

LESSON EIGHTEEN

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AMONG THE HEATHEN.

“THEN Jesus went thence, and departed into the regions of Tyre and Sidon.”

Such is the brief notice which prefaces the few and scanty records of a period of His life and work of which, had it been vouchsafed to us, we should have been deeply interested to learn something more. But only a single incident of this visit to heathendom has been recorded. It might have seemed that in that distant region there would be a certainty, not of safety only, but even of repose; but it was not so. We have already seen traces that the fame of His miracles had penetrated even to the old Phœnician cities, and no sooner had He reached their neighbourhood than it became evident that He could not be hid. A woman sought for Him, and followed the little company of wayfarers with passionate entreaties—“Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David: my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.”

We might have imagined that our Lord would answer such a prayer with immediate and tender approbation, and all the more because, in granting her petition, He would symbolically have been representing the extension of His kingdom to the three greatest branches of the Pagan world. For this woman was by birth a Canaanite, and a Syro-Phœnician; by position a Roman subject; by culture and language a Greek; and her appeal for mercy to the Messiah of the Chosen People might well look like the first-fruits of that harvest in which the good seed should spring up hereafter in Tyre and Sidon, and Carthage, and Greece, and Rome. But Jesus—and is not this one of the numberless indications that we are dealing, not with loose and false tradition, but with solid fact?—“Jesus answered her not a word.”

In no other single instance are we told of a similar apparent coldness on the part of Christ; nor are we here informed of the causes which influenced His actions. Two alone suggest themselves: He may have desired to test the feelings of His disciples, who, in the narrow spirit of Judaic exclusiveness, might be unprepared to see Him grant His blessings, not only to a Gentile, but a Canaanite, and descendant of the accursed race. It was true that He had healed the servant of the centurion, but he was perhaps a Roman, certainly a

benefactor to the Jews, and in all probability a proselyte of the gate. But it is more likely that, knowing what would follow, He may have desired to test yet further the woman's faith, both that He might crown it with a more complete and glorious reward, and that she might learn something deeper respecting Him than the mere Jewish title that she may have accidentally picked up. And further than this, since every miracle is also rich in moral significance, He may have wished for all time to encourage us in our prayers and hopes, and teach us to persevere, even when it might seem that His face is dark to us, or that His ear is turned away.

Weary with the importunity of her cries, the disciples begged Him to send her away. But, as if even *their* intercession would be unavailing, He said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the *house of Israel*."

Then she came and fell at His feet, and began to worship Him, saying, "Lord, help me." Could He indeed remain untouched by that sorrow? Could He reject that appeal? and would He leave her to return to the life-long agony of watching the paroxysms of her demoniac child? Calmly and coldly came from those lips that never yet had answered with anything but mercy to a suppliant's prayer—"It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs."

Such an answer might well have struck a chill into her soul; and had He not foreseen that hers was the rare trust which can see mercy and acceptance even in apparent rejection, He would not so have answered her. But not all the snows of her native Lebanon could quench the fire of love which was burning on the altar of her heart, and promptly as an echo came forth the glorious and immortal answer—

"Truth, Lord; then let me share the condition, not of the children but of the dogs, for even the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

She had triumphed, and more than triumphed. Not one moment longer did her Lord prolong the agony of her suspense. "O woman," He exclaimed, "great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." And with his usual beautiful and graphic simplicity St. Mark ends the narrative with the touching words, "And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed."

How long our Lord remained in these regions, and at what spot

He stayed, we do not know. Probably His departure was hastened by the publicity which attended His movements even there, and which—in a region where it had been His object quietly to train His own nearest and most beloved followers, and not either to preach or to work deeds of mercy—would only impede His work. He therefore left that interesting land. On Tyre, with its commercial magnificence, its ancient traditions, its gorgeous and impure idolatries, its connection with the history and prophecies of His native land—on Sarepta, with its memories of Elijah's flight and Elijah's miracles—on Sidon, with its fisheries of the purple limpet, its tombs of once-famous and long-forgotten kings, its minarets rising out of their groves of palm and citron, beside the blue historic sea—on the white wings of the countless vessels, sailing to the Isles of the Gentiles, and to all the sunny and famous regions of Greece and Italy and Spain—He would doubtless look with a feeling of mingled sorrow and interest. But His work did not lie here, and leaving behind Him those Phœnician shrines of Melkarth and Asherah, of Baalim and Ashtaroth, He turned eastward—probably through the deep gorge of the rushing and beautiful Leontes—and so reaching the sources of the Jordan, travelled southward on its further bank into the regions of Decapolis.

