

LESSON TEN

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TWELVE, AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

AFTER one of His days of loving and ceaseless toil, Jesus, as was His wont, found rest and peace in prayer. "He went out into a mountain"—or, as it should rather be rendered, into *the* mountain—"to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God." There is something affecting beyond measure in the thought of these lonely hours; the absolute silence and stillness, broken by no sounds of human life, but only by the hooting of the night-jar or the howl of the jackal; the stars of an Eastern heaven raining their large lustre out of the unfathomable depth; the figure of the Man of Sorrows kneeling upon the dewy grass, and gaining strength for His labours from the purer air, the more open heaven, of that intense and silent communing with His Father and His God.

The scene of this lonely vigil, and of the Sermon on the Mount, was in all probability the singular elevation known at this day as the Kurn Hattín, or "Horns of Hattín." It is a hill with a summit which closely resembles an Oriental saddle with its two high peaks. On the west it rises very little above the level of a broad and undulating plain; on the east it sinks precipitately towards a plateau, on which lies, immediately beneath the cliffs, the village of Hattín; and from this plateau the traveller descends through a wild and tropic gorge to the shining levels of the Lake of Galilee. It is the only conspicuous hill on the western side of the lake, and it is singularly adapted by its conformation, both to form a place for short retirement and a rendezvous for gathering multitudes. Hitherward, in all probability, our Lord wandered in the evening between the rugged and brigand-haunted crags which form the sides of the Vale of Doves, stopping, perhaps, at times to drink the clear water of the little stream, to gather the pleasant apples of the *nubk*, and to watch the eagles swooping down on some near point of rock. And hither, in the morning, less heedful than their Divine Master of the manifold beauties of the scene, the crowd followed Him—loth even for a time to lose His inspiring presence, eager to listen to the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth.

It was at dawn of day, and before the crowd had assembled, that our Lord summoned into His presence the disciples who had gradually gathered around Him. Hitherto the relation which bound them to His person seems to have been loose and partial; and it is doubtful whether they at all realised its full significance. But now

the hour was come, and out of the wider band of general followers He made the final and special choice of His twelve Apostles. Their number was insignificant compared to the pompous retinue of hundreds who called themselves followers of a Hillel or a Gamaliel, and their position in life was humble and obscure. Simon and Andrew the sons of Jonas, James and John the sons of Zabdiá, and Philip, were of the little village of Bethsaida. If Matthew be the same as Levi, he was a son of Alphæus, and therefore a brother of James the Less and of Jude, the brother of James, who is generally regarded as identical with Lebbæus and Thaddæus. They belonged in all probability to Cana or Capernaum, and if there were any ground for believing the tradition which says that Mary, the wife of Alphæus or Klopas, was a younger sister of the Virgin, then we should have to consider these two brothers as first cousins of our Lord. Nathanael or Bartholomew was of Cana in Galilee. Thomas and Simon Zelotes were also Galilæans. Judas Iscariot was the son of a Simon Iscariot, but whether this Simon is identical with the Zealot cannot be determined.

Of these, "the glorious company of the Apostles," three, James the Less, Jude [the brother] of James, and Simon Zelotes, are almost totally unknown. The very personality of James and Jude is involved in numerous and difficult problems, caused by the extreme frequency of those names among the Jews. Whether they are the authors of the two Catholic Epistles, is a question which, perhaps, will never be determined. Nor is anything of individual interest recorded about them in the Gospels, if we except the single question of "Judas, not Iscariot," which is mentioned by St. John. Simon is only known by his surnames of Zelotes, "the Zealot," or "the Canaanite"—names which are identical in meaning, and which mark him out as having once belonged to the wild and furious followers of Judas of Giscala. The Greek names of Philip and Andrew, together with the fact that it was to Philip that the Greeks applied who wished for an interview with our Lord, and his reference of the request to Andrew, may possibly point to some connection on their part with the Hellenists; but, besides their first call, almost nothing is recorded about them; and the same remark applies to Nathanael and to Matthew. Of Thomas, called also Didymus, or "the Twin," which is only a Greek version of his Hebrew name, we catch several interesting glimpses, which show a well-marked character, naïve and simple, but at the same time ardent and generous; ready to die, yet slow to believe. Of Judas, the man of Kerioth, perhaps the only Jew in the Apostolic

band, we shall have sad occasion to speak hereafter; and throughout the Gospels he is often branded by the fatal epitaph, so terrible in its very simplicity, "Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him."

