

suffering, one almost unbroken gloom. But in the Bible—though there alone—we find the perfect compatibility, nay, the close union of joy with sorrow : and myriads of Christians who have been “troubled on every side, yet not distressed ; perplexed, but not in despair ; persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed,” can understand how the Man of Sorrows, even in the days of His manhood, may have lived a life happier, in the true sense of happiness — happier, because purer, more sinless, more faithful, more absorbed in the joy of obedience to His Heavenly Father—than has been ever granted to the sons of men. The deep pure stream flows on its way rejoicing, even though the forests overshadow it, and no transient sunshine flickers on its waves.

And if, indeed, true joy—the highest joy—be “severe, and chaste and solitary, and incompatible,” then how constant, how inexpressible, what a joy of God, must have been the joy of the Man Christ Jesus, who came to give to all who love Him, henceforth and for ever, a joy which no man taketh from them—a joy which the world can neither give nor take away !

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## LESSON TWENTY-TWO

### CHAPTER XLIII.

#### INCIDENTS OF THE JOURNEY.

WE are not told the exact route taken by Jesus as He left Gennesareth ; but as He probably avoided Nazareth, with its deeply happy and deeply painful memories, He may have crossed the bridge at the southern extremity of the Lake, and so got round into the plain of Esdraelon either by the valley of Bethshean, or over Mount Tabor and round Little Hermon, passing Endor and Nain and Shunem on His way.

Crossing the plain, and passing Taanach and Megiddo, He would reach the range of hills which form the northern limit of Samaria ; and at the foot of their first ascent lies the little town of En-gannim, or the “Fountain of Gardens.” This would be the first Samaritan village at which he would arrive, and hither, apparently, He had sent two messengers “to make ready for Him.” Although the incident is

mentioned by St. Luke before the Mission of the Seventy, yet that is probably due to his subjective choice of order, and we may suppose that these were two of the seventy who were despatched to prepare the way for Him spiritually as well as in the more ordinary sense; unless, indeed, we adopt the conjecture that the messengers may have been James and John, who would thus be likely to feel with special vividness the insult of His rejection. At any rate the inhabitants—who to this day are not remarkable for their civility to strangers—absolutely declined to receive or admit Him. Previously indeed, when He was passing through Samaria on His journey northwards; He had found Samaritans not only willing to receive, but anxious to detain His presence among them, and eager to listen to His words. But now in two respects the circumstances were different; for now He was professedly travelling to the city which they hated and the Temple which they despised, and now He was attended, not by a few Apostles, but by a great multitude, who were accompanying Him as their acknowledged Prophet and Messiah. Had Gerizim and not Jerusalem been the goal of His journey, all might have been different; but now His destination and His associates inflamed their national animosity too much to admit of their supplying to the weary pilgrims the ordinary civilities of life. And if the feelings of this little frontier village of En Gammin were so unmistakably hostile, it became clear that any attempt to journey through the whole country of the Samaritans, and even to pass under the shadow of their rival sanctuary, would be a dangerous if not a hopeless task. Jesus therefore altered the course of His journey, and turned once more towards the Jordan valley. Rejected by Galilee, refused by Samaria, without a word He bent His steps towards Peræa.

But the deep discouragement of this refusal to receive Him was mingled in the minds of James and John with hot indignation. There is nothing so trying, so absolutely exasperating, as a failure to find food and shelter, and common civility, after the fatigue of travel, and especially for a large multitude to begin a fresh journey when they expected rest. Full, therefore, of the Messianic kingdom, which now at last they thought was on the eve of being mightily proclaimed, the two brothers wanted to usher it in with a blaze of Sinaitic vengeance, and thereby to astonish and restore the flagging spirits of followers who would naturally be discouraged by so immediate and decided a repulse. "Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?" "What wonder," says St.

Ambrose, "that the Sons of Thunder wished to flash lightning?" And this their fiery impetuosity seemed to find its justification not only in the precedent of Elijah's conduct, but in the fact that it had been displayed in this very country of Samaria. Was it more necessary in personal defence of a single prophet than to vindicate the honour of the Messiah and His attendants? But Jesus turned and rebuked them. God's heaven has other uses than for thunder. "They did not know," He told them, "what spirit they were of." They had not realised the difference which separated Sinai and Carmel from Calvary and Hermon. He had come to save, not to destroy; and if any heard His words and believed not, He judged them not. And so, without a word of anger, He went to a different village; and doubtless St. John, who by that time *did* know of what spirit he was, remembered these words of Christ when he went with Peter into Samaria to confirm the recent converts, and to bestow upon them the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Perhaps it may have been on this occasion—for certainly no occasion would have been more suitable than that furnished by this early and rude repulse—that Jesus, turning to the great multitudes that accompanied Him, delivered to them that memorable discourse in which He warned them that all who would be His disciples must come to Him, not expecting earthly love or acceptance, but expecting alienation and opposition, and *counting the cost*. They must abandon, if need be, every earthly tie; they must sit absolutely loose to the interests of the world; they must take up the cross and follow Him. Strange language, of which it was only afterwards that they learnt the full significance! For a man to begin a tower which he could not finish—for a king to enter on a war in which nothing was possible save disaster and defeat—involved disgrace and indicated folly; better not to follow Him at all, unless they followed Him prepared to forsake all that they had on earth; prepared to sacrifice the interests of time, and to live solely for those of eternity. One who believed not, would indeed suffer loss and harm, yet his lot was less pitiable than that of him who became a disciple only to be a backslider—who, facing both ways, cast like Lot's wife a longing glance on all that he ought to flee—who made the attempt, at once impotent and disastrous, to serve both God and Mammon.