Decapolis was the name given to a district east of the Jordan, extending as far north (apparently) as Damascus, and as far south as the river Jabbok, which formed the northern limit of Peræa. It was a confederacy of ten free cities, in a district which, on their return from exile, the Jews had never been able to recover, and which was therefore mainly occupied by Gentiles, who formed a separate section of the Roman province. The reception of Jesus in this semi-pagan district seems to have been favourable. Wherever He went He was unable to abstain from exercising His miraculous powers in favour of the sufferers for whom His aid was sought; and in one of these cities He was entreated to heal a man who was deaf, and could scarcely speak. He might have healed him by a word, but there were evidently circumstances in his case which rendered it desirable to make the cure gradual, and to effect it by visible signs. He took the man aside, put His fingers in his ears, and spat, and touched his tongue; and then St. Mark preserves for us the sigh, and the uplifted glance, as He spoke the one word, "Ephphatha! Be opened!" Here again it is not revealed to us what were the immediate influences which saddened His spirit. He may have sighed in pity for the man; He may have sighed in pity for the race; He may have sighed for all

the sins that degrade and all the sufferings which torture ; but certainly He sighed in a spirit of deep tenderness and compassion, and certainly that sigh ascended like an infinite intercession into the ears of the Lord God of Hosts.

The multitudes of that outlying region, unfamiliar with His miracles, were beyond measure astonished. His injunction of secrecy was as usual disregarded, and all hope of seclusion was at an end. The cure had apparently been wrought in close vicinity to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, and great multitudes followed Jesus to the summit of a hill overlooking the lake, and there bringing their lame, and blind, and maimed, and dumb, they laid them at the feet of the Good Physician, and He healed them all. Filled with intense and joyful amazement, these people of Decapolis could not tear themselves from His presence, and—semi-pagans as they were—they “glorified the God of Israel.”

Three days they had now been with Him, and, as many of them came from a distance, their food was exhausted. Jesus pitied them, and seeing their faith, and unwilling that they should faint by the way, once more spread for His people a table in the wilderness. Some have wondered that, in answer to the expression of His pity, the disciples did not at once anticipate or suggest what He should do. But surely here there is a touch of delicacy and truth. They knew that there was in Him no prodigality of the supernatural, no lavish and needless exercise of miraculous power. Many and many a time had they been with multitudes before, and yet on one occasion only had He fed them ; and moreover, after He had done so, He had most sternly rebuked those who came to Him in expectation of a repeated offer of such gifts, and had uttered a discourse so searching and strange that it had alienated from Him many even of His friends. For them to suggest to Him a repetition of the feeding of the five thousand would be a presumption which their ever-deepening reverence forbade, and forbade more than ever as they recalled how persistently He had refused to work a sign, such as this was, at the bidding of others. But no sooner had He given them the signal of His intention, than with perfect faith they became His ready ministers. They seated the multitude, and distributed to them the miraculous multiplication of the seven loaves and the few small fishes ; and, this time unbidden, they gathered the fragments that remained, and with them filled seven large baskets of rope, after the multitude—four thousand in number, besides women and children—had eaten and were filled,

And then kindly and peacefully, and with no exhibition on the part of the populace of that spurious excitement which had marked the former miracle, the Lord and His Apostles joined in sending away the rejoicing and grateful throng.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE GREAT CONFESSION.