James, John, and Peter belonged to the innermost circle—the *ἐκλεκτῶν ἐκλεκτότεροι*—of our Lord's associates and friends. They alone were admitted into His presence when He raised the daughter of Jairus, and at His transfiguration, and during His agony in the garden. Of James we know nothing further except that to him was granted the high honour of being the first martyr in the Apostolic band. He and his brother John seem, although they were fishermen, to have been in easier circumstances than their associates. Zebedee, their father, not only had his own boat, but also his own hired servants; and John mentions incidentally in his Gospel that he "was known to the high priest." We have already noticed the not improbable conjecture that he resided much at Jerusalem, and there managed the importing of the fish which were sent thither from the Sea of Galilee. We should thus be able to account for his more intimate knowledge of those many incidents of our Lord's ministry in Judæa which have been entirely omitted by the other Evangelists.

St. John and St. Peter—the one the symbol of the contemplative, the other of the practical life—are undoubtedly the grandest and most attractive figures in that Apostolic band. The character of St. John has been often mistaken. Filled as he was with a most divine tenderness—realising as he did to a greater extent than any of the Apostles the full depth and significance of our Lord's new commandment—rich as his Epistles and his Gospel are with a meditative and absorbing reverence—dear as he has ever been in consequence to the heart of the mystic and the saint—yet he was something indefinitely far removed from that effeminate pietist which has furnished the usual type under which he has been represented. The name Boanerges, or "Sons of Thunder," which he shared with his brother James, their joint petition for precedence in the kingdom of God, their passionate request to call down fire from heaven on the offending village of the Samaritans, the burning energy of the *patois* in which the Apocalypse is written, the impetuous horror with which, according to tradition, St. John recoiled from the presence of the heretic Cerinthus, all show that in him was the spirit of the eagle, which, rather than the dove, has been his immemorial symbol. And since zeal and enthusiasm, dead as they are, and scorned in these days by an effete and comfortable religionism, yet have ever been indispensable instru-

ments in spreading the Kingdom of Heaven, doubtless it was the existence of these elements in his character, side by side with tenderness and devotion, which endeared him so greatly to his Master, and made him the "disciple whom Jesus loved." The wonderful depth and power of his imagination, the rare combination of contemplativeness and passion, of strength and sweetness in the same soul, the perfect faith which inspired his devotion, and the perfect love which precluded fear—these were the gifts and graces which rendered him worthy of leaning his young head on the bosom of his Lord.

Nor is his friend St. Peter a less interesting study. We shall have many opportunities of observing the generous, impetuous, wavering, noble, timid, impulses of his thoroughly human but most lovable disposition. Let the brief but vivid summary of another now suffice. "It would be hard to tell," says Dr. Hamilton, "whether most of his fervour flowed through the outlet of adoration or activity. His full heart put force and promptitude into every movement. Is his Master encompassed by fierce ruffians?—Peter's ardour flashes in his ready sword, and converts the Galilæan boatman into the soldier instantaneously. Is there a rumour of a resurrection from Joseph's tomb?—John's nimbler foot distances his older friend; but Peter's eagerness outruns the serene love of John, and past the gazing disciple he rushes breathless into the vacant sepulchre. Is the risen Saviour on the strand?—his comrades secure the net, and turn the vessel's head for shore; but Peter plunges over the vessel's side, and struggling through the waves, in his dripping coat falls down at his Master's feet. Does Jesus say, 'Bring of the fish ye have caught?'—ere any one could anticipate the word, Peter's brawny arm is lugging the weltering net with its glittering spoil ashore, and every eager movement unwittingly is answering beforehand the question of his Lord, 'Simon, lovest thou me?' And that fervour is the best which, like Peter's, and as occasion requires, can ascend in ecstatic ascriptions of adoration and praise, or follow Christ to prison and to death; which can concentrate itself on feats of heroic devotion, or distribute itself in the affectionate assiduities of a miscellaneous industry."

