

When Paulus, with somewhat vulgar jocosity, calls this “a miracle for half-a-crown,” he only shows his own entire misconception of the fine ethical lessons which are involved in the narrative, and which in this, as in every other instance, separate our Lord’s miracles from those of the Apocrypha. Yet I agree with the learned and thoughtful Olshausen in regarding this as the most difficult to comprehend of all the Gospel miracles—as being, in many respects, *sui generis*—as not falling under the same category as the other miracles of Christ. “It is remarkable,” says Archbishop Trench, “and is a solitary instance of the kind, that the issue of this bidding is not told us.” He goes on, indeed, to say that the narrative is evidently *intended* to be miraculous, and this is the impression which it has almost universally left on the minds of those who read it. Yet the literal translation of our Lord’s words may most certainly be, “on opening its mouth, thou shalt get, or obtain, a stater;” and although there is no difficulty whatever in supposing that a fish may have swallowed the glittering coin as it was accidentally dropped into the water, nor should I feel the slightest difficulty in believing—as I hope that this book, from its first page to its last, will show—that a miracle might have been wrought, yet the peculiarities both of the miracle itself and of the manner in which it is narrated, leave in my mind a doubt as to whether, in this instance, some essential particular may not have been either omitted or left unexplained.

LESSON TWENTY

CHAPTER XXXIX.

JESUS AT THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES.

It was not likely that Jesus should have been able to live at Capernaum without the fact of His visit being known to some of the inhabitants. But it is clear that His stay in the town was very brief, and that it was of a strictly private character. The discourse and the incident mentioned in the last chapter are the only records of it which are left.

But it was now autumn, and all Galilee was in the stir of preparation which preceded the starting of the annual caravan of pilgrims to one of the three great yearly feasts—the Feast of Tabernacles. That

feast—the Feast of Ingathering—was intended to commemorate the passage of the Israelites through the wilderness, and was celebrated with such universal joy, that both Josephus and Philo call it “the holiest and greatest feast,” and it was known among the Jews as “*the Feast*” pre-eminently. It was kept for seven consecutive days, from the 15th to the 21st of Tisri, and the eighth day was celebrated by a holy convocation. During the seven days the Jews, to recall their desert wanderings, lived in little *succôth*, or booths made of the thickly-foliaged boughs of olive, and palm, and pine, and myrtle, and each person carried in his hands a *lulab*, consisting of palm-branches, or willows of the brook, or fruits of peach and citron. During the week of festivities all the courses of priests were employed in turn; seventy bullocks were offered in sacrifice for the seventy nations of the world; the Law was daily read, and on each day the Temple trumpets sounded twenty-one times an inspiring and triumphant blast. The joy of the occasion was doubtless deepened by the fact that the feast followed but four days after the awful and comforting ceremonies of the Great Day of atonement, in which a solemn expiation was made for the sins of all the people.

On the eve of their departure for this feast the family and relations of our Lord—those who in the Gospels are invariably called His “brethren,” and some of whose descendants were known to early tradition as the Desposyni—came to Him for the last time with a well-meant but painful and presumptuous interference. They—like the Pharisees, and like the multitude, and like Peter—fancied that they knew better than Jesus Himself that line of conduct which would best accomplish His work and hasten the universal recognition of His claims. They came to Him with the language of criticism, of discontent, almost of reproaches and complaints. “Why this unreasonable and incomprehensible secrecy? it contradicts Thy claims; it discourages Thy followers. Thou hast disciples in Judæa: go thither, and let them too see Thy works which Thou doest. If Thou doest these things, manifest Thyself to the world.” If they could use such language to their Lord and Master—if they could, as it were, thus challenge His power to the proof—it is but too plain that their knowledge of Him was so narrow and inadequate as to justify the sad parenthesis of the beloved Evangelist—“for not even His brethren believed on Him.” He was a stranger unto His brethren, even an alien unto His mother’s children.

Such dictation on their part—the bitter fruit of impatient vanity

and unspiritual ignorance—showed indeed a most blameable forwardness; yet our Lord only answered them with calm and gentle dignity. “No; my time to manifest myself to the world—which is *your* world also, and which therefore cannot hate you as it hates me—is not yet come. Go ye up to this feast. I choose not to go up to this feast, for not yet has my time been fulfilled.” So He answered them, and stayed in Galilee.

