

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.”

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### LESSON THIRTEEN

## 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

memorable day—Jesus went first into the town of Capernaum, which was now regarded as “His own city.” He went at once to the house—probably the house of St. Peter—which He ordinarily used when staying at Capernaum. There the crowd gathered in ever denser numbers, filling the house, and even the court-yard which surrounded it, so that there was no access even to the door. But there was one poor sufferer—a man bedridden from a stroke of paralysis—who, with his friends, had absolutely determined that access should be made for *him*; he would be one of those violent men who would take the kingdom of heaven by force. And the four who were carrying him, finding that they could not reach Jesus through the crowd, made their way to the roof, perhaps by the usual outer staircase, and making an aperture in the roof by the removal of a few tiles, let down the paralytic, on his humble couch, exactly in front of the place where Christ was sitting. The man was silent, perhaps awe-struck at his manner of intrusion into the Lord’s presence; but Jesus was pleased at the strength and unhesitating boldness of faith which the act displayed, and bestowing first upon the man a richer blessing than that which he primarily sought, He gently said to Him, as He had said to the woman who was a sinner, “Be of good courage, son; thy sins are forgiven thee.” Our Lord had before observed the unfavourable impression produced on the bystanders by those startling words. He again observed it now in the interchanged glances of the Scribes who were present, and the look of angry disapproval on their countenances. But on this occasion He did not, as before, silently substitute another phrase. On the contrary, he distinctly challenged attention to His words, and miraculously justified them. Reading their thoughts, He reproved them for their fierce unuttered calumnies of which their hearts were full, and put to them a direct question. “Which,” He asked, “is easier? to say to the paralytic, ‘Thy sins are forgiven thee;’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk?’” May not anybody *say* the former without its being possible to tell whether the sins are forgiven or not? but who can say the latter, and give effect to his own words, without a power from above? If I can by a word heal this paralytic, is it not clear that I must be One who has also power on earth to forgive sins? The unanswerable question was received with the silence of an invincible obstinacy; but turning once more to the paralytic, Jesus said to him, “Arise, take up thy bed, and walk.” At once power was restored to the palsied limbs, peace to the stricken soul. The man was healed. He rose, lifted the light couch on which

he had been lying, and while now the crowd opened a passage for him, he went to his house glorifying God; and the multitude, when they broke up to disperse, kept exchanging one with another exclamations of astonishment not unmixed with fear, "We saw strange things to-day!" "We never saw anything like this before!"

From the house—perhaps to allow of more listeners hearing His words—Jesus seems to have adjourned to his favourite shore; and thence, after a brief interval of teaching, He repaired to the house of Matthew, in which the publican, who was now an Apostle, had made a great feast of farewell to all his friends. As he had been a publican himself, it was natural that many of these friends would be "publicans and sinners"—the outcasts of society, objects at once of hatred and contempt. Yet Jesus and His disciples, with no touch of scorn or exclusiveness, sat down with them at the feast: "for there were many, and they were His followers." A charity so liberal caused deep dissatisfaction on two grounds, to two powerful bodies—the Pharisees and the disciples of John. To the former, mainly because this contact with men of careless and evil lives violated all the traditions of their haughty scrupulosity; to the latter, because this ready acceptance of invitations to scenes of feasting seemed to discountenance the necessity for their half-Essenian asceticism. The complaints could hardly have been made at the time, for unless any Pharisees or disciples of John merely looked in from curiosity during the progress of the meal, their own presence there would have involved them in the very blame which they were casting on their Lord. But Jesus probably heard of their murmurs before the feast was over. There was something characteristic in the way in which the criticism was made. The Pharisees, still a little dubious as to Christ's real character and mission, evidently overawed by His greatness, and not yet having ventured upon any open rupture with Him, only vented their ill-humour on the disciples, asking *them* "why their Master ate with publicans and sinners?" The simple-minded Apostles were perhaps unable to explain; but Jesus at once faced the opposition, and told these murmuring respectabilities that He came not to the self-righteous, but to the conscious sinners. He came not to the folded flock, but to the straying sheep. To preach the Gospel to the poor, to extend mercy to the lost, was the very object for which he tabernacled among men. It was His will *not* to thrust His grace on those who from the very first wilfully steeled their hearts against it, but gently to extend it to those who needed and felt their need of it. His teaching was to be "as the small rain upon the tender