Such were the chief of the Apostles whom their Lord united into one band as He sat on the green summit of Kurn Hattin. We may suppose that on one of those two peaks He had passed the night in prayer, and had there been joined by His disciples at the early dawn. By what external symbol, if by any, our Lord ratified this first great ordination to the Apostolate we do not know; but undoubtedly the

present choice was regarded as formal and as final. Henceforth there was to be no return to the fisher's boat or the publican's booth as a source of sustenance ; but the disciples were to share the wandering missions, the evangelic labours, the scant meal and uncertain home, which marked even the happiest period of the ministry of their Lord. They were to be weary with Him under the burning noonday, and to sleep, as He did, under the starry sky.

And while the choice was being made, a vast promiscuous multitude had begun to gather. Not only from the densely-populated shores of the Sea of Galilee, but even from Judæa and Jerusalem—nay, even from the distant sea-coasts of Tyre and Sidon—they had crowded to touch His person and hear His words. From the peak He descended to the flat summit of the hill, and first of all occupied Himself with the physical wants of those anxious hearers, healing their diseases, and dispossessing the unclean spirits of the souls which they had seized. And then, when the multitude were seated in calm and serious attention on the grassy sides of that lovely natural amphitheatre, He raised His eyes, which had, perhaps, been bent downwards for a few moments of inward prayer, and opening His mouth, delivered primarily to His disciples—but intending through them to address the multitude—that memorable discourse which will be known for ever as “the Sermon on the Mount.”

The most careless reader has probably been struck with the contrast between the delivery of this sermon and the delivery of the Law on Sinai. We think of that as a “fiery law,” whose promulgation is surrounded by the imagery of thunders, and lightnings, and the voice of the trumpet sounding long and waxing louder and louder. We think of this as flowing forth in divinest music amid all the calm and loveliness of the clear and quiet dawn. That came dreadfully to the startled conscience from an Unseen Presence, shrouded by wreathing clouds, and destroying fire, and eddying smoke ; this was uttered by a sweet human voice that moved the heart most gently in words of peace. That was delivered on the desolate and storm-rent hill which seems with its red granite crags to threaten the scorching wilderness ; this on the flowery grass of the green hill-side which slopes down to the silver lake. That shook the heart with terror and agitation ; this soothed it with peace and love. And yet the New Commandments of the Mount of Beatitudes were not meant to abrogate, but rather to complete, the Law which was spoken from Sinai to them of old. That Law was founded on the eternal distinctions of right and wrong

—distinctions strong and irremovable as the granite bases of the world. Easier would it be to sweep away the heaven and the earth, than to destroy the least letter, one *yod*—or the least point of a letter, one projecting horn—of that code which contains the very principles of all moral life. Jesus warned them that He came, not to abolish that Law, but to obey and to fulfil; while at the same time He taught that this obedience had nothing to do with the Levitical scrupulosity of a superstitious adherence to the letter, but was rather a surrender of the heart and will to the innermost meaning and spirit which the commands involved. He fulfilled that olden Law by perfectly keeping it, and by imparting a power to keep it to all who believe in Him, even though He made its cogency so far more universal and profound.

