into the joy of his Lord.

But though the number of the talents is not the rule of acceptance, it is the measure of the position to which that acceptance admits. The parable shows this; and the principle is reasonable, and is affirmed in the Scriptures in many ways. It is recognised that fruitfulness is in “some thirty fold, some sixty fold, and some an hundred fold,” and it is plainly declared that “every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour” (1 Cor. iii. 8). It is on this principle that “the wise shall shine as the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.” It is a principle distinctly foreshadowed in the organization of David’s worthies. There were a “first three,” and those who

“attained not unto the first three,” and so on in the list downwards. The degree of rank was determined by achievement. All more or less did meritorious things under circumstances of difficulty; but the greatness and the difficulty of some deeds exceeded that of others (2 Sam. xxiii. 8–39). When Jesus says “he will give to every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. xxii. 12), we see the same thing.

Thus his judgment has two operations. While it decrees total rejection and death in the case of the class represented by the unprofitable servant (of whom it is said, “Cast out the unprofitable servant into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”), it distributes differing measures of reward and distinction among those servants who, in differing degrees, are found faithful to the trusts severally reposed. It is therefore no mere flight of the imagination that looks forward in the light of this parable to the time when the accepted servants of Christ, reigning with him, will hold different positions of honour and power according to the parts they have performed in this cloudy and dark day. Some will be heads of villages while some are rulers of towns, and some, groups of towns, and others governors of districts and provinces, and some even heads of kingdoms. All will be satisfied and all glorious, but all will not be of equal rank and honour. The degree in which one of these stars will differ from another star in glory will be the Lord’s sovereign determination. It will therefore not be open to question, or fruitful of envy; for every one admitted will be so much a lover of the Lord as to be ready to rejoice in all the Lord’s appointments, even if they involved his own exclusion. The dreadfulness will belong to those who, in the first establishment of these things, are permitted to see what they have lost, and doomed to a place in that distracted crowd which will depart with “weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth,” to be seen no more for ever.

### **The Master of the House**

Jesus said (Mark xiii. 34) he was “like a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.” He added “Watch ye therefore, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning, lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you (who now listen), I say unto ALL, Watch.”

This falls into the explanation of the parable of the talents and the pounds, only that is intended to bear not so much on how the servants should be dealt with on the master’s return, as on the need for their constant readiness on account of the uncertainty of the time of his return. The applicability of this has been direct to every generation of believers since Christ’s departure, notwithstanding its special realization in that one that is actually contemporary with his appearing. Always having in view that there is no conscious interval in death, and that the occurrence of death is an incalculable eventuality, there has always existed, and will to the last moment exist, a need for daily circumspection and readiness for

the coming of the Lord. There never can be a time when a man can reasonably feel that the coming of the Lord is a remote contingency. It never can be more remote from a man's consciousness than the day of his death, and because this may be any day, the shadow of the Lord's coming is over every hour of a man's present life. We are actually in the position sketched in this parable. We are exactly like servants who do not know when the master's wheels may roll up to the door. It is therefore no artificial or superfluous exhortation the Lord delivers when he says "Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh."

### **The Two Sons**

"A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise: and he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not" (Matt. xxi. 28).

The question which Jesus put to "the chief priests and elders of the people" immediately after he had uttered this parable, shows the meaning of it "Whether of them twain did the will of his father?" They answered, the first. He immediately made this application of it. "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." On what principle? On the principle supplied in the answer they had given—that the man who did what was required of him was the right doer, even if in the first instance he made great show in the contrary direction. The publicans and the harlots by their profession were such as refused to perform the commands of righteousness: but as a matter of fact, they "repented at the preaching of John the Baptist," whom the Scribes and Pharisees rejected. These Scribes and Pharisees made a great show of willingness to submit to the divine requirements, but as a matter of fact, while promising obedience, they did not yield it, and their long prayers and religious performances did not make up for their disobedience. They were in the position of the son, who said, "I go, sir," but went not.

The parable has a valuable modern application. There is much talk of the lips: much piety. Where is the doing of what God has commanded? There is very little of it. No wonder. The state of things is so corrupt that the very theology of the people almost kills incentive to righteous action. They are taught that they can do nothing to please God; that all that is needful is to believe that Christ died for them. "Only believe," that is enough, say they. As for doing, they are to "cast their deadly doing down—down at Jesus' feet" Jesus "did it all, long, long ago." As for them, they are "miserable sinners," who constantly do the things they ought not to do, and leave undone the things they ought to do.

In clear and dignified contradiction to this demoralising travesty of the apostolic doctrine of justification by faith, stands the words of Jesus: "He that doeth the will of my Father, the same is my mother and sister and brother,"—a doctrine he

could not have placed in a clearer light than by this parable of the son who was approved even after rebelliousness of speech, because he did the things that were required of him. How reasonable and beautiful is the doctrine. Action is the very essence of character. If a man's actions are always evil, of what acceptance with God or man can the finest speeches find? They are as a fine cloak over a grinning skeleton. The man who talks finely and acts badly is not inaccurately known in all the world as a hypocrite, and a knave whose basenesses are rendered all the more hideous for being tricked out in the garb of a fine wordy profession.

### **The Parable of the Vineyard (Matt. xxi. 33–41)**

In this parable, we are informed that the Pharisees “perceived that he spake of them.” If they saw through it on its first utterance, it ought not to be difficult for us to understand it after having had it so long in our hands. And, indeed, it is most easy when the history to which it relates is known and understood.

It condenses Israel's history into a single view. God forming them into a nation is set forth under the figure of a man planting a vineyard. The man who plants a vineyard for himself does so that he may have pleasure from it. It is not merely that the vineyard may exist. The human view is that a nation exists for itself, and that its end is served if it prosper and is happy. But here is another and a higher view—one that does not appeal to patriotic sympathies, but which is nevertheless the true one, conformity or non-conformity to which will ultimately determine all questions of national well-being. “God, in whose hand thy breath is, thou hast not glorified:” this was Daniel's complaint against Belshazzar. It is the true indictment against all nations, and is the cause of the judgment that is coming on all nations. Israel was especially formed for the purpose and pleasure of God. “This people have I formed for myself” (Isaiah xliii. 21), “that they might be unto me for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory” before all people of the earth (Jer. xiii. 11).

The planting of a vine is a frequent figure of Israel's national incorporation. It was not used for the first time when Jesus spoke this parable. So early as in David, we read “Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt. Thou hast cast out the heathen and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land” (Psa. lxxx. 8). In Isaiah, it is the theme of a song, “Now will I sing to my well-beloved, a song of my well-beloved, touching his vineyard. My beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill, and he fenced it and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine....

The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel” (Is. v. 7). For God's pleasure, and the well-being of the men composing it, this national vineyard existed. Had it answered its end, nothing but the purest prosperity would have attended it. God was “waiting over them to do them good.” Moses put it thus plainly to them: “It shall come to pass if ye hearken to these judgments and keep

and do them, that the Lord thy God ... will love thee and bless thee and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb and the fruit of thy land, thy corn and thy wine and thine oil, the increase of thy kine and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee. Thou shalt be blessed above all people: there shall not be male or female barren among you or among your cattle.... What doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him and to serve the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul?" (Deut. vii. 12–14; x. 12).

Having planted the vineyard, the proprietor sent messengers to receive of the fruit. That is, God raised up prophets in the midst of Israel, to bring them to the obedience which he required, and to that service and praise in which he delighted. With what result everyone acquainted with Israel's history knows. There is no sadder chapter in the whole story of human confusion upon earth than this—that a nation, divinely founded, constituted, and guided, should, in all their generations, have turned against and killed the messengers divinely sent to them to keep them in the right way. It is a fact which painfully appears in the detail of Israel's history, and is thus concisely and graphically summarised at the close of the Divine record: "The chief of the priests and the people transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen, and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes and sending, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people till there was no remedy" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 14–16). This is, in fact, the state of things parabolically exhibited in this story of the vineyard.

Israel's long career of insubordination culminated in the rejection and crucifixion of the Son of God himself. Judgment was not long delayed after this. The account of public events during A.D. 30—70 (vulgar era), written by Josephus, is the historic illustration of the process of that "miserable destruction" which, in fulfilment of the words of Jesus, slowly came on them as the result of their disobedience. The vineyard, by that process, was taken from the order of "husbandmen" then in possession. Of that vineyard, Jesus is here exhibited as "the heir." He has not since that time come into possession, but he must do so as the heir. He indicates such an event in sanctioning the statement that it will be "given unto others." The Gospel of the Kingdom enables us to recognise in those "others," the Lord Jesus and his brethren in the day of his glory at his return, as he says, "When the son of man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory" (Matt. xxv. 31).

## **CHAPTER XXXIII.**



# The Parables (Continued).

## The Marriage Feast (Matt. xxii. 1–13)

This parable was spoken by Jesus soon after he had uttered the parable of the vineyard considered in the last chapter. It was addressed to the same people, that is, “the chief priests and Pharisees,” who “perceiving” his parables were aimed at them, “sought to lay hands on him.”

We must remember this in our understanding of it. We shall blunder if we seek the key in circumstances not before the mind of Christ. The great fact of the situation was the hostile attitude of the priests, who ought to have been foremost in the recognition and exposition of the truth (Mal. ii. 7). He had indicated the divine estimation and the ultimate consequences of this attitude in the parable of a vineyard held by unfaithful keepers. Now he changes the figure and increases the light. Israel's leaders are no longer vine dressers, who usurp the proprietor's rights, but men who have received an invitation which they despise, and who abuse and ill-treat and even kill the messengers who convey it to them. The invitation is from the highest quarter—the court of a king. It relates to the most interesting occasion that could arise—the marriage of the King's Son.

It scarcely requires saying that the King is God, and that the King's Son is Christ, and that the marriage purposed for Christ is that consummation of his work at his coming, which is expressly described in the last of the apostolic writings under the figure of a marriage: “The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready; and to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white” (Rev. xix. 7, 8). The union to Christ in glory of those who have been prepared for him in previous generations of probation is fitly likened to a marriage.

The aptness of the comparison is obscured by the common view that salvation is a thing of individual detail, going on daily with the supposed passage of each supposed soul to glory when the righteous die. When the truth of man's mortality is seen, and death is recognised as a temporary victory over the Lord's people, this obscurity vanishes, and the beauty of the parable shines out. The righteous are to be “glorified together” (Rom. viii. 17) “at the appearing of Christ” (2 Tim. iv. 1). They will be presented, a multitudinous bride, to the Lord at His return. Their union will be formally, ceremonially proclaimed and practically consummated in the assimilation of their nature to his (Phil. iii. 21; 1 Jno. iii. 2). Thus will be developed the true commune—(together, one), the only true commune the world is ever destined to see—the only one it requires—the only one adequate to its needs—an organised community of immortals developed by probation, and installed by divine right in possession of the earth and all power therein—under one head, the King's son, “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”

This is the goal of the divine plan upon the earth, It is the object that has been in view in all the divine measures that have been taken in the ages of the past. God “sent forth his servants” “at sundry times and in divers manners” to invite men to this purposed wedding. Christ’s parable is to illustrate how it was received in his day at the hands of Israel’s leaders and their followers, and the consequences that came of their treatment of it. The bearers of the invitation were Christ and his apostles. They delivered it to “many,”—only a few of whom appreciated it at its true value—so few that they are not represented in the first stage of the parable. The common attitude was that represented. “They made light of it and went their ways”—each to his own particular hobby. They did worse. They persecuted and destroyed the Lord Jesus and his apostles. The ultimate sequel was terrible. “The king was wrath, and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city.” Let the awful particulars of the destruction of Jerusalem furnished by Josephus bear witness to the fulfilment of this.

Before things reached this terrible end, a minor but very important result sprang from Israel’s rejection of the marriage invitation. It is one that specially effects us as part of the Gentile community to whom the invitation has come. Paul gives expression to it thus: “Through their fall, salvation is come unto the Gentiles” (Rom. xi. 11). The form in which it appears in the parable is in almost remarkable coincidence with these words: “Then saith he (the king) to his servants, the wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find bid to the marriage.” This part of the parable has its interpretation in the work of the apostles as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Peter, as Christ appointed, took the foremost part in this, as in other matters. As he said in the Apostolic conference (Acts xv. 7): “God made choice among us that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the Gospel and believe.”

The persistent opposition of the Jews to the apostolic work, from its very outset, was the proximate cause of this. Paul gives expression to it in his own case: “It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you, but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts xiii. 46). Thus the invitation, originally addressed to Israel alone, was extended to the occupants of the Gentile highways. For eighteen centuries it has been almost confined to the Gentiles, and with the lapse of time and the prevalence of corruption, it has come to be very much misapprehended by them. They think it a wholesale, cheap, and easy affair. They have long lost the idea of the way being narrow and the gate straight. They have long forgotten that “God at the first did visit the Gentiles,” not to convert the world by preaching, but “to take out of them a people for His Name” (Acts xv. 14). They have settled into the most inveterate complacency with regard to their position. They imagine they are all the Lord’s people, in total forgetfulness of the words of Christ, that it is “not everyone that saith Lord, Lord, but he that doeth the will of the Father, that shall enter the kingdom.” Well, there will be a wonderful disenchantment on this subject when Christ returns. The parable teaches what

he elsewhere plainly declared: "MANY shall come to me in that day and shall say, Lord, have we not preached in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works? but I will profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me ye that work iniquity."

What the parable has to teach on this point, it does by one case. It tells us first of the gathering of the motley congregation of guests from the highways. The "servants went out into the highways and gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good, and the wedding was furnished with guests." The apostles did their work: the result will be seen in the immense multitude gathered into Christ's presence for judgment in the day of his appearing. "And when the King came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment." This man, questioned on the subject, is speechless, and ordered to be expelled "into the outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Christ adds a comment, which supplies the sense in which he used the parable: "For many are called but few are chosen." The parable, as instancing only one man rejected, might seem to teach the reverse of this, that many are called and nearly all chosen; but we must take the meaning as here interpreted by Christ, and illustrated by his plainer teaching elsewhere.

The call is to all who come within range of the invitation: first, the Jews; secondly, the Gentiles. But the choice is from those who respond to the call, on the principle of preparedness for what they are called to. The man not accepted was dismissed because he had not on a wedding garment. He might have pleaded the free invitation he had received on the highways; but the objection to his want of fit vesture shows that preparation on this head was expected as a matter of course from those accepting the invitation. The meaning of the wedding garment is supplied by Rev. xix.: "To her (the bride) was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness (or righteous actions) of the saints." This is in harmony with every teaching of the word and every reasonable consideration in the case: that a man's acceptance of the Gospel will not be counted for righteousness unless it bring forth compliance with the will of Christ as expressed in his commandments.

The parable was spoken in Jerusalem during his last presence there before his crucifixion. He had spoken it in another form while on his progress through Galilee, before "setting his face to go up to Jerusalem" (Luke xiv. 16, in connection with Luke xviii 31). Critics have assumed that the two versions are accounts of the same utterance, and they have not failed to point out the differences between them as discrediting inspiration. The criticism is as groundless as most of the similar efforts to undermine the authority of the Scriptures. It is inevitable that during the incessant teaching activity of three years and a half, Jesus should frequently repeat parables and precepts, not always in the same forms, whence most easily arises the so-called "discrepancy" between three or four separate accounts which are in themselves absolutely consistent.

The parable as spoken in Galilee makes the king “a man,” who gives a supper, instead of a wedding feast; and sends out one servant instead of a number. It also gives the excuses of the invited guests which are in detail omitted in the Jerusalem parable. The principal difference is in the instruction given to the servant by the master on the refusal of the guests being reported to him. He was to go “into the streets and lanes of the city” and bring together “the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind.” The servant does as commanded, and returning, says, “Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.” He is then ordered to “go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.” This feature is a noticeable one, not as a difference but as a supplemental item in the divine programme. The order of invitation according to the Galilee parable is, 1st, selected guests who refuse; 2nd, the people in the streets and lanes, many of whom come; 3rd, wayfarers on the highways outside of the town, and even loungers about the hedges.

An order something like this is visible in the apostolic operations: 1. “It was necessary that the word of God should FIRST have been spoken to you (Jews)” (Acts xiii. 46). 2. “The salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and they will hear it” (Acts xxviii. 28). 3. (Nearly A.D. 100, when the Apostles were all in their graves except John), “The Spirit and the Bride say, come,.... whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely” (Rev. xxii. 17). The highways-and-hedges operation continues to the very coming of the Lord, and embraces “those who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord.” It acts upon the figuratively “poor and maimed, and halt and blind.” This explains why it is that the Gospel is not received among the wise and noble of the world, but is confined to such as are of no standing or account, even as it was in the days of Jesus. The cultured and the well-to-do are too much pre-occupied with their own self-comforting devices to have room for the ways of God. The lowly classes are not much better off in this respect, but among them are here and there to be found such as are small in their own eyes, and prepared in an honest and glad heart to “receive the Kingdom of God as little children.”

### **The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. xxv. 1–12)**

This is the last and perhaps the most interesting of the parables. A knowledge of the truth, as distinguished from orthodox theology, is peculiarly necessary to the understanding of it. It cannot be made to fit with the scheme of things that sends men away to heaven or hell when they die. It is only intelligible in the light of the doctrine that the return of Christ to the earth is necessary to the renewed life and glorification of his people. This doctrine is the key-note supplied in its very first word—“THEN”: This is a question of time, for the apprehension of which we are thrown back on what goes before.

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins,” extorts the question—when? The answer of the context is free from all obscurity. “The Lord

of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder (that is, cut him off), and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Then—when the Lord returns. Having in view the actual nature of the coming of the Lord, it becomes easy to see the bearings of the parable in all directions. At the crisis of his approach, the members of his house (all of them) are like "ten virgins which look their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom." There is nothing in the number ten except that it was the usual number of bridesmaids that took part in the marriage ceremony as practised in the country. They performed a part unknown to Western customs. Their business was to meet the bridegroom on his way to fetch the bride from her father's house. They had to go so far on the road and wait. The arrival of the bridegroom was usually at night, requiring the use of lamps, and the hour was uncertain, almost always causing waiting. If the waiting was long, the lamps were liable to go out unless they had brought a supply of oil besides what the lamp contained; and any one with an unlit lamp was considered by the etiquette of the country as much unfit to take part in the ceremony as any one would be in our country who should omit appropriate attire.

In what way the household of Christ at the era of his return are like virgins who have gone out to meet the bridegroom, Will be instantly appreciated by everyone who knows the truth. It is the very peculiarity of their position that they have "gone forth" "to wait for" Christ—speaking now of no modern people or institution, though there are such. It is profitable to look at the matter from the apostolic point of view only. The writings of the apostles define the matter in a way to be trusted. They tell us that the saints have "come out from among" the people of the world who know not God (2 Cor. vi. 17); that they are a peculiar people (1 Pet. ii. 9) whose part it is "to wait for the Son of God from heaven" (1 Thess. i. 10) who, "to them that look for him, shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. ix. 28). However many or few may be truly answerable to this description in the 19th century, this is the characteristic attitude of the house of Christ ever since he parted with the disciples on the summit of the Mount of Olives 1850 years ago. They have one and all "gone forth to meet the bridegroom."

And as with any average company of bridesmaids, so with these; half have been wise and half foolish, half at a rough estimation. The folly of the foolish virgins consisted in not taking a supply of oil for the replenishing of the lamp. "But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." The corresponding wisdom and folly of the antitypical virgins it is not difficult to understand, when we discern the nature of the light by which they wait in the darkness for the coming of the bridegroom. The light is the understanding of the truth in the love thereof. The oil that feeds this light is the word. Those who light their lamps and go forth, but take no supply of oil in their vessels, are those who are delighted with the truth at their first reception of it, but do not keep up their interest afterwards, by the reading of the Word of God in which it has its source, and attending the assemblies of the brethren which have been enjoined for edification. The word is the oil, which,

being combusted in the mind, sheds forth light, as Jesus commands (“Let your light shine”). To “let the word of Christ dwell in us richly” as Paul exhorts, is to keep oil in the vessel with the lamp. As in the natural, so in the spiritual; combustion involves consumption. The life of faith and obedience uses up the motive power which the mind furnishes in the memory of the word. If this is not renewed by reading and prayer, the oil fails and the lamp by-and-by will go out.

“While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.” This cannot mean spiritual sleeping, for spiritual sleeping would mean that they were all foolish together. In what other sense has the House of Christ slept in his absence? In the sense in which Christ is “the first fruits of them that slept.” They have all died, speaking of them generally. It is true there will be some “who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord;” but the number of such is so insignificant in relation to “the multitude that no man can number” that they are not taken into account in the rough presentation of the subject in a parable. As regards the apostles and the whole generation of disciples contemporary with the parable (those who in a special sense “went forth to meet the bridegroom”), absolutely all of them “slumbered and slept.” They all went to their graves, and now “sleep in Jesus,” waiting the awakening proclamation next referred to in the parable.

“At midnight, there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him!” Midnight is just before morning begins. In relation to the coming of Christ, it is the darkest hour of the night that prevails during his absence. We are in such an hour at present, when misapplied science is fast banishing all faith from the earth, and when nothing seems more childish and chimerical than the expectation that Christ will return. At such an hour as this—the appointed Gentile periods having some of them run out, and others nearly so—the cry is raised, “Behold the bridegroom cometh.” It is a cry that awakes the sleeping virgins; therefore it is not a human movement of any kind. Some have imagined that the resuscitation in our age of the doctrine of the second advent is the midnight cry. It is evidently something much more powerful than this that is meant, for the sleeping virgins, wise and foolish, all arise. They all awake from their long sleep. They come forth from their graves by the resurrection power put forth at this period.

What power is this? It is the power of Christ which he has received “over all flesh” (John xvii. 2); a power in response to which, in the form of command, as at Lazarus’ tomb, the dead “come forth” (John v. 29; xi. 43). But by what instrumentality is this command made effectual? The parable shows the bridegroom on his way, and a herald proclamation going before him. Who are the bearers of this herald proclamation? Jesus answers in saying, “He shall send forth his angels with a trumpet and a great voice, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds” (Matt. xxiv. 31). The angels, then, who have had to do with Christ’s own resurrection, have to do with that of his sleeping servants. By his authority and power they wake these from their long sleep (but a moment to them), and summon them to a meeting with the bridegroom.

They all “rise and trim their lamps.” Never so earnestly was this done by them before; furbishing up memory, reviewing the ways of their probation, fixing their minds on the truth, casting themselves in prayer on the Father’s mercy. The foolish who went to sleep with empty vessels find them still in that state (for every one will rise at the resurrection in the spiritual state in which death overtakes them). Dismayed now at their poverty-stricken state, they throw themselves upon the sympathy and support of their more spiritually-minded brethren and sisters. “Give us of your oil.” Nay; too late. The most spiritually minded will have enough to do to sustain themselves at such a crisis. The time has passed for looking to others or helping others. All will have to look to themselves till the dread judgment seat is past. “Go rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.” All will be so real and natural at the resurrection, and there may even be such time and deliberation in the proceedings, that it may even appear practicable to still do something to remedy spiritual poverty. But all the response the wise can make to the frantic appeals of the foolish is to do the best they can for themselves while as yet they are not in the Lord’s presence.

“While they went to buy, the bridegroom came and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage.” It is impossible to assign the exact counterpart to every detail in a parable, because a parable is only a rough imagining of general features. But it is possible there may even be place for something like this. There may be an attempt on the part of the self-condemned during the interval between emergence from the grave and appearance at the judgment seat, to make good their shortcoming case. And while so engaged, the actual summons to Christ’s presence may arrive to the others assembled, and these may be accepted, and the others afterwards arrive to find the door of the kingdom closed against unavailing cries of “Lord, Lord, open unto us.” The dramatic details of the resurrection era are not revealed, but some of them may be shadowed in such a parable as this. The general object of the parable is plain: to provoke habitual preparedness for the Lord’s return on the part of all who call him Lord. This is the application he gives it himself: “Watch, therefore; for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh.”

## **CHAPTER XXXIV.**

### **Multiplying the Loaves and Walking on the Sea.**

Most of the parables considered in recent chapters were delivered at different times and places, but some of them were given in a string from a boat moored a little way from the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and were addressed to the crowd of hearers standing on the land down to the waters edge.

When he had finished his discourse on that occasion, the crowd dispersed and he landed, and proceeded up the ascending hill-country westward towards Nazareth, where arriving, “he taught them in their synagogue.” There was

something in his teaching that both impressed and overawed them; but in spite of this, their self-love was wounded by superiority in one with whom they had been personally familiar for nearly 30 years. Although they were astonished at the wisdom and the power displayed by the new teacher, they could not reconcile themselves to the idea that he was anything more than themselves.

Discontentedly and peevishly, they asked: "Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren James, Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?" As much as to say: Is he not a common man like ourselves? Why should we look up to him? "Whence hath this man all these things?"

This disease of envy is widespread and deep-rooted. You cannot pacify it but by prostration, and this sometimes would be sheer hypocrisy, of which there was none in Jesus. He could but recognise the situation and act accordingly. He did not storm against their infirmity. He simply implied that in the present state of human nature, a prophet could not be appreciated among his own kindred. He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief, and did not long remain among them.

A report was brought to him of John's execution in prison, Hearing it, he left Nazareth, went down to the Lake again, and took ship for one of the solitudes to be found on its remoter shores. We are not told Christ's motive in this movement. Probably the report of John's death made a deep impression upon him. Alluding to it afterwards, he said, "Likewise also must the Son of man suffer." Knowing this, he probably felt moved to get away into quietness for strengthening reflection and prayer.

Whatever the motive, the people got wind of his movement, and on foot, in crowds, followed the vessel till it came to shore, so that when Christ landed, instead of solitude, he found himself in the midst of a multitude, collected in a desert place from all parts, with sick persons of all kinds brought for healing. What did Jesus do? Not as most men seeking seclusion would have done. He did not order the people away, and he did not re-embark and sail away. He "was moved with compassion towards them." It was in no stoical spirit of "accepting the inevitable" that he surrendered to the situation. In the moral greatness exhibited as a pattern for all the sons of God, he considered the people's side of the question. He sympathised and condescended. He "healed their sick." He spoke to them and stayed with them awhile, and comforted them, though he knew most of them were as the grass that perisheth. Evening drew on.

The multitude had no provisions, and they were at a long distance from any place where they could procure any. The disciples called Christ's attention to the fact. "This is a desert place, and the time is now past. Send the multitude away that they may go into the villages and buy themselves victuals." The answer of Christ gives such an insight into his magnanimous character: "They need not depart:



give ye them to eat.” The disciples were perplexed. How could they feed a multitude on their scanty store? Jesus tested his disciples a little (John viii. 5). He suggested the buying of bread. Their answer was, “Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?” John says, Jesus knew what he would do, but that he said this to prove his disciples, and particularly Philip, to whom the question was addressed. It also opened the way for doing what he intended. Philip said it would require a large sum to buy the provision necessary for such a crowd. Jesus asked how many loaves the disciples had. The answer was: “Five loaves and two small fishes,” to which the disciples added the natural comment: “What are they among so many?”

The state of the case being thus distinctly manifest to all, Jesus gave command for the whole multitude to be seated in orderly companies of fifty “upon the green grass.” He then proceeded to work a marvel entirely out of human power. He took the loaves and the fishes: he gave thanks: he then handed them to the disciples—to each as much as he could carry away; and the disciples, each taking certain companies, distributed to the people. When each had disposed of what he had, he returned to Christ and received a further supply, and again and again, until all were served. Then, a sufficient time having been allowed for eating, Jesus ordered his disciples to go and gather up the fragments. Twelve baskets were near at hand—probably belonging to the twelve apostles. The disciples set to work and gathered up the bits left by a company of “about five thousand men, besides women and children.” Naturally their twelve baskets were filled. The collection of the fragments was probably ordered to emphasize the miracle, as well as to teach frugality.

The miracle itself is the striking element in the scene. It was in its nature no more extraordinary than the hundreds of other miracles that Jesus did: but it was more impressive in its form, and in the scale on which it was performed. To produce bread that had no existence the moment before, had a more wonderful appearance to men than to restore a paralytic limb to soundness: and to do it on a scale sufficient to feed about 6,000 men, women and children, left no room for disbelief, It was as easy to divine power as removing the fever from one person, but it was a more manifest and striking display. It was one of those “works” to which Jesus afterwards referred: “If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not: but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works.... The Father who dwelleth in me, He doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me, or else believe me for the very Works’ sake” (Jno. x. 37; xiv. 10). It was on their extraordinary character that he laid stress “If I not done among them works which none other man did, they had not had sin” (Jno. xv. 24). The appeal is irresistible. The modern habit of shying at the miracles, or saying they can mean nothing even if they happened, is simply the metaphysical refinement of modern stupidity. The evidence of their occurrence is of a nature that cannot be set aside. Even the mere nature of the apostolic narrative is evidence. The mere narrative is itself a miracle, as men see when they have had experience enough

of human ways, and senses sufficiently sharpened by exercise to recognise an extraordinary thing when they see it.

And as for the meaning of the miracles, it is on the face of them. They show possession of power not human, and therefore authority to speak of the applications of that power. When a man shews he can dispose of a property as he likes, his word concerning that property is law. Jesus shewing control of the powers of nature, proved his ability to speak with authority concerning those future application of those powers in which we are interested. The logic of the matter cannot be more tersely stated than Jesus has done it in these words: "The works that I do, bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me" (Jno. v. 36).

The crowd shewed their apprehension of this significance of the miracle of the loaves: They said one to another, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world;" and they shewed symptoms of giving effect to their impressions by gathering round Christ to proclaim him King, and force him to compliance after the Roman fashion of appointing leaders by acclamation. Jesus "perceived that they would come and take him by force to make him a king." This was altogether outside the plan, and inconsistent with it. Christ's kingship was not only a matter of futurity, but of pure divinity. It was "not of this world." It was to owe nothing to the suffrages of the people. It was to rest on no human title, and prosper by no human favour. God would set His king on His holy hill of Zion, when the time should come to make his enemies his footstool; and it would be by acts of world astounding and king-killing power that his throne would be established in righteousness (Psa. cx.).

It was therefore impossible that Jesus could for a moment tolerate the advances of the people. He had come to the spot for a very different purpose, and with very different feelings from those connected with such a movement. He had come for seclusion, and meditation, and prayer in the sadness caused by the hearing of John's execution. He longed for the opportunity. He therefore urged the disciples to get into the boat that had brought them to the "desert place" where they were; and having seen them off, he turned to the crowd and told them they must depart. He doubtless did this with an authority they could not resist, They began to disperse, and they were soon all gone. The shades of evening were fast closing on the scene, and he hastened to one of the many mountain solitudes that surround the sea of Galilee, in the darkness, and there, "himself alone," he poured out his soul to God in one of those suspirations which are the highest ecstasies of human experience, but rarely attained. Such were more natural to Christ than to the degenerate sons of Adam. He and the Father were one, and the act of communion was reciprocal, and therefore complete and soul-filling and strengthening as our poor prayers rarely are, and cannot often be—in misshapen and earth-cleaving mortality.

Soothed and comforted, he ceased, and then turned his attention to the disciples who were crossing the sea in the dark at his feet, and who were finding it hard

work in consequence of the descent on the lake of one of those wind-gusts which frequently come down from the hills without notice. "The wind was contrary" and "the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with the waves." He descended from the mountain; he came to the water's edge. The wind was blowing hard; the sea was furious. How helpless an ordinary man is under such circumstances, and any of us can bear witness who have gone down to a stormy beach in the teeth of a gale to perhaps see, and if possible help, a distressed ship in the offing. But this was no ordinary man. He advanced into the stormy waters. They came not on him. He stepped on them as if they had been the undulations of a moorland. He went on and on in the direction of the labouring vessel. The disciples were "toiling in rowing." They were trying to keep the vessel to the wind, and with very little success.

All at once, they drop their oars. They have descried the advancing figure. They cannot believe their senses. Yet there, sure enough, is a man walking on the water. Knowing such a thing to be impossible, they conclude it is something unearthly. They say one to another, "It is a spirit;" in this united conviction, they all cry out together in terror. Jesus comes close to the ship and says soothingly "be of good cheer: it is I: be not afraid." There is a pause; they recognise the voice; still the extraordinary situation has run away with their feelings. Peter breaks the silence: "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come to thee on the water." There was logic in this. Jesus takes him at his word. A single word: "Come." At once, Peter has his legs over the side of the boat. He stands on the water. He makes a step or two forward. He looks round. The darkness—not quite total, the angry waves; the roaring wind, overwhelm him with the peril of his situation: his confidence deserts him, and he finds himself sinking.

What can he do? He is too far from the boat to clutch at that. There is nothing left but petition to the wonderful man who stands before him unsinking in the tumult of waters. "Lord, save me. Immediately, Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him" He saves him, but with a reproof that suggest profound reflections: "O thou of little faith: wherefore didst thou doubt?" They then get into the ship together: the storm suddenly ceases: and the disciples, amazed at the manifestation of power so self-evidently beyond all human possibilities, "worshipped Jesus, saying, Of a truth, thou art the Son of God." Immediately also, by the power which had stilled the tempest, they found themselves at the landing-place for which they had been making, which would be very welcome to them in the state of fatigue to which their hard rowing had brought them.

What are the thoughts suggested by Christ's remark to Peter about the littleness of his faith? The subject has been before us in a previous chapter, but it is as well to take it again. The remark shows that faith has something to do with a man's ability to use the power God may place at his disposal. This is according to experience of natural power. A confident faith can always do better with the same power than the man who unbelievably hesitates. A man can speak better who has confidence in his abilities, than the man with the same abilities who lacks

confidence. What a man can do in sleep-walking is the most striking of all illustrations. He can climb places and walk on dizzy ledges that he could not even do with the sense of danger that usually belongs to waking life. He has no more power in his sleep-walking than he has in his waking state, but the power he has is in the hands of a sublime confidence that knows no danger, therefore he can do what he could not do without that confidence. This much is evident. But we must exercise care in the application of the principle to matters that are beyond natural power. Otherwise, we shall fall into the mistakes of the "faith healers" and some other extremists, who only cover themselves with confusion by the unskillful application of a true principle.

It is not in natural power to walk on the water: and no amount of faith will develop a power not actually present. With Christ, the power was present, and he provisionally extended it to Peter in the invitation to "come." There was an invisible hand held out to him for the moment to support him in the water. There was something for his faith to act on which is not present in the normal relations of sinful men. His faith acting on it could hold him up. In the absence of faith on his part, he lost his hold. The case is parallel to that of a child crossing a brook by the help of its father. If a child's confidence fails, the father's outstretched hand is of little use to it. The child's faith will enable it to make the most of it, and enable it to cross with ease. But suppose there is no father there, or a father not offering his hand, no confidence on the part of the child will get it across the stream. This is the case of those who see one side of the case and imagine that faith will do all. They are mistaken. Faith may help them a little, but they will certainly fall into the water.

"Without faith it is impossible to please God:" this is true in all relations, and will probably govern the exercise of the powers of the spirit-body. The power is there, but will not act without faith to lay hold on it. Peter had power given him to walk on the water, but he doubted, and therefore his spiritual grapnel lost hold of its catch, and down he went. We have no power given us to walk on the water. To try to do it by faith in the absence of this, would be trying to fasten our grapnel in the air. A right discrimination in these matters will save us from confusion and embarrassment, without leading us into the tremendous mistake of those who regard the faith-performances of the first century as myths.

The people who had witnessed and profited by the miracle of the loaves had new ideas stirred in them by the event. They felt a new attachment for a teacher who could not only heal their diseases, but supply the larder without spending money. They deceived themselves as to the nature of their new feelings. They confounded their hunger for temporalities with zeal for the Messiahship. In their excitement they eagerly watch the indications of where he was next to be found. Concluding from all they saw that he would be at Capernaum, they hastened thither in numbers, and having found him, they made enquiries of him with the eagerness of self-interested partisans.

Jesus was not deceived by their new-born zeal. He knew their motives better than they did themselves. "Ye seek me," he said, "because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." He added this exhortation, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you." Whence all men, down to the present day, get this reliable cue, that it is according to the mind of Christ that "making a living" should not be the sole and engrossing business of life, as it is with most men, but the main object of endeavour should be the doing of the will of God, with a view to that perfect and endless life which Christ will confer, attending also to the other as a matter of duty in the confidence that God (who knows what things we have need of before we ask Him) will work with us in the matter, and ensure for us a needful supply of food and raiment while we "seek first the kingdom of God."

The crowd, thus rebuffed, professed their willingness to labour for the meat that perisheth not if they knew how. "What shall we do that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom He hath sent." To this the crowd, in effect, responded, "Very well, we are willing to believe if you show us cause." "What sign shewest thou that we may see and believe thee? What dost thou work?" This was a sniff in the direction of the loaves, which was the subject next their hearts. Their next remark shewed it. "Our fathers did eat manna in the desert." The remark was true, but not in the sense in which they urged it. They meant to say "Moses looked after our fathers in the matter of the meat that perisheth, for which you say we ought not to labour."

It was true manna was given, but not by Moses, and it was not given merely as an affair of sustenance, but as part of a discipline having higher objects than mere food supply: as Moses himself said, "The Lord thy God humbled thee and suffered thee to hunger and fed thee with manna ... that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of Yahweh" (Deut. viii. 3). But as Jesus afterwards told them, they "knew not the Scriptures." But he knew them. "Moses," said he, "gave you not that bread from heaven, but my Father (who now) giveth you the true bread from heaven: for the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven and giveth life unto the world." They, supposing he referred to his power of multiplying loaves, responded, "Lord, ever more give us this bread." He saw they had not taken his point, and that in fact their heart was on temporal supplies, and not enlightened or believing with regard to his mission from God, of which the miracles were the mere attestation.

He went straight to the point in his next remark: "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger: and he that believeth in me shall never thirst." This did not suit their mood at all. They shewed symptoms of disappointment. Jesus informed them that they did not believe though they had seen him, and seen the miracles; but his mission would be a success for all that. "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me." It was a matter of plan with God, and could

not be thwarted by any number of individual cases of unbelief. Jesus would receive the disciples and lovers and obedient servants required by the plan. He adds a word to fence off the discouragement at first suggested to his auditors by this view. They might say "If it is a matter of plan—if all you want are sure to come—we have nothing to do with it: why trouble us one way or other?"

Such a feeling, though apparently reasonable in the abstract, would be unreasonable in view of the method by which God was to give to Jesus those whom his mission required. It was to be done by the testimony brought to bear upon the unfettered minds of listeners—all listeners. Those of the right stamp would be drawn to him by this means: the other class would be irresponsive. The failure as to this other class would be no reason for refraining from the testimony that was to develop the right class; and in the process of its operation, there would be no respect of persons: and no room for any one to feel it was no use for him to try. He therefore added: "He that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." The fact of the coming would be evidence of the giving by the Father. It was the Father's will he should operate thus, and save those surrendering to him. Hence he continues: "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will but the will of him that sent me.... And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one that seeth the Son and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day."

The Jews now broke out into open murmuring. They had come with a hearty disposition to support him as the promised prophet, in view of the miracles he had performed, and recognising that it would be to their immediate advantage to be friends with one who could provide daily bread without labour or expense. He had chilled them off at the first contact, and now he had said things they could not receive. He had said he had come down from heaven. They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven." Ignorant as they would be of the real circumstances connected with his birth, it is easy to see how this would stumble them (though it would not have stumbled them had they been of the right disposition, because such a disposition, in view of the miracles, would have reserved difficulties and waited). Had they known that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit coming upon his virgin mother, and filled plenary therewith at his baptism in Jordan, they might have discovered the parable with which he spoke: but in probable ignorance thereof, and judging only as natural, impatient, mere food-hunting men, and being, moreover, offended at the preliminary rebuff with which he received them, they could see nothing but an occasion of difficulty in it. They murmured.

Jesus said, "Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him." This was making the matter worse—yes, for them and all such: but not for the truly reasonable and childlike, who but desire humbly and reverently to know the truth of the matter. For the sake of such, Jesus, as in the other case, immediately added words that shewed his

meaning. "It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God." The Jews recognised the authority of the prophets. Here was the statement that the Messiah's children would all be God-taught. How taught? Jesus adds: "Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me." Here is a process of "hearing" and "learning" by which men attain to the taught state. Hearing what? Learning what? "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith." By what means—through what means—speaketh the Spirit? "By Thy Spirit in Thy prophets" (Neh. ix. 30). "He spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets" (Heb. i. 1). Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing is possible because of the speaking of "the word of the Lord" (Rom. x. 17). This speaking reduced to writing has become "the Scriptures." Hence the Scriptures, given by inspiration of God, are "able to make men wise unto salvation" (2 Tim. iii. 16). Jesus meant then to say, that everyone truly instructed by the Father, through His spoken and written word, would recognise him as the Christ, and come to him. This is enough for those who have the docility of little children, without which, Jesus said, they could not be acceptable to the Father nor to him.

## **CHAPTER XXXV.**

### **In the Synagogue at Capernaum.**

It was in the synagogue at Capernaum—probably the very building whose foundations were explored by Mr. Laurence Oliphant, and described by him in his book named Haifa—that the conversation took place which partly occupied our last chapter. It is not purely imagination that pictures him seated in the midst of a crowded and eager audience, gravely delivering himself of snatches of discourse in answer to the remarks and questions of those surrounding him. It is not so much the picture that is important as the communications that passed between the wonderful Teacher and his audience.

He had been gradually leading them from the question of mere natural sustenance (suggested to their minds by the miracle of the loaves) to the higher question of life everlasting to which the miracle stood related. He reached the climax of the conversation when he said with emphasis: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life (of which he had been speaking). Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven that a man may eat thereof and not die." In this there is a mixing of figure with literal truth that naturally had a confusing effect on the bulk of the listeners. The eating of the manna in the wilderness under Moses, they could understand: and they knew what Christ meant by saying that the eaters were dead. But what could he mean by the eating of this other bread, the eating of which would lead to men not dying? He said he was the bread: could they eat him? He deepened the parable by saying, "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." No wonder they exclaimed, "How can this man give his flesh to eat?" But

there is no mystery in his words when taken in connection with all that he said. His meaning is perfectly apparent, though he did not condescend to be simple with the congregation.

In the sense intended, his staggering declaration is absolutely true: "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." It is the truth in parable, concerning the present mortal nature of man, and the relation of the work of Christ to the hope of salvation. It cannot be understood apart from this truth which may be defined as follows:—

All men are sinners, by nature and action (Rom. iii. 23; Eph. ii. 3); and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. vi. 23). Consequently, men of themselves, are wholly under the dominion of death. But "since by man came death, by man (Christ) came also the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. xv. 21). In what way resurrection came by man is to be read only in the life of Christ: "By the obedience of ONE" (Rom. v. 19). "He was obedient unto death" (Phil. ii. 8). He laid down his life. No man took it from him; it was a matter of the Father's arrangement and requirement (Jno. x. 18). In the wisdom of God, the ceremonial condemnation of sin in the person of a sinless possessor of the nature under its power, was a necessity in the opening of a way for the pardon and return of sinners to life everlasting. It was a necessary declaration of God's righteousness, that God might be just, while justifying the sinner who might believe in this arrangement of God's mercy (Rom. iii. 25–26).

In this condemnation of sin in the flesh, the sinning nature had to be representatively nailed up to death in the eyes of all the world, in one who, without sin himself, was a partaker of the nature that had come under death by its power (Rom. viii. 3; Heb. ii. 14). Had he been a sinner, he would have been as other sinners, and resurrection could not have come by him: for sin would have held him in death as all others. But Jesus was without sin. Had he possessed any other than the very nature of condemned man, he would not have been a suitable sacrifice for man. And his blood would have been like the blood of the animals shed under the Mosaic system of things, "which could not take away sin" (Heb. x. 4). Hence, the emphasis with which John insists on the importance of receiving the fact that he "came in the flesh" (1 Jno. iv. 3; 2 Jno. 7), and Paul, that "in all things he was made like unto his brethren": and "in all points tempted like them, yet without sin" (Heb. ii. 17; iv. 15)

He was specially prepared for the work. In crucifixion, he gave his flesh for the life of the world, and poured out his blood for their sins—that is, for those who should believe in him, and have faith in his blood as the Passover sacrificed for them. Those who learn of him as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, and who believe in him as the righteousness of God, and come unto God in faith and submission through him, figuratively eat the flesh and drink the blood



of the Son of Man in thus receiving the truth concerning these things. Unless a man do so, he has no relation to eternal life at all. This is what Christ says: and no man can get past his word. It is only “those who believe” who are justified (Acts xiii. 39). “Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins” (Acts xiii. 38). “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (Jno. viii. 24). Except we eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, we have no life in us: we have no hope. If we do so eat and drink, we have life; that is, we acquire the right to it, and the hope of it—not the possession of it. It is a matter of heirship. Our heirship is a present experience: but actual possession is in the future, as shown in the words Christ uses: “I will raise him up at the last day” (Jno. vi. 54)—a conclusion involved in the whole scheme of divine truth as to the nature of man and the purpose of God with him.

But these things the audience in the Capernaum synagogue did not understand. They could not see beyond the literal. Moses had given them manna: Jesus, in the recent miracle, had given them bread: now he talked of giving his flesh for them to live by—a true saying, but they did not understand it. It was truth in a stumbling form, and they stumbled. Why it was presented in a stumbling form, we have considered before. A murmur ran through the synagogue. “This is an hard saying,” said they: “who can hear it?” Most of them were of one mind on the subject: including “many” who had considered themselves his disciples. The narrative tells us that “Jesus knew in himself” what the mind of the audience was. He knew as ordinary men could not know. He not only “knew what was in man” in the sense of thoroughly understanding human nature in its poor resources, but he could perceive the thoughts of those about him in any particular case.

He knew that the Capernaum audience disapproved of his words. He did not wait the formal expression of their thought. He advanced aggressively to a higher and still more unintelligible form of truth, as it would seem to the untaught. “Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before?” If they thought the giving of his flesh for the life of the world an impossible truth to receive, what would they say if they saw that flesh go away from the earth altogether? His ascension to heaven afterwards shews us what he meant. The body that was literally broken was literally taken up into heaven, and this was the crowning proof of the divine nature of his work to all who had eyes to see and ears to hear. He had said he came down from heaven which they met by the question, “Is he not the son of Joseph?” If he went back there again, the case would be open to no such question; it would be a final demonstration that he was of God; and this is what happened: “God manifest in the flesh (crucified), justified (or made right again or raised), by the Spirit; seen of angels, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Tim. iii. 16). “He was received up and sat on the right hand of God” (Mark xvi. 19).

If some in Christ’s day said, “How is it that he saith, I came down from heaven?” some in our day say, “How is it that he saith, the Son of Man ascendeth up where he was before?” The parable is in both cases to be discerned in the literal truth:

“The HOLY SPIRIT shall come upon thee; the POWER OF THE HIGHEST shall overshadow thee (Mary the mother of Jesus)” (Luke i. 35). This shows the sense in which the babe of Bethlehem came down from heaven: the power and presence of God came from heaven and assumed the vesture of human nature through action on the human procreative organism. When that human nature, crucified and raised, and glorified, was taken to heaven, there was an ascending up to where he was before, though in a different relation of things. In the time expressed by the word “before,” he was “The Word” that was “with God and was God” (Jno. i. 1). In the days of his flesh, he was “the Word made flesh” (verse 14). In the days subsequent to his resurrection, he was the Word-flesh glorified and exalted to heaven, where the Word was before there was any child-germination of Emmanuel (God with us).

Jesus tried to direct the attention of the murmuring Capernaum audience to the Spirit as the essential element in the case, and the key to the parable of his speech. “It is the Spirit that quickeneth : the flesh profiteth nothing: (that is, his flesh as flesh would have done them no good in the eating—a thing he never intended; it was the doctrine about his flesh that was the saving-power): the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life.” They were the Spirit’s ideas expressed in words, which, when they obtain a lodgment in a man’s understanding and affections, become in him the power of the Spirit, quickening him into the moral life of the Spirit in this present state, and preparing the way for that physical manifestation of Spirit-life in the resurrection, which will so assimilate the body to its nature that the subjects thereof “shall not die any more, but are as the angels of God in heaven, the children of God, being the children of the resurrection” (Luke xx. 36).

But he remembered that his words were falling on dull ears. He therefore abruptly added, “But there are some of you that believe not (for, adds John, ‘Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not and who would betray him’). Therefore said I unto you that no man can come unto me except it were given unto him of my Father.” This was referring to what he had said earlier in the conversation, and giving to it an application which, though true and reasonable, was very distasteful to those concerned. Men like to be appreciated as indispensable—at least, as useful. Christ’s words placed them in a different position from this. They had brandished their unbelief as a sort of threat. They had as much as said, “Do as we expect in the matter of loaves and fishes, and we will believe in you and help you, but take that foolish mystical line on which you seem bent, and we can have nothing to do with you, and the consequences will be bad for you.” Jesus in effect said “Ye understand not, ye believe not, because it is not within your capacity. All whom the Father giveth me as friends and adherents will understand and believe, and will come to me as the result of that understanding. Ye understand and believe not, because it has not been given to you of my Father so to do. Therefore ye cannot come to me. But neither can ye harm or hinder me. If ye oppose me, the loss is all your own.” Such an attitude on the part of Christ was bound to offend, and as a matter of fact, did

offend and stumble the great body of his disciples at this early stage of his work: "From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him."

Seeing the audience break up in that mood, Jesus turned to the twelve and said, "Will ye also go away?" There was a possibility they might, or Jesus would not have put the question. The words that had alienated the crowd might be a difficulty with them: but oh, no; that was by no means the case. Peter, as the ever-ready mouthpiece of the apostolic band, asked a question which contained a world of answer: "Lord, to whom shall we go?" To whom could they go if they turned away from Christ? To the Scribes and Pharisees who sat in Moses' seat, but did not the things Moses commanded? What had they as mortal men to offer them that they could not do for themselves? To Moses? He wrote of Christ. To the Scriptures? They were they that testified of him. To the heathen? To the philosophers—the one walking in darkness, the other in foolishness in the name of wisdom, all with steps tending to death?

No: however little they might understand some of the hard utterances of Christ, they felt certain that what hope there was for man was with him. Their confidence went beyond this hypothetical form: "Thou hast the words of eternal life: and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ (promised to the fathers), the son of the living God." And what man of sane mind is there, who, in the full contemplation of all the authentic facts of the case, will not come to the same conclusion? To whom can men go with any hope or prospect, for any light or comfort concerning God and the future, if they turn away from Jesus of Nazareth, who wrought multitudinous miracles; who spake as never man spake; who, though crucified by Pontius Pilate, rose from the dead, and showed himself openly and repeatedly to his disciples during 40 days; and became in their attested preaching, the highest name and the greatest power of the most benign influence the world has ever known? Happy is the man who is able, in the full exercise of the most searching reason, to join in the declaration made by Peter on behalf of the rest of the apostles on this occasion: "We believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the son of the living God."

A mere human leader would have felt like thanking the disciples for this avowal in the face of a scattering band of unbelieving erstwhile followers. He could scarcely have failed to feel it as an honour and a comfort to be thus acknowledged by a faithful few in the hour of desertion by the majority, putting him under some obligation to them. It is one of almost innumerable indications and proofs of the divinity of Christ that he did not so receive it. His response was apparently bluff and unfeeling: "Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of YOU is a devil?" "He spake of Judas Iscariot," but he did not mention him. If he had mentioned him, it would have been some comfort to the rest. By putting it in the way he did, he put the whole band under an imputation which all must have felt the reverse of flattering to their self-complacence. It is as if he had said: "The multitude have left me: do not think you honour me by staying. I honour you by allowing you to remain. I have chosen you: but even you number among you a deadly enemy. I

do not say which, that you may all be on your guard.” It is not in human nature to have taken such an attitude at such an hour. Such deportment was a self-manifest token that the speaker was “greater than Jonas,” “greater than Solomon,” “greater than the prophets,” “greater than our father Abraham,”—even one who could say, “Before Abraham was, I am.”

The desertion of “many of his disciples” did not interfere with the attention of the populace. The conversation at an end, it became known all over the town and district that Jesus had returned. He himself began to move about, preaching. The result was seen in great activity everywhere: “They ran through the whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick; where they heard he was. And whithersoever he entered into villages or cities, or country, they laid their sick in the streets, and besought him that they might touch if it were but the border of his garment: and as many as touched him were made whole.” What a wonderful manifestation of power and goodness. What a patient condescension towards a multitude, most of whom Jesus knew would prove his betrayers and murderers, and would perish in the calamities which were fast approaching for the nation’s destruction in fulfilment of what had long been “written in the prophets.”

His god-like magnanimity is illustrated in the fact: but this is not the whole explanation. Jesus had a work to do: and he knew he had but a short time to do it. “I must work,” as he said, “while it is day—the work of Him that sent me.” That work was to manifest the Father’s power and name by deeds of power which testified of him that the Father had sent him. Most men could not understand his doctrine: but they could not mistake the nature of his “works,” however much they might misinterpret them. To those works he constantly appealed. By them he laid the foundation for that faith of Christ, which is one of the principal instrumentalities employed by the wisdom of God in developing the purpose of God to fill the earth at last with a redeemed, glorified, and rejoicing population.

Therefore, as we see him patiently and kindly healing multitudes of the common people, and stooping to a familiarity with them which caused him to be “despised and rejected,” we see much more than mere kindness at work. We see the calm clear-eyed discernment of a sublime and far-reaching purpose, leading him to persevere with intelligent resolution and inflexible faith, in a course that in itself was barren of promise. The mere restoration of physical vigour to a sinful population, who would turn it to no spiritual result, would have been a bootless work considered in itself. It must be looked at in its relation to the mighty work as a whole, which it was his mission to perform. Its place is then apparent, and his part in it becomes intelligible, which cannot be said of it when contemplated through the impenetrable haze of maudlin idealism, and foggy rhapsody in which it is the modern habit to enshroud the subject.

It was these wonderful works of power that kept him before the public, and made him a subject of anxiety with the leaders of the people—the Scribes and

Pharisees. "The people rejoiced for all the glorious things done by him," and the leaders could not resist the popular feeling. They followed in its wake and tried to neutralise it by criticism and objection whenever they could find occasion. They watched him with this view, during his progress in the neighbourhood of Capernaum.

They saw the disciples in one case eat bread without first washing their hands. To do this was an offence against the established Jewish etiquette, which was mainly based on rabbinical tradition, for which Jesus had no respect. This, in the eyes of the Pharisees, was a great offence, and one which they seemed to imagine Jesus himself would allow. They boldly asked him, "Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?" They seemed to think this was strong ground. The "tradition of the elders" was the highest authority with them, as it is universally with the Jews to the present day. What is written in Moses and the Prophets does not seem to weigh with them a tithe of the weight they attach to the uninspired and erring traditions of their disobedient fathers. It seems strange it should be so: but on reflection, it will appear thoroughly natural.

What Paul testifies concerning the tendency of the human mind, is found thoroughly true, though uncomplimentary and unacceptable: "The carnal mind is enmity against God: it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Again, what Jesus said to Peter is true of nearly all men, Jew and Gentile: "Thou savourest not the things that be of God but those that be of men." The words of God by Moses and the prophets had nothing like the relish (for the bulk of the Jewish nation) which they found in the glosses and interpolations and commentaries of the Rabbis, which were entirely according to human impression, thought and sympathy. They easily disobeyed Moses and the prophets: as easily, they set up the traditions of the Rabbis as the very rule of righteousness and life. Jesus surprised them by taking up a strong stand against tradition: "Ye have made the Word of God of none effect through your tradition": "Why do you transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"

He instanced a case: The Word of God commanded care of father and mother. Tradition said a man could buy himself out of this obligation by making a present to the temple, which would be counted to him as if he had applied it to the support of his father and mother. Thus, they as effectually nullified the commandment of God as if it had never been delivered. And so they did in many cases, as has been done by the ecclesiasticism of our own age. Jesus hurled back their accusation upon them with force. "Full well, ye reject the commandment of God that ye may keep your own tradition. Laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men." "Ye hypocrites," exclaimed he, "well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men."

To read this with a merely historic reference would be to lose more than half its value. It is truly an episode of the highest interest—an impressive illustration of the dialectic power which made the adversaries of Jesus at last afraid to ask him any questions; but it is much more than this. It supplies a principle of judgment in spiritual things which reason itself in all the circumstances would suggest, but which commends itself with irresistible sanction when thus boldly endorsed and applied by Christ. It shews that the word of God, direct from the mouth of God by Moses and the prophets, is the rule of truth and duty which God intends every man for himself to apply in the testing and determination of all views and claims emanating from what quarter soever. The lesson is of peculiar force in an age like ours, when almost every religious view is pressed on our notice on the kind of authority arising from the transmitted consent of experts, supported by the compliance of the multitude for a long time. Tradition is the universal foundation; and it is held in the highest repute as a thing that educated intelligence will defer to.

Now, if ever tradition was respectable, it was at the time when Christ so thoroughly impeached it as a nullifier of the word of God. The Scribes and Pharisees were of the tribe which had been divinely separated as the custodians and ministers of the divine knowledge. Inspiration had mainly selected Levites since the days of Moses as the vehicles of prophetic communication. It had only ceased about four hundred years previously; and presumably the Levitical caste would be the reliable conservators and expositors of the divine ideas. Yet here is the sweeping declaration of Christ that they had made void the word of God through their tradition. The obvious reflection is that if this were the case with a divinely-appointed order of men, after so brief a suspension of the oracle of revelation, how much more likely is it to be the case with an order of men like the modern clergy who never were divinely-appointed, and who are the mere incarnations of a particular set of traditions perpetuated by the machinery of endowed institutions.

How much is the reflection strengthened by the fact that it is more than 1,800 years since the light of revelation went out, and that before the apostles left the scene they predicted an entire departure from apostolic doctrine, and the substitution of fables and traditions in its place—(2 Tim. iv. 1–4; 2 Pet. ii. 1)—a prophecy of which surely the most obtuse mind can see the ample fulfilment in the history of European ecclesiasticism. To judge doctrine and systems by the written word of God is the plan prescribed by Christ on this occasion, with a clearness and emphasis that ought to enable every honest mind to adopt and act on it without fear of presumption or uncharity. “To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Is. viii. 20).

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### At Tyre and Decapolis—Feeds the Multitude a Second Time.

We have looked at the charge made by the Scribes and Pharisees against Jesus of violating tradition by “eating bread with defiled (that is to say) unwashed hands.” We have considered his pungent and much more serious counter charge against them, of nullifying the commandments of God by their tradition. There was a defilement to which mere ritual had apparently made them insensible. To this, Jesus now called attention in a very emphatic manner.

Not content with addressing himself to the immediate circle which had witnessed the passage of arms between himself and the Pharisees, “he called all the people to him”—that is, all within reach—probably a considerable multitude, who, before his call, would be loosely scattered about, talking together in knots, or attending to the people whom they had brought to be healed. They collected at his call. Having secured their special attention, he stood up, probably on some slight elevation, the Pharisees standing by as listeners. He then made a very brief emphatic speech. He said “Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand: there is nothing from without a man that entering into him can defile him; the things that come out of him, those are they that defile him. If any man hath ears to hear, let him hear.” He then stepped down, and gave it to be understood that the assembly was over. Jesus slowly withdrew and entered a neighbouring house. The crowd broke up into groups and debated his meaning. The Pharisees were particularly stung, and gave vent to angry criticisms. The disciples, remaining behind for a little, heard the debates. They then joined Jesus in the house.

The first thing they did was to report the impression his words had made, especially on the leaders. “Knowest thou,” said the disciples to him, “that the Pharisees were offended after they heard this saying?” To the disciples, this seemed a serious thing. Such a thing seems serious to the common run of people to the present day. For the learned to be out of humour—for the doctors and professors and recognised leaders of the people to be opposed to a matter—weighs much more with most people than the disagreement of all scripture. How did Jesus treat it? Most instructively for us, in its modern applications.

“Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.” The Scribes and Pharisees, priests and elders, seemed planted firmly enough. They were revered by all the people, and substantially supported by them in the payment of tithes. Nothing could be more apparently stable and respectable than the priestly institution that flourished in Palestine in the days of Jesus. And

nothing could have put forward better prima facie claims to be an institution of divine planting: for it was the continuance of the institution established by divine appointment in the wilderness by the hand of Moses. The divinity of it in this respect was recognised by Jesus himself on another occasion, when he said, "The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat." Yet here, he denies by implication that they were divinely planted, and foretells their rooting up, as came to pass forty years afterwards.

On what principle did he deny in the one case what he seemed to admit in the other? It is supplied in the further remark he made: "Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind, and if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." Here were men divinely "planted" in the official sense whose position ceased to be divinely recognised by reason of individual declension from those conditions and qualifications which were the aim of the official institution. Because they were not such as the Father could approve individually and morally, their collective and official planting became a nullity. This is reasonable. What is the use of a priesthood if it has ceased to answer the end for which it was appointed? (Mal. ii. 7).

The application to modern times is evident. The clergy lay great stress on "ordination" and "apostolic succession." Suppose their claims on this head were allowed for the sake of argument, what would be the value of them, if it should appear that the clergy not only do not fulfil, but frustrate the objects of the so-called "succession" and "ordination?" What if they make void the Word of God through their tradition? What if they turn away their ears from the truth and turn unto fables (2 Tim. iv. 4), as Paul foretold would be the case conjointly with a great multiplication of teaching agency? It would only make their case all the worse if it could be proved that they were a divinely appointed caste. It would not screen them from that judicial "rooting up," which befell the Levitical priesthood in the days of Vespasian; and which is awaiting the clerical institutions of every order in the near future.

Jesus said, "Let them alone:" this is good advice in the parallel circumstances of the clergy. Their opinions and feelings on divine matters are not worthy of being taken into account. They do not know, and cannot teach the way of truth: and therefore their favour or disfavour can only tend to lead and keep men astray. "Let them alone." It is the best plan. "They be blind leaders of the blind."

What the disciples thought of such an apparently harsh attitude on the part of Jesus towards the Scribes and Pharisees, we are not told. In all probability, they implicitly fell in with it. They were convinced that their master was "the Christ of God," and this they would take as decisive in any issue raised between them. A similar rule, though in a slightly different form, enables us to decide the questions belonging to our age. We know that the Bible is of God. In the very best form of the case, there must always be a reserve as to the pretensions of the clergy. We



are safe, therefore, in deciding on the side of the Bible in all cases of collision or variance—which are many.

Passing from this, the disciples wanted to know Christ's meaning about nothing going into a man defiling him. A very superfluous question it may seem to us, but it would not be so to those who, like them, had been brought up under a system that recognised and insisted on the defiling effects of certain meats and drinks, and physical contacts and conditions. Jesus appeared to regret their want of discernment: "Are ye so without understanding also?" He then explained to them that the true source of human defilement was the heart "out of which proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness." "All these evil things," said he, "come from within and defile the man." What a man ate, he insisted, could not defile him.

This is now all obvious enough, except where men receive a bias from the Judaism which was early planted among believers in the first century. In such cases, the ceremonial distinctions of the law of Moses retain some of their force, as evidenced by scruples (other than hygienic) about the eating of swine's flesh. Paul makes short work of these scruples in maintaining the absolute freedom of believers from the law of Moses, particularly in the matter of eating and drinking (Rom. vi. 14, 15; xiv. 3–16). Paul's sentiments on this subject must not be attributed to Paul, as is the modern habit. Paul maintained that what he wrote were the commandments of the Lord (1 Cor. xiv. 37) and Christ, who sent Paul, said of the apostles in general, "He that heareth you heareth me" (Luke x. 16).

Somewhat wearied with his prolonged and contentious intercourse with the people and their leaders, Jesus now planned a little retirement for a season. He left the scenes of his activity in the neighbourhood of the Sea of Galilee, to seek repose by the quiet Mediterranean sea-board, on "the borders of Tyre and Sidon," about 50 miles distant to the north and west. His road thither with his disciples would be through the most picturesque country on the face of the earth. The towering snow-capped heights of the Lebanon range in the distance to the right would be a constant feature throughout the journey, and the road would wind tortuously through a labyrinth of hills and valleys for miles, till it opened out on the left upon the plain country reaching down to the sea near Tyre and Sidon.

Doubtless, the quietness of the walk would be very acceptable to the Lord after the busy time he had had. It would take three or four days to make the distance on foot, and it was nearly always on foot that these journeys were made. Arriving near Tyre and Sidon, "He entered into a house, and would have no man know it." Those who have had any considerable experience of public work can enter into this touching incident. Disposed to bless, yet needing repose after a time of incessant activity, and knowing on the whole the futility of much of the work done among a population the mass of which could rise no higher than loaves and fishes, it reveals a picture true to the life in showing us Jesus trying to conceal

himself in a house to which he had retired for rest. The house was probably a wayside inn or house of accommodation of some sort.