As both Galilee and Samaria were now closed to Him, He could only journey on His way to Peræa, down the valley of Bethshean, between the borders of both provinces. There a very touching incident

occurred. On the outskirts of one of the villages a dull, harsh, plaintive cry smote His ears, and looking up He saw "ten men who were lepers," united in a community of deadly misery. They were afar off, for they dared not approach, since their approach was pollution, and they were obliged to warn away all who would have come near them by the heart-rending cry, "*Tamê! tamê!*"—"Unclean! Unclean!" There was something in that living death of leprosy—recalling as it did the most frightful images of suffering and degradation, corrupting as it did the very fountains of the life-blood of man, distorting his countenance, rendering loathsome his touch, slowly encrusting and infecting him with a plague-spot of disease far more horrible than death itself—which always seems to have thrilled the Lord's heart with a keen and instantaneous compassion. And never more so than at this moment. Scarcely had He heard their piteous cry of "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us," than instantly, without sufficient pause even to approach them more nearly, He called aloud to them, "Go, show yourselves unto the priests." They knew the significance of that command: they knew that it bade them hurry off to claim from the priests the recognition of their cure, the certificate of their restitution to every rite and privilege of human life. Already, at the sound of that potent voice, they felt a stream of wholesome life, of recovered energy, of purer blood, pulsing through their veins; and as they went they were cleansed.

He who has not seen the hideous, degraded spectacle of the lepers clamorously revealing their mutilations, and almost demanding alms, by the roadside of some Eastern city, can hardly conceive how transcendent and immeasurable was the boon which they had thus received at the hands of Jesus. One would have thought that they would have suffered no obstacle to hinder the passionate gratitude which should have prompted them to hasten back at once—to struggle, if need be, even through fire and water, if thereby they could fling themselves with tears of heartfelt acknowledgment at their Saviour's feet, to thank Him for a gift of something more precious than life itself. What absorbing selfishness, what Jewish infatuation, what sacerdotal interference, what new and worse leprosy of shameful thanklessness and superstitious ignorance, prevented it? We do not know. We only know that of ten who were healed but *one* returned, and he was a Samaritan. On the frontiers of the two countries had been gathered, like froth at the margin of wave and sand, the misery of both; but while the nine Jews were infamously

thankless, the one Samaritan “turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks.” The heart of Jesus, familiar as He was with all ingratitude, was yet moved by an instance of it so flagrant, so all but unanimous, and so abnormal. “Were not the ten cleansed?” He asked in sorrowful surprise; “but the nine—where are they?” There are not found that returned to give glory to God save this alien.” “It is,” says Lange, “as if all these benefits were falling into a deep silent grave.” The voice of their misery had awaked the instant echo of His mercy; but the miraculous utterance of His mercy, though it thrilled through their whole physical being, woke no echo of gratitude in their earthly and still leprous hearts.

But, nevertheless, this alien shall not have returned in vain, nor shall the rare virtue—alas, *how* rare a virtue!—of his gratitude go unrewarded. Not his body alone, but the soul—whose value was so infinitely more precious, just as its diseases are so infinitely more profound—should be healed by his Saviour’s word.

“Arise and go,” said Jesus; “thy faith hath saved thee.”

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## CHAPTER XLIV.

### TEACHINGS OF THE JOURNEY.

EVEN during this last journey our Lord did not escape the taunts, the opposition, the depreciating remarks—in one word, the Pharisaism—of the Pharisees and those who resembled them. The circumstances which irritated them against Him were exactly the same as they had been throughout His whole career—exactly those in which His example was most lofty, and His teaching most beneficial—namely, the performance on the Sabbath of works of mercy, and the association with publicans and sinners.

