



BOOK OF  
BIBLE STORIES.

ILLUSTRATED WITH ENGRAVINGS.

By

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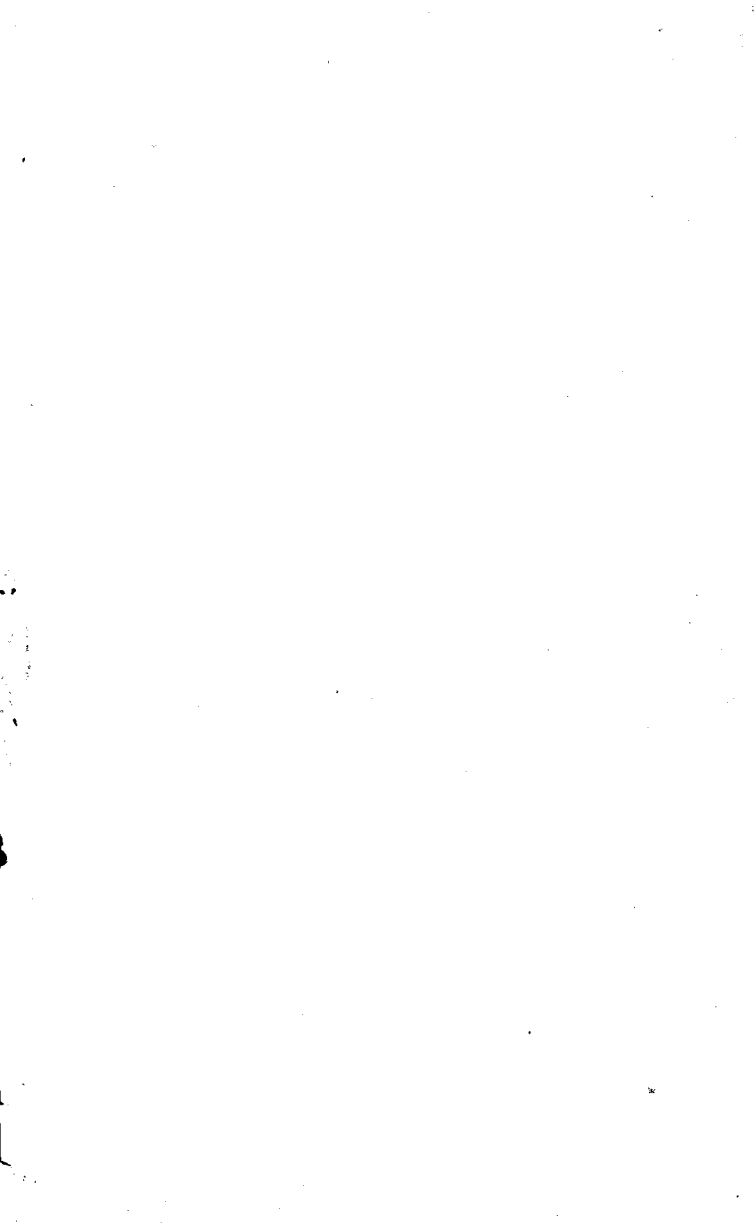
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THE EXPULSION FROM PARADISE.



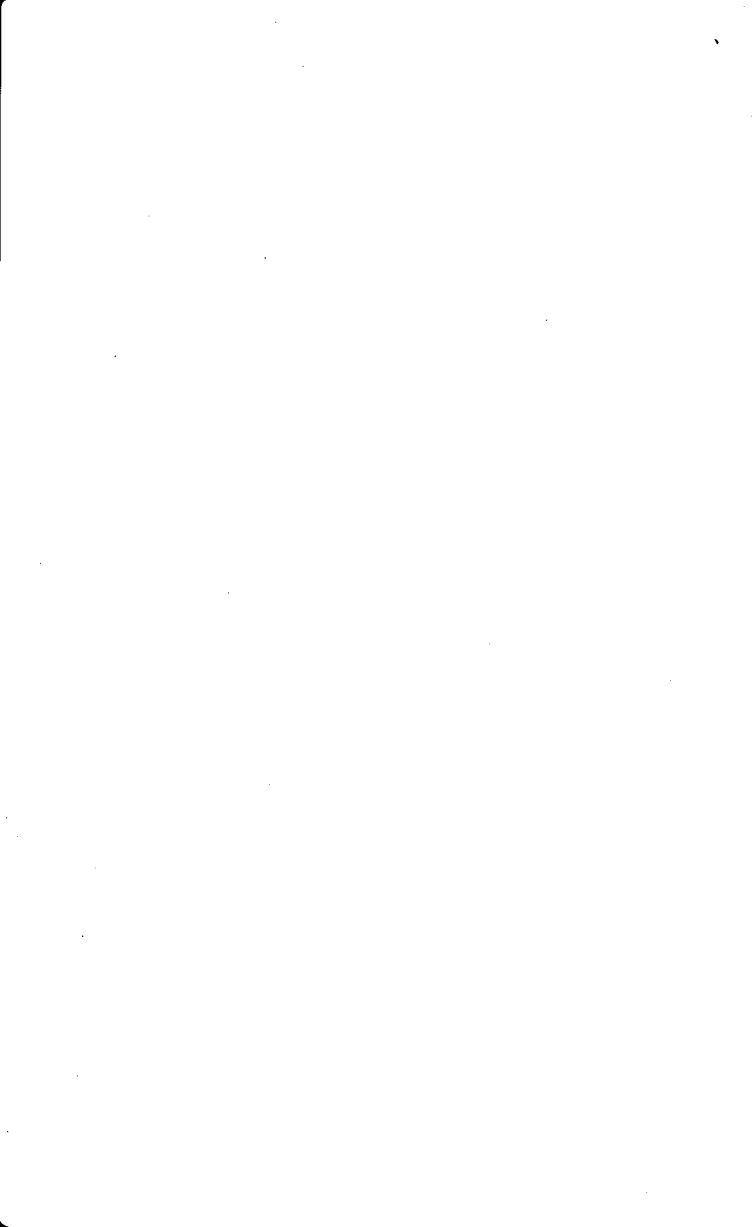


COLLECTION of all the striking incidents of Scripture would fill a large volume ; so that in preparing a small one, selection must be made. As, however, in doing this, I have included the great facts of both the Old and New Testaments, together with some of the minor ones, that have always been found especially interesting, I hope my little book will prove acceptable to young readers.

M. J.

LONDON, *September* 1865.







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## BIBLE STORIES.

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### I.

#### The Garden of Eden.

**I**N the beginning God made the heavens and the earth, and all things in them.

Then when He had created the heavens and the earth, the sea and the sky, the sun, the moon, and the stars, trees and herbs, with beasts, birds, fishes, and creeping things innumerable, He made man and woman, and naming them Adam and Eve, placed them in the garden of Eden to dress and cultivate it.

We know not where the garden of Eden was situated. God has hidden it from our eyes. All that we do know is that it was

somewhere in the eastern part of the world, and that with pure beings inhabiting it, and with no sin in the world, it must have been a beautiful place indeed.

In this garden were all manner of trees, both those that were beautiful to the sight, and such as bore fruit for man's food; and all these God gave to Adam and Eve, for their enjoyment and use, with the exception of one tree, called the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This they were strictly forbidden to touch; death was to be the penalty if they ate of it. A heavy penalty it may seem, but the command was one easy to obey.

In those days the names of creatures signified what they were. Adam means earth, for God made him out of the dust of the earth; Eve signifies the mother of all living, for from these two parents the whole race of men all over the world, white and black alike, was to spring. Adam also gave names to all the creatures that God had made, and those names meant what those creatures were. If for sin, long afterwards, God had not caused us all to speak different languages, the names of the living creatures around us, such as Adam gave to



THE TEMPTATION.



them, would have caused us to understand something at least of the nature of each one.

The work of God, in creating the world, was finished in six days ; the seventh was a rest-day, and He blessed it as such.

When Adam and Eve were first created they were pure and holy. God Himself talked with them in the garden of Eden, and they talked with Him, and loved Him without fear, because they had never sinned.

But the devil—who had so sinned against God, that He had sent him out of heaven (where he was once a glorious angel) never to return thither—was envious of the happiness of Adam and Eve, and what might have been the happiness of their children after them. He hated God and His creatures too, and determined to spoil His work and make it evil ; for God had said that everything which He had made was very good. So in some mysterious manner, under the form of a serpent, he one day spoke to Eve, who knew not what he really was, and tried to make her discontented with her lot. He began cautiously by asking whether it indeed was so, that God did not permit them to eat the fruit of every tree in

the garden. She told him that God had given them everything in that garden save one tree in the midst of it, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, whose fruit they were not to taste, nor even touch, because in the day that they should do so they would die. The serpent told her that was not so ; they would not die, but God knew that if they did eat of it, they should be like Himself, knowing good and evil, and therefore He had forbidden it. While he was speaking to her, Eve looked at the tree. The fruit was tempting to the taste, and she thought that to be as wise as God Himself would be a very desirable thing ; so at last, utterly regardless of God's command, and believing the devil rather than Him, she plucked the fruit and ate of it, and then offered it to Adam, who also preferred believing the devil to believing God, and ate of it as well.

But no sooner had they eaten than they knew the wrong they had done, and went and hid themselves among the trees lest God should see them ; for they heard His voice walking in the garden. But there is no hiding from God ; and when He called them they came trembling before Him, and told Him that

they had hidden themselves for very fear of Him. He asked them whether they had eaten of the tree which He had forbidden them to taste. And they each replied in their own way : Adam said Eve had given it to him, and he had eaten of it ; and Eve answered that the serpent had deceived her, and she too had eaten.