It would be interesting to know what measures he took to suppress the fact of his presence. He would probably say quietly to the disciples, "Don't let it be known that I am here." He knew from the fame of him that had gone abroad, that if it were known, the people would come, and that was just what he did not want at this time. It is interesting to note that he worked no miracle to prevent the people knowing. He could have done so. The fact that he did not is one of many illustrations that the miraculous power God had given him (and which he after his ascension to heaven, sent upon his disciples), was not exercised for private ends or works of convenience, but only when public need called for it as in attestation of the reality of his mission from God.

Whatever steps he took to hide the fact of his presence, they were not quite successful. One day, when they were out on a quiet walk, a Greek woman (called also "a woman of Canaan," and a "Syro-Phœnician," because the Greeks were really the descendants of colonists from Phœnicia, and the Phœnicians were a remnant of the nations of Canaan left unsubdued when the land was conquered by Israel under Joshua)—this woman, having a sick daughter at home, and learning in some way that this company of men walking along the road was Jesus and his disciples, followed after them at some distance, calling out, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou Son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon." Jesus took no notice for awhile. "He answered her not a word." The woman kept on calling, walking after them at about the same pace.

Jesus appears to have walked in advance of the rest, and the disciples, who were annoyed with the woman's persistent entreaties, made up to him, and asked him to grant the woman's request and send the woman away, for she took no notice of their deprecatory gestures. Jesus said to them, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." This woman did not belong to the house of Israel; therefore he seemed to imply she was outside the channel of his attention. This is a great stumbling block to those who believe in human immortality.

It is one of the features of Christ's life which orthodox commentators put a strained and artificial construction—suggesting that Christ said what he said to try the faith of his disciples, or the faith of the woman. The simple fact is what he stated—that this woman had no claim on his attention. His mission was to the house of Israel, outside of God's plan with whom, the world of sinners was as so much grass of the earth growing up and passing away, filling but an evanescent part in the scheme of things. He therefore stated the simple truth when declining to attend to her. He said, "I am not come but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But while he and the disciples were thus in conference, the woman with the irrepressible eagerness of a mother seeking her daughter's benefit, pushed

herself right before Christ and prostrated herself, "beseeching him that he would cast the demon out of her daughter." "Lord, help me!" said she.

Here was an embarrassing situation. Jesus had declined the request of the disciples. Here was the woman herself before him with her importunities. His true and graceful adroitness never failed him. He could not be harsh, but he did not retreat from the position of truth he had taken up. He said to the woman in another form what he had said to the disciples: "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs." Her perfectly humble and apposite rejoinder left Jesus no alternative (as we might almost say) but to grant her request. "Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the master's table."

This removed the objection that lay in the way. Jesus, who had strictly forbidden his disciples in their separate tours to "go into the way of the Gentiles," would naturally feel that his compliance with this woman's request, apart from a recognition of their mutual positions, would be in collision with his own instructions, and lay his position open to misunderstanding. But when the woman acknowledged herself a "dog," and asked only a crumb, Jesus had no scruples. "O woman, great is thy faith. For this saying, go thy way. Be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Away the woman went: this was the whole extent of her desire—a creature benefit: and she got it. "When she was come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed."

Having sufficiently rested themselves in the quiet district of the Phŕnician seaboard, Jesus and disciples returned to the Sea of Galilee and resumed work in "the coasts of Decapolis," or the district of the ten cities on the eastern side of the lake. When his arrival was known, a man deaf, and having an impediment in his speech, was brought to him for healing. Others soon came. "He went up into a mountain (what mountain is not known, and it matters nothing: there are plenty of them) and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet. And he healed them, insomuch that the multitude wondered when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see, and they glorified the God of Israel" (Matt. xv. 29–31.)

There was naturally much crowding and much loitering in connection with such a promiscuous distribution of benefactions. For three whole days the multitude hung about Christ—probably sleeping in the open air during the night, the climate admitting of it. His praise was on every lip (how could it be otherwise? it would happen again, though shallow and evanescent). "They were beyond measure astonished," we are told—(no wonder: when has it ever been known that a man by a mere word should be able to heal the maladies of thousands in the open air?) They said. "He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak." And the fact remains unweakened by the lapse of

centuries. Other names and other events have risen to engage the minds of men; but who or what can compare with Jesus of Nazareth and his wonderful works and words? Is it not part of the insanity of this generation that they should be forgotten or lightly appreciated merely because it is over 1,800 years since the earth witnessed the happy spectacle? It is part of the wisdom of the wise to have them in enthusiastic remembrance, in view of their approaching renewal on a scale of far greater splendour at the coming of the Son of Man in power and great glory.

At the end of three days, the crowd were still hanging about. They numbered about four thousand men, besides women and children, who would probably be another thousand. They were encamped on a hill side, away from places where food might be procured, and their provisions were exhausted. Jesus purposed ending the assembly, but he would not send them away in a tired and famishing state. He called the disciples and said, "I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat. And I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way." The disciples appear to have thought he meant that they, the disciples, should provide for them. "Whence," said they, "should we have so much bread in the wilderness as to fill so great a multitude?" Jesus asked them what they had. They said, seven loaves and a few little fishes. Jesus at once commanded that the multitude should be seated on the ground.

We can imagine the disciples scattering themselves through the crowd in all directions to inform them of the approaching meal, and the crowd drawing together from all quarters, and seating themselves around Christ in anticipation. In due course, all being assembled and seated in proper order, silence is obtained, and Jesus gives thanks. The disciples are clustered near him as waiters. The thanksgiving having ceased, Jesus proceeds to take the loaves and fishes, and hands them the disciples, who walk round among the people and supply them as fast as they can carry. Jesus produces fresh bread and fish as fast as it is taken away, and the disciples go on carrying till all are served.

The bread would be produced by a mere volition on the part of Christ. The process would probably not be visible. It would simply appear as the loaves were taken away that there were still some left. It was very wonderful, and altogether out of human power, to provide bread and fish in this way. But it was not more wonderful (if men would only think) than the gradual production of bread and fish every year, that before have no existence. The difference is that in the latter case, men see the mode of production (in its outside aspect at all events), and they see that the process has had an automatic action imparted to it which takes time to organise the abstract elements, which in their combination constitute bread and fish. In the other, the process was invisible and instantaneous. But it is the same power in both cases—differently applied.

God has made heaven and earth, and imparted a certain automatic action to the organic processes which propagate vegetable and animal forms. This required stupendous power “in the beginning.” We are so familiar with the long-established work that we are apt to forget the power; but reason will recall the mind to its recognition. When reason acts in this way, all difficulty about the miracles of Christ disappears. It is merely the same power doing small things where great things have been already done; only, the power acts obviously in the one case, and in the other we have (apart from revelation) to refer it from the work done. The miracles were “signs and wonders which God did by Christ” (Acts ii. 22). Their object was to show that God was at work in Christ to accomplish a certain purpose towards the human race, which Jesus (having thus proved its divinity) propounded to the understanding and faith of men. How else could God have commended Christ to our faith? His words might have been beautiful, but how could we be sure they were true if God had not thus stamped them with his own authority? It is all very simple—very reasonable—very beautiful. It is only false learning that has obscured the subject.

When the meal was at an end, the fragments were collected as in the previous similar miracle—filling seven baskets. Then he sent the people away, and “straightway entered into a ship with his disciples and came into the parts of Dalmanutha”—called also “the coasts of Magdala.” There is no hint as to the object of his visit to these parts. Whatever it was, the movements of the Pharisees appear to have frustrated it. On landing, a company of them met him, along with a number of the Sadducees—people not usually to be found in the company of the Pharisees, but who, like Herod with Pilate, could become friends when there was a work in which their common animosity could be gratified. These men began to question Jesus. They asked him to set all doubts at rest by giving them such a sign as they agreed to accept—a sign from heaven—bringing down fire, like Elijah; showing a host of chariots and horses of fire, like Elisha; or wrapping the hills in thundering, smoke and flame, as when Moses received the law.

Their request caused Jesus to “sigh deeply in his spirit.” Why it should have this effect we may imagine when we realise that the demand which seemed reasonable to superficial thought, was one which could not be complied with at the merely preliminary stage at which the work of Christ then stood, and was made by men who were not sincere in making it. Had the Pharisees and Sadducees been sincere, they would have seen sign enough in what Jesus was doing every day. This was the point on which Jesus grounded his answer.

“When it is evening, ye say it will be fair weather; for the sky is red. And in the morning, it will be foul weather to-day, for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky: can ye not discern the signs of the times?” Christ’s argument here is that the common intelligence that was able to forecast the weather from atmospheric appearance was equal to the discernment of his divine credentials in the abundant miracles he wrought, if there were only

the sincere and humble disposition to know the truth. The gravamen of his answer lay in the term he applied to them: "hypocrites!" They were acting; they were not honest: they pretended there were no signs, when in point of fact they were really of the opinion expressed by a prominent member of their body— Nicodemus: "We know that thou art a leacher came from Gad: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him." Is it a wonder he "sighed deeply in his spirit?"

"A wicked and adulterous generation," he proceeded, "seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas." In chapter xxv. we had occasion to consider the meaning of these words. They were deep and appropriate, as all his words were. Their effect on the smart but shallow quibblers who were simply bent on discrediting him in the eyes of the multitude, would have been interesting to witness. But that was a point of no moment. They felt themselves foiled by the quiet, sad man of Nazareth, and doubtless made their best effort to preserve their learned dignity with the bystanders under discomfiture. In whatever way they took it, Jesus drew off, and returned to the vessel which had brought him from the eastern side of the Lake. Getting on board, the disciples soon spread the sail and got out their oars, and away they quickly sped to the other side.

This departure was evidently out of the programme. Jesus had intended to stay (perhaps at the house of loving Mary Magdalene, whose abode was in that part), but retired on finding the Pharisees and Sadducees in occupation of the field. The disciples in the hurry of this unexpected departure had "forgotten to take bread." They had but one loaf in the ship for a company of at least 13 men. They had just discovered the fact and remarked it among themselves, when Jesus, who evidently retained a strong impression of the recontre he had just had with the Pharisees and Sadducees, began to say, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the Sadducees (or the leaven of Herod)." The disciples said one to another, "It is because we have taken no bread?"

They really supposed, it would seem, that he meant they were to be careful, when reprovisioning the boat, not to buy bread made by the Pharisees or Sadducees for fear of its being tainted with leaven; and furthermore, that they were in danger through having forgotten to bring bread. Jesus was disappointed with the childishness of such a supposition. "O ye of little faith," said he, "why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread?" He reminded them of the two miraculous provisions of bread which they themselves had witnessed; why should the lack of provisions on board the vessel seem a serious circumstance, in view of the power to multiply loaves when necessary? It was something else altogether that he meant when he spoke of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. "Then understood they," we are told, "how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the DOCTRINE of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### At Bethsaida—in Cæsarea Philippi—the Transfiguration.

Speeding along on the smooth waters of the Galilean Lake, the boat containing Jesus and the disciples came to anchor at Bethsaida. It is commonly supposed there were two Bethsaidas, though Mr. Oliphant is inclined to think there was only one, and that the idea of there being two is due to the different way in which Bethsaida is mentioned in the Gospel narratives. If there were two, one of them was on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee, some four or six miles to the South of Capernaum; and the other, at the north end of the sea, on the eastern side, near the influx of the Jordan. The fact that Jesus was next found in Cæsarea Philippi, would suggest that it was this upper Bethsaida that Jesus came to on landing.

When he came to the place, the people becoming aware of his arrival, brought him a blind man, with a request that he would exercise his healing power upon him. Jesus complied with the request, but did not in this case heal by a word. For a reason not stated, and on which we cannot speculate with any probability of being right, "he took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town," and at a convenient spot, he "spat on his eyes, and put his hands upon him." He then asked the blind man if he saw anything. The blind man looked up and said, "I see men as trees walking." He then put his hands upon his eyes again, and again made him look up. This time, the man's sight was perfect, and he "saw every man clearly." The man was naturally delighted, but Jesus suffered him not to stay, or to blazon the matter. "He sent him away to his house," and forbid him to report his cure in the town. The reason for such effort at secrecy, we have before considered.

Those who find in this case of healing an evidence of labour, and a suggestion of natural power, have to be reminded that the miracles of Christ were all of them "works" involving the expenditure of the power God had given him; and that special obstructions of faculty might require special applications of that power. They have to be reminded that all power is of God, and that the difference between natural and miraculous power consists in a larger measure and a more direct impartation. They have also to be reminded that if there are one or two miracles suggestive of difficulty, there are hundreds with no trace of such a thing, and that most of them were entirely beyond natural power, and that the series concluded with the most astounding miracle of all—the restoration of Christ to life after he had been killed and buried—when, therefore, as a man, he had no power at all, and when the only power that could be operative was that divine presence and energy that had dwelt within him for 3½ years. The friends who

find these objections, have a curious propensity for looking only at a part of the evidence, and that a very small part.

From Bethsaida, Jesus appears to have walked to the neighbourhood of Cæsarea Philippi with his disciples. The distance would be about 30 miles, in a northerly direction, and the journey would be through the most splendid scenery of Palestine—under the shadow of the Lebanon range, in whose wild and solitary glades they had time for reflection and private conversation. Jesus asked the disciples what the people were saying of him. They said, “Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.”

It is evident from his next remark that it was in no spirit of mere curiosity that he had asked about the popular impression, but merely to open the way for “the good confession” of his disciples: “But whom say ye that I am?” However many of his disciples took part in the answer to the first question, Peter stands forth in answer to this: “Simon Peter answered and said,”—this seems to suggest that the others hesitated; taken aback, perhaps, by the sudden call on their own views, after having so freely reported the conflicting opinions entertained by the populace. Or, perhaps, it merely illustrates the more impulsive ardour of Peter, who promptly declared, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

To the modern point of view, it might seem superfluous that Jesus should challenge the confession of his disciples on this subject. If we transfer ourselves to the moment and the circumstances, we may see differently. Jesus had not made his Messiahship a prominent feature of the proclamation in which he had associated the disciples with himself. The kingdom of God was the burden of their preaching. His personal relation to the matter was a thing he rather sought to conceal, on account of the fact that he had to suffer before the kingdom could come. His Messiahship was a subject of private communication mostly, and that very occasionally; and since it was not received either by the leaders or the body of the people, Jesus deemed it necessary to rally the disciples distinctly on this point at this time.

His response to Peter’s declaration is full of significance. He did not thank Peter, as a human pretender might have done. He congratulated Peter on the attainment of so important an enlightenment: “Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.” This calls for deeper consideration. If “flesh and blood” had revealed the matter to Peter, the revelation would have been of very doubtful value; for flesh and blood, of its own congenital resources, is darkness and not light. Flesh and blood left to itself always goes wrong. But flesh and blood had nothing to do with revealing the Messiahship of Jesus. The Messiahship of Jesus is a divine contrivance wholly, for divine ends: and it is a maxim of the Spirit-illuminated Paul, that “the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.” Only God could reveal it. Flesh and blood in the finest state would never tell a man that



Jesus of Nazareth, born of Mary in the hill country of Judæ, over 1800 years ago, was the Son of God, and his Anointed, or Christ.

But Peter had attained to this conviction, and the blessedness of it, according to Christ, lay in the fact that the Father himself had revealed it, and therefore it was true, and might be relied upon and built on utterly. How the Father had revealed it to Peter, the life of Christ shows. He had proclaimed it in Peter's hearing on the banks of the Jordan when Christ was baptised of John; and he had testified it by the many works which he had enabled Jesus to perform, "which," said Jesus, "bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me." Peter's faith, therefore, stood upon a rock—not on hearsay—not on feeling—not on flesh and blood; but on the undeniable testimony of the living God himself. A man in such a position is surely "blessed"—happy. Christ uttered no platitude in saying this.

Then, Jesus turns upon the application of the matter to others to whom Peter should become related in the evolution of the work of Christ with men. In doing so, he fondles the analogy suggested by Peter's name. "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter (a stone or rock); and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." We know the application which the Roman Catholic church gives to this. We need not stay to discuss that. It is effectually disposed of by the declaration of Paul in 1 Cor. iii. 11, that "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Jesus Christ confessed, is the rock or foundation on which God's spiritual house is built. "On this rock will I build my church." But why mix it up with Peter? Well, Peter, whose name is Rock, had just made the foundation-confession. "And I say also unto thee, that thou art" Rock, and upon this rock-confession which thou who art named Rock hast made, will I build my church, and that by thy hands. It was a looking forward to the use to be made of Peter, who was to humble himself for ever by denying his Lord. He was to be made use of in the first official public laying of this rock-foundation of hope for men to build on. "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

The history of the events that came after is the full interpretation of these sayings which have been so grievously wrested from their meaning in propping up the most odious and long-lived tyranny under which the groaning earth has laboured. At the time of their utterance by Christ, the door was locked against the Gentiles. Afterwards, it was reported that God "had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Acts xiv. 27). By whom had this door-opening (or key-using) been performed? Peter answers: 'Ye know how that a good while ago, God made choice among us that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the words of the gospel and believe' (Acts xv. 7). His reference was to the transaction reported in Acts x. and xi., in which it will be found fully narrated how Peter was commissioned to offer salvation to the Gentiles for the first time. By Peter also was the door of repentance opened to the Jews after they had murdered Christ.

Let any one read the second chapter of the Acts; and he will see how Peter used the keys of the kingdom of heaven on the day of Pentecost, as well as some years later, in the house of Cornelius, for the Gentiles.

It was fitting, therefore, that in this conversation under the shadow of Lebanon, in which Peter was so prompt to confess that Jesus was the Christ, that Jesus should appoint to Peter the prominent part he was to perform in laying the foundation and opening the door of faith to Jew and Gentile, and should, in doing so, happily associate the meaning of Peter's name with that appointment.

It reads strangely at first sight, that having emphasised the value of Peter's confession of his Messiahship, he should "charge his disciples that they should tell no man that he was the Christ." We have a full explanation in the context. It is an explanation we have had to look at in former cases—an explanation that could not have arisen if Christ had been a human pretender in any sense. It was because of approaching suffering and death that Jesus wished to throw a veil over his glory. This is specially evident from what we read on this occasion: "From that day forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how that he must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Matt. xvi. 21). Having such a prospect before him, what marvel that he had no heart in pressing his Messiahship in any manner that would seem to challenge the popular acceptance of his claims? His state of mind is plainly revealed when he exclaimed: "I have a baptism to be baptized with: and how am I straitened (or pained) till it be accomplished" (Luke xii. 50).

Peter, who had just confessed Christ in a special manner, and to whom Christ had assigned the honour of a special association in the coming work of laying the foundation and using the keys of hope, now appears in a wonderful light. He would avert the impending sacrifice of Christ. He protested against the idea that Christ should be surrendered to his enemies. "Peter took him and began to rebuke him"—to rebuke him—think of it. "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." What was the meaning of this on Peter's part? Did he mean antagonism to the purpose of God? Nothing of the sort. It was "good feeling" without enlightenment. It was the presumption of ignorant kindness, placing itself in opposition to the revealed will of God. If Peter could err in this way, are we to be surprised at "pious" moderns opposing divine principles and purposes?

And here we may note as a little "aside" that Peter had been preaching the gospel (Luke ix. 6) and Peter knows nothing about the sacrifice of Christ! Consider this, ye who preach only the cross, and will have nothing of the gospel of the Kingdom which Jesus and the apostles preached (Luke viii. 1; ix. 2); and to which the doctrine of the cross was an appendix (Acts xxviii. 31). Another point: out of compassion, Peter opposes the programme of divine wisdom. This is considered a very venial offence in our day. "Charitable feeling" condones every opposition to the revealed way of God. How did Christ take Peter's attitude? Not

mildly or apologetically at all: "Get thee behind me, SATAN: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God but those that be of men." Peter becomes "Satan" when he opposes himself to God's plans and principles. What are modern friends in the same attitude? Are they angels where Peter was Satan? Nay, verily. They may be on excellent terms with themselves and their fellow Peters; but Christ's measure of them will prevail. Their part is all the same, the dangerous one suggested in the words of Paul: "Though we or an angel from heaven preach unto you any other gospel, ... let him be accursed" (Gal. i. 8).

It is a final and noteworthy thought in connection with this incident, that we have the nature and characteristics of Bible Satanism as distinct from clerical diabolism, defined in the words of Christ: "Thou savourest not the things that be of God but those that be of men." The ways of God and the ways of men are necessarily different to the roots. How much different, God Himself says: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord: for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah lv. 8). For a man, then, to sympathise with "the thoughts of men" as opposed to the thoughts of God, is to be "Satan" in Bible speech.

This is a rule of judgment that not only excludes the supernatural devil of pulpit theology, but condemns the vast mass of mankind now upon earth. In all departments of their "world-life," high and low, they do exactly what made Peter Satan for the time being. "They savour not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." For "the things that be of God" they have no taste. For "those that be of men" they have a sympathy that rouses them to wonderful life in press, pulpit, platform, counting-house, and boudoir. The world is not changed since the days of John and Paul. The "Spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience" is "the Prince of the Power of the air" to the present day—more literally defined by John as "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life" (Eph. ii. 2; 1 Jno. ii. 16). It is impossible to live in this social "air" or atmosphere without doing homage to its Prince—the ruling spirit—incorporate in society as "the desires of the flesh and of the mind."

For this reason, it is impossible for a friend of God to be a friend of the world at the same time (James iv. 4). What Jesus said to the disciples applies to their class in all generations: "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (Jno. xv. 19). The world "savours not"—cares not for—has no interest in "things that be of God, but those that be of men." Therefore, as Jesus pathetically said to the Father in prayer, "I have given them Thy word: therefore the world hath hated them." The world dislikes all who "savour"—who like—care for the things that be of God. Such is the truth, however unacceptable.

For the time being, Peter made himself of this Satan class. If we ask, what could his idea be in opposing the work of Christ; what shape did his feelings take? it may not be difficult on reflection to perceive. Peter, in common with the other disciples, “thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.” To his mind, therefore, the work and cause of Christ would appear all an affair of advantage, to which suffering would seem foreign. The idea of Christ falling into the hands of his enemies—specially of being killed—would appear to be inconsistent with the very first element of the kingdom of power and glory which they preached. Peter had not yet learnt that the way to the kingdom is a way of suffering for all—necessitated by the prevalence of sin, and the moral need for humiliation and proof before exaltation. Especially were the sufferings of Christ essential as the foundation of righteousness for the temple of joy and gladness. To oppose these was to be a Satan to the very first of the ways of God. Peter had no idea he was acting such a part.

Jesus proceeded to apply the necessity for suffering to his disciples as well as himself: “If any man will follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it.” Many say about this what the Jews in the Capernaum synagogue said about the flesh-and-blood doctrine: “This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” It is “hard” only to a dark state of mind—the state of mind that does not rightly estimate the vanity of human life—that is not open to the reality of the work of God done in the earth through Moses and the prophets, Jesus and the apostles. To such a mind, it seems “hard” to lose anything now, for lack of faith in the connection between the losing and the getting promised. It is not hard for those who can feel the force of the argument that Christ immediately added: “What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul (life). What shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he shall reward every man according to his works.”

Let common sense work on this argument, and it will be found irresistible. A man must die; what can he gain by mortal success if it is at the expense of Christ’s favour who can give life? His coming is compared to a time of harvest reaping. Let the analogy be followed. A farmer would think it “hard” to put his seed in the ground if he did not believe it would come up again multifold. But believing this, he cheerfully submits to the present loss. So the man who clearly and confidently realises that letting life go now will lead to the keeping thereof in the day of Christ, when all mere natural life will wither like the flowers, can let it go. The words, of course, had special force at a time when the reception of the faith of Christ was about to become a capital offence in all the world; but they have not lost their force as a general truth, that a man to be an acceptable friend of Christ in the day of his coming, must be content to forego the world’s favour in an age when the world is Christ’s enemy. Men find this “hard.” “He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.”

The immediate disciples of Christ, whom he was to leave behind him in the tempest of persecution that would arise in consequence of the testimony for his resurrection, stood in need of special strengthening for the difficult part they had to perform. This he proceeded to impart in the exhibition of his glory by transfiguration. That it thoroughly served its purpose is evident from the allusion that Peter, who was one of its spectators, afterwards made to it. That it was calculated to do so will be realised by everyone paying close attention to it. To strengthen a man for a persevering testimony in a matter in the face of opposition and unfavourable appearances, the thing necessary to be done is to make him quite certain the thing is true. This is best done by evidence that will implant its own conviction. Jesus had given this evidence in various ways already. He had performed many miracles: but these were performed on others. There was no visible connection between the person of Christ and the performance of the works: and the way was open for cavillers to suggest, as the Pharisees did suggest, that the miracles were the works of another power—the power of Beelzebub, and not of Christ.

Christ was now to show something that would not be open to any suggestion of this sort—something affecting his own person. His transfiguration would shew them more conclusively than anything could, that the Messiahship of Jesus was not and could not be “a cunningly devised fable.” In his own person, he would show in advance the glory of his power and coming of which he so frequently spoke. How powerfully it affected the minds of the three apostles who beheld it is manifest from the words of Peter referred to: “We have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye-witnesses of his majesty, for he received from God the Father, honour and glory when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the Holy mount” (2 Pet. i. 16–18).

The event thus referred to, occurred immediately after the conversation about what men thought of Christ. Christ prepared them for it by saying, “Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” The transfiguration was a vision of this, in a realistic presentment. About a week after this saying, he took Peter, James, and John—the three who were always prominent, and whom Jesus on several other occasions drew specially near to himself—the only three, also, out of the twelve, who have contributed to the apostolic writings, with the exception of Jude. He asked them out with him, and conducted them to “an high mountain apart.” The district of Cæsarea Philippi is a very mountainous district, lying at the foot of the Lebanon range. It would, therefore, afford many solitary eminences suitable for the purpose for which Jesus had brought out the three disciples. That we are not told which one in particular it was, is probably the result of design. The knowledge of the exact locality would be of no advantage, and might be a disadvantage in giving occasion for an idolatrous shrine.

Visitors to the Holy Land are shewn the Mount of Transfiguration, of course, notwithstanding; but this is mere invention—or at all events speculation—with an eye to the offerings of pilgrims—part of the “abomination” with which the land is infested. It is no part of the wisdom of God to furnish materials for superstition. “An high mountain apart” is all the description given. Leading them to such an elevation, away from the traffic and the intrusion of men, he did not deliver himself of grandiloquent apostrophe, such as the mere literary inventor would have imagined. He made no speech to his three disciples. “He prayed.” Think of it. Jesus praying in that retired spot on a hill side, in the presence of his disciples.

The disciples listened and beheld; and “as he prayed,” they saw a change come over him. “The fashion of his countenance was altered”: “His face did shine as the sun.” His very clothes changed their appearance. “His raiment became shining”—“white and glistening”—“white as the light”—“exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them.” Is it necessary to ask “how” this extraordinary transformation came about, by which even the fibres of an ordinary woollen fabric became lustrous and shining? Is it necessary to suggest it was not a reality, but the hallucination of excited feelings on the part of the apostles? Both suggestions are totally foreign to the character of the appearance, life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Christ.

The transfiguration is on a par with the conception of Christ and all his miracles. It was a phenomenon of divine energy specifically directed, and one that can have no difficulty for students of nature who have realised how universal and subtle is the potency of the electric force of the universe, and how easily under appropriate excitations, dead and lustreless things can be made to glow with blinding brightness. Grant (as the facts in connection with Christ compel you to grant) the operation of the Father, through Iris Spirit, and nothing is impossible or too hard to understand. Christ was exhibited in glory that the disciples might see what it was they were related to, and have such assurance as would qualify them to maintain a testimony by-and-by against all the world.

Presently, two men appeared with Christ in the midst of the brightness. Who were they? The narrative says they were Moses and Elijah, and from a remark immediately made by Peter, it was evident the three apostles knew them to be such. How they were able to recognise men they had never seen, and whose portraits the law of God deprived them of the means of being acquainted with, may appear a difficulty at first sight. The difficulty disappears if we take into account the presence and power of the Spirit of God, which evolved the whole manifestation and embraced the three onlookers in its power. This presence affected them physically. They became heavy with sleep. When this passed off “they were awake.” The disciples were there to see and know, and, therefore, the Spirit of God would impart to them intuitively the knowledge that the two men were Moses, the representative of the law, and Elijah, the most notable of the prophets—by whose presence the work and person of Christ were thus

demonstrably associated with the whole work of God with Israel from the beginning.

Presently the apostles hear them converse with Jesus. They listen while the three men “in glory” talk. What is the topic of conversation? “They spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.” Is not this the very climax of the interesting and sublime? We had Jesus a few days before instructing the disciples on this very subject, which naturally lay near his heart. We had Peter protesting, and Peter rebuked; and now here is the very same matter made the theme of communication among exalted personages, “appearing in glory.”

Such a conversation could not fail to strengthen Jesus in prospect of his suffering; and it must have been equally powerful to send home to the hearts of the three disciples the fact which he had sought to impress upon them—that he must die. Nothing could more strikingly shew the importance of the place occupied by the death of Christ in the scheme of God’s love and wisdom, than this conversation of three men “in glory.” How important it is was afterwards abundantly shewn in the writings of the apostles—for the possession of which it is impossible for us to be too thankful. To “the wisdom of this world,” in our day, as in Paul’s “Christ crucified is foolishness, and to the Jews a stumbling block. But unto them which are called; both Jews and Greeks, Christ (crucified is) the power of God and the wisdom of God, because the foolishness of God is wiser than man, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. i. 23, 24, 18).

Peter was transported with a fearful joy at the scene—Christ, Moses, Elijah—in glory, and in mutual conference! He had “thought the kingdom of God should immediately appear,” and Jesus had said they would not taste of death till they saw it, and now surely it was here, before his very eyes. It does not seem so difficult as some find it to understand why he should say, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles: one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Moses and Elijah were framing to depart, and “as they departed” (Luke ix. 33) Peter requests that they might not go that the desirable situation might not cease. His sense seems to be—“It is good for this to be: let it not go away. Let the glory continue. Let Moses and Elijah remain. There was one tabernacle in the wilderness, but now there are three greatneses. Let us make three tabernacles—a tabernacle for each. Let the kingdom come thus.” It was Peter’s raw conception of what was desirable. As was his wont, he gave frank and childlike utterance to his impulsive feelings. “He wist not what to say.” He spoke out what came first.

Presently his unwise talk was quenched. A cloud drew over the scene—not a rain cloud, nor a dark cloud, but “a bright cloud.” Out of the cloud came a voice, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him.” “They feared as they entered the cloud.” “They fell on their face and were sore afraid.” Presently, Jesus touched them, saying, “Arise, and be not afraid.” They lifted their heads, looked around, and the transfiguration had ended—the vision had

passed; “they saw no man any more, save Jesus only, with themselves.” Jesus then invites them to descend from the hill,—and on the way, he talked with them, and “charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen,” until he should have risen from the dead. Why he should wish them to keep such a matter secret we can understand, in view of those considerations (already glanced at) which led him to command them to “tell no man that he was the Christ.” On no other principle is it intelligible. There was a time to exhibit the whole matter fully to view; but that time could not arrive while he was still on the scene, and when there was always a possibility that the publicity of his claims might lead to an insurrection of the people to place him on the throne. That he should seek to keep the matter a secret, or even that he should be represented by his apostolic biographers as seeking to do so, is one of the strongest proofs, if reason would but work it out, that his work was a true work, and no imposture in any sense. It is characteristic of all imposture to seek to make an impression by the sedulous cultivation of every opportunity of publicity.

The disciples wondered what Jesus could mean by the rising from the dead (Mark ix. 10). This is another of those constantly recurring symptoms of the truthfulness of the story. Why, except that it was so, should the disciples be represented as not understanding the resurrection of Christ? An artificial narrative, written for the purpose of supporting the story of a Christ who had never appeared, would certainly have assumed that the whole matter was lucid to all concerned from the very beginning, and that the life, death, and resurrection of Christ had developed themselves in harmony with the apostolic conception of things from the start. No conceivable object could be served by any other representation. But here they were put into a quandary by Christ’s allusion to his resurrection. The reason is plain. They did not understand he was to die, but, like the Jews in common, expected that when Messiah appeared he would “abide for ever” (Jno. xii. 34). Consequently, there was no room in their idea of things for the resurrection of the Messiah.

That idea was strengthened by the Rabbinical expectation that Elias would appear before the finishing of the Messiah’s work. They presented this obstacle to Christ. “Why, then, say the Scribes that Elias must first come?” (Matt. xvii. 10). Surely there would be no dying of the Messiah, and therefore no rising, after the appearing of Elias? Christ’s answer was, “Elias truly shall first come and restore all things.” That in no way interfered with the place assigned to Messiah’s death in the Scriptures. “It is written of the Son of man that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought.” On the contrary, it seemed to provide the room for this event: for as Elias had not yet appeared, there was opportunity for the rejection of Christ, so far as that was concerned. Notwithstanding this, he wished them to understand that the Elias precursorship, which the scribes were right in leading the people to expect, had, in an incipient form been realised—which the scribes were ignorant of. “I say unto you that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed ... Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.” This was in harmony



with the angel's words in announcing the birth of John the Baptist to Zecharias (Luke i. 17). "He (John) shall go before him (Jesus) in the SPIRIT and POWER of Elias." Christ's reference to John as Elias was in the nature of an "aside." The main argument was that the foretold and destined re-appearance of Elijah (whom they had just seen on the mount in converse with him) was in no way inconsistent with the death that was waiting Christ. The rulers (because they knew him not) had killed John, who had come in the spirit and power of Elias. "Likewise," said Jesus, "shall also the Son of man suffer of them."

## **CHAPTER XXXVIII.**

### **From the Mount of Transfiguration to Capernaum.—Christ's Rebuke of Ambition.**

When Jesus and the three disciples had descended from "the Mount of transfiguration," a crowd was on the plain, and in the heart of the crowd, a knot of the Scribes, closely questioning Christ's disciples. When it was reported that Jesus was near, the crowd broke up and ran towards him, saluting him eagerly. They had evidently become excited by the debate between the Scribes and the disciples. By-and-bye, the Scribes drew near also. Jesus asked the Scribes what they had been questioning the disciples about. A man in the crowd answered. He said he had brought an afflicted son to the disciples to be cured, and they could do nothing with him. This appears to have furnished an occasion of cavil which the Scribes were not slow to seize. Their question no doubt would be—if the power of Jesus be of God, why could not the disciples employ it in his absence as well as when he was with them? So now the question would be pressed by inference on Jesus: "Why could not they cure the lunatic lad?"

There was a reason which had no reference to the power of God, but to the weakness of man. Jesus put his finger on it in the exclamation he immediately addressed to one and all: "O faithless and perverse generation! How long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring him hither to me." The lad is brought. The people are all attention. The case was a bad one. It had baffled the disciples, who had been able in other cases to easily exercise healing power: would Christ be able to deal with it? As the lad is coming, the epileptic paroxysm seizes him, and throws him to the ground, where he lies foaming at the mouth and wallowing. Jesus asks the father how long the child has been affected in this way. The father, who is all agitation, answers, "From a child." He adds that he is his only child, and he implores Jesus to help them if he can do anything. Jesus replies that it is a question of faith simply: "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." The agitated father at once cries out with tears, "Lord, I believe: help thou mine unbelief." On this, Jesus utters the word of command: "Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee come out of him, and enter no more into him."

The word worked with power in the organism of the lad. It coursed as a powerful life-current through his whole nervous system, restoring the obstructed continuity in every fibre, and reestablishing every normal function, but with a force that was too strong for the lad to bear easily. He was convulsed with extreme pain; cried out at the top of his voice, and then apparently collapsed in a moment and lay motionless, and apparently lifeless. The excited spectators said one to another, "He is dead." Jesus confuted this suggestion by stooping forward and lifting the lad by the hand. The lad stood, opened his eyes, looked round, and was all right. Jesus handed him to his father, who led him away quickly. The crowd were speechless with admiration.

The disciples, gathering around Jesus, said to him, "Why could not we cast him out?" This implies that usually they found no difficulty in effecting cures in the name of Jesus, and that they were surprised they could not deal with this case, and had so laid themselves open to the assaults of the Scribes. Jesus gave two reasons: the case was difficult, and their faith had failed them. His exact words on the last point were:—"Because of your unbelief." But why should unbelief have obstructed their use of the power of God in this case and not in others? We are not informed. If, however, we realise the embarrassing effect of having hostile sneering spectators like the Scribes standing round, while an acute and obstinate case was submitted for treatment, we may not find much difficulty in understanding why the disciples should waver in the feeling of ability to deal with it. Their sense of personal honour would be liable to obscure God from their momentary discernment, as with Moses at Meribah: and God, who is jealous, and will not suffer His glory to be taken by another, refused the power; which rendered the disciples helpless. The right kind of faith is very powerful, if ever so small, when the right opportunity for its action is at hand. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed," said Christ, "ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

We have more than once had occasion to consider this question of the relation of faith to performance. It is a matter much requiring the reasonable discrimination of wisdom, in order to avoid the disasters that befall faith of almost every kind in modern times. We may all have heard of the old woman who, on the strength of the words of Christ, prayed at night that a neighbouring hill might be shifted to a more convenient place for her, and went in the morning to see, and finding the hill just as it was, said, "Ah, it is just as I thought." Many are liable to this superficial and frivolous view of the subject, and to the consequent disappointment and depression belonging to it. Faith, in this relation of things, is usually not understood. Simply stated, it is confidence where God proposes to work by us. Faith, at such a time, is powerful to do anything. And the want of it at such a time will interfere with the greatest works of God. That is, God will not work with an unbelieving man.

Moses, at the rock of Meribah, had not the least doubt that water would come from the rock. Had he doubted after God's assurance, the rock would not have opened. His offence on that occasion was not the want of faith, but the taking of the credit of the marvel to himself and Aaron in the eyes of the children of Israel. But that which is faith, when God proposes to work, becomes presumption in the absence of His appointment, especially when associated with the old woman's reservation. She had no real reason to expect the moving of the hill, though the words seemed to justify her. Therefore, in her own heart, she did not believe. But even if she had, it would not have altered the case in the absence of God's appointment. The initiative belongs to Him. When God puts it in our power to do this and that, then is the time for faith which will remove mountains. Such a time was with the disciples at this time.

Christ had given them authority and power to "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead." Therefore, it was a mere question of faith on their part. Any failure was due to their want of faith, and not to any limitation of the power that Christ had put within the control of their faith. There is a time for everything. Such a time as was with the disciples is not with the world, nor with the friends of Christ in this age. And no amount of faith can lead to anything in this line of things. "Faith-healing" is only a going as far as human resources will take men. These resources are feeble and extremely limited. The utmost verge of their accomplishments can only amount to a transferring of a healthy human magnetism to a poorly magnetised organism, and a consequent increase of natural vigour. Those who have much faith will get a higher result on the human scale than those who have poor faith; but it is all on the same merely human scale. There can be none of the radical and instant transformations that the power of God alone can accomplish, such as those performed by Jesus and the apostles—such as feeding a multitude with a few loaves, raising the dead, cleansing lepers. Modern "faith-healing" in this sense is a great deception, and a hurtful one, too, for it brings into contempt the real works of God, and the faith belonging to them.

"This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." So Jesus is reported to have added, in part extenuation of the inability of his disciples to perform the cure. Doubt is thrown by the Revisers on the genuineness of this part of the text, the suggestion being it was an interpolation by a later (ascetic) hand. The fact need bring no embarrassment. If we suppose the words genuine and really uttered by Christ, they only emphasise a lesson discoverable in other parts of the Word, viz., that acceptability with God is largely a matter of preparedness, in which prayer and fasting may often have a special place. We read that "when" the disciples "had fasted and prayed," they laid hands on Paul and Barnabas, whom the Spirit of God had designated for the Gentile ministry (Acts xiii. 3). A similar exercise is frequently mentioned. Jesus expressly recognises it when he says, "When thou fastest, appear not unto men to fast." It was an exercise naturally conducive to spiritual susceptibility in a hot country, and would often be found advantageous in colder climates, when it is desired to fix the heart in a specially

earnest way upon some spiritual aim or contemplation. If we have any special cause of petition to God in hand—whether in matters private or public—it will conduce to the earnestness and concentratedness of our endeavour, and to our acceptability with God through Christ, if we humble ourselves in fasting and prayer for a season. If Jesus spoke the words in question, he taught that even the magnitude of miracles in the day of the Spirit's ministration might be affected by resort to this means of spiritual circumcision.

The wonder excited by Christ's masterly handling of the case which had baffled his disciples, was generating the inconvenient thoughts in the mind of the multitudes which he had several times to quell—thoughts of compelling him to head a movement for exaltation to the throne of David's Kingdom. He, therefore, referred again in a pointed manner to the fact that he must suffer: "Let these sayings sink down into your ears; the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed he shall rise again the third day." But, again, "they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, and they perceived it not." "They were afraid to ask him," about it. "They were exceeding sorry" at the statement.

Not too forcibly can it be insisted on that there is nothing in the whole range of the life of Christ that shews more powerfully than this,—first, the divinity of the work of Christ; who, in his life, thus always fell back on his coming death, as a barrier to popular misapprehension; and, secondly, the superficiality and incompleteness of the modern gospel which restricts itself to that one point (the death of Christ) which the apostles, the first preachers of the gospel, knew nothing of in their first presentations of that gospel when Christ was upon the earth. A human Christ would have clutched at present results; an ecclesiastically-originated account of his life would have placed the cross in the over-weening position it occupies in the gloomy precincts of the Romish pale.

Christ and the disciples now set out on their return to Capernaum. As they walked along the road (Jesus going before, as seems to have been his wont), the disciples disputed among themselves who should be the greatest in the kingdom. When they had reached the end of their journey, and were seated in the house, Jesus asked them what it was they had been disputing about by the way. They knew, but they were ashamed of it, and they remained silent. Jesus then specially beckoned their attention and said, "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all and servant of all." This is open to two meanings, either of which would be correct. It may mean that if any man desire to be distinguished above others, the way to achieve his desire is to make himself the general servant and promoter of the well-being of others, by which he becomes indispensable to all, and therefore the first of all. Or it may mean that any attempt to lord it over others must and will end in humiliation and defeat—if not now, then when Christ distributes to every man according to his works.

In either meaning, it is a strong inculcation of modesty and benevolence, and by implication, a strong condemnation of those principles of ambition and self-assertion which are common in the world. In nothing was the teaching of Christ more distinguishable, from all that went before or came after, than in this point. It comes out repeatedly in the course of his ministry. It was about the very last thing he pressed home upon the twelve before he suffered. "The Kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and they that exercise authority over them are called benefactors, but it shall not be so among you. But he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief as he that doth serve." Humble service one of another is the characteristic of all who conform to the mind of Christ. It will be found on closest reflection to be the most reasonable and the most beautiful deportment on the part of a human being. A man appears at his best when sincerely and unaffectedly humble. The greatness of any gift he may have will only add to the beauty of modesty, and will certainly not detract from the reasonableness of it, for what can a man have that he has not received? Even the power of application and perseverance by which he may attain results is a gift: he did not create it.

Most people approve of this maxim of conduct, but apply it the wrong way. They are for pulling their brother down; hence come wars and fighting, envies, railings, evil surmisings, and every evil work. We are nowhere commanded to pull our brother down. On the contrary, we are commanded to lift him up—in honour to prefer one another. The pulling down is to be on ourselves only. Where all strive to pull themselves down and exalt their neighbours, there is no difficulty. "Take THOU the lowest seat." You have no liberty to run to another who has put himself at the head of the table and hustle him down. The commandments of Christ are beautiful, but they require to be worked out in their own lines, otherwise their beauty turns to ashes.

Some conversation appears to have ensued between Jesus and his disciples, during which the disciples endeavoured to elicit from Jesus a decisive expression from him on the matter they had been debating among themselves, namely, who really would be the greatest in the kingdom. Jesus had indicated the principle on which the question would be settled at last. He now carried home the lesson with a personal illustration. He called a child who was near—(one of the children of the house where they were staying, likely)—and setting him right in the midst of the twelve, took him up in his arms. Fixing their attention on the child in his arms, he said "Whosoever shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

We all know that a child is simple, artless and deferential, with very little disposition to stand upon ceremony or dignity. We all know that the Gentile ideal of manhood differs exceedingly from this. We are brought up among the Gentiles, and naturally catch their views and spirit. It may be a hard lesson, but we must discard these if we are to come into harmony with the mind of Christ. He requires us to humble ourselves as little children. It is the requirement of the

Spirit of God. The current pride and arrogance of society have their source in the mere propensities of nature, which, while having a useful place in subjection to wisdom, become as inconvenient and destructive and ugly as the unregulated predatory instincts of the savage. "To be carnally minded is death: to be spiritually minded is life and peace." The humility of a little child is not inconsistent with the highest wisdom and executive resource. Jesus illustrates the combination in its highest form; and He could exercise reserve, fulminate angry condemnation, and proceed to high-handed extremity, as in the expulsion of the traders from the temple, while filling the place of a servant in meekness and gentleness. He himself sums up the character, in the words: "Be ye wise as serpents, harmless as doves,"—an injunction which, as Mr. Oliphant says, is usually acted on as if it had called on men to be silly as doves and hurtful as the serpent.

Jesus dwelt on the theme in various other phases before leaving it. "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." This was showing that humility not only had to do with the question of how high a man would rise in the Kingdom, but involved the question of whether he would get in at all. It puts it in a vital position altogether. A man without humility cannot be saved: it comes to that. A proud man, who must have the first place, and who cannot be satisfied without overbearing his neighbours, is unfit for a kingdom, of which the prevailing sentiment will be the grateful humility of forgiven sinners. This is why he also says so frequently that a rich man shall hardly enter the Kingdom of God. Rich men are usually proud men, because riches give power and importance. Because proud men cannot, rich men scarcely can, inherit the Kingdom of God. Rich men may; Zaccheus was one, but he gave "half of his goods to feed the poor," and was of the child-like sort. Such, also, were those whom Paul exhorted by Timothy, to lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come (1 Tim. vi. 18). Such, also, those whom Jesus commanded to make to themselves friends out of the mammon of unrighteousness.

No man is more beautiful than a good, useful, faithful, humble, rich man. But there are not many of them. Poverty is usually more conducive to the training of the spiritual man. Poverty by itself is no recommendation. People in our age have almost come to think of poverty as a virtue in itself. They have to thank press and platform rant. It is the age of democracy, when votes have to be conciliated, and when, therefore, poverty has become deified. The poor man (who is in the overwhelming majority) has become accustomed to a portrait of himself which is as far from the truth as most of the bubble-blown platitudes of time serving politicians. Poverty is good manure; it is neither the soil nor the plant.

The Bible poor man has his illustration in Christ, and his definition in the apostolic formula "the poor in this world, rich in faith." Such poor men are of inestimable worth: they are fit jewels for the Messiah's crown—poor child-like men, with intelligence illuminated from on high, and hearts afire with that affection which is

set on things above—not on things on the earth. Such men are precious to Christ, as he proceeds to say: “Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me; and whoso shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.... Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven” (Matt. xviii. 5, 10). Angels have charge of them, as it is written, angels are “ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (Heb. i. 14), and “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him” (Psa. xxxiv. 7). To fight against those who are dear to Christ is therefore to fight against the angels—a combat in which no mortal can hope to get the better.

Jesus foresaw that there would be much of this insane work—this antagonising and afflicting of those whose zeal for the truth would make them offensive to the children of the flesh. “It must needs be that offences come,” said he; “but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh” “Woe unto the world because of offences!” Christ never speaks pleasantly of the world. He is a contrast in this to the public teachers of the present day, who, though they preach in his name, preach the things that please the world, and not the things that Jesus preached. He described his own case and theirs in the words he spoke to his own brothers on a certain occasion: “The world cannot hate you, but me it hateth, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil” (Jno. vii. 7). John correctly diagnoses the popular teachers in the words “They are of the world: there fore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them” (1 Jno. iv. 5).

In view of the certainty, that the world in general would assume this attitude of opposition to him and his, he enjoins it as a matter of care on all who desire to be his disciples to be clear on this matter. “Wherefore, if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.” This is connected with the exhortation to “Despise not one of these little ones,” and must therefore refer to matters of attitude or relation to them. What can it mean but that we must be ready to part with anything rather than remain in a position that involves hostility to the undoubted friends of Christ? Jesus even gives it an application to brethren in the wrong. We are not to give them up without effort at reclamation in the particular way prescribed. “Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he shall not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the ecclesia; but if he neglects to hear the ecclesia, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

Nothing tends more to the keeping or the restoring of peace than the observance of this law; and no law is more constantly broken. The universal impulse, when

anything is supposed to be wrong, is to tell the matter to third persons. From them it spreads, with the result of causing much bad feeling which, perhaps, the original cause does not warrant, and would not have produced if the aggrieved person had taken the course prescribed by Christ, and told the fault "between thee and him alone." If good men, or those who consider themselves such, would adopt the rule of refusing to listen to an evil report privately conveyed, until it had been dealt with to the last stage according to the rule prescribed by Christ, much evil would be prevented. Disobedience is almost the universal rule in this matter. The results are serious now, in the generation of hatred instead of love. Much more serious will the result be to the offenders against this rule in the day when all matters will be measured and settled by the divine rule.

Jesus indicates that any decision arrived at by an ecclesia in the proper application of this rule will be respected and confirmed by God Himself: "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." This is much encouragement to the brethren to be faithful in the matter. The application of the rule will often make it unnecessary to advance beyond the first stage. A brother approached privately, with every opportunity of explanation, will often make concessions that must remain impossible if he is made the subject of public opprobrium, however deserved. The healing of a matter will often be the result if you go and tell a man his fault "between thee and him alone." If there be no fault, there will be explanation and understanding. If there be, there will be concession and forgiveness. And we are not to weary in the recurrence of the process.

Peter asked how often this forgiveness was to be granted. Christ's answer practically was, "No limit." Peter suggested "Seven times" as going a long way. Christ said "I say not unto thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven." He then backed his remark with the parable of the unmerciful fellow-servant, which we have already considered, and which concluded with the command that we must every one forgive trespassers, on pain of not being forgiven ourselves. The mind cannot exhaust the beauty of this commandment. How noble is the placable mind! How cordially it commends itself to all classes of men. How hideous and detestable the harsh and unforgiving. By so much we may estimate the superiority of the doctrine of Christ over all teachers who went before Him. Moderns may complacently think themselves at least equal to Christ—and in some points, perhaps, superior. They forget that they work upon a situation prepared by the teaching of Christ, and are themselves the offspring of the forces which his teaching set in motion. No system of teaching places man so low and God so high, and the duty of mercy in such an imperative position. The reason self-evidently is, that, with all their plausible talk, other systems are of man: Christ's alone is of God.

Here John mentioned the case of a man whom they had met in their journeys, who was casting out demons in the name of Christ, but had not made himself one of the followers of Christ. "We forbade him," said John, "because he



followeth not with us.” Jesus said, “Forbid him not: for there is no man who shall do a miracle in my name that can lightly speak evil of me.” For he that is not against us is on our part. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ; verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward.” It does not seem possible to mistake the meaning of this; and yet it has often been made use of to justify a wrong course—that is, a course opposed to other parts of the teaching of Christ (which includes the teaching of the apostles). Men have said there is no need for the public profession of the truth. They have said there is no need to separate from organisations of men who receive not the truth. They have said there is no need for a man knowing the truth to make himself one with those who have openly given themselves to the service of that truth—and all because Christ said “Forbid him not,” concerning a man who did the work of Christ without “following with” the disciples.

It is an effectual answer to this line of contention to point to the invariable practice of enlightened men in the apostolic age, as indicated in the acts of the apostles and the epistles they addressed to the ecclesias. This practice was to “come out from among” the unenlightened (2 Cor. vi. 17), to assemble with those of like precious faith wherever their company was possible (Heb. x. 25; Acts xx. 7); to be incorporate with all such in the collective maintenance of the testimony and work of the truth, and in the calling on the name of the Lord (1 Tim. iii. 15; ii. 22; 1 Peter ii. 9); to be in fact members of the public body of Christ in whatever town a man might be located (Apoc. i. 11). These facts being indisputable, it follows that no construction of any saying of Christ that would stultify them can be correct. It will be found that none of his sayings do stultify them. The saying in question has certainly no such sense.

The formation of believers into ecclesias had not yet begun. The breaking of bread as the germ and rallying point of their development had not yet been appointed. The work of the gospel was at a stage of transition, in which any man was at liberty to serve in the way that might seem best in the absence of command. The man in question had not been told to “follow.” Therefore it was no infraction of righteousness for him to refrain from doing so. He had become enamoured of the doctrine of the power and the name of Christ, and publicly served him in the only way that he knew how. It was in the name of Christ that he invoked the miracles he had seen Jesus perform: and it pleased the Father to honour the name of His son thus sincerely employed, in granting the power invoked. It was a public, open, and sincere service on the part of a sincere friend of Christ at a time when such a course could only mean that the performer was altogether “with” Christ, though following not personally in his train. It was a different course from that of the man who should pusillanimously seek to minimise or hide his service from a fear of the social inconvenience of identification with “the sect everywhere spoken against”—which it has always been the lot of the faithful friends of Christ to be. It was a service that Christ accepted—which is the best proof of its courage and completeness. His comment shows its character: “He that is not against us is ON OUR PART.”

There are times when to be “not against” is to be “for.” The time in question was such a time. The line was sharply and simply drawn by the ordination of the Pharisees that whoever should confess that Jesus was the Christ should be put out of the synagogue. Neutrality was impossible in the time of such an issue. The man who did not oppose Christ under such circumstances was “for him.” There might of course be many who were too indifferent to be for or against. Jesus did not mean to apply his remark to such a class, but to men who gave it clearly to be understood that they were on his side, for such is his application of it—to a man who was publicly invoking the name of Christ as well as he knew how. The facts show that there can be no warrant in such a case for those who fear to confess Christ fully before men. The situation was such that even the giving the cup of cold water to a friend of Christ as such was proof that the giver was within the scope of a discipleship that Jesus could recognise. It was such that Jesus, on another occasion, could reverse the maxim with perfect appropriateness and force, and say, “He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad” (Matt. xii. 30). Thus the ground was marked off at each end in such a way as to put a man outside who was not prepared to perform the part of a friend in a thorough and hearty and open manner.

## **CHAPTER XXXIX.**

### **Pays Taxes—Forbids Vengeance—Attends The Feast of Tabernacles.**

At the close of the conversation between Christ and his disciples, one of the public officials challenged Peter on the subject of Christ’s liability to pay taxes. He did not approach Christ. There was a natural shrinking from his grave and earnest presence. He applied through Peter—a fisherman—an ordinary man, who had not yet acquired the character and reputation that afterwards led Cornelius to fall down before him. It was probably done outside the house.

“Doth not your master pay tribute?” Peter could only answer, “Yes.” Jesus took part in all the burdens and obligations common to the people, and thus laid a deep foundation for sympathy and fellowship, in not only wearing a nature identical with theirs, but in submitting “in all points” to their temptations and experiences, and among others, to that form of exaction which implies subjection—the paying of taxes. This was especially humiliating on the part of anyone possessed of any title to authority. A king paying taxes! Such was the fact in Christ’s case—incongruous and humiliating fact.

He did not submit to it without a distinct assertion of its incongruous character. This he put forth in his own beautiful way. He did not wait for Peter to break the subject. Peter had come into the house for that purpose. Jesus anticipated him by a question: “What thinkest thou, Simon? Of whom do the kings of the earth

take custom or tribute? Of their own children, or of strangers?" This was a reference to the well-known fact that the Romans, who were the masters of the world at that time, did not tax their own citizens, but only the inhabitants of the subject provinces. Peter was aware of this, and answered, "Of strangers." Christ rejoined, "Then are the children free?" as much as to say, "They ought not to apply to us for taxes, for we are the true children—not strangers; the others are the strangers."

This is truth, and no sentiment. Most people regard it as a mere poetical suggestion. An understanding of the law and the testimony will show us that it is the assertion of an ultimate political fact. The Roman institution was on sand. They had got their power and standing in the earth "by their own sword." Their right was the right of might. It did not rest on a valid title. The only valid title is by bequest or transfer from the original possessor. God is the original proprietor of the earth. He made it for His own purpose, which is certain to be realised. In the working out of this purpose He has given the earth to Christ and his brethren, whose full inheritance of it is only a question of time. They are, therefore, "the children." The Romans, and all other merely human incumbents of the soil, are but successful adventurers and interlopers, tolerated for the time-being for a purpose. Their success is divinely permitted, and is being used to promote certain preliminary and subordinate parts of the purpose as a whole; but still it is only the success of the powerful stranger.

The right of the soil rests in Christ and his brethren, and their taxation is an outrage. Should they then resist and refuse? Far from it. Submission is enjoined on them till the time arrives for the enforcement of their rights with great power and effect. "For this cause, therefore," says Paul, "pay ye tribute also: they are God's ministers, attending continually on this very tiling" (Rom. xiii. 6). The tax-gatherers have a place in the scheme of his work, and it is our business to submit so long as they are divinely permitted to fill that place. Jesus exemplified this duty in what he proceeded to say to Peter: "Notwithstanding (i.e., though we are the children, and, in true right, untaxable), lest we should offend them (resistance would lead to strife, and the work of God at present has no connection with strife), go thou to the sea and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up, and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money; that take, and give unto them for thee and me." Peter doubtless did as directed, and was able in this easy and honourable manner to discharge the claim of the tax collector.

How came the piece of money into the fish's mouth? Some are full of curious surmise on such topics. There is no difficulty when the power of God in Christ is recognised. The money might be dropped into the water by some one losing it; in that case the fish would be drawn to seize and hold the coin, and to wander into the neighbourhood of Peter's line. Peter's bait would be an attraction, notwithstanding its full mouth, and the seizing of the bait would complete the process by which Jesus and Peter were associated in the act of giving an

example to the household afterwards, of submitting to the powers that be. It may, of course, have been done another way. The close association of Jesus and Peter is remarkable. It is seen in many instances, ending with Peter's crucifixion after the example of the Lord, as the Lord had predicted.

The affairs of Christ were now to turn a corner, as it were. "The time was come that he should be received up," so we read: not that the moment had actually arrived for his ascension, but that the time had come for him to frame his movements with reference to that stupendous occurrence. Before it could take place, he must go to Jerusalem and go through the appointed terrible ordeal waiting him there, concerning which he said, "I have a baptism to be baptised with: and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." He seems at this time to face the prospect with what might almost be considered painful determination. This seems to be the significance of the statement that "he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem."

He had hitherto lingered along in the neighbourhood of the Galilean lake, preaching the word to multitudes and healing their sick. He now realised that the time had come for the next move—a move towards darkness, trouble, and death. He knew the issue of it all—in life and light and joy: still it required an effort to take the path down into the valley of suffering that must be traversed before he could emerge on the heights beyond. "He steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem." He was to return from Jerusalem and make a second visit to Galilee, but the ultimate purpose and end of his journey was what was most before his mind. With this view, "he sent messengers before his face:" that is, he sent disciples ahead of him to make the needful practical arrangements for a journey to Jerusalem coincident with the feast of tabernacles.

The messengers "entered into a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him." What village it was we are not told: but it was one that was strongly infected with the jealous hatred that divided the Samaritans from the Jews; for when they ascertained that this small travelling band of Galileans were en route for Jerusalem, they refused them the temporary accommodation they desired. Had they been proposing a visit to Mount Gerizim, or any other locality that implied a recognition of the Samaritan claims, they would have been full of courteous civilities, no doubt: but they had no hospitality for men who proclaimed by their attitude that the claim of Samaria, inherited from the appointments of Jeroboam, was without divine foundation. This was natural. These villagers were acting according to their light, which was darkness.

The only alternative was to patiently endure the incivility, and pass on. But the disciples were not yet enlightened enough for that. They were aflame against the insult offered them, and knowing it was directed against the very Son of God, and that the power of God was on their side, their impulse was to use that power in avengement of the affront. They appealed in this spirit to Christ. "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as

Elias did.” But Christ “turned and rebuked them, and said “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.”

Why should Christ reprove in the disciples what was commendable in Elijah? This problem resolves itself into a simple question of fitness of time. For everything there is a season and a time. Elijah, as the appointed avenger of a nation’s apostacy, was in place in imprecating destruction on a band of troops sent to arrest his work. Jesus, as the appointed treader of “the winepress of Jehovah’s anger” in “the day of vengeance and the year of recompenses,” will be equally in place when “he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked;” but that will not be till the day when “he shall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.” That time had not come when he walked through Israel’s coasts as a suffering teacher of righteousness, and a healer of diseases, in preparation for the final service of meekness and love in laying down his life for the sins of the world. The disciples, on the contrary, “thought the kingdom of God should immediately appear,” and were busy sometimes speculating on who of them should fill the highest station in “the execution of the judgment written.”

That Jesus should rebuke them is perfectly intelligible in the circumstances: “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.” That is, they did not understand the spirit applicable to that phase of the work to which they had been called, which was one, not of executing judgment, but of offering salvation:—“The Son of Man is not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.” The “spirit” pertaining to such a work was that of “giving place to wrath,” “enduring grief,” “suffering wrongfully,” threatening not when abused; reviling not again when reviled, rather turning the cheek to the smiter, than calling fire from heaven upon him—as was afterwards abundantly indicated by the teaching of the Spirit of God in the apostolic writings. This does not preclude the divinely revealed determination, that when the time arrives, for which all this patient submission to evil is a preliminary discipline, the saints will take the sword in hand and inflict long-slumbering retribution, and break in pieces the institutions of the present evil world and rule the nations with a rod of iron.

All truth has its place. There is a time for everything. The disciples did not know that the time for executing judgment on men had not arrived, though Christ was in their midst; but that, on the contrary, it was a time for putting up with insults, and for doing good to the unthankful and the evil, and for overcoming evil with good. Jesus took the opportunity of instructing them in the matter, and instruction to them is instruction to all in later times who have the circumcised heart to hear and obey. So, leaving the irate villagers to themselves, “they went to another village.” Here they apparently received the accommodation they required, and afterwards went on their way. On the way various incidents happened, including a visit to his domestic acquaintances who were also preparing to go to Jerusalem, for which they started before him.

Before his arrival at Jerusalem, multitudes had come from all parts of the country to be at the feast of tabernacles. Among these there was naturally much conversation about Christ, whose words and works had made a deep impression in all the land. The people expressed divergent opinions about him. "Some said, He is a good man; others said, Nay, but he deceiveth the people." No one felt at liberty to openly avow belief in him as the Messiah, because of the strong attitude against him on the part of the rulers of the people; but there was a strong under-current of interest and sympathy on his behalf which predisposed them for an instant, and hearty attention should he attend the feast. No one seemed to know whether he would or not. His family connections were there, but they could not tell. They had advised him before starting to attend; but he had not taken their advice in a way to enable them to know whether he would come or not. Their advice had in fact been in a spirit of unbelieving banter. "Depart hence," said they, "and go into Judæa, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest; for there is no man that doeth anything in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly: for neither," adds John, "did his brethren believe in him." Christ said, "My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready." His words were true in a double sense. The time that he had determined upon for attending the feast had not arrived: he did not purpose being there at the opening. This was the superficial meaning. The deeper meaning was that the time had not come for him to make such a display of his power as would compel the universal acceptance which his brothers derided.

That time has not yet come, but will come. It is an appointed and a fixed time. There is a plan in the great matters to which it stands related. "Your time is always ready." Present and instant gratification is the rule of merely natural wisdom and natural men. There is no plan in the policy of their lives: no principle to guide the development of their affairs: no rational patience in their posture. How different it is with the ways of God, of which Jesus was the great and long-promised instrument. In these there is a plan, involving delay, labour, waiting, growth, ripening, harvest, and a climax of transcendent interest.

"Go ye up unto this feast," said Jesus to his brethren. "I go not up yet unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come." And so when they started for Jerusalem they did not know whether Jesus would follow or not. The first and second day of the feast had passed, and there was no appearance of him. At last, on the third or fourth day, "about the midst of the feast," he came openly into the temple in the midst of the crowd, and sat down in one of the open courts and began to speak to the people.

His teaching was of a kind that ordinarily required a special education to take part in. He had had no such special education, having been brought up at Nazareth in the house of his father and mother. The leading men of the community who opposed Christ would make themselves aware of this by inquiry at the Nazareth Synagogue when Christ's movements began to arrest public attention; and from them it would pass into currency as a fact that Jesus was unlearned.

Consequently, when Jesus taught in the temple in a way common only with the learned, a mixed feeling of curiosity and contempt was occasioned among the unfriendly and respectable class of Jews. They said: "How knoweth this man letters, having never learnt?" The saying was reported to Christ. Perhaps it was uttered in his hearing. His answer was, "My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent me."