The sermon began with the word “blessed,” and with an octave of beatitudes. But it was a *new* revelation of beatitude. The people were expecting a Messiah who should break the yoke off their necks—a king clothed in earthly splendour, and manifested in the pomp of victory and vengeance. Their minds were haunted with legendary prophecies, as to how He should stand on the shore at Joppa, and bid the sea pour out its pearls and treasure at His feet; how He should clothe them with jewels and scarlet, and feed them with even a sweeter manna than the wilderness had known. But Christ reveals to them another King, another happiness—the riches of poverty, the royalty of meekness, the high beatitude of sorrow and persecution. And this new Law, which should not only command but also aid, was to be set forth in beneficent manifestation—at once as salt to preserve the world from corruption, and as a light to guide it in the darkness. And then follows a comparison of the new Law of mercy with the old Law of threatening; the old was transitory, this permanent; the old was a type and shadow, the new a fulfilment and completion; the old demanded obedience in outward action, the new was to permeate the thoughts; the old contained the rule of conduct, the new the secret of obedience. The command, “Thou shalt not murder,” was henceforth extended to angry words and feelings of hatred. The germ of adultery was shown to be involved in a lascivious look. The prohibition of perjury was extended to every vain and unnecessary oath. The law of equivalent revenge was superseded by a law of absolute self-abnegation. The love due to our neighbour was extended also to our enemy. Henceforth the children of the kingdom were to aim at nothing less than this—namely, to be *perfect*, as their Father in heaven is perfect.

And the new life which was to issue from this new Law was to be

contrasted in all respects with that routine of exaggerated scruples and Pharisaic formalism which had hitherto been regarded as the highest type of religious conversation. Alms were to be given, not with noisy ostentation, but in modest secrecy. Prayers were to be uttered, not with hypocritic publicity, but in holy solitude. Fasting was to be exercised, not as a belauded virtue, but as a private self-denial. And all these acts of devotion were to be offered with sole reference to the love of God, in a simplicity which sought no earthly reward, but which stored up for itself a heavenly and incorruptible treasure. And the service to be sincere must be entire and undistracted. The cares and the anxieties of life were not to divert its earnestness or to trouble its repose. The God to whom it was directed was a Father also, and He who ever feeds the fowls of the air, which neither sow nor reap, and clothes in their more than regal loveliness the flowers of the field, would not fail to clothe and feed, and that without any need for their own toilsome anxiety, the children who seek His righteousness as their first desire.

And what should be the basis of such service? The self-examination which issues in a gentleness which will not condemn, in a charity that cannot believe, in an ignorance that will not know, the sins of others; the reserve which will not waste or degrade things holy; the faith which seeks for strength from above, and knows that, seeking rightly, it shall obtain; the self-denial which, in the desire to increase God's glory and man's happiness, sees the sole guide of its actions towards all the world.

The gate was strait, the path narrow, but it led to life; by the lives and actions of those who professed to live by it, and point it out, they were to judge whether their doctrine was true or false; without this neither words of orthodoxy would avail, nor works of power.

Lastly, He warned them that he who heard these sayings and did them was like a wise man who built a house with foundations dug deeply into the living rock, whose house, because it was founded upon a rock, stood unshaken amid the vehement beating of storm and surge: but he who heard and did them not was likened "unto a foolish man that built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house: and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

Such in barest and most colourless outline are the topics of that mighty sermon; nor is it marvellous that they who heard it "were astonished at the doctrine." Their main astonishment was that He