herb, and as the showers upon the grass." And then, referring them to one of those palmary passages of the Old Testament (Hos. vi. 6) which even in those days had summed up the very essence of all that was pleasing to God in love and mercy, He borrowed the phrase of their own Rabbis, and bade *them*—these teachers of the people, who claimed to know so much—to “go and learn” what *that* meaneth, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.” Perhaps it had never before occurred to their astonished minds, overlaid as they were by a crust of mere Levitism and tradition, that the love which thinks it no condescension to mingle with sinners in the effort to win their souls, is more pleasing to God than thousands of rams and tens of thousands of rivers of oil.

The answer to the somewhat querulous question asked Him by John’s disciples was less severe in tone. No doubt He pitied that natural dejection of mind which arose from the position of the great teacher to whom alone they had as yet learned to look, and who now lay in the dreary misery of his dungeon at Machærus. He might have answered that fasting was at the best a work of supererogation—useful, indeed, and obligatory, if any man felt that thereby he was assisted in the mortification of anything which was evil in his nature—but worse than useless if it merely ministered to his spiritual pride, and led him to despise others. He might have pointed out to them that although they had instituted a fast twice in the week, this was but a traditional institution, so little sanctioned by the Mosaic law, that in it but *one single day* of fasting was appointed for the entire year. He might, too, have added that the reason why fasting had *not* been made a universal duty is probably that spirit of mercy which recognised how differently it worked upon different temperaments, fortifying some against the attacks of temptations, but only hindering others in the accomplishment of duty. Or, again, He might have referred them to those passages in their own Prophets which pointed out that, in the sight of God, the true fasting is not mere abstinence from food, while all the time the man is “smiting with the fist of wickedness;” but rather to love mercy, and to do justice, and to let the oppressed go free. But instead of all these lessons, which, in their present state, might only have exasperated their prejudices, He answers them only by a gentle *argumentum ad hominem*. Referring to the fine image in which their own beloved and revered teacher had spoken of Him as the bridegroom, He contented Himself with asking them, “Can ye make the children of the bridechamber fast while the bridegroom is with them?” and then, looking calmly down at the

deep abyss which yawned before Him, He uttered a saying which—although at that time none probably understood it—was perhaps the very earliest public intimation that He gave of the violent end which awaited Him—“But the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days.” Further He told them, in words of yet deeper significance, though expressed, as so often, in the homeliest metaphors, that His religion is, as it were, a robe entirely new, not a patch of unteazled cloth upon an old robe, serving only to make worse its original rents; that it is not new wine, put, in all its fresh fermenting, expansive strength, into old and worn wine-skins, and so serving only to burst the wine-skins and be lost, but *new wine in fresh wine-skins*. The new spirit was to be embodied in wholly renovated forms; the new freedom was to be untrammelled by obsolete and meaningless limitations; the spiritual doctrine was to be sundered for ever from mere elaborate and external ceremonials.

St. Luke also has preserved for us the tender and remarkable addition—“No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is excellent.” Perhaps the fact that these words were found to be obscure has caused the variety of readings in the original text. There is nothing less like the ordinary character of man than to make allowance for difference of opinion in matters of religion; yet it is the duty of doing this which the words imply. He had been showing them that His kingdom was something more than a restitution (*ἀποκατάστασις*), it was a re-creation (*παλιγγενεσία*); but He knew how hard it was for men trained in the traditions of the Pharisees, and in admiration for the stern asceticism of the Baptist, to accept truths which were to them both new and strange; and, therefore, even when He is endeavouring to lighten their darkness, He shows that He can look on them “with larger other eyes, to make allowance for them all.”

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### THE DAY OF MATTHEW'S FEAST (*continued*).

