

LESSON TWELVE

CHAPTER XXII.

JESUS AS HE LIVED IN GALILEE.

IT is to this period of our Lord's earlier ministry that those mission journeys belong—those circuits through the towns and villages of Galilee, teaching, and preaching, and performing works of mercy—which are so frequently alluded to in the first three Gospels, and which are specially mentioned at this point of the narrative by the Evangelist St. Luke. "He walked in Galilee." It was the brightest, hopefullest, most active episode in His life. Let us, in imagination, stand aside and see Him pass, and so, with all humility and reverence, set before us as vividly as we can what manner of man He was.

Let us then suppose ourselves to mingle with any one section of those many multitudes which at this period awaited Him at every point of His career, and let us gaze on Him as they did when He was a man on earth.

We are on that little plain that runs between the hills of Zebulon and Naphtali, somewhere between the villages of Kefr Kenna and the so-called Kana el-Jalil. A sea of corn, fast yellowing to the harvest, is around us, and the bright, innumerable flowers that broider the wayside are richer and larger than those of home. The path on which we stand leads in one direction to Accho and the coast, in the other over the summit of Hattin to the Sea of Galilee. The land is lovely with all the loveliness of a spring day in Palestine, but the hearts of the eager, excited crowd, in the midst of which we stand, are too much occupied by one absorbing thought to notice its beauty; for some of them are blind, and sick, and lame, and they know not whether to-day a finger of mercy, a word of healing—nay, even the touch of the garment of this great Unknown Prophet as He passes by—may not alter and gladden the whole complexion of their future lives. And farther back, at a little distance from the crowd, standing among the wheat, with covered lips, and warning off all who approached them with the cry *Tamé, Tamé*—"Unclean! unclean!"—clad in mean and scanty garments, are some fearful and mutilated figures whom, with a shudder, we recognise as lepers.

The comments of the crowd show that many different motives have brought them together. Some are there from interest, some from curiosity, some from the vulgar contagion of enthusiasm which they

cannot themselves explain. Marvellous tales of Him.—of His mercy, of His power, of His gracious words, of His mighty deeds—are passing from lip to lip, mingled, doubtless, with suspicions and calumnies. One or two Scribes and Pharisees who are present, holding themselves a little apart from the crowd, whisper to each other their perplexities, their indignation, their alarm.

Suddenly, over the rising ground, at no great distance, is seen the cloud of dust which marks an approaching company; and a young boy of Magdala or Bethsaida, heedless of the scornful reproaches of the Scribes, points in that direction, and runs excitedly forward with the shout of *Malka Meshîchah! Malka Meshîchah!*—"The King Messiah! the King Messiah!"—which even on youthful lips must have quickened the heart-beats of a simple Galilæan throug.

And now the throng approaches. It is a motley multitude of young and old, composed mainly of peasants, but with others of higher rank interspersed in their loose array—here a frowning Pharisee, there a gaily-clad Herodian whispering to some Greek merchant or Roman soldier his scoffing comments on the enthusiasm of the crowd. But these are the few, and almost every eye of that large throng is constantly directed towards One who stands in the centre of the separate group which the crowd surrounds.

In the front of this group walk some of the newly-chosen Apostles: behind are others, among whom there is one whose restless glance and saturnine countenance accord but little with that look of openness and innocence which stamps his comrades as honest men. Some of those who are looking on whisper that he is a certain Judas of Kerioth, almost the only follower of Jesus who is not a Galilæan. A little further in the rear, behind the remainder of the Apostles, are four or five women, some on foot, some on mules, among whom, though they are partly veiled, there are some who recognise the once wealthy and dissolute but now repentant Mary of Magdala; and Salome, the wife of the fisherman Zabdîa; and one of still higher wealth and position, Joanna, the wife of Chuza, steward of Herod Antipas.

But He whom all eyes seek is in the very centre of the throng; and though at His right is Peter of Bethsaida, and at His left the more youthful figure of John, yet every glance is absorbed by Him alone.