This was a complete answer. It was an admission of the two points involved.—1st. That he had not qualified as a teacher in the customary method; and 2nd, that he yet exercised the office of a teacher with all the ability usual only with trained experts. It went further. It disclaimed personal credit for the fact. He did not take the glory to himself, as is the egotistical habit of most self-taught men. "My doctrine is not mine:" whose then? "His that sent me." Who sent him? "My Father, of whom ye say that He is your God." "I am not come of myself, but He sent me." He attributed his teaching ability direct to power from God. This was high ground. How could he expect them to receive it? He indicates a rule of test. "If any man will do His will (the Father's will) HE SHALL KNOW of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of (or by the power of) myself." The truth and depth of this saying is necessarily hidden from all, save the class described. A man having the disposition and the determination to perform the will of God, so far as the knowledge thereof is within his reach, will, by the sheer effect of inevitable progress and development in that line of things, come to know, to discern, to be assured of the absolute divinity and authority of the teaching of Christ. He will know it by a line of reasoning that may be partly intuitive, but which, at the same time, has a logical method about it that will make it possible for him to formulate the process of knowledge in a way that will appeal to the recognition of all who are in a similar attitude towards God.

Jesus refers to a well-known peculiarity of men by which he was to be discriminated from all others. All public characters aimed to secure their own reputation or advantage. This was peculiarly the rule before the days of Christ; and any exceptions to it exhibited by human history since then are directly due to the power of the word of Christ. "He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him." In this Christ stands absolutely alone—that though he was worthy as no man ever was, it was not his own elevation, his own credit, or his own advantage, that he aimed at in his whole work. He was the disinterested, zealous, faithful servant of Jehovah. It was his Father's will he sought to exalt; his Father's honour and glory he sought to achieve.

A judgment of him by this fact can yield but one verdict. Every effect must have efficient cause. If Christ was an exception among men in the fundamental motives that moved him, it could only have its explanation in the fact constantly asserted by him: that though a man among men, he was not of man, but of God, and sent by Him to manifest His name, declare His will, and execute His work.

The adversaries who personally antagonised him in the days of his sojourn upon the earth, professed a zeal for Moses as the excuse for their antagonism, and yet were not obedient to Moses in whom they boasted. "Did not Moses give you the law?" cries Christ, "and yet none of you keepeth the law." The law forbade murder; yet, in the name of the law, they haunted his steps to destroy him. "Why go ye about to kill me?" The people about him, of course, repudiated the imputation,— "Who goeth about to kill thee?" asked they in fierce resentment. Sinners always repudiate the character for sin. The wickedest man likes a good reputation. No evil-doer owns to his intentions. There is a power of self-deception in men that enables them, with a sort of muddy sincerity, to disclaim the very things they have in contemplation. The Jews were laying traps for Christ. Yet when he alludes to the publicly avowed animosity, the reply is a scornful scepticism, and the suggestion that he must be mad.

Any extensive acquaintance with men today will reveal precisely the same characteristics and tactics; and lead a man at last to a mournful non-committal attitude like that which Christ observed. Christ did not argue the point with them, knowing that was futile. He rather appealed to their reason against the prejudice which his acts had excited. He had healed a man on the Sabbath. They thought that was dreadful wickedness; he entreated them to "judge not according to the appearance, but to judge righteous judgment." He had done a thing on the Sabbath day: but he had not necessarily desecrated the day. He had done well on the Sabbath day, and it was lawful to do that. Did not they themselves circumcise children on the Sabbath if the eighth day happened to fall on it? "If a man on the Sabbath day receive circumcision that the law of Moses should not be broken, are ye angry at me because I have made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath day?" Thus had the Son of God to humble himself in controversy with unreasonable and wicked men, enduring the contradiction of sinners against himself.

Some of the people were surprised at the boldness of Christ in view of the attitude of the authorities towards him, and indulged in a curious piece of reasoning often to be met with in the speculative illogical crowd. They inclined to conclude that, after all, the rulers might be of opinion that Jesus was really the Messiah, and were giving him scope to prove himself. And this set them to discussing the claims of Christ. Was he the Christ? He was a good man—a wonderful man; but was he really the Messiah? They thought not. "We know this man whence he is," said they, "but when Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence he is." In this they committed the common fault of setting up one element of truth to exclude another, when in fact both are co-ordinate, each having its own place without jostling the other. It was true they knew the proximate origin of Christ very well, for he had been brought up from childhood at Nazareth in their midst; but in what way did this conflict with the fact that when the day for the manifestation of his power should arrive, he will appear upon the scene in a manner as absolutely inexplicable to the common run of men, as his birth as the son of a virgin? When Christ steals into the world "as a thief" from heaven, it will be absolutely true that



“no man knoweth whence he is,” although they all knew, in the day of his humiliation, he came from Nazareth.

Jesus did not enter into these particulars in reply to the remarks of the people. He contented himself with a simple assertion of the facts as they bore on that present moment: “Ye both know me, and ye know whence I am: and I am not come of myself. But He that sent me is true, whom ye know not. But I know Him, for I am from Him, and He hath sent me.” This simple, gentle affirmation of truth offended the immediate speakers. There was a rush to apprehend him, but it came to nothing: “No man laid hands on him because his hour was not yet come.” Then there came a reaction among the people standing by. One and another asked, “When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?” The cry was taken up. It passed through the multitudes in the temple court with the quickness of an electrical movement. It threatened to become a serious demonstration in favour of Christ. Then authority openly interfered. “When the Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him, the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him.” The officers came to where he stood, the people making way for them as they advanced. When they came to him, they did not take him. Their inclination was to stand respectfully and listen. He meekly said to them, “Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto Him that sent me. Ye shall seek me and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come.”

These words, uttered in a dignified, simple, and earnest manner, rivetted attention both of the officers and the crowd. The crowd wondered what he could mean about going away where he could not be found. Christ referred to his coming ascension, but the people knew nothing of this, and sought a solution according to their own knowledge. “Will he go to the dispersed among the Gentiles and teach the Gentiles?” Jesus could not expect to make himself understood in a crowd. He, therefore, as was his wont, fell back on the simple objects of his mission, uttered in parable; challenging their attention in an emphatic manner, he stood and cried (on the principal day of the feast, when the crowd was greatest and the interest highest), “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (a reference—it is immediately added—to the coming impartation of the Holy Spirit to those who should believe on him).

This proclamation of Christ, made in the hearing of a Jewish crowd in the precincts of the temple, afterwards destroyed by Titus, 1,850 years ago, retains its unabated force to the present day as the declaration of an essential principle for the guidance of human life. Many thirst, and are dying of it—they thirst after the infinite in love, wisdom, life, perfection—“the good, the beautiful, and the true.” They find them unattainable, and ardent aspirations and earnest effort die at last through sheer fatuity, and all men have to endorse Solomon’s verdict—“All is vanity and vexation of spirit.” But perfection of life is, nevertheless, an attainable condition in the abstract, if men could but know the way. The way has

been revealed. Christ is that revelation. "I am the way, the truth and the life." "If any man thirst, let him come to me." Application in any other quarter must be vain. Men wander in the arid desert to find water where there is none. They fall at last with parched mouths and empty vessels, to die and whiten their bones in the desolation. A fountain has been opened, and an invitation promulgated: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." But most men in their pride will not humble themselves, and wander forth to die.

Many of the people were impressed with this final declaration of Christ's. They said, "Of a truth, this is the prophet." Others, "This is the Christ." But with others there came up the difficulty: "Shall Christ come out of Galilee?" We know that this man is from Nazareth, the prophets say that Christ should be born in Bethlehem. How can he be the Christ? Good people, if ye had but been patient and investigated, ye would have found there was no difficulty. Jesus, though brought up at Nazareth, was born at Bethlehem. Ye ought to have taken pains to ascertain. Surely the word and works of this man forbid any rash rejection of his claims. But there are smart people with whom reason does not prevail. Their self-conceit determines their attitude in the first case, and prevents any alteration of it afterwards. There was no lack of such among the Jews. "So there was division among the people because of Christ."

Some of them felt so strongly against him that they would have taken him, but no one could act with effect. The very officers felt powerless, and returned to their masters without their prisoner. The natural question of the masters was: "Why have ye not brought him?" The officers could scarcely excuse themselves. They could only say timidly, "Never man spoke like this man." This exasperated the Pharisees and chief priests. "Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people which knoweth not the law are accursed." There was an exception to this irrational acrimony. Nicodemus, who was one of them (both a Pharisee and a member of the ruling council), tried, by a simple question, to moderate the heat under which the officers visibly winced. "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him?" This only added fuel to the flame. The council turned upon Nicodemus: "Art thou also of Galilee? Search and see, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." And with this, the council broke up in a state of discomfiture. Each man went to his own house, and Jesus, threading his way through the crowd, departed to the house of Martha and Mary, on the Mount of Olives.

## **CHAPTER XL.**

### **Controversy in the Temple Courts—The Accused Woman.**

Jesus left the scene of chafe and argument and retired to the congenial seclusion of Martha's house on the summit of the Mount of Olives. He was not long in retirement. He was early astir the following morning as was his wont, and was soon walking down the quiet slope of the hill in the pleasant morning air towards the city, which was then much more picturesque and wooded in its surroundings than it became after the days, forty years afterwards, when the soldiers of Titus levelled every tree in the environs to make banks for the siege of Jerusalem. He was among the first that reassembled for the exercises connected with the feast of tabernacles. Taking his seat on one of the open promenades in the temple enclosure, it was soon known among the assembling people that Jesus was returned; and they came to him in numbers. Sitting and standing around him in an informal way, he taught them in the style peculiar to himself.

While so engaged, the continuity of his discourse was interrupted by the arrival of a band of the scribes and Pharisees, for whom the people made way. The Pharisees had with them a woman, to whom, when they had penetrated the crowd, they directed Christ's special attention. They were about to catch Jesus in his own trap, as they supposed. They had a vague impression that Jesus was antagonistic to Moses; and they thought if they could once make this manifest to the people who believed in Moses, his influence with them would be at an end, and they would have established a ground for successful accusation. It was with this object and with no true zeal for the law, which they disobeyed in a hundred matters, that they brought the woman forward and "set her in the midst." "Master," said they, "this woman was taken in adultery—in the very act. Now, Moses in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned: BUT WHAT SAYEST THOU?" This raised the issue direct—Moses versus Christ. The people listened eagerly for Christ's response: but none at first came. Jesus stooped on the ground and wrote with his finger on the stones as if unconscious of their question. The Pharisees repeated it, doubtless glancing around with that leering appeal for support on which insincere partizanship seeks to strengthen itself to the present day. Jesus still remained in the stooping posture, and silent. His enemies thought he was nonplussed, and kept asking the question.

At last Jesus rises, and quietly says, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." He then resumes his stooping posture, and leaves his answer to work its own results. It was a master-stroke, by which he escaped with consummate dignity from the apparent dilemma of having to abjure the law of Moses, or do violence to the principles of mercy with which his name had come to be associated in the public mind. Not only so, but he turned the case against his accusers. He honoured the law, magnified mercy, and at the same time impaled his adversaries upon the spikes of self-conviction. His quiet challenge entered their turbid minds and rankled like an arrow. What could they say to it? They stood for a moment looking down on the stooping form of this new teacher who perturbed them so much.

The nonplus was now all on their side. The more they thought of Christ's remark (uttered in the hearing of the on-looking people), the less they felt able to deal with it. At last with a contemptuous snort, in which baffled caste sought to preserve a dignity which it felt to be fatally wounded, the eldest of the priestly company made straight away from the spot, followed by the other members of it in the order of their age. The woman they left standing before Jesus, in the midst of the crowd. Such a case of moral discomfiture belongs only to divine operation. By a single brief remark, Jesus escapes a dilemma without quibble or compromise, and at the same time overwhelms his adversaries with defeat and confusion. There are those who would omit this narrative from John, as an interpolation. It is self-evidently part of the divine context. What if certain MSS. lack it? this is only evidence that if some one has not added, some have suppressed. It is easier to suppress than to add, and antipathy would easily lead a copyist to leave out something that seemed to him to go against the ordinary current of scriptural teaching, in an age when habitual mutilation of scripture text had evoked the censure of the Spirit of God (Rev. xxii. 18, 19). That this might appear to be such a passage, we can easily imagine when we realise that to a shallow copyist, Jesus might appear to be taking sides with vice against the constitutional defenders of virtue in the country.

The Pharisees having confessed defeat by retirement, Jesus, lifting himself from his stooping position, sees the woman standing in the position in which they had left her. "Woman," said he, "where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?" She said, "No man, Lord," and Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more." The Pharisees had power to condemn the woman; Jesus had none, in the same sense, but he had power in a higher sense, a sense soaring beyond all present and transient penalties. And this higher jurisdiction he boldly accepts, and acquits the woman—of having committed the offence? No, but of guilt in respect to it. Why this, seeing she was guilty? Because the ministry of Christ was a ministry of reconciliation through forgiveness, where sin was confessed and repented of in the scriptural sense—that is by repudiation and amendment. "Go and sin no more;" this is the universal condition of forgiveness, as proclaimed in the Scriptures.

The idea that a man can go on sinning and receive the divine favour is one of the fables of the apostasy. There is no more man-demoralising and God-dishonouring tradition among men than the Roman Catholic notion than by paying money to the priest, a man can get rid of his sins to date (and sometimes beyond). Nor is the Protestant doctrine much better that preaches the blood of Christ as a sort of spiritual benzine or stain-cleaner, by which sin can be blotted out by a single application, and any number of times, without hurting the fabric. The woman, doubtless, took the lesson to heart, and went her way.

Afterwards Jesus resumed his teaching to the crowd, and the Pharisees appear to have stolen back to listen. Listening led to debating. At all events we find them taking part in the conference between Jesus and the people, as the custom of

the Temple on the occasion of the feast allowed. Jesus made a statement that certainly challenged debate on the widest grounds. He said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Such a statement from an ordinary man in ordinary circumstances would not even be a debatable one. It would be a self-proclaimed evidence of insanity on the part of the utterer. But in the case of Christ, it could not be so dismissed. It stood related to many things favouring its truth. The speaker had "done many miracles," and was daily performing them—miracles of a class entirely out of the range of ordinary so-called miraculous performances: "works which none other man did," as Jesus defined them. How were these to be accounted for? They could not be ignored. They made the profoundest impression on the people, and through them on the leaders. His declaration, therefore, that he was the light of the world, coming as it did from a mouth distinguished by originality, independence, and truth, and purity, as no public teacher had ever been before, possessed a weightiness of character which they could not make sport of, and which to this day impresses the attentive and discerning listener.

The only thing they could do was to quibble. They laid hold of the legal maxim that no man could bear testimony in his own case. "Thou bearest record of thyself: thy testimony is not true." Jesus had to admit the self-testimony, but could not admit the untruth; because, though it might not be receivable unsupported in the practice of the law, a thing known to only one man would not be less true on account of there being no second man who could testify to it. Jesus knew the truth of what he was saying, and no one else did or could, except as a matter discerned from his testimony, confirmed by the many works of super-human power. "Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true: for I KNOW WHENCE I CAME and whither I go, Ye judge after the flesh." That is, not knowing anything of Christ beyond what they could see or hear of him as of any other man, they judged him by the rule applicable in the ordinary experience of flesh and blood, and made a great mistake in consequence; for though, to all appearance, Christ was an ordinary man and came as an ordinary man, in reality he came from above, in being directly generated by the Spirit of God, and he was God in their midst, in the full indwelling presence of that Spirit which is one with the boundless Father-Spirit, filling immensity.

They judged him, but he did not judge them, though his judgment would have been just. "I judge no man, and yet if I judge, my judgment is true, for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent me." This touched and exploded the legal quibble they had raised about the unreceivability of his testimony. "It is written in your law that the testimony of TWO men is true. I am one that bear witness of myself, and the Father that sent me (is the other that) beareth witness of me." Therefore, on their own showing, they ought to have believed. But men who have no concern for the discernment or the issues of truth, easily evade the result of their own admissions. They run off to a side issue.

“Where is thy Father?” flippantly asked these men. How could Jesus deal with such a question? He could only say, with angry earnestness, as he did, “Ye neither know me nor my Father: if ye had known me ye would have known my Father also.” They thought they knew Christ. They knew him after a manner. If they had known him according to what in reality he was in himself, they would have known God, from whom he proceeded, for no man can know Jesus in reality who does not know that he is the manifestation of the Creator of the Universe in flesh and blood for the establishment of the Creator’s name and glory in the earth we inhabit. Hence to know Christ scripturally is necessarily to know the Father also, for the two are inseparable. This is the sense of John’s remark in his 1st epistle (ii. 23), “Whosoever denieth the son, the same hath not the Father.”

This is the predicament of all classes of misbelievers. They think they know and highly compliment Jesus of Nazareth when they speak of him as a great moral reformer, or “the highest teacher of morality the world has ever seen.” In reality, they are just where these temple Pharisees were. They were able to recognise the good there was in Christ according to the superficial estimate of the natural mind. They could say when occasion served: “Master, we know that thou art true and carest not for the person of men, but teachest the way of God in truth.” Yet Christ repudiated their view of him altogether. “Ye neither know me nor my Father,” and in these words he condemns all modern views of him that come short of the truth—that he is God manifest in the flesh.

His words were naturally exasperating to the Jewish leaders, who were accustomed to the utmost deference at the hands of the people. They would have given way to their feelings and seized Christ with their own hands: but they were divinely restrained; “his hour was not yet come.” He therefore proceeded unmolested with remarks which must have been absolutely incomprehensible to the listeners, but on which his subsequent ascension throws the clearest light. “I go my way, and ye shall seek me and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come.” The time came when Christ, crucified and risen, was no more in their midst, and when the Jewish nation found itself helplessly sinking in the gloom and tempest of that long-foretold storm of wrath in which it disappeared from the earth.

Jerusalem, forty years afterwards, crammed with fugitives from a thousand towns and villages of the country: tortured with internal feuds: a prey to the depredations of the lawless elements of the population: without order or government: suffering from famine and bloodshed within, and the destructive assaults of the Romans without, had cause to bring to mind the quiet words which they scorned in the day of peace.

They were puzzled to understand him, or at least professed themselves so. “Will he kill himself?” said they. Where could he go where they could not reach him? He indicated the meaning of his allusion: “Ye are from beneath: I am from

ABOVE. Ye are of this world: I am not of this world ... If ye believe not that I AM HE, ye shall die in your sins" (Jno. viii. 24). Well, and who might he be? This was what they did not know, though he had asserted his character and identify often enough. Here was an opportunity of telling them plainly: but there are people with whom you can never take such an opportunity. They have no capacity to appreciate a rational explanation: they do not want to know the truth of a matter. They are in a chronic attitude of scorn. If you tell them the truth, they laugh. They furnish occasion for the advice of Solomon: "Speak not in the ears of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words." Such were the Pharisees who in the crowd were badgering Christ: so Christ did not answer them plainly. He put them off with a reference to what he had said before: "Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning." He, however, made allusion to a coming demonstration which might be useful to any of the bystanders who might have a heart for wisdom. "When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself, but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. He that sent me is with me. The Father hath not left me alone, for I do always those things that please Him."

These words must have been uttered with an earnest and plaintive emphasis; for they made a deep impression on many of the listeners who became disposed to think he must be the Messiah. He turned to this class with encouraging words, but did not have an encouraging reception. The way they received what he said showed how superficial was their apprehension, and how carnal their estimate of things. Jesus said to them, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed: and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." This hurt their dignity at once,—“We be Abraham’s seed,” said they: “and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, ye shall be made free?”

Ah, there was a deeper bondage than they knew anything of—the one great bondage from which Christ came to give deliverance—a bondage holding rich and poor, bond and free alike; a bondage more real than that in which any man can hold another, but the existence of which is not felt or perceived by those who restrict their view to the mortal relations of man to man; but which will at last be seen in its terrible reality by every one whose responsibility may permit him to see its awful issues in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus. Jesus gently indicated it in his response. “Whosoever,” said he, “committeth sin is the servant of sin: and the servant abideth not in the house for ever; but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

The argument is evidently founded on the status of the members of a household. Hired servants are not permanent: the son of the householder, on the contrary, remains while ten sets of servants may come and go. If the son of the householder, having abiding rights, confer those rights on one of the servants, that servant is no longer in his original position. Jesus, as the Son, proposes this benefit. The commission of sin had degraded even the descendants of Abraham

to the position of mere servants, having no rights, and only a momentary tenure of the Father's long suffering favour, for "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Christ, by the truth, offering the forgiveness of sins, offered freedom to the bond slaves of Abraham's race, few of whom realised the depth of the bondage in which they lived. They resented what seemed to them the patronising and insulting proposal. They considered that, as Abraham's seed, they were already free, and in no need of deliverance. They were willing to accept Jesus as the Messiah, but not as a Saviour to whom they were to be personally indebted in any sense, except as opening to them the higher privileges of their race. In this they evinced that total misconception of the relation of things which unfitted them for a freedom whose first condition of attainment was the frank recognition of their helpless position apart from it.

Jesus admitted their Abrahamic extraction but not their Abrahamic rights, which depended upon an Abrahamic character, "I know," said he, "that ye are Abraham's seed," but he denied they were Abraham's children. "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham." To be Abraham's descendants was a privilege, in so far as concerned the relations and possibilities to which it introduced them; but by itself, it was of no more value than descent from any other son of Adam. Abraham's selection was based upon character; and the position of his descendants would depend upon the same. "The flesh (by itself) profiteth nothing," as Jesus said: His interrogators were men of Abrahamic blood, but not of Abrahamic works. "Ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God. This did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father." Here was a new aspect of paternity, the introduction of which greatly offended them. Jesus admitted that as regards literal descent, Abraham was their father, but now he asserts they had another father as regarded the type of their character. They could not follow him here. They supposed he insinuated some taint in their racial extraction. "We be not born of fornication." They went farther, and claimed a higher fatherhood than even Abraham, of whom they boasted. "We have one Father, even God." Jesus said, "If God were your father, ye would love me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but He sent me." If neither God nor Abraham were their father, who was? Jesus spoke plainly. "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lust of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar and the father of it."

This is one of those unvarnished declarations of truth that galled the Jews beyond measure, and laid the foundations for that bitter antipathy shown by the Jews of all generations to the name of Jesus ever since. It belongs to a class of denunciations that distinguish Jesus from all other so-called teachers of moral truth. Superficially considered, it is a singular and anomalous fact that one who enjoyed a reputation for "meekness and gentleness," unapproached by any man that ever lived, should at the same time have been characterised by a severity of condemnation unknown to any other teacher except Moses and the prophets,



whom he entirely resembles in this. Looking below the surface, the anomaly disappears. Jesus was divine, and expressed the thoughts of God in the various situations that arose. Those thoughts are as often thoughts of severity as of gentleness. The whole Scriptures and the whole history of Israel and of man before Abraham's call attest this. "Our God is a consuming fire," in certain relations. He is severe towards all disobedience and rebellion, as illustrated by Adam's expulsion from Eden, the destruction of Noah's generation by water, the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah, the judgment on the Egyptians, the terrible retributions against God's own nation (concerning whom he says in Deut. xxxii. 22, "A fire is kindled in mine anger and shall burn unto the lowest hell.")

Because, therefore, Jesus spoke the words of God, he spoke with a superhuman vehemence against all that was displeasing to God, as occasion arose; and at the same time discoursed with an equally superhuman sweetness and gentleness when dealing with the humble class, to whom God himself said he would stoop—viz., such as were broken and contrite in heart and trembled at His word. There is no greater proof of the divinity of the Bible than this peculiarity, which extends through all its pages—its unsparing impartiality and stern truthfulness and disparagement of man, combined with a purity and sweetness of precept and promise that characterise no other work whatever. The Jewish nation condemned and killed all the prophets, and last of all the Lord Jesus, for this very reason, that these found fault with their ways instead of flattering them with smooth speeches. In all other nations, the public men please by complimentary speeches and rule by the self-complacence they produce. In God's nation only do we see the spectacle of the best of men uttering the bitterest of speeches and paying the penalty of their faithfulness with their lives in a long series of generations.

What Jesus meant by saying they were of their father the devil, was not, perhaps, quite clear to them. There is no indication of what their ideas of the subject of the devil were. They believed in Beelzebub, a mythical deity of the Philistines, and entertained various other traditions that made void the word; that they held the notion of the personal supernatural devil of orthodox religion is inconsistent with all accessible information as to their opinions. It matters not. It is Christ's view and not theirs that is important. He was given to personification and parable, as when he spake of mammon, the prince of this world, &c., and in this case he employed his own way of defining their spiritual pedigree. He spoke of the devil as a person. The orthodox devil would suit his language exactly, but Jesus spoke of the true devil—the devil of Bible history, and it is to this we must fit his allusion.

He refers to a "beginning," and to the birth or introduction of sin into the world, when the devil of his discourse performed the part of father to the he that prevailed. The Bible exhibits only one such history, and that is when the serpent in Eden expressly contradicted what God had said on the subject of the effect of Adam doing what he was forbidden to do. God said Adam would die; the serpent

said, "Ye shall not surely die." Eve believed the lie, and, under the power of this belief, enticed her husband to do what had been forbidden. Thus the he prevailed, and became established in the state of sin and death that prevailed in consequence; and the serpent became the father of liars in the sense in which Jubal is said (Gen. iv. 21) to be "the father of all such as handle the harp and the organ," and Jabal, "the father of all such as dwell in tents and have cattle." Thus the serpent is used as the symbol of the present evil world in its political constitution (Rev. xii. 3–9; xvii. 9–14), and is declared to be "the devil and satan" (Rev. xx. 2), from which we may understand how the constituted authorities, antagonising the truth in the first century, were said to be the devil (Rev. ii. 10), and the same in their antagonism to Paul, Satan (1 Thess. ii. 18).

Literally construed, Christ's words amounted to an allegation that the Jews who were opposing him belonged to the sinful stock of the world—mere flesh which passeth away—instead of having any real kinship to Abraham, in whom they made their boast. Their father was the serpent, the original enemy of God, and not God, whom they claimed, for if they had been God's children, they would have loved and submitted to the "first-born among many brethren." As he said, "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God." He could appeal to their knowledge as to whether he (Christ) were a sinner or no. "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" There was a powerful logical sequence in the question with which he followed this: "If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" But his words fell on unimpressible ears. "The heart of this people" was "hardened." Their rejoinder, that Christ must be mad, was indicative of their own state. "Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan (that is, a merely pretended Jew, having no connection with Abraham, the holder of the promises), and hast a demon?" Jesus could only deny the suggestion, and maintained that what they took for madness was his desire to honour the Father, with whom they had no sympathy. Nothing so readily appears madness to those who have no faith in God as a strong disposition to take God into account in every word and action.

The conversation was about to close when Jesus earnestly said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man keep my saying, he shall never see death." This was a declaration of truth without reference to the attitude of his hearers—a truth very precious to such as are able to receive it. The immediate hearers were unworthy of it. They found it only a crowning evidence of the insanity which they had long affected to suspect. "Now we know that thou hast a demon, Abraham is dead, and the prophets (are dead); and thou sayest, if a man keep my saying, he shall never taste of death. Art thou greater than our father Abraham ... Whom makest thou thyself?" Jesus admitted that if his declaration rested on his unsupported word, their incredulity was excusable. A man saying such things of himself without an exhibition of extraneous evidence of the truth of the things spoken would only give evidence of that lunacy which they imputed to him: but supported as he constantly was, by "works which none other man did," and which he himself disclaimed the power of performing, his statement was entitled to belief.

The honour he appeared to claim was not self-imposed. "If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me, of whom ye say that he is your God."

There was no confuting this argument. To this day it remains unanswerable. The powers exhibited by Christ have to be accounted for. They cannot be denied. They could not be his own, for when he was killed, they were still exerted on his behalf: he rose from the dead. Whose were they? Whose could they be but those of God, who had similarly interposed in Israel's midst many a time since the day he brought them out of Egypt by unexampled power? But Israel had shown they did not know God. It remained God's own accusation against them by the prophets, and that while they drew near to Him with their mouths, their hearts were far from Him. Jesus confirmed the accusation, "Ye have not known Him: but I know him, and if I should say I know Him not, I should be a liar like unto you." As for his implied supremacy over Abraham—the very idea of which so shocked the short-sighted conventional Jews—Jesus owned to it. "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad." "What?" indignantly exclaimed the Jews, rising to the climax of their long-gathering wrath, "Thou art not yet 50 years old: and hast thou seen Abraham?" This was a perversion of Christ's words. He did not say he had seen Abraham. He said Abraham had been gladdened by the prospect of his (Christ's) day. Nevertheless, Jesus feared not even to accept the imputed claim of contemporaneity with Abraham; for the Father was with him to speak directly when occasion required:—"Verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I am." This was too much for them. They took up stones and would have vented their indignation in personal violence had not Jesus "hid himself" and escaped from the temple unperceived.

## CHAPTER XLI.

### **The Blind Beggar Controversy.—The Pharisees and Resurrectional Responsibility.**

Jesus having left the temple in company with his disciples, they went together in the direction of the house of Martha and Mary, which was situate at Bethany, on the other side of the top of the Mount of Olives. On the way, a blind man attracted the notice of the disciples—probably sitting by the wayside begging. He appears to have been well-known. The disciples knew he had been blind from infancy, and that, in fact, he was born blind; and they put a question on the subject, which is supposed to favour the idea originating with the Egyptians, methodised by the Greeks, and generally disseminated throughout the world with the prevalence of the Greek language—the existence of souls in a disembodied and pre-embodied state: "Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Does this mean that the apostles thought the blind man lived before he was born? It looks a little like it, but it does not necessarily mean it. "This man"

must have meant the man of flesh and blood who sat there without sight. Even in the language of the highest spiritualists, a so-called “spirit” out of a body is never called a man.

But it may be asked, how could the blind man in that sense have sinned before he was born? Of course, he could not do anything before he existed. The question before the minds of the disciples would not take this shape. They would assume that he might have sinned in a special manner after he was born, and that the consequences had been visited upon him in advance by that divine wisdom which sees all things beforehand. There is nothing in the question of the disciples to exclude this view of their meaning. But suppose it were otherwise—supposing it were really a reflex of the current heathenish idea that men are eternal ghosts, travelling from body to body, and getting into the kind of body from time to time that their deserts call for, it would signify nothing in favour of its truth; for at this time the disciples were but poorly enlightened on many points, and liable to be infected with the traditions prevalent around them. We have found Jesus chiding them on more than one occasion for their childishness of apprehension; and it is expressly testified that “the Holy Spirit was not yet given” (John vii. 39). Hence, at this stage, it would be a mistake to attach to the unconfirmed words of the disciples that degree of authority which belonged to them when the Comforter came who was to guide them into all truth.

Whatever their idea may have been, Jesus gave it no countenance. The cause of the blindness was not in the man or his parents, “but that the works of God may be made manifest in him.” His sight had been withheld that the power of God in Christ might be shown in its restoration. This furnishes the philosophy of the existence of evil generally, which perplexes natural thinkers. While evil is the punishment of sin, it is also the occasion of the manifestation of the power and goodness of God in its removal, but this must be taken in the widest application to see its force. “The end of the matter” must be kept in view. This end is exhibited in the revealed purpose of God to send Christ again to consummate the work of which the foundation has been laid. When death is removed from the earth, and evil is banished from the experience of its immortal inhabitants, the mission of evil will be clear to every understanding in the joy and thanksgiving of the population. Such a blessed appreciation of the revelation of goodness to the Creator’s will and supremacy could not be reached without the sad story now being accomplished. The man who is not satisfied with this view of the matter will find no other, but must accept the darkness of agnosticism, which is a negation of many facts.

Jesus recognised in this man one of the appointed occasions of his “work.” “I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is yet day.” The man’s blindness and his being in the way might seem accidental; but it was otherwise. May we not take from this some guidance for our own lives? The circumstances we are related to, though ever so casual, may always be to us God’s opportunities—God’s tests—with reference to our actions, in which our judgment will be decided.

“The night cometh when no man can work.” Mortal opportunity cannot last always. The earth is always here and the population, but not individual men. Our days have a fixed number; every sunrise and sunset takes away one and brings on the “night” when no man can work. If Jesus applied this to himself, how much more we may take the application to ourselves. It is the apostolic exhortation to “redeem the time.”

Jesus then cures the blind man in the indirect way observed in the case of the blind man at Bethsaida. The remarks made in that case as to the indirectness of the miracle apply to this (see page 190), and need not be repeated. Returning from the pool of Siloam, he is in full possession of his sight. His neighbours, who had long known him as a blind way-side beggar, are struck at his now being able to see as well as any of them. They asked him how it came about, and he tells them. Where was this “man that is called Jesus” who had performed this wonderful cure? He did not know. The case is so extraordinary that his neighbours bring the man to the Pharisees. They also ask into the particulars, and receive the same information, with this addition, that the cure was performed by Jesus on the Sabbath day. Their shortsightedness was manifest in the comment they made: “This man is not of God because he keepeth not the Sabbath day.” Some of the bystanders were more penetrating. They said, “How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?” To do good on the Sabbath might not be sin: to perform a miracle was evidently divine. There was force in this, and a division of opinion was the result. The Pharisees were evidently in a quandary. They turned to the blind man himself who had been cured, and asked his opinion. “What sayest thou of him that hath opened thine eyes?” The man did not hesitate in the only verdict the facts admitted of: “He is a prophet.” But the Pharisees would not have it: they were invincible in their bias against a man who had wounded their pride by condemning their ways. Yet they were in a dilemma.

The contention that a miracle was beyond the powers of a sinner had made its impression. They therefore affected to question the fact of the miracle. “They did not believe that the man had been blind and received his sight.” The people of an opposite mind produced evidence. The parents of the man were called. Now, ye Pharisees, examine the witnesses. “Is this your son?” “Yes.” “Was he blind?” “Yes, he was born blind.” “How then doth he now see?” On this point the parents were non-committal. “The Jews had agreed already that if any man did confess that Jesus was the Christ, he should be put out of the Synagogue”—a serious affair in days when membership of the Synagogue was the basis of civil rights among the Jews. The parents were afraid of such a consequence; therefore, though they believed in their hearts, as any parent would have done, on the testimony of his own son, that their son’s sight had been restored by Jesus, they shielded themselves in their personal ignorance. “By what means he now seeth, we know not: or who hath opened his eyes, we know not. He is of age: ask him; he shall speak for himself.” This did not help the case. The Pharisees had already questioned the man, and had received an unpalatable answer. They thought it no use asking him again. So, with an air of superiority, they decided to

close the case with a paternal exhortation to the man: "Give God the praise: we know this man is a sinner:" cheap piety which we see so often exemplified in our own day, by which men with religious unction perform the most irreligious offences against the institutions, the Scriptures, and the servants of God. ("Praise God, but these men who serve him are evil: the Bible is to be taken with qualifications; the belief and obedience of the Gospel is an affair of bigotry.") The blind man had wit enough for the occasion: "Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not. One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."

This coming back upon a central fact is good when there is one to come back upon. It is the saving of many an important truth. In the matter of the Gospel, its divinity, its validity, its obligatoriness, its value—the central fact is the resurrection of Christ. Critics may gloss over a good deal; they cannot get rid of this. The evidence (and who in affairs of moment disregards the evidence?)—the evidence is such as to justify simple-minded, discerning men in saying, "One thing I know, if evidence proves anything, Christ rose from the dead, and this settles his case against all rival claims under the sun."

The logic of the blind man's remark was powerful, though indirect. It left the Pharisees no reasonable ground for rejoinder. So their temper broke, as always happens with their class in like circumstances. "They reviled him." Their vilification was mixed with just a trace of reasonable boast: "We are Moses' disciples: we know that God spake by Moses." So far, so good: God did speak by Moses; that is one of the inexpugnable facts of history, which all the polished criticism of the 18th and 19th centuries have left unscathed in the convictions of such as have acquainted themselves with the facts at first hand. But the Pharisees made a mistake in placing this fact against Christ. If they could but have seen it, the case stood the other way. The fact of God having spoken by Moses necessitated the wonderful fact foreshadowed by Moses, and now exhibited before their eyes, that God would place His words in the mouth of a man raised up among them "from their midst." But they did not see. They did not want to see. They were outwardly righteous before men, but were inwardly actuated by the basest motives; and towards Christ could feel nothing but the deadliest animosity, because of his exposure of their iniquity. They shut their eyes to the plainest indication of facts. "As for this fellow, we know not whence he is."

In this they laid themselves open to the crushing rejoinder with which an illiterate blind man possessed of common sense was able to overwhelm them. "Why, herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes! Now, we know that God heareth not sinners, but if any man be a worshipper of God and doeth His will, him He heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing." A vigorous and irresistible sally like this, from the mouth of one of the common people, and the least gifted of them, was probably prompted by a higher impulse than the cured blind man was

conscious of. It may have been of the order referred to by the Spirit in David in the words: "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise." The thought is warranted by the fact that it was Christ that was in question, and that the husbandmen of Israel's vineyard were in rebuke. God, who rebuked the madness of a prophet by the mouth of a dumb ass, would be likely to use in defence of His son the mouth of a man who had been cured by Christ. Such boldness and incisiveness were very unlikely to characterise a beggar's thoughts. At all events, it was too much for the lofty hypocrites; nothing but flouts and excommunications remained. "Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out."

The blind man does not himself appear to have understood who his benefactor was. He was not long left in ignorance. Jesus took early occasion to introduce himself to his notice. "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" The man answered, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?" The use of the term "Lord" on his part would merely be in courtesy, as when in our day we say "Master" or "Sir." Jesus avowed himself in that gentleness and majesty of style which was foreshadowed in the words of the Psalm: "Grace is poured into thy lips;" "Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee." The man's state of mind prepared him for the right reception of this revelation.

Some people do at once see and surrender to the claims of truth. Most people have reservations and endless dimnesses. They say "I cannot see that," and it is true. This man was of the lucid order of mind which sees with the clearness and accepts with the docility of childhood. "Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him." "Worshipped him!" Yes, why not? It is written, "Let all the angels of God worship him;" and John beheld them in vision comply. He "heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, saying with a loud voice, worthy is the Lamb that was slain." Shall we, with the puny, frost-bitten Unitarian ideas of this nineteenth century of darkness, refuse to bend the knee where angels spend themselves in celestial raptures? Nay, verily: "To Him every knee shall bow and every tongue confess to the glory of God the Father."

Christ accepted the worship, and spoke confidentially to the man as to the purpose for which he had come into the world at that time. His words were apparently mystical, yet literally true when understood. Their vagueness was due to the situation and the topic. "For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see, and that they which see might be made blind." "They which see not" was an allusion, in the first place, to what Christ had done to the blind man, but happily defined the larger class of blindness which is universal in the world, and for whose cure he sent an apostle forth in these words: "To whom (the Gentiles) now I send thee that thou mightest open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light."

"They which see" was a reference to the ruling class in Israel who had such a high opinion of their own discernment and enlightenment. The effect of Christ's

mission upon them was to bring about a retribution in a most curious and interesting way. They were blind self-seekers, but they posed before the nation as the very guides of the blind and children of light, as the hierarchical class does to the present day. But how was this to be made apparent? Not by merely proclaiming the fact, but by bringing them into contact with the very light of heaven which they pretended to follow—by showing them this light in its very nakedness—by bringing into their presence him who could truthfully say, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness.” If they were of the light they would come to this light and rejoice in it. Did they? The reverse. They shrank from it, as it is written, “Light is come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than the light, because their deeds were evil.”

The men therefore who said they saw, were convicted of blindness in their rejection of him who was the light, so that Jesus became a darkener of their eyes or a manifestor of their real state of blindness. It was part of his mission “that they which see might be made blind.” He thus became a stumbling stone and rock of offence. The disobedient stumbled at him and over him, and were broken. It was the most consummate exposure of spiritual sham that could have been devised, that by the highest manifestation of light the world has ever seen, the hypocritical professors of light should, by their own rejection of it, have become manifest as the children of darkness. Who knows by what similar test the clerical leaders of the present age may yet be manifested in their true character, when the time comes to say to Israel, “Arise, shine, for thy light is come?”

The Pharisees seem to have been in the neighbourhood of Christ and the cured blind man, when the short but pregnant conversation above recorded took place. “Some of the Pharisees,” we are told, heard these words.” They supposed Christ was referring to them and said, “Are we blind also?” The answer of Christ has important bearings beyond its application to the Pharisees: bearings, too it may be remarked, for which popular theology has no place. “If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, we see: therefore your sin remaineth.” What is this but the affirmation of the principle that people are not responsible where they are in a state of ignorance? It may be said that popular theology does recognise this. It recognises it in the only way that its fundamental dogma of human immortality admits of, and that is a way that results in the nullification of another, and, if possible, more important scriptural principle. It says that those who are in a state of darkness—such as the uncivilised “heathen,” the idiotic, the insane, or children dying in infancy having no sin, according to the words of Christ—are heirs of salvation and “go to heaven.”

This idea makes salvation come through the operation of darkness. It overthrows the doctrine that darkness excludes a man from the possibility of salvation. This doctrine is one of the most plainly enunciated in the Bible. Paul, speaking of “the Gentiles,” who “walk in the vanity of their mind,” says (Eph. iv. 18) they “have the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God THROUGH THE IGNORANCE THAT IS IN THEM, because of the blindness of their heart.” David



says that “the man that understandeth not is like the beasts that perish” (Psa. xlix. 20); and Solomon that “the man who wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead” (Prov. xxi. 16). With this agree the words in which Christ sent forth Paul to his gospel work:—“... the Gentiles to whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive the forgiveness of their sins and inheritance among all them that are sanctified through the faith that is in me” (Acts xxvi. 17–18).

There must be some grave flaw in a theory of things that necessitates a view so expressly in opposition to the first principles of Bible teaching—and not only so, but so self-manifestly absurd, and so demoralising; for if ignorance makes salvation certain, we have a new view of the moral universe and a new kind of incentive brought into action. Ignorance then becomes a desirable condition, and the true reforming effort would be to keep men undisturbed in their ignorance, and to keep knowledge at a distance as the most dangerous thing. Where is the flaw? It lies where few orthodox believers suspect it. It lies in the doctrine of the nature of man, which is the Greek doctrine—the pagan doctrine—not the Bible doctrine: the doctrine that man is an immortal being, and must sustain some relation of being everlasting.

This doctrine compels the other: for if a man must go to a hell of endless torment unless he attain a place among the blessed, every moral instinct revolts against the idea of sending the helplessly blind to that hell, and eagerly clutches at the relief suggested by the words of Christ, that the blind are not responsible. What is the escape from the difficulty? It lies in the fact that man is not an immortal being, but a mortal being—who, when he dies, must be the subject of resurrection if he is to live again. That there shall be such a resurrection is the characteristic doctrine of the Christian system, as affirmed by Christ (Jno. v. 28, 29), illustrated in his own case (1 Cor. xv. 20), and categorically proclaimed by Paul before the tribunal of Festus: “There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust” (Acts xxiv. 15).

That this resurrection is regulated by the principles of justice is what we should expect since “God is not unrighteous” (Heb. vi. 10), but “just and true in all His ways” (Rev. xv. 3). It is what is declared: that the dead shall be “judged according to their works” (Rev. xx. 12); that to whom much has been given, of them will much be required, and that things worthy of many stripes will be visited with many stripes, and things only calling for few stripes, with few stripes (Luke xii. 48). In the operation of such principles of justice, there is no room for the arraignment of the class spoken of by Christ. While sinners, as all men are, they “have no sin” for which they are answerable: their circumstances preclude responsibility. Therefore, there is no resurrection. This, which would follow, is expressly declared, “They shall never see light” (Psa. xlix. 19). “They are dead, they shall not live: deceased, they shall not rise” (Is. xxvi. 14). They are as though they had not been (Obad. 16).

There can be no demur to such a conclusion, except on the score of human feeling. It seems to be assumed that the fact of a man having lived establishes a right to live again. This has only to be examined to be found without any warrant, either from reason or scripture. Why should the right be limited to those who have lived? Why not extend it to those who would have lived if accident had not barred the way, as in the case of the children who would have been born if young emigrant fathers and mothers, say had not been drowned through shipwreck? As for the scriptures, they are very explicit—that man has no rights at all, and can work out none, apart from the interposition of God's own favour in the gospel: that all have sinned and come short of His glory (Rom. iii. 23); that death has passed on all men (Rom. v. 12); that all are by nature children of wrath, and without hope (Eph. ii. 2–12); that it is of the Lord's mercy we are not consumed (Lam. iii. 22).

Resurrection at all is a favour—not a tight, except God's right that the responsible may be brought to account. It is the divine point of view that settles this question. So long as men only look from the stand-point of human feeling, they must flounder in the mire. Let them realise that man is but a permitted form of the power of God (a power that assumes such endless forms throughout the universe), and they will cease to make human feeling a standard for the determination of questions in which eternal principles and the purpose of God are involved. They will see the perfect justice and the entire beneficence of the principles laid down by Christ—that where men are in a condition of helpless ignorance, though sinners and under the power of death, they are not held accountable for their sin as regards the punishment waiting responsible sinners at the resurrection, but pass away out of being. It is fitting that the unfit for being should cease to be, and that they should not be held responsible for helpless misfortune.

“But now ye (Pharisees) say, we see. Therefore your sin remaineth.” The Pharisees were in reputation for divine enlightenment because they made much profession in this direction. In reality also they were much related to the light, though not personally controlled by it. They were the descendants of Levi, and members of the tribe to which had been assigned the function of ministering the law of the Lord to the body of the nation (Mal. ii. 7). They had the law in their hands and devoted much time to a certain kind of acquaintance with it. In fact, as Jesus said on another occasion, they “sat in Moses' seat,” and taught what was right “to observe and do,” though giving no example that could be safely followed. Under all these circumstances, though blind as men are blind who are blinded by their own interests, Jesus affirmed they were responsible, and would one day be face to face with their responsibility under fearful circumstances: There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when “ye shall see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and ye yourselves thrust out” (Luke xiii. 28).

## CHAPTER XLII.

### The Charge of Blasphemy Against Christ—The Raising of Lazarus.

Jesus then proceeded to affirm the truth concerning himself, which the blind Pharisees, who said they saw, could not receive. He did so in parable, as was his custom in dealing with the Pharisees. It was the parable of the Good Shepherd, which we fully considered in chapters 28, 29, and 30. Though the Pharisees were unimpressed by his words, many who heard them were powerfully exercised. "These," said they, "are not the words of a madman." There was a strong division of opinion among them, just as there has been in all the world ever since, with regard to the whole claims and character of Christ.

The division was not so sharply drawn in the crowd who daily heard Christ in the precincts of the temple, nor was it so stable as it has since become. This is not to be wondered at. A man seeing and hearing Christ with his own eyes and ears was in a different position from the mere controversial reader of subsequent centuries. However adverse his judgment might be to Christ, what he saw and heard was liable at any moment to cause him to doubt his own unfriendly views. The listeners frequently wavered. Many of them were in a quandary.

On this occasion, after debating the matter energetically among themselves, they crowded around Christ as he walked in Solomon's porch, and made an attempt to bring him to such an avowal as would suit their limited conceptions and their impulsive feelings. "How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly?" His communications had been plain enough for the sincere type which he alone sought to attach to himself—the type, namely, described in the words, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." But they were not plain enough to suit the tastes or enter the understandings of those who had no concern for the will of God, but who were mere time and self-servers of the politician class. Such were these who now clamoured for something unequivocal in their sense. Their clamour, literally interpreted, meant that all Christ's previous declarations went for nothing, and that the evidences he had exhibited before their eyes had no meaning. What answer, therefore, could be more suitable than the one he made them: "I told you, and ye believed not. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me." As much as to say, "If ye sincerely wish to know me, consider what I have done." But they had no such wish. It was that their own purposes might be served—their own headstrong whims gratified—perhaps that their animosity to him might get a more legal ground of action than his words had yet afforded them, that they called upon him to make a definite avowal.

“Ye believe not,” he continued, “because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you.” This might seem harsh, did we not remember that Jesus “knew what was in man” (Jno. ii. 25), and that the whole attitude of his present questioners was that of obtuse resistance to manifest truth. “My sheep,” he went on to say, “hear my voice and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish.... No man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.” He had said that “no man was able to pluck his sheep out of his (Christ’s) hand. It was therefore a natural climax to his words to say, as he now said, “I and my Father are one.” At this the Jews were violently indignant. It is no wonder that “they took up stones to stone him.” There was no principle in their understanding of things on which a man could claim unity with the God of Israel. They were angered by the blasphemy, as they considered it. Jesus presently reminded them of a fact in their own Scriptures that might have yielded them a clue. But first he sought to soothe their asperity by a gentle question of reason: “Many good works have I shown you from my Father: for which of those works do ye stone me?” This was a powerful appeal, looking back upon all that Christ had done in their midst. But the anger of animosity cannot be pacified. A strong argument only angers it the more.

“For a good work we stone thee not.” Oh, dear, no; malice always works with such virtuous pleas. It never confessed to its true character yet. It is not in its nature to be able to do so. A man requires to be accessible to the motions of righteousness before he can detect the prevalence of the evil within himself. What was the cause of the stoning then? “Because that thou being a man makest thyself God.” The accusation was not true in the Trinitarian sense; for Jesus had said just before (Jno. x. 29), “My Father is greater than all;” and afterwards, “My Father is GREATER THAN I” (xiv. 28). “I can of my own self do nothing” (ver. 30). In what sense, then, did Jesus, being a man, make himself God? Christ’s own answer on this occasion shews. “Is it not written in your law, I said ye are gods? If he called them gods TO WHOM THE WORD OF GOD CAME (and the Scripture cannot be broken), say ye of him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest, because I said, I am the Son of God?” The argument of this may seem obscure at first. It will become clear with a little looking into.

The argument is founded on Psalm lxxxii. Recognising the character attributed by Christ to “the Scripture” of which it forms a part (“the Scripture cannot be broken”), we may feel encouraged in attempting to dive as deeply as possible into it, and to rest as implicitly as we may on all we may discover in it. The scope and bearing of the psalm seem evident at a glance. It is an address to the judges of Israel—those who sat in Moses’ seat, dispensing justice to the people. They are adjured to “defend the poor and fatherless: to do justice to the afflicted and needy” (verse 3) on the ground that God is among them, as set forth in the first verse: “God standeth in the congregation of the mighty: he judgeth among the gods,” that is, among the magistrates (rulers, powerful ones). As Jehoshaphat told them, “Ye judge not for man but for Yahweh, who is with you in the

judgment” ( 2 Chron. xix. 6). Instead, however, of judging justly, they judged for reward (i.e., in favour of those who could bribe them—Micah iii. 11). Therefore enquired the Spirit in David in the end verse of this psalm: “How long will ye judge unjustly, and except the persons of the wicked? ... All the foundations of the earth (the foundations of society in Israel) are out of course.” What is the finish of the matter? “I have said, ye are gods: (He so called them in the opening verse) and all of you children of the Most High: but ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes” (i.e., of the heathen). Was it to be then that justice should perish from the earth in the death of the unjust judges of Israel? This were a gloomy climax to God’s work in the earth. Oh, no. “Arise, O God: judge thou the earth: for THOU shalt inherit all nations.” The kingdom of God will come, and banish darkness from the earth in the brightness of the glory of God.

The feature of the psalm, as used by Christ, lies here, that the men who were placed to judge on behalf of God in the midst of Israel were “called gods.” It would not affect the argument founded by Christ on this, even if we could not see why they should be called gods; but there seems to be no difficulty even in this. They were gods by deputy; they stood for God to Israel, as the angels stood for God to them. Even Moses stood for God by God’s own appointment in his dealings with Pharaoh. “See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh; and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet” (Ex. vii. 1). He (Aaron) shall be to thee instead of a mouth, and thou shalt be to him instead of God” (Ex. iv. 16). On this principle, the occupants of the judgment-seat in Israel were “called gods.” To them “the word (or commandment or appointment) of God came” to this very effect, and, therefore, though they were men, it was no blasphemy to call them “gods.”

The argument of Christ from these facts was irresistible. Why should they think it blasphemy in him to claim to be God who had been “sanctified and sent forth into the world” as the very bearer of the Father’s name, the manifestor of the Father’s presence, and the instrument of the Father’s reconciliation, since the mortal representatives of God’s justice in Israel’s midst were “called God?” “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. v. 19). The Father dwelt in him bodily (Jno. xiv. 10; Col. ii. 9). Where was the blasphemy in those circumstances in that “being a man, he made himself God?” There was none except such as was created by a narrow and fossilized superstition on the subject.

Jesus grounded his appeal on reason: “If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me and I in Him.” There can be no true resistance to this appeal. Men may be impervious to it through ignorance or unbelief of “the works,” to which they become a prey through affinity for the voice of cavil which musically resounds in the modern air. But when men take to reading the Bible rather than reading about the Bible, “the works” loom before them as living verities which no amount of “learned” criticism can dispose of. They are facts in earth’s history which yield but one meaning to the ear of

reason, and that is the one that Jesus put upon them—that the things he did, and the things he said, could emanate from God only.

This is true of the Bible as a whole, and all the history to which it stands related; but especially of the personality of Christ, which stands invincibly written and engraved in the records of men. It cannot be removed; it cannot be blotted out. Men may close their eyes, but the thing is there. It cannot be explained away. Men may nurse their theories, but the theories do not stand. The facts are in fundamental contradiction to every theory that would deny God in Christ. The theories come and go with every age, like the changing clouds that sometimes hide the sun; but Christ, like the sun, remains, and imparts, even to the obscuring clouds the only bit of radiance they ever display. All modern beauty of character or intellect is borrowed from Christ if the development is only skilfully traced.

“Believe,” cried Christ, “that the Father is in me and I in Him” It was too much for the “blind Pharisees.” They made a final rush to get the person of Christ into their hands; but the time had not yet come. “He escaped out of their hand.” And escaping, he went away and tarried no more among them at that time in the open way he had done. He left the temple and left Jerusalem and left the district. Ascending by the Mount of Olives, he passed by the descending pathway on the other side towards the Dead Sea, and came to the Jordan, near where Elijah and Elisha crossed a thousand years before. In Elijah’s day there were no bridges, and the ferry that took David across some generations previously was either not working, or was not at that part of the river bank where they arrived, for he made a way across by smiting the waters with his mantle. In the days of Christ, the Jordan had been bridged by the Romans in more than one place. Mr. Oliphant has recently found and described the remains. It is probable that Christ crossed by one of these Roman bridges. “He went away again beyond Jordan unto the place where John at first baptised, and there he abode.”

How long he stayed is not stated—probably a few weeks. “Many resorted unto him,” which suggests a considerable time of stay. “And many believed on him there,” we are told; and we are also told the reason they gave for their belief. “John,” said they (in whom all men believed), “did no miracle, but all things that John spake of this man were true.” There was force in this. Jesus did many miracles, and John had virtually foretold he would. So there was a double ground of belief which weighed with those who were capable of yielding to conviction. Their allusion to the “all things that John said of this man,” gives a passing insight into the fact that John had said much more concerning Christ than is recorded. What is briefly recorded is direct enough, but this remark of the people would suggest that Christ had been much the theme of John’s remarks, and excludes the foolish suggestion of Renan that there was a degree of jealousy between John and Jesus.

When Jesus had been some time “beyond Jordan, at the place where John at the first baptised,” he received a message from Martha and Mary, who lived at

Bethany with their brother Lazarus—all of whom “Jesus loved.” The message was that Lazarus was dangerously ill. The fact that Jesus loved Lazarus was put forward in the message: “He whom thou lovest is sick,” and there was an implied request that Jesus should come at once. Jesus did not go at once. He remained two days after receiving the message, remarking to those about him, who perhaps wondered that he lingered so long from the sick bedside of him whom he loved, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.” Jesus, in fact, gave Lazarus time to die. Yet, “the sickness is not unto death.” How could he say this? Because by death he meant death to remain dead. Death that was to be interrupted in a few days, though real death for the moment, could only be thought of as a transient phase of disease. All language of description is necessarily more or less borrowed from final results. Especially is this so in the Scriptures, where an authorship is at work that foresees results. Thus the living are called dead, who are related to death as a finality. “Let the dead bury their dead” (Luke ix. 60). And thus, too, the dead are spoken of as living who are related to a futurity of everlasting life. “I am the God of Abraham ... God is the God of THE LIVING” (Mar. xii. 26, 27), “Look unto Abraham your father” (Isaiah li. 2). “We have passed from death unto life” (1 Jno. iii. 14).

After two days, Jesus proposed to his disciples that he and they should return to the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, from which they had fled from the menace of the Jews some weeks before. The disciples expressed their surprise: “Master, the Jews of late sought to stone thee, and goest thou thither again?” Christ’s answer was parabolic but instructive. “Are there not 12 hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not.” A man’s day is his appointed time. Some men have no appointed time, like the cattle; but where there is a time appointed, he is safe till it is past. His day has 12 hours. Christ was several times in danger, as we have seen, but it came to nothing “because his hour (12 o’clock) was not yet come.” So it is with all who belong to him. They cannot be prevailed against till their work is done. This gives peace in the presence of danger.

Evidently, the disciples did not know why Christ wished to “go into Judæa again.” He condescended to tell them. “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go that I may awake him out of sleep.” Again Jesus spoke in the language of figure to which he was prone. It is a more graphic style than the purely literal. There is life and colour in it. But the disciples thought it was literal. They said, “Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.” They thought Jesus “had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them PLAINLY, Lazarus is dead” (Jno. xi. 7–14).

He then added a remark suggesting some consideration: “I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe.” The meaning is evident. If he had been “there,” he would have been requested to cure Lazarus of his sickness, and he could not well have refused doing for Lazarus what he did for multitudes. And then Lazarus would not have died, and there would not have been that great opportunity for the display of God’s power which his death

afforded in his resurrection. But why was it necessary there should be such a display? Did not the disciples already believe? Yes, but multitudes did not, and he and the disciples had just recently come fresh from the violent opposition of the ruling classes at Jerusalem, in the presence of which (as the mind ceases to be impressed with what it sees repeatedly) it was just possible that the mere works of healing would lose their effect on the minds of the disciples, who looked up to the chief priests and scribes as the divinely-appointed leaders of the nation. Jesus, therefore was evidently desirous of a special opportunity of showing the power that was with him. The death of Lazarus afforded such a special opportunity; and therefore he was glad he was not with Lazarus in time to prevent its occurrence—glad “for your sakes.” To himself it mattered not at all; for he knew whence he came, what he was, and whither he went. But it mattered for the disciples, who only knew him and believed in him at this stage “by his works.”

The announcement of the death of Lazarus made a deep impression on the apostolic circle, and on Thomas especially, who exclaimed, “Lord, let us go, that we may die with him.” “Let us go unto him” said Jesus: and they went. It would be two or three days’ journey if they walked, which they probably did. Arrived at Bethany, which was about two miles from Jerusalem, overlooking the city from the hill of Olivet, Jesus and the disciples found that Lazarus had been four days dead and buried (for the Jews in Palestine bury quickly on account of the rapidity of decomposition from the heat of the country). He did not at once enter Bethany. He stayed at a place on the outskirts of the village, and sent word to Martha and Mary that he had arrived, probably wishing to avoid the embarrassment of a meeting in the presence of the promiscuous company that had come from Jerusalem to condole with them—a conventional and shallow class, that are prompt and glib and officious on such occasions.

As soon as Martha heard he had come, she went to him. Her first greeting was probably intended as a mild reproof of Christ’s delay in coming. It was a statement which Jesus well knew to be true, and the truth of which had in fact led him to put off a little: “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” We misread this if we suppose it to mean that the proximity of the person of Christ would necessarily prevent death. His power knows not the limitations of space. He could as easily have cured Lazarus from a distance of 50 miles as in the house, as was shewn in previous cases. It is not a question of presence, but of circumstances. If he had been present, he would have been importuned to heal Lazarus, and, as already remarked, he could not well have refused a favour he was in the habit of daily granting to all and sundry. The presence of Christ did not prevent thousands dying all around him wherever he was.

The object of his work was not at that time to suspend the just operation of the law of sin and death; but to show the power of God as a foundation for the work of the final removal of death by the full and leisurely operation of the law of faith and obedience in those who are called. The manifestation of the power gave the ground of faith. To show this power, he arrested disease and death in certain



cases. He will abolish them altogether at last, and it will be by means of his glorious presence: but there is a certain order to be observed in the process, and a certain principle in its effectuation. The order is defined by Paul: "Every man in his own order, (1) Christ the first fruits; (2) Afterwards those who are Christ's at his coming; (3) Then (at the end), when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father" (1 Cor. xv. 23). The principle he exhibits when he tells us in Heb. v. 9, that Christ is "the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him." Obedience requires time for trial. He gives his people this time in every generation: he gave it to them when upon earth himself (his mere being with them did not immortalise them); and in the kingdom, the multitudes who are to furnish the harvest for eternal life at the close of the kingdom will have the same scope during the kingdom. They will be saved from death by faith and obedience. Christ's being upon the earth will not suspend the law of sin and death before the time.

Let us not then make the mistake of some, and put upon Martha's words a meaning she never thought of, and which, as a matter of record, they were not intended to bear—a meaning which would destroy truth in other directions. She did not mean that so long as Christ was bodily near, death could not happen, but that had he been at Bethany a week sooner, he would have cured the sickness that killed Lazarus. She went further, "I know that even now whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." She knew he had raised the dead. It was natural for her to think of this power in connection with her dead brother. Christ's answer dealt with her suggestion generally: "Thy brother will rise again." This was not direct enough for her urgent desires. She recognised in it a mere abstract allusion to the coming resurrection of all the friends of God: "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." But Christ had intended a personal application. as we know from what he said to his disciples: "I go that I may awake him out of sleep." He sought to lead Martha to this personal application, in general words: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me (as Lazarus did) though he were dead (as Lazarus was), yet shall he live ... Believest thou this?"

Martha did not hesitate in the confident response which will come ardently from every heart enlightened in the facts of the case: "Yea, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." She did not, however, seem to catch Christ's purpose to raise Lazarus. The other words that he addressed to her—"He that liveth and believeth on me shall never die"—could only mean in view of the surroundings, what Paul afterwards taught by the word of the Lord (1 Cor. xv. 51; 1 Thess. iv. 15) viz.:—that believers who are alive when the moment comes for the completion of Christ's work will not die, but experience the instantaneous change from the corruptible to the incorruptible.

Jesus asked her to let Mary know of his arrival, so she broke off at this point, and went back to call her. Arrived at the house where the condolences were going on, Martha whispered in Mary's ear, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee!"

Instantly she rose and left the house without a word of explanation. The people who were with her thought she had gone to the grave, and they followed her, arriving closely after her where Christ was. She threw herself at his feet, and said what Martha had said before her, showing it was a communication that had passed between the sisters as a matter of strong belief: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." She wept as she knelt before him, and the Jews who came with her were similarly affected.

What could Jesus do in the presence of outpouring grief? There are times when nothing can be said—when the only comfort is to "weep with those who weep." This was such a moment. "Jesus groaned in the spirit, and was troubled." "JESUS WEPT." He asked the weeping company where they had laid Lazarus. The only answer was, "Lord, come and see." They then walked all together to the place. As they walked, some of the less affected Jews began to converse: they remarked upon Christ's evident love of Lazarus and said: "Could not this man which opened the eyes of the blind have caused even that this man should not have died?"

A kind of superficial common sense dictated this comment. But suppose a purpose is to be answered that common sense does not recognise, what then? This is the explanation of many things that so called common sense stumbles at. The people were right in one thing: Christ could have prevented the death of Lazarus. We have seen that he expressly allowed it for a purpose the people could not sympathise with. Their remark has a certain value. It shews they were cognisant of great works of power performed by Christ, for this was the basis of their present surmise. These works are of the first importance to us as the evidence of the divinity of the whole works of Christ. Consequently every testimony to their reality is to be appreciated.

In a short time, the sorrowful company arrive at a place where Lazarus had been interred. It was a cave, closed by a massive block of stone. The hills of Palestine abound to this day with such formations. Mr. Oliphant has explored hundreds of them, and has described many of them in a particular manner. The mechanical features are of no particular importance. Sufficient that this was the mode of sepulture, and that Lazarus had been thus buried for four days. Jesus asked that the stone might be removed. Martha seemed to doubt the propriety of this. "Lord, by this time he stinketh." She either had not yet divined the purpose of Jesus, or was aiming to draw from him a distinct intimation of it. Jesus chided her. "Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldst believe thou shouldst see the glory of God?" Then the stone having been removed, Jesus assumed the attitude of petition, and prayed in few and pregnant words:

"Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me." (He must have received some indication from on high that the resurrection of Lazarus would be permitted, in accordance with his desire.) And I knew that thou hearest me always." The Father and Jesus were so intimately in unison as to make the granting of Christ's

requests a certainty when not inconsistent with the Father's purpose. Why then did Jesus single out the case of Lazarus for special thanksgiving? His next words answer: "But because of the people that stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me." There are times when the effect on bystanders has to be considered. This was such a time when Christ, by mighty works, was laying the foundation of that faith in him which was hereafter to justify believers unto everlasting life. His words were intended to fix attention on what was about to happen as a proof that he was of God. His words were few and to the point. There is none of the studied and laboured formality of modern "devotion." Truth, sincerity, and modesty, regulating our relations to the Eternal Father, will find expression in a simple style.