taught "as one having authority, and not as the Scribes." The teaching of their Scribes was narrow, dogmatical, material; it was cold in manner, frivolous in matter, second-hand, and iterative in its very essence; with no freshness in it, no force, no fire; servile to all authority, opposed to all independence; at once erudite and foolish, at once contemptuous and mean; never passing a hair's breadth beyond the carefully-watched boundary line of commentary and precedent; full of balanced inference, and orthodox hesitancy, and impossible literalism; intricate with legal pettiness and labyrinthine system; elevating mere memory above genius, and repetition above originality; concerned only about Priests and Pharisees, in Temple and synagogue, or school, or Sanhedrin, and mostly occupied with things infinitely little. It was not indeed wholly devoid of moral significance, nor is it impossible to find here and there, among the *débris* of it, a noble thought; but it was occupied a thousandfold more with Levitical minutiae about mint, and anise, and cummin, and the length of fringes, and the breadth of phylacteries, and the washing of cups and platters, and the particular quarter of a second when new moons and Sabbath days began. But this teaching of Jesus was wholly different in its character, and as much grander as the temple of the morning sky under which it was uttered was grander than stifling synagogue or crowded school. It was preached, as each occasion rose, on the hill-side, or by the lake, or on the roads, or in the house of the Pharisee, or at the banquet of the publican; nor was it any sweeter or loftier when it was addressed in the Royal Portico to the Masters of Israel, than when its only hearers were the ignorant people whom the haughty Pharisees held to be accursed. And there was no reserve in its administration. It flowed forth as sweetly and as lavishly to single listeners as to enraptured crowds; and some of its very richest revelations were vouchsafed, neither to rulers nor to multitudes, but to the persecuted outcast of the Jewish synagogue, to the timid inquirer in the lonely midnight, and the frail woman by the noonday well. And it dealt, not with scrupulous tithes and ceremonial cleansings, but with the human soul, and human destiny, and human life—with Hope and Charity, and Faith. There were no definitions in it, or explanations, or "scholastic systems," or philosophic theorising, or implicated mazes of difficult and dubious discussion, but a swift intuitive insight into the very depths of the human heart—even a supreme and daring paradox which, without being fenced round with exceptions or limitations, appealed to the conscience with its irresistible simplicity, and

with an absolute mastery stirred and dominated over the heart. Springing from the depths of holy emotions, it thrilled the being of every listener as with electric flame. In a word, its authority was the authority of the Divine Incarnate; it was a Voice of God, speaking in the utterance of man; its austere purity was yet pervaded with tenderest sympathy, and its awful severity with an unutterable love. It is, to borrow the image of the wisest of the Latin Fathers, a great sea whose smiling surface breaks into refreshing ripples at the feet of our little ones, but into whose unfathomable depths the wisest may gaze with the shudder of amazement and the thrill of love.

And we, who can compare Christ's teaching—the teaching of One whom some would represent to have been no more than the carpenter of Nazareth—with all that the world has of best and greatest in Philosophy and Eloquence and Song, must not we too add, with yet deeper emphasis, that teaching as one having authority, He spake as never man spake? Other teachers have by God's grace uttered words of wisdom, but to which of them has it been granted to regenerate mankind? What would the world be now if it had nothing better than the dry aphorisms and cautious hesitations of Confucius, or the dubious principles and dangerous concessions of Plato? Would humanity have made the vast moral advance which it *has* made, if no great Prophet from on High had furnished it with anything better than Sakya Mouni's dreary hope of a *nirvāna*, to be won by unnatural asceticism, or than Mohammed's cynical sanction of polygamy and despotism? Christianity may have degenerated in many respects from its old and great ideal; it may have lost something of its virgin purity—the struggling and divided Church of to-day may have waned, during these long centuries, from the splendour of the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God; but is Christendom no better than what Greece became, and what Turkey and Arabia and China are? Does Christianity wither the nations which have accepted it with the atrophy of Buddhism, or the blight of Islam? Even as a moral system—though it is infinitely more than a moral system—we do not concede that Christianity is unoriginal; and we besides maintain that no faith has ever been able like it to sway the affections and hearts of men. Other religions are demonstrably defective and erroneous; ours has never been proved to be otherwise than perfect and entire; other systems were esoteric and exclusive, ours simple and universal; others temporary and for the few, ours eternal and for the race. K'ung Foo-tze, Sakya Mouni, Mohammed,

could not even conceive the ideal of a society without falling into miserable error; Christ established the reality of an eternal and glorious kingdom—whose theory for all, whose history in the world, prove it to be indeed what it was from the first proclaimed to be—the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God.