“I go not up yet unto this feast” is the rendering of the English version, adopting the reading *οὐπω*, “not yet;” but even if *οὐκ*, “not,” be the true reading, the meaning is substantially the same. The *οὐπω* in the next clause, “my time has *not yet* been fulfilled,” distinctly intimated that such a time *would* come, and that it was not His object to intimate to His brethren—whose utter want of sympathy and reverence had just been so unhappily displayed—*when* that time would be. And there was a reason for this. It was essential for the safety of His life, which was not to end for six months more—it was essential for the carrying out of His Divine purposes, which were closely enwoven with the events of the next few days—that His brethren should *not* know about His plans. And therefore He let them depart in the completest uncertainty as to whether or not He intended to follow them. Certain as they were to be asked by multitudes whether He was coming to the feast, it was necessary that they should be able to answer, with perfect truthfulness, that He was at any rate not coming with *them*, and that whether He would come before the feast was over or not they could not tell. And that this must have occurred, and that this must have been their answer, is evident from the fact that the one question buzzed about from ear to ear in those gay and busy streets was, “Where is He? is He here already? is He coming?” And as He did not appear, His whole character, His whole mission were discussed. The words of approval were vague and timid. “He is a good man;” the words of condemnation were bitter and emphatic, “Nay, but He is a *mesîth*—He deceiveth the people.” But no one dared to speak openly his full thought about Him; each seemed to distrust his neighbour; and all feared to commit themselves too far while the opinion of the “Jews,” and of the leading Priests and Pharisees, had not been finally or decisively declared.

And suddenly, in the midst of all these murmurs and discussions, in the middle of the feast, Jesus, unaccompanied apparently by His followers, unheralded by His friends, appeared suddenly in the Temple,

and taught. By what route He had reached the Holy City—how He had passed through the bright thronged streets unnoticed—whether He joined in the innocent mirth of the festival—whether He too lived in a little *succah* of palm-leaves during the remainder of the week, and wandered among the brightly-dressed crowds of an Oriental gala day with the *lulab* and citron in His hands—whether His voice was heard in the Hallel, or the great Hosanna—we do not know. All that is told us is that, throwing Himself, as it were, in full confidence on the protection of His disciples from Galilee and those in Jerusalem, He was suddenly found seated in one of the large halls which opened out of the Temple courts, and there He taught.

For a time they listened to Him in awe-struck silence ; but soon the old scruples recurred to them. “He is no authorised Rabbi ; He belongs to no recognised school ; neither the followers of Hillel nor those of Shammai claim Him ; He is a Nazarene ; He was trained in the shop of the Galilæan carpenter ; how knoweth this man letters, having never learned ?” As though the few who are taught of God—whose learning is the learning of a pure heart and an enlightened eye and a blameless life—did not unspeakably transcend in wisdom, and therefore also in the best and truest knowledge, those whose learning has but come from other men ! It is not the voice of erudition, but it is, as the old Greek thinker says, the voice of Inspiration—the voice of the divine Sibyl—which, uttering things simple and unperfumed and unadorned, reacheth through myriads of years.

Jesus understood their looks. He interpreted their murmurs. He told them that His learning came immediately from His Heavenly Father, and they too, if they did God’s will, might learn, and might understand, the same high lessons. In all ages there is a tendency to mistake erudition for learning, knowledge for wisdom ; in all ages there has been a slowness to comprehend that true learning of the deepest and noblest character may co-exist with complete and utter ignorance of everything which absorbs and constitutes the learning of the schools. In *one* sense—Jesus told His hearers—they knew the law which Moses had given them ; in another they were pitiably ignorant of it. They could not understand its principles, because they were not “faithful to its precepts.” And then He asked them openly, “Why go ye about to kill me ?”

That determination to kill Him was known indeed to Him, and known to some of those who heard Him, but was a guilty secret which had been concealed from the majority of the multitude. *These*

answered the question, while the others kept their guilty silence. "Thou hast a devil," the people answered; "who goeth about to kill Thee?" Why did they speak with such superfluous and brutal bluntness? Do not we repudiate, with far less flaming indignation, a charge which we know to be not only false, but wholly preposterous and foundationless? Was there not in the minds even of this not yet wholly alienated multitude an uneasy sense of their distance from the Speaker—of that unutterable superiority to themselves which pained and shamed and irritated them? Were they not conscious, in their carnal and vulgar aspirations, that *this* Prophet came, not to condescend to such views as theirs, but to raise them to a region where they felt that they could not breathe? Was there not even then in their hearts something of the half-unconscious hatred of vice to virtue, the repulsion of darkness against light? Would they have said, "Thou hast a devil," when they heard Him say that some of them were plotting against His life, if they had not felt that they were themselves capable at almost any moment of joining it—aye, with their own hands of executing—so base a plot?