Jesus then, with a loud voice, called upon "Lazarus" to "come forth." No mere loudness of voice will wake the dead in the absence of a concurrent operation of vitalising energy directed to the result desired. This was what was at work with Christ "God, by him," as Peter expressed it on the day of Pentecost, "did" all the works he performed. This energy directed by volition to a specific end, can accomplish anything. It made heaven and earth in the beginning: and it was an easy matter for it to concentrate on the lifeless clay of Lazarus, and restore the chemical and functional conditions that produce individual life. It was the work of a moment. Lazarus awoke. It was no magic. As an effect of power appropriately directed, it was as natural as the death of Lazarus. He found himself alive and better, as the effect of an unusual operation of the laws of health; and he naturally did not wish to remain in the grave in which he found he had been unconsciously deposited. "He came forth." He was in his grave clothes, of course. His very face was tied up in the napkin put upon the corpse. "Loose him," said Jesus, "and let him go"—sensible words, in response to which we may be sure sensible and loving hands were promptly at work. The company returned from the grave in a very different mood from that in which they had come to it. Many who had come to comfort Martha and Mary went away believing on Jesus. Some, of a malignant mind, "went their ways to the Pharisees and told them what things Jesus had done."

## **CHAPTER XLIII.**

### **Departure from Jerusalem—Interview with the Seventy.**

When the chief priests and Pharisees heard the report of the raising of Lazarus, and of the deep impression it had made on the people, they were stirred to an unpleasant degree. They saw in it a grave political danger, calling for measures of counteraction. They hastily called a meeting of the council to consider the matter. They argued that if Christ were allowed to go on as he had been doing, the conviction of his Messiahship would take such hold on the populace that

there would be an attempt to throw off the Roman yoke, which could only end in the destruction of the State. "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."

In this they showed themselves mere politicians—a class of men sharp enough to discern the probable effects of events on the motives and actions of men, but too shallow and faithless to be influenced by the diviner bearing of matters. The measure they resolved on was the resolution of mere politicians—dictated partly by regard for the public safety as affecting their own, but much more powerfully, though perhaps unconsciously, inspired by the hatred excited by Christ's condemnation of their ways. They resolved on the death of Christ. "From that day forth" it was the object of their policy to bring this about. Of course, they put a virtuous complexion on the foul resolve. "It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."

So spoke the high priest Caiaphas, who afterwards sat on the Bench to give judicial sanction to the murder. There was a certain truth in the utterance, because there was a divine purpose in the event, as John notices. Nay, John goes further and attributes the saying itself to the Holy Spirit: "This spake he not of himself, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation, and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (Jno. xi. 51, 52).

It is impossible rightly to judge of the events in Christ's life without taking its divine purpose into account. Those who try to interpret it by the ordinary rules of human experience are sure to stumble and bungle. It was not within those ordinary rules that a man should die for others at the hands of his own enemies, and yet with power to escape their malice if he had so chosen. This was Christ's case. As he said, "No man taketh it (my life) from me; but I lay it down of myself" (x. 18). He suffered himself to be taken when he could have repelled all the efforts of his destroyers; and it was not within those ordinary rules that such submission should be a thing directly required of God: "This commandment I have received of my Father." To judge of the death of Christ apart from this is to ignore the principal ingredient—the leading "factor" in the case. To judge it so, is not to judge but to violate it. It must be judged as a whole—not in parts: and this judgment of it as a whole requires that we recognise what Peter and the other apostles afterwards testified by the Spirit: that the Jewish rulers destroying Christ carried out a divine pre-determination (Acts iv. 28). "Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts ii. 23). "And now brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers: but those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled" (iii. 18). "The people of Israel were gathered together for to do **WHATSOEVER THY HAND AND THY COUNSEL DETERMINED BEFORE TO BE DONE**" (iv. 27, 28).

A part of the case is that the Jewish rulers plotted against him, arrested him, condemned and delivered him over to Roman executioners; another part of it is that in all this God worked by them to bring about His own wise purpose. The two parts were interfused though distinct. The Jews were filled with malice and intended evil: yet God used their feelings and their actions to accomplish His own plan. The glory of the plan is not to them, though God accomplished it by them. For the wickedness of their actions they are responsible, though God used that wickedness to work out His own righteousness.

Men who merely look on nature cannot, or affect that they cannot, understand how this can be, and in their folly they blaspheme. Men who realise that nature exists in God, and is but the expression of His intelligence and power, and subject to His control, have no difficulty in recognising divine and human forces both working in the same action. They can understand how Caiphas thought he gave utterance to his own thought as a mere politician when he counselled the death of Christ to avert the destruction of the nation, while he was actually moved by the Holy Spirit to adumbrate the divine purpose in the tragedy the Jews were plotting to bring about. The fact that the Holy Spirit should use such a man at such a time loses its apparent difficulty when we remember that as high priest, he was the official head and mouth of the divine system of Moses, and the personal instrument by which the great sacrifice typified by all the sacrifices of that system was about to be brought about.

Jesus knowing the decision of the council to put him to death, again left Jerusalem, and departed with his disciples to the country, staying for a while near Baal-hazor at a small city called Ephraim (Jno. xi. 54). If we were to be guided by the appearance of things in John's narrative, we should conclude that his stay here was of brief duration, and that he returned from here to Jerusalem to keep the last Passover. But we must not be misled by appearances. John's narrative was written when the others had been for a long time in the hands of believers throughout the world; and though strictly chronological in the order of its narration, it was not intended to give an account of all that Jesus said and did, as John expressly says at the close of his narrative (chap. xxi. 25). We must therefore make room at the indicated breaks for the further matters recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. There appears to be such a break at this point. It is not expressly indicated, but there is room for it, and, therefore, the other narratives requiring it, we must avail ourselves of it.

John proceeds to speak generally of the passover being nigh at hand in such a way as to constitute what he says a prologue to what follows, and not as a connecting link with what goes before (xi. 55). "And the Jews' Passover was nigh at hand; and many went up from the country to Jerusalem," &c. The commencing of a new narrative, or new passage in a narrative, by the word "and" is a common peculiarity throughout the scriptures, as if to say "In addition to what is written before," rather than to say "and next in order happened this." Illustrations of this will be found in the opening verse of Luke iv. v. vi. viii. xi. xvi., &c., &c., and many

other places. It is, therefore, not taking an unwarrantable liberty to read into the space between verses 54 and 55 of John xi., whatever appears by the other evangelists to have occurred in the interval. Therefore, here we depart a while from the narrative of John, and return to the guidance of Luke and the other writers.

Here we must place the return of the seventy whom Jesus had appointed in addition to the twelve apostles to go “two and two before his face into every city and place whither he himself would come” (Luke x. 1). They returned to him “with joy,” reporting the successful invocation of his name in all cases of disease, even to the dispossession of the demonised (Luke x. 17). Their report was a satisfaction to Christ. His response was brief and characteristic. “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven”—beheld in vision, as a matter of prospect, the complete dethronement of the power of the Adversary in every form—for Satan merely signifies the Adversary. It was as if Jesus had said, “My name has prevailed at your hands on a small scale. The time is coming when all evil will disappear by the same power. The work has already begun.” His allusion to this was an encouragement to the seventy who had returned from an arduous journey.

He further comforted the laborious seventy by saying, “Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” This was in allusion to the further gift with which they should be armed on his departure—which came to pass fifty days after his resurrection, when the Holy Spirit came with power on the day of Pentecost, Its power in the direction indicated by Christ was illustrated in the case of Paul, on whom a venomous beast fastened, in the island of Malta, after his shipwreck, and which he shook off without harm (Acts xxviii. 5). The possession of such a power, and the power of controlling disease, would naturally be a source of satisfaction to any man. Jesus warned them against holding it in this spirit. “In this rejoice not ... but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

This is another of the constantly recurring indications of the divine nature of the work of Christ. Who but such as he said he was, and showed himself to be, would have propounded such a cause of personal gladness? It is according to man to rejoice in present power: it is according to God only to forbid such joy, and to invite gladness for a reason that is in God's control only. Nevertheless, the triumphant operation of divine power upon earth was a satisfaction to Christ as well; for Luke adds: “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said ‘I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.’” He had said this on an earlier occasion, recorded by Matthew. Doubtless, many of the things he said were said more than once, and repeated on separate occasions in different connections, as happens often among men now This would account for some of the so-called “discrepancies” which so easily stumble certain kinds of minds.

Soon after the interview referred to, between Christ and the returned-seventy, “a certain lawyer stood up and tempted him.” The lawyers were a class for whom Christ had no regard, and of whom he spoke not only slightly, but in terms of severe condemnation more than once, on the ground that they were what the legal profession to this day is liable to make men—indifferent to the interests of others: “binding on men’s shoulders burdens grievous to be borne, which they would not move their little finger to ease.” The “certain lawyer” in this case probably shared the soreness felt by the profession in general at Christ’s unmeasured condemnations. The question he employed in “tempting him” was apparently of the most innocent description: “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” How could such a question be a “tempting” of Christ? We may realise this when we remember that a lawyer’s business was to stand up for the law and to bring punishment on those who should treasonably speak against it. The lawyer evidently expected that Christ would speak against the law, and his question was a trap to lead Christ to do so. In view of this, how masterly was Christ’s answer: “What is written in the law? How readest thou?” The lawyer answered by a quotation from the law. Jesus said, “Thou hast answered right. This do and thou shalt live.”

In what way was Christ able to make such an answer in view of the truth afterwards proclaimed, that “by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal. ii. 16), and that any man “justified by the law is fallen from grace?” (Gal. v. 4). We may understand if we consider the part of the law quoted by the lawyer: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy strength, and with all thy soul, and thy neighbour as thyself.” Any man in true subjection to these precepts would be sure to submit to every further development of the will of God, and therefore to the reception of Christ as “the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” (Rom. x. 4). Submission to God would mean submission to Christ, who came from God. The greater includes the less. Christ’s answer was therefore complete, while at the same time it was a masterly evasion of the trap laid for him by the lawyer. The lawyer did not like to be foiled. Willing to justify himself, he said unto Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” Christ’s answer was the parable of the good Samaritan, which we considered in ch. xxviii. It was the most telling rejoinder that could have been made to a lawyer, who is generally the last man to put himself out of the way in any attempt to go to the rescue of a stranger that has fallen among thieves.

On another occasion (Matt. xix. 16), Christ went further on the subject of eternal life, in answer to a similar question put to him by a “young man” who was rich, and of whom, it is said, that Jesus, “beholding him, loved him.” This was not a tempting-lawyer, but a young man of some sincerity and earnestness of character. The question was nearly the same, but the answer, in its form, a little different. This young man came “running, and knelt.” It was when “Jesus had gone forth into the way”—evidently when he had gone out for a walk or started on a journey—the kneeling young man said, “Good master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” Jesus first found fault with his mode of address.

“Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God.” Was not Jesus good then? Yes, but not in the sense intended by the young man. The young man evidently regarded Jesus as a teacher in the sense in which the Rabbis were regarded as teachers, and in which the poets and philosophers of Greece were regarded as teachers, and the “great and good men” so-called of our own day—men popularly supposed to have light and good in them as an inherent attribute. Jesus disowned the application in this sense.

He maintained that in the sense intended by the populace, no one was good but God. With him only is goodness an essential, an inherent attribute. Any good that man has, comes from without, as a matter of communication from God directly, as in the case of Adam’s inspiration, or indirectly, as in the case of the modifying influence exerted by the Bible. Man left to his unaided resources develops no goodness, as in the case of a human being brought up in solitude, or a nation having no contact with the civilisation that has resulted from divine interposition in the earth’s affairs. He is naturally destitute of knowledge, and his instinctive impulses, in the absence of knowledge, turn to evil. Thus the statement of Paul is experimentally and scientifically true, that “in the flesh dwelleth no good thing.” The young man, in calling Jesus “good master,” was giving expression to the common fallacy that goodness is a thing innate with man. Therefore Jesus refused the apparent compliment, and put the stern fact in the foreground that “there is none good but one, that is God.” In this Jesus differed from all human teachers, past or present. In this the Bible differs from all books. Human teachers and human books all deify human nature as a good thing. Universal experience proves that goodness is only a potentiality with man depending upon outside supply for development. Universal experience, therefore, proves Christ and the Bible true on the very point where they are supposed by modern ideas to be behind.

Jesus then dealt with the young man’s question on the subject of eternal life. “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” The young man said, “Which?” Jesus said: “Thou knowest the commandments: do not commit adultery; do not kill; do not steal; do not bear false witness; defraud not; honour thy father and thy mother; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” The young man answered, “Master (he omitted the good this time), all these things have I observed from my youth.” If this was a true testimony, then the young man, according to Christ’s answer, was an heir of life eternal, upon which there would seem to arise a conflict between the teaching of Christ and the statement of Paul: that the law of Moses could not give life (Rom. vii. 10; Gal. iii. 21). The apparent conflict vanishes when we realise that other teaching of Paul (Rom. viii. 3); that the inefficiency of the law in this respect was due to the inability of human nature to render to it the perfect obedience required. It was “weak through the flesh.” It was truly “ordained to life,” as Paul says and as Jesus recognised; but all Israel found it, like Paul, “to be unto death,” because it pronounced a curse upon every one continuing not in all things written therein. Its blessing was upon perfect obedience, and none were able to render this in the sense of embracing all



particulars. Christ only exhibited this ability; and “by one man’s obedience” many are made righteous, in being forgiven and received for his sake. He is “the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” (Rom. x. 4).

Jesus did not enter into these explanations with the young man. They would have been futile of any effect upon his unripe understanding. He adopted a course that convicted the young man of fatal shortcoming upon his own principles. No doubt he might have taken the ground that the young man had often failed in his obedience of the commandments, which in the main he had tried to keep “from his youth up,” for the testimony of the scriptures is true, that “there liveth not a man upon the earth that sinneth not.” But he might not so easily have brought this home to the young man’s conviction; so he tried him on the spot, by using the authority the Father had given him, to deliver to him a commandment for his special obedience: “One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me.” The young man “had great possessions,” and he shrank from this command. He went away sorrowful. He desired to be in the right and to inherit eternal life; but he could not possibly part with his possessions, though directly commanded. Thus he was shown to be incapable of the perfect obedience which he boasted, and went away condemned on his own grounds.

Christ has not required believers in general to part with their possessions. He required it of this young man because the case called for it, and because with Christ personally on the earth to be followed as a head and Master, it was reasonable. It is inapplicable to our time, though the Roman Catholic church, among its many enormities, has not scrupled to make use of this to fleece its wealthy votaries of their substance for the benefit of lazy and sensuous priests. What Christ requires of believers in general in his absence is to be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet. iv. 10), and the rich among them particularly are enjoined “to be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come” (1 Tim. vi. 17).

In most cases, this is as hard a test as the command to sell all was to the young man. The rich, as a rule, have gluey fingers. Jesus remarked as the young man retired, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God. A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.” The disciples were astonished at these expressions. They seemed to think they shut off all hope for anyone that had anything. Jesus repeated his remark in a modified form, that his meaning might be quiet apparent: “Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God.” Still he added, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom.” This seemed an extreme saying which, however, experience has shown to be true. As a general rule, rich people are so satisfied with themselves, and so full of their own schemes, as to be incapable of complying with the requirements of the

gospel. Their minds are so pre-occupied with human things that the way is barred against the entrance of those that are divine.

But there are exceptions. There were exceptions in the days of Jesus. Some of the most useful disciples were rich, to wit: Zaccheus, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, Chuza, wife of Herod's steward, and other examples. Jesus intimated that there would be a multitude of exceptions by the power of God: "To men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible." That is, in ordinary circumstances, riches form an unconquerable impediment to salvation; but God would show them the destruction of that impediment in the submission of hundreds of rich men to the self-sacrificing claims of the service of Christ. And he did. When his power was shown in the effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and in the miraculous manifestations that followed, we read that as a result, "as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold and laid them down at the apostles' feet" (Acts iv. 34, 35).

Then Peter, with his usual impulsive readiness, sought to draw a personal application to themselves from the things Jesus had been saying. The rich young man had gone away sorrowful when asked to leave all and follow Christ; so had it not been with the twelve: "Behold, we have forsaken all and have followed thee: what shall we have therefore?" The answer of Christ is of great importance as specifically defining the practical form of the recompense. Paul says that a "great recompense of reward" awaits the course of that faith which is the "confidence of things hoped for" (Heb. x. 35; xi. 1). Here Jesus indicates what it consists of in the case of the twelve disciples: "Verily, I say unto you, that ye who have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall SIT ON TWELVE THRONES judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

On a later occasion, Jesus plainly stated when this "sitting on the throne of his glory" should be an actual fact: "WHEN the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, THEN shall he sit on the throne of his glory" (Matt. xxv. 31). In view of this, there is no room for doubt as to the meaning of Christ's words. They amount to an assurance that at his return from heaven, to which he departed 40 days after his resurrection, he will associate the 12 apostles with himself in the kingly work that will be his to do at the regeneration—"the restitution of all things" spoken of by the prophets (Acts iii. 20)—the restoration of the kingdom again to Israel (Acts i. 6)—when sitting on the throne of David, "he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (Luke i. 32).

Popular theology provides no place for this divinely promised element of the great salvation. Though in this particular form the promise is limited to the apostles, it indicates the nature of the kingdom to be possessed by all the saints; for the salvation to be given to them is styled a "common salvation" (Jude 3)—a

salvation common to them all, differing only in position and degree. All “reign with Christ” (Rev. xx 4); but some reign near him, as in the case of the apostles and the fathers; and some hold jurisdiction over ten cities, while some have authority over five. They all inherit one kingdom (Matt. xxv. 24; Luke xii. 32), but occupy positions differing in glory—“every man according to his works” (Rev. ii. 23; xxii. 12). It is the kingdom of Israel reestablished with the Holy Land (Zech. ii. 12), as the centre of that new system of things (Jer. iii. 17; Isaiah lxxv. 18), which will diffuse the promised universal blessedness among men—all nations blessed in Abraham and his seed (Gen. xii. 2, 3); “the glory of God filling the earth as the waters cover the sea” (Num. xiv. 21; Hab. ii. 14)—the God of heaven having set up his kingdom, which shall break in pieces and consume all other kingdoms, and itself shall stand for ever (Dan. ii. 44).

Jesus added something to the kingdom-promise. The question put by Peter related to what the twelve had done, who had “left all.” The question was “What shall WE have?” Jesus answered the question in its ultimate sense first, and then makes an addition of a proximate bearing, something about “now in this time;” and that was this: “Every one that hath forsaken houses or brethren or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my name’s sake shall receive an hundredfold, now in this time houses and brethren and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions, and in the world to come eternal life.” Those who witnessed what came after the day of Pentecost saw the fulfilment of this. Houses and lands by the score were placed at the disposal of the apostles. Even “a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts vi. 7). Multitudes of fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters, &c., were “added to the Lord” (Acts v. 14); and bestowing their property on them, clustered round the apostles with an ardour of affection rarely exhibited among men (Acts iv. 32–35). But this tide of favour was “with persecutions.” The authorities interposed and tried to stamp out the newborn faith. The effort was vain: “When they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they they might punish them because of the people, for all men glorified God for that which was done” (Acts iv. 21). Though futile, the persecutions continued without intermission. With the advance of time there came a great change, but still in the first instance, Christ’s words were fulfilled to the very letter.

What Jesus had said about the apostles sharing the kingdom with him at his coming, naturally impressed their minds. James and John, set on by an ambitious mother, appear to have been more exercised than the others, and exercised in a wrong way. Along with her, they privately applied to Christ in their own special interest. The mother, “worshipping him,” “desired a certain thing of him.” The obsequious, anxious, ambitious woman, waiting Christ’s invitation: “What wilt thou?” ventured on a large request: “Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.” The sons themselves joined in the proposal. It is beside the mark to condemn the request as a carnal misconception of the nature of the kingdom of Christ. Christ did not so treat it. It was a carnal request growing out of his own promise. It was

wrong to desire preeminence; it was not wrong to desire to reign with him in his kingdom. This distinction is indicated in Christ's reply. He condemned the spirit of the request: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentile exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But, it shall not be so among you. But whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant, even as the Son of Man (who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many).

While condemning the spirit of the request, he did not condemn the idea of the kingdom on which the request was based. On the contrary, he sanctioned the idea in saying: "To sit on my right hand and my left is not mine to give, but to them for whom it is prepared." He indicated the principle upon which this highest of all positions would be allotted in the very first words with which he received the request: "Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of; and be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with?" As much as to say, "The place next me in glory can only be earned by filling the place next me in suffering." As Paul says, "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (1 Cor. iii. 8); and Jesus himself: "I will give to everyone of you according as your work shall be" (Rev. xxii. 12).

However much men may scoff at the idea, it is the simple truth, and the central promise of the Gospel that "if we suffer him we shall reign with him: if we deny him, he will deny us" (2 Tim. ii. 12). James and John at this time were young untutored men, not yet in that subjection to the mind of the Spirit which brings self abasement, and that exaltation of God and our neighbour as the ruling mental habit. Their request was the carnal mis-appreciation of a divine promise and naturally excited the indignation of their fellow-apostles. But that misconception in no way interferes with the promise itself, which, like the mercy of God out of which it springs, "endureth for ever."

## **CHAPTER XLIV.**

### **Martha and Mary—the Children—How to Pray—At Dinner with the Pharisees.**

We next have a peep into Mary's house—the Mary who lived with Martha and her brother Lazarus. The place, the time, the social status are immaterial particulars. The absorbing fact is that Christ was in the house as a guest. We are naturally alert to watch his deportment in that character, and to enter into his estimate of domestic matters so far as his recorded words allow. They are brief, but very pregnant. The picture is transient, but distinct. Jesus is seated (or more correctly, recumbent) in the reclining posture that is prevalent in the East to the present day. Mary is seated on the lounge, close to his feet. She is listening to

“his word.” Martha is bustling about, attending to household matters—probably in preparation of the coming meal. She wants Mary’s help, but Mary is intent on what Christ is saying, and shows no signs of moving. Martha tries to get her attention, but in vain. At last Martha makes bold to break in: “Lord dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her, therefore, that she help me.” Christ’s answer was a rebuff: “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part that shall not be taken away from her.”

There have been many comments on this brief domestic incident, and various views indulged in. People have taken Martha’s part or Mary’s part according to their predispositions and affinities. Some have said that Martha’s request was only reasonable, and that Mary should have chosen another time for listening to Christ than just the moment when her services were wanted for housework. Others have said that Martha was a worldly woman, and was guilty of sacrilege in obtruding household affairs upon the attention of one absorbed in the words of Christ. Those who sympathise with Martha as a practical, sensible serving woman, think she was severely dealt with. Or, if afraid to impute injustice to Christ, they explain away the force of his words by suggesting that what he meant was that Martha was getting ready too many dishes, and that only one dish was needful. Those who take strong sides with Mary consider that Martha’s salvation was placed in doubt by the words of Christ, and that, in fact, Christ meant to discourage domestic industry, and to countenance even slovenliness and neglect in things pertaining to this life.

There seems no occasion for any of these extremes. Christ’s life was a teaching life. It was his mission for three years and a half to manifest the mind of God on the various things that go to make up human life, and to use circumstances as they arose to that end. The domestic circumstance before us was not too insignificant to be employed in that way. It stood related to the most common form of slavery to which people subject themselves from want of enlightenment “Cumbered about much serving,” is the peculiarity which the narrative notes about Martha; and this has always been the bane of whole classes of otherwise sensible people. It was, therefore, a matter which it was natural that Jesus should bring under his reprehension when a suitable opportunity arose. He seizes this opportunity.

He is a passing visitor. He is to be but a short time under the roof. Mary shows her appreciation of the occasion by giving her fixed attention to what Christ had to say, even to the neglect for the moment of the little ways of the household. This was reasonable in the circumstances. Martha does not show the same discernment. She is interested in the circumstance of Christ’s presence, but it is not the same kind of interest. It is a social interest—a ceremonial interest—in which she, Martha, as hostess, will divide the honours with Christ, the guest, by a lavish display of hospitality, and a considerable fussiness of attention. Mary’s interest was a spiritual interest—an interest in what Christ had to say of the

Father's work and purpose by Him, rather than an interest in his visit as reflecting honour upon their household. The latter was the character of Martha's interest. Had Martha let well alone, her service would have been accepted at what it was worth—not so fragrant as Mary's, still acceptable as the best she could offer. But she challenged criticism by her interruption. And Jesus did not spare: "Thou art careful and troubled about many things"—that is, needlessly careful, needlessly troubled: much less would do in that line of things.

And is it not so with the Martha class all over the world? Their lives are eaten up with attention to the mere trivialities of life,—a little of which is good in its place, but much of which obstructs the action of the understanding and taste in higher directions. A woman whose house is her shrine is good for nothing in the higher relations of existence. Her mind is narrowed and lowered and deteriorated and rendered insipid by constant action upon petty objects. Cooking and dressmaking and music and etiquette are all very well as adjuncts: but without something else, the higher nature starves. If she would give herself time and occasion for the contemplation and application of the higher principles underlying life—our relation to God and His law—our relation to man and our duties—her mind would have opportunity to expand to the beauty of her original type. A woman cannot be noble whose attention is confined to domesticities, though a due amount of attention to these is part of true nobility; and a woman who is not noble is no companion to the sons or daughters of God who will all be assorted on the principle of affinities around their living head by and bye.

Mary is the type of the right class. Christ's description of her gives the cue: "She hath chosen that good thing that shall not be taken away." Discernment and decision are implied in this: an eye to see what is good, and a will to choose it. The eye is the deficient part with most people—both man and woman. They see only that which is proximately visible. The others see beyond the appearances of the day: As Paul expresses it, "We look not at the things which are seen," which are but for a moment. They look beyond to things which, though for the moment not seen, are the coming realities and not phantoms—not imaginations—but facts as substantial as anything we now stand related to, but much more glorious, and destined to abide when they once arrive. God has promised them, and, therefore, men and women of the Mary class "choose them," at his invitation, and are characterised by a strong and irrepressible interest in them now while they are matters of promise. They form "that good thing, that shall not be taken away." All other things are destined to be taken away: the fashion, the social prestige, the fine establishments, possessions of every description. The Martha's, therefore, make a mistake in being troubled so much about them. A little less attention and care would do.

"One thing is (absolutely) needful"—indispensable; and this is the one thing that almost everyone in every house, in Christ's day and ever since, agrees to consider not quite urgent, a thing that may be left alone a bit, that at least need not be a matter of great prominence or pressing arrangement. This was the one

thing that transfixed Mary's attention as "she sat at Jesus' feet and heard his words," and it is the one thing that is supreme with the same class in every age and country—the good part that will not be taken away when all human things will vanish like a dream. This class will always be considered extreme by those who do not see with open eyes as they see; but time will justify the former. Jesus meant to emphasize this in his commendation of Mary; and it is far from a needless lesson. At the same time "he loved Martha" and appreciated her service, and has doubtless a cordial place for her in the everlasting household that will shortly be manifested in the earth. He was not anxious to condemn her. At the same time, he did not shrink to teach at her expense a lesson for all time, affecting every day and every house where there are those who desire to abide in the love of Christ.

Another incident occurred about this time—equally notable and suggestive (the exact time and place equally immaterial), namely, the blessing of the children: "Then were brought unto him little children that he should put his hands on them and pray." Who brought them we are not told—probably fond mothers; nor how many—perhaps a dozen or so, Jesus appears to have been conversing in the midst of a crowd at the time. The children were first presented to the disciples on the outside—the mothers fearing to approach Christ direct. The mothers made known their wish that Christ should bless their children. The disciples scouted the idea as out of place altogether. Christ's work had to do with matters that only grown people could understand. What had children to do with it? So the disciples rebuffed them decisively, and were driving them away when Jesus interfered—"much displeased" at the action of the disciples. "Suffer the little children," said he, "to come unto me, for of such is the kingdom of God ... and he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them."

There is reason to be glad at the record of this incident. It helps to check the tendency to sternness which some aspects of the truth by themselves would generate. It helps to preserve the spirit of loving sympathy which is at the root of the gospel. It makes a place for the young and the helpless in the hearts of all who take after Christ. But, like everything else, it can be misinterpreted to the destruction of other parts of divine truth. Such a misinterpretation is that which, in almost all systems of theology, deduces from it the idea that children are saved because they are children, in defiance of the truth most plainly enunciated in all the Scriptures, that salvation is by faith and obedience alone. When Christ said, "Of such is the kingdom of God," he immediately explained the sense in which he uttered the words. He added: "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." It was evident that it was mental attitude in relation to the kingdom that he had in view when he said, "Of such is the kingdom." This is in harmony with all he taught either by his own mouth or through the apostles.

The popular view is in contradiction to all he taught; for it would make children heirs of the kingdom irrespective of "receiving" it, and it would make the kingdom

of God an institution in which there would be no place for grown men and women. It is the child-like disposition that Jesus sought to enforce. He enforced it still more plainly on other occasions: "Except a man humble himself as a little child, he shall in no case enter the Kingdom of God." There was need for the enforcement of this. It is a feature that distinguishes divine principles in their application from human. In human life it is the proud and the unbelieving and the self-assertive that carry influence and obtain position and find favour. The ascendancy of this type of character spreads blight in the world. It propagates itself in all classes, interferes with the development of innocence and kindness in those who would be disposed in those directions.

We have all known the pain of discovering how unkind and faithless the world is when we emerged in youth from the atmosphere of truth and sincerity and love that prevails more or less at most firesides. We have all perceived the beautiful faith and honest simplicity of childhood checked and perverted by contact with the ugly ways of grown life. In this, we get a momentary glimpse of the type of character that Christ would generate in men. He would not have them abdicate their reason: on the contrary, he would have them "wise as serpents;" he would not have them ignorant of truth and fact: on the contrary, he would have them "filled with all wisdom, able also to admonish one another." At the same time, with their knowledge, he would have love to dwell: with their discernment and skill, he would have the simplicity and faith that can trust implicitly where the eye perceives; and with the firmness and boldness of confident knowledge, he would have them combine that humility of self estimate which is according to self-powerlessness; that reverence for greatness and worth which is the noblest attitude of a created being; and that docility of faith and obedience which is the highest result of enlightened reason.

There is no type of manhood so beautiful as that in which these qualities combine. A child-like strong man is the beau ideal of humanity. Christ himself was the highest example of this, and he seeks to generate his own image in all who believe in him. It was fitting, therefore, that he should seize the incident of children being brought for blessing, to rebuke the harshness of the disciples, and to exhibit the children as the type of the men and women who will at last find acceptance with him.

Another lesson, at another time, we learn thus:—Jesus was praying. The disciples were in attendance. As they listened, it they heard what he said; or as they ruminated on the fact of his being so engaged, if they did not hear, they felt within themselves how deficient they were in the aptitude of approaching God. When he ceased, they spoke to him on the subject. They asked him to teach them to pray, as it seems, John had made a point of teaching his disciples (Luke xi. 1). In response to their request, he recited to them the form of prayer known as The Lord's Prayer, which he had publicly recommended in his "Sermon on the Mount," and advised them to use it. This prescribing of a form of words, in answer to a request to be taught, how to pray, suggests that a right form of words



has something to do with acceptable prayer. It is of advantage to note the fact in an age like ours, when the metaphysical treatment of such subjects for ages has either reduced the language of prayer to a degrading effeminacy, or banished words as a superfluity. It is part of the function of reason to embody its thoughts in suitable words, whether in addressing God or man. Unsuitable words, or words of unreasonable or insulting implication, even if the implications are not intended, are unacceptable to God and man.

The Bible furnishes many examples of acceptable prayer. Its models will reward study. They excel all prayer books as much as divine thought excels human thought. They express in a majestic manner the relations subsisting between God and man, and the aspirations and desires which God regards as acceptable in man. They deal with facts and needs, and not with metaphysical processes. The use of a right form of words is an important part of acceptable prayer. Right words give pleasure to God; and right words re-act on the man who utters them, tending to generate right thoughts. But right words are only a part. Without right thoughts, right words are a mere jingle. It was one of God's complaints against Isaiah that while they drew near with their mouth, their heart was far from him (Isaiah xxix. 13). The "preparation of the heart" is the principal thing. And this is not the work of a day. It is the result of habitual meditation on what may be called the facts of existence—present and past. The universe speaks of God to reason's ear; and the authentic history of mankind exhibits the revelation of His will in Israel's record. The study of all will make God a fact to the understanding and the heart, and fit a man to pray with sincerity and to receive with liberality the blessing He requests.

Jesus laid stress on this last thought before leaving the subject on the occasion in question. "Which of you," said he, "shall have a friend and shall go unto him at midnight and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come to me and I have nothing to set before him. And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity, he will rise and give him as many as he needeth." The words immediately following show that Jesus intended to teach by this that our own receivings at the hands of the Father depend to some extent upon the perseverance of our supplications. The words are: "And I say unto you, Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." That Jesus meant that these aphorisms governed men's experience in prayer, as well as being true as between man and man, is evident from his next remark: "If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask him for a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? or if he shall ask of him an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

Here is a doctrine of which we should take the fullest advantage. Our mere impressions as natural men are liable to withhold us from it. We are in danger of thinking either that prayer is an ineffective formality, or that, at the least, its efficacy is independent of importunity. The fact is, that as natural men, we know nothing about it, and therefore ought to distrust our feelings on the subject. Jesus knew. As he said, "We speak that we do know." It is for us to accept the teaching of one who knew the Father's mind in all things. What if some have tried and found nothing for their pains? Are there no conditions? Is there not such a thing as "asking amiss?" (Jas. iv. 3). Has not God said, "To such and such a man will I look?" Is it not written, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me?" Do we not read, "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous. His ears are open to their cry. But the face of the Lord is set against them that do evil?" We should reason illogically if we were to conclude there is nothing in importunate prayer because others, or even we ourselves, may have found no result. Let us look into ourselves for the cause: "Cleanse your hands ye sinners; cleanse your hearts ye double-minded." "Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you" (Jas. iv. 8). "Seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

It is according to experience in natural life that the importunate receive attention. The universe is framed upon such a principle that all things tend to quiescence if left to themselves. The best of men grow passive if there is no call upon their services. It may be contrary to some ideas of God that He should come in the least within this rule; but it is what he has revealed. "Call upon me, and I will answer." "I will for this be enquired of by the house of Israel." "The prayer of the righteous is His delight." It is true that "He knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him," and that He does not need the "much speaking" of superstitious practice to move Him; but it is also true that the putting forth of His power is affected by the importunity of His children and that the measure of their experience of His goodness depends largely upon that "seeking" and "knocking" which Christ recommended on the occasion under consideration. It requires not many words, but that those words be frequently and earnestly spoken. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

"A certain Pharisee," who listened to these things, was struck with the piquancy and originality of Christ's discourse; and, though not surrendering to him, he desired a closer acquaintance. He therefore asked him to come and dine with him. Jesus consented, and accompanied the Pharisee to his house. The Pharisee naturally watched Christ's deportment attentively. He observed that he did not first wash before dinner," but "sat down to meat" without that customary ceremony. The Pharisee said nothing, but thought very unfavourably of the circumstance, and, no doubt, looked a little disgusted. However he may have looked, Jesus knew what was passing in his mind, and, looking at him, said, "Now, do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness." We may be sure that this did not mollify the feelings that were hurt by the omission to wash hands. Why was Jesus so apparently rude in remark? Why did he omit the innocent hand-washing

before dinner? If we realise the work which Christ had been sent to do, and the state of the community in which the work had to be done, we may see the answer.

The community was in a state of spiritual mummification, having much correctness of outward manners, according to the standard prescribed by "tradition," combined with much self-satisfaction, and real destitution of those qualities of "judgment, mercy, and faith," which are the true salt of acceptable deportment in the sight of God. It was Christ's work to either bring them to repentance or "give a testimony against them." He could not do this without fitting occasion, and it was for him to create occasion as circumstances might call. To violate social etiquette was to create occasion. In the state of wonderment caused, it gave him the opportunity to inveigh against the mere outside proprieties that were unaccompanied with the interior graciousness from which they derive all their meaning. And as to the roughness of speech, it was his part to "cry aloud and spare not: show Israel their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins." It was therefore the language of faithfulness in the mouth of authority, when he proceeded to say: "Ye fools, did not He that made that which is without make that which is within also? But rather give alms of such things as ye have, and behold all things are clean unto you. But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets. Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them."

The Pharisees were a religious sect; the Scribes, a class having a religious sanctity in the eyes of the people from their occupation as copyists of the sacred scrolls. Members of both orders were probably present at the dinner at which Jesus so discourteously spoke (as it would be thought by them), and Jesus appears to have directed his discourse to both. Some lawyers were present also. These were also a semi-sacred class, having, however, more to do with the administration of the law in its secular bearings. They appear to have felt that Christ's remarks reflected upon them, as well as upon the Scribes and Pharisees, probably because of their close identification with both. One of them said: "Master, thus saying thou reproachest us also." The response of Christ left them in no doubt of his opinion of them: "Woe unto you also, ye lawyers; for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers." This outspoken and commanding reprobation of things and men who were in high repute among the people, and who are always respectfully dealt with by ordinary writers and teachers, is one of the things that distinguished Christ from all who ever went before him. Anything of the same kind that has been exhibited by those who came after is but a faint imitation, and sits with none of the grace and majesty appertaining to him "who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."

Here is a god-like penetration and independence and righteous anger never shown by the best of the sons of men. This is enough of itself to mark the origin and nature of the speaker. It was not in mere mortal man to evince such uniform towering majesty and moral grandeur. "God in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself," is the only sufficient explanation of this brightest and strangest of all historic phenomena. The effect of such a style of discourse, addressed to such men was natural. "The scribes and Pharisees began to urge him vehemently, to provoke him to speak of many things, laying wait for him, and seeking to catch something out of his mouth that they might accuse him." They were bent on destroying him, but situated as they were under the Romans, they could only destroy him with their consent, and this they could only obtain by proving some kind of treason against either Roman law or the law of the Jewish province. Their aim was to prove this out of his own mouth, but he was able to confound their tactics, and went from their heated presence to a multitude who had assembled in the neighbourhood of the house outside, to whom he denounced them in terms of warning: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy."

It is most important as a matter of instruction to note in Christ's remarks his total condemnation of any scrupulosity as to external decorums that is not accompanied by a complete subjection of heart and mind to mercy, truthfulness, justice, and the fear of God; and further, his utter reprobation of that habit of indifference to the woes and burdens of others which was characteristic of the lawyers of his age, and the lawyers of every age since, and more or less of all classes of men. It may not be considered prudent, it may be considered quixotic and erratic to the point of aberration for a man to be governed in his transactions by some regard to how they may bear on others. But it is according to Christ that we bear one another's burdens, and that we do not to others what we should not wish done to ourselves. And the law of Christ will shape the destinies of men, and will yet rule the world, however unanimously a hundred generations may consider it impracticable and visionary.

## **CHAPTER XLV.**

### **A Property Dispute—Covetousness and Anxiety— His Second Coming.**

At the close of the remarks which Christ addressed to the crowd outside the house in which he had had the sharp encounter with the Scribes, Pharisees, and lawyers, described in the last chapter, an incident occurred that gave colour to a long and most valuable discourse on practical topics. One of the company, taking advantage of his personal proximity to Christ, asked him to interfere in a dispute in his family about property—thinking no doubt that Christ's influence would be powerful for settlement. Christ will yet settle all disputes, great and small—both by influence, and power; for it is written, "He shall execute justice and judgment

in the earth,” and “He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, nor reprove after the hearing of his ears.” But the time had not come for him to act this part. He had no command from the Father and no authority from man to interpose judicially in temporal affairs in his character as “the Lamb of God,” manifested to “take away the sins of the world.” He, therefore, could have no other answer than the one he gave: “Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?”

He did not, however, content himself with repudiating the part he was prematurely invited to act. He gave the subject an immediate present application. The man who had asked his interference in a property dispute evidently did so in the grasping spirit common to men at such times. Jesus took hold of this. “Take heed and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth.” Then, as was his wont, he gave point to the lesson by employing a parable—the parable of the man with the barns, which will be found discoursed of in chapter xxx. He leaves no doubt of its application; for he concludes by saying, “So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.” We have already had occasion to remark on the frequency and the emphasis with which Jesus refers disparagingly to the influence of great possessions in the present state of existence. Some of the Sons of God can “make to themselves friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness,” by their righteous use in the service of God, as Jesus himself in another place exhorted, and as exemplified in cases of Zaccheus, Joseph of Arimathea, Chusa, and many others in the apostolic age; and in the times of the prophets, Ezra, Josiah, Hezekiah, Solomon, David, and further back, Moses, Joseph, Abraham, and others. But, as regards the average run of men, there can be no doubt that the possession of wealth tends to generate a frame of mind inconsistent with the modesty and purity that are acceptable to God. It tends to pride and indulgence and barrenness of spiritual fruit. Therefore the operations of the gospel are divinely directed towards the poor. “To the poor the gospel is preached.” “Hath not God chosen the poor of this world?”

There is an object in this. It is not that the poor as such are sought after, but that the poor offer a better soil for spiritual tillage. They are, as a class, humbler and more reasonably-minded where light comes, and more appreciative of the goodness of God than those who have “more than heart could wish.” Where they are not in this sense “rich in faith,” their poverty is no recommendation. A poor man who is poor in faith is an uninteresting object indeed, both to God and man. There are millions of them upon the earth who grow and perish like “the grass of the field.” But such as are enlightened and believing and obedient, are precious in the sight of God. For their guidance, Jesus proceeded to speak.

Having finished his response to the man who had said, “Speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me,” he addressed himself to his disciples (Luke xii. 22): He had not only deprecated riches: he went a step further. He discouraged the anxiety that is common to men on the subject of temporal affairs; that is, to men who have not faith in God. His command to his disciples

was: "Have faith in God." That this means more than belief that God exists, and that He will perform His promises—that it means trust in Him for care in temporal things, is manifest from what he said on this occasion. They were to take no thought for their life, what they should eat: neither for the body, what they should put on. They were to look at God's provision for the ravens and the herbs of the field, and to consider that they themselves were of more value in God's estimation than these. "How much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith? Seek not what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after (men that are 'without God in the world'). Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you? Fear not little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."

It is evident that these precepts pre-suppose "Faith in God." They test the existence of that faith. They excite no response where it does not exist. But they are not intended to lead to presumption. There is a palpable difference between faith and presumption. Jesus barred the way to a presumptuous application of the promises by his response to the Tempter's suggestion, that he should cast himself from the pinnacle of the temple on the strength of the assurance he had received that the angels would bear him free from harm. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." If he recognised this rule in his own case, he did not mean his disciples to ignore it in theirs. That he did not mean them to neglect their part in the provision of promised daily bread is evident from other sayings of his, and notably from those which he spoke by the mouth of his apostles after his departure from the earth, such as "If any will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thes. iii. 10); and again, "If any provide not for his own, especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. v. 8).

It is evident that the design of the remarks under consideration was to encourage a tranquil spirit of faith and hope in the occupations of life, and not to inculcate idleness or neglect. Christ would place God and the hope of His kingdom and the obtaining of an entrance therein, first in the aims of a man's life. Therefore, he would have temporalities, which with the world occupy the first place, put in the second, on the ground that God, who has made us, and will bestow the kingdom that is coming, is not indifferent to the conditions that affect us now while we are in probation for His use. In this there is perfect reasonableness. But it affords no countenance to the extremes to which many in past ages, and some in the present, have carried it. It tells us not to make life a slavery to the mere material means of its sustenance, since God has promised what we need (of which He alone is judge). It tells us to bend mortal strength and anxiety to the attainment of God's approbation, that we may enter at last upon the fulness of well-being and joy which He purposes to bestow at the right and ripe hour, in His kingdom upon earth. It does not tell us to neglect this world's affairs, or to put forth none of the exertions which in the wisdom of God are necessary for the maintenance of life in its present state.

Christ went further than to inculcate a cheerful faith and a non-anxious providing. He advised giving to others as the best method of saving—not as some ancient philosophers have recommended: by having our time of need met by the gratitude of those whom we may succour in the day of our ability; but that by giving alms we may lay up “a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.” This doctrine of Christ is as far above the doctrine of the philosophers as the heaven is high above the earth. The philosophers would give us human gratitude as our resource and our reward (a poor reliance as all experience proves). Christ gives us God’s recognition and memory as our incentive in doing good to men. This is all-powerful where there is “faith in God.” Of course, if the foolish heart whisper, “there is no God,” it will fall like grain on the arid rock—which is pretty much the case with universal mankind upon the earth at the present time. It was no new lesson. It had been heard before from the same Spirit speaking in the prophets. “He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord, and that which he hath given will he repay to him again.” It is a standing obligation and a test during all the generations of mortal men. The children of God are distinguishable from the children of the devil in their submission to this self-denying precept.

Before leaving the subject, Jesus gave it practical application in another way: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Let your loins be girded about and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding, that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately.” It is as if Jesus had said: “Beware of whatever steals the heart. If you pile up wealth, you create a magnet that will act drawingly on the heart, and if your heart is under bondage to earthly things, where then will you be when the Son of Man comes? Can you be among those who will open to him immediately?” There is great force in this way of putting it. It is a matter of common experience that opulence indisposes the heart to godliness. A man who is full of what consolations the present life can afford is liable to have but a feeble sense of dependence upon God, and but little ardour of desire for the coming of Christ. He naturally lapses into the condition described by a modern preacher as that of being in no danger of bursting the boilers in getting saved.

Jesus goes on to indicate the superior blessedness of the class to which he would have us belong: “Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching.” This would apply equally to those who fall asleep “watching,” and to those whom the Lord finds in the watching attitude at his appearing. The contrast is between the state of mind usually generated by riches and the state of mind that qualifies a man for the coming of Christ. Wealth is liable to throw a man off the watching mood. Therefore, says Jesus, “seek it not.” In his other teaching he adds, If you have it, turn it to account as stewards who will have to account to their lord at his coming. There is a logical cohesion in the whole discourse that is not apparent on an inattentive reading.

He specifies the blessedness of the watching servants in a way suggestive of much comfort in the prospect of his coming, and much motive to compliance with the course which he recommends. "Verily, I say unto you that he (their lord) shall gird himself and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." It is impossible to exhaust the significance of this. The imagination may revel in it without the danger of going too far. Christ taking the attitude of servitor and comforter to his brethren at his coming! There is the element of parable in it. All the more comprehensively and richly does it convey the attractive meaning that Jesus intended to express. We cannot in the present state know the full meaning of Christ's beneficence to those whom he has come to save. We know his gracious testimony that he came not to be ministered unto but to minister. We know that he laid down his life for us, and that the Father for his sake has forgiven us, whereby, though originally dead in trespasses and in sins, we have the answer of a good conscience towards him. But these are privileges discerned by faith in a land of darkness and exile, We are in "a great and terrible wilderness," in which the hardships and discouragements of the way often come nigh quenching all comfort and hope. What shall the blessedness be when the journey is ended, and we stand in Christ's actual presence, to find the whole earth tinder his charge, and ourselves in an emancipated nature, the special objects of his kindness and attention? It is no dream. This is waiting. It is in the Father's own declared purpose. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom. viii. 32).

Christ appeals to our common sense to make a consistent application of these facts. He reminds us of what every householder does who knows that a thief is abroad. He watches that he may prevent his house from being broken into. "Therefore," he says, "be ye ready also; for the Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not." The idea is—be on the watch in the sense of preparedness for what you know will happen, and which may happen at any time—namely, the return of Christ to the earth to take vengeance on the ungodly, and to comfort and save his people. Is not this appeal irresistible to practical judgment? It can only fail where the facts on which it is based are denied, or doubted, or dimly perceived. Such denial or doubt or dimness is a form of mental aberration. A man's mind must be inaccessible to the greatest fact of history who is in that state. Has not Christ appeared among men? Has he not left his mark on their affairs? Has he not given us the witness of himself in the inexpugnable writings of the apostles occupying the highest place among the literary monuments of the world? Have we not every pledge that the case admits of that he lives now and will come again? It is therefore the simplest practical un wisdom to leave it out of account as almost all men do, and to spend life in a total devotion to the things that pass away.

Peter asked whether the parable was confined to the apostles, or whether it bore upon all and sundry. Jesus did not answer categorically, but nevertheless made it manifest that it was for every one who chose to make it his own. "Who then," said



he, "is that faithful and wise steward whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom the lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth, I say unto you, he will make him ruler over all that he hath." It is evident that Jesus means to say that the exaltation which he will bestow at his coming is not to be conferred by partiality or respect of persons, but on the principal of just award to faithful stewardship in whomsoever it may be found. "Who is such a steward?" is his question—as much as to say, wherever he is, there is the man who is entitled to and will receive the special recognition of which he speaks.

This holds out an incentive to all. All are not appointed to the same degree of stewardship. The apostles had a rank in this matter that none who came after them can attain. They were "stewards of the mysteries of God." To them, by the Spirit of God, were confided knowledge and gifts that have and could descend to no successors. Their responsibility will be correspondingly great, for "to whom much is given, of them will much be required." But all have a degree of stewardship corresponding with the degree of privilege which they possess in the matter of knowledge, capacity, opportunity, health, means, and what not. It is, therefore, open to every one to earn in measure the blessedness of which Christ speaks. Every "faithful and wise steward"—every enlightened and justified man who sincerely and modestly realises that he is not his own, but belongs to Christ, as whose agent he must act, will experience at the hands of Christ that enlargement of trust of which Christ here speaks. He will be made "ruler over many things." How imperfectly popular theories of Christianity provide scope for this feature of the teaching of Christ, and how complete and suitable is the place for it in the gospel of the kingdom (as witnessed in the total collective testimony of Moses, the prophets and apostles)—those are aware who have been privileged to have their eyes opened to primitive apostolic truth, and whose hearts have been delivered from the confusion of the theological systems of the day.

Jesus brings into contrast with "the faithful and wise steward" a servant of another class, whom it concerns every one to diagnose distinctly with a view to habitual subjective repudiation—the servant who says "My lord delayeth his coming," and who under the demoralising power of that thought, abandons himself to frolic and carousal. That Jesus should introduce such a case for even supposition merely, is proof of our danger in that direction. Our own experience will tell us the danger is not imaginary. The purposes and plans of God are on a scale that is trying to human littleness. "A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past—as a watch in the night" (Psa. xc. 4). Because, therefore, each man's watching day is his short life, God's great ways seem long in maturing, and there is a liability to listen to the suggestion of our weakness: "My lord delayeth his coming." Resist the thought by knowledge acquired in the daily reading and pondering the word of his truth; and by conformity to the instruction he has appointed for our preservation in the path of life. If we give in to the feeling that the coming of the Lord is too remote and intangible to be taken

into account, we get on to an incline that leads to death. First, we take part with the foolish in their ways. Once do this, and you cannot stop. The little salt of godliness that may be left in your mind soon disappears. You degenerate in all your ways, till at last, in the language of Peter, you “who once escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” are “again entangled therein and overcome” with a “latter end worse than the beginning.”

The delay of the Lord's coming is only a mere appearance to mortal shortsightedness and ignorance. There is no delay. The Lord has already been on the scene, and he will reappear thereon by a plan all marked out and that will not fail. However long this plan might be drawn out, the whole length exists not for us. Our few and evil days are the full measure of all the waiting we can have; for in the grave there is not a moment; consequently, it is infatuation for a man to say in his heart, “My lord delayeth his coming.” In a moment his life may cease. In a moment he may be face to face with the Lord at his coming. So that there is a sense applicable to every generation in the words Jesus proceeded to utter: “The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.”

Among those in this terrible position, he indicates two classes: 1. “That servant that knew his lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will.” 2. “He that knew not and did commit things worthy of stripes.” To each he assigns beforehand a retribution according to what every one will recognise to be the justice of the case. The first “shall be beaten with many stripes;” the second “shall be beaten with few stripes.” Of course, this is the language of parable which Jesus was so prone to use, but it has an obvious and solemn significance. We have clear indication in various parts of Scripture of the fate that is in reserve for those who emerge from the grave at the coming of Christ to be rejected at his judgment seat. We are told of “shame” (Dan. xii. 2); tribulation and anguish and wrath (Rom. ii. 8–9); hurt and corruption (Rev. ii. 11; Gal. vi. 8); banishment to outer darkness (Matt. xxii. 13); weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt. xiii. 28); burning up with fire unquenchable (Mal. iv. 1; Mark ix. 48). Many other like expressions there are which we can be at no loss to interpret in view of what we might call the dispensational fruits of sin as experienced in the present state. The race has for ages existed in a state of suffering, dishonour, calamity and pain of every kind ending in death. If we imagine these brought to an individual focus, we may form some conception of what awaits the rejected, and may perceive how scope is afforded for many or few stripes, according to the judge's infallible award.

A man dismissed from the judgment seat first suffers the agony of having his shame “seen” (Rev. xvi. 15). He is publicly condemned in the presence of fellow, servants and a multitude of the angelic host (Rev. iii. 5–9; Luke xii. 8) Next, he departs not whither he wills. He might choose to bury himself in the forests or

wander wide o'er earth or ocean, or find refuge in death. The sentence orders his expulsion to the "outer darkness" which still reigns in the world for a while after Christ's return. In this outer darkness, the world of the ungodly, organised as "the devil and his angels," alias "the beast and the kings of the earth and their army" (Rev. xix. 19), is marshalling its forces for "the war of the great day of God Almighty," in which they "make war with the Lamb, but the Lamb shall overcome them." Fierce judgment impends at that moment, of which the world is unconscious. Christ, of whose presence they are not aware, is about to be manifested "in flaming fire taking vengeance" (2 Thess. i. 7, 8).

The sentence of expulsion consigns its unhappy objects to participation in "the judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. x. 27). Their fate is to "depart from me, ye cursed, into the aionian fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." Into the countries of the condemned, the whole multitude of the rejected will be driven to shift for themselves among a cruel population for whom judgment waits. Mortal as they are, it is no stretch of the imagination to realise the suffering of body, the anguish of mind incidental to such a fearful situation—without home or friends or acquaintances or means of living, wandering as vagabonds like Cain till the maturing judgment of God culminates in the terrible outbreak of destruction and desolation long foretold. This "hour of judgment" will take time to run. The "few stripes" will probably be exemplified in the shortening of the term of suffering. Such will die before the worst comes. "Many stripes" will be seen in the case of those wretched children of disobedience who will be preserved through all the terrors of "the time of trouble such as never was," and survive to be engulfed in the finishing strokes of judgment by which wickedness will be finally overthrown, and the way cleared for the Kingdom of God.

This is what Jesus describes as being "appointed a portion with the unbelievers." It is the most terrible calamity possible to man. "A portion with the unbelievers" just now means a share in the honours and advantages of the present evil world, which is made up of unbelievers. A portion with them now means a portion with them then, and what a portion then! What a companion picture to the present. It is no picture of fancy. It is Christ's own delineation. It will sure to be verified in actual human experience.

## **CHAPTER XLVI.**

### **The Slaughtered Galileans—the Fox, Herod— Jerusalem—a Sabbath-Day Dinner and its Incidents.**

At the close of the discourse last considered, "some told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." The communication was

evidently in the spirit of judicial commiseration—as if the speakers had said: “Poor things! these slaughtered Galileans! They must have been great sinners for such things to have happened to them.” Christ’s answer suggests that the remark was made in this spirit.

It is a natural and a common view, that calamity now happens as “a judgment” on the sufferers as distinguished from those who do not suffer these calamities. It was this view that Job’s friends aggravated his affliction with, by pressing it upon his distracted attention. God repudiated it in the case of Job’s friends, and Jesus repudiates it now. “Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay; but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” And so with the case of 18 persons killed by the fall of a tower at Siloam, to whom he makes reference. “Except ye repent”: this shows the drift. It tells the bystanders—not that the slaughtered Galileans were undeserving of their fate, but that they, the bystanders, deserved it, too, and would share it in ultimate experience, if they did not cease to be what they were.

This is the real position of the world as estimated by him who could make no mistake in judgment. It is this state of facts that renders it absurd to argue special guilt from special trouble. People talk about “seeing ourselves as others see us”: this is a matter in which Christ enables us to see ourselves as God sees us:—not to see the suffering as specially guilty but the unsuffering as specially favoured. For what reason, we can see when we apply the standard that governed Jesus. In brief, this standard was God’s view. By this view, all men are wicked, because all men are estranged from Him. They may be on decent terms among themselves, but God they know not, nor take Him into account, nor do, think, or say the things that are pleasing to Him. They have been away from Him thus in the mass ever since Adam’s expulsion from Eden. At any time since then the words of David have applied: “The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that did understand and that did seek God.” Such a state of things is wickedness, according to the only standard that decides what is wickedness and what is righteousness.

This standard is God’s will. This will has been revealed and is accordant with reason. It is that men know and love Him first of all as a matter of hourly condition from day to day; that as a consequence, they worship, fear, and obey Him; and act the patient and beneficent part towards one another that He acts towards them. His right to maintain and enforce this will not be questioned by any one recognising that God has created all things, and in Him all things subsist. Consequently, it is easy to enter into Christ’s view—so different from that of any school of human thinkers, ancient or modern, theological or philosophical—that the actual condition of all men is that of sinners who are permitted to live by divine tolerance merely—a toleration exercised because of the purpose He has in the life of the race upon the earth; and that their ultimate continuance in the enjoyment of this tolerance depends upon their conformity in some considerable

measure to what God requires at their hands. To convey this idea, he spoke the parable of the fig tree, which we considered in chapter xxx.

We next find Jesus in a synagogue on the Sabbath day (Luke xiii. 10), where, is not stated, and does not matter. Luke, not having personally seen or heard the things he describes, writes of them in the detached, and inconsecutive, and sometimes incomplete style of one who obtained his information from others, even those “who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word” (chap. i. 2)—a circumstance, however, which does not exclude the fact that the Holy Spirit guided him in the narrative-use of the information so obtained—as we have previously considered.

Among the worshippers in the synagogue was a lame woman whose body had for 18 years been drawn and held together by disease—styled in the narrative “a spirit of infirmity” and “Satan”—the personified adversary. Jesus noticed her, and called her to him, and said to her, “Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity,” at the same time laying his hands on her, when “immediately she was made straight and glorified God.” This interesting performance ought to have excited admiration. So it did among the congregation; but “the ruler of the synagogue” was put into a contrary mood by it. He was indignant. Why should he be? He professed to be shocked at the profanation of the Sabbath. He said, “There are six days in which men ought to work; in them, therefore, come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day.” But Jesus knew that this was not the real root of the matter. He reminded the ruler of the synagogue that he and his class were in the habit regularly of loosing their beasts and taking them to the watering on the Sabbath day, and why should they object to the loosing of a daughter of Abraham from her infirmity? The real objection was to the display of such power on the part of Christ which discredited the religious leaders in the eyes of the people. Offended pride is unreasonable, and always cloaks itself in another plea, which it possibly thinks sincere. There was no answer to Christ’s interrogatory. The ruler of the synagogue was silenced (and mortified), and the people unmistakably showed their satisfaction. “All his adversaries (present) were ashamed, and the people rejoiced at all the glorious things done by him.”

Again journeying towards Jerusalem, Jesus “went through the cities and villages, teaching.” The thickly occupied state of the country admitted of an effective progress on foot of this sort. The land was covered, comparatively speaking, with towns and villages. They did not straggle far and wide, as in western lands. The clustering of towns and villages within a few miles of each other in some parts of Yorkshire is the nearest approach to the populated state of Palestine in the days of Jesus. Even in its desolation at the present day, Palestine bears evidence of its former state in ruins, ruins everywhere. Highly honoured was the teeming population, though they did not know. “The people that walked in darkness saw great light.” “The light shined in the darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not.” Here and there, some discerned “the day of their visitation.”

One such, evidently noting with sadness the general inappreciation, enquired of him "Lord, are there few that be saved?" Jesus did not answer the question directly. He told his questioner to "strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able." Some have been distressed by this saying, as if it reduced hope to a very narrow channel. They have said to themselves, "What is the use of effort if many actually seeking to enter in shall not be able?" Perhaps they read the words of Christ otherwise than he intended. Did he mean, "Many shall seek to enter in by complying with the will of the Lord in faith and obedience, and will fail?" His whole teaching forbids this. He says, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." What did he mean then by many seeking to enter and not being able?

His own application, in the words immediately succeeding, seems to point to those who will unworthily apply to him in the day of his coming. The words are: "When once the master of the house is risen up, AND HATH SHUT TO THE DOOR, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are. Then shall ye begin to say, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know not whence ye are: depart from me all ye workers of iniquity." From this it would seem that many at Christ's return will claim friendship with him on the score of acquaintance with him in the days of his sojourn in Judea when Herod reigned. Many, many thousands at that time "ate and drank in his presence," as, for example, at the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, not to speak of the countless private occasions. Many more thousands could say "Thou hast taught in our streets"—multitudes, who paid no heed to his teaching beyond the idle interest of the village gossip. In the day of his glory, many of these think to be acceptable to him on this flimsy ground, like people of the same town who meet in a distant country. They "seek to enter in" then, but shall not be able, because their seeking is not in accordance with the appointed principle.

The striving to enter in that Jesus enjoins, consists of that doing of the will of the Father, which Peter, in harmony with Christ, says will ensure "an entrance abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. i. 11). The unacceptable claimants who in the day of Christ's return "seek to enter in and shall not be able" are "workers of iniquity" who think to obtain favour by local partiality. The rejection of this class need be no discouragement to those who are sincerely and in the scriptural way "striving to enter in at the strait gate." Such are exhorted by Paul to "Lift up the hands that hang down and to strengthen the feeble knees" (Heb. xii. 12). God Himself authorises this message to them by Isaiah: "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, be strong: fear not. Behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense. He will come and save you" (chap. xxxv. 4).

Another reflection comes out of Christ's allusion to the presence and rejection, at his coming, of many of those among whom he patiently and magnanimously laboured in the days of his flesh. It shows how untenable is the thought of such as are inclined to indulge the idea that none but the accepted will be dealt with on that august occasion; and of such as draw the line of responsibility at those who try to obey the gospel in the initial obedience of baptism. It is evident that light, and not partial obedience, is the ground of responsibility, which is accordant with the most elementary considerations of reason.

Jesus proceeded to say, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out," that is, those then listening to him, who would claim entrance on the ground of having known him in the days of his flesh. And to give point to their exclusion, who regarded the inheritance of the kingdom as their birthright, he spoke of the admission of many from other lands on whom they looked as aliens: "And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God"—an allusion to the multitude taken from among the Gentiles, who, "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation," will glorify Christ and reign with him for ever. There was point in the words he added: "There are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last." At the moment, his Jewish auditors were first: the Gentiles about to be called were last: so, too, the Scribes and Pharisees were first; and Jesus, and those who received him, were last. The reversal of these positions is easy to understand in view of what is coming. It was natural that the Pharisees should dislike such inuendoes, and that they should try to suppress Christ. Their efforts were unavailing till "his hour" had come. He foiled them by his skill of rejoinder. They now tried to frighten him away.

A deputation of them came to him and said, "Get thee out and depart hence, for Herod will kill thee." They made a mistake in supposing that such a consideration could make any impression on Christ. Herod could do nothing till the time was come. Even if he could, it was not in Christ to be afraid of what man could do to him. This would have been a sufficient answer for reasonable men, but the men who were badgering him were not such as would be influenced by a reasonable answer. He therefore answered them according to their folly: "Go ye and tell that fox, behold I cast out demons and I do cures to-day and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected." "That fox!"—There was an indignant emphasis in this. There is a time to be angry. They were trying to intimidate him with the name of one of the vilest of mankind (see Josephus's portrait of the human monster). It was natural that he should retort upon them with the definition of Herod's true character, yet only as a matter of description: "that fox!"—not in the spirit of invective: for the message he asked them to take back to him had no acrimony in it, but was confined to a declaration of truth, viz., that his work on earth had still a to-day and a to-morrow, and that as for being killed, that could not happen in Herod's jurisdiction: "It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem."