Then the Lord God pronounced sentence upon them all for their wickedness. To the serpent, that is the devil, He spoke darkly of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, who should, through His own obedience, and sufferings, and death, destroy the works of the devil. He also inflicted upon him, in his assumed character of one of those creatures whom God had made to serve man, a penalty, the precise nature of which we do not understand, because the whole narrative concerning this wicked being is very mysterious. But in his character of a serpent God denounced him as utterly accursed, condemning him to go grovelling upon the earth, and eat the bitter dust of it all his days. He told the woman that sorrow and suffering should be her portion ; while the man should henceforth eat his bread in the sweat of his brow, for the

earth itself was cursed for his sake, who with toil and anxiety should henceforth win his subsistence from it until the day of his death, when he should return to the dust of which he had been made.

But while God was thus punishing our first parents for their disobedience—with a life of suffering, with the death of their bodies, and the possibility of death to their souls also—He was full of compassion. There was already provided the great gift of a Divine Saviour to rescue them from the death eternal which they had incurred ; for God Himself has told us that Christ was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world : and He now had pity on their bodily distresses also, giving them clothing to defend them from the inclemency of weather which they would have to encounter when they left the fair, sunny garden of Eden, where for their sin they might no longer dwell. They had disobeyed one of His commands in eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil ; and lest they should take and eat of the tree of life which stood in the midst of the garden and live for ever, when He had doomed them to die, He now sent



them forth out of it into the dreary world, where they were to toil for their subsistence, and where every thorn and thistle that sprang up to mar their crops should remind them of their offence and God's anger.

They had disobeyed God in what He had commanded in kindness and love. They could not resist Him now, when in His wrath and justice He drove them out of the garden, placing over it, as they departed, a guard of angels, with a strange, mysterious sword, that flamed hither and thither in all directions that none should enter it again, nor approach to the tree of life.

We do not know whether our first parents repented of their sin or not. The Bible does not say anything about it; and where it is silent, we must be also. But there is great reason to think that they did, because we soon read of worship being offered to God in such a way as He Himself must have commanded. Obedience to that seems to imply that they had repented of their former disobedience; and we know that God forgives sinners who repent of their misdeeds, and ask pardon from Him for the sake of that Divine Redeemer promised to mankind in the very hour of the fall.



## II.

### The Flood.

**A**FTER Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise, they had sons and daughters.

The eldest son was named Cain, which signifies a possession ; and Eve rejoiced at his birth, because she thought he should be the one by whom, according to God's word when He drove them from Eden, men should be delivered from the curse which her disobedience and that of Adam had brought upon them. For that was the meaning of God's word to the serpent, that One descended from Eve should bruise his head. The second son was called Abel, which means weakness. He kept sheep ; Cain was a husbandman.

God, who had taught our first parents all that they knew (as indeed in these days it is He that teaches us all that we know), had

commanded that sacrifices should be offered to Him as worship ; and Cain and Abel therefore brought their offerings accordingly. Cain brought the fruits of his own toil in cultivating the ground ; Abel offered up the firstlings of his flock. This was the offering that God Himself had seen fit to appoint, and therefore He was well-pleased with it : it was an act of obedience and faith on Abel's part. But with Cain's offering He was not pleased, because it was not the one that He had commanded, and the conduct of Cain showed that he neither believed nor cared to obey God. Cain was very angry that his offering should be rejected and Abel's approved. But God told him that if he only did what was right, he too should be accepted by Him, as his brother had been.

Notwithstanding this Cain still bore a grudge in his heart against Abel, nay, he hated him because he was more righteous than himself ; so that at length when they were in the field together one day, he fell upon him and murdered him.

Then God said to Cain, " Where is Abel thy brother ? " And Cain, whose heart was utterly hardened by sin, answered with a lie, " I know

not: am I my brother's keeper?" As if he did not well know where he had left his brother lying murdered in the field, and as though he thought God did not know it quite as well! But his reckless lie did not save him—lying never does—and the righteous Judge at once pronounced sentence upon him, the voice of whose murdered brother's blood cried against him from the ground whereon it had been shed—"Now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth."

It was a fearful sentence. But all that Cain felt was the severity of the punishment; for his crime he had no sorrow, not a word of repentance for that escaped him, only a complaint that his punishment was greater than he could bear, for he doubted not that he himself should be killed in his turn by some one or other who knew that he had murdered his brother. God, however, promised to shield him from that: his sentence he must endure. So Cain went out, it is said, from

the presence of God, with all his burden of guilt and condemnation upon him.

This was the second great sin while the world was so young. As the earth began to be more fully peopled, the wickedness of men so increased that God Himself repented that He had ever created them, and He determined to destroy them from off the face of the earth. Among these evil ones, however, there was one good man, named Noah; and him God determined to save, with his family, when He destroyed the race of men. And God told him—we know not in what manner, but tell him he did—that for the wickedness of mankind He was about to destroy them by a flood: them, and all living creatures, save those whom He had appointed to save with Noah, in order to continue the race of living creatures afterwards. Then He bade Noah make an ark—that is, a sort of ship—into which he and his family should be shut up during the flood, that their lives, and the lives of those with them, might be preserved.

Noah did as God commanded, and built the ark according to the directions for it that God had given him. It was long in building, for

God had given a long warning of what He meant to do, in order to afford time for repentance ; and during the hundred and twenty years that He thus spared mankind Noah sought to turn them from their evil ways. But it was in vain ; they did not believe him, or rather they did not believe God, whose word it was that he made known to them.

One may easily imagine how the unbelievers of that time would deride the good man, as he patiently toiled on at what appeared such useless labour. A deluge of water to destroy the whole earth !—and even the very evening before it burst forth, the sun would set as peacefully and brightly as ever, and, more than ever, they would laugh at him for his credulity ; perhaps, at last, convinced of his goodness, kindly pitying him for having so little sense.

At length the time came after which God had said that He would bring the flood upon the earth. Noah, with his wife, and his three sons, and their wives, went into the ark, taking with him those living creatures which God purposed to spare, and also food for them and himself. Then when they were all safely shut in, God, it is said, opened the



THE FLOOD.





windows of heaven to pour down a deluge of rain, which continued forty days; while floods of water issued from the great deep, rising higher and higher, bearing up the ark on its surface, until even the high hills were covered, and everything that had breath upon the earth, both man and beast, perished. None were left in the whole world but those eight, who, believing God, were sheltered in the ark.

For a hundred and fifty days—that is, nearly half a year—the earth remained utterly covered by the waters of this flood. Then they began to abate, sinking lower and lower until the ark rested upon the mountains of Ararat in Armenia. Still they continued sinking; one hill top after another came in sight, and at length Noah, opening the window of the ark, sent forth a raven and a dove that he might know whether the dry land had appeared, so that he and his might come out of the ark. But the dove finding no resting place, on account of the waters, returned to the ark, and Noah took the poor weary bird in to him again. Seven days afterwards he sent her forth a second time; and she flew about, rejoicing to use her free wings in the

open air, until the evening, when she came back with an olive leaf in her mouth, which she had just plucked. By that Noah knew that the flood of water was disappearing from off the earth. Seven days more, and he sent her forth again; but she never returned, for now the earth, cleansed from the wickedness that had defiled it, was fit for the new race by which it was to be peopled, from those saved with Noah in the ark.

Looking forth Noah saw that the waters were at length entirely dried up; and God Himself then gave him commandment to come out of the ark, he, with his wife, and his children, and all the multitude of beasts, birds, and other living creatures that were with him, that they might spread themselves abroad in the earth, which they were again to people and replenish.

So Noah and all with him came rejoicing out of the ark, in which they had been so long and drearily confined (a whole year), amid the wilderness of destroying waters all around. Then, in token of worship and thanksgiving, Noah built an altar, and offered upon it a sacrifice to God, who was well pleased with it,



THE DOVE RETURNING TO THE ARK.



and solemnly blessed him and his sons, and the whole race of mankind, who should afterwards spring from them to repeople the now empty, silent world. And God bade Noah look upon the rainbow in the clouds, telling him that it should be a sign unto him, and all after him, that God would never again destroy the earth by a flood.

So, when we look upon that beautiful bow in the clouds we know that God looks upon it also ; and that it brings to His mind—for He said so—as well as to ours, that He will not again whelm the earth with a deluge of water, but that henceforth seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall go on uninterruptedly so long as time itself shall last.





### III.

#### Lot Fleeing from Sodom.

**T**HE people of Sodom, where Lot, the nephew of Abraham, dwelt, were so utterly wicked that there were not in it even ten righteous men to save it from the destruction which God had determined to bring upon it.

Abraham to whom God had made known what He was about to do, pleaded hard that the sinful city might be spared. First he prayed that if fifty righteous men were found in it God would spare it for the sake of that fifty; and God said that if there were fifty, then He would spare all the place for their sake. Then Abraham prayed that if there should lack five of that fifty it still should be spared; and God said that if He found there forty and five He would not destroy it. And so Abraham continued praying, and God continued granting his request,

until when God had promised that He would spare it even for the sake of ten righteous men, if they could be found in it, Abraham left off praying; for who could have thought that there should not be ten righteous men even in the vilest city on the face of the earth?

On the evening of that very day, as Lot was sitting in the gate of the city, he saw two angels, under the appearance of men, approaching Sodom. He did not know that they were angels, he thought they were only two weary travellers, so he went to meet them, and with all courtesy and kindness prayed them to come into his house for rest and refreshment, and early the next morning they should go on their way. They said no, they would remain out all night; for in those warm, eastern countries to camp out all night is no hardship. But Lot would not suffer this, and at last he prevailed upon them to come in and eat with him, and spend the night in his house. Then, as they sat, they asked if he had any of his family in that place—sons, daughters, or sons-in-law—because if he had he must at once get them out of it, as God was about to destroy the city for its extreme wickedness. Upon hear-

ing this Lot hastened to warn his sons-in-law, saying, "Up, get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city." But they gave no heed to him, and the angels bade him speed away for his life, with his wife and his two daughters who were there with him, otherwise they would certainly be consumed with the rest. And while Lot lingered they laid hold of him and of his wife and daughters by the hand and brought them out of the city, bidding them all escape in haste to the mountain, nor even look behind them, lest they should be consumed. But Lot hung back, disheartened by the difficulties before him, and prayed the angel that he might find refuge in a small city near at hand, instead of on the distant mountain, where he feared some evil might befall him. The request was benignantly granted, and the angel bade him hasten to that city (which should be spared for his sake), for he could not do anything till Lot was in safety.