THE feast was scarcely over at the house of Matthew, and Jesus was still engaged in the kindly teaching which arose out of the question of John's disciples, when another event occurred which led in succession to three of the greatest miracles of His earthly life.

A ruler of the synagogue—the *rosh hakkenéseth*, or chief elder of the congregation, to whom the Jews looked with great respect—came to Jesus in extreme agitation. It is not improbable that this ruler of the synagogue had been one of the very deputation who had pleaded with Jesus for the centurion-proselyte by whom it had been built. If so, he knew by experience the power of Him to whom he now appealed. Flinging himself at His feet, with broken words—which in the original still sound as though they were interrupted and rendered incoherent by bursts of grief—he tells Him that his little daughter, his only daughter, is dying, is dead ; but still, if He will but come and lay His hand upon her, she shall live. With the tenderness which could not be deaf to a mourner's cry, Jesus rose at once from the table, and went with him, followed not only by His disciples, but also by a dense, expectant multitude, which had been witness of the scene. And, as He went, the people in their eagerness pressed upon Him and thronged Him.

But among this throng—containing doubtless some of the Pharisees and of John's disciples with whom He had been discoursing, as well as some of the publicans and sinners with whom He had been seated at the feast—there was one who had not been attracted by curiosity to witness what would be done for the ruler of the synagogue. It was a woman who for twelve years had suffered from a distressing malady, which unfitted her for all the relationships of life, and which was peculiarly afflicting, because in the popular mind it was regarded as a direct consequence of sinful habits. In vain had she wasted her substance and done fresh injury to her health in the effort to procure relief from many different physicians, and now, as a last desperate resource, she would try what could be gained without money and without price from the Great Physician. Perhaps, in her ignorance, it was because she had no longer any reward to offer ; perhaps because she was ashamed in her feminine modesty to reveal the malady from which she had been suffering ; but from whatever cause, she determined, as it were, to steal from Him, unknown, the blessing for which she longed. And so, with the strength and pertinacity of despair, she struggled in that dense throng until she was near enough to touch Him ; and then, perhaps all the more violently from her extreme nervousness, she grasped the white fringe of His robe. By the law of Moses every Jew was to wear at each corner of his *tallith* a fringe or tassel, bound by a riband of symbolic blue, to remind him that he was holy to God. Two of these fringes usually

hung down at the bottom of the robe; one hung over the shoulder where the robe was folded round the person. It was probably this one that she touched with secret and trembling haste, and then, feeling instantly that she had gained her desire and was healed, she shrank back unnoticed into the throng. Unnoticed by others, but not by Christ. Perceiving that healing power had gone out of Him, recognising the one magnetic touch of timid faith even amid the pressure of the crowd, He stopped and asked, "Who touched My clothes?" There was something almost impatient in the reply of Peter, as though in such a throng he thought it absurd to ask, "Who touched me?" But Jesus, His eyes still wandering over the many faces, told Him that there was a difference between the crowding of curiosity and the touch of faith, and as at last His glance fell on the poor woman, she, perceiving that she had erred in trying to filch the blessing which He would have graciously bestowed, came forward fearing and trembling, and, flinging herself at His feet, told Him all the truth. All her feminine shame and fear were forgotten in her desire to atone for her fault. Doubtless she dreaded His anger, for the law expressly ordained that the touch of one afflicted as she was caused ceremonial uncleanness till the evening. But His touch had cleansed her, not hers polluted Him. So far from being indignant, He said to her, "Daughter"—and at once at the sound of that gracious word sealed her pardon—"go in peace: thy faith hath saved thee; be healed from thy disease."

The incident must have caused a brief delay, and, as we have seen, to the anguish of Jairus every instant was critical. But he was not the only sufferer who had a claim on the Saviour's mercy; and, as he uttered no complaint, it is clear that sorrow had not made him selfish. But at this moment a messenger reached him with the brief message—"Thy daughter is dead;" and then, apparently with a touch of dislike and irony, he added, "Worry not the Rabbi."