He is not clothed in soft raiment of byssus or purple, like Herod's courtiers, or the luxurious friends of the Procurator Pilate: He does not wear the white ephod of the Levite, or the sweeping robes of the

Scribe. There are not, on His arm and forehead, the *tephillîn* or phylacteries, which the Pharisees make so broad; and though there is at each corner of His dress the fringe and blue ribbon which the Law enjoins, it is not worn of the ostentatious size affected by those who wished to parade the scrupulousness of their obedience. He is in the ordinary dress of His time and country. He is not bareheaded—as painters usually represent Him—for to move about bareheaded in the Syrian sunlight is impossible, but a white *keffiyeh*, such as is worn to this day, covers his hair, fastened by an *aghal* or fillet round the top of the head, and falling back over the neck and shoulders. A large blue outer robe or *tallîth*, pure and clean, but of the simplest materials, covers His entire person, and only shows occasional glimpses of the *ketôneth*, a seamless woollen tunic of the ordinary striped texture, so common in the East, which is confined by a girdle round the waist, and which clothes Him from the neck almost down to the sandalled feet. But the simple garments do not conceal the King; and though in His bearing there is nothing of the self-conscious haughtiness of the Rabbi, yet, in its natural nobleness and unsought grace, it is such as instantly suffices to check every rude tongue and overawe every wicked thought.

* And His aspect? He is a man of middle size, and of about thirty years of age, on whose face the purity and charm of youth are mingled with the thoughtfulness and dignity of manhood. His hair, which legend has compared to the colour of wine, is parted in the middle of the forehead, and flows down over the neck. His features are paler and of a more Hellenic type than the weather-bronzed and olive-tinted faces of the hardy fishermen who are His Apostles; but though those features have evidently been marred by sorrow—though it is manifest that those eyes, whose pure and indescribable glance seems to read the very secrets of the heart, have often glowed through tears—yet no man, whose soul has not been eaten away by sin and selfishness, can look unmoved and unawed on the divine expression of that calm and patient face. Yes, this is He of whom Moses and the Prophets did speak—Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Mary, and the Son of David; and the Son of Man, and the Son of God. Our eyes have seen the King in His beauty. We have beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. And having seen Him we can well understand how, while He spake, a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice and said, “Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps that Thou hast sucked!” “Yea, rather

*Again, we cannot allow the love and want of a heart for the appearance of the Saviour to be more than what the Scriptures portray Him- unremarkable in appearance. (Isaiah 53:2) Dr. VBK

blessed," He answered, in words full of deep sweet mystery, "are they that hear the word of God and keep it."

One or two facts and features of His life on earth may here be fitly introduced.

1. First, then, it was a life of *poverty*. Some of the old Messianic prophecies, which the Jews in general so little understood, had already indicated His voluntary submission to a humble lot. "Though He were rich, yet for our sakes He became poor." He was born in the cavern-stable, cradled in the manger. His mother offered for her purification the doves which were the offering of the poor. The flight into Egypt was doubtless accompanied with many a hardship, and when He returned it was to live as a carpenter, and the son of a carpenter, in the despised provincial village. It was as a poor wandering teacher, possessing nothing, that He travelled through the land. With the words, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," He began His Sermon on the Mount; and he made it the chief sign of the opening dispensation that to the poor the Gospel was being preached. It was a fit comment on this His poverty, that after but three short years of His public ministry He was sold by one of His own Apostles for the thirty shekels which were the price of the meanest slave.

2. And the *simplicity* of His life corresponded to its external poverty. Never in His life did He possess a roof which he could call His own. The humble abode at Nazareth was but shared with numerous brothers and sisters. Even the house in Capernaum which He so often visited was not His own possession; it was lent Him by one of His disciples. There never belonged to Him one foot's-breadth of the earth which He came to save. We never hear that any of the beggars, who in every Eastern country are so numerous and so importunate, asked Him for alms. Had they done so He might have answered with Peter, "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have that give I thee." His food was of the plainest. He was ready, indeed, when invited, to join in the innocent social happiness of Simon's, or Levi's, or Martha's, or the bridegroom of Cana's feast; but His ordinary food was as simple as that of the humblest peasant—bread of the coarsest quality, fish caught in the lake and broiled in embers on the shore, and sometimes a piece of honeycomb, probably of the wild honey which was then found abundantly in Palestine. Small indeed was the gossamer thread of semblance on which His enemies could support the weight of their outrageous calumny, "Behold a glutton and a wine-bibber." And yet Jesus, though poor,

was not a pauper. He did not for one moment countenance (as Sakya Mouni did) the life of beggary, or say one word which could be perverted into a recommendation of that degrading squalor which some religious teachers have represented as the perfection of piety. He never received an alms from any public fund, but He and the little company of His followers lived on their lawful possessions or the produce of their own industry, and even had a bag or cash-box of their own, both for their own use and for their charities to others. From this they provided the simple necessaries of the Paschal feast, and distributed what they could to the poor; only Christ does not Himself seem to have given money to the poor, because He gave them richer and nobler gifts than could be compared with gold or silver. Yet even the little money which they wanted was not always forthcoming, and when the collectors of the trivial sum demanded from the very poorest for the service of the Temple came to Peter for the didrachma which was alone required, neither he nor his Master had the sum at hand. The Son of Man had no earthly possession besides the clothes He wore.