VERY different was the reception which awaited Jesus on the farther shore. The poor heathens of Decapolis had welcomed Him with reverent enthusiasm: the haughty Pharisees of Jerusalem met Him with sneering hate. It may be that, after this period of absence, His human soul yearned for the only resting-place which He could call a home. Entering into His little vessel, He sailed across the lake to Magdala. It is probable that He purposely avoided sailing to Bethsaida or Capernaum, which are a little north of Magdala, and which had become the head-quarters of the hostile Pharisees. But it seems that these personages had kept a look-out for His arrival. As though they had been watching from the tower of Magdala for the sail of His returning vessel, barely had He set foot on shore than they came forth to meet Him. Nor were they alone: this time they were accompanied—ill-omened conjunction!—with their rivals and enemies the Sadducees, that sceptical sect, half-religious, half-political, to which at this time belonged the two High Priests, as well as the members of the reigning family. Every section of the ruling classes—the Pharisees, formidable from their religious weight among the people; the Sadducees, few in number, but powerful from wealth and position; the Herodians, representing the influence of the Romans, and of their nominees the tetrarchs; the Scribes and lawyers, bringing to bear the authority of their orthodoxy and their learning—were all united against Him in one firm phalanx of conspiracy and opposition, and were determined above all things to hinder his preaching, and to alienate from Him, as far as was practicable, the affections of the people among whom most of His mighty works were done.

They had already found by experience that the one most effectual weapon to discredit His mission and undermine His influence was the

demand of a sign—above all, a sign from heaven. If He were indeed the Messiah, why should He not give them bread from heaven as Moses, they said, had done? where were Samuel's thunder and Elijah's flame? why should not the sun be darkened, and the moon turned into blood, and the stars of heaven be shaken? why should not some fiery pillar glide before them to victory, or the burst of some stormy *Bath Kol* ratify His words?

They knew that no such sign would be granted them, and they knew that He had vouchsafed to them the strongest reasons for His thrice-repeated refusal to gratify their presumptuous and unspiritual demand. Had they known or understood the fact of His temptation in the wilderness, they would have known that His earliest answers to the tempter were uttered in this very spirit of utter self-abnegation. Had He granted their request, what purpose would have been furthered? It is not the influence of external forces, but it is the germinal principle of life within, which makes the good seed to grow; nor can the hard heart be converted, or the stubborn unbelief removed, by portents and prodigies, but by inward humility, and the grace of God stealing downward like the dew of heaven, in silence and unseen. What would have ensued had the sign been vouchsafed? By its actual eye-witnesses it would have been attributed to demoniac agency; by those to whom it was reported it would have been explained away; by those of the next generation it would have been denied as an invention, or evaporated into a myth.

But in spite of all this, the Pharisees and Sadducees felt that for the present this refusal to gratify their demand gave them a handle against Jesus, and was an effectual engine for weakening the admiration of the people. Yet not for one moment did He hesitate in rejecting this their temptation. He would not work any epideictic miracle at *their* bidding, any more than at the bidding of the tempter. He at once told them, as He had told them before, that "no sign should be given them but the sign of the prophet Jonah." Pointing to the western sky, now crimson with the deepening hues of sunset, He said, "When it is evening, ye say, 'Fair weather! for the sky is red;' and in the morning, 'Storm to-day, for the sky is red and frowning.' Hypocrites! ye know how to discern the face of the sky: can ye not learn the signs of the times?"

As He spoke He heaved a deep inward sigh. For some time He had been absent from home. He had been sought out with trustful faith in the regions of Tyre and Sidon. He had been welcomed with

ready gratitude in heathen Decapolis ; here, at home, He was met with the flaunt of triumphant opposition, under the guise of hypocritic zeal. He steps ashore on the lovely plain, where He had done so many noble and tender deeds, and spoken for all time such transcendent and immortal words. He came back, haply to work once more in the little district where His steps had once been followed by rejoicing thousands, hanging in deep silence on every word He spoke. As He approaches Magdala, the little village destined for all time to lend its name to a word expressive of His most divine compassion—as He wishes to enter once more the little cities and villages which offered to His homelessness the only shadow of a home—here, barely has He stepped upon the pebbly strand, barely passed through the fringe of flowering shrubs which embroider the water's edge, barely listened to the twittering of the innumerable birds which welcome Him back with their familiar notes—when He finds all the self-satisfied hypocrisies of a decadent religion drawn up in array to stop His path !