Then the Lord rained down fire and brimstone from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and upon the other wicked cities of the fertile plain of Jordan, and destroyed them with an utter destruction, so that no trace of them





LOT AND HIS DAUGHTERS FLEEING FROM SODOM.

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remained to show where those sinners had dwelt. It was a very terrible destruction; for Abraham rising up early that morning, and looking towards the cities of the plain, for which he had so long interceded with God, saw the smoke of them rising up towards heaven, as if it had been the smoke of a furnace!

So Lot escaped because he was obedient to the angel whom God had sent to save him. But his wife, heedless of the command not to look behind them as they fled, turned, perhaps regretfully, towards the city they were forsaking, and perished in her sin, for we are told that she "became a pillar of salt."

We do not know exactly what this "pillar of salt" means. Nor is it needful, seeing that we well understand the instruction it is intended to convey to us: that disobedience to God is a great sin, for which opportunity of repentance is not always afforded to evil doers.





#### IV.

### Rebekah and Abraham's Servant at the Well.

**A**BRAM, in his old age, wished that his son Isaac, who was then about forty years old, should be married. But the Canaanites, among whom he lived, were idolaters, so that it was not fit that Isaac should take any of them for a wife. He therefore bade the eldest servant of his house, that is what we should call his steward, go into Mesopotamia, Abraham's own country, whence by God's command he had come out, and choose a wife for Isaac from among his relations there.

The man was afraid that any one whom he chose for Isaac's wife might be unwilling to follow him, a stranger, into a strange land, and he asked whether in that case he must take Isaac to her country. But Abraham absolutely

forbade Isaac's going to settle in Mesopotamia, he must remain in the land of Canaan, which God had sworn to give unto Abraham and his descendants; and he also told the man, whose name was Eliezer, that he believed God would give him good success in his errand; but even if it were not so, Isaac must on no account return to his father's native country.

Eliezer then solemnly vowed to obey Abraham's commands in this business, and taking with him ten camels, which were used both for riding and carrying burdens, set out on his journey.

When he came into Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor, Abraham's brother, he halted his little troop outside the city, near a well of water, just at the time of evening when the women of the place, whose peculiar duty it was, came out to fetch water. And then this good man, who knew that it is God Himself who orders all the events of our life, prayed to Him to direct him in the important business which he had in hand. His prayer was that that one of the women coming to draw water of whom he should ask water for himself to drink, might offer to draw water for his camels also, and

that she might be the one whom God had appointed to be Isaac's wife.

While he was yet praying the women came out as usual to draw water. Among them was Rebekah, Nahor's grand-daughter, with her pitcher upon her shoulder, according to the custom of the East. As she came up from the well, after having filled it, Eliezer begged her to let him drink a little water out of the pitcher. She gave it him readily, and then said she would draw water for the camels, hastily emptying the vessel into the trough, and running for more until it was filled. The man stood watching her in silent wonder, it was so exactly as he had prayed God it might be. Then, taking ornaments of gold which he had brought with him,—ear-rings and bracelets—he put them upon her, asking whose daughter she was, and whether there was room in her father's house for him and his servants to lodge. When she told him that she was Nahor's grand-daughter, and bade him welcome to her father's house, he devoutly thanked God who had brought him among Abraham's own kindred, and chosen from them a wife for Isaac.

When he came into the house he would not



REBECCA AND ABRAHAM'S SERVANT AT THE WELL.





either eat or drink until he had told his errand, and how he had prayed God—as do millions in this day—to “pre-vent” him—that is, to go before and further him—in the business he came about. His proposal was very agreeable to the family of Rebekah. It came from their own kindred; and the people of those countries then, as now, preferred marrying among their relations; besides this, Abraham was a great chief. Rebekah, however, was to have her choice in the matter, and when she had consented, her father willingly gave her to be Isaac’s wife. So she returned with the steward to the land of Canaan, and married Isaac, who loved her tenderly.





V.

The Finding of Moses.

**T**HE children of Israel, who were the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob, became very numerous in the land of Egypt. At first they had been very kindly treated for the sake of Joseph, Jacob's younger son, who, having been sold for a slave by his brothers, rose, through his integrity and ability, to be ruler over the whole land of Egypt. But after his death the memory of his great services died away—he was forgotten, as has been many another benefactor to his country, and the king who then reigned became harsh and cruel to the Israelites.

The truth was that their numbers frightened him; he thought, that in case of war, they would go over to his enemies, and then there would be no chance for the Egyptians: they would be vanquished, and afterwards the Israe-

lites, who, though hated, were much too valuable to be spared, would withdraw from the land. So he sought to break them down as a people, not only by imposing bitter toil upon them, in making bricks and building cities for him, but by commanding that all their sons should be put to death as soon as they were born; their daughters might be allowed to live.

Those, however, whom he charged with this cruel command, were much too merciful to execute it, and so the Israelites still increased in numbers.

About this time one of the Israelites named Amram had a son born, a beautiful infant, whom his mother contrived to conceal for three months. Then, finding it impossible any longer to keep him hidden, she determined, in her distress, to trust him to God's providence, hoping, though she knew not how, that He would in some manner take care of her child, and not suffer him to be put to death—thrown into the river and drowned—as the king had commanded. Her scheme did not appear a very hopeful one, but it was the best she could think of. So she made a sort of basket of bulrushes that grew by the river side, coated it over with

pitch that it might float upon the water, and then, placing the poor baby tenderly in it, laid it among the reeds at the river's brink. She could not bear to stay herself to see what became of her child, but his sister stood at some distance watching what should befall him. As she watched she saw the king's daughter, with her attendants, come down to bathe in the river. Seeing something lying among the reeds, the princess sent one of her maidens to fetch it; the little ark was secured, and when it was brought to her and opened there was a weeping infant in it. She saw at once that this must be one of the Hebrew children (condemned by her father's cruel law) whose mother had thus endeavoured to save his life; and heartily pitying him, determined to save the forsaken child. His sister, who had ventured to draw near, eagerly offered to procure a Hebrew nurse to bring him up for her; and when bidden to do so, fetched the child's own mother, to whom the princess committed him, bidding her nurse him for her. So the child was nursed at home by his own father and mother, until he was old enough to be brought to her who had adopted him, who treated him tenderly, calling him her son, and



THE FINDING OF MOSES.



educating him in a manner befitting the son of a king of that great and learned people. The name she gave to him was Moses, which signifies drawn out of the water, because, she said, "I drew him out of the water." She little thought how she was fostering one who should plague the Egyptians, while, as God's servant, he delivered the slaves they had so long oppressed, from their cruel bondage.

All the advantages, flowing to him from the motherly kindness of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses, however, had to relinquish. The preservation of them became inconsistent with his duty to God, and he did not hesitate between the two. "By faith"—that is, believing God—"he chose rather to suffer affliction with his own people," who were God's chosen people, than to renounce them for all the grandeur of the Egyptians, who were not within the covenant.





## VI.

### Samson.

**S**AMSON was the strongest man that ever lived. He tore a lion, that sprang upon him, in pieces by sheer strength of arms, for he had no weapon in his hand. With the jaw-bone of an ass he slew a thousand men, after having broken the cords with which they had bound him, as though they had been burnt to tinder. He carried off the gates of a city, in which he had been shut up, bars, bolts, hinges and all, upon his shoulders, climbed a hill with them, and then, as if in derision, left them there on the top of it. All this wonderful strength was an especial gift from God, and he used it, like a good patriot, to discomfit the enemies of his country.

The birth of Samson was marvellously fore-told to his parents by an angel, as that of one who



should begin to deliver the children of Israel from the Philistines, by whom they were greatly oppressed. Various directions were given them as to the training of this wonderful child, which they faithfully observed; and he grew up endowed with such extraordinary strength as caused the oppressors of his people to tremble before him. As long as he regarded the word of the Lord God as to the manner of life, consecrated peculiarly to Him, that he should observe, so long his gigantic strength remained to him. And we may imagine how much, in those early times, the possession of immense bodily strength would add to the reverence with which his countrymen would regard him as their ruler; for he was one of the judges of Israel. In these days we look more to strength of mind in our rulers, and in this Samson was wanting; for at last he suffered himself to be persuaded to abandon that distinctive life to which God had called him, and then he became weak as any other man.

Those who tempt people to do wrong are often the very first to betray them into suffering for it; and so it was with Samson. His

tempter betrayed him into the hands of the Philistines, who took a cruel revenge by putting out his eyes, and setting him, in chains, to grind corn in the prison. They were so delighted to have him in their power, that they made a great feast to their god Dagon (for they were idolaters), in honour of so important a captive, whom they owed, as they imagined, to his power. Vast numbers of them came to this festival; and they said, "Let us have Samson out, to make us sport." For they thought the blind man would show them some feats of strength, which his blindness would render perfectly harmless.

So Samson was led in by a boy; and when they had amused themselves with him for a time, he asked the lad to let him lean upon the pillars of the house, where the Philistine lords and others were assembled to the number of several thousand; for the house was full inside and out. The request was granted; and, knowing that his strength had come to him again, he laid hold of the two principal pillars which supported the building, the one with his right hand, the other with his left. Then bending down with all his



**SAMSON BREAKING DOWN THE PILLARS.**



might, as he prayed God to strengthen him, he pulled down the whole house, killing multitudes of the Philistines, nor caring that he himself was crushed in the ruin that he had brought upon his enemies and the enemies of God Himself.