3. And it was, as we have seen, a life of *toil*—of toil from boyhood upwards, in the shop of the carpenter, to aid in maintaining Himself and His family by honest and noble labour; of toil afterwards to save the world. We have seen that “He went about doing good,” and that this, which is the epitome of His public life, constitutes also its sublimest originality. The insight which we have gained already, and shall gain still further, into the manner in which His days were spent, shows us how overwhelming an amount of ever-active benevolence was crowded into the brief compass of the hours of light. At any moment He was at the service of any call, whether it came from an inquirer who longed to be taught, or from a sufferer who had faith to be healed. Teaching, preaching, travelling, doing works of mercy, bearing patiently with the fretful impatience of the stiffnecked and the ignorant, enduring without a murmur the incessant and selfish pressure of the multitude—work like this so absorbed His time and energy that we are told, more than once, that so many were coming and going as to leave no leisure even to eat. For Himself He seemed to claim no rest except the quiet hours of night and silence, when He retired so often to pray to His heavenly Father, amid the mountain solitudes which He loved so well.

4. And it was a life of *health*. Among its many sorrows and trials, sickness alone was absent. We hear of His healing multitudes of the

sick—we never hear that He was sick Himself. It is true that “the golden Passional of the Book of Isaiah” says of Him: “Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed;” but the best explanation of that passage has been already supplied from St. Matthew, that He suffered with those whom He saw suffer. He was touched with a feeling of our infirmities; His divine sympathy made those sufferings His own. Certain it is that the story of His life and death show exceptional powers of physical endurance. No one who was not endowed with perfect health could have stood out against the incessant and wearing demands of such daily life as the Gospels describe. Above all, He seems to have possessed that blessing of ready sleep which is the best natural antidote to fatigue, and the best influence to calm the over-wearied mind, and “knit up the ravelled sleeve of care.” Even on the wave-lashed deck of the little fishing-boat as it was tossed on the stormy sea, He could sleep, with no better bed or pillow than the hard leather-covered boss that served as the steersman’s cushion. And often in those nights spent under the starry sky, in the wilderness, and on the mountain-top, He could have had no softer resting-place than the grassy turf, no other covering than the *tallith*, or perhaps some striped *abba*, such as often forms the sole bed of the Arab at the present day. And we shall see in the last sad scene how the same strength of constitution and endurance, even after all that He had undergone, enabled Him to hold out—after a sleepless night and a most exhausting day—under fifteen hours of trial and torture and the long-protracted agony of a bitter death.

5. And, once more, it must have been a life of *sorrow*; for He is rightly called the “Man of Sorrows.” And yet we think that there is a possibility of error here. The terms “sorrow” and “joy” are very relative, and we may be sure that if there was crushing sorrow—the sorrow of sympathy with those who suffered, the sorrow of rejection by those whom He loved, the sorrow of being hated by those whom He came to save, the sorrows of One on whom were laid the iniquities of the world, the sorrows of the last long agony upon the cross, when it seemed as if even His Father had forsaken Him—yet assuredly also there was an abounding joy. For the worst of all sorrows, the most maddening of all miseries—which is the consciousness of alienation from God, the sense of shame and guilt and inward

degradation, the frenzy of self-loathing by which, as by a scourge of fire, the abandoned soul is driven to an incurable despair—*that* was absent, not only in its extreme forms, but even in the faintest of its most transient assoilments; and, on the other hand, the joy of an unsullied conscience, the joy of a stainless life, the joy of a soul absolutely and infinitely removed from every shadow of baseness and every fleck of guilt, the joy of an existence wholly devoted to the service of God and the love of man—*this* was ever present to Him in its fullest influences. It is hardly what the world calls joy; it was not the merriment of the frivolous, like the transient flickering of April sunshine upon the shallow stream; it was not the laughter of fools, which is as the crackling of thorns under a pot—of *this* kind of joy, life has but little for a man who feels all that life truly means. But, as is said by the great Latin Father, “*Crede mihi res severa est verum gaudium,*” and of that deep well-spring of life which lies in the heart of things noble, and pure, and permanent, and true, even the Man of Sorrows could drink large draughts. And though we are never told that He laughed, while we are told that once He wept, and that once He sighed, and that more than once He was troubled; yet He who threw no shadow of discountenance on social meetings and innocent festivity, could not have been without that inward happiness which sometimes shone even upon His countenance, and which we often trace in the tender and almost playful irony of His words. “In that hour,” we are told of one occasion in His life, “Jesus rejoiced”—or, as it should rather be, *exulted*—“in spirit.” Can we believe that this rejoicing took place once alone?