One of these Sabbatical disputes occurred in a synagogue. Jesus, as we have already remarked, whether because of the lesser excommunication or for any other reason, seems, during this latter period of His ministry, to have entered the synagogues but rarely. The exclusion, however, from one synagogue or more did not include a prohibition

to enter *any* synagogue; and the subsequent conduct of the ruler of this synagogue seems to show that he had a certain awe of Jesus, mingled with his jealousy and suspicion. On this day there sat among the worshippers a poor woman who, for eighteen long years, had been bent double by "a spirit of infirmity," and could not lift herself up. The compassionate heart of Jesus could not brook the mute appeal of her presence. He called her to Him, and saying to her, "Woman thou art loosed from thine infirmity," laid His hands on her. Instantly she experienced the miraculous strengthening which enabled her to lift up the long-bowed and crooked frame, and instantly she broke into utterances of gratitude to God. But her strain of thanksgiving was interrupted by the narrow and ignorant indignation of the ruler of the synagogue. Here, under his very eyes, and without any reference to the "little brief authority," which gave him a sense of dignity on each recurring Sabbath, a woman—a member of *his* congregation—had actually had the presumption to be healed. Armed with his favourite "texts," and in all the fussiness of official hypocrisy, he gets up and rebukes the perfectly innocent multitude, telling them it was a gross instance of sabbath-breaking for them to be healed on that sacred day, when they might just as well be healed on any of the other six days of the week. That the offence consisted solely in the being healed is clear, for he certainly could not mean that, if they had any sickness, it was a crime for them to come to the synagogue at all on the Sabbath day. Now, as the poor woman does not seem to have spoken one word of entreaty to Jesus, or even to have called His attention to her case, the utterly senseless address of this man could only by any possibility mean either "You *sick* people must not come to the synagogue at all on the Sabbath under present circumstances, for fear you should be led into Sabbath-breaking by having a miraculous cure performed upon you;" or "If any one wants to heal you on a Sabbath, you must decline." And these remarks he has neither the courage to address to Jesus himself, nor the candour to address to the poor healed woman, but preaches *at* them both by rebuking the multitude, who had no concern in the action at all, beyond the fact that they had been passive spectators of it!

The whole range of the Gospels does not supply any other instance of an interference so illogical, or a stupidity so hopeless; and the indirect, underhand way in which he gave vent to his outraged ignorance brought on him that expression of our Lord's indignation which he had not dared openly to brave. "*Hypocrite!*" was the one crushing

word with which Jesus addressed him. This silly official had been censorious with *Him* because He had spoken a few words to the woman, and laid upon her a healing hand; and with the woman because, having been bent double, she lifted herself up and glorified God! It would be difficult to imagine such a paralysis of the moral sense, if we did not daily see the stultifying effect produced upon the intellect by the "deep slumber of a decided opinion," especially when the opinion itself rests upon nothing better than a meaningless tradition. Now Jesus constantly varied the arguments and appeals by which He endeavoured to show the Pharisees of His nation that their views about the Sabbath only degraded it from a divine benefit into a revolting bondage. To the Rabbis of Jerusalem He justified Himself by an appeal to His own character and authority, as supported by the triple testimony of John the Baptist, of the Scriptures, and of the Father Himself, who bore witness to Him by the authority which He had given Him. To the Pharisees of Galilee He had quoted the direct precedents of Scripture, or had addressed an appeal, founded on their own common sense and power of insight into the eternal principles of things. But the duller and less practised intellects of these Peræans might not have understood either the essential love and liberty implied by the institution of the Sabbath, or the paramount authority of Jesus as Lord of the Sabbath. It could not rise above the cogency of the *argumentum ad hominem*. It was only capable of a conviction based on their own common practices and received limitations. There was not one of them who did not consider himself justified in unloosing and leading to the water his ox or his ass on the Sabbath, although that involved far more labour than either laying the hand on a sick woman, or even being healed by a miraculous word! If their Sabbath rules gave way to the needs of ox or ass, ought they not to give way to the cruel necessities of a daughter of Abraham? If *they* might do much more labour on the Sabbath to abbreviate a few hours' thirst, might He not do much less to terminate a Satanically cruel bondage which had lasted, lo! these eighteen years? At reasonings so unanswerable, no wonder that His adversaries were ashamed, and that the simpler, more unsophisticated people rejoiced at all the glorious acts of mercy which He wrought on their behalf.