This may strike the ear as a strange saying. Jerusalem the chosen—Jerusalem where God had placed His name—Jerusalem where David reigned, and which God had honoured with His manifested presence. Why must Jerusalem be the scene of a prophet's martyrdom? It seems as if the fitness of things would have required a reverse conclusion. But the history of the case supports the words of Christ. God Himself says: "This city hath been to Me as a provocation of Mine anger and of My fury from the day that they built it, even to this day ... They have turned to Me the back and not the face, though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not hearkened to receive instruction" (Jer. xxxii. 31–33). And again by Ezekiel: "This Jerusalem, I have set it in the midst of the nations and countries that are round about her, and she hath changed my judgments into wickedness more than the nations, and my statutes more than the countries that are round about her ... Therefore, thus saith the Lord God, behold I, even I, am against thee, and will execute judgments in the midst of thee in the sight of the nations" (Ezek. v. 5). It was to bring Jerusalem from her wickedness that the prophets were sent; and it was because of their message that they perished at her hands, as we read succinctly in 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15. "The Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes and sending: because he had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people till there was no remedy."

Jesus was therefore in strict harmony with the divinely-recorded history of Jerusalem when he sent word to Herod that that city, and not Galilee, must witness his sufferings—a strange, sad, sorrowful history, which on this same occasion wrung from the lips of Christ the memorable apostrophe: "O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee: how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate; and, verily I say unto you, ye shall not see me until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." There has been a history since the history that drew this lamentable exclamation from the mouth of Christ; and how signally has that second history borne out his words. What has been Israel's state since the destruction of Jerusalem? What has been Israel's history for 1800 years past? Could it be more graphically portrayed than in the words of Christ: "Your house is left unto you desolate." Reasonable men will behold in this fulfilment of prophecy the evidence of the divinity of his work and words.

This is not the place to write of the restoration of Israel. Yet it is not digressing to point in passing to the presence of that subject in the mind of Christ when he uttered the concluding words of his apostrophe to woe-struck Jerusalem: "Ye shall not see me henceforth until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." What is this but the recognition of the coming of a time when Israel, who rejected him, would accept him? It might be



retorted by unbelievers in that revealed purpose of God, that the words amount to no more than the expression of an uncertain contingency—namely, that if the time come when Israel shall accept Jesus, the time will come when they shall see him again. There might be room for such a suggestion if there were no other indication of Christ's anticipation on the subject. There is much other indication. His statement that "all things that are written (in the prophets) must be fulfilled" is one of a very broad character, for it covers all that we read in the prophets of the purpose of God who scattered Israel, to gather them. The Scripture, he said, cannot be broken—a statement which he extended to the "Holy Scriptures" in their entirety when he elsewhere said, "I am not come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil." He specifically endorses the national hope of Israel in referring to "the re-generation, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory" (Matt. xix. 27): and to the establishment of a kingdom in which his twelve apostles will share with him the occupancy of the thrones of "the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke xxii. 30). The apostles added their confirmation when they asked him before his ascension: "Wilt thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?" (Acts i. 6): and Peter, after his ascension, when he said, "The heavens must hold him until the times of the restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts iii. 20): and Paul, when he said, "Blindness in part hath happened unto Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved ... If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?" (Rom. xi. 15).

No understanding of the life and sayings of Christ can be complete or harmonious that leaves out of account his relation to the hope of Israel which he touched on this occasion. Jerusalem has been "left desolate" for 1850 years, in accordance with his words; but the time draws near when her restored children will hail his re-appearance among them with joyful enthusiasm unparalleled in the national history. "They shall look upon him whom they have pierced, and (at first) mourn"—mourn at the infatuation that crucified him (Zech. xii. 10); but there will soon be "joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isaiah lxi. 3). "Many nations shall be joined unto the Lord in that day," and "the whole earth shall rejoice."

Not long after the words we have been considering, Jesus "went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath Day." He had been invited, and accepted the invitation. A number of guests had been invited as well. Jesus used the occasion for instruction, as was his wont. He noticed as the guests came in that they "chose out the chief rooms." When the process had gone on so long, he broke silence with a remark that would be considered rude in modern etiquette. He said to the company that they ought not to choose the best places at any table to which they were invited, lest the host might ask them to make way for more honourable guests, and they with shame would have to go down lower. "Go and sit down in the lowest room," he said, which would leave scope for promotion: "for whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he

that humbleth himself shall be exalted." If this lesson may seem in any degree superfluous in our day, we owe it to the influence of the teaching of Christ, which has slowly filtered through a certain class of the population in the course of centuries, modifying the original barbarism of self-obtrusiveness. But the modification is not very deep. A time of peril of any kind is sufficient to develop the reckless self-seeking that is natural to most men. Where the law of Christ prevails, it is greatly restrained, and human nature appears at its best. The law of Christ will yet be universal upon the earth. Happy those permitted to see the day.

Christ had a lesson for the host also as to the character of the invitations. He noticed that the invited guests were all well-to-do and friends of the host. There was nothing for criticism in this, according to the custom common to ancient and modern times. But Jesus had something to say on the subject which his friends in all ages have noted. He turned to the host and said, "When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen nor thy rich neighbours, lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made unto thee. But when thou makest a feast call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and thou shalt be blessed, for they cannot recompense thee, for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." Most of the commandments of Christ go contrary to the natural grain—none more than this. When a man is disposed and able to indulge in festivity, "the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind," are the very very last he would think of asking. Their company puts a task on magnanimity; it yields no pleasure, but the reverse; it brings a slur in the eyes of neighbours, and it has not even the germ of prospective advantage; but is apt, on the contrary, to sow the seeds of an embarrassing and damaging intimacy.

Why should Jesus command so unnatural a thing? There is probably a variety of reasons. He conditions friendship on obedience; and how is this to be put to the test without commandments that are disagreeable? He aims to keep his brethren in that humble frame of mind which alone is reasonable and acceptable to God. How could they be more effectually helped than by the obligation to "condescend to men of low estate?" Above all, he would develop in them the Father's character, who is long-suffering and kind, even to the undeserving, and who, "while we were yet sinners," made advances of love to us. What so likely to help this character in his brethren as to make it obligatory on them to consider and minister to the less-favoured of mankind with whom they may be thrown in contact, and to make it their rule to give pleasure rather than to seek for it? This commandment is on a par with some others that are practically ignored in professing Christendom. It is hard to contemplate in the abstract, but sweeter in the practice than would be expected. Not many act upon it. True disciples do. Those to whom Christ is a reality and a beau ideal, and the sum and substance of the coming glory, cannot be deaf to a saying which, though addressed to one man on a particular occasion, in the hill country of Judea, was intended for the ears of the millions in all the world who have since read the words. They are strengthened in their obedience by this consideration, that it is only for a time that

these bitter herbs have to be eaten with the Passover. When the kingdom of God is come, the day of hardship of every sort will have gone for ever.

One of the company somewhat effusively endorsed the allusion of Christ to "the resurrection of the just." He exclaimed, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." The speaker must have been one of those who desire the advantages of the kingdom without acting on its principles: for Christ's rejoinder almost amounted to a snub. He spoke to him the parable of the invited guests who refused to come to a certain great supper. This parable has been considered in chapter xxxiii., and therefore need not be entered on here. How the man took it we are not told. He probably did not like it. It is not to the common taste to be pleased with eternal truth apart from personal compliment, and from this, as mere compliment, Jesus abstained, though he was not backward to recognise and proclaim personal worth when occasion called, as in the case of Nathanael, Zaccheus, the woman with the alabaster box of ointment, and others.

Jesus could not and did not speak to please, though no speaking ever conferred such pleasure as his words impart to his true lovers, who are lovers of the Father also. In this Paul imitated him. "If I yet please men I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. i. 10). To please men in general a man must flatter and deviate from truth, and, above all, abstain from divine allusions, which are intolerable to natural men. He must praise the world, and speak of the things that please the world. A servant of Christ can do none of these, and therefore he is hated, as Jesus was. Jesus encouraged all such in advance when he said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." This hatred is only for a time. "The world passeth away," and its hatred with it; it passes never to return: "He that doeth the will of God (ultimately) abideth for ever." It is, therefore, not strange that those who desire to do the will of God should be exhorted to "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." Jesus requires that we hold loosely by these. He gave very emphatic expression to his view on this point immediately after the Sabbath dinner, at which he uttered the things we have been considering.

The occasion being at an end, he went on his journey: "and there went great multitudes with him." In this, Jesus did not glory or feel the satisfaction that most human leaders find in the number of their adherents. He did not encourage the people to come after him. On the contrary, he poured cold water on their enthusiasm. He turned to them and delivered a brief address to them which must have perplexed the bulk of them. He said, "If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple.... Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." These seem hard sayings until the eyes are opened to the true relation of man to God, and to the actual nature of the state of things now prevalent upon the earth as estimated by Him. It is for the lack of this eye opening that the ordinary run of critics are at fault

with words that square not with their philosophy of things. Christ seems to them cold and harsh in this matter, and his words of a narrow bigotry. His faithful people were called man-haters in the early centuries, and all through human history, an impression to the same effect has prevailed—that disciples of Christ are “without natural feeling.” It is a natural misconception on the part of those who know not God, nor Jesus Christ whom He hath sent.

As a matter of fact, no men are so loving and kind as the true friends of Christ, but their love is governed by considerations which the world cannot appreciate. It cannot act apart from the rights and purposes and requirements of God. It cannot go off the ground of fealty to the Eternal God to commend itself to the goodwill of perishing man; and this fealty requires the friends of God to maintain His law as the rule of their own life and that of all men who are “commanded everywhere to repent.” Consequently, they cannot join in aims of life that are based merely upon natural wants and that do not embrace the service of God as the highest object. With them, the natural is but the stepping stone to the spiritual. It is not ignored, but it is held in subordination. It has its place—its valuable place—in the scheme of things that has God as the objective of life; but away from this scheme of things, it loses that place, becomes inadequate as the basis of friendship or even of co-operation. Hence, the friends of Christ naturally seem unnatural to those who only know the natural, but the cause lies with the latter, who are “the world” and not with the friends of Christ, whose sympathies embrace all, but cannot act on a disjointed part.

The case may be likened to that of an aristocratic household in a country side where the local peasantry are in revolt, say, against the rights of the earl or duke, as the case may be, who is the head of the house. The members of the house cannot be on intimate terms with the peasantry under those circumstances, though those members are really kind people, and prepared to act a sympathetic part when the rights of their father are recognised, and the rules of the estate established. They will be considered peasant-haters, but only by the ignorant and misguided. It is the attitude of the peasants that is to blame. The family it may be are waiting the arrival of troops to enforce law and order, on the achievement of which, they will appear in their true light as benefactors of the whole population.

## **CHAPTER XLVII.**

### **Causes of Stumbling—“Unprofitable Servants”— the Ten lepers—the Kingdom—the Signs of his Coming.**

On the occasion last under consideration, the Pharisees found occasion for cavil in the circumstance that “the publicans and sinners drew near to hear him.” They construed his attention to them as a moral identification with them, or, at all

events, affected so to construe it. "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." It was a galling insinuation, and difficult to rebut, because the fact was as stated. But Jesus rebutted it in the masterly way characteristic of all his performances. He rebutted it by parable. He introduced three successive suppositions, which effectively exhibited the true character of his association with "publicans and sinners." It was not as sinners, but to change them from being sinners that he received the classes from whom the Pharisees held aloof. We have considered this in the parables of the lost sheep, the lost piece of money, and the prodigal son, treated of in chapter xxx. On the same occasion, he uttered the parables of the unjust steward (also chapter xxx.), and of the rich man and Lazarus, which will be found fully discussed in chapter xxxi. He then proceeded to address his disciples on matters specially affecting them.

"It is impossible," he said, "but that offences (or causes of stumbling) will come, but woe to him through whom they come. It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend (or cause to stumble) one of these little ones" (Luke xvii. 1–2). We might have supposed that Jesus here referred to avowed enemies of the truth, had he not given it an application to believers themselves: "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother sin (Revised Version) rebuke him: if he repent, forgive him, and if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day, turn again, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him." From this it would seem that Christ meant to make his brethren particular as to the bearing of their actions on one another. They were not only to avoid causes of stumbling, but even when such had arisen, they were to endeavour to extricate those who had stumbled—with a patience that was to go to the extremest limit: "seventy times seven." It is in fact an inculcation of the reverse sentiment from that which animated Cain when he said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Christ means to say we are our brother's keeper to a certain extent, and Paul, his servant, carries the idea to an extent much beyond what men in our age are disposed to recognise. In his argument about the conscientious scruples of brethren in matters of eating and drinking, he says, "If thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died ... It is good neither to eat flesh nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended or is made weak." It is manifest that by the law of Christ, we are under an obligation to consider the bearing of our actions upon others. If we are indifferent on this head, we may find ourselves unexpectedly confronted with unknown responsibilities in the day of account.

The law of Christ goes contrary to modern sentiment on many points. Here is another: "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was OUR DUTY to do." The modern temper attaches little weight to the consideration of "duty." It inclines men to take great credit to themselves for well doing, and in its more generous form, to recognise it in others. No sooner does a man do anything fairly decent in this line, than his friends get up a testimonial or a complimentary

dinner, or some other way of “doing honour one to another.” Jesus discourages this tendency; and in this he is in accordance with the highest form of reason of which man is capable. Man, as a created being, owes it to God to obey His commandments. God has associated our highest well-being with it. God’s approval of the performance of our obligation, and the recompense He purposes are all of His favour. There is no claim on our part. We do our duty: we do not profit God in this. We cannot profit Him. “We are unprofitable servants,” in this sense. The profit is all on our side. Boastful sentiment is barbarous. Even complacency is offensive. Only the attitude of humility is reasonable. If those who have “done all those things that are commanded” are acceptable only when they say, “We are unprofitable servants,” what is the position of those who do not “the things that are commanded?” This is the most pointed bearing of Christ’s injunction in this case. He illustrates it by the case of servants who do their duty. They are acceptable, but are not regarded as specially meritorious. But if they do not their duty, they are worse than useless. This is the position of the bulk of those who say they are “Christians.”

Journeying towards Jerusalem, on the highway passing through the Roman provinces of Galilee and Samaria, Jesus and his disciples were met near a certain village by a company of lepers. The lepers, numbering ten, did not come close, but kept at the distance which their diseased condition required. “They stood afar off.” That a company of men in their condition should associate together is not wonderful, considering the complete insulation from the rest of the community which the law and custom imposed upon them. Though insulated, they had heard of Jesus and his wondrous healing power: and now saw their opportunity had come. Perhaps they travelled on the highway at this time in the hope of meeting him. At all events, seeing their opportunity, they seized it. Though standing afar off, they arrested the attention of Jesus by their signals, and at the top of their voices implored him to have mercy on them. “Jesus! Master! have mercy on us.” Jesus, whose mercy was never appealed to in vain, complied with their wishes in an indirect mode: “Go shew yourselves to the priests!”

They knew what this meant. The law required a cured leper to shew himself to the priest. Though the priests were Christ’s enemies, and though he had to condemn them in toto, yet as himself under the law (Gal. iv. 4) he was obedient to the law, because it was God’s law, and therefore directed this melancholy group of social outcasts to do as the law required. They were not slow to catch his meaning, and at once departed with all speed to the nearest priest. As they went along with the ardour of new hope, they felt in themselves that their disease was arrested, and that in fact a sound state had set in. The power of God in Christ had rectified the functional disorder that caused the disease, and they experienced the joyful sensation of being healed. They would no doubt exchange remarks on the subject. One of them was so impressed that he left the other nine to go forward, and turned back to where Christ was, and threw himself down at his feet with overflowing thanksgiving for the benefit he had received. “With a

loud voice he glorified God.” The man was not a Jew, but a stranger—a Samaritan. Jesus took notice of the fact, and found no fault with him, but the reverse. Why were not the others with him? “Were there not ten cleansed?” said Jesus: “But where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God save this stranger.”

How easy it is to extract the intended meaning of this comment—(Christ’s comment)—however difficult the people may find it to work out in the circumstances of modern life. Many are the benefits conferred. Life is a string of benefactions from the cradle to the grave. “He giveth unto all life and breath and all things.” Why do so few recognise their obligation? Why are there so few to give hearty thanks? Why is it that praise to God for common mercies should seem cant and sentiment? Because the minds of few are exercised to discern the roots and relations of things; and this is the result of the unhappy situation of things upon earth when mankind are left to govern themselves instead of being taken charge of and led by God who made them, who only knows the right conditions of human life and development, and who will yet set up a kingdom that will govern and guide them all. It is for those, meanwhile, to whom it may have been given to see wisdom in the matter, to decline the example of the absent nine and their countless companions; and to imitate the tenth, in obedience to the apostolic command, “In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. v. 18).

Pursuing his journey, Jesus came into contact with a band of the Pharisees—it is not stated where—probably at some town on the route, and in some local synagogue on the Sabbath. He was now known throughout all the land; and it was natural that his claims should be first in men’s minds wherever he appeared. With the common people his being the Messiah was a settled question so far as anything can be settled with a fickle populace. It was not so with the Pharisees. A number of them were perplexed, and many privately believed: but, as a body, their attitude was hostile. Their hostility came out in various ways, according to circumstances. On this occasion, it was an ironical question. Jesus had been preaching the Kingdom of God all through the country. The Pharisees now asked, “When is the Kingdom of God coming?”

The question was put for cavil—not for information. It was as much as if they had said, “You have been talking about the Kingdom of God a long time, and you say you are the King; shew it in an open way, and we will believe. Set up the Kingdom with public demonstration.” Jesus answered the question in accordance with the spirit that dictated it. He did not speak as plainly as he might, though in what he said he uttered the truth absolutely. He said “The Kingdom of God cometh not (i.e., and that time) with observation, or public demonstration, neither shall they say, lo here, or, lo there, for behold the Kingdom of God is within (among) you.” That the reference was to his own presence among them is made certain by the remark he immediately added: “The days come when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man and shall not see it.” He was with

them then—in their midst: and his presence in the capacity of the King inviting to a future inheritance of the Kingdom was the only form in which the Kingdom was to be looked for at that time. By and bye, he would be gone, and it would be no longer affirmable that “the Kingdom of God was among them.”

Why he should identify himself with the Kingdom is not difficult of apprehension when we realise that he is the kernel and root of all that the Kingdom will ever be when established over all the earth. The Kingdom, when it comes, will be but his power organically applied in the locality and constitution of things foreshewn in the prophets. He was the Kingdom in the germ. It was in this sense that the people sang on the occasion of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem a little later: “Blessed is the Kingdom of our father David that cometh in the name of the Lord.” It was, therefore, permissible for him to tell the Pharisees, in answer to their question when the Kingdom was coming, that it was already come and actually in their midst, though without the outward show of a political institution. The statement was a rebuke of their blindness.

Turning then to his disciples, he spoke of the approach of the time when he would be no more with them, and when their desire for his return might expose them to false alarms and announcements on the subject of his coming. “They shall say to you, see here, or, see there: go not after them nor follow them: for as the lightning that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven shineth unto the other part under heaven, so shall also the Son of Man be in his day.” That is, his coming would be an open public thing that would make them independent of all private report. He then proceeds to make remarks that at first sight present some features of difficulty.

“And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot: they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded, but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away; and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot’s wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. I tell you in that night, there shall be two men in one bed: the one shall be taken and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together: the one shall be taken and the other left. And they answered and said unto him, Where Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.”

The difficulty lies here: the subject of the remarks is apparently the second coming of the Son of Man, and yet they refer to events connected with the impending overthrow of the Jewish nation and the destruction of Jerusalem, as



where he counsels flight from the midst of destruction, reminding them of Lot's wife; and speaks of the gathering of vultures to a dead body (the gathering of the Romans to prey on the carcass of the Jewish party). How came two such apparently widely separated subjects to be interwoven one with another? We may find our answer if we go back and take our stand with Christ at the time he uttered the words.

Looking forward from that point of time, the events would not seem so far separated as they do to us. In fact, in a sense, they were actually part and parcel of one another. Looking forward, the long-foretold overthrow of the Jewish state was the immediately proximate and impending event. It would fill the mental sky of the beholder. It was to happen within the life-time of that generation (Matt. xxiv. 34). It was to happen after Christ's departure from his disciples, but it was associated with the idea of his personal co-operation and presence: for he was to be alive, with "all power in heaven and earth in his hands." The infliction of judgment on Jerusalem was to be by "the King sending forth his armies, destroying those murderers, and burning up their city" (Matt. xxii. 7). It was therefore in a sense a coming of Christ in judgment: not an appearing, but a coming. He was alive and there to take part.

The idea of his personal though unseen participation in the events of the period is countenanced by the fact that he appeared to Saul of Tarsus on the way to Damascus, saying, with reference to Paul's antagonism to believers, "Why persecutest thou ME?" also by his declaration to John in Patmos, that he walked in the midst of the golden candlesticks (this is, the ecclesias), and that if certain did not repent, he would come on them as a thief, and they would not know when (Rev. iii. 3). It is not an act of the imagination, therefore if we realise his cooperation in the events that devastated the land in destroying judgment long-gathered up.

This harmonises all the allusions of the discourse under consideration. A day of judgment had come in Noah's day, a day of judgment had come in Lot's day. In both cases, the approach of the day was disregarded. So it would be in the day of judgment fast hastening upon Israel, when He, Jesus ("first suffering many things and rejected of that generation, but afterwards raised and glorified"), would come upon them as a thief, invisible, but powerful for their destruction.

To his friends, his advice was, "When the hour comes, make no attempt to save your property: leave the doomed city: get away to the mountains" (Luke xxi. 21). Those who obeyed his instructions would be thus "taken" from the midst of the judgment: those who did not would be "left." Where? Why, where the vultures were about to gather to fatten on Israel's carcass. Such directions could not apply to the incidents of his second appearing in power and great glory, when the gathering of his household is for judgment, and not left to their will, but effected by angelic agency.

This understanding of the matter does not conflict with the fact of his second appearing in our future. It only shows that there is an interval between the judgment inflicted on the Jews, and that to be poured out upon the Gentiles. But that they are both part and parcel of the same work carried out by the same hand, viz.—the hand of him to whom “The Father hath committed all judgment”: who invisibly inflicted judgment on the Jews, but will openly appear to save his people and punish the Gentiles, and re-establishing the throne of David, sit thereon, and reign over a rejoicing earth for ever.

Some think that this view surrenders the basis of the expectation of his coming to reign. They say that if the destruction of Jerusalem was the work of Christ, and in a sense a coming of his, there is no other coming to look for, since that was all the coming spoken of in the words of Christ and the apostles. There is no ground for this contention. Jesus did not limit his work or his coming to the destruction that was to overtake Jerusalem. He went far beyond that event. He spoke of “the times of the Gentiles” as a long period during which Jerusalem would be downtrodden, at the end of which redemption was to draw nigh. When the times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled, a sign of the impending appearing of Christ should be “on earth distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, men’s hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things that are coming on the earth,” etc.

When, therefore, Jesus said, “This generation shall not pass till all these things shall be fulfilled,” we must not think that he meant things which he expressly excluded from the lifetime of “that generation” by placing them at the expiry of the times of the Gentiles, and which could not occur in that generation by his own description of their scope. The history of the case is the interpretation of the case. That generation did not pass without witnessing the “these things” about which the disciples asked. Forty years afterwards, the temple was destroyed, and Jerusalem laid in ashes. The Gentile down-treading of Jerusalem then ensued, and has continued till now. And now, the times of the Gentiles being at their expiry, we are in the throes of a new era for Palestine, and witnesses of a growing distress of nations with perplexity, pointing to the climax of the prophecy in the return of Christ to the earth, to accomplish those mighty and glorious changes which have been promised from the beginning.

In recognising the unexpired currency of Daniel’s “times of the Gentiles,” Jesus gave evidence that he had no expectation of his kingly manifestation, 1,800 years ago. He gave evidence of this in various other ways. He spake a parable—“BECAUSE THEY THOUGHT the kingdom of God should immediately appear” (Luke xix. 11). His parable was of a nobleman departing into a far country, leaving behind him servants whom he should call to account at his return. Matthew’s account represents him as saying, “AFTER A LONG TIME, the Lord of those servants cometh” (xxv. 19). To this “long time” there are frequent references: “the days will come,” he said, “when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man and shall not see it” (Luke xvii. 22). “The days will come

when the bridegroom shall be taken away" (Matt. ix. 15). "It is expedient for you that I go away" (Jno. xvi. 7). "And while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept (went to the grave)" (Matt xxv. 5).

It is, therefore, contrary to fact to represent Christ and the apostles (as some do) as teaching the occurrence of the second appearing, "in that generation in which the apostles wrote." The saying of Christ, on a certain occasion, that some were standing by which should not taste of the death till they should see him coming in his kingdom, refers to the illustration of that event vouchsafed six days afterwards to Peter, James, and John, in the brilliant manifestation of his glory on the Mount of Transfiguration. This is manifest from Peter's allusion to it afterwards: "We have not followed cunningly-devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we were eye-witnesses of his majesty.... when we were with him on the holy mount" (2 Peter i. 16, 18). If this be demurred to, the objector has but to be reminded that Christ's words contemplate a "tasting of death" after the event referred to—after the analogy of Simeon, to whom "it was revealed that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ," and who, when he had seen him, said, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace" (Luke ii. 26–29). Will any affirm that Christ supposed it possible his disciples should die after entering into the kingdom of God?

As for the epistles, there is only a seeming countenance to the idea that the second appearing of Christ was imminent in the first century. It is due to the fact already before us, that the judicial destruction of the Jewish commonwealth was imminent, and that that judicial destruction was to be the doing of the Son of Man (Matt. xiii. 41), and that it would be the beginning of the programme sketched by the Lord in the discourse already considered, and which should culminate in his appearing and kingdom. The statements, "The Lord is at hand;" "The end of all things is at hand;" "It is the last time," had a Hebraic sense, and found their truthful application in the terrible overthrow about to befall the Jewish nation.

When it came to be a question of the personal appearing of the Lord to judge and save his people, Paul expressly said, "Let no man deceive you by any means, for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed.... Remember ye not that while I was yet with you I told you these things" (2 Thess. ii. 3, 4). Here is a plain evidence that Paul, late in his life, recognised and familiarly taught that certain events had to transpire in the ecclesiastical sphere before the appearing of Christ was a possibility in the purpose of God. Peter also declared God would send Jesus, but that "the heavens must hold him until" a certain, even later, period than that spoken of by Paul, "the times of the restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the prophets since the beginning" (Acts iii. 19–22).

The aim of every earnest student will be to find a place for every part and feature of the teaching of Christ without reference to any set theory which would nullify

any part, and above all without the least surrender to the thought of error on the part of Christ, whose origin and mission from God are so abundantly otherwise attested. On the point in question, a reconciliation is possible in the way indicated between features at first perplexing. The events of the first century had a bearing on the friends of Christ who were contemporary with his life in the flesh; and this bearing he could not, and did not ignore; but, at the same time, he discoursed of them in a way that admitted of an application to the remoter crisis coming, even the time of the end afterwards foreshadowed in the Apocalypse, when a watching class would be waiting his re-appearing under the sixth vial—even now.

Whether then or now, there are trying demands on the faith and patience of those who wait the purpose of God. It was therefore appropriate that he should close his remarks with a parable “to this end, that men ought always to pray and not to faint.” Those who wait are liable to “faint and grow weary.” It is true that at last “they shall not be ashamed that wait for me,” but while waiting, they bear shame; suffering from the mental fatigue that comes of it; and are in danger of wearying. Christ commands us to pray. It is not in vain that we do so, even now. It is a constant source of renewed strength to “cry day and night” to the God of our life to bring to pass the things He has promised, and to fortify us with His blessing and guidance while seeking to do His will in the cloudy and dark day. He illustrated the point by a parable which we have already considered.

## **CHAPTER XLVIII.**

### **Weeps Over Jerusalem—Rides into the City— Blasts the Fig-Tree.**

Jesus now set his face for the last time towards Jerusalem. He had made several visits to it during his “ministry.” He had journeyed up and down among the people for 3½ years, teaching the words and doing the works of God with all kindness and patience and independence; but now he would do so no more. The end was in sight.

It was with a certain relief that he went forward to what awaited him. He had said on a previous occasion, “I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished?” The prospect was now before him of its “accomplishment.” He unbosomed himself on the subject to his disciples, but found a poor response. “Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished. For he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked and spitefully entreated and spitted on, and they shall scourge him and put him to death, and the third day he shall rise again.” It might have been some comfort to Jesus had the disciples quite entered into his meaning, and manifested intelligent sympathy. Instead of that, “They understood none of these things, and this saying was hid

from them, neither knew they the things that were spoken” (Luke xviii. 34). What a sense this circumstance conveys of the loneliness of the Son of Man in the day of his suffering.

Jesus approaches Jericho, on the Roman road that connects that place with the north, accompanied by a crowd of people who increase in number as he nears the town. Two blind men sitting by the wayside, hear the hum of the crowd and the sound of their feet on the road, and ask what is the meaning of it. Being told that Jesus of Nazareth is passing, one of them shouts at the top of his voice to arrest Christ’s attention. He had doubtless heard of Jesus opening the eyes of the blind. “Jesus! thou Son of David! Have mercy on me!” The blind man had begun to shout thus as soon as the head of the procession began to pass, and a good while before Jesus came up. The people told him he must not make such a noise—that it was rude to interrupt a great man passing, &c., that he must in fact hold his tongue. But the man was not to be silenced. An opportunity had come to him that might never come again. So he shouted “so much the more.” He got his reward.

There is something in the maxim: “He that seeketh findeth;” but much depends on the quarter to which the seeking is directed. An ordinary traveller of eminence would have given no heed to the cry of a pauper: but this was no ordinary traveller. He came to show compassion and to teach it. When he came opposite where the blind men were sitting, he stopped on the road, and gave orders for them to be brought to him. The crowd, who had been ordering the shouter to “hold his peace,” now changed their tone. They said: “Be of good cheer. Rise: he calleth you.” And the men rose and were guided to the presence of Jesus. Jesus asked the simple but welcome question: “What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?” Promptly came the natural answer: “Lord, that we may receive our sight.” Swift and effectual the response: “Receive thy sight.” Gracious and instructive the explanation: “Thy faith hath saved thee.” Jesus actually gives the man part of the credit of the cure. We have before considered the scriptural connection between faith and healing. Faith will do nothing if the healing power is not present, but the action of the healing power is helped by the exercise of faith. The defect of modern so-called “faith-healing” lies in the absence of the divine power to heal, consequently the healing can go no higher than the recuperative resources of nature. The glory of the works done by Christ and his apostles in the first century, lay in the fact that God worked by them, and that therefore to faith, “all things were possible.”—The men, in full and instant possession of restored sight, gave loud glory to God, and fell into the ranks and followed the crowd which now resumed its course into Jericho.

Jesus passed through the place. A leading man there, wealthy but of poor repute, seeing the crowd, and hearing, like the blind man, that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, made a special effort to get a look at Jesus. He was small of stature, and could not easily do so for the crowd. Observing the direction of the procession, and being nimble though diminutive, he ran ahead of the crowd,

clambering up a tree that stood on the road side, and there waited the interesting moment when he should be able from his elevated position to get a deliberate and uninterrupted view of the most interesting human form ever seen upon the earth. He had not long to wait, and when the moment came, he got more than he expected. When Jesus reached the tree, he stopped, bringing the crowd to a stand with him. The little rich man with honest eyes (for he was an honest man) was intently peering at Christ, when Christ, looking up, fixed his eyes on the little rich man and said "Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for to-day I must abide at thy house." Zaccheus, thus unexpectedly summoned, after a moment's surprise, came down with alacrity, and standing deferentially before Christ expressed the gladness it would afford him to entertain him. He then led the way towards his house, and Christ followed, leaving the bulk of the crowd hanging on the road. The crowd did not relish the incident at all. The crowd are almost always murmurers. "They all murmured, saying, that he has gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." The remark was perfectly unreasonable. All murmuring is unreasonable at the bottom. When you have reasoned with it and answered it, it remains. But it always takes the semblance of reason. In its vilest forms, it affects virtuous indignation.

There was an appearance of reason in this case. "Gone to be a guest with a man that is a sinner." What then? Would you have liked him to remain with you, O, murmurers? Doubtless. And are not you sinners? But the fact is they were mistaken. Zaccheus was not the sinner they took him to be. All men are sinners, but there are sinners and sinners. When Christ arrived at the house of Zaccheus, Zaccheus gave an account of himself which Jesus endorsed, and which shows that he was the right man for Jesus to honour by "abiding at his house." The account was this:

"Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor: and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." Christ confirmed the account thus: "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." A sinner who was in the habit of devoting half his income to the relief of the necessitous and in the habit of returning four times the value of inadvertent exactions in business (for this man was a tax assessor and collector) was clearly a son of Abraham in the sense defined by Christ in his conversation with the Jews: "If ye were Abraham's children ye would do the works of Abraham" (Jno. viii. 39). This was the class whom Jesus had come to "seek and save:" "men of an honest and good heart" who were wandering in the way of death (Luke viii. 15); as Paul expressed it, "whosoever among you feareth God, TO YOU is the word of this salvation sent" (Acts xiii. 26). It is true that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. In this sense, Christ came not to call the (self) righteous but sinners to repentance. But it is also true that the sinners called to repentance are "those who have ears to hear" the called are not those who have "consciences seared as with a hot iron" and who, being past feeling,

work all uncleanness with greediness, like natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed (Eph. iv. 19; 1 Tim. iv. 2; Rom. i. 28–32; 2 Pet. ii. 12–22).

It is clear that Zaccheus was of the former and not of the latter class, and that the bad odour in which he was held by the Jews was not justified by his character, but was probably attributable solely to the fact of his holding office as a taxgatherer under the Romans. All Jew publicans were odious to the Jews on this ground; and no doubt most of the publicans were extortioners and unjust as well; but there were just men among them, and on Christ's authority, Zaccheus was one of them, which was one reason why he honoured him by staying under his roof.

The pleasant declaration made by Jesus, "This day is salvation come to this house," excited the liveliest feelings in the listening disciples, who "thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear." We are informed that for this reason, and "because they were nigh to Jerusalem," he spake the parable of a nobleman departing to a far country and returning before he could settle the affairs of his kingdom. This parable is considered in chapter xxxii. Why his being near to Jerusalem should be a reason for speaking the parable, a knowledge of the gospel of the kingdom as distinguished from the gospel of popular preaching will enable us to understand. The kingdom they were looking for pertains to Jerusalem (Micah iv 8; Jer. iii. 17; Luke ii. 38), and will be established there (Isaiah xxiv. 23; ii. 1–4; Zeph. iii. 14–17; Jer. xxxiii. 6–17). Its establishment there is necessitated by Christ's heirship to the throne of David (Luke i. 32; Acts ii. 29; Jer. xxiii. 5), for David, as all are aware, reigned for God there (2 Sam. v. 5; 1 Chron. xxix. 11, 23, 26, 27).

Nearness to Jerusalem, after a three and a half years' proclamation of the gospel of the kingdom (Luke iv. 43), was therefore highly calculated to strengthen the expectation that he was then about to establish the kingdom. It is, therefore, no chance expression that informs us that one reason of his speaking this parable to the nobleman was "because he was nigh to Jerusalem." He probably felt there was a necessity for checking ardour in this direction on account of the fact that he was actually about to accept a popular ovation in fulfilment of the beautiful prophecy of Zechariah: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold thy King cometh unto thee; he is just and having salvation; lowly and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass."

That ovation was a beautiful and cheering incident—like a gleam of sunshine in the midst of a cloudy day. Its occurrence at this time was an arrangement of divine wisdom. We are not told what its object was as regards Christ himself. It was probably of the same character as that of the angel's visit in the garden of Gethsemane. He was on the eve of a terrible ordeal of suffering. He knew it was coming, and was exercised by the prospect. Did he not need "strengthening?" In the garden of Gethsemane, the angel "strengthened" him. It is probable that the triumphal entry into Jerusalem at this time would have a similar effect. We must

not forget the testimony that he was “touched with the feeling of our infirmity.” It would tone him up for the last bitter cup to have a foretaste of the glorious future, when the whole nation would receive him with blessing, and when the whole earth would bow suppliant and adoring at his feet.

Its occurrence was perfectly natural when Jesus provided the opportunity. For over three years, the work of Christ, though it excited the jealousy and hatred of the priestly classes, had filled the popular mind with increasing admiration. The crowd accompanying him on this occasion, shared the feeling to the fullest extent. They had just seen the miracle of the curing of the blind, coming after a long series of wonderful deeds. They had been witnesses of, and gloried in, his righteous oppositions to the leaders. Their ranks were swelled by the arrival of many from Jerusalem, who had come to the feast, and who, hearing of the resurrection of Lazarus, were anxious to see Lazarus as well as Jesus. It was whispered by many, “Is not this the Messiah?” When, therefore, Jesus mounted an animal to make the foretold entry into Jerusalem, the associations of such an event almost provoked demonstration on his behalf. It had several times happened in Israel’s history that a new reign had been inaugurated by a royal progress in this particular form—mounted on an ass. The ass is a different animal in the East from what it is in the West, and holds a different position in popular regard from what it does in England. The spectacle, therefore, of Jesus so mounted and riding towards Jerusalem, was suggestive of ideas in harmony with the popular impression that the kingdom of God was immediately to appear.

The people caught up the idea and threw themselves into it. They cast off their clothes and spread them in the way for Christ to pass over, in a transport of loyal affection. They also broke off branches from the trees, which were then numerous in the neighbourhood, and strewed them on the road. By-and-bye, they broke into song, in which the people who went before and the people who followed after, joined. The air to which they sang would probably be one well-known, and borrowed from the temple service with which they were all made familiar by their regular visits at the feasts. The words also were closely allied to words found in Psalm cxviii., and may have been the very paraphrase of these words then used in the synagogues throughout the country: “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. Blessed be the kingdom of our Father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!”

In the jubilant multitude who thus “rejoiced and praised God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen,” were some of the Pharisees, but they took no part in the demonstration. On the contrary, getting close to Christ, they advised him to restrain it. “Master, rebuke thy disciples!” They would, doubtless, profess to be shocked at the profanity of the performance. “Thou blind Pharisee!” There is nothing more odious in the whole range of abortive mental phenomena incidental to the present deranged and cursed state of human life upon the earth, than the conceited and insincere mediocrity that sets itself against the true



greatnesses of wisdom. It professes to be moved by high considerations of principle, whereas it is moved by the vexation of disappointed egotism when conscious, as the Pharisees were, of eclipse in the presence of a greater than themselves. What could Jesus say but the words of sad emphasis in which he rejoined: "I tell you if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

The first part of the journey, in the wild ascent from Jericho, in the Jordan valley, to the crest of Olivet, overlooking Jerusalem, was on foot. The crowd with their backs towards the east, and leaving the valley and advancing westwards up the hill, would have their view in front cut off by the top of the hill range. Jerusalem lay at the other side, and therefore, would be out of view till the summit was gained. When the company reached this position, Jerusalem would burst upon their view suddenly.

Apparently at this point, Jesus halted and "beheld the city." The crowd would halt with him and gather round. As he viewed the city, he was seen to weep. His own sufferings were near, but it was not these that drew tears to his eyes. He saw a suffering beyond, more terrible, more unavailing. The beautiful city before him, more honoured than any upon earth, was about to bring on itself a retribution more terrible than history knew, through its failure to recognise Emmanuel in their midst—yea, worse, the enormity of its treatment of him, "Killing the Prince of life and desiring a murderer to be granted to them" After a contemplative pause, he apostrophised the city.

"If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee that thine enemies shall east a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground and thy children within thee. And they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

Tears leave their mark. They may be dried away and leave no visible discolouration on the cheek: but the countenance looks like the countenance of a man who has wept. We may safely imagine, therefore, that as the cavalcade moved on towards the city at the base of the hill, the mounted central figure, in the midst of all the joyful demonstrations in which the crowd indulged, looked like "the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief."

They passed into the city by one of the gates leading to the temple. The arrival of such a large crowd in such an excited state naturally caused a commotion. "The whole city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus of Nazareth of Galilee." The authorities were powerless in the presence of popular enthusiasm. Jesus entered the temple itself. The very children took up the refrain: "Hosanna to the Son of David." No wonder: "the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them." This was no ordinary leader,

glamouring the people with empty high-sounding words. He conferred real benefit and showed real power. The people discerned the case, so far as the populace could discern so great a matter, and they gave utterance to their feelings.

The Scribes and Pharisees were ill at ease. They could not deny the works, but they could not join in their praise. Their mood was expressed in the words they addressed to the cured blind man on a previous occasion: "Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner." They could not conceal their displeasure at the deference shewn to Jesus. The participation of the children especially excited their disgust: "Hearest thou what these say!" said they to Jesus. Jesus quickly answered "Yes: have you never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?"

At this time, Christ still more offended the Scribes and Pharisees by repeating the operation he had performed over three years previously. The temple was profaned, as then, by a crowd of mere traffickers in temporalities who had no sympathy for the objects for which the temple had been erected: he did now, as he shocked them by doing then: "He cast out them that bought and sold in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money changers and the seats of them that sold doves, and would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple." The principles involved in this proceeding were considered on its first occurrence (chapter xiii.). It is not necessary to repeat. The whole incident was a fore-shadowing of the greater purification he will effect when he returns to the scene of his sufferings in power and great glory.

The Scribes and Pharisees were paralysed by his boldness. They were chagrined to the last degree, but they could do nothing. The people were on his side: and of himself they were afraid. They conferred together and "sought how they might destroy him." They accomplished their object in a few days, but the ripe moment had not just yet arrived.

The public stir having subsided, and evening drawing on, he retired from the city with the twelve, retracing his steps up the face of the Mount of Olives to Bethany, where he lodged under the genial roof of Martha and Mary and their brother Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead. Here they "made him a supper." This was evidently a ceremonial and semi-public repast; for we read that "Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table." During its course, an incident occurred similar to that which happened at the Pharisee's house earlier in his ministry.

A Mary (there were several Marys—probably this was the sister of Martha) "took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and poured it on the head of Jesus. She also anointed his feet and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment." This was the act of affection, affection based upon enlightenment, but still affection; and as such, it was offensive to

those who felt none of it. In the former case, it was the Pharisee: in this case, it was Judas. He had no sympathy with the fine feeling that prompted "such extravagance." His sordid soul looked at the value of the stuff. "Why was not this ointment sold for 300 pence?" But, of course, he must put a superior complexion on his objection. Murmurers never own to the real nature of their feelings; probably they have not sufficient power of self-analysis to discern it. At all events, they always manage to claim a virtuous character for their growls; and so he blurted out "and given to the poor." "Given to the poor!" This is always a handy plea, but look at its injustice—Judas on the side of the poor and Christ not! This was the insinuation.

If Christ was the subject of such a reflection, why need his brethren be over-grieved if it be turned on them—and by the very same class? Men of God sympathise with the poor and help them as they can. But there come times when something else has a call for attention. And then the Judases, who never at other times concern themselves about the poor, except at other people's expense, are liable to step forward and grumble about "the poor" being neglected.

Judas had no care for the poor; but he had objects of his own. Even some of the other disciples sympathised with his objection to the "waste." Their attitude forced Jesus into an appearance of indifference to the poor. "The poor ye have with you always: and whensoever ye will ye may do them good. But me ye have not always." "Let her alone; why trouble ye her; she hath wrought a good work on me.... She is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying." And then he conferred the singular distinction upon her which she will awake at the resurrection to find she has ever since enjoyed: "Wheresoever the gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, there also shall this that this woman hath done be spoken of for a memorial of her."

Early next morning, Jesus emerged from the house, breakfastless, to go to Jerusalem, accompanied by his disciples. On the way, feeling the motions of hunger, he turned aside to a fig tree, in the hope of finding some figs on it. There were none, "for the time of figs was not yet," upon which Jesus said, "No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever." The disciples noted the saying; and next morning, passing by the same spot, they observed that the fig-tree was completely withered.

There has been some very childish writing on the subject of this incident. It has either been dismissed as inexplicable, with much superior lifting of the eyebrows, or it has been set down as a proof of the latent irascibility of Christ's temper—that he should blight an innocent fig-tree for not bearing fruit out of season. It does not appear as if there ought to be the least difficulty in understanding it. Even if there were not the guidance contained in the practical application that Christ made of the incident, it does not seem an unreasonable thing that Jesus should embrace a good opportunity of pressing home upon his disciples the fact that he affirmed on another occasion, that "a greater than Solomon is here." Facts are

louder than words. He whose mere word could blast a tree like the lightning, must be great.

A human majesty would not be considered too strongly asserted which ordered the filling up of a well that failed to supply water at a moment of need. Why, then, should there be any difficulty about the Prince of the Kings of the earth? His life was a teaching life, in word and deed, toward his disciples and toward the populace according to occasion, and the great object of all his teaching was to convince the hearers that God was working and speaking by him. No fairly disposed mind realising this, could make any difficulty with the fig tree. But in addition to these obvious reflections, there is the use that Jesus made of the incident, which of itself is all-sufficient to explain it.

Passing the fig tree next day, the disciples noticed its withered state. We cannot doubt that Jesus intended this. Peter said, "Master, behold the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away." This was the opportunity to apply the matter. Jesus answering Peter, said to all the disciples, "Have faith in God; for verily I say unto you that whosoever shall say to this mountain, Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." It is evident that Jesus intended to inculcate and force powerfully home upon the disciples the necessity for faith in the performance of the wonderful works which they were to do in his name when he should leave them.

We have before had occasion to remark on the connection of faith with the performance of miracle. Faith is powerless in the absence of the power to do the works; and the power to do the works is not sufficient in the absence of the faith. Here is doubtless the key to a difficulty which has shaken some—the difficulty, namely, caused by the total absence in our day of any such experience as Jesus describes in his words on this occasion. Neither mountains nor pins move at the intercession of prayer, nor does faith do anything beyond the power of nature. People are apt to inquire—Why is this? and in the absence of reasonable answer, they sink into a feeling, perhaps unconfessed, that there is something radically wrong in the representations of the original matter. The glory of Christ and the hope of salvation become dimmed in their minds through the absence of a right interpretation.

Prayer and faith have no reference to miracle in an age when miracle is by plan suspended. But prayer and faith are not therefore unavailing. They operate in another line of things; that is all. They have power to affect that form of divine operation which we understand by the ways of Providence. God will choose our steps for us if we commit our way to Him, though He will not show His hand in the way peculiar to the apostolic "ministration of the Spirit." The lesson of the fig tree remains good in all circumstances: "Have faith in God."

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### **Silences Pharisees and the Sadducees—His Open Denunciation of Them as Blind Leaders.**

The foregoing chapter conducted us to the last visit of Christ to Jerusalem. He did not spend many days in the city before the agonising scene that closed his work upon the earth. But during those few days, he said much that cannot be passed lightly over in an endeavour to thoroughly exhibit the incidents of his life. What he said was mostly said under circumstances of provocation; for the Scribes and Pharisees were now thoroughly roused, and resolved at all hazards to make away with him. "He taught daily in the temple," but his enemies "could not find what they might do; for all the people were very attentive to hear him." They were obliged to work warily. Opposition by open force would have placed their own position in danger. Diplomacy directed their tactics. They tried to entrap him into some utterance that would bring him within the meshes of the law. In this they failed, because Jesus knew their object, and evaded them with the most admirable skill.

A band of them came to him as he was teaching one day in the courts of the temple, and said, "Tell us by what authority doest thou these things? Who is he that gave thee this authority?" Had he replied that God was his authority, they would have charged him with blasphemy and taken him into custody. The time had not come for this; therefore Jesus fenced their words. He said he would tell them his authority if they would first tell him what was to be thought of John the Baptist's work—whether it was of divine origin or a merely human affair. This answer he made in the hearing of the people, who believed that John's work was of God, which put the Scribes and Pharisees in a great dilemma. If they said John's work was human, it would turn the people against them. If they said it was divine, they laid themselves open to the charge of having rejected and opposed a work of God. Neither answer suited them.

Men concerned only for truth would have answered straight one way or other, but these were not men concerned for truth, but concerned only for the maintenance of their ascendancy which was threatened by the influence of Jesus, whom therefore they resolved to destroy. They took the middle ground of ignorance. "We cannot tell." This gave Jesus his escape—with grace and power in the presence of the multitude. "Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things." He did not stop there. He spoke the parable of the two sons, and the parable of the householder, which we considered in chapter xxxii. "They perceived that he spake to them." This poured oil on the fire of their anger. They were incensed to the point of wishing to lay hands on him there and then; but the friendly attitude of the multitude towards Jesus restrained them. "They feared the multitude," we are told (Matt. xxi. 46), "who took Jesus for a prophet." Jesus

knew that his day of opportunity was coming to a close. He made full use of the little remaining time. He spoke the parable of the marriage feast which will be found fully treated in chapter xxxiii.

The Pharisees and their colleagues in hostility appear to have been unable to stand any more. They left the crowd that were so attentively listening to Christ, and retired for consultation. The result of their consultation was another attempt to entrap Jesus in his speech. He had evaded them on the subject of his authority: but he could not easily escape a direct question as to whether it was a right thing for God's nation to pay tribute to a foreigner. At least, they thought not. The question was one that divided opinion among the Jews. The Pharisees maintained that the payment of tribute to the Romans was an infringement of the law of Moses which said, "Thou mayest not set a stranger over thee which is not thy brother" (Deut. xvii. 15). Another party contended (probably on the strength of Jeremiah's letter to the captives at Babylon—Jer. xxxix.)—that it was their duty to submit to the power having authority over them in the Providence of God. This latter party were called Herodians from loyalty to Herod, who was at that time the leading representative of Roman authority among them. The Pharisees sent a deputation to Christ composed equally of members of both factions with the calculation that an answer, "yes" or "no," would be sure to put him wrong with one or other of them, and lead to his arrest.

The deputation would be quite well instructed as to the object of their manoeuvre. They addressed themselves to the work in the style of supple flattery usually adopted by men with an evil object. They approached Jesus with the sweetest of speeches. They little knew that he saw through them. What they said was true, but was not spoken for its truth, but for its supposed effect in getting the answer they wanted: "Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth; neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, what thinkest thou?—Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar or not?" Having thus fired off their prepared words, they watch the effect. They fix their sinister and eager eyes on the grave and sad man who stands in the midst of the crowd. Jesus attempts no courtesy. He knows he is face to face with men who are aiming at his destruction under the pretence of desiring information: "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money." This was an unexpected turn. They fumble for the coin and produce it. Jesus looks at it: "Whose is this image and superscription?" They answer readily enough, but feeling a little uncomfortable no doubt: "Cæsar's." Now then what about the question? Straight the answer came like a volley from a thousand levelled muskets—"Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's and unto God the things which are God's."

What could they do with such an answer? It completely shut them up. "They could not take hold on his word." The deputation must have looked very sheepish as they stood there for a moment. They did not stand long. "They left him and went their way,"—fairly vanquished. The rejoinder was a masterpiece. It

appeared to answer the question with a crushing obviousness, and yet it did not deal with the question at all; for the real question was: what are the things that Caesar may claim? At the same time, it was no quibble. Though evading the particular question propounded, it affirmed a serious truth in laying it down as a principle that there are things that Cæsar may claim and things that God claims over and above and sometimes in defiance of Cæsar. To appreciate the splendour of the strategy, we must have in view the object of the questioners; and the fact that the time had not yet come (though very near) for Christ to surrender to the power of his enemies.

Hostile writers have used Christ's behaviour on this occasion against him. They complain that he did not deal frankly with a plain and important question, and that he put off his interrogators with a subterfuge. If they took the whole situation into account, they could not make this mistake. They would see that his escape from the tactics of malice, while apparently in a hopeless corner on a question of principle, was part of the superhuman subtlety which struck even his enemies dumb with admiration. There is a time for everything. It was not a time for frank answer when answer was sought as a weapon of murder.

The deputation having retired in discomfiture, the Sadducees, not displeased to see the Pharisees worsted, came to him with a friendly poser on the subject of resurrection, of which they were unbelievers. Their question related to the position of a woman in the resurrection who should have had several husbands during her mortal life. Jesus disposes of their difficulty by informing them that the marriage relation is abolished in the resurrection-state, and that "those who are accounted worthy" to enter that state "are as the angels." A woman and several husbands would therefore be like a sister having several brothers—all equally near and intimate in the perfect state in which they "cannot die any more, for they are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." Marriage is a provisional institution whose object ceases with the imperfect and transitory state to which it belongs. To those who may in the present desolation find it the greenest spot upon earth at present, the prospect of its abolition may not seem welcome. Reason will come to their aid if they realise that in all the operations of nature, what has become obsolete, ceases to be desirable—whether you take the transformations undergone by certain forms of insect and animal life, or the change that takes place in man between infancy and the grave.

The butterfly has no liking for caterpillar ways. The doll and the milk bottle are not to the old woman what they were in her childhood. The exclusive friendships of the animal state would be out of place in a state where all is love, purity, and light. Faith will come to our aid if we remember that it is the wisdom that devised nature in all its departments that has promised to bestow eternal life: and that if any good thing belonging to the present is taken from us, it is because a much better is to be given us in the perfect state, concerning which, it remains true, notwithstanding all that has been revealed, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear

heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive what God hath prepared for them that love him.”

Family life is beautiful, but it is narrow and partly barbarous, as a thing shut off from the kinship and communion of common man, between whom and itself it erects impassable barriers in the most important affairs of life. It cannot be otherwise than so shut in to itself in the degraded condition of life that prevails upon earth at the present time: yet as a thing so shut in, it is defective, and lacking in perfect beauty and goodness. In the perfect state of life that will dawn with the advent of an immortal and non-reproductive population upon the earth, the restrictions of family life will lose their beauty and their necessity. The earth will see a pure and everlasting communism, regulated only by such distinctions and institutions as the wisdom of God may see such a perfect social state to require.

Turning from the resurrection-state, Jesus had a word to say on resurrection itself, in which the Sadducees were unbelievers. His argument was that the Sadducees, as believers in Moses, were bound to believe in the resurrection, since in the writings of Moses, God described himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God, he said, was not the God of the dead; yet here he owned himself the God of three men who were in their graves. On what principle could this be explained except on the principle that he purposed to raise them from the dead? The Sadducees saw the force of the question and were silenced.

It is notorious that the logic of his argument is very differently understood in our day. His words are actually used to sanction the idea that the dead are not dead, but alive in an intermediate state. It must be manifest that with such a meaning, they cannot prove the resurrection; for prove that the dead are alive, and you prove that there is no need for resurrection. It is evident that the Sadducees understood Christ to use the phrase “the dead” in the sense in which they used it; and all are aware what the Sadducean sense was. They had no belief in an intermediate state. They understood the dead to be really dead and gone—never to re-appear. Jesus contended that God was not the God of such. According to the modern contention, there are none such. According to Christ, there are such, though all the dead do not belong to them. Christ and the Sadducees were agreed as to “the dead”—who as the Scriptures declare, “know not anything” (Ecc. ix. 5). The issue was, should the dead rise again? Jesus proved the affirmative of this issue by the argument indicated above—an argument which the Sadducees countersigned by retiring, and which the Pharisees rejoiced in as unanswerable; for “when the Pharisees heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.”

Jesus told the Sadducees they erred in their understanding of these matters “because they knew not the Scriptures, neither the power of God.” This is the explanation of modern incompetences of all kinds in the same direction. The remark seemed to please one of the scribes who overheard the argument, and



who seems to have been an intelligent and devout reader of the Scriptures, of which it was his business to make copies. He felt encouraged to put a question to Christ on his own account. "Master, which is the great commandment of the law?" Jesus answered without hesitation (for this was an honest question) "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these."

The answer pleased the scribe well. "Well, Master, thou hast said the truth, for there is one God and there is none other than He: and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the soul and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." Jesus commended this remark, and informed the maker of it that he was "not far from the Kingdom of God." It is pleasant to meet with a case like this in the midst of the general sterility and animosity of the priestly class. It was, however, but as a lily among the thorns.

The result of Christ's encounters with the thorny class was to make both Pharisees and Sadducees feel that it was dangerous work trying to confute him. The argument was always turned overwhelmingly on themselves. They concluded, therefore, to ask him no more questions. But before they had time to get away, Jesus proposed a question to them: "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is he?" A simple question certainly, but one that went very deep. The question had no personal reference to himself, as the professed Messiah—but to the "Christ," the Messiah of the prophets, in the abstract, for whom the Jews were looking. Their ideas on this subject were as wide of the mark as on most subjects, and Christ proposed to make this manifest. They thought the Messiah would be a mere descendant of David. They had not grasped the sense of his name, Emanuel, as intimating that he would be a manifestation of the Eternal Creator in a man begotten of the Holy Spirit of a virgin of the house of David, and therefore of higher rank than the very angels (Heb. i. 4). They were, therefore, incapable of harmonising all scriptural testimony on the subject, as Jesus quickly made manifest.

In answer to the question, whose Son the Messiah was, they promptly replied, "the son of David." Now came the difficulty: "How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, the Lord (Yahweh) said unto my lord, sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool (Psa. cx.). If David call him Lord, how is he his son?" This was a great difficulty for those whose traditions compelled them to recognise a son as in all cases subordinate to his father, and whose view of the Messiah forbade them soaring higher than a Davidic sonship. The difficulty was insuperable. They could not answer the question. It has no difficulty for those who recognise the truth concerning the Messiah in its prophetic and apostolic breadth.

The divine origin of Christ, as expounded in the writings of the prophets and the apostles, supplies an explanation of every phase in which the gospel narratives exhibit the Lord Jesus Christ, and every utterance that came out of his mouth. They give the key that is beyond the reach alike of those who consider him to have been a mere man, and those whose theology compels them to describe him as eternal God. They account to us for what appear otherwise to be contradictions. They explain to us why in a man, the deportment of God is visible; why in sinful flesh, a sinless character was evolved; why in the impotent seed of Abraham, the power of Abraham's God should be shown; why a man born as a babe in Bethlehem should speak of having come down from heaven; why a man not forty years of age should speak as if he had been contemporary with Abraham; why a man should at once be David's son and David's lord; why a man of our own flesh and blood should assume the authority that belongs to God only, saying "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well, for so I am;" why of a man it should be said that the world was made by him; that he dwelt in the bosom of the Father, and that he was the image of the invisible God, by whom and for whom all things had been created.

They explain to us, at the same time, why such a man should say "Of mine own self I can do nothing:" "My Father is greater than I." "I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love." "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" They show us that there is only one God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that whatever in Christ's sayings seemed to indicate another God, was referable to the Father in him, whose Son, and medium and power he was, and in no way inconsistent with the fact that Jesus was but His Son, in loving submission to all His commandments.

Both Pharisees and Sadducees stood speechless in the presence of Christ's incisive question. They could not get away from the 110th Psalm. They had not yet learnt the sophistry by which subsequent generations of Jews (in their attempts to justify the rejection of Jesus) have robbed that psalm of David's authorship, and turned it into the utterance of a courtier poet concerning David. By comparison with the Rabbinical quibblers of later times, they stood there honestly cornered in the presence of all the people. After a sufficient pause to give them the opportunity of answering if they could, Jesus proceeded to deliver words of terrible denunciation against them. They are words that many people have a difficulty in understanding from the mouth of one who is popularly identified with mercy and gentleness only.

The popular conception of the character of Christ is defective in this respect. That he is meek and lowly and loving is a joyful truth. His kindness and sympathy are a healing ocean in which the world will yet bathe to the curing of all their woes. But there is another side—a stern side—which is one of the chiefest glories of his character. How defective would that character be if it had not this other side. How lamentable if his kindness and sympathy were not counterpoised by the faithfulness and firmness essential to justice. Love without severity would be

moral weakness, and would fail to constrain the adoration evoked by the perfect blending of all the excellencies. The attitude of Christ, when he was upon the earth in the days of his weakness and submission to evil, ought to be sufficient of itself to correct a one-sided idea of him. But when we go forward to the day of his appearing, how immeasurably is this consideration strengthened. Look at the judgment seat, before which are gathered the multitudes of responsible men and women of all generations, of whose destiny he is the sole appointed arbiter. Consider what is involved in his rejection of the bulk of them: "Depart from me ... I never knew you." What inflexible faithfulness! What indomitable firmness of purpose! What judicial vigour and stern executiveness implied in his sentence of a vast and wailing crowd to dismissal from his presence and everlasting death!

In the full understanding of these things, we instinctively feel it is no Strange Christ, but the true Christ that speaks in the temple as he thus harangues the people concerning their leaders: "Beware of the scribes which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the market places, and the chief seats in the Synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts, which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation ... all their works they do to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries and enlarge the borders of their garments.... Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites: for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor. Ye fools and blind! Whether is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifieth the gold. And (ye say), whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing: but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty. Ye fools, and blind! Whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift? ... Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but within, they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee.... Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. Even so, ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.... Fill ye up the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell."

Here is a speech suggestive of strange reflections—reflections made strange by the modern surroundings of the subject. This is the Christ of the New Testament—not of pulpit sermonizings. Hark to the loud crack of the sudden thunder peals! Behold the blinding flash of the terrible lightning. What an intensity of divine indignation is expressed in these burning words. What an awful impression they convey of the divinity of the speaker. Who but God manifest in the flesh could thus hurl the thunderbolts of divine anger without the preface

customary with the prophets? “Thus saith the Lord.” We may be thankful that among the many words of Christ recorded, these were not omitted. They are necessary to give us a complete understanding of his character, which was perfect. He is an exact representation of the character of the eternal Father. He is love, but thunder sleeps in his love; and only those who are in harmony with the purity and truth and righteousness that underlie the love, will, in the end, find him altogether lovely

We cannot marvel that the men against whom such scathing things were said in the hearing of a large and approving crowd, should be filled with a deadly animosity that could find no appeasement except in the blood of the speaker. Jesus knew that the hour was at hand when their enmity should prevail. He knew it was the last opportunity he should have of addressing them. He therefore bade them farewell in words which must have appeared to them the mere rant of fanaticism, but which the history of the next forty years (of apostolic activity and persecution, ending in the fearful destruction of all the land) was calculated to bring to their painful recollection: “Behold, I send unto you prophets and wise men and scribes, and some of them ye shall kill and crucify, and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city—that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zecharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house if left unto you desolate, for I say unto you, ye shall not see me henceforth till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

## CHAPTER L.

### **The Widow’s Mite—The Olivet Prophecy—The Parable of the Sheep and Goats.**

Jesus, making his way through the crowd, left the temple courts at the close of his earnest impeachment of the Scribes and Pharisees. As he was passing out, he sat down do rest, “over against the treasury,” and saw the widow cast in those two mites which have become of world-wide fame. His remark thereon was no commonplace aphorism. It was the statement of a truth which has been a comfort and encouragement to the many thousands of “the poor in this world rich in faith” who have since been called to the kingdom. It was a truth that would not have occurred to human wisdom: “This poor widow hath cast in more than” the rich which have “cast in much.” We can see how from a divine point of view this must be the case. We cannot give anything to God in the absolute sense, since

all things are His. The munificence of the intention must be the measure of all offerings to Him. Judged by this rule, the widow gave more than the rich, because she gave more in proportion. By the same rule, it is in the power of the poorest to be large doers for God though their gifts may be paltry by human comparisons. "It is reckoned according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not."

Before passing on, one of the disciples called the attention of Christ to the beauty of the temple buildings. They had recently been renovated by Herod, and according to Josephus, they were enriched by the expensive ornaments of worshippers from all lands. Built of marble and spiked with gold, it looked, say they who saw it, like a glittering pile of snow. The Jews took a pride in it; so did the disciples who at this time shared the feelings of the nation. The response of Christ was not at all in harmony with the national feeling: "Seest thou these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down."

Soon after this remark, Jesus resumed his journey towards Bethany with his disciples, passing out of the gate, east or south, and descending the Kedron valley, crossing the brook, and ascending the path that goes obliquely up the Olivet slope in a southeastern direction. On the face of the hill, overlooking Jerusalem, with the temple right opposite them, Jesus and his disciples sat down again to rest. On the way, the disciples had been thinking of the statement he made about the coming destruction of the temple. Peter, James, John, and Andrew take advantage of this opportunity of asking him about it: "When shall these things be, and what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?" Within a few days, Jesus was to be crucified and rise again. Within a few weeks, he was to be taken away from his disciples altogether, in that prolonged absence which has not yet come to an end. The things he now said must be read from this point of view, for the nearness of their separation was known to Jesus.

He first of all told them to be on their guard against false Christs. "Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. Go ye not after them." If we can imagine ourselves in the position of the disciples, we shall see how necessary such a direction as this was. Without it, they would have been liable to continual distraction. Having known Christ and receiving before his departure a promise of his return, his reappearance would be both a most desirable and a perfectly natural thing; therefore the announcement, from any quarter, that he had come would naturally interfere with the continuity of those labours in which they were destined to spend the full terms of their natural lives. For naturally, on receiving such reports, they would be unhinged, put into an attitude of expectancy and investigation. This warning beforehand was a complete protection. The rumours of Christ's reappearance as they arose would have no disturbing effect at all, but the reverse; for the disciples would recall to mind that it was just what Jesus had told them.