Jesus did not notice their coarse insolence. He referred them to that one work of healing on the Sabbath day (John v. 5), at which they were all still marvelling, with an empty wonder, that He who had the power to perform such a deed should, in performing it, have risen above their carnal, ceremonial, fetish-worshipping notions of Sabbath sanctity. And Jesus, who ever wished to teach the lesson that love and not literalism is the fulfilling of the Law, showed them, even on their own purely ritual and Levitical principle, that His word of healing had in no respect violated the Sabbath at all. For instance, Moses had established, or rather re-established, the ordinance of circumcision on the eighth day, and if that eighth day happened to be a Sabbath, they without scruple sacrificed the one ordinance to the other, and in spite of the labour which it involved, performed the rite of circumcision on the Sabbath day. If the law of circumcision superseded that of the Sabbath, did not the law of Mercy? If it was right by a series of actions to inflict that wound, was it wrong by a single word to effect a total cure? If that, which was at the best but a *sign* of deliverance, could not even on account of the Sabbath be postponed for a single day, why was it criminal not to have postponed for the sake of the Sabbath a deliverance actual and entire? And then He summed up His self-defence in the one calm word, "Do not be ever judging by the mere appearance, but judge a righteous judgment;"

instead of being permanently content with a superficial mode of criticism, come once for all to some principle of righteous decision.

His hearers were perplexed and amazed, "Is this He against whose life some are plotting? Can He be the Messiah? Nay, he cannot be; for we know whence this speaker comes, whereas they say that none shall know whence the Messiah shall have come when He appears."

There was a certain irony in the answer of Jesus. They knew whence He came and all about Him, and yet, in very truth, He came not of Himself, but from one of whom they knew nothing. This word maddened still more some of his hearers. They longed, but did not dare to seize Him, and all the more because there were some whom these words convinced, and who appealed to his many miracles as irresistible proof of his sacred claims. The Sanhedrin, seated in frequent session in their stone hall of meeting within the immediate precincts of the Temple, were, by means of their emissaries, kept informed of all that he did and said, and, without seeming to do so, watched His every movement with malignant and jealous eyes. These whispered arguments in His favour, this deepened awe of Him and belief in Him, which, despite their authority, was growing up under their very eyes, seemed to them at once humiliating and dangerous. They determined on a bolder course of action. They sent out emissaries to seize Him suddenly and stealthily, at the first opportunity which should occur. But Jesus showed no fear. He was to be with them a little longer; then, and not till then, should He return to Him that sent Him. Then, indeed they would seek Him—seek Him, not as now with hostile intentions, but in all the crushing agony of remorse and shame; but their search would be in vain. His enemies wholly failed to understand the allusion. In the troubled and terrible days which were to come they would understand it only too bitterly and well. Now they could only jeeringly conjecture that possibly he had some wild intention of going to teach among the Gentiles.

So passed this memorable day; and again, on the last day of the feast, Jesus was standing in the Temple. On each day of the seven, and, possibly, even on the eighth, there was a significant and joyous ceremony. At early morning the people repaired to the Temple, and when the morning sacrifice had been laid on the altar, one of the priests went down with a golden ewer to the Pool of Siloam, not far from the foot of Mount Sion. There, with great solemnity, he drew three *logs* of water, which were then carried in triumphant procession

through the water-gate into the Temple. As he entered the Temple courts the sacred trumpets breathed out a joyous blast, which continued till he reached the top of the altar slope, and there poured the water into a silver bason on the western side, while wine was poured into another silver bason on the eastern side. Then the great Hallel was sung, and when they came to the verse "Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good: for His mercy endureth for ever," each of the gaily-clad worshippers, as he stood beside the altars, shook his *lulab* in triumph. In the evening they abandoned themselves to such rejoicing, that the Rabbis say that the man who has not seen this "joy of the drawing water" does not know what joy means.