The friends and relations of Samson came to take up the mangled remains of this mighty chief; and carrying them home, buried him in his father's grave. *Not* to rest, in death, with their fathers was by the Hebrews considered a great calamity. And we, in these days, think it a very sad thing.





## VII.

### Esther before King Ahasuerus.

**T**HE Ahasuerus of whom we read in the Book of Esther, was a powerful Persian monarch, whose kingdom was a splendid one, not only for its extent, containing a hundred and twenty seven provinces, but for its wealth and the magnificence of his court.

In the third year of this king's reign he made a great feast for his nobles, or rather a festival, for it lasted during six entire months. His queen, whose name was Vashti, also at the same time made a great entertainment for her ladies ; for it was not the custom in that part of the world for men and women to eat and drink together, nor indeed to mix at all in social intercourse as we do.

During the course of this festival, the king, who had drunk too much wine, so far forgot

what was due to his queen as well as to himself, as to command that she should be brought in among them at their revelling, that all might see how beautiful she was. The queen very properly refused to do so ; upon which, in a rage, and at the advice of one of his wine-bibbing companions (who said that if she went unpunished in this matter, all the wives in the kingdom would take advantage of it, and set their husbands at nought), he put her away from being his wife. For in the East, and in those days, women were little better than the slaves of their husbands, so that king and courtier alike stood aghast at the queen's venturing to dispute his commands, however improper.

Having thus got rid of his wife, the king's next care was to find another ; and the one that he chose was a beautiful Jewish maiden (of one of the families remaining from the Captivity), whose name was Esther.

Some years after the king had married Esther, his chief minister, whose name was Haman, out of revenge on Mordecai, the cousin of Esther, who had not treated him with the reverence which he thought his due, procured from the king a decree authorizing the utter

extermination of his Jewish subjects,—men, women, and children. As soon as this atrocious edict became known to Mordecai, he sent word to the queen that it was her duty to use her influence with the king, by whom she was much loved, to procure the reversal of it. Esther reminded him that, according to the laws of the kingdom, any presenting themselves unbidden before the king in his inner palace were condemned to death, unless he should please to hold out to them his golden sceptre, to intimate their safety; and for thirty days past she herself had not been summoned to his presence. Mordecai answered her that as she was a Jewess, her own life, queen as she was, would assuredly be sacrificed with the rest; so that, though there was risk on the one hand, there was certainty of death on the other; and even if the golden sceptre were *not* stretched out to her, it was a glorious thing to die for her people.

In a spirit of rare patriotism Queen Esther accepted the hazardous service, requiring only that the Jews of the city should fast and pray on her behalf; and then if she perished, she perished!





ESTHER BEFORE KING AHASUERUS.



Arraying herself in her queenly robes, she therefore presented herself before the throne of her dread husband, who, holding out to her the golden sceptre of peace, kindly asked her what was her request,—it should be granted, even to the half of his kingdom. Thus encouraged she ventured at last to make known to the king that the decree which he had just issued would destroy her and all her countrymen. Upon hearing this, in a rage with Haman, he ordered that he should be hanged on a gallows which the malignity of that odious man had prepared for Mordecai. The next thing was to protect the Jews, for whom Esther had so nobly risked her life, from the consequences of his unjust decree, which even he, king as he was, had no power to reverse. The only way in which he could accomplish this was to order letters to be sent to all the provinces, authorizing the Jews, in the king's name, to arm themselves and kill all who attacked them, including the wives and children of their persecutors, whose possessions they were also entitled to seize for their own use. Mounted posts were hastily sent forth in all directions with these royal letters, which excited such alarm through-

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out the kingdom, that many of the Persians became Jews, by way of taking care of themselves. The Jews were not slow to avail themselves of the royal decree, setting upon their enemies with such hearty goodwill as in a very short space to slay more than seventy-five thousand of them, the king's native subjects, some in the provinces, a number even in his own palace.

To commemorate this great deliverance a festival was ordained to be observed yearly; and to this day the Jews throughout all countries observe, with more or less of ceremony, the commemorative festival of Purim





## VIII.

### Daniel.

**A**MONG the Jews who were led captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, who besieged and took Jerusalem in the reign of King Jehoiakim, was a youth of noble family named Daniel, who with his three companions, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were taken in training for the king's service.

These four youths were in great favour with the high officer of state whom the king had appointed to take care of them ; and they grew up, by God's own gift, more wise-hearted than any of the wise men whom the king used to consult in his affairs. Among Daniel's gifts was that of being able to interpret the meaning of dreams ; for in those days God not unfrequently made known His will, or what He was about to do to men or nations,

through the medium of dreams. As we read in the Book of Job : " God speaketh once, yea, twice, . . . in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men."

Now, one night the king dreamed a dream that troubled him greatly, for he thought that it foretold something important that was about to happen to him, but which he could not at all understand. When he awoke, however, he had forgotten the dream. Upon this he sent for his wise men, and most unreasonably required them, not only to tell him what the dream meant, but what it was that he had dreamed. They answered, that if he would only tell them what his dream was, they would at once tell him the signification of it. Upon this the king, in a fury, told them that if they did not tell him speedily *what* the dream was, as well as what it meant, they should all be put to death : it was plain they only intended to tell him lies, and therefore they pretended they could not make out for him what he had dreamed. An angry and absolute monarch, in Oriental countries, is a fearful sort of being to deal with ; so the wise men replied submissively that what he required was

beyond the power of mortal man ; none could do such a thing save the gods—for the Babylonians were worshippers of false gods ;—and, gathering courage, they added that no king ever before made such a request of his wise men. Their expostulation was unheeded, and in his headlong rage the king commanded that all the wise men in Babylon, including Daniel and his three companions, should be put to death.

The captain of the king's guard was charged with the execution of this merciless decree ; and when he had communicated it to Daniel, Daniel ventured to present himself before the king, and say that if time were given him, he would show the king both his dream and the interpretation of it. Daniel must either have been in high favour with the king, or the anxiety of the latter to have his dream told to him must have caused him to suspend the command, for the request was granted ; and the petitioner, returning to his companions, begged them to pray for him to God that the dream might be made known to him, that they might not perish with the other wise men of Babylon.

In a dream God made known to Daniel both the dream and the meaning of it; and after he had given hearty thanks to Him, he went to the captain of the guard, who, at his request, took him to the royal presence, saying that he had found one of the captives of Judah, who would do the king's pleasure in the matter of his dream.

Then Daniel stood before the king, and told him that the great God of heaven had revealed to him this which none of his wise men, by their own wisdom, could possibly have found out. And he told the king, not only what he had dreamed, but what his dream signified; at which the king was so overjoyed, that he prostrated himself before Daniel, to do him honour, after the manner of Oriental countries, saying that of a truth Daniel's God was a God of gods, and Lord of kings. He also heaped riches and honours upon Daniel, whom he made governor of the whole province, and chief over the wise men of Babylon; while at his request his three companions were advanced to high dignities in the empire.

Again the king dreamed a dream, and summoned Daniel to interpret it for him; and





DANIEL INTERPRETING THE KING'S DREAM.



this was a dream that it required great moral courage on the part of the interpreter to expound truly. It was no easy thing for Daniel, as a subject, to appear before this mighty monarch, and tell him, as he did, that he should lose his reason for a time, and be driven out from among men to herd with the beasts of the field. But with all fidelity the noble Hebrew ventured to tell his master this, and after having done so, to exhort him to repentance for his past misdeeds, and to amendment of life for the future. The sad fate predicted did really fall upon the king, who, for a certain term, wandered apart from human habitations, a wretched maniac, upon whom the dews of heaven and the winter's frost fell alike unheeded. And the severe discipline seems to have had its proper effect upon the mind of Nebuchadnezzar, who, after his recovery and restoration to his kingdom, gave thanks, openly, to the Most High God, instead of to his former false gods, acknowledging that He was indeed supreme upon the earth.

After the conquest of Babylon by the Medes and Persians—an event which Daniel had been able to foretell to King Belshazzar,

through the interpreting of a mysterious, supernatural hand-writing upon the wall—the prophet occupied a post of great honour and trust under the conqueror, King Darius. A hundred and twenty governors had been appointed over the kingdom, subordinate to three officers, of whom Daniel was the chief. Envious of his supremacy, these governors sought occasion to injure Daniel in the king's estimation; but his management of public affairs was so excellent, that it was impossible to find any fault with him on that score. So they determined to entrap him into an act of disobedience to the king; and for this purpose procured a law to be passed, that any one who should, during a period of thirty days, ask a petition of any god or man, the king excepted, should be thrown into a den of lions. They did not care about giving up their own prayers; but they knew that Daniel worshipped the true God, and they felt sure that nothing would hinder him offering up his daily prayers to that God. Their wicked scheme was successful: spite of the decree, of which he was perfectly aware, Daniel as usual, and without any attempt to conceal the fact,



DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN.



prayed three times a day in his chamber with the windows open, looking towards Jerusalem, as was the custom of the captive Jews. He was found by his enemies in the very act, and his disobedience reported to the king, who was maliciously told that Daniel the Jew cared neither for him nor his law, which he was breaking every day. The king, who loved and honoured Daniel, was greatly distressed at this, and strove to save him, but in vain; and he was compelled to order the execution of this decree, which he now saw to have been framed purposely against his faithful minister. It was sorely against his will; but in consigning him to his fate, his firm trust was, that the God whom Daniel worshipped would protect him.