CHAPTER XXIII

A GREAT DAY IN THE LIFE OF JESUS.

THE sequence of events in the narrative on which we are now about to enter is nearly the same in the first three Gospels. Without neglecting any clear indications given by the other Evangelists, we shall, in this part of the life of Jesus, mainly follow the chronological guidance of St. Luke. The order of St. Matthew and St. Mark appears to be

much guided by subjective considerations. Events in their Gospels are sometimes grouped together by their moral or religious bearings. St. Luke, as is evident, pays more attention to the natural sequence, although he also occasionally allows a unity of subjects to supersede in his arrangement the order of time.

Immediately after the missionary journey which we have described, St. Luke adds that when Jesus saw himself surrounded by a great multitude out of every city, He spake by a parable. We learn from the two other Evangelists the interesting circumstance that this was the first occasion on which He taught in parables, and that they were spoken to the multitude who lined the shore while our Lord sat in His favourite pulpit, the boat which was kept for Him on the Lake.

We might infer from St. Mark that this teaching was delivered on the afternoon of the day on which he healed the paralytic, but the inference is too precarious to be relied on. All that we can see is that this new form of teaching was felt to be necessary in consequence of the state of mind which had been produced in some, at least, of the hearers among the multitude. The one emphatic word "hearken!" with which He prefaced his address, prepared them for something unusual and memorable in what He was going to say.

The great mass of hearers must now have been aware of the general features in the new Gospel which Jesus preached. Some self-examination, some earnest careful thought of their own was now requisite, if they were indeed sincere in their desire to profit by His words. "Take heed how ye hear" was the great lesson which He would now impress. He would warn them against the otiose attention of curiosity or mere intellectual interest, and would fix upon their minds a sense of their moral responsibility for the effects produced by what they heard. He would teach them in such a way that the extent of each hearer's profit should depend largely upon his own faithfulness.

And, therefore, to show them that the only true fruit of good teaching is holiness of life, and that there were many dangers which might prevent its growth, He told them His first parable, the Parable of the Sower. The imagery of it was derived, as usual, from the objects immediately before His eyes—the sown fields of Gennesareth; the springing corn in them; the hard-trodden paths which ran through them, on which no corn could grow; the innumerable birds which fluttered over them ready to feed upon the grain; the weak and withering struggle for life on the stony places; the tangling growth of luxuriant thistles in neglected corners; the deep loam of the

general soil, on which already the golden ears stood thick and strong, giving promise of a sixty and hundredfold return as they rippled under the balmy wind. To us, who from infancy have read the parable side by side with Christ's own interpretation of it, the meaning is singularly clear and plain, and we see in it the liveliest images of the danger incurred by the cold and indifferent, by the impulsive and shallow, by the worldly and ambitious, by the pre-occupied and the luxurious, as they listen to the Word of God. But it was not so easy to those who heard it. Even the disciples failed to catch its full significance, although they reserved their request for an explanation till they and their Master should be alone. It is clear that parables like this, so luminous to us, but so difficult to these simple listeners, suggested thoughts which to them were wholly unfamiliar.

It seems clear that our Lord did not on this occasion deliver all of those seven parables—the parable of the tares of the field, of the grain of mustard-seed, of the leaven, of the hid treasure, of the pearl, and of the net—which, from a certain resemblance in their subjects and consecutiveness in their teaching, are here grouped together by St. Matthew. Seven parables delivered at once, and delivered without interpretation, to a promiscuous multitude which He was for the first time addressing in this form of teaching, would have only tended to bewilder and to distract. Indeed, the expression of St. Mark—“as they were able to hear it”—seems distinctly to imply a gradual and non-continuous course of teaching, which would have lost its value if it had given to the listeners more than they were able to remember and to understand. We may rather conclude, from a comparison of St. Mark and St. Luke, that the teaching of this particular afternoon contained no other parables, except, perhaps, the simple and closely analogous ones of the grain of mustard-seed, and of the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear, which might serve to encourage into patience those who were expecting too rapid a revelation of the kingdom of God in their own lives and in the world; and perhaps, with these, the similitude of the candle to warn them not to stifle the light they had received, but to remember that Great Light which should one day reveal all things, and so to let their light shine as to illuminate both their own paths in life, and to shed radiance on the souls of all around.