In evident allusion to this glad custom—perhaps in sympathy with that sense of something missing which succeeded the disuse of it on the eighth day of the feast—Jesus pointed the yearnings of the festal crowd in the Temple, as He had done those of the Samaritan woman by the lonely well, to a new truth, and to one which more than fulfilled alike the spiritual (Isa. xii. 3) and the historical meaning (1 Cor. x. 4) of the scenes which they had witnessed. He "stood and cried, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." And the best of them felt in their inmost soul—and this is the strongest of all the evidences of Christianity for those who believe heart and soul in a God of love who cares for His children in the family of man—that they had deep need of a comfort and salvation, of the outpouring of a Holy Spirit, which He who spake to them could alone bestow. But the very fact that some were beginning openly to speak of Him as the Prophet and the Christ, only exasperated the others. They had a small difficulty of their own creating, founded on pure ignorance of fact, but which yet to their own narrow dogmatic fancy was irresistible—"Shall Christ come out of Galilee? must He not come from Bethlehem? of David's seed?"

It was during this division of opinion that the officers whom the Pharisees had dispatched to seize Jesus, returned to them without having even attempted to carry out their design. As they hovered among the Temple courts, as they stood half sheltered behind the Temple pillars, not unobserved it may be, by Him for whom they were lying in wait, they too could not fail to hear some of the divine words which flowed out of His mouth. And, hearing them, they could not fulfil their mission. A sacred spell was upon them, which they were unable to resist; a force infinitely more powerful than their own,

unnerved their strength and paralysed their will. To listen to Him was not only to be disarmed in every attempt against Him, it was even to be half-converted from bitter enemies to awe-struck disciples. "Never man spake like this man," was all that they could say. That bold disobedience to positive orders must have made them afraid of the possible consequences to themselves, but obedience would have required a courage even greater, to say nothing of that rankling wound wherewith an awakened conscience ever pierces the breast of crime.

The Pharisees could only meet them with angry taunts. "What, ye too intend to accept this Prophet of the ignorant, this favourite of the accursed and miserable mob!" Then Nicodemus ventured on a timid word, "Ought you not to *try*, before you condemn Him?" They had no reply to the justice of that principle: they could only fall back again on taunts—"Are you then a Galilæan?" and then the old ignorant dogmatism, "Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet."

Where then, as we have asked already, was Gathhepher, whence Jonah came? where Thisbe, whence Elijah came? where Elkosh, whence Nahum came? where the northern town whence Hosea came? The more recent Jews, with better knowledge of Scripture, declare that the Messiah is to come from Galilee; and they reside at Tiberias, because they believe that He will rise from the waters of the Lake; and at Safed, "the city set on a hill," because they believe that He will there first fix His throne. But there is no ignorance so deep as the ignorance that will not know; no blindness so incurable as the blindness which will not see. And the dogmatism of a narrow and stolid prejudice which believes itself to be theological learning is, of all others, the most wilful and the most blind. Such was the spirit in which, ignoring the mild justice of Nicodemus, and the marvellous impression made by Jesus even on their own hostile apparitors, the majority of the Sanhedrin broke up, and went each to his own home.

CHAPTER XL.

THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY.

IN the difficulties which beset the celebrated incident which follows, it is impossible for us to arrive at any certainty as to its true position in the narrative. As there must, however, be some *à priori* probability that its place was assigned with due reference to the order of events, and as there appear to be some obvious though indirect references to it in the discourses which immediately follow (*ex. gr.*, John viii. 15, 17, 24, 46), I shall proceed to speak of it here, feeling no shadow of a doubt that the incident really happened, even if the form in which it is preserved to us is by no means indisputably genuine.

At the close of the day recorded in the last chapter, Jesus withdrew to the Mount of Olives. Whether He went to the garden of Gethsemane, and to the house of its unknown but friendly owner, or whether—not having where to lay His head—He simply slept, Eastern fashion, on the green turf under those ancient olive-trees, we cannot tell; but it is interesting to trace in Him once more that dislike of crowded cities, that love for the pure, sweet, fresh air, and for the quiet of the lonely hill, which we see in all parts of His career on earth. There was, indeed, in Him nothing of that supercilious sentimentality and morbid egotism which makes men shrink from all contact with their brother-men; nor can they who would be His true servants belong to those merely fantastic philanthropists

Who sigh for wretchedness, yet shun the wretched,
Nursing in some delicious solitude
Their dainty loves and slothful sympathies.*

On the contrary, day after day, while His day-time of work continued, we find Him sacrificing all that was dearest and most elevating to His soul, and in spite of heat, and pressure, and conflict, and weariness, calmly pursuing His labours of love amid “the madding crowd’s ignoble strife.” But in the night-time, when men cannot work, no call of duty required His presence within the walls of Jerusalem; and those who are familiar with the oppressive foulness of ancient cities can best imagine the relief which His spirit must have felt when He could escape from the close streets and thronged bazaars, to cross the

* Coleridge, “Religious Musings.”

ravine, and climb the green slope beyond it, and be alone with His Heavenly Father under the starry night.