He did not press His mercies on those who rejected them. As in after days His nation were suffered to prefer their robber and their murderer to the Lord of Life, so now the Galilæans were suffered to keep their Pharisees and lose their Christ. He left them as He had left the Gadarenes—rejected, not suffered to rest even in His home ; with heavy heart, solemnly and sadly He left them—left them then and there—left them, to revisit, indeed, once more their neighbourhood, but never again to return publicly—never again to work miracles, to teach or preach.

It must have been late in that autumn evening when He stepped once more into the little ship, and bade His disciples steer their course towards Bethsaida Julias, at the northern end of the lake. On their way they must have sailed by the bright sands of the western Bethsaida, on which Peter and the sons of Zebedee had played in their infancy, and must have seen the white marble synagogue of Capernaum flinging its shadow across the waters, which blushed with the reflected colours of the sunset. Was it at such a moment, when He was leaving Galilee with the full knowledge that His work there was at an end, and that He was sailing away from it under the ban of partial excommunication and certain death—was it at that supreme moment of sorrow that He uttered the rhythmic woe in which He upbraided the unrepentant cities wherein most of His mighty works were done?—

“Woe unto thee, Chorazin ! woe unto thee, Bethsaida ! for if the

mighty works which have been done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

“But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you.

“And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

“But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee!”

Whether these touching words were uttered on this occasion as a stern and sad farewell to His public ministry in the land He loved, we cannot tell: but certainly His soul was still filled with sorrow for the unbelief and hardness of heart, the darkened intellects and corrupted consciences of those who were thus leaving for Him no power to set foot in His native land. It has been said by a great forensic orator, that “no form of self-deceit is more hateful and detestable . . . than that which veils spite and falsehood under the guise of frankness, and behind the profession of religion.” Repugnance to this hideous vice must have been prominent in the stricken heart of Jesus, when, as the ship sailed along the pleasant shore upon its northward way, He said to His disciples, “Take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

He added nothing more; and this remark the strange simplicity of the disciples foolishly misinterpreted. They were constantly taking His figurative expressions literally, and His literal expressions metaphorically. When He called Himself the “bread from heaven,” they thought the saying hard; when He said, “I have meat to eat that ye know not of,” they could only remark, “Hath any man brought Him aught to eat?” when He said, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth,” they answered, “Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.” And so now, although leaven was one of the very commonest types of sin, and especially of insidious and subterranean sin, the only interpretation which, after a discussion among themselves, they could attach to His remark was, that He was warning them not to buy leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees, or, perhaps, indirectly reproaching them because, in the sorrow and hurry of their unexpected re-embarkation, they had only brought with them one single loaf! Jesus was grieved at this utter non-comprehension, this almost stupid literalism. Did they suppose that He

at whose words the loaves and fishes had been so miraculously multiplied—that they, who after feeding the five thousand had gathered twelve hand-baskets, and after feeding the four thousand had gathered seven large baskets-full of the fragments that remained—did they suppose, after *that*, that there was danger lest He or they should suffer from starvation? There was something almost of indignation in the rapid questions in which, without correcting, He indicated their error. “Why reason ye because ye have no bread? Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? Have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember?” And then once more, after He had reminded them of those miracles, “How is it that ye do not understand?” They had not ventured to ask Him for any explanation; there was something about Him—something so awe-inspiring and exalted in His personality—that their love for Him, intense though it was, was tempered by an overwhelming reverence; but now it began to dawn upon them that something else was meant, and that He was bidding them beware, not of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