We have not much information about these false alarms. There is here and there in ecclesiastical history an indication of their having occurred, but not the full account that mere curiosity would demand. We do not require particulars about the false. Particulars about the true are most essential. Hence we have the one and not the other. There have been false Christs at various times since the apostolic age; but it was those of the apostolic age that Christ would have more particularly in view in fore-arming his apostles.

Next he spoke of the political convulsions that would by-and-by ensue. At the time of his own presence upon the earth comparative peace prevailed; but as leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem, there would be "wars and commotions" throughout the land. When hearing of these, they were "not to be terrified: for these things must first come to pass." Before anything of this sort happened, there would be trouble for themselves. "Before all these, they shall lay their hands upon you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. It shall turn to you for a testimony:" that is, the occurrence of these great tribulations, instead of being a damper and a discouragement to them in the work which they would have in hand as witnesses for him, would be a confirmation to them that they were in the right way; because they would be a fulfilment of the word which he was now speaking to them; and would strengthen them to endure. They would be specially helped in the rigours that would assail them. Jesus himself would help them, though invisible to them. "I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist." "Take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye pre-meditate; but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye, for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Spirit."

They would greatly need the help and encouragement which the speaking of these things to them beforehand was calculated to afford; for in the bitterness of the times, "Many," said he, "shall be offended and shall betray one another and shall hate one another ... and because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" "The brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son, and children shall rise up against their parents and shall cause them to be put to death, and ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But he that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved."

The preaching of the gospel would go on in the midst of it all. "This gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations;" which came to pass, as the subsequent record of apostolic labour shews: "and then shall the end come," that is, the end decreed for the land and the people of Israel; for then, he goes on to say, they would "see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (Matt. xxiv. 14, 25). They would see "Jerusalem compassed with armies" (Luke xxi. 20), and by this would discern that the desolation thereof was nigh. They were then to flee out of the city and from the neighbourhood to the mountains (on the east side of the

Jordan: which ecclesiastical history tells us they did—escaping to Pella). “These,” said Jesus, “be the days of vengeance that all things which are written may be fulfilled.... There shall be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people.” (The finish would be thus:) “And they shall fall by the edge of the sword and shall be led away captive into all nations, and Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”

How long a time these events would take, Jesus did not know (Matt xxiv. 36). The Father had reserved the times and seasons in His own power (Acts i. 7) until a later time, 60 years later, when he gave to Jesus a revelation so that his servants might know of other things which would shortly come to pass (Rev. i. 1). He did know this, however, that the generation would not pass away without witnessing the fulfilment of his words concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish polity (Matt. xxiv. 34). He also knew that beyond the time of the calamity, there would elapse a period of down-treading which would continue to the time of his coming, and which would end with sign-events analogous to those which closed Israel’s day of grace: “There shall be signs in the sun, moon, and stars—a Bible figure for commotions among the ruling powers upon the earth) and distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring (a figure for the people in tumult), men’s hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things that are coming upon the earth: for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. (A figure for the undermining of thrones and governments). Then shall they see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

It is thus evident that the discourse privately addressed to his disciples on this occasion, as they sat together on the Mount of Olives overlooking the city and temple, covers the entire interval from the moment of its utterance to the time when Jesus should be manifested in glory to his people at his return from heaven. The discourse having this scope is noticeable on two points, as affecting the popular conception of the mission of Christ. First, that it deals with political events and occurrences on earth as calling-for the attention of his disciples, whereas popular theology, in proportion as it is earnestly worked out in a man’s life, pushes all such matters out of sight; and, second, that it concentrates attention on his second appearing, as the culminating point of the believer’s hope: (“When ye see these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads: for your redemption draweth nigh”): whereas popular theology leads men to fix their attention on the day of death when the believer is supposed to fly to Christ in heaven. Such features as these in a discourse of Christ, bearing directly on the hopes and prospects of his people, ought to be suggestive to logical minds that there is something wrong with popular theology; which, indeed, they will discover to be the case to an extent that will appal them. This is not the place to enlarge on this, though the suggestion forces itself on attention as we listen to Christ on this particular occasion.

His discourse was delivered with practical ends. It was intended as a guide both for those who should be contemporary with the terrible events that would lay the land of Israel in desolation, and for those who, in all the intervening intervals, should wait for his return from heaven. It is so framed as to serve this double purpose. Those who should "see Jerusalem compassed with armies" were to "know that the desolation thereof was nigh," and were accordingly to "depart out of the midst of it" and "flee to the mountains," praying that their flight might not be in the winter or on the Sabbath day (when a severe season, or a day of activity with the enemy and inaction on the part of the defenders of the city, would add to the personal suffering of those in flight). Those who should see the times of the Gentiles in full swing, and be watchful of the signs of his coming, were to "take heed to themselves, lest at any time their hearts should be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon them unawares which should come as a snare on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth." The haze that overspread the whole subject of the times and seasons at the time of the delivery of the address, brought both classes to a level as regards the practical bearing of events upon them. They were both, and all, and at all times to be "always ready; not knowing the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man should come."

The fact that many generations of believers would go to the grave would make, and has made, no practical difference to their relation to the final event of the Lord's coming; by reason of the fact revealed in the Scriptures, and denied by popular theology, that man is mortal, and the dead know not anything. There being no conscious interval between a man's death and resurrection, the day of the believer's death appears the day of the Lord's coming to him, because the Lord's coming is the next conscious event to him, and apparently in immediate sequence to the moment of his death. As regards, therefore, his fitness for appearance before the Lord, and the bearing of the Lord's judgment on his life and actions, the day of his own death is on the same practical footing in relation to him as the day of the Lord's arrival on the earth for judgment.

For this reason the Olivet discourse, while primarily intended for the information of the apostles, was useful, and in the sense hinted at, applicable to every generation of believers that should come after. Because of this it was placed on record by the Spirit of God long after its immediate purpose had been served, and it still answers its purpose, as when Jesus proceeds to say: "Take ye heed; watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is: for the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye, therefore, for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh.... lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping" (Mark xiii. 34). "Who then is a faithful and wise servant whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you that he shall make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant shall say in his heart, my lord delayeth his coming: and shall



begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken, the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not and shall him asunder, and aware of, cut appoint him his portion among the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. xxiv. 45-51).

When the Lord has arrived for these interesting and terrible transactions, the kingdom (Christ now said) will be comparable “to ten virgins who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom.” In what sense and way we have considered in chapter xxxiii., and need not here repeat. We find the subject expanded in the remarks he made immediately after the parable of the ten virgins—remarks not lacking the parabolic element, yet quite clearly literal in their main features; and having this effect, first and foremost on the listening ear, that, unlike modern popular theology, they fix attention on the Lord’s return to earth as the supreme crisis of destiny for all who stand related to his judgment seat: “When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.” To the sheep he says, “Come, ye blessed;” and to the goats, “Depart, ye cursed;” for reasons we shall look at.

First, let us ask who are to be understood by the sheep, and who by the goats, and who by “my brethren” to whom the king alludes in his speech to both. Some think “my brethren” means the Jewish race, and the sheep those nations that have treated the Jews well, and the goats those nations that have treated them badly. The only thing that favours this idea is the use of the phrase “all nations” in describing those gathered before the king for judgment. If the idea were right, all parts of the parable would be in harmony with it. That this is not the case must be evident from the words addressed by the king to “them on his right hand.” “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

We know abundantly from the plain teaching of the word that the heirs of the kingdom, for whom it has been prepared, do not consist of nations, but of persons out of all nations with whom the Father is pleased, because of their faith and obedience: as James says, “God hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, heirs of the kingdom which he hath prepared for them that love him” (James ii 5). It is the saints who “take the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever” (Dan. vii. 18), who, being washed from their sins in the blood of Christ, are made kings and priests to reign with him (Rev. i. 6; v. 10). The nations, as such, do not inherit the kingdom, but are governed by the kingdom in the hands of the saints (Rev. ii. 26; 1 Cor. vi. 2). Consequently, an interpretation which makes Christ invite Jew-favouring nations to inherit the kingdom prepared only for the saints, must be a wrong one. It is manifestly wrong also from the unscriptural construction it would compel us to put on the phrase “my brethren.” Jesus has

told us who his brethren are: "He that doeth the will of God is my brother." He has also given us his estimate of mere Jews according to the flesh: "Ye are of your father the devil" (Jno. viii. 44). "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham" (Ibid 39). "The flesh profiteth nothing" (Jno. vi. 63).

What, then, is the meaning of "all nations?" The plain representations of the judgment must be our guide: "WE must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." What, "we?" The class to and of whom Paul wrote these words. He, a Jew, wrote to Corinthian Greeks, and affirmed things intended to be applicable to "all that in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus." It had been proclaimed by Peter, in opening the door of the kingdom to the Gentiles, that "in every nation, he that feared God and worked righteousness was accepted with him" (Acts x. 35). These, gathered at last in one body, speak of themselves as "redeemed unto God out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. v. 10). Hence, it is plain that those who are gathered before Christ for judgment at his coming, are not unfitly described as "all nations." Literally and exactly stated, they would be "people of all nations," but the larger phrase is not out of place, as when we say of the first exhibition (of 1851) "All nations were there;" or, as when the scriptures, in speaking of the assembly of the armies of all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, say, "I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle" (Zech. xiv. 1). When Christ returns, and gathers the "all" who have to stand before his judgment seat, the resultant assembly (consisting for the most part of people raised from the dead of all countries of the Roman habitable) will be composed of "all nations."

The reason why Jesus should choose this mode of describing them may be apprehended if we realise that for many previous generations, the responsible class were Israelites exclusively. It would naturally be anticipated by the disciples that the assembly of the resurrected would be composed of none other. Jesus had already hinted the participation of the Gentiles (though the time had not arrived to invite them). He had said "Many shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of God." There was advantage in his now saying that the judgment to be dispensed at his coming, in the presence of the angels who should be with him, would be dispensed to an assembly composed of "all nations," gathered before him for the purpose—not Jews only, nor all nations in the popular sense of absolute universality, but in the sense of people out of all nations who, through enlightenment, have become responsible to the judgment of God, whether their part be that of acceptance or rejection of His revealed truth—obedience or disobedience of His revealed commandments.

With this view, we may understand why the award of the judgment seat should be made to turn on practical service and not on doctrinal enlightenment. Some have said "Nothing about doctrine in this judgment scene of Matthew xxv." They say this in discouragement of that earnest contention for the faith which Jude enjoins. It is a case of setting one part of the word of God against another, which

ought never to be done. Let everything have its place. It is enlightenment in the truth that brings the people out of all nations to the judgment seat. There is no need to bring that into question. It would be as much out of place as at the breaking of bread. It is taken for granted. Its discussion could settle nothing; because the worthy and unworthy alike know and profess the truth. The real question is their practical attitude towards Christ during the probation to which acceptance of the truth introduces them. "I was an hungered and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison and ye came unto me." This is the commendation the Judge passes upon the accepted. It covers every form of benevolent service.

It is not mere philanthropy that is commended. Attention is fixed upon the "I." As the Lord said to Israel when they did certain things, "Did ye it all unto Me?" Not that goodness to all men is excluded: far from it. It is Christ's command to "do good to all men as we have opportunity:" to be "kind even to the unthankful, and to the evil." But in the case before us, it is what men have done to Christ that is in question. Did they feed Christ, clothe Christ, succour Christ? But how do these things to Christ in a day when he is not upon the earth? The commended class are made to present this difficulty for the sake of bringing out the king's answer: "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." But who are his brethren? Not paupers who pronounce his name for the sake of the loaves and fishes. So he himself tells us: "Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, but he that doeth the will of my Father."

By this we may try ourselves beforehand. Are we drawn out affectionately to the needs of such as show themselves in love with God and all His ways? Could we lay down our lives for such? We know how our feelings act in this matter, and whether it is our practice in the measure of our possibilities to give them effect. If it is as suggested (and it will be well to give the fullest and most liberal effect to the things commended in advance by the Judge; for the danger is always more in the direction of frittering away their import than of over-performing them), if our case be so, we may look forward with confidence to our arraignment on that solemn day, when men and angels will be made to see us as we actually are under the searching light of divine exposure.

John helps us in our judgment of the point when he says: "By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and do His commandments." There may be no children of God around us. We may be so situated as to be in contact with nothing but what grieves and mortifies and disgusts the innermost recesses of the righteous soul, as in the case of Lot in Sodom (2 Pet. ii. 8). In such a situation, not love but vexation may be our daily experience, and we may bitterly stand in doubt of ourselves on this head. John's test will come to our aid: Do we ourselves love God and keep His commandments? if so, it is a moral certainty that we love all who are in the same attitude to God, though we may rarely have the opportunity of experiencing it in personal manifestation. Where

we have no such delightful opportunity of ministering to Christ as is presented in the needs of those who “fear God and keep His commandments,” we can at least fall back on the commandment that tells us to love our enemies; do good to them that hate us: pray for them that despitefully use and afflict us. How pleasant will the retrospect of obedience be, however bitter now, when the King is pleased to say, “Come ye blessed of my Father: inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

In the case of the rejected, the rule is just reversed. “I was an hungered and ye gave me no meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink, I was a stranger and ye took me not in, naked and ye clothed me not, sick and in prison and ye visited me not.” On this ground, the awful order issues: “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” In no more forcible manner could Christ have enforced the fact that our ultimate acceptance with him depends upon self-sacrificing deeds of kindness of the kind that he himself exemplified, when, as he said, “The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister.” Our faith is the foundation, but works in harmony with what he requires is the indispensable superstructure.

Much will be forgiven: but much will also be required at the hands of those who would enter life eternal. His commandments require us to “Look not every man on his own things” only, but to “Bear one another’s burdens.” If we harden our hearts to the afflictions of the afflicted, and wrap ourselves comfortably in the mantle of God’s bestowed mercies, heedless of the needs of those to whom God has given less, the day so powerfully depicted by Christ in Matthew xxv. will show us in terrible severity, if we never realised it before, that though we speak with the tongues of men and angels, and though we have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, if we have not the love that takes an active serving shape, we are of no use to the King whose reign is to be a reign of love and blessing.

## CHAPTER LI.

### **Visitors: the End of His Public Labour—His Last Passover—The Breaking of Bread.**

Having concluded his discourse to the disciples as they sat on the Mount of Olives, Jesus went to Bethany for the night, returning early next day to the temple. It only lacked a few days to that Passover of which he was to partake for the last time under the law of Moses (a feast to be resumed in another more glorious time—Ezek. xlv. 21; Luke xxii. 16). Many were assembling to the feast, and the city was full of people. Jesus took advantage of the opportunity of teaching those who came to the temple courts. He did this in the day time, always retiring at night to Bethany (Luke xxi. 37).

He was now known more or less to all who were in the habit of attending the feast; but on the occasion of this feast, there was a special band of Greek (Jew) visitors who had heard of him and had probably never seen him, and were desirous of an introduction to him, with which view they applied to Philip of Bethsaida, who, they had ascertained, was one of his disciples. Philip reported their desire to Andrew, and Andrew and Philip go together to tell Jesus. From the way that Jesus received the intimation, we may infer that the proposed interviewers were more animated by curiosity than by any earnestness of purpose towards Christ. Perhaps, like a good many people in modern times, they had a little earnestness mixed up with a good deal of personal consequence, and were desirous of approaching Christ with the idea that if he were the Messiah, their adhesion might be of some help to him, while of great advantage to themselves. Whatever may have been their mood (and it is of course possible that in these suggestions we may wrong them), Jesus did not give them the cordial reception which Nathaniel received at his hand when he came to him enquiringly, over three years earlier. He does not appear to have received them at all. He made remarks of a stand-off character, "and departed and did hide himself from" the multitude (Jno. xxi. 36).

The remarks he made appear quite irrelevant to the communication made to him, unless we look deep enough. First of all he said "The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified." This might seem to mean that he regarded the respectful enquiries of these Greek visitors as the beginning of a current of popular favour. The shallow school of opinion that would bring Christ down to the level of a human enthusiast, would put this interpretation upon it. It is impossible that such an interpretation can be correct in view of his refusal of the movement "to make him a King". (Jno. vi. 15). It is inconceivable that he who refused the homage of a multitude should be moved to compliance by the private attentions of a few. Neither is it conceivable that he who wept over Jerusalem in the midst of a public ovation, because he foresaw the troubles coming upon her for her refusal of Divine ways, should be so gratified with the complimentary enquiries of a few foreign visitors as to talk of his being "glorified" thereby.

His very next remark utterly excludes the thought. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and DIE, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." This shows it was death and not public acceptance that he was looking to for the glorification that was before his mind. His death only, followed by resurrection, would open the way for the fecundity that would fill the earth with life and glory. This death was only a few days ahead. What could it matter to him that a few influential Greek Jews were curious about him? His glory would not come from mortal attention, but from his own submission to the Father who had required him to lay down his life (Jno. x. 18).

He goes further and hints that the rule was a severe one by which men could become associated with his glory. It was evidently far from what the influential visitors were thinking: "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his

life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.” The visitors had probably no idea of hating their life in this world, but much the reverse, in wishing a connection with one who might be the Messiah. The way was open for them nevertheless if they chose to submit to the terms. “If any man serve me let him follow me: that where I am there also shall my servant be.” “If any man serve me, him will my Father honour.” This was on the whole a rebuff to the visitors. Following Christ in the keeping of his self-denying commandments, and looking to the Father for any honour that might come of such a course, was the reverse of an attractive programme to men who were looking to present advantage, and expecting in case of their adhesion to Christ some distinguished and grateful consideration at his hands. We read a few verses further on (42) that “many (among the chief rulers) believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they would not confess him. lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.”

Jesus was far from seeking to conciliate human favour. He went on to say: “Now is my soul troubled.” Certainly, the prospect of his sufferings troubled him, as he told his disciples before (Luke xii. 50). “What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?” That would have been a merely human prayer—the prayer of mere human distress. It was not a prayer he could pray, seeing he had been manifested for the very purpose of the hour. “For this cause came I unto this hour.” What was a legitimate prayer for such a time, then? “Father, glorify thy name.” At this, the Father audibly spoke: “I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.” This is the universal rule of well-being—past, present, and to come. The earth will not be blessed till the earth is filled with His glory. Man cannot be happy unless he lives to glorify God; all things else have their place, but this is the topstone of existence.

The people heard the sound of the voice of God, but to Jesus only the words appear to have been articulate and intelligible. The people said that it thundered. Jesus answered: “This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes.” That is, Jesus required not such a response to determine him in the course he was to pursue. The people required it that they might believe on him. God gave them all the evidence that could be necessary. He left them without excuse. For himself, Jesus knew that rejection and death were at hand; and it was all he had to look for at their hands. But there was a purpose in it. Therefore he could face it. It was not in caprice, or without a most serious object, that the Father required the Son to submit to ignominy and a cruel death at the hands of the very people he had come to save: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.” His death would compass both these things spoken in parable: it would condemn the world; it would cast out the prince of it; and it would give Christ as the dawning point of the world’s hope and futurity.

How it would accomplish these things, the subsequent explanations of the Apostles shew. In the crucifixion of Christ, sin was condemned in the flesh

(Romans viii. 3). This is the general declaration of the Spirit of God, whose significance becomes apparent on a full view of all the facts it comprehends. We first look at "the world," whether in its Mosaic or Gentile element, and we see that it consisted wholly of the flesh and blood of Adam, who sinned, and thereby became subject to death. The prince of this world we may take to mean the government of this world, which is a government of the world by itself, personified as "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph. ii. 1). God had in various ways, since Adam's expulsion from Eden, employed the world of Adam's descendants in the work of organising and conducting human life upon the earth. But nothing satisfactory had come of it. In the first phase of things, a flood was necessary to sweep away the corrupt population. In the succeeding era, the seven nations of Canaan required extermination at the hands of Joshua. In the Mosaic system, God's own nation required repeated captivity and spoil to keep them in the right way, and they at last went wholly astray. In the days of Jesus, the measure of Israel's iniquity was full, and there impended a visitation of judgment of unprecedented severity and duration.

In Jesus himself the foundation stone of a new order of things was being laid, as saith the prophet: "Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation" (Isaiah xxviii, 16). The first step in the process was the begetting of the Son of Mary by the Spirit. The second, his growth and development in the ways of the Father. The third, his manifestation to Israel in the word and works of God. And now was about to be accomplished the next and most difficult of all, so far as Christ's submission was concerned: the public and official condemnation of sin in his crucifixion, which His nature qualified him to be the subject of, but not without all the suffering of the most sensitive of Adam's race. His physical flesh and blood, as he was before his death, was identical with that which had prevailed upon earth from Adam downwards, characterised by the same weakness and mortality, arising from the same hereditary cause—the sentence of death upon Adam. The nailing of his body to the cross was therefore a representative ritual, in which the rejection of the first Adam nature was signified, and the righteousness of God thereby declared. As Paul affirms in Romans it was a "declaration of the righteousness of God for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Rom. iii. 25). We morally identify ourselves with the transaction when we receive it in faith as God's appointed mode of reconciliation. Paul expresses it thus: "Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom. vi. 6).

The next step in the process of laying the foundation stone was Christ's resurrection to immortal life. With this, the old-Adam nature had nothing to do. Death was the part appertaining to the old Adam. "In that he died, he died unto sin once, but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God" (Rom. vi. 10). His resurrection to immortal life was the result of obedience, and that obedience was the result of the new work which God did upon the earth in his love, when he begat a son for

Himself who should live and die, and live again, that the world might be saved in harmony with all the requirements of eternal wisdom. Therefore the whole work was God's work. "Of God, he is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor. i. 30). And by these he is our life: for because of these "He who raised Christ from the dead shall raise us up also by Jesus" (2 Cor. iv. 14).

Jesus understood all these things, though he reserved their full explanation till afterwards. "He gave himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. ii. 6). This due time arrived when the apostles were sent forth by the Spirit to proclaim that "Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. xv. 3), and that "through this man was preached the forgiveness of sins, and by him all that believed were justified" (Acts xiii. 38). But though the full explanation was reserved for the Apostles, we have seen that Jesus repeatedly referred, in the course of his public teaching, to the place which his death had in the scheme of God's love for the salvation of the world. His death was the germinal casting out of the old: his resurrection, the bringing in of the new. The full result will not be manifest till the work accomplished in himself will be extended and established in a race of sinless immortals, before whom the present population will have disappeared in relentless extermination. But it was begun within a few days of the utterance of the words we are considering: "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."

John says, "This, he said, signifying what death he should die." The people seemed to understand that his words meant this: for they answered him, "We have heard out of the law that Christ ABIDETH FOR EVER! and how sayest thou, The Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" The time was not suitable for a lengthened rejoinder. Their mood was unbelieving: "Though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him." What could be done with men who were proof against such evidence? Jesus therefore briefly replied, "Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you." A few more days and the light ceased, and the nation stumbled on for 30 years or more in the darkness of Rabbinical tradition till, in the words of the prophet, "Hell opened her mouth, and their glory and honour and pomp descended into it." The Roman perdition swept the land, and nigh consumed the obstinate nation off the face of the earth.

A few finishing words concluded the testimony which Jesus had for three years and a half been engaged in delivering. In these farewell words, he accommodated himself for a moment to their point of view. He realised that they stumbled at his personal appearance, as Isaiah had foretold (chap. liii. 2); their conceptions of Messianic grandeur and power made them stagger at the unpretentious personality of a lowly carpenter of Nazareth. He therefore "cried and said (as if earnestly protesting the truth to them for the last time), he that believeth on me believeth not on me, but ON HIM THAT SENT ME. And he that



seeth me seeth Him that sent me.” As much as to say, “I am nothing in myself. Do not be repelled because you see no beauty to desire in me. It is the God of your fathers, who begat me and dwells in me, that presents Himself to you for your good. It is Him you see in seeing me. It is on Him you believe when you believe on me.”

Understood in this way, he pressed himself earnestly upon their attention. “I am come a light into the world that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.” At the same time he wished them to understand it was no part of his mission at that time to employ coercion. “If any man hear my words and believe not, I judge him not, for I came not to judge the world (not at that time) but to save the world,” that is, to open the way of salvation and point it out to them, and earnestly plead with them to walk in it. If they refused submission, the loss would be all their own. At the same time, there would be judgment in due course: “He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my word hath one that judgeth him. The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” Why his words would be the rule of judgment he makes plain to the meanest capacity. “For I have not spoken of myself (that is, of my own impulse or authority); but the Father who sent me, He gave me a commandment what I should say and what I should speak: and I know that His commandment is life everlasting.” If the words of Christ are the words of God, is it wonderful that they should be the rule of judgment hereafter? Men, strong in each other’s countenance, treat them lightly now. How changed will their attitude be when he is present in the earth again to apply the teaching which they are privileged to have in their hand now in his absence.

And here a curtain drops upon his public labours. His next appearance was before the council as a prisoner. Between the one point and the other, there probably did not elapse more than three days; and it was during this interval that those wonderful communications passed between Jesus and the Apostles which find record in the 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th and 17th chapters of John—private, fraternal, affectionate communications, in which Jesus, without abating the dignity of the Master, unbosomed himself as he did on no other recorded occasion as a Friend. There appears to have been two occasions on which these communications passed—one being “before the feast of the Passover” “in Bethany in the house of Simon, the leper” (Jno xiii. 1; Mark xiv. 1–3); and the other, “the first day of the feast of unleavened bread” (Matt. xxvi. 17). To the first of these belongs the washing of the disciples’ feet; though at first sight, it appears as if it occurred on the second. The appearance is due to the word “supper” in Jno. xiii. 1, which is usually confounded with “the Lord’s supper.” It is evident it was a supper at Bethany.

At the end of it, Jesus rose from his place, put off his upper robe, and to the surprise of his disciples, took a towel and girded himself, poured water into a basin, and began to wash their feet one by one, drying them with the towel which he had tied round him. They submitted in quiet amazement till it came to Peter’s

turn. Peter could not endure such humiliation of his Lord. "Wash my feet? Never." "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." No part with Christ! This was more unendurable still Peter was ready for anything rather than this: at least he thought so. (We never know ourselves until we are in circumstances that throw us fully upon our own resources). He implored Christ to wash his head and hands as well if it was a question of association with him. But Christ gently gave him to understand it was not necessary, so Peter suffered the washing of his feet, and Christ, re-arraying himself in his garments, sat down again in his place. He then explained what he had done.

Could friend humble himself more completely to friend than in such an act? It was not a mystic ceremony he had gone through, though having a meaning special to his own recognition. It was an act of personal ministration, and in the most menial form. Peter appreciated it in this character and rebelled against it, as we have seen. It was the practical lowliness that Jesus intended. He had told his disciples early in his communications with them that a man must humble himself as a little child to be eligible for the kingdom. He was now about to leave them, and he wished to leave a deep impression on this point. Could he have possibly done it more effectually? "Ye call me MASTER and LORD: and ye say well: for so I am: if I, then, YOUR LORD and MASTER, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you. The servant is not greater than his Lord."

There are those that make this feet-washing an institution to be ceremonially observed along with the breaking of bread: (and it is part of the ritual of the Roman Catholic church at a certain season to enact it as a performance). This view is unsupported by apostolic example as exhibited in the Acts of the Apostles and the Epistles. The only allusion to feet-washing is in the list of private excellencies on the part of a widow, requiring support in her old age (1 Tim. v. 10). It is evident that Christ contemplated nothing beyond the inculcation of humble, kindly, mutual, practical, personal ministration of which he chose feet-washing as the extremest form in a country where the wearing of sandals exposed the feet to dust and irritation, and rendered the washing of the feet a personal luxury. That Jesus should enforce personal humility and lowliness on the future kings of the world is one of the numberless beauties of the purpose of God which centre in him. What a noble race of kings and priests the saints will be when chosen for their faith and obedience out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation, and invested with the glory of the spirit nature.

The Passover feast furnished the other occasion. The time for this feast had come. It was part of the duty of Jesus, "obedient in all things," to keep the Passover as part of the law under which he was born (Gal. iv. 4). On this occasion, he was impelled by special desire, as he told the disciples at the commencement of the proceedings: "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." He gave them two days' notice beforehand (Matt. xxvi. 2). It was the killing of the other Passover that was before the mind of

Christ evidently. Thus he said: "Ye know that after two days is the feast of the Passover, and the son of Man is betrayed to be crucified." John says "Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father." No wonder he should dwell on a Passover so momentous for him, and of such significance for the Passover itself, which, in his own death, should have its full meaning and entire supersession for 18 centuries. The disciples had not yet reached the meanings of things in this respect. The Kingdom filled their eye, and their affection for Christ as its living, noble, miracle-working King. They were about to be enlightened by a very rude process.

The first day of the feast arrived (the 14th day of the month Abib) in the evening of which, the Passover must be killed. Jesus had not indicated where he would observe the feast with them. There was no time to lose. They enquired of Jesus, "Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the Passover?"

While Jesus and the disciples were making their arrangements, very different arrangements were being made at the palace of Caiaphas the high priest (a large and stately building in Jerusalem). A general meeting of the priesthood and heads of the people had been convened in this building under that official's auspices, to consult as to the best means of getting Christ into their power. They were burning with unappeasable anger under the wounds inflicted upon their pride and self-love in their collisions with him, and especially by his open denunciation of them before all the people. They were resolved upon his destruction, but they did not see exactly how to bring it about. They had power to impeach him to the Roman governor Pilate, if they could get hold of him; but there was a great difficulty as to this on account of the friendly feelings entertained for Jesus by the common people. If they made an attempt to arrest him in the presence of the people, there was danger of a resistance that might be formidable to the chief priests themselves. Yet they knew not how to get at him in the absence of the people, for he was only a visitor to Jerusalem, and his haunts were not known outside the circle of his friends, who were also unknown. It was only among the people that he was to be found, and among them he could not be taken because of the attention they gave him.

There was considerable discussion, but no decisive result beyond a general agreement that there must be no attempt on the feast day, when crowds of people would be thronging the temple courts, and that they must be on the outlook, and trust to tact and craft to get Jesus into their power. What measures they resolved on with this view, we are not informed, but it is probable they gave it to be understood that there was money to be made by those who might be willing to aid them in their schemes. How far they would have succeeded if there had not been a Judas among the disciples, is very problematical. But their success was appointed, and the instrument was to hand.

Judas heard of the plotting, and the idea occurred to him that he might turn it to his own advantage. Avarice, which was a normal weakness with him, took fire at

the idea. In Bible language, "Satan entered into him." Instead of dismissing the thought with the determination with which he would have flung a deadly serpent from himself, he turned it over: he considered it: he entertained it. Perhaps there may be something in the suggestion that has been made, that he took comfort in the idea that Christ was able to deliver himself from their power, and that no harm could come from Judas making money by what could bring no hurt to Christ. At all events, he went straight to the chief priests, and plumply said, "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you (in the absence of the multitude)?" The proposal filled the chief priests with supremest satisfaction. It was "the very thing." It released them from a great dilemma, and relieved them, with splendid promise of gratifying the feelings that burned in their bosoms, against Jesus, without exposing themselves to the violence of the crowd. "They were glad, and covenanted to give him money," and from that moment Judas "sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude." That opportunity he found and embraced by and by.

Jesus, with a full knowledge of all that was going on, and of all that was coming upon him, gave directions to his disciples to make arrangements which were equivalent to getting ready a death trap for him. They were to engage an apartment in the city, and get ready the Passover in preparation for their celebration of the same in the evening. The engagement of a place, which, being put off to the last moment, would have been a difficulty in ordinary circumstances in the crowded state of the city, proved a very simple matter in the hands of such a master of the ceremonies. Peter and John were to go into the city, and would meet a man carrying water. They were to follow this man till they saw him go into a house. They were then to go in after him, and deliver a message from Christ to the master of the house: "I will keep the Passover at thy house with my disciples:" and he would show them a large upper room furnished, of which they would at once take possession, and proceed to make the necessary preparations. They went, and everything happened as Christ had said. What is impossible to such foreknowledge except the disobedience of the Father's commandments? The "master of the house" was probably acquainted with Christ and friendly to him; and he had probably been restrained from letting his place to other Passover visitors. When God wants a man or a thing, there will be provision.

At the hour appointed, Jesus and his disciples assembled in "the guest chamber," and sat down to eat the Passover. The nature of the repast (roast lamb, unleavened bread and wine), and the occasion of it—the celebration of the anniversary of Israel's departure from Egypt under Moses, on the night of the slaying of the Egyptian first-born) are well known. It is not these that challenge our attention, as we look upon this quiet company of 13 men. Doubtless the order of procedure would be observed that was customary with a company of Jews assembled for such a purpose: but there was more than one thing done on this occasion that was never done before, and such things said as had never before been uttered in any company, Jew or Gentile. The whole complexion of the

meeting, in fact, differed from any previous assembly for the eating of the Passover. Not gladness, but sadness prevailed, and this sadness was at first concentrated in the head of the company, whose first remark struck a heavy keynote: "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God." These words were simple enough, yet were they not intelligible to the disciples till afterwards, and could only have a sort of scaring effect. That he was about to suffer they could not realise in the presence of his great power. That they would never celebrate the Passover with him again, must have been inconceivable to men who "thought that the Kingdom of God should immediately appear."

Still his words "filled them with sorrow," as Jesus afterwards recognised. The effect was not abated when he introduced a feature that was never in the programme at the eating of the Passover before:

As they were eating, he took bread (the bread that was on the table for Passover purposes), and gave thanks, and gave unto them saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. And he took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them saying, Drink ye all of it, for this is the new covenant in my blood, shed for the remission of the sins of many. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom." The full meaning of these words the disciples apprehended afterwards through the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit sent upon them on the Day of Pentecost as an instructor; and they were able to discern the will of Christ that this simple ceremony of the breaking of bread was to be observed once a week by all his disciples during his absence "until he come" (Acts xx. 7; 1 Cor. xi. 2, 23–26; Heb. x. 25). But for the time, the words which were calculated to soothe, and which have in fact since ministered comfort to millions of disciples convened to break bread in remembrance of Christ, must have only added to the gloom caused by his opening words.

## **CHAPTER LII.**

### **At the Table.**

Jesus began to indicate the cloud he was under from his knowledge of the impending treachery of Judas. He had spoken of their blessedness if they continued in his commandments. He now said, "I speak not of you all. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me." Then a pause, and symptoms that he was "troubled in spirit." Then plainer language: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." We can imagine the consternation that this announcement would produce. "The disciples looked one upon another, doubting of whom he spake." One asked, "Lord, is it I?" and another, "Lord, is it I?" The

Lord answered vaguely, "He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me." Several did this all more or less. Therefore it was no indication. Peter beckoned to John to ask in a particular manner, as he sat next to Christ, and was on terms of particular intimacy and affection. John then, "lying on Jesus' breast" (probably laying his head there for the purpose of this confidence), whispered, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it," upon which he dipped the sop and handed it to Judas.

Judas appears at this point to have asked like the rest, "Lord, is it I?" and to have received an affirmative answer, "Thou hast said," but probably the excited communications passing among the disciples prevented the question and answer from being observed, for when Jesus said to him on his rising to go, "What thou doest, do quickly," it is said (Jno. xiii. 28) that none of them knew what Jesus meant by this, but supposed it referred to some business arrangement connected with the feast. The departure of Judas happened immediately after the mark of identification granted at John's request. That Jesus should wish him to do his fell work quickly is an interesting side-light. It shows us the Lord's state of mind with regard to the terrible trouble before him. Jesus was under a great embarrassment till his sacrifice should be accomplished. He endured and went through it with heroic fortitude. This all can admire: but how it adds to his loveliness in the eyes of his people that he was not a stoic in the matter, but felt as human nature everywhere feels at the prospect of suffering—going through it, not with callous indifference, but with the resolution inspired by a recognition of the Father's will, and an understanding of the "must be" there was in the case.

Jesus appears to have felt relieved when Judas had withdrawn. "When he was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him;" and he proceeded with those confidential communications which are recorded so fully in John's gospel. It seems strange at first sight that there should have been a traitor among the apostles who were all chosen by Christ himself at the beginning. Did he make a mistake in choosing Judas? Impossible. Did he not know him? He knew him well; "He needed not that any should testify of man; for he knew what was in man" (Jno. ii. 25). Why then did he choose a man who would play false at the last? There were doubtless reasons of which no indication has been given; but we may note the value to subsequent generations in the occurrence of such a breach in the circle closest to Christ, in that it shows us the impossibility of the apostolic narrative being a concoction (for who would make one of the apostles a traitor if the story had been an invention?); and arms believers against undue discouragement at any unfaithfulness that may spring up in their ranks (for if a personal attendant of Christ, and a witness of his miracles, could be false to a trust directly imposed by him, what is not possible in the weak days of mere testimony by report?)

The disciples do not appear to have taken greatly to heart the intimation that one of them would betray him. They understood it enough to join in an earnest repudiation of such an idea; but not enough to realize that it was an actual

impending catastrophe. So little affected were they by it in this sense, that when the immediate sensation caused by it had subsided, they began to discuss among themselves the positions they were severally likely to have in the kingdom which they thought was about to be established—a discussion not the most dignified as regards the spirit leading to it. It was a spirit of emulation—an uncircumcised, short-sighted, petty spirit. There was actually “a strife among them which of them should be accounted the greatest.” So little yet did they “know the manner of spirit” belonging to the mighty matter to which they had been called. How greatly must this deficiency of theirs have aggravated the Lord’s trouble—to think that his very own disciples, in the very crisis of his approaching agony, should be debating a question such as should never be raised among saints at any time. In his greatness, he was able to excuse them. They were not yet what they would be by-and-bye, and what they became when the Spirit gave them understanding.

And their strife was only the mis-appreciation of a real matter to which they stood related—a position of authority with him in the kingdom that would surely come. So he gently chode and instructed them: “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so. But he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger and he that is chief as he that doth serve. For whether is greater he that sitteth at meat or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth.” On this basis, he confirmed their ideas on the kingdom, and their expected participation therein as the companions of his labours: “Ye are they that have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom as my Father hath appointed unto me, that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Then he returns to the question of the betrayal: Addressing himself to Peter, who had probably been prominent in the discussion of the question of personal precedence, he exclaims, “Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you (plural) and to sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for THEE that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted strengthen thy brethren.” Christ probably meant that the authorities who were plotting his destruction would try to corrupt the fidelity of the disciples one by one, should Judas fail them, and that Peter would be in special danger from such a process—in more danger than the others it would seem, for he prayed specially for Peter that the temptation might not be too much for him. That Peter was weak was shewn in his denial of Christ at the last moment. Was Christ’s prayer on his behalf of no avail then? We are in every way debarred from coming to such a conclusion. Peter did not prove the traitor which he might have done. And when he stumbled into a momentary denial, he stumbled out as quickly, and washed away his guilt in tears. His faith did not fail him as it might have done had the Lord not prayed for him.

It may seem strange that Peter the impulsive, the weak, and (by the Lord's denial) the dishonoured, should have been afterwards chosen as the Spirit's mouthpiece on the Day of Pentecost, and employed in the specially honourable office of holder and user of the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, in opening the doors thereof officially and finally for Jew and Gentile, first for the Jews on the Day of Pentecost, and afterwards for the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius. Why not John, the loving and the loyal? Why not James, the faithful and stern? Why Peter, the weak and the disgraced? Because flesh and blood at its best is liable to appropriate the glory that belongs to God, like Moses at the waters of Meribah, for which he was excluded from the land of promise. Peter, the humbled—humbled in his own eyes—humbled by himself, was not in so much danger. He would always remember the shame of having publicly denied the Lord. He would always feel like Paul, after him, that he was not worthy to be called an apostle. He was therefore qualified to fill the highest station in the ministration of the Spirit without being lifted up, for which his undoubted affectionate loyalty fitted him on another side of his character.

When Judas had departed, Jesus appears to have drawn closer to the disciples. "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me, and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come, so now I say to you." Jesus was referring to his approaching departure by ascension after resurrection. The disciples did not understand. Peter, always forward as the spokesman of the rest, asked, "Lord, whither goest thou?" Jesus did not answer directly. The "going" in the case included shame, rejection, and death, as well as ascension. In these the apostles would follow him afterwards, as he now said to Peter: "Thou canst not follow me now, but thou shalt follow me afterwards." Peter protested he was willing to follow to the laying down of his life. So Peter felt at the moment, and such really was his disposition at the bottom of his heart, for he did at the last submit to death for Christ's sake. But he was not so strong at this time as he thought, and within 24 hours he was made to feel his insufficiency in the fulfilment of the words which Christ immediately added: "Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice." (These words Jesus repeated an hour or two afterwards on the hill side.) They had a sobering effect on the disciples—an effect which Christ increased by telling them the hour had come for a temporary rupture in the relations that had subsisted between them for three years and a half: "When I sent you without purse and scrip and shoes, lacked ye anything?" They answered, "No." Their every want had been liberally supplied by those among whom they had laboured in his name, as he had told them.

"But now," says he, "he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." Why? He supplies the answer in these words: "For I say unto you, this that is written must yet be accomplished in me; and he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end." The disciples took him literally. They had two swords among them. They produced them, "Lord, here are two swords." In



his own mental agony, and in their obtuseness of understanding, he did not enter upon explanations. He simply waived the subject in the vague response: "It is enough." That he did not mean they were literally to buy and use swords, was shown at the moment of his arrest, when Peter, having drawn one of the two swords in question upon the servant of the high priest, Jesus said, "Put up now thy sword into his sheath, for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword." What did he mean then? He meant that for a time, the divine protection that had guarded them all in their mutual labours was to be withdrawn, in consequence of which he (the shepherd) would be "smitten," and they (the sheep) would be scattered, as it was Written (Zech. xiii. 7). The violence of the enemy would prevail in his destruction; and for the moment, he would be in the category of captured felons—than which there is no lower point of degradation and helplessness. His recommendation of self-help in the various particulars enumerated was his figurative way of describing the dark hour that was about to set in upon them.

The disciples began now to be seriously troubled. They had for some time resisted the doleful tendency of Christ's communications to them during this most sad Passover. Their conviction that the kingdom was nigh enabled them to bear up against it, but now they began to see that something of a really terrible nature was looming, and their hearts sank within them—sank more than the facts warranted—sank farther than Christ intended—sank as if there was to be no rallying from the trouble—as if the approaching success of the enemies of Christ meant the complete failure of Christ's Messiahship—the complete extinction of all their hopes. After a due pause, therefore, Jesus altered the tone of his remarks, forbidding them to be downcast, and reminding them of the brightness that lay beyond: "Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God: believe also in me." Believing in God was matter of course with a Jew: believing in Jesus was not so, because he was a recent object of faith, and as yet but very imperfectly understood, besides being opposed by the recognised authorities of the nation. To believe in Christ was therefore a needful subject of exhortation, and it was what we might call a natural source of consolation.

Belief in God did not necessarily bring consolation: it might bring the reverse; for the whole history of Israel had shown Him the adversary of the nation because of their disobedience. The Jews were still disobedient, and therefore belief in God was calculated to inspire fear. But belief in the Messiah was a source of hope and comfort, because the Messiah's mission was to "make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness."—"In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, ye may be also." Before he closed his remarks, Jesus said, "These things I have spoken unto you in parables." A more beautiful and comforting parable of the kingdom of God he could not have spoken—than by comparing it to the house of his Father. What more endearing than "my Father?" What more safe and bountiful than His "house?" What could bring a

greater sense of loving security and peace? This was the view Jesus presented that their hearts might be cured of “trouble.” And actually, the grievous things he had told them of, were part of the process by which he was going to prepare a place for them in that house.

There were many “mansions” therein—many abiding places—places of fixed and permanent and honourable abode; but as yet they were unoccupied, and could not become tenanted without preparation in harmony with the laws of the house. To accomplish that preparation, he must be separated from them: he must die: he must rise: he must depart to heaven as their high priest; but when the work was done, he would return and receive them, and they would never more be parted.

“Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.” He had informed them on the subject from time to time, but not as yet with much effect of enlightenment. Thomas confessed their ignorance: “Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?” Jesus, disappointed but patient, renewed his previous instruction, but this time in a condensed and somewhat parabolic form: “I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” The disciples’ ideas were as yet too much on the outsides of things. They were thinking of mere geography when Christ talked of going and preparing a place, whereas Christ was speaking of the legal and spiritual relations between God and man, which had all been marred and deranged by sin, resulting in every form of evil upon the earth, and which were to be set right in him (by death and resurrection) as the nucleus for a new development of Adam’s race—the foundation for a new house, to be built up in the earth of new and living stones for the habitation of God and the joy of men. His discourse centred in himself, and what was to be accomplished by him and in him—the opening of “the Way;” the manifestation of “the Truth;” the bestowal of “The Life.”

There is no “WAY” apart from him. Grievously mistaken are those who think there is a way in Confucius, in Brahma, in Zoroaster, or in whatever sincere idea or endeavour men may formulate for themselves. As for “THE TRUTH,” men of a certain stamp much ask, “What is the truth?” in relation to human destiny or man’s duty, or man’s relation to God; such questions, in whatever form, are all answered in the single word, “Christ.” Away from him, it is not only all speculation, but falsehood. The plausible talk about what is truth to one being not truth to another, will be found at last to be mere aberration. Truth is absolute and inflexible, like the laws of nature. It has been revealed that truth for man as regards duty and futurity, is embodied in Christ. Men will seek in vain to draw water from other fountains. “LIFE”—there is none without him, speaking of man and of the ultimate shape of things on the earth. Man is mortal. The life he has vanishes at last like the moisture of the plucked flower, and leaves him withered and dead. The idea that his life is he, is the fiction of an obsolete philosophy. He is an organism whose basis is in the materials of the globe. When the life has evaporated from the organism, the organism quickly decomposes and

disappears, and man is gone. Where is there renewal of life for him? Nowhere in all creation but in Christ. He is "THE WAY, THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE." There is no access to the Father but by him. All attempts and expectations apart from him are the vain imaginations of men.

How came a son of Mary to attain such a vaulting pre-eminence? How came such superhuman things to be affirmable of a man? Of such a man as the disciples as yet imagined him to be, they never could have been affirmable. Such a man he was not, but the veiled manifestation of the Father Himself. This he proceeds to declare. "If ye had known me, ye would have known MY FATHER ALSO." They had known him in a superficial way, but not in his real relation to the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They knew that he was Christ in the traditional sense of the Jewish expectation, without knowing what this truly involved. Had they known him in his reality, they would have discerned the presence of God in their midst. This he proceeds to say: "From henceforth ye know Him and have seen Him (the Father)." Still the disciples did not apprehend him. Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." Jesus now spoke plainly: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? HE THAT HATH SEEN ME HATH SEEN THE FATHER. How sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" This declaration probably staggered the disciples, as Christ's next words took the shape of interrogative appeal to previous convictions. It would not have staggered them had their enlightenment been complete.

For many generations, the Scriptures had revealed to them that the Creator not only dwelt in "heaven his dwelling place" at inconceivable distance from the earth, but filled all space by His Spirit, as a unit of diffused presence and power, so that He could say: "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" Their history had familiarised them with the idea of this, the One Omnipresent God of their fathers, manifesting Himself by concentration at a point or in a person, as when He spoke in the prophets or worked by an angel. It ought not, therefore, to have been difficult for them to receive the idea of the Father connecting Himself with the seed of David, and dwelling among men in the person of a Son. But the things of the Spirit are high, and subtle and great, and it is a while before the weak human mind rises to them.

Jesus knew the weakness and the willingness of the disciples, and he was patient: "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father—('in the shadow of His hand hath He hid me'—Is. xlix. 2)—and the Father in me, or else, (the disciples still showing non-receptivity), believe me for the very works' sake" (i.e., if the Father be not in me, how do you account for the works which you have seen me perform?) Strengthening the argument with a view to their conviction, he spoke of their own coming participation in the power he had manifested—predicable, however, on their recognition of his relation to the Father: "Verily,

verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also: and greater works than these shall he do, because I go to my Father.” Christ’s departure to the Father would give him greater power of imparting gift than he could possess while in the fixed groove of his work in the flesh. If he remained with them, it would not be in his power to do for them what he could do if he went to the Father. It was therefore “expedient for them” (as he afterwards told them), that he should go away. He should then be able to do for them “whatsoever they should ask in his name.”

Why this should be so—why he should have more power to bless them separated from them than with them, we need not ask, though we may discern a glimmer of the reason in the fact that while with them, he was in the feeble nature common to them all, with power limited to his mission in the flesh, while, after death, resurrection and ascension, he would be harmonised and assimilated and absorbed, as we might say, in the Father-power of the universe, and have “all power in heaven and earth,” as he said. Referring to that time, he says, “If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.” To ask anything in his name, is not only to ask it for his sake, in that union with his name which the reception of the truth imparts, but with eye and heart fully open to him in the invocation. Hence love and obedience would be the conditions-precendent of his attention to such petitions which he indicates in the words immediately added—otherwise apparently without connection: “If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter that he may abide with you for ever,” that is, the Comforter would not depart as he (Jesus) was about to do—“even the Spirit of truth”—not the disposition of truthfulness, but THE SPIRIT itself, which is the root of all fact and truth—the fountain of all power and reality—as contra-distinguished from the impotencies and imaginations of human wisdom: “Whom the world cannot receive because it seeth him not, nor knoweth him.”

The natural man is responsive only to that which he can experience in the ordinary range of his faculties. The Spirit of God is not within this range at all. Consequently it is to him a myth or a notion, though in reality the first and truest and most powerful of all truth. For, by the spirit of God, all things were made and subsist, and by it, greater things will yet be done in the evolution of God’s purpose in the original constitution of things. “But ye (my disciples) know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” They had seen the Spirit’s work in two forms: in the ministry of Moses and the prophets in all the generations of their forefathers, and in the works of John the Baptist and of Jesus before their own eyes. Seeing, they believed, and received the Spirit’s testimony and command. Thus they knew the “Spirit of truth,” and thus He dwelt with them. But a closer intimacy was coming, for which Jesus would prepare the way. He shall be IN you. “I will not leave you comfortless.” Hence, he calls the Spirit the Comforter: “The Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name; He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you.” They were in fact to become Spirit guided men

when he should leave them. While he was with them, they were Christ-guided men, which was a great privilege; but Spirit-guidance was greater. Christ-guidance in the days of his flesh was guidance from without, while Spirit-guidance would be guidance from within—a guidance unerring and permanent. “At that day, ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.”

He recurs again to his approaching departure, but in a vein more comforting than his first allusion. “Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more: but ye see me. Because I live, ye shall live also.” Christ had been a familiar figure in the world for 3 1/2 years, and as regards the Nazareth world, 33 1/2 years: but he would be seen among them no more, for within the next 24 hours, they would crucify him and bury him and think themselves done with him. But he would rise, and the disciples would see him again, though the world would not; and because he would live again to die no more, so ultimately would it be with the disciples. They also would rise from the dead and be glorified and immortalised in nature, and this because of the power and authority resident in the risen Christ. “At that day they shall know” what he could but testify while he was with them—always presuming the continuance of their love, for what is life without love? And the love he would require at their hands must be of the robust and practical kind that found expression in action. What is love without kindness? “He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me.” Such love will not go unrequited, though for a time it may seem spent in the air: “He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.”

Why is this manifestation so guarded?—why not open and indiscriminate so that all the world could see and believe? So the sceptic asks; so Judas (not Iscariot), asked, but not in the spirit of scepticism: “Lord, how is that thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not to the world?” Jesus answers in a way requiring search for his meaning: “If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings, and the word which ye hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.” These facts, thus stated abstractly, supply the reason why there was to be no manifestation to the world. In brief, they were not fit for it. As Jesus had before said, “They have both seen and hated both me and my Father.” There can be no divine condescensions in a personal form in the absence of loving obedience. This was entirely absent from the world referred to. They neither received Christ nor kept his word; and how was it possible there could be any further manifestation towards them, seeing the words they had rejected were not those of Christ the man considered in himself, but of God who had made all things?

God is great, and will not be mocked. “I will be sanctified (honoured, had in reverence) in them that approach unto me,” said He to Moses when Nadab and Abihu were struck dead for trifling with His appointments. Adam was driven out of Eden for the same reason; and could there be any divine confidences extended to a generation so inappreciative and rebellious as that which had rejected God

himself in rejecting His Son? No, Judas (not Iscariot): the only thing remaining was the apostolic preaching of the gospel for a testimony against them, and then judgment and fiery indignation such as nearly destroyed Israel out of the earth.

But as regards believers, the purpose was peace. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth give I unto you." Well might he add, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Great peace have those who receive the peace that Christ gives. The world cannot give peace. It may bestow its favour, its commendations, its emoluments, but these cannot bring peace. They may afford gratification to "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life," but they cannot minister to those higher capacities and higher cravings in elohistic man, which can only be filled and satisfied by God Himself. Man was made for God in the beginning, and can never realise the object of his being, away from His friendship and service. These secured in Christ, give peace—a peace that makes a man independent of the world—a peace too profound to be described—fitly defined only in the words of Paul: "the peace of God that passeth all understanding, filling the heart and mind." It is a peace accessible in Christ only; "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. v. 1). It is a peace that can endure and approve of Christ's own absence for a time in view of the objects involved, as he proceeded to say: "Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away and come again unto you. If ye loved me (that is, truly loved me in the enlightened way that they thought they did, but which they did not till their understandings were afterwards fully opened) ye would rejoice because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I."

He now explained that he had told them beforehand of his coming departure, "that when it is come to pass, ye might believe." This may sound strange, but we must remember that the faith of the disciples was not at this time finally established, because not yet standing upon the broad foundation of a full understanding. They knew not yet that the work of Christ required his submission to death as a sacrifice for sin, and the occurrence of that event, now impending was calculated to strain, and did in fact terribly strain the faith founded merely upon his miracles and the gospel of the kingdom. It would help them to survive the strain when they came to look back and remembered that he had spoken to them plainly of his separation from them as a necessity. "Then remembered they," as we read in one case, "that he had spoken these things unto them."

His remarks at the table were coming to a close. "Hereafter I will not talk much with you, for the prince of this world cometh," that is, to take me. "The prince of this world" was a periphrasis for the authority or government of the present world as represented by Pilate, the Roman governor, and Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest. Arrangements were about complete at that moment for his arrest; the band of soldiers and officers under Judas's leadership was being organised: "He hath nothing in me;" that is, there was no cause of arrest, "no fault in this man," as Pilate on investigation testified. Why, then, did it happen? There were reasons

connected with divine law, though not with human law: "That the world may know (as it will ultimately know and recognise) that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment (that I should lay down my life), even so I do."

## CHAPTER LIII.

### On the Way to Gethsemane.

When Jesus had finished the remarks considered in the last chapter, he said, "Arise, let us go hence." Upon this "they sang an hymn and went out unto the Mount of Olives." On the way, he appears to have referred again to the calamity over-hanging them all. There was something extremely natural in this. We all know from experience, how the agony of approaching evil recurs again and again to the troubled apprehensions. This agony must have been peculiarly acute in the case of the Lord, from his knowledge of the certainty of its occurrence, and from the extreme susceptibility to impression which must have characterised so lucid a mentality as his. His allusion, however, was not in the vein of tragedy, or even in the spirit of suffering, but rather in that of the calm and dignified contemplation of fact.

"All ye," said he, as they walked along, "shall be offended because of me this night." "Stumbled." is the idea—confounded—perplexed. Their minds were fixed on him in his kingly capacity. Something was about to happen for which they were totally unprepared, though he had sought to prepare them. The prophecy was to be fulfilled which said, "I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." Though God should be the smiter, it would be by the hands of the ungodly, and the cruel. The tender, loving, faithful shepherd should be "delivered into the hands of sinners, who should insult him and kill him." Yet would the cloud be but for a moment. "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee." Peter again protested the impossibility of his deserting the Lord, whatever others might do. Again, he received the intimation that Peter would be distinguished above the others in denying. Again, with ardour he declared his readiness to go with him to death, in which the other disciples joined him.

The vine was a common thing in Palestine, and must have been a common object on the road which Jesus and his disciples now walked, towards the Olivet suburb of Jerusalem, which, though naked enough now, was richly cultivated before the terrible Roman destruction. Apparently seizing on this common familiar object, he made it a text for most interesting discourse concerning himself. Considering the painful pre-occupation of his mind, we may realise the mental majesty that could so speak on the way to agony and death.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman." What a glimpse we get here of the vital position of Christ in the Father's work and purpose on the

earth—a position so ignored in the popular and learned thoughts of the day—the Father cultivating and training the Christ-vine for the rich grape-fruit of his service and praise.

“I am the vine, ye are the branches.” Here we have men in Christ the Father’s tillage: but the tillage is with an object—not the mere benefit of the branches (as the popular idea of salvation supposes), but the gratification and profit of the Father vine-dresser. “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away”—a fruitless branch, a useless thing. What is the fruit? The results that spring in a man’s mind and life from the faith of Christ, otherwise described by Paul as “the fruit of the spirit, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Gal. v. 22, 23). God aims at producing this fruit in men by the truth concerning Christ. The power or success of the truth in any man is to be measured by this result. “Herein is my Father glorified that ye bear much fruit: so shall ye be my disciples.” If the fruit does not come, the Father removes the branch: so Jesus informs us. This will be done finally at the judgment: but there is many a removal in the ways of providence now, as we learn from the messages of Christ to the seven Asiatic churches (Rev. ii 16; iii. 3).

If the fruit comes, what then? The fruit-bearing branches instead of being removed, become the subjects of special attention with a view to their further improvement. “Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth (or pruneth) it that it may bring forth more fruit.” The true and loving servants of Christ may therefore expect trouble. Trouble (not allowed to go to the destroying point), is the thing for accentuating a man’s spiritual preferences. Hence it is love and not displeasure that leads the Father to bring His children into trouble. “Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth ... for our profit that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous; nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby” (Heb. xii. 6, 11). The trouble, however, will not be prolonged beyond the time it is needed. “The God of all grace, after ye have suffered a while (will) establish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Pet. v. 10).

Jesus proceeded to indicate the principle on which men become engrafted in him as branches of the vine: “Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” This is the principle to which every study of the Word of God conducts us. “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word” (Psa. cxix. 9). “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path” (verse 105). “Ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth” (1 Pet. i. 22). “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (Jno. xvii. 17). “I commend you to God and the word of His grace, which is able to build you up” (Acts xx. 32).

The word which Christ spoke and the word contained in the Scriptures of Moses and the prophets is one. It is increasingly unfashionable to estimate that word in



the way that Christ indicates. But the truth remains with Christ, though all the world go away from it. It is by the enlightenment resulting from the study of the Christ-Word given to us in the Scriptures of truth (and by this enlightenment alone), that men can attain that unity with Christ which is signified by incorporation with the branchship of the true vine. And it is only by continuance in this enlightenment that the connection can be maintained. Therefore, saith he, "Abide in me and I in you." This implies the need for effort on our part. We cannot abide in Christ, nor he in us, without aiming to do so. Practically, it means letting the truth abide. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col. iii. 16). Or as Christ expressed it, let "my words abide in you."

How we are to do this is manifest, but has been much obscured by the metaphysical theology of the dark ages. It is by "giving attention to reading" (1 Tim. iv. 13). Only by reading the word with regularity, attention, and prayer can the word abide in us. By this process, it does abide. By the neglect of it, it withers away and the mind is left with its merely natural impressions, which in spiritual directions, are darkness itself. There is much literal force and truth in what Christ says on this head: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye expect ye abide in me. He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without me, ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a (broken) branch and is withered, and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burnt." There are those who recognise the truth of this, and there are those who practically deny it. The latter give in to the false impression either that the knowledge of the truth is of little importance, or that once known, it needs no renewal; and under this false impression, they give attention to the truth but little, and cultivate the things of the present world much, with the result that in all spiritual directions they grow barren and sterile; their hearts become but feebly responsive to the glorious things of God; their affections die; till at last the withering branch is broken by the next storm, and falls with the wreckage to the ground.

There is no safety except in Christ's advice to abide in him, and to let his words abide in us. The adoption of this advice brings special privileges. "If ye abide in me ... Ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." There are those who doubt—those who deny this. What shall we say? Shall our faith be turned aside by their unbelief? Shall the word of Christ be neutralised by human ignorance and failure? If men of a disobedient and faithless mind ask and receive not, does it follow that God will disregard the prayer of the humble and the afflicted who believe in Him and serve Him? As well might we argue that because God refused to be inquired of by the faithless princes of Israel who came before Ezekiel, therefore to Ezekiel God would turn a deaf ear (Ezek. xx. 3). There are doubtless thousands who ask and receive not, because, like these princes, "the stumbling block of their iniquity is set up in their hearts."

Let not their failures dismay or discourage the humble and the contrite who tremble at Yahweh's word, to whom Yahweh has promised that He will look and

“save them in the time of need.” Let them “make their requests known unto God,” in everything giving thanks, and in everything prepared to subordinate their own ideas and wishes to the perfect will of God. Christ has given us an example here: “Take away this cup from me: nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt.” This qualification makes us certain of an answer to all our prayers, even if we do not get the answer in the very form we may ask it. This is John’s reasoning on the point: “This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us. And if we know that he hear us whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.” The apparent obscurity of this saying disappears in the experience of true children of God. Such would desire nothing that God sees not fit to give. What He sees fit, that He gives; and this being what we ask, we know that we always have what we ask; and here we rest, even in the midst of the most direful experiences, knowing that experience of evil is part of the instrumentality by which God is preparing children for Himself during this transitory age of evil, against the perfect and endless ages beyond.

Besides the assurance of prayer-answer to those who abide in Christ, there is the assurance out of which that springs, viz.: the assurance of Christ’s own love. “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.” It seems a peculiarity about this at first that continuance in the love of Christ should seem to depend upon ourselves. Does it not depend upon Christ whether his love continue toward us or not? No: his love is governed by conditions. He explains this: “If ye keep my commandments, YE SHALL ABIDE IN MY LOVE.” Is not this reasonable? Is it not beautiful? Here we are alone in the darkness, with his commandments in our hands: does it not seem natural that his pity and his love should be excited by the spectacle of poor and feeble men and women striving, under circumstances of difficulty, to do what he has told them to do? And is it not similarly accordant with reason that his love should be turned away from men who are governed only by their natural desires, and who do not admit the commandments of Christ to a share in the moulding of their actions? There can be but one answer.

His reason for discoursing of these things is also beautiful: “These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.” What more calculated to kindle and maintain a perpetual personal joy than the confidence that we are objects of care to the Father, and that Christ’s own love is towards us? We thirst for love and care. We are naturally formed to require and to desire them. And, in Christ, they are within our reach in the most perfect and beneficent form. Faith lays hold of them now with perfect satisfaction with this perfectly consoling prospect, that when faith has finished her short fight during the darkness of this probation, the fact on which faith feeds will become a thing seen with the brightness of the sun. For God Himself has said: “The hand of the Lord shall be known toward his servants, and His indignation toward His enemies.” “When ye see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb.” “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you:

and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem” (Is. lxvi. 14, 13). “They shall be mine,” saith the Lord of Hosts, “in that day when I make up my jewels: and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked: between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not” (Mal. iii. 17, 18).

Here Christ introduced the leading commandment—one that, as Paul afterwards said (Gal. v. 14), comprehends all the others: “This is my commandment that ye love one another AS I have loved you.” To what length did the love of Christ go? He anticipates the question: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.” The world has grown hoary in hatred, strifes, emulations—anger, wrath and selfishness. To those who know only this bitterness, the very word “love” has become a mockery. It is a reality for all that, and the most beautiful and powerful reality under the sun. There is no element of character so constraining and ennobling. It is, however, of exotic growth. It can only grow and last where God is known and feared. We love because He loved. It is the principal attribute of the Father’s character: for God is love, while much else besides. It is the essential characteristic of His children: for “he that loveth not knoweth not God” (1 Jno. iv. 8). It is a love that acts more highly—and draws its life more deeply than mere “like.” It acts towards friend and foe, though necessarily more powerfully towards the former than the latter. It can do good to those who hate: it can benefit the unthankful and the evil: it can pray for the scornful and the hurtful: at the lowest, it can and always does refrain from doing evil and inflicting harm on enemies. All this it has been commanded to do, and it finds possible because commanded.

But love’s glorious revel is towards God and those who show themselves out of a full heart to be His. It loves God with all the heart: and loving Him that begat, it loveth also all that is begotten of Him. So inevitable is this that John puts the love of God as the true criterion of the love of His children. “By THIS we know that we love the children of God when we love God and keep His commandments” (1 Jno. v. 2). A man’s love of God is a pledge to himself that he loves the children of God, even though he may be as lonely as Noah or Lot, and know the children of God only by far-off report. This glorious love is a continual feast. In the nature of things it cannot come to an end. Faith and hope must necessarily cease with the imperfect order of things to which they belong: but love never faileth. It will rejoice for ever in the perfect objects on which it will feast itself in “the general assembly and church of the first-born,” when God will have accomplished His purpose of rooting the wicked out of the earth for ever.