A method of instruction so rare, so stimulating, so full of interest—a method which, in its unapproachable beauty and finish, stands

unrivalled in the annals of human speech—would doubtless tend to increase beyond measure the crowds that thronged to listen. And through the sultry afternoon He continued to teach them, barely succeeding in dismissing them when the evening was come. A sense of complete weariness and deep unspeakable longing for repose, and solitude, and sleep, seems then to have come over our Lord's spirit. Possibly the desire for rest and quiet may have been accelerated by one more ill-judged endeavour of His mother and His brethren to assert a claim upon His actions. They had not indeed been able "to come at Him for the press," but their attempt to do so may have been one more reason for a desire to get away, and be free for a time from this incessant publicity, from these irreverent interferences. At any rate, one little touch, preserved for us as usual by the graphic pen of the Evangelist St. Mark, shows that there was a certain eagerness and urgency in His departure, as though in His weariness, and in that oppression of mind which results from the wearing contact with numbers, He could not return to Capernaum, but suddenly determined on a change of plan. After dismissing the crowd, the disciples took Him, "*as He was,*" in the boat, no time being left, in the urgency of His spirit, for preparation of any kind. He yearned for the quiet and deserted loneliness of the eastern shore. The western shore also is lonely now, and the traveller will meet no human being there but a few careworn Fellahîn, or a Jew from Tiberias, or some Arab fishermen, or an armed and mounted Sheykh of some tribe of Bedawîn. But the eastern shore is loneliness itself; not a tree, not a village, not a human being, not a single habitation is visible; nothing but the low range of hills, scarred with rocky fissures, and sweeping down to a narrow and barren strip which forms the margin of the Lake. In our Lord's time the contrast of this thinly-inhabited region with the busy and populous towns that lay close together on the Plain of Gennesareth must have been very striking; and though the scattered population of Peræa was partly Gentile, we shall find Him not unfrequently seeking to recover the tone and calm of His burdened soul by putting those six miles of water between Himself and the crowds He taught.

But before the boat could be pushed off, another remarkable interruption occurred. Three of His listeners in succession—struck perhaps by the depth and power of this His new method of teaching, dazzled, too, by this zenith of His popularity—desired or fancied that they desired to attach themselves to Him as permanent disciples. The first was a Scribe, who, thinking no doubt that his official rank would

make him a most acceptable disciple, exclaimed with confident asseveration, "Lord, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." But in spite of the man's high position, in spite of His glowing promises, He who cared less than nothing for lip-service, and who preferred "the modesty of fearful duty" to the "rattling tongue of audacious eloquence," coldly checked His would-be follower. He who had called the hated publican gave no encouragement to the reputable scribe. He did not reject the proffered service, but neither did He accept it. Perhaps "in the man's flaring enthusiasm, he saw the smoke of egotistical self-deceit." He pointed out that his service was not one of wealth or honour, or delight; not one in which any could hope for earthly gain. "The foxes," He said, "have holes, and the birds of the air have resting-places, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head."

The second was already a partial disciple, but wished to become an entire follower, with the reservation that he might first be permitted to bury his father. "Follow Me!" was the thrilling answer, "and let the dead bury their dead;" that is, leave the world and the things of the world to mind themselves. He who would follow Christ must in comparison hate even father and mother. He must leave the spiritually dead to attend to their physically dead.

The answer to the third aspirant was not dissimilar. He too pleaded for delay—wished not to join Christ immediately in His voyage, but first of all to bid farewell to his friends at home. "No man," was the reply—which has become proverbial for all time—"No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of heaven." To use the fine image of St. Augustine, "the East was calling him, he must turn his thoughts from the fading West." It was in this spirit that the loving souls of St. Thomas of Aquino, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Francis Xavier, and so many more of the great saints in the Church's history consoled and fortified themselves, when forced to resign every family affection, and for Christ's sake to abandon every earthly tie.

So then, at last, these fresh delays were over, and the little vessel could spread her sails for the voyage. Yet even now Jesus was, as it were, pursued by followers, for, as St. Mark again tells us, "other little ships were with Him." But they, in all probability—since we are not told of their reaching the other shore—were soon scattered or frightened back by the signs of a gathering storm. At any rate, in His own boat, and among His own trusted disciples Jesus could rest

undisturbed, and long before they were far from shore, had laid His weary head on the leather cushion of the steersman, and was sleeping the deep sleep of the worn and weary—the calm sleep of those who are at peace with God.