And yet how exquisitely and freshly simple is the actual language of Christ compared with all other teaching that has ever gained the ear of the world! There is no science in it, no art, no pomp of demonstration, no carefulness of toil, no trick of rhetoricians, no wisdom of the schools. Straight as an arrow to the mark His precepts pierce to the very depths of the soul and spirit. All is short, clear, precise, full of holiness, full of the common images of daily life. There is scarcely a scene or object familiar to the Galilee of that day, which Jesus did not use as a moral illustration of some glorious promise or moral law. He spoke of green fields, and springing flowers, and the budding of the vernal trees; of the red or lowering sky; of sunrise and sunset; of wind and rain; of night and storm; of clouds and lightning; of stream and river; of stars and lamps; of honey and salt; of quivering bulrushes and burning weeds; of rent garments and bursting wine-skins; of eggs and serpents; of pearls and pieces of money; of nets and fish. Wine and wheat, corn and oil, stewards and gardeners, labourers and employers, kings and shepherds, travellers and fathers of families, courtiers in soft clothing and brides in nuptial robes—all these are found in His discourses. He knew all life, and had gazed on it with a kindly as well as a kingly glance. He could sympathise with its joys no less than He could heal its sorrows, and the eyes that were so often suffused with tears as they saw the sufferings of earth's mourners beside the bed of death, had shone also with a kindlier glow as they watched the games of earth's happy little ones in the green fields and busy streets.

CHAPTER XIX.

FURTHER MIRACLES.

THE Inauguration of the Great Doctrine was immediately followed and ratified by mighty signs. Jesus went, says one of the Fathers, from teaching to miracle. Having taught as one who had authority, He proceeded to confirm that authority by accordant deeds.

It might have been thought that after a night of ceaseless prayer under the open sky, followed at early dawn by the choice of Twelve Apostles, and by a long address to them and to a vast promiscuous multitude, our Lord would have retired to the repose which such incessant activity required. Such, however, was very far from being the case, and the next few days, if we rightly grasp the sequence of events, were days of continuous and unwearying toil.

When the Sermon was over, the immense throng dispersed in various directions, and those whose homes lay in the plain of Genesareth would doubtless follow Jesus through the village of Hattin and across the narrow plateau, and then, after descending the ravine, would leave Magdala on the right, and pass through Bethsaida to Capernaum.

As He descended the mountain, and was just entering one of the little towns, probably a short distance in advance of the multitude, who from natural respect would be likely to leave Him undisturbed after His labours, a pitiable spectacle met His eyes. Suddenly, with agonies of entreaty, falling first on his knees, then, in the anguish of his heart and the intensity of his supplication, prostrating himself upon his face, there appeared before Him, with bare head, and rent garments, and covered lip, a leper—"full of leprosy"—smitten with the worst and foulest form of that loathsome and terrible disease. It must, indeed, have required on the part of the poor wretch a stupendous faith to believe that the young Prophet of Nazareth was One who could heal a disease of which the worst misery was the belief that, when once thoroughly seated in the blood, it was ineradicable and progressive. And yet the concentrated hope of a life broke out in the man's impassioned prayer, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." Prompt as an echo came the answer to his faith, "I will : be thou clean." All Christ's miracles are revelations also. Sometimes, when the circumstances of the case required it, He delayed His answer to a sufferer's prayer. But we are never told that there was a moment's pause when a *leper* cried to Him. Leprosy was an acknowledged type of sin, and Christ would teach us that the heartfelt prayer of the sinner to be purged and cleansed is always met by instantaneous acceptance. When David, the type of all true penitents, cried with intense contrition, "I have sinned against the Lord," Nathan could instantly convey to him God's gracious message, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin ; thou shalt not die."

Instantly stretching forth His hand, our Lord touched the leper, and he was cleansed.

It was a glorious violation of the *letter* of the Law, which attached ceremonial pollution to a leper's touch; but it was at the same time a glorious illustration of the *spirit* of the Law, which was that mercy is better than sacrifice. The hand of Jesus was not polluted by touching the leper's body, but the leper's whole body was cleansed by the touch of that holy hand. It was even thus that He touched our sinful human nature, and yet remained without spot of sin.