Jesus recurred again to the fact that our continuance in his friendship is dependent upon conformity to his commandments (Jno. xv. 14). That conformity brings us very close to him. It is an honour to have him for “Lord and Master,” which he says he is: but he points out that we are higher than servants if we make ourselves pleasing to him by the observance of his commandments. “Henceforth I call you not servants: for the servant knoweth not what his Lord

doeth. But I have called you friends: for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.” He would have us recognise that the privilege is of his conferring, and in nowise of our own procuring. “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.”

How true is this of the whole work of God. It is an affair of divine initiative. God made choice of Israel: they had nothing to do with choosing Him. He forced Himself on their notice: His whole work through them, down to that “visiting of the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name,” which is still in force, has been His own planning: His own working out. Man has nothing to do with it, except to humbly and gratefully accept what is offered to him. The wisdom of the present world, even in its most approved and most modern form, is darkness on this point. Men have only begun to be wise when they have begun to fear God, and serve Him, and wait upon Him in His way.

While speaking so much of love, Jesus glances at hatred, in the full knowledge that his disciples would have their share. “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.” Herein is an extraordinary theme for contemplation—that the world should hate Christ and his people. About the fact there can be no doubt. The crosses with which the world is filled are the evidences in a certain way that Christ the good; Christ the faultless; Christ the perfect, was hated with the intensity that can only find satisfaction in murder. Men who in any degree resemble him have in all ages been the object of a similar feeling. The world cannot find expletives bitter enough to express their contempt and detestation for men who try to “keep themselves unspotted from the world,” and who are animated by the principles and loves that governed Christ. What is the explanation of this apparently incredible but undoubted fact, that the best of mankind have been the worst hated? Jesus indicates it in the next remark he made: “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” He states it still more plainly in the prayer with which he concluded this loving discourse: “I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world ... I have given them thy word, and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”

The explanation of the enmity is clearly seen when we realise what constitutes the godliness of the godly, and what constitutes the ungodliness of the ungodly. Taking the ungodly first: “God is not in all their thoughts.” Gratification is their rule of action, and that on the lowest plane—self indulgence and mutual glorification for advantage. They worship and serve the creature in one another. They enjoy the things God has made without any reference to God. His worship, His fear, His love, are sentiments totally foreign to them. Their likes and inclinations are the law of their actions. They are not subject to the laws of God. They look no higher than man in all their dealings and all their relations. They have no hope concerning the future: and no intelligence concerning the past. They have no interest in what God has already done and no faith in what He has promised to

do. They have no taste for people or books that have affinities in those directions. They are a law unto themselves. They love those that are of their own mind, and this not with a very strong love; while they hate, and hate heartily, those who stand apart from them, for God's sake, and who teach that their worldiness is an evil thing. Nothing is more intolerable and detestable to them than the apostolic injunction, "Come out from among them and be ye separate," unless it be the actual obedience of that injunction on the part of those who love God. By this, their self-esteem is wounded: their pride stung to the quick: their resentments stirred to the deadliest bitterness. They hate godliness, which they call "cant." They detest obedience, which they call 'hypocrisy.'" They abominate faithfulness to God, which they call "bigotry."

The excellence of the excellent is their godliness. Therefore it was the very excellence of Christ and his brethren that stirred the hatred of the world; and the same cause produces the same effect to the present day. For what is this godliness of the godly but the reverse of ungodliness on every point? With the godly, God is first: His law is their rule whatever self-mortification it may inflict. Gratification is with them permissible only where the law of God allows. The worship and service of God is their highest pleasure: His love their highest affection. They set God always before them. Man is interesting and valuable to them as he conforms to God. "Glory to God in the highest" is their motto. Their whole interest is in His purpose with the earth: their hearts are in what He has done and what He has promised to do: their minds are shaped and controlled by His commandments. It is no wonder the world cannot love them: and no wonder that their part is to "come out from among them." How can two such opposites mix?

It is a bad sign when the professed friends of Christ are at home in the world. There must, of course, be intercourse and adaptation to a certain extent, as Paul teaches in 1 Cor. v.; but between true men of God and thorough-paced children of the flesh, there can be nothing in common as regards principle of action and policy of life. He who is after the flesh hates him who is after the Spirit, if he be really such. It is by no means pleasant to the friends of Christ to be objects of hatred. It is an experience, however, to which Christ's example and Christ's words have reconciled them. Properly enlightened, they do not look for anything else: "Remember the word that I said unto you." The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you because they know not Him that sent me." When, therefore, a man of God finds himself avoided and tabooed, and disliked on account of his partiality for the things that pertain to God, he is not tempted to conceal his partiality or to conform to the world to disarm their enmity. He rather accepts the situation with a certain satisfaction. He finds consolation in the fact that Christ experienced an exactly similar treatment, and that the real explanation of it is, that the world, with all its pretensions to superiority, is ignorant of the highest and the governing fact of the universe, namely, that God exists and has made all things for Himself.

“They know not the Father.” This is enough to reconcile us to their unfriendliness,—or at all events to enable us to bear it with composure and to choose it by preference. For what wise man of God would want to be on good terms with a generation that “in works deny Him?” What enlightened man would wish to be in love with those who hate Christ? (And that they hate him is shown by their utter disregard for all things pertaining to him, and by their disobedience of his commandments.) “He that hateth me,” Christ proceeded to say, “hateth my Father also.” The world hates God. This is the true explanation of its hatred of all who belong to Him. There is a terrible sequel to its awful infatuation. “A sword is sharpened and furbished: it glitters for the slaughter.” If Christ had not come and done works unparalleled in the history of mankind, their indifference might have been excusable. So Christ proceeds to say. But after the display of wisdom and power that took place in the apostolic age, and which has practically been held up to the gaze of all subsequent generations in the apostolic writings, there is no palliation for the universal folly and stupidity. They have truly hated Christ without a cause, and their crime will be brought home to them in terrifying judgment, “when once his wrath begins to burn.”

## **CHAPTER LIV.**

### **Nearing Gethsemane.**

Jesus, continuing his discourse as he walked towards the Garden of Gethsemane, referred next in natural order to the provision that was to be made for preserving his work from the oblivion which would certainly have overtaken it if its effect and permanency had been left to the impression made upon his contemporary generation. This was the bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles as an upholding and working power, dwelling and remaining with them, and therefore acting as a comforter. “When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the spirit of truth which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me, and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.” This testifying of the Spirit was essential to the efficacy of the testimony of the apostles. Without it, the declarations of the apostles that a crucified man had come to life again would have been treated as madness, and their work would have been thrown away. But with it, their testimony became a powerful means of producing conviction and faith.

The dual nature of the witness was afterwards clearly apparent and distinctly recognised by the apostles themselves. Thus, Peter, in one of the earliest arraignments of the apostles before the Jewish council for preaching the resurrection of Christ, said, “We are his witness of these things: and so ALSO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT whom he hath given to them that obey him” (Acts v. 32). Thus also Paul refers to the matter: “Was confirmed unto us by them that heard him, God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit” (Heb. ii. 3, 4).

The nature of the Spirit-witness is very manifest. It was by no means the sort of thing that would be understood by such an expression in our age. It was no mere feeling or experience in the minds of the apostles themselves. It was the co-operation of palpable supernatural power shown in the healing of the sick, the raising of the dead, the smiting of the rebellious, the speaking of known languages without learning them, &c. The co-operation of such a divine attestation with the earnest testimony of living eye-witnesses of Christ's resurrection was all-powerful with devout multitudes everywhere, producing the faith and obedience which it was expressly given to generate. If such divine endorsement of the gospel is not given now, it is because the extent of the divine purpose as regards the number of believers necessary to fill up the plan does not require it. The scriptures themselves, in the hands of earnest advocacy and honest enquiry, are sufficient for the generation of the remaining number wanted.

"These things," said Jesus, "have I spoken unto you that ye should not be offended" (stumbled). Why should he provide for the probability of stumbling? Because of the terrible treatment they would experience at the hands of fellow-Jews when he should leave them. "They shall put you out of the synagogues (equivalent to modern outlawry): yea, the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." Such experience, in the absence of forewarning, would have been liable to lead them to think, in the bereavement of Christ's absence, that something was wrong: that God had forsaken them: that the work in some inscrutable way had miscarried. His telling them beforehand prevented this. "These things have I told you, that when the time shall come ye may remember that I told you of them." He had not communicated with them freely on the subject in the early part of their association together: there was no need. "These things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you. But now I go my way to Him that sent me."

We might imagine the disciples thinking it was a pity he should leave them, since his presence was such a protection to them. Jesus took note of the fact that his words were causing sorrow. "Because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart." But there was a reason for it all. "I tell you the truth. It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the comforter will not come to you." Why the Holy Spirit could not come without his departure, we may not fully understand. Sufficient that Jesus declares such to have been the fact. "If I depart, I will send him unto you." His departure and the sending were linked in the Father's methods: and as a matter of fact, the one followed the other, within ten days, for "when the day of Pentecost was fully come (Jesus having ascended), they were all with one accord in one place, and there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting ... and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts ii. 1).

Jesus fixes their attention on the work to be done by the Holy Spirit when he should be sent: "when he is come, he will reprove (or convince) the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment; of sin, because they believe not on me;

of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the Prince of this world is judged.” We may see how all this was done by considering what was effected by the co-operation of the Spirit with the apostles after the day of Pentecost. It demonstrated to the entire Jewish community (1) that they had sinned in the rejection of Jesus; (2) that Jesus was righteous, and also the appointed righteousness of God for men, as shown in his being taken by the Father to the Father’s own presence; and (3) that the present world-rulership was God-rejected in Christ’s acceptance after crucifixion.

These things would not be intelligible to the disciples at the first. There were many aspects of the truth as it is in Jesus which they were, in fact, incapable of discerning, and would not be capable of discerning till they should become the subjects of that illumination and guidance of the Spirit which He promised. Jesus recognised this and found apology for them. “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak; and he will show you things to come.”

The disciples realised the truth of these sayings, and we are all able to see it in what portions we have of their written epistles. These epistles are luminous with the Spirit’s presence, and rich with a wisdom that is not of man. In nothing are they more distinguishable from human writings than in the feature mentioned by Christ: “He shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak.” Human philosophy concerns itself with the “how” things are done; divine wisdom deals with the what and the why. Human wisdom would have delighted in a treatise by the Spirit on its own nature, its “molecular” constitution if it have one; and the number and mode and origin of the “vibrations” by which it accomplishes the various results achieved by it as the medium of creative will. Divine wisdom passes by these speculative and useless abstractions, and presents to our attention the earnest and valuable lessons of truth as affecting our present peace and our future well-being. The Spirit spoke not to the apostles of itself in the sense dear to the age of Greek philosophy, but spoke of the things it was charged to communicate concerning Christ and the future. In this lay wisdom. What benefit would there have been in discoursing to us of matters we could not understand, and that could not interest us? It would be as if the electric telegraph, instead of bringing us messages of intelligence and friendship, were to occupy our attention in vain disquisition on the nature of electric force which no man can understand, whatever terms of explanation might be employed.

No: the function of the Spirit was practical. “He shall glorify ME; for he shall receive of mine and shall shew it unto you.” The Spirit with the apostles was not a philosophizer about Spirit, but a simple medium of the instruction transmitted from the Father and the Son—instruction with a practical object towards those instructed. This instruction related to the things concerning Christ and therefore the Father; for as Jesus immediately added, “All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.” This



close co-partnership between Jesus and the Father is at the root of the gospel which the apostles were to preach: it is the most fundamental element of the truth. Christ is not truly discerned where he is not seen as the expression, manifestation, instrument, and presence of the Father among men for their salvation, on the principle of his own supremacy, as the basis of his kindness in forgiveness. He is not seen scripturally if seen as a man merely, however noble. He was a man, but more: "in him dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily." The ascriptions of the glorified saints, as heard by John in vision, are equally "to him that sits upon the throne and to the Lamb." Jesus keeps this wonderful truth in view all through this discourse. He recurs to it again and again.

But here he diverges a little. "A little while and ye shall not see me, and again a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father." The disciples could not understand this in their ignorance of the impending separation. The two "little whiles" puzzled them. We need be in no such difficulty. Its meaning is plain from the history of the case in connection with the commentary on the case which Christ added in response to their manifested anxiety to understand. This commentary informed them that, in his absence, the world would rejoice while they would be the subjects of sorrow: "But I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." Did this refer to the three days' separation about to ensue as he spoke, ending with his resurrection? or did it refer to the larger separation ending with his coming again? It seems more naturally to have the larger as its meaning. The two "little whiles" are then apparent. The FIRST "LITTLE WHILE"—from the moment he was addressing them to the 44th day afterwards, when he was taken from them into heaven, when the time commenced, and is still current, during which the words are fulfilled, "ye shall not see me." The SECOND "LITTLE WHILE."—from the 44th day after his crucifixion to the day of his reappearing in power and great glory, when it will be true of all the saints, "ye shall see me."

If we suppose the words to refer to the short separation, to be ended by his resurrection, the facts would be difficult to fit to the words, and the words themselves would have a pettiness of scope quite unusual to the large and exalted style of Christ's utterances. The first "little while," in that case, would be at the most of an hour's duration, for Jesus was apprehended almost immediately after he spoke them; and the second "little while" would consist of the three days he lay in Joseph's tomb, at the end of which he showed himself to his disciples. This limited application would be quite out of keeping with the style of divine language which calls two thousand years "a small moment" (Isa. liv. 7), and a thousand years "one day" (2 Pet. iii. 8). Besides, it would fail to provide a suitable place for the two ideas that Jesus associates with the ending of the second little while—the permanent turning of the disciples' sorrow into joy, and the going to the Father as the cause or explanation of their joyful re-union.

Although the sorrow caused by the crucifixion was ended by the Lord's resurrection, the disciples, in the larger sense, continued to be men of sorrow

long after the Lord's ascension. It could not be said that in that day (the day of his resurrection) the disciples had nothing to ask him: for they did ask him much. Yet Jesus says, "In that day ye shall ask me nothing"—which we can understand as applicable to the day of his second appearing; for then, being changed into the Lord's own nature—even the glorious spirit nature, they will, as Paul expresses it, "know even as they are known" (1 Cot. xiii. 12). When the disciples "know even as they are known," they will understand all things with a thoroughness and a translucency that will render the asking of questions unnecessary.

Then as regards the words, "Because I go to the Father," they could not have a very obvious meaning as applied to the meeting again in Galilee after Christ's resurrection, since the departure to the Father was after that event, and in no way causatively related to it. But if we understand him to refer to the final seeing him again at his return to the earth at the end of the times of the Gentiles, it is possible to see a logical connection in the statements. His departure to the Father was the procedure on his part that was to prepare the way for a joyful meeting with him again. His intercession as high priest over the house of God was to effect that reconciliation which would lead to joyful re-union after necessary separation. This is the application Jesus gave to the subject in the discourse delivered at the table, considered a chapter or two back. "I go to prepare a place for you: and if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to myself."

On the whole, we seem justified in concluding that Jesus referred to his absence from the earth (still continuing) when he said "Ye shall not see me." If he also meant the shorter separation about to be caused by his death at the time of speaking, it would not be the first instance in which one expression covered two forms of the same truth.

It is noticeable that Jesus gives prominence to personal joy as an ingredient of the matter bearing vitally on the disciples now. "Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you ... ask and ye shall receive that your joy may be full." The modern habit is to deprecate this feature as sentimentalism. This is only one of the symptoms of the false culture that prevails at present upon the earth. Joy is the oil of life. It makes existence sweet, and makes men beautiful in each other's eyes. There is little of it at present because the conditions out of which it springs are violated everywhere. But it remains in the constitution of things as the beneficent possibility "all the world o'er"—latent for the time, but ready to spring into activity when its fountains are opened and cleared by the Master hand that will make and proclaim "all things new" in due time—establishing peace on earth and good will among men. Meanwhile, it is an individual experience where the mind of Christ prevails—an experience in measure—small measure, but true—joy in God, joy in Christ, joy in the promises and the prospect, and joy in the present path of blessing and well-doing, which on the whole is a pleasant path, though much beset with flesh-tearing bramble growth. As one of the fruits of the spirit, it is accessible now, but cannot be tasted in its fulness till the day when

“the redeemed of the Lord shall, come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.” It is a thing to be cultivated by the children of God as their peculiar privilege, distinguishing them from the gross, heavy-jawed, selfish, joyless children of the flesh. It cannot feed and grow unless the mental roots are fastened in God, who is its eternal reservoir.

“These things,” said Jesus, “have I spoken unto you in parables (parables): but the time cometh when I will no more speak unto you in parables, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.” This is an important indication of the veiled character of the statements made by Christ in these discourses. There are some who overlook this character, and make the mistake of taking parabolic statements literally, with the result of creating embarrassments for the general adjustments of truth. The subjects on which Christ spoke were such as could not well be expressed otherwise than in parable to men in the mental state of the disciples at that time, or in the mental state of the generality of those who were afterwards to read these statements for instruction and enlightenment. What can be more subtle than the relations between Creative Intelligence (as incorporated in the Father) and His operations among men through the Spirit, whether in the ordinary inspiration of His servants, or in the manifestation of His wisdom, character and power in a body prepared from the seed of David? Figure necessarily enters largely into the expression of these relations, when directed to mortal intellect; and of figure there was much in the words of Christ. It would be a mistake to confound figure with literal truth. Yet underneath the figure, there is absolute truth which Jesus here intimates will one day be made plain. “The time cometh when ... I shall shew you plainly of the Father.”

For such a day every enlightened mind must thirst with ardent desire. Ever since Adam was driven out of Eden, the cherubim and the flaming sword of symbol have shut off the verities of the divine existence from death-stricken man. He has had to discern them as through a glass darkly. Approach has been invited through them for reconciliation, with a view to the day of open sight that is coming. Those who have accepted the invitation have in all ages been distinguished by a longing for the removal of all barriers, and the end of all darkness to, yards God. They desire to come plainly into the presence and touch of Eternal Power. Even the higher kinds of unjustified intellect have a certain yearning for the “infinite” and the “absolute.” David gives expression to the circumcised form of this longing: “My soul thirsteth for thee. My flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is.” “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God. My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?” Through Christ, the answer and the solution will come. “I shall show you plainly of the Father.” What unspeakable satisfaction in the prospect. In no connection are the shortcomings of popular theology more apparent than here. The “salvation” of sectarian discourse is an affair of “getting to heaven” to rejoin fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and all kinds of relations. God is the least desirable object in all their aspirations. Their religion is a religion of the

flesh. It is not the faith of Jesus which tells us the flesh profits nothing, and that no man coming to him acceptable unless, with the humility of a little child, he discerns and bows before the sovereign preeminence of the Father, "of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things."

Meantime, Jesus gave the disciples this comfort, which belongs to all their class who are waiting and longing for the manifested presence of creative power and wisdom—namely, that now in their darkness and loneliness they are objects of the Father's love: "I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me and have believed that I came out from God." What solace is equal to this—to be loved of God? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" We may take the comfort without reservation if the basis of it is ours. Jesus indicates the basis: "because ye have loved me." Men who do not love Christ are outside the comfort of this verse; and if they love him, they will keep his commandments. So Jesus declares and reason confirms. Though "God is love," and "loved us while we were yet sinners," yet the personal special love that will redeem from death and plant us in His eternal glory, is reserved for those who please Him in connection with Christ, who is "The way." And first of all, they must love Christ; and honour him even as they honour the Father. They are able to do this when they "believe that he came out from God." Jesus lays the emphasis of repetition on this point: "I came forth from the Father and am come into the world; again, I leave the world and go to the Father." The disciples thought this was plain speaking. So it was in a manner. Still, it was part of the parable in which he spoke. The truth expressed is literal, but requires understanding. Jesus literally came out from the Father, but not as a man comes out of a wood. He was not a man before he came, but the WORD or Spirit-power of God, which became a man in the way described by the angel's words to Mary (Luke i. 35). Those who think that Joseph was his father are bound to deny this truth, and place themselves on the awful reverse side of Christ's comforting words. How can the Father regard otherwise than with displeasure the man who denies that His Son Jesus came out from Him in any more direct sense than other men who, as Jesus said, are "from beneath," while he is "from above?"

The conversation was about over. The disciples thought they saw special light in these last remarks, and felt more at ease with themselves. They had believed from the beginning; but there was so much in the sayings of Jesus that was mysterious to them, that their ideas had been prevented from settling in a final and comfortable form. Now the cloud seemed to move and the light shine. They expressed their feelings. "Now we are sure that thou knowest all things and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God.

They seemed to expect that Jesus would be pleased with this. So he doubtless was in a way, but not in the sense of being in any way indebted to their patronage. They did not see so clearly as they thought. Events showed it. So, Jesus, with apparent brusqueness, thus responded to their expressed fealty. "Do

ye now believe? Behold the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone; because the Father is with me." With what object did Jesus speak so lengthily to his disciples, then, if he could not accept the incense of their faith and confidence in the complacent spirit in which it was offered. He explained and ended his words. "These things I have spoken to you that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jno. xvi. 33).

## **CHAPTER LV.**

### **The Prayer of John XVII.**

It was night when Jesus discoursed to his disciples on the road in the manner we have been considering. Dark it must have been, but probably not with the darkness to which we are accustomed in the vapour-laden atmosphere of Britain. It would be the darkness of the clear Oriental night, tempered, perhaps, with the star light which is so brilliant in the East, or even with "the moon walking in brightness." There would not be the physical discomfort that attends personal communion in the dark on British roads. At all events, the 12 sad men as they sauntered leisurely along would be too absorbed in their communications to take much notice of the physical conditions.

Jesus came to a pause with the words: "These things I have spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." He then stood still in the midst of the eleven disciples (for Judas was at far other work) and lifting his eyes, and assuming the attitude of prayer, he addressed the Father in the words recorded in Jno. xvii.

What a subject for study! How can mortal man enter into the suspiration of the Son of God directed to the Eternal Throne. If it be true, as God himself tells us by Isaiah (chap. lv. 9), and as we instinctively feel must be the case, that God's thoughts are as high above ours as the heaven is high above the earth, how can we participate in a communion passing between the man who dwelt in the bosom of the Father, and that incomprehensible "High and Holy one" whose mind and power embrace and sustain the universe and fill the ages! Yet the placing of the prayer on record is a proof of Christ's desire and design that we should be lifted somewhat in its soaring reach. And truly this is the effect of its frequent contemplation.

We cannot appreciate its character at first; but as the mind opens, its greatness dawns. We are struck first with the simple majesty of its diction. There is no redundancy of language; no ornamental periphrasis; no effort to amplify or impress; no attempt at style, no tragic emphasis; no grandiloquence of any kind,

but the simple utterance of great and powerful thought and fact. It is not a human conception of how the Deity ought to be addressed. It manifestly comes from one who “made himself equal with God because he said: I am the Son of God.” Consider the opening apostrophe: “Father!” How weighty in its simplicity. This is the approach of more than a mere worshipper. It is the style naturally belonging to one of whom Yahweh could speak as “The Man that is my fellow.” The whole prayer has this undertone of what we might call dignified familiarity combined with reverential subordination.

“The hour is come. Glorify thy Son that thy Son also may glorify thee.” Jesus was not yet glorified. For 33½ years, he had lived the life of a weak mortal man, and that a man “of no reputation;” worse, “a worm and no man, a reproach of men and despised of the people” (Psa. xxii. 7). But now his end in this line of things had come—an end darkening in deeper bitterness and distress, yet the end. The cup in his hand was but the prelude to promised joy and glory and honour unspeakable; and for this he prayed: “Glorify thy son that thy Son also may glorify Thee.” Jesus had glorified the Father much during his life upon the earth. “I have glorified Thee on the earth, I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do.” But when himself glorified, he would be able to glorify the Father with an effectiveness not possible in the days of weakness. He would glorify Him in the work to be done through the apostles when he was exalted to the right hand of power: and he would at last fill the earth with the Father’s glory by what he should be able to do at his return to the scene of his labour “in power” at the appointed time. Having received “power over all flesh,” he should then “give eternal life to as many as the Father had given him”—“given” by the process of causing them to “know Him, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he had sent,” for this knowledge is the way to life eternal. The glory that would enable him to confer this life eternal was the glory of the Divine nature transferred to Himself “Glorify thou me with thine own self.” The Father is underived life and glory bodily incorporate in glowing spirit form and substance, “dwelling in Light unapproachable.” To glorify another “with his own self” is to impart to that other his own nature, which was done when the Lord Jesus was “changed into the same image or likeness,” so that in Jesus now “dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Col. ii. 9). Being thus glorified, Jesus has the power to do for his brethren what has been done to himself, and the promise is that he will do it. “He shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body by the energy wherewith he is able to subdue all things to himself” (Phil. iii. 21). Jesus had his mind set on this attainment when he prayed this prayer. It was part of “the joy set before him,” for which “he endured the cross, despising the shame.”

This glory, he says, “I had with thee before the world was.” It is possible we may fail to enter fully into the thought that was before the mind of Christ in the utterance of these words. Possibly it may blend both the meanings that believers see in it. There is first the sense suggested further on in the prayer—the sense of retrospective prospect, if we might so say—a glory possessed as part of the

eternal purpose and plan of things, but waiting the future for its actual development as a reality. This seems to be the sense suggested by these words. "The glory which Thou gavest me, I HAVE GIVEN THEM (the disciples).... that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given me, FOR THOU LOVEDST ME BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD." Here Jesus makes the disciples actual possessors, so far as apparent meaning of language goes, of the glory of which he speaks of himself as having been actual possessor. We know that in their case the whole force of the expression lay in the foundation laid for a future manifestation; and he seems to suggest this application in his own case in the words "for thou lovedst me before, the foundation of the world." That in divine language a man may be loved before he has any existence, we know from Paul's expression in Ephesians and 1 Tim.: "He hath CHOSEN US in Him before the foundation of the world." "According to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." The case of Jeremiah is also very express on this point: "Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee" (Jer. i. 5). That Jesus himself is spoken of in this sense, we have instance in 1 Pet. i. 20: "He verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,"

These instances seem to justify the contention that Christ's meaning was that the glory for which he now prays was the glory the Father purposed for him before the beginning of things—the more especially as we know that the glory granted to him in answer to his prayer was not a glory that, in the particular form in which it was granted, could have been possessed by him as an actual reality "before the world was"—viz.: the glorification of the mortal body of the Son of God.

But this is not necessarily inconsistent with the other view to which Dr. Thomas was always inclined to accord weight and prominence, and which it is impossible to dismiss with a full regard to the grounds on which it rests. It is not necessarily an alternate view, but one that may have a place co-ordinately with the other: namely, that Jesus being what he was, the "Word made flesh," the manifestation of the God of David in the seed of David, and therefore David's "Lord"—it is impossible to disconnect his mentality from the Eternal Power in which he was rooted; and that, although as the Son of David and the man Christ Jesus, his existence dates from his conception "of the Holy Spirit," the consciousness within him whose foundation was laid by the Holy Spirit may have reflected previous relations in away that pure earth-borns like ourselves have no experience of. The facts stated in the words "I and my Father are one," and, "the words that I speak are not mine, but the Father's who dwelleth in me," would necessarily carry such an idea, and involve a state of mind requiring expressions to describe it that could not be applicable to us.

Only on such a principle does it seem possible to attach a natural meaning to the statement he makes in his prayer: "They (the disciples) have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou did'st send me." And again (previously) "I came forth from the Father and am come into the world: again I

leave the world and go unto the Father” (Jno. xvi. 28); and again John’s remark—“Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father ... Jesus knowing ... that he was come from God and went to God” (Jno. xiii. 1–3); also the expressions, “I come down from heaven.” “Before Abraham was, I am,” and his question: “What, and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before?” All these expressions imply reminiscence of the preexisting relation of things, which cannot be surprising if we realise that all wisdom and knowledge and memory are stored in the Eternal Father-Spirit of whom Jesus was the expression. It may be there is an ingredient of it in the allusion to the glory had with the Father before the world began. The Father element in Jesus must always be kept in view in judging the expressions that came from his mouth.

Jesus then refers to the nature of the work he had done. “I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest me out of the world.” In this we have a glimpse of the inner side of the work of the Gospel: its divine side: its aspect as seen from the standpoint of God and Christ. From this, it is an affair of manifesting God. To man, it may sometimes seem the mere announcement of changes to come: the return of Christ, the immortality of justified man, the setting-up of the Kingdom. But rightly apprehended, all these are the manifesting of God. Without God, they could have no occurrence or meaning. It is to carry out His purpose, to enforce His supremacy, that the performances planned and announced in the Gospel will be carried out. A reception of the truth, therefore, that limits itself to the skeleton facts of the Gospel, is an inadequate reception. The truth, as exhibited in the Bible, has God in its sky like the sun, from whose fructifying beams, all other forms and things derive life and light.

Then, we have the whole process of Gospel enlightenment in a sentence. “I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest me: and they have received them.” This comes down to the simplest capacity—and ought to give peace in a distracted theological age. God gave Christ a message to deliver; Christ delivered it; the message has been preserved in writing; and we have but to make its acquaintance and receive it in order to be in the position of the disciples who surrounded the Lord as he uttered this memorable prayer. We are then included with them in the prayer he prayed on their behalf. “I pray for them ... neither pray I for them alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.” To be included in Christ’s prayer may seem a light and even sentimental matter at present. It will be apparent as a great and solid privilege when the prayer is answered in its final fulness: that they all may be ONE, as Thou father art in me and I in Thee, that they also may be ONE IN US: that the world may believe that Thou has sent me”

This evidently refers to what Paul calls “the day of the manifestation of the sons of God.” The world will “believe” when the saints are visibly revealed in the earth in their corporate unity and completeness, under Christ, at “the general assembly and church of the first-born” to whom the wealth and dignity and glory and



honour of all the kingdoms of the world will be transferred. The glory of their assembly will be their deathlessness and their absolute unity in mind and nature, caused by the brooding and indwelling among them of the One Eternal Spirit of Christ, who is "the Lord, the Spirit," through whom they will be one with the Father as he was. Such a body of rulers and governors the world has never seen; strong and glad and beautiful in every faculty, a joy to one another, and a pure blessing to the nations of mankind over whom they will be placed; a perfect satisfaction to Christ, and a praise and a glory to the Father in heaven. The development of such a body was the subject of Christ's prayer. It is a poor view of his words that limits the petition to mental unity among the few and weak disciples at any time living upon the earth during the dark days of probation. Such a unity is doubtless a beautiful thing, but it is never seen to perfection and never among "all" and has never had power to convince an unbelieving world. The unity of an immortal multitude will be a very different thing. It will overawe with its impressiveness, and strike conviction into universal man, and tend to evoke that "glory to God in the highest" which is the first characteristic of the age of blessing which Jesus came to prepare the way for.

Men who do not "receive" the word which Jesus delivered from the Father are not included in the prayer, and consequently can have no place in the glorious community that will be developed in answer to it, because it is only for those who receive his words that he prays. As regards others, he says, "I pray not for the world but for them whom thou hast given me." These are remarkable and terrible words. If Christ pray not for a man, where is he? As a sinner, he has no standing before God. There can be no approach but by sacrifice and priesthood. This is the lesson of the Mosaic Tabernacle, as well as the express teaching of Christ and the Apostles. It is Christ's appointed part, as "high priest over the house of God," to "make intercession for us according to the will of God" (Heb. iii 6; iv. 14; Rom. viii. 27-34). Where he refuses to perform this part, there can, in the nature of things, be no hope. Here is Christ refusing to pray for the world, or purposely declaring he omits praying for them, which amounts to the same thing. What is this but the condemnation of the world. On what ground? The cause appears towards the close of the prayer: "O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee" (verse 25). In the beginning of the prayer, Jesus had said, "This is eternal life, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." If therefore, the world know not the Father as Jesus says (and as we know is the fact), they are not in the position admitting of the operation of his priesthood and the hope of eternal life. The knowledge of God and submission to Him are the first conditions of human reconciliation. The destroying judgment attendant upon His coming is alleged by Paul to be directed against "them that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. i. 8). How far away, then, from the truth as taught by Christ is the theology as well as the philosophy of the present day which obliterates all distinction between the world and His reconciled people. It may seem a narrow view, according to the recognised standards of current human thought, that hope should be limited to those who know God and obey His will as expressed in Christ; but if it is true,

what then? The “concensus” of human opinion will not alter it, and the true wisdom lies in the supposed narrowness. The stars and their movements have always been the same, whatever view has prevailed on the earth on the subject; and so eternal truth, resting on the appointment of God, will prevail at the last, whatever unanimity of opinion there may be among men to the contrary.

Of the men who believed on him, Jesus said: “I have given them Thy word and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy Word is truth.” We have in a previous chapter considered why the reception of the word of Christ should be a ground of hatred on the part of the world. That it is so is a matter of universal experience. It might seem to follow that therefore the best thing is for believers to withdraw themselves into the seclusion of separate communities, after the manner of the Mormon settlement or nunneries and monasteries, and some more recent American examples. This part of Christ’s prayer is a complete discountenance of this conclusion. It would be very pleasing to retire into the harmonious sphere of love and communion; but it would not serve the object for which men and women are called. It is necessary that Christ’s people should remain in the world, though not of it, that they may be tried in the tribulation that comes from contact with it. Their separation is a separation from “the evil” that is in it and not from the forms of life that prevail in it. Faithfulness in this separation is the ground of their final promotion to a state in which there shall “neither be adversary nor evil occurrent;” and there would be no scope for this faithfulness if they were bodily and socially separated from the world as soon as they received the truth. They have to “endure hardness” in obeying the commandments under circumstances of difficulty. The process is painful, but the upshot is unutterably glorious when the short conflict is over: for human life is short; and the welcome seems to come as soon as life has ended, because there is no conscious interval between death and resurrection.

We should, however, fail in rightly reading the lesson of Christ’s prayer if we did not observe that, while we are to remain in the world during probation, we are not to be “of it.” it may often be difficult for godly men to reconcile the two things: to remain apart from the world while dealing with it: it is so easy to be drawn insensibly into identity with it while living in it. But there must be a line of demarcation, which it is practicable to recognise and observe. We shall gradually learn this line by the means that Jesus immediately indicated in this connection: “Sanctify them through thy truth: **THY WORD IS TRUTH.**” Sanctification or separation from the world is the result of a mental state engendered by the truth. In brief, the truth is the Bible, and the Bible is the Word of God. When Jesus says: “Thy word is truth,” no doubt he utters what is an abstract proposition taken by itself; as if he had said: “Whatever thou sayest is true.” But, taken in its connection, it can only apply to what is revealed; to the word that has been spoken, as incorporate in the Bible. Where the Bible indwells, in the

understanding and love thereof, resulting from, and at the same time inducing a loving familiarity with its contents, sanctification prevails. It is a sanctifying book, by universal experience. Men who keep close to it with that accompaniment of prayer which naturally springs from it, will not be long in learning where the line lies that separates them from a “world lying in wickedness,” in which they are commanded to live, while, with equal exquisiteness commanded to be separate from it.

“And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world ... and now come I to thee, and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.” This presents to us at once the most sublime, and, for believers, the most painful fact of the present situation: Christ’s departure to the Father, leaving us alone and comfortless in the darkness and storm of the present evil world, while he, “anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows,” basks in the full presence of Eternal Glory, at whose right hand are “pleasures for evermore.” We need not trouble ourselves with what may be termed the mechanical bearings of the fact. We cannot apprehend these. We do not know whether Jesus bodily traversed the inconceivable immensities of space to the central throne of Eternal Light and Power; or whether he have but entered the Father’s universal presence and become established at the right hand of His power, in the sense of having become assimilated to the Father in the bodily transformation which changed him from flesh to spirit (as seems to be countenanced by the figure of the rent veil—his flesh: and also by the fact of his personal appearance to Saul of Tarsus some years after his ascension). The subtleties of spirit relation make possible a blending of both ideas, and make it impossible for us to be confident about the ways of God in such depths. But the fact in its practical bearing is plain, that Jesus, in harmony with the foreshadowing of prayer, departed to the Father, and in doing so, went away from the earth, and remains away till the time appointed for his return.

If we could fully open our minds to the greatness of this idea we should never know sorrow: we should be sustained by a perpetual sentiment of joy—to think that our best friend is closeted—(as we might say)—with the Almighty power of the universe, with whom he is our appointed and all-prevailing intercessor; from whom he holds “all power in heaven and earth;” and by whose arrangement of love, he will come forth to bless us with life and peace for evermore. But we are weak and dim-eyed, because of the poverty of our nature, and the darkness of the situation at present prevailing on the earth. Therefore we fail to be as glad as we might. But the morning will come: and when the sun rises, the gladsome warmth and brightness of his living rays will chase the darkness and the sadness for ever away. “Come, Lord Jesus? Come quickly.” It was that his disciples might have his joy that he spoke these words So he says, and such is the effect in measure.

We close with the contemplation of these beautiful words: “Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my

glory which Thou hast given me: for Thou lovest me before the foundation of the world." This is the end of the matter which will be realized at last. The mortal life of the saints is but a preliminary—a necessary, developing preparatory preliminary—but only a preliminary—to the lasting relation of being to which they are called by the Gospel. The finality—soon reached in reality, for mortal life is short, and at its end there is no conscious delay in the sequel—the finality is companionship—close, loving, and delightful—with Christ in the glory that is his for ever. The form and locality of this glory the truth teaches us. Away from the earth he will not remain. "I will come again and receive you to myself." With immortality of nature conferred, the cup of life will mantle to the brim with pure and perfect blessing. To witness and partake of the glory of Christ will be "joy unspeakable." The long oppression of evil may crush the very sentiment of joy out of the heart. But this is but for a moment and is a preparation. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. iv. 17).

## **CHAPTER LVI.**

### **Gethsemane—The Arrest.**

Having concluded the prayer considered in the last chapter, Jesus went forward "over the brook Kedron," and turned aside into the secluded clump of trees since renowned in all the world as "the garden of Gethsemane"—of which it seems there are remains at the present day.

It is said that "Jesus oft-times resorted thither with his disciples"—probably for congenial privacy: he specially desired it on this occasion. He was about to suffer, and he desired the opportunity of special petition to the Father. The words he had spoken on the road, and the prayer he had just prayed in the presence of his disciples, seemed to be more "for their sakes" than his own. But now, for his own sake, he desired to draw near in the mental agony caused by the immediate prospect of sufferings from which the flesh naturally shrank. He desired strength for the supreme effort of his mortal life. He desired to be saved from it altogether if that were possible. Both desires led him to seek that opportunity of earnest wrestling with the Father which could only be fully enjoyed in solitude. We may understand, therefore, why, on entering the garden of Gethsemane, he immediately asked his disciples to halt at the entrance while he went forward. That he should take Peter, James, and John with him, while asking the others to stay, is illustrative of the closer affinity, which we have seen all the way through, to exist between him and these disciples; but even these favoured three might not be with him in his final struggle.

Having entered the garden so far with them, he came to a halt, and in their presence, "began to be sore amazed and very heavy." He was in visible and powerful distress. There was none of the foolish brag about "dying game." He

confessed his feelings. "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death." It is not possible that we can accurately estimate the reason of his distress, which presently deepened to an "agony" in which "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." We may be sure it was something more than the mere prospect of physical suffering that Jesus painfully exercised his powerful and heroic mind. Popular theology finds the explanation in a supposed vicarious concentration of God's anger at sinners on the head of his faultless son. But this apparently suitable view cannot be entertained, for many reasons. God's anger was never manifested towards the Son of His love at any stage of the dread experience, God required him to submit to shame, rejection and death, not in anger, but in wisdom and love, that the righteous principles of God's action with the human race might be representatively declared in him, as the basis on which His favour might be shewn in a return to man in life and kindness. So Paul teaches in Rom. iii. 24–26. This reconciles the fact that salvation is by grace or favour, through forgiveness, "freely," with the fact that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.

The shedding of blood is no payment or satisfaction of a debt, but the ceremonial vindication of God's supremacy, the recognition of which is necessarily the first principle of fellowship with God. Christ was the Son of Man as well as the Son of God, and as such partook the nature that inherited death because of sin in Eden. He was therefore the suitable medium of this vindication. It pleased the Father that our sinful and condemned nature should be sacrificially put to death in a spotless wearer thereof, as the foundation of reconciliation for all such as should come unto God by him, reckoning themselves as crucified with him and taking part in his death in the way provided. On this basis, forgiveness—real, free forgiveness—was offered. The carrying out of the plan involved no anger towards Christ. On the contrary, the Father's love and pleasure were toward him in all things, as not only testified during his life, but as shewn in the veiled sun at his death, and the opened grave at his resurrection, and as shewn in angelic comfort in the Garden of Gethsemane. It did involve his submission to a very painful ordeal, in which "it pleased the Lord to bruise him: he hath put him to grief.... Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him (contrary to the fact) smitten of God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions: he was bruised for our iniquity: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah liii).

The struggle lay in the demand made for his voluntary submission to an experience from which his whole nature revolted. He had received the "commandment" as he said (John x. 18). The part he was called upon to perform was the part of "obedience." This also is testified, that he was "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. ii. 8): that he learnt (or made the acquaintance of) obedience through the things that he suffered (Heb. v. 8). Obedience implies the liberty to decline what is commanded. There was the strong inclination to avoid what was required in this case, as shown by the terrible perturbation which the prospect of it caused him; and we may judge from

his words to Peter, a little later, that it was in his power to do so: “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” (Matt. xxvi. 53). From this we may infer that the Father was prepared to grant whatever Christ positively requested in the way of deliverance. The Father had made known His will that Christ should surrender to a cruel mob, and be insulted and crucified by them—with a meaning to be afterwards “testified in due time” (1 Tim. ii. 6). But if Christ quailed—if it was too much for him—if he said, “I cannot,” God was prepared to rescue him, though it would be rescue at the expense of his failure in the great work that centred in the cross. While we must hold such an issue to have been morally impossible, still its latent possibility as a recognised ingredient in the case helps us to understand the nature of the mental struggle which caused Christ to “sweat as it were great drops of blood” and led him in agony to pray with increasing earnestness as the last moment approached.

Having made known his distress to the three disciples, he asked them to remain where they were and wait. He then went further into the thicket, and threw himself on his face in a transport of earnest entreaty. How long he occupied himself thus we are not told, unless we have it in Christ’s question, “Could ye not watch with me one hour?” (it was long enough for the waiting disciples to fall asleep): nor are we informed of all the words he used in his agonised imploration, but enough is recorded to show us the exact workings of his inner man at this supreme moment, and to give us the sublimest instruction as to what is the acceptable attitude in prayer to God when we are called upon to suffer. He did not pray the fatal prayer of unconditional deliverance. At the same time, he showed his desire for deliverance if it were compatible with divine ends: “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt. Abba Father, all things are possible unto Thee: take away this cup from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt. Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done.” “Being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly.” Was the Father angry, or even indifferent to the sorrows of His beloved? Far from it. He could not grant deliverance in harmony with the object he was aiming at in the sufferings of Christ, and Christ did not ask it or wish it otherwise.

But He gave what He could: strength for the conflict. “There appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him”—not strengthening him as a man is strengthened who takes strong drink for an emergency, for that would not have required an angel; but a simple afflatus of the spirit from God. The strengthening would be mental strengthening by appeals to that faith which overcomes, and which is liable to fail in moments of weakness. Who but an angel could have performed such a part for the Son of God? We can imagine the tender, loving words in which the angelic comforter (probably Gabriel, who communicated the prophecy of the Messiah’s sufferings to Daniel, and announced his coming birth to Mary) would rally memory, dimmed in the “sickening anguish” of the hour: how

he would remind him of the great "joy set before him;" of the momentary character of the shame and suffering to which he was about to be subjected; of the certainty of Yahweh's performance of the promise of resurrection and the oil of gladness; of the multitudes who would attain to everlasting life and joy through his submission: and of their glad praises of him in the day of glory.

We may have sometimes seen a beautiful, earnest, loving child shrink from a task appointed or a medicine prescribed, yet strive, under the soothing persuasions of love, to bring itself into conformity with what is required. Its tearful, suffering face is a spectacle to melt a father's heart. How immeasurably more touching must have been the agonised countenance of the Saviour as

He "yielded to his Father's will,"  
In sad Gethsemane.

After a time, being strengthened, "he rose up from prayer," and then returned to the three disciples. He found them asleep. He had asked them to "watch with Me." What an addition to his sorrows it must have been, that in his darkest hour his closest friends were for the moment insensible to his needs. He evidently felt it: "What! could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." But reason and pity (blended as they never were in human breast before) quickly mollified rebuke, and led him to find excuse for men late at night who had been busy all day, and who had been brought into the depression of sorrow by his own words. He added, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

The armed rabble that was to arrest him, under the guidance of Judas, was on its way, but there was yet time for prayer. So he went back to the heart of the wood—"about a stone's cast" away from his disciples, and prayed as before. Returning a second time, he found the disciples again overpowered with sleep: "their eyes were heavy." He spoke to them, but "they wist not what to say to him." Still the band was at a distance. Again he went away to prayer. Returning a third time, the hour had come. The hum of men's voices was outside the garden; the flare of their lanterns and torches was visible through the trees. With a touch of sorrowful sarcasm, he said to his sleeping disciples, who quickly roused up in the presence of danger, "Sleep on now, and take your rest.... The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." They sprang to their feet, and Peter drew a sword. The armed crowd began to enter the garden in search of Christ.

They did not know him, and would have been powerless to find him without Judas. This need occasion no surprise, when we realise that the class of men employed to apprehend him were such as hang only about courts and prisons, and could not be found among Christ's audiences during the comparatively short and recent time he had been in Jerusalem as a teacher. Judas had undertaken there should be no mistake as to his identity. He should walk straight to him and kiss him, and the officers would do the rest.

“Jesus, knowing all things that should come upon him,” anticipated the action of the crowd and walked forth from the concealment of the garden towards them. Judas quickly saw him, and at once gave the signal agreed upon. He walked up to him and saluted him, “Hail master, master!” Christ’s first response to the infamy was in the mildness of powerful though agitated self-control: “Friend, wherefore art thou come?” Then, as Judas made no answer—could make no answer—to such a question, Christ’s words deepened in their tone; smothered indignation underlay them, as he said with emphasis, “Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?” What viler treachery could man be guilty of than to hand over an irreproachable friend to his enemies for the sake of money? But to do this with the privileged token of affection, and to do it in a case like Christ’s who went about doing good, and whose only offence was his zeal for righteousness, was to sink to a depth of wickedness that beggars language to characterise Its unutterable infamy was condensed into Christ’s simple interrogatory.

It is probable that the trenchant power of the question staggered Judas, and cowed the officers themselves for a moment, for Judas made no response, but “stood with” the officers; and Jesus found it necessary to say to them, “Whom seek ye?” They timidly answered, “Jesus of Nazareth!” Jesus firmly said, “I am he,” and upon this, they all staggered backward and fell to the ground. What was the reason of this? There is no explanation given. It may seem a singular circumstance, but it strikes the mind as singularly in harmony with the sentiments belonging to the situation. Here was Jesus, the great and glorious and sinless, treacherously brought into the power of an unfeeling mob, the instruments of still more unfeeling and cruel foes assembled at the palace of the high priest. It seemed as if his word and his claims were utterly falsified by such a triumph of brute force. It seemed as if, after all, he were not to “lay down his life” of his own accord, but that it was to be “taken from” him by his enemies, whether he willed or no, notwithstanding his earnest deprecation of this view in the course of his public teaching. How terribly torturing was such an appearance of things, when it was the very question which had been decided with much prayer-wrestle in Gethsemane. It seems altogether fitting, therefore, that Jesus should have been permitted to show at this last moment that it was his own surrender to the Father’s requirement and not the superior power of his enemies that brought him into their cruel hands. The withering glance of his eye, which threw them on the ground, could have consumed them in a moment, like the captains and their fifties who went to arrest Elijah.

But the time had not come. It was the time for humiliation and death, yet a time when it might be shown it was the Son of God’s surrender to the wisdom of God, and not the victory of a wretched man’s cupidity, that had placed power on the side of the armed ruffians who were seeking his life. The latter were made to feel this as they gathered themselves up from the ground and stood with Judas a second time in the presence of this extraordinary man whom they desired to get into their possession. They were silent for a moment. Then Jesus said again, “Whom seek ye?” They repeated, “Jesus of Nazareth” His answer was, “I have



told you that I am he; if therefore ye seek me, let these (the disciples) go their way." Upon this they seized him.

Peter could not quietly submit to this. He had drawn one of the two swords referred to at the table, and flourishing it, he excitedly enquired of Jesus if he should smite. Without waiting an answer, he brought it clown over the head of one of the company, who proved to be Malchus, a servant of the high priest, cutting off his right ear. Jesus had an instant word for Peter and for Malchus. To Peter he said, "Put up again thy sword into its place, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. The cup which my Father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink it?" "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that this must be." To Malchus he said. "Suffer ye thus far," and touched his ear and healed him. How impressive is the moral grandeur that could not only teach and practice submission to evil under circumstances so provocative of resentment, but that could at the same moment confer a benefaction on one of his murderers. This was not only "enduring the cross for the joy set before him" (the work of faith); it was the crowning grace of charity added to faith and hope; in which he hath set us an example that we should follow in his steps. It was not only that "when he was reviled, he reviled not again," but he "did good to the unthankful and the evil," which is a higher degree of excellence.

There yet withal followed a protest against the triumph of pure wickedness, which we cannot but feel to be pleasing, and some mollification of the pain caused by the spectacle of transcendent excellence overpowered by mere villainy. The protest came from the same lips that commanded Peter's submission: "Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with ye teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me." What reasonable answer could be expected at the hands of enmity? The Lord gave his own answer: "The Scripture must be fulfilled;" "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." The officers tightened their hold on their surrendering victim. The "power of darkness" for the moment prevailed. The thongs reserved for the worst of mankind were fastened on hands only beneficent and righteous; and he who had done nothing but good among his enemies was led away bound, and insulted like a common felon. They might have spared him the indignity of bonds had they known. He was no common prisoner who would try to make his escape. He went of his own will to prison and to death, "for the love wherewith he loved us."

Faith only can endure the heart-breaking scene Its meaning soothes and upholds: "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world." The enemies of Christ were only actors in the scene, though at the same time acting the perfectly witting part of malice and wickedness. As Peter afterwards told them, "Those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he so fulfilled" (Acts iii. 18). By "wicked hands"

they took him; but it was “by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” that they had the opportunity (Acts ii. 22; iv. 27, 28).

When the disciples saw that Jesus was fully arrested, they fled. The record is that “they forsook him and fled.” This is one drop more bitter. It seems to imply that they might have gone with him if their faithfulness to Christ had prevailed over their personal fears. Deserted by friends, and in the hands of enemies who sought his life, what situation could be more desolate? Perhaps the one that followed, when friendship itself repudiated him in the presence of his foes. Peter and John seem to have rallied themselves after a temporary flight. They turned back, and followed the band that were returning to Jerusalem with Christ. They did so, however, at a safe distance. They followed “afar off,” yet sufficiently near to notice the direction taken by the sinister procession.

The high priest (who that year was Caiaphas), had summoned the chief priests and elders and scribes to wait the result. They were all assembled in his official palace—one of the leading public buildings in Jerusalem; but the band stopped first at the house of Annas, who was father-in-law to the high priest. Why they did so we may only conjecture. Annas, as the high priest’s father-in-law, and associate in the high-priesthood, would be a man of high consideration in the city; and possibly the captain of the band thought the capture of Jesus would be a very acceptable piece of news to him, and a look at him a gratification to his curiosity, seeing they all hated him and had for some time plotted his death. It was only for a moment: Annas sent them on at once to the palace, where the whole council were eagerly waiting their expected prey. Hearing the band approach and enter, they were all attention, and took their places in the council room.

They feared the Nazarene, though they hated him: and all they had heard of his wonderful works had inspired them with a high interest in his person, though it was but the scared interest of a hateful curiosity. Here he was a manacled prisoner in their hands. Was not this a proof that he was a pretender, and not the true Messiah? Could the true Messiah be arrested? So they doubtless reasoned, to their own satisfaction, as they sharpened their eyes on the sad and dejected man who stood before them, under the high vaulted roof of a stately chamber, with seats for 70 old men ranged in crescentic form at one end, the horns of the crescent reaching each side of the hall towards the middle. The high priest, as mouthpiece of the body, interrogated the prisoner. How many disciples had he? What did he teach? Jesus was in no mood to answer useless questions. He therefore mildly said, “I spake openly to the world: I ever taught in the synagogue and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort. In secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? Ask them who heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said.”

His meek and reasonable answer sounded insulting to those accustomed to the cringing subserviency shown in all ages and countries to the holders of power.

An officious officer of the court avenged the indignity by slapping Jesus on the face with his hand, and asking, "Answerest thou the high priest so?" Boils the blood at this monstrous official sacrilege? Prays the heart for the vengeance that paralysed Jeroboam's arm uplifted to seize a prophet who uttered the word of the Lord against his idolatrous altar? The prayer will have its answer shortly, when the insulted Son of Man appears "in flaming fire, taking vengeance," and when these very men will see, in terror, the victim of their cruelty enthroned in glory as Israel's King and Sovereign of all earth. As yet, it was not the time to show the Father's anger, or interfere with the mission of malice.

The officer felt none the worse for his presumptuous sacrilege, but rather the better, as he looked toward the high priest for the approval of his zeal. Jesus replied in meekness: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?" The high priest then enquired if there were no witnesses? Those who had the matter in charge called several who had been manufactured beforehand, official false witnesses—men ready to say anything required by authority. One said one thing; another, another; but their statements were so incoherent, so improbable, and so inconsistent with each other, that the council could not for very shame profess to act on them. Jesus stood silent as they tried in vain to inculpate him. At last, the high priest, in a dilemma, addressed himself directly to Christ again, in the hope of eliciting something against him. "Answerest thou nothing? What is it that these witness against thee?"

To this most improper question, from a judge to an unconvicted prisoner, Jesus made no response, and the court was non-plussed. Jesus might have foiled them to the last if the high priest had not thereupon put a question in a form which compelled him to answer, and which at the same time furnished an accusation upon which it was glorious to die. Rising in his place, and fixing his eyes on Christ, he said, in a powerful voice, "I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus answered, "Thou hast said (that is, thou hast said the truth), I am; and hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." At this the high priest professed to be unutterably shocked. He tore his clothes, according to the Eastern practice, and with dolorous emphasis exclaimed, "He hath spoken blasphemy: what further need have we of witnesses?" He then appealed to the council for their verdict. They had but one answer: "Guilty," and but one sentence, "Death." The council was the supreme authority in the Jewish nation at this time, in all Jewish affairs: but being subject to Rome, they could not inflict death without the sanction of the Roman Governor. Consequently, it was needful to apply to Pilate, who was governor in Jerusalem at the time; which they arranged to do as soon as it was daylight.

## CHAPTER LVII.

### “Set at Naught.”

Sentence of death upon Christ having been resolved on, though not formally passed, by the Jewish Council (and the Council having retired), the officers of the court who had charge of Jesus felt at liberty to make brutal sport of their noble victim. The head swims at the indignities heaped upon him. Some spat upon him: if personal humiliation could be deeper or more bitter, it was when they blindfolded him, and struck him, first one and then another, probably with foot and fist promiscuously, calling upon him in ribald mirth to name the smiter in the exercise of what to them was but his professed supernatural power. The very servants caught their spirit, and made blows at him with open palm on the cheek as they could get a chance. Think of this, carried on at intervals through the sleepless night. What a preparation for the awful morrow!

arly in these heart-breaking transactions, the maid-servant who kept the doors and had admitted Peter, observed him cowering among the servants at a fire in the waiting hall, outside the Council Chamber of the palace. The waiting-hall was on a lower level than the Council Chamber, but within view of the chamber through the pillars, so that what was said and done in one place could be heard and seen from the other. The maid-servant, looking at Peter narrowly, said, “Thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.” Peter was ’taken aback. He had come—not as one of Christ’s disciples, but as a neutral onlooker, “to see the end,” as it is expressed. He had obtained admittance to the palace as an acquaintance of John, who “knew the high priest.” Painful curiosity had prompted him to get thus near the Lord in his last moments. Not as a declared friend, but as a disciple incognito he had “followed afar off,” and crept into the place of his Lord’s humiliation. Though he had protested that he would follow him to death, he felt very unlike it now, in the presence of scoffing enemies, and in the cold of midnight, after a fatiguing day, and in the confused state of the faculties which succeeds to such snatches of sleep as he had had in the Garden of Gethsemane while Christ was praying. The servant-maid’s challenge, therefore, threw him off his balance altogether. Acknowledgment of his connection with Christ would likely lead to participation in his fate. From this he shrank in the utter weakness of this unguarded hour. It was not wickedness; it was the instinct of self-preservation acting without control. Wickedness would have led him to take part, like Judas, in the plans to destroy Christ. This was furthest from his thoughts. At the same time, he felt unable to own to discipleship. He could but deny the maid-servant’s statement, and seek refuge in professed ignorance of her meaning. “I know not what thou sayest.” It was a terrible failure under trial, but it was a failure with ameliorating circumstances, which secured his forgiveness. It was a failure that actually qualified him in one way for the work he had to do, as the chosen mouth-piece of the Apostolic witnesses of Christ’s resurrection. It humbled

himself in his own eyes for ever, and fitted him to wear the honours of his position afterwards, in which it was fitting that God only should be exalted.

Peter's prompt repudiation of the impeachment appears to have thrown the bystanders off the scent; and he wandered off to the porch in the terrible uneasiness of his position. Here, after a little time, another maid called attention to him. "This is one of them: this fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth." Those who were standing about the porch took up the cry, "Thou art also of them." Peter, at terrible war with himself, ejaculated, "Man, I am not." "Did I not see thee in the garden with him?" said a kinsman of Malchus, whose ear Peter had cut off. "I do not know the man," replied Peter.

Again repulsed, the loiterers leave him alone, and disconsolately hanging about for an hour in the cold and misery of the night, he finds his way back to the hall, where he becomes an object of renewed attention on the part of the group near the fire, whose suspicions of him had become excited. They gathered round him, and protested that he must be one of Christ's disciples, for his very dialect betrayed him. Peter met this renewed suggestion with renewed emphasis of denials, cursing and swearing, and saying, "I know not this man of whom ye speak." It is probable that Peter forgot or did not realise that his words were audible in the open Council Chamber overhead. At all events, it happened that at this juncture, "the Lord (in the hand of his captors) turned and looked on Peter." Peter noticed the movement and caught Christ's eye.

There are circumstances in which a look is more impressive than the most eloquent and convincing harangue. Such a look must this have been. It was probably not so much a look of reproach as a solemn reminder. The absence of reproach would make it all the more crushing to Peter. "Though all forsake thee, yet will not I;" so Peter had boasted. The Lord had answered: "Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice." And lo, here was the agonising fulfilment. A look was enough to force it into Peter's inmost soul. He could not endure it. He went straight out and in the darkness and solitude of the night, poured out his broken heart in bitter tears.

When the light began to dawn, there appears to have been a second and fuller muster of the Council, with the whole of their immediate associates among the scribes and priestly classes, all of whom would be deeply interested in the case. In their numerous and attentive presence, Jesus, after the miseries of that night, was more formally arraigned than at the hasty gathering of the previous night. "Art thou the Christ?" said they; "tell us." Jesus knew the question was insincere. He, therefore, answered, "If I tell you, ye will not believe; and if I also ask you, ye will not answer me nor let me go." Then we may imagine a pause, during which whisperings would pass among the members of the Council, to the effect that at the night sitting, Jesus had openly professed his Messiahship but was now afraid to do so. His reticence now might perplex them as to their next procedure. If so, Jesus ended their perplexity by repeating the declaration of the previous night.

“Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God.” Eagerly catching at this, which was not sufficiently explicit for them, they all said, “Art thou then the Son of God?”—to which Jesus signified his assent. This ended their dilemma. “We ourselves have heard of his own mouth:” what further need of legal ceremony or delay? The way was open to hand him at once over to the Roman Governor, without whose concurrence, they could not have the sentence of death carried out (for at this time the power of death had been taken away from the Jewish Council). So, binding him as if he were a dangerous criminal, they led him away to the house of Pontius Pilate, connected with which there was a Roman “hall of judgment.” Into this, Pilate having taken his seat on the bema or judgment seat, Jesus was taken by the officers and placed before Pilate, with request that there might be order for execution.

At this point, Judas reappears on the scene. He had anxiously followed the course of events, evidently expecting that Jesus, would deliver himself from the hands of his captors by the power that he knew he possessed, and which he had seen him put forth in self-preservation on more than one occasion before. When he now saw that all hope in this direction was at an end, and that Jesus was a doomed victim of authority in the hands of those to whom he had betrayed him, his spirit sank under the remorse excited by the full sense of what he had done. “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.” He now hated the money he had made by his treachery. He felt he would give all he had to reverse the events of the past 48 hours. In vain. He could at least return the 30 pieces of silver. In a frenzy of despair, he went back to the officials in the Temple, from whom he had received the money, and threw the money before them in an agony of self-accusation. “What is that to us? See thou to that.” Is it a wonder that “Judas departed and hanged himself?”

The members of the Council did not go into the actual precincts of the judgment hall to which Jesus was conveyed, but remained outside, fearing ceremonial defilement on the eve of the Passover. This necessitated Pilate going out to them occasionally during the hearing of the case. There would be an audience of the common Jews inside, in addition to the officers, and the members of the Sanhedrim and their immediate friends outside. Having inside received the application for capital sentence, Pilate came out to the priests, and asked them what the accusation against the prisoner was; for it was a law with the Romans not to grant sentence against any man without just charge and hearing.

Their first answer revealed the weakness of their case against Christ. “If he were not a malefactor (an evil doer), we would not have delivered him up to thee.” In an ordinary case, they would have specified the charge; but they had no charge such as Roman law could recognise, or Jewish either, unless it were blasphemy, which they could not prove. Therefore they answered in the language of pique and wounded pride. “Do you think we would have brought him as a criminal to you without just cause?” But this was not enough for Pilate. He must have some allegation of offence. They then put their charge into a shape that would engage

the sympathies of Pilate against the prisoner. "We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that he himself is Christ, a King." This was a charge of high treason which, on proof, would subject Jesus to the capital penalty of Roman law. Pilate had, therefore, something that he could enquire into. He returned to Jesus, and enquired, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" Christ's answer was an enquiry of Pilate whether the question was spontaneous on his part or whether others had suggested it:

"Am I a Jew?" responded Pilate. As much as to say, "How could I know anything on such a subject myself, being a Roman?" "Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: What hast thou done?" Then Jesus proceeded to indicate that he had done nothing that could bring him within the law. It was true that he was a King, and that he claimed a kingdom, but not now. He was not a competitor as other kings were one of another. He was not a political intriguer, or a stirrer-up of insurrection. He did not belong to the present order at all. His Kingdom was not of this world. If it were, his servants would fight, which was what he had expressly forbidden them to do. His Kingdom was "not from hence." It was "from thence"—from heaven at another time. "Thou art a King then, though not now?" was in substance Pilate's rejoinder.

Well, yes: this was the truth, and that he might bear witness to the truth was the very object of his present appearance among the Jews. And then, as reflecting on the attitude of the chief priests, he added, "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." As much as to say, if they had been of the truth, they would not have been his accusers and calumniators. This excited a momentary curiosity in Pilate. What could this "truth" be which Jesus made so prominent. He asked him, "What is truth?" But he did not stay to get an answer. He had no earnest solicitude on the point one way or other. He was a hard-headed practical Roman who, like another after him, "cared for none of these things," except as they came in his way. He had evidently come to the conclusion that Jesus was a harmless person of the philosophic stamp, whom the chief priests had arrested from envy because of his influence with the people, and whom it would be wise policy on his part to discharge under the custom that had for some time prevailed of surrendering one prisoner to amnesty at the passover feast. He therefore went out to them and said, "I find no fault in this man; but ye have a custom that I should release unto you one at the passover. Will ye, therefore, that I release unto you the King of the Jews?"

There is no doubt that if the priestly company outside the judgment hall had at this moment been in a peaceable, or even in a fairly well-disposed mood, Pilate's proposal would have taken effect, and Jesus would have been liberated. Instead of this, they were animated by a hatred that could not even simulate the decencies of judicial impartiality. They burst into a tempest of clamour against Christ, in which they were supported by the voices of the fickle mob. They had no objection to the release of a prisoner, according to custom; but it must not be Jesus, but Barabbas, a recently arrested robber. For Jesus they demanded

death. Pilate was embarrassed. "He stirreth tip all Jewry," shouted the priests, "beginning from Galilee to this place." The mention of Galilee gave Pilate a momentary escape from the inconvenient clamour. He asked if Jesus were a Galilean, and being answered in the affirmative, he said he should send Jesus to Herod, whose jurisdiction lay in Galilee and who himself was at that moment on a visit to Jerusalem. Upon this he gave the needful instructions, and Jesus was led away to Herod, the people tumultuously following. Then ensued another and more galling humiliation for the suffering Lamb of God.