Again and again was our Lord thus obliged to redeem this great primeval institution of God's love from these narrow, formal, pernicious restrictions of an otiose and unintelligent tradition. But it is evident that He attached as much importance to the noble and loving

freedom of the day of rest as they did to the stupefying inaction to which they had reduced the normal character of its observance. Their absorbing attachment to it, the frenzy which filled them when He set at nought their Sabbatarian uncharities, rose from many circumstances. They were wedded to the religious system which had long prevailed among them, because it is easy to be a slave to the letter, and difficult to enter into the spirit; easy to obey a number of outward rules, difficult to enter intelligently and self-sacrificingly into the will of God; easy to entangle the soul in a network of petty observances, difficult to yield the obedience of an enlightened heart; easy to be haughtily exclusive, difficult to be humbly spiritual; easy to be an ascetic or a formalist, difficult to be pure and loving, and wise and free; easy to be a Pharisee, difficult to be a disciple; very easy to embrace a self-satisfying and sanctimonious system of rabbinical observances, very difficult to love God with all the heart, and all the might, and all the soul, and all the strength. In laying His axe at the root of their proud and ignorant Sabbatarianism, He was laying His axe at the root of all that "miserable micrology" which they had been accustomed to take for their religious life. Is the spirit of the sects so free in these days from Pharisaic taint as not to need such lessons? Will not these very words which I have written—although they are but an expansion of the lessons which Jesus incessantly taught—yet give offence to some who read them?

One more such incident is recorded—the sixth embittered controversy of the kind in which they had involved our Lord. Nothing but Sabbatarianism which had degenerated into monomania could account for their so frequently courting a controversy which always ended in their total discomfiture. On a certain Sabbath, which was the principal day for Jewish entertainments, Jesus was invited to the house of one who, as he is called a ruler of the Pharisees, must have been a man in high position, and perhaps even a member of the Sanhedrin. The invitation was one of those to which He was so often subjected, not respectful or generous, but due either to idle curiosity or downright malice. Throughout the meal He was carefully watched by hostile scrutiny. The Pharisees, as has been well said, "performed the duty of religious espionage with exemplary diligence." Among the unbidden guests who, Oriental fashion, stood about the room and looked on, as they do to this day during the continuance of a meal, was a man afflicted with the dropsy. The prominent position in which he stood, combined with the keen watchfulness of the Pharisees, seems to

show that he had been placed there designedly, either to test Christ's willingness to respect their Sabbath prejudices, or to defeat His miraculous power by the failure to cure a disease more inveterate, and less amenable to curative measures, than any other. If so, this was another of those miserable cases in which these unfeeling teachers of the people were ready to make the most heart-rending shame or the deepest misery a mere tool to be used or thrown aside, as chance might serve, in their dealings with Jesus. But this time Jesus anticipated, and went to meet half-way, the subtle machinations of this learned and distinguished company. He asked them the very simple question—

“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?” They *would* not say “Yes;” but, on the other hand, they dared not say “No!” Had it been unlawful, it was their positive function and duty to say so then and there, and without any subterfuge to deprive the poor sufferer, so far as in them lay, of the miraculous mercy which was prepared for him, and to brave the consequences. If they dared not say so—either for fear of the people, or for fear of instant refutation, or because the spell of Christ's awful ascendancy was upon them, or out of a mere splenetic pride, or—to imagine better motives—because in their inmost hearts, if any spot remained in them uncrusted by idle and irreligious prejudices, they felt that it *was* lawful, and more than lawful, RIGHT—then, by their own judgment, they left Jesus free to heal without the possibility of censure. Their silence, therefore, was, even on their own showing, and on their own principles, His entire justification. His mere simple question, and their inability to answer it, was an absolute decision of the controversy in His favour. He therefore took the man, healed him, and let him go.

And then He appealed, as before, to their own practice. “Which of you shall have a son, or (even) an ox, fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day?” They knew that they *could* only admit the fact, and then the argument *à fortiori* was irresistible; a man was more important than a beast; the extrication of a beast involved more labour by far than the healing of a man. Their base little plot only ended in the constrained and awkward silence of a complete refutation which they were too ungenerous to acknowledge.

Jesus deigned no farther to dwell on a subject which to the mind of every candid listener had been set at rest for ever, and He turned their thoughts to other lessons. The dropsy of their inflated self-

satisfaction was a disease far more difficult to heal than that of the sufferer whom they had used to entrap Him. Scarcely was the feast ready, when there arose among the distinguished company one of those unseemly struggles for precedence which—common, nay, almost universal as they are—show the tendencies of human nature on its weakest and most contemptible side. And nothing more clearly showed the essential hollowness of Pharisaic religion than its intense pride and self-exaltation. Let one anecdote suffice. The King Jannæus had on one occasion invited several Persian Satraps, and among the guests asked to meet them was the Rabbi Shimon Ben Shetach. The latter on entering seated himself at table between the King and the Queen. Being asked his reason for such a presumptuous intrusion, he replied that it was written in the Book of Ben Sirach, “Exalt wisdom and she shall exalt thee, and shall make thee sit among princes.”