It was in the depth and spontaneity of His human emotion that our Lord had touched the leper into health. But it was His present desire to fulfil the Mosaic Law by perfect obedience; and both in proof of the miracle, and out of consideration to the sufferer, and in conformity with the Levitical ordinance, He bade the leper go and show himself to the priest, make the customary offerings, and obtain the legal certificate that he was clean. He accompanied the direction with a strict and even stern injunction to say not one word of it to any one. It appears from this that the suddenness with which the miracle had been accomplished had kept it secret from all, except perhaps a few of our Lord's immediate followers, although it had been wrought in open day, and in the immediate neighbourhood of a city, and at no great distance from the following multitudes. But why did our Lord on this, and many other occasions, enjoin on the recipient of the miracles a secrecy which they so rarely observed? The full reason perhaps we shall never know, but that it had reference to circumstances of time and place, and the mental condition of those in whose favour the deeds were wrought, is clear from the fact that on one occasion at least, where the conditions were different, He even enjoined a publication of the mercy vouchsafed. Was it, as St. Chrysostom conjectures, to repress a spirit of boastfulness, and teach men not to talk away the deep inward sense of God's great gifts? or was it to avoid an over-excitement and tumult in the already astonished multitudes of Galilee? or was it that He might be regarded by them in His true light—not as a mighty Wonder-worker, not as a universal Hakîm, but as a Saviour by Revelation and by Hope?

Whatever may have been the general reasons, it appears that in this case there must have been some reason of special importance. St. Mark, reflecting for us the intense and vivid impressions of St. Peter, shows us, in his terse but most graphic narrative, that the man's dismissal was accompanied on our Saviour's part with some overpowering

emotion. Not only is the word, "He straitly charged him" (Mark i. 43), a word implying an extreme earnestness and even vehemence of look and gesture, but the word for "forthwith sent him away" is literally He "pushed" or "drove him forth." What was the cause for this severely inculcated order, for this instantaneous dismissal? Perhaps it was the fact that by touching the leper—though the touch was healing—He would, in the eyes of an unreasoning and unspiritual orthodoxy, be regarded as ceremonially unclean. And that this actually did occur may be assumed from the expressly mentioned fact that, in consequence of the manner in which this incident was blazoned abroad by the cleansed sufferer, "He could not openly enter into a city, but was without in desert places." St. Luke mentions a similar circumstance, though without giving any special reason for it, and adds that Jesus spent the time in prayer. If, however, the dissemination of the leper's story involved the necessity for a short period of seclusion, it is clear that the multitude paid but little regard to this Levitical uncleanness, for even in the lonely spot to which Jesus had retired they thronged to Him from every quarter.

Whether the healing of the centurion's servant took place before or after this retirement is uncertain; but from the fact that both St. Matthew and St. Luke place it in close connection with the Sermon on the Mount, we may suppose that the thronging of the multitudes to seek Him, even in desert places, may have shown Him that it would not be possible for Him to satisfy the scruples of the Legalists by this temporary retirement from human intercourse.

Our Lord had barely reached the town of Capernaum, where He had fixed His temporary home, when He was met by a deputation of Jewish elders—probably the officials of the chief synagogue—to intercede with Him on behalf of a centurion, whose faithful and beloved slave lay in the agony and peril of a paralytic seizure. It might have seemed strange that Jewish elders should take this amount of interest in one who, whether a Roman or not, was certainly a heathen, and may not even have been a "proselyte of the gate." They explained, however, that not only did he love their nation—a thing most rare in a Gentile, for, generally speaking, the Jews were regarded with singular detestation—but had even, at his own expense, built them a synagogue, which, although there must have been several in Capernaum, was sufficiently beautiful and conspicuous to be called "*the* synagogue." The mere fact of their appealing to Jesus shows that this event belongs to an early period of His ministry, when