It was even so. After a restless, troubled night the king came early in the morning to the mouth of the pit into which the prophet had been cast, and cried out with a lamentable voice, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God whom thou servest continually able to deliver thee from the lions?" Then a clear, calm voice came up from that horrible den, whence no sound had ever before issued

save the growls of hungry lions and the shrieks of their victims; so calm, that even the homage usually paid to the monarch was not omitted: "O king, live for ever! my God hath sent His angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths that they have not hurt me; forasmuch as before Him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt."

Then the king gladly ordered him to be drawn out; and, with true Oriental cruelty, commanded that not only the men who had sought to destroy Daniel should themselves be thrown into the den, but their wives and children also—"And the lions had the mastery over *them*, and brake all their bones in pieces or ever they came at the bottom of the pit."







## IX.

### Jonah.

**S**OME time about the reign of Jero-boam II., King of Israel, there was a prophet of that nation, named Jonah, whom God commanded to go to Nineveh, a vast city of Assyria, and capital of the empire, to warn its inhabitants of His anger on account of their great wickedness. Jonah was unwilling to obey this command, for he did not quite take God at His word; and, with a strange infatuation on the part of one who believed in a God whose presence fills heaven and earth, and whose power is infinite, fled, as he thought, from Him, taking ship for Tarshish, a celebrated city, supposed to be near the entrance of the Mediterranean. The displeasure of God at this was shown by His sending so violent a storm that the vessel was in danger of being wrecked.

The mariners, accustomed to the sudden squalls that break forth upon those waters and which still embarrass their navigation, worked like men in this emergency, throwing overboard their goods to lighten the ship, while each man, according to his heathen creed, called upon his own god to help them.

Men often forget God when things are all smooth and pleasant ; but in times of danger, if they have not the true God to appeal to, they will trust in any ideal, supernatural being, whom their hopes or their fears may have conjured up.

Meanwhile the cause of this tempest, the man who, knowing what the true God was, had madly dreamed of hiding himself from His presence, was comfortably asleep in the lower part of the vessel. Incensed at his stupidity, the master of the ship shook him rudely out of his mistimed slumber, asking him what he meant by it, and bidding him arise and pray for their deliverance, if haply his God might help them. Then, strong in their belief that it was a supernatural storm, sent in judgment for the sin of some one among them, they, according to their custom,

drew lots in order to find out the culprit. The lot fell upon Jonah, and when they asked who he was, whence he came, and what evil he had done to bring them all into this danger, he told them frankly that he was a Hebrew, and that, unwilling to obey a hard command of his God, he was now fleeing from Him.

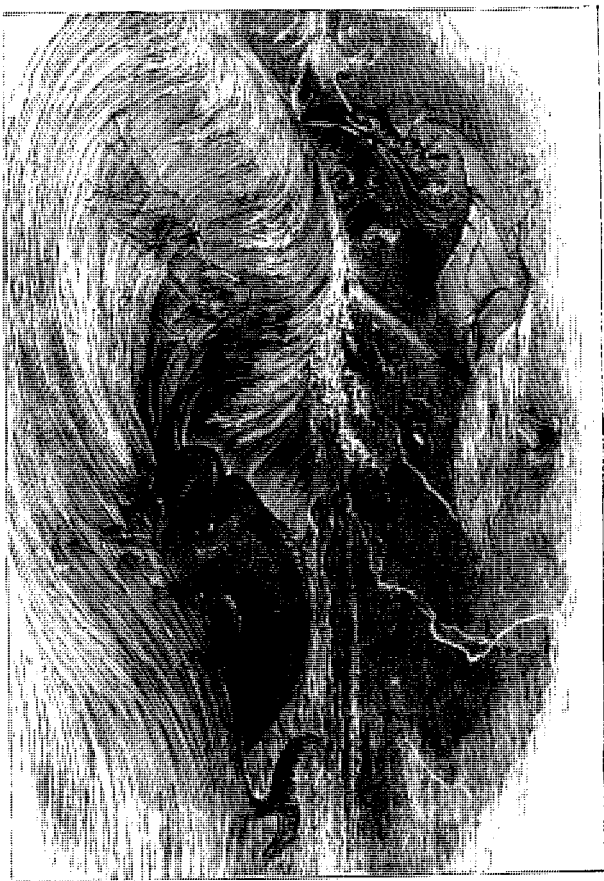
The sailors were much frightened when Jonah told them this; and asked what they must do that the tempest, raised on his account, might cease. For according to the belief of the heathen world, afflictive events brought on by the misdoing of any individual could only be averted by the suffering of that one. Jonah answered that they must throw him into the sea, and then the storm would abate. But the men were kind-hearted, and very unwilling to consign him to what appeared certain death; so they did their best, rowing hard, to bring the ship to land. Then, finding it was all useless, with a pathetic prayer to God that He would not hold them guilty of the death of this man, who at his own command (given like a prophet), they were about to throw overboard, they cast him into the

sea, whose turbulent waves at once sank down, and all was calm.

But the marvel did not cease here. Plunged in those boiling waters, where it seemed as if life must be instantly extinguished, God had prepared a strange rescue for the disobedient prophet, who was swallowed by a huge fish. Three days did he remain in that horrible condition at the bottom of the sea, repenting of his sin, and praying God to deliver him. At the end of that time God, who had miraculously punished Jonah, as miraculously delivered him, for the fish cast him out on dry land uninjured, and ready to yield a prompt obedience when God the second time sent him to denounce the wickedness of the people of Nineveh.

To them, after Jonah's preaching, God gave the grace of repentance (without His help none can really repent of their misdoings), and crying humbly and heartily to Him they were heard in the day of their trouble, and mercifully spared.

Jonah, strange to say, was not pleased at this. One would have thought that any man with one spark of human feeling in his heart



JONAH CAST INTO THE SEA.



would have been only too thankful that a wicked city, doomed to destruction for its excessive wickedness, should amend its ways, and so escape the threatened punishment. But Jonah was angry about it; perhaps he feared he should be deemed a false prophet, and he resentfully said something of this kind to God, ending by wishing himself dead: and with that he turned away and left the city. Sitting weary and faint by the wayside, God, in His tender care for this ungracious man, caused a shady plant to spring up and shelter him from the intense heat of the sun. The next day, however, the gourd withered away, and Jonah, with the sun beating full upon him, again, as he had done before, wished himself dead out of the way of it. Then came the gentle, heavenly rebuke, reminding him that he had taken neither care nor pains for the quickly withered plant, whose loss he so passionately lamented, while the great city, with whose deliverance from threatened destruction he had dared to reproach his Maker, was crowded with human beings, precious to Him by whom they were created.



X.

The Offerings of the Wise Men.



THE birth of our Lord Jesus Christ is one of the mysteries of our religion. God was His Father, the blessed Virgin was His Mother,—thus He was truly God and truly man, divine to save, human to endure.

Scripture tells us that the angel Gabriel came to Mary, the Mother of our Lord, and, with a heavenly greeting, foretold to her the birth of her Divine Son, who should be truly the Son of God. To her husband Joseph also a divine communication was made to the same effect, and that He who should be born was to be named Jesus, that is, Saviour, because He should save His people from their sins.

Both Joseph and Mary were of the royal house of David. Therefore, when by command of the Roman emperor, to whom Judea



was subject, an account (what we call a census), of the whole population of the empire was to be taken, in which each one should be set down in the roll of his own city, or that of his tribe, the two repaired to Bethlehem, the city of David, for this purpose.

The throng of people coming up from their various dwelling-places was great, so that Joseph and Mary, finding the inn already full of travellers, were obliged to seek accommodation for the time in the place where the cattle were kept ; and here our Lord was born.

This poor shelter was the scene of the first acknowledgment of Christ's kingly rank ; that acknowledgment proceeding not from Jews, trained and educated by God's long-forbearing providence, for this especial purpose, but by those ignorant of, or imperfectly acquainted with, the true God. Wise men from the east, we are told, came to Jerusalem asking where was He who was born King of the Jews, for they had seen His star in the east, and had come to worship Him.

The star thus spoken of was an allusion to that prophecy of Balaam, "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise

out of Israel ;" a prophecy that had become known among other nations than that of the Jews, and given rise to a wide-spread expectation of some mighty and divine monarch, who should exert a righteous rule upon earth.

Seeking the King of the Jews, it was natural for them to come to Jerusalem, the capital city of that people ; and here it was that King Herod first heard with dismay of One who, as he thought, would dispossess him of his kingdom. Inquiring of the chief priests and learned men of the Jews where this king should be born, they referred him to the prophecy which foretold that the event should take place at Bethlehem. Thither, accordingly, he sent the wise men, bidding them let him know when they had found the King, that he also might go and worship Him.

They left him on their short journey of about six miles, guided by the same star which they had seen in the east, and which now led them directly to the very spot where the Divine Child lay in His Mother's arms. Over that spot it stood fixed in the heavens, as if in "earnest gaze" upon the scene beneath. Then, when they were come in into the house



THE OFFERINGS OF THE WISE MEN.



and saw the young Child in His Mother's arms, they prostrated themselves before Him after the Oriental manner of doing homage, and offered to Him gifts of the most precious things,—gold, frankincense, and myrrh; the two latter are valuable gums, highly prized in the East, both for personal use, and in solemn acts of worship. Afterwards being warned by God in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their own country by another way; and the king, in his mad rage at the disappointment, slew all the children of two years' old and under, in and around Bethlehem, in order to be quite sure that He who was born King of the Jews had not escaped him.





XI.

Christ in the Temple Disputing with the  
Doctors.

**W**HEN our Lord was about six weeks old, His parents brought Him to Jerusalem, to fulfil for Him the various requirements of the Jewish law. Among these requirements was an offering in sacrifice, which was to be according to the ability of the offerer. Our Lord's parents were in humble life, and therefore, instead of the more costly lamb,—the sacrifice of the wealthy—the birth-offering for the King of heaven and earth, was that of the lowly Israelite, a pair of turtle-doves, one for a burnt-offering, the other for a sin-offering, according to the law of Moses.