The Jews at this period had adopted the system of *triclinia* from the Greeks and Romans, and the “chief seat” (*πρωτοκλισία*) was the middle seat in the central *triclinium*. Observing the anxiety of each guest to secure this place for himself, our Lord laid down a wiser and better principle of social courtesy, which involved the far deeper lesson of spiritual humility. Just as in earthly society the pushing, intrusive, self-conceited man must be prepared for many a strong rebuff, and will find himself often compelled to give place to modest merit, so in the eternal world, “whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” Pride, exclusiveness, self-glorification, have no place in the kingdom of God. Humility is the only passport which can obtain for us an entrance there.

“Humble we must be, if to heaven we go;  
High is the roof there, but the gate is low.”

And He proceeded to teach them another lesson, addressed to some obvious foible in the character of His host. Luxury, ostentation, the hope of a return, are not true principles of hospitality. A richer recompense awaits the kindness bestowed upon the poor than the adulatory entertainment of the friendly and the rich. In receiving friends and relatives, do not forget the helpless and the afflicted. Interested beneficence is nothing in the world but a deceitful selfishness. It may be that thou wouldest have won a more eternal blessing if that dropsical man had been invited to remain—if those poor lookers-on were counted among the number of the guests.

At this point one of the guests, perhaps because he thought that these lessons were disagreeable and severe, interposed a remark which, under the circumstances, rose very little above the level of a vapid and misleading platitude. He poured upon the troubled waters a sort of general impersonal aphorism. Instead of profiting by these Divine lessons, he seemed inclined to rest content with "an indolent remission of the matter into distant futurity," as though he were quite sure of that blessedness, of which he seems to have a very poor and material conception. But our Lord turned his idle poor remark into a fresh occasion for most memorable teaching. He told them a parable to show that "to eat bread in the kingdom of heaven" might involve conditions which those who felt so very sure of doing it would not be willing to accept. He told them of a king who had sent out many invitations to a great banquet, but who, when the due time came, was met by general refusals. One had his estate to manage, and was positively obliged to go and see a new addition to it. Another was deep in buying and selling, and all the business it entailed. A third was so lapped in contented domesticity that his coming was out of the question. Then the king, rejecting, in his anger, these disrespectful and dilatory guests, bade his slaves go at once to the broad and narrow streets, and bring in the poor and maimed, and lame and blind; and when that was done, and there still was room, he sent them to urge in even the houseless wanderers by the hedges and the roads. The application to all present was obvious. The worldly heart—whether absorbed in the management of property, or the acquisition of riches, or the mere sensualisms of contented comfort—was incompatible with any desire for the true banquet of the kingdom of heaven. The Gentile and the Pariah, the harlot and the publican, the labourer of the roadside and the beggar of the streets, these might be there in greater multitudes than the Scribe with his boasted learning, and the Pharisee with his broad phylactery. "For I say unto you," He added in His own person, to point the moral more immediately to their own hearts, "that none of those men who were called shall taste of my supper." It was the lesson which He so often pointed. "To be invited is one thing, to accept the invitation is another. Many are called, but few are chosen. Many—as the heathen proverb said—'Many bear the *narthex*, but few feel the inspiring god' (*πολλοί τοι ναρθηκοφόροι παῦροι δέ τε βάκχοι*)."

Teachings like these ran throughout this entire period of the Lord's ministry. The parable just recorded was, in its far-reaching and

many-sided significance, a reproof not only to the close exclusiveness of the Pharisees, but also to their worldliness and avarice. On another occasion, when our Lord was mainly teaching His own disciples, He told them the parable of the Unjust Steward, to show them the necessity of care and faithfulness, of prudence and wisdom, in so managing the affairs and interests and possessions of this life as not to lose hereafter their heritage of the eternal riches. It was impossible—such was the recurrent burden of so many discourses—to be at once worldly and spiritual; to be at once the slave of God and the slave of Mammon. With the supreme and daring paradox which impressed His divine teaching on the heart and memory of the world, He urged them to the foresight of a spiritual wisdom by an example drawn from the foresight of a criminal cleverness.

Although Christ had been speaking in the first instance to the Apostles, some of the Pharisees seem to have been present and to have heard Him; and it is a characteristic fact that this teaching, more than any other, seems to have kindled their most undisguised derision. They began to treat Him with the most open and insolent disdain. And why? Because they were Pharisees, and yet were fond of money. Had not they, then, in their own persons, successfully solved the problem of “making the best of both worlds?” Who could doubt *their* perfect safety for the future? nay, the absolute certainty that they would be admitted to the “chief seats,” the most distinguished and conspicuous places in the world to come? Were they not, then, standing witnesses of the absurdity of the supposition that the love of money was incompatible with the love of God?