myriads looked to Him with astonishment and hope, and before the deadly exasperation of after days had begun. Christ immediately granted their request. "I will go," He said, "and heal him." But on the way they met other messengers from the humble and devout centurion, entreating Him not to enter the unworthy roof of a Gentile, but to heal the suffering slave (as He had healed the son of a courtier) by a mere word of power. As the centurion, though in a subordinate office, yet had ministers ever ready to do his bidding, so could not Christ bid viewless messengers to perform His will, without undergoing this personal labour? The Lord was struck by so remarkable a faith, greater than any which He had met with even in Israel. He had found in the oleaster what He had not found in the olive; and He drew from this circumstance the lesson, which fell with such a chilling and unwelcome sound on Jewish ears, that when many of the natural children of the kingdom should be cast into outer darkness, many should come from the East and the West, and sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the centurion's messengers found on their return that the healing word had been effectual and that the cherished slave had been restored to health.

It is not strange that, after days as marvellous as these, it was impossible for Jesus to find due repose. From early dawn on the mountain-top to late evening in whatever house He had selected for His nightly rest, the multitudes came crowding about Him, not respecting His privacy, not allowing for His weariness, eager to see Him, eager to share His miracles, eager to listen to His words. There was no time even to eat bread. Such a life is not only to the last degree trying and fatiguing, but to a refined and high-strung nature, rejoicing in thoughtful solitude, finding its purest and most perfect happiness in lonely prayer, this incessant publicity, this apparently illimitable toil becomes simply maddening, unless the spirit be sustained by boundless sympathy and love. But the heart of the Saviour *was* so sustained. It is probably to this period that the remarkable anecdote belongs which is preserved for us by St. Mark alone. The kinsmen and immediate family of Christ, hearing of all that He was doing, came from their home—perhaps at Cana, perhaps at Capernaum—to get possession of His person, to put Him under constraint. Their informants had mistaken the exaltation visible in all His words and actions—the intense glow of compassion—the burning flame of love; they looked upon it as over-excitement, exaggerated sensibility, the very delirium of beneficence and zeal. To the world there has ever been a tendency

to confuse the fervour of enthusiasm with the eccentricity of a disordered genius. "Paul, thou art mad," was the comment which the Apostle's passion of exalted eloquence produced on the common-place and worldly intellect of the Roman Procurator. "He hath a devil," was the inference suggested to many dull and worldly hearers after some of the tenderest and divinest sayings of our Lord. "Brother Martin has a fine genius," was the sneering allusion of Pope Leo X. to Luther. "What crackbrained fanatics," observed the fine gentlemen of the eighteenth century when they spoke of Wesley and Whitefield. Similar, though not so coarse, was the thought which filled the mind of Christ's wondering relatives, when they heard of this sudden and amazing activity, after the calm seclusion of thirty unknown and unnoticed years. As yet they were out of sympathy with Him; they knew Him not, did not fully believe in Him; they said, "He is beside Himself." It was needful that they should be henceforth taught by several decisive proofs that He was not of them; that this was no longer the carpenter, the brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon, but the Son of God, the Saviour of the world.

Stop and take lesson test.

CHAPTER XX.

JESUS AT NAIN.

IF the common reading in the text of St. Luke (vii. 11) be right, it was on the very day after these events that our Lord took His way from Capernaum to Nain. Possibly—for, in the dim uncertainties of the chronological sequence, much scope must be left to pure conjecture—the incident of His having touched the leper may have tended to hasten His temporary departure from Capernaum by the comments which the act involved.

Nain—now a squalid and miserable village—is about twenty-five miles from Capernaum, and lies on the north-west slope of Jebel ed-Duhy, or Little Hermon. The name (which it still retains) means "fair," and its situation near Endor—nestling picturesquely on the hill-slopes of the graceful mountain, and full in view of Tabor and the heights of Zebulon—justifies the flattering title. Starting, as Orientals always do, early in the cool morning hours, Jesus, in all probability, sailed to the southern end of the lake, and then passed down the Jordan