But when the day dawned His duties lay once more within the city walls, and in that part of the city where, almost alone, we hear of His presence—in the courts of His Father's house. And with the very dawn His enemies contrived a fresh plot against Him, the circumstances of which made their malice even more actually painful than it was intentionally perilous.

It is probable that the hilarity and abandonment of the Feast of Tabernacles, which had grown to be a kind of vintage festival, would often degenerate into acts of licence and immorality, and these would find more numerous opportunities in the general disturbance of ordinary life caused by the dwelling of the whole people in their little leafy booths. One such act had been detected during the previous night, and the guilty woman had been handed over to the Scribes and Pharisees.

Even had the morals of the nation at that time been as clean as in the days when Moses ordained the fearful ordeal of the "water of jealousy"—even had these rulers and teachers of the nation been elevated as far above their contemporaries in the real, as in the professed, sanctity of their lives—the discovery, and the threatened punishment of this miserable adulteress, could hardly have failed to move every pure and noble mind to a compassion which would have mingled largely with the horror which her sin inspired. They might, indeed, even on those suppositions, have inflicted the established penalty with a sternness as inflexible as that of the Pilgrim Fathers in the early days of Salem or Providence; but the sternness of a severe and pure-hearted judge is not a sternness which precludes all pity; it is a sternness which would not willingly inflict one unnecessary pang—it is a sternness *not* incompatible with a righteous tenderness, but *wholly* incompatible with a mixture of meaner and slighter motives, *wholly* incompatible with a spirit of malignant levity and hideous sport.

But the spirit which actuated these Scribes and Pharisees was not by any means the spirit of a sincere and outraged purity. In the decadence of national life, in the daily familiarity with heathen degradations, in the gradual substitution of a Levitical scrupulosity for a heartfelt religion, the morals of the nation had grown utterly corrupt. The ordeal of the "water of jealousy" had long been abolished, and the death by stoning as a punishment for adultery had long been

suffered to fall into desuetude. Not even the Scribes and Pharisees—for all their external religiosity—had any genuine horror of an impurity with which their own lives were often stained. They saw in the accident which had put this guilty woman into their power nothing but a chance of annoying, entrapping, possibly even endangering this Prophet of Galilee, whom they already regarded as their deadliest enemy.

It was a curious custom among the Jews to consult distinguished Rabbis in cases of doubt and difficulty; but there was no doubt or difficulty here. It was long since the Mosaic law of death to the adulteress had been demanded or enforced; and even if this had not been the case, the Roman law would, in all probability, have prevented such a sentence from being put in execution. On the other hand, the civil and religious penalties of divorce were open to the injured husband; nor did the case of this woman differ from that of any other who had similarly transgressed. Nor, again, even if they had honestly and sincerely desired the opinion of Jesus, could there have been the slightest excuse for haling the woman herself into His presence, and thus subjecting her to a moral torture which would be rendered all the more insupportable from the close seclusion of women in the East.

And, therefore, to subject her to the superfluous horror of this odious publicity—to drag her, fresh from the agony of detection, into the sacred precincts of the Temple—to subject this unveiled, dishevelled, terror-stricken woman to the cold and sensual curiosity of a malignant mob—to make her, with total disregard to her own sufferings, the mere passive instrument of their hatred against Jesus; and to do all this—not under the pressure of moral indignation, but in order to gratify a calculating malice—showed on their parts a cold, hard cynicism, a graceless, pitiless, barbarous brutality of heart and conscience, which could not but prove, in every particular, revolting and hateful to One who alone was infinitely tender, because He alone was infinitely pure.

And so they dragged her to Him, and set her in the midst—flagrant guilt subjected to the gaze of stainless Innocence, degraded misery set before the bar of perfect Mercy. And then, just as though their hearts were not full of outrage, they glibly begin, with ironical deference, to set before Him their case. “Master, this woman was seized in the very act of adultery. Now, *Moses* in the Law commanded us to stone *such*; but what sayest *Thou* about her?”