At Bethsaida Julias, probably on the following morning, a blind man was brought to Him for healing. The cure was wrought in a manner very similar to that of the deaf and dumb man in Decapolis. It has none of the ready freedom, the radiant spontaneity of the earlier and happier miracles. In one respect it differs from every other recorded miracle, for it was, as it were, tentative. Jesus took the man by the hand, led him out of the village, spat upon his eyes, and then, laying His hands upon them, asked if he saw. The man looked at the figures in the distance, and, but imperfectly cured as yet, said, “I see men as trees walking.” Not until Jesus had laid His hands a second time upon his eyes did he see clearly. And then Jesus bade him go to his house, which was not at Bethsaida: for, with an emphatic repetition of the word, he is forbidden either to *enter* into the town, or to tell it to any one *in* the town. We cannot explain the causes of the method which Christ here adopted. The impossibility of understanding what guided His actions arises from the brevity of the narrative, in which the Evangelist—as is so often the case with writers conversant with their subject—passes over many particulars, which, because they were so familiar to himself, will, he supposes, be self-explaining to those who read his words. All that we can dimly see is Christ’s dislike and

avoidance of these heathenish Herodian towns, with their borrowed Hellenic architecture, their careless customs, and even their very names commemorating, as was the case with Bethsaida Julias, some of the most contemptible of the human race. We see from the Gospels themselves that the richness and power displayed in the miracles was correlative to the faith of the recipients: in places where faith was scanty it was but too natural that miracles should be gradual and few.

Leaving Bethsaida Julias, Jesus made His way towards Cæsarea Philippi. Here, again, it seems to be distinctly intimated that He did not enter into the town itself, but only visited the "coasts" of it, or wandered about the neighbouring villages. Why He bent His footsteps in that direction we are not told. It was a town that had seen many vicissitudes. As "Laish," it had been the possession of the careless Sidonians. As "Dan," it had been the chief refuge of a warlike tribe of Israel, the northern limit of the Israelitish kingdom, and the seat of the idolatry of the golden calf. Colonised by Greeks, its name had been changed into Paneas, in honour of the cave under its towering hill, which had been artificially fashioned into a grotto of Pan, and adorned with niches, which once contained statues of his sylvan nymphs. As the capital of Herod Philip, it had been re-named in honour of Himself and his patron Tiberius. The Lord might gaze with interest on the noble ranges of Libanus and Anti-Libanus; He might watch the splendid and snowy mass of Hermon glittering under the dawn, or flushed with its evening glow; He might wander round Lake Phiala, and see where, according to popular belief, the Jordan, after his subterranean course, bursts rejoicing into the light: but He could only have gazed with sorrow on the city itself, with its dark memories of Israelitish apostacy, its poor mimicry of Roman Imperialism, and the broken statues of its unhallowed and Hellenic cave.

But it was on His way to the northern region that there occurred an incident which may well be regarded as the culminating point of His earthly ministry. He was alone. The crowd that surged so tumultuously about Him in more frequented districts, here only followed Him at a distance. Only His disciples were near Him as He stood apart in solitary prayer. And when the prayer was over, He beckoned them about Him as they continued their journey, and asked them those two momentous questions, on the answers to which depended the whole outcome of His work on earth.

First He asked them—

“Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?”

The answer was a sad one. The Apostles dared not and would not speak aught but the words of soberness and truth, and they made the disheartening admission that the Messiah had not been recognised by the world which He came to save. They could only repeat the idle guesses of the people. Some, echoing the verdict of the guilty conscience of Antipas, said that He was John the Baptist; some, who may have heard the sterner denunciations of His impassioned grief, caught in that mighty utterance the thunder-tones of a new Elijah; others, who had listened to His accents of tenderness and words of universal love, saw in Him the plaintive soul of Jeremiah, and thought that he had come, perhaps, to restore them the lost Urim and the vanished Ark: many looked on Him as a prophet and a precursor. None—in spite of an occasional Messianic cry wrung from the admiration of the multitude, amazed by some unwonted display of power—none dreamt of who He was. The light had shone in the darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.

“But whom say ye that I am?”

Had that great question been answered otherwise—*could* it have been answered otherwise—the world’s whole destinies might have been changed. Had it been answered otherwise, then, humanly speaking, so far the mission of the Saviour would have wholly failed, and Christianity and Christendom have never been. For the work of Christ on earth lay mainly with His disciples. He sowed the seed, they reaped the harvest; He converted them, and they the world. He had never openly spoken of His Messiahship. John indeed had borne witness to Him, and to those who could receive it He had indirectly intimated, both in word and deed, that He was the Son of God. But it was his will that the light of revelation should dawn gradually on the minds of His children; that it should spring more from the truths He spake, and the life He lived, than from the wonders which He wrought; that it should be conveyed not in sudden thunder-crashes of supernatural majesty or visions of unutterable glory, but through the quiet medium of a sinless and self-sacrificing course. It was in the Son of Man that they were to recognise the Son of God.