Herod was one of the worst of mankind—so infamous in every way that there was an open outburst of national joy at his death: so Josephus informs us. Before this brute—"that fox," Jesus had styled him) Jesus was now placed. He had long had a wish to see Jesus, because of the fame of his miracles. He now hoped to make him perform some of them before him, and to have the gratification afforded to the vulgar by the performance of a conjuror's tricks. With the eager insulting glare of a libertine, Herod plied him with many questions. But Jesus was silent: To Pilate he condescended to some opening of the mind: to this man, he had nothing whatever to say. The chief priests and scribes stood round, vehemently accusing him. To their words he made no answer. Probably Herod would promise to set him free on condition of his working some miracles, but to all Herod's questions and suggestions he was absolutely impenetrable.

Herod's mood then changed to exasperation. He jeered at him and mocked him, and was at a loss to express the intensity of his angry scorn and contempt. In this he was supported by his officers and soldiers, who easily and eagerly made sport of a prisoner who was the butt of their master's rage. They procured a gorgeous caricature of the robe that kings only wore, and arrayed him in it with brutal mirth, and without gentleness we may be sure. "They set him at naught and mocked him." Then Herod despatched him to Pilate. We can imagine the derisive shouts of laughter with which they would greet his departure from Herod's presence, in the exaggerated robes of royalty. We cannot imagine the Lord's lacerated feelings under such treatment. They are fully described in the words of the psalmist, foreshowing his sufferings:

"I am a worm and no man, a reproach of men and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn. They shoot out the lip; they shake the head, saying, He trusted in the Lord that he would deliver him; let Him deliver him, seeing He delighted in him ... Trouble is near. There is none to help: Many bulls have compassed me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.... Dogs have compassed me. The assembly of the wicked have enclosed me ... Thou hast known my reproach and my shame and my dishonour. Mine adversaries are all before thee. Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness. I looked for some to take pity, and there was none: and for comforters, but I found none ... I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax. It is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a



potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws: and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.”

That Herod, who had been at enmity with Pilate, should have become reconciled to him again, through such a transaction, only added a further ingredient of bitterness and humiliation to the sufferings of Christ. Flattered with Pilate’s attention in sending Jesus to him, Herod sent Jesus back to him for final adjudication; which Pilate, in his turn, accepted as a pleasant compliment, and returned to sentiments of amity. It is no new thing for bad men to become friends, over the destruction of the righteous. But what about the vindication, when “God shall judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus?”

We behold Christ marched back through the street, in the midst of a jeering mob, to Pilate’s “Hall of judgment.” Arrived there, Pilate sends for all concerned: “the chief priests and the rulers of the people,” to lay the result of Herod’s investigations before them, and to secure their concurrence in the release of Christ. His uneasiness about Christ, and his anxiety to release him, had been quickened by a message received from his own wife: “Have thou nothing to do with that just man, for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.” There may have been nothing in the dream of Pilate’s wife but the idle reflex of the current city-excitement. At the same time, there is nothing improbable in the supposition that it was something more—that her dream was of divine origin with the object of influencing Pilate in Christ’s favour, and leading him to proclaim the innocence of Christ, in a position from which his words would (afterwards) be heard by all the world. It was a judicial vindication of Christ at the very moment of his condemnation, and threw the whole responsibility of that condemnation on “the Jews, his own nation,” who have since tried in vain to get rid of it.

The chief priests having assembled, Pilate briefly addressed them: “Ye have brought this man unto me as one that perverteth the people: and behold I, having examined him before you, have no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him; no, nor yet Herod; for I sent you to him, and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. I will, therefore, chastise him, and release him.” Men swayed by reason would have acquiesced in this decision, and quietly gone their way; but the audience before Pilate were far from this state of mind. His words excited them to the utmost pitch of clamour. They cried out all at once, and with deafening persistency, “Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas.” Pilate recoiled before the demonstration. He asked what he was to do with Jesus, whose only fault was that he called himself King of the Jews. “Crucify him!” shouted they at the top of their voices; “crucify him! crucify him!” “Why should I crucify him: what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will, therefore, chastise him, and let him go.” It is useless reasoning with hatred. Pilate’s question was drowned in the storm of their hateful demand for crucifixion. “Crucify him! crucify him!” was all that could be heard. Pilate felt he must make some concession, or there might be serious riot, for which he would

be held responsible at headquarters. His desire to release Christ was not strong enough to withstand the pressure of personal danger. So he signified compliance with the demands of the crowd, and secured peace and infamy by one and the same act.

Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. "And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired but he delivered Jesus to their will." The first and ordinary preliminary to crucifixion was "scourging." To this Jesus was now subjected. Horror of horrors! Think of it ye who have been "bought with (such) a price." Hark at the resounding blows on that noble form! If the usual practice was followed, which there is no reason to doubt, he was publicly stripped where he stood, and made to kneel down with his hands tied to a pillar, and many blows inflicted by a strong man on his bare back with a knotted scourge, which tore the flesh and drew blood at every stroke. It is said that those subjected to this terrible torture frequently died under it. It would have been well for Jesus in a human sense if this had been his experience, for he survived it only to undergo more terrible sufferings.

The scourging at an end, he was handed over to the soldiers of the Prætorium, who "called together the whole band" to get sport out of their bleeding prisoner in their barrack room before conducting him to execution. The heart (already broken) reels at the sight of what follows. The robe that Herod had put upon him having been taken off for the scourging, they roughly array him in a mock imperial purple, and force on his head a crown constructed out of a thorn plant, the spikes of which would inflict the utmost pain. They force him to hold in his hands a rod in imitation of a sceptre. Then, in brutal mirth, they go through the mockery of pretending to salute him as king, and mingling their obeisances with a grotesque admixture of blows and insults, which elicit the loud laughter of the band. While this was going on, Pilate was in a state of indecision. He had verbally given in to the clamour of the people, but had not yet made out the execution warrant. It seems to have occurred to him to make a last effort on behalf of Christ, or, at all events, to wash his own hands of all complicity in his death.

He sends order to the centurion to bring Christ again to the hall of judgment, and meanwhile going before the un-dispersed assembly outside, says, "Behold, I bring him forth to you that ye may know that I find no fault in him." At this moment Jesus appears in the fantastic guise in which the soldiers had appalled him, "wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe." Pilate announces him: "Behold the man." Instantly the chief priests and their supporters repeat the insane shout to which Pilate had already yielded: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate responded: "Take ye him and crucify him; for I find no fault in him." Christ having retired into the judgment hall, the Jews said: "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God." This only increased Pilate's perplexity. His wife's message had perturbed him. The prisoner's extraordinary bearing had impressed him, and now the claim of divine

sonship reported to him was calculated to stagger him. He rose from his seat and went straight to Christ in the judgment hall behind him, and said unto him, "Whence art thou?"

Jesus made no answer. Already condemned, and deeply suffering in body and mind, it was natural he should think all further communication useless. But Pilate was too much in earnest, though it might be the earnestness of superstition, to be put off. "Speakest thou not unto me ! Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and power to release thee?" This roused Jesus to assert the true character of the situation: "Thou couldest have no power at all against me except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." Pilate was touched with this recognition of his position, though it is improbable that he understood the meaning of Christ's words. Christ was but affirming the truth apparent throughout the Scriptures that "God ruleth in the kingdoms of men and giveth them to whomsoever He will—putting down one and setting up another," as the providential exigencies of His purposes require. He meant to say that Pilate's power, though real and personal for the time being, was not his own, though he might think it was, but was divinely conferred, and could only be exercised conformably with Heaven's object in the gift: that, as the executive of Roman authority divinely permitted over Jehovah's land and people for the time being, he might not be personally responsible for its exercise: that the real sin lay with those who were using that authority for the private ends of malice and wickedness.

Whether Pilate understood or not, Christ's answer pleased him, and he returned to the Jewish assembly outside with an increased determination to release him. But it was all in vain. The more he argued in favour of release, the more tumultuous the Jews became in their opposition. At last they used an argument at once dishonourable to themselves and fatal to Pilate's further friendly efforts on behalf of Christ: "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend; whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cæsar."

What, O Israel? "Whosoever?" Your own promised Messiah also? Ye say that this Jesus of Nazareth is not he; but do ye not believe that he will in due time appear? And do ye say that when he comes, he must be rejected for "making himself a king?" To what a depth of faithlessness and darkness must Israel have sunk to employ an argument that shut the door thus against the promises of God; or into what mental perversity they must have come to use an argument against Christ which, if correct, would exclude the Messiahship for ever. It was so that "darkness had blinded their eyes."

Pilate was dark-minded, but not in the same way. He felt a regard for Christ that would have been gratified at his release: but he felt a much greater regard for his own skin. Consequently, when he heard an insinuation of treason that might be turned against himself, he felt he must not trifle with the case. He decided again that he must let the Jews have their will—not, how. ever, without a final and

feeble struggle, like the parting shots of a vessel that sheers out of action. He recalls Jesus from the judgment hall. On his emergence, in presence of the multitude, Pilate says, "Behold your king." "Away with him," shout the crowd; "Away with him! crucify him!" "What!" exclaims Pilate, "shall I crucify your king?" "We have no king but Cæsar," was the insane response. Pilate saw that further opposition was unavailing, and he surrendered, but under protest—made as ceremonially solemn as he could. He called for a basin of water, and washing his hands before them, said: "I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it."

"His blood be on us and on our children," replied they in one tumultuous shout. And surely the imprecation has rested on them in tenfold severity. Let the afflicted experience of the Jews for 18 centuries testify. That afflicted experience is now near its end: and the day is near when, "having received at the Lord's hand double for all her sins," Jerusalem will again see Christ, but this time to say, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Pilate having given his final consent to crucifixion, the soldiers took Jesus aside, and divesting him of the mock imperial robe, they put on him his own clothes and led him away to be crucified. Two others who were under sentence of crucifixion were brought out to be crucified at the same time. These were common thieves. Perhaps the centurion intended their joint-execution as an economy of arrangement; whatever his idea was, such an association was the last and bitterest drop of "the wormwood and the gall." To be numbered thus with the transgressors!

As he was led through the streets, many people followed him who had had no part in his condemnation, including many women, "who bewailed and lamented him." To these latter, at a certain stage in the journey, Jesus turned and said: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children, for the days are coming in which they shall say, Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bare, and the paps that never gave suck. Then they shall begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us, and to the hills, cover us, for if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"—a proverbial expression contrasting Israel's fitness for the consuming fire of judgment shortly to be kindled, as compared with himself, who was as damp wood on which the fire could not catch. If such terrible things were done to him, with whom God was pleased, what might not a "wicked and adulterous generation" expect who were thus putting him to death? The narrative of Josephus, of the events attendant on the overthrow of the Jewish state, is the full and awful answer.

It was customary with the Romans to make the prisoner who was doomed to crucifixion carry on his shoulders to the place of execution the cross on which he was to be crucified. That this custom was observed in the case of Jesus is evident from the statement of John that "he went forth bearing his cross." But

why the other statement that as “they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross?” Tradition reports that Jesus, enfeebled and exhausted with his previous sufferings, was unable to carry the cross, and fell under it after walking a few steps, and that his guardians were compelled to get another to carry it. It is not improbable there may be truth in the report, (1) because it is not likely the Romans would willingly omit any aggravating circumstance of execution, and (2) because they would not be likely to have impressed a stranger into this service if Jesus had been able to carry the cross himself.

And thus in uttermost humiliation marched the Man of Sorrows to that sacrifice for the sins of the world which the Father required at his hands—he in the middle with hands tied behind his back—on each side, a file of soldiers—behind him, a strong man carrying the piece of rude carpentry on which he was to be nailed, and before and behind, a rabble of running, vulgar, callous sightseers. Only the reflection that it is all past, and that soon the dreadful ignominy was wiped away in the glad healing of the resurrection morning, enables the heart to endure the terrible scene. Prefigured in the offering of Isaac, bound as he now was, near the very spot to which he was now on the way; typified in the Passover lamb, the very hour for whose annual national eating had now arrived; and pointed forward to in every slain animal offered on the Mosaic altar under whose very shadow he was now passing: “BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD THAT TAKETH AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD.”

## **CHAPTER LVIII.**

### **Golgotha.**

“And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him.” Such is the unadorned record of the awful climax of the Lord’s sufferings. The name of the spot has gone round the world in all languages, through all the ages with the cross of his shame and the name of his glory. Its particular locality is doubtful. It matters little. It is known to God, and is better not known to man in the state of things now upon the earth. It will doubtless be marked and honoured in the day of the Lord’s glory when he reigns, with the nail marks in his hands where they were inflicted. It is natural for men to be curious as to the exact site of Calvary. An attempt has recently been made to identify it in connection with its other name—Golgotha, “the place of a skull.”

There is a prominence or spur outside the walls of Jerusalem on the eastern side resembling the shape of a skull, and it is supposed this was “the place” where the procession that led Jesus out to crucifixion came to a halt. Wherever it was, arrived at Calvary, the soldiers proceeded to the work which an agonised imagination refuses to realise. There was, first of all, a mitigating touch of humanity. They offered their noble victim a mixture to drink, which it is said would

have had the effect of dulling sensibility to pain. Was this the result of softened feelings, inspired by the spectacle of his broken-heartedness? (for it is written in the psalms, "Grief hath broken his heart"—we may know that such would be his aspect). Whatever feeling prompted their kindness, it was in vain. Jesus refused the drink. He would not assuage, by a mechanical stupefaction, the sufferings which the Father had called upon him to go through by the power of faith. "

And they crucified him:" brief words. What unutterable anguish is crowded into them! The soldiers would undress him: for it was the custom to crucify prisoners naked. Oh, what heartrending indignity. Shall we be afraid of being put to shame for his sake? It was for us he thus suffered: "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." Then they would lay the cross on the ground; and taking hold of Christ, they would lay him down on his back upon it, and seizing hammer and strong nails, they would drive the nails through hands and feet as if he were a piece of senseless wood. Oh, the agonised face! Oh, the sweat-beaded brow! Oh, the cruel pangs and heavy groans of that holy bosom! O God, why this heart-crushing tragedy—Thy dear Son, Thy beloved Son, given thus into the hands of sinners, torn and mangled as by beasts of prey, subjected to every indignity in the power of man to inflict?

We know the answer: "By one man sin entered into the world." He himself has said "The cup which my Father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink?" But we are weak. We can ill bear this sight. "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." Father, thou art great, and sin is terrible. "It pleased the Lord to put him to grief." Thou wilt yet divide him a portion with the strong in the bright and endless day for which thou art thus preparing. When we think of this, we draw a sigh of relief. We are panting to join in the praises that will then crown his head: "Worthy the Lamb that was slain, to receive power and riches and wisdom and honour and glory and blessing; for thou hast redeemed us unto God by thy blood, from every kindred and tongue and people and nation; and thou hast made us as unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign with thee upon the earth."

The broad-headed nails driven entirely home, the soldiers would then lift the 'cross with its bleeding burden, and plant it in the hole dug in the earth to receive it. Firmly fixing it there, they do the same for the two thieves, and put the climax on the shame of his cross by placing them one on each side of him. Jesus is still able to speak. What are those words that come from his parched lips? "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do!" Compassionate in the midst of his sufferings, he prays for his murderers. O Lord of heaven and earth, help us to conform to the example he hath left us. Our hearts break for love and pity. Help us to do his commandments.

The soldiers are heedless of the prayer, but the centurion, more intelligent than the rest, takes notice. Then, according to the custom, the soldiers performing the execution divide the clothes of the crucified among themselves. The soldiers are

four in number (a quarternion) they divide the clothes equally: but the vesture is more valuable than the rest. It is the work of love, and is seamless, a woven work throughout. For this, they cast lots.

It would be the business of the captain to affix over the cross the usual writing specifying the offence of the prisoners. In the case of Christ, Pilate himself had prepared the writing. It was a difficult case to define. Pilate might have written "Treason." He chose not to do this. He wrote a title which became a declaration of the truth for all time. In this, he would be guided first by his own feelings (for he was persuaded Christ was no promoter of sedition), and the hand of God would guide him in a matter in which a divine work was concerned. He wrote,

"THIS IS JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS."

He wrote it in three languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Latin) to suit the Jews themselves; the Greek Jews who were visitors at the Passover feast; and the soldiers and officials of Rome, who spoke Latin. When the chief priests saw the writing, they disliked it exceedingly, It was a discomfiting declaration, which many believed, and of which many of them suspected the truth: for many of them (as John informs us) believed, but confessed him not, for fear of being excommunicated. They quailed under such a declaration staring at them from the head of the cross. They therefore went to Pilate, and asked him to change it. They said, "Write not, The King of the Jews, but that he said, I am King of the Jews." But Pilate was not to be moved. "What I have written, I have written." And thus by an extraordinary and beautiful Providence of God, the truth was proclaimed in the very act by which man intended to brand it as a lie.

Having completed their work, the soldiers sit down to watch their victims. The crowd that had accompanied them surge all around, gloating their eyes with triumphant satisfaction on the bleeding and suffering form of him who "went about among them doing good." The scribes and Pharisees and rulers of the people made themselves prominent in this ignominious pageant. Ill at ease, they try to argue themselves into the conviction that all is well: "He saved others; himself he cannot save." "If he be king of Israel, let him descend now from the cross that we may see and believe." Ah, "scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites," did he save others? Are ye not afraid to crucify a man who saved others? Do bad men "save others?" As to coming down from the cross, suppose that like Joseph, cast to death by his brethren; like Moses, rejected at first by your predecessors in Egypt, the purpose of your God requires that the king of Israel thus should suffer: that "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, the son of man should thus be lifted up." How can he in that case "come down from the cross?" How then should the Scripture be fulfilled?—Are not your questions unreasonable?

But they know not what they do. The people, at all times easily led, join with them in their brutal taunts—cruel to hurl at any man, even the worst, in the hour of torture—how much more at one "without spot and blameless," and whose name

has since in all the world been the synonym of all that is beneficent and righteous, and holy and true. Wagging head and railing tongue sent home the shafts of ridicule. "O thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself and come down from the cross." "Let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God." "He trusted in God: let him deliver him now if he will have him." The scribes and Pharisees took the lead in the mocking jibes that rung around the cross. Even the soldiers, encouraged by their example, took part. "If thou be the King of the Jews save thyself." To crown the infamy, the very thieves who were crucified with him "cast the same in his teeth;" they, who, as fellow-sufferers, might have been expected to at least sympathise with him in silence. "If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us."

There was a little mitigation in this presently. One of the thieves appears to have come to a reasonable mind, and to have rebuked the railing of his companion. Declaring that Jesus had done nothing to deserve such a fate, he not only rebuked his fellow-criminal, but implored Jesus to remember the speaker in the day of his kingdom. It is a matter of momentary marvel that a man of this stamp should have preferred such a request. The marvel ceases when we recollect that for 3 1/2 years, Jesus had engaged public attention, and that "the common people heard him gladly" everywhere; to which class, the man now on the cross by the side of Jesus probably belonged. He evidently knew enough of Jesus to recognise him in his true character, and to give way to the effect of his knowledge when his first bravado had subsided under the torture of his position. Jesus did not despise the prayer. "I say unto thee, To-day (this day—the day introduced in the question) shalt thou be with me in Paradise." The common view of this answer is excluded by the fact that Jesus did not go to Paradise during the twenty-four hours in which the words were uttered: that in fact he died, and had not ascended to the Father three days afterwards (Jno. xx. 17); and further by the fact that Paradise is not above the clouds, nor as yet established on the earth, but is to be established there, in the Holy Land, in the day of his glory.— (See Ezek. xxxvi. 33–35; Is. lx. 13–15; Jer. xxxi. 23–26).

For six dreadful hours, Jesus hung in helpless agony—and part of that time, he was exposed to the scorching rays of a Syrian sun. At first, the weeping women who followed him to execution, "stood afar off." How could they bear the agony and the shame? But before the scene closed, some of them found their way near him, including his mother Mary, her sister the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. They stood near the cross along with John, the beloved disciple who had found them in the crowd. Jesus perceived them, and in brief words, directed John to take care of his mother—from which it is probable that the tradition is correct that by this time, Joseph, "the husband of Mary" was dead. John acted on the dying direction, and "from that hour took her to his own home."

At the end of three hours, namely towards 12 o'clock mid-day, according to modern reckoning, the day began to grow dark. The people began to look about expecting a thunderstorm, but there were no clouds. Shortly the obscuration



deepened, till it was quite dark “over all the land.” Many would probably disperse to their homes in presence of the darkness, which was unusual and terrifying. It is said that calculations show that an eclipse of the sun occurred about this time. Possibly so, but this does not detract from the significance of a pre-arranged frown of nature at the wickedness of man in putting to death the son of God. If it was done by an eclipse, that was God’s way of bringing it about—by timing the events with the eclipse; but it is by no means certain that this was the method. There were other circumstances in the situation of a directly supernatural character, and it is likely that all were such. For three hours darkness lasted,—namely, from 12 to 3 o’clock (Western time). The prevalence of darkness must have added greatly to the horror of Christ’s last moments. He was a prey to raging thirst. His last words were a piercing wail, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?”

Some have a difficulty in understanding such words from the mouth of Christ. There need be none. The exhaustion of nature accounts for the momentary suspension of understanding. Consider the sleepless and terrible night he had come through; the buffetings; the scourging; and the six hours fierce agony of the cross; can we wonder at strength gone, understanding clouded, heart broken? The moment of release was at hand. Some of the bystanders, misunderstanding the Hebrew in which Jesus spoke, imagined he was calling for Elias, and one proposed to strengthen him in prospect of a possible rescue by that prophet, by moistening his parched and dry lips with vinegar. Ah! they little understood. There was one long loud wail from the convulsed form on “the accursed tree” and then a few scarcely audible words: “Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.” Again he said, “It is finished.” The head then fell on the breast; the frame hung motionless. All was over. Christ was dead.

The tempest of grief and anger that sweeps over the soul in the contemplation of these things finds its counterpart in the manifestation that now struck terror into the spectators. An earthquake sent its appalling tremors far and wide; with sharp, cracking sound, the rocky hills in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem were rent asunder in all directions; the graves were exposed; the veil of the temple that fenced off the holiest from human intrusion, was sharply torn open from top to bottom. Dark, weird, and terrific, every aspect of nature combined to express the anger of God at a tragedy which, while His own pre-appointment for high and holy ends, was none the less the infamous triumph of human wickedness over the holy, the good, and divine. Not many years afterwards, there was a fearful retribution on the same spot, when by the order of Titus, to deter the inhabitants of the beleaguered city from escaping into his camp, Jerusalem was surrounded with a long line of crosses on each of which an escaped Jew was transfixed in writhing agony. If we could know, we should probably discover that the victims on that occasion, though taken at haphazard by the Romans, were probably selected by the hand of Providence with reference to the guilt of Calvary.

The officer in command of the squad of soldiers that had been entrusted with the execution of Jesus, was deeply impressed with all he saw, taken in connection with the character and demeanour of the prisoner. He was convinced that Jesus was no ordinary man. "Certainly," said he, "this was a righteous man: Truly this was the Son of God." All standing round him were similarly impressed. All "feared greatly," and were moved deeply. Solemnly they exchanged remarks with the emphatic gesture and breast-smitings of Orientals. Quickly they dispersed, and the light began to return. Then came the question among the officials about the disposal of the bodies. The thieves were still in full life. Under ordinary circumstances they would have been left to languish to death where they were; but next day was the high sabbath of the Passover, the feast, and the Jews were very punctilious about proper ceremonial observance, which the exposure of criminals in execution would have contravened. They therefore "besought Pilate" that "they might be taken away," but that in order to secure death, their legs might be broken. Pilate consented, and soldiers were sent to do as had been requested.

When they came to Jesus, finding that he was already dead, they refrained; but one of the soldiers, to make sure that it was death and no trance, plunged his spear in his side. "Forthwith came there out blood and water." Thus was the certainty of death guaranteed to all who should come after, and thus also was it shewn that mental suffering had more to do with causing death than physical agony: for, according to surgical testimony, the efflux of "blood and water" could only occur where the heart had been ruptured. Thus, finally, was the precious blood of Christ shed for us as the antitypical lamb without spot. Blood would ooze from the hands and feet, and from the pain punctures of the thorny crown; but copious and complete would be the discharge caused by the Roman spear; and thus would the one great offering for sin be consummated. "Without the shedding of blood is no remission:" such is the law of God which no man can change. "The life is in the blood" (Lev. xvii. II); and it is the life that sin brings into condemnation—not as an entity but as the possession of the flesh. It was, therefore, fitting that "the blood of the new covenant" should be poured out in a manner, leaving no sense of incompleteness. This was secured by the providential regulation of the natural circumstances connected with the Lord's crucifixion.

Another point had now to be secured. The body of the Lord was in danger of being cast as a dishonoured carcase among the rubbish and defilement of the local town waste. This was the customary way of disposing of the corpses of crucified criminals; and such he was in the eye of human law at this moment. This needless dishonour of God's Holy One was to be prevented, and also the doubt as to his resurrection, which would in some measure have arisen if his body had been thrown out into an unidentifiable spot. "An honourable man and a councillor" was providentially brought to the rescue—a member of the Sannhedrim who "had not consented to the counsel and deed of them"—Joseph, of Arimathea,—"a good man and a just," who also himself waited for the Kingdom

of God, and who had in fact been secretly a disciple of Jesus. He now threw aside his secrecy, and went openly and boldly to Pilate, and begged that he might be allowed to take possession of the body of Jesus.

This was an act of great courage. It was to identify himself with an executed criminal, and incur the reproach of his name at a time when as yet there was nothing to lighten the stigma like the circumstances that developed themselves in connection with his resurrection. When a man is necessary, God provides him. An ordinary man would not have had influence enough with Pilate to get such a request granted. Joseph of Arimathea was no ordinary man. He was not only a man of exceptional character, but as a member of the council, he would carry all the weight of a modern member of Parliament. Pilate was surprised to be applied to for the body. He had just given orders to have the legs of the prisoners broken, that death might be ensured in a day or two; and he had not heard that when the soldiers came to Jesus, they found him dead already. He sent for the centurion who had had charge of the execution, and asked if Jesus were really dead, and if he had been for some time dead. The centurion answered affirmatively on, both points: and Pilate then gave orders that the body should be delivered to Joseph.

Joseph went away at once to Golgotha, to receive the body. There was need for haste, as the evening was come, and the bodies had to be removed in compliance with the urgent scrupulosities of the Jews. Joseph had a newly-made grave of his own close to the city, and not far from the cross; and he had just purchased a quantity of new linen. His plan was to wrap the body in the linen and put it in his grave till a permanent arrangement could be made. After leaving Pilate, he was joined by Nicodemus, a chief man among the Jews (the same who, at the beginning of the public ministry of Christ, came to him by night, confessing, "We know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him"). Nicodemus brought with him about a hundred-weight of the spices in which it was customary for the Jews to enswathe their beloved dead before committing them to the tomb. Nicodemus must have made this preparation during the day, in the full knowledge of Christ's condemnation, and in anticipation of his death. Possibly he and Joseph agreed together that they should ask Pilate for custody of the body when death should be certified. Probably they were among the crowds that came out to witness the crucifixion and saw the end. At all events, here they were together at the cross, with the full authority of the governor to take possession of the body, and armed with the needful appliances for affectionate interment.

They took the body down and tenderly wrapped it in the linen with the spices liberally laid on; and then conveyed it to the garden which contained Joseph's new sepulchre. Hither they were accompanied by the women who had followed the Lord out of Galilee. With affectionate faithfulness these had lingered to the last, and saw the body taken down, and now witnessed its deposit in the tomb, to the door of which a great stone was rolled; after which, they departed to their temporary home in Jerusalem, to rest, according to the commandment, on the

high passover Sabbath which had now commenced, and at the same time to prepare spices and ointments for a more affectionate attention to the body when another visit should provide the occasion.

Next day, there were other visitors to the tomb where the Lord of Glory lay in death. Soldiers! Very unusual visitors at such a place. How extraordinary a man must be to have soldiers posted at his grave—on whatever plea the soldiers are placed there. The chief priests and Pharisees were uneasy about the occupant of that grave. They had prevailed against him. They had killed him. And yet they were not content. They must have soldiers set to watch his dead body. They asked this favour of Pilate. Why? Here is their own account: “Sir, we remember that that deceiver said while he was yet alive, After three days, I will rise again. Command, therefore, that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead, so the last error shall be worse than the first” (Matt. xxvii. 63). Pilate’s answer was: “Ye have a watch: go your way: make it as sure as ye can.” “So they went and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.”

Behold, then, a squad of Roman soldiers march into the garden, and set themselves down before a quiet stone chamber, containing a dead man! Was ever such a thing seen before? How suggestive is the incident every way when thought over. How fruitful of evidence of the truth. It proves (out of the mouth of Christ’s enemies) that Christ had predicted his own death; for how otherwise could the idea of rising again in three days have arisen? And if he predicted his own death, the presence of his dead body in that cold soldier-guarded chamber is proof of his having been a true prophet in that particular. And if a true prophet in that particular, why not in the other particular also, that “in three days he would rise again?” It proves also that Christ was a doer of mighty works “before God and all the people;” for if he were not, how came the Pharisees to take such trouble to prevent the idea of his resurrection from arising. The Pharisees themselves are witnesses to the mighty works—the curing of multitudes by his word. The very explanation they gave of them is evidence of their occurrence. “He casteth out demons by the prince of demons.” If he performed these mighty works, what explanation is there of them but the one he gave himself: “The works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me.” It proves also how utterly childish and absurd—how unreasonable and impossible were the views of the case entertained by the destroyers of Jesus.

Here was a body of soldiers at his grave side by their request—to prevent what? His resurrection? Oh, no; they could not admit that. Jesus was “that deceiver.” Though he said he would rise in three days, of course he would do no such thing. What then were the soldiers for? To prevent the disciples stealing the body, and saying Jesus had risen. To prevent the disciples stealing and lying? Why should they steal and lie in the case? When men steal and lie, it is with an object— invariably. What object could there be in this case? The possession of Christ’s

dead body would be the surest evidence to the disciples that he was not what they believed him to be. With such fatal proof that he was dead, and not alive, why should they wish to say he had risen? What had they to gain by it—for themselves or others? We could understand their getting up a story that was to work to advantage in some way; but where was the advantage in preaching a lie in the face of opposition, imprisonment and death? If Christ rose, we can understand it. If he did not, the procedure of the apostles is inexplicable on any known principle of human action, and their success still more so.

How overpowering do these considerations become when we come to study the actual inducements afterwards offered by the disciples to the people in connection with faith in his resurrection: "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins! Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out WHEN the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord, and God shall send Jesus Christ whom the heavens must receive until.-"

That men should steal a dead body and proclaim a lie that they might preach such doctrines and present such considerations, is a moral impossibility. Yet such was the puerile suggestion on which the chief priests asked Pilate to safeguard the grave of Jesus of Nazareth. It bears its own condemnation on its face. However, it was a useful piece of folly. It turned the very murderers of Christ into witnesses of his resurrection. By placing a guard at the tomb, they were placed under the obligation of admitting before the whole world that "after three days;" the tomb was empty; and the very story they put into circulation to explain the emptiness—(current among the Jews to this very day)—became, by its lameness and self-evident absurdity, one of the principal evidences of that very resurrection which they invented it to deny.

## **CHAPTER LIX.**

### **Resurrection.**

How sweet is the calm of the bright and tranquil morning that comes after a night of tempest and suffering. Glorious to Christ must have been the morning of his resurrection. For years he had contemplated the prospect of his suffering with burden of mind. "How am I straitened till it be accomplished!" This was the exclamation that admits us to a knowledge of the trouble it caused him (Luke xii. 50). How terrible his sufferings were, we have seen. Now they were all past. On the morning of the third day, he awoke all healed and strengthened, and stepped forth from the temporary imprisonment of Joseph's tomb, to be "anointed with the oil of gladness above his fellows." We profitably regard the joyful event when we think of it as the type and forecast of the deliverance that awaits all the troubled children of God at the epoch of their resurrection.

The soldiers who had been placed on guard over the sepulchre came into the city on “the morrow after the Sabbath” with a panic-struck report. Their watch had been disturbed early in the morning in a violent and extraordinary manner. They had been frightened out of their wits, and expelled from the garden. First, an earthquake had terrified them, and then a brilliant visitor, in whose presence they were paralysed, had burst in upon them, and overpowered them. What happened besides they did not know, except that the same visitor had pushed aside a great stone that closed the entrance of the tomb, and broken the careful official seals into a thousand fragments, and sent the soldiers out of the place in a state of helpless fear.

The leading members of the watch went straight to the chief priests and made this report. The chief priests at once convened an assembly of the leading men. What was to be done? They could not admit the idea of resurrection having occurred. They could only suppose that the disciples had managed in some way to baffle the Roman guard. The soldiers protested it was no ordinary thing that had happened, and that there had in fact been an irresistible interposition of some kind, and that the truth must be told if they were to save their heads; for it was death to a Roman soldier to be found derelict in duty. The chief priests contended that whatever it was, it must have been a stratagem of the disciples to get hold of the body, and that the soldiers must support this view; any uncertainty in their report must lead to the most disastrous consequences among the people. It would be impossible to prevent the idea of Christ’s resurrection getting into vogue if the soldiers gave an ambiguous account of their repulse from the sepulchre.

The idea of fishermen overpowering armed soldiers seemed absurd, besides being hurtful to the pride of the soldiers; so they must say the disciples stole the body while they slept. They really must; “and look here, we will make it worth your while.” And forth came the lucre in glittering and persuasive amount. The soldiers hesitated about the “sleeping,” because it would be death under the Roman law to have it reported that they slept on duty. The chief priests, with nods and winks, told them to keep themselves easy on that point; they had influence enough with the governor to secure them against all consequences. And so, seeing the way clear all round, the soldiers took the money, and faithfully carried out their part of the bargain—from which moment, the absurd report has been in circulation among the Jews to the present day.

O chief priests, most lies are lame. Yours cannot walk the honest roadside at all. If the soldiers were asleep, how did they know the disciples stole the body? If they awoke in time to discover them in the act, were they not in time to chase and capture men carrying a corpse? And what did dispirited fisher men want with a corpse? Why should they be anxious to say the corpse came to life if they knew it didn’t? Why should they wish people to believe in a resurrection, which, on your story, they knew had never taken place? and why should we believe your story and not theirs? Were not ye the murderers of Christ? And if ye could be

murderers, could ye not be liars also? Were not the disciples, on the contrary, his lovers? And did they not preach that men should repent of lying and all wicked works? And did they not show their own repentance by publishing their own faults (Peter's denial of Christ, to wit) in their public writings? And is it not the fact that as ye imprisoned and killed Christ, so ye imprisoned and killed some of them? and is it not the fact that, notwithstanding this, they adhered to their statements which brought them no gain? Is it not the fact that they shewed themselves men of truth, and that all who came under their influence, turned from wicked works to serve the living God and to wait for His Son from Heaven? Why should we believe your story on such bad authority and so inconsistent with the facts, and reject their account, which is the account of many eye-witnesses, and which is so entirely in harmony with the whole character and teachings of Christ, and the whole work of the God of Israel on the earth?

Shortly after the soldiers left the garden, just before sunrise, a party of a very different character arrived—a party of timid, defenceless women, who were apparently unaware that the grave had been in military charge. These were the two Mary's and Salome and the other women who had followed the Lord out of Galilee. The several accounts of their proceedings at the sepulchre appear on a rough comparison to be inconsistent with one another, but a careful sifting of the details yield a connected and harmonious narrative of the following tenour.

The women had provided themselves with spices and ointments with which to honour the body which they expected to find lifeless in the tomb, and they were coming before daylight, as the best time to carry out their purpose undisturbed. They little suspected what had happened. As they approached the garden, they remarked one to another on the difficulty there would be in removing the large stone that had been placed at the entrance of the grave. Arriving at the grave, they were agreeably surprised to find the stone removed to one side. Before they had time to realise what could be the meaning of this, they entered the sepulchre—doubtless with lit lamps, for it was “yet dark.” They looked round the inside of the sepulchre, and now their satisfaction was turned to a reverse state of mind. The sepulchre was empty. The body of the Lord was gone!

Marvel and trepidation seized them. Who could have taken the body, and where? They stood paralysed for a moment, exchanging expressions of astonishment. Then they went out into the garden and stood in a perplexity what to do. While so engaged, Mary Magdalen—apparently the warmest-hearted and most impulsive in her feelings concerning Christ—darted away to the city to communicate to Peter and John the fact that the body of Christ had been removed from the sepulchre. After her departure, the other women looked into the sepulchre again. There were angels with them, but they did not know it. The angels had not allowed themselves to be seen till this moment. But now they removed the optical obstruction which had rendered them invisible, and the women were struck with amazement to find an angel sitting on the stone, and an angel sitting inside the sepulchre on the right side. They were “young men in white garments.” Of one of

them it is said, "His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow." The women were overpowered with fright and fell to the ground.

One of the angels addressed them soothingly: "Fear not. Why seek ye the living amongst the dead? I know whom ye seek. Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is not here, he is risen: behold the place where they laid him. Remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." The women remembered with intense interest that Jesus had spoken these words. Resuming, the angel-speaker said, "Go quickly, and tell his disciples (and Peter) that he is risen from the dead, and that he goeth before you unto Galilee. There shall ye see him, as he said unto you." The women, regaining a little of their composure, yet in much trepidation, "went out quickly and fled from the sepulchre: for they trembled and were amazed." They went with all speed to find the disciples, making no communication with anyone on the way. But an astounding and delightful communication was made to them in a short time.

Meanwhile, Mary Magdalen, who had gone away, had found Peter and John and informed them of what she supposed had taken place, the removal of the Lord's body. Peter and John at once set out to see for themselves, "they ran both together;" but John got ahead of his companion, and arrived at the sepulchre just after the angels had sent the other women to tell the disciples of the Lord's resurrection. These women had taken a different road from the one by which Peter and John had come to the sepulchre, so they did not meet. From John's outrunning of Peter, we seem to catch a glimpse of the personal peculiarity of the two men—John, spare and agile, and Peter, thick set and full-bodied; and, corresponding with the mental difference of the two—John arriving first, peeped into the sepulchre, but did not enter. He noted what was inside—"the linen clothes (in which Joseph and Nicodemus had wrapped the body of the Lord) lying, and the napkin that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself."

These details, though trifling in themselves, have some value in the circumstances. They prove the body had not been taken away; for the removal of the body, either in the way alleged by the chief priests, or in the way supposed at first by Mary and the two disciples, would have involved the removal of the wrappings; as no one taking the body away, for whatever purpose, could be supposed to have taken time to undo the wrappings. They also show the practical nature of the whole transaction of the resurrection. The Lord, awaking from his short death slumber, would find himself like Lazarus, whom he raised from the dead, enswathed with cerements of the tomb, "bound hand and foot"; these he would gently undo and lay neatly aside, in the position in which John saw them lie. His angelic liberators would provide him with the garments in which he appeared to his disciples, arraying himself in which, he would step forth into the fresh morning air with a glad feeling of healing and relief.



But Peter and John were not yet aware of this. Peter, arriving after John, goes boldly into the empty sepulchre, and beholds the folded wrappings in which the dead had lain. He and John exchange expressions of sad wonderment, "for as yet they knew not the scripture that he must rise again from the dead." They then depart to go home. Jesus was close at hand, but he does not choose to shew himself to them just yet. Mary does not go back with the two disciples. She lingers at the sepulchre entrance, and she weeps in the coldness and silence and darkness of the early morning as she thinks that not only has the Lord been crucified, but that she is denied the very comfort of honouring his dead body. In the midst of her sobs, she takes another look into the sepulchre with the sort of hopeless hope that we all feel of perhaps seeing what we have lost, when suddenly and agonisingly deprived of an object of love.

The angels who had appeared to the other women are there. They had not allowed Peter and John to see them; they now became visible to Mary, but she does not seem to have recognised them as angels. She appears to have taken them either as visitors or attendants. They ask her sympathetically why she is weeping. She replies: "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." When she said this, she became conscious of the presence of another behind her. She turned and saw a man whom she took for the gardener. It was Jesus, but he prevented her from recognising him. Her first thought was that, as the gardener, he could throw some light on the removal of the body. "Sir," said she earnestly, "if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus now chose that she should know him. "Mary!" said he. With a thrill of rapturous recognition, she exclaimed, "Rabboni,"—an exclamation of tender reverence, signifying much more than "master," though "master" is the English translation of it. Its sentiment might be expressed in the free paraphrase, "My loved Lord, guide and teacher."

Mary appears to have accompanied the exclamation with a movement as if she would embrace the Lord. He checked her: "Touch me not," said he, "for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God." In the evening of that same day, the Lord suffered himself to be freely handled by the disciples. Consequently, there must have been a removal of the cause which led him to prevent Mary from touching him. He said to Mary he had not ascended to the Father. He must have made this ascent in the interim: but in what did the ascent consist? It cannot have been ascent in space, because in less than half-an-hour, it had been performed, for he was embraced by the feet within that time by the group of women to whom the angels had appeared during Mary's absence. What other ascent could he have made? The Father is everywhere present. To rise from the low nature of the earthy to the high nature of the divine, is to ascend to the Father. This ascent he must have performed after seeing Mary.

The need for it will appear if we realise that he had emerged from the tomb a natural man, or body of life, according to the nature of Abraham and David. This

had to be “changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” from the natural to the spiritual, as in the case of his brethren, who are to be developed after the pattern of his example. Until this change had taken place, he was in the defilement which contact with death imparted to everything for those under the law of Moses. Mary was under this law; and therefore until the Lord was cleansed by change, there was a reason why she should not touch him.

Mary having received his command to carry the tidings of his resurrection and impending change to the disciples, left him and went with all speed on her intensely interesting errand—one of those errands that give wings to the feet. She flew to them; she told them, probably with much excitement and breathlessness of speech, that the Lord, whose death they were lamenting inconsolably, was risen: that he had appeared to her: that she had just left him; and that she was commanded by him to inform them. They were astounded by her words, but it did not seem possible to them they could be true. Their whole idea of Christ had been so deranged by his deaths—(at once so real and so unexpected)—that they could not enter into the notion of his resurrection. They heard Mary’s words as in a dream—without being impressed by them.

Shortly afterwards, the other women came in, those with whom Mary had gone to the grave in the first instance, but from whom she had separated herself on finding the grave empty. They had their own report to make, which, while confirmatory of Mary’s, differed from hers because relating to different incidents. They reported having lingered at the grave for a time, and then, having seen the angels who told them of Christ having risen, and then, finally, they said that while on the way to bring word of what the angels said, the Lord himself appeared to them and saluted them. Overjoyed, they held him by the feet, and worshipped him; and he said unto them, “Be not afraid. Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.” The disciples were in a kind of stupefaction on hearing the words of the women. They did not know exactly what to make of them. They thought they must be dreaming. “Their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.” Peter seems at this stage to have gone out by himself and made another visit to the sepulchre in the light of these reports. He again saw the linen clothes lie, but could not make up his mind, and “departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.” On his way back from this second visit, the Lord appeared to him. What passed between them is not recorded, but his report at a later period of the day made the unbelief of the disciples begin to give way, for it was reported among them, “The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Peter.”

The most interesting of all the incidents connected with the resurrection of Christ is the Emmaus journey, reported fully by Luke, and only alluded to by Mark. Two of the disciples had occasion to go to Emmaus on the day that Christ rose from the dead—Emmaus is a walking distance of seven or eight miles from Jerusalem, and the road to it lies through the hilly approaches to Jerusalem on the road from Jaffa on the seacoast. As they walked along, they naturally talked

of the engrossing event of three days ago, and talked as men under a great sorrow. While so engaged, Jesus himself joined them on the road, but without permitting them to recognise him. ("He held their eyes that they should not know him.") In their eyes, he appeared an ordinary fellow-traveller on the road. In their depressed state of mind, they might have allowed him to pass without notice; but he did not allow himself to be thus ignored.

We may imagine the delicious feeling with which he broke in upon their melancholy talk, knowing that his own death was the subject of it, and that he had such a delightful disclosure to make at the right moment. He asked them what they were so sad about! Looking at him, they expressed surprise that he should not know. "Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?" "What things?" said he, to draw them out. They then proceeded to relate the circumstances connected with Christ's condemnation and death, in a tone that indicated their inability to understand such occurrences, and the shattering their faith had received. "We trusted," said they, "that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel," as much as to say they must now abandon that hope. Yet they indicated great unsettlement, for they proceeded to refer to the reports with which "certain women of our company" had surprised them that morning—that they had seen angels who had informed them that Christ was risen, and that one or two of themselves had gone to the sepulchre and truly found it empty, but had seen nothing of Christ—all of which must have been extremely pleasant for Christ to hear from their lips.

Having heard them out, he surprised and gratified them by charging them with folly in not perceiving that all these things were as they ought to be, in view of "all that the prophets had spoken." (Men are glad to be charged even with folly when it means that some pressing fear is groundless.) "Ought not Christ," exclaimed he, "to have suffered these things?" And in support of his question, he recalled to their minds certain things written in the Scriptures, 'Beginning at Moses and (in a cursory way going through) all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself.' It is natural to wish we had possession of this discourse. Having so much, we must be resigned to its absence. It exercised the two disciples intensely. The cogency of his arguments struck home with healing power upon their grieved and bewildered minds. To use their own expression, their "hearts burned within them while he talked to them by the way." Their acquaintance with the Scriptures would enable them to recognise the appositeness of his quotations, and to feel a joyful rekindling of all the hopes and love that had grown and centred in Christ during the three and a half years of their association with him.

In such pleasant occupation, the road quickly slipped under their feet, and they found themselves in Emmaus, and at the house to which their business took them. Jesus proposed to take leave of them, but they would not hear of it. Such a roadside companion at such a time was altogether too precious to part with in the

ordinary way; and there lacked not arguments to press him to stay. "The day is far spent; it is towards evening; abide with us." Jesus yielded. He went in as if to stay with them. A meal was ordered. They sat down together to partake. They would naturally ask such a guest (though as yet ignorant of who he really was) to give thanks. Jesus complied. He gave thanks. At that moment, he removed the optical interference by which he had prevented them recognising him. How overpowering the discovery that it was Christ himself! But no sooner had they tasted of the healing delight than the Lord withdrew it—well, not exactly— withdrew it only in a sense. He renewed that interference with their sight which had caused him to appear a stranger, but renewed it in a more powerful form; for now "he ceased to be seen of them" at all. He seemed to "vanish out of their sight." In point of fact, having closed their eyes, he withdrew, and departed to Jerusalem to present himself to the whole assembly of the Apostles, when he should have given these two time to join them.

These lost no time. Finishing their meal in a hurry, and exchanging excited thoughts on what had happened, they returned to Jerusalem, and made straight for the house where the eleven were gathered. Their arrival added to the state of quandary in which the disciples had been thrown by the various reports of the day. They were discussing a reported interview of Christ with Peter. And now they listened to the account of the journey to Emmaus. They thought it all very strange, but they could not make up their minds to believe, when lo! Jesus himself stood in their midst. The disciples were thunderstruck at his presence. It was not as if he had entered in an ordinary way. The door of the room where they were assembled was "shut" in the sense of being locked, for fear of molestation from the Jews. They had not seen him open the door and come in, though it is probable he did this while holding their eyes. It was therefore a great shock to see him suddenly standing in their midst. They were fairly overpowered for a few moments with fright. Their first thought was he must be an apparition. He spoke soothing words to them: "Why are ye troubled? Behold my hands and my feet that IT IS I MYSELF. Handle me and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as you see me have."

Under his kindly words their excited feelings calmed down. They began to realise that it was really the Lord himself, and not an illusion that stood before them; and that all the rumours of his resurrection that had been flying about during the day were true. Still their doubts would struggle with their glad senses. Could it be true that the agony of that terrible crucifixion day was thus wiped out for ever? "They believed not for joy."

While in this delicious chaos of mind, Jesus sought to establish absolute conviction; for this was now a necessity for them in the work they had by and bye to do. "Have ye here any meat?" he inquired. The response brought forth what they had—"a piece of a broiled fish and of a honeycomb." Taking these articles of food, he stood and ate them before them. Nothing could have been more effectually contrived for conviction as to the reality of his appearance to them. An

illusion, however vivid, when ended, would leave everything as it was before; but how could that be an illusion which consumed food that could no more be found in the house when the transaction was at an end? The effect was conclusive. The disciples yielded to the evidence, and no more hesitated to indulge in the feelings of unspeakable relief and gladness brought to them by the Lord's appearance in their midst.

## **CHAPTER LX.**

### **Forty Days' Sojourn, and Ascension.**

Luke testifies that Jesus showed himself alive after his sufferings "by many infallible proofs" (Acts i., 3)—proofs not open to cavil or question. Of this character were the incidents described in our last chapter. They included every kind of circumstance by which living men are known to one another. Seeing and hearing and feeling were all enlisted in the demonstration, and that too on the part of many different persons in different transactions. Had the case rested on the testimony of the women who visited the sepulchre alone, or on the testimony of Peter alone, or on the testimony of the two who journeyed to Emmaus alone, or even on the eleven alone, it would not have stood on the solid foundation on which it was placed by separate interviews with separately grouped persons in various places. The case in fact is impregnable. It can only be impugned by doubting the veracity of the record; and this cannot successfully be done in harmony with the facts. All the rules of evidence go to establish the apostolic narratives as those of capable and honest witnesses: honesty doubly guaranteed by the nature of their enterprise, and its personal consequences to themselves: capability self-manifest in writings which are inimitable for their combination of power with grace, and lucidity with simplicity of diction.

The "proofs" would have been "infallible proofs" had they been limited to one day. The incidents already described all belong to one day: but there were other incidents of the same character afterwards, spreading over a period of forty days. The last interview of Christ with his disciples did not take place till the sixth week after his resurrection; and during the interval, there were various appearances, terminating in a formal leavetaking, which definitely closed the resurrection episode. How many times Jesus appeared to them in the interim is not recorded. There are hints at more than are described. One or two are fully detailed in addition to those of the first day. It was seven days before he showed himself again.

During the interval, a very remarkable and valuable circumstance appears. One of the apostles (Thomas, called Didymus) stood out against all conviction on the subject of Christ's resurrection. He had not been present on the evening of the resurrection day when Jesus showed himself to the assembled company, and when, afterwards, he heard the report of the event, he would not believe. He said

that nothing but the evidence of his own senses would convince him "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe" (Jno. xx. 25). It was a happy circumstance for the faith of subsequent generations that one of the very apostles should have been allowed to take such an attitude. His absence from the first interview can scarcely have been an accident, in view of its providential value. The ardent faith that succeeded to such determined unbelief must have been the result of strong evidence, which we accordingly see. For at the end of the seven days, the disciples being again assembled within closed doors because of the public hostility, Jesus again presented himself among them.

On this occasion, there was none of the surprise or trepidation that agitated the disciples on the first interview. Seven days' reflection on what happened then had enabled them to settle to the calm and joyful conviction that "the Lord had risen indeed." They now received him with the pure delight that belongs to the intercourse of enlightened, cordial, living friendship. To Thomas Didymus, the doubter only, was the occurrence the cause of some painful excitement, but it was soon at an end. Jesus greeted the company with a salutation of peace, and then directed his attention specially to Thomas: "Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands: and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless but believing" (Jno. xx. 27). What could Thomas do but make a humble and joyful surrender: "My Lord and my God?"

"Many other signs did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book." So testifies John, and so we instinctively feel it must have been, during a period so protracted as six weeks. We are only told as much as is needful for faith: and for this purpose we have enough. There are hints at some things of which particulars are not supplied. We are told that "many bodies of the saints which slept arose and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many" (Matt. xxvii. 52, 53). The statement occurs in connection with the description of the crucifixion, and the first impression it makes on the mind is that it occurred at the same time that terrible day when "the earth did quake and the rocks rent." But reading again, it appears that only the opening of the graves happened in connection with the earthquake. the vivifying of the bodies thus exposed and ready for liberty, did not take place till the morning that saw the Lord himself "arise triumphant from the tomb." There is something fitting in the idea that the effluence of life-power, employed in restoring the Lord to life, should extend its healing effects to the Lord's recently-interred friends. We may infer they were recently interred from the circumstance of their entering Jerusalem and "appearing unto many." Strangers would not have been recognised Did they die again? or did they survive in the Elias and Enoch state? The question has been asked. It cannot be answered. There is no information. It matters nothing. The circumstance of their return to life at the Lord's resurrection is interesting: and no doubt it would greatly tend to establish that faith in the event which all the opposition and unbelief of the enemy was not able to eradicate.

There is a reference by Paul (1 Cor. xv. 6) to an appearance of Christ to a large company of disciples simultaneously. "After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present (the time of Paul's writing) but some are fallen asleep." From the place Paul gives to this occurrence in the enumeration of the witnesses to Christ's resurrection, it must have happened during the first week after that event, but where, or under what circumstances, is not recorded. It was a matter evidently well known among the believers of the first century. Paul would hear of it from Peter during the fortnight he spent with Peter at Jerusalem, after his own enlightenment (Gal. i. 18). It would be a thoroughly authenticated circumstance, since the majority of the 500 were still living when Paul wrote. It would be interesting to know the particulars, but it could not add to the strength of the "infallible proofs."

Paul refers (1 Cor. xv. 7) to an interview of Christ with James, of which we have no other record. John gives particulars of a very interesting meeting with Christ on the part of seven of his disciples whose names are given (Jno. xxi. 2). The meeting took place in Galilee by the lake or sea (as it is called in the New Testament) in whose neighbourhood Jesus performed so many of his works while in the flesh. The disciples had returned from Jerusalem to their own homes, and having as yet received no final directions concerning their future operations, they proposed to occupy the time at their business as fishermen on the lake. "I go a fishing," said Peter. Some have suggested that he did so in a spirit of indifference or faithlessness, under the feeling that the whole case of Christ was enveloped in fog and perplexity.

There is no evidence in support of this view at all. The evidence is rather the other way. Jesus had appeared to Peter on the day of his resurrection, besides his meeting again with him and the others in the evening, and once again within seven days. It is contrary to common sense to suppose that in the course of a few days, after such experiences, he could so lose heart as to propose to throw up his apostleship, and go back to business. It is more natural to believe that he knew a little time must elapse before anything definite could be done in execution of the work in which Jesus had told them they were to be employed; and that it would be the best way of filling up the time to return to Galilee, the more especially as Jesus had said he would see them there (Matt. xxviii, 10). He had in fact told them to "go into Galilee," and it is the reverse of unnatural to find them here. He had not yet told them to "tarry at Jerusalem,"—a direction he gave them at his final interview.

On the lake, then, we find them fishing, and fishing in vain a whole night—probably by Christ's own arrangement, that he might find effective opportunity of introducing himself to them. In the morning, as they are nearing the shore, a friendly voice from the shingle enquires if they had got anything. They see the speaker, but know not who he is. They answer, "No." He advises them to let out the net just where they are on the right side of the ship, assuring them there is fish to be had there. There was something in the voice that constrains them to

comply. They let down the net, and instantly they have a haul that they cannot deal with—the fish so large and so numerous. The exact number is given—153. John eyes their friend on the shore; he recalls a similar circumstance some years before. Quickly as a woman's intuition, he jumps to the conclusion that it is Christ. He whispers his conviction to Peter: "It is the Lord." Peter does not wait another moment. With the ardour of discipleship, which was always manifest, he hastily puts on his fisherman's coat, of which he had probably divested himself to deal with the extraordinary haul of fish (or possibly the warmth of the morning had led him to sit without it—in a not absolutely nude, but comparatively unclothed state); and getting over the boat's side into the water, he swam or waded to the land, a distance of about 100 yards, to where Christ was. The others took time to pull to shore, dragging the fish-laden net after them. They would wonder why Peter was in such a hurry to land.

When they got to land they found a coal-fire burning on the shingle, near to Christ, with fish and bread cooking. Who lit the fire, who got ready the meal, there is no hint; but with such a host, there need be no questions. The disciples appear to have stood for a moment uncertain what to do—momentarily embarrassed between their deference to the interesting friend standing before them, whose identity had not been declared; and the necessity for dealing with the fish, which were struggling in the net-meshes in the water. Their friend ended their embarrassment by proposing they should "bring of the fish they had now caught." Peter at once goes to work and hauls the net ashore with its living, gleaming, leaping mass. This done, Jesus invites them to sit down and partake of the meal he had provided—a proposal which very likely was a welcome one, after a toilsome night on the water. They accepted the invitation and sat down. No one dared as yet to ask the host who he was. Though nothing had been said, they "knew it was the Lord," and were awed in his presence. He put them at their ease by handing round the cooked fish and bread, and probably eating with them.

When they had eaten enough, a most interesting passage ensued between him and Peter, the beauty and force of which is usually lost by a false application. Peter had said, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee into prison and to death." "Though all shall be offended yet will not I. Though I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise." This was equivalent to saying he loved him more than the other disciples did. We know he three times denied that he had any connection with him. This had been forgiven; but Jesus now proceeded to take a sweet revenge—sweet and complete—complete in its humiliating reminiscence and numerical correspondence, and sweet in humbling without hurting, and effecting its end in love's declaration. Fixing his eyes on Peter, he said, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" Peter could only say, probably with some degree of abashment, in remembrance of his boast and his failure, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee" (nothing about "more than the others," now). Jesus did not upbraid him as he might have done. He did not say, "Why then denied ye me?" He did not go back upon the past. There is never any



advantage in that, though it is so common. He gave it a future application: (this is the part of wisdom, always)—“Feed my lambs”—as much as to say, “Let your love, which failed you in my own case, be shown in what you will have to do for my people.” Doubtless Peter’s heart would rise in loyal gladness at such a charge. But he was not to be let off so lightly. The reproof was gentle, but it was made weighty by repetition, and by its appendix. “He saith unto him a second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time (after a pause, doubtless), Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?” Peter was now greatly embarrassed. We may just know how he would feel. It says he was “grieved” that Jesus should put the question a third time. Under any circumstances, the repetition of the same question three times would put any person to shame, but under such circumstances,—a triple denial of the Lord so recent and after such confident boast of loyalty—it was like getting the finger on to a sore place and rubbing it. It was concentrating attention on the one terribly weak spot which Peter would gladly have hidden. It was all very fitting, very beautiful, very just. Peter met the ordeal in the only way possible to honest affection: “Lord thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.” Jesus responds again with the command to show his love in the feeding of the sheep; and closes the episode by “signifying by what death he should glorify God” (Jno. xxi. 19).

After this, they all appear to have had a walk together, during which Peter made bold to ask what would happen to John; but Jesus closed the door against curiosity by an ambiguous remark which gave rise to the mistaken idea that John would not die (verse 23). How and where the walk terminated, we are not informed by John; but it is probable that it was connected with what Matthew records, that the eleven having come into Galilee, went to “a mountain where Jesus had appointed them.” The mountain might be pointed out during this walk by the Sea of Galilee, and a day fixed for the whole eleven to be there (four of their number were lacking on this occasion). Be that as it may, they separated and met again by appointment, the whole eleven being there. “When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.” It might be the previously absent four that doubted. Their doubt was not unnatural in their only partial illumination and consequent inability to understand as yet all that had happened. The record of their doubt is a weighty fact. It is a proof of the veracity of the record, for why should the fact of some having doubted be recorded except that it was true? and being true, what explanation is there of the fact that the doubt afterwards disappeared except that the after occurrences were of a character to dispel all doubt? which they truly were when we consider their nature “Jesus came to them and spake to them, saying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age” (aiwn). On another occasion, he said, “Go ye unto all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,

and he that believeth not shall be condemned.” He also indicated the miracles that would accompany and confirm their preaching.

Towards the end of the forty days the Lord remained on the earth after his resurrection, the disciples were again in Jerusalem, and Jesus came to them for the last time. The fact only is stated, without personal particulars. From what is stated, it is evident that much conversation passed between them on this occasion: “Being assembled together with them, he commanded that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me (referring to the promise he had given to them at the table that he would send the Holy Spirit), for John truly baptised with water, but ye shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit, not many days hence” (Acts i. 4,5).

This allusion to something so imminent—the effusion of Divine power, “not many days hence,” seems to have revived their idea that “the kingdom was about to appear.” At all events, it led to the expression of it on this occasion. Jesus had uttered the Jericho parable to counteract this idea (Luke xix. 11), and it probably received somewhat of a quietus from that parable, but naturally came to life again with the restoration of his personal presence among them, and his reference to a descent of power “not many days hence.” They asked him, “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom again to Israel?” He did not rebuke this idea, except on the question of time. “It is not for you to know the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in His own power.” The kingdom would certainly be restored to Israel, as had been abundantly promised; but the time had not come. The impending descent of the Holy Spirit had nothing to do with that, but with the work which they had to do as his witnesses; “YE SHALL RECEIVE POWER AFTER THAT THE HOLY SPIRIT IS COME UPON YOU; and ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts i. 8).

For this, he said, they were to wait; they were not to begin till the Holy Spirit came, and qualified them for an effective testimony. What an indication this circumstance affords of the true and divine character of all these transactions. If Jesus and the disciples had been the subject of a phantasy (as unbelievers are so prone to suggest), there could have been no reason for the disciples waiting at Jerusalem before beginning their testimony to his resurrection. As a matter of fact, they did wait; and as a matter of fact, they began their testimony at the end of the waiting; and as a matter of fact, the reason given for the waiting, and for then waiting no longer, was the most powerful that could be imagined; viz., that the co-operation of the power of God with their testimony in the performance of wonderful works, might produce conviction. Had they begun to proclaim Christ risen, without “the Lord working with them, confirming their words with signs following” (Mark xvi. 20), it is certain that their words would have produced no effect. But their words produced great and instantaneous effect; for 3000 believers were added to the apostles on the very first day (Acts ii. 41); and as Jesus had said in the words above quoted, the apostles became his witnesses to

“the uttermost parts of the earth;” and in the uttermost parts of the earth to this day his name is established. Let any reasonable man ask himself what it was that enabled the apostles to produce an effect which could not have attended their unsupported words, and he must find himself compelled to recognise the record of Acts ii. (coinciding with the previous promise of Christ), as the only admissible or possible explanation: the bestowal of miraculous power, by the effusion of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus had told the disciples that he would have to leave them and “go to the Father.” The moment had now arrived for an event of which they had not comprehended the import. It was to be done openly in their presence, so that no misapprehension might rest on the cause of his disappearance from the earth. How much unbelieving scorn has to say we know; but what would it not have said had the Lord simply ceased to be seen any more after a certain day, without any open leave-taking? The meeting they had just had was preliminary to the final parting. Where the meeting took place is not stated, but it appears to have been in Jerusalem. At its close “he led them out as far as to Bethany,” on the summit of the Mount of Olives. On the way thither, they talked as they walked, until, arriving at a certain spot, they came to a halt. The disciples gathered round the Lord. A few more words of kindness were his last. Then he lifted up his hands in the attitude of benediction. While in this posture, he slowly rose from the earth. Ascending, their eyes followed him. Presently “a cloud received him out of their sight.” Still they looked. They intently watched the cloud that concealed his form. They might have remained watching a long time, but “while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel, which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? THIS SAME JESUS WHO IS TAKEN UP FROM YOU INTO HEAVEN SHALL SO COME IN LIKE MANNER AS YE HAVE SEEN HIM GO INTO HEAVEN” (Acts i. 10).

We need not trouble our minds with the question of where he went to, or the time he would occupy in traversing the ether fields on his way to the Throne of Eternal Light and Life (see remarks in chapter Iv.) Suffice it that he left the earth for a season. Since that day he has been no more seen upon the earth. A year or two afterwards, he showed himself by vision from heaven to Saul of Tarsus, turning him from a rabid persecutor to a devoted apostle (Acts xxvi. 13 19; 2 Cor. ix. 1; xv. 8), and close on sixty years further on, he sent his angel to John in Patmos, to communicate a revelation of the events among men that should fill up the interval of his absence from the earth, and indicate the epoch of his promised return, to restore again the Kingdom of Israel, and take possession of all the kingdoms of the world (Rev. i. 1). As yet the days are current of which he spoke when on earth: “The days will come when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man and shall not see it” (Luke xvii. 22), but the signs which he said should precede his second appearing are all too distinctly visible in human affairs everywhere to leave any doubt that the time for that blessed event is nigh, even at the door. Among his last words by John in Patmos are these: “Behold I come

quickly, and my reward is with me, go give to every man according as his work shall be.... He that testified these things saith, Surely come quickly. Amen. Even so: come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. xxii. 12, 20).