They thought that now they had caught Him in a dilemma. They

knew the divine trembling pity which had loved where others hated, and praised where others scorned, and encouraged where others crushed; and they knew how that pity had won for Him the admiration of many, the passionate devotion of not a few. They knew that a publican was among His chosen, that sinners had sat with Him at the banquet, and harlots unreprieved had bathed His feet, and listened to His words. Would He then acquit this woman, and so make Himself liable to an accusation of heresy, by placing Himself in open disaccord with the sacred and fiery Law? or, on the other hand, would He belie His own compassion, and be ruthless, and condemn? And, if He did, would He not at once shock the multitude, who were touched by His tenderness, and offend the civil magistrates by making Himself liable to a charge of sedition? How could He possibly get out of the difficulty? Either alternative—heresy or treason, accusation before the Sanhedrin or delation to the Procurator, opposition to the orthodox or alienation from the many—would serve equally well their unscrupulous intentions. And one of these, they thought, *must* follow. What a happy chance this weak, guilty woman had given them!

Not yet. A sense of all their baseness, their hardness, their malice, their cynical parade of every feeling which pity would temper and delicacy repress, rushed over the mind of Jesus. He blushed for His nation, for His race; He blushed, not for the degradation of the miserable accused, but for the deeper guilt of her unblushing accusers. Glowing with uncontrollable disgust that modes of opposition so irredeemable in their meanness should be put in play against Him, and that He should be made the involuntary centre of such a shameful scene—indignant (for it cannot be irreverent to imagine in Him an intensified degree of emotions which even the humblest of His true followers would have shared) that the sacredness of His personal reserve should thus be shamelessly violated, and that those things which belong to the sphere of a noble reticence should be thus cynically obtruded on His notice—He bent his face forward from His seat, and as though He did not, or would not, hear them, stooped and wrote with His finger on the ground.

For any others but such as these it would have been enough. Even if they failed to see in the action a symbol of forgiveness—a symbol that the memory of things thus written in the dust might be obliterated and forgotten—still any but these could hardly have failed to interpret the gesture into a distinct indication that in such a matter Jesus would not mix himself. But they saw nothing and understood

nothing, and stood there unabashed, still pressing their brutal question, still holding, pointing to, jeering at the woman, with no compunction in their cunning glances, and no relenting in their steeled hearts.

The scene could not last any longer; and, therefore, raising Himself from his stooping attitude, He, who could read their hearts, calmly passed upon them that sad judgment involved in the memorable words—

“Let him that is without sin among you, first cast the stone at her.”

It was not any abrogation of the Mosaic law; it was, on the contrary, an admission of its justice, and doubtless it must have sunk heavily as a death-warrant upon the woman's heart. But it acted in a manner wholly unexpected. The terrible law stood written; it was not the time, it was not His will, to rescind it. But, on the other hand, they themselves, by not acting on the law, by referring the whole question to Him as though it needed a new solution, had practically confessed that the law was at present valid in theory alone, that it had fallen into desuetude, and that even with His authority they had no intention of carrying it into action. Since, therefore, the whole proceeding was on their part illegal and irregular, He transfers it by these words from the forum of law to that of conscience. The judge may sometimes be obliged to condemn the criminal brought before him for sins of which he has himself been guilty, but the position of the self-constituted accuser who eagerly demands a needless condemnation is very different. Herein to condemn her would have been in God's sight most fatally to have condemned themselves; to have been the first to cast the stone at her would have been to crush themselves.

He had but glanced at them for a moment, but that glance had read their inmost souls. He had but calmly spoken a few simple words, but those words, like the still small voice to Elijah at Horeb, had been more terrible than wind or earthquake. They had fallen like a spark of fire upon slumbering souls, and lay burning there till “the blushing, shame-faced spirit” mutinied within them. The Scribes and Pharisees stood silent and fearful; they loosened their hold upon the woman; their insolent glances, so full of guile and malice, fell guiltily to the ground. They who had unjustly inflicted, now justly felt the overwhelming anguish of an intolerable shame, while over their guilty consciences there rolled, in crash on crash of thunder, such thoughts as these:—“Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man,

whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself: for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? or despisest thou the riches of His goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? but after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds." They were "*such*" as the woman they had condemned, and they dared not stay.

And so, with burning cheeks and cowed hearts, from the eldest to the youngest, one by one gradually, silently they slunk away. He would not add to their shame and confusion of face by watching them: He had no wish further to reveal His knowledge of the impure secrets of their hearts; He would not tempt them to brazen it out before Him, and to lie against the testimony of their own memories; He had stooped down once more, and was writing on the ground.