But the answer came, as from everlasting it had been written in the book of destiny that it should come; and Peter, the ever warm-hearted, the *coryphaeus* of the Apostolic choir, had the immortal honour of giving it utterance for them all—

“THOU ART THE CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD!”

Such an answer from the chief of the Apostles atoned by its fulness of insight and certitude of conviction for the defective appreciation of the multitudes. It showed that at last the great mystery was revealed which had been hidden from the ages and the generations. The Apostles at least had not only recognised in Jesus of Nazareth the promised Messiah of their nation, but it had been revealed to them by the special grace of God that that Messiah was not only what the Jews expected, a Prince, and a Ruler, and a Son of David, but was *more* than this, even the Son of the living God.

With awful solemnity did the Saviour ratify that great confession. “Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon, son of Jonas: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, that thou art Peter (*Petros*), and on this rock (*petra*) I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Never did even the lips of Jesus utter more memorable words. It was His own testimony of Himself. It was the promise that they who can acknowledge it are blessed. It was the revealed fact that they only *can* acknowledge it who are led thereto by the Spirit of God. It told mankind for ever that not by earthly criticisms, but only by heavenly grace, can the full knowledge of that truth be obtained. It was the laying of the corner-stone of the CHURCH OF CHRIST, and the earliest occasion on which was uttered that memorable word, thereafter to be so intimately blended with the history of the world. It was the promise that that Church founded on the rock of inspired confession should remain unconquered by all the powers of hell. It was the conferring upon that Church, in the person of its typical representative, the power to open and shut, to bind and loose, and the promise that the power faithfully exercised on earth should be finally ratified in heaven.

“Tute haec omnia dicuntur,” says the great Bengel, “nam quid ad Romam?” “all these statements are made with safety; for what have they to do with Rome?” Let him who will wade through all the controversy necessitated by the memorable perversions of this memorable text, which runs as an inscription round the interior of the great dome of St. Peter’s. But little force is needed to overthrow the strange inverted pyramids of argument which have been built upon it. Were

it not a matter of history, it would have been deemed incredible that on so baseless a foundation should have been rested the fantastic claim that abnormal power should be conceded to the bishops of a Church which almost certainly St. Peter did not found, and in a city in which there is no indisputable proof that He ever set his foot. The immense arrogancies of sacerdotalism; the disgraceful abuses of the confessional; the imaginary power of absolving from oaths; the ambitious assumption of a right to crush and control the civil power; the extravagant usurpation of infallibility in wielding the dangerous weapons of anathema and excommunication; the colossal tyrannies of the Popedom, and the detestable cruelties of the Inquisition—all these abominations are, we may hope, henceforth and for ever, things of the past. But the Church of Christ remains, of which Peter was a chief foundation, a living stone. The powers of hell have *not* prevailed against it; it still has a commission to fling wide open the gates of the kingdom of heaven; it still may loose us from idle traditional burdens and meaningless ceremonial observances; it still may bind upon our hearts and consciences the truths of revealed religion and the eternal obligations of the Moral Law.

To Peter himself the great promise was remarkably fulfilled. It was he who converted on the day of Pentecost the first great body of Jews who adopted the Christian faith; it was he who admitted the earliest Gentile into the full privileges of Christian fellowship. His confession made him as a rock, on which the faith of many was founded, which the powers of Hades might shake, but over which they never could prevail. But, as has been well added by one of the deepest, most venerable, and most learned Fathers of the ancient Church, "If *any one* thus confess, when flesh and blood have not revealed it unto him, but our Father in heaven, *he*, too, shall obtain the promised blessings; as the letter of the Gospel saith indeed to the great St. Peter, but as its spirit teacheth to every man who hath become like what that great Peter was."