On this occasion, an aged, devout Jew, to whom God Himself had revealed that he should not die until he had seen the Christ of God,—

the Hope of Israel—led by the Spirit of God came into the temple while the acts of worship and obedience were being performed. Guided by a divine instinct he at once recognised the Holy Child as the promised Messiah, and taking Him in his arms gave thanks to God in those beautiful words of Scripture, still used throughout the church: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.” And then, blessing the astonished parents who but imperfectly comprehended the scene, he prophesied obscurely of the crucifixion of our Lord, in alluding to the sorrow that should one day pierce the heart of Mary because of Him.

Then the holy family returned to their own city of Nazareth, in Galilee, to their simple life there; Joseph working at his trade, which was that of a carpenter, and their Divine Son growing on from infancy to childhood, and in a wisdom far beyond that of the children of men. So the time passed on until He had attained the age of twelve years, when, as was their custom yearly, His parents went up to Jerusalem to keep the Passover, and took Him with them.

The feast of the Passover was a high festival with the Jews; and bands of pilgrims, from all parts of the country used to join on this journey for safety in travelling thither and home again. The feast lasted for eight days, and on their return to Nazareth at its close, the parents of our Lord missed their child. They did not take any notice of His absence the first day, thinking He was with some of their friends, who were in the same band of pilgrims. After that, finding He was nowhere to be seen they became alarmed, and hastened back to Jerusalem, seeking Him long before they found Him in the very last place where they would expect to see one so young, sitting among the doctors,—that is, the scribes and teachers of the law,—in the temple, conversing with them on terms of equality, and astonishing all by the wisdom alike of his questions and his answers. For though answering wisely is a great thing, it requires no small ability to question wisely.

His mother was displeased at His conduct, and asked why He had put them to so much trouble and anxiety. But the answer of that boy of twelve—they knew the mystery of





CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE DISPUTING WITH THE DOCTORS.



His birth, yet but inadequately apprehended it—was utterly incomprehensible to them: “How is it that ye sought Me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” His Father’s business! A child of twelve, talking with, and even able to instruct, learned priests and scribes:—what *could* He mean?

Then after this calm assertion of His divinity, still not understood, He meekly followed His earthly parents to their humble abode in Nazareth, where He was obedient to them, like any other child, working, it is said, at His father’s trade. While His mother, as she saw Him daily growing in years and holy understanding, and watched Him tenderly as He went in and out, busy with the labours of their homely life, mused on His strange words when in the temple, and vainly sought to fathom their meaning.





## XII.

### Christ Healing the Impotent Man.

**T**HE first of our Lord's miracles was at Cana, a town in Galilee, where, at a marriage feast, He turned water into wine, because there was a deficiency of the latter.

It seems not a little striking that the very first display of miraculous power on the part of God incarnate should have been simply to promote innocent human enjoyment; while at the same time it also asserted His miraculous power. This, and His many succeeding miracles, almost wholly wrought for the physical benefit of men, teach us how precious in the sight of God are those bodies which He has created for us, how entire is His sympathy with that human nature which we sometimes fancy we must, as much as possible, get rid of, in order to be perfectly holy. But the coming

of our Lord in the flesh was to destroy the works of the devil, not to destroy our human nature. *That*, His object was to redeem, that is, rescue, from all sinful uses, which are abuses of it; and make it so pure, and consecrated to Himself that it might become what it was at first designed to be, so that all the actions of our human life might be carried on as if in His presence. Just like loving children, who, whether they work or play, need not run out of their father's sight, but delight to do everything under his eye, sure of his sympathy; however trivial, compared with his, may be their occupations, which still are suited to their childish nature. This is precisely the kind of relationship in which we ought to stand towards our heavenly Father, and to restore which, after it was broken off by the sin in Eden, He assumed our human nature.

The kindly, compassionate nature of our Lord's miracles is strikingly shown in His healing of the poor cripple, at Bethesda.

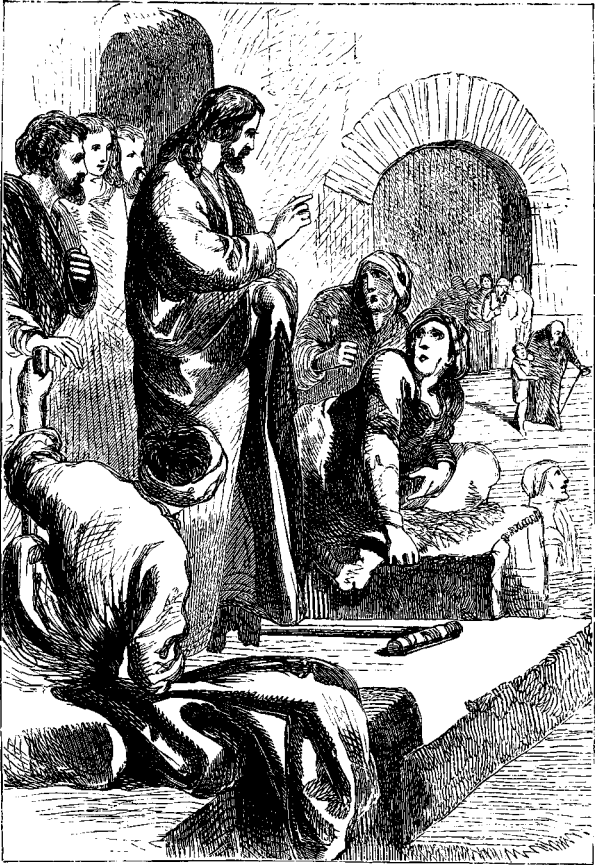
By one of the gates of Jerusalem, the Sheep-gate it was called, there was a pool called Bethesda, which means, the place of mercy, whose waters were at certain times endued

with miraculous virtue for the cure of diseases of every kind. At certain seasons, we are told, an angel descended, and agitated the waters, after which the first who stepped into them was cured, whatever might be his disease. Only one, it would appear, could be cured at once; so, round about the pool were covered places where the sick might lie waiting for the expected "troubling of the waters."

Our Lord one day passing this spot saw a miserable object there, who had been crippled for thirty-eight years, and He put to him the question:—"Wilt thou be made whole?" The man, little dreaming who it was that questioned him, and for what purpose, answered simply, explaining how it was that he had remained so long uncured,—that being utterly helpless, he could not get down to the pool time enough after the troubling of the waters, others less crippled than himself out-distancing his slow steps; and he had no one to carry him down, so as to be in time.

"Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed and walk."

Instantly his helplessness was gone; rising up strong and well, he took up the mat, (such



CHRIST HEALING THE IMPOTENT MAN.





as in that country was used by the poor for a bed) whereon he lay, and walked away from the pool by whose side he had so long remained a hopeless, miserable cripple.

This miracle was performed on the Sabbath day, which the Jews in those degenerate times kept with a superstitious strictness, losing the spirit of the command in the letter of it. So they told the poor fellow, rejoicing in his new found strength, that it was very wrong of him to carry his bed on that sacred day. This did not make much impression on him; and the next thing was that, unable to deny the reality of the marvel that He had wrought, their malice against our Lord found vent in charging Him with Sabbath-breaking, for which they sought to put Him to death!





### XIII.

## Christ Driving the Money-Changers out of the Temple.



**O**UR Lord, notwithstanding the tenderness and benignity of His character, could be justly and strikingly severe with hardened offenders.

The Scribes and Pharisees, who did all in their power to thwart Him and His divine mission, which they ought, from their position, to have been the first to acknowledge and further, were fearlessly denounced by him as hypocrites and a generation of vipers; while the lips that had uttered the repeated beatitudes on the mount now poured forth woe, woe, woe, upon those false-hearted, traitorous Jews. Cared for, specially protected, and trained by God himself for the reception of the Messiah, in whom they and all nations were to be blessed, they utterly frustrated, so far as they were

concerned, His purpose; and this was an act of treason towards their Divine King.

The crafty, cruel Herod was as mercilessly stigmatized, and the desecration of the temple itself excited not only His stern reprobation in words, but in deeds also.

The temple at Jerusalem, at the time that our Lord was upon earth, was what is called the third temple, built with extraordinary splendour by Herod the Great, the Herod who was king of Judea at the time of our Lord's birth. It was a magnificent structure, covering with its several surrounding courts, a large extent of ground towards the north-east of the city. These courts were built rising, like terraces, one above another as they approached the temple, which, surmounting them, was conspicuous to all parts of Jerusalem. The enclosures were used for various purposes connected with the religious rites of the Jews, and for the dwellings of the Levites; whilst, with strange irreverence, in the outer court of all, secular business was transacted. Here were dealers in sheep, oxen, and doves; while others carried on the trade of money-changers, changing the money of strangers into the coin current in Jerusalem.

This profanation of so sacred a spot excited

our Lord's strongest indignation, and not content with rebuking it sharply in words, saying, "My Father's house is a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves," He made, we are told, a scourge or whip of small cords, and with it indignantly drove out these profane, cheating people, cattle and all, overthrowing the tables of the money-changers, and scattering their money on the ground. Nor would He suffer the holy place to be made a mere thoroughfare by people going to and fro with their burdens.

The scribes and priests of the Jews looked on with alarm, while our Lord thus executed judgment on the desecrators of the temple, for He did it as one who had authority to do it; and then calling the temple "My Father's house!" So they asked Him what sign—that is, what miracle—He could show to prove that God had indeed sent Him. But His answer was utterly unintelligible to them, for, foreseeing His own death near at hand, he prophesied of it and His resurrection, saying, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They thought He referred to the temple within whose court they were then



CHRIST DRIVING THE MONEY-CHANGERS OUT OF THE TEMPLE.



standing, and so made light of His reply, contenting themselves with saying, "Forty and six years was this Temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?"