Our Lord’s answer to them is very much compressed by St. Luke, but consisted, first, in showing them that respectability of life is one thing, and sincerity of heart quite another. Into the new kingdom, for which John had prepared the way, the world’s lowest were pressing, and were being accepted before them; the Gospel was being rejected by them, though it was not the destruction, but the highest fulfilment of the Law. Nay—such seems to be the meaning of the apparently disconnected verse which follows—even to the Law itself, of which not one tittle should fail, they were faithless, for they could connive at the violation of its most distinct provisions. In this apparently isolated remark He alluded, in all probability, to their relations to Herod Antipas, whom they were content to acknowledge and to flatter, and to whom not one of them had dared to use the brave language of reproach which had been used by John the Baptist. although, by the

clearest decisions of the Law which they professed to venerate, his divorce from the daughter of Aretas was adulterous, and his marriage with Herodias was doubly adulterous, and worse.

But to make the immediate truth which He had been explaining yet more clear to them, He told them the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Like all of our Lord's parables, it is full of meaning, and admits of more than one application; but at least they could not miss the one plain and obvious application, that the decisions of the next world will often reverse the estimation wherein men are held in this; that God is no respecter of persons; that the heart must make its choice between the "good things" of this life and those which the externals of this life do not affect. And what may be called the epilogue of this parable contains a lesson more solemn still—namely, that the means of grace which God's mercy accords to every living soul are ample for its enlightenment and deliverance; that if these be neglected, no miracle will be wrought to startle the absorbed soul from its worldly interests; that "if they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." *Auditu fidei salvamur*, says Bengel, *non apparitionibus*—"We are saved by faithful hearing, not by ghosts."

This constant reference to life as a time of probation, and to the Great Judgment, when the one word "Come," or "Depart," as uttered by the Judge, should decide all controversies and all questions for ever, naturally turned the thoughts of many listeners to these solemn subjects. But there is a great and constant tendency in the minds of us all to refer such questions to the case of others rather than our own—to make them questions rather of speculative curiosity than of practical import. And such tendencies, which rob moral teaching of all its wholesomeness, and turn its warnings into mere excuses for want of charity, were always checked and discouraged by our Lord. A special opportunity was given Him for this on one occasion during those days in which He was going "through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem." He had—not, perhaps, for the first time—been speaking of the small beginnings and the vast growth of the kingdom of heaven alike in the soul and in the world; and one of His listeners, in the spirit of unwise though not unnatural curiosity, asked Him, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" Whether the question was dictated by secure self-satisfaction, or by despondent pity, we cannot tell; but in either case our Lord's answer involved a disapproval of the inquiry, and a statement of the wholly different manner

in which such questions should be approached. “Few” and “many” are relative terms. Waste not the precious opportunities of life in idle wonderment, but *strive*. Through that narrow gate, none—not were they a thousand times of the seed of Abraham—can enter without earnest effort. And since the efforts, the wilful efforts, the erring efforts of many fail—since the day will come when the door shall be shut, and it shall be too late to enter there—since no impassioned appeal shall then admit, no claim of olden knowledge shall then be recognised—since some of those who in their spiritual pride thought that they best knew the Lord, shall hear the awful repudiation, “I know you not”—*strive ye* to be of those that enter in. For many *shall* enter from every quarter of the globe, and yet thou, O son of Abraham, mayest be excluded. And behold, once more—it may well sound strange to thee, yet so it is—“there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.”

Thus each vapid interruption, each scornful criticism, each erroneous question, each sad or happy incident, was made by Jesus, throughout this journey, an opportunity of teaching to His hearers, and through them to all the world, the things that belonged unto their peace. And He did so once more, when “a certain lawyer” stood up tempting Him, and asked—not to obtain guidance, but to find subject for objection—the momentous question, “What must I do to obtain eternal life?” Jesus, seeing through the evil motive of his question, simply asked him what was the answer to that question which was given in the Law which it was the very object of the man’s life to teach and to explain. The lawyer gave the best summary which the best teaching of his nation had by this time rendered prevalent. Jesus simply confirmed his answer, and said, “This do, and thou shalt live.” But wanting something more than this, and anxious to justify a question which from his own point of view was superfluous, and which had, as he well knew, been asked with an ungenerous purpose, the lawyer thought to cover his retreat by the fresh question, “And who is my neighbour?” Had Jesus asked the man’s own opinion on this question, He well knew how narrow and false it must have been; He therefore answered it Himself, or rather gave to the lawyer the means for answering it, by one of His most striking parables. He told him how once a man, going down the rocky gorge which led from Jerusalem to Jericho, had fallen into the hands of the robbers, whose frequent attacks had given to that descent the ill-omened name of “the bloody way,” and had been left by these Bedawîn marauders, after the fashion