It may be said that, from that time forth, the Saviour might regard one great portion of His work on earth as having been accomplished. His Apostles were now convinced of the mystery of His being; the foundations were laid on which, with Himself as the chief corner-stone, the whole vast edifice was to be hereafter built.

But He forbade them to reveal this truth as yet. The time for such preaching had not yet come. They were yet wholly ignorant of the true method of His manifestation. They were yet too unconfirmed in faith

even to remain true to Him in His hour of utmost need. As yet He would be known as the Christ to those only whose spiritual insight could see Him immediately in His life and in His works. As yet He would neither strive nor cry, nor should His voice be heard in the streets. When their own faith was confirmed beyond all wavering by the mighty fact of His resurrection, when their hearts had been filled with the new Shechînah of God's Holy Spirit, and their brows, with final consecration, had been mitred with Pentecostal flame, then, but not till then, would the hour have come for them to go forth and teach all nations that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

But although they now knew Him, they knew nothing as yet of the way in which it was His will to carry out His divine purposes. It was time that they should yet further be prepared; it was time that they should learn that, King though He was, His kingdom was not of this world; it was time that all idle earthly hopes of splendour and advancement in the Messianic kingdom should be quenched in them for ever, and that they should know that the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace, and joy in believing.

Therefore He began, calmly and deliberately, to reveal to them His intended journey to Jerusalem, His rejection by the leaders of His nation, the anguish and insult that awaited Him, His violent death, His resurrection on the third day. He had, indeed, on previous occasions given them divers and distant intimations of these approaching sufferings, but now for the first time He dwelt on them distinctly, and that with full freedom of speech. Yet even now He did not reveal in its entire awfulness the *manner* of His approaching death. He made known unto them, indeed, that He should be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes—by all the authorities, and dignities, and sanctities of the nation—but not that He should be delivered to the Gentiles. He warned them that He should be killed, but He reserved till the time of His last journey to Jerusalem the horrible fact that He should be *crucified*. He thus revealed to them the future only as they were best able to bear it, and even then, to console their anguish and to support their faith, He told them quite distinctly, that on the third day He should rise again.

But the human mind has a singular capacity for rejecting that which it cannot comprehend—for ignoring and forgetting all that does not fall within the range of its previous conceptions. The Apostles, ever faithful and ever simple in their testimony, never conceal from us their dulness of spiritual insight, nor the dominance of Judaic pre-

conceptions over their minds. They themselves confess to us how sometimes they took the literal for the figurative, and sometimes the figurative for the literal. They heard the announcement, but they did not realise it. "They understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, and they perceived it not." Now as on so many other occasions a supernatural awe was upon them, "and they feared to ask Him." The prediction of His end was so completely alien from their whole habit of thought, that they would only put it aside as irrelevant and unintelligible—some mystery which they could not fathom; and as regards the resurrection, when it was again prophesied to the most spiritual among them all, they could only question among one another what the rising from the dead should mean.

But Peter, in his impetuosity, thought that he understood, and thought that he could prevent; and so he interrupted those solemn utterances by his ignorant and presumptuous zeal. The sense that it had been given to him to perceive and utter a new and mighty truth, together with the splendid eulogium and promise which he had just received, combined to inflate his intellect and misguide his heart; and taking Jesus by the hand or by the robe, he led Him a step or two aside from the disciples, and began to advise, to instruct, to rebuke his Lord. "God forbid," he said; "this shall certainly *not* happen to thee." With a flash of sudden indignation our Lord rebuked his worldliness and presumption. Turning away from him, fixing His eyes on the other disciples, and speaking in the hearing of them all—for it was fit that they who had heard the words of vast promise should hear also the crushing rebuke—He exclaimed, "Get thee behind me, Satan! thou art a stumbling-block unto me; for thy thoughts are not the thoughts of God but of men." This thy mere carnal and human view—this attempt to dissuade me from my "baptism of death"—is a sin against the purposes of God. Peter was to learn—would that the Church which professes to have inherited from him its exclusive and superhuman claims had also learnt in time!—that he was far indeed from being infallible—that he was capable of falling, ay, and with scarcely a moment's intermission, from heights of divine insight into depths of most earthly folly.