Even that sleep, so sorely needed, was destined to speedy and violent disturbance. One of the fierce storms peculiar to that deep hollow in the earth's surface, swept down with sudden fury on the little inland sea. With scarcely a moment's notice the air was filled with whirlwind and the sea buffeted into tempest. The danger was extreme. The boat was again and again buried amid the foam of the breakers which burst over it; yet though they must have covered Him with their dashing spray as He lay on the open deck at the stern, He was calmly sleeping on—undisturbed, so deep was His fatigue, by the tempestuous darkness—and as yet no one ventured to awake Him. But now the billows were actually breaking into the boat itself, which was beginning to be filled and to sink. Then, with sudden and vehement cries of excitement and terror, the disciples woke Him. "Lord! Master! Master! save! we perish!" Such were the wild sounds which, mingled with the howling of the winds and the dash of the mastering waves, broke confusedly upon His half-awakened ear. It is such crises as these—crises of sudden unexpected terror, met without a moment of preparation, which test a man what spirit he is of—which show not only his nerve, but the grandeur and purity of his whole nature. The hurricane which shook the tried courage and baffled the utmost skill of the hardy fishermen, did not ruffle for one instant the deep inward serenity of the Son of Man. Without one sign of confusion, without one tremor of alarm, Jesus simply raised Himself on His elbow from the dripping stern of the labouring and half-sinking vessel, and, without further movement, stilled the tempest of their souls by the quiet words, "Why so cowardly, O ye of little faith?" And then rising up, standing in all the calm of a natural majesty on the lofty stern, while the hurricane tossed, for a moment only, His fluttering garments and streaming hair, He gazed forth into the darkness, and His voice was heard amid the roaring of the troubled elements, saying, "Peace, be still!" And instantly the wind dropped, and there was a great calm. And as they watched the starlight reflected on the now unrippled water, not the disciples only but even the sailors whispered to one another, "What manner of man is this?"

This is a stupendous miracle, one of those which test whether we indeed believe in the credibility of the miraculous or not; one of

those miracles of power which cannot, like many of the miracles of healing, be explained away by existing laws. It is not my object in this book to convince the unbeliever, or hold controversy with the doubter. Something of what I had to say on this subject I have done my little best to say in my Lectures on *The Witness of History to Christ*; and yet, perhaps, a few words may here be pardoned. Some, and they neither irreverent nor unfaithful men, have asked whether the reality may not have been somewhat different? Whether we may not understand this narrative in a sense like that in which we *should* understand it if we found it in the reasonably-attested legend of some mediæval saint—a St. Nicholas or a St. Brandan? Whether we may not suppose that the fact which underlies the narrative was in reality not a miraculous exercise of power over those elements which are most beyond the reach of man, but that Christ's calm communicated itself by immediate and subtle influence to His terrified companions, and that the hurricane, from natural causes, sank as rapidly as it had arisen? I reply, that if this were the only miracle in the life of Christ; if the Gospels were indeed the loose, exaggerated, inaccurate, credulous narratives which such an interpretation would suppose; if there were something antecedently incredible in the supernatural; if there were in the spiritual world no transcendent facts which lie far beyond the comprehension of those who would bid us see nothing in the universe but the action of material laws; if there were no providences of God during these nineteen centuries to attest the work and the divinity of Christ—then indeed there would be no difficulty in such an interpretation. But if we believe that God rules; if we believe that Christ rose; if we have reason to hold, among the deepest convictions of our being, the certainty that God has not delegated His sovereignty or His providence to the final, unintelligent, pitiless, inevitable working of material forces; if we see on every page of the Evangelists the quiet simplicity of truthful and faithful witnesses; if we see in every year of succeeding history, and in every experience of individual life, a confirmation of the testimony which they delivered—then we shall neither clutch at rationalistic interpretations, nor be much troubled if others adopt them. He who believes, he who *knows*, the efficacy of prayer, in what other men may regard as the inevitable certainties or blindly-directed accidents of life—he who has felt how the voice of a Saviour, heard across the long generations, can calm wilder storms than ever buffeted into fury the bosom of the inland lake—he who sees in the person of his Redeemer a fact more

stupendous and more majestic than all those observed sequences which men endow with an imaginary omnipotence, and worship under the name of Law—to him, at least, there will be neither difficulty nor hesitation in supposing that Christ, on board that half-wrecked fishing-boat, did utter His mandate, and that the wind and the sea obeyed; that HIS WORD was indeed more potent among the cosmic forces than miles of agitated water or leagues of rushing air.