But there was a meaning in his answer too deep for them to fathom, who had obstinately rejected the divine teaching with which He had so long pursued them; for "He spake of the temple of His body," which was to be destroyed in bitter pangs upon the cross, laid to rest within the grave, and then raised to life again on the third day, for a glorious ascension into heaven, to the right hand of the Father, there for ever to represent our human nature which He had redeemed.





#### XIV.

### Christ Blessing Little Children.

UR blessed Lord was content to remain a long time in obscurity. Thirty years did He, the very God, live on this earth like a mere man, in lowly condition, earning, as it is supposed, His own livelihood by the labour of His hands.

The thoughts that come into our heart, as we, like His blessed mother, ponder these things, are such as we can scarcely put into words. The mean life, of daily, unnoticed toil about common things, serving our own human needs, and those of others—until middle age this was the one that He chose; a life that many of us think so far beneath the dignity of our human nature, perhaps, unworthy of our vocation as Christians, but which we may now well think dignified by that choice. There is a wholesome lesson here, if we will but consider it.



Then when He came out of this obscurity, meekly submitting to baptism at the hands of one of His own creatures ; He, the fountain of blessing and purity, content to receive its symbol, from a sin-stained man, who showed an act of profound piety and obedience to God, when at his God's command he no more urged his own unworthiness but reverently did as he was bidden. Afterwards, going forth on His mission of teaching and healing, what intense kindly sympathy did not our Lord manifest for the bodily distresses of those around him. What intense human feeling did not He, who made man, exhibit in His various intercourse with His creatures. Not only in such pathetic scenes as that when he wept over the grave of a friend, whom he was still just about to restore to life, but in that exquisitely tender one when eager mothers brought their little ones to Him, and " He took them. in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them."

The disciples would fain have repelled these eager mothers. They thought it beneath the dignity of their Master, whose high and holy office they were beginning to comprehend, to

be troubled with little children. They had seen His miracles of healing, of feeding thousands with the poor fisherman's store of five loaves and two small fishes, of raising the dead, nay, they had seen His glory in the mount, and it seemed too trivial after this, that He should be asked to lay His hands, in blessing, upon perhaps unconscious infants. But with what benignity He sets them right, assuring them, as He lays those awful, divine hands,—soon to be nailed to the cross—in gentlest blessing upon the little ones, that of such is the kingdom of heaven.

If any of those children blessed by our Lord, lived to grow up, and become Christians, with what sacred awe after His ascension must they have looked back to the time when He, the very God, had touched them with human hands, while He poured Divine benedictions upon them! How happy, we cannot help thinking them. But there is another of His divine blessings resting upon us in these later days, beyond even theirs. "Blessed are they that have not seen, yet have believed."

This tender act of our Lord's was among the last of His life, for He was just about going



CHRIST BLESSING LITTLE CHILDREN.



up to Jerusalem, there to suffer for mankind. On His way thither He remained a few days at Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead, and his sisters Mary and Martha. Bethany was a village at the foot of the Mount of Olives, which stands to the east of Jerusalem, and was only about two miles distant from it, so that He could go thither, working "while it was called to-day," and return in the evening to refresh His spirit with that human sympathy which He loved, and in the bosom of that family of whom it is emphatically written, "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus."

It was characteristic of the obstinate malice of the Jews that they sought to put Lazarus himself to death, for the crime of having been raised from the dead by our Lord.





XV.

Christ before Pilate.



OUR Lord, but a short time before His passion and death, had come up to Jerusalem to keep the Passover. His enemies took advantage of His doing so, and plotted to kill Him. The treachery of one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, rendered this more easy to them, for the wretched man was willing, for a certain sum of money, a paltry sum too, to make use of his knowledge of his Master's comings and goings to guide them to Him.

After keeping the Passover with His disciples, when He took an affecting farewell of them with earnest exhortations and heavenly benedictions, our Lord left the city, and walked with them towards the Mount of Olives, at whose foot was an enclosure called the garden of Gethsemane, a place where He was wont to resort with His disciples, and which was therefore

well known to Judas. There the last mysterious agony in the work of man's redemption began. It was too sacred and too fearful to admit of human view. Three of His disciples, Peter, James, and John, were chosen to accompany Him thither, but even they were bidden to stay at a little distance from the spot where His mysterious passion was to be endured.

Kneeling in anguish upon the ground, alone, save when in one overpowering moment an angel was sent from heaven to strengthen him, that transcendent, incomprehensible suffering was sustained;—suffering of which we can form no conception, and which rose so high that even He thrice prayed that, if it were possible, He might be spared it; with the instant addition that still not His, but His Father's will might be done. Then rising and returning to His friends, who, poor human creatures, had sunk into sleep with the pressure of their grief, He gently bade them sleep on now, for His hour was at hand, and so was he who should betray Him. At that moment Judas, at the head of a band of Roman soldiers, with the priests, and a tumultuous throng of those who in every city are ready for mischief and violence, burst

into the garden; and as he had promised his miserable associates a sign, by which they might know their prisoner, he now stepped up to his Lord, and gave it by a kiss! Surely treachery could go no further than this. The quiet response was, "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" His hard heart stood even that. Then the throng fell upon our Lord and hurried Him before the chief priests, whence He was led before Pilate, the Roman governor, to whom they accused Him of rebellion against the emperor, and of claiming to be Himself a king.

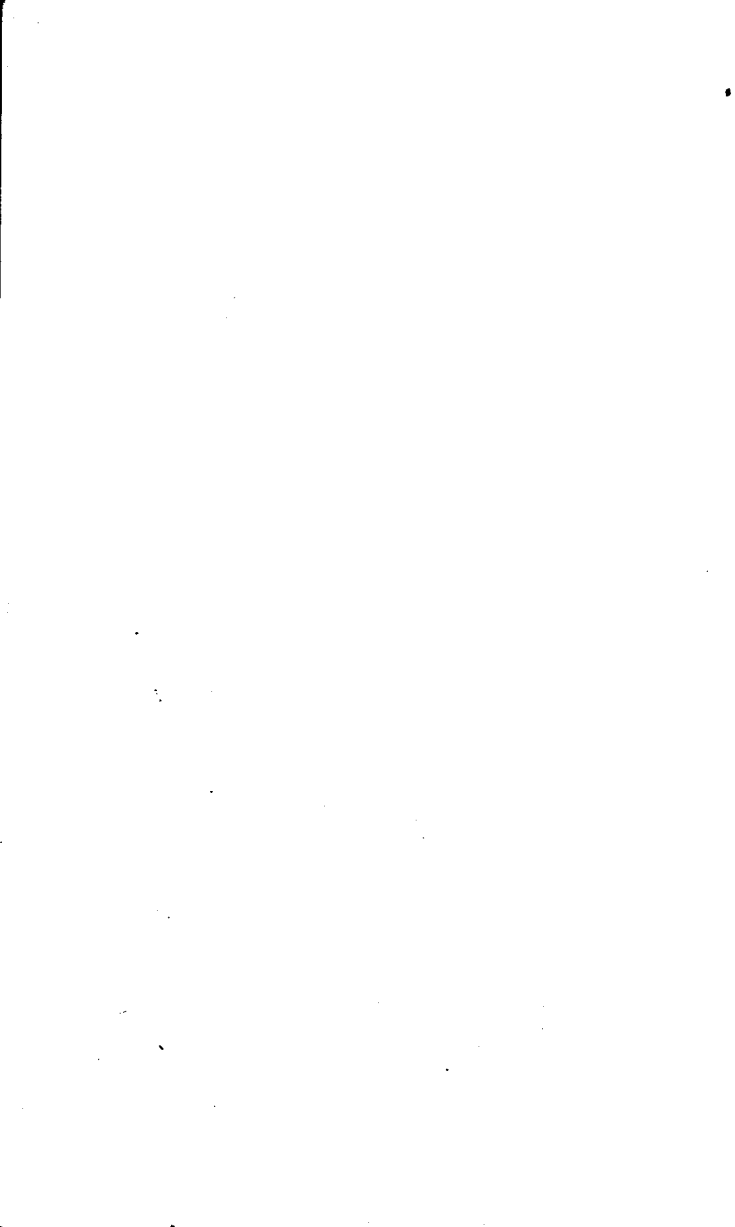
The Roman, who had not much respect for Jews of any kind, inquired into the matter, and was soon convinced that our Lord was innocent of the crimes laid to His charge, and that it was simply owing to the malice of the Jews that He was brought before him as a criminal. Believing this, he did what he could to save Him; again and again (affirming His innocence) trying to persuade them to let Him go. But at length he was weak and wicked enough, innocent as he believed Him, to give Him up to the insatiable malice of the Jews; with one last solemn assertion of the guiltless-





CHRIST BEFORE PILATE.

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ness of their victim, and of His destruction being their deed, not his : a responsibility which they unhesitatingly accepted.

Pilate's grand fault was cowardice, Roman though he was ; moral cowardice in sacrificing an innocent person to popular clamour. But, as a sin-offering for Jew and Gentile alike, it was perhaps appropriate that both should thus join in pursuing our blessed Lord unto the death.

There is one very interesting little circumstance in connection with our Lord's unjust condemnation ; and that is, that the wife of Pilate, while the Roman governor was vainly and weakly seeking to rescue Him from His enemies, sent a message to her husband, entreating him not to condemn his innocent prisoner, on whose behalf she had become so painfully concerned, as to have spent a restless, miserable night, full of painful dreams. But Pilate despised all that !