"*Get thee behind me, Satan!*"—the very words which He had used to the tempter in the wilderness. The rebuke was strong, yet to our ears it probably conveys a meaning far more violent than it would have done to the ears that heard it. The word Satan means no more than "adversary," and, as in many passages of the Old Testament, is so far

from meaning the great Adversary of mankind, that it is even applied to opposing angels. The word, in fact, was among the Jews, as in the East generally, and to this day, a very common one for anything bold, powerful, dangerous—for every secret opponent or open enemy. But its special applicability in this instance rose from the fact that Peter was in truth adopting the very line of argument which the Tempter himself had adopted in the wilderness. And in calling Peter an offence (*σκάνδαλον*), Jesus probably again alluded to his name, and compared him to a stone in the path over which the wayfarer stumbles. The comparison must have sunk deeply into the Apostle's mind, for he too in his Epistle warns his readers against some to whom, because they believe not, the Headstone of the Corner became "a stone of stumbling and a *rock of offence*" (*πέτρα σκανδάλου*, 1 Pet. ii. 8).

But having thus warned and rebuked the ignorant affection of unspiritual effeminacy in His presumptuous Apostle, the Lord graciously made the incident an occasion for some of His deepest teaching, which He not only addressed to His disciples, but to all. We learn quite incidentally from St. Mark, that even in these remote regions, His footsteps were sometimes followed by attendant crowds, who usually walked at a little distance from Him and His disciples, but were sometimes called to Him to hear the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And alike they and His disciples were as yet infected with the false notions which had inspired the impetuous interference of Peter. To them, therefore, He addressed the words which have taught us for ever that the essence of all highest duty, the meaning of all truest life—alike the most acceptable service to God, and the most ennobling example to men—is involved in the law of self-sacrifice. It was on this occasion that He spoke those few words which have produced so infinite an effect on the conscience of mankind. "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" And then, after warning them that He should Himself be judged, He consoled them under this shock of unexpected revelation by the assurance that there were some standing there who should not taste of death till they had seen the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. If, as all Scripture shows, "the kingdom of the Son of Man" be understood in a sense primarily spiritual, then there can be no difficulty in understanding this prophecy in the sense that, ere all of them passed away, the foundations of that kingdom should have been established

for ever in the abolition of the old and the establishment of the new dispensation. Three of them were immediately to see Him transfigured; all but one were to be witnesses of His resurrection; one at least—the beloved disciple—was to survive that capture of Jerusalem and destruction of the Temple which were to render impossible any literal fulfilment of the Mosaic law. And the prophecy may have deeper meanings yet than these—meanings still more real because they are still more wholly spiritual. “If we wish not to fear death,” says St. Ambrose, “let us stand where Christ is; Christ is your Life; He is the very Life which cannot die.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE TRANSFIGURATION.

NONE of the Evangelists tell us about the week which followed this memorable event. They tell us only that “after six days” He took with Him the three dearest and most enlightened of His disciples, and went with them—the expression implies a certain solemnity of expectation—up a lofty mountain, or, as St. Luke calls it, simply “*the mountain.*”

The supposition that the mountain intended was Mount Tabor has been engrained for centuries in the tradition of the Christian Church; and three churches and a monastery erected before the close of the sixth century attest the unhesitating acceptance of this belief. Yet it is almost certain that Tabor was not the scene of that great epiphany. The rounded summit of that picturesque and wood-crowned hill, which forms so fine a feature in the landscape, as the traveller approaches the northern limit of the plain of Esdraelon, had probably from time immemorial been a fortified and inhabited spot, and less than thirty years after this time, Josephus, on this very mountain, strengthened the existing fortress of Itaburion. This, therefore, was not a spot to which Jesus could have taken the three Apostles “apart by themselves.” Nor, again, is there the slightest intimation that the six intervening days had been spent in travelling southwards from Cæsarea Philippi, the place last mentioned; on the contrary, it is