Not even on the farther shore was Jesus to find peace or rest. On the contrary, no sooner had He reached that part of Peræa which is called by St. Matthew the “country of the Gergesenes,” than He was met by an exhibition of human fury, and madness, and degradation, even more terrible and startling than the rage of the troubled sea. Barely had He landed when, from among the rocky cavern-tombs of the Wady Semakh, there burst into His presence a man troubled with the most exaggerated form of that raging madness which was universally attributed to demoniacal possession. Amid all the boasted civilisation of antiquity, there existed no hospitals, no penitentiaries, no asylums; and unfortunates of this class, being too dangerous and desperate for human intercourse, could only be driven forth from among their fellow-men, and restrained from mischief by measures at once inadequate and cruel. Under such circumstances they could, if irreclaimable, only take refuge in those holes along the rocky hill-sides which abound in Palestine, and which were used by the Jews as tombs. It is clear that the foul and polluted nature of such dwelling-places, with all their associations of ghastliness and terror, would tend to aggravate the nature of the malady; and this man, who had long been afflicted, was beyond even the possibility of control. Attempts had been made to bind him, but in the paroxysms of his mania he had exerted that apparently supernatural strength which is often noticed in such forms of mental excitement, and had always succeeded in rending off his fetters and twisting away or shattering his chains; and now he had been abandoned to the lonely hills and unclean solitudes which, night and day, rang with his yells as he wandered among them, dangerous to himself and to others, raving, and gashing himself with stones.

It was the frightful figure of this naked and homicidal maniac that burst upon our Lord almost as soon as He had landed at early dawn; and perhaps another demoniac, who was not a Gadarene, and who was less grievously afflicted, may have hovered about at no great distance, although, beyond this allusion to his presence, he plays no part in the

narrative. The presence, the look, the voice of Christ, even before He addressed these sufferers, seems always to have calmed and overawed them, and this demoniac of Gergesa was no exception. Instead of falling upon the disciples, he ran to Jesus from a distance, and fell down before Him in an attitude of worship. Mingling his own perturbed individuality with that of the multitude of unclean spirits which he believed to be in possession of his soul, he entreated the Lord, in loud and terrified accents, not to torment him before the time.

It is well known that to recall a maniac's attention to his name, to awake his memory, to touch his sympathies by past association, often produces a lucid interval, and perhaps this may have been the reason why Jesus said to the man, "What is thy name?" But this question only receives the wild answer, "My name is Legion, for we are many." The man had, as it were, lost his own name; it was absorbed in the hideous tyranny of that multitude of demons under whose influence his own personality was destroyed. The presence of Roman armies in Palestine had rendered him familiar with that title of multitude, and as though six thousand evil spirits were in him he answers by the Latin word which had now become so familiar to every Jew. And still agitated by his own perturbed fancies, he entreats, as though the thousands of demons were speaking by his mouth, that they might not be driven into the abyss, but be suffered to take refuge in the swine.

The narrative which follows is to us difficult of comprehension, and one which, however literally accepted, touches upon regions so wholly mysterious and unknown that we have no clue to its real significance, and can gain nothing by speculating upon it. The narrative in St. Luke runs as follows:—

"And there was an herd of many swine feeding upon the mountain; and they besought Him that He would suffer them to enter into them. And He suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine; and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked."

That the demoniac was healed—that in the terrible final paroxysm which usually accompanied the deliverance from this strange and awful malady, a herd of swine was in some way affected with such wild terror as to rush headlong in large numbers over a steep hill-side into the waters of the lake—and that, in the minds of all who were present, including that of the sufferer himself, this precipitate rushing of the swine was connected with the man's release from his demoniac thralldom—thus much is clear. And, indeed, so far, there is no

difficulty whatever. Any one who believes in the Gospels, and believes that the Son of God *did* work on earth deeds which far surpass mere human power, must believe that among the most frequent of His cures were those of the distressing forms of mental and nervous malady which we ascribe to purely natural causes, but which the ancient Jews, like all Orientals, attributed to direct supernatural agency. *

And knowing to how singular an extent the mental impressions of man affect by some unknown electric influence the lower animals—knowing, for instance, that man's cowardice and exultation, and even his superstitious terrors *do* communicate themselves to the dog which accompanies him, or the horse on which he rides—there can be little or no difficulty in understanding that the shrieks and gesticulations of a powerful lunatic might strike uncontrollable terror into a herd of swine. May there not have been something of this kind at work in this singular event?