which they still practise, bleeding, naked, and half dead upon the road. A priest going back to his priestly city had passed that way, caught a glimpse of him, and crossed over to the other side of the road. A Levite, with still cooler indifference, had come and stared at him, and quietly done the same. But a Samaritan journeying that way—one on whom he would have looked with shuddering national antipathy, one in whose very shadow he would have seen pollution—a good Samaritan, pattern of that Divine Speaker whom men rejected and despised, but who had come to stanch those bleeding wounds of humanity, for which there was no remedy either in the ceremonial or the moral law—came to him, pitied, tended him, mounted him on his own beast, trudged beside him on the hard, hot, dusty, dangerous road, and would not leave him till he had secured his safety, and generously provided for his future wants. Which of these three, Jesus asked the lawyer, was *neighbour* to him who fell among thieves? The man was not so dull as to refuse to see; but yet, knowing that he would have excluded alike the Samaritans and the Gentiles from his definition of “neighbours,” he has not the candour to say at once, “*The Samaritan,*” but uses the poor periphrasis, “He that did him the kindness.” “Go,” said Jesus, “and do thou likewise.” I, the friend of publicans and sinners, hold up the example of this Samaritan to thee.

We must not, however, suppose that these two months of mission-progress were all occupied in teaching, which, however exalted, received its external shape and impulse from the errors and controversies which met the Saviour on His way. There were many circumstances during these days which must have filled His soul with joy.

Pre-eminent among these was the return of the Seventy. We cannot, of course, suppose that they returned in a body, but that from time to time, two and two, as our Lord approached the various cities and villages whither He had sent them, they came to give Him an account of their success. And that success was such as to fill their simple hearts with astonishment and exultation. “Lord,” they exclaimed, “even the demons are subject unto us through Thy name.” Though He had given them no special commission to heal demoniacs, though in one conspicuous instance even the Apostles had failed in this attempt, yet now they could cast out demons in their Master’s name. Jesus, while entering into their joy, yet checked the tone of over-exultation, and rather turned it into a nobler and holier channel. He bade them feel sure that good was eternally mightier than evil; and that the

victory over Satan—his fall like lightning from heaven—had been achieved and should continue for ever. Over all evil influences He gave them authority and victory, and the word of His promise should be an amulet to protect them from every source of harm. They should go upon the lion and adder, the young lion and the dragon should they tread under feet; because He had set His love upon them, therefore would He deliver them: He would set them up because they had known His name. And yet there was a subject of joy more deep and real and true—less dangerous because less seemingly personal and conspicuous than this—on which He rather fixed their thoughts: it was that their names had been written, and stood unobliterated, in the Book of Life in heaven.

And besides the gladness inspired into the heart of Jesus by the happy faith and unbounded hope of His disciples, He also rejoiced in spirit that, though rejected and despised by Scribes and Pharisees, He was loved and worshipped by Publicans and Sinners. The poor to whom He preached His Gospel—the blind whose eyes He had come to open—the sick whom He had come to heal—the lost whom it was His mission to seek and save;—these all thronged with heartfelt and pathetic gratitude to the Good Shepherd, the Great Physician. The Scribes and Pharisees as usual murmured, but what mattered that to the happy listeners? To the weary and heavy-laden He spoke in every varied form of hope, of blessing, of encouragement. By the parable of the Importunate Widow He taught them the duty of faith, and the certain answer to ceaseless and earnest prayer. By the parable of the haughty, respectable, fasting, almsgiving, self-satisfied Pharisee—who, going to make his boast to God in the Temple, went home less justified than the poor Publican, who could only reiterate one single cry for God's mercy as he stood there beating his breast, and with downcast eyes—He taught them that God loves better a penitent humility than a merely external service, and that a broken heart and a contrite spirit were sacrifices which He would not despise. Nor was this all. He made them feel that they were dear to God; that, though erring children, they were His children still. And, therefore, to the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Drachma, He added that parable in which lies the whole Gospel in its richest and tenderest grace—the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Never certainly in human language was so much—such a world of love and wisdom and tenderness—compressed into such few immortal words. Every line, every touch of the picture is full of beautiful

eternal significance. The poor boy's presumptuous claim for all that life could give him—the leaving of the old home—the journey to a far country—the brief spasm of “enjoyment” there—the mighty famine in that land—the premature exhaustion of all that could make life noble and endurable—the abysmal degradation and unutterable misery that followed—the coming to himself, and recollection of all that he had left behind—the return in heart-broken penitence and deep humility—the father's far-off sight of him, and the gush of compassion and tenderness over this poor returning prodigal—the ringing joy of the whole household over him who had been loved and lost, and had now come home—the unjust jealousy and mean complaint of the elder brother—and then that close of the parable in a strain of music—“*Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad : for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again ; was lost, and is found*”—all this is indeed a divine epitome of the wandering of man and the love of God, such as no literature has ever equalled, such as no ear of man has ever heard elsewhere. Put in the one scale all that Confucius, or Sakya Mouni, or Zoroaster, or Socrates, ever wrote or said—and they wrote and said many beautiful and holy words—and put in the other the Parable of the Prodigal Son alone, with all that this single parable connotes and means, and can any candid spirit doubt which scale would outweigh the other in eternal preciousness—in divine adaptation to the wants of man ?