And when He once more raised His head, all the accusers had melted away: only the woman still cowered before Him on the Temple floor. She, too, *might* have gone: none hindered her, and it might have seemed but natural that she should fly anywhere to escape her danger, and to hide her guilt and shame. But remorse, and, it may be, an awful trembling gratitude, in which hope struggled with despair, fixed her there before her Judge. His look, the most terrible of all to meet, because it was the only look that fell on her from a soul robed in the unapproachable majesty of a stainless innocence, was at the same time the most gentle, and the most forgiving. Her stay was a sign of her penitence; her penitence, let us trust, a certain pledge of her future forgiveness. "Two things," as St. Augustine finely says, "were here left alone together—Misery and Mercy."

"Woman," He asked, "where are those thine accusers? did no one convict thee?"

"No man, Lord." It was the only answer which her lips could find power to frame; and then she received the gracious yet heart-searching permission to depart—

"Neither do I convict thee. Go; henceforth sin no more."

Were the critical evidence against the genuineness of this passage

far more overwhelming than it is, it would yet bear upon its surface the strongest possible proof of its own authentic truthfulness. It is hardly too much to say that the mixture which it displays of tragedy and of tenderness—the contrast which it involves between low, cruel cunning, and exalted nobility of intellect and emotion—transcends all power of human imagination to have invented it; while the picture of a divine insight reading the inmost secrets of the heart, and a yet diviner love, which sees those inmost secrets with larger eyes than ours, furnish us with a conception of Christ's power and person at once too lofty and too original to have been founded on anything but fact. No one could have invented, for few could even appreciate, the sovereign purity and ineffable charm—the serene authority of condemnation, and of pardon—by which the story is so deeply characterised. The repeated instances in which, without a moment's hesitation, He foiled the crafty designs of His enemies, and in foiling them taught for ever some eternal principles of thought and action, are among the most unique and decisive proofs of His more than human wisdom; and yet not one of those gleams of sacred light which were struck from Him by collision with the malice or hate of man was brighter or more beautiful than this. The very fact that the narrative found so little favour in the early centuries of Church history—the fact that whole Churches regarded the narrative as dangerous in its tendency—the fact that eminent Fathers of the Church either ignore it or speak of it in a semi-apologetic tone—in these facts we see the most decisive proof that its real moral and meaning are too transcendent to admit of its having been originally invented, or interpolated without adequate authority into the sacred text. Yet it is strange that any should have failed to see that in the ray of mercy which thus streamed from heaven upon the wretched sinner, the sin assumed an aspect tenfold more heinous, tenfold more repulsive to the conscience of mankind—to every conscience which accepts it as a law of life that it should strive to be holy as God is holy, and pure as He is pure.

However painful this scene must have been to the holy and loving heart of the Saviour, it was at least alleviated by the sense of that compassionate deliverance—deliverance, we may trust, for Eternity, no less than Time—which it had wrought for one guilty soul. But the scenes that followed were a climax of perpetual misunderstandings, fluctuating impressions, and bitter taunts, which caused the great and joyous festival to end with a sudden burst of rage, and an attempt of

the Jewish leaders to make an end of Him—not by public accusation, but by furious violence.

For, on the same day—the *eighth* day of the feast if the last narrative has got displaced, the day *after* the feast if it belongs to the true sequence of events—Jesus continued those interrupted discourses which were intended almost for the last time to set clearly before the Jewish nation His divine claims.

He was seated at that moment in the Treasury—either some special building in the Temple so called, or that part of the court of the women which contained the thirteen chests with trumpet-shaped openings—called *shopherôth*—into which the people, and especially the Pharisees, used to cast their gifts. In this court, and therefore close beside Him, were two gigantic candelabra, fifty cubits high and sumptuously gilded, on the summit of which, nightly, during the Feast of Tabernacles, lamps were lit which shed their soft light over all the city. Round these lamps the people, in their joyful enthusiasm, and even the stateliest Priests and Pharisees, joined in festal dances, while, to the sound of flutes and other music, the Levites, drawn up in array on the fifteen steps which led up to the court, chanted the beautiful Psalms which early received the title of “Songs of Degrees.”