The message had not been addressed to Jesus, but He overheard it, and with a compassionate desire to spare the poor father from needless agony, He said to him those memorable words, "Fear not, only believe." They soon arrived at his house, and found it occupied by the hired mourners and flute-players, who, as they beat their breasts with mercenary clamour, insulted the dumbness of sincere sorrow and the patient majesty of death. Probably this simulated wailing would be very repulsive to the soul of Christ; and, first

stopping at the door to forbid any of the multitude to follow Him, He entered the house with three only of the inmost circle of His Apostles—Peter, and James, and John. On entering, His first care was to still the idle noise; but when His kind declaration—“The little maid is not dead, but sleepeth”—was only received with coarse ridicule, He indignantly ejected the paid mourners. When calm was restored He took with Him the father and the mother and His three Apostles, and entered with quiet reverence the chamber hallowed by the silence and awfulness of death. Then, taking the little cold dead hand, He uttered these two thrilling words, “*Talitha cumi*”—“Little maid, arise!” and her spirit returned, and the child arose and walked. An awful amazement seized the parents; but Jesus calmly bade them give the child some food. And if He added His customary warning that they should not speak of what had happened, it was not evidently in the intention that the entire fact should remain unknown—for that would have been impossible, when all the circumstances had been witnessed by so many—but because those who have received from God’s hand unbounded mercy are more likely to reverence that mercy with adoring gratitude if it be kept like a hidden treasure in the inmost heart.

Crowded and overwhelming as had been the incidents of this long night and day, it seems probable from St. Matthew that it was signalised by yet one more astonishing work of power. For as He departed thence two blind men followed Him with the cry—as yet unheard—“Son of David, have mercy on us.” Already Christ had begun to check, as it were, the spontaneity of His miracles. He had performed more than sufficient to attest his power and mission, and it was important that men should pay more heed to His divine eternal teaching than to His temporal healings. Nor would He as yet sanction the premature, and perhaps ill-considered, use of the Messianic title “Son of David”—a title which, had He publicly accepted it, might have thwarted His sacred purposes, by leading to an instantaneous revolt in His favour against the Roman power. Without noticing the men or their cry, He went to the house in Capernaum where He abode; nor was it until they had persistently followed Him into the house that He tested their faith by the question, “Believe ye that I am able to do this?” They said unto Him, “Yea, Lord.” Then touched He their eyes, saying, “According to your faith be it unto you.” And their eyes were opened. Like so many whom He healed, they neglected His stern command not to reveal it.



There are some who have admired their disobedience, and have attributed it to the enthusiasm of gratitude and admiration; but was it not rather the enthusiasm of a blatant wonder, the vulgarity of a chattering boast? How many of these multitudes who had been healed by Him became His true disciples? Did not the holy fire of devotion which a hallowed silence must have kept alive upon the altar of their hearts die away in the mere blaze of empty rumour? Did not He know best? Would not obedience have been better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams? Yes. It is possible to deceive ourselves; it is possible to offer to Christ a *seeming* service which disobeys His inmost precepts—to *grieve* Him, under the guise of honouring Him, by vain repetitions, and empty genuflexions, and bitter intolerance, and irreverent familiarity, and the hollow simulacrum of a dead devotion. Better, far better, to serve Him by doing the things He said than by a seeming zeal!—often false in exact proportion to its obtrusiveness—for the glory of His name. These disobedient babblers, who talked so much of Him, did but offer Him the dishonouring service of a double heart; their violation of His commandment served only to hinder His usefulness, to trouble His spirit, and to precipitate His death.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### A VISIT TO JERUSALEM.

ANY one who has carefully and repeatedly studied the Gospel narratives side by side, in order to form from them as clear a conception as is possible of the life of Christ on earth, can hardly fail to have been struck with two or three general facts respecting the sequence of events in His public ministry. In spite of the difficulty introduced by the varying and non-chronological arrangements of the Synoptists, and by the silence of the fourth Gospel about the main part of the preaching in Galilee, we see distinctly the following circumstances:—

1. That the innocent enthusiasm of joyous welcome with which Jesus and His words and works were at first received in Northern