It is true that the Evangelists (as their language clearly shows) held in all its simplicity the belief that actual devils passed in multitudes out of the man and into the swine. But is it not allowable here to make a distinction between actual facts and that which was the mere conjecture and inference of the spectators from whom the three Evangelists heard the tale? If we are not bound to believe the man's hallucination that six thousand devils were in possession of his soul, are we bound to believe the possibility, suggested by his perturbed intellect, that the unclean spirits should pass from him into the swine? If indeed we could be sure that Jesus directly encouraged or sanctioned in the man's mind the belief that the swine were indeed driven wild by the unclean spirits which passed objectively from the body of the Gergesene into the bodies of these dumb beasts, then we could, without hesitation, believe as a literal truth, however incomprehensible, that so it was.

But this by no means follows indisputably from what we know of the method of the Evangelists. Let all who will, hold fast to the conviction that men and beasts may be quite literally possessed of devils; only let them beware of confusing their own convictions, which are binding on themselves alone, with those absolute and eternal certainties which cannot be rejected without moral blindness by others. Let them remember that a hard and denunciative dogmatism approaches more nearly than anything else to that Pharisaic want of charity which the Lord whom they love and

*This common confusion should be assiduously avoided. The Bible makes a clear distinction between those who have mental problems and those who are possessed by malevolent spirits. Dr. VBK

worship visited with His most scathing anger and rebuke. The literal reality of demoniac possession is a belief for which more may perhaps be said than is admitted by the purely physical science of the present day, but it is not a necessary article of the Christian creed; and if any reader imagines that in this brief narrative to a greater extent than in any other, there are certain *nuances* of expression in which subjective inferences are confused with exact realities, he is holding a view which has the sanction of many wise and thoughtful Churchmen, and has a right to do so without the slightest imputation on the orthodoxy of his belief.

We must hold to the clear teachings of Scripture- demon possession is real. Dr. VBK

That the whole scene was violent and startling appears in the fact that the keepers of the swine "fled and told it in the city and in the country." The people of Gergesa, and the Gadarenes and Gerasenes of all the neighbouring district, flocked out to see the Mighty Stranger who had thus visited their coasts. What livelier or more decisive proof of His power and His beneficence could they have had than the sight which met their eyes? The filthy and frantic demoniac who had been the terror of the country, so that none could pass that way—the wild-eyed dweller in the tombs who had been accustomed to gash himself with cries of rage, and whose untamed fierceness broke away all fetters—was now calm as a child. Some charitable hand had flung an outer robe over his naked figure, and he was sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind.

"And they were afraid"—more afraid of that Holy Presence than of the previous furies of the possessed. The man indeed was saved; but what of that, considering that some of their two thousand unclean beasts had perished! Their precious swine were evidently in danger; the greed and gluttony of every apostate Jew and low-bred Gentile in the place were clearly imperilled by receiving such a one as they saw that Jesus was. With disgraceful and urgent unanimity they entreated and implored Him to leave their coasts. Both heathens and Jews had recognised already the great truth that God sometimes answers bad prayers in His deepest anger. Jesus Himself had taught His disciples not to give that which was holy to the dogs, neither to cast their pearls before swine, "less they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." He had gone across the lake for quiet and rest, desiring, though among lesser multitudes, to extend to these semi-heathens also the blessings of the kingdom of God. But they loved their sins and their swine, and with a perfect energy of deliberate preference for all that was base and mean, rejected such blessings,

and entreated Him to go away. Sadly, but at once, He turned and left them. Gergesa was no place for Him; better the lonely hill-tops to the north of it; better the crowded strand on the other side.

And yet He did not leave them in anger. One deed of mercy had been done there; one sinner had been saved; from one soul the unclean spirits had been cast out. And just as the united multitude of the Gadarenes had entreated for His absence, so the poor saved demoniac entreated henceforth to be with Him. But Jesus would fain leave one more, one last opportunity for those who had rejected Him. On others for whose sake miracles had been performed He had enjoined silence; on this man—since He was now leaving the place—He enjoined publicity. “Go home,” He said, “to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.” And so the demoniac of Gergesa became the first great missionary to the region of Decapolis, bearing in his own person the confirmation of his words; and Jesus, as His little vessel left the inhospitable shore, might still hope that the day might not be far distant—might come, at any rate, before over that ill-fated district burst the storm of sword and fire—when

“E’en the witless Gadarene,
Preferring Christ to swine, would feel
That life is sweetest when ’tis clean.”

Return to the course main page and take the lesson test.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DAY OF MATTHEW’S FEAST.

THE events just described had happened apparently in the early morning, and it might perhaps be noon when Jesus reached once more the Plain of Gennesareth. People had recognised the sail of His returning vessel, and long before He reached land the multitudes had lined the shore, and were waiting for Him, and received him gladly.

If we may here accept as chronological the order of St. Matthew—to whom, as we shall see hereafter, this must have been a very