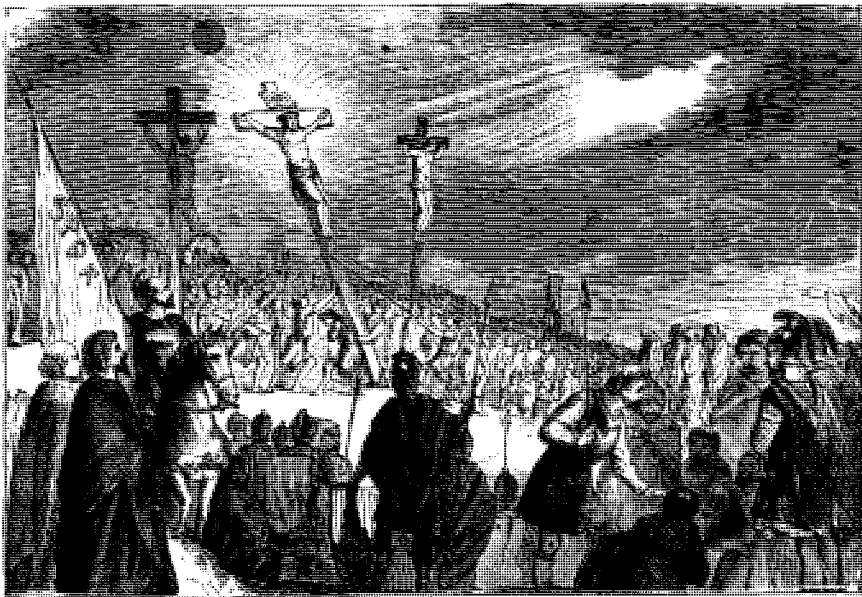


## XVI.

### The Crucifixion.

**I**NSULT, derision, and scourging—the last the treatment of the vilest criminals, from which the proud Roman was specially exempt—was the lot of the Lord of heaven and earth when He came to thankless mortals, to redeem souls and bodies alike.

Invested with mock royal robes, crowned—in derision of His kingly claim—with thorns, a reed thrust into His passive hand by way of sceptre, our Lord had to endure the vulgar insolence of the Roman soldiery; bad, indeed, but not so bad as the deep-set hatred of the Jews, which found its vent in taunting speeches drawn from their own holy records, prophetic of the Messiah. The Roman had never been nurtured in the belief of a Saviour to come, whose signs, exhibited in the life of



THE CRUCIFIXION.



our Lord, ought to have been recognised by the well-trained Jew, as indicative of the promised and long-expected Hope of Israel.

From the presence of this unjust judge, our Lord was led to execution,—the death of the cross: while, still further to degrade Him, two malefactors were crucified with Him, the one on His right hand, the other on His left. One of these with strange recklessness in his dreadful position—perchance the recklessness of intolerable suffering—bade our Lord save Himself, and them also, if He were indeed the Christ. His fellow rebuked him, saying, “Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our evil deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss.” And then came that solemn recognition of our Lord’s divinity, with the pathetic prayer founded on it, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!” O what a response came from that dying form—still the same assertion of His Godhead: “To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise!”

Then began the marvels of this wondrous

scene. Thick darkness settled down upon the earth; the sun was quenched as if in night, while from the "altar of the cross," upon which the sacred victim was just about to expire, came that awful cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" One of the mocking crowd around, more compassionate than the rest, (and truly one loves to read of any compassionate act shown to an innocent sufferer, most of all to this Divine Sufferer), filled a sponge with cooling drink, and carried it to His parched lips upon a reed. Then another loud cry,—but this time the triumphant exclamation, "It is finished!" and Jesus gave up the ghost.

Immediately the veil of the temple, which concealed the holiest place of all, was supernaturally rent in twain, signifying that henceforth the glory had departed from it; the ground réeled in earthquake, which burst open the very graves around that funereal spot, and even the Roman officer whose duty it was to superintend the execution, seeing all these marvels, exclaimed, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

It was the custom to break the legs of



persons crucified, in order to hasten death,—a cruel humanity. But when those appointed came thus to finish the horrible execution, they found our Lord already dead, so that they “brake not His legs;” but one of them, perhaps from mere wantonness, pierced His side with a spear, and thereout came blood and water; thus proving the reality of His death, and typifying the two sacraments of the Church of Christ. Then, seeing He was indeed dead, Joseph of Arimathæa, one of the Jewish council, who had kept himself aloof from their unjust condemnation of our Lord, begged that His body should be given to him for burial. The request was granted. Taking Him down from the cross, loving hands laid our Lord in His grave; and with sad hearts the disciples dispersed, their faith and hope in Him, as the Redeemer of Israel, well-nigh extinct.





## XVII.

### Christ at Emmaus.

**F**RIDAY was the day on which the death and burial of our Lord took place. Saturday was the Jewish Sabbath, on which it was not lawful even to embalm the dead, for which holy, devoted women had made preparations. So they rested that day in quiet grief.

But so soon as the Sabbath was ended, very early in the morning of the first day of the week, long before it was light, these holy women, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, with Salome, came to the sepulchre in which our Lord had been laid, to begin their pious labours.

The sepulchre had been secured by a large stone placed at its entrance, and as they went thither they had wondered who should roll away that heavy stone for them, for it was

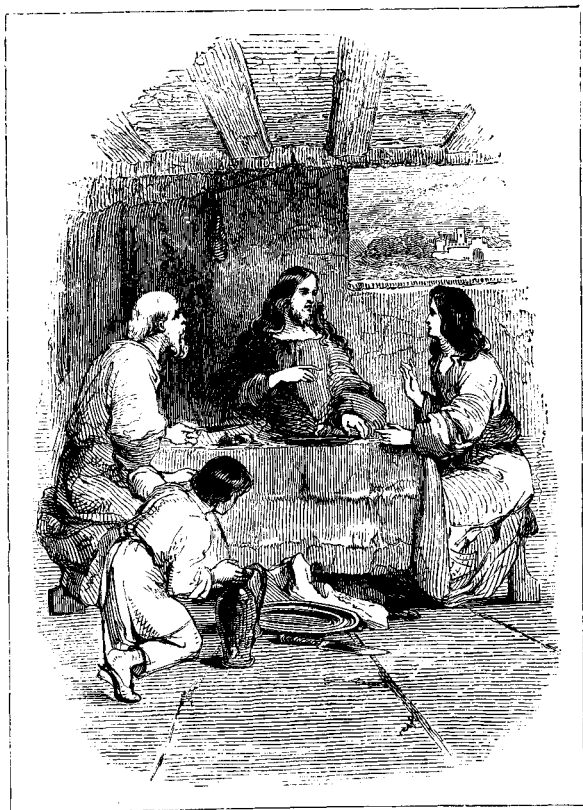
quite beyond their strength to do it. But lo, stone there was none, and the sepulchre itself was empty of its precious deposit,—for they explored it in anxious haste—but there were two unearthly visitants, in shining, angelic garb, who reassured them, saying, “Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, He is risen;” reminding the women how our Lord Himself had forewarned them of this, that in three days after His death, He would arise again.

Joyfully the women returned to the disciples with their good tidings, for they remembered how our Lord had spoken these very words, though, at the time, they did not understand them. The disciples would not believe their account, but Peter—guilty, repentant Peter—ran to see for himself, whether it was indeed true; and looking into the sepulchre, saw it was as the women had said: nothing was there save the grave-clothes in which the body of our Lord had been wrapped, and which were now placed orderly on the floor of the tomb.

That same day two others of the disciples, walking sadly to Emmaus, a village about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking to-

gether about what seemed the destruction of their hopes in Jesus as the Messiah, were joined by one who entered into conversation with them, asking what it was that they were so sorrowfully discussing. Surprised that He should know nothing of what had filled all Jerusalem with consternation, and taking for granted that He must be a stranger there, they opened their hearts to Him, telling Him the whole mournful story of our Lord's crucifixion, and its disappointment of their own firm expectation that it was He who should have redeemed Israel. The stranger listened, and spoke to them in reply, sweet, solemn words of instruction; explaining to them their own Scriptures concerning the Messiah, as they had never heard them explained before; until they were ready to wonder that they should not have understood that this must indeed be the fate of him who was the true King of Israel, according to that ancient word of God on which they had ever relied. Then yielding to their entreaties, that, as the night was falling, he would go and take rest and food with them, he accompanied them home.

The evening meal was hospitably spread for



CHRIST WITH THE DISCIPLES AT EMMAUS.



the stranger, who, sitting down with them, blessed the food and then gave to the twain, as though He had been the host. But in that very act their dull eyes were opened; it was the Lord himself whom they had mourned as dead, and Who, as they sat gazing in transport, "vanished out of their sight." Filled with glad amazement, they hastened to Jerusalem, to the eleven who were met together there, with other of the disciples. Telling these how their Lord had appeared to them, and had made Himself known in the breaking of bread, they saw that there was another in their company, at sight of whom they were affrighted, thinking they had seen a spirit. But though the form was at first strange to them, they recognised the kindly, benign voice, speaking in its old familiar tones, which bade them not be afraid, for it was He, their Master; adding, to re-assure them, the command to touch Him, that they might know for themselves that it was indeed He, in flesh and blood, which a mere spirit had not; holding out to them as He spoke His hands and feet, still bearing trace of His wounds upon the cross.

For very joy they could still scarcely believe

Him ; while He, still the more to prove to them that it was their Lord, whom they knew to have died, and been buried, and not a mere phantom, bade them bring Him food, which He ate in their presence. Even their incredulity could not hold out against this ; and joyfully they now recognised Him as He went on to explain to them those mysteries of His passion, and death, and resurrection, which had been so inexplicable to them before.

Forty days did our Lord remain upon earth with His disciples after His resurrection. Then leading them out to Bethany, in the very act of blessing them He ascended up to heaven, charioted in clouds, even, as we know, from angelic testimony, He shall once more revisit the earth to judge us, whom He came to redeem.