So this great journey grew gradually to a close. The awful solemnity—the shadow, as it were, of coming doom—the half-uttered “too late” which might be dimly heard in its tones of warning—characterise the single record of it which the Evangelist St. Luke has happily preserved. We seem to hear throughout it an undertone of that deep yearning which Jesus had before expressed—“I have a baptism to be baptised with ; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished !” It was a sorrow for all the broken peace and angry opposition which His work would cause on earth—a sense that He was prepared to plunge into the “willing agony” of the already kindled flame. And this seems to have struck the minds of all who heard Him ; they had an expectation, fearful or glad according to the condition of their consciences, of something great. Some new manifestation—some revelation of the thoughts of men's hearts—was near at hand. At last the Pharisees summoned up courage to ask Him “When the kingdom of God should come ?” There was a certain

impatience, a certain materialism, possibly also a tinge of sarcasm and depreciation in the question, as though they had said, "When is all this preaching and preparation to end, and the actual time to arrive?" His answer, as usual, indicated that their *point of view* was wholly mistaken. The coming of the kingdom of God could not be ascertained by the kind of narrow and curious watching to which they were addicted. False Christs and mistaken Rabbis might cry "*Lo here!*" and "*Lo there!*" but that kingdom was already in the midst of them; nay, if they had the will and the wisdom to recognise and to embrace it, that kingdom was *within them*. That answer was sufficient to the Pharisees, but to His disciples He added words which implied the fuller explanation. Even *they* did not fully realise that the kingdom *had already* come. Their eyes were strained *forward* in intense and yearning eagerness to some glorious future; but in the future, glorious as it would be, they would still look *backward* with yet deeper yearning, not unmingled with regret, to this very past—to these days of the Son of Man, in which they were seeing and their hands handling the Word of Life. In those days, let them not be deceived by any "*Lo there! Lo here!*" nor let them waste in feverish and fruitless restlessness the calm and golden opportunities of life. For that coming of the Son of Man should be bright, sudden, terrible, universal, irresistible as the lightning flash; but before that day He must suffer and be rejected. Moreover, that gleam of His second **advent** would flame upon the midnight of a sensual, unexpectant world, as the flood rolled over the festive sensualism in the days of Noah, and the fire and brimstone streamed from heaven upon the glittering rottenness of the Cities of the Plain. Woe to those who should in that day be casting regretful glances on a world destined to pass away in flame! For though till then the business and companionships of life should continue, and all its various fellowships of toil or friendliness, that night would be one of fearful and of final separations!

The disciples were startled and terrified by words of such strange solemnity. "Where, Lord?" they ask in alarm. But to the "where" there could be as little answer as to the "when," and the coming of God's kingdom is as little geographical as it is chronological. "Where-soever the body is," He says, "thither will the vultures be gathered together." The mystic Armageddon is no place whose situation you may fix by latitude and longitude. Wherever there is individual wickedness, wherever there is social degeneracy, wherever there is deep national corruption, thither do the eagle-avengers of the Divine

vengeance wing their flight from far: thither from the ends of the earth come nations of a fierce countenance, "swift as the eagle flieth," to rend and to devour. "Her young ones also suck up blood: and where the slain are, there is she." Jerusalem—nay, the whole Jewish nation—was falling rapidly into the dissolution arising from internal decay; and already the flap of avenging pinions was in the air. When the world too should lie in a state of morbid infamy, then should be heard once more the rushing of those "congregated wings."

Is not all history one long vast commentary on these great prophecies? In the destinies of nations and of races has not the Christ returned again and again to deliver or to judge?

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## CHAPTER XLV.

### THE FEAST OF DEDICATION.

**NOWHERE**, in all probability, did Jesus pass more restful and happy hours than in the quiet house of that little family at Bethany, which, as we are told by St. John, "He loved." The family, so far as we know, consisted only of Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus. That Martha was a widow—that her husband was, or had been, Simon the Leper—that Lazarus is identical with the gentle and holy Rabbi of that name mentioned in the Talmud—are conjectures that may or may not be true; but we see from the Gospels that they were a family in easy circumstances, and of sufficient dignity and position to excite considerable attention not only in their own little village of Bethany, but even in Jerusalem. The lovely little hamlet, lying among its peaceful uplands, near Jerusalem, and yet completely hidden from it by the summit of Olivet, and thus

"Not wholly in the busy world, nor quite  
Beyond it."

must always have had for the soul of Jesus an especial charm; and the more so because of the friends whose love and reverence always placed at His disposal their holy and happy home. It is there that we find Him on the eve of the Feast of the Dedication, which marked the close of that public journey designed for the full and final proclamation of His coming kingdom.