In allusion to these great lamps, on which some circumstance of the moment may have concentrated the attention of the hearers, Christ exclaimed to them, “I am the Light of the world.” It was His constant plan to shape the illustrations of His discourses by those external incidents which would rouse the deepest attention, and fix the words most indelibly on the memories of His hearers. The Pharisees who heard his words charged Him with idle self-glorification; but He showed them that He had His Father’s testimony, and that even were it not so, the Light can only be seen, only be known, by the evidence of its own existence; without it, neither itself nor anything else is visible. They asked Him, “Where is Thy Father?” He told them, that, not knowing *Him*, they *could* not know His Father; and then He once more sadly warned them that His departure was nigh, and that *then* they would be unable to come to Him. Their only reply was a taunting inquiry whether, by committing suicide, He meant to plunge Himself in the darkest regions of the grave? Nay, He made them understand, it was *they*, not *He*, who were from below—*they*, not *He*, who were destined, if they persisted in unbelief of His eternal existence, to that dark end. “Who art thou?” they once more asked, in angry

and faithless perplexity. "Altogether that which I am telling you," He calmly answered. They wanted Him to announce Himself as the Messiah, and so become their temporal deliverer; but He will only tell them the far deeper, more eternal truths, that He is the Light, and the Life, and the Living Water, and that He came from the Father—as they, too, should know when they had lifted Him up upon the cross. They were looking solely for the Messiah of the Jews: He would have them know Him as the Redeemer of the world, the Saviour of their souls.

As they heard Him speak, many, even of these fierce enemies, were won over to a belief in Him: but it was a wavering belief, a half belief, a false belief, a belief mingled with a thousand worldly and erroneous fancies, not a belief which had in it any saving power, or on which He could rely. And He put it to an immediate test, which revealed its hollowness, and changed it into mad hatred. He told them that faithfulness and obedience were the marks of true discipleship, and the requisites of true freedom. The word freedom acted as a touchstone to show the spuriousness of their incipient faith. *They* knew of no freedom but that political freedom which they falsely asserted; they resented the promise of future spiritual freedom in lieu of the achievement of present national freedom. So Jesus showed them that they were still the slaves of sin, and in name only, not in reality, the children of Abraham, or the children of God. They were absorbed with pride when they thought of the purity of their ancestral origin, and the privilege of their exclusive monotheism; but He told them that in very truth they were, by spiritual affinity, the affinity of cruelty and falsehood, children of him who was a liar and a murderer from the beginning—children of the devil. That home-rebuke stung them to fury. They repaid it by calling Jesus a Samaritan, and a demoniac. Our Lord gently put the taunt aside, and once more held out to them the gracious promise that if they will but keep His sayings, they not only shall not die in their sins, but shall not see death. Their dull, blind hearts could not even imagine a spiritual meaning in His words. They could only charge Him with demoniac arrogance and insolence in making Himself greater than Abraham and the prophets, of whom *they* could only think as dead. Jesus told them that in prophetic vision, perhaps too by spiritual intuition, in that other world, Abraham, who was not dead, but living, saw and rejoiced to see His day. Such an assertion appeared to them either senseless or blasphemous. "Abraham has

been dead for seventeen centuries ; Thou art not even fifty years old ; how are we to understand such words as these ?” Then very gently, but with great solemnity, and with that formula of asseveration which He only used when He announced His most solemn truths, the Saviour revealed to them His eternity, His Divine pre-existence before He had entered the tabernacle of mortal flesh :

“Verily, verily I say unto you, Before Abraham came into existence, I am.”

Then, with a burst of impetuous fury—one of those paroxysms of sudden, uncontrollable, frantic rage to which this people has in all ages been liable upon any collision with its religious convictions—they took up stones to stone Him. But the very blindness of their rage made it more easy to elude them. His hour was not yet come. With perfect calmness He departed unhurt out of the Temple.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE MAN BORN BLIND.

EITHER on His way from the Temple, after this attempted assault, or on the next ensuing Sabbath, Jesus, as He passed by, saw a man blind from his birth, who perhaps announced his miserable condition as he sat begging by the roadside, and at the Temple gate.

All the Jews were trained to regard special suffering as the necessary and immediate consequence of special sin. Perhaps the disciples supposed that the words of our Lord to the paralytic whom He had healed at the Pool of Bethesda, as well as to the paralytic at Capernaum, might seem to sanction such an impression. They asked, therefore, how this man came to be born blind. Could it be in consequence of the sins of his parents ? If not, was there any way of supposing that it could have been for his own ? The supposition in the former case seemed hard ; in the latter, impossible. They were therefore perplexed.

Into the unprofitable regions of such barren speculation our Lord refused to follow them, and He declined, as always, the tendency to infer and to sit in judgment upon the sins of